Through Inclusion to Excellence: Moving From Policy to Practice

A literature and research review performed by Cathy Tissot, Sally Faraday, Lynn Macqueen and Liz Maudslay

Commissioned by the Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the LSC’s Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector

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Of interest to the further education system, researchers and academics
The Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC’s) Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector commissioned the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) to perform a literature and research review in relation to this cohort of learners. This document reports the findings of that review.

Further information
For further information, please contact:

Learning and Skills Council
National Office
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

www.lsc.gov.uk
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Executive Summary

1 In March 2004 the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC’s) National Council endorsed the need for a strategic review of its funding and planning of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This review is grounded on the principle of inclusive learning, at a time when demand for provision is steadily increasing.

2 The steering group commissioned the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) (now the Learning and Skills Network or LSN) to undertake this literature review. It aimed to provide an evidence base to inform the review process, and to enable the LSC to develop a framework that will improve and expand the quality and range of choices for learners, as well as make effective use of the available funding.

3 This report is a synthesis of current literature and research with the aim of informing the LSC’s strategic review. In addition to a search of the literature, the views of key individuals working in the field of post-16 education and learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been sought. The search of the literature for a project of this nature is complex, and involved combining information gained through printed matter with the first-hand experiences of those colleagues in the field. A ‘realist synthesis’ model of evidence-based assessment was used in this review.

4 In the course of this review five themes emerged, which were used to structure this report. They were:
   - learner-centred planning and provision
   - inclusive provision
   - linking education and training to employment
   - planning
   - funding.

5 The key messages to emerge from the themes were as follows.
   - Many learners and potential learners are not able to access provision that genuinely takes account of their expressed wishes and needs. This is because of a lack of appropriate provision, and fundamental changes are required to the structure of provision, with learners having a greater influence on designing the service they receive so it can be tailored to their specific needs.
   - Collaboration is often not working effectively. Collaboration at local level will only be effective if clear structures are created at national level.
   - Inclusive learning is not a ‘fixed state’ but a ‘goal’ towards which the organisation constantly strives.
   - Certain groups of disabled learners are harder to include than others and are still under-represented in post-compulsory education and training provision. A major concern is the expressed lack of access to work-based learning opportunities for some learners.
   - An inclusive learning and skills sector requires a continuum of provision, and does not necessarily mean an absence of all specialist provision. However, at present some learners with disabilities feel forced into specialist provision because of a lack of suitable learning opportunities with local providers.
   - It is important to maintain a broad range of learning opportunities, including non-accredited and non-vocational provision, either as an important first step in learning or to enhance the quality of life of individuals, reducing future need for support services.
   - A key component of inclusive provision is flexibility, both in design and delivery of the curriculum.
   - People with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are still profoundly under-represented in the labour market, and much provision designed to help learners to gain employment does not result in jobs.
   - Work-based learning needs to be more flexible in its structure and design or through interpretation of policy on work-based learning programmes. The full range needs to include Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E) and workforce development through to the supported employment spectrum.
Some programmes designed to help learners towards employment do not achieve their aims, for example, many learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, are on work preparation college courses but do not move into employment.

There is considerable value, and positive models are developed, in many supported employment schemes. This is an essential part of the continuum of employment-related provision.

Effective relationships with employers are crucial to improving access to employment for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities needs to be highlighted as a priority.

All policies must recognise the existence and learning needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The collection and use of data about learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are problematic.

There needs to be a clear strategy with clearly articulated aims and outcomes expressed as objective targets for improvement that address current inconsistencies and inequalities within a defined timescale.

Funding is of great importance in determining provision. The range of different systems has created artificial barriers between sectors and the inequalities and inconsistencies that affect some learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in some sectors.

The most successful models for achieving inclusivity are ‘throughput’ models, in which the responsibility for the organisation of provision and allocation of resources is at a regional level, where the emphasis is on improving the inclusivity of mainstream provision, and where individual allocations are retained for higher costs of support.

There needs to be clarity at national level regarding outcomes to be achieved, with decisions about how they may be realised made at a regional or local level. There has been a lack of opportunity for the funding of innovative developments. The current provision supports the status quo unquestioningly.

A strong competitive climate acts against inclusive provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and that funding is better used to encourage collaboration.

It is important to consider carefully the setting of outcomes to ensure that they promote rather than act against the interests of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Accountability is key. Earmarking funds, methods of control, monitoring, review evaluation and inspection are all essential to ensure that funding is used for the learners and to achieve the purposes for which it is intended. The research is also clear that this needs to be achieved with the minimum bureaucracy, resulting in simplicity, consistency, predictability and stability.

Strategic Opportunities

From such an extensive pool of information it is not surprising that the preceding list of findings has given rise to a large number of possible actions for the LSC. Realistically, however, it might prove a more manageable task for the LSC to focus initially on a number of opportunities for action. For each action, LSC will need to make explicit how it will operate at national, regional and local levels, and what providers are expected to do. In proposing this line of action, the authors have been struck by the serendipitous timing of the introduction of the duty to promote disability equality. An effective response through the LSC’s disability equality scheme has the potential to address the vast majority of the issues raised in this review. Thus the LSC can use this opportunity not only to meet its statutory duties but also to address some of the implications for action previously set out.

Recommendation 1

Take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the duty to promote disability equality and the requirement to produce a disability equality scheme

This will provide a helpful structure to address a number of the issues identified in this review, in particular the need to:

- consult learners
- collect and analyse data
- assess the impact of all policies and procedures on learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
set goals for improving inclusivity and equity
achieve better outcomes for learners.

**Recommendation 2**

**Build on the process for local planning and funding**

8 Strategic area reviews (StARs) and thematic reviews present a rich source of information, which can be used to identify gaps in provision, and barriers to participation, achievement and progression. Used to inform future planning, StARs and thematic reviews present a real opportunity to make strategic decisions to reshape and reform the current pattern of provision locally, and planning co-ordinated at regional level provides a mechanism to address existing inequalities. The LSC will also be able to ensure the match between individuals’ learning requirements and provision by the learning and skills sector.

9 National LSC should facilitate the freedom of regional and local LSCs to respond to local demands and circumstances. At regional and local levels, the LSC should ensure the availability of specialist support to all providers. The LSC nationally should also ensure that research and emerging practice is shared across regions and that sufficient flexibility is available to encourage local innovation. Effective planning through this process should help to:

* ensure a comprehensive range of provision
* promote inter-agency collaboration
* help learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities towards employment.

**Recommendation 3**

**Use the opportunity afforded by the agenda for change funding review to plan a more inclusive pattern of provision**

10 The opportunity, afforded by the agenda for change funding review, to remove the artificial barriers between sectors and to address the inequities for learners, is one that cannot be missed.

The proposed plan-led approach has great potential, but the emphasis must be on getting in place plans that promote inclusivity and equity.
1 Introduction

Background and Context

15 In March 2004, the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC’s) National Council endorsed the need for a strategic review of its funding and planning of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The National Council agreed that it was appropriate to review this provision at this time because the LSC was at a point of being firmly established as an organisation. This review is grounded on the principle of inclusive learning, at a time when demand for provision is steadily increasing.

16 This is an exciting time in the recent history of learner provision. The emphasis of the Warnock Report (Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, 1978) and the Special Education Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) on removing barriers for individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities placed an increased emphasis on the education and/or training for learners as learners first, and secondly on their specific educational or training requirements. This, in addition to other seminal reports (FEFC, 1996; DfES, 2004a), legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) Part 4 (2001) and the new public sector duty to promote disability equality (Disability Discrimination Act 2005), refocused the aims of providers toward ensuring the positive inclusion of all learners. The fruits of these labours are yielding results as more learners of all ability levels wish to be active in further education and training.

17 There is a concern that the increasing requirement for provision is creating uncertainty that future demand may not be adequately met under the current arrangements. These may not always offer learner-centred options. Local provision may not wholly meet some learners’ needs. There is also evidence of differing ‘entitlements’, which suggests the need for stronger links between the different LSC funding streams. In addition, disabled people face many barriers. These may be attitudinal, in relation to policy, physical in nature or due to empowerment. The effect of these is to ‘marginalise disabled people from the mainstream of society and the economy’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 5). This review of literature will aim to assist the production of recommendations to ensure provision is established that is learner-centred, cost-effective and accessible for all across the post-16 sector.

18 The planning and funding of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the post-16 sector is the statutory responsibility of the LSC. It is based on the belief that all learners should be helped towards adult status. Tomlinson defines this as:

the achievement of autonomy, and a positive self-image realistically grounded in the capacity to live as independently as possible and contribute both to the economy and the community.

FEFC, 1996: 7

19 The avenue by which the LSC makes provision can vary. This depends on the needs and aspirations of the individual learner, matched to the attributes of potential placements. Other considerations may include access to necessary support and facilities provided by other (non-educational) agencies, the needs and wishes of the family, the range of locally based education and training provision, the availability of suitable transport, the priorities identified by local LSCs and other factors. In addition, learner choice can be limited by several factors, such as the variable patterns of provision in different parts of the country, increased demand for specialist individual support, restricted options, in spite of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), for learners with particular disabilities or learning difficulties, a lack of information, or the failure of agencies or funding bodies to work together.

20 The factors highlighted above result in a large portion of disabled young adults who are not in education, training or employment (see Figure 1).
Figure 1: Disabled young adults not in education, training or employment.

21 Hence, there is a need to plan and fund a co-ordinated range of provision for people with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities that is appropriate to their needs. It is important to note that there are many definitions for learners with a learning difficulty or disability. For example, the Learning and Skills Act 2000, building on earlier education legislation, defines it as:

*a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, or a disability, which either prevents or hinders the learner from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training.*

22 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial, long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities; the Strategy Unit (2005: 19) defines disability as ‘the disadvantage experienced by an individual as a result of barriers (attitudinal, physical, and so on) that impact on people with impairments and/or ill health’. The LSC’s vision is to involve different parts of the post-16 sector working together to provide an integrated and relevant range of options for this group of learners. This vision is confirmed by the Learning and Skills Act, making it a mandatory part of the LSC’s work.

23 There is a strong desire on the part of the LSC to define this vision. The LSC wishes to refocus its efforts, placing the emphasis on the learner, with a concentration on the improvement and expansion of provision at local level. Provision must be sufficiently robust to respond to the needs of individual young people and adults of all ability levels. Keeping these points in mind, the LSC identified three initial key questions that it would like the strategic review to focus on. These became the starting point for this review.

- What practices should be kept and built on in developing provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- What barriers and gaps are currently present in provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- What solutions and plans are required to address these problems or to implement successful practice more widely?
As part of the process, the LSC refined the scope of this review by using focused sub-groups. These sub-groups each concentrated on individual areas that stemmed from the initial three questions, and this review of literature will contribute towards these groupings. The five themes were defined before the committee's sub-groups were formed; however, there are links between the themes and the sub-groups. These themes were:

- learner-centred planning and provision
- inclusive provision
- linking education and training to employment
- planning
- funding.

**Aim**

The aim of this literature review is to provide an evidence base to inform the review process that will enable the LSC to develop a framework that will improve and expand the quality and range of choices for learners, as well as make effective use of the available funding.

**Objectives**

The objectives of this review are to:

- identify and summarise relevant UK and English language international research literature on planning and funding for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- identify and summarise relevant UK and English language international research literature on inclusive practice
- identify examples of innovative and best practice focusing on resource allocation
- report on research and literature on effective approaches, locally, nationally and internationally.

**Methodology**

This project is a synthesis of current literature and research in order to inform the LSC's strategic review. In addition to a search of the literature, the views of key individuals working in the field of post-16 education and learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been sought. The search of the literature for a project of this nature is complex. By combining knowledge gained through printed matter with the first-hand experiences of those colleagues in the field, the use of a new model of evidence-based assessment called 'realist synthesis' is appropriate.

Realist synthesis allows for complexity. It 'is compatible with... modern service delivery, and sympathetic to the usage of a multi-method, multi-disciplinary evidence base' (Pawson et al, 2004: iii). In addition, it addresses two common concerns inherent in a literature search of this kind: the distinct contribution individuals make to the successful implementation of any programme and the issue of change over time. Both of these influence the implementation of a successful provision of service for individuals under the remit of the LSC.

As such, the description of each programme or article contributes unique pieces to the puzzle. By closer inspection of these pieces, we are able to make general statements beyond each piece. In other words, this literature review will focus on the framework for the whole by allowing the contributions of the individual partners. Only by sharing the examples of what makes programmes successful, and under which circumstances, can the reader pick apart the aspects useful for application to their individual situation.

This is a critical aspect of realist synthesis. It acknowledges that programmes are never implemented in exactly the same way. Individuals gain expertise in implementing them and then make alterations to suit a diverse and changing learner base (Pawson, 2002). By doing so, colleagues deliver individualised programmes that sit well with the original directive, but, more importantly, meet the unique needs of their learners. Although some aspects are similar (the directive allows for the use of a variety of sources of data), this is distinct from other methods of searching the literature. It allows for input that is from a broader base (not restricted to one type of source; that is, research literature) and individualised to reflect the specific nature of post-compulsory education and training, as it is applied to practice.
To allow for a range of views, input was gathered in several ways. First, a series of informal discussions was held among members of the research team. This identified general areas that warranted exploration. Next, the research team identified key contacts for input, which reinforced and refocused the emerging ideas. Finally, individuals attending the recent conferences hosted in the autumn term of 2004 by the LSDA on the implementation of the DDA were invited to comment on the three key questions of this review (see above). In other words, both relevant published research as well as knowledge reported by Faraday and O’Toole (2005) from ‘hands-on’ experience of key individuals defines the scope of this review.

**Scope and Parameters**

The preliminary review of literature was undertaken with a focus on three main sources. Based on the preliminary discussions with colleagues, the purpose of this was to help define the main themes for further exploration. This review also includes policy documents, relevant research (published and unpublished) and web-based sources. These will come from national and international sources.

The first source was a search of materials at the LSDA archives. This helped focus the search and identified several areas warranting further attention. The second initial search involved the Internet, concentrating on two areas. The first of these was a visit to the sites of statutory bodies for an understanding of the statutory framework and policy initiatives in this area. Included in this are the publications link of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Connexions, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the LSC’s websites. Next, several charity websites were also visited. These include the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), National Autistic Society, National Association of Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC), Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and the Mental Health Foundation. Another important source of information was the recent StARs, included in Section 5 of this report (see paragraphs 244–274).

Third, the academic search facility, ATHENS, was accessed. From the selection listed, several resources were identified as promising. These either had the words ‘social sciences’, ‘education’, or ‘employment’ in their description. Once a resource was opened, a keyword search was undertaken. For the purpose of this study, a combination of words and word stems were used. These are ‘social policy’, ‘funding’, ‘educ*’, ‘work*’ and/or ‘disab*’. A combination of two of these words generated a very large number of unhelpful hits, so it was decided to look for combinations of at least three of these words or word stems. The corresponding searches identified several useful resources. This work identified a starting point.

After completing these three initial searches, a meeting was held to draw together the findings from the research team’s initial discussions with key individuals as well as responses from consultation sessions at the autumn term (2004) DDA Part 4 conferences. This feedback was then compared with the initial search of the literature. Although there were many overlapping areas, the team found that five key themes were emerging. These themes are inter-related, and have been separated for the purpose of manageability only.

Each of these themes was explored within the context of the three questions directed by the LSC (see Introduction above for full questions), but this was not the whole story. Realist synthesis directs the review to use ‘search strategies which make deliberate use of purposive sampling, aiming to retrieve materials purposively to answer specific questions or test particular theories’ (Pawson et al, 2004: 20). Briefly, this means pursuing purposive sampling or ‘snowballing’ (searching the references of the source document for other leads). This process is continued and sources are revisited until no new evidence is produced, or a theory has evolved. The outcomes of this process are presented in the next sections. As the findings were examined a revised structure emerged.

It is important to note that by its very nature research tends to problematise issues, and consequently there is a stronger emphasis in published research on what is wrong: the problems. Readers are asked to be mindful of this when reading this review and not to make assumptions that everything is of poor quality or problematic. While there are indeed a number of difficulties, a comparison between Student Voices (Skill, 1996), the report of a national consultation with students to support the FEFC review of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the consultation carried out by Skill to support the review (Skill, 2007), shows considerable, widespread improvements. While learners continue to raise issues, they are now of a very different nature than they were in the past and indicate that much progress had been made.
In summary, this review of literature has been informed by several sources. Discussions with colleagues and an initial review of literature produced several leads, which were then investigated further through the use of realist synthesis. Purposive sampling was employed to tease out the many different areas under each theme. This process was followed for each of the themes, presented in the following sections.
2 Learner-centred Planning and Provision

Planning and provision for learners with disabilities has gone through an encouraging change. In the past, provision for learners has been created by institutions and then offered to the individual who had to try and fit their own needs and desires around what was on offer. Often, for those with any requirements outside the norm, choice was very limited. Today the belief that ‘pre-packaged provision’ is appropriate is rare. Instead there is a positive consensus among policy-makers that learners must be involved in the process of determining the type and scope of programmes needed to meet individual needs.

This section will begin by looking at literature that reflects these changes. It will then look at certain issues which can be problematic in ensuring that learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have their voices listened to. It will centre specifically on the issue of decision-making at times of transition and will end by focusing on the structural changes required if provision really is to become learner-centred.

The Voices of Disabled People

Emphasis on the crucial importance of disabled people determining the nature of provision became widespread with the rise of the Disabled People’s Movement in the 1970s and 1980s. It is paralleled by the shift from the ‘medical’ model of disability, which saw handicap as inherent in the individual, to the ‘social’ model, which saw that blocks to access were determined by society (Oliver, 1990; Morris, 2002). Simons (2000: 2) lists participation of disabled learners in planning as a ‘moral imperative’ which is a fundamental part of being a citizen, stating that it makes for better services as well as having a positive impact on people with disabilities.

The importance of listening to the voices of disabled people led to an increased awareness of notions of self-advocacy. The literature reveals that the process of being involved in identifying goals and then working towards them creates an enhanced sense of self-worth, leading to an increase in self-advocacy. Learners need to be helped to acquire skills of self-advocacy (G. Allen Roemer Institute, 1991), which then becomes an important part of empowering individuals (Renzaglia et al, 2003). Although instigated primarily by people with physical and sensory disabilities the notion of self-advocacy quickly spread to include people with learning difficulties (for example, see www.peoplefirstofnorfolk.org), while the importance of self-advocacy for individuals with mental health needs is highlighted by Berkeley (2004) and Mumford (2004).

The Department of Health (DoH) White Paper, Valuing People (DoH, 2001), is based on the belief that people with learning disabilities must be at the centre of the design of provision rather than having to fit into pre-determined services. Valuing People is underpinned by the concept of ‘person-centred planning’, which:

represents a move away from programme-centred planning, through which people with disabilities are offered only those services that an agency has available. In person-centred planning, the specific characteristics, needs and situations of the person drive the services.

Renzaglia et al, 2003: 146

Sanderson develops this further by describing five key principles of person-centred planning.

a The person is at the centre and:

• is consulted throughout the planning process
• chooses who to involve in the process
• chooses the setting and time of the meetings.
b Family members and friends are partners in planning.

c The plan reflects what is important to the person, their capacities, and what support they require. It:

• has a focus on capacities
• identifies support available
• provides a shared understanding – rethinking the role of the professional
• aids discovery of what is important to the person.

d The plan results in actions that are about life, not just about services, and reflects what is possible, not just what is available.

e The plan results in ongoing listening, learning and further action.

45 She sees person-centred planning as a process of ‘continual listening and learning; focused on what is important to someone now and in the future and acting upon this in alliance with their family and friends’ (Sanderson, 2000: 2).

46 Person-centred planning has resulted in a range of resources, which aim to help practitioners support people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in expressing their views, and developing their own plans. ‘Towards person-centred approaches’ (part of the Valuing People pack) contains a detailed review of these resources, both publications and videos, which explain the concept and practice of person-centred planning. The voluntary sector too has produced resources to help practitioners improve their practice and to encourage people with disabilities to voice their opinions (Stone, 2001). These take several forms. There are materials that help practitioners to teach learners how to express a view; Listen Up (Mencap, 2003) uses a variety of activities to help learners to express preferred choices and opinions. Ask Us (Children’s Society, 2001, 2003) is a multimedia tool, where individuals give their views on inclusion and getting access to services. Others are geared towards staff training, using the voices of learners (Baker and Comfort, 2004; LSDA, 2004a).

Learner-centred Planning and Provision in Post-school Education

47 Government and policy-makers are showing themselves to be increasingly keen to involve learners in the design of programmes to meet the needs of all individuals. The Strategy Unit report Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People outlines how individual disabled learners are in the best place to ‘take the lead in identifying their own needs and in identifying the most appropriate ways in meeting such needs’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 71). The LSC’s Grant letter for 2005 (Clarke, 2004: 1) highlights the need for ‘promoting greater personalisation and choice for learners’. The term ‘personalised learning’ has increasingly become a buzzword in public services, including education policy documents. The phrase ‘personalised learning’ appears to be used to mean many different things, and is often referred to without any clear definition either of what it means or what changes are needed to enable it to happen. In recent Demos reports Leadbeater defines it as a shift of power from service deliverer to service user and as ‘professionals working with users to help unlock their needs, preferences and aspirations through an extended dialogue’ (Leadbeater, 2004a, 2004b). It is ‘the drive to tailor education to individual need, interest and aptitude so as to fulfil every young person’s potential’ (DfES, 2004b: 4).

48 Leadbeater’s report shows close links between the concept of personalised learning currently advocated in educational policy and the self-advocacy movement and person-centred planning philosophy as advocated by disabled people and the DoH. The literature shows evidence that the voices of disabled learners are increasingly being listened to in post-school education (Berkley, 2004). Several of the DDA action research projects (Dryden, 2004; Maudslay, 2004; Nightingale, 2004; Rose, 2004) stipulated that listening to learners was a central tenet of the research, and site reports from 90 sites revealed many innovative ways in which consultation with disabled learners was carried out (www.lsneducation.org.uk/dda/home.aspx).

49 However, practitioners who took part in the action research projects (both verbally and in their written reports) reported facing contradictions in putting
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this into practice. While the rhetoric of government policy, reiterated by the LSC, advocated an individualised or personalised approach, it also advocated a target-driven and outcome-driven philosophy, which could force practitioners to deliver a curriculum that worked against designing provision based on listening to learners.

Listening to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

The consultation with disabled children Valuing People (DoH, 2001) found that in essence their aspirations paralleled those of their non-disabled peers. It speaks of three main messages.

- Treat us more like our brothers and sisters.
- We want to do the things other children do, not something special.
- Give us a chance to be independent, get a job and have a home.

There are certain factors, however, which can make it particularly difficult for disabled people, and in particular those with learning difficulties, to articulate their own views and to have them heard. Three of these – listening to learners who have little or no formal means of communication, the difficulty of arbitrating between conflicting other voices, and the assumptions which are often made by professionals about what people with learning difficulties really need – are explored in the following section.

Listening to learners who have little formal communication

The language of expressing views and wishes is nearly always expressed in terms of verbal communication. However, ‘a high proportion of people with learning difficulties will also have communication difficulties. They may rely on alternative or augmentative methods to assist their communication’ (Dee, 2004). Staff working in the project cited above found that traditional one-to-one interviews or focus groups were often not appropriate for eliciting learners’ views, and that they needed to make use of a variety of different methods including ‘graphics, pictures, photographs, video’ and so on, in order to allow learners’ wishes to be expressed (Dee, 2004).

Some organisations have explored many innovative ways of allowing people who find spoken language difficult to express their views. For example, Speaking Up, an advocacy organisation run by people with learning difficulties, uses techniques such as a graffiti wall and designing individual personal, pictorial shields. The literature search revealed several works that show how learners with limited speech can be enabled to express their own views and hence enhance the quality of their life (Grove et al, 1999; Grove, 2000; Marchant and Gordon, 2001). Byers et al (2002) show how even learners with no formal speech can develop ways of expressing their views. One of the means they advocate is the use of ‘circles of support’, a method articulated in the work of the Circles Network (www.circlesnetwork.org.uk). They show how a ‘circle of support (which may) consist of close family members, friends, and perhaps key professionals in the person’s life’ (2002: 19) can, with the individual learner at the centre, contemplate and record an ‘idealised’ scenario that is not restricted by services that are currently available to take full account of the person’s wishes. Action plans are drawn up based on this ideal. The circle of support then ‘meets regularly to monitor the implementation of the plan, note and celebrate success, and try to resolve any emerging problems’ (Byers et al, 2002: 17).

Conflicting voices

Dee (2002) shows how decision making is, for all of us, ‘an ongoing process which is messy and complex rather than logical and rationale’. Our decisions are influenced by others and made in conjunction with an awareness of the decisions and needs of those who are close to us. For people with learning difficulties in particular, the voices of parents and professionals are likely to have a profound influence on their decision-making. Debate exists on the role of parents and young adults during times of transition. Some see it as vital (Pascall and Hendey, 2004; Smart, 2004), attributing success to the ‘material and cultural support they draw on from parents and the wider family’ (Morris, 2002: 3–4). Dewson et al’s research (2004) links active parental involvement to the success of placements, while Cowen (2001) emphasises the importance of circles of support which include parents, and shows the value of parents going through the transition process, receiving tips from parents who have already experienced it (Home Farm Trust, 2005). Much literature stated that parents often feel unsupported by professionals during the process of transition (Abbott, Morris and Ward, 2001; Dee, 2002; Strategy Unit, 2005).
Others cited concerns about the ‘over-involvement’ of parents, or resulting ‘power struggles’ (Swain and Walker, 2003). When making choices about education, research revealed that ‘in a few cases young people were minimally involved in the process of decision-making, with decisions being made between parents and social workers or college staff’ (Anderson et al, 2003: 17). Tarleton emphasises the need to ensure that transition plans should ‘be owned by the young person, that the plan should reflect the young person’s dreams and that while they were involved in the decisions, the young person should be the focus’ (2004: 23).

Dee (2002) speaks of the conflicting voices, which can often make it very hard for people with learning difficulties to express their own views — in particular the conflict between some parental views, which may understandably veer towards safe options, and the views of professionals, which may focus more on independence and autonomy. She speaks of parents sometimes ‘seeing their child as continuing to be dependent’ and having a perspective which was ‘concerned about their long-term future’, while teachers were often ‘seeing the child as needing to be more autonomous’ and ‘being concerned about the post-school destination’. This often left the young people themselves caught ‘straddling’ this conflict.

Maudslay in the Aasha project (2003) cites one of the project workers speaking of how parents of young Bangladeshi people with learning difficulties often opted, understandably, for the safe option of a full-time day centre as they knew their children would have transport to get there and receive full-time care. Dee (2004) gives examples of adults with learning difficulties receiving conflicting messages from college staff who were encouraging them to look at the option of moving onto different classes, while the care workers in their residential home were keen that they should stay in their existing classes.

This range of literature reveals the particular complexity of decision-making for people with learning difficulties. It shows the need for practitioners to give time to the process, to involve and listen to all partners, and the sensitivity required to try to ensure that the individual is always at the centre of the process.

### Practitioner assumptions

There are many ways in which professionals’ voices can have a positive influence in encouraging people to try things they have not thought they could do. However, the literature also revealed the way in which professionals can at times deny the voice of the individual, by having preconceived views on what a person needs, which deny the reality of what they actually want. Rowland-Crosby, Giraud-Saunders and Swift (2004) give the example of a special school in which three out of the five school leavers expressed an interest in learning more about photography. However, they were all placed on a college course based on their impairments and their care needs, which contained no opportunity to study photography. In this example, a medical model of disability is privileged over educational aspirations and practitioner anxiety about care needs overrides learner preference.

Cases of professional assumptions subsuming genuine listening to individuals can be particularly apparent when working with learners from a different cultural context. It has been generally noted that ‘disabled people from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience disadvantage’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 29), and be under-represented in post-school education. In addition to this, when they are in education their distinctive cultural context is often dismissed. Changes and Choices cites an example of a young man who developed serious symptoms of mental ill health through the conflict of college staff emphasising the importance of him learning to live independently and considering living away from home, when this was at odds with the cultural reality of the lives and views of his family and siblings (Maudsley, 2005).

However, the literature also revealed instances where professionals did not dismiss individual aspirations out of hand but instead supported learners to translate them into realisable goals. Dee (2004) cites a learner with learning difficulties who wanted to be an airline pilot. Staff took his wishes seriously and explored the reasons for his wish. He loved aeroplanes and thought that being a pilot was the only type of job that would enable him to work in proximity to them. Staff worked with the learner and arranged a work placement for him at an airport. He is now happily employed as a baggage handler.

### Transition

Times of transition are difficult for most learners, and learners with specialised learning requirements are no exception. When the distinctive needs of an individual with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are added to this process of change, the
potential arises for a situation that can become complex and stressful for all stakeholders. The process of change during one’s life is ongoing, and this section concentrates on the transitions that occur beyond compulsory schooling.

62 Transitions occur throughout life for learners of all ability levels (Bradley, Dee and Wilenius, 1994; Dee, 2002). Society defines benchmarks that individuals go through, and which become markers of adulthood, and Jones and Wallace (1992) divide these into three main types: the private, the public and the official. Cultural differences as well as individual differences determine the significance of these events, and the timing when individuals achieve these markers (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

63 Transitions should be ‘a time of possibilities and options’ (Routledge, 2005: 4), one in which young people are involved, and options are explained. A transition is a complex process involving a series of decisions (Dee, 2002), therefore it is essential that it is well planned, so that the benefits of previous programmes are extended beyond the limited time the individual remains in a particular setting (Townsley, 2005). The Strategy Unit argues that there are three key ingredients to transitions: planned focus on individual needs, continuous service provision, and providing access to a more ‘transparent and appropriate menu of opportunities and choices’ (Strategy Unit, 2005). However, this is not always the case, and the literature reveals a general sense that many individuals are not getting the service they have come to expect or need.

64 Grewal et al (2004) reported that disabled people experienced a range of difficulties when making transitions in their lives, with the main negative impacts being delays to the service they needed, or not receiving the service at all. Service providers identified a range of barriers, which may disrupt a smooth transition. These may originate at the central government level, local service delivery level, or both. Barriers can be grouped into organisational/structural issues (the way a particular service is structured can have implications for service delivery), budgetary issues (in particular the way that budgetary boundaries and procedures operate between and within organisations in different sectors) and procedural issues (such as procedures being incompatible between organisations, procedures not being followed, or not existing in the first place).

65 Gaps also exist in information about ‘services and support corresponding to some of the most often-stated aspirations of young people with learning difficulties – in areas such as opportunities to develop friendships and relationships, getting jobs, obtaining accommodation in non-emergency situations, etc’ (Routledge, 2005: 3). Maudslay (2003) found that information about post-school provision was singularly failing to reach all members of South Asian communities.

66 There is also a discrepancy in the way in which young people receive support in transition. Transition planning tends to focus on those learners with a statement of special educational need or who are in specialist provision (Polat et al, 2001). These learners may not be the only ones who need it (Dewson et al, 2004). The shift away from statementing in certain local education authorities can lead to an even greater reduction in numbers receiving transition support (Pinney, 2004). Practice is inconsistent (Tarleton, 2004), and very limited for those with multiple needs (Simons and Russell, 2003). Dewson et al (2004) in the DfES longitudinal study of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties found that only half of young adults in their study could recall attending a transition planning meeting, this number falling to only one-third when the young adults did not have a statement. Recent research by Heslop et al (2002) shows that 20 per cent of young adults with disabilities left school without any transition plan at all. Dee (2002) shows how even when transition planning does occur, its nature is often determined by the needs of professionals and their requirement to hold statutory meetings rather than being incorporated into the curriculum and allowing individuals to gain direct experience of potential future options.

Inter-agency Collaboration

67 The literature on transitions revealed the vital role that inter-agency collaboration plays in transition planning for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. It is essential that there is very close collaboration between the organisation or service which a person is currently attending and the place to which they will move on. In addition to this, the fulfilment of learners’ aspirations may often require a collaborative, inter-agency response not suitable to being met by a single agency; young people with specialist support needs, for example, who wish to move into their own home (Morris, 2002; Dean,
The literature showed that this collaboration is often not present. Frequently there is a lack of attention to the big picture (Dewson et al, 2004), which leads to ‘a lack of continuity in provision across transition [which] stems from different entitlement criteria and definitions between child and adult services’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 112). The danger if this joint planning does not happen is that transitions can become ‘extended or fractured’ (Dewson et al, 2004). Discussion with practitioners at LSDA DDA regional events (Faraday and O’Toole, 2005) showed how many adult learners with learning difficulties were becoming, in their words ‘warehoused’ – staying on the same learning programme or moving from one college course to another because the inter-agency collaboration needed for them to progress to the next stage of their lives was not in place.

The Strategy Unit notes that ‘there remains a lack of joined-up working and strategic planning on the ground, leading to gaps in services and information about provision – particularly between health, social services, and education departments’ (2005). This can have serious effects on individuals with disabilities and their families. Routledge (2005: 1) concluded that ‘poor coordination between the agencies responsible for services for children and adults lead(s) to dislocating experiences for young people and their families’. When placements break down this is often cited as the reason (Smart, 2004).

This is a complex issue with many factors contributing to the current dilemma. It can be a problem of terminology, where each service (education, health, social services, voluntary sector) has its own terminology, category system and criteria for service provision. This lack of agreed categorisation can result in a lack of advance planning and co-ordination, with no room for multiple categories (Morris, 1999a). Added to this can be the ‘preciousness’ of information, with some agencies finding it challenging to share information with others outside their agency (Berkeley, 2004). This can result in information being inadequate for proper planning (Morris, 1999a). Another factor cited was that practitioners need to be involved in essential negotiation for inter-agency planning and this has implications for the allocation of resources to carry out this task (Byers et al, 2002; Dee et al, 2002).

In general there exist ‘significant differences between the intention of inter-agency working expressed at government and policy level and the experiences of young people and their families’, with strategic commitment to working together often not being followed through in practice (Morris, 2002: 2). The new development of children’s trusts is a welcome move, which it is to be hoped will help to address some of these issues.

### Connexions

Lacey (2001) points to clear leadership as an essential factor in successful inter-agency collaboration while Dewson et al (2004) posits that the ‘fractured transitions’ of many people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are in part caused by the fact that no one has taken a clear lead in co-ordinating post-school transition.

For young people leaving school the Connexions Service is the obvious service to take the lead in bringing agencies together. Much of the literature cites Connexions as being helpful (Dewson et al, 2004). Nearly three-quarters of individuals surveyed in Polat’s study (2001) had had an interview with a careers advisor. Efforts to make the Connexions Service supportive to individuals with disabilities (Connexions, 2003) were welcomed, as was the fact that key documents are made accessible for individuals with disabilities (Rowland-Crosby, Giraud-Saunders and Swift, 2004).

Unfortunately, others reported that all is not working well (Abbott, Morris and Ward, 2001). Large caseloads were seen as interfering with the amount of work an advisor was able to do and problems with inter-agency work and communications were also seen to cause barriers (Coles, Britton and Hicks, 2004).

The literature cited above saw the role of the Connexions Service as very important, and there was a concern that, although the service is currently in transition, its work must continue. There was, however, the recognition that Connexions does not have a remit to work with people over the age of 25 and in many instances ceases at age 19, and that adult guidance services do not always have the necessary resources to carry out the in-depth work needed for adults with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

### Conclusions and Implications for the LSC

Three major implications for the LSC can be drawn from the literature reviewed in this section. The literature shows the importance of putting the
disabled learner at the centre of the planning process and of listening to the voices of learners or potential learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Currently the LSC does not have systematic procedures in place for directly listening to these voices. However, this will need to change with the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. This new legislation extends to public sector organisations the duty to promote disability equality and so includes the LSC. From December 2006 the LSC will have to produce a disability equality scheme and will need to show how it has actively involved disabled people in drawing up this scheme. Hence the LSC will need to start drawing up procedures for meeting and listening to disabled people.

76 The literature also showed the time and complexity involved in truly hearing the voices of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Listening to these learners requires far more than a one-off meeting. In its planning and funding the LSC needs to ensure that the skilled practitioners of its providers have the structures and time to allow for this kind of listening to take place. The literature also showed how many learners and potential learners were not able to access provision that genuinely took account of their wishes and needs.

77 In part this was because of a lack of appropriate provision (an issue which will be developed in more detail in the next section). In planning its provision, the LSC needs to take account of the views of disabled people. An encouraging step is being taken in the LSC East of England Region. LSC staff in the East of England Region have drawn together a pathfinder (Improving Choice: Developing Local Inclusive Provision in the East of England), which has enabled the six counties of the East of England Region to create local opportunities based on individual aspirations for local learners, rather than have them leave the region for residential provision. More projects such as this, in which planning is informed by learners’ voices, need to be encouraged and developed.

78 In other instances the literature showed how learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties were not being placed at the centre of the individual planning process and that, even when learning programmes that might meet their aspirations were available, they were guided onto other provision, for example the three young people who all stated an interest in studying photography but were instead placed on a specific course for disabled people which included no photography (Rowland-Crosby, Giraud-Saunders and Swift, 2004). Leadbeater (2004a) shows how a genuine response to personalised learning requires fundamental changes to the structure of provision. He states the need for more ‘co-production’, whereby learners themselves would have more say in designing the service they receive so that they can tailor it to their specific needs. In the example cited above, this might have resulted in the learners helping to design individual programmes, which could include their stated aspiration to study photography. If the LSC is to create a genuinely learner-centred approach it will need to plan in a way that allows for far greater flexibility in the design of individual programmes of study.

79 The literature also gave examples of practitioners who wanted to work in a learner-centred way, but who felt pressure to deliver programmes to meet government priorities. This could distort their curriculum offer and steer provision in order to meet these targets rather than allowing learner-centred programmes to be developed. The LSC will need to make explicit the priority to individualise programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The LSC will also need to examine its planning in the light of this contradiction to ensure that it meets the targets required of it by the DfES, at the same time ensuring that it fulfils its legal duties in relation to learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

80 The literature showed the importance of inter-agency collaboration, especially at times of transition. It also showed that in many cases this collaboration was not working effectively. While such collaboration may take place at a local level it will only be effective if clear structures are created at all levels, including at national level. The LSC needs to support its providers in establishing workable collaborative partnerships, which will allow for the transition needs of disabled learners to be met.
3 Inclusive Learning

81 The literature shows an international trend of increasing the inclusiveness of educational provision. This section traces the historical development of inclusive provision and identifies learners who remain under-represented in post-school education and training. It goes on to explore what constitutes inclusive provision, and discusses issues of progression, supporting learning, and initial formative and summative assessment. The need to consider inclusion outside formal learning and a whole-organisation approach is outlined. Finally, this section looks at collaboration between agencies and the barriers presented by transport.

The Historical Development of Inclusive Provision

82 Over the past 25 years, first instigated in the UK by the publication of the Warnock Report (Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, 1978), there has been a fundamental shift from an assumed belief that learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties should be automatically placed in separate provision to a general belief that learners of different abilities should be taught together (Norwich and Kelly, 2004). There has also developed a move beyond notions of integration, in which learners with disabilities or learning difficulties were simply placed in groups with non-disabled peers, to inclusion, which defines a ‘lifestyle in which a person is an active participant in his or her life’ (Renzaglia et al, 2003: 140). The vision of inclusive provision goes far beyond a particular type of educational provision (Vislie, 2003) to one where all learners are expected to be actively included in their education and training environment. Parents wanted inclusive provision ‘because they wanted their child to have access to the same activities and opportunities as other students’ (Spann, Kohler and Soenksen, 2003: 234). Lord and Hutchison argue that ‘people with disabilities no longer want or need to be protected from community, but require mechanisms for embedding their lives in community life’ (2003: 85).

83 This movement towards inclusive educational practice is part of a worldwide shift. The signing of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) strengthened the voice of the learner with special educational needs to be educated within mainstream provision throughout the world. However, different countries have developed varying systems in response to inclusion. Flem and Keller (2000) categorise this into one-track countries (Italy, Sweden) where the major emphasis is on mainstream education, and two-track countries (Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands) where there is still a concentration on special schools. Other countries (Norway, the UK and the USA) tend to use a mixture.

84 Post-school education in the UK received a major boost in its progress towards inclusion through the publication of Inclusive Learning (FEFC, 1996). In this report, the Chair of the FEFC Inclusive Learning Committee, Professor John Tomlinson, places the onus of inclusion firmly away from a medical model of disability, ‘which locates the difficulty or deficit with the student’, to a social or educational model, which sees the need to focus instead on the ‘educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner’s requirement’ (FEFC, 1996: 4).

85 For Tomlinson, ‘this means we have to move away from labelling the student and towards creating an appropriate educational environment; concentrate on understanding better how people learn so that they can better be helped to learn; and see people with disabilities first and foremost as learners’ (FEFC, 1996: 4).

86 The report emphasises the difference between integration and full inclusion by stressing that learners need to be ‘actively engaged in learning, rather than being passive recipients of information’ (1996: 32). It also stresses that inclusive learning will not be achieved solely by individual teachers. It requires ‘the greatest degree of match or fit between the individual learner’s requirements and the provision made for them’ (1996: 26), and, to be truly effective, this match must occur at three levels: ‘between the teacher and the learner’, ‘between the college and the learner’ and ‘between
further education as a whole and the learner’ (1996: 26). There are clear messages here for the LSC. Tomlinson was also clear that inclusive learning is not ‘a fixed state to be achieved once and for all by the sector’ but is a ‘goal to be aimed at’, which requires continual acknowledgment and adaptation (1996: 36). The literature examined in this section explores the extent to which inclusive learning is becoming a reality, and the gaps that still need to be addressed.

87 The literature shows that, in general, notions of social inclusion still face many challenges (Flem and Keller, 2000). Some difficulties arise through a contradiction between the ideological stand that stakeholders have and the practical difficulties of putting these notions in place daily (Evans and Lunt, 2002). Most members of staff state a positive belief in the idea of inclusion for all learners, but the practice of that belief is another matter (Croll and Moss, 2000; Flem and Keller, 2000). Staff can have difficulty with the practical aspects of inclusion (Hamill and Boyd, 2001; Gray, 2002; Pitt and Curtin, 2004). In schools the ‘culture of educational reformers’ competes with the ‘culture of the school site’. Parents and children may be caught in the middle (Grove and Fisher, 1999: 214). In the systematic review of research on the effectiveness of actions for promoting participation by all learners in schools, Dyson, Howes and Roberts (2002) identify as a general principle that structural barriers between different groups of students and staff need to be reduced:

The maintenance of separate programmes, services and specialisms runs counter to the notion of participation and has been discontinued with some success... Dismantling structural barriers in turn implies an increase in the level of staff collaboration as an alternative to segregated specialisation. It also implies the adoption of pedagogical approaches, which enable students to learn together rather than separately.

Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2002: 57

88 There is no doubt that the practice of inclusive learning in post-school education has made substantial progress in the nine years following the FEFC report. Hyland and Merrill (2001: 347) state that their ‘research on FE communities combined with a number of recent policy developments in the sector suggests that a modest and cautious optimism might be justified’. However, there is no place for complacency and, on an individual level; there still exists a ‘chasm between the ideology of inclusive education and the reality of student placements’ (Grove and Fisher, 1999: 214). At the time of writing, Baroness Warnock has expressed concerns, and has indicated that she does not believe that inclusive education has worked in practice, although she has, in saying this, stimulated robust responses from other writers.

89 Some policy initiatives designed to improve economic prosperity and others to promote social inclusion may appear contradictory. Inclusion can be seen as an integral part of social justice (DfES, 2001b). However, some commentators argue that ‘despite the policy push for lifelong learning there is still evidence of a learning divide’ (Hyland and Merrill, 2001: 344), and ‘current policy in England is driven primarily by economic purposes and less by the need to address the problem of social exclusion’ (Stasz and Wright, 2004: 11). These contradictions were endorsed by discussions with practitioners in the post-school sector, many of whom spoke of how practice based on the principles of inclusive learning could become distorted by contradicting policy demands. For example, the focus on provision to headline targets has shifted the emphasis away from other priority learning requirements.

Learners With Disabilities or Learning Difficulties who are Under-represented

90 The literature showed that certain groups of disabled learners are less likely to be included in post-school education than others. The schools-based literature shows that many teachers have positive attitudes but are still strongly influenced in a negative way by the nature and severity of the disabling condition (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Evans and Lunt (2002) explore this theme further and found that educators grouped certain types of disabilities as ‘easy’ or ‘difficult’ to include:

91 Disabilities that are easy to include are:

- physical difficulties
- sensory difficulties
- speech and language difficulties
- moderate or general learning difficulties
- autistic spectrum disorders
- specific learning difficulties.
Disabilities that are difficult to include are:

- emotional and behavioural difficulties
- low-incidence special educational needs (SEN) needing high levels of expertise
- profound and multiple difficulties
- severe learning difficulties
- autism.

Croll and Moss (2000: 1) reached similar conclusions. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) also found that the attitude a practitioner had towards inclusion was strongly influenced by the availability of physical and human resources.

The FEFC’s report *Inclusive Learning* (1996) identifies three main groups of learners under-represented in further education: young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, adults with mental health difficulties, and people with profound and complex learning difficulties. More recent literature seems to confirm that these gaps in provision are still to be filled. A survey on post-school provision for young people with profound and complex learning difficulties (Florian et al, 2000) showed that the lack of provision for these learners remained an issue for concern. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (2003) and the LSC and DoH guidance (2005) have reiterated this concern. Jones and Smith (2004) highlight the limited opportunities for inclusive provision for learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties, a message reiterated in the LSDA DDA projects.

James and Nightingale (2004), Moore (2002) and Berkeley (2004) report the difficulty that post-school provision can have in including learners with mental health difficulties. In addition to these groups, Maudslay (2003) writes of the high number of young people with a learning difficulty from a South Asian background who had never received any post-school learning provision. In 2002 a consortium led by the LSDA in partnership with NIACE and Skill carried out a scoping study designed to identify what support was needed to enable staff in further education (FE) and adult and community learning (ACL) to meet the requirements of DDA part 4 (LSDA, 2002). Interestingly, practitioners emphasised the need for more support in understanding the particular needs of groups of learners with mental health difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, profound and complex learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and illnesses leading to an acquired disability. The study also identified the particular issues of disabled learners from minority ethnic groups.

There are, however, some positive developments cited in the literature. Several writers show ways in which a whole-organisation approach to behavioural policy and a strategic, consistent approach can further the inclusion of learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties (DES, 1989; Mitchell et al, 1998; Jones and Smith, 2004; Smith, Travell and Worton, 2004) and also the individual commitment of staff working in this area (Attwood et al, 2004). Mumford (2004) shows the positive results achieved in the inclusion of people with mental health difficulties in further education through joint work between Wigan and Leigh College and a local NHS trust. Dee et al (2002) give many positive examples of work carried out with post-school learners with profound and complex learning difficulties.

The literature also shows one other group of learners who are not, by default, under-represented in post-school education, but whose specific learning needs are often not being properly met. These are learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in young offender institutions. The Social Exclusion Unit Report *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002) gives statistics which clearly show the high prevalence of learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and mental ill health that exists among offenders. In addition, the Dyslexia Institute has carried out research showing high rates of dyslexia, dyspraxia and hidden disabilities among prisoners (Rack, 2005). Good experience in education has shown to be a key factor in reducing re-offending (Home Office, 2004). The Education and Skills Committee report on prison education highlights throughout the failure of prison education to support learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties adequately. It points out how, if this large number of learners is to be properly supported, education needs to be far more ‘learner-centred’ and ‘there needs to be far more flexibility’ with less narrow focus on targets (House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee, 2005: 28). It also recommends the introduction of additional learning support for offenders and that ‘every prison should have a special educational needs coordinator’ (2005: 32). These recommendations are particularly pertinent at a time when the LSC is beginning to take over responsibility for offender education.
Inclusive Provision

The next section discusses literature that refers to what constitutes inclusive provision for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Specialist versus mainstream provision

Inclusive learning does not necessarily mean an absence of all specialist provision. Renzaglia et al state that ‘inclusion is not an all-or-nothing proposition’ (2003: 148). It does not define one type of provision as good and others as the opposite. Instead it is a continuum (Pitt and Curtin, 2004). Lord Filkin, then minister with responsibility for special educational needs services, defines it as ‘trying to ensure that a child – wherever it can meet their needs appropriately – is not excluded from an ordinary school or ordinary life or aspects of the school curriculum’ (Green, 2005: 25).

Inclusive Learning (FEFC, 1996) recognises a need for some specialist provision. However, the citations below show that some learners with disabilities feel forced into specialist provision because of a lack of suitable mainstream learning opportunities.

Research with a group of learners who moved from an inclusive setting to specialist colleges found that learners reported that this decision was guided by a lack of choice, in that mainstream colleges were unable to meet their needs (Pitt and Curtin, 2004). Experience in Ontario, Canada, revealed similar experiences (G. Allan Roeher Institute, 1991: 73).

This has been echoed by findings in the East of England region, where a recognition that some learners were being forced to apply for places at a specialist college because there were no options in local mainstream organisations has led to changes in planning (Improving Choice, Developing Local Inclusive Provision in the East of England).

The range of curriculum offer

Much of the literature emphasises the importance of lifelong learning (Blewitt, 2002: 14) and, in particular, of learning which is not necessarily accredited or vocational. It shows how the Government has a strong commitment to encouraging learners into education (DWP, 2002; Strategy Unit, 2005) and how for some of these learners foundation courses or leisure courses can be an important first step in learning (DfES et al, 2003: 68). Often, learners with disabilities require these initial programmes to lead them on to more traditional learning paths (Maudslay, 2004). Such programmes are seen to play an important part in enhancing the quality of life of individuals (Zekovic and Renwick, 2003: 22; Cox and Smith, 2004; Maudslay and Nightingale, 2004) as well as reducing future need for support services (FEFC, 1996). Non-accredited learning can make a significant contribution to an individual’s well-being (Dee et al, 2002; Nashashibi, 2004). However, there is concern by practitioners that these programmes are not sufficiently seen as a priority (Berkeley, 2004: 10).

Course structure and delivery

The literature shows that a key component of inclusive provision is flexibility in design and delivery of the curriculum (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2004). Rigidity around timing and length of courses is seen to impede the learning of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties (Berkeley, 2004: 6) – a finding reinforced by the authors of several of the LSDA DDA action research projects, in particular those looking at the inclusion of learners with mental health difficulties (James, 2004) and learners with acquired disability and ill health (Nightingale, 2004). Leadbeater (2004a), in his Demos report on personalised learning, recognises the need for learning programmes to be designed so that individuals can use them flexibly according to their own particular learning needs, while recommendations on the 14–19 curriculum (DfES, 2004c) advocate a model in which learners would be able to ‘dip into’ areas outside their main focus. The QCA Guidance (2002) gives many positive examples of how staff can deliver existing curricula in creative and flexible ways to create a learner-centred approach for individuals with learning difficulties. However, Pitt and Curtin are concerned that ‘while an individual curriculum is possible, in practice this is not happening’ (2004: 397). The work being undertaken by the LSC and the Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority (QCA) to develop a Foundation Learning Tier provision, based on smaller sets of learning than whole qualifications, has the potential to improve the flexibility of the curriculum and the match to learners' requirements.

**Progression**

103 A further issue emerging from the literature concerned with course structure is that of progression from courses. Courses, it seems, are often not designed with future progression in mind. It is argued that 'too often, courses for learners with learning difficulties do not result in meaningful progression. Learners either move into a vacuum, or they can get on a seemingly endless conveyor belt which might include periods in a day centre, repeating educational programmes or moving from course to course without ever achieving a real outcome' (NIACE, 2003: 2).

Described as a 'magic roundabout' situation (Roberts, 1995) or 'warehousing' (Dee, 2004: 9), learners enter a pattern of repeated provision with some learners on the same course 'year after year', without any progression (Berkeley, 2004: 6). The danger is that 'education can merely become a new kind of day centre which people attend, without it really helping them to fulfil their own person-centred plan' (LSC and DoH, 2005: 48–49).

104 Sometimes this 'warehousing' occurs because of a lack of possible future options (an issue which will be revisited in the next section, on employment). Sometimes it occurs because of the difficulty of encouraging learners to take risks. Beyer and Kisby (1998) shows that the special education system itself can often be based on notions of routine and security, which can themselves work against giving people with learning difficulties the skills to cope with changing their lives. Important as this security may be, he argues that the balance between support and challenge, help and independence, protection and autonomy, and safe practice and risk-taking in the social climate of the learning environment should be maintained under constant review. Dee (2004: 9) states 'if learners are only exposed to that which is safe and predictable, they will never have the experience of taking risks and coping with the unpredictable which in turn further disadvantages them in adapting to and coping with change in their everyday lives'.

**Supporting Learning**

105 The literature also showed the need for staff to be aware of developing innovative ways of providing learning support, particularly in terms of assistive technology (Denham and Macleod, 2003; Berkeley, 2004). Computers are being used in general to support post-compulsory education (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1997) and can be a good mechanism to enable learners with learning difficulties or disabilities to be successful in inclusive provision (G. Allan Roehrer Institute, 1996). Use of technology can support learning to increase flexibility (Hewitt-Taylor, 2003; Nightingale, 2004) and can be an invaluable mechanism for supporting disabled learners. The literature revealed pockets of innovative practice. Technology was being used effectively in some prisons to engage hard-to-reach learners (DfES et al, 2003). Trans-active (2005) is a web-based project where disabled and non-disabled peers work together to create 'passports' about choices.

These are made with multimedia resources, and include pages for parents as well as 'e-zines'. NIACE’s project, Overcoming Social Exclusion (NIACE, 2004), is an online learning tool, which aims to work with socially excluded groups to overcome barriers to learning. The RNIB’s project on lifelong learning offers free consultation services and advice on the purchase of ICT equipment (RNIB, 2004). In addition, ICT can be used as a useful tool to increase learner involvement or feedback (Dee, 2004). Often, technical expertise in ICT as a means of supporting disabled learners is most advanced in specialist colleges. The example at Treloar College, cited earlier (paragraph 100), resulted in the college undertaking complex multidisciplinary assessments involving assistive technology with learners in local mainstream organisations.

**Assessment**

106 The literature cited below shows the importance of distinguishing between initial assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment – concepts often confused in general discussion. It shows the essential part that all three of these assessments play in the provision of inclusive learning.

**Initial assessment**

107 Initial assessment of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is increasingly being seen as a time to explore the views of the learner...
and focus on their emerging skills and understanding rather than on the limiting affects of their disability (Cline, 1992; James, 1998). Lunt (1992) compares ‘static’ versus ‘dynamic’ assessment, showing how static assessment focuses on the product rather than the process of learning, while dynamic assessment procedures involve ‘a dynamic exploration of a learner’s learning and thinking processes’. In contrast to this dynamic view of assessment, the assessment carried out in many organisations in the UK is seen to be restrictive and functional, often focusing predominantly on aptitude in basic skills where ‘assessments tend to be about services rather than need’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 77). The danger of this approach is that learners can be fitted into pre-determined provision. For example if you assess mainly basic skills, then basic skills programmes are likely to be provided, and the particular wishes and needs of the learner can become lost.

**Formative assessment**

Formative assessment is described as an ongoing process (Ecclestone, 1994). Assessment is ‘for’ rather than ‘of’ learning and the evidence is ‘used to adapt teaching to meet student [needs]’ (Black and William, 1998). Effective formative assessment allows learners the space to talk about their learning experiences. It requires staff to spend more time listening and observing. It also requires ‘divergent assessment’, which emphasises what the learner knows, can do and can understand rather than ‘convergent assessment’, which relies on closed questioning and tasks (Torrance and Pryor, 2001). All of these methods have been seen to be particularly effective for learners who find learning difficult. Several studies have shown how improved formative assessment has a quantifiable and positive effect on raising standards. In particular, Black and William note that many studies (for example Fuchs et al, 1997) have shown that ‘improved formative assessment helps low achievers more than other students’. However, as Ecclestone (2002) points out, staff in post-school education do not always ‘appreciate the need to understand theories about assessment and then relate them to change in practice’, and if this does not happen then ‘formative assessment is little more than continuous summative assessment’.

**Summative assessment**

Summative assessment is concerned with the outcomes of learning. The Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) project aims to encourage means of assessing the outcomes of learners in ways not in accordance with traditional standardised means of assessment, which are seen as alienating certain groups of learners (Turner and Watters, 2001). Other authors point to the danger of measuring the success of provision solely by measuring formal targets (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2004; Stasz and Wright, 2004). There is recognition that measurement that takes account only of generalised targets fails to acknowledge the range of individual, unplanned, and informal achievements which learners’ experience (Nashashibi, 2004). Turner and Watters (2001: 4) found that learners in non-accredited provision expressed strong views against the word ‘assessment’ – ‘it appeared to connote judgmental, unsympathetic attitudes and provoked strong antipathy among some (learners)’. They suggest the use of learner outcomes, which could be measured by self-assessment, tutor assessment, or peer assessment. Maudslay and Nightingale (2004) reveal the range of creative ways that staff working with learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have developed to celebrate their learners’ achievements.

**Summative assessment**

The design of the RARPA project (LSC, 2004a) encapsulates all three of these types of assessment. It provides a high quality, flexible structure, which has been shown to be equally applicable for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties (Maudslay and Nightingale, 2004; Brooke, 2004).

**Inclusion in Education Outside the Formal Learning Situation**

The literature shows how fully inclusive learning must look beyond the placements of individuals in a setting (Norwich and Kelly, 2004), towards the full acceptance and participation of this individual in the educational community. Flem and Keller (2000: 190) argue that ‘they should become part of their class, acknowledged and accepted, and given the support and assistance they need in order to have meaningful social interactions with their peers and other people’. They give examples of learners who have experienced barriers in terms of social inclusion within an educational organisation. Pitt and Curtin (2004) found that learners with physical disabilities experienced barriers beyond physical obstacles. Some of them
chose to return to a specialist setting not simply because of difficulties in obtaining the necessary support but also because of social isolation. Pitt and Curtin stated that 'the overwhelming experience of mainstream school was being socially isolated. All 10 respondents reported being bullied at some time' (2004: 392). These experiences are reiterated in the research carried out by Anderson et al (2003) in which some learners expressed relative satisfaction with their learning support yet felt isolated within the social environment of college. An LSDA DDA project on learners with autistic spectrum disorders (Tarleton, 2004) revealed the value of enabling learners to meet other learners who shared the same disability, even when they were following different learning programmes.

A Whole-organisation Approach

112 A key theme running through the literature is that learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties will not experience a fully inclusive experience unless the organisation of which they are a part adopts a 'whole-organisation' approach towards inclusive learning. Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen (1999), reporting on the school effectiveness movement, indicate that organisations need to reflect on their own practice and the extent to which they are meeting the needs of all their learners. The challenge is to meet individual needs by whole-school approaches rather than be designing 'special' curricula for 'special' pupils.

113 Tomlinson made this clear in emphasising the need for a 'match' at three levels, not just between individual teacher and learner, but between college and learner, and between the sector as a whole and the learner (FEFC, 1996). Anderson et al state that 'the first hurdle to overcome is to convince all staff that they share a responsibility for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities' (2003:7), and report how some learners felt that their teaching requirements were often seen as primarily the concern of the member of staff who was providing learning support. James and Nightingale (2004) highlight the necessity for good staff development in the area of mental health for all staff, and not just those who have a specific responsibility for these learners.

114 The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation identified this as an international concern, by reporting 'across the participant countries... as far as teachers in further and higher education generally are concerned, the overall features are that training in teaching students with disabilities is not a requirement upon them and that few have expertise in this field' (1997: 27). The need for a 'whole-organisation' approach was one of the key messages in the LSDA DDA action research projects. Macqueen (2004), the project leader of the project on including learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties, spoke of the irony of a situation in which increased specialisation could have the unwanted side-effect of making other staff feel that they had neither the expertise nor the responsibility to support learners with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Collaboration Between Agencies

115 The importance of inter-agency collaboration and partnership working has been mentioned in the previous theme. The benefits include: achieving greater impact by having agencies working together; attracting new resources; access to broader networks; providing a wider range of learning opportunities; finding better solutions to problems; identifying and addressing gaps in provision; eliminating duplication; reducing or sharing costs; and spreading risks (Hutchinson and Campbell, 1998; Hodgson et al, 2005). However, they can be time consuming and appear to be more effective for longer term than immediate change. This has clear implications for the LSC and stresses the need to develop a strategic approach at all levels, with clear long-term goals.

116 Collaboration and partnership working is a crucial aspect of inclusive provision, yet the literature identifies a gap in the nature and quality of provision in terms of a lack of collaborative working practices (Morris, 1999a). Inclusive Learning (FEFC, 1996: 63) found this true in 1996, when it reported the 'absence of joint working between social and health services and further education managers'. It also indicated that 'lack of knowledge and expertise in collaboration and joint planning among staff in further education were key factors in the lack of provision'. More recently, Dee (2004) found little or no co-ordinated planning between further and adult education providers, even when part of the same organisation. Individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties do not have needs which 'fit neatly' into the categories that define agencies (Byers et al, 2002: 37). They are likely to require a
holistic programme, which requires information to be shared and different agencies to play a part.

117 Inter-agency collaboration needs to happen at both an operational and a strategic level (Byers et al., 2002). The literature revealed some positive examples of how this was occurring. McIntosh and Whittaker (2000) give examples of how staff can develop a person-centred approach and use the results of this to define the organisation of future services. Hamill and Boyd (2001: 138) cite the formation of regional councils, which carried out ‘youth strategies’ as a positive step towards inter-agency co-operation, and more recently the government initiative on children’s trusts is seen as a positive move towards addressing the gap. The recent Valuing People and Post-16 Education (LSC and DoH, 2005) gives encouraging examples of education providers sitting on learning disability partnership boards, hence helping to develop collaborative responses. However, this work is piecemeal, and a more concerted national strategy is required if learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are to receive holistic, inclusive provision.

Transport

118 One final area that requires complex inter-agency negotiation is transport. The literature identifies transport as an area that can have a profound impact on learner inclusion. Learners with disabilities themselves cite it as problematic (NIACE, 2003, 2004). There is often a lack of reliable transport when learners need to attend provision regularly (Children’s Society, 2001, 2003). Even when transport to college is arranged, it is often at set times with little or no flexibility, hence learners are not able to benefit from the social inclusion enjoyed by other learners. This affects their ability to form friendships and to have access to leisure activities (Heslop et al., 2002). Public transport can be inaccessible (McCLean, 2003), unreliable, or offer limited options. One barrier, such as buses without announcements, can jeopardise the whole journey for an individual with a disability (Strategy Unit, 2005). Maudslay (2003) found that parents from the Asian community were particularly concerned about allowing their daughters with learning difficulties to travel independently, and cited lack of transport as a major block to inclusion in further education.

119 Identified in 1996 as a ‘significant concern’ (FEFC, 1996: 62), the provision of transport for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is still problematic (LSC and DoH, 2005). The current system is inconsistent with ‘significant variation in the extent and type of support provided’ (Fletcher and Kirk, 2000: 1). Anderson et al (2003) note that one of the reasons for the problem is that, although several agencies have legal ‘powers’ to provide transport for disabled people, there is no single agency which has a ‘duty’ to provide transport for people over age 19 to attend post-school education or training. Although the LSC does not have the responsibility to provide transport to and from college for disabled learners, it is clear that they need to play a key role in negotiation for transport if disabled learners are to be fully included in post-school provision.

Conclusions and Implications for the LSC

120 The literature shows that the LSC inherited a strong model for providing inclusive learning for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties as exemplified in Inclusive Learning (FEFC, 1996). Many positive strategies for the implementation of the recommendations of this report are in place. However, Professor John Tomlinson himself spoke of inclusive learning not as being a ‘fixed state’ but a ‘goal’, which is constantly to be strived for. The report describes one of the important matches required to further inclusive learning as that between ‘further education as a whole and the learner’. The LSC needs to ensure, in exercising its planning and funding responsibilities, that this match between the learning and skills sector as a whole and the learner is considered and acted on.

121 The literature shows how certain groups of disabled learners are harder to include, and more likely to be under-represented in post-school education and training provision. While the FEFC and the LSC have made considerable progress in including many learners with physical or sensory disabilities and/or learning difficulties, certain groups are still not being fully included. The literature found that this was particularly true for learners with mental health difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, medical conditions, or profound and complex learning difficulties. The LSC needs to address these gaps in its planning strategies.

122 An inclusive learning and skills sector requires a continuum of provision, and does not necessarily mean an absence of all specialist provision. However, at present some learners with disabilities feel forced into specialist provision because of a
lack of suitable learning opportunities in local providers. Developing provision locally will require a strategic steer from the LSC and an increase in expertise and support available to a wider range of providers than currently. This can occur if specialist providers work collaboratively with mainstream providers in order to enrich opportunities for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The LSC needs to be aware that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not merely the concern of a discrete group of specialist staff, but requires a whole-organisation response, and should ensure that this is reflected in LSC planning.

123 Much of the literature emphasises the importance of maintaining a broad range of learning opportunities including non-accredited and non-vocational provision, either as an important first step in learning or to enhance the quality of life of individuals, reducing future need for support services. This provision can make a significant contribution to an individual’s well-being. However, practitioners are concerned that these programmes are being cut, as they are not seen as a priority. The LSC needs to recognise the value of ‘other provision’ for many learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties and ensure that the priority given to achieving targets in basic skills and Level 2 provision does not lead to the disproportionate reduction of ‘other provision’. It should make explicit in all of its documentation that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a legal duty, and thus also a priority.

124 Aligned with the continuing requirement for non-accredited provision is the need to develop inclusive measures of success and to continue to support the RARPA process, which has been seen to have particular benefit for many disabled learners.

125 The literature shows that a key component of inclusive provision is flexibility, both in design and delivery, of the curriculum. Rigidity around timing and length of courses is seen to impede the learning of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Learning programmes need to be designed so that individuals can use them flexibly according to their own particular learning needs. QCA guidance gives many positive examples of how staff can deliver existing curricula in creative and flexible ways that can be built on to create a learner-centred approach for individuals with learning difficulties. The development a Foundation Learning Tier provision, based on smaller steps of learning than whole qualifications, also has the potential to improve the flexibility of the curriculum and the match to learners’ requirements. In particular, the LSC needs to ensure that provision is designed in ways that allow for positive progression of disabled learners. It also needs to examine the potential of assistive technology that can support inclusive learning.

126 Disabled learners have reported that they do not always feel socially included within their organisations. This means that providers may need to offer support beyond formal learning settings. The LSC needs to recognise this in the planning and contracting process with providers to ensure that this situation is reversed.

127 The literature shows that inter-agency collaboration is an important factor in creating fully inclusive learning. In responding to this the LSC needs to:

- work at a national level with other government departments, for example with the Department of Health (DoH) and the DWP
- work at a regional level to ensure that there is regional collaboration between different agencies
- ensure that the LSC’s contracts with providers include the requirement to work collaboratively with other agencies.

128 The literature also showed that transport can still present a major block to the inclusion of disabled learners in post-school learning. While not having a direct responsibility to provide transport, the LSC needs to take a key negotiating role to try to facilitate improved transport for learners.

129 The LSC should ensure that all of its staff have the knowledge, understanding and skills to ‘mainstream’ provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across all the LSC’s structures and procedures so it becomes integral, and that the impact of any proposed changes are assessed. Responsibility for these learners should not be seen as the responsibility of any team or directorate, but of the whole organisation.
4 Linking Education and Training to Employment

130 For the purposes of this literature review, employment is defined as either paid or voluntary work, full-time or part-time, which may be supported or open. The literature is clear that a large majority of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties want to work (Christie and Mensah-Coker, 1999; Jacobsen, 2002; Anderson et al, 2003; Beyer et al, 2004; National Employment Panel, 2005).

People with learning disabilities in our study like (and disliked) work for much the same reasons as everybody else, including money, social contact, making a contribution to other people, and having something to do. The advantages of working outweighed the disadvantages. People like paid work best of all, and career progression is sought by most people already in work. ... People want to work even in they are not working at present. Over half of this group said they would like to enter paid work.

Beyer et al, 2004: 17

131 They also want equal access to work experience (Rowland-Crosby, Giraud-Saunders and Swift, 2004). However, it is also clear that they are seriously under-represented in the labour market (DWP, 2002; Beyer et al, 2004). Of the 20 per cent of the potential workforce with a disability, ‘almost 50 per cent are economically inactive. It is estimated that there are 1 million disabled people who want to work but who are not working’ (National Employment Panel, 2005). At a time when the Government is emphasising the importance for those who can to move from benefits to work it is crucial that the LSC looks at ways in which it can support disabled people into the full range of work activity.

Recent Policy Initiatives

132 Recent government policies emphasise the importance of education and training in supporting all people into employment and it has put in place several programmes that aim to do this. Upskilling the population to meet the needs of employers and the economy is an important part of the Government’s Skills Strategy (DFES et al, 2003). The aim of the national Skills Strategy ‘is to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled’ (DFES et al, 2003: 11). The Skills Strategy represents the overarching vision that ‘skills matter for individuals, organisations and society more generally’ (LSC, 2005: iv). Learners of all abilities should achieve the education and skills necessary to fulfil their potential and dreams. The Strategy Unit’s Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People (2005) emphasises that disabled people should not be excluded from work-based programmes, and cites as one of its four main objectives the need for disabled people to receive the support and incentives to allow them to gain and remain in employment.

133 The literature reveals generic issues that have provided setbacks to the work-based agenda in the UK. Vocational training has traditionally suffered from having low status, an issue which the 14–19 White Paper attempts to address (DFES, 2005a), stating that ‘lack of investment in vocational skills, and deficiencies in the infrastructure to secure development has resulted in a legacy of skills gaps and shortages’ (Hughes, Smeaton and Hall, 2004: 4). In addition, poor information has been given in advice centres (Connor and Little, 2005). The new emphasis on creating a ‘demand-led’ system (Stasz and Wright, 2004: 5) should have a positive influence in changing this. This would require vocational training providers to demonstrate that they are meeting local labour market needs (National Employment Panel Skills Advisory Board, 2004). This supports vocational training by meeting the needs of the local community. Jobcentre Plus will work closely with the local LSC and the Business Link Network to help ensure that training matches the need of local businesses and attempts to meet sector skills shortages and skills gaps, as well as providing for self-employment for those for whom this makes sense (DWP, 2004).
A range of programmes has been developed with the aim of supporting people of all ages into employment. The New Deal has already reported the programme’s considerable success with young people, while the New Deal for Disabled People provides a brokerage service to support people with disabilities or health-related issues who want to work. Recent initiatives have attempted to look at what is needed to support the 2.7 million people claiming Incapacity Benefits, many of whom have mental health difficulties, back into work (Strategy Unit, 2005: 40). In addition, Workstep provides supported job opportunities for disabled people with more complex needs. Apprenticeship programmes offer an important link between training and work (National Employment Panel Skill’s Advisory Board, 2004) and provide an alternative to further education for individuals ‘the Government sees as vulnerable to social and economic exclusion’ (Stasz and Wright, 2004: 16). Entry to Employment stands as a significant development in provision for those who are not ready or able to enter full employment or Apprenticeships and, since its launch in 2003, has already exceeded the original target set, with 50,000 enrolments (Clough, 2003). New Deal for Disabled People designs individually based programmes for people who are over 25 and have been unemployed for at least six months. Finally, the 14–19 White Paper presents strong recommendations to strengthen vocational routes for young people.

One of the difficulties faced when looking at the work-based learning route and support into employment is the wide range of initiatives divided between the DfES and the DWP. An initiative that may help to bridge this divide is the establishment of centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs). CoVEs should provide ‘a mechanism for systematic management and planning of the development of excellent vocational and pre-vocational provision’ (LSDA, 2004b: 8). The primary aim would be to raise the quality, volume and status of vocational training. Experts would combine work-based learning and employment as well as education. CoVEs would be based on sharing good practice and partnerships (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2003). The development of CoVEs is important in three ways; to:

- develop regional partnerships to ensure sufficient centres in each region to meet skills priorities
- enable the Skills for Business network to play a greater role in shaping the pattern of CoVEs in their sectors
- develop the capability of colleges and training providers to offer a wider range of support for local businesses.

Many of these initiatives are relatively recent, and their full effect remains to be seen. However, despite the policy commitment and this extensive range of initiatives, the fact remains that large numbers of disabled people who want to work are not able to do so and are under-represented in the programmes designed to support all people into work. The following sections will examine literature that points to some of the reasons why this is the case.

Guidance Towards Vocational Programmes

Connor and Little (2005) state that poor information on vocational routes has been given in advice centres. While the Connexions service is the likely first place for young people to go for advice, the National Employment Panel cautioned that Connexions staff have large caseloads and might not be specialised enough to advise on specific work-based routes (2005). For adults, ‘the quality of information advice and guidance (IAG) services is extremely patchy and, even where effective, the services are under-utilised’ (National Employment Panel, 2005: 32). The literature shows an overall need for guidance services to be improved (National Employment Panel Skills Advisory Board, 2004). The DWP has attempted to address some of these concerns (2004). Disability employment advisors (DEAs) support disabled individuals by a ‘positive appraisal of what people can do – looking at capacity as well as incapacity’ (DWP, 2004: 11). However, practitioners report uneven practice among DEAs, and the fact that sometimes their caseloads make it difficult for them to give the ongoing individual support required for people with more complex needs. In the LSDA DDA action research projects, the project dealing with supporting young disabled people into work was concerned that lack of appropriate guidance and early support was often blocking young people from following their desired vocational route. One of the sites stated that ‘a large percentage of our learners are interested in manual and construction trades’, however, ‘many young people... are not being prepared early enough for the requirements needed of them to access trades which they expect to enter after leaving education’.
Programmes That do Lead to Employment Outcomes

138 The literature reveals three main ways in which the current range of vocational programmes do not always meet the needs of disabled people who wish to work. The first is that, despite the growth of work-related initiatives described above, people with disabilities still report being denied access to programmes and it appears there are still gaps in the work-based offer. The second concerns the lack of specialist support on particular programmes. The third is that the overall design of the programme is not necessarily one that leads to employment outcomes.

Lack of places or appropriate provision

139 A clear message coming from the literature is the lack of places and appropriate programmes leading to employment for learners with disabilities. ‘Despite many students with learning difficulties being clear that they wanted to gain employment in the future, there appeared to be few effective routes into work’ (Anderson et al, 2003: 31). In Nottinghamshire, Lockton (2003: 7) agrees that ‘there are insufficient work-based opportunities for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. A greater variety of post-16 courses and work placements are needed to prepare these learners for work.’ This is not only a problem for the UK. Canada, in the forefront of developments in inclusion, identified the same problem (G. Allan Roeher Institute, 1992). Honey and Williams, in research carried out for the DfEE in 1998, found that lack of appropriate places was an issue for non-disabled as well as disabled people and that demand outweighed supply by between 30 per cent and 80 per cent, depending on the definitions used (1998: 37). In addition, they found an imbalance depending on the age of the learner, with those under 30 more likely to find a place on a training programme.

140 A lack of suitable vocational training is seen to be a particular issue for people with a learning difficulty and/or disability who are working below Level 2, and who may well require a longer time to move into employment than other learners. The recent Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) report *Entry to Employment* (ALI, 2005) was particularly positive both about the E2E programme as a whole and the way it had been able to respond to the needs of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. It regards E2E as ‘essential for those young people who are not able or ready for other work-based learning programmes or employment’. It further comments on positive outcomes achieved by learners with various disabilities, especially mental health difficulties.

141 However, the over-subscription on E2E programmes may have resulted in provider interpretation of eligibility criteria changing to an increased emphasis on learners who are most likely to progress to a Level 2 or Apprenticeship programme in a short period of time. Feedback from DDA dissemination events (Faraday and O’Toole, 2005) and also from DDA action research projects (LSDA, 2004c), in particular Project 14 on supporting young people into employment, revealed a high level of concern that young people with disabilities were being turned away from E2E programmes because it was felt that they would neither progress to Level 2 nor be able to complete their programme near to the planning assumption of 22 weeks.

Lack of specialist support

142 The Strategy Unit calls for ‘ongoing support’ for disabled people, which is ‘personalised to their specific circumstances’ (2005: 13). Feedback from work-based delegates at LSDA DDA regional conferences identified a lack of appropriate specialist support for disabled learners as a particular concern in Apprenticeship programmes. The Quality and Performance Improvement Dissemination Unit (QPID) (1999) has produced a helpful document with illuminating case studies on how to provide adaptations for disabled people on Apprenticeship programmes. However, research by DfEE (2000) concluded that most regions and most occupational sectors fall well short in terms of the proportion of young people with disabilities recruited into Apprenticeships compared with their overall proportion in the labour market.

143 This is a serious issue and while it proved impossible to find in the literature a recent detailed analysis of numbers of learners with particular disabilities on Apprenticeship programmes, an examination of individualised learner record (ILR) data concludes that this is still the case. While a relatively high number self-identify as having some kind of disability, learning difficulty or health problem, there appears to be no analysis of these figures to address the inequality
they reveal. While 20 per cent of the working age population is disabled, only 5 per cent of apprentices have disabilities at advanced level and 12 per cent at foundation level. Employer Training Pilots (ETPs), which are employer driven, show similar inequalities: an estimated 12 per cent of employees are disabled yet less than 5 per cent of ETP participants are disabled. Those who broker ETPs have a significant role to play in ensuring that disabled people achieve greater representation (National Employment Panel, 2005). Despite this under-representation of disabled people, there are no specific targets to increase the number of disabled people in work-based learning. In the DDA project on supporting young people into employment, Little (2004) stated that this was an issue he had raised with the LSC. Evidently the focus of these programmes also raise the importance of the employer’s actions in building the diversity of its workforce who are participating in training.

144 In a series of regional events carried out by the LSDA to disseminate the project findings, it became apparent that delegates from the work-based learning sector, in particular those working with Apprenticeship learners, had far less experience and received far less support in working with disabled learners than their counterparts in colleges. The ALI E2E report (2005) spoke of how support for disabled learners was particularly effective when providers worked closely with specialist disability organisations to organise specialist support. Similar effective models need to be devised for Apprenticeships and also for any new work-based programmes that might be developed through the Skills Strategy or the 14–19 White Paper.

Programmes That do not Lead to Employment Outcomes

145 The literature shows that one of the major concerns, particularly for adults with learning difficulties, is that employment preparation programmes do not actually lead on to real work (Jacobsen, 2002; National Employment Panel Skills Advisory Board, 2004; LSC and DoH, 2005). One of the reasons put forward to explain this is that these learning programmes often place too much emphasis on work preparation skills and not enough on learners actually experiencing real work. The emphasis needs to be 'on work, not getting ready for work, not on having the skills before going to work and not on meeting human services criteria before entering the competitive market’ (Wehman and Kregas, 1998: 153). (This approach is discussed at paragraphs 148–149.) Vickers speaks of how the line between ‘practice work’ and ‘real work’ can be confusing for people with learning difficulties and the skills learned in a training session can be difficult to transfer, hence it is better to practise them in a real context (Vickers, 2003). The impressive results obtained when learners were individually engaged with ‘real work’ illuminates the positive benefits of this approach.

146 The literature referred to in paragraph 145 shows how a sequential approach to skills development is not always the most appropriate in supporting people who find learning difficult to gain employment. Several of the policy documents cited throughout this section make the assumption that a lack of basic skills can have a negative effect on people’s employment opportunities. Interestingly, a recent Parliamentary Select Committee report on prison education (House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee, 2005) questions the validity of this assumption. The report states that at least in the case of prisoners it is not based on strong evidence and that while poor basic skills may be one important factor it is not the only one which needs to be considered. The result of the fundamental linking of poor basic skills with unemployment has resulted in many providers making basic skills education a major part of their programmes. There is considerable literature on the best ways of embedding basic skills into vocational areas of work as this has been seen to be far more fruitful than teaching these skills discretely.

147 The report by the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee is concerned that over-emphasis on discrete basic skills can lead to a lack of concern about other skills also important for employment. Some of the other factors that help disabled people to gain and sustain employment have been suggested by research from Canada (G. Allan Roeher Institute, 1992: 170–172). This work has produced a list of shared characteristics of disabled individuals who are in sustained employment. These include the fact that these people were ‘relatively well informed about human rights’ and ‘seemed better grounded in or connected to their communities than many other persons through informal networks, social activities and other contacts’. This suggests that, particularly for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, preparation for work programmes must
be careful not to ignore the importance of ‘softer’ skills in gaining and sustaining employment.

**Supported Employment**

148 Supported employment agencies work with disabled people, including people with learning difficulties, to help them prepare for and find work. They work closely with employers to ‘match’ the right person to the right job. ‘Supported employment can be characterised by the phrase “place and train”, which differs from the more traditional vocational preparation models that tend to use a job-readiness approach characterised by “train then place”’ (Everatt, 2002). Such an approach challenges the more traditional belief that skills can be taught in an educational or training situation and then transferred when a person goes to work. ‘Supported Employment challenges the efficacy of conventional work-readiness approaches where people develop transferable skills within vocational training or simulated work environments prior to employment’ (Pozner, 1997). Instead the message is that, particularly for adults with learning difficulties, the best and maybe only way to prepare for work is to prepare in work.

149 Supported employment agencies vary in the way they work and in their efficacy (Beyer et al, 2004). There is also a discrepancy in who funds them. Some of the most innovative rely on non-statutory and often short-term funding, which can make their work fragile and insecure (Byers et al, 2002). However, what is clear from the literature is that potential demand for supported employment places far exceeds supply (Honey and Williams, 1998: 3). It is also clear that education providers working with people with disabilities, and in particular with learning difficulties, tend to speak very positively about the supported employment model (Jacobsen, 2004; Little, 2004). It seems clear that the LSC needs to recognise the value of supported employment where skills are developed in the workplace. The LSC needs to work closely with partners to ensure that supported employment programmes are universally available.

**Benefits**

150 In recent months there has been considerable debate about Incapacity Benefit, and announcements in the Queen’s Speech (May 2005) indicate that the Government intends to make substantial changes to Incapacity Benefit in the belief that many people who claim this benefit could in fact be in work. It has been established that, once in the system, if people are on Incapacity Benefit for over one year the average length of claim is eight years (DWP, 2002). It is also clear that although many people claiming Incapacity Benefit want to work, very few take active steps to achieve such a return’ (DWP, 2004: 16).

151 The literature highlights concerns expressed about the effect that employment would have on the level of benefits currently received by an individual: ‘There was a potentially real or perceived fear that by taking part in paid work, or increasing hours, that people would be worse off. The main reason people were working few hours was that they did not want to lose income support’ (Beyer et al, 2004: 1). Having a disability can lead to additional expenses (Järbrink and Knapp, 2001) which, in some cases, are not covered by job earnings (C. Allan Roeher Institute, 1992). Unfortunately, this is a real fear for individuals (Beyer et al, 2004), and one which is recognised by the Government: ‘For those who want to find work, worries about the financial consequences of getting a job can be particularly heavy.’ (DWP, 2002: 16). Even the effort of seeking employment is flagged as problematic in the literature. Many are unclear about the financial position if they tried to find a job (DWP, 2002, 2004), and fear that efforts to find work would negatively affect their disability benefit: ‘Many feared that any effort to look for work would worsen their health and lead to disqualification from benefit’ (DWP, 2004: 11).

152 The Government has in fact made considerable efforts to improve the benefit situation in order to ensure that a return to work does not result in a lack of income (see www.direct.gov.uk). It is stipulated that ‘people who leave Incapacity Benefit to move into full-time work or training are entitled to reclaim their old benefit, for the same health condition, at any time within 52 weeks of starting work or training’ (Strategy Unit, 2005: 150). However, the literature revealed that the perception of complete loss of benefit still exists and this perception needs to be taken seriously. Jacobsen states that ‘specialist advice and clear information about benefits’ is ‘key to the success of transition to work provision’ (2002: 15). Vickers has arranged for welfare rights advisors to be funded out of his LSC work preparation programme to give individual specialised advice to adults with learning difficulties who are considering work and also to their families (2003).
Employer Engagement

153 Any real progress in encouraging learners with disabilities to follow their aspirations into employment must actively engage employers in the process. The LSC Grant Letter highlights the importance the Government places on the value of ‘greater engagement with employers’ (Clarke, 2004:1). The G. Allan Roeher Institute shows that successful employment of disabled people is more likely to occur ‘in workplaces with employment equity or affirmative action programmes’, ‘in workplaces where accommodations have been made for their disabilities’ and ‘in jobs where employers offer on-the-job training’ (1992: 170–172). However, Denholm and Macleod (2003: 22) found an indifference to participation in government initiatives. Most (employers) felt them to be ‘irrelevant to their training needs or did not perceive the need for further training from any source’. Connor and Little too found that employers were often not keen on encouraging further training (2005). Research for DWP identified two broad groups of employers:

The first had a strong commitment to employing disabled people. They were mostly larger organisations with specialist support departments and access to external sources of support. The second group did not have the same active commitment to employing disabled people, but said they did not discriminate. They generally had little experience of employing disabled people or specialist support, either internally or externally.  

DWP, 2001

154 The DDA projects on supporting young disabled people into work and on work experience (Dryden, 2004; Little, 2004) cited lack of employer engagement as one of the major barriers to employment for disabled people. This is despite the fact that large employers have had duties under the Disability Discrimination Act since 1995, and smaller employers since 2004. Sites in both these projects found that initiatives that attempted to engage employers directly were far more effective than impersonal questionnaires and that arranging ‘work buddying’ schemes was often a very effective way of allaying employer concerns and giving employers the confidence to accept disabled people into work or onto work experience programmes. QPID (2000) notes that while the practical aspects of the job are important, there is also the need to provide support of a social and emotional nature. The presence of supportive individuals within the organisation is important for the successful transition of disabled people into work. The QPID report found that the converse was also true. Negative attitudes of colleagues can present a significant barrier, as can isolation in the workplace.

155 A briefing paper which has arisen out of the DDA projects suggests policies and procedures that colleges need to draw up in order to ensure that employers can receive disabled learners onto work experience on an equal basis to their non-disabled peers (Maudslay, 2006). Vickers (Jacobsen, 2004) has developed individual action plans, which are documents drawn up and shared between the learner, the college and the employer.

156 The literature shows how one of the issues that can prevent employers providing support for people with a disability is that disabled people are often reluctant to disclose their disability, fearing that it will jeopardise their chances of gaining employment (Kruspa and Klein, 1995; Christie and Mensah-Coker, 1999; Rowland-Crosby. Giraud-Saunders and Swift, 2004). Information on the positive benefits of disclosure have been acknowledged by Rose (2005), the Disability Rights Commission and the Government (www.direct.gov.uk).

157 The literature also showed that employers were sometimes uninformed about issues concerning disability and had little knowledge of how best to support disabled people, often feeling that it would be complex, time-consuming and beyond their ability to do so. However, the literature also revealed positive examples of materials that provide very clear guidance for employers, and pointed out how best to make adjustments for disabled people and the positive benefits that disabled people could bring to a workforce (Hemmings and Morris, 2004).

The Importance of Provision That is not Directly Work-related

158 Although this theme is specifically concerned with supporting disabled people into employment, a study of the literature revealed the importance of educational provision that is not directly work-related. On the one hand, this is important for the small number of learners for whom employment is unlikely to be a viable option (Byers et al, 2002). It is important, with the current impetus on vocational
provision, that ‘other’ provision continues to be available for these people both because of the part it plays in enhancing their quality of life, and also so that they should not be placed in vocational or basic skills provision that may not be the most appropriate response to their needs. In addition to this, the literature revealed the important first step that ‘other’ provision can play in leading people with disabilities onto a vocational route. This is particularly true for people with mental health difficulties (Mumford, 2004). With the current Government’s move to provide progression routes for people on Incapacity Benefit, many of whom have mental health difficulties, it is particularly important that the LSC recognises the important first step that non-vocational provision can play in the journey to employment.

Conclusions and Implications for the LSC

159 The overriding message from the literature was that most learners want to get jobs but despite the many initiatives created to support learners, including disabled learners, into employment, people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are still profoundly under-represented in the labour market. The LSC needs to be aware of this contradiction and seek to redress it. In its forthcoming duties under the revised Disability Discrimination Act 2005, it will need to produce a disability equality scheme which shows how it is actively promoting opportunities for disabled people both within its own workforce and through its providers.

160 A priority for the LSC is to review all work-based learning frameworks for inclusivity, to ensure that they do not discriminate against and exclude people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through inflexibility in the structure and design, or through interpretation of policy on work-based learning programmes.

161 In its contracts with providers, the LSC needs to ensure that learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have access to appropriate places, and that appropriate work-based provision is available for them. This is a particular issue for disabled learners who want to work and for whom employment is a possibility, but who are at an Entry or Foundation level, and may never attain a full Level 2 qualification. E2E has the potential to address these learners’ needs, as it has a flexible structure but planning assumptions and targets for progression to Level 2 effectively exclude these learners.

162 A major concern is the expressed lack of access to work-based learning opportunities for some learners. The LSC will need to examine the data to identify patterns of under-representation of people with particular disabilities on Apprenticeships and ETPs, and set targets for starts, completions and employment outcomes for disabled people, to address poor take up and lack of participation.

163 One of the main messages is that there is a lack of access by training providers to specialist support for particular disabilities. The LSC will need to ensure that all providers can offer appropriate support for all learners who require it.

164 In addition to this, the LSC should ensure that any new vocational programmes that might be developed as a result of the Skills Strategy or the 14–19 curriculum have support for disability built into them from the outset. (Such analysis of data will become a requirement under the new Disability Discrimination Act 2005.)

165 Some programmes designed to help learners towards employment do not achieve their aims. To address this, the LSC should contract with providers that enable learners to progress into employment. It should recognise that many learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, are on work preparation college courses but do not move into employment, and should ensure that their contracts with providers demonstrate that options for progression are increased – in particular, by recognising the value of direct experience in work rather than training for work. Within the contracts, the LSC and providers need to recognise the importance of a wide range of employability skills and ‘soft’ outcomes and not concentrate only on a narrow interpretation of basic skills.

166 There is considerable value in and positive models developed in many supported employment schemes. This is an essential part of the continuum of employment-related provision. The LSC needs either to ensure that learning providers work in partnership with such supported employment schemes to create inter-agency packages or, if that is not feasible, to develop similar effective models within its own provision.

167 A major barrier in moving into employment is the fear that many disabled people have of losing benefits. The LSC needs to ensure that providing information about benefits is included in specifications for advice and guidance, and that providers have access, through collaboration with partners, to expert advice for learners to clarify the true benefit picture to them.
Effective relationships with employers are crucial to improving access to employment for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The LSC will need to use its employer engagement activities to the fullest extent, encouraging employers to view in a positive light the employment of disabled people.

Despite the strong emphasis on gaining access to work expressed by many disabled people, it is important to remember that this does not apply to everyone. Similarly, for some learners, the route back towards employment may be a long one. This means that the LSC will need to recognise the ongoing importance of ‘other’ non-vocational provision both for those learners for whom employment is not a realistic option and also for disabled people, particularly those with mental health difficulties currently on Incapacity Benefit, who may require ‘other provision’ as an essential first step towards employment.
Planning and Funding

Planning and funding are inextricably linked. This section seeks to describe the legislative and policy context in which the LSC operates, and the implications these have for the LSC. It outlines the legislative framework, DfES policies and initiatives, initiatives from other government departments, and the LSC’s policy development. The section goes on to review the growing body of evidence generated by local LSCs through the StAR activity, before considering the messages from these sources with literature for planning and funding.

Legislative and Policy Context

The LSC operates in an environment in which it is subject to major political influence. The Government makes a direct link between the effectiveness of the programmes the LSC funds, those its providers deliver, the economic well-being and prosperity of the country, and social inclusion.

The task of the LSC is to reconcile the legislative and policy imperatives placed on it with the pressures from learners and providers for recognition of a learner-centred approach. This section sets out some of the main influences of the LSC planning and funding functions.

The legislative framework

Learning and Skills Act 2000

Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000 the LSC has a duty to have due regard to the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and also to have regard to promoting equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled people.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Under the DDA 1995 Part 2, the LSC has duties as an employer not to treat disabled employees less favourably for a reason related to their disability, and also to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. Under the DDA Part 3, the LSC has similar duties when providing services (for example, putting on events, and so on).

The Policy Environment

The policy influences on the LSC come from three main sources:

- government initiatives (via the DfES) relating to education and training
government initiatives (via other departments) relating to disability

LSC policy developments.

**DfES policies and initiatives**

14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (February 2005)

179 The White Paper (DfES, 2005a) appears initially to be an inclusive document – ‘routes to success for all, engaging all young people’ – but it soon makes clear that its use of such phrases in fact excludes those with learning difficulties, and no mention is made, within the report’s main focus areas, of disability.

180 It is disappointing to find such a high level document talking of those with learning difficulties as ‘a very different group of young people’ (DfES, 2005a: 9.21). The literature, and indeed other government papers such as *Removing the Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004a), suggests that young people with disabilities share many of the aspirations and needs of their peers.

181 The needs of those with learning difficulties are addressed in a separate section. The range of measures designed, the White Paper says, to make a significant difference to such learners includes:

- QCA’s work on the Framework of Achievement – specifically below Level 2
- improved transition planning
- wider opportunities to develop life skills; the strategic review is mentioned as aiming to ‘increase capacity within FE colleges and encourage greater collaboration among providers from different sectors’
- Learning Disability Task Force recommendations on creating employment opportunities.

182 There appears to be no reference to issues such as how the Skills for Life programme must be tailored to meet needs, around appropriate advice and guidance services, and curriculum developments at Entry level.

183 It is difficult to envisage the means by which increased capacity will be delivered at a time when some programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not contribute to headline targets and are thus not seen as a priority for funding. ‘Other provision’ is being scaled back generally and, in some parts of the country, cut out altogether.

184 Yet the sentiments expressed in the main body of the White Paper sound so inclusive, and appear to reflect so well the approaches recommended in the literature:

> *In setting out our long-term course, we send a clear signal that our intention is that the system should be fashioned around the needs of the learner and be responsive to the needs of employers. The job of educational institutions is to ensure locality by locality that the full range of programmes is made available to young people.*

**Skills Strategy**

185 By signalling, however, that those with learning difficulties are ‘different’, the White Paper is sending conflicting messages about the priority that the post-16 sector should place on that group of learners. It is not clear whether they are included in the messages of the White Paper, or whether they stand outside it.

In July 2003 the Government launched its national Skills Strategy (DfES et al, 2003). Its goal is to maximise the contribution of skills to raising productivity, economic competitiveness and sustainable employment in the UK. The LSC wants to support business in developing the skilled workforce it needs to achieve key business objectives: improving productivity, retaining staff, reducing costs, and increasing profits. The Strategy states:

> *People with disabilities also face a range of barriers to involvement in training and jobs. We will safeguard the continuing availability of opportunities for those with learning difficulties, who are unlikely to achieve Level 2 qualifications but for whom smaller steps in learning represent an enormous personal achievement and a route to greater independence. The LSC has increased its spending on provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and will spend around £119m on these in 2004-05. The Council is reviewing the planning and funding of provision for*
learners with learning difficulties to improve their quality, availability and cost-effectiveness. It is providing capital funding to support colleges and training providers in making the necessary changes to their accommodation, in order to improve access for disabled learners, as required under the Disability Discrimination Act.

DfES, 2003: 40

Skills for Life

187 Skills for Life is the Government’s strategy for improving basic skills for young people and adults. The LSC has key targets associated with this programme.

188 The National Audit Office (NAO) published a report on the background and implementation of the Skills for Life Strategy, Skills for Life (National Audit Office, 2004). The report examines how the DfES and the LSC have implemented it, the costs of the programme and its achievements to date, the growth in participation, and how delivery will be sustained. The report goes on to recommend supporting the delivery of the Strategy 'until 2010 and beyond'. The report states that good progress has been made by the DfES on adult literacy and numeracy, achieving its 2004 target. At least £3.7 billion will be spent on implementing the Skills for Life Strategy by 2006.

189 There 'are more challenges ahead' to achieve the 2010 objectives of 2.25 million adults with improved literacy and numeracy (particularly older adults). The report’s recommendations have a particular focus on the needs of local LSCs. It is argued that local LSCs have been hampered by poor local information, and as such local LSCs should use information from the Skills for Life survey and information on their local areas to build a picture of local needs for literacy and numeracy. Local LSCs should use the enthusiasm and knowledge of existing and recent learners to attract others. The report also argues that low-skilled employees are often the hardest to reach for various reasons, and this is particularly true of smaller local employers; local LSCs should therefore also continue to work with local employers to overcome barriers employers perceive to providing their employees with learning opportunities. Financial incentives and flexible learning opportunities need to be investigated.

190 The report goes on to recommend that the DfES should look at ways of following up learners (encouraging them to take up further opportunities), while the DfES and the LSC should establish and disseminate successful examples of ‘embedded’ and personalised learning, drawing on successful examples from voluntary and community organisations. The report argues that there is a need to continue to find... new and creative ways to persuade more people... that improving their skills is worthwhile’, as there continue to be high barriers to some people taking up and continuing opportunities to learn. Different groups have different needs and are assessed differently, and this could lead to exclusion from learning programmes. The DfES, the LSC and the DWP should work together to ensure that customers on Jobcentre Plus-funded courses are encouraged to continue their learning if they take up employment, accessing and completing their learning in a way that suits them. The report acknowledges that the low levels of skills are a problem that can ‘only be addressed in the long term’. Local and national LSCs should be encouraged to share approaches and experience of what works (and what has not worked), as well as working with their providers to make sure that there are sufficient teachers in their areas and that teachers are properly supported. Finally, the DfES should ensure that programmes are assessed properly and regularly.

Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework

191 The adult basic skills curriculum includes the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, which sets out the entitlement to learning literacy and numeracy for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that have not yet reached Entry 1.

192 The guidance to the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework points out that:

While many learners with learning difficulties will benefit enormously from improving their literacy and numeracy skills, it is important to plan for this in the context of a broad-based curriculum where, for some learners, other skills may take priority.

193 Skills for Life provision is a government priority, and therefore a LSC priority. Significant funding has been allocated to implement the programme. There is increasing evidence, particularly from StARS, that some learners are inappropriately enrolled on Skills for Life programmes, partly to help meet targets, but also for want of any other suitable provision.
Success for All: Reforming further education and training

194 In his introduction to Success for All (DFE, 2002), the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills Charles Clarke said:

Success for All is about everyone in the sector – providers, learners and employers. ... The sector must ensure that 14–19 learners have greater choice and higher standards with a wide range of academic and vocational programmes providing clear opportunities to progress to higher education and skilled employment. It must also ensure that adult learners have greater access to excellent provision for basic skills, training for work, and learning for personal development.

DFE, 2002: 2

195 The four key themes of Success for All were originally:

- meeting needs and improving choice – creating a responsive, demand-led system that provides learning to meets the needs of young people, adults and employers; this includes the investment and strategic planning behind the rhetoric
- putting teaching, training and learning at the heart of all we do – ensuring that there is excellent teaching, training and learning across the learning and skills sector
- developing leaders, teachers, trainers and support staff of the future – creating a culture which will ensure that the sector attracts, motivates, develops and retains the very best staff
- developing a framework for quality and success – establishing a framework for planning, funding and accountability based on greater partnership and trust.

196 A fifth theme has subsequently been added:

- accelerating quality improvement – the AQI strategy will support the delivery of the Success for All reforms and help build capacity in the sector, enabling the creation of a network of high-quality, demand-led and responsive colleges and providers.

197 Three years on from the writing of Success for All, some of the key elements, such as three-year-plan-led funding, have yet to be fully realised. In addition, StARS have received some criticism for failing to bring about changes and rationalisation in delivery.

198 The requirement on the LSC to carry out StARS at local level is contained within Success for All under ‘developing a framework for quality and success’. Most of these reviews have now reported and have been out to consultation. These are complex studies, mapping and reviewing all aspects of provision, consulting and reviewing with partners. These plans and related thematic reviews are delivering rich sources of information from learners, from prospective learners and from local partners. They provide a solid basis for future planning at local and regional level. Some key features from local StARS are highlighted in paragraphs 248–274.

199 What is interesting from the StARS is the extent to which the most common themes correlate closely with the issues identified in the literature. In addition, many of the thematic reviews have involved consultation with learners, paving the way to the activities required under the Disability Equality Duty.

Review of the Future Role of FE Colleges

200 The DfES Five-year Strategy sets out a vision that will have significant implications for the future role and status of the further education college sector. This links to both the 14–19 and Skills strategies. To support this, Sir Andrew Foster has performed a review of the future role of the FE college sector, which considers issues for the sector raised by the reform agenda (Foster, 2005).

201 The Government’s reform plans for 14–19 year olds and skills will require colleges in every community to examine their mission and relationship with other providers, learners and employers. The review aims to identify:

- the distinctive contribution colleges make to the learning and skills market
- their long-term contribution to economic development and social inclusion
- anything else that needs to happen to transform the sector.
202 The review will include:

- ethos, mission and structure
- workforce, leadership and governance
- relationships with early year providers, schools and universities
- employer engagement
- business planning and income generation systems to disseminate best practice and enhance the reputation of the sector.

The Government’s strategy for special educational needs: Removing the Barriers to Achievement

203 This strategy sets out the Government’s vision for enabling children with special needs to realise their potential. The part of this strategy with particular relevance to the LSC is in raising expectations and achievement, where there should be cross-agency working to:

- improve the quality of transition planning
- set national standards for health and social care
- expand education and training opportunities, and develop new opportunities for transition to work.

Transfer of responsibility for offender education

204 In 2004 the LSC assumed responsibility for the planning and funding of provision for offenders in the community, in partnership with the Probation Service. By 2006 the LSC will have similar responsibility for offenders in custody.

205 This initiative merits inclusion in a paper on learning difficulty and disability because of the educational profiles of offenders, as identified in the SEU report Reducing Re-offending by Ex-offenders (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002). In comparison with the general population, offenders are more likely to have been in care, be regular truants and be excluded from school. The majority have low levels of basic skills and over three-quarters have mental health difficulties. Offenders within the prison system also have (in small numbers) physical and sensory impairments, and in larger numbers chronic ill health. More recently, research from the Dyslexia Institute (Rack, 2005: 15) about the prison population has concluded the following.

206 Nearly one-fifth, 18 per cent, of the sample has some form of hidden disability which will affect them in work and learning situations and for which additional specialist support will be needed. In more detail, 8 per cent of the sample could be positively identified as dyslexic, with a further 2 per cent showing evidence of difficulties in tasks requiring spatial skills and motor co-ordination, as is characteristic of dyspraxia; and 8 per cent show hidden disabilities of a more widespread nature.

207 The LSC’s experience in delivering appropriate provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will be a vital contribution to the education of offenders. The LSC’s planning and funding role within this new area of responsibility is likely to benefit from the messages from the review.

Other government initiatives

Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century

208 Arguably, this has been one of the most important papers influencing a change in attitude and in services for children and adults with learning disabilities (DoH, 2001). Its importance may be said to lie principally in the vigour and success with which it has been implemented, so much so that it is driving this area of work, and in many ways the education world is struggling to keep up.

209 Its four key principles are rights, independence, choice and inclusion. They have been applied to all aspects of life, and practices such as person-centred planning are widely accepted as working principles for the range of partners drawn together in the learning disability partnership boards (LDPBs). Their work in including people in decision-making, and in listening to the voices of service users, has set standards which other statutory bodies seek to emulate.

210 In terms of the strategic review two points about the Valuing People initiative must be borne in mind. The first is that much of the activity focuses on adults, so the curriculum under scrutiny is very different from that for school leavers and learners in transition.

211 The second point is that Valuing People is fundamentally about those people with learning disabilities, so however valuable the LSC’s partnership working arrangements are with LDPBs; they will not address the needs of the far wider group of learners with other forms of learning difficulty and/or disability who fall within the LSC’s remit.
Valuing People and Post-16 Education

212 This report (LSC and DoH, 2005) has been jointly produced by the LSC and the Valuing People support team. The purpose is to improve joint working with a view to increasing access opportunities. It reiterates the Government’s expectation that LDPBs will help people with disabilities get a full range of opportunities for education throughout their life. Such an expectation has been warmly received, but as provision for adults and resources for ‘other provision’ slip down the priority list, grave concern is being expressed about how realistic this aim might be.

Mental Health and Social Exclusion

213 The report Mental Health and Social Exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004) includes commitments from more than 20 government departments, agencies and other organisations to tackle issues of social exclusion for people with mental health difficulties. This model of joint working is an essential feature of meeting the needs of many excluded groups.

214 Only 24 per cent of adults with long-term mental health problems are in work, and more than 900,000 claim Incapacity Benefit for mental health reasons. Many people do not have activities to fill their days, and many frequently spend their time alone.

215 Two strands of the six-point action plan have particular relevance to the LSC’s work:

- giving people a real chance of sustained paid work reflecting their skills and experience
- improved support for parents with mental health problems and their children, and more opportunities to access education, volunteering, sports and arts activities.

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People

216 In 2003 the Strategy Unit was asked by the Prime Minister to carry out a project which would:

- assess the extent to which disabled people are experiencing adverse economic and social outcomes in the UK
- identify why this is happening, and what its implications are
- assess what could be done to improve the situation, in particular by making better use of existing resources.

217 Of particular interest to the LSC, the report notes:

Disabled people do not benefit as much as the general population from Government-provided training – only 9.5 per cent of learners in LSC-funded provision are disabled, although 20 per cent of the working age population are disabled.

Strategy Unit, 2005: 167

218 Recommendation 7.6 indicates that as part of its review of planning and funding for disabled learners, from 2006 onwards, the LSC should aim to increase the proportion of disabled learners engaged in education and training at all levels.

219 In order to achieve this aim, the LSC will have to ensure that disability issues are mainstreamed not only within the LSC, but also within its training providers.

220 The report is of particular assistance to the work of the strategic review, in that it takes a holistic view of people’s needs, as they are reflected across a range of government functions. In doing so, it highlights for the LSC some of the key areas for partnership development.

DWP Five-year Strategy

221 The Government intends, in 2008, to end Incapacity Benefit for new claimants. Existing Incapacity Benefit claimants will be unaffected by these changes, though they will be able to take advantage of the extra support on offer under the new system. There will be pilots and consultation about the changes, which are due to be in place for new claimants by 2008.

222 There will be an initial ‘holding benefit’, payable at the same rate as Jobseeker’s Allowance – before people have satisfied the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) test, which would normally occur within 12 weeks.

223 The PCA process could then become the gateway to the new main benefits, but there would also be a fuller assessment of potential future work capacity – an employment and support assessment – to help clients and advisors focus more fully on how they can best plan a return to work.
224 The majority of people with potentially more manageable conditions would receive a payment that might be called a ‘Rehabilitation Support Allowance’, with a stronger focus on supporting people back to work. Claimants would be required to engage in work-focused interviews and activity that would help them prepare for a return to work. This could include work preparation, training, or basic skills support.

225 People with severe health conditions or impairments would receive a payment that might be called a ‘Disability and Sickness Allowance’. They will, as now, be required to engage in some work-focused interviews. They will also be encouraged to engage in return-to-work activity wherever possible, but there will be no requirement on them to do so. These changes are particularly relevant to the LSC in terms of its remit for preparing people for work.

**LSC policy developments**

**The Skills We Need: Our annual statement of priorities 2004/05**

226 This is a critical document for the disability agenda, stating in the introduction: ‘We have a duty to support social inclusion as well as economic competitiveness.’ Also in the introduction the pressures on the LSC are made clear: ‘Demand can be limitless, but resources are finite.’

227 One of the key issues for the disability agenda is to be pragmatic in accepting that all the needs of all learners cannot be met all of the time. The LSC will be expected, however, arising from its conceptualising of its approach towards these learners, to make clear that as a ‘group’ they are not disproportionately bearing the brunt of any changes to the refocusing or targeting of resources.

228 The statement of priorities makes several important commitments which chime with issues emerging from the research:

- the need for employers to look to recruit workers with disabilities
- meeting the Government’s ambitious adult basic skills targets; there is evidence from StARs that such secure funding can distort the range of provision available to learners
- commitment to implementing the Equality and Diversity Strategy
- commitment to implement the recommendations of the strategic review on learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- responding to the SEU report on people with mental health difficulties (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004)
- improvements for 14–19 year olds, encouraging collaboration with schools – ‘enabling each person to progress as far in learning as they are able’.

229 The Skills Strategy recognises that people with disabilities also face a range of barriers to involvement in training and jobs. It gives a commitment to safeguarding the continuing availability of opportunities for those with learning difficulties who are unlikely to achieve Level 2 qualifications but for whom smaller steps in learning represent an enormous personal achievement and a route to greater independence. It suggests that so long as it is properly designed, ICT-enabled learning and assessment can be a valuable support for those with disabilities. That is one strand of the Government’s e-strategy for children and learners. It includes the development of a new, simpler search and web interface (My Guide) to help people with disabilities and those who lack the necessary ICT skills to use the Internet. The realisation of these commitments, through planning and funding activities, lies at the heart of the review.

**agenda for change**

230 The LSC has set out agenda for change, outlining a major programme for the transformation of the further education sector. This new agenda is fundamental to the LSC’s commitment to engage fully with the sector and work in partnership with colleges and training providers in a spirit of openness and transparency. agenda for change comprises six themes, which will allow the sector to respond to the needs of local learners, employers, the economy, and the local communities they serve. It also aims to help prepare for the combined demands of the 14–19 review, the Skills Strategy and Success for All. The themes are:

- skills and employers – how to help colleges best meet the needs of employers and the economy
- quality – how best to build a sector fully committed to quality and delivery to the highest standards throughout
funding – a radical overhaul of the LSC’s methodology, to ensure that the most is made of available funds to support the sector’s priorities with the minimum of complexity and bureaucracy

business excellence – driving up the efficiency of the sector, individually and collectively, including investing in improvements

data – radically revised and simplified systems, which deliver data and management information and sector needs

reputation – highlighting the major contribution it makes to the delivery of education, training and skills fit for the 21st century.

Equality and Diversity Strategy 2004–2007

231 The LSC’s equality and diversity strategy states that its vision for the whole organisation can be achieved only through a strong commitment to equality and diversity. The ‘equality and diversity’ label is at its broadest an understanding that each learner comes as an individual, but that some characteristics of learners seem to afford them fewer access opportunities to participate and achieve. It is important to see disability as an equality issue, because it leads to an exploration of the possibilities of institutionalised discrimination.

232 Among the LSC priorities in its Equality and Diversity Strategy are to:

- make more positive use of planning and funding
- ensure that provision responds effectively to individual learners
- promote the business case for diversity and inclusion in the workforce
- measure impacts and outcomes.

233 The LSC commits itself to support compliance through its use of planning and funding to ‘encourage all providers to prioritise equality and diversity’. While this is an admirable intention, there are so many other priorities and targets demanding the attention of the LSC and providers that some unpicking is required.

234 Prioritising one area inevitably can impact another. For those with cognitive and/or profound and complex difficulties, the Government’s Level 2 targets and the Skills for Life programme have little application. There is a need to make more explicit that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also a priority, and to reflect this in LSC planning and funding allocations.

235 Similarly, the support required for low incidence disabilities, such as deafness, can be very costly, and StARS report difficulties in securing a system of regular supply of high-quality provision. This also needs to be addressed through the LSC planning and funding functions.

236 Elsewhere in the Strategy the LSC suggests that inclusive and personalised learning are one and the same. The literature suggests a more complex relationship, so, not least for funding and planning purposes, it will be important to clarify the LSC’s understanding of each concept in relation to the resource and training implications for providers.

237 Finally, the Strategy commits the LSC to the role of an advocate for this area of work:

We will use our communication with the Government to maximise the impact of this work by arguing for a greater budget allocation for equality and diversity.

238 In both these key documents, the LSC has demonstrated that it already has an understanding of some of the key issues arising from the research. With this foundation, the issue of realisation rests with local interpretation, local provider management decisions, and removing some of the perverse effects of planning and funding frameworks. Coherent delivery of high-quality provision for learners with disabilities is most at risk in the translation of policy into practice.

Bureaucracy Review Group Annual Report 2004

239 In the introduction to this report (Bureaucracy Review Group, 2004), Sir Andrew Foster comments:

We take ‘bureaucracy’ to be, in common parlance, a broad synonym for poor management of the system and of provider organisations and believe that this prompts a fruitful approach to reducing the level of bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy Review Group, 2004: 3
The report does not specifically address the systems that have grown up around the funding and accountability arrangements for provision for learners requiring the allocation of additional resources. However, the report’s main recommendations (summarised) have great relevance to the planning and funding systems for this group of learners. The report recommends that:

- there should be a strategic approach to regulation
- there should be a simplified and reduced management information system
- the QCA should extend its modernisation programme to encompass all qualifications
- there should be clarification of the roles between DfES and the LSC.

Given the importance that the literature has placed on the gathering and sharing of data, it is useful to note the report’s observations on the demand for data. It sets out good practice criteria, which it says are not reflected in the present position. Information gathering should be:

- clear in purpose (the rationale should be understood)
- timely (sensitive to other demands)
- efficient (can be put to multiple uses)
- synergistic
- serving the interests of the core business (ensuring learner success)
- supporting the work of those in the front line.

Several StARs report the development of protocols around the sharing of information (not just sensitive confidential information). The criteria above might make a helpful contribution to such protocols.

The StARs comment on the problems created by ‘red tape’ and they particularly note the need to persuade auditors and senior managers that some of the planned reductions in reporting are permanent. There is anecdotal evidence that some providers are ‘playing safe’ by keeping higher levels of reporting in place within their institution, in fear of being caught out by any sudden reversal of policy.
learners with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the merits of existing provision, and the barriers to progression and participation. The full reviews have a very wide focus, looking at issues such as the needs of employers, and skills shortages.

250 Many areas have used the review as an opportunity to gather additional information and evidence about the scope of provision for particular groups of learners, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition many of the reports make proposals for local action by local LSCs.

251 This literature review has had access to only some of the thematic reviews of the needs of individuals with disabilities. In particular, it has not been possible to quote from reviews of provision in city or urban areas, which might have provided an interesting contrast between provision and gaps in urban and more rural areas. The comments that follow should therefore be considered in that light.

252 The report writers have appreciated the opportunity to see the variety of examples of practice that colleagues have shared. The indication in many reviews is that this is the beginning of a process that will be built on in the future. The strategic review should consider how national LSC policy-making functions in future might be informed by the work taking place locally and regionally.

253 This section gathers the emerging themes that may help illuminate the work of the review. Common elements of the thematic review process include:

• detailed consideration of the provision within all LSC funding streams, and identification of the gaps
• consultation with learners
• discussions with providers.

254 The quotes given in this section reflect those areas where the reviews, not written to a standard format, find common ground. Some reviews (such as Herefordshire and Worcestershire) take strategic planning as a focus, while others (such as Somerset) look at a particular range of disabilities. There is no standard format for the reviews, but certain issues recur, and these are presented under the following headings:

• definition of the learners
• progression – or lack of it
• work-related activity
• collaboration and shared resources
• staffing and funding
• consultation with, and involvement of, learners
• transport.

Definition of the learners

255 The first issue mentioned in most of the reviews is that of defining this group of learners. One review specifically mentions, and others allude to, the problem of researching a group of learners with ‘learning difficulties and/or disabilities’ who do not comprise anything that could be considered a homogeneous group.

256 Within the world of education there has been a reluctance to use a medical model of disability for learners, that is, one where the learners’ needs are thought to be identifiable by means of the condition or label that has been attached to them. Being visually impaired, having some kind of cognitive impairment, having co-ordination problems, or experiencing depression or anxiety are all labels that might be attributed to people, yet none of these descriptors indicate the impact the impairment has on learning nor do they identify how an individual learns best. In some ways the label is a distraction, and leads to a temptation to assume common curricular requirements for shared difficulties.

257 It has become preferable therefore to use a cover-all term – ‘learning difficulties and/or disabilities’ (derived from legislation) – and to argue that the specific nature of disability is irrelevant for planning and delivery purposes, so long as the individualised, person-centred approach, advocated in inclusive learning and personalised learning, is followed. The reviews identify the need to look beyond the broad ‘label’ in order to identify which learners or groups of learners might be missing out. There is a further implication for the LSC arising from the difficulties associated with defining learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and that is the problem of data capture, and the use of data for monitoring purposes.
The inclusive learning model as defined by the Tomlinson committee (FEFC, 1996), sees inclusive learning as the best match between the learner’s needs and aspirations and the provision. Ideally, the inclusive learning approach will meet the needs of all learners. However, the following factors must be taken into account.

- Inclusive learning as defined by Tomlinson is not universally understood or practised.
- The initial document and subsequent quality initiative targeted only the FE sector.
- Some learners require additional levels of expertise that is not routinely found in each provider.
- A multi-agency approach is required.
- Adequate funding is essential.

What all of the reviews identify is that the existing systems of provision are more able to provide ‘inclusive learning’ for some groups of learners and not others. Those learner groups where gaps are most commonly identified mirror those found in the literature and include:

- autistic spectrum disorders
- complex difficulties accompanied by emotional and behavioural problems
- profound and complex learning difficulties
- mental health concerns
- some difficulties in providing appropriate support for low incidence disabilities such as hearing and visual impairments.

The reviews identify factors linked to the growth in numbers seeking support within education and training provision, such as:

- quicker diagnosis
- inclusion agendas of schools
- better and earlier medical interventions
- support through technology
- higher expectations.

An additional issue raised by most reviews is the likely lifelong benefit arising from access to education and training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This potentially conflicts with the priority afforded to young people.

There is also evidence of confusion over the boundaries of the definition of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is particularly apparent in the work-based learning sector, where the term ‘learner with additional social needs’ has been adopted to refer to those whose difficulties in learning result from social circumstances rather than cognitive, physical or sensory impairments. Since the definition of ‘learning difficulties’ in education is a comparative one, and since the outcome of any of these circumstances is a greater difficulty in learning than their peers, it is appropriate to include all these learners within the scope of this definition. This means that learners defined as ‘NEET’ – not in education, employment or training – are included, as are offenders, whose capacity to learn has been impaired, for example, by drugs and/or alcohol.

Publications such as Back on Track (Marken and Taylor, 2001a) contains useful strategies for the promotion of inclusion. The fact that the learners are described as ‘disaffected’ might mean that such strategies are overlooked when considering learners with the ‘learning difficulty and/or disability’ label.

Another important issue is the need to consider individuals as a whole. It is clear that disability or learning difficulty is not the only aspect to be considered. Many learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also from black and minority ethnic groups.

It is significant to note that there is a clear indicator that there are disabled young people from the wide spectrum of black and ethnic minority groups using services provided by Norfolk, even if they are small in number. Services interviewed, particularly those for young disabled people only, did not tend to outline how they address multi-cultural needs.

Most of the reviews tend to use medical definitions to define the learners within the scope of their studies. This review is one of the exceptions.

In determining the extent and nature of provision, the decision was made to categorise students and young people by the extent of their need for support rather than by the nature of their disability.
Cohort 1
Those students who may have an identified disability or special needs but are able to access mainstream education, in school, further education and/or work placement, with support normally available to students in those sectors.

Cohort 2
Those students who have an identified disability or special needs but are able to access mainstream education, in school, further education and/or work placement, with support that is provided over and above that which is normally available – for which the local authority (through statement), the LSC (through additionality) or the disability employment advisor (who may require multi-agency involvement) provides additional resources.

Cohort 3
Those students with significant special educational needs who require discrete courses either in special schools, FE colleges, specialist out-of-county colleges, or supported work placements, and who will require multi-agency involvement.

Cohort 4
Those students with severe or profound educational needs who require specialist care placements, long-term care and a ‘lifestyle’ package which may involve some access to education (Herefordshire and Worcestershire).

Progression – or lack of it

There are many examples quoted of ‘initial’ FE experiences for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but many reviews report concerns about providing extended vocational opportunities or broader skills for living. The reviews display concern about learners in college provision who appear to be on a ‘roundabout’ where continued attendance in education is the alternative to being at home with nothing to do. The theme of progression is closely linked to that of collaboration, with the school sector on one side, and person-centred planning on the other. Review comments include:

There is worrying evidence of a lack of direction among learners, and many cases of individuals undertaking multiple or repeat programmes and never progressing.
Norfolk

It is important to distinguish between those who genuinely require engagement in continued learning in order to continue to work towards or complete a specified learning goal and those who continue because alternative activities are not available. It is, however, essential to continue to recognise that for some learners, maintenance of their current capabilities may require on-going learning.
Northumberland

Tutors stress the need for a broad range of horizontal pathways to allow for the diversity of learner interests and to provide the ‘test ground’ before the learner finds the direction they wish to take.
Nottinghamshire

A need to shift from traditional generic [learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities] courses to one of tailored packages of learning that can be accredited to meet the individual needs and abilities of LLDD and to enable progression into meaningful activities and/or mainstream provision.
Cambridgeshire

Work-related activity

Most reviews comment on learners’ desire for employment, and the difficulties faced in finding appropriate work placements to facilitate this. The lack of work-based opportunities has led to many calls in the reviews for the LSC to seek to encourage employers to consider work experience, work trials, and the employment of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Review comments include:

It was considered that the public sector and learning providers should take the lead in providing employment opportunities by using their own organisations to offer jobs and also training opportunities in order that people with learning difficulties and disabilities can gain the necessary work experience.
Northumberland

The LSC needs to continue to work with Connexions to identify and meet learner demand for E2E provision.
Nottinghamshire

Few (providers) had contact with the Disability Employment Advisors at Jobcentre Plus. The majority did not know what supported employment was.
Norfolk
Voluntary agencies are working very effectively with young people with more severe and complex needs. Their expertise in providing the bridge into work for young people with more severe and complex needs should be capitalised on.

Herefordshire and Worcestershire

The use of job coaches should be supported and extended and funding and links should be sought through Jobcentre Plus’s New Deal for the Disabled, and Workstep.

Herefordshire and Worcestershire

**Collaboration and shared resources**

270 Reviews comment on the potential available if the post-16 sectors could work collaboratively with all relevant agencies, particularly schools and local authorities. Many reviews record failures in information sharing, both about learners in transition, and about types of provision, an absence of a shared local vision, and missed opportunities to make best use of scarce resources.

271 The post-school sector needs to be involved in local communities of learning, and there needs to be thought given to the criteria used for the Increased Flexibility programme, which currently excludes provision at Entry level, in some areas at least. Review comments include:

- Participants in the consultation identified the need for a holistic approach to individuals, in line with Valuing People, and that education should not be considered in isolation.
  - Berkshire

- Support voluntary organisations that provide good quality educational opportunities for disabled learners.
  - Berkshire

- There is no established network for services to join together in addressing key issues and for sharing practice. Many services seemed isolated and set apart from others even when they had a common client group.
  - Norfolk

- Although the LSC is able to provide some support for such learners, the role of Health and Social Services must be recognised. As budgets are constrained for all, it is essential that formal agreements exist of the relevant contributions of the various organisations concerned.
  - Northumberland

- The LSC should improve anticipation of demand (for example, through analysis of section 140 assessments) and proactively plan how to meet it.
  - Devon and Cornwall

- Collaboration … is less effective between the sectors, and appears almost non-existent with the voluntary sector.
  - Shropshire

- Strategic planning for the needs of young people with additional needs is still not fully developed. The Learning Partnerships and the Learning Disability Partnerships are still working independently with little cross-referencing.
  - Herefordshire and Worcestershire

- Inspectors have noted with approval a number of instances where schools and colleges co-operate on 16+ provision... A forum might be developed to share good practice and build up protocols for joint funding, taking joint responsibility for assessment of accreditation, etc.
  - Somerset

- There are no plans to include colleges in communities of learning and the arrival of formal systems may reduce the opportunities for colleges to use informal exchanges that have operated in the past.
  - County Durham

**Staffing and funding**

272 Reviews identify particular areas where delivery is affected by insufficient levels of specialist staff and funding issues. There are several areas where a role is envisaged for the national LSC. Review comments include:

- Short-term project funding can be a disincentive to long-term planning.
  - Berkshire

- There was a general feeling among providers that their hands are tied due to targets set through the LSC which relate to outcome measures that many of these young people will find it hard to attain.
  - Norfolk

- Colleges seem well resourced and funded to provide the requisite range (of support methods); work-based learning providers struggle to get the specialist equipment/staff they need in some cases.
The LSC should investigate a pool of loan equipment.
Derbyshire

The LSC can assist providers by the implementation of clearer and more transparent funding formulas. These would ideally allow greater flexibility for programme completion and extra resources to cover special purchases and specialist diagnostic help.
Derbyshire

A programme of staff awareness training for learning difficulty and disability is essential for all providers on an on-going basis. Providers want to know where to find it.
Derbyshire

E2E could be dealing with those with less severe special needs, although it too is under budgetary pressures.
Devon and Cornwall

Salary levels for SEN staff are lower in the FE sector than elsewhere; unless parity can be re-established there is increasing risk that the sector will face a brain drain.
Shropshire

Funding levels are generally considered adequate. Such complaints that there were tended to relate to issues of flexibility and speed of response.
Shropshire

Several colleges mentioned the fact that their arrangements (links with special schools) [were] outside the Increased Flexibility initiative.
County Durham

Consulting and involving learners

- 273 A positive outcome from most reviews is that structured consultation with learners has taken place. Potentially this could become a regular, annual activity. It could offer a means of monitoring the local LSC’s developing policies in this area and provide one way of actively involving disabled learners as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Findings included:
  
  Conversations with Year 11 students identified very limited direction or planning for their future on leaving school.
  Norfolk

  Learners wanted ... full-time courses running for five days a week rather than four, with shorter holiday periods to enable more intensity of focus on subjects. Long holidays were felt to be negative by students, who said they got bored and craved more of the provision they were receiving.
  Norfolk

  I wanted skills for childcare but ended up with basic skills.
  Nottinghamshire

  Learners were very positive about their post-school learning experiences. Their participation in college or work-based learning was driven by aspirations for independence and vocational skills.
  Shropshire

  Consult with advocacy agencies to see how best to ensure that the voice of young people informs strategic decisions on future developments.
  Herefordshire and Worcestershire

  The aspirations of learners with special needs was also said to have risen. One head teacher, for example, reported that his MLD [moderate learning difficulty] learners, just like mainstream learners, wanted work-related education, especially if it led to employment. This will have an impact in post-16 education, as SEN learners ask for a range of vocationally relevant, rather than general, courses.
  County Durham

Transport

- 274 For many learners, including those in small towns and rural areas, this is a major access issue:

  Transport issues disproportionately affect the lives of learners with disabilities.
  Berkshire

  Key issue – lack of clarity surrounding responsibility for commissioning and funding transport for LLDD across key transition stages.
  Cambridgeshire

  Students invariably considered that the only place they could learn was at their nearest college; there was little prospect that they could go further afield to learn. This means that if they are to have real learning choices then a wide range of provision needs to be available or accessible to ensure that students learn what they really want to
Planning

275 The aspects of planning considered here are those activities undertaken nationally, regionally and locally by the LSC, and with partner organisations.

276 Regionally and locally, the planning activities involve understanding the nature of demand for learning, and identifying appropriate sources of high quality supply that are effective and efficient. As with all planning cycles, there should be an element of monitoring, review and evaluation, to ensure that the activities undertaken have produced the desired outcomes. This final phase appears to be missing from current LSC planning processes. This can be traced back to the fact that although the LSC undertakes many activities in relation to learning difficulties and/or disabilities, this review has found no indication that it has formally articulated what it aims to achieve by these activities.

277 The LSC’s priorities are agreed with the Government, and, for key priorities, targets are set. Understandably, targets tend to drive the planning and funding approaches. One of the dilemmas for the LSC in this area of provision is to work through, and if necessary articulate to Government, the tensions of meeting, planning and funding the provision for learners towards whom it has a statutory duty, but who do not always feature within the headline targets. A systematic review of research in the schools sector (Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2002) found that the external policy environment can help or hinder schools’ attempts to enhance student’s participation and the compromises that staff have to make between the non-inclusive implications of policy. Policy needs to be compatible with inclusive developments if it is to support rather than undermine organisations’ efforts.

278 In considering the impact of targets, Hodgson et al (2005) note that ‘accountability’ targets, that is, centrally driven, top-down, Treasury-driven targets can distort the behaviour of professionals, sometimes with serious unintended consequences. They cite examples of where learners with genuine needs, who are unlikely to contribute to meeting the targets, are excluded. The authors conclude that in terms of targets in the learning and skills sector, there is something seriously wrong when the most effective way of meeting targets is to be exclusive, yet the targets were supposedly aimed at increasing inclusion. The Skills for Life programme exemplifies one aspect of the dilemma: learners are in some cases inappropriately following these programmes, where funding is secure (because of its links to key targets); where learners have more appropriate non-accredited provision, which does not contribute to targets, long-term funding may be less secure.

Publishing a disability equality scheme

279 The general duty from the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 has already been mentioned but there is a particularly powerful link to planning which merits further exploration.

280 Under the specific duties of the new legislation, the LSC, along with other public bodies, is required by December 2006 to publish a disability equality scheme (DES). The goal of the DES should ultimately be to effect a narrowing of the gaps in the outcomes and experiences of disabled and non-disabled people. It will often be appropriate to set targets for doing this over the timespan of a DES. The DES will include:

- details of how the LSC measures the impact of its policies and practices (or likely policies and practices) on equality for disabled people
- how disabled people have been consulted and involved in developing the scheme.

281 It is clear from even this very brief summary of the new requirement that the duty will be challenging in the following ways.

- It depends on a capacity to identify and track disabled people in the post-16 sector. Evidence suggests that this is an area of weakness, in part because of the difficulties of disclosure.
- It requires comparisons to be made within areas of activity not specifically designed for learners with disabilities (DfES 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper) (DfES, 2005a). How will the LSC be able to gauge the impact of the strategies outlined in the White Paper on those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- It assumes levels of consultation and involvement with disabled people, more than currently appears to be the norm. Evidence from the StARs suggests that, in some local areas, the LSC has gone to considerable lengths to set up consultation arrangements. These can provide a model to build on.
However, the duty provides a timely opportunity for the LSC to look at its planning and funding functions and to consider its process for impact assessment. All public bodies will need to be satisfied that, where services are reduced, or where criteria are in place for access to particular services, the action does not disproportionately affect people with disabilities.

Planning for post-16 providers at local level is often based on evidence derived from local networks, frequently facilitated by the local LSC. Such arrangements appear to meet immediate and short-term needs for the exchange of data and information. Barriers to the smooth running of this process are cited as:

- the different definitions used in schools and the post-school sector
- difficulty in obtaining detailed reports related to Section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

For the purposes of medium- to longer-term planning, both for individual post-16 providers and for the setting up of regional support centres for low incidence disability, some areas report ongoing problems with local authority data. Most StARs call for continued and increased collaboration in the interests of improved transition and the delivery of more appropriate provision and support.

Of course, one of the main problems about data collection for planning purposes is that it is not possible to say what provision a person might want, or indeed what their support needs might be, simply on the basis of a medical label. That having been said, there are very positive reports in the reviews where better collaboration with the school sector (particularly development using the Increased Flexibility programme) seem to be influencing the practice in post-school providers.

Planning with other agencies

Effective collaboration between agencies needs formal structures such as joint training, planning and development groups, policy forums, meetings, panels for considering referrals, and designated people responsible for liaison. It is also facilitated where agencies share the same issues, for example having individual cases in common, shared premises, similar organisational structures, shared information, and shared documentation and ways of working. Despite recognition of their importance, Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen (1999) found that structures alone were not deemed to be sufficient, and good working relationships were regarded as the key to effective liaison. This involved informal links such as the maintenance of professional relationships built up over time. This has implications both for securing effective multi-agency planning and the allocation of funding for such activity.

Another issue to emerge from the StARs with reference to planning is the relationship between social services provision and that funded by the LSC. Where more than one statutory body has powers or duties in relation to groups of learners, the process of collaboration is frequently difficult. Often learners or clients follow one pre-determined route or the other, rather than receive the ‘package’ of provision most likely to meet their needs.

The LSC has begun to address this issue in a number of ways. The first is that the placement panels set up by the LSC to promote inter-agency discussion on the need for residential placements have helped develop trust and a collaborative approach between the agencies involved. This accords with one of the key messages in the Strategy Unit’s report (2005): to ensure continuity and coherence in the provision of education, training and employment with services offered by other agencies.

An example of innovation

One example of an interesting initiative linked to the decisions surrounding residential placements is the LSC East of England pathfinder – ‘Improving Choices’. The Eastern Region has identified that it has a lack of specialist provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which means that too many young people have to attend out-of-county colleges. Offering more choice to learners locally will not remove the need for specialist colleges, as many young people will continue to be best placed there, but it will offer a choice of locally based provision.

The plan is to provide participating FE colleges with ‘pump-priming’ funds to develop appropriate in-college provision without the residential element. This will require collaboration with, for example, adult care services, training agencies, work-based learning provision, specialist colleges and housing associations. A residential option will be provided (more limited than the current two- or three-year placement) for the development of independent living skills.
Each of the counties within the region is taking a lead role for a different category of need. At least two additional points are worthy of note here.

- The initiative is regional, not local. This prompts consideration about the most relevant level for planning provision.
- The messages from this work will have implications at national level for collaborative approaches between government departments. This identifies an important role for the national LSC.

Planning linked to Valuing People and modernising day services

One of the major activities for the LDPBs is the modernisation of day services. This is a significant planning exercise, with implications for education and training provision in each LSC area.

Rob Greig, National Director, Learning Disabilities, explains the process:

*The modernisation of day services is one of the most important pieces of work facing Partnership Boards. When consulting people with learning disabilities during the development of Valuing People, there was a clear and consistent message that current day services were not what people want. The changes needed are much more than a move from large day centres to small ones. People want lifestyle opportunities that are based on them being real and full members of communities, with the opportunity to have jobs, go to college, meet friends, relax, and enjoy themselves. At the same time, the genuine need of families to have support to get on with their own lives must be recognised.*

Love, Bates and Whitehead, 2002: 1

The modernisation of day services is an example of an initiative beyond the education and training context, but which has major implications for education and training. As well as catching up with such initiatives as they work through local implementation, it is important that the LSC (either individually or through the DfES) ‘has a seat at the table’ when such initiatives are first developed. Only in this way can the LSC engage in proactive – rather than reactive – planning.

Planning at individual, local, regional and national levels

At individual, local, regional and national levels, the LSC will need to consider the extent to which the planning functions available to it are used to best advantage and to ensure that disability is ‘mainstreamed’ throughout its business planning. The LSC has a range of planning mechanisms available.

At individual learner level

Transition planning (within schools’ SEN procedures) was designed to achieve several objectives:

- ownership for learners of their planned post-school activity
- objective assessments (now through Section 140 assessments) of learners’ needs and aspirations and the appropriate setting where these might be met
- involvement of providers in the post-16 sector, helping it position itself to meet learners’ needs
- advance notice to local LSCs to assist in planning for the upcoming requirements of learners.

While the theory behind this process appears to be sound, and is well intentioned, there is evidence that the process is not working as well as it might. The Connexions service has the lead role in this work, and a key to success for learners is the quality of the partnership between Connexions and other organisations. The LSC may need to be proactive to ensure that the flow of information it receives is fit for the purpose.

In its strategy for SEN, *Removing the Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004a), the Government acknowledges:

*We know from research that the quality of transition planning varies, the statutory procedures are not followed in many cases, services are often poorly coordinated, and young people’s and parents’ views are not adequately addressed.*

DfES, 2004a: 68

At local level

The data held by local authorities on learner numbers, nature of support needs and quantity and nature of local specialist support is not
routinely used to inform providers of prospective staff development needs and curriculum demands. Inclusive learning and indeed the anticipatory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (Equality Challenge Unit, 2004) can only be met if planning and related funding is proactive in relation to this area of work. Post-school providers need to become involved in communities of learning.

At regional level

300 The emerging regional structure provides an opportunity to ensure greater consistency across a wider area, to address gaps in provision and to plan to develop new provision to meet low incidence needs and to ensure the availability of specialist support to all providers. The East of England pilot is a powerful example, and there are initiatives in other regions.

At national level

301 At the national level, there is an opportunity to set high-level objectives and targets, to co-ordinate strategy, to maintain an overview of regional planning, to ensure that effective initiatives are shared and replicated in all areas, to monitor and review data, and to report on overall progress as required by the disability equality scheme.

302 There is a need at national level to improve inter-agency and inter-departmental work that would allow the LSC to be more proactive, at times when other agencies are identifying possible roles for post-16 education providers. This review should assist the LSC in determining how its funding and planning might fit with agendas such as Valuing People, rather than be forced to react to requests for involvement in unanticipated ways.

303 National level policy can help set clear and appropriate parameters, which recognise the different purposes education and training fulfil for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The LSC can, within funding and planning policies, communicate that for some learners, for example those with severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, employment of any kind is unlikely to be realistic. Nonetheless, education can make a significant contribution to their quality of life and social inclusion through the development of communication and life skills, the maintenance of skills already acquired, and their appreciation of leisure and social skills.

304 The LSC, in reviewing its policies under the duty to promote disability equality, should ensure that it complements and reflects the Government’s agenda on the inclusion of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into mainstream activities and should set specific objectives to increase the number of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across all programmes until they are comparable to the population as a whole (National Employment Panel, 2005).

Conclusions and Implications for the LSC

305 The conflicting demands for the LSC of the legislative environment and the legal duty to have regard to and promote provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in a time of acute budgetary constraint, presents significant challenges. The LSC needs to balance the imperative to achieve national headline targets with its legal duties towards these learners. The LSC has stated its legal duty to have regard to and promote provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but needs to make this explicit, and to communicate this clearly to all its staff and providers. The LSC should reiterate, in all of its documentation, alongside any mention of priorities, its expectations, and that at least the same proportion of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities should be maintained.

306 Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not form a homogenous group. It follows then that any single LSC policy directive will not meet their needs. The LSC must ensure that all its policies recognise the existence and learning needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This work must be mainstreamed across the organisation and not be marginalised to a specialist team.

307 Strategic area reviews and thematic reviews present a rich source of information that can be used to identify gaps in provision, and barriers to participation, achievement and progression. Used to inform future planning, STARS and thematic reviews present a real opportunity to make strategic decisions to reshape and reform the current pattern of provision locally and regionally to address current inequalities.
Through Inclusion to Excellence: Moving From Policy to Practice

308 The collection and use of data about learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is problematic for a number of reasons. The fact that learning difficulty and disability is a very broad spectrum, which is hard to define, that it is not stable over time and does not have homogenous groups within it, presents problems of identification. The fact that a ‘medical model’ label of learning difficulty and disability says little about the nature of learning programmes and support that an individual might require, further limits its usefulness in planning. In addition, the discontinuity of definitions and systems between the school and post-school sectors and other government agencies creates other problems for transition and collaborative working. Some of the data related to learning difficulty and disability and additional learning support recorded on the ILR is incomplete, and appears not to be entirely reliable. The LSC needs the best possible data to inform planning. This means that it will need to improve the compatibility of its data with that of other sectors and government agencies, to improve the accuracy of the data collected, and to improve the use of the data to inform planning and in monitoring and reporting on changes to the pattern of provision.

309 The difficulty the LSC faces in translating its statements of principle and policy into clearly articulated aims and outcomes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities needs to be addressed. This review offers an opportunity to set out a strategy with clearly articulated aims and outcomes expressed as objective targets for improvement, which address current inconsistencies and inequalities within a defined timescale.

310 In anticipation of the LSC’s forthcoming duty to promote disability equality and to produce a disability equality scheme by December 2006, the LSC should assess the impact of its plans, and all proposed changes, to ensure that it does not discriminate against disabled learners, and is actively addressing inequalities.

Funding

311 The picture about funding to meet the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a very complex one. This section demonstrates the importance of funding as a driver of provision, describes the complex funding position inherited by the LSC, explores the impacts of funding silos, examines what research tells us about funding, and draws out the implications for the LSC in the light of the agenda for change funding review.

The importance of funding in determining provision

312 Although planning and funding are inextricably linked, the importance of funding in determining the nature and level of provision cannot be underestimated. Hodgson et al (2005) and Leney, Lucas and Taubman (1998) have identified the powerful influence funding has on providers in the learning and skills sector. Funding was identified as one of the most important levers for promoting inclusive provision (FFEC, 1996). Conversely, inadequate or inflexible funding has been identified as one of the greatest barriers to meeting learners’ needs (Byers, 2004; Dee, 2004). European research shows that funding is one of the most important factors in realising inclusive provision and if the financial arrangements do not match policy, then learners will not be included (Meijer, 1999). The importance of funding was echoed by the report of a major consultation with practitioners to support this review; they identified it overwhelmingly as the most significant issue (Faraday and O’Toole, 2005).

The LSC’s inheritance

313 The LSC inherited very different approaches to funding providers, with different eligibility criteria, costing mechanisms, payment methods, audit requirements, ways of providing financial support for learners, and ways of identifying and meeting the additional costs of support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Discussion and debate about funding, and reference to its complexity, is not a new phenomenon. In 1997, Helena Kennedy wrote:

"Each of the funding routes has been developed for separate policy objectives. We found a bewildering variety of complex systems, the interaction between them and the plethora of specific and challenge funding presented real problems. Such funding arrangements inhibit informed debate and absorb disproportionate costs and management time."

Kennedy, 1997: 47

314 This referred only to the funding streams available to further education at that time, but the picture has become even more complex and bewildering with the broader remit of the LSC.
Current funding arrangements

315 The LSC’s duties and powers in relation to all learners are bounded by a range of criteria: the age of the learners, the provision the LSC can fund, the type of provider, and the priorities set by the Government and the LSC. In terms of funding for providers, in 2004/05, local LSCs made allocations to providers in the FE and work-based learning sectors. They received funding calculated according to a formula for the main programmes offered, which also included identified resources that could be drawn down for additional support. For school sixth forms and adult community learning providers, an overall allocation was made which included an unidentified sum for additional support. There is a perception (Fletcher et al, 2003) that there are no resources for additional support. A significant funding stream is held at national level for a small number of learners whose needs may not be met locally (less than 1 per cent of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities). The LSC has a statutory duty to consider such placements under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The LSC contracts with independent specialist colleges for this provision, and calculates the payment based on a matrix describing a relationship between level of support requirements and costs.

Funding silos

316 The differences in funding are starkly contrasted between the different sectors and have been variously described as ‘silos’. The effect of these silos is to ‘lock’ learners into a single provider or stream of provision, even when the best provision for an individual might involve a package with contributions from a range of different providers. It also results in serious inequalities in the type and amount of provision learners receive, and inhibits flexibility.

317 Practitioners viewed silos as a barrier to the delivery of comprehensive, inclusive and progressive provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities:

It appears that the current funding model does not support the kind of changes that providers are beginning to make as they adopt person-centred planning approaches.

Dee, 2004: 12

318 Not only do funding silos exist between the different LSC funding sectors, but also between the different funding streams, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), to which learning and skills sector providers have access. There are further silos between different agencies and government departments, for example, those elements of programmes funded by health and social services departments or the DWP. These silos can cause conflicts to be created between different departments’ directives (Stasz and Wright, 2004) such as person-centred planning. An individual may have links to several different services such as education, health, social services and housing, yet there is a lack of communication, shared planning, or negotiation between them. There is therefore no opportunity to put together a holistic package with different components funded by different agencies. As a result, an individual might be steered into a particular funding route and type of provision, or might miss out on services because of the exclusivity of the eligibility criteria (Strategy Unit, 2005).

Funding silos and additional learning support

319 The effect of these different funding streams has resulted in widely different entitlements to learning programmes and support for learning. The LSC has recognised the inequalities inherent in the existing system, and has undertaken successive modifications to the funding methodology on a sector-by-sector basis. In its policy statement on a common approach to funding (LSC, 2004a), the LSC stated the principle that there should be a level of consistency and equity across the post-16 sector, and that in terms of additional learning support, there should be:

- a single definition of additional learning support (ALS) applied across the post-16 sector
- the entitlement of all learners to ALS, regardless of age, mode of study, type of programme or provider type
- the achievement of a common funding approach (within which arrangements may differ between sectors in some respects).

320 The LSC thus stated its commitment to ensuring that all learners should be supported, but recognised that a common funding approach would not be achievable across the post-16 sector at that time. Although the LSC has sought to decrease the differences across funding streams for each sector, they remain significant.
What research tells us about funding

321 A European study of all the EU countries (at that time) and Norway and Iceland (Meijer, 1999), provides a considerable evidence base on the effect of funding in realising inclusive policy imperatives. This interesting publication was the only one considered within the literature search that looked not only at the various methods of allocating additional funds, but at what these additional resources achieved in the way of outcomes for learners. This is such an important point that the LSC might wish to consider the implications at greater length. For example, do we know what any additional funding buys in the way of learner outcomes? What are the learner outcomes we are seeking to achieve? How are these outcomes captured and identified?

322 There are caveats with this research – first, the study looks specifically at the school sector; second, it is now six years old. However, the value of the study is in its analysis of different funding systems and examination of the impact of funding on the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is particularly helpful that the study not only presents the results of the analysis between funding and inclusion, but also provides an analytical framework to inform the restructuring of funding policies. Some of the key issues and findings are directly applicable to the learning and skills sector.

323 In conceptualising the approach to funding, the study identifies several key issues as being helpful. These are:

- how funding is organised – although complex, this is already understood by the LSC
- the decision-making processes which determine the allocations to providers
- how the funding is used in institutions – how flexible is it?
- how effectively the funding is used – how is this judged? What are the desired outcomes?
- how efficiently the funding is used – are bureaucracy and organisational procedures being kept to a minimum?
- the possibility of the funding system giving rise to different forms of strategic behaviour from various parties involved – establishments may seek to use the system to their advantage, while parents may have a different agenda – both possibly in conflict with formal policy goals
- how accountability is handled.

Funding models – direct input funding for special provision

324 The report identified a series of key findings and funding models from an analysis of the funding approaches in the various countries, and draws conclusions about what works best.

325 Most criticisms were raised about a system characterised by direct input funding for special provision (that is, more learners equals more funding). The researchers found that it can lead to negative strategic behaviour with less inclusion, more labelling and rising costs. More resources are spent on bureaucracy, litigation, diagnostic procedures and so on, and less on direct provision. It notes the unintended outcomes of this funding approach.

326 It is demonstrated that all funding mechanisms entail certain incentives, some of them even rewarding the segregation of pupils with special educational needs.

327 This model is exemplified by the statementing procedure in the schools sector in England and would also seem to apply to the specialist college placement process, where costs have risen and relatively high levels of resources are spent on the placement process, including appeals procedures.

Regional approach

328 In contrast, another finding is that countries with strong decentralised systems, where the region or ‘municipality’ has responsibility for the organisation and allocation of funds, report positive effects. Where the allocation of more funds to separate settings influences the amount of funding for support in mainstream provision, there tends to be a very positive impact on achieving inclusion. Reports state that there are no negative side-effects, and high levels of satisfaction with funding systems. This is consistent with the recent decision by the LSC to concentrate on developing its capacity at a regional level.
Funding for individual learners

329 The study also found that the allocation of resources to individuals is not advisable for learners with lower levels of support needs. Funding is better spent on increasing the inclusivity of the mainstream setting. Although the report does not indicate what level might be considered lower (or higher) and the threshold between them, this finding confirms the change to FE additional learning support funding recommended by Fletcher et al (2003) and implemented in the 2004/05 year. This change means that colleges have the flexibility to meet lower levels of need in the most effective way and that individual claims are required only for individuals whose additional support costs more than a threshold of £4,500.

330 An evaluation carried out in the FE sector (Faraday, Fletcher and Gidney, 2000) suggested that having the additional support funding mechanism providing access to funding based on individual claims was the most significant factor in improving the accessibility and quality of support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The very high levels of satisfaction with the arrangements for ALS in FE colleges are also reported in the StARS, which have recognised that ALS arrangements have supported FE colleges in meeting learners’ needs. Recent analysis of ILR data (Fletcher and Munoz, 2005) provides strong evidence of the increasing effectiveness of ALS on the success of those who receive it. This substantial evidence base suggests that there are merits in retaining a system of individually based claims for learners with higher levels of support needs. The level of the threshold will of course need to be determined.

331 However, emerging problems are reported in StARS about the high costs needed to meet the needs of learners with low incidence disabilities, such as deafness or hearing impairment. In addition, there is a very limited pool of qualified staff available for such work. This is leading to proposals for ‘centres of excellence’, sometimes on a regional basis, to ensure consistent delivery of high-quality support. Hopes are expressed that future funding arrangements will encourage such developments.

Throughput model

332 The European study recommends that a ‘throughput’ model at regional level seems to be the most successful, especially where some elements of output funding are incorporated. In this model, the budget for support is delegated from central to regional level, where decisions are taken as to how the resources are allocated. This model was found to be more cost-effective, and to provide fewer perverse incentives to encourage non-inclusive practices. Nevertheless, the study indicates that it is essential for central Government to specify clearly which goals must be achieved, but decisions about how these goals are achieved can be made at a local level.

Accountability

333 An important concern in this (and any) system is accountability; that is, how providers have spent their resources and to what effect. The research shows that earmarking funds for support, methods of control, and effective monitoring and evaluation are inherent elements of a finance system adequate for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Monitoring, inspection and evaluation procedures are deemed to be an essential element of this funding system (Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen, 1999; Meijer, 1999). This has clear implications for the LSC in developing its common approach to funding as part of agenda for change.

Effectiveness, outcomes and bureaucracy

334 One of the most important questions is whether the funding is used effectively. Effectiveness is essentially related to the issue of outcomes – are the targets for participation by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and appropriate measures of success achieved? The next most important factor is to know that the funding has reached the target group without unnecessary bureaucracy and by the most economic means. The need to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy chimes with the recommendations of the Bureaucracy Taskforce (2002), which made specific recommendations to ensure simplicity and consistency in funding, which should give rise to stability and predictability for providers.

Allocation of resources

335 Meijer (1999) found that the prevalence of ‘special educational needs’ is relatively evenly distributed; provided that socio-economic factors are taken into account, funds can be allocated according to total numbers of learners. At local level, the most attractive model is for a (smaller, and fixed) part of the budget to be allocated to all organisations irrespective of need, based on the assumption that
all providers need at least some facilities to respond to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Another (flexible and more substantial) part of the budget can be distributed on the basis of an independent assessment of need. Where providers do not deliver to plan there can be adjustments to the budget in the next period, but some degree of stability over years is important. This mirrors the arrangements in the FE sector where there is a ‘two-tier’ approach to funding for additional learning support, and accords with proposals underpinning the agenda for change funding review.

Funding eligibility and priorities

338 One of the main funding concerns expressed through the StARs is around the eligibility for funding of provision that falls under the ‘other provision’ heading. By prioritising funding on particular types of programme it does of course (as is intended) make it more difficult to offer ‘other provision’ unless full-cost funding is available. Clearly this is an undesirable option for a group of young learners for whom the LSC has powers and duties up to the age of 25. Because this directive appears to be interpreted differently in different parts of the country, there is a wide variation in the programmes that are funded in different areas.

Funding and collaboration

336 A strong competitive climate does not enhance collaboration or lead to inclusive provision. The importance of co-operation needs to be clearly pointed out, and the study points to effective models where clusters of organisations co-operate at a regional level in order to make provision as inclusive as possible (Meijer, 1999). In England, Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen (1999) found widespread support provided by special schools to mainstream schools even when they were not specifically funded to do so. However, they reported a number of barriers to special schools providing support to mainstream schools. These included a lack of earmarked funding and budgetary constraints; there were difficulties in negotiating a relationship between special schools and other support services and the strong specialist–mainstream divide.

337 Examples of collaborative practice already exist in post-16 education and training. ‘Learning to Include’ is the RNIB’s strategy for lifelong learning for blind and partially sighted people (RNIB, 2004). As a result of the strategy RNIB has developed and marketed a consultancy package to providers offering services to blind and partially sighted learners who have severe, profound and complex learning difficulties. They developed partnership arrangements with mainstream and specialist providers with a view to making holistic packages of support available locally. Also work funded through a local LSC intervention and development project carried out an investigation into the demand for and practicalities surrounding a specialist diagnostic and assessment service for learners in mainstream provision. These examples indicate the potential for an additional role for independent specialist colleges as providers of expertise and specialist services to mainstream providers. The LSC might wish to consider how planning and funding approaches might be developed to encourage such collaborative ventures.

340 The proposed new common approach to funding, based on a plan-led approach, appears to provide a positive opportunity to build on the needs identified within the StARs and thematic reviews. However, the new arrangements must recognise how patchy some providers’ understanding is of the full range of education and training needs of people with disabilities. The shortfall in understanding may be evident from a lack of reference to this group of learners, or by reference to wholly discrete provision. Their plans are likely to reflect this lack of awareness, and it will fall to the LSC to ensure that there is adequate provision in a locality based on its knowledge from STARS. The proposals to move towards a common approach to funding, removing the artificial boundaries between sectors, as outlined in the agenda for change, will be welcomed as having the potential to open up the work-based learning sector, in particular, to the requirements of a wider group of learners and to enable collaboration.

341 There are fundamental questions underpinning the funding review to be considered.
What is the nature of the curriculum and support that the LSC wishes to purchase in the way of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?

What are the processes (such as guidance, assessment) that it expects to see in place?

What are the outcomes in terms of learner needs?

How will it fund collaboration with other statutory bodies?

How will it implement the commitments set out in Working Together (LSC, 2004c) as regards expertise within the voluntary sector in relation to disability?

Criteria for evaluating new proposals

All aspects of the agenda for change will need to be subjected to an impact assessment, as will be required by the Disability Equality Duty. The European study proposed a helpful set of criteria for judging a new funding system for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the LSC might wish to consider adopting these to test out any recommended changes to funding:

- effectiveness in terms of achieved goals: improvement in the quality of provision and access to provision, and fewer learners in separate settings

- funding directed as far as possible to the target group: learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- immunity against strategic behaviour.

While the study points out that every person and organisation reveals strategic behaviour, the intention here is to maximise the fit between strategic behaviour and policy goals, otherwise a new approach might result in negative consequences.

The LSC might also wish to consider the following criteria adapted from Parrish (1995) for evaluating any funding model. The approach should be:

- understandable – it has clear, transparent concepts and procedures

- equitable – providers receive comparable resources for comparable learners

- adequate – funding is sufficient for providing the programmes and support required

- predictable – allocations are stable and predictable over time

- flexible – maximum latitude is given in use of resources

- neutral in terms of identification and placement – it is not based on labelling or type of placement.

The formula should have or result in:

- a reasonable reporting burden (no excessive bureaucracy)

- fiscal accountability, cost-based and cost-controlled (funds are spent in an authorised manner, for the purpose intended; funding is linked to costs but stabilised over time)

- outcome accountability (monitoring of outcomes is necessary)

- integration in overall funding arrangements (requires integration of funding systems)

- political acceptability.

Conclusions and Implications for the LSC

Funding is of great importance in determining provision, and the LSC has inherited a range of different systems, which are complex, inconsistent and inequitable. The current system reinforces a ‘silo’ approach to funding and planning, characterised by inflexibility and some inappropriate provision. It doesn’t always meet learners’ needs and some learners don’t have access to learning and support, either locally or at all. All these have a detrimental effect on some learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and some sectors. The LSC has made some progress but needs to take the opportunity to redress fundamentally the inconsistencies and
inequalities in the funding review taking place as part of agenda for change.

347 It is possible to draw some helpful advice on the way forward from the research literature. The most successful models for achieving inclusivity are 'throughput' models, in which the responsibility for the organisation of provision and allocation of resources is at regional level, where the emphasis is on improving the inclusivity of mainstream provision, and where individual allocations are retained for higher costs of support.

348 This is particularly successful where there are clear outcomes to be achieved, set at national level but with decisions about how that may be achieved made at a regional or local level. There has been a lack of opportunity for the funding of innovative developments that might help create local provision to meet needs. There are examples where new approaches have been envisaged which cannot be brought into being because the existing funding rules cannot allow it. The current provision supports the status quo unquestioningly. The current options in relation to specialist residential provision effectively isolate the skills of that sector from the vast majority of learners. There is an urgent need to address the current lack of specialist support through, for example, the development of regional centres of excellence.

349 However, there needs to be careful consideration given to the setting of outcomes to ensure that they promote rather than act against the interests of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Outcomes could for example be matched to inclusivity objectives in terms of increased participation of under-represented groups and partnership approaches to delivery of individually-tailored packages of learning and support. This has implications for the LSC’s work on developing new measures of success.

350 Another important factor to consider with this devolved approach is accountability, where research suggests that earmarking funds, methods of control, monitoring, review evaluation and inspection are all essential to ensure that funding is used for the learners and to achieve the purposes for which it is intended. The research is also clear that this needs to be achieved with the minimum bureaucracy resulting in simplicity, consistency, predictability and stability.

351 Research shows that a strong competitive climate acts against inclusive provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and that funding is better used to encourage collaboration. The LSC might wish to encourage such collaboration between specialist and mainstream providers where good examples of developing practice already exist.

352 The opportunity to remove the artificial barriers between sectors and to address the inequities for learners, afforded by the agenda for change funding review, is one that cannot be missed. The proposed plan-led approach has great potential, but the emphasis must be on getting in place plans that promote inclusivity and equity.

353 The following criteria derived from research might provide a useful basis for evaluating the new proposals. The approach should be: understandable, equitable, adequate, predictable, flexible, and identification and placement neutral. It should also be non-bureaucratic, have fiscal accountability, and ensure that the overall objective of equity and inclusivity are achieved in a manner that is acceptable to all concerned.
6 Synthesis of Messages From Findings

354 It will be helpful here to reflect on the major themes identified so far before going on to see how these might be addressed by the LSC’s planning and funding functions.

Learner-centred Planning and Provision

Message 1 – Listening to learners

355 The literature shows the importance of putting the disabled learner at the centre of the planning process and of listening to the voices of learners or potential learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The LSC nationally, regionally and locally will need to consider how it consults learners and potential learners.

Message 2 – Learner-centred approach

356 Many learners and potential learners are not able to access provision that genuinely takes account of their expressed wishes and needs. This is because there is a lack of appropriate provision, and requires fundamental changes to the structure of provision, with learners having a greater influence on designing the service they receive so it can be tailored to their specific needs. This will require far greater flexibility in the design of individual programmes of study. The LSC regionally and locally will need to consider how it might redesign the pattern of provision to match it to learners’ needs and aspirations.

Message 3 – Inter-agency collaboration

357 The importance of inter-agency collaboration cannot be overstressed, yet this collaboration is often not working effectively. Collaboration at local level will only be effective if clear structures are created at national level. The LSC needs to enable and support providers in establishing workable collaborative partnerships, which will allow for the holistic needs of learners to be met in a coherent way. To achieve this LSC needs to:

- work at a national level with other government departments, for example, the DoH and the DWP
- work at a regional and local level to ensure that there is effective collaboration between different agencies
- ensure that the LSC’s contracts with providers include the requirement to work collaboratively with other agencies.

358 Transport can still present a major barrier to the inclusion of disabled learners in post-school learning. While not having a direct responsibility to provide transport, the LSC nationally needs to take a key negotiating role with other government departments to try to facilitate improved transport for learners.

Inclusive Provision

Message 4 – The goal of inclusive learning

359 The literature shows that the LSC inherited a strong model for providing inclusive learning for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, as exemplified in Inclusive Learning (FEFC, 1996). Many positive strategies for the implementation of the recommendations of this report are in place. However, Tomlinson himself spoke of inclusive learning as being not a ‘fixed state’ but a ‘goal’ towards which the organisation constantly strives. The report describes one of the important matches required to further inclusive learning as that between ‘further education as a
whole and the learner’. The LSC needs to ensure, in all its strategic planning, that the match between the learning and skills sector as a whole and the learner is considered and acted on.

**Message 5 – Under-represented groups**

Certain groups of disabled learners are harder to include and are still under-represented in post-school education and training provision. While progress has been made, some learners are still not being fully included, particularly learners with mental health difficulties, learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties, learners with autistic spectrum disorders, learners with medical conditions, and learners with profound and complex learning difficulties. A major concern is the expressed lack of access to work-based learning opportunities for some learners. In exercising its planning and funding responsibilities, the LSC nationally, regionally and locally will need to examine the data to identify patterns of under-representation of people with particular disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and specific programmes such as Apprenticeships and Employer Training Pilots. The LSC should set targets to address poor take up, lack of participation and gaps in provision.

**Message 6 – A continuum of provision and access to support**

An inclusive learning and skills sector requires a continuum of provision, and does not necessarily mean an absence of all specialist provision. However, at present some learners with disabilities feel forced into specialist provision because of a lack of suitable learning opportunities in local providers. Developing provision locally will require a strategic steer from the LSC nationally, and at regional level LSC will need to plan an increase in expertise and support available to a wider range of providers than currently. There is a clear lack of access by training providers to specialist support for particular disabilities. The LSC will need to ensure that all providers can offer appropriate support for all learners who require it.

**Message 7 – A broad range of learning opportunities**

Much of the literature emphasises the importance of maintaining a broad range of learning opportunities, including non-accredited and non-vocational provision, either as an important first step in learning or to enhance the quality of life of individuals, reducing future need for support services. The LSC needs to ensure that its regional directors and executive directors understand the value of ‘other provision’ for many learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties and ensure that the priority given to achieving targets in basic skills and Level 2 provision does not lead to the disproportionate reduction of ‘other provision’. A lack of such provision could undermine the whole strategy for an inclusive range of learning opportunities. The LSC nationally will need to make explicit in all of its documentation that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a legal duty and thus also a priority.

**Message 8 – Flexible curriculum and delivery**

The literature shows that a key component of inclusive provision is flexibility, both in design and delivery of the curriculum. Rigidity around timing and length of courses is seen to impede the learning of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Learning programmes need to be designed so that individuals can use them flexibly according to their own particular learning needs. The QCA curriculum guidance and the development of Foundation Learning Tier provision have much potential to improve the flexibility of the curriculum and the match to learners’ requirements. In particular, the LSC needs to ensure that it plans and funds provision designed to achieve positive progression of disabled learners. It also needs to examine the potential of assistive technology to support inclusive learning.

**Linking Education and Training to Employment**

**Message 9 – Helping learners towards employment**

The over-riding message from the literature was that, despite the many initiatives created to support learners, including disabled learners, into
employment, people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are still profoundly under-represented in the labour market, and much provision designed to help these learners to gain employment does not end in jobs. The challenge for the LSC is to ensure that employment-related provision is accessible and actively encourages participation by these learners.

366 A major barrier in moving into employment is the fear that many disabled people have of losing benefits. The LSC needs to ensure that providing information about benefits is included in specifications for advice and guidance, and that providers have access, through collaboration with partners, to expert advice for learners to clarify the true benefit picture to them.

**Message 10 – An inclusive range of work-based learning opportunities**

367 A priority for the LSC is to review all work-based learning frameworks for inclusivity, to ensure that they do not discriminate against and exclude people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through inflexibility in the structure and design or through interpretation of policy on work-based learning programmes. The full range needs to include Apprenticeships, E2E, and workforce development through to the supported employment spectrum.

368 The LSC needs to ensure that the full range of work-based and work-related activities is available to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially those who are at Entry or Foundation level and may never attain a full Apprenticeship or Level 2 qualification. Entry to Employment has the potential to address these learners’ needs as it has a flexible structure, but planning assumptions of length of time on programme and targets for progression to Level 2 often effectively exclude these learners. The LSC needs to set targets for improving starts, completions and employment outcomes for learners on Apprenticeships and to ensure that Employer Training Pilots increase participation of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

369 Some programmes designed to help learners towards employment do not achieve their aims. To address this, local LSCs should contract with providers that enable learners to progress into employment, and recognise that many learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, are on work preparation college courses but do not move into employment. Local LSCs should ensure that their contracts with providers demonstrate that options for progression are increased – in particular in recognising the value of direct experience in work rather than training for work. Within the contracts, the LSC and providers need to recognise the importance of a wide range of employability skills and ‘soft’ outcomes and not concentrate only on a narrow interpretation of basic skills; employment with training is also a positive outcome.

**Message 11 – Supported employment**

370 There is considerable value, and positive models have been developed, in many supported employment schemes. This is an essential part of the continuum of employment-related provision. Local LSCs need either to ensure that learning providers work in partnership with such supported employment schemes to create inter-agency packages or, if that is not feasible, develop similar effective models within providers’ own provision. In terms of skills and workforce development, a modest investment in supported employment might elicit a large payback in terms of employment outcomes for disabled people.

**Message 12 – Employer engagement**

371 Effective relationships with employers are crucial to improving access to employment for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The LSC at all levels will need to use its employer engagement activities to encourage employers to see the business case for employing disabled people.

**Planning**

**Message 13 – Planning duties and priorities**

372 The LSC has stated its legal duty to have regard to and promote provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but has failed to make explicit what this means in terms of learning opportunities and outcomes, and to communicate this clearly to all staff and providers. The LSC needs to reiterate, in all of its documentation, that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a legal duty, and therefore a priority, and state its expectations alongside any mention of priorities that at least the same
proportion of provision for these learners should be maintained.

Message 14 – Mainstreaming policy across the LSC

373 Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not form a homogeneous group. It follows then that their needs will not be met by a single LSC policy directive, team of staff or directorate. The LSC nationally must ensure that all its policies recognise the existence and learning needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This work must be mainstreamed across the organisation and not be marginalised to a specialist team or directorate. The LSC nationally will need to ensure that all LSC staff have the knowledge, understanding and skills to ‘mainstream’ provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across all its structures and procedures to ensure that it becomes integral, and that the impact of any proposed changes are assessed. This in turn has implications for training for staff at all levels.

Message 15 – Strategic area reviews

374 Strategic area reviews and thematic reviews present a rich source of information that can be used to identify gaps in provision, and barriers to participation, achievement and progression. Used to inform future planning, StARs and thematic reviews present a real opportunity to make strategic decisions to reshape and reform the current pattern of provision locally, and planning co-ordinated at regional level provides a mechanism for addressing current inequalities.

Message 16 – Data collection and analysis

375 The collection and use of data about learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is problematic for a number of reasons. The LSC nationally needs the best possible data, and to make better use of the data to inform policy. Regional and local LSCs need better data to improve planning. This means that the LSC will need to consider the data it collects and to improve the compatibility of its data with that of other sectors and government agencies. Local and regional LSCs will need to work with providers to improve the reliability of the data collected. Local and regional LSCs also need to make better use of data to inform planning and in monitoring and reporting on changes to the pattern of provision.

Message 17 – Clearly defined targets

376 The weakness of the LSC in translating its statements of principle and policy into clearly articulated aims and outcomes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities needs to be addressed. This review offers a clear opportunity for the LSC to set out a strategy with clearly articulated aims and outcomes expressed as objective targets for improvement that address current inconsistencies and inequalities within a defined timescale.

Funding

Message 18 – The impact of funding

377 Funding is of great importance in determining provision and the LSC has inherited a range of different systems, which are complex, inconsistent and inequitable. They are characterised by ‘silos’, which have a detrimental effect on some learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and on some sectors. The LSC needs to take the opportunity afforded by the agenda for change funding review to remove the artificial barriers between sectors and to address the inequalities and inconsistencies apparent. It is an opportunity the LSC cannot afford to miss. The proposed planned approach has great potential, but the emphasis must be on getting plans into place that promote inclusivity and equity.

Message 19 – Successful funding models

378 Research indicates that the most successful models for achieving inclusivity are ‘throughput’ models in which the responsibility for the organisation of provision and allocation of resources is at regional level, where the emphasis is on improving the inclusivity of mainstream provision, and where individual allocations are retained for higher costs of support.

379 At national level, LSC needs to set out clear outcomes to be achieved, with decisions about
how that may be achieved made at a regional or local level. There has been a lack of opportunity for the funding of innovative developments. The current provision supports the status quo unquestioningly. The current options in relation to specialist residential provision effectively isolate the skills of that sector from the vast majority of learners. The LSC regionally and locally needs urgently to address the current lack of specialist support through, for example, the development of regional centres of excellence.

Message 20 – Funding for collaboration

Research shows that a strong competitive climate acts against inclusive provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and that funding is better used to encourage collaboration. The LSC nationally needs to set a new outcome measure for how well collaboration has been achieved and local LSCs might wish to encourage collaboration between providers and other agencies by writing it into contracts and ensuring that providers’ plans include collaboration. Regional and local LSCs should similarly encourage collaboration between specialist and mainstream providers where good examples of developing practice already exist.

Message 21 – Appropriate measures of success

The LSC needs to consider carefully setting outcomes to ensure that they promote rather than act against the interests of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Outcomes could for example be matched to inclusivity objectives in terms of increased participation of under-represented groups, and partnership approaches to delivery of individually tailored packages of learning and support. This has implications for the LSC’s work on developing new measures of success.

Message 22 – Accountability

Another important factor to consider with this devolved approach is accountability, where research suggests that earmarking funds, methods of control, monitoring, review evaluation and inspection are all essential to ensure that funding is used for the learners and to achieve the purposes for which it is intended. The research is also clear that this needs to be achieved with the minimum bureaucracy, resulting in simplicity, consistency, predictability and stability. The LSC nationally will need to make explicit statements about the purpose of any resources allocated to addressing the recommendations from the strategic review, together with a clear, non-bureaucratic approach to accountability.
7 Conclusion

383 A wealth of information and evidence from a wide range of sources has been used to inform this review. Although there is a larger body of research on education and learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the schools sector, that of post-school education and training is growing all the time. This review has identified clear messages about progress having been made, but there remains much still to do to redress existing inequalities.

384 There are significant challenges to the LSC to resolve the tensions between individuals’ requirements, policy or legislative directives, and the reality of making provision against competing priorities at a time of financial constraints. However, this review comes at an opportune time, when there are a number of changes being planned and there are strategic opportunities to reshape the pattern of provision, and to ensure that no one should be left behind in life. As Anne McGuire said:

*It is simply not acceptable that 10 million people have to put up with discrimination and poor life chances. The statistics speak for themselves. Disabled people are more than twice as likely to have no educational qualifications; they are less likely to be in work – when they do work, they earn less than others; and one in four people have experienced harassment. No-one should be left behind in life. And it’s vital disabled people have a say in how we can end this. The Government is committed to ensuring that disabled people are involved – and will lead by example.*

DWP, 26 May 2005

385 The challenge is here and it is now up to the LSC to respond.
Annex:

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