The Learning and Skills Council’s Single Equality Scheme: A Review of Regional Evidence Following Implementation in April 2007

March 2008

Of interest to LSC staff and stakeholders
Further information
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Introduction

1 This report is a synthesis of the views of regional Learning and Skills Council (LSC) colleagues on the regional interpretation of the single equality scheme (SES) introduced nationally in April 2007. The report was requested by the Equality and Diversity team as a 'light review' and draws on the available regional documentation. Staff at the National Institute of Continuing Adult Education (NIACE) held discussions with one or more LSC colleagues in all regions but one. To support these discussions, a telephone interview pro-forma (see Annex A) was constructed. NIACE colleagues were advised that while this pro-forma could act as a prompt, the questions did not have to feature in every discussion. As a result, this report has been constructed thematically and represents the view of the regions collectively.

2 A selection of innovative and creative activity has been incorporated into the main body of this report and at Annex B, and individual regions are identified only in these places. The featured activity highlights the divergence between regions and the range of differing priorities within them. The report’s conclusion presents key findings from the activity. All regional responses to the questionnaire are available for inspection by the national Equality and Diversity team. The separate reports were completed and summarised for this document in November 2007.

Achievements Identified in Relation to the Single Equality Scheme

3 All regions agreed that the SES had afforded a more joined-up approach and framework for equality and diversity, consolidating previously separate schemes, such as race equality. The development of the SES is more likely to lead to better co-ordination of previously individual schemes. There is evidence from the regions that equality and diversity practices are becoming more accepted within the LSC, and that they are particularly supported by regional agencies.

4 Praise for the SES was evidenced in all regions, with many colleagues identifying it as one of the most useful policies created by the LSC, touching as it does on all strategic plans and policies.

5 It was felt by some staff that the launch of the SES within the LSC has necessitated a cultural shift in the working practices of many colleagues, with the majority of staff now acknowledging that they have a role in and responsibility for the SES.

6 The development of regional SES action plans has become fundamental to LSC activity, and underpins much of its work. In some regions the SES is seen as a working document to be reviewed and discussed monthly by equality and diversity managers and other colleagues.

7 An opportunity has been provided, through the SES, to address issues that may not otherwise have been identified. It has provided a good mechanism for
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alternative thinking and creativity. Additionally, the ability to tailor the national SES to respond to regional issues and capture local activity through local provider plans is seen as a powerful lever.

The Development of Action Plans

8 Regional single equality scheme action plans have brought a more focused approach to the consideration of equality and diversity activity under this umbrella framework. Task and finish groups have assisted in the development of action plans, which have been constructed by means of a detailed consultation exercise with national, regional and local stakeholders. All regional action plans are now in place. Action plans provide the regional landscape, while reflecting national requirements, and have been significant in creating a framework against which progress can be monitored and assessed. The plans have also been useful in raising the profile of equality and diversity within the regions.

9 Going forward, some regions would like to see the SES move beyond considerations of race, disability and gender to incorporate, religion and belief, sexual orientation and age. These equality areas are thought to be particularly significant in some regions and need to have a higher profile in some regional plans.

Dissemination

Internal

10 Dissemination of the SES among LSC staff within the regions has been undertaken using a range of training activities, including workshops; these were instrumental in constructing terms of reference for task and finish groups. The national and regional SES provider support programme was identified by some regions as complementing this activity and they looked forward to its impact.

11 However, it should be acknowledged that while dissemination internally has been significantly wide-ranging and broad in some regions, in other regions it has been more contained and limited to staff with identified equality and diversity.

External

12 Regional staff report that stakeholders have responded openly to the SES, with providers becoming more interested in and committed to developing their own impact measures for equality and diversity.

13 Some regions have developed internal and external web pages dedicated to equality and diversity to provide a portal for dissemination of the SES. Additionally, regions have planned events, targeted at local LSC and partnership teams, such as SES road shows.
In general, external dissemination at this stage has largely been concerned with awareness raising, and raising the profile of the SES.

Impact Measures

In all regions it was felt to be too early to say with any confidence that the SES had had a quantifiable impact. However, regional equality and diversity action plans have already set out targets and measures for monitoring and measuring activity, and these are now being reviewed and revised in the light of the introduction of the SES.

All regions identified the use of equality and diversity impact measures (EDIMs) as the major force in driving up impact and linked them to ‘everyday’ business activity. Regions were keen to see this data being useful to the business rather than rapidly becoming a ‘fossilised’ collection. It was considered that the EDIMs, if standardised, would become a significant tool in translating regional measures and providing benchmark information against which to compare and contrast activity outputs.

Regional action plans are considered by many of the regions as instrumental not only in successfully embedding equality and diversity practices but also in interpreting the national SES to reflect regional variations.

Regions hoped to align impact measures with the business cycle and to marry them with the LSC’s Statement of Priorities (Better skills, Better jobs, Better lives, November 2007) and with Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. Alignment of the equality and diversity measures with the quality improvement agenda was also felt to be important; this could be done through the development of profiles for providers to include both hard and soft measures, using a system of ‘traffic light’ indicators. This would create more easily accessible data and constructively inform dialogues with providers.

Sustainability of the Single Equality Scheme

In order for the SES to become sustainable, regions felt it had to be embedded within practice. However, controversially, it was recognised that this approach may compromise the ability to measure the impact of SES easily.

There is evidence in the regions more generally of a growing culture shift whereby LSC staff are starting to view equality and diversity as part of their roles and responsibilities. This is considered to be a significant shift in working practices that is taking place within the LSC as a whole.

In order to develop a sustainable SES, regions identified the need for regular local and regional meetings to provide a framework for reviewing progress and maintaining a focus on equality and diversity issues. Once again, the mainstreaming
of the SES into the LSC business cycle is highlighted as significant in creating a sustainable SES model. Collaborative partnership working will enhance the sustainability of the SES and allow equality and diversity issues to be continually addressed and updated.

Innovative and Creative Activity

22 Regions highlighted innovative and creative practices surrounding the SES, some of which are presented here. For more detail, see Annex B.

23 The East of England region is developing a peer review project around equality and diversity as part of the Quality Improvement Agency’s programme. Additionally, the region has commissioned a qualitative research project to identify needs, barriers and best practice relating to equality and diversity.

24 The East Midlands region is conducting activity (including commissioning a piece of action research) around gypsy and traveller communities, aiming to develop a profile of such communities in relation to learning and skills. The region has also developed a ‘comments log’ to provide a forum for live commentary and debate that can inform and contribute to the construction of the SES action plan. The regional LSC is working collaboratively with the East Midlands Development Agency which is funding some action research, for example a mapping exercise exploring the practical and strategic approaches to equality and diversity to be found in other regions, in order to identify areas of best practice.

25 In the London region, the LSC has focused strongly on aspects of disability, creating an excellent and accessible website, a strong pan-London consultation and a balanced strategy aimed at delivering strategic benefit to providers, which includes centres of expertise.

26 In the North East region, the LSC funded the ‘If I Can You Can’ initiative to address gender and race stereotyping in schools; a new plan focuses on asylum seekers and refugees; a service-level agreement with the Black and Ethnic Minority Community Network (BECON) has been signed; and the region has established an inter-faith forum.

27 In the North West region, a project with Business in the Community (known as Merlin – ‘minority ethnic role-models for learning and inspiration’) encourages role-model mentoring with black and minority ethnic learners with a focus on the workplace. There is also a North West hub network for black professionals that plays a key role in the diversification of the learning sector workforce. There is a strong learner involvement strategy in partnership with the North West Youth Parliament, and some additional activity regarding workless young Muslim women.

28 Within the South West region, there is activity with college providers to test the degree to which sexual orientation should be included within the equality and diversity measures. There is also a project exploring atypical employment as well as the GERI project on gender equality and race inclusion issues, developing briefing
mechanisms and tools for employers, the Connexions Service and schools – using drama, role-model mentoring and employer engagement.

29 Yorkshire and the Humber region has developed a regional people plan, including enhanced management information on diversity, and has introduced proactive initiatives to address identified areas for regional improvement. It has instigated a rolling programme of equality and diversity awareness for staff and has set up an organisational development group, made up of staff from all directorates, to implement and monitor key areas of this plan, including internal equality and diversity.

Areas for Development

30 This section presents some suggestions from regional colleagues that they would like to see taken forward.

- The role of governance should be strengthened within the SES – bearing in mind the new LSC regional structures and the reporting role that regional directors have to the Chief Executive. Increased focus on equality and diversity in governance could be enhanced through the appointment of an equality and diversity champion at LSC National Council.

- Refugees and migrant workers should be included in the usual activity around race and disability; and disadvantage in general could perhaps be included in action plans.

- The LSC’s work with employers and the latter’s role in the diversification of the workforce should be clarified.

- People who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) should be afforded a higher profile within the regional activity arising from the SES, bearing in mind the potential problems arising from including more and more groups.

- Disability data should be included in local needs analyses, and there should be clearer links between needs analyses and regional SES action plans.

- There should be a strategy to engage all colleagues, not just specified equality and diversity managers. Some staff reported that equality and diversity is not ‘owned’ as a relevant issue, perhaps because of the view that there are ‘few black and minority ethnic communities within the region’.

- Some regions considered the SES to be too complicated and in need of simplification. A series of ideas were put forward to enhance the accessibility and incorporation of the SES into day-to-day activity. These included an ‘easy access’ version of the SES (however, there is an easy read version already available); a pull-out summary highlighting key issues; and cutting back on
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duplication of material found in other documents by cross-referring to them. (The SES provider support programme might be of assistance here.)

Conclusion

31 In conclusion, it should be acknowledged that, throughout the process of gathering regional evidence about the implementation of the SES, it was felt that it was important for stakeholders to play a key role in supporting the development and dissemination of the SES to providers.

32 The stage at which the SES has been adopted internally and disseminated externally varies between regions. Broadly, regional teams have disseminated, consulted and requested feedback internally through equality and diversity regional and local groups on which key stakeholders sit, and they have contributed to the consultation and feedback. Some regions, however, have not significantly involved themselves in wide external dissemination at this time.

33 The primary method of dissemination activity has been through road shows which, for most regions, will be completed by March 2008. Embedding the principles of SES is now widespread practice in the regions, particularly among those colleagues with lead responsibility. Some colleagues, though, have a little way to go when considering the SES in relation to their work activity.

34 All regional plans are now published.

35 The SES should, it was felt, be seen as a positive scheme to be embraced by the LSC as an organisation. Almost as important is that the scheme should have an impact on providers, and not become a tick-box activity to satisfy targets and inspection. All regions were keen to ensure that the SES took equality and diversity out of the ‘silo’ in which some regions felt it was sitting. However, it was recognised that a significant cultural shift in working practices was required by many colleagues both internally and externally.

36 It is recognised that there are pockets of very good practice in some regions, while other areas see themselves simply as conduits for communicating the equality and diversity policy without any need to be proactive.

37 The SES should, it was felt by the majority, be a living document updated regularly and containing links to a range of other documents, with the aim of developing a standardisation of excellent practice within equality and diversity.

38 The SES provider support programme was identified as playing a potentially significant and crucial role in the dissemination of the SES and the raising of its profile both internally and with external stakeholders and providers. Dissemination of the SES through the provider support programme is welcomed by all regions.
Annex A: Telephone Interview Pro-forma

Review of the impact of the single equality scheme, following implementation

The aim of this telephone interview and/or meeting with LSC equality and diversity representatives was to develop responses to the action plans recently completed by the regions.

There is no set guidance for the focus of the interview; these are guided questions only, suggesting possible areas for discussion.

1. Was there anything you would have liked to comment on relating to the SES for which there wasn’t space in the action plan?

2. How has the SES been implemented, disseminated internally within the LSC and externally? What has been the response?

3. What has been the impact of the SES to date?

4. What do you think have been the most significant achievements of the SES to date?

5. What actions have you developed to ensure the SES is sustainable?

6. Is your region doing anything particularly innovative or creative to implement the SES?

7. What targets and measures have you put in place to monitor and measure the successful implementation and adoption of the SES?

8. How useful is the action plan you have created in constructing a framework for the implementation of the SES across your region?

9. What omissions, if any, do you feel exist within the SES?

10. Are internal/external colleagues aware of the SES dissemination programme?

11. Are there any other comments you would like to make?
Annex B: Region by Region Report of Evidence Following Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme

Introduction

1 This annex should be read in conjunction with the attached report, which provides an overview of implementation of the single equality scheme (SES) in the regions. All regional leads for equality and diversity were invited to submit evidence to the National Office of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC asked colleagues from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to discuss the SES and the regional evidence and were offered opportunities to add to their submissions. The following report summarises, by region, the activity on the SES using both these sources of data.

East of England region

2 Because of staff changes it was felt that the region was lagging behind others. The regional SES action plan has been published.

3 The LSC had undertaken consultation activities with colleagues at national, regional and local levels. Consequently, a task and finish group was established to develop a regional action plan; its focus was significantly about working with providers at a local level.

4 The creation of the SES has provided a strong implementation framework. While the region has created a draft action plan, it would have liked to have seen a higher profile for young people classified as NEET, although it was accepted that once you start to consider separate groups, it is difficult to know where to stop. A further area that did not appear within the SES was learner support.

5 The SES was disseminated through a range of LSC colleagues, and feedback was sought. It was then built into the emerging action plan for the region. Dissemination of the SES externally has not yet been undertaken. There is a recognition in this region that more engagement with senior managers is necessary in order to raise the profile of equality and diversity.

6 The SES is slowly raising the profile of equality and diversity activity, ‘bringing it out of its silo’ and demonstrating that equality and diversity is important for all colleagues. In order to create a SES that can be sustained, a peer review project around equality and diversity is being established in this region as part of the quality improvement programme, with sub-regional equality and diversity groups being piloted. Additionally, the region is commissioning a qualitative research project to identify the needs, barriers and best practices associated with equality and diversity.

7 The SES in this region will be aligned with the LSC business cycle, the most recent Statement of Priorities (Better skills, Better jobs, Better lives, November 2007)
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and the PSA targets. The East of England region also hopes to include soft measures in its assessment activities through a system of ‘traffic light’ indicators that will be easily accessible to all LSC staff and inform provider dialogues.

8 The LSC lead in this region identified a range of barriers and challenges she faced when working to implement the SES, including the following.

- Issues of equality and diversity have historically been not sufficiently integrated in regional LSCs.

- There is inconsistency of approach across the region, with pockets of very good practice and other areas where equality and diversity leads are not proactive and simply act as channels of communication.

- Data issues: there is no disability data in the local needs analysis, and no baseline for equality and diversity (although data is available on the intranet).

- It is currently felt that equality and diversity is not an issue in the region because there are not many black and minority ethnic communities in some areas; some colleagues do not realise that equality and diversity includes disability and gender issues.

- Roles and responsibilities within the region and in areas for influencing providers are not currently clear, due to the withdrawal of full-time equality and diversity colleagues in local offices.

- Equality and diversity is not always seen as intrinsic to the success of the LSC; some colleagues claim that the demand-led funding model means that the LSC doesn’t have to think about equality and diversity.

9 This region is keen that the SES provider support programme should offer support to local equality and diversity leads. There is a strong commitment from the SES lead to drive the SES forward.

East Midlands region

10 The East Midlands LSC colleague who holds the lead responsibility is new in post and feels that the East Midlands is not as fully advanced in implementing the SES as the region would like. However, she provided a number of draft documents to support the implementation of the SES across the region:

- East Midlands LSC Single Equality Scheme Regional Action Plan 2007–10 (draft, September 2007);

- East Midlands LSC Single Equality Scheme Regional Action Plan 2007–08 (draft proposal);

- East Midlands LSC Single Equality Scheme Regional Action Plan 2007–08, Comments Log; and

11 The SES in this region has been implemented by circulating the draft to the senior management team, obtaining agreement from LSC National Office, and disseminating it to stakeholders and regional strategy equality and diversity groups.

12 The draft SES is seen in the region as a ‘live’ document. A ‘comments log’ has been created so that live debate surrounding the construction of the documentation can take place. The draft documents are thus being shared on an ongoing basis, with changes being incorporated as they arise from equality and diversity discussion groups. Minor alterations have consequently been made to reflect local area demands and to correct local statements.

13 The East Midlands region felt it was too early in the life of the SES to comment on its impact; its intention was to be open-minded about the SES and embrace the philosophy behind it.

14 Significantly, the region felt that the SES provided the opportunity to address issues that might not otherwise have been identified; it was a good mechanism for alternative thinking and creativity. The chance to tailor the SES to respond to regional issues was welcomed, as was its ability to capture and respond to issues at a local level through local provider plans.

15 On the sustainability of the SES, the East Midlands region has focused on the development of collaborative partnerships, allowing equality and diversity issues to be continually reflected and addressed. The main focus for this region has been the construction of a platform for stakeholders within the region, including the voluntary and third sectors as well as the public and private sectors. The region aims to identify ‘champion SES providers’.

16 In supporting the implementation of the SES, the East Midlands region has commissioned a piece of action research to develop a profile of the region’s gypsy and travelling community.

17 The East Midlands region will assess the effectiveness of the SES using generic national targets. To date, the SES has been welcomed by all stakeholders in this region as a useful and focused framework for the construction of strong equality and diversity activity. The region is also concentrating on the creation of a standard of excellence within equality and diversity by seeking accreditation from Investors in Diversity. However, the region recognises the requirement of all related organisations to involve themselves in cultural change.

18 The development of regional action plans for SES is now positioned within the LSC business cycle. Significantly, the East Midlands has chosen a fourth priority in its Statement of Priorities that focuses on equality; this sends a strong regional message about the importance of the SES in the future: ‘Improving participation and attainment through equality and diversity’ – invest in people: to give them the skills they need for success in work and life.’
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London region

19 One of the key challenges facing the implementation of the SES in the London region is the staffing of vacant posts, although many of these have been filled in recent months.

20 The SES has generally been received positively, simply by raising the profile of equality and diversity and ‘putting it on the agenda’. The SES has also usefully provided a framework within which various strands of work can be brought together.

21 Criticism of the SES focused on the complicated nature of the document. This was supported by a list of suggestions for improvement, including:

- an easy-read version;
- a pull-out summary highlighting key issues;
- removing duplication of material, through cross-referencing;
- a ‘live’ online document that can be updated regularly, containing links to other relevant documents; and
- increased clarity (the LSC colleague felt that this may be covered by the LSN/NIACE dissemination project).

22 Dissemination of the SES has taken place through some equalities training for partnership teams, resulting in the identification of support needs for partnership managers.

23 The impact of the SES to date cannot be quantified at this stage. However, the region has produced a statement of ‘expected impact’ within its regional plan. For similar reasons, LSC colleagues felt that they were unable to state that there were any significant achievements attributable to the SES.

24 This region aims to embed the SES activity within the LSC business cycle. Interestingly, the region aims to use a differentiated model of EDIMs, which can work with a bottom-up approach to providers, to measure and monitor the progress of the SES.

25 The action plan for the region is still under construction and the LSC hopes to obtain support through partnership directors and the London management group. LSC London is looking forward to the start of the dissemination project.

North East region

26 The North East region submitted a strong regional evidence document to the National Office outlining how the region had implemented the SES and its plans to take it forward. There has been extensive dissemination activity internally within the LSC and across the region to external stakeholders.

27 To date, the region has been unable to measure the impact of the SES, in part because the most significant activities were to raise awareness throughout the
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region; to disseminate activity; and to develop a regional action plan to support its implementation.

28 So far, the region has produced:

- a plan focusing on asylum seekers and refugees (this is separate from the regional action plan);
- a service-level agreement with the Black and Ethnic Minority Community Network (BECON); and
- an inter-faith forum.

29 The SES is embedded in all delivery and it is believed that this will enhance strategic cohesion throughout the region.

30 In the development and implementation of the SES, the region aims to undertake a number of activities, such as the LSC-funded ‘I Can You Can’ initiative that addresses gender and race stereotyping in schools.

31 Measuring and monitoring the SES will be undertaken in this region through the equality and diversity impact measures (EDIMs) framework.

32 Within the SES, the North East region would like to see a stronger focus on areas such as class and disadvantage, young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and multiple disadvantage, although these areas are being addressed in other parts of core business activity.

33 This region has welcomed the SES as a very useful and ‘live’ document that is fundamental to all the activities the LSC is involved with. The regional action plan is a working document, reviewed and discussed monthly by equality and diversity managers and other colleagues. The following year is regarded as crucial in the implementation of the SES.

**North West region**

34 The SES in this region has been implemented through the regional strategic equality and diversity action plan. To date, staff have been very responsive to the SES and are looking forward to working on projects associated with it.

35 Dissemination activity has been undertaken internally, with partnership teams invited to road shows in the five sub-regional areas. Additional external dissemination activity has been undertaken when opportunities have arisen; for example, a briefing on the SES was presented to the Ethnic Minority Business Federation.

36 This region was unable to measure quantitatively any impact of the SES to date. A significant cultural shift has taken place within the organisation and the majority of staff now acknowledge that issues of equality and diversity are part of
their role. A strategic data platform has been established and provides an excellent source of information, such as identifying different groups participating in learning.

37 This region felt that it was important for equality and diversity to become mainstreamed into the business cycle. This has allowed the production of a strategic action plan that identifies areas of work across the directorates where equality and diversity impact. The SES has streamlined a previously haphazard activity and provided a robust reporting mechanism, as well as a framework for regional EDIMs.

38 Work in this region that will implement, inform and link with the SES includes:

- ‘Merlin’ – a project with Business in the Community that encourages role-model mentoring with black and minority ethnic learners with a workplace focus;
- the North West hub network for black professionals, which has a key role in the diversification of the learning sector workforce;
- the North West learner involvement strategy – a partnership with the North West Youth Parliament and QDP services; and
- activity with workless young Muslim women.

39 A regional equality and diversity steering group is in place and meets regularly to review the strategy and report to the senior management team.

40 Additional areas of focus in constructing the North West regional plan include disadvantage, as well as race and disability. Colleagues in the region would also like to do more work for groups such as refugees and migrant workers.

41 The North West region has requested greater clarity. Colleagues would particularly welcome more information on work with employers – what exactly does the LSC want to say to employers about equality and diversity? Does it involve diversification of the workforce, links to employment law or fair contracts of employment?

42 It is recognised that the SES is a massive agenda and that it will be difficult to manage at times.

South East region

43 The SES has been welcomed in this region by both LSC colleagues and providers as a good LSC policy. Implementation in the region has been undertaken by contacting all stakeholders and providers through the disability equality duty workshop programme. This was followed up through internal and external web pages for equality and diversity.

44 The region aims to engage with partnership teams through regional SES road shows, visiting each local office monthly to discuss the SES at their team meetings.
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It is hoped that this activity will demystify the SES and make it comprehensible to all involved.

45 Colleagues in the LSC are working with regional and local partners to embed the principles of the SES into all activities. Significantly, implementation of the SES has brought about a shift in workplace culture in this region, from one that saw equality and diversity in isolation from other activities to one where more and more colleagues see this as integral to everybody’s role.

46 The SES impact will be measured through the use of the EDIMs. Additionally, regional human resource (HR) business partners, who regularly engage with local union leads on equality issues, will focus on the HR side of the SES.

47 The construction of the regional action plan provides an opportunity to monitor activity against the action plan and to react effectively to issues that may arise; this will ensure clear and consistent communication with all regional partners.

48 The involvement of regional stakeholders in the presentation of the SES is of primary importance in the South East region, demonstrating that the SES can be adopted by, and is of value to, provider organisations, rather than being ‘just another target’.

South West region

49 The South West region is currently in the final stages of developing its regional action plan for the SES – a ‘regional colourisation’ of the national plan.

50 Although areas of race, disability and gender are covered, there is a feeling in the South West that there is scope to move beyond these areas to include sexual orientation and age (the latter is particularly significant, given the region’s demographic profile).

51 The SES is being disseminated through equality and diversity training activity delivered to all LSC staff on a general basis. Currently, it is thought that about half the staff have undertaken this training. Additionally, the region held a conference on equality and diversity for staff and providers, which successfully raised the profile both of the national plan and of the regional action plan in development. Further, more detailed training for partnership managers and other LSC staff is planned for 2008.

52 Importantly, this region has its own SES support project which is likely to reach internal staff and provider staff at a more local level.

53 Measuring the impact of the SES at this stage is problematic. The region had impact measures a year earlier than nationally which may assist in measuring the impact of the SES earlier.

54 The regional view on the sustainability of the SES is that it needs to be embedded within practice. If this approach is adopted, impact becomes more difficult
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to measure explicitly. However, there is evidence that providers are becoming more interested in and committed to developing their impact measurement regarding equality and diversity and it is hoped that the developing work via SES will support this.

55 The most significant achievements of the SES to date in the South West relate to the development of a more joined-up approach. Prior to the SES, separate schemes had existed but little progress had been made. The integrated approach of the SES provides a more understandable focus for LSC staff, a clearer sense of what has to be done, how it may be done, and its relationship to HR and business benefits.

56 There are signs in the South West that positive and active equality and diversity practice will become more sustainable due to the introduction of the SES, combined with the two support projects.

57 This region is developing a creative and embedded approach to equality and diversity with some innovative initiatives emerging. For example, work on atypical employment and on gender issues (the GERI project) to develop briefing mechanisms and tools for employers, the Connexions Service and schools – using drama, role-model mentoring and employer engagement to raise gender issues.

58 The regional equality and diversity action plan for the South West sets out targets and measures for monitoring. The impact measures developed for 2007–08 are being revised for 2008–09 in the light of the SES strategy, and these will feed into the regional commissioning plan, link to regional baseline data, and provide development for specific actions, such as:

- strengthening the equality and diversity element in discussions between the LSC and sector skills councils;

- developing hard targets for Adult Apprenticeships; and

- establishing equality and diversity briefings and training for Train to Gain brokers.

59 Additionally, the region’s management group will be looking at equality and diversity impact measures on a quarterly basis and specific issues will be fed back nationally. The South West would like to see more activity on the role of governance, with the appointment of a governance-level equality and diversity champion.

60 The SES is developing a higher profile and there is growing awareness of it among colleagues. The regional action plan is seen as key to both the success of embedding equality and diversity practice and to making sense of the national SES strategy in regional terms.
West Midlands region

61 In the West Midlands, the opportunity to complete the regional evidence document had been missed. However, the NIACE regional development officer was able to interview the lead for the SES. Because of staff changes there had been a hiatus in activity, but an equality and diversity forum continues to be active within the region and there are additional local partnerships.

62 The West Midlands SES seeks to interpret national policy and focus its role, remit and priorities within the West Midlands region. The SES was delivered to LSC colleagues through a presentation at a directors’ meeting in June 2007. The SES has been welcomed as a framework for providing greater clarity and focus to this area of work.

63 Throughout the region, there is a wide range of knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity; some colleagues have worked in this area for between three and five years, but others have only limited knowledge. There is a recognised need to come together to share colleagues’ experiences of equality and diversity activity.

64 At the time of the interview, colleagues in the West Midlands region did not feel that they were undertaking any activity that they would consider innovative or creative. Nevertheless, activity that they are keen to incorporate into their regional SES action plan will focus on Level 2/Level 3 and on young people classified as NEET as well as providing assurances around the ‘September guarantee’ for young people. EDIMs would be the major tool for supporting the impact of the SES in the West Midlands.

65 Dissemination activity had not yet taken place with stakeholders or providers at the time of the interview in November 2007. Currently, the SES does not have a high profile among internal or external colleagues in this region.

66 West Midlands LSC colleagues recognised the urgency of responding to the SES and invited the SES provider support programme lead to speak at the next West Midlands equality and diversity meeting to discuss it in more detail.

Yorkshire and the Humber region

67 LSC and NIACE colleagues in this area felt that the evidence submitted in relation to the region’s interpretation of the SES provided all the necessary and available information. Therefore, no interview was undertaken. The information presented here is drawn solely from the regional evidence document.

68 A regional equality and diversity action plan has been prepared. The regional director has been approached to raise the need for an equality champion at Council level. There has been increased participation from equality and diversity leads in area offices.
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69 An LSC regional equality and diversity steering group has been instigated, chaired by an area director; this group is a sub-group of the learning, planning and performance board.

70 Mandatory equality and diversity training has been promoted across the region and completion has increased. Also, an opportunity has been extended to all staff to develop understanding and awareness of equality and diversity issues, with appropriate priority placed on activities to support them.

71 It is too early in the process to measure any impacts. Data teams have developed EDIMs that link directly to Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. Partnership teams will review EDIMs with providers, asking for EDIMs to be included in providers’ plans. The data will give information to partnership teams that will enable them to challenge areas where improvement is required, and ultimately to improve services for learners. Partnership teams will thus be better informed to challenge providers. Informed debate should increase participation and retention for learners. The region is working with the regional data team to provide robust information on an individual provider basis.

72 A range of innovative activities are being undertaken in the region. These include:

- a co-financing contract to develop equality and diversity business benefit training;
- a tender to implement regional networks, whose activities will align with regional priorities;
- research into the under-representation of black and minority ethnic communities in work-based learning and Apprenticeships;
- the establishment of a pilot regional learner panel;
- regional and sub-regional provider forums, to encourage sharing of best practice and provide peer support and information; and
- a project to support and mentor learners from black and minority ethnic communities to access and remain in further education, and to identify and challenge barriers to learning in colleges.

73 All contractors will be expected to demonstrate they have equality and diversity policies. Road shows to all area offices on the national single equality scheme will be undertaken.

74 Although the region does not feel able to measure specific impacts of the SES on learners, awareness raising among providers on the benefits of having an SES has been undertaken. Providers who have no legal requirement to produce equality schemes are being encouraged to develop them.

75 his region has developed a regional people plan, including improved management information on diversity; introducing proactive initiatives to address
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identified areas for improvement; and developing and delivering a rolling programme of equality and diversity awareness and development for staff. Additionally, an organisational development group, made up of staff from all directorates, has been set up to influence, implement and monitor key areas of this plan, including internal equality and diversity.

Conclusion

76 It is apparent from the above that all LSC regions are aware of the single equality scheme and, to differing degrees, have had success in implementing and disseminating it.

77 It is also clear that the regions welcome the opportunity to participate in the SES provider support programme provided by NIACE and LSC colleagues in the forthcoming months.