



## Skills in London: Preparing for 2012

### Background Paper for an Ideas-Building Event at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2006

#### Welcome

I'm delighted to welcome you to this confidential ideas-building event.

The purpose of this event is to give us an opportunity to work through how we can operate as a strong cross-organisational team to ensure that we have the skills that we need not only to stage a successful Olympic Games, but a legacy that will provide a skilled workforce able to deliver services and products that supports London's position as a competitive world city.

A top priority for the newly established London 2012 Employment and Skills Taskforce will be *"to deliver a collaborative business plan that identifies and co-ordinates to support both local people, and those drawn from across London, in accessing direct and indirect employment opportunities arising from the hosting of the Games in 2012."*

At this event, we want to begin to **set the foundations** for this collaboration by identifying our shared priorities for action and how we want to work together. All of the organisations involved are familiar with working in partnership with one another – but I would suggest their partnership working has never been quite so much in the spotlight before. There is an enormous expectation of success riding on getting this right.

We can all see the potential of this opportunity for the economic regeneration of some of London's poorest and most disadvantaged areas.

However, we also recognise that the potential is not in the building or the staging of the Games. The building of Heathrow Terminal 5 is a larger capital project.

The potential will be realised through bringing together the resources and expertise of key public agencies and raising the aspirations and ambitions of local people and businesses. It is this focusing and harnessing of resources that will make the long-term difference.

As we all know, the issue is **how** we can make this happen alongside Agencies' wider roles and responsibilities? What we want to explore is how we can build an effective cross-agency team that can work quickly in innovative ways in to deliver different types of skills development, as part of Agencies' mainstream budgets and broader remits.

This event is **not** designed to develop a detailed action plan.

It is too early for this. For example, the design and materials of much of the construction has yet to be decided, so we can't predict the specific skills that will be needed.

Of course, once skills demands have been identified, it will be imperative to **respond quickly**. And generic skills and aspiration development within communities must happen **now** to ensure that residents are ready to train for specific jobs as they become known.

Our focus will be to explore how we might best lay firm foundations now so that we can begin developing communities, and work fast and effectively in partnership when called upon. To do this we are going to have work differently and break some new ground.

This is why we ask everyone joining the event to be prepared to be as open minded as possible, and to accept that we are engaging in areas of debate in which **no one is certain of 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.

#### St. George's House

Having worked at the House for some years now, Jo and I have found it to be a really valuable and special place for holding ideas building events.

The aim of St. George's 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.

St George's House 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.

We are conscious that we're welcoming a number of you to St. George's House for the first time, which is why we'd like to forewarn those booked into the House that when you arrive, you will find that you are not offered a key to your room.

This is quite intentional, and is because *we welcome you to the House, as our 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.

Jo and I very much look forward to welcoming you to St George's House on 2<sup>nd</sup> February.

## Background Information

Even at this early stage, we're conscious of the wealth of statistical information that is being pulled together to forecast and analyse needs, including skills needs. To help ensure that you have the information you need but not to overload you with data, forecasts and structures we've put together an early compendium of information drawn from various sources.

One of these sources is Experian Business Strategies, who have been commissioned to assist the London Development Agency and the Learning & Skills Council to draw together evidence from previous Olympic and Paralympic Games and from other large scale regeneration projects.

This will provide a broad indication of the range of opportunities that are likely to occur in the context of plans for London 2012. The questions that Experian Business Strategies will seek to answer include:

- What do the timescales look like for ensuring that London has people with the right level and type of skills to help deliver the Games?
- How did other host cities manage the process of skills training?
- How did the policies of other host cities and other regeneration projects maximise the benefits to local citizens?
- What might this mean for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games?

The project is running from this month until April, and although it is very early on, Experian has been able to provide us with some statistical information, emerging issues and a timeline to inform our discussions.

We're also delighted that Richard Holt, Director of Futures Research, Experian Business Strategies will be joining us for this event.

## Key Timings and Contact Numbers

On pages 3 - 4 are outlined our key timings for the two days. 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**. The report of the event will be posted on the Open Agenda website by Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> February.

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.

We are just putting first names on badges to make it easier to see each other's names, and also to spare us what can be the 'creeping death' of introductions.

We are very keen to create an informal atmosphere during our time together, and we have found that making a point of using each other's names – instead of saying "*I agree or disagree with the person over there, who's name I can't remember!*" really does help people to relax and spark creative discussion. Please don't think we're being over familiar!

## Agenda

Thursday, 2 <sup>nd</sup> February	From 11.30 am	Arrival at St. George's House
	12.15 pm	Light sandwich lunch in St. George's House
	1.30 pm prompt	<p><b>Opening Session</b> in the Vicars' Hall Following a brief welcome and confirmation of our ground rules for discussion, we will begin the event by setting the stage for what it is envisioned the Games will be all about</p> <p>Once we've shared the vision, we want to begin sharpening up what we feel will be the <b>most challenging areas</b> that we need to <b>tackle jointly</b> to make it a reality.</p>
	3.00 pm	<b>Short break</b>
	3.15 pm	<p><b>Second session</b> Begin to shape our thinking on what we see as the <b>important characteristics</b> of how different agencies will need to work together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that the development of skills is included in every aspect of planning and delivering the 2012 Games to ensure a legacy of improved long-term employment and business opportunities for residents</li> <li>• maximise synergy</li> <li>• avoid duplication, and</li> <li>• best utilise the public funding available through different agencies in London.</li> </ul> <p>Before breaking for tea, we will agree the areas of work we want to work up in greater detail during our evening session</p>
	4.55 pm	Tea
	5.05 pm	Sung Evensong in the Chapel for those who wish to attend
	6.00 pm prompt	<p><b>Evening Session</b> In groups, work through the protocols and processes for areas of work that we feel are essential and will require close partnership working at this stage in preparation for the Games</p>
	7.45 pm	Break for pre-dinner drinks in the sitting room
	8.15 pm	Dinner – we encourage people <b>to dress as informally as they wish</b> for dinner
	9.45 pm	Private Tour of St. George's Chapel, led by Andrew Carter, Warden of St. George's House

Friday, 3 <sup>rd</sup> February	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	<b>Morning Session</b> First share the protocols and processes agreed, before moving on to developing first step plans of action that should follow the event drawing on these protocols and processes  Before ending, draw out from participants what for them, personally, has been of the most value in this event how it has helped sharpen up any actions they will now take
	12.30 pm	Lunch, in time for everyone to be away by just after 1.00pm. (If you don't have time to stay for lunch, we can organise a packed lunch for you, so long as you let us know on Thursday)

## Our approach to the opening session

At an event like this you might expect to begin with a 'round robin' of introductions, followed closely by two or three opening presentations outlining the context of our discussions and the key issues we want to tackle. But as those of you who have worked with us before know at Open Agenda events we adopt a different approach.

Over the years, we've found that the problem with introductions is that it's not only difficult to remember who everyone is but also, to some extent, can 'pigeon hole' people as likely to have particular views on the issues we want to tackle. And from the very outset, we want to feel that we are 'free spirits' in our discussions, representing no one but ourselves, and **ready to shift in our thinking** if the discussions persuade us to do so.

We also resist the temptation of nobbling one or two people to begin the event with presentations, although there is no shortage of candidates who are more than qualified to take on this role!

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.

So, following a brief welcome and confirmation of the ground rules for the event, we are going to break with tradition and watch a short video that was prepared as part of the Olympic bid.

The purpose of watching the video is to remind ourselves of the vision for the Olympics and how this vision is rooted in improving the lives of local residents and the economic competitiveness of local areas, London region and the UK as a whole. The question we want to explore is how, through the development of skills, we can contribute to making this vision a reality. The question we want to ask ourselves is:

**What are the toughest challenges we need to tackle in partnership?**

## Emerging challenges

Since winning the Olympic bid around seven months ago, a number of challenges are already emerging. Looking outward, these include:

- preparing large and small companies for recruitment growth;

- influencing procurement strategies, so that they include skills development;
- changing attitudes and winning communities' confidence that the Olympics will provide them with long-term employment and business opportunities and greater economic prosperity;
- building the capacity of providers to deliver the type of provision that is needed.

and looking inward:

- developing a robust communication strategy between agencies that provides intelligence on skills issues and keeps everyone informed of developments;
- agreeing new protocols for partnership working that will enable fast and flexible to meeting needs as they arise, which will include
- synchronising key Olympic developments and agencies' business cycles successfully.

By no means is this an exhaustive list of challenges: others are bound to emerge through our discussions.

One challenge that will run as a constant thread through much of what we need to tackle is incomplete information! But I'm sure you'll agree that we don't want this to be a barrier to our creative thinking. What will be sufficient for the purposes of our discussions will be to have a feel for the **magnitude** of issues and opportunities.

### 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. I say this, 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**.

So once we've identified the toughest challenges, we will move on to explore what you feel will be important in how Agencies work together to tackle these challenges. What lessons can we learn from the past? What do we need to do now to meld the agencies into a responsive partnership able to withstand the publicity, demands and pressure that preparing for 2012 and ensuring a legacy is bound to involve?

During our evening session we will have the opportunity to work through in greater depth how best to meet some of the challenges we've flagged up through specific processes and protocols.

The following morning, we want to build on our discussions from the day before and start to firm up the first steps of action we feel should follow the event.

### 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.

## Going with the flow

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 I'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 what should be our key priorities at this stage in preparations for 2012. 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 tackle 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, I 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 brainstorming events held here at Windsor Castle. At the beginning of the event, I will ask you if you are happy to adopt them as ground rules for our discussions.

I 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.

**And given the diversity, experience and expertise we have between us, who knows what we might achieve by lunchtime on 3<sup>rd</sup> February.**

Krysia Hudek  
Open Agenda  
20<sup>th</sup> January 2006

## 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