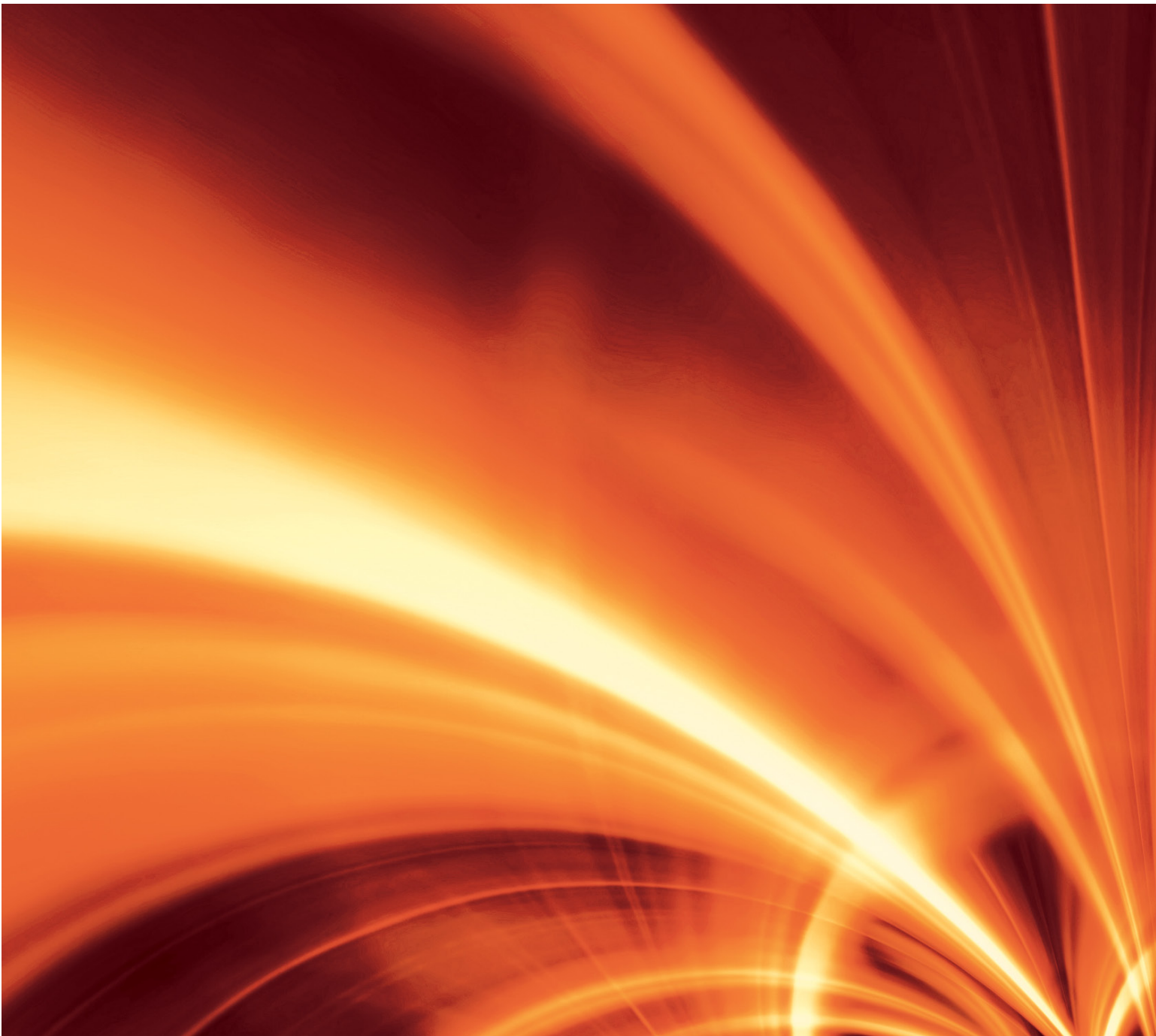


An evaluation of LSIS provider-led collaborative development projects on Getting People into Work and Apprenticeships



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1. Executive summary

This executive summary reports on an evaluation of LSIS provider-led collaborative development projects on 'Getting People into Work' and 'Apprenticeships'. The development projects ran from November 2011 to July 2012 and the evaluation took place between July and December 2012. Each project was coordinated by a lead provider, who recruited partner providers to work together to achieve the project objectives. They were supported by an LSIS Associate, who provided ongoing advice on project plans and their implementation¹.

Key findings

The development projects achieved a significant amount within a relatively short timescale. Most continued to their expected end date and resulted in useful outcomes. Some exceeded the expected outcomes and led to plans for substantial change or improvement to provision.

There is evidence of early impact on provision both in terms of organisational policies and structures, such as establishing new posts and new contracts of employment to secure flexibility and 52-week year working. However, some of this change is planned, rather than in place and new provision and processes will need time to bed down.

Providers learnt a great deal about funding provision for the unemployed, a new client group for many of them, and the importance of making their provision more relevant to the needs of people trying to get into work. The research into and exchange of information about the qualifications and units of qualifications that were available and would be appropriate for people seeking work has led to shorter, more work-related programmes being developed.

Many of the providers were concerned about how they could work better with other bodies, such as Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the Skills Funding Agency, which have become increasingly important in the development of programmes for the unemployed. The projects improved the providers' relationship management and understanding of the importance of liaising with JCP staff and other stakeholders when providing support for the unemployed.

Many projects report attitudinal change and increased confidence among staff, especially in meeting the needs of new client groups. Providers report that the importance of work with the unemployed has increased since the projects first began.

The Apprenticeship projects led to significant changes – extending the range of frameworks on offer, updating content and changing processes. Some providers shifted the focus of quality improvement processes to ensure that they reflect learner/employer perspective of quality.

Some partners are continuing to work together, either in LSIS Peer Review and Development (PRD) groups and/or in new, funded project activity.

¹ For details of the project participants see the full project reports on the [LSIS Excellence Gateway](#).

Conclusions

The development projects were based on a concept that providers benefit from exploring a theme collaboratively with other providers. The evaluation suggests that many partner providers gained benefits that were similar to their project leads.

Partnership working has also resulted in 'high gearing', where the outputs are greater than if providers worked alone. Sharing information and ideas accelerated project participants' knowledge about what works and, in some cases, developed the specialist skills and knowledge needed to update provision.

The importance of clear criteria for selecting partners and consideration of the role they may play was apparent. Some projects made substantial gains with a small number of partners whereas others needed a larger group to review and test materials or processes. Complementary activity, where partners play to their strengths, is likely to result in better outcomes achieved more quickly.

Groups with a strong common purpose and perceived mutual benefits from joint working, or who have an urgent business need requiring collaboration, are more likely to continue. However, despite being seen as beneficial sustaining working relationships without funding is becoming increasingly difficult. Webinars and other electronic means of communication could take the place of face-to-face meetings but may limit the extent of the discussion and sharing of practice that has been such a strong factor in the success of these development projects.

Although there were distinctive strands for the projects concerned with either Apprenticeships or Getting People into Work, there are considerable similarities in the issues raised. The learners in each context require support along a continuum of needs – for getting into work on the one hand and learning successfully at work on the other. Much of what was learnt from the effective practice models has a wider impact than just the pre-employment programmes, such as how employer engagement sits within the college or provider organisation.

The LSIS funding was crucially important to most lead providers. Without it the projects would not have happened or would have made less progress.

There was general approval of LSIS procedures for the projects. Many participants commented adversely on the delay between approval and project launch and the short timescale for running the projects, but the project extension contributed to better outcomes.

LSIS Associates played a very important role in the projects. They helped participants to articulate their vision and put the project objectives into action. Their specialist expertise and knowledge was greatly valued by the project leads.

2. Introduction

In November 2011 LSIS commissioned 18 development projects on ‘Getting People into Work’ and ‘Apprenticeships’. Each project had a lead provider, who recruited partner providers to work together to achieve the project objectives and was supported by an LSIS Associate, who provided ongoing advice on project plans and their implementation².

The projects ran from November 2011 to July 2012 in two phases: Phase One was between November 2011 to March 2012 and Phase Two was between April and July 2012 with additional funding. Two projects ended in March 2012 but the other 16 projects completed their funded activity at the end of July 2012.

This report summarises the findings, draws conclusions and outlines issues from an evaluation of the development projects commissioned by LSIS and was conducted between July and December 2012. Only the projects that completed both Phase One and Two were included in the evaluation.

3. Context and scope of the projects

Each strand of the projects focussed on different areas of development:

- The ‘Apprenticeships’ projects looked at improving quality systems, developing new units, trialling a new framework and developing and testing learning and support materials. Some projects looked at introducing delivery of Higher Apprenticeships or Access to Apprenticeships. Others looked at emerging or sustainable technologies and how these could be introduced into the frameworks. Many produced, or improved, guides, frameworks and tools.
- ‘Getting People into Work’ projects looked at how providers could develop and improve provision and support to help people to get into work and sustainable employment. In many cases they were developing provision from scratch or from very limited provision. This is a complicated area of work requiring flexibility and collaborative working with a range of other bodies, notably Jobcentre Plus (JCP), and employers as well as recording outcomes for learners in relation to work and continuation in employment. This taxed existing management information systems (MIS) which meant that many projects concentrated on setting-up and managing new systems and relationships, as well as considering what provision might be appropriate for a new client group.

Some projects set out with large-scale aims that needed to be modified; others had more modest aims from the outset. Some had a few partners, around four to six, while others had up to 20 partners in Phase Two when the testing of what had been developed often took place.

²For details of the project participants see the full project reports on the [LSIS Excellence Gateway](#).

Overview of the projects

The Apprenticeship projects

- The Boston partnership drew together two colleges and four work-based learning (WBL) providers to promote Apprenticeship progression opportunities from Access to Apprenticeships through to Higher Apprenticeships. They produced marketing materials and extended the availability of Higher Apprenticeships at the partner colleges.
- The Careers Exchange partnership consisted of seven WBL providers that produced resources and workbooks to deliver the new level three Managing Volunteers Apprenticeship framework and trialled the framework with apprentices.
- In the Hartlepool College partnership, six colleges active in the low carbon arena focussed on enhancing continuing professional development (CPD) to improve the quality of teaching and learning and include sustainability in the content and delivery of Construction and the Built Environment Apprenticeship frameworks.
- The KEITS Ltd partnership worked on developing understanding of opportunities available to maximise funding and progression into and through Apprenticeships. Twelve partners joined the project in Phase Two, which focussed on providing feedback to Apprenticeship applicants. Tools for screening, assessment and giving feedback to prospective apprentices were produced.
- The Newham College partnership brought together the Institute of Nanotechnology, SEMTA, Construction Skills, EUskills, Proskills, Cogent, Edexcel, Bedford College and the College of North West London. They conducted a feasibility study into developing an Apprenticeship framework, or individual units, in nanoscience and nanotechnology and subsequently developed a generic Nanotechnology unit for existing frameworks.
- The Prevista partnership involved four WBL providers and a college working together to improve the quality of their Apprenticeship provision. They tested new ways of working, including introducing the role of Assessor Champion, devised a well-being questionnaire to support learner retention and learner-formulated job descriptions and created a guide for the innovations tested.
- The Strobe partnership addressed barriers to the engagement of rural micro businesses in Apprenticeships. They commissioned a Sales Training Workshop for the partners led by an external trainer with expertise in working with micro businesses and produced a toolkit for all employer-facing staff across the county.
- The West Yorkshire Learning Providers (WYLP) partnership had 13 partners – nine of whom were subcontractors to WYLP. They reviewed their Apprenticeship delivery and developed new resources, adding more learner support and making changes to delivery to ensure consistently high quality of service in all provision for learners.

Getting People into Work projects

- The ACER partnership involved seven colleges and an adult education (AE) provider examining the extent to which programmes for unemployed learners lead to progression to sustainable employment, further education or training. They produced a Provider Framework to enable providers to self-assess their level of development against effective practice in working with unemployed learners. They also collected impact measures and data from all participating providers.
- The Bournville College Partnership involved four colleges, two WBL providers and, for Phase One only, an AE provider. They improved the administrative infrastructure for employability programmes by producing an ‘in-work’ assessment tool; adapting the ‘performance pound’ tool (software to assess learners’ employability at the start and end of their course and calculate a value-added score) and developing and implementing a client-tracking database.
- The Derby College partnership included nine providers who looked at the model of provision at ‘Employment World @ Derby College’. This involved partnerships with employers and JCP and aimed to equip JCP claimants with the skills required to re-join the workforce. They held workshops to share the principles of the model with presentations from guest speakers, such as JCP Employer Partnership Managers and NCFE, an awarding organisation.
- The Knowsley Community College partnership included four colleges and a WBL provider. They developed a pathway for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to progress into Access to Apprenticeship or Apprenticeship programmes.
- The Milton Keynes College partnership involved six colleges and an AE provider. The project undertook research into the use of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) policy for a 2.5% per cent Job Outcome Incentive Payment scheme (now Job Outcome Achievement Payments). It found that the funding prompted colleges to focus on job outcomes and mechanisms to track learner destinations.
- The New College Swindon partnership included four colleges and three WBL providers. The project explored different types of job-search systems to select ones best suited to their learners and local employers. As a result of the work, two of the partners plan to set up a joint Job Club; one partner has purchased software to support learners to find work; and another will improve their internal processes to support employer engagement.
- The Petroc partnership included six colleges and a WBL provider. They designed and tested approaches to make the curriculum offer to NEET 16–24 year olds more stimulating and motivational.
- The Remploy partnership included three colleges, a WBL provider and Remploy, a supported employment provider. They worked together to generate positive employment outcomes for young people with disabilities in Yorkshire and Humberside and developed provision leading to qualifications, Apprenticeships and/or employment.

4. Aims and method of evaluation

The evaluation of the projects aimed to:

- capture the overall impact of each project
- identify the extent to which project involvement improved the knowledge and skills of provider staff involved in relation to the project topic
- assess the extent to which project activity led to changes in the practice of the project lead and other providers involved
- identify what value and benefits the project lead organisation and other providers attribute to their involvement in the project
- gain feedback from projects on LSIS arrangements for supporting the project
- identify the effects of the projects on partnership working between providers and on relationships with non-provider partners and stakeholders.

A mix of research methods was used, including:

- desk research of available information and outputs from the projects such as project plans, reports and draft materials and tools
- 11 structured telephone interviews with the LSIS Associates were undertaken in order to get their views on the impact and progress of the projects and identify examples of effective practice
- 16 structured telephone interviews with project leads were undertaken, initially to elicit more detailed information on the projects. As a result of this a further seven interviews with project participants took place in December 2012 on how the work of the project was being implemented
- two email surveys took place. The first was conducted between August and September 2012, seeking the views of the partner providers and the second, conducted in November 2012 with project leads, discussed any further progress made since the end of the project funding.

5. Findings

Impact on provision

At the time of evaluation most of the project participants were still preparing to implement outcomes from the projects but there were already many examples of early impact and some firm plans for change.

Enhanced Apprenticeship provision

Several of the providers involved in the Apprenticeship projects have begun to implement changes to frameworks or extend the range of Apprenticeships on offer.

The challenge for partners in the Boston College project was to prove the value of Higher Apprenticeships and improve perceptions of them in schools and among learners. Boston College itself now has an HE Centre and will be marketing Higher Apprenticeships. Grantham College has expanded its provision of Higher Apprenticeships from one framework to a further three curriculum areas. The project has produced promotional materials to raise awareness and all providers in Lincolnshire will be using them. Potential candidates will be asked where they found out about the Apprenticeships so that the impact of the materials can be assessed in the longer term.

ATL Yorkshire Ltd, one of the WYLP partners, has changed aspects of their childcare programmes, adding new resources, increasing learner support and making changes to how learning is delivered.

The Careers Exchange partnership developed materials to support the delivery of the Managing Volunteers Apprenticeship framework. The framework is likely to be useful to managers of volunteers in a range of contexts and the employers consulted said it could influence how they identify and use volunteers. Rathbone and The Learning Community, both partners of the Careers Exchange project, are delivering the Managing Volunteers Apprenticeship. The partners are continuing to receive feedback on the framework and associated materials and are taking part in standardisation meetings.

The Hartlepool College and Newham College projects looked at the implications of new technology and the skills required to apply this in the workplace. They both introduced up-to-date practice and enhancements to Apprenticeship programmes.

The generic nanotechnology unit developed by the Newham College Partnership is now with the awarding organisation Edexcel and going through the validation process prior to being available on the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF). Lack of awareness of the implications of nanotechnology, especially in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), means that demand from industry is not yet widespread but the unit will be embedded in college provision, probably in the science and technology curriculum. Specialist units

for STEM subjects that will include nanotechnology are also being developed. Students studying science at university need to be aware of nanotechnology and so the theory and some of the practical applications will be added to the 16-19 curriculum.

The Hartlepool College Partnership has developed retrofit provision (the addition of new features or technology to older systems). This is included in some learning programmes and is also attracting interest from firms keen to update their staff.

Although the Remploy project was concerned with Getting People into Work it established routes into Apprenticeships for people with disabilities and learning difficulties providing WorkSkills qualifications for approximately 280 employees at its branches. This work is also widening participation and reaching people who have been disengaged from education and training. Learners who have had training and achieved qualifications are more attractive to employers and more able to move to an Apprenticeship framework.

New provision for the unemployed

Initially, some of the project participants did not know how to get involved in programmes such as Job Clubs, Work Clubs, Enterprise Clubs and/or sector-based work academies or how to get the extra funds available to run them. Many providers have subsequently obtained funding to run these programmes and report good qualifications outcomes, with some learners progressing into work placements or jobs.

The Getting People into Work projects developed new provision to support unemployed learners or extended Access to Apprenticeships, for example:

One of the ACER partners, Southend Adult Community College, is in discussion with another provider about their Adult Enterprise curriculum. This covers all aspects of enterprise theory and leads to a full level two qualification with units that can be funded separately. There may be a sizeable market for this provision and the provider is talking to JCP to identify gaps they could fill.

The Knowsley College project partners developed a significant amount of new provision:

Hopwood Hall College, in partnership with Clear Aims Ltd, gained Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Flexible Support Funding for a 'Get the Gist' programme, which delivered one-week motivational workshops to two cohorts to accelerate young people's progression from benefits and into work.

Lancaster and Morecambe College developed a pre-employment pathway to Apprenticeships for 18–24 year olds referred from the JCP or NEET cohort, alongside their range of pre-employment training for job seekers and their recent Pathway to Customer Service Apprenticeship course for job seekers aged 19–24. The college has Apprenticeship vacancies in this area and these learners can now apply with more skills and knowledge of what is involved.

Southport College ran a short sector-specific programme in partnership with JCP to develop NEET young people's basic skills for possible jobs in this area of work.

Knowsley Community College identified QCF units from technical certificates to aid progression to an Apprenticeship or Access to Apprenticeship (A2A) programme. The Employer Engagement section then used a 'jobs night' that promoted Access to Apprenticeship provision to potential applicants. They identified several young people to further trial the model in negotiation with the Shaw Trust voluntary organisation.

Learning from the projects

Better understanding of funding and more relevant provision

The most frequently mentioned learning outcome from both strands of development projects was better understanding of funding – what and how much is available and what the rules are. Guidance on funding, particularly new provision for the unemployed, can seem complicated and needs to be interpreted in relation to the curriculum offer. The projects developed the participants' ability to make use of the funding streams available and increased their knowledge and skills in developing and delivering relevant content.

A Bournville project partner, City College Coventry, had difficulty measuring distance travelled and making the best use of time with clients on a two-week course. They explored ideas on how to use this opportunity more effectively with partners at a project meeting day.

Derby College partners found it very useful to hear from NCFE about the qualifications that could be offered and from another partner about identifying appropriate and fundable units. They also learned about funding, what qualifications might be appropriate and how to work effectively with JCP.

Learning from partners

Some partners appreciated learning from more experienced providers, particularly when facing the challenge of making provision for adults job-orientated. As the Derby project lead emphasised:

“The future of adult learning is likely to be critically linked with employability and jobs and what colleges offer needs to be aligned with this.”

Some partners discovered new ways of working from their partners:

The KEITS Ltd partners pooled their collective knowledge and experience and learned from each other, sharing tips on paperwork and working with JCP especially dealing with inconsistencies in interpretation and emphasis.

Being small, the Careers Exchange found it useful to work with larger organisations and see their processes and systems.

Building rapport and developing robust working relationships is important. Derby College partners gained a great deal from seeing how good relationships with JCP could lead to new ways of working with employers and supporting people seeking work.

Sainsbury's approached Hertfordshire Regional College (HRC) to provide support for recruitment at a new store. HRC adapted Derby College's Selection Day model and have now run their individualised programme three times. Partnership working between HRC, JCP and Sainsbury's resulted in 41 learners accessing Pre Employment Training during April 2012. 20 of them gained part-time jobs and another gained a full-time team leader role.

Bournville College partners benefitted from sharing ideas:

City College Coventry refined Bournville College's 'Performance pound' tool. It made a significant impact on development and delivery and partners learned from the experience. The project enhanced the status of work with the unemployed in the colleges and the project milestones helped to maintain momentum.

New College Swindon project partners shared ideas on funding, the organisation and composition of internal teams. They shared data to identify employment trends, MIS and customer relationship management (CRM) systems as well as approaches to supporting unemployed learners.

Exchanging information and experience

Sharing information and experiences in meetings, workshops and peer review visits, where provision was observed in action, proved to be a powerful learning tool.

Providers attending Derby College's workshops learned about the initial stages in the learner journey i.e. pre-recruitment, assessment and matching learners' skills and aspirations to the opportunities available. Participants shared information and some took up the offer to see the approach in action at selection days.

The Petroc partnership found peer review visits particularly useful and shared insights with all partners at subsequent meetings, while New College Swindon reviewed Gloucestershire College's discrete unit for work with the unemployed.

Cross-project working was also a useful way to find out about how others work and give different perspectives.

The projects led by Milton Keynes College and New College Swindon held a useful joint conference, while providers who attended the LSIS Celebration event for the projects in July 2012 were also very enthusiastic about what they learned from it.

Comparing provision and performance

Some of the providers undertook a systematic analysis of their provision for the unemployed and compared their performance against a range of measures.

The ACER project produced benchmarking data and reports on specific aspects of partners' operations and delivery. This formed the basis of discussion on what and how they were delivering, the volume of participants, activity and outputs across the project and on the units and awarding organisations being used. Although it was never intended to create a long-term benchmarking group, the exercise was useful in highlighting different ways of working. One of the ACER partners observed:

“The benchmarking activity was useful as it gave a helpful snapshot which enabled comparisons to be made and provided ideas on how to develop our provision.”

The data collected also showed an increasing number of referrals from JCP, an increased number of learners engaged since the start of the project activity and a general upward trend in recording job outcomes.

For one ACER partner, Southend Adult Community College, the project accelerated their growing relationship with JCP, giving them more direction resulting in a significant increase in referrals from JCP. The college has run a sector-based work academy – which was very successful – and plans to run another.

Project management skills

Working in partnership developed skills in collaboration, negotiation and project management:

“The project manager learned a tremendous amount in terms of managing and interacting with partners and stakeholders. He developed presentation skills, learned about other providers and how they work, how to work under pressure and produce reports on time and how to build rapport with individuals.”

Developing resources

The projects developed a wealth of resources and many partners gained experience in developing, reviewing and revising resources and materials.

The Careers Exchange partners developed a range of support materials for the Volunteer Managers' Apprenticeship framework.

Hartlepool College partners developed specialist materials for the sustainable technologies provision.

The ACER project produced a tool to support providers in assessing their provision for the unemployed to be used alongside an LSIS provider resource developed in partnership with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)³.

These resources and many others are all available on the LSIS Excellence Gateway <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/25957>

Improving practice and processes

Better support for employers and prospective Apprenticeship candidates

The KEITS project developed resources to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants for Apprenticeships. At first this development appeared to be relevant to KEITS' partners rather than KEITS, as the company were not directly involved in recruitment, but they have since realised that if they can help employers with recruitment it results in a better fit of trainee for the employer and for the Apprenticeship.

KEITS now supplies employers with a recruitment pack providing advice on a range of procedural issues including compliance with the new Equality Act which small firms find especially useful. As a result more employers are providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants and providers find the feedback tools useful. KEITS now also posts vacancies on their website and offers feedback to unsuccessful applicants who appreciate this service.

One of the Prevista project partners changed their recruitment processes and literature to reflect the language and terminology used by employers. The numbers of employers engaged in Apprenticeships has since increased.

The likely impact of the Strode Partnership project is anticipated as being better quality of Apprenticeship candidates, better briefed employers and better conversion rates from application to participation.

A college in the Strode Partnership that routinely goes to interviews for prospective apprentices with the employer was asked to help in the selection between two candidates. The case made for both was so good that the employer took them both on.

Reflecting the employer and learner perspective of quality

Some projects looked at how to start planning their provision from the perspectives and needs of the learners and employers in relation to potential job contexts.

The partners in both Prevista and Petroc projects engaged in direct dialogue with employers to find out what they thought of the quality of delivery, their expectations of the client group and the implications of this for their provision.

The Strode College partners enhanced their awareness of the employer perspective and developed marketing techniques to secure better employer engagement. The project lead said:

³ AELP/LSIS (2012) [A Guide to Delivering Adult Skills Provision to the Unemployed](#).

“The trainers are aware of the needs of the local economy and micro businesses. The support provided must reflect these needs, often across a range of skill areas.”

The New College Swindon project considered new approaches to employer engagement. They drew on the experience of one of the partners, Gloucestershire College, in their use of a recruitment specialist who provided a different perspective on the kind of support and development that employers and unemployed learners might need. The partners subsequently looked for units that would add value in securing job outcomes for the unemployed.

Such insights help to show what relevant provision might look like and how to match what is offered to the needs of the learner and employer and the job.

Ownership of quality improvement

Some of the projects considered ways of improving the quality of their provision.

The project has had an influence on how Prevista works with its supply chain, reflecting a shift in perception of what quality means and how to improve it. The culture within the Prevista partnership is said to have changed as a result of the project from a bureaucratic compliance approach to focus on what individual trainers and assessors can do in their routine duties to improve the quality of provision.

“The impact of the project, particularly on how Prevista interacts with its supply chain partners has been significant. Over the past six months we have successfully won a number of contracts, which has increased our supply chain partnerships from around 10 to 23. The key changes include: integrating peer sharing/discussion in partnership meetings, establishing and working with partner feedback to a greater extent and routinely using the ‘good to great’ discussion model in performance meetings. In addition, both we and our partners have shown a much greater appetite to involve front-line staff in meetings and development activities – a key lesson we all learnt from piloting the Assessor Champions.”

Similarly, WYLP is building process review into the ongoing self-evaluation processes.

The WYLP project identified the need to concentrate on pre-delivery processes, staffing and delivery. Some of their providers now use a new ‘lean’ approach to quality assurance that strips out waste and duplication and should reduce costs so that resources can be re-directed to improve delivery; there is also a greater focus on monitoring and tracking learners’ progress. The peer review group will continue to work together to improve Apprenticeship delivery.

Tracking and recording job outcomes

The Ofsted report on skills for employment⁴ identified that many providers did not have systems to track job outcomes and record how well jobs were sustained, so many of the projects looked at how to develop such systems. The ACER project lead noted:

“When the project started this area of work was not strategically important but it is now becoming part of mainstream activity. Initially, partners were unsure about how and where to record job outcomes. Lack of clarity about what was required meant they worried about doing the wrong thing and being penalised. They highlighted the need for clearer guidance, pooled their knowledge and liaised with JCP and the Skills Funding Agency to secure better understanding. They now use the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) to track progress into employment.”

Other projects undertook similar developments and, as a result, are now better able to track learners’ progression into work:

Information from the client tracking database now feeds into Bournville College’s MIS to track progression into employment and also informs their self-assessment and Ofsted Inspection.

Enrolment forms at Milton Keynes College now capture data needed for tracking. Their college information services team is aware of the need to track job outcome destination data, although there are still some issues to resolve about what constitutes evidence of work.

New tools for assessment of needs and tracking progress

Many tools for assessing learners’ needs and starting points or tracking their progress were produced during the projects.

Bournville partner, Freshwinds, produced an ‘in-work’ assessment tool and trialled it with clients. The tool enables individuals to address barriers to finding work and to focus on maintaining long-term employment.

City College Coventry adapted and applied Bournville College’s ‘Performance pound’ tool on employer-sponsored pre-employment training programmes and plans to use it on all future employer-led training programmes. The tool consists of software to assess learners against employability criteria at the start and end of their course and calculate a value-added score.

The Prevista partners developed a well-being questionnaire that has been incorporated into a new Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for apprentices. All partners are now using this ILP and it is providing a more holistic view of learners’ development.

⁴ In Skills for Employment: The impact of skills programmes for adults on achieving sustained employment (July 2012 No. 110178) Ofsted observed, ‘Too many providers did not have effective systems in place to track job outcomes and record if, or how well the jobs had been sustained. Only 31 of the 45 providers visited were able to provide data on job outcomes for programmes that had been completed.’ p.7

Providers are also aware that they need to use their CRM systems more effectively to improve employer engagement.

Enhanced support for Getting People into Work

The 'Getting People into Work' projects were largely concerned with developing providers' capacity to meet the needs of (for many) a new client group, whose main aim is gaining sustainable employment. Identifying the support required and ensuring the provision on offer is tailored to needs are key concerns.

Knowsley College partners used an initial assessment tool, 'Self-Smart', to improve motivation and identify barriers to work. The tool is now widely used across Knowsley College with all full-time learners. The College's Progress Coaches are working with a Self-Smart trainer to further improve and extend this approach during 2013.

The Petroc partnership's original objectives to provide a common curriculum for the NEET client group proved not to be viable. It became apparent that it was neither possible nor desirable and that provision must be based on the needs of the individual. The project went on to identify how to improve work with this cohort. A psychologist helped the partners to understand the client group and ways to motivate them. They also learned from peer review visits where they saw different ways of working.

Remploy partners are working together to provide a better service for people with disabilities, improving learners' employability by enabling them to gain relevant vocational qualifications, work placements and employment opportunities. For many learners this is a first qualification and a boost to self-esteem and engagement. The project has increased inclusivity and widened participation for disabled learners.

Colleges are under pressure to deliver job outcomes and Remploy's partners now recognise that supported employment providers can help to secure them. Working with Remploy provides a route to achieving jobs while enabling partners to concentrate on their strengths. Referral to another provider or employer can be a daunting experience for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Remploy has started going into the colleges to ensure that learners are familiar with the Remploy staff and understand what Remploy do to make moving from college into employment or a placement less stressful.

The information shared by the ACER partners on a vast array of programmes encouraged them to consider a much wider range of provision and helped make programmes more cost effective, for example by sharing information on funding streams and by choosing more appropriate units that could be completed in the time available. The project is, therefore, likely to have a longer-term effect on what is on offer and ensure it is more appropriate to the clients' needs.

The Milton Keynes College partnership focus on job outcomes, together with information on the range of QCF units in line with local Labour Market Information (LMI), prompted Milton Keynes College to offer shorter, more job-focussed provision.

Structural changes and mainstreaming new provision

The Apprenticeship projects led providers to re-think how they organised the delivery, support and quality assurance and improvement of their programmes.

WYLP partners have reduced unnecessary bureaucracy and concentrated resources on pre-delivery and delivery, which has implications for the type of staff they need. One of their partner providers has completely re-organised their provision, structure and staffing; another has restructured to improve the correlation between the time spent on recruitment and conversion to learner numbers.

Some providers also noted they must now involve staff who had not been part of the project but whose cooperation would be needed to implement change.

At Boston College, the responsibility for managing and delivering the new Apprenticeship provision is being moved into the curriculum areas which are most relevant to the Apprenticeship framework. This will help to ensure that the provision is seen as a part of the routine curriculum and secure the wholehearted involvement of curriculum specialists.

The Strobe partners have made significant changes to the employer journey. Staff now understand that it is not necessary to address all barriers to participation but to identify and address the most important ones for each client.

The strategic importance and volume of work with the unemployed is said, by some project participants, to have increased since the projects began. It is, therefore, not surprising that the providers have put in place new structures to support the delivery and administration of this work. In some cases responsibility for new provision has been relocated as it grows and becomes part of the mainstream offer.

Walsall College has created a new team and reorganised its employability provision, giving it much higher priority in their strategic planning and curriculum delivery.

A restructure at Knowsley College has moved the curriculum for the unemployed into the employer engagement section, resulting in closer working relationships with employers and access for learners to employment opportunities/vacancy matching.

The Derby College project lead anticipated that the College restructure and move to 52-week working will bring transformational change. Although this is not wholly due to the LSIS project, the influence on the project's partners may be significant. Provision for the unemployed will be embedded across Derby College along with ESOL and Basic Skills. This will mainstream the work and provide more natural progression routes.

The Derby lead observed:

“There are CPD issues as this is unknown territory for many staff. Speed of response is essential. A recent approach to the college from Argos for support to recruit seasonal workers demanded a swift response. The project lead needed to work with the College's

Retail section to develop and deliver this within a matter of days. WBL providers are used to this approach and colleges must develop this capacity.

“Colleges should look at local job opportunities and tailor provision to match demand. Provision will need to be re-jigged and re-thought to meet the demands of JCP. The recent Ofsted report (see footnote 4) provided another incentive to focus on jobs and employability. Outcomes must be captured and referenced in self-assessment reports.”

Similarly the Petroc project coincided with a relocation of their work with the unemployed to the Directorate of Employment with new staff employed on more flexible contracts. Learners are now going on work experience or work shadowing and there is a focus on progression from college – ultimately into an Apprenticeship. However, the project lead observed that although they continue to develop and improve their provision for NEET learners they will need to review the curriculum offer again to ensure it is cost effective and complies with funding regulations.

One of the Petroc partners, Yeovil College, made changes across the college, chunking the curriculum and developing smaller blocks of content and learning so that it became easier to identify learners’ progress and achievement.

Some of the providers now appreciate that college staff need to be located in JCP offices in order to liaise with JCP staff and to maintain a profile so that JCP are aware of the potential opportunities that the colleges can provide. Colleges also understand that they must work with JCP paperwork rather than their own, regardless of the difficulties this might pose in reconciling these systems. However, they reported that the costs of liaison and administration are considerable, especially as securing a cost-effective cohort from these activities is uncertain and the likelihood of clients achieving sustainable job outcomes (on which some funding depends) is often low. They have put in place systems for tracking clients’ sustainable job outcomes but some might not respond to requests for such information.

Sustainability and embedding

There are several aspects to consider under this heading:

- whether the group of providers will continue to work together
- the extent to which development activity will be sustained, either in the individual partner organisations or across the partnership
- how the project outcomes will be embedded in providers’ policy and practice.

Continuation of work with partners

Many of the project partnerships were intending to continue working together and some had firm plans for this. Some will continue either as LSIS Peer Review and Development (PRD) groups or because they have secured funding from another source, although their focus and membership may change.

ACER has recently been successful in an open tender process with LSIS to secure grant funding to develop a community of practice in the East of England that will improve teaching and learning for employability, the delivery of Apprenticeships and skills for businesses. This work will be influenced by this development project.

Remploy has successfully tendered for grant funding from LSIS to pilot workshops that will enable Apprenticeship providers to access the additional support and funding they need to successfully support more disabled people. Some of the same approaches will be used as in the previous work. The project will run three workshops with the aim of getting five colleges to attend each of them in order to consider how they may work collaboratively with Remploy.

New College Swindon and partners have established a PRD Group and successfully applied for LSIS funding to disseminate the good and effective practice identified in the original project. Five of the original partners will meet every four months and organise learning actions between meetings. Representatives from JCP and the economic development departments of the local authorities across the areas covered by the partnership have accepted invitations to sit on and observe the work of the group.

Some of the Derby College partners have formed a PRD group, which will help to sustain the work. Derby College has bid for European Social Fund (ESF) money to develop skills for the unemployed across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

In some regions there is an established culture of partnership working.

The strong networks in the East of England region enabled the KEITS project to engage a lot of providers relatively easily. KEITS has now secured grant funding from LSIS to develop the tools they prepared from the development project into support packs for providers, employers and learners. These are being piloted with three groups of providers. The project lead observed:

“We will continue to involve original partners as they were integral to the initial testing phase of the tools and feel ownership towards their successful development.”

Some project leads were keen to continue with the partnership but were experiencing difficulty in finding the time and resources this would require.

The Careers Exchange’s partners are looking at ways to continue the development, perhaps by extending into the cultural industries and tourism sites. The Careers Exchange, Learning Community and Nice Day continue to work together. Learning Community is now a subcontractor to Rathbone to deliver the Apprenticeships in Managing Volunteers, supported by The Careers Exchange. The other partners still maintain a link but significant staffing changes have greatly reduced the working relationship.

It is important strategically for Prevista to continue with the quality improvement work although it may be more beneficial for each provider to modify the tools produced to suit their individual circumstances. The project lead noted:

“Due to commercial pressures, most of the pilots we tested have run their course or have been modified into more established tools. However, Fit for Sport have continued to develop more collaborative employer relationships and are producing materials to generate interest in the provision jointly with employers, using language that is commonly understood.”

Some projects brought organisations together to achieve specific aims. Once these are realised the group may no longer have a common purpose.

The Strode group will continue to meet for its original purpose – to stimulate awareness of Apprenticeships. A promotional campaign to stimulate take-up by employers has been launched and is reported to be the most successful to date. They have especially benefitted from gaining progression to other provision as well as new business. The group has remained strong, however it was always planned to disband and reconstitute after March 2013 and things learned from the project will be passed on to the new team.

Continuing development activity

Some groups will continue to work together because the issues addressed by the project are still of critical importance to members.

The Boston College partners will continue to meet to promote the Higher Apprenticeships. A high school and an employer have joined the group. The project lead will continue to lead the group while looking for funding to support further development.

The processes developed by the KEITS Ltd project have been mainstreamed to the benefit of all partners. The project lead confirmed the strategic importance of the project; especially given the decrease in budgets. KEITS needs a broad base of provision to accommodate dips in income. Assessors and the business development team need to be more aware of what can be funded in addition to Apprenticeships.

Milton Keynes College will continue to work collaboratively as research into funding is needed as arrangements are changing all the time. The group will continue to share practice:

“We are continuing to develop and respond to the needs of job seekers, working with JCP and the Work Programme, as well as our local labour market. This has been an area of growth with delivery on the QCF-accredited pathway in Milton Keynes College increasing from no units in 2009/10 to 966 in 2010/11 with an 86 per cent success rate.”

New College Swindon continues to work with some partners to explore different ways of supporting the unemployed, such as moving from course-based provision to more personalised solutions. Partners are continuing to develop their processes based on important aspects of delivering robust employability programmes. The partners will

continue to identify models of effective practice to ensure that their pre-employment programmes effectively meet the needs of the unemployed and employers.

In sectors where there is a developing technology it is important for providers to work with partners to keep up with developments.

The Hartlepool College partners are at various stages in embedding the practice developed by the project. Highbury College and Bedford College have embedded their policy and practice in the green agenda across their colleges: in how they are built and operated and in the curriculum. The four northern colleges are all part of the north-east hub for the National Skills Academy for Environmental Technologies and will continue to develop the work. All the partners are making use of the resources developed by the project and have formed lasting relationships.

Some groups will continue to work together because they are contractually linked.

The WYLP group, for example, is based on a relationship between prime and subcontracting organisations. Their work will continue because the lead provider considers it essential to improving quality and, ultimately, to the survival of the business.

The WYLP providers have development plans resulting from the project. There will be an impact report on how these will be embedded into the quality cycle. The LSIS Apprenticeship Improvement and Development tool will be used to assess progress. Improvements have been made to the learner sign-up process and timescale and the organisation's priorities for developing provision and quality improvement have changed. The project lead observed:

“It would be interesting to repeat the process – say April next year. Further issues are likely to have emerged by then, such as delivering Functional Skills.”

Petroc is continuing to work with some partners to share effective practice and ideas on how to meet the requirements of the NEETs study programme and in their ESF NEETS project. The project lead observed:

“The project provided time to look at issues, the range of curriculum on offer and how it could be improved. This engaged all partners and the work will continue. We now understand that there is not a single way of engaging and supporting the client group. There is a need to make the work financially sustainable, to balance the opportunities offered with funding available.”

Embedding the project outcomes within provider organisations

The work of some of the projects has been influential in changing the status or raising the profile of the Apprenticeship or Getting People into Work programmes.

At Boston College the project has raised the profile of Higher Apprenticeships at Boston College and they are now mentioned specifically in strategic plans.

The New College Swindon project accelerated progress in developing appropriate provision for the unemployed.

Bournville College will continue to develop their tracking tool. The development is business-critical to the college and will support their work in this area. The senior manager at the college observed:

“The work of the project reflects one of the central strands of college policy. It was, therefore, important to have a senior manager with responsibility for this area of work involved in the project. The college will continue to work with some of the partners.”

In some cases, the projects have re-designed their provision or put in place new or adapted policies and practice.

Swindon and Wiltshire Colleges are collaborating by sharing learners and New College Swindon is hoping to work with Wiltshire College and Wiltshire Council on provision for NEETs.

The work of the Remploy project is being rolled out beyond the initial partners. There are plans to extend the provision to the North West and discussions are taking place with Knowsley Community College. Remploy now have greater knowledge about how to tap into mainstream funding to continue their work.

At Hartlepool College, the knowledge and skills gained have contributed to the development of a sustainability policy backed by senior managers and the CPD that has taken place, or is planned, will bring college staff up to speed in retrofit practices.

In both the Hartlepool and Newham projects, teachers need to be informed and updated to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to deliver the new provision. Staff from Hartlepool College undertook CPD with the National Renewable Energy Centre (Narec) in September 2012 and there are plans to cascade elements of Narec CPD and LSIS project CPD resources to all staff in the schools of Building Services and Environmental Technologies and Construction and Allied Trades.

Bedford College and the Regional LSIS Sustainability Adviser held a regional Sustainability event in October 2012 and cascaded CPD resources to attendees. Similarly, Newham College gave a presentation on the nanotechnology unit to the London region Association of Colleges, which generated lots of interest.

The next step for the Newham College project is the development of CPD materials to ensure that practitioners understand the concepts and applications of nanotechnology in different contexts. There are wider opportunities in relation to the provision of CPD, perhaps in association with awarding organisations.

However, whether there is a desire to embed work for the unemployed within the providers' routine offer is not yet certain. Many of the providers commented on the additional workload and new ways of working that programmes for getting people back to work require. The programmes also demand greater flexibility and can be expensive to run due to the lack of economies of scale. The projects found that individuals' starting points and support to make them job-ready must be the focus of provision but not all providers are equipped to put this into practice, as one project lead observed:

“Colleges, in particular, can adapt their systems and draw on resources from a wide range of existing provision. However, provision for the unemployed is hard work for not much return and some private providers are going out of business. This work requires a big financial (and time) commitment to chasing and follow-up. There has been a shift in aligning provision to match the demands of developing employability but this is not yet enough.”

Partnership working

One of the central principles of the LSIS development projects is that providers can learn from working collaboratively on a topic both within their own organisation and with partners to share experiences and practice.

In the main, project participants enjoyed working in partnerships and many observed that it was much better to have partners in the project than to work alone:

“The LSIS funded project was worthwhile, especially in providing funding to support peers from different organisations working together.” New College Swindon

“The project was helpful in sharing ideas and development activity with peers. They gained a great deal of information on funding and on doing things differently.” ACER partner

The projects also involved close collaboration with other bodies, such as the National Apprenticeship Service, Jobcentre Plus, Skills Funding Agency, Sector Skills Councils and awarding organisations. Developing robust relationships with them, especially JCP, was very important. Having the stakeholders at the meetings was said to be invaluable and it also helped stakeholders to see all providers together rather than having to set up separate meetings.

Geographical spread and type of provider

The distance between some of the partners initially caused concern but there was communication via telephone and email. Where travel to meetings was an issue project leads compensated by providing notes or individual briefings. The Hartlepool project, for example, consisted of a virtual team which met infrequently because of the broad geographical spread spanning Portsmouth to Northumberland.

It was generally more productive to have both similar types of providers and a range of provider types within a partnership as this enabled like-minded partners to compare practice and

different practice to be shared. It was also useful to have members with different job roles, for example – responsibility for finance as well as curriculum.

The Newham College partnership differed from most of the other projects in its substantial involvement of external agencies. The Newham project lead observed that it was very useful to work with these experts as developing the nanotechnology unit needed specialist input.

Establishing a common purpose

It was often easier to establish effective project plans and activities where all the partners shared a common purpose.

The partners in the Boston College partnership all faced the same challenge in developing the credibility and availability of Higher Apprenticeships. Grantham College shared its experiences of developing Higher Apprenticeships and recruiting young people and employers. There was helpful sharing of experience with the WBL providers.

The Hartlepool College partnership emerged from their involvement in the National Skills Academy for Environmental Technology. The partners based in the north east already met quarterly. Other partners were chosen because of their links with the National Skills Academy for Environmental Technology and their expertise. The director of sustainability at Bedford College had done a significant amount of curriculum development and made changes to the college site, in line with the ‘retrofit’ concept. Highbury’s expertise was also beneficial.

The KEITS Ltd project involved three main partners, each of which led a cluster group during Phase 1. In Phase 2, providers were invited to attend two regional workshops to design new feedback tools. This secured much greater involvement and 18 providers took part in the development and testing of the tools.

Existing or new relationships

Where partners already knew each other it enabled them to work together more comfortably at the outset but new partners offered valuable new perspectives.

Knowsley Community College chose partners from those who had worked with them in the past, although not all those approached agreed to take part.

Boston College’s partners had also previously worked together and were chosen because they knew about Apprenticeships and were offering provision in areas where Higher Level Apprenticeship Frameworks existed.

Some of The Careers Exchange partners had existing relationships from a local learning partnership but others were looking for new partners.

Although none of the Prevista project partners were subcontractors at the time of the project, most had previously worked together.

Nine of the WYLP project partners were subcontractors and the rest were part of the same network and were meeting regularly.

The Remploy project found that having a geographical hub helped it to make rapid progress, especially important given the tight timescales. The project lead observed:

“Despite the difficulties with snow and disruptions to travel at the first workshop, the project made good progress. In fact it was possibly advantageous that only a few people came to the first meeting, as it was then possible to get down to business very quickly. More partners subsequently came on board, but the initial thinking was probably clearer and more focused because the group was small.”

In some cases, the partnerships were not formed until after the project was approved and partners were chosen from providers with whom the lead provider had already worked.

The senior manager from the Bournville College project said that in the main they selected partners they had previously worked with, who were not located so close that commercial sensitivities could get in the way.

In contrast, Derby College’s partners included a mix of colleges and WBL providers drawn from the lead’s local contacts and other networking activity.

The New College Swindon partners all wanted to improve their progression into employment outcomes by developing more robust employer engagement strategies and procedures for tracking learners after completing employability programmes. The partners came together specifically for the project and it was seen as important to include those who were proactive in work with the unemployed.

Balanced contribution

Each of the Prevista partners looked at the internal mechanisms driving the delivery and management of provision and shared insight into previous quality concerns, offering tools and tactics to tackle them. Each partner tested one or two new interventions to monitor and measure increases in the quality of delivery. The project lead observed:

“Working in partnership poses challenges. There are different cultures and getting people to work to the same drumbeat can be difficult and takes time to develop. Prevista, perhaps, had to play more of a part in getting things actioned but it was good to have the discussion and to get ideas from the group.”

The ACER partners conducted research into systems for tracking and reporting to identify benchmarks, develop and implement actions for improvement and prepare and review materials for the toolkit. Consultation on the project aims and agendas for meetings ensured ownership of the project.

Although some of the participants, especially those new to the work, may have got more out of the project, they all benefited from greater clarity about funding and regulations.

In a similar vein, the Hartlepool College project lead observed:

“It is probable that some partners got more out of the project than others. For example, two partners were unable to go to the meeting at Highbury College where it was very useful to see things in action. Although the information from the meeting was shared it was not the same as being there.”

The Petroc project development plan set specific inputs from partners. Criteria for selecting partners resulted in a balance of contributions. The project lead noted:

“The partners had previously worked together and there was a fair degree of trust and respect, which developed further throughout the project. All contributed to the project, although it would probably have been better to have had another WBL provider as this would have enhanced opportunities for exchanging practice on WBL. Partners from WBL will become increasingly useful as outreach work develops.”

Clearly defined roles

Some projects found it difficult to establish how the partners would contribute to the project objectives and to ensure they were not engaged in potentially disparate activities. In some cases, it took time for partners to identify how the sum of their actions contributed to the overall project aims. Sometimes the contributing partners varied and it was difficult to get partners to undertake work outside meetings.

Partners in the Hartlepool College project each had a defined role:

- Bedford College led on the development of CPD for Retrofit
- Hartlepool College led on Skills Champions’ role and Master Class development
- Highbury College led on the development of the Sustainability Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
- Redcar and Cleveland College tested the VLE CPD materials.

The WYLP partners also made specific contributions to the project:

- each partner completed the Apprenticeship Improvement and Development questionnaires with their staff
- the group analysed findings and identified areas for improvement
- project champions were trained to provide support in using the tool
- all partners completed a development plan and impact report from which was drawn the effective practice guide for the project group and the wider sector.

Contributions were inevitably of a different order where partners were new to the area of work. However, more experienced partners were perceived as very generous in providing support and mentorship which may, in turn, have added to the experienced partners' understanding of how to develop and improve provision.

Partners in The Careers Exchange project shared tasks with members working to their strengths and sharing expertise. All had specific milestones on the development plan. The lead provider noted:

“All partners played to their specialisms and contributed to the project accordingly. For example, some knew about schemes of work, another had an overview of the sector and partners new to Apprenticeship reviewed materials. There was a good dialogue between us and no stepping on each other's toes. It worked out nicely. People had busy schedules to manage but made good use of their time.”

Views of partner providers

The projects involved a large number of partners, most of whom were providers although some other bodies also took part. The extent of provider partners' active involvement in the work of the projects varied enormously. In order to assess the extent to which provider partners felt they had benefitted from the projects, a web-based questionnaire seeking their views was emailed to partners whose details were provided by the project leads. Sixty-four partner providers were asked to take part in the survey and 21 responses were received, representing approximately a 33 per cent response rate.

The full results of the survey are shown in Appendix One but the key findings are as follows:

- The partners tended to echo the views of the lead providers and displayed a high level of satisfaction with the project experience.
- Most partners stated that they played an active role throughout the project and the majority thought their project had been extremely or quite useful.
- Two-thirds of respondents said new or improved provision had resulted from the project and nearly half said that stakeholder relationships had been strengthened. Over one-third said there had been a considerable input from stakeholders which is in line with the proportion of projects with considerable stakeholder contributions.
- Seventy-six per cent of respondents said they would sustain the development after the project by continuing to work with partners, which accords with the views of lead providers. However, in contrast relatively few partners said that the development would be sustained by changes in organisational structure (14 per cent) or being embedded in corporate objectives (24 twenty-four per cent).
- Most respondents thought that the project contributed very considerably or to some extent to the knowledge and skills of staff involved. A large majority thought there had been significant joint learning with partners.

- Ideas for doing things differently reflected those reported by lead providers and included:
 - a stronger focus on employability and employment
 - new or improved relationships
 - new or enhanced provision
 - changes to organisational structures and staffing.
- Most respondents thought that learners were seen as the main beneficiaries of the project although over half thought their organisation benefitted most.
- There were contrasting views of the value of the LSIS funding which may reflect the difference in the perception of the value of grants to large and small providers or whether the partners concerned received any LSIS funding from the lead organisation.
- Some respondents suggested that the funding was extremely valuable in that it provided time to reflect and develop provision and gave opportunities for relationship building and for sharing ideas.

Project management, process and support issues

There are several issues to consider in this section:

- overall project processes and management requirements of LSIS
- support provided for the projects by LSIS
- management of the project by the project leads.

LSIS processes

In general, project leads were happy with the LSIS requirements for project application with some commenting that the processes were generally more appropriate and lighter touch than other bodies with whom they had worked.

“The project application process was very straightforward. The absence of a complicated form enabled the specific objectives to be stated and explained. It was also good that the results of the application were announced in the original timescale.”

Most were also content with the reporting requirements, although some felt too many reports were required in too short a time:

“The reporting schedule was perhaps a bit top-heavy for the scale of the project – especially in asking for evidence of impact at the early stages of the project.”

Timescales

Many of those interviewed commented on the time lag between submitting the application and finally getting the project started. Some also commented on the uncertainty of getting the extension funding for Phase Two from April to July 2012– which could have resulted in a lack of momentum – and the extra bureaucracy that this had entailed:

“The gap between announcement of successful projects and start-up was unhelpful.”

“The extension to the project enabled the work to be continued but the gap while waiting for confirmation was a bit of a problem.”

However, the extension period was very important, enabling the projects to move beyond the research and ideas stage and on to the application of development.

“The extension period helped a great deal as it enabled providers to re-assess the materials and make changes.”

“The extension also helped – without this the timescale would have been too short.”

Changes to original aims

Many projects made changes to their original aims. Both providers and Associates noted that this was beneficial because it secured more achievable and relevant outcomes. However, the application process could perhaps advise that projects leading to incremental change are as valid (and probably more achievable) as those with more ambitious stated aims, especially given available timescales and resources. This might ensure fewer changes to aims and objectives once projects have begun.

“The project aims were perhaps too broad at the outset but this was addressed in the early stages. It was useful to be able to adapt the aims to be more achievable.”

“The ability to be flexible in changing project focus helped enormously in securing outcomes. A rigid approach would, perhaps, not have helped as much.”

Support from LSIS Associates

Many of the lead providers were grateful for the support of the LSIS Associates, especially in providing the broader picture in terms of the development agenda and the need for change, setting and meeting deadlines, acting as a critical friend and, in some cases, providing specialist expertise.

“The Associate had significant experience of delivering Apprenticeships and this was very helpful in making judgements about the materials and lesson plans and in understanding how awarding organisations worked.”

“There was lots of support from the LSIS Associate – to keep the project on track, structuring thinking about options, providing a wider view and information from other reports etc.”

In many cases, the strong partnership between the lead provider and the Associate greatly enhanced the smooth running of the projects.

Associates also provided additional project management support when, for example, project leads became ill, were unavailable due to leave commitments, or were having difficulties managing the project.

Project funding

The financial support from LSIS was thought to be a critical factor by the LSIS Associates and most of the project leads, especially in the initial stages of the projects when the longer-term benefits might not have been apparent to lead providers and, possibly, even less apparent to partners.

“It is unlikely that the partners would have been able to release staff to do the work without the LSIS funding.”

“The funding from LSIS provided the impetus for the work – it probably would not have taken place without pump-priming funds. The development will now continue.”

“Not sure if partners would have come to four meetings without funding.”

“The funding from LSIS made a difference and the participants would not have found the time to do the work without it. Some money was disbursed to partners and there was an oral agreement but not a written contract.”

For some providers the funding was useful but increasingly unimportant once the project and partnership was established.

“Some of the funding was disbursed to the partners for travel and the production of case studies. But I think the partners would have done the work without funding because of the benefits they gained in terms of getting learners and access to funding streams.”

“Funding helped to pay for partners’ time and travel to meetings. This was a good selling point initially but partners have not all invoiced for the funds they are due.”

But a few providers were concerned that the level of funding was too low:

“It was helpful to have a consultant, but longer time and a more realistic budget would have helped the project to progress further. A small amount of the budget was disbursed to partners but in the main they were involved because they wanted to be rather than because of the funding.”

“The funding helped to cover some costs but did not fully cover the cost of the time.”

Although some of the development may have occurred without a formal, funded project it would have lacked the coherence and comprehensiveness of activity that came from articulating defined aims and expected outcomes.

“The project provided a structure and helped to prevent the work from drifting.”

“Project leads were busy and running many other projects concurrently. They needed help to clarify their objectives and understand how to organise and execute the projects.” (LSIS Associate)

“The development would not have happened without the project. The project has brought benefits to all the partners, to learners and to employers. Processes are more streamlined and in-line with each other, reducing duplication of effort. There are more employment opportunities and more young people have access to them.”

Not all projects disbursed funds to partners. One project lead noted that distributing funds to partners might have secured greater commitment to additional work but the amounts would have been small and would have reduced the funds available for project management.

Project management

In some projects, the project lead had considerable experience of project management. One partner observed that the project lead knew when to guide and lead and when to step back.

“It is useful to have support for peer working and, importantly, to encourage taking responsibility for the project activities. This also helped to ensure that participants got more out of the project.”

Initially, however, some of the project leads were not clear that they should have involved partners in the development planning process and some had little experience in development planning or project management.

“Managing an LSIS project was a new experience. It would have been helpful to have had the templates and guidance on the need for partners to contribute to development plans from the outset.”

“The project took a while to get going but got up to full steam once the ‘penny had dropped’ and it was apparent that all would benefit from the work. The project lead had a strong vision for the project but found it hard to articulate this at first.”

There are particular issues in managing partners from different organisations:

“Most of the partners were very proactive but it was sometimes difficult to get full attendance at meetings and to keep in contact in between. There were many meetings over a short period of time”.

One project lead observed that if all their original partners had continued their involvement in the project it would have been quite difficult to manage; it was easier to work with fewer partners. Meetings were arranged but some partners would send apologies late in the day.

In many cases each partner's activities were specified in the Development Plan:

“Partners needed to understand the commitment required to be part of the project and that they would have to do ‘homework’ as well as attend meetings.”

Several of those interviewed thought it had been useful to have a formal contract for partners, which clearly described their contribution and attached a small payment to delivery. Looser arrangements were thought, by some, to signify that partners' contributions were less important.

“There was a pause at the beginning of the project for determining what each partner would do and the formal arrangements for project management.”

6. Conclusions

Making a difference

The projects achieved a significant amount within a relatively short timescale. Most continued to their expected end-point and all achieved useful outcomes, in some cases exceeding initial expectations. Project participants learnt a great deal about funding and relationship management and work in new areas of provision. Some developed specialist skills and knowledge that will be useful in modernising the curriculum and updating provision. There is extensive evidence of early impact on provision, policies, structures and job roles, although some of this is planned rather than fully in place.

The Apprenticeship projects led to significant changes – extending the range of frameworks on offer, updating content and changing processes to ensure they reflect learner and employer perspectives on what constitutes high-quality provision.

The Getting People into Work projects helped many providers to develop their provision for the unemployed and tackle the real problems involved in implementing new programmes with often complex funding and relationship issues.

Developing provision for new client groups

There are particular needs relating to setting up provision to support people to get back into work. Many 'Getting People into Work' projects, therefore, focused on administrative processes and now report increased confidence in meeting the needs of new client groups.

Employers and people looking for work should begin to benefit from the establishment of more support and more relevant provision developed as a result of the projects. However, some project participants observed that provision for the unemployed is challenging for them and provides limited financial return. Some programmes are difficult to run cost effectively as it is not possible to predict the range of needs that must be met in a relatively short time. A pool of qualified trainers and assessors is required across a wide range of subject areas.

Although colleges can adapt their systems and draw on resources from a broad range of existing provision, smaller providers may not be able to offer this support from within their available resources. While work with the unemployed was seen by some project participants to be increasing in strategic importance, some colleges and providers may be concerned that it is a high-risk activity. Taking part in development activity prior to the full implementation of new programmes could enable providers to understand the issues, consider the options available and assess the risks of offering this provision.

Consolidating learning across both project strands

Both project strands were concerned with the learner and employer journey and there were similarities in the issues identified including:

- liaising with external stakeholders
- a focus on progression into employment
- awareness of LMI and specific skills required for employment
- flexibility in delivery, often to meet needs on a 24/7 basis
- contextualised learning in a work-based context
- a partnership approach between employers, learners and providers.

However, development needs associated with each strand differed, perhaps due to the extent of the maturity of the provision concerned:

- Getting People into Work projects concentrated on the 'front end' of employability, which involved motivating learners to actively seek work, preparing them for taking a job- perhaps by coaching or structured work experience, providing careers guidance and job matching. This was a new area of work for many providers.
- Apprenticeship programmes are relatively well embedded but still have areas requiring development, such as extending and enhancing Apprenticeship programmes, improving the quality of the service offered to learners and employers and securing better progression.

All the issues addressed by the projects are important along a continuum of learning and support for people either trying to get into work or to learn successfully at work. Joined-up development in projects and in the way that both strands of provision are implemented in colleges and WBL organisations would better support learners along this continuum. Although links were encouraged between individual projects within each strand, greater consolidation of learning from the projects could have been achieved by more crossover activity across the different strands of development. However, this would need to be carefully positioned within the lifespan of the projects to ensure that there is something concrete to share or a common issue to consider.

Partnership working

The LSIS development projects are based on the concept that providers benefit from exploring a concept collaboratively with other providers. Partnership working appears to have resulted in 'high gearing', where the outputs have been considerably greater than if providers had worked alone. Complementary activity, where partners play to their strengths, results in better outcomes achieved more quickly.

Sharing information and ideas accelerated the development process. Providers also gained a great deal from observing other providers' practice, especially when reinforced by follow-up discussion and debate. Many of those interviewed commented enthusiastically on the LSIS Celebration event held in July 2012 to share the experiences across all the projects.

"The celebration event in Birmingham was extremely valuable and opened eyes to the variety of projects going on. It was good for making contacts and I will contact or visit some of the people I met."

Events such as this, which bring together people who have been working on related project activity, helps to disseminate outcomes and extend insights across different themes.

A wealth of information and materials has resulted from the projects and is now available on the Excellence Gateway at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/25957> This could be extremely helpful to other providers interested in the outcomes of the projects and in disseminating the messages from the work across their organisations.

The results of the survey of partners suggest that many of them acquired similar benefits to the project lead, confirming that the approach of collaborative project funding channelled through one provider was effective. Most partners said they played an active role throughout the project and thought that the projects were useful to their organisations. The impact of the project in partner organisations may be less significant where partners were not as actively engaged, especially in the initial planning stage.

Selecting partners

It is important that partners are selected on the basis of clear criteria, with some understanding of the role they will play in the development activity. Sharing tasks and taking joint accountability for project outcomes needs careful planning and clear and agreed responsibilities for tasks to secure group and individual commitment, responsibility and accountability.

The number of partners involved does not necessarily relate to the volume of project activity or outputs. Some projects made substantial gains or developed many resources with only a few partners. The range and skills of partners also need to be appropriate to the task. For example, reviewing and testing materials may benefit from a larger project group, whereas detailed planning of a process or curriculum may best be done by a smaller group. A mix of type of providers is important to provide a range of learning contexts but there needs to be some common interest to ensure they can gain from working together.

Managing collaborative activity among large numbers of partners can be difficult, especially with newly formed groups. It is likely to be easier where there is an existing relationship with an established culture of collaboration or where there are contractual arrangements in place, such as between prime and sub-contractors.

There can be difficulties in arranging meetings between more geographically dispersed providers but these can be overcome by advance planning and use of electronic communications. Working on a national basis should not be ruled out if it brings together partners with the right expertise.

Sustaining development

Project groups that continue to gain mutual benefit from joint working and have a strong common purpose, or where the need to complete or continue the work is an urgent business imperative, are more likely to keep going. Some groups become unnecessary once the project work is completed while others continue because the partners are involved in similar projects with funding.

Although partnership working was seen to be beneficial by most of the people consulted throughout the evaluation, sustaining the working relationships without funding is said to be increasingly difficult. Budgetary constraints and increased staff workloads now mean it is harder to get people to commit to sustained involvement in development activity. Release is more difficult, especially for smaller WBL providers and face-to-face meetings are hard to arrange. Webinars and other electronic means of communication are sometimes favoured but may limit the extent of the discussion and sharing of practice that has been such a strong factor in the success of these development projects.

Most of the providers reported some implementation of the ideas and outputs resulting from the project. However, extending the awareness of what needs to change and putting this in place across an organisation requires strong management support and internal dissemination. Buy-in from senior management is crucial and should be explicit in the rationale for involvement in development work. The original applications for project funding required senior manager approval for the lead provider. There may have been less explicit commitment from senior managers in the partner provider organisations. The direction of project activity and the implications of implementing the findings and outputs should be in line with the objectives of the organisations concerned. Although commitment may be apparent at the start of development activity, ongoing communication between project participants and their senior managers is essential to ensure it will be put in place when the project ends.

Project management, process and support

There was general approval of LSIS procedures for application, project management and reporting although many participants commented on the initial delay between approval and project launch and the initial short project timescale. Start-up of projects is often fraught with difficulties and can take longer than anticipated; similarly, useful outcomes generally take time to develop. It was interesting to note that the progress of the projects accelerated during Phase

Two, possibly partly because the project teams had “bedded down.” It was also apparent at that time that some of the original aims were not either realistically achievable or as important as they had at first seemed. Project participants valued the flexibility of the LSIS approach in enabling changes to plans to be made in the light of experience and findings from the initial phase of the projects.

The funding from LSIS was crucially important to most of the lead providers and small payments for partners were useful in securing their active involvement, particularly in the early stages of the project.

LSIS Associates played an important role in the projects, particularly in helping project leads to articulate their vision and put the project objectives into action. Their specialist expertise, knowledge and project management skills were also invaluable in helping the project leads to manage the projects effectively and secure good outputs in the short time available.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the lead providers and their partners in these projects and the LSIS Associates who worked with them for their support and the valuable insights into the challenges and rewards of taking part in the LSIS provider-led development projects.

Appendix One Survey of project partners

An electronic questionnaire was circulated to all partners whose details were given by the lead providers. Sixty-four providers were asked to take part in the survey and 21 responses were received, representing approximately a 33 per cent response rate.

The responses to the survey questions are shown below:

1. How would you describe your role in the LSIS project?

	Response %	Response count
Played an active role throughout	70.0%	14
Contributed ideas to discussion	55.0%	11
Attended meetings	65.0%	13
Provided specific input	40.0%	8

Most partners stated that they played an active role throughout the project, although the next most frequently described role was attending meetings. The responses suggest an active role was played by the providers responding to the survey.

2. How useful was the project to your organisation?

Extremely useful	52.4%	11
Of some use	47.6%	10
Not very	0%	0

Partners' views on the projects' usefulness to the organisation are fairly evenly balanced. This may reflect different levels of involvement in the project and also that some activity was preparatory and had not yet been implemented.

3. What impact has there been to date on your organisation and provision?

Significant shift in culture	14.3%	3
Stronger stakeholder relationships	42.9%	9
Measurable improvement in performance	9.5%	2
New or improved provision	66.7%	14
Increased staff capacity	9.5%	2
Better cooperation across the organisation	38.1%	8

The most frequently mentioned answer to this question is in line with other evidence from interviews in that new or improved provision appears to be the most common outcome of the projects to date. As only half the projects were concerned with 'Getting People into Work', where developing relationships with stakeholders featured strongly, the relatively high rating for this response is also important.

4. How will development be sustained after the project?

Embedded in corporate objectives	23.8%	5
Changes in organisational structure	14.3%	3
Stronger leadership	23.8%	5
Widespread ownership of new approach	66.7%	14
Continued work with partners	76.2%	16

The apparent desire to continue working with partners is in line with the anecdotal and reported views of lead providers. The ownership of new approaches is also strong. However, relatively few partners say that the development will be sustained by changes in organisational structure, being embedded in corporate objectives or strong leadership. This appears to be at odds with the reported views of lead providers and may reflect a lesser involvement by senior managers from partners in projects in comparison with lead providers.

5. To what extent has your project contributed to the knowledge and skills of staff involved?

Very considerably	33.3%	7
Somewhat	52.4%	11
Hardly at all	14.3%	3

The most frequently mentioned response of 'somewhat' to the above question reflects the response to similar questions to lead providers.

6. Please state up to three things you are doing differently as a result of this project.

There were many suggestions for doing things differently including:

More emphasis on employability and employment:

- a stronger focus on employability and jobs
- tracking of employment outcomes
- focus on work skills
- more heavily involved in sector-based work academies.

New or improved relationships:

- more open, two-way communication with JCP
- improving dialogue with employers
- working closely with new partners with similar interests and priorities
- working with Awarding Organisations on qualifications
- working with Work Programme providers
- new progression routes and partnerships.

New or enhanced provision:

- promoting Higher Level Apprenticeships
- offering more unit delivery
- making our provision bespoke to individual learners and employers we work with
- demonstrating impact and using soft outcomes to measure performance.

Changes to organisational structure and staffing:

- new structures to support employability provision
- 52 week provision
- identifying a workplace mentor to support apprentices
- linking the employer to e-portfolio for reporting purposes.

The responses to this question give a good insight into the changes brought about by the projects and align with changes reported by lead providers.

7. Who have been the main beneficiaries of this project?

Your organisation	61.9%	13
Your staff	33.3%	7
Partners	57.1%	12
Learners	71.4%	15
Employers	38.1%	8
Yourself	47.6%	10
Others (please specify)	9.5%	2

The highest response rate for learners as the main beneficiaries indicates that partners saw the link between the development work and impact on learners. The frequency of mentions of the organisation and the partners as beneficiaries from involvement in the project is also high.

8. What difference did the funding and support from LSIS make?

Contrasting views were held on the value of the funding, for example, a WBL partner observed it 'paid' for time out of the business to work on the project collaboratively:

"I do not feel this would have happened without the funding".

Whereas a college partner commented:

"The funding is seed money, so was pretty much irrelevant to the college"

This may reflect the difference in the value of grants to large and small providers. Partners' views on the value of funding may also depend on whether any funding was disbursed to them.

Other answers to this open question tended to focus on:

Time to reflect and develop

- allowed time and space to reflect on what we do and how we could do it differently
- time to discuss ideas with partners and reflect on own practice in the context of discussions around quality delivery.

Relationship building

- enabled us to work closely with other organisations to develop resource that will benefit the whole sector
- allowed us to make valuable links with other organisations and partners.

Developing provision

- helped to promote Higher Apprenticeships
- enabled the college to focus more on the employability agenda.

Sharing ideas

- sharing ideas was helpful and the project encouraged analysis of our approach
- the workshops were very useful in sharing ideas on how we could all work together to benefit the students.

9. What contribution did partners make? (Tick as many as apply)

Substantial input from key stakeholders	38.1%	8
Significant joint learning with partners	85.7%	18
Inconsistent involvement	4.8%	1
Little contribution	0.0%	0

The responses to this question appear to confirm that partners learnt from each other during the projects. Some partners also appear to value the contribution of input from stakeholders and this correlates to the proportion of projects that included considerable stakeholder contributions.

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Learning and Skills Improvement Service

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service's aim is to accelerate the drive for excellence in the learning and skills sector, building the sector's own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change. LSIS's vision is that every learner acquires the skills, knowledge and appetite for learning, living and working and every provider is valued by their community and employers for their contribution to sustainable social and economic priorities.

LSIS's Strategic Ambitions demonstrates how we will contribute to delivering core improvement principles and sets out our new ways of working to engage the sector in everything we do to make LSIS a truly sector-led organisation. You can find this document and other information about LSIS activities and services at www.lsis.org.uk

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