

Machinery of Government

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has now closed and has been replaced by 3 new government agencies with, in addition, wider roles and increased responsibilities delegated to Local Authorities and Regional Development Agencies.

The following summarises the main changes and the current links with Enable. This briefing is Enable's take of the situation and may help you form a clearer picture of who is doing what. However we cannot guarantee that all the information is 100% accurate as it is a compilation of the knowledge that exists within our organisation and our view of the outside world.

Skills Funding Agency

The Skills Funding Agency is an agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and will fund and regulate adult further education and skills training. It has a head office in Coventry and in 21 offices around England. There is no office in Nottinghamshire. The local offices are in Leicester and Derby.

It will generally only communicate with organisations contracted with. The majority of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations will have no direct contact with the Skills Funding Agency and so it will be important that Enable provides an effective voice for the sector.

Many of Enable's key contacts at the LSC have transferred to the Skills Funding Agency, with others transferring to the other relevant agencies.

At national level, David Hughes is the national Director of Provider Services and Verity Bullough the national Director of Employer Services. Christine Hibbard will be the regional VCS lead at the Skills Funding Agency.

There will be a nominated lead for specific geographical areas. Di Pudney will lead on Nottinghamshire. Di was formally at Lincolnshire LSC.

National Apprenticeship Service

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is a division of the Skills Funding Agency. Its role is to increase the number of Apprenticeships and provide a responsive service for both employers and learners.

We have established links with NAS and are discussing extending Enable's regional VCS Adult Apprenticeship programme and the development of Apprenticeships for young people 16-19 within VCS employers.

Young People's Learning Agency

The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) is a Non-Departmental Public Body supported by the Department for Education (formerly known as the Department for Children, Schools and Families). It will oversee Local Authorities in their new role of commissioning education and training for all 16-19 year old learners.

We have a positive relationship with a number of people within this new agency locally as well as at national level where Cheryl Turner has transferred from the LSC to champion the VCS within the YPLA.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Futures

In Nottinghamshire, the two Authorities have formed a joint venture company to manage the commissioning of 16-19 learning. Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Futures has a Board drawn from members and officers of the two councils. Connexions has become a division of Futures with Jean Pardoe becoming the Chief Executive of Futures.

14-19 Strategic Partnerships

14-19 Strategic Partnerships set the local funding priorities, within a national framework, that will influence Local Authority commissioning. Enable is represented on both the City and County 14-19 Strategic Partnership Boards.

Regional Planning Groups

Regional Planning Groups, consisting of the lead officer in each Local Authority, will ensure national priorities and regional needs are supported within Local Authority commissioning plans. Enable will represent the VCS on the Reference Group that will advise the Planning Group.

We attended a national event facilitated by the YPLA and DCSF for VCS organisations that represent the sector on 14-19 learning in their area. The purpose was to look at how the VCS can engage with the 14-19 agenda and in particular with 14-19 Strategic Partnerships. Enable may need to do better but is clearly ahead of others in this area and we were highlighted as an example of good practice, to be published in a DCSF guide on engaging the VCS.

Following the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration, funding for skills and regeneration is being re-routed from away from sub-regional partnerships to local authorities. This led to the closure of the Alliance SSP and GNP will close this year. The activities undertaken by the Alliance have transferred to the County Council. How the skills activities delivered by GNP, including the officer support for the Skills Board, will be taken forward has yet to be determined.

Regional Skills Strategy

EMDA now has responsibility for publishing a Regional Skills Strategy. This will influence what the Skills Funding Agency funds and should require EMDA to give greater consideration to the needs within deprived communities and those furthest from the labour market rather than just high level skills and the needs of employers within specific sectors.

We have had a meeting with Sally Bassett who is leading on the Regional Skills Strategy to establish how we can feed into the plan.

Regional Employment and Skills Partnership

The Regional Employment and Skills Partnership (esp) is being disbanded. Its sub-group the Integrated Employment and Skills Co-ordination Group, which Enable is represented on, is being reviewed in light of a change of Regional Director at JCP and the other different structural changes. Karen Foulds has moved to the JCP national office and Keith Burn will act as temporary Regional Director.

Nottinghamshire Employment and Skills Board

Locally, the former separate Employment Skills Boards for the Alliance area and Greater Nottingham are now firmly established as a single Nottinghamshire Employment and Skills Board. Ambitious Employment and Skills Boards are being given increasing influence over the design of DWP national programmes. Enable remains a member of the Employment and Skills Board.

~~Nottingham City Council has created a City employment, skills and anti-poverty group called Working Nottingham. Enable supply one of 3 VCS on this group. Working Nottingham's Plan is currently being debated.~~

Nottinghamshire County Council has restructured their economic development partnership, discontinuing the Economic Development and Enterprise Partnership and creating a higher level Economic Development Partnership Board with a broader remit. Enable has been asked to represent the VCS on this new Board.

In addition the County's Head of Economic Regeneration Caroline Agnew has taken a temporary promotion with the County and Matt Lockley, who we have worked closely with on the Future Jobs Fund and other matters, will replace Caroline.

Clearly it is a period of significant change with regard to structures and personnel. We feel Enable has made a positive start in engaging with the new structures and key officers. We also remain involved with a range of existing groups including: the employment and skills groups in Ashfield, Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw; the City NEET reduction group; the Public Service Compact Steering Group and Workforce Development Group in Nottinghamshire; the Nottinghamshire Loves Learning Informal Learning Group, the County Foundation Learning Strategy Group and the Regional Skills for Life CPD Partnership.

In the new external environment where local VCS organisations are in danger of becoming further disconnected from the decision making and funding, we need to ensure we improve our information and consultation processes so we can ensure the sector has an effective voice and access to funding.