



Helping to meet the employability agenda for London

Background Paper for an Ideas-Building Event at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 3rd – 4th July 2007

Welcome

We are delighted to welcome you to this confidential ideas-building event. As you'll know from your invitation, the purpose of this event is to build on the work that is already well underway in developing an integrated approach to **responsive** planning and delivery for skills and employment in London.

The concept of integration is at the heart of this work: there is a wide consensus amongst strategic and operational partners that much more can be achieved in helping people to develop the skills to move into and stay in work through a shared approach. This consensus is reflected in Lord Leitch's recommendations and at regional level in the work of the London Skills and Employment Board.

Our goal for the event is to identify priorities for Agencies and providers over the coming months to ratchet up the number of people we can help to move into and stay in work by developing their employability skills, and draw up a shared work plan to tackle these priorities.

At the event, we want to get to grips with 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. At this event, the viewpoints we will **all** need to consider will be those of the Government and employers, as well as that of workless and low-skilled people, if we're going to work up some robust propositions that are likely to attract their buy in and support.

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.

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.

Agenda and Contact Numbers

Our agenda for the 2 days is outlined below and overleaf. 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**.

Tuesday, 3rd July	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</p> <p>Agree goals and ground rules.</p> <p>Begin by agreeing some ball park figures for the number of workless people we want to help move into and stay in work over the coming 12 months give us a sense of scale of the task we need to tackle.</p> <p>Identify some key groups of different people that make up this number, and the type of approaches and interventions already in place that are helping them to move into work.</p> <p>We then want to ask ourselves: <i>Have we got everything in place we need to reach the target we have set ourselves?</i></p> <p><i>Is the big challenge now increasing capacity and buy in, or are there types of interventions and support still missing that we need to plug in order to move this number of workless people into jobs and to continue up-skilling once in work?</i></p>
	3.00 pm	Short break
	3.10 pm	<p>Second Session Consider in greater depth the specific challenges we need to tackle.</p> <p>At this stage, we will want to distinguish between barriers and difficulties that are outside of our direct control, and those we can change.</p> <p>We will also have an opportunity to share what we see as the greatest risks in working differently and collectively to achieve our goal, and how we can manage these risks.</p>
4.55 pm	Tea	

Wednesday, 4th July	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 up in detail proposals for meeting the challenges we have identified. In particular, we want to flesh out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ What are the key actions that need to be taken by providers and agencies/ ➔ How will they impact on and change how we help workless people back into work, and encourage them (and employers) to continue developing employability skills by those working 'behind the scenes' in agencies and providers, as well as 'front line' staff? ➔ How we should measure collective success
	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
	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 our work plan to take these ideas forward and make them happen over the next 12 months or so.
	12.30 pm	Lunch

Our approach to this event

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.

So, following a brief welcome and confirmation of the ground rules for the event and how we will manage our time over the next 24 hours, we want to move straight into discussions by agreeing **our ambition in 2007 – 2008 regarding the number of workless people we want to move into work.**

To give you an idea of the scale of the challenge and employment opportunities, we have drawn together some headline figures.

- London currently has 1,546,000 workless working-age residents (a third of the working age population)
- **313,000** unemployed residents - those who are actively seeking employment and are available to begin work within two weeks.
- 1,233,000 economically inactive residents (students, people who are sick or disabled and people looking after family/home) of whom **370,000** state they would like to have a job and 868,000 don't want one.
- To raise London's employment rate to the UK average would require an additional **270,000** working age London residents to be in employment.

- One in three London residents is educated to degree level, compared with a national average of one in four
- One third of working-age Londoners do not have the equivalent of five good GCSEs
- Nearly 1 million people of working age have literacy skills below those expected for an 11 year old and over 2 million have numeracy skills below this level. An estimated 600,000 people need varying degrees of help with their English language skills.
- A quarter of all children in inner London live in workless households, the highest proportion of any of the English regions. In inner London, 36% of children live in workless households, compared with 16% nationally.

- Currently London has more low skilled residents than low skilled jobs – a ratio of 3:1.
- Classifying jobs according to the required skill level shows that demand for high skills has been growing and is forecast to continue to grow.
- Since 1984 there has been a 700,000 increase in the number of London jobs requiring skill level 3 or 4. Whilst simultaneously a 400,000 reduction in the number of jobs requiring skill level 1 or 2.

- Demand for high level skills is likely to increase, and with the increase in jobs in hotels and restaurants, little if any reduction in the demand for lower level skills.
- By 2026, the number of workplace jobs in London is forecast to increase to 5.499 million jobs, a rise of 912,000 jobs on 2006 levels. The majority of the employment growth is expected to occur in business services, other services, and hotels & restaurants.
- The National Employer Skills Survey indicates that employers spend £5.8 billion on training employees in London. 21% of employers who train their staff use colleges.

The purpose of these statistics is to help us to develop a view about what the sort of ball park figures we're working with regard to how many people need help with skills, support, advocacy and mentoring to move into and stay in work. Of course, these are headline figures: we will have an opportunity to identify the different groups of people with very different needs that are included in these figures.

And don't worry: any target number of people we agree upon as our goal to help into work over then next 12 months is simply for the **purposes of our discussions**. It is a device to help us understand the magnitude of the challenge that we're taking on, the issues this raises and the resources and culture changes that will be needed to meet the challenge.

Once we've got a sense of the scale, we want to identify quickly some of the key **groups of people** that share sets of broad characteristics that make up this overall number. We can do this speedily by drawing on the 'Licence to Skill' segmentation that many will already be familiar with.

The next stage will be to share what is already happening to equip members of these specific groups with employability skills and move them into work, and not necessarily in that order. This is when we want to draw on the first year achievements and challenges of the Employability Demonstration Pilots, as well as the experience in developing the City Strategy Pathfinders and other key initiatives.

Significant progress for the Employability Demonstration and Licence to Skill Pilots include:

- ➔ Seeing the **'whole journey'** of the individual and how 'service providers' fit on that pathway – **that a single organisation is almost always only one part of the solution/step on the journey**.
- ➔ **Creating pathways between departments** and helping to tackle the silo working that can be a tendency in any large organisation. There is a growing recognition of how the Pilot work can provide a 'pipeline' for key initiatives such as Train to Gain. It is also helping organisations to be more 'outward facing' – recognising that partners can help to develop 'delivery chains' that benefit not only the service users, but also the organisations that are involved.
- ➔ Through the segmentation approach of Licence to Skill, developing a **better understanding of the characteristics of different groups** that make up the 'markets' of individuals and employers.
- ➔ Designing services in ways that enable **each element along a pathway to reflect individuals' goals**. For example, for organisations delivering IAG and/or first steps provision, are helping to develop their services so that they reflect not just a learning goal, but the broader context for that goal – becoming a volunteer, helping a child with homework, getting a job etc.
- ➔ Designing services that **run throughout the year**, including through 'academic' holiday periods.
- ➔ Using the 'Licence to Skill' template approach as a **self assessment and quality tool**, including the potential for assuring quality through 'self policing' for a 'virtual campus'. Some have already seen the potential for

using the template as part of their self-assessment process, and/or have made the link with the LSC's new Framework for Excellence and the Standard for Employer Responsiveness and Vocational Excellence.

- ➔ Establishing a **network of pilot colleges to share successful approaches** and provide a forum for joint ideas building and problem solving in the second year of the pilots.
- ➔ Creating more client-centred approaches on the ground that are **influencing public agencies' strategies and programme development**. For example, the principles of the Pilots and Templates are informing a variety of work including the ESOL Transition Funding, Skills for Jobs, Basic Skills for JCP customers, NRF commissioning, services for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Early impacts and learning points are also feeding into LSEB's strategy development.

So we have a lot to build on. But do we need to step this up if we are to reach our target?

Also, we don't want to gloss over some of the difficulties that are being experienced. Resolving the challenges that are **within our power** to do could help enormously to increase success and the rate of change needed to drive up employability in the Capital. Some of the challenges reported include:

- The danger that new ways of working may remain within the 'silo' in which they are located (in colleges and agencies) and have minimum impact on the **mainstream** work of a provider or agency.
- The challenge of moving to business models that are predicated labour market need rather than a supply side (pick from the options we offer) model. This is reinforced by the perception that public funding is triggered by the achievement of outputs that often do not match what the customer (employer and/or individual) want.

There is wariness about how pilots can be scaled up without adversely affecting 'mainstream' funding. This can have an adverse impact on the ability of a pilot to influence wider provider and agency behaviour.

- Ineffective partnerships with external delivery and strategic partners – preventing fully effective pathways to employability from being established.
- Difficulty and lack of experience in working effectively with employers. Colleges and other providers that are delivering on Train to Gain tend to have better employer relationships and have found the experience of the pilots less challenging.
- Patchy communication and relationships with other organisations and agencies that leads to a lack of knowledge about what other key services are being delivered locally (often funded through regional partners) and how these can support the pilot initiatives.

What we want to avoid at this event is to get stuck into the difficulties! I'm sure you've been to many events where that is what happens. It is especially easy when working in small groups to get into a satisfying group moan about what is wrong.

The problem is that while this may feel good at the time, it doesn't get us any further forward in our thinking. So while we need to recognise:

challenges, difficulties, barriers,

we need to park those outside of our control and focus on those we can do something about. At the end of the event we will include in our action plan the messages and evidence we need to gather for those with authority to change policies and approaches that impede the progress and success of driving up employability in London.

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 priorities for driving up employability in London. 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 & Jo Hudek, Open Agenda, JH Consulting

22nd June 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