

The LSC Agenda for Change:

Voluntary Sector Contribution, Capacity and Potential in Yorkshire and the Humber

(September 2006)



Introduction

The LSC's long-term vision for *Agenda for Change* is:

A transformed learning and skills system which has at its heart the needs of learners and employers – and is seen as valued, proud, responsive, confident and trusted. Colleges and other delivery partners will be famous for delivering cost effective, high quality learning that benefits learners, encourages regeneration, meets the long-term needs of employers and secures the economic future of the country.

Agenda for Change sets out seven themes for transforming the learning and skills sector:

1. **Skills** – to create a new network of colleges that are quality marked by business to enable colleges and other training providers to go further in offering employers the appropriately skilled employees they require
2. **Quality** – to develop a culture of self-improvement and peer-referencing where colleges learn from each other and work together to improve quality
3. **Funding** – to simplify funding mechanisms to provide greater certainty for colleges and a common approach across all post-16 education providers
4. **Data** – to create a consistent set of data definitions and collect only that data needed for colleges to manage their operations
5. **Business excellence** – to accelerate capital expenditure to improve recruitment, retention and learner achievement, and encourage collective procurement to deliver better value for money
6. **Reputation** – to undertake regular research to track changing perceptions of the sector
7. **The LSC** – to reconfigure the Learning and Skills Council to meet the challenges of *Agenda for Change*

Initially, the LSC has concentrated mainly on FE colleges, and on 16-19 provision. However, consideration is being given to ways of extending the proposals across the whole of the learning and skills sector.

Providers in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) have a strong track record of meeting the needs of individual learners – not least, people who are in some way disadvantaged, disaffected or excluded. In addition, many unpaid volunteers develop skills and experience which enhance their future employment and career prospects.

The LSC has already invested in work in which will help the VCS develop and implement:

- A robust Management Information System geared to the requirements of a range of funders and inspection regimes (based on “DataMine”, led by VC Train)
- An integrated e-learning repository and Virtual Learning Environment (led by West Yorkshire Learning Consortium)
- A refined quality framework for providers (led by the Centre for Learning Excellence)

As noted later in this paper, Humberside Learning Consortium has also played a leading role in helping VCOs in the sub-region and beyond to adopt stretching quality standards – not least the Common Inspection Framework.

Against this existing track record of commitment and progress, the voluntary and community sector is ready and willing to work with the LSC to support Agenda for Change. The VCS and the LSC regionally have already demonstrated their strong commitment to partnership work through the regional Working Together Steering Group which brings together the LSC regionally with the VCS Regional learning and Skills group (supported by the Regional Forum).

This paper is commissioned by the LSC and explores each theme of *Agenda for Change* in turn, and sets out recommendations both for the VCS and the LSC in Yorkshire and Humberside. An appendix is added which indicates the contribution the VCS makes to the LSC annual priorities for 2006/2007.

The paper has been written through the active collaboration of the VCS Regional Learning and Skills Group members – led by the Regional Forum with valuable input from David Harbourne (formerly Executive Director of LSC North Yorkshire).

The recommendations are offered as a pathway to joint discussion between the LSC and the VCS and as a means to extending VCS capacity as a significant contribution to LSC priorities within the Agenda for Change process.

Executive Summary – Recommendations

Skills for employers theme – to create a new network of colleges that are quality marked by business to enable colleges and other training providers to go further in offering employers the appropriately skilled employees they require

The VCS as a provider of learning and skills

Recommendation 1

- To further develop curriculum offers with employers to ensure skills priorities are being considered and full qualifications are made available where appropriate

Recommendation 2

- To develop effective relationships with voluntary, public and private sector employers (with a particular emphasis on identifying and meeting VCS skill needs)

Recommendation 3

- To develop effective co-operation between VCS providers and Train to Gain brokerage services

Recommendation 4

- To support plans to extend the standard for recognising excellence at subject or sector level beyond colleges and into other types of provider (e.g. by joining working parties looking at the content of the standard, and taking part in pilot activities)

Recommendation 5

- To further develop the role of VCS consortia (see also the final section of this paper)

The VCS as an employer

Recommendation 6

- To recognise the established and flourishing relationship between the VCS as providers and the VCS as employers. Much can be learnt from this relationship and how this has aided in developing personnel

Recommendation 7

- To support the work of Business Link as generic Train to Gain broker, in order to enhance their understanding of the sector's skills needs and the contribution which the VCS makes to the life and economy of the region

Recommendation 8

- To ensure Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) appreciate the value of accredited provision (e.g. NVQs) at all levels, and how this kind of provision can improve the performance of individuals and organisations alike

Recommendation 9

- To build on the emerging Regional VCS Skills Action Plan with regular and coherent data gathering in relation to VCS employer skills needs

Quality theme – to develop a culture of self-improvement and peer-referencing where colleges learn from each other and work together to improve quality

Recommendation 10

- To build on recent investment in quality improvement and standards – to ensure that growing numbers of VCOs throughout the region can access the kind of expertise built up by HLC and others

Recommendation 11

- To support more VCOs with the help and support required to meet the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework

Recommendation 12

- To provide funding so that more mock inspections can be carried out throughout the region

Recommendation 13

- For the LSC, QIA and VCS to ensure the Framework for Excellence is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of the VCS

Funding theme – to simplify funding mechanisms to provide greater certainty for colleges and a common approach across all post-16 education providers

Recommendation 14

- That the RLSG and the regional office of the LSC in Yorkshire and Humberside should continue to build on existing commitment to partnership and continue to maintain close contact as contestability is

introduced, to ensure that the interests of the sector are not overlooked.

Recommendation 15

- That LSC National Office should hold regional briefings for the VCS to explain how contestability will work, and the implications for the sector.

Recommendation 16

- To pilot any new simplified funding arrangement outside mainstream FE system with VCS providers in Yorkshire and Humberside (e.g. with members of one or more of the sub-regional consortia). The RLSG should make this offer to LSC colleagues

Recommendation 17

- To extend the Futurebuilders/LSC offer to fund sub-regional consortia plans in relation to contestability across the region.

Data theme – to create a consistent set of data definitions and collect only that data needed for colleges to manage their operations

Recommendation 18

- To pilot any new data and MIS arrangement outside mainstream FE and WBL with VCS providers in one or more of the sub-regions of Yorkshire and Humberside.

Recommendation 19

- The LSC should give reassurances that information about a learner will not be shared without their consent.

Business excellence theme – to accelerate capital expenditure to improve recruitment, retention and learner achievement, and encourage collective procurement to deliver better value for money

Recommendation 20

- To explore ways in which appropriate VCS providers might access capital funds.

Recommendation 21

- Benchmarking and peer referencing should be extended (a) across the region and (b) to include both performance measures and value for money indicators

Recommendation 22

- The consortia should explore ways of extending arrangements for joint purchasing and procurement arrangements, including sharing “back office” functions where appropriate- such a co-operative model will add to VCS progression to sustainability.

Recommendation 23

- The VCS to develop its expertise in data gathering, monitoring and reporting with the Regional Forum to explore a bid to appropriate funders for a Marketing Co-ordinator

Reputation theme – to undertake regular research to track changing perceptions of the sector

Recommendation 24

- The LSC must ensure that all parts of the learning and skills sector benefit from plans which promote and enhance their reputation. This is not an issue solely confined to FE colleges.

Recommendation 25

- The VCS should continue to promote best practice in equality and diversity both within the sector, and by supporting the plans of other providers such as colleges and private sector training providers – this can be progressed in part through the LSC/NIACE development work on the “learner voice” .

Recommendation 26

- The RLSG, working with the four sub-regional consortia, should consider whether there is extra value in a marketing and communications programme specifically aimed at raising the profile and awareness of VCS learning provision in Yorkshire and Humberside e.g. in relation to the VCS ability to access markets the LSC cannot.

The LSC theme – to reconfigure the Learning and Skills Council to meet the challenges of Agenda for Change

Recommendation 27

- For the Regional Forum and LSC to plan a programme of two way briefings and placements between VCOs and the LSC

This can include LSC staff taking on new roles which involve working with the VCS and reciprocal arrangements with VCS personnel undertaking work shadowing or longer work placements in the LSC. It could also include any regional VCS LSC staff member being based partial at the Regional Forum.

VCS Consortia Development

Recommendation 28

- To continue to develop the capacity of the four sub-regional consortia separately, at least for the time being.

Recommendation 29

- To explore jointly the advantages of a VCS regional contracting and

commissioning group

Recommendation 30

- For the four sub-regional consortia to remain open to new members.

Each consortium must help new members to develop their infrastructure to deliver learning and skills to their workforce or their clients. It is especially important to reach out to groups which may (for whatever reason) be marginalized by mainstream arrangements, such as migrant and refugee community organisations.

Theme 1: Skills for employers

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

Colleges – and other training providers – will have to go further in offering employers the opportunity to prepare the skilled employees they require.

We propose to:

- create a nationwide network of colleges – and other providers – focused on the needs of employers
- develop with employers a Quality Mark for those colleges – and other providers – so that employers know they meet exacting standards and that the services they provide will be of high quality and responsive to the real needs of their businesses
- increasingly make employers aware of the benefits of working with these quality-marked colleges – and other providers – so funding flows accordingly in line with employer choice; and
- as set out in the Skills White Paper of March 2005, develop the National Employer Training Programme (NETP¹) as a powerful, demand-led mechanism for changing the way in which training for adults is delivered.

The White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* expanded on these commitments. For example, it says:

The LSC will work with SSCs, other employer organisations and providers to develop in detail a new standard [which] will be used both to accredit the next generation of CoVEs and when we redesignate existing CoVEs ... It will also build upon the Quality Mark proposals for employer responsiveness set out in the LSC's *Agenda for Change* so that there will be a single standard for recognising excellence at subject or sector level. We are deliberately and significantly raising the bar of quality and performance to extend the best of what has been achieved so far.

Trials for the new standard for recognising excellence at subject or sector level will take place in November 2006, with full roll out in 2007. The new standard will build on both the 'Responsiveness' element of the 'Framework for Excellence' (see the section on Quality, below) and approaches to provider self assessment. Employer validation will form part of the process.

¹ Now known as Train to Gain

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 1

(a) As a provider of learning and skills

Self assessment reports from the four sub-regions carried out as part of this work indicate that the VCS in Yorkshire and the Humber has at least 600 organisations delivering learning and skills. These deliver around 14,000 courses of learning to 86,000 learners each year.

The VCS provides a diverse range of learning opportunities. It is renowned for reaching people who are disadvantaged or disaffected, and helping to overcome barriers to inclusion in the labour market and in society more generally.

Providers throughout the region deliver learning to target groups such as –

- Socially disadvantaged communities including isolated rural areas
- BME communities
- Refugee and asylum seekers
- Migrant workers
- Disability groups
- People with mental health problems
- Young people aged 16-19 who are not in employment, education or training (the NEET group)
- Apprentices
- Lone parents
- Unemployed and low wage earners
- Small organisations (SMEs)

Within this broad spectrum, some VCOs deliver learning which is geared very directly to meeting the needs of employers in all three sectors – public, private and voluntary. VCOs in the region deliver NVQs at levels 1 to 5 as well as other qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework.

The largest volume of employment-related provision is offered in South Yorkshire. VC Train has provided the following breakdown showing the occupational areas covered by their members in the last three years:

	04-05	03-04	02-03
Information Advice & Guidance	13%	14%	80%
Information and communications technology	24%	24%	6%
Health, public services and care	14%	20%	4%
Preparation for Life and work	24%	22%	5%
Business Administration and Law	13%	10%	3%

Land-based provision	1%	0%	0%
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	1%	0%	0%
Engineering and manufacturing	0%	0%	0%
Construction, planning and the built	0%	0%	0%
Retail and commercial enterprise	2%	2%	0%
Leisure, travel and tourism	1%	0%	0%
Arts, media and publishing	2%	4%	0%
Humanities	3%	2%	0%
Social Sciences	0%	0%	0%
Languages, literature and culture	1%	0%	0%
Education and training	0%	0%	0%

“Preparation for life and work” includes elements of Skills for Life, which is one of the sector’s strengths in most parts of Yorkshire and Humberside.

In North Yorkshire, accredited provision includes Learning and Development NVQs, Train the Trainer, Health and Social Care Assessor programmes, ICT, Child Protection and Community Work. The Assessment Centre for Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) supports learning up to level 5, including higher-level management qualifications.

Members of the Humberside Learning Consortium provide accredited training related to management skills, ICT and its applications, and specific work related training. West Yorkshire VCOs also provide a broad range of work-related programmes, leading (for example) to NVQs in Motor Vehicle Mechanics, Body Repair and Maintenance, Engineering Operations, Business Administration and Customer Service.

However, a much larger proportion of VCS delivery relates to learning for personal and community development learning (PCDL) – that is, learning which is not directly linked to the skills needed in the world of work, but which has a social value for some people and communities. This is a point made by the Humberside Learning Consortium in its own self-assessment:

[There is] a concentration in the delivery of learning in areas associated with Introduction to Learning and First Step Learning with opportunities for progression. Non-accredited training is aligned towards personal development, preparation for work skills and first rung learning.

Taster courses and some leisure-related “other provision” can play an important part in helping people to return to learning after a long gap, or after previous unhappy experiences of learning: in this case, it is called “first step learning”. However, it is sometimes hard to prove that first step learning leads *quickly* and *directly* to progression into further learning or work

Although the sector accesses some mainstream LSC funding for work-based learning (e.g. Apprenticeship programmes), further education and PCDL, it is heavily reliant on ESF co-financing made available through the LSC (and to a lesser extent, Jobcentre Plus) to pay for a large proportion of its current provision. ESF funding can and does support employment-related provision:

in South Yorkshire, for example, ESF Objective 1 measure 3.13 has delivered training to 4,275 employees, of whom 3,308 achieved accreditation. However, most ESF-funded programmes have been developed to meet the needs of particular client groups. Many of these programmes do not lead to qualifications within the NQF, although many are accredited by the Open College Network. Some VCOs also attract funding from local authorities, the health service and others to fund the delivery of learning and skills.

SWOT analysis – Agenda for Change Theme 1

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Flexibility and adaptability</p> <p>Fleet-footed and responsive</p> <p>Ability to reach individuals and communities who may not engage with other types of provider, including people at risk of social inclusion</p> <p>Well respected by employers within the VCS, including social enterprises</p> <p>Strengths in some sectors in particular (e.g. health and care)</p> <p>Growing strength of sub-regional consortia (especially in South Yorkshire and Humberside) makes it easier to research employer needs and to market services to employers of all types and size</p> <p>Active commitment to equality and diversity</p>	<p>Sector remains relatively fragmented (despite the growing strength of consortia, especially in South Yorkshire and Humberside)</p> <p>Much current provision is geared to “return to learn”/first step programmes</p> <p>Many programmes do not lead to qualifications on the NQF</p> <p>Many VCOs have few or no connections with employers in the public and private sectors</p> <p>Train to Gain brokers unfamiliar with the full range of VCS provision</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Shift more provision onto the national learner aim database and wherever possible, onto qualifications which are classed as ‘full’ qualifications</p> <p>Show linkages between current provision and future frameworks – especially Framework for Achievement</p> <p>Expand provision for public and private sector employers, linked both to 16-19 provision and adult skills</p> <p>Reinforce the role of consortia in researching employer needs and marketing to employers in all sectors</p> <p>Make sure information about VCS provision is more widely known, e.g.</p>	<p>Dependency on short-term funding which could come to an abrupt end</p> <p>Very limited access to core LSC programmes, including mainstream FE and Train to Gain</p> <p>Uncertainty about the size, scope and timing of future ESF programmes</p> <p>Potential to be crowded out by other types of provider – especially colleges – as an unintended consequence of Agenda for Change and contestability</p>

Skills for Employers – VCS as provider

Recommendation 1

- To further develop curriculum offers with employers to ensure skills priorities are being considered and full qualifications are made available where appropriate

Recommendation 2

- To develop effective relationships with voluntary, public and private sector employers (with a particular emphasis on identifying and meeting VCS skill needs)

Recommendation 3

- To develop effective co-operation between VCS providers and Train to Gain brokerage services

Recommendation 4

- To support plans to extend the standard for recognising excellence at subject or sector level beyond colleges and into other types of provider (e.g. by joining working parties looking at the content of the standard, and taking part in pilot activities)

Recommendation 5

- To further develop the role of VCS consortia (see also the final section of this paper)

(b) As an employer

The VCS as a whole is a significant employer of paid staff and volunteers, representing between 3-4% of the regional workforce and creating a total turnover of around 4% of regional GDP. The learning and skills sector needs to respond effectively to the needs of the VCS as an employer, alongside other sectors of the economy.

The sector has a long track record of self-help. North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations, for example, has acted as a kind of group training association for the VCS for many years. More recently, NYFVO and Humberside Learning Consortium acted as brokers for the VCS as part of the Train 2 Gain pilots funded by Yorkshire Forward. I

In South Yorkshire, Change Up funds helped fund the identification of VCS workforce needs and brokerage and support mechanisms through a South Yorkshire workforce hub, led by Voluntary Action Sheffield. This work was undertaken to ensure a strategic approach to planning appropriate delivery methods in the absence of a brokerage service under the pilot Train2Gain programme.

Now that Train to Gain is being rolled out nationwide, Business Link has been appointed to act as the generic broker for Yorkshire and Humberside (i.e. working with employers where there is no sector-specific broker in place). It is essential for Business Link to understand and support the skills needs of VCOs.

The VCS is making a major contribution to understanding the sector's skill needs both nationally (through the UK Workforce Hub) and regionally: a Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Skills Plan has been prepared during 2006.

Skills for Employers – VCS as employer

Recommendation 6

- To recognise the established and flourishing relationship between the VCS as providers and the VCS as employers. Much can be learnt from this relationship and how this has aided in developing personnel

Recommendation 7

- To support the work of Business Link as generic Train to Gain broker, in order to enhance their understanding of the sector's skills needs and the contribution which the VCS makes to the life and economy of the region

Recommendation 8

- To ensure VCOs appreciate the value of accredited provision (e.g. NVQs) at all levels, and how this kind of provision can improve the performance of individuals and organisations alike

Recommendation 9

- To build on the emerging Regional VCS Skills Action Plan with regular and coherent data gathering in relation to VCS employer skills needs

Theme 2: Quality

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

Working with the new Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and our partners, we plan to support improvements in quality among all providers and across subject areas. We propose to –

- develop a culture of self-improvement and peer-referencing where colleges learn from each other and work together to improve quality
- place quality improvement at the heart of the colleges' and the LSC's review process, linking funding and planning more explicitly to quality improvement

- create ever more effective measures of success that place the learner and employer at the heart of performance measures; and
- develop skills and motivation among the workforces of both colleges and the LSC itself².

The central plank of the LSC's new approach to quality is the Framework for Excellence, which will provide a comprehensive performance assessment framework for the Further Education system.

Colleges and work-based learning (WBL) providers will start to use the Framework to assess how they performed in the 2006/07 academic year. The results will be used as part of the evidence for discussions between the LSC and individual colleges and WBL providers within the annual planning review in spring 2008.

Other provision – e.g. personal and community development learning and offender learning and skills – will be brought into scope a year later. However, The LSC will encourage all providers to start their preparation for introducing the Framework in 2007. The LSC has invited expressions of interest from providers to take part in the trial phases.

The aims of the new Framework are –

- To provide a comprehensive basis for performance assessment
- To maximise the use of existing information and data
- To support the imperative for performance improvement
- To provide the link between performance assessment and commissioning

The Framework should provide a comprehensive basis for self-assessment that identifies and enables rapid improvements in quality. The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) forms the core of the Framework but extends its scope.

Key Performance Indicators will relate to seven categories, grouped into three themes:

Responsiveness

- i. Delivery against plan
- ii. Responsiveness to learners
- iii. Responsiveness to employers

² Issues relating to the LSC's internal capacity were later moved to the new Theme 7 – see below.

Effectiveness

- iv. Quality of outcomes
- v. Quality of provision

Finance

- vi. Financial health
- vii. Financial control

Responsiveness

As noted earlier, the LSC is developing a new standard for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence in response to the FE White Paper. The extent to which colleges and providers meet this new standard is likely to be a heavily weighted constituent of the new Framework, but the LSC acknowledges the need for some flexibility. For the purposes of the Framework, it will be necessary to devise indicators that accommodate the full range of different types of providers and provision, not all of which have employer responsiveness as their foremost objective, and to maintain a proper emphasis on meeting individual learners' needs and aspirations.

Effectiveness

In terms of quality of outcomes, a range of measures are being investigated, including qualification success rates, which may be adjusted for the length and level of programmes offered. Certain types of provision may be monitored by using indicators such as value added, distance travelled and recognising and recording progress and achievement in accredited and non-accredited learning (RARPA³).

For quality of provision, Ofsted inspection judgements will be the key indicator. Another component will be the provider's self-assessment against Questions 2, 3 and 4 of the Common Inspection Framework, particularly the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the other key learning processes.

Finance

The financial health indicator will focus on three measures:

- solvency (current ratio)
- sustainability (margin)
- status (net worth)

The financial control indicator will be based on the evidence of auditors and other financially-based reviews of providers. It will pick up qualitative factors in financial management that are not conveyed by the numbers in the financial health indicator. Examples are the institution's soundness of internal control,

³ See the section on data, below, for more information on RARPA

regularity and propriety in use of LSC funds, and quality of deployment of financial resources in achieving the provider's objectives.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 2

The VCS has shown a commitment to standards such as PQASSO, Matrix and Customer First, and to ensuring that teachers and tutors are appropriately qualified. In North Yorkshire, for example, a survey of VCOs carried out by NYFVO showed that within organisations delivering accredited training, 99% of trainers are qualified in their area of expertise with 54% of those also holding a training qualification. In addition, 55% of VCOs interviewed by NYFVO either held or were working towards a quality standard: 31% had achieved Investors in People and 26% PQASSO level 1 or 2.

On the other hand, relatively few VCOs have been in scope for full inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, other than those which are delivering work-based learning for young people (chiefly Apprenticeships). Now that ESF programmes are to be inspected, however, this will begin to change.

Some important work has already been done to prepare the way. In Humberside, a pilot project to assess the sector's ability to respond to the Common Inspection Framework has indicated the capability of sector organisations to perform at levels sufficient to meet with acceptable ALI standards. Indeed, mock inspections have shown that members of the Humberside Learning Consortium (HLC) are capable of reaching the highest standards – “outstanding”, in the language of the Common Inspection Framework. This reflects high standards both in learner retention and achievement, and in generic requirements such as leadership and management.

Through the pilot described above, HLC has acted as a central hub, supporting action planning by participating organisations. This has provided a process that can respond to the LSC's own provider review process, including monitoring against budgets, measures of success and improvements over time.

HLC has been instrumental in establishing an ALI-compatible quality framework that is responsive to stakeholders, employers, deliverers and learners. The framework is reviewed by a quality action group made up of participating organisations on a quarterly basis. This establishes standards within the delivery of teaching and learning that responds to the identified needs of the learner through effective initial assessment and the tracking of progress. In this way success is measured against each learner's own individual learning plan.

HLC has also worked with others in the region – notably VC Train and the West Yorkshire Learning Consortium – to share experience of self-assessment, action planning and the Common Inspection Framework. There has been significant capacity building in this area, with support (including ESF funding) from the LSC.

In South Yorkshire, VC Train requires all delivery organisations, as a contractual obligation, to complete a Self Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan. SARs and QIPs are assessed for their effectiveness and graded according to their use as a self improvement tool. A toolkit is provided for VCOs to use: this is a repository of best practice tools, created by the support unit and a range of providers who have agreed to share their practices. Peer referencing is supported through a variety of methods, including networking providers with common curriculum delivery areas, and providing benchmarking data to enable individual VCOs to compare their own performance with the consortium as a whole.

VC Train’s quality framework is in line with the Common Inspection Framework and an umbrella SAR/QIP, capturing information from the contributory SARs is submitted to the LSC on an annual basis in accordance with quality arrangements equal to those of FE Colleges.

SWOT analysis – Agenda for Change Theme 2

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Many VCOs have achieved or are working towards one or more quality standard (e.g. Matrix, Customer First)</p> <p>Many VCOs are familiar with self-assessment and action planning for quality improvement</p> <p>Some VCOs have had ALI inspections or mock inspections, and of these, many have been shown to be performing satisfactorily or better</p> <p>VCOs have been willing to work together on quality</p> <p>Infrastructure organisations – notably HLC – have developed significant capacity to support quality standards and improvement in other VCOs</p>	<p>Significant numbers of VCOs have not achieved or committed themselves to quality standards</p> <p>Significant numbers of VCOs have no direct experience of inspection (mock or real)</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Build the sector’s capacity using the expertise of the consortia and individual VCOs</p> <p>Adopt RARPA as the most appropriate route to monitor performance for many programmes offered by VCOs</p> <p>Extend benchmarking and peer referencing</p>	<p>New and emerging quality systems could be complex and demanding for small VCOs with limited resources</p> <p>“Responsiveness to employers” (a key part of the new Framework for Excellence) may not be relevant to the mission of some VCOs</p> <p>A narrow interpretation of the financial requirements of the Framework for Excellence could make the LSC less likely to contract with VCOs if they</p>

	appear to have weak balance sheets
--	------------------------------------

Quality theme

Recommendation 10

- To build on recent investment in quality improvement and standards – to ensure that growing numbers of VCOs throughout the region can access the kind of expertise built up by HLC and others

Recommendation 11

- To support more VCOs should be given help and support to meet the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework

Recommendation 12

- To provide funding so that more mock inspections can be carried out throughout the region

Recommendation 13

- For the LSC, the VCS and QIA to ensure the Framework for Excellence is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of the VCS

Theme 3: Funding

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

The present funding process is complex, bureaucratic and causes difficulties for colleges, other providers and the LSC itself.

We propose to:

- link funding explicitly to college plans and move the LSC away from the micromanagement of funding
- explore the scope for extending proposals for simplifying FE funding to other sectors so enabling the LSC to fund whoever is most suited to deliver the provision required, thus ensuring ‘contestability’
- radically simplify the funding formula by introducing the concepts of a standard learner number and a provider factor which, together, will be sufficient to drive funding decisions; and
- introduce core and commissioned funding where the core guarantees funding based on the previous year’s allocations and the commissioned element provides for a degree of flexibility to meet changing needs, summing together to a plan driven by demand.

The White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* endorses the *Agenda for Change* approach to funding of 16–19 year olds as the basis for a common system covering schools, colleges and independent training providers. At the heart of the funding formula are standard learner numbers (SLNs), to which a funding rate per SLN will then be applied. The rate per SLN will be differentiated according to whether the provision is fully funded or co-funded. Guided learning hours (glh) will be the base measure of learning activity, which can then be converted into SLNs. This approach will apply to all learning sectors.

Consultations have demonstrated broad support for the aims of creating a common funding approach and simplifying the system. However, there were widely differing views on the detailed technical funding proposals. A document will be published in September 2006, detailing the final funding methodology for 2007/08.

For 19+ provision, the Government has indicated that it wants to move progressively to a position where more funding is driven directly by employers' and learners' choices. The LSC has been asked to review how the *Agenda for Change* funding system can incorporate an increasingly demand-led approach, and work has begun. The LSC will be working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to determine a way forward. However, it is clear that this will have significant implications on the way adult learning is funded.

Finally, the LSC is working with the QCA on the development of a Foundation Learning Tier, which will deliver an inclusive curriculum at entry and Level 1 for learners of all ages from 14 upwards, supported by units and qualifications in the Framework for Achievement. There are potential connections between the new Foundation Learning Tier and some existing VCS provision.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 3

The audit rules relating to European funding have forced the VCS to develop relatively sophisticated financial and management information systems, but complexity remains a major bugbear. The VCS welcomes any and all moves to simplify funding arrangements.

Similarly, the VCS has demonstrated an ability to deliver learning and skills to high standards, and a growing proportion of total provision meets core LSC and Government priorities. Until now, however, most of this provision has been funded from non-core, short-term budgets such as ESF Objectives 1 and 3. The sector believes it is well placed to take on more mainstream delivery using FE funds released under the "contestability" arrangements.

The same goes for PCDL provision: the VCS welcomes moves to introduce contestability so that funds previously allocated mainly to local authorities for Adult and Community Learning may become available to support provision by the VCS.

It is not yet clear how contestability will work in practice. However, it is likely that each region will identify provision which (a) is weak (and not improving) and/or (b) does not contribute to the priorities set out nationally and regionally. Funding which would otherwise have been used to support this provision will be freed up to support new or alternative provision linked to national and regional priorities, taking account of the need to maintain an overall balance in the mix of LSC-funded provision.

This point was covered in a note issued by the LSC in January 2006⁴. The LSC's aim is –

to ensure that the mix of programmes and balance of provision will secure a breadth of provision that will deliver as appropriate:

- provision that demonstrably supports return to learning (particularly at entry and Level 1) and progression to *Skills for Life* and Level 2 and 3 provision
- upskilling to Level 3 and Level 4 and above in accordance with regional and local priorities and in line with Sector Skills Agreements and Sector Qualification Strategies and other sector priorities
- provision to support learners to re-skill for new careers and those returning to the labour market
- Framework for Achievement trials (including Foundation Learning Tier)
- access to Higher Education provision as it provides an alternative progression route into HE for adult learners and counts towards the LSC's Level 3 target
- TUC provision for union learning representatives
- languages provision to support the National Languages Strategy

Understandably, there is a strong emphasis on shifting resources towards key priorities at level 2 and 3, and continued support for nationally recognised Skills for Life qualifications. However, this is balanced by a commitment to “maintain a rich and diverse learning offer”, while avoiding “a simplistic quota approach to reducing lower priority provision without determining the potential for contribution to LSC targets and priorities”. There is also a specific commitment to “ensuring that personal and community development learning continues to be secured in local areas, that it is of high quality, and in sufficient quantity that publicly funded learning for adults remains responsive, accessible and flexible.”

It has been suggested that the voluntary and community sector should use college and provider inspection reports as a way of predicting the types of provision likely to be opened up under contestability. A review of inspection reports published in the last two years suggests that a few colleges in the region are underperforming in a number of curriculum areas, but that the majority perform satisfactorily or better in most respects. Weaknesses are

⁴ “Policy Requirements for Planning: Managing the Balance and Mix of Provision (2006/07)”

typically in a single occupational or curriculum area and in some cases, these are not areas of strength for the voluntary and community sector (although there is some VCS provision even in areas such as construction skills). From a VCS perspective, our review points to potential opportunities to deliver more nationally-accredited Skills for Life in some parts of the region. Beyond that, college inspection reports do not provide a clear guide to the kind of provision likely to be commissioned under contestability.

ALI reports on adult and community learning perhaps reveal more than college inspection reports. In Leeds, for example, access programmes and independent living and leisure skills were both judged to be unsatisfactory (grade 4). In Kingston-upon Hull, sport, leisure and recreation provision was unsatisfactory. It is reasonable to assume that these areas will be subject to contestability.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the VCS will secure increased funds through contestability. Other providers, including colleges, will also be keen to deliver provision using “contestability” funding. VCOs will need to work collaboratively to identify and respond to opportunities as they arise, in order to make a strong case for taking on mainstream delivery.

Funding theme

Recommendation 14

- That the RLSG and the regional office of the LSC in Yorkshire and Humberside should continue to build on existing commitment to partnership and continue to maintain close contact as contestability is introduced, to ensure that the interests of the sector are not overlooked.

Recommendation 15

- That LSC National Office should hold regional briefings for the VCS to explain how contestability will work, and the implications for the sector.

Recommendation 16

- To pilot any new simplified funding arrangements outside mainstream Further Education with VCS providers Yorkshire and Humberside (e.g. with members of one or more of the sub-regional consortia). The VCS Regional Learning and Skills Group (RLSG) should make this offer to LSC colleagues.

Recommendation 17

- To extend the Futurebuilders/LSC offer to fund sub-regional consortia plans in relation to contestability across the region.

Theme 4: Data

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

Current data requirements imposed on the sector are bureaucratic and too often ask for information of little real use.

We propose to:

- create a consistent set of data definitions and management information (MI) reports to be used by all organisations across the education and skills sector, including the introduction of a Unique Learner Identifier
- work with partners, including DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to create a record of learning for each individual which can be accessed by learners, and by colleges and other providers acting on behalf of the learner
- collect only that data which colleges need to manage their own business
- have all data collected from colleges by one ‘data partner’ to avoid multiple requests for information from various bodies; and
- make a simplified and more coherent link between the collection of data and the simplified funding methodology.

The White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* says –

We intend to bring together the information needs of all the organisations who request information from the sector and agree what will be required from all providers, based on common standards. This will mean that data is collected once and used for a variety of purposes. We will ensure that only priority information is collected and that reports are made back in a standard format.

We will do so by establishing a single mechanism or gatekeeper for setting information standards and data and reporting requirements. We will set up an operational body or data agency to implement these requirements.

Under the banner of “Managing Information Across Partners” (MIAP), the LSC has been working with partners to develop a learning data interface which will enable learners (and with their consent, learning providers) to access individualised learner records, using a unique learner number. These records will bring together information currently collected from schools, FE, HE, other LSC-funded providers, and awarding bodies. Agreement was reached with providers and awarding bodies on Unique Learner Number processes in

October 2005 and the first set of Common Data Definitions was published in January 2006 for implementation in 2007/08.

Prototypes for the Unique Learner Number will run until September 2007 to test the new processes fit well with existing provider enrolment processes. Procurement for the full MIAP service of a Unique Learner Number, Learner Registration Service and Lifelong Learner Record is on track to deliver phased implementation from 2007/08.

In the meantime, other steps have been taken. For example, all providers funded by the LSC, including adult and community learning providers, are now able to access a unified Provider Gateway, which offers two-way access to receive information from the LSC, and to provide information in return.

Secondly, the LSC and other partners have developed their approach to recording the progress of learners, as well as their eventual achievements. From September 2006 RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) will be systematically extended to all provision across the Learning and Skills sector – that is, to both non-accredited and accredited provision.

RARPA allows progress to be monitored from the start of a learning programme, through to its conclusion:

- Learning aim(s) are set which are appropriate to an individual learner or group of learners
- Initial assessment takes place to establish the learner's starting point
- Appropriately challenging learning objectives are identified
- Progress and achievement are recognized and recorded during the programme (formative assessment)
- At the end of the programme, appropriate steps are taken to review results – for example, through learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment, and a joint review of overall progress and achievement in relation to the learning objectives agreed at the outset

The full extension of RARPA to all provision will take place alongside the transition from the National Qualification Framework (NQF) to the Framework for Achievement planned for 2006 to 2010. This will make it easier for learners to take a step-by-step approach to learning, and work at their own speed towards qualifications which most directly meet their needs and aspirations.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 4

VC Train has a strong track record of supporting VCOs so they meet the data and management information requirements of different funding systems. In effect, VC Train acts a co-operative enabling members to access ICT-based packages (notably MAYTAS) and providing the necessary back-up in terms of

staff training and support for the use of MI systems. This expertise has been shared with other sub-regional consortia.

The sector welcomes moves to simplify data and MI requirements, including the full suite of MIAP services. VCS providers also welcome the introduction of RARPA, which provides a way to recognize learners' progress whether or not they are committed to achieving recognized qualifications. The VCS in this region has played an active role in membership (through VC Train) in the Agenda for Change Data Theme Group.

While the VCS will not be in the first phase of the roll-out of new MIAP services, the fact that good-quality data and MI systems are already in place means that this region is very well placed to help the LSC pilot ways of extending the new systems to VCS provision.

The new systems could be implemented separately by each of the four sub-regional consortia and indeed by VCOs acting individually. Alternatively, one of the consortia could provide a data and MI service to all VCS providers in the region, or a new social enterprise could be set up specifically to provide data and MI services to other VCOs. This point will be considered later, in the section about the future development of VCS consortia (below).

Finally, a word of caution. The introduction of Unique Learner Numbers opens the opportunity to track learners through successive episodes of learning throughout their lifetime. There are obvious benefits to providers and to the education and training system as whole. There may also be advantages to individual learners, in that they will not have to provide information about prior attainment each time they enroll on a new learning programme. On the other hand, there are concerns about privacy and data protection. The VCS works with some very vulnerable individuals who may not be so happy about personal information being passed between providers or (potentially) to funding agencies. It is essential that safeguards should be in place so that learners can choose for their information *not* to be shared.

Data theme

Recommendation 18

- To pilot any new data and MI arrangements outside mainstream FE and WBL with VCS providers in one or more of the sub-regions of Yorkshire and Humberside.

Recommendation 19

- The LSC should give reassurances that information about a learner will not be shared without their consent.

Theme 5: Business excellence

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

We plan to help colleges become better businesses, reduce their administrative overheads and thus release resource for front line delivery.

We propose to:

- introduce new benchmarking and value for money measures to stimulate improvements in business performance
- continue capital expenditure to improve the estate, and so drive up learner recruitment, retention and achievement; and
- encourage collective procurement to deliver better value for money.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 5

Capital expenditure has not generally been accessible for the VCS, though it can be significant for a minority of organisations such as providers of Apprenticeship programmes. It appears to be appropriate to explore ways in which appropriate VCS providers might access capital funds.

Benchmarking, peer referencing, value for money measures and collective procurement are clearly of significance to the sector.

In South Yorkshire, *peer referencing* is supported through a variety of methods, including networking providers with common curriculum delivery areas and providing benchmarking data on whole consortia delivery (split into curriculum areas).

This connects with the overall approach to quality management covered in an earlier section of this paper. Members of VC Train are expected, as a contractual obligation, to complete a SAR/QIP which is effective as a management tool. VC Train assesses the effectiveness of the contributory SAR/QIPs and grades them according to their use as a self improvement tool.

VC Train (and other sub-regional consortia) bring together providers who are experts within their own field of delivery, such as the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service, to share experience and benchmark delivery of training programmes. Joining forces makes it feasible to ensure quality and standards can be monitored and that deliverers share good practice and continuously improve.

This type of arrangement could be extended across more sub-sectors of the VCS, and across all four sub-regions, through curriculum network groupings which provide peer support. This work could be rolled out through clearly identified curriculum areas which would help market and profile the VCS provision and by a joint approach to delivering whole qualifications across the consortium. For example, unitised NVQ programmes could be jointly developed where the verification and management of the whole programme is held within a Consortium Support Unit and the units are delivered and assessed by the most appropriate expert provider. This would be an excellent way of extending partnership arrangements to gain the best deal for employers and learners.

There has been some benchmarking of other measures such as *value for money*, but these are less well developed. Here is another opportunity to extend good practice both within and between the sub-regional consortia.

Finally, the VCS is aware that purchasing power can be improved through collaboration. It is quite usual for VCOs to share accommodation and some office services. However, there is certainly scope to take this further in future.

Business Excellence theme

Recommendation 20

- To explore ways in which appropriate VCS providers might access capital funds.

Recommendation 21

- Benchmarking and peer referencing should be extended (a) across the region and (b) to include both performance measures and value for money indicators.

Recommendation 22

- The consortia should explore ways of extending arrangements for joint purchasing and procurement arrangements, including sharing “back office” functions where appropriate - such a co-operative model will add to VCS progression to sustainability.

Recommendation 23

- The VCS to develop its expertise in data gathering, monitoring and reporting with the Regional Forum to explore a bid to appropriate funders for a Marketing Co-ordinator

Theme 6: Reputation

Background

The Agenda for Change prospectus says –

We plan to help colleges secure the reputation that most deserve, and at all levels – local, regional and national.

We propose to:

- promote the examples of best practice that exist in many colleges
- amplify the excellent reputation colleges have locally on to a national stage
- develop a marketing and communications strategy to promote the sector to all of its audiences and especially to those, such as employers, where we will have something significantly different to promote
- build on the reputation held by colleges – and other providers – along with the LSC in promoting equality of access and diversity of provision; and
- undertake regular research to track changing perceptions of the sector.

The LSC and DfES hold the view (quite understandably) that the best way to enhance the reputation of the learning and skills sector is by raising quality and standards, including responsiveness to the needs of employers and individuals. However, there is also a need for a marketing and communications strategy, which is being developed to enhance the reputation of the learning and skills sector in the eyes of employers, learners and the wider community.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 6

All sections of the Agenda for Change prospectus place a particular emphasis on colleges – this section especially. However, the VCS has an obvious interest in promoting an excellent reputation for meeting the needs of learners, employers and communities. The VCS is also keen to share good practice, promote equality of access and diversity of provision, and play an active part in tracking changing perceptions of the sector.

Reputation theme

Recommendation 24

- The LSC must ensure that all parts of the learning and skills sector benefit from plans which promote and enhance their reputation. This is not an issue solely confined to FE colleges.

Recommendation 25

- The VCS should continue to promote best practice in equality and diversity both within the sector, and by supporting the plans of other providers such as colleges and private sector training providers – this can be progressed in part through the LSC/NIACE development work on the “learner voice”.

Recommendation 26

- The RLSG, working with the four sub-regional consortia, should consider whether there is extra value in a marketing and communications programme specifically aimed at raising the profile and awareness of VCS learning provision in Yorkshire and Humberside e.g. in relation to the VCS ability to access markets the LSC cannot.

-

Theme 7: Reconfiguring the LSC

Background

The LSC is nearing the end of a year-long programme to reshape and restructure teams at the local, regional and national level so as to be better able to deliver Agenda for Change and other priorities.

The contribution of the VCS to Theme 7

The Regional Forum has previously worked with a number of LSC staff to help improve their understanding of the voluntary and community sector – the diverse nature of the sector, its strengths, its challenges, and so on. The Forum would be glad to arrange briefings and placements with VCOs for any staff taking on new roles which involve working with the VCS. If reciprocal arrangements are possible, people working in the VCS could undertake work shadowing or longer work placements in the LSC. Steps such as these would enhance mutual understanding and joint working.

Reconfiguring the LSC theme

Recommendation 27

- For the Regional Forum and LSC to plan a programme of two way briefings and placements between VCOs and the LSC

This can include LSC staff taking on new roles which involve working with the VCS and reciprocal arrangements with VCS personnel undertaking work shadowing or longer work placements in the LSC. It could also include any regional VCS LSC staff member being based partial at the Regional Forum.

The consortia

(a) Self assessment

Earlier in 2006, the four sub-regional consortia carried out a self-assessment exercise. The results were shared with LSC colleagues at the time. What follows are highly abbreviated conclusions drawn from the four self-assessment reports.

VC Train and South Yorkshire

A £12m investment through ESF Objective 1 over a 3 year period has developed this Consortium as a deliverer that can demonstrate the capacity to:

- Target “need to reach” learners and engage significant numbers
- Develop a tried and tested curriculum that meets not only the needs of the learners, but is coherent and meets the requirements of awarding bodies and leads to progression
- Develop a rigorous quality framework to support delivery which unfortunately has not had the opportunity to be tested under inspection conditions
- Operate an MIS which meets the requirements of the LSC and ESF funding

Humberside Learning Consortium and the Humber

Has benefited from a significant, but more limited, investment which has enabled them to demonstrate their capacity to:

- Engage learners through numerous short term contracts
- Target hard to reach learners
- Address the Common Inspection Framework with a limited number of VCS delivery organisations and support them to demonstrate their capability through an inspection processes
- Develop a quality framework to support the delivery
- Manage the inspection processes, or Health Check, as this was not a mandatory inspection which resulted in a very successful report which clearly demonstrates the capability within the sector

On the other hand -

- Some of the support systems and particularly the MIS are not as developed as VC Train as they have not benefited from the same sustained investment
- The curriculum is not as coherent

Yet –

- They have demonstrated the success of a consortium approach with highly effective communication links
- The effectiveness of a hub providing leadership and management for delivery organisations

West Yorkshire Learning Consortium and West Yorkshire

Although not operating as a delivery consortium at the moment, there are a number of individual voluntary organisations successfully delivering and it has been identified that -

- An effective communications infrastructure is enabling partnership working
- A consortium approach to delivery would bring a lot of added value, increase cohesion and support the quality of delivery
- In the recent four months WYLC and other key WY VCOs have been working together to develop a model which will enable delivery to be supported through an effective sub-regional consortium

North Yorkshire Forum and North Yorkshire

Although there appears to be a substantial amount of training currently being delivered, it seems to be fragmented and lacks coordination and relatively little of it is being delivered by VCS organisations, although they do seem to have a role in identifying the needs.

It would appear that there are opportunities to create better links between needs and what is already happening on the ground. This would require further investment and could prove to have bigger problems than in the other sub-regions due to the vast geographical area, rural isolation of communities and the scale of the investment that would be needed to address these issues.

Despite the differences in the levels of development in the four sub-regions some strong common threads have emerged in the Self Assessment reports –

Strengths

- Effective communications infrastructure
- Strong infrastructure to build partnerships and networks
- Provision is demand led – meeting the needs of communities and individuals
- Customised and flexible programmes to meet the needs of learners
- Good support strategies for learners

- Good staff development processes in place
- Effective partnerships to widen participation
- Good commitment to quality improvement
- The four sub-regional consortia are working hard to access opportunities to ensure there is accessible provision across the whole of the region

Weaknesses/Areas in Need of Improvement

- Short term funding inhibiting strategic planning
- Investment in resources
- Curriculum development

The strong infrastructure, highly developed networks and communication channels, both formal and informal, are the basis for successful engagement with these groups.

The capacity to engage and utilise specialist organisations with existing relationships with the client group is a further significant success factor, because they bring an established reputation, plus very specialised support and considerable additionality to the delivery of learning programmes.

Locally based delivery encourages access to provision, particularly for non-traditional learners, and supports retention.

Strong commitment to quality is demonstrated through the high percentage of organisations that have addressed quality improvement through PQASSO, Customer First, IIP, Matrix. It has been demonstrated that this commitment can be focussed on the CIF and organisations are capable of achieving good standards if they are given the support (HLC example).

Experienced and qualified staff are a great strength, often qualified in a specialist discipline with an added teaching qualification as part of their CPD.

A track record in demonstrating successful partnership working, creating additional opportunities and progression paths.

All four surveys revealed that respondents had ambitions to develop provision both in terms of volume and quality.

(b) the LSC position

The LSC's National Office propose that sub-regional consortia should have an increasingly important role in enabling the VCS to deliver LSC-funded learning. In April 2006, the National Office sent guidance to regional and local colleagues, stating -

We will encourage local⁵ VCS organisations to work through the local consortia organisations to deliver their learning and skills work. We will expect local LSC teams to refer local VCS organisations to their consortia rather than fund them direct (unless they are national / regional umbrella organisations working at local level).

During 06 / 07, it is expected that LSC area offices will support consortia in every way possible to build their capacity to apply for any mainstream funds that might be open to competition in 07 / 08.

More recently, the LSC and Futurebuilders have announced plans to make grants available to around a dozen sub-regional consortia later this year, to help them prepare proposals to deliver adult learning under mainstream LSC programmes. There is also a possibility of joint LSC-Capacitybuilders support for sub-regional consortia, but discussions are at an early stage.

VC Train (South Yorkshire) and Humberside Learning Consortium are regarded by LSC National Office and NIACE as amongst the most advanced VCS consortia anywhere in the country. As noted earlier in this report, they have supported each other's development plans – VC Train leading on data and management information, and HLC on quality and the Common Inspection Framework – and both have provided support and encouragement to the consortia in West and North Yorkshire. Some of this capacity building work has been supported financially by the LSCs in Yorkshire and Humberside.

In principle, it would be possible to bring the four consortia together, perhaps to form a single regional consortium. However, there are strong arguments in favour of retaining sub-regional structures, at least for the time being.

A key consideration is the role which consortia might play in future relationships with funders other than the LSC. Sub-regions have become an important part of the geography of social and economic development in recent years, as shown by the importance of Sub-Regional Investment Plans to support the Regional Economic Strategy. Equally, sub-regional consortia offer a sense of “localness” which might be lost in a move to a single regional organisation: this could be very important from the point of view of Local Strategic Partnerships and local authorities operating at the district level.

The sub-regional consortia are already working at closer collaboration e.g. through the LSC commissioned projects on developing MIS, Quality frameworks, E Vision. It is also to be recognised that the process of developing a collective business model needs further time.

⁵ The LSC guidance note also states that the Consortia model is not necessarily the most effective way for the LSC to deal with national VCS organisations or those who work in one or more sub regions. Separate arrangements will be considered for these organisations. Having said that, there is nothing to prevent larger VCOs and sub-regional consortia working together or at least sharing information and intelligence.

The consortia

Recommendation 28

- To continue to develop the capacity of the four sub-regional consortia separately, at least for the time being.

Each can then negotiate delivery contracts for and on behalf of its member VCOs with the LSC and other funders. However, the four consortia are very willing to support each other's development, and there may be opportunities to share some facilities such as a single MI system as well as to continue to provide mutual support and share good practice in vital areas such as quality and reputation.

Recommendation 29

- To explore jointly the advantages of a VCS regional contracting and commissioning group

Recommendation 30

- For the four sub-regional consortia to remain open to new members.

Each consortium must help new members to develop their infrastructure to deliver learning and skills to their workforce or their clients. It is especially important to reach out to groups which may (for whatever reason) be marginalized by mainstream arrangements, such as migrant and refugee community organisations.

Appendix 1: How can the voluntary and community sector support the LSC's priorities in Yorkshire and Humberside?

The headings in this table are derived from the LSC's annual statement of priorities, Yorkshire and Humberside, 2006/07

LSC Priority	Issues for development	Key Actions for 2006/07	VCS contribution
<p>Priority 1: Ensure that all 14–19 year olds have access to high quality, relevant learning opportunities</p>	<p>Work with partners to increase the numbers of young people who achieve a level 2 qualification at 16</p> <p>Develop suitable post-16 progression routes for young people who have not achieved the benchmark level 2 at 16, to enable them to reach level 2 by 19</p> <p>Reduce the number of young people not in education or training</p> <p>Increase the number of young people who successfully complete an Apprenticeship Framework</p> <p>Engage more employers in the development and delivery of vocational learning for young people</p>	<p>Continue to develop the range of vocational opportunities at foundation and level 1</p> <p>Develop the E2E programme to provide appropriate training and support to enable young people to progress to full level 2 education and training</p> <p>Work with the Connexions Service to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training</p> <p>Provide a range of opportunities for young people to better prepare for the world of work through improved Education Business Link activity</p> <p>Develop and promote the suite of Apprenticeships and improve quality and success rates</p>	<p>To work with the Yorkshire and Humber Strategic Commissioning Forum for NEETs</p> <p>A range of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) offer varied innovative and user friendly services (e.g. through sports, arts or media) which have been identified as being of value to young people</p> <p>Generally the VCS offers a route map of connections with disadvantaged communities – thus access to NEET groupings is facilitated by the VCS</p>

<p>Priority 2: Making learning truly demand-led so that it better meets the needs of employers, young people and adults</p>	<p>Increase the number of adults achieving a first full level 2</p> <p>Build on the previous success in improving the basic skills of adults</p> <p>Continue to engage employers in the delivery of learning to meet skills gaps and shortages</p> <p>Encourage a greater financial contribution to learning from employers and individuals</p>	<p>Implement Train to Gain across the whole region</p> <p>Encourage the attainment of first full level 2 qualifications</p> <p>Identify, with the Regional Skills Alliance, priority sectors for level 3 support</p> <p>Implement the Construction Skills Action Plan</p> <p>Utilise Sector Skills Agreements to inform planning at local and regional level</p>	<p>Strategically through the leadership of the VCS Regional Learning and Skills Group (RLSG) the sector will promote Level 2 qualifications – through partnership work with the generic sector broker (Business Link) and a targeted communications programme to stimulate demand.</p> <p>The RLSG offers a briefing to the Regional Skills Alliance on the VCS’s needs for Level 3</p> <p>The VCS is completing a regional Skills Action Plan which can be used to progress actions with the Regional Skills alliance, Business Link, the SfBN and relevant Sector Skills Councils.</p> <p>The VCS offers support in identifying what demand-led learning actually is in certain contexts.</p> <p>The VCS has a strong role in supporting disadvantaged people through a possible pathway to employment – building on roles such as engagement back into learning and developing employability skills.</p>
<p>Priority 3: Transform the learning and skills sector through agenda for change</p>		<p>Strengthen the annual planning review process</p> <p>Expand and further develop the CoVE network</p> <p>Work with colleges to identify and develop alternative delivery methods and locations including for example e-learning and the assess train assess approach</p> <p>Prioritise resources for quality improvement in areas of greatest need</p>	<p>The VCS offers the VCS Regional learning and Skills Group (supported by the Regional Forum) which is recognised as a model of good practice across the country. The VCS has a representative on the Regional Skills Partnership.</p> <p>The VCS is part of the learning and skills sector and so can play its part in driving through transformation e.g. affecting a cultural change in e-learning throughout the VCS – by building on current initiatives such as the VCS e-learning benchmarking project and E Vision (the e-repository and Virtual learning Environment).</p> <p>The VCS is committed to promoting continuous development and can offer models of quality improvement where most needed.</p>

Priority 4:
Strengthen the role of the LSC in economic development so that we provide the skills needed to help all individuals into jobs and lifelong employability

Improve the quality of management and leadership skills in business

Work with partners to develop provision for growth sectors

Build on current employer engagement in training, including designing delivery methods which meet business needs

Continue to improve the Skills for Life and wider employability skills of adults and young people

Implement joint Welfare to Workforce Development plans with Jobcentre Plus

Implement the range of Equality and Diversity Impact Measures Develop and implement projects and programmes which address higher level management and business skill needs

Work with partners to implement Local Area Agreements

The draft VCS Regional Skills Action plan clearly identifies management and leadership as a key need for the sector – the VCS is willing to develop in partnership the appropriate programmes (with the Third Sector Leadership centre on board) required in order to drive up productivity and value for money.

Sector specific needs indicated thus far are e.g. trustee and volunteer development which could be addressed by VCS led programmes.

A similar approach in relation to equality and diversity is offered – a strong link to the Regional BME Panel (supported by the Regional Forum) is possible.

Working at neighbourhood and community level is recognised as a VCS strength. Partnership between local authorities, LSPs and VCS infrastructure is offered as a way to strengthen the involvement of the VCS in LAA development.

The VCS makes a significant contribution to the skills for life and employability agendas – these are included in more detail in the supplementary section.

The sector offers support in developing a strong social economy through support for social entrepreneurs and social enterprise. This is through strategic work, networking and the provision of a range of learning and skills programmes.

The VCS offers a wide range of learning opportunities to workers delivering public services e.g. social work, youth work, health etc.

The sector has a key role in innovation and knowledge transfer and can develop the skills of workers in a range of ways e.g. community engagement for developing LAAs, civil renewal and community cohesion.

More VCOs are delivering public services – a significant proportion of the VCS works in health related activity – the VCS can work in partnership through the SfBN and relevant SSCs to drive up skills.

Priority 5:
Improve the skills of the workers who are delivering public services

Target the up-skilling of people working in the Health sector via the development of Regional NHS/LSC compacts

Implement the LSC Public Services Offer

Target low-skilled workers in the public sector

<p>Priority 6 - Strengthen the capacity of the LSC to lead change nationally, regionally and locally</p>		<p>Play a lead role in regional planning to meet skill needs through membership of the Regional Skills Partnership and Regional Skills Alliance and inclusive Regional Investment Planning</p> <p>Promote the sharing of information and intelligence through Yorkshire Futures and targets through Advancing Together</p>	<p>The VCS offers the VCS Regional learning and Skills Group (supported by the Regional Forum) which is recognised as a model of good practice across the country. The VCS has a representative on the Regional Skills Partnership.</p> <p>The VCS in Yorkshire and the Humber has had two key personnel recruited to the LSC National Working Together Committee (the Regional Forum and VC Train) and so the links are in place to join up issues and activity from national through to local levels..</p> <p>The sub-regional learning and skills consortia are actively working together to increase their effectiveness in delivering the required skills across the region – this regional collaboration will support the LSC in its transformation..</p> <p>The VCS Agenda for Change paper sets out the offer of the sector in relation to all 7 of the Agenda for Change themes.</p>
--	--	--	---