Clarification of the CoVE 50 FTEs at Level 3 criterion for LSC local offices, and CoVE providers

Background

1 The 50 FTEs at vocational level 3 criterion is extremely important and is an essential benchmark for the approval of proposals and for recognition of Full CoVE status. The growth in level 3 learning remains a key objective of the CoVE programme and this should include working with employers to upskill the adult workforce.

2 CoVE should be a demand-led, skills-driven programme and it should respond to employers’ skills needs by providing flexible and responsive learning. As such it is recognised that a pragmatic approach is necessary to ensure CoVEs develop in a way that responds to sector skills needs and delivers the training and qualifications that are needed by industry and commerce.

Guidelines – General Principles

3 The LSC expects that the majority of providers, either leading or part of a collaborative CoVE, will meet the criterion of 50 FTEs at level 3 at the end of their first year’s development funding or exceptionally by the end of their third development year. This is particularly the case where CoVEs deliver areas of well-established Level 3 provision on entry to the programme.

4 For CoVEs who, fall short of meeting the 50 FTE criterion at the end of the first year due to an economic downturn the LSC will need to reach a judgement on whether the criterion can be relaxed for confirmation of Full CoVE status. Evidence will need to be submitted within the assessment process that level 3 numbers will increase to an acceptable volume, and the criterion met, by the end of year 3.

5 However, there are other categories that require special consideration. These are:
   - Where delivery of priority vocational skills will grow from a low base, and
   - The employment sector has a high proportion of learners who do not work standard hours, are part-time, and where training is being developed to meet new vocational skills needs.

6 There will however be CoVEs focusing on new skills areas or growing level 3 from a low base, or developing new employer responsive courses and qualifications that cannot reasonably be expected to meet the FTE criterion at the end of the first year. As a minimum these CoVEs are expected to meet the criterion at the end of their third funded development year. The proposal and agreed development plan should clearly set out how the Level 3 targets have been set and how and when they will be achieved.
Collaborative CoVEs with established provision

7 Where a provider is delivering an established curriculum area, the 50 FTE benchmark should be delivered at the end of year 1. However, where the curriculum area is being developed from a low base the partner should be allowed the 3-year funded development period to deliver the benchmark. Proposals and development plans will need to show each partner’s contribution including the baseline position and the projected growth.

8 Where the targets or benchmark has not been delivered as agreed, the LSC will need to consider sector, economic conditions and other factors that have affected the performance of the partners(s) in meeting the Level 3 benchmark. Past cases have ranged from serious under performance resulting in suspension or removal from the programme, to justifiable and recoverable situations managed through agreed action and development planning. These cases arise following assessment for Full CoVE Status by the LSC using a standard assessment process that is moderated to ensure consistency.

9 For CoVEs that fall short of meeting the benchmark (or the agreed development plan targets should these be different) at the end of the first development year the LSC will need to decide whether an exception can be justified and the criterion relaxed for confirmation of Full CoVE Status. Convincing evidence should be provided as part of assessment that indicates that level 3 volumes will increase sufficiently and the criterion will be met in a reasonable timescale and ideally by the end of year 3.

CoVES Increasing Level 3 specialist provision to meet sector and economic needs

10 This category is the most complex and will require a clear understanding of the skills needs and training requirements of the sector in question. The LSC will therefore need to consider:

- All available labour market intelligence (LMI);
- Views from key strategic partners – RDA, SSC, industry bodies, employers. This is essential to reach a conclusion as to whether the CoVE will be supported by the sector and seen to be meeting vocational skills needs;
- Data showing current demand and expected growth, particularly at Level 3. Progression and employment data and trends in growth and demand for the specialist skills;
- Details of core qualifications necessary for the sector and the modes of delivery and time learners’ need to achieve each qualification; and
- An assessment of the strategic importance of the proposed CoVE.

11 The above information should be supplemented by completion of an overview by the lead Local LSC and supported by the local LSC and where possible key stakeholders.
CoVE Form PF07

Conclusion

12 The chart below sets out the various options and flexibility available in the policy framework. Where existing live CoVEs fall outside these categories, for example, not all partners in an approved collaborative CoVE are delivering 50FTEs at level 3, the Local LSC should review all factors and agree revised targets that are realistic and achievable.

13 The role of the CoVE Regional Validation Panels is key in maintaining consistency deciding whether each CoVE has met the 50 FTE criterion as outlined in this note.

14 All Round 9 proposals will be moderated by Regional Validation Panels. A Regional Validation Panel will moderate each assessment for confirmation of Full CoVE Status from Round 6 and this will include agreement that CoVE level 3 targets have been met.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CoVE Category</th>
<th>Year 1 Benchmark</th>
<th>Year 2 Benchmark</th>
<th>Year 3 Benchmark</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single partner, delivering established level 3 curriculum</td>
<td>X 50 FTEs at level 3</td>
<td>Year 1 level, plus agreed growth target in Development Plan</td>
<td>Year 2 level, plus agreed growth in Development Plan</td>
<td>Some flexibility acceptable in a range of 0-10%, but only in exceptional circumstances, for example external factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single partner, new curriculum</td>
<td>Baseline of 30 FTEs by year end</td>
<td>Year 1 plus agreed target growth in Development Plan</td>
<td>X 50 FTEs at level 3</td>
<td>Flexibility acceptable in a range of 0-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative CoVE, for example X 4 partners all with established Level 3</td>
<td>Each partner 50 X 4 = 200 FTEs</td>
<td>Year 1 plus agreed growth in Development Plan</td>
<td>Year 2 plus agreed growth in Development Plan</td>
<td>Overall CoVE achievement is key, with high volumes offsetting acceptable underperformance by certain partners. All partners should deliver 50 FTEs at the end of year 3, but flexibility in exceptional circumstances of 0-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative CoVE, new curriculum area for example X 4 partners, X 1 with</td>
<td>3 partners X 50, plus 1 x 30 =180 FTEs</td>
<td>Year 1 plus agreed growth in Development Plan</td>
<td>X 50 FTEs at level 3 for all partners, plus growth = 200+</td>
<td>All partners should deliver 50+ FTEs at the end of year 3, but acceptable flexibility in a range of 0-10%.</td>
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<tr>
<td>new provision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CoVE starting from a low base of level 3, growing new provision to meet</td>
<td>Each partner’s targets based on realistic assessment and agreement. These might be</td>
<td>Year 1 plus agreed growth in Development Plan, to be agreed by Local LSC and</td>
<td>Each partner aiming at a minimum volume measure for Level 3, to be agreed by</td>
<td>Measures include high learner numbers gaining vocational skills and achieving level 3 qualifications. Agreed minimum volumes and range of provision reflects the CoVE funding and LSC investment. Key targets include increased volume of level 3 learners, high achievement rates and new qualifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exceptional sector circumstances, structures or work patterns</td>
<td>learner starts and achievement</td>
<td>regional Validation Group</td>
<td>Local LSC and regional Validation Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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