

8 February 2010

The Learning Revolution

This letter provides further information for local authorities and other key delivery organisations on the new and exciting vision for informal adult learning set out in the recent White Paper, *The Learning Revolution*.

During the Government's national consultation in 2008, the majority of local authority responses expressed the aspiration to take on strategic and operational leadership of informal learning. In particular, local authorities wanted to:

- improve coherence across services to support family learning, citizenship, mental and physical wellbeing, health, culture, environment
- engage disadvantaged groups and integrate informal learning with their wider, local agendas for community and economic well-being.

We wrote to you last October outlining our commitments in *The Learning Revolution*, a key number of which reflect these aspirations. We said how we hoped local authorities would take up the pivotal role of providing the leadership to create and support vibrant local networks of informal adult learning in their area.

Since then we have been working with the Local Government Association, the Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults, the Association of Colleges, Ofsted and other delivery partners to develop a Lead Accountable Body model that would enable local authorities effectively to discharge this pivotal leadership role. From August 2011, the Skills Funding Agency plans to channel all

the available budget to support informal adult learning in a local or sub-regional area through identified Lead Accountable Bodies.

Although our work together is still at a relatively early stage, we already know that many local authorities are energised by the opportunities this invitation offers. Accepting the role of Lead Accountable Body in their geographical area would enable local authorities to better position their resources, alongside the existing resources of the Learning and Skills Council / Skills Funding Agency, as part of a local learning infrastructure. This in turn would help to promote the wider personalisation agenda across a number of fronts, and enable other local services, such as libraries, to play an important role in supporting Lead Accountable Bodies to broaden choice for local people.

We have also learned that there may be an appetite for some clusters of local authorities to form sub-regional groupings within this new leadership model – for example in situations where a number of neighbouring local authorities cover a heavily populated area or, large conurbation, or where ‘travel to learn’ patterns cross local authority boundaries. In all these instances we would expect one of the local authorities in a sub-regional grouping to take the Lead Accountable Body role on behalf of the cluster. This, of course, would be an entirely voluntary arrangement.

Our work to date has identified a number of key leadership responsibilities that each Lead Accountable Body (at either the local or sub-regional level) would have the responsibility, accountability and necessary authority to deliver; namely to:

- provide the vision and leadership to innovate by promoting a culture of learning through life, that will help widen access *to learning and skills*, target public investment and encourage collaboration;
- lead a strong local partnership ensuring participation across a wide range of organisations with a diverse offer to meet local needs;
- propose annual jointly-agreed delivery plans which will form the basis for the funding agreement with the new Skills Funding Agency;
- ensure the local plan secures value-for-money and levers in additional resources from fees and other sources;
- moderate plans at a sub regional level (where a number of local authorities have agreed voluntarily to form a sub-regional cluster).

We expect these new arrangements to be operational in good time to plan the academic year commencing August 2011, so that the Skills Funding Agency can allocate the funding needed to deliver the agreed delivery plan for each local/sub-regional area. Further details about our ambitions are at Annex A.

We expect to write to you again in the spring to invite expressions of interest in taking forward (and helping to develop further) the role of a Lead Accountable Body. In the meantime further information and updates can be found on:

<http://lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/adultlearner/learningrevolution>

In addition, the Local Government Association has produced a concise guide for councillors that will be available in early February at: www.lga.gov.uk/adultlearning.

If you have any questions about the new arrangements or wish to discuss any of the issues relating to Lead Accountable Bodies please contact Jerry O'Shea at the Learning and Skills Council on 02476 823305 or jerry.oshea@lsc.gov.uk or email your views or comments to: informaladultlearning@lsc.gov.uk

Yours sincerely



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copy: Heads of Adult Education Services in Local Authorities

The Learning Revolution White Paper states that the national vision for informal learning “needs to be translated into local action that genuinely transforms people’s lives.” Local authorities, as commissioners and providers of a range of statutory and non statutory services, including health, environment, adult care, families, education and libraries, are clearly well placed to take up the leadership role on informal adult learning. Their understanding of local needs and their comprehensive overview of relevant local activities, often funded through different funding streams, can provide the links that will enable informal adult learning to join up with other services and support important local agendas including personalisation, citizenship and wellbeing.

Our ambitions for Informal Adult Learning are set out in the White Paper: we want to increase the awareness, ‘reach’ and ‘stretch’ of IAL funding through the leadership of a Lead Accountable Body in each local authority or sub regional grouping. By ‘**reach**’ we mean securing a broad, high quality informal adult learning offer to residents in every local authority area in England. We want public funding to continue targeting groups of learners who are experiencing difficulties, such as deprivation, disability or isolation that limit their life chances and future opportunities. By ‘**stretch**’ we mean the value that will be added to the financial resources currently allocated by the LSC (and, from April 2010, the Skills Funding Agency). Value can be added in various ways, for example by:

- continuing to collect fees from those who can afford to pay
- linking relevant funding streams for informal learning
- providing in-kind services through volunteer teaching and support
- increasing the availability of free or low cost learning spaces, particularly for self-organised learning groups, clubs or societies.

It is envisaged that the offer will be wide ranging, offering people flexible learning opportunities that contribute to their personal, social, educational and economic development. The Lead Accountable Body will be encouraged to involve local learning champions, mentors and a wide range of other local informal adult learning partners in developing the local plan.

It is anticipated that the LAB will respond to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) commission with a jointly agreed annual delivery plan which reflects local priorities, targets, cultures and planning arrangements, setting out:

- volumes of participation in informal learning funded via the SFA Adult Safeguarded Learning budget
- estimates of local self-organised learner numbers
- the value-for-money and ‘stretch’ secured for the public investment
- the flexibilities achieved, for example by the levering in of in-kind resources or ‘growing the pound’ available for informal adult learning
- local capacity-building activity and the linkages developed across relevant stakeholders, including self-organised learning groups, clubs and societies, third sector and private sector organisations.

The councillors' concise guide to Informal Adult Learning and Lead Accountable Body status

03 February 2010

Informal Adult Learning – what's it all about?

In March 2009 a White Paper, *the Learning Revolution* was published. This provides a new vision for Informal Adult Learning. In a nutshell: it is about the adult learning courses provided by most local authorities but much more as it also includes informal adult learning that happens in other places such as libraries, museums, through reading groups, through self-organised activities, on-line, via broadcasting, in communities. It uses as a catalyst the £210 million Learning and Skills Council funds called Adult Safeguarded Learning – this is currently used for personal and community development learning, neighbourhood learning for deprived communities and family learning – with the intention to join with other existing national and local lifelong learning budgets, for example, health, culture. In April 2010 the Learning Skills Council will be abolished and adult learning will be managed by a new successor body called the Skills Funding Agency.

Why is it important to us?

Local Authorities will be invited to take responsibility for the local agenda for this type of learning by becoming a Lead Accountable Body (LAB). This puts us in a key position to be advocates for and facilitators of a local strategic vision for this non-skills learning and build it more effectively into our local priorities. The wider benefits of learning are well documented: the new agenda gives us an opportunity to look at informal adult learning and link it to well-being for all. This includes developing a culture of learning in families, responding to demographic changes in the community such as helping older people to keep mentally and physically active and fit, supporting communities through the after-effects of the recession, targeting activities to engage people in local democratic processes, engaging people in new digital technologies, learning for a green future. Informal Adult Learning can often be a stepping stone to gaining new skills and qualifications and complements vocational learning. It is part of a broader learning and skills continuum that can enable citizens to keep learning throughout their lives.

What is a Lead Accountable Body?

A lead accountable body (LAB) will pull together all the partners in the area and develop a local plan for all types of informal adult learning. The key is that the learning meets local needs and supports a range of social and economic priorities of elected bodies. We are being invited to innovate in the way we do this. The Skills Funding Agency will agree the headline targets in the plan. If local authorities chose to they can group together and have one LAB across a number of authorities – but this does not need to happen.

So what's new about this?

The LAB will manage all the funds for Informal Adult Learning going into the area. This currently does not happen as some of the budget is paid directly to Further Education Colleges and other organisations. There is a commitment from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to deregulate this area. This means increased flexibility in how the funding can be used, non-accredited learning will be looked at differently by Ofsted and there are discussions about the type of qualifications needed for those facilitating the informal learning activities. The LAB

will have to show how it is leveraging in extra funds in addition to those from the Skills Funding Agency, either in kind, such as through opening up new spaces, or through other means. It will also need to show an increase in overall learner numbers.

What's the timetable for this happening?

In Spring 2010 local authorities will be invited to become Lead Accountable Bodies. This can be as single authority or as a partnership of elected councils – this is a local choice. Throughout 2010-11 the LAB will work with other partners in an area, including those currently receiving this funding, to develop the plan. From 2011-12 all the funding will then go through the LAB.

What are the current unknowns?

We don't know yet the full details of deregulation and the new flexibilities, the specific accountability requirements of the LAB or the precise details of the relationship between the LAB and the Skills Funding Agency. Local Authorities themselves have an important role in helping shape the actual arrangements and requirements. BIS have committed to protect the budget at the current level for 2010-11, but we don't know what happens after then.

Key questions you may wish to consider

In order to gain the most local strategic benefit from these changes, you may want to consider the following questions:

1. Have you chosen an elected member and a chief officer who are going to discharge the lead role?
2. What planning processes do you plan to have in place to take on the role of Lead Accountable Body?
3. What is your vision for adult learning and skills in your area and how does informal learning feature and contribute to your ambitions? Can you use it to shape your plans for engaging more people in democratic processes and community activity? Can you and partners benefit from opening up new spaces for learning in your buildings? How does it link to your wider long-term vision for adult learning in the area?
4. Are you confident that your plans include all the adult and family learning in departments and services across the local authority area, such as libraries, adult learning, museums, community centres, extended services, archives, health centres?
5. Who are your new partners? Do your plans make the most of the local voluntary organisations and groups who can introduce those most excluded to new learning opportunities as well as Further Education colleges? Are there any sensitive relationships with organisations whose funding will be channelled through the LAB in future?
6. Have you examined how the benefits of learning can save spending on other budgets, such as health and care? Do you have enough examples of what happens locally to make the case for the public value of learning? Are the agencies where the savings are made contributing to the local learning budget?
7. Is it clear to all that the local authority can both commission and deliver learning as appropriate to local needs and the decision on what constitutes the right mix rests with each local authority?

For more information

This is the first in a series of updates for councillors on adult learning, these will be located at www.lga.gov.uk/adultlearning or contact Penny.Lamb@lga.gov.uk