



# Newsletter

## Editor's comment

In this edition you will find a report on the changes to the learning and skills system taken from the latest Edexcel Policy Watch, feedback from the latest LLN IAG Workstrand meeting provided by Victoria Trachy, an update from the Assistant Director Curriculum and a brief report on the results from a study by CHERI on what impact employer engagement in course development has on employers and students.

The whole team would like to wish Mary (WVLLN Administrator) and her fiancé Dave our very best wishes for their upcoming wedding on Friday 18th April. We all hope that the day goes smoothly, that there is plenty of sunshine and we look forward to seeing the photos!

The team would also like to wish the best of luck to Kate Thomas (Progression Co-ordinator UWE) as she undertakes a sponsored bike ride across mountainous terrain in aid of emphysema.

## Latest changes to the learning & skills system (Taken from Edexcel Policy Watch 2008/22 - 26 March 2008)

Re-arranging the deck chairs or just some essential back office changes; what is the latest re-arranging of the furniture in the learning and skills system all about? This was the question that led the latest policy watch (2008/22) from Edexcel.

According to the Policy Watch there are three reasons for the changes which stand out.

Firstly that the Government feels it is time for a change. The current learning and skills system has been around for about seven years although during that time it has already undergone restructuring several times. The Government has been quick to point out that 'the current landscape has worked well and the LSC has hit all the targets Government set it'. This rather suggests that the system isn't broken but 'simply in need of an oil change'.

Secondly, new policy drivers are in place which has prompted the need for different organisational structures: these include at 14-19, a standardised qualification offer, a common funding system, a regional planning

framework and the integration of services under a long-term Children's Plan. At post-19 it includes Leitch skills targets, a new qualification and credit framework, employer ordered provision and training and a growing integration between skills and employability.

Thirdly, 'the age of the large enabling agency is drawing to a close, regional and sub-regional planning is in and subtler promptings are at work: local collaboration at 14-19, closer co-operation between DIUS and DWP post-19 to name but two'. The Impact Assessment Paper highlights some of these promptings in more detail, "the advent of Skills Accounts and the growth of Train to Gain sees a radically different model of organisation of the skills system where the role of the Government is to ensure that customers are empowered, well-informed and well-supported, so that demand can lead supply." It is about enabling a demand-led system to take shape.

Just how much is actually changing is difficult to quantify at the moment because it is

cultural and long-term such as new demand systems, new funding drivers, new ways of working etc, but at a machinery level, the amount of change looks vast. This is also happening at the same time as considerable curriculum reforms are being introduced.

Three of the changes are as follows:

**Skills Funding Agency:** the new executive Agency to take over from the LSC in 2010, post-19 remit, operational role to allocate funds to providers according to purchasing choice, will manage the development of the FE service, work closely to DIUS, set the 'trading conditions' for provision.

**Local Authorities:** lead strategic role, responsible for 14-19 entitlement, provision for young people, commissioning of 16-19 provision.

**National Apprenticeship Service:** announced under recent Apprenticeship Strategy, overall responsibility for Apprenticeships, will sit within the LSC then transfer to the Skills Funding Agency.

## LLN IAG Workstrand meeting

### Update provided by Victoria Trachy, Progression Coordinator, Bath Spa University

The latest Information, Advice and Guidance workstrand meeting for Lifelong Learning Networks took place at the Open University of the West Midlands in late February. Led by Lois Thorn, IAG Strand Leader for the SWLLN, the meeting gave LLNs from as far a field as Humberside and the Isle of Wight the opportunity to share good practice on IAG matters. Topics for discussion included the new Adult Careers Service recently outlined in the Leitch Implementation Plan, the Sector Skills Council IAG Project presented by Sue Fairest (Project Manager) and Foundation degree Forward (fdf) IAG Training Materials.

The Department for Innovation, Universities

and Skills (DIUS) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are working together to create a joined-up employment and skills system. The IAG services of Learndirect and Nextstep will be merged into a new universal adult careers service in England, working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. The Government is currently carrying out ten pilots for the new adult careers service, deadlines for submitting bids for these pilots was March 2008.

The SSC IAG project is being led by Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for UK audio visual and publishing industries. Funded by DIUS, the project aims to make Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) the prime source of

Labour Market Information (LMI) in the UK and increase awareness and understanding of the SSCs network. The project is focusing on the needs of adults in preparation for the planned Adult Careers Service. The Government wants all the providers of the Adult Careers Service to access SSC LMI and IAG materials at the press of a button in an accessible and standardised way. This will mean establishing a co-ordinated approach across all 25 SSCs to promote access to IAG and career related materials. A central LMI signposting portal will be established which will enable users to be signposted directly to the relevant SSC LMI and IAG data. Each SSC will have to provide LMI

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## Our aims for the next month

**Pauline Dixey Assistant Director Curriculum**



The University of Gloucestershire has now agreed the precise curriculum for a Foundation Degree in Accounting with Business Management. The proposal has now received approval to progress towards full validation in May 2008.

The course has been designed to meet the needs of two types of learners: Vocational NVQ learners across the region already enrolled on the AAT NVQ wishing to progress to an academic qualification and also younger learners perhaps taking AS & A levels and aspiring to achieve both a vocational and academic qualification in Accounting locally to the Swindon/Bath area. This FD will also provide a stepping stone for young vocational apprentices who may wish to make the necessary progression to achieve an academic qualification in addition to the vocational AAT qualification. Plans are in the early stages to link a small group of young learners with high quality training opportunities with local firms of accountants in the area. On 27th March the Assistant Director

Curriculum visited New College Swindon to meet a group of young learners interested to learn how the Foundation Degree could fast track learners onto full professional accounting bodies.

The RAC together with Cirencester College are developing a forward-looking Foundation Degree in Environment Conservation and Heritage Management. The programme will offer flexible study pathways for school leavers / career changers wanting to develop a career within the environmental, conservation, heritage and tourism sectors. It is further aimed at existing sector employees who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills as part of a staff development programme. It is being designed to ensure that students will gain relevant skills in both practical and managerial areas equipping them with the confidence to "step up to the mark" and will include general project management & problem solving skills together

with team working, leadership and mentoring skills developed within a practical working environment. In tandem it will also provide an opportunity for employers to accredit in-house training when mapped against programme outcomes. RAC have been in consultation with employers ranging from Natural England, Forestry Commission, Lantra and Charities including RSPB to ensure the qualification meets the needs of all stakeholders and potential learners.

FDs are stepping stones for vocationally-minded students, and this dovetailed in with the BTEch/Diplomas and A levels provides a progression pathway to a BSc (Honours) degree and possible professional accreditation.

### Upcoming Events

- 10th April—WVLLN Executive Board, Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester
- 17th April—Progression Co-ordinator team meeting, Oakfield Campus, Swindon
- 22nd April—WTPN research meeting, Oakfield Campus, Swindon
- 25th April—Planning meeting for Diploma event, Oakfield Campus, Swindon

## Progression Focus

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at national & regional level. The SSC IAG project will forecast sector trends by providing career pathway case studies & emerging job roles. A full review of SSCs potential IAG provision and the IAG needs of key partners such as Ufi, TUC/union learn, Jobcentre Plus and LSC/nextstep is underway along with a draft SSC IAG core offer. The project team plans to meet its' objectives by March 2009.

Fdf have designed an IAG Training Material pack available from their website. The IAG pack has been designed to improve understanding of Foundation Degrees (FDs); how & where to access information & advice about FDs for students, parents, employers & lecturers and how FDs can support progression & career development. The pack is for people who train and support those providing IAG to prospective FD students. The materials are generic and can be customised and contextualised to meet local needs. The pack includes how to use the training materials, the materials themselves and useful resources. The pack can be used for training staff about FDs.

## Employer engagement in course development

Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) of the Open University

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) set the topic for the review undertaken by CHERI to improve the understanding of employer engagement in higher education (HE) curriculum development and, in particular, the impact (if any), of that engagement. The underlying rationale for this review was that there have been a number of studies that have sought to seek out employers' views of graduate skills and qualities, and the findings of some of these has been that the employers are often not satisfied with the 'softer' skills that graduates possess. This is in conjunction with the current policy which has created an environment where the norm is for employer engagement for both further and higher education.

The review question was: What impact does employer engagement in course development have on employers and students (from the student / employer perspectives)?

The review found that there are benefits to employer engagement such as work-based learning but there are also barriers. One of the barriers is the size of the employer as smaller organisations are less likely to engage with higher education.

The review also found that there is a need for more rigorous evaluative, analytical and longitudinal studies in order to discover more about the impact of employer engagement in course development as well as the disciplinary areas and occupational sectors that were the focus of this review.

The results of this review are available in four formats: summary, report, technical report and databases. These can be downloaded or accessed at <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/reel/>