

NATIONAL CONTRACTS SERVICE

Business Plan Summary - 2004/05



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE



Learning+Skills Council

National Contracts Service

<http://ncs.lsc.gov.uk>

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Foreword

This is the third Business Plan of the National Contracts Service (NCS). The plan sets out our contribution to the LSC's Corporate Plan and the National Learning Targets, and how we will deliver this. The plan also identifies how we will contribute to new and emerging developments such as the Skills Strategy.

Over the last year we have:

- engaged a further 49 new large employers into work based learning;
- continued to extend participation in Work Based Learning for Young People from 42,000 to 59,595 at period 6 in the current year;
- continued to raise the quality of provision we inherited from a position where only 21% of our contractors were undergoing successful inspection without the need for reinspection to 73% at period 6 in the current year;
- engaged 28,000 employees in learning aged 24 and over with an NVQ success rate of 78%.

Our aim remains the same: to provide employer based national provision which is judged to be of the highest quality. Whilst our learner attainment rates continue to improve, we remain acutely aware of the need to improve achievement levels within Work Based Learning for Young People. We are also conscious of the need to place a greater focus on equality and diversity.

Over the coming year, we look forward to working more closely with local LSCs and Regional Directors on the management of the new Ufi national contract. We will also respond appropriately to the new regional and National Office structures within the LSC.

All contributions made through NCS contracts will continue to count towards the achievement of the LSC's targets.

Marinos Paphitis
Director - National Contracts Service

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL CONTRACTS SERVICE

1.1 Remit of the National Contracts Service

- The National Contract Service (NCS) was established in order to provide an effective contracting arm for the LSC in its dealings with large multi sited employers and providers who represent them. The NCS is based in Coventry and is an operational arm of the LSC, contracting with employers and their learning providers in exactly the same way as the local Learning and Skills Councils.
- The NCS provides a service to national employers, with the potential for 100 learners or more, who operate in more than one local LSC area (normally five or more) and who operate a single contract with the LSC in England.
- In addition, the NCS provides a service to training providers who act on behalf of national employers, as well as sector specific training providers. The NCS also seeks ways of encouraging the potential for employers to develop their entire workforce, not just those aged 16-24, and therefore also holds some other national contracts for a number of NVQ initiatives with employers for people aged 24+, as well as for national UFI sector hubs (until July 2004).
- All young people and adults involved in NCS work based learning programmes normally have employed status. In very rare occurrences where employed status is not currently an option, NCS only accepts such placements in full consultation and agreement with the local LSCs.
- From August 2004 the NCS will also hold the LSC's contract with Ufi.
- The NCS is **not** resourced or remitted to work with;
 - national providers working on behalf of individuals or local SMEs;
 - national voluntary organisations or other, dealing with individuals who are not their employees;
 - general national learning projects/contracts where the focus is not on employed status work based learning leading to national vocational qualifications.
- In summary the purpose of NCS is to:
 - provide services to national multi sited **employers** who have a presence in than one local LSC area;
 - to simplify the relationship between large employers across the range of LSC programmes;
 - to engage new national employers in all aspects of work based learning;
 - to facilitate Work Based Learning for Young People contracting arrangements for large specialist sector providers.

In order to achieve this role the NCS actively works with local LSCs to ensure that provision is effectively planned and that quality, health and safety and Provider Financial Assurance standards are maintained for each employer/provider across the network. Each local LSC has agreed a lead person to work alongside NCS and an NCS member of staff has been identified to work with them.

1.2 Role of the NCS Advisory Board

- The role of the NCS Advisory Board is to advise on the strategic operation and development of the NCS in order to improve participation, retention and attainment in work based learning. The key priority areas for the Board are:
 - to advise national, regional and local directors on any policy and significant operational issues arising from the engagement of large employers;
 - to advise on new business opportunities to maximise the involvement of major national companies in work based learning and wider workforce development, with a focus on Work Based Learning for Young People;
 - to help identify and promote good practice;
 - to consider the collective results of Performance Review and its overall impact on provision, and advise on action to improve attainment and retention;
 - to consider and inform the NCS Business Plan, including key performance benchmarks, and review progress on NCS defined targets;
 - to represent and promote the NCS internally and externally;
 - to receive presentations/papers from NCS executives and provide advice on policy/strategy, including the NCS marketing and communication strategies and plans;
 - to consider and advise on the following:
 - the results of Provider Financial Assurance and action to improve effectiveness;
 - the annual assurance statement from the Director of NCS to the LSC's Chief Executive;
 - reports on NCS operations received from the Council's Internal Audit Services, NAO, the Council's national Provider Financial Assurance team or other bodies;
 - NCS internal controls.

1.3 Ufi Programme Board

- A Ufi Programme Board has been set up within the LSC to oversee the policy and strategic development of the Financial Memorandum and relationship between the LSC and Ufi. Malcolm Gillespie (Regional Director South West and chair of the NCS Advisory Board) sits on the Ufi Programme Board and Marinos Paphitis, Director of NCS, is a member of both Boards.

2 CONTEXT

2.1 Local Context

- The NCS responds to the recruitment and development needs of large national employers and certain sector specific employers. All the learners funded by the NCS are normally employees.
- During the annual planning process, the projected geographical split of NCS provision is communicated to colleagues in local LSCs to help inform Area Strategic Planning. This information is reinforced on a monthly basis with the issue of detailed management information that breaks down NCS learners by local LSC, occupation/sector, employer/provider, programme and age group etc. Each local LSC is then able to take NCS provision into account when assessing the impact on local needs, Strategic Area Review and long term local and regional planning.
- To support the data that is supplied, NCS will continue to liaise closely with each local LSC, offering updates and briefings where required and regular update meetings to discuss performance and planning. In addition to this local network activity, liaison at the regional level will be further developed during the 2004/05 operational year to take account of the new regional structures within the LSC.

2.2 National Context

- Over the 2002/03 and 2003/04 contract years, the occupational breakdown of learners on NCS programmes has shifted. While the majority of provision is still in the traditional occupational sectors of Construction and Engineering, the engagement of new employers to Work Based Learning has increased uptake and delivery in service industries such as Retail and Customer Service, Healthcare and Hospitality. In addition, NCS contracted with the Construction Industry Training Board for a single national contact to cover all of their Work Based Learning for Young People, adding over 8,000 construction workers to the provision being delivered.
- Charts 1 and 2 show that this growth activity has increased the number of learners engaged in non traditional sectors, although the significant number of learners engaged in construction and engineering have prevented this from being reflected in the percentage of overall learners. It is anticipated that this non traditional growth will continue over the 2004/05 and 2005/06 contract years as the new business brought to contract during the 2002/03 contract year is embedded and then starts to grow as second and third year learners are brought on stream.

Chart 1 Number of Learners On Programme by Occupational Area in 2001/02 and 2003/04 Contract Years

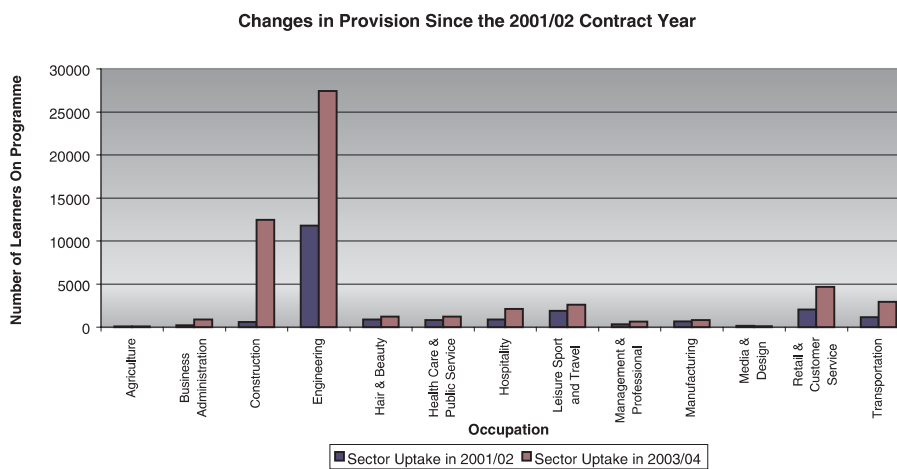
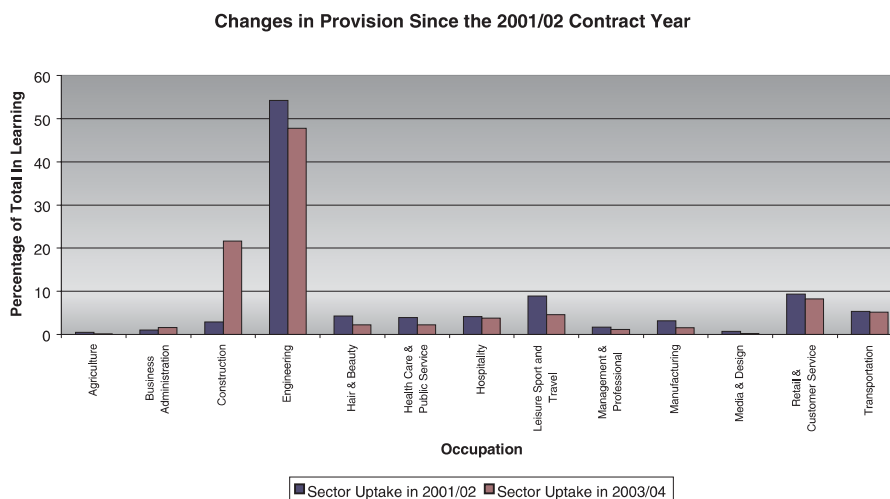


Chart 2 Percentage of Learners On Programme by Occupational Area in 2001/02 and 2003/04 Contract Years



- Linked to the expansion of the Retail, Healthcare and Hospitality Sectors is an increase in the uptake of Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMAs) within the NCS employer/provider network. Over the last two contract years the percentage of FMAs has increased from 22% of all provision to 36%. This second shift in the provision being delivered has a two fold impact, one positive and one negative. At one level, a surge in FMA delivery contributes significantly to the LSCs Public Sector level 2 engagement targets, however, as shown in Table 1 the framework completion rate for FMA programmes within NCS is significantly lower than the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) completion rate, so the overall completion rate is depressed as the uptake of FMA programmes increases.
- Initial analysis links the lower achievement rate to the occupations – Hospitality, Retail and Care sectors tend to have a more transient workforce, with a high turnover of staff. This turnover of staff in the workforce is mirrored in Apprenticeship programmes, reducing the percentage of learners that stay on programme and complete their Apprenticeship.
- To address this issue and to support the development of accounts, NCS contracts will be clustered by their main sector for development activity. The aim of this is to enable best practice to be shared between different types of organisation within the same sector, while at the same time allowing more effective benchmarking and targeted sector based development work for NCS contract holders.
- Another benefit of this clustering will be more effective networking and partnership activity with organisations such as Sector Skills Councils. As the Councils develop, NCS Account Managers will be able to focus on specific sectors, representing their best interests in sector wide development activity and keeping up to date with sector based best practice.

Table 1 shows the current breakdown of provision by occupational sector

Table 1 – In Learning by Sector

Occupational Sector	AMA (In Learning)	FMA (In Learning)	NVQ (In Learning)	Sector as % of total In Learning
Agriculture	14	78	0	0.16
Business Administration	200	568	145	1.59
Construction	3,188	9,222	50	21.68
Engineering	23,063	3,519	883	47.78
Hair & Beauty	287	975	0	2.20
Health Care & Public Service	530	671	42	2.16
Hospitality	493	1,625	12	3.71
Leisure Sport and Travel	2,361	265	0	4.57
Management & Professional	101	523	40	1.16
Manufacturing	431	322	96	1.48
Media & Design	117	1	0	0.21
Retail & Customer Service	1,442	3,215	41	8.17
Transportation	738	1,546	681	5.16

2.3 Equality and Diversity

- Sitting alongside the development of sector benchmarking will be the analysis of equality of opportunity data, both across NCS programmes as a whole and by sector. Over the year data sets that accurately show the make up of the sector - both within the learning environment and in the workforce as a whole, will be developed. This will allow recruitment and achievement patterns to be assessed to ensure that, as a minimum, the national averages are being delivered.

Tables 2 and 3 show the current position.

Table 2 - Recruitment Patterns as at Period 4 2003/04 Contract Year

Occupational Sector	% Of New Learners from an Ethnic Minority Group	Female Starts as a % of all New Learners
Business Admin, Management & Professional	12.07	62.15
Construction	2.28	0.6
Engineering, Technology and Manufacturing	3.34	4.39
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	5.26	88.33
Health care & Public Services	10.99	73.58
Hospitality, Sports, Leisure and Travel	6.61	61.36
Information and Communication Technology	1.79	22.81
Land Based Provision	0	0
Retail, Customer Service and Transportation	6.44	59.75
Visual and Performing Arts and Media	0	2.86

Table 3 - Achievement Rates as at Period 4 2003/04 Contract Year

Occupational Sector	Framework Achievement Rate (%)			
	Ethnic Minority	White	Female	Male
Business Admin, Management & Professional	0	18	17	17
Construction	25	20	50	20
Engineering, Technology and Manufacturing	32	46	20	46
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	50	32	35	19
Health care & Public Services	0	8	7	0
Hospitality, Sports, Leisure and Travel	12	19	24	9
Information and Communication Technology	100	58	64	61
Land Based Provision	0	38	0	0
Retail, Customer Service and Transportation	9	17	18	15
Visual and Performing Arts and Media	0	52	0	55

- These tables show that many of the sectors are conforming to traditional equality and diversity norms, for example a high percentage of female learners in Hospitality and Leisure (includes travel) and a high ethnic representation in Health Care and Public Service. Over the coming 2004/05 year, NCS Account Managers will continue to work with their accounts to ensure effective Equality and Diversity policies are in place and that genuine equality of opportunity exists across National Contracts Service provision. More on this is developed in section 6.
- Across all NCS provision, the current make up of learners is as shown in charts 3 and 4.

Chart 3 – In Learning Broken Down by Ethnic Background

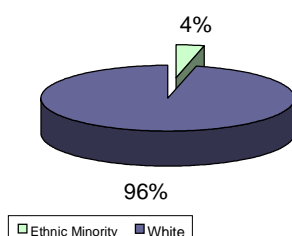
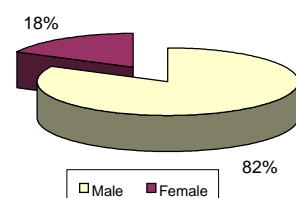


Chart 4 – In Learning Broken Down by Gender



3 OUR AIM AND OBJECTIVES 2004-05

3.1 Aim

- To provide a highly effective and professional contracting arm of the LSC dealing with the needs of national and multi-sited organisations, employers and training providers who represent them.

3.2 NCS Objectives 2004-05

- Our key objectives are to:
 - maintain the development of NCS systems, people and processes which enable growth and highly effective contract management to take place;
 - deliver agreed participation levels, including measures on Equality and Diversity as detailed in our “key targets”;
 - through Success for All implementation, increase the attainment of all NCS learners and the overall quality of provision as measured by qualifications, framework completions and ALL inspections grades;
 - engage a further 10 significant large employers into Work Based Learning alongside further growth of existing business;
 - support the emerging Skills Strategy through additional support for those over 24 with basic skills needs or undertaking an NVQ;
 - support the work of the LSC at local, regional and national level;
 - effect the successful transition of Ufi contract management to NCS working closely with the LSC at local and regional level, DfES and Ufi.

4 OUR RESOURCES

- The NCS has three blocks of money which fund:
 - Work Based Learning for Young People;
 - certain NVQ based workforce development initiatives with national employers for employees aged 24 and over;
 - NVQ Level 2s (for the Professional Footballers Association).
- In addition, the NCS has a block of money to support quality improvement, as well as an administration budget for the functions we deliver “in house” and the services contracted out.

Work Based Learning for Young People

Core Budgets

Age Group	Budget	Average in Learning
16/18	£115,500,000	40,040
19+	£50,500,000	17,160
Total	£166,000,000	57,200

Employee 24+ Initiatives

Budget	Number of Learners	Number of NVQs*
£15.8 million	23,000	16,875

*The number of NVQs is spread over the 2004-05 and 2004-06 years and a proportion will relate to some 2003/04 starts

NVQ Level 2 Initiative (Footballers)

Budget	Number of Learners
£5.6 million*	1560

*This budget is for the 2003/04 contract year and is solely to support the Footballers programme until a Framework is developed which allows them to move to a Modern Apprenticeship

Contracted-out Services

Budget	£3.1 million
Data Processing Provider Financial Assurance Quality, and Health & Safety Call-off Contracts Marketing	

- We will continue to use these resources to purchase high quality learning, to engage targeted national employers in work based learning and, critically, to improve retention and achievement, **particularly Framework achievement.**
- Underpinning the funding of learners is the Provider Development Fund which we will use to support improvement in the quality of learning and one of the key measures will be the achievement of Framework completions. To assist in increasing achievement levels we will use these funds, matched by employer/provider contributions, to bring about improvement in the following key areas:
 - self assessment and development planning, including 3 year development plans as outlined in “Success for All”;
 - equality and diversity;
 - learner retention and achievement;
 - leadership and management;
 - development of qualified staff with a focus on key skills, assessment and verification, and basic skills assessment and support;
 - pre contract support
 - pre and post inspection support.
- In addition, we will also use our resources to encourage employers and providers, as appropriate, to improve learner safety, as well as to address sector specific issues.

5 TARGETS TO BE ACHIEVED

- The key targets we will be working with our employers and providers to achieve during the 2004/05 year and the 2005/06 and 2006/07 years as appropriate are:

Programme	2003/04 Target	2004/05 Target	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target
Participation & Recruitment				
WBLYP - New Learners	N/A	33,000	35,000	36,000
WBLYP - In Learning	42,000	60,000	62,000	65,000
Over 24+ Employee Initiative - New Learners	21,000	23,000	Subject To Annual Review and Funding Availability	
Retention and Achievement				
AMA Framework Completion Rate	35%	40%	50%	55%
FMA Framework Completion Rate	30%	30%	40%	45%
“Success for All” Completion Rate: AMA FMA	N/A	45% 35%	55% 45%	60% 50%
Over 24+ Employee Initiative NVQ Achievement Rate	65%	70%	73%	75%
Quality Assurance				
Percentage of Learners Enrolled on a Learning Programme Graded as at Least Acceptable by ALI	N/A	85%	90%	95%
Increased Employer Engagement				
Number of Targeted blue chip Employers engaged in Work Based Learning	10	10	To be Reviewed Annually	
Number of other Employers engaged in Work Based Learning	0	20		

In addition to our key targets we have also agreed some process benchmarks:

- To facilitate 2 employer/provider network events to support continuous improvement
- To undertake Planning and Performance Review in line with the Council's published timetable and guidance
- To have established the necessary systems and processes for the effective contract management of the LSC's contract with Ufi from August 2004.

6 OUR STRATEGIES

- A number of strategies will support the achievement of our objectives and key targets. These are:
 - our internal structures and processes;
 - our quality assurance improvement plan;
 - our equality and diversity strategy;
 - our basic skills strategy;
 - our sector strategy;
 - our marketing strategy; and
 - our communications plan.

6.1 Internal structures and processes

- Sector Account Managers, acting as the key interface with employers and providers on all issues, remain fundamental to the success of NCS. Account Managers have a three-way role with NCS accounts:
 - quality assurance and development
 - effective contracting
 - new business and workforce development.
- Account Managers also have a key role, alongside other NCS staff, in communicating with, and engaging, local LSC staff in all aspects of quality and Performance Review for activity on their patch. With the recruitment of 7 additional Sector Account Managers NCS will, for the first time, be in a position to allocate sector specialisms.
- The Planning and Contracts Team will continue to be responsible for all aspects of running the NCS including planning, communications to employers and local LSCs, servicing the Advisory and Ufi Programme Boards, liaison with other national office teams, production of management information, co-ordination of our Performance Review process and management of our outsourced services contracts (Provider Financial Assurance, Data Processing and Quality and Health and Safety call off contracts).
- Underpinning our structure, we will continue to build on the systems and processes we have established over the past year. We will look in particular to continue to:
 - streamline our processes and forms;
 - in liaison with the LSC's National Office, improve the management information we are able to provide, in particular in relation to sectoral benchmarking;
 - raise skill levels (internally and with our employers and providers) in respect of the effective use of management information, planning and profiling;
 - develop a protocol in respect of the LSC's contract with Ufi with the local and regional levels within the LSC and Ufi to ensure roles and responsibilities and expectations are clear.

6.2 Quality Improvement Plan

- The NCS Quality Strategy for the coming year has been designed to support the development of NCS contracted provision within the overall framework of the LSC Quality Improvement Strategy and the developing Success for All agenda. The key focus will be on:
 - improving learner success rates by supporting improvements in the quality of the delivery and management of learning for existing employers/providers, as well as giving clarity of expectations to new contractors;
 - maintaining confidence that learners are operating in a safe, healthy and supportive environment with structures in place to promote their development as safe learners.
- The key responsibility for the overall quality of learning and achievement remains with employers and providers. NCS Account Managers will continue to work with them to ensure that progress is being made and that interventions and support are available at appropriate points in the development of the contract.
- The priorities for 2004-05 build upon the progress made against our 2003-04 Business Plan objectives, specifically:
 - key systems have been established for:
 - evaluating the effectiveness of self assessment reports and approving the resultant development plans
 - the Performance Review process
 - pre and post inspection support
 - and the use of support funding;
 - the scope and usage of our call off contractor support has been extended;
 - employer and provider focus on self-assessment and development planning has increased, in particular the integration of health and safety into the process;
 - the need for robust management of health and safety has been promoted;
 - the targeted use of support funds;
 - the introduction of three year development plans and three year funding agreements; and
 - the support for the development of our Account Managers.
- Whilst demonstrable progress has been made, there is still scope for improvement and the priorities within our 2004-05 strategy reflect this along with a focus on some significant additional areas. The priorities for the coming year are:
 - to further develop core systems and common standards within the NCS with a particular emphasis on:
 - ensuring the consistency of approach to the evaluation of self assessment reports and development plans

- the further development of three year development plans
- the effective use and timely release of support funding
- the further development of the role of the call off contractor and the effective evaluation of the impact of interventions;
- to develop effective pre-contract support and development activity with new employers and providers to ensure that both the understanding and the processes required to support high quality delivery are in place early in the life of the contract;
- to enable and support the development of employers and providers through the provision of high quality NCS specific resource materials and development activity;
- to further develop pre and post inspection support ensuring that this complements and adds to the support from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and is focussed effectively. In addition we will ensure that those considered satisfactory following re-inspection maintain the progress they have made;
- the continued identification of NCS Account Managers development needs and the provision of time and support to meet these. Particular focus will be on ensuring the full integration of new Account Managers and on equipping all Account Managers to support the development of new contractors;
- the development of a clear understanding of the "safe learner" concept and its effective promotion and implementation across the NCS employers and provider base;
- support for the development of effective health and safety management systems within NCS employers and providers. In particular those systems fundamental to the identification and reporting, and assessment, of learner incidents.

➤ These priorities will be met through a variety of activities including:

- working with both individual and groups of employers and providers, including network events focussing on key priority areas and facilitating the sharing of good practice;
- developing, mapping and refining of key processes;
- use of specialist interventions;
- development of targeted materials and support activities;
- NCS Account Managers and development events.

Success will be evaluated through a combination of:

- Business Plan headline targets (Achievement levels, Adult Learning Inspectorate grades);

- employer and provider feedback (annual NCS employer/provider survey, feedback from specific events and interventions);
- key process measures, for example timescales met, impact on learners as a proportion of NCS total, quality of outcome.

➤ Where an employer or provider fails to meet the quality thresholds serious consideration will continue to be given to stopping the contract. In addition, where an employer or provider achieves Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection grades 4 or 5, as part of the post inspection action plan agreed, we will explore putting a hold on new learners starting until the quality of the provision is improved.

6.3 Equality and Diversity

➤ NCS will place the focus of its activities with employers and providers on practical, targeted work which will impact on the recruitment, retention and achievement of learners. Work will be in line with the LSC's national Equality and Diversity Strategy and we will build on the links we have established with specialist colleagues in National Office.

➤ During the year we intend to engage with the Sector Skills Councils who can contribute to our development of sectoral benchmarks and share information on projects in their sector. We also intend to begin our work with new employers and providers much earlier, before they come to the Initial Assessment Panel, so that they are fully au fait with the business benefits of having a robust Equality and Diversity policy and the LSC's requirements and expectations in this respect.

➤ In 2003/04 we have:

- developed an operational strategy which will guide our activities over the next two years;
- launched this strategy as one of the themed workshops at our employer/provider network event;
- developed a Self Assessment checklist for use by employers and providers;
- identified expert consultants who can work with employers and providers to develop their equality and diversity strategies and activities;
- collected and distributed a list of useful publications; for example the specific issues and questions that will be focus for an Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection;
- created a document which sets out the business case for diversity within employers recruitment strategies;
- built a set of data tables which set out performance in relation to gender and ethnicity issues, by employer/provider, by sector; including benchmarking across NCS and national provision. This data is capable of disaggregation to a local level.

➤ NCS provision shows the following characteristics

Recruitment	July 2002	Feb 2003	Feb 2004
Male	72	81	77.2
Female	28	19	22.8
White	97.2	98.1	95.98
Ethnic	2.8	1.9	4.02

Section 2 of our plan offers an insight into:

- relative size of the sectors in which NCS has provision
- relative proportions of recruitment and achievement by gender and ethnicity

This data can be broken down by age group, by programme and by any combination of male, female, ethnic group or white.

➤ In 2004-05 NCS will deliver six primary activities:

- design and delivery of Equality and Diversity Health Checks (16) focussed on large employers/providers or those due for Inspection in the following year;
- commission specialist consultancy to work with employers/providers who have identified needs following use of the Self Assessment process or Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection (10);
- design and deliver expert seminars (4) to a minimum of 60 delegates;
- develop a specific equality and diversity section within the Quality Improvement Good Practice Guide developed by NCS in 2003/04 in relation to nationally delivered provision;

and most importantly:

- agree **Recruitment** and **Achievement** Performance Indicators with employers and providers based on **gender** and **ethnicity**. Each performance indicator will be accompanied by a narrative setting out the specific actions and activities the employer/provider will undertake to tackle issues of under representation and/or poor performance.

➤ We will measure the impact of our activities by:

- placing special focus on equality and diversity within Performance Review;
- a bi-annual review of data at sector and employer/provider level;
- measuring the rolling average of the equal opportunities contributory grade from inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate.

➤ These measures will focus on employers/providers position against both **policies** – legislative and in-company, and **practices** – data collection and analysis, good practice, equality and diversity “champions” etc.

6.4 Marketing Strategy 2004-2005

- As in proceeding years, NCS has continued to bring large national employers into Work Based Learning. Last year saw a switch of emphasis, moving the marketing strategy from being reactive to one that was much more proactive and targeted at significant large organisations.
- The criteria for contracting with NCS was changed requiring employers to have a minimum of 1000 employees and the potential for at least 100 learners. This allowed NCS to maintain its ability to manage contracts effectively within the staffing resources available.
- The number of new organisations engaged by NCS in 2002-03 was 49.
- NCS has recruited and trained 10 new members of the team. This will allow us to maintain the quality of service to the current accounts while continuing to engage new employers from the target list.
- Our marketing approach for 2004-05 will continue to be proactive. This will allow us to continue to make the most effective use of the resources available and maximise engagement of new employers and learners. NCS will pay particular attention to the time it takes from initial contact to producing a final Learning Agreement with a view to fine tuning the process and reducing any unnecessary delays. NCS marketing will focus on a limited number of activities in order to meet the objectives outlined below.
- Our marketing objectives for 2004-05 are:
 - to engage a further 10 major national employers into Work Based Learning;
 - to increase the number of learners within contracted (new and existing) major national employers by 10%;
 - to continue to raise the profile of the National Contracts Service amongst potential accounts by regular and effective use of PR opportunities.
- In support of the above objectives NCS staff and contractors will engage in the following activity:
 - continue with a proactive marketing approach by focussing on specific employers within the target group;
 - regular analysis of the NCS target list against the FTSE top 250 list;
 - carry out background research on target organisations to establish the most appropriate means of contacting them given their record in LSC funded activity and current external factors;
 - co-ordinate with, and make full use of local LSC contacts and those from government departments in order to maximise effectiveness and minimise duplication of effort;
 - in liaison with local LSCs use senior NCS staff to contact target employers in order to establish the

potential for national contracting;

- continue to work with the Modern Apprenticeship Task force to investigate ways in which they can use their influence to promote and increase participation in modern apprenticeships amongst our target group;
- continue to encourage contracted organisations to sign and display the Modern Apprenticeship Commitment Certificate and utilise the presentations of the certificates as a media opportunity;
- use sector account managers to identify young learners or organisations who can be used as exemplars in the media to help raise the profile of NCS and modern apprenticeships;
- using the network of contracted organisations, produce a set of case studies featuring individuals who have progressed from vocational training to success within their organisations or elsewhere;
- produce articles, updates and news stories for the LSC Bulletin publication to help raise the profile, understanding and significance of the NCS contribution;
- re-evaluate our sales process in order to minimise the time between first contact and contract signing;
- identify and contribute to events attended by large national employers with appropriate display and promotional material;
- identify and undertake development of the NCS website in order to maximise its use in terms of promotion, communication and information given to potential new employers.

Sector Approach

- As highlighted in section 2, in 2004-05 NCS proposes to move to a sector approach to account management in order to maximise the effectiveness of our contract management process and in order to benefit from the further development of the Sector Skills Councils. Alongside this NCS will, where appropriate, engage in sectoral marketing initiatives in partnership both with the Sector Skills Councils and the Modern Apprenticeships Task Force as appropriate.

6.5 Communications Plan

- NCS will continue the focus on establishing and developing effective communication with all key stakeholders including new employers and young people. As outlined in our Marketing Strategy, we will focus on maintaining the current systems and activity in order to achieve effective communications with:
 - NCS Accounts (employers and providers);
 - targeted new Employers;
 - local LSC and National Office colleagues;

- through Connexions Services and the Web – Young People;
- Modern Apprenticeship Task Force.

➤ Additionally in 2004/05 NCS will focus on:

- developing an appropriate response to the new LSC regional structure;
- developing our website to specifically target employers, young people, existing accounts and general enquiries.

➤ Our objectives for 2004/05 are:

- achieve regular PR opportunity in specialist and general media;
- develop the NCS website in order to effectively serve our different target audience;
- establish regular channels of communication with new LSC Regional Directors.

➤ In support of the above objectives NCS will engage in the following activities:

- work alongside the LSC Communications team to produce regular press releases and photo opportunities linked to NCS activity;
- ensure that all new major national employers who embark on Modern Apprenticeships sign a Commitment Certificate;
- continue to distribute the NCS Update to existing accounts on a monthly basis;
- further develop the NCS Newsletter for local LSCs and send out with data disks at least twice a year;
- appoint a Web Master and agree a work plan designed to achieve our communication objectives by August 2004;
- review the link local LSC allocations within NCS to ensure each local LSC has regular liaison with an NCS link person;
- establish a regular communication mechanism with new LSC Regional Directors;
- offer Business Plan presentations to all local LSCs, both individually and on a regional basis, as well as to National Office teams during 2004/05;
- establish direct relationships with Sector Skills Councils or where appropriate work with them through the new Skills Directorate in National Office.

➤ The new sectoral approach being implemented for 2004/05 will also allow us to focus our communication activity on specific sectoral groupings. In particular we will focus on:

- Construction
- Engineering
- MoD/Public Sector
- Retail
- Care
- Hospitality

- All NCS staff will be kept up to date on achievements, new developments and LSC management issues at regular team meetings, a monthly all staff communications event and twice yearly Business Planning and Performance events.

6.6 Skills Strategy

- The Skills Strategy aims to deliver:
 - better support for businesses to help them plan, develop and get the skills and training they need;
 - new entitlements to learning to give individuals the opportunity to gain the core skills needed for work;
 - higher quality training provision more closely geared to the needs of employers, allowing employers more say in how, where and when it is delivered;
 - a more flexible and relevant qualifications framework allowing people to build more precisely the skills they need and help employers to target their own training resources.
- The NCS will address and deliver significant aspects of the Skills Strategy in the following ways:

Apprenticeship Agents

- In 2004/05 the NCS will expect Employer Support Agents to work in a brokerage or intermediary capacity to help meet the needs of employers to develop their workforce with the support of the Modern Apprenticeships.

Collaboration with other agencies including Business Links, Connexions, Sector Bodies and Apprenticeship providers will be key to ensure they are able to offer a comprehensive set of services to employers.

- Employer Support Agents will operate on a demand led basis serving a sector based employer market, working with providers to broker an Apprenticeship Agreement between the employer and young person.
- The NCS will fully develop a national model for Employer Support Agents in consultation with LSC colleagues with the intention of 'main streaming' activity from 2005 onwards. The strategy aims to achieve the following objectives:
 - to work with and develop a minimum of four 'trailblazer' Employer Support Agents to the point where they are able to operate as 'mainstream' Employer Support Agents;
 - to develop processes and systems enabling the National Contracts Service to approve national Employer Support Agents for 'mainstream' activity by 2005.

Approved Employer Schemes

- The LSC has been working with a number of large employers to establish how high quality in company training schemes can be incorporated into Modern

Apprenticeship frameworks. This is in response to the need to provide more flexible Modern Apprenticeship frameworks to meet employer demand. A series of trials are taking place to evaluate the impact of registering apprentices onto these frameworks.

- In 2004/05 the NCS will further develop existing models along with continued development of new schemes, where appropriate, in consultation with LSC colleagues and national employers. The strategy aims to achieve the following objectives:
 - to continue development of existing Approved Employer Schemes to the point where they are able to operate as 'mainstream' approved Modern Apprenticeship programmes when and where appropriate;
 - to engage a minimum of two national employers in the identification, planning and development of new Approved Employer Schemes with a view to moving towards operation as 'mainstream' approved Modern Apprenticeship programmes when and where appropriate.

Over 24 Employee Initiative

- The Skills Strategy outlines the requirement for targeted support for Level 2 qualifications to meet sectoral/regional needs. The Over 24 Employee Initiative developed and piloted by the NCS addresses this requirement directly.
- In 2004/05 the NCS will further work with large national employers and alongside LSC colleagues to both identify and articulate where this Initiative meets sectoral/regional needs.
- Specific targets for this Initiative are set out in section 5 within the Business Plan.

Basic Skills

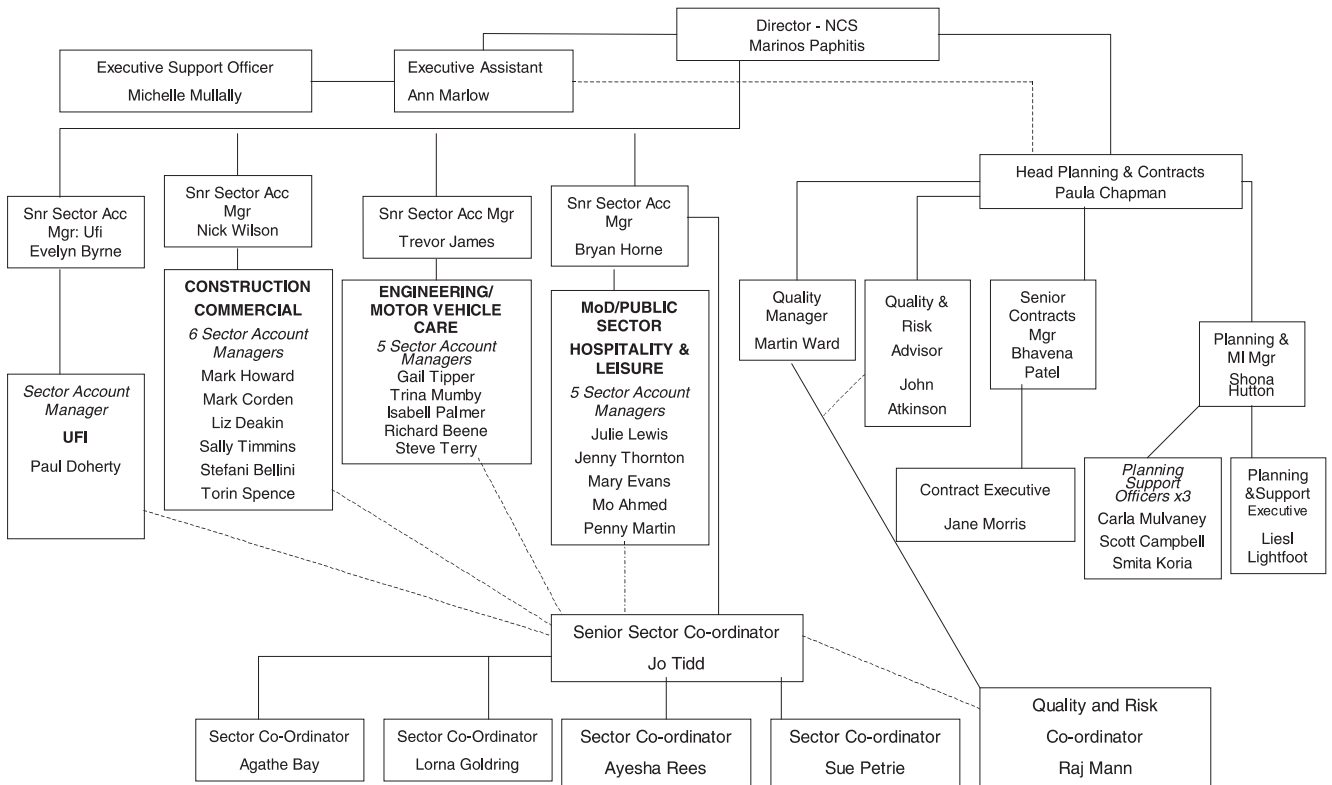
- During the current year the NCS will work with its employers and providers to ensure that learners with basic skills needs are effectively identified and given the appropriate level of support.

Our key primary activities are:

- to undertake pilots with 4 to 6 key employer accounts and one sector specific provider;
- to provide good practice materials and facilitate the exchange of good practice through employer/provider workshops, in particular in respect of the 'front end' learning processes;
- to encourage the upskilling of trainers, assessors and tutors in respect of basic skills approved qualifications linked to professional development within the context of Success for All.

Effectiveness will be monitored through impact on retention and achievement levels, as well as from Adult Learning Inspectorate reports in this area.

NATIONAL CONTRACTS SERVICE: Structure



Members of National Contracts Service Advisory Board

Malcolm Gillespie (Chair)	Regional Director South West LSC
Paul Binks	Technical Training Manager Kwikfit
Verity Bullough	Regional Director, Operations, London
Keith Donnelly	General Manager Carillion
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Mary Rogers	Director of Operations Leicestershire LSC
Terry Tucker	Learning and Development Director Westminster Health Care
Roger Waters	Career Programme Manager BMW (GB) Ltd

Membership of the Advisory Board will be kept under regular review to ensure appropriate representation.

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