



EDUCATION COMMISSION 24 April 2006

Report of the Chair of the Education Commission

Adult Learning Review

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 To consider the comments to the Commission's Adult Learning review report by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Education Services.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Commission considered its report on Adult Learning review at the last meeting and agreed to submit it to the Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Education Services and to the LSC for their consideration.
- 2.2 The report was presented by the Chair to the Cabinet Member at the 20 March meeting and whose comments are attached. The report has also been sent to the Director of Derbyshire LSC for his comments.
- 2.3 Members are asked to consider the comments and give their views.

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Background papers:

None

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 - Implications

Appendix 2 – Response of the Cabinet Member with
responsibility for Children and Education Services

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. None arising from this report.

Legal

2. None arising from this report.

Personnel

3. None arising from this report.

Equalities impact

4. None arising from this report.

Corporate Objectives, Values and Priorities

5. This report links to the corporate priorities and key outcomes for 2006 - 09 approved by the Council on 1 March which aim to encourage lifelong learning and achievement as a catalyst for economic growth, by:
 - providing early and effective support for under performing schools to
 - reduce the number of 'causing concern' schools
 - improving educational attainment at Key Stage and GCSE levels
 - raising skill levels to improve the chances of securing employment.

COUNCILLOR CHRIS WYNN
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Cllr Anne Macdonald
Chair of the Education Commission
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Your Reference
Education Commission

Our Reference
CW/CW

Date
20 March 2006

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Councillor Chris Wynn

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Dear Anne,

Review of the Impact of the Learning and Skills Council's Agenda for Change on Adult Learning.

Thank you for a copy of your Commission's report. I've now had a look at the recommendations and here are my comments and questions that I would like you to take back to the Commission.

General Comments

The Commission's review has to start from an understanding of the role of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and, like most partnership organisations, it isn't straightforward. It is not dissimilar to the (Local Authority's) LA's relationship with schools, as its most important levers are influence and funding. The LSC is 'responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone.' Their vision is 'that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a fiercely competitive workforce.'

Whilst the LSC depends on the quality of its influence and relationships to achieve its vision and aims, it is through the funding rules that it can fundamentally bring about change.

It does not directly control Adult and Community Learning, any more than Derby City Council (DCC) does. DCC is one provider of Adult and Community Learning (ACL). We can set our strategy for what we want to achieve for Derby. Of course, what the LSC will fund, related to its priorities, is a most powerful driver, but if there are other priorities we have then it is open to the Council to promote and, if necessary, fund such provision, or cover costs through fee income. The constant iteration of priorities and how to meet them between DCC and the LSC should seek to arrive at common goals and a shared view of the use of funding. As funding becomes more restricted and where there is a national set of priorities, as with the LSC, the chances are that some of our local priorities will no longer be funded and that is the situation we now face.

We cannot simply put the responsibility for the strategy and funding entirely at the door of the LSC, but we should certainly challenge and seek to influence the direction of their strategies.

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Specific Comments on the Report

A number of pieces of evidence appear to have been misinterpreted or telescoped, despite the assumption that the notes of interviews have been sent to interviewees for checking.

I am concerned that misunderstanding of the actual remit of the LSC, our own responsibilities and our partnership with them has led to the report being unfairly antagonistic towards the LSC. In my opinion, however, there are indeed some real issues about LSC priorities, partnership and operation, but much of that is at a national level and we are fortunate in the partnership we have locally.

Comments on the Recommendations of the Report

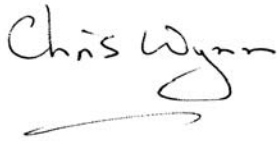
1. This recommendation is redundant as it is too late to affect the LSC restructure. Whilst the Government guidelines for Governance are not satisfactory, the local LSC Board recognise the need for representation.
2. I agree that there should be some form of Adult Skills Board for the City (as opposed to the LSC view of a County-wide role). For example, I believe the objectives of one candidate, the Derbyshire Learning Partnership (DLP) are not sufficiently linked to our own LSP.
3. This recommendation is an expression of the Commission's aspirations for Adult Education. You have informed me that the report refers to LSC rather than DCC funding and so, in that context, I have to point out that DCC is a provider to the LSC Agenda and therefore cannot divert those LSC funds from their intended purpose. If, on the other hand, the Commission wish to see DCC funding being spent differently, I would be pleased to learn more.
4. Your recommendation 4 is split between information and the coordination of Adult Learning provision. The information is covered in recommendation 5. Coordination needs to come from the sort of Board referred to earlier. One very significant omission in the report is the Strategic Options Review (StAR) that was recently carried out and which is now being further developed. The StAR will hopefully provide a sense of direction for all of us.
5. It is right that learners need more coordinated information about provision in the city. In part that is because of the individual decisions of schools and other providers. LSC can provide levers for this, but it can be argued that DCC, along with other major strategic bodies in the city, should share a part of that responsibility. The brochure developed by the Derby City of Learning (and funded by the LSC) is a welcome development. Because of the volatility and timescales of courses and providers, I am personally in favour of an interactive web site.
6. Given the way formula funding works, and the differing agendas of the individual course providers, this recommendation is most unlikely to be practical.
7. There are actually two entirely separate recommendations listed under number 7. One is for the LSC to provide a variety of routes into basic skills learning and the other is that so called "leisure" or non-vocational courses be protected wherever possible. I empathise with both of these aims. What the LSC funding process is in danger of ignoring is that many people have lower level learning needs in preparation for accredited courses that the LSC is prioritising and very often they get on the ladder through leisure learning. In the most deprived areas some funding may be available, but much of this funding is not sustainable long term and doesn't apply to all.
8. The main consideration here is that the LSC budgets and objectives are decided by Central Government as are those of DCC. Both LSC and DCC would benefit substantially from prior knowledge in order to decide courses in a timely fashion. Other providers operate under a wide range of funding regimes, and, importantly, may decide to run or withdraw courses at any time.
9. I believe that this recommendation is insecure and requires verification. Personally, I have to say that I was able to access the LSC website and read their papers in under two minutes.
10. Agreed. However, I believe that the LSC would respond that they regularly review impact through the Council papers and meetings.

Continued.....

Questions on the Report

- Q1. Is the Commission in favour of objectives of the LSC's Agenda for Change?
- Q2. Does the Commission support the LSC view that learners should meet an increasing proportion of course funding?
- Q3. Should DCC review its current discount scheme in order to better target its resources on potential learners from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- Q4. Should DCC review the types of courses that it provides on the grounds of economic viability or other factors?
- Q5. Does the Commission have any views on the types of non-vocational and vocational courses it would like to see prioritised and safeguarded?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Wynn', with a horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Chris Wynn
Cabinet Member for Children's and Education Services