



Development of the Workforce Strategy for the Further Education Sector in England 2007-12

Background Paper for an Ideas-Building Event

St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 15th – 16th November 2007

I'm delighted to welcome you to this confidential event. As you'll know from your invitation, our focus for this session will be to build on the responses to the consultation that Lifelong Learning UK has been carrying out to shape the vision and strategy for the workforce development of the sector.

The outcomes we aim to achieve

By the end of this session, we want to have:

- built on and fully endorsed the content and connectivity of the strategy.
- identified priorities for action, including partnership building and the roles of individual stakeholders.
- agreed the roles and terms of reference of stakeholders to lead, advise and take forward the strategy's implementation plan.

The story so far

The purpose of the strategy is to develop the workforce so that it is seen as world class in responding to both individuals' and employers' demands on the sector with confidence, competence and connectivity. The draft strategy proposes that the workforce will be recognised by four features of excellence.

- Participation - learning will be widely accessed and valued by learners of all ages and backgrounds;
- Partnership - working with employers to provide high quality knowledge and skills for businesses across all sectors;
- Promotion - promoting engagement in communities of learning leading social cohesion, and
- Designing and delivery of flexible blended learning in the workplace and community.

We not only want to use our time in this session to affirm that these features will testify to the world class quality of the workforce, but also begin to work through the roles and responsibilities that stakeholders will need to take on to create the momentum and pace that will make this aspiration a reality.

There are six elements of the strategy which, together, create the vision of the workforce by 2012:

- A workforce that benefits from **outstanding leadership** across all providers and the sector as a whole.
- A **fully-professional, well qualified, responsive**, modern workforce capable of operating effectively in a demand-led skills environment.
- A well trained and developed workforce that can offer increased and expanded opportunities for young people and adults, **enabling the development of economically valuable skills**.
- A flexible workforce that is growing to embrace the new roles needed to support **more multi-agency and partnership working**, to deliver demand-led funding including Train to Gain and enable greater community cohesion.

- A **diverse workforce** that fully reflects the learners and employers it serves.
- A workforce culture of **continuous improvement** in the context of a self-regulating environment.

Feedback on the strategy to date has been very supportive. It is recognised that it is really breaking new ground by providing the first overall and inclusive vision for those working within the sector. There is also warm support for the prominence that the strategy gives to the importance of equality and diversity in the workforce, and for the breadth of its scope.

There are areas that have been highlighted where some consulted have felt that the strategy could be further strengthened. Some feel that there needs to be more recognition of the need to retain and develop existing staff. Others recommend that the strategy would benefit by providing more detail about the changes and challenges facing the sector. For example it has been suggested that the strategy could include, more vision about the future Further Education landscape, more reference to the impact of structural issues within the sector, and more reflection of the balance that needs to be achieved in the roles Government wants the sector to play in helping to drive up the success of the economy and meeting the needs of communities.

It has **not** been suggested in the feedback that the strategy fails to tackle these issues. The issue appears to be that some feel that that the challenges (and opportunities) that the sector is facing are not sufficiently explicit, and that making them more explicit could help the workforce understand the drive behind priorities and themes, and why professional development is needed.


At stages throughout our discussions we will question whether our proposals are linked strongly enough with the external drivers for continuous professional development, both those raised and others that we may identify.

Moving towards realising the vision

In order to take the six elements listed above from aspiration to reality, four priorities for action and eight key themes are identified in the strategy. While I'm sure that you're familiar with these, I've included the headlines in the background paper for easy reference. Detailed descriptions are included in the draft strategy.

Priority 1: Understand the workforce

1. Achieving consistent coverage and robust systems of data collection on the FE Sector workforce
2. Transforming workforce data into intelligence and using it sector-wide to plan for and strengthen the FE workforce

 Identifying under-representation within the workforce at all levels so that support for increasing workforce diversity is targeted, appropriate and justified

Priority 2: Attracting and retaining the best people and improving the sector image

4. Targeted sector marketing, recruitment and retention programmes and incentives to new entrants
5. Increasing the diversity of the Further Education workforce
6. Improving the workplace 'offer' and sector image

Priority 3: Training and developing the modern, professional workforce

7. Meeting continuous professional development and qualifications requirements to underpin the professionalisation of the workforce
8. Being responsive: ensuring that new skills demands on the workforce can be met

Priority 4: Increasing the diversity of the workforce

We all know that these priorities and themes are not new. A tremendous amount of valuable development and achievement is already taking place nationally, regionally and sub-regionally. The Further Education reform programme is well underway, including the new teaching qualifications, new qualifications for Skills for Life specialists and for leaders, training for those delivering the Diplomas, the National Improvement Strategy and the Framework for Excellence, with many colleges and providers already responding to and benefiting from the reforms.

What **IS** new is that the strategy encompasses all the reforms being taken forward by different stakeholders. It will provide an overarching framework and, importantly, connectivity between the training and development taking place. This connectivity is all important. It helps:

- members of the workforce understand the 'big picture' and their role in ensuring that the sector can respond to what individuals and employers want it to provide;
- to maximise impact;
- minimise duplication in workforce development, and identify any gaps.

Let's agree our givens

I'm sure you've all had the experience of joining discussions where you're not 100% certain that everyone is talking about the same thing or, even, what they are talking about. The only thing to do in these circumstances is call a halt on discussions to check whether when using a word or phrase we do all mean the same thing and what that is. While it is essential for clarity, the problem with doing this is that it also stops debate and ideas building. It can also lead us quickly off course, with the main purpose of the debate forgotten.

For this reason I would like to suggest up-front that we take as givens in this debate the following:

1. Increasing equality and diversity in the workforce is a constant and important thread throughout the strategy, woven through all priorities and themes.
2. The Further Education sector workforce in England covers principals, CEOs/managing directors, teachers, trainers, tutors, support staff, managers and others, such as, volunteers. Excluding volunteers, the estimated total number of staff this includes is around 320,000.
3. We do not use acronyms and if compelled to use jargon or loose descriptors we explain what we mean if there is any ambiguity. For example demand-led – meaning by **my** definition having the responsibility to stimulate demand as well as respond to it – may not be the way others define the phrase.

We'll have an opportunity to agree any other 'givens' we want to include immediately prior to and during our discussions.

St. George's House

For those who haven't been in on an Open Agenda event before, the reason that we are holding this event at St. George's House is that the aim of the House is to create an atmosphere of trust in which well-informed people can bring fresh thinking to key issues that will have impact on our future. It is **NOT** the sort of place where delegates with badges listen to speeches. It **IS** a place where free spirits can try out new ideas without fearing the consequences. If you are coming to an event at St. George's for the first time, we'd like to forewarn you that when you arrive, you will find that you are not offered a key to your room. This is quite intentional, and is because the Dean, Canons and Warden welcome you to the House, as their home. We hope that you'll feel that you can enter into the spirit of the place as a safe and welcoming environment, and that the experience will be both creative and enjoyable.

Our agenda for the 2 days is outlined on pages 4 - 5. If anyone needs to contact you urgently whilst you're attending the event, the 'phone number for St. George's House is **01753 848848** and the fax number is **01753 848849**.

Agenda

Thursday, 15 th November	from 11.30 am	Arrival at St. George's House
	12.15 pm	Light buffet lunch in St. George's House
	1.30 pm prompt	<p>Opening Session in the Vicars' Hall. Agree our goals, ground rules and givens for discussions</p> <p>Open our discussions by asking whether we feel that the strategy is ambitious enough for the sector.</p> <p>By this I mean whether we feel it will support the transformation of the sector so that it can respond successfully to the demands that will be made upon it over the coming 5 years and beyond.</p>
	3.20 pm	Short break
	3.10 pm	<p>Second Session Consider how we can maximise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • buy in of stakeholders and the workforce to the strategy • momentum in rolling out the strategy and putting it into practice. <p>Agree headline changes that will be needed (to be considered after evensong)</p>
	4.55 pm	Tea
	5.05 pm	Sung Evensong in the Chapel for those who wish to attend
	6.05 pm prompt	<p>Evening Session During this session we want to work through how we get to where we want to be from where we are now. We will identify :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the headline changes that need to take place; • who and how they can be made to happen, and within what sort of timescale; • any dependency factors that will affect their success, and • how we should measure impact.
	7.40 pm	Break for pre-dinner drinks in the sitting room
	8.05 pm	Dinner – we encourage people to dress as informally as they wish for dinner
	9.45 pm	Private Tour of St. George's Chapel, led by Andrew Carter, Warden of St. George's House

Friday, 16 th November	8.00 am	Communion in the Chapel, for any who wish to attend
	8.28 am!	Breakfast in the Dining Room – timed just before 8.30am to coincide with the end of Communion
	9.15 am prompt	<p>Morning Session in the Vicars' Hall, with short breaks during the morning</p> <p>During the morning session we want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test out our propositions – are they robust enough to take forward to make happen? Are there any areas that need further thinking through? • agree next steps including terms of reference of stakeholders to lead, advise and take forward the strategy's implementation plan.
	12.30 pm	End of the event, followed by lunch

The way we want to work during the event

At this event, we want to tackle these issues by drawing on our collective expertise and experience and, most importantly, by being willing to consider propositions **from different viewpoints**.

I'm sure you're all familiar with events where participants act as strong persuasive advocates for a particular group, organisation or sector. That's not what Open Agenda events are about. We actively encourage participants to view issues from different angles, and try and put organisational loyalties to one side. At this event, the viewpoints we will **all** need to consider will be how **collectively** we can ensure that the shared strategy for the workforce is fit for purpose and that stakeholders' drive it forward and make it happen in a coherent and connected way.

Advocates only represent one viewpoint. Their aim is to persuade others round to their way of thinking by the power of their arguments. While this is a valued role, it is not helpful for ideas-building. It can often result in people becoming locked in battles of views, where no one is prepared to shift in their thinking, or give up an inch of ground! This is why we hope everyone joining the event will be as open minded as possible, and accept that we are engaging in areas of debate in which **no one is certain of all the answers or the best way ahead**. This can sound risky to some – and feel even riskier as we go through the process – but the great pay-off is that it really does give us the opportunity to break new ground in our thinking.

Our approach to the opening session

Important key notes of our approach to these events are informality and confidentiality. So we dispense with the usual 'round robin' of introductions and format of opening presentations. Instead of going through the creeping death of introductions, we will just put first names on badges to make it easier to see each other's names. When you arrive, you will find your name badge on a table in the Patricia Hotung Room, on the ground floor of St. George's House. Alongside the first name badges you will also have a first name participant and contact list.

We will also **not** be including any opening presentations. However good, opening speeches encourage the 'us and them' habit, with one or two people being expected to produce all the answers, and the rest of us lobbing in questions and indulging in the sport of picking holes in their arguments! We want to begin this event as we mean to continue – with a fast flowing informal discussion, in which we **all** feel that we have a responsibility to put forward ideas and, in doing so, **take risks** in breaking new ground.

Our opening question

Before we launch into how we can best take forward the strategy by building on and, perhaps, creating stronger connectivity between reforms that are already taking place, we want first to develop a shared view of **whether the strategy is sufficiently ambitious and inclusive to ensure that the workforce are confident and competent in responding to Government's, individuals' and employers' future demands on the sector.**

We can then begin to explore how we make the vision and strategy a reality by prioritising action, and securing the buy in and momentum necessary to realise our ambitions for the workforce by 2012 and beyond.

We determine the agenda

One of the key principles of Open Agenda events is that we determine the agenda as we go, in order to get the most from our time together. This means that, at any stage of our discussions, we can change the structure of a session, if we feel that it will help us achieve stronger outputs from the event – with one important proviso.

We find that groups go away far more satisfied with what we have accomplished by the end of an event, if we start off with a commitment to achieving **as much clarity as possible** in our discussions, and really push ourselves in **breaking new ground and moving ideas forward.**

Working in idea-generating groups

As an important part of the ideas-building process, we will break into '**idea-generating**' groups during the event to tackle key questions raised through our discussions.

The purpose of these groups is to focus on sharpening up the issues and developing ideas that we want to pick up and run with. Please use your time in groups to sound out your ideas and do **not** be tempted into trying to develop a group view.

We use these groups because it gives everyone an opportunity to think through different points of view and have their say, when this would be impossible as one large group because of time constraints. As a result, a number of different – even opposing – ideas can emerge from small group discussions.

This is what we're after: ideas and not a group view. For those who haven't been in on a Windsor event before, it's worth saying that it really helps us to leave the groups behind, if you make a point of **not sitting with members of your group** afterwards, and agree to outlaw the phrases "we think" or "my group thought that". "We think" makes it difficult for group members to change their minds without feeling disloyal to their group. Also, "we think" has more authority than "I think" and, completely unintentionally, can make it less easy for others to challenge or discard ideas.

We will also break into groups for longer periods of time to '**build ideas**'. In this instance, it is more likely (but not certain!) that there will be agreement amongst members of the group. What we ask is that when you come to share your thinking with the rest of us, you **just give us the idea.** Please don't feel you need to share the journey your group has travelled in developing this idea! If we are not clear about its rationale, we can always ask questions.

Listening, going with the flow and sharing debate

We need to manage our time together carefully as one large group, if we're going to develop the momentum we need to move our discussions forward.

Developing ideas needs careful listening. Let's try and stick to the rule that when someone comes in on the discussion, they **follow on** from what the person before them has said, before moving on and starting a fresh train of thought. Please also resist the temptation of making more than one point. As soon as someone says "*I'd just like to make two or three points at this stage in our discussions*" the ideas stop flowing, as we are drawn to recap on what's gone before.

Of course, when we're together as one large group we want **as many people as possible to participate**: brainstorming is not a spectator event. So we'll try and ensure that the more confident, natural talkers amongst us don't squeeze others out.

Meeting everyone's expectations

We are bound to arrive at Windsor with very different views about the next stages in developing and taking forward the strategy. This is why we should give ourselves some time early on to work through **as a group** the issues we feel are most important for us to explore during our time together.

Developing ideas is always a messy process, especially during the opening stages. It can be frustrating for those who like to focus quickly on what they feel is **the** key issue that needs to be tackled, and want to get on with sorting it out. The difficulty with this approach is that one person's key issue is another's back burner!

So, we would like to ask that we all try to be as relaxed as possible in the opening session, and let as many as possible have their say, so that we can build up a head of steam **as a group** in identifying the issues we want to explore in greater depth.

Overleaf are the Conventions of St. George's House for consultations and ideas building events held here at Windsor Castle. At the beginning of the event, we will ask you if you are happy to adopt them as ground rules for our discussions.

We very much hope that you'll be open to giving them a go, as experience has shown that their application can make an enormous difference to both the quality of debate and the ideas that emerge.

Krysia Hudek, Open Agenda

5th November 2007

St. George's House Conventions

1. *Please be open to changing your mind*

We hope that during your time at the House you will see yourself as a “free spirit”, open to the possibility that the opinions you hold most dearly, on the topic under discussion, might actually be wrong. Once we each take that step, we find that it is much easier to persuade others to question their own assumptions, as well.

2. *Please do not attribute remarks to individuals after the event*

At all House events, we ask groups to agree at the outset that comments made in plenary or small group sessions will not be attributed to individuals afterwards. We have a firm convention that people should not be quoted without their permission, and commend this to you most strongly.

3. *Please take risks with ideas*

The most successful Consultations at the House have been those where individuals feel sufficiently relaxed, and supported by others, to be able to take risks with ideas. This requires a high degree of trust among a group, and we hope that from the outset you will seek to build that trust.

4. *Please try and avoid any false consensus*

We hope that if you find a consensus emerging in your discussions, you will check to ensure that it is soundly based. It can sometimes be very difficult for individuals to resist the pressure to agree with their peers, and we hope that healthy debate will not be stifled by a false consensus.

5. *Please use “plain English”*

At just about every event, one of the biggest struggles is with the weight of technical language that some speakers tend to use, and others leave unchallenged for fear of displaying ignorance. We ask **everyone** joining a Consultation at the House to avoid using acronyms, and to be ready to intervene in debate to ask colleagues to use “plain English”.

Andrew Carter

Warden of St. George's House