RESEARCH

National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships: Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Points

- Learning Partnerships have been through an almost constantly changing policy environment which has had an impact on their development, particularly in relation to clarity of purpose, credibility and capacity;

- Despite this, over the past three and a half years Learning Partnerships have generally added value across a significant number of localities. Indeed, their micro interventions have, in many areas, filled an important gap that appeared during the transition from Training and Enterprise Councils to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC);

- The strength, commitment and credibility of Partnership Chairs and Managers/Coordinators have played a major role in moving the most successful Learning Partnerships forward;

- There is clear evidence of outcomes and impact through better information, understanding and awareness amongst partner organisations. Providers collaborating to deliver development projects, joint strategies to address key learning issues (such as Basic Skills and ICT), and partner capacity building are also significant areas of achievement for many of the case studies.

- In some areas, where circumstances have been right, Learning Partnerships have played an important role in helping to lay the ground for key local interventions such as Area Inspections and Area Reviews;

- Given the relatively modest central investment, Learning Partnerships should generally be regarded as a cost-efficient initiative that has generated a significant funding multiplier. Had the co-ordination, information sharing and development activity been commissioned centrally, the cost would have been significantly higher;

- The thematic area of provider collaboration on provision has seen the least progress amongst the case studies. This is their biggest challenge, namely, that of putting critical issues relating to gaps and overlaps on the agenda. There is, however, evidence in a small number of the case study areas that the Partnerships are starting to address coherence issues;

- From April this year, the LSC should play a strong role in promoting Learning Partnership benefits and cascading good practice at the local level. A critical dimension for it to manage will be around 'expectations'. There is a need to recognise that partnership working is an ongoing process, which has to be nurtured, developed and valued. The most effective Learning Partnerships are not simply a delivery machine;

- Both Learning Partnerships and LLSCs need to understand that there is no 'single' or 'right' model of Learning Partnerships/LLSCs/LSP delivery. Local circumstances should dictate the approach. Some of the key characteristics that appear to be associated with effective delivery include:
  - strong management and coordination team;
  - clear vision and strong will to get things done;
  - effective structures for internal communication;
  - inclusiveness.

1. Learning Partnerships were set up across the country in early 1999 to promote a new culture of provider collaboration across the sectors (schools, FE, work-based learning and adult and community learning) and to rationalise the plethora of existing local partnership arrangements covering post-16 learning.

2. This is the last of six reports that have been produced for the National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships by York Consulting Limited (YCL). It provides a final assessment of the value achieved by Learning Partnerships after three and a half years development and looks to the future and their role in the lifelong learning arena. The evaluation has used a wide variety of methodologies depending on their appropriateness to the situation of Learning Partnerships. For the purposes of this report, we have drawn information from:

    - visits to the 20 Case Study Partnerships (representing around one fifth of the total number of Learning Partnerships) between September and November 2002;

    - telephone survey work with half of all Learning Partnerships and Local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and all Government Offices between August and September 2002;

    - key findings from the earlier research activities and evaluation reports.

    ## History of Learning Partnerships

3. **Section Two** of the full report plots the journey undertaken by Learning Partnerships since their inception.

4. In the three and a half years of their existence Learning Partnerships have been through an almost constantly changing policy environment, including, in particular, the introduction of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The remit of Learning Partnerships and their relationship to these other bodies have, as a result, been subject to change a number of times. Broadly speaking, an initially powerful strategic role in the planning of post-16 learning is now less explicit and a more supporting role to both the LSC and LSPs has emerged. This evolution process has had an impact on the development of Learning Partnerships, particularly in relation to clarity of purpose, credibility and capacity.

5. The most recent review set Learning Partnerships two core roles of promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning and maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration. It also switched the funding route to local LSCs' Local Intervention and Development Fund (LIDF) from April 2003. This will result in an end to guaranteed funding for Learning Partnerships from April 2004, since the funding will no longer be ring-fenced (in line with all other programmes funded through the LSC).

6.   These issues have been at the core of the activities of the national Transition Group, which was set up to oversee the change over from DfES to the LSC. This group has now produced a Learning and Skills Council and Learning Partnership National Policy Framework, which is on the Learning Partnerships website.

Effectiveness of Partnership Working

7.   In **Section Three** of the full report, we consider the latest stage of development reached by the 20 case study Learning Partnerships. A summary of findings at earlier points in their development is outlined in Annex A of the full report.

8.   Partnership working across the 20 case studies is generally good. The most positive picture is in relation to aspects of management and co-ordination and delivering actions - we assessed three-quarters of the case studies as having made "significant progress" or being "advanced". A significant factor contributing to the progress made is the dedicated resource that most Learning Partnerships have in the form of a Partnership Manager.

9.   In addition, most of the case studies performed well in relation to resources. This reflects the success that a number of Partnerships have had in bidding for external funds.

10. Conversely, a little under half of the case studies were assessed as being at the early development/development stage in relation to planning and three-fifths in relation to review and evaluation. In cases where performance measures have been developed, there is little evidence that actual measurement and assessment has subsequently taken place.

11. Given the variation in progress we have observed, it is reasonable to assume that the local context is a key factor that ultimately determines the stage of development reached on partnership operation. However, we have also identified other factors that influence partnership effectiveness, in terms of both strengths and weaknesses. The three most significant strengths mentioned by Partnerships were:

- strong management and coordination team;
- clear vision and strong will to get things done;
- fit within a clear local structure.

12. The three most significant constraints were:

- lack of clarity and recognition of the value of Partnership;
- lack of ownership amongst partners;
- inconsistent representation

13. We also identified 'effectiveness of internal communication' and 'inclusiveness' as two areas that contribute to a Learning Partnership's ability to add value. Just under three-quarters of the 20 case studies are assessed as having made at least "significant progress" in relation to internal communication and just over half in relation to inclusiveness.

Learning Partnership Outcomes and Added Value

14. In **Section Four** of the final report, we outline the key achievements of the 20 case studies. Over three quarters of the case studies have undertaken activities directly focused on achieving outcomes for learners, including those aimed at addressing participation, basic skills needs, social inclusion and barriers to learning. Markedly fewer, approximately a third, have sought to address the areas of equal opportunities, quality and standards and workforce development or employer participation. Workforce development and employer involvement, in particular, have simply not been a priority or have been regarded as too hard to tackle for many Learning Partnerships.

15. All case studies have undertaken a range of activities aimed at improving partner working (intended to indirectly lead to outcomes for learners). In particular, there is clear evidence of outcomes and impact through better information, understanding and awareness amongst partner organisations. Providers **collaborating to deliver development projects**, **joint strategies** to address key learning issues (such as Basic Skills and ICT), and **partner capacity building** are also significant areas of achievement for many of the case studies.

16. Informing and challenging stakeholders has been an area of activity where Learning Partnerships have had to tread carefully; particularly in relation to challenging LLSCs.

17. The thematic area of **provider collaboration on provision** has seen the least progress among the case study Learning Partnerships. This is their biggest challenge, namely, that of putting critical issues relating to gaps and overlaps on the agenda. There is, however, some evidence in a small number of the case study areas that the partners and Partnerships are starting to move towards achieving some outcomes in relation to increasing the coherence of learning provision. There are also some examples where Learning Partnerships are taking the lead on developing or implementing the action plan resulting from Area Wide Inspections.

18. We have identified **three models of added value** for Learning Partnerships, demonstrating the differing levels of value generated by different Partnerships:

Model 1: Joint project delivery and information sharing

19. Learning Partnerships that have achieved this type of value have facilitated the sharing of information across partner organisations and joint working on the delivery of projects and activities, where previously they would have sought funding independently and delivered activities separately. **Five of the twenty case studies** have achieved added value relating to Model 1.

Model 2: Strategic/joint working on learning issues

20. Learning Partnerships achieving this type of value have sought to work strategically to address fundamental learning issues, barriers and priorities in the local area. A common example is basic skills. These partnerships use research that they or others have undertaken to identify the most appropriate strategic action to take forward to address the needs identified. They also broker funding to ensure that it is targeted in priority areas. **Seven of the case study Partnerships** have been assessed as achieving added value associated with Model 2.

Model 3: Collaborative planning and delivery of learning provision.

21. Learning Partnerships achieving this type of value added have undertaken action aimed at improving the coherence of learning provision and support locally. These Learning Partnerships may have played an active role in planning for, and developing action plans following area wide inspection. They have delivered real and effective change in working arrangements.

22. **Two of the case studies** have been identified as achieving value added associated with Model 3, and a further **four case studies have been assessed as having made clear progress** towards achieving such added value.

Exceptions to the three models.

23. For three of the case study Learning Partnerships (which are characterised by having an overarching strategic board together with a series of well-developed, local geographical groups) our assessment of the model of added value achieved is different for the local groups than it is for the overarching strategic board.

24. Two of the case study Learning Partnerships are considered as not having achieved added value relating to any of the models presented.

Future Direction

25. **Section Five** of all the full report, considers the future direction that Learning Partnerships are likely to take. The analysis highlights the range of both opportunity and concern. It also reveals a diversity of opinion, but perhaps more fundamental, a range of expectancy cast within a general framework of uncertainty.

26. Based on the perceptions that we obtained from both the case study Partnerships and LLSC representatives, we have identified a number of potential models of delivery for Learning Partnerships in the future (note that we have classified some of the case studies within more than one of these models):

    (a) LLSC owned: This relates to a situation where the Partnership is effectively driven or owned by the LLSC. It essentially becomes part of the supplier network, forming a portfolio of subject focused sub-groups. A total of **seven case studies** in our view fall into this category.

    (b) Close to the LSC but independent: Partnerships in this category are keen to deliver activities in line with aspects of the LLSC agenda, perhaps in similar areas to those identified in the previous model, but retain independence. **Nine case studies** fall within this category.

    (c) Disappear/replaced: In this model the Partnership will either completely disappear or be replaced by another body. **Six case studies** feel that this is a distinct possible outcome, but only if an alternative strategy fails to materialise.

    (d) Declared independence/wider agenda: Partnerships in this group wish to maintain their independence but also maintain their strategic high ground. Partnerships falling into this category tend to be in a stronger position than others, given that they have built up a range of other funding sources to draw upon. A total of **six case studies** fall within this category.

Conclusions

27. Over the past three and a half years Learning Partnerships have generally had a bad press. In many cases this has been undeserved. We conclude that in the main they have achieved added value in a significant number of localities.

28. Early on in the evaluation we estimated that one quarter of Partnerships were performing very well, one quarter were making little/no progress and the remainder were somewhere in between. Our current assessment would be that 10% stand out as leading performers, 50% have made significant progress, 20% are showing positive signs of development and 20% are still close to base position. This represents both an overall performance improvement and a significant base to build upon.

29. The vast majority of Partnerships have been able to demonstrate aspects of added value by increasing the level and amount of joint working and information sharing across partner organisations and sectors. Some have also made significant inroads to developing the voice of the learner including local research and mapping exercises. While these activities are now the responsibility of the LLSC they are now perhaps further advanced than they might have been without Learning Partnership involvement. In some cases Learning Partnerships have retained this role through agreement with the LLSC.

30. Where the circumstances have been right Learning Partnerships have shown that they have been able to lay the ground for important local interventions such as Area Inspections and Area Reviews.

31. Furthermore, there is evidence that Learning Partnerships have added value beyond the micro interventions in their individual localities. In a national policy context, in many respects, they filled an important gap, which appeared in the transition from TECs to LLSCs. Had they not been there, not only would a number of projects have been lost, but there would have been a breach in both momentum and continuity.

32. In some respects it is true that Learning Partnerships have failed to deliver policy expectations. As a national initiative it also failed to generate a national network of homogeneous Partnerships with common agendas and structures. This failure may be due more to the problem of policy reality rather than Partnership delivery:

    • the failure to lock Learning Partnerships firmly into the national policy context has been an initial and recurrent blow to their development. They were from an early stage perceived nationally almost as a failed and forgotten initiative. This view has been perpetuated, and reinforced by poor performance in some Partnerships, to the extent they were essentially perceived, in many quarters, as a tarnished product. All tarred with the same brush. This has made effective LLSC engagement all the more difficult. It has also inhibited a stronger lead from the national LSC;

    • Partnerships from the outset felt that as voluntary organisations they were ill equipped to deal with the more strategic roles they were initially given. It is perhaps to their credit that now over half are assessed as achieving some added value through strategically working together to identify and address learning issues within the locality;

    • it has not always been recognised that Partnership development, which involves cultural change and changing hearts and minds, is a long term process. Everyone is at a different starting point and some are more able to deal with the practicalities and the politics than others. The situation is often dictated by local circumstances.

33. It is quite clear from our analysis that Partnership managers, coordinators and chairs have played a major role in moving the Learning Partnership agenda forward in times of conflict and uncertainty. Over the past 12 months, in particular, despite job insecurity issues, over half of Partnerships have been assessed as having accelerated in terms of Partnership effectiveness and added value achieved. The Partnership managers and coordinators supported by their chairs have played a major role in holding things together.

34. In some respects Learning Partnerships might be regarded from an Exchequer perspective, as one of the most cost efficient initiatives ever introduced. Relatively modest funding of approximately £100k per annum has levered in many times this in direct additional funding from, for example, ESF/SRB and in-kind support from individual partners. It has generated a significant funding multiplier.

35. In terms of cost effectiveness it is clear that the majority of Partnerships have been able to demonstrate value added; some more than others. Once again from the point of view of the Exchequer, given a relatively modest central investment, this, even on average, Learning Partnership performance probably represents value for money. Where the Partnerships have worked particularly well it represents excellent value for money.

36. Had the information sharing, coordination, coherence and development activity that has been achieved, been commissioned centrally from a remote point the cost would have been significantly higher and the will to deliver (given the voluntary nature of Learning Partnerships) possibly lower. It might therefore be argued that Learning Partnerships have achieved more with the same money than an LLSC type body might have done in isolation.

37. We have identified a myriad of potential problems and uncertainties concerning the future of Learning Partnerships. These have been documented and are genuine enough. However when one cuts through the general 'noise' of 'who's going to do what with whom and how' the position is actually very positive. More than three quarters of Partnerships have indicated that their LLSC are currently very supportive towards them. This represents a significant step forward from earlier in the summer.

38. There will inevitably be organisational changes. It is likely that over one third of Partnerships may significantly restructure to reflect LLSC local delivery structures. In other cases Learning Partnerships are keen to retain a 'cradle to grave' remit, which is broader than the LSC's direct interest. These different approaches should not pose major problems providing the process is handled well. The continuation of collaborative activity is more important than the method of delivery.

39. There is evidence of tension around aspects of Partnership independence. If handled sensitively by the LLSC this might yet prove to be more of a problem in theory than in practice.

40. A critical dimension for the LSC to manage is 'expectation'. They need to understand what can be done and what is more difficult to do with Learning Partnerships. Asking Learning Partnerships to address the most difficult problems immediately may not be productive. They also need to recognise that Partnership is a continuous process, which has to be nurtured, developed and valued. Learning Partnerships are not simply a delivery machine.

Recommendations

1. Both Learning Partnerships and LLSCs need to understand that there is no 'single' or 'right' model of Learning Partnerships/LLSCs/LSP delivery. Almost anything can be made to work. Local circumstances should dictate the approach.

2. Learning Partnerships in consultation with their LLSCs need to place the benefit of activity on the ground above historical structures that they have developed. While the old structures may have supported them in the past they may not be sufficient for the new agenda.

3. LLSCs should recognise the importance of the manager and coordinator to Learning Partnership activity. They are not simply an overhead. Their removal or downgrading could significantly affect Partnership working. The softer outputs they generate should be valued.

4. LLSCs should think twice before dismantling overarching Partnerships. Whilst the main LLSC interest may be at local level they may find it difficult to control independently. Some of the most successful Partnerships to date have built their achievements around an overarching strategic centre.

5. The LLSCs should seek to work towards establishing three year contracts with Learning Partnerships. While it is perhaps reasonable that they might be reluctant to do so in this first year they should be making undertakings that providing performance is satisfactory then a three year deal will be entered into from 2004/05.

6. The National Learning Skills Council should play a strong role in promoting Learning Partnership benefits and cascading good practice. An important co-ordination role, played by the Government Offices in terms of providing information on policy and funding, may not be so direct. The LSC should consider whether this role is required and if so who should undertake it.

7. Learning Partnerships should be encouraged to aspire to take on the learning arm role of the Local Strategic Partnerships. There are already good practice examples here which should be cascaded.

8. LLSCs should use this initial year to get to know and better understand Learning Partnerships. Although it is understandable that they may wish to make some changes, they should perhaps avoid major surgery until they are clear what can be delivered.

9. Learning Partnerships, with support from their LLSCs, should seek to establish clear performance measures, which are smart and can be evaluated. This has been a major failing in the past and, if addressed, is likely to secure a more productive future.

10. LLSCs might find it useful to use the framework within this final report to assess where their local Learning Partnership is. Government Offices have already identified the need to undertake such an assessment in preparation for the local Learning and Skills Councils.

11. LLSCs should study the examples of Learning Partnerships good practice set out in the Learning Partnership Toolkit and promote its use.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 This is the last of six reports that have been produced for the National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships. It provides a final assessment of the value achieved by Learning Partnerships after three and a half years development and looks to the future and their role in the lifelong learning arena. The progress of Learning Partnerships has previously been assessed in the earlier evaluation reports:

- Baseline Report I (July 2000);
- Baseline Report II and Early Progress (November 2000);
- Case Study Findings (November 2000);
- Interim Progress and Early Impact (July 2001);
- Interim Impact Report 1 (January 2002).

The Evaluation

1.2 The evaluation process, over the three years of operation, has involved a multifaceted approach that has evolved as Partnerships themselves have evolved. At the core of the process has been a set of longitudinal case studies undertaken with the following 20 Learning Partnerships:

- Bedfordshire & Luton;
- Bournemouth, Poole & Dorset;
- Buckinghamshire;
- Calderdale;
- Cambridgeshire;
- Central London;
- Cheshire;
- City Pride – Manchester;
- County Durham;
- East Thames;
- Greater Nottingham;
- Hampshire and Portsmouth (previously Southern Strategic Partnership);
- Hull;
- Kent;
- Lincolnshire & Rutland;
- Liverpool;

- Sandwell;
- Staffordshire;
- Sunderland;
- Wiltshire & Swindon.

1.3 These case studies have involved discussions with the Chairs, Directors, Managers and Co-ordinators of Learning Partnerships; with key partners from all sectors; and with key stakeholders, such as Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs). These case studies have been complemented by:

- **analyses of the national learning targets, whose achievement was originally charged to Learning Partnerships;**

- **discussions with Government Offices and regional evaluators;**

- **assessments of Partnership plans, evaluations and progress reports;**

- **performance data;**

- **telephone interviews following the Learning Partnership review with around 50 Learning Partnerships, 20 LLSCs and all Government Office representatives.**

1.4 These wider activities have been used as has been appropriate to the needs of the evaluation and over time the evaluation process has evolved considerably. The reasons for these changes are explained in more detail in **Section 2**, where we look at the history of Learning Partnerships.

1.5 For the purposes of this final impact report we have drawn chiefly on:

- the 20 Case Studies undertaken between September and November of 2002;

- the consultations undertaken with Learning Partnerships, Government Offices and Learning and Skills Councils in August and September 2002.

1.6 This final report does not make an assessment against performance on the National Learning Targets. These are now the responsibility of the LSC and perhaps no longer so relevant to the role being played by Learning Partnerships. In addition, there is such diversity in focus and activities across the 101 Learning Partnerships that the availability of consistent information from Partnerships' own assessments of progress is limited. As a result, **this report provides a largely qualitative assessment of the impact of Learning Partnerships** based on the 20 case study Partnerships.

Structure of the Report

1.7 Initially, in **Section 2**, we provide the context for assessing the value and impact of Learning Partnerships by outlining the development journey for Learning Partnerships over the past three and a half years. We go on to provide an assessment of the stage of development of the 20 case study Learning Partnerships in relation to three core themes:

- **effectiveness of Partnership working (Section 3);**
- **Learning Partnership outcomes and added value (Section 4);**
- **views and perspectives on the journey ahead (Section 5).**

1.8 Throughout these sections, we comment on many of the strengths, weaknesses/constraints, opportunities and threats that have and continue to face Learning Partnerships nationally. In the concluding section (**Section 6**), we pull many of these together to present an overall assessment of the value of Learning Partnerships and the extent to which they have fulfilled the roles set out for them.

2 THE HISTORY OF LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS 1999 TO 2002

Background

2.1 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), previously the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), established 101 Learning Partnerships in 1999. They set out to encourage the key agencies and organisations involved in lifelong learning to voluntarily work together in order to bring greater coherence and co-ordination to learning provision, so that the needs of learners could be met more effectively.

2.2 This section plots the journey undertaken by Learning Partnerships since their inception. We seek to briefly analyse the impacts that the changes in emphasis of policy and role have had on the progress of Partnerships over this period. This exercise is an important first step in understanding the position that Learning Partnerships hold today.

The Role of Learning Partnerships

2.3 In the three and a half years of their existence Learning Partnerships have been through an almost constantly changing policy environment. As the Government's lifelong learning agenda has emerged their remit has been amended a number of times.

Original Remit

2.4 At their inception in 1999 Learning Partnerships were given a remit as follows:

"The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and its national partners want to see a single strategic body - a Learning Partnership - in each area that will bring together all existing local Partnership arrangements covering post-16 and lifelong learning"

2.5 **Their role included** action in relation to a wide range of areas, including:

- the **development of coherence through** co-ordination in relation to learning provision;

- **establishment of coherent and effective student support arrangements;**

- **ensuring co-ordinated and integrated transport for post 16 learners;**

- **the development of local targets in relation to the National Learning Targets** including the supporting work towards the National Participation Target.

2.6 This role reflected a high level strategic role for Learning Partnerships, a role that would genuinely affect the planning and delivery of learning within their local areas.

Post *"Learning to Succeed"*

2.7 The publication of the *"Learning to Succeed"* White Paper in June 1999 changed the policy environment for Learning Partnerships. It announced the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council and its 47 attendant local arms. This development threw into doubt, in many quarters, the role of Learning Partnerships. The LSC would have responsibility for the planning and funding of all post 16 learning (excluding Higher Education) and it would interact on a day-to-day basis with all Partners as part of its responsibility. **Where did Learning Partnerships fit into this new world?** There seemed to be substantial areas of overlap between the LSC and Learning Partnership remits, mainly in relation to the development of coherent planning processes.

2.8 It was against this backdrop that the role of Learning Partnerships was refreshed for the first time. On the 27th October 1999 Baroness Blackstone announced two key roles for Learning Partnerships at the Learning Partnership conference:

- **"Firstly, they will reach out into local communities and find out what it is that local people really need**. They will provide the new local arms of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with invaluable information on youth, adult and community learning needs and on employer skill needs";

- **"Secondly, Learning Partnerships will provide a forum for collaboration** enabling local providers and others to work together to ensure education and training provision is as efficient and cost-effective as possible. **They can ensure that gaps in local provision are filled** and that duplication is avoided by co-ordinating local curriculum planning and staff development".

2.9 This signalled a clear change in direction for the future of Learning Partnerships. The powerful strategic role in the planning of post-16 learning was less explicit and a more supporting role to the LSC appeared to emerge, as Partnerships were asked to become the eyes and ears of the LLSCs reporting on learner and employer needs.

Further Guidance for Learning Partnerships

2.10 With the arrival of the LSC in April 2001, the DfES issued an updated guidance document for Learning Partnerships. This provided an update and clarification of the roles of Learning Partnerships in light of the LSC remit that was published in November 2000. The roles were defined as follows:

- "**to deliver greater collaboration on the range of provision, its delivery and its standards** so that learning becomes more coherent, relevant and accessible to local people and employers";

- "**to enable providers to work collectively**, with users, to identify local learner, community and employer needs and to respond to them through their own actions and by influencing local LSCs";

- "**to ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to provide feedback** on the quality and accessibility of learning to providers and the LSC from both young people and adults, especially through learner forums".

2.11 The Guidance also outlined a number of priority areas of activity for Learning Partnerships for the coming year:

- **continuing progress** towards the achievement of agreed local learning targets in line with the National Learning Targets;

- **ensuring effective mechanisms** are in place for consulting young people and adults;

- **helping to drive up the quality of learning provision** in their areas, in particular by addressing issues arising from Area Inspections of 16 to 19 provision;

- **contributing to local neighbourhood renewal strategies** and, in particular, ensuring that Learning Partnerships have the capacity to provide the learning and skills input to LSPs;

- **promoting and marketing learning** to different audiences;

- **developing further inclusive links** with grass root partners and clients and continuing to share local information and plans.

2.12 This guidance did not represent a fundamental change in direction for Learning Partnerships, but through the identification of priority areas **did begin to introduce a number of themes, such as involvement in Area Wide Inspections and in the regeneration agenda**, that would become important in their further development. It also recognised the important role that many Partnerships were beginning to play in reaching out to partners, such as voluntary and community organisations, who are often excluded from the partnership process. It is, however, interesting to note that the priorities did not identify activity around the joint planning of learning, an activity that is at the very centre of the coherence and strategic influencing role.

The Learning Partnership Review

2.13 The remit of Learning Partnerships then remained largely stable until the most recent review process. At the Learning Partnerships Conference in November 2001 the Department announced that it was going to undertake a formal review of Learning Partnerships. The results of this review were announced in April 2002.

2.14 The review set out two core roles for Learning Partnerships:

- **promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning;**
- **maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration.**

2.15 This second role was introduced within the context of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) being introduced in April 2001. In addition, and perhaps in some ways more importantly, the results of the review brought with them a change in the funding route for the Partnership Fund. This had previously been distributed through the Government Office network, but the review switched the funding route to Local LSCs' Local Intervention and Development Fund (LIDF) from April 2003. It also announced the end of guaranteed funding for Learning Partnerships - the funds remain ring-fenced within LIDF until April 2004, but beyond this date the LSC only has a requirement to support local Partnerships. This is in line with all other programmes funded through the LSC, none of which are ring-fenced

2.16 **At the time of writing, Learning Partnerships are, in the main, still interpreting the implications of the review for their local areas** and we examine these activities in more detail in **Section 5** of this report. However, the immediate reaction from Partnerships has been largely muted. The majority of those consulted following the review felt that the content of the Minister's announcement were generally expected by Partners, with many commenting that it was **"predictable" and that "there has been little impact on operations and activities" to date**.

2.17 The new roles for Learning Partnerships have proved largely uncontroversial. The development of collaboration between providers has always been at the core of the Learning Partnership role and was consequently thought to be nothing new. Maximising the contribution of learning to the regeneration agenda has proved slightly more controversial, but this mainly stems from a lack of understanding of exactly what this role means. The level of understanding seems to be linked strongly to the previous experience of links to regeneration. Where regeneration has been a major focus due to local conditions, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding is available or Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are at a more advanced stage of development there is, unsurprisingly, a better level of understanding.

2.18 The transfer of funding to the LSC has been by far the most difficult issue arising from the review. Concerns have been expressed about the independence of Partnerships; long term sustainability; a mismatch between the breadth of LSC and Learning Partnership agendas; and the nature of the relationship between the organisations. These concerns have, perhaps, been exacerbated by the lack of hard information about the future from DfES and the LSC.

2.19 These issues have been at the core of the activities of the national Transition Group, which has been set up to oversee the change over from DfES to the LSC. This group has now produced a Learning and Skills Council and Learning Partnership National Policy Framework, available on the Learning Partnerships website.

Impact of the Journey on Learning Partnerships

2.20 Outlined above is the evidence of an initiative that has been in a state of flux almost since its inception. The role of Learning Partnerships has been reviewed and fine tuned three times over a period of only three years and perhaps most damagingly was changed within the first year of the publication of their original remit.

2.21 These changes have had a variety of impacts on Learning Partnerships that need to be considered in making any assessment of their achievements, impact and added value over the period. This evolution process has impacted particularly on their:

- **clarity of purpose** – a key problem faced by Partnerships has been a lack of understanding amongst key stakeholders and even partners of their role. This lack of clarity has in some cases proved a hindrance to progress towards maturity and achievement against the roles set out for them. This problem can only have been exacerbated by the rapidly changing roles that Partnerships have been asked to play;

- **credibility** – the changes at an early stage of their development and the rumours that were circulating about the establishment of the LSC, even prior to the publication of the *"Learning to Succeed"* white paper, meant that questions were being asked about their future and their purpose almost from the outset. This has had an impact on the credibility of Partnerships in some areas with its attendant knock on effects in terms of partner commitment;

- **capacity** – the initial vision set out for Learning Partnerships offered a grand strategic role which suggested a considerable amount of power and the potential for substantial resource. As the role has changed over time and their importance as a strategic instrument has been diminished their ability to attract resource has been inhibited (although many to their credit have accessed considerable funding from elsewhere), which in turn has impacted on their ability to deliver on their assigned roles.

Impact on the Evaluation

2.22 The changing nature of Learning Partnerships has also impacted on the evaluation approach that has been taken. At the outset of the evaluation, when the Learning Partnership role was first announced, a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach was proposed:

- the quantitative focus was very much on the impact of Partnerships on high level strategic indicators at a regional and national level, particularly the National Learning Targets. These assessments were to be supported by the findings from Learning Partnerships' own evaluation findings undertaken at the local level and considerable time was spent in the early stages of the evaluation in seeking to develop an evaluation culture within Partnerships to facilitate both benefits for the Partnerships and support for the evaluation. It was hoped that these local evaluations and the regional evaluations undertaken by Government Offices would produce a number of consistent indicators that could be bundled to make an assessment at the national level;

- the qualitative perspective was to be provided by 20 longitudinal case studies, involving Partnership executives, partners and key stakeholders.

2.23 This approach has been heavily affected by the changes that have taken place to Learning Partnerships. As their role has become perhaps less strategic and potentially less influential, measuring them against high level indicators, such as the National Learning Targets, has become less appropriate.

2.24 In addition, the process of evaluation and self-review has not been a priority for many Partnerships, as more pressing issues around their development have limited the time they have been able to spend in this area. The result has been that effective information has not been available from this approach and consequently it has been removed.

2.25 The final evaluation has therefore become a largely qualitative assessment based on the 20 case study Partnerships.

3   EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

3.1   In this section we consider the latest stage of development reached by the 20 case study Learning Partnerships. Each of the Partnership profiles relate to the period ending October 2002.

3.2   Our analysis segments "Partnership development" into eight aspects of performance which we consider both individually and collectively to be critical to the effective operation and delivery of Partnerships.   These include:

(i)   **planning;**
(ii)   **priority setting;**
(iii)   **delivering actions;**
(iv)   **review;**
(v)   **management and co-ordination;**
(vi)   **resources;**
(vii)   **internal communication;**
(viii) **inclusiveness.**

3.3   The stage of development reached within each theme will ultimately determine the type and level of output or value added achieved by individual Partnerships to date. Aspects of Partnership achievement and added value are reviewed in the next section of this report.

Operation of Partnership

3.4   The first six components of Partnership working that we have identified relate to operational elements of Partnership activity. In **Table 3.1** we show the stage reached against each theme and in **Table 3.2** outline in more detail the types of activities involved within each themed category.

3.5   Each Partnership is classified as either "advanced", "making significant progress", "developing" or as an "early developer". These are the same classifications used in our earlier evaluation reports and are based on an objective assessment of absolute and comparative Partnership performance.

Case Study Learning Partnership	Planning	Priority Setting	Delivering Actions	Review	Management & Co-ordination	Resources
Table 3.1: **Operation of Partnership – Stage of Development of 20 Case Studies**						
1	D	D	D	D	SP	SP
2	D	ED	SP	ED	D	SP
3	SP	SP	SP	D	SP	SP
4	D	D	SP	ED	SP	SP
5	SP	A	SP	SP	SP	D
6	SP	SP	A	A	A	A
7	D	ED	ED	D	D	ED
8	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	D
9	SP	SP	A	SP	SP	A
10	ED	ED	ED	ED	ED	ED
11	SP	SP	SP	D	SP	SP
12	D	SP	SP	D	SP	D
13	D	SP	SP	SP	D	A
14	SP	A	A	SP	SP	A
15	D	SP	SP	D	A	A
16	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	D
17	A	A	A	D	A	SP
18	SP	A	A	D	A	SP
19	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	A
20	ED	D	D	ED	D	D

Ranking:
A = Advanced; SP = Significant Progress Made; D = Developing; ED = Early Developer

3.6 Performance against these operational indicators is generally good - seventeen of the case studies achieved scores of advanced or significant progress on at least one indicator. There is, however, evidence of significant polarity of performance with over one third of case studies displaying advanced qualities and one quarter still appearing as early developers, against same indicators.

3.7 The most positive picture is in relation to the aspects of management and co-ordination and delivering actions, where around three-quarters of the case studies were at the significant progress or advanced stage.   A factor contributing to the progress made is, in many cases, the dedicated resource that most Learning Partnerships have in the form of a Partnership Manager or Coordinator.   This was identified early on in the evaluation as a critical success factor for Learning Partnerships, providing them with both the resource to do things and, in many cases, an individual to drive and/or facilitate Partnership working.

3.8 The importance of this resource is clearly demonstrated by one of the case studies. This particular Partnership has been without a Partnership Manager for almost one year. The result has been that it has fallen back on the very significant progress it had made on almost all aspects of Partnership operation.

Table 3.2: Activities involved in Aspects of Partnership Operation	
Planning:	• Identifying and developing clarity of purpose across partner organisations – vision, aims and objectives • Setting priorities • Identifying performance measures • Developing action plans • Reviewing performance • Documenting/communicating plans (Learning Plans, Executive Summaries)
Priority Setting	• Shared understanding of issues, needs, provision • Analyse/interpret information • Identify resulting areas of Learning Partnership activity
Delivering Actions	• Projects/actions identified for Partnership/individual partners are delivered
Review	• Identify/clarify indicators of performance; • Develop mechanisms/approaches to measuring performance • Evaluate projects/actions against Partnership aims/objectives • Evaluate Partnership progress/achievements – Partnership effectiveness, outcomes and added value
Management and Co-ordination	• Planning and review • Resources • Communication • Facilitation • Representation • Clear roles and responsibilities • Project management
Resources	• Identifying/obtaining additional resource – leverage • Focus on sustainability/future delivery • Maximising resource available e.g. use of in-kind support

3.9 Aspects of advanced performance among Partnerships was greatest in relation to resources. This reflects the success that a number of Partnerships have had in bidding for external funds

3.10 However, with a little under half of the case studies at the early development/development stage in relation to planning and more than half in relation to review, a key question for us to pose in relation to Partnership operation is "should we expect more Partnerships to be at the advanced/significant progress stage three and a half years into their development?". The effect of the issues/barriers highlighted in Section 2 must not be underestimated here – clarity of purpose, credibility and capacity are key factors that are likely to contribute to slower development.

Review and Evaluation

3.11 The effectiveness of the 20 case study Learning Partnerships in relation to the aspect of 'review and evaluation' deserves particular mention. Against the review indicator in **Table 3.1**, three-fifths of Partnerships were considered to be either early developers or developers. Developing approaches to review and evaluation is something that Learning Partnerships have been reluctant to do throughout the past three and a half years. Some of the reasons for this include:

- in the early days, there was a focus **nationally on the need for Learning Partnerships to own and therefore evaluate performance against high level targets** such as those relating to attainment and participation (the National Learning Targets) – **many partners and Partnerships have never accepted these as their responsibility** and, in particular, have struggled to see how the activities of a Learning Partnership can be shown to directly contribute to any changes or improvements in these high level targets;

- **the difficulties associated with measuring the effectiveness and added value of Partnership activities**, given that outcomes and impact are generally more qualitative than quantitative;

- **the skills and abilities of Partnership managers** and partners to undertake such evaluations, given that it is not a straightforward quantitative or 'bean counting' exercise;

- focus on achieving clarity of purpose and "actually doing something" has necessarily been a priority for many Partnerships and the constraints associated with this (clarity of purpose, credibility and capacity) have meant **there has been little time and resource to really effectively consider the processes of review and evaluation**;

- **lack of understanding and misconceptions** amongst Partnership managers and partners of what is being asked in relation to evaluation and review.

3.12 **Almost half of the case study Partnerships have been assessed as 'developing' in relation to review**. In these cases, the Partnerships have put in place effective structures to evaluate specific projects that the Learning Partnership delivers and have taken some steps towards developing clear plans and trying to identify performance measures for their Learning Partnership. What they have generally not been able to do as yet is to link the evaluations of specific projects within an overall framework for evaluating Learning Partnership effectiveness, impact and added value. **In cases where performance measures have been developed, there is little evidence that actual measurement and assessment has subsequently taken place**.

3.13 Those case study Learning Partnerships that have been assessed as making significant progress or are advanced in relation to the aspect of review have, for example:

- **undertaken partner surveys or focus groups** at away days which have involved obtaining qualitative views and perceptions of partner representatives on the stage of development reached by their Learning Partnership, the impact that it has had and areas for improvement;

- **appointed an independent evaluator** to produce an overall assessment of the achievements and stage of development of the Learning Partnership;

- **commissioned a student to consult partner members** and draw up an assessment of performance against key roles;

- **undertaking annual away days** where the progress of the Partnership is reviewed and evaluated every March.

Determinants of Success

3.14 This analysis of partnership operation shows significant variability in performance. It shows that while some Learning Partnerships have operated very effectively others have struggled. What is the reason for this? Is it not reasonable to argue that if some Partnerships have been successful all others have the potential to be successful?

3.15 Given the variation in progress we have observed it is reasonable to assume that the local context is a factor that ultimately determines the stage of **development** of the operational features of Learning Partnerships. **Table 3.3** summarises some of the additional factors that Partnerships have identified as either strengths or constraints in relation to operational delivery.

3.16 The three most significant strengths mentioned by Partnerships include:

- strong management and coordination team;
- clear vision and strong will to get things done;
- fit within a clear local structure.

3.17 The three most significant constraints include:

- lack of clarity and recognition of the value of partnership;
- lack of ownership amongst partners;
- inconsistent representation.

Table 3.3: Factors influencing Effective Partnership Operation	

Some strengths of Learning Partnerships at SP/A stage	• Stable Partnership manager over three years;
	• Skills and abilities of Partnership manager and/or Chair to drive forward and facilitate Partnership;
	• Commitment/attendance and contribution of senior people at board level meetings;
	• Regular/annual away days to review progress/set forward agenda;
	• Clear roles and responsibilities for Partnership Chair, Manager and individual partner representatives;
	• Clear structures for reporting on and evaluating individual Partnership actions/projects;
	• Developing a clear framework for evaluation;
	• Fit within a clear local structure, linking to regeneration Partnerships for example, credibility with other local stakeholders and Partnerships;
	• Clear and identified linkages between board members and other Partnerships;
	• Strong management and co-ordination team – strong management from the Chair, co-ordination from the Partnership Co-ordinator and support from the Administrators;
	• Clarity of focus through having the right members on the Board and the right players involved to take things forward;
	• Skills of the Partnership Manager including:
	  - needs to keep abreast of priorities and developments and present recommendations to the Board;
	  - independent of partners;
	  - facilitates communication;
	  - identifies funding opportunities.
	• Ability and range of skills of the Partnership Manager;
	• Remains relatively unbureaucratic;
	• Clear vision and strong will to get things done – driven by the activities of the Manager and Chair;
	• Annual review of plans – including plans for internal evaluation;
	• Partnership Manager and Chair are dynamic and influential;
	• Structured and dynamic Board meetings – ensuring focus and action on a range of issues;
	• Dedicated management energy.

Some constraints faced by Learning Partnerships at ED/D stage	• Lack shared clarity and recognition of the value of the Learning Partnership and how it fits with other stakeholders/Partnerships (e.g. LSC, LSP, regeneration Partnerships); • Lack of ownership amongst partners; • Inconsistent representation on sub-groups and Boards; • No lead body/conduit for generic Partnership projects; • Lack clear and agreed purpose and priorities; • Unclear at county-wide level of the purpose; • Struggling to keep all partners and organisations in touch with events.

Nature of Partnership Working

3.18 **Table 3.4** shows the final two aspects of Partnership working that have been assessed. More than half of the 20 case study Learning Partnerships have made at least significant progress in relation to internal communication and inclusiveness. These aspects of Partnership effectiveness must be considered as the key factors contributing to a Learning Partnership's ability to add value. Achievement and progress towards these features of Partnership, therefore, influences the extent to which a Partnership may achieve some added value in a local area.

Table 3.4: Nature of Partnership – Stage of Development of 20 Case Studies		
Case Studies	**Internal Communication**	**Inclusive**
1.	SP	D
2.	D	SP
3.	SP	SP
4.	D	ED
5.	SP	A
6.	SP	A
7.	D	ED
8.	SP	ED
9.	A	D
10.	ED	ED
11.	SP	SP
12.	SP	D
13.	A	A
14.	D	A
15.	SP	SP
16.	SP	SP
17.	SP	D
18.	A	A
19.	SP	SP
20.	D	D

Ranking:
A = Advanced; SP = Significant Progress Made; D = Developing; ED = Early Developer

Internal Communication

3.19 Some of the key features from those Learning Partnerships that have made significant progress or are advanced in relation to internal communication include:

- **the development of a range of tools and activities** to help facilitate improved communication across partner organisations and between partners represented on the Partnership board and sub-groups, for example, web sites, newsletters, email groups;

- **regular opportunities within meetings** for individual partner representatives to share current issues and information about their sector **with other partner organisations**;

- **clear structures and responsibilities** within the Partnership, for example, between board and sub-group and between Partnership manager and board for communicating and reporting;

- **activities undertaken to map and understand existing communication** links in order to raise awareness of existing communication links and build upon them;

- **implementing consultation exercises**.

Inclusiveness

3.20 Key features of those Learning Partnerships that have made significant progress or are advanced in relation to inclusiveness include:

- **representation of all key sectors** in the learning environment on the board of the Learning Partnership;

- **representation** and involvement of all relevant and appropriate sectors **on task groups and sub-groups**;

- **activities to develop the capacity of key sectors** to contribute to the learning agenda and to the Learning Partnership activities – partner capacity building, particularly amongst the voluntary and community sector.

3.21 Most Learning Partnerships have found it difficult to appropriately include and have representation from employers, particularly small businesses. In addition, a number of Learning Partnerships have expressed difficulties in engaging the school sector.

Constraints

3.22 Some of the constraints being faced by those Learning Partnerships that are at the early developing or developing stages in relation to internal communication and inclusiveness include:

- the fact that **developing inclusiveness and communication within a Learning Partnership is a long term exercise**. The barriers mentioned earlier around clarity of purpose and capacity, for example, have inhibited the ability of some Learning Partnerships to develop their own clear purpose and focus in order to address the issues of inclusiveness and communication;

- **information shared at Boards and sub-groups** is not cascaded or shared within the partner organisations;

- **lack of ownership amongst partners of the Learning Partnership** – individual partners perceive the Learning Partnership as another player, rather than something that they contribute to and are integral to;

- many of the constraints faced by Learning Partnerships at the early developing and developing stage in relation to effective Partnership operation, as outlined in Table 4.1, also apply here. Generally speaking, **if a Learning Partnership has not yet made significant progress in developing these aspects of effective Partnership operation, it is likely that they will have been unable to make significant progress in relation to inclusiveness and communication**.

4 LEARNING PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES AND ADDED VALUE

4.1 In this section we look at the achievements of the 20 case study Learning Partnerships in terms of:

- activities, and associated achievements, that are intended to result in **outcomes for the 'learner/non-learner';**

- activities, and associated achievements, that are intended to result in **outcomes for partners/the Partnership** (and therefore, have some indirect impact for learners/non-learners);

- **the added value** that these activities and achievements have resulted in.

Activities/Achievements with Learner Outcomes

4.2 **Table 4.1** shows that the 20 case study Learning Partnerships have undertaken activities intended to result in a range of positive outcomes for learners/non-learners. Approximately three quarters of the case studies have undertaken activities in the following broad areas:

- **improved participation;**
- **basic skills needs:**
- **social inclusion;**
- **barriers to learning.**

4.3 Markedly fewer case studies, approximately one third, have addressed the areas of:

- equal opportunities;
- quality and standards;
- workforce development or employer participation.

Table 4.1: Case Studies Undertaking Activities With Potential Outcomes For Learners/Non-Learners							
Case Studies	**Improve Participation**	**Address Basic Skills Needs**	**Social Inclusion**	**Address Barriers To Learning**	**Equal Opportunities**	**Quality & Standards**	**Workforce Development/ Employer Involvement**
1	√	√	√	√	√		
2							
3	√	√	√		√		√
4							
5	√	√	√	√			
6	√	√	√	√			
7	√	√	√	√			
8	√	√	√	√	√		√
9	√	√		√			
10							
11	√	√	√	√		√	√
12	√	√	√	√		√	√
13	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
14	√	√	√	√			√
15	√	√	√	√	√	√	
16	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
17							√
18	√	√	√	√	√	√	
19	√	√	√	√		√	
20	√	√		√		√	

4.4 **Table 4.2** gives a flavour of the types of activities that have been undertaken in relation to each of these elements.

4.5 Activities relating to **improving participation** include high profile events and awards schemes. These often have an immediate and direct impact on the relatively small groups of attendees or participants as well as wider 'PR opportunities' to reach larger groups of people through associated press and marketing coverage.

4.6 The issue of **basic skills** has been a clear Government priority over recent years and Learning Partnerships have rightly made this a relative priority for action. In many areas Learning Partnerships have established basic skills strategies as well as more tangible activities such as sub-groups, consortia, units and funding for specialist staff.

4.7 Activities relating to **social inclusion** have been associated with specific projects often at a community level such as family learning and supporting those at risk of disaffection. There is a clear linkage of those activities with the developing regeneration agenda.

4.8 A wide range of activities has been undertaken to **address barriers to learning**. These have ranged from ICT related projects utilising the recognised benefits of computers to engage learners and non-learners, through to projects which use events or 'routine locations' to target learners and non-learners. This latter group includes taster opportunities at festivals, family learning weekends and positioning of a learning point in a local supermarket.

Table 4.2: **Types of Activity that 20 LP Case Studies have undertaken**	
Improve Participation	• Management of Learner of the Year Awards – promoting learning • Learning Awards Schemes • Attendance at local, regional and national shows/exhibitions with a focus of engaging participants and encouraging involvement in learning • Strategic Marketing Group – Promoting learning across the area – learning champions project; introduction of local learning information & support line
Address Basic Skills Needs	• Various basic skills activities/projects funded/delivered by LP • Establishment of a basic skills Consortium • Establishment of a local basic skills unit • Mapping of basic skills provision • County Wide Basic Skills Strategy
Social Inclusion	• Adult & Community learning projects – YOT works with Basic Skills clients • Motor Vehicle training for young people at risk of disaffection • Parent Learning Support Project
Address Barriers To Learning	• UK Online Projects • ICT strategy group to widen access to Internet • Taster opportunities in festival & family learning weekend • Purchased 2 mobile learning vehicles • Learner point in local supermarket
Equal Opportunities	• Work with traveller/gypsy groups • Learning support for asylum seekers
Quality & Standards	• Developing quality workshops for the voluntary/community sector
Workforce Development/Employer Involvement	• Partnership Manager attends employer forum & feeds back to LP and LSC • Work with ethnic minorities business forum • Learning Bus taken round to SMEs • Business Excellence Awards Scheme

4.9 As mentioned previously the areas of equal opportunities, quality and standards and workforce development have seen less activity across the case study Learning Partnerships. However, some examples of activity include:

• the issue of **equal opportunities** is often integrated into many activities of Learning Partnerships who are very aware of the need to ensure equality of opportunity for all individuals. Specific projects include those working with minority groups such as travellers and asylum seekers;

- activity relating to **quality and standards** has not been extensive. This is clearly an area of focus for the LSC and its local arms – over time more activity may develop for Learning Partnerships. Some specific projects have covered the voluntary and community sector – an area where Learning Partnerships have a unique opportunity to influence change and capacity build;

- **workforce development and employer involvement** has simply not been a priority or has been regarded as too hard to tackle for many Learning Partnerships. Indeed, many say they have struggled to get employer representation on their boards. The two main strands of activity undertaken by a minority of Partnerships include seeking the 'employer voice/view' and more operational projects such as using a learning bus to travel to SMEs to encourage awareness of the benefits of learning.

4.10 Measurement of the impact of these activities is patchy, given that most of the case study Learning Partnerships are at an early developing or developing stage in terms of review and evaluation. However, this will also be a function of the fact that some of these activities remain ongoing.

Activities/Achievements Contributing to Partner/Partnership Outcomes

4.11 In **Table 4.3** we outline a range of themes that case study Partnerships have sought to address by undertaking activities and actions particularly aimed at adding value through Partnership working – working jointly together as opposed to addressing local learning issues independently as individual partners or sectors.

4.12 We have identified seven themed categories of activity. The following two thematic areas are undertaken by almost all Learning Partnerships:

- **improving Partnership communication/information sharing;**
- **provider collaboration on projects/ issues.**

Case Studies	Improving Partnership Communication/ Information Sharing	Understanding Local needs	Understanding Learner/ Non learner Needs	Informing/ Challenging Stakeholders (LSC, LSPs, RDA etc)	Provider Collaboration On Projects/ Issues	Provider Collaboration On Provision	Contribution to Regeneration
1	√	√	√	√	√		√
2	√		√		√		
3	√	√	√	√	√		√
4	√				√		
5	√	√			√		√
6	√	√	√	√	√		√
7	√	√	√	√	√		
8	√	√	√	√	√	√	
9	√	√	√		√	√	
10	√				√		
11	√			√	√	√	√
12	√			√	√	√	√
13	√	√	√		√		√
14	√	√	√	√			√
15	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
16	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
17	√	√	√	√	√		√
18	√	√	√	√		√	√
19	√	√	√	√	√		√
20	√	√	√	√	√	√	

Table 4.3:
Case Studies Undertaking Activities With Potential Outcomes For Partners And Partnerships
(with in direct impact on learners/community)

4.13 The following four thematic areas are undertaken by around three-quarters of Learning Partnerships:

- **understanding local needs;**
- **understanding learner/non learner needs;**
- **informing/ challenging stakeholders (LSC, LSPs, RDA etc);**
- **contribution to regeneration.**

4.14 Finally, a little over one third of Partnerships are addressing the thematic area of **provider collaboration on provision**.

4.15 **Table 4.4** outlines some examples of types of activities and actions that Learning Partnerships have undertaken in order to address these themes. Again, evidence of the actual outcomes and impact of these activities is patchy, however, as outlined below we have been able to identify (either through the Learning Partnerships own evaluation, or through our review of the case studies) some indication of the outcomes and impact of these activities.

4.16 In terms of **Partnership communication and information sharing** there is clear evidence of outcomes and impact through better information, understanding and awareness amongst partner organisations. The following quotes, combined with the range of approaches listed in **Table 4.4**, serve to re-enforce this:

> *"for example, in one area an individual met up with providers and organisations they would not otherwise of done and as a result have learnt about provision for their young people that they were unaware of previously";*
>
> *"improved understanding of respective roles of, and potential for, future collaboration with other providers and agencies";*
>
> *"sharing information about good practice across organisations";*
>
> *"informs individuals inside educational institutions";*
>
> *"individuals learn about bigger issues";*
>
> *"improved strategic decisions by partners eg responding to the 14-19 green paper jointly as a Partnership"*

Table 4.4:
Examples Of Case Study Activities Focused On Partner/ Partnership Outcomes

Partnership Communication/Information Sharing

- Production of newsletters and maintenance of websites informing a range of partners represented on the Learning Partnerships;
- Partnership manager and administration support aids communication between partners and sub groups – many partners raised this as an area of success;
- Networking activities across and between provider sectors;
- Promoting the Learning Partnership through local and regional events;
- Locating the Learning Partnership manager in a single central location with other key Learning Partnerships – learning link centre, including SRB, UK Online, Study Support, Princes Trust, Excel Plus, Drugs and Alcohol Coordinators and the Learning Partnership manager;

Provider collaboration on projects/issues

- A range of jointly delivered projects as outlined above in table 5.2;
- Other specific examples include:
  - an LEA, schools, Education Business Partnerships, and higher education institutions working together on the development of a young people university project;
  - the development of theme based strategies, such as basic skills strategies, widening participation, UK Online;
  - NVQ care project;
  - collaborative strategic bidding process for UK Online centres;

Understanding local needs

- A range of research activities including mapping studies relating to basic skills, ICT, community centres, and rural assessment piloting;
- Working jointly with neighbouring Learning Partnerships on mapping exercises for the LSC;
- Local research to identify how learning provision for those aged 16+ with learning difficulties and/or disabilities could be improved across the region;

Informing/challenging stakeholders

- Local strategic Partnerships have used the Learning Partnership voice of the learner research;
- The Learning Partnership has undertaken joint projects with LSC and the local LSCs have commissioned a number of Learning Partnerships to deliver projects;
- One Learning Partnership was commissioned by the RDA to organise a regeneration seminar and to support the development of area investment frameworks;
- Two Learning Partnerships in one local LSC area worked together to develop a joint transition strategy feeding into the LSC strategic agenda;
- The Partnership has been supporting the LSC with a number of consultation exercises – the LP has also adopting the LSCs targets and is encouraging partners to do the same;
- The Partnership manager has undertaken an exercise to clearly link the Learning Partnerships plan to that of the LSC, LEA and local strategic Partnership;
- Business planning linking Learning Partnership objectives to other organisational plans;
- Learning Partnership planning and targets follow and build on the strategic plans of other partners (LSC, LSP and LEA);
- Supporting the establishment of Connections;
- For area wide inspection the Learning Partnership: developed a briefing pack for the inspectors; facilitated access to the area forums; briefed key stakeholders and partners on the process; worked with the LSC to set up groups to assist with the action planning.

Table 4.4 (continued): Examples Of Case Study Activities Focused On Partner/ Partnership Outcomes
Understanding learner/non-learner needs
• Developing common and consistent mechanisms for partners to obtain the views and perspectives from learners;
• Voice of learner research and conference – 10 mini projects with under represented groups including dissemination of findings at a conference;
• The Partnerships community forum providers a channel for consultation for the Partnership including access to learners and non-learners;
• The Learning Partnership set up community learning forums, which are structured mechanisms to record feedback from learners and non-learners – this has been used to support LSC research and to provide a focus on learners through partner delivery.
Contribution to regeneration
• Use of neighbourhood renewal funding for an employability entitlement programme for YP;
• LP manager and SRB coordinator in the same office – working side by side and making links;
• The Learning Partnership has been asked to facilitate along with other stakeholders neighbourhood learning fora in deprived communities;
• The LP has accessed & brokered neighbourhood learning funding for deprived communities;
• The Learning Partnership has set up community learning forums which will become the learning arms of the local strategic Partnerships;
• The Partnerships annual conference this year was designed to be a cross sector event encompassing all elements of the local strategic Partnership;
• The Partnership is seeking to act as the learning arm by seeking to provide access to all key players in learning (particularly the voluntary and community groups), and using the acquired expertise of the Learning Partnership to help the LSP to lever in funds;
• Linking to the LSPs voices community consultation scheme to access feedback from learners;
• The LP manager is located within a single central office from key regeneration Partnerships in the local area (SRB, UK Online, Princes Trust, XL Plus, and Drugs & Alcohol Coordinators).
Provider collaboration on provision
• Mapping activities: vocational education and WRL across 3 boroughs; and, 14-19 mapping;
• Development of strategies: - development of a 14-19 collaboration strategy involving schools, FE etc;   - action plan for area review;   - working on strategy for 6-19 provision;   - curriculum review across the area has identified a number of areas mismatch that the Partnership will be taking forward (area wide review process);
• Delivering collaborative provision: - Partnerships have been developed between libraries and the college/schools which as allowed the provision of adult education in a host of new premises at more convenient times;
• Set up of a number of groups with representatives from key sectors to look at the learning experience, support and guidance, aspirations and opportunities, strategy and planning (in relation to the 14-19 gender);
• In response to local research on learning provision for those aged 16+ with learning difficulties, the development of a transition support strategy including actions to improve the post 16 transition process, central resources offering outreach services, and improving the quality of post 16 learning provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

4.17 **Provider collaboration on projects and issues** is the second thematic area where almost all Partnerships are performing well. There is less competition between providers on development projects and learning issues (as opposed to learning provision), as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> *'the Partnership provides an opportunity for providers to work together';*
>
> *'there is now collaboration rather than competition between providers now';*
>
> *'we are not dominated by funding and bid writing – this is really liberating'.*

4.18 In a number of the case study areas, Learning Partnerships have undertaken partner capacity building activities, primarily with the voluntary and community sector. These have included conferences and training for voluntary and community organisations to raise their awareness of the learning agenda and identify ways in which the learning providers can link more closely with the voluntary and community sector. Quality improvement seminars have for example been undertaken in one of the case study areas.

4.19 The thematic area of **understanding local needs** received attention from some Learning Partnerships, but has seen a particular focus in the past 18 months since the establishment of the LSC. Research and mapping studies have been undertaken and in some cases the LLSC has commissioned the Learning Partnership directly. In such cases the LLSC views the Learning Partnership as an ideal vehicle for delivering research through a group representing all local learning interests.

4.20 **Informing and challenging stakeholders** has been an area of activity where Learning Partnerships have had to tread carefully. The informing aspect of this theme has been stronger than the challenging. In the early stages of the establishment of the LSC, Learning Partnerships have been wary of challenging a new body, particularly in light of the emerging contractual relationship.

4.21 It is clear that Learning Partnerships have been working to provide information and support to a range of interested partners. The LSC is the most common but others include Connexions Partnership, Local Strategic Partnerships and a Regional Development Agency in one case.

4.22 Learning Partnerships have generally had a clear strand of activity focused on **understanding the learner/non-learner needs**. This originally derives from the 'voice of the learner' remit which generated a range of action research projects. While some Learning Partnerships have ceased undertaking this activity or handed it to the LLSC, a number remain active and in some cases see it as central to their *local* role.

4.23 Some examples of successful approaches are presented below:

'the LP has ensured systematic inclusion of learner views through local learning fora and learner feedback infrastructure';

'the FE college now writes all its plans and strategies from the learner perspective';

'the feedback from learners and non-learners has led to a greater focus on learners through partner delivery';

the increased learner focus in provision has led one college to use the research in order to develop marketing plans to attract particular learners'.

4.24 The role of **contributing to the regeneration agenda** has recently been established as one of the core functions of Learning Partnerships. A number of Learning Partnerships can demonstrate extensive activity in this area even prior to the Review. The major issue affecting this area of work is the 'fit' between Learning Partnerships and Local Strategic Partnerships, where they exist. Two examples of this development include:

- in a number of case study areas the Learning Partnership or its local community forums have **become the accepted learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership;**

- in one Learning Partnership area greater synergy between the Learning Partnership and the regeneration Partnerships **has led to a coalfield regeneration project** looking at staff development for auxiliary staff in schools – helping them to create a welcoming environment for learners.

4.25 The thematic area of **provider collaboration on provision** has seen the least progress among the case study Learning Partnerships. This relates to the biggest challenge, namely, that of putting critical issues relating to gaps and overlaps on the agenda.

4.26 There has been some progress on more minor or geographically specific projects, which have provided clear impact that otherwise may not have happened. For example:

- in one area there is **more partner debate about learning issues** – "this has started a strategic debate about post 16 issues, which is not constrained by vested interests of providing organisations";

- **greater synergies exist between providers** from the joint working perspective – "as people have seen what others are doing they have refrained from doing it themselves";

- **some cost savings have emerged**, for example, in one Learning Partnership area the college and the university have agreed to share a reprographics facility.

4.27 There is some evidence in a small number of the case study areas that the partners and Partnerships are starting to move towards achieving some outcomes in relation to increasing the coherence of learning provision. In areas where Area Wide Inspections or Area Reviews have been undertaken they have facilitated independent or relatively independent analyses of provision. This has then prompted real dialogue about these previously 'hard to table' issues.

4.28 Furthermore, there are some cases where Learning Partnerships are taking the lead on developing or implementing the action plan resulting from Area Wide Inspections.

The Added Value of Case Study Learning Partnerships

4.29 Here we identify ways in which the 20 case study Learning Partnerships have achieved some value from working jointly together across partner organisations and sectors as opposed to operating separately and independently of one another within the learning arena.

4.30 We have established three very broad models. These models demonstrate the differing levels of value added generated by different Partnerships. Later in this section we explore constraints and enabling factors, which influence performance within the different models.

Models of Value Added

4.31 The three models of value added by Learning Partnerships include:

- **Model 1: Joint project delivery and information sharing;**

- **Model 2: Strategic/joint working on the planning and delivery of learning issues;**

- **Model 3: Collaborative planning and delivery of learning provision.**

4.32 Each of these is presented in turn together with examples of characteristics and types of activity common to Partnerships within that model.

Model 1: Joint project delivery and information sharing

4.33 Learning Partnerships that have achieved this type of value have **facilitated the sharing of information across partner organisations and joint working on the delivery of projects and activities**, where previously they would have sought funding independently and delivered activities separately. **Five of the twenty case studies have achieved added value relating to Model 1**.

4.34 Overall, these Learning Partnerships have acted as a catalyst to get providers around the table and work together on project activity. They have played a co-ordinating role, rather than leading and driving, around a series of learning issues. Thus, they have provided a networking body that has facilitated joint delivery of collaborative projects. Some of the Learning Partnerships within this model have levered in substantial levels of additional funding (the figure of £3.5 million levered has been achieved in one of the case study areas).

4.35 Key features and characteristics of this model include :

- **working jointly not separately;**

- **more providers/partners engaged;**

- **cross-sector working;**

- **sharing information across providers and sectors;**

- **working together on things that will cause least resistance (providers can agree to);**

- **reactive to areas of partner common interest and the national agenda currently;**

- **bringing new partners in.**

4.36 A number of quotes from these Learning Partnerships help to articulate these characteristics in their own words:

"facilitated more collaborative bidding from a formally competitive environment";

"co-ordinated project delivery";

"positively encouraged Partnership working where practicable";

"individuals and partners have learnt about the wider learning issues";

"the voluntary and community sector have been more involved in the delivery of activities";

"there is a better understanding of the local needs and learner issues";

"information has been shared across partners and partner organisations";

"the Partnership has improved/engendered more collaboration in bidding processes";

"fostered and brokered more collaborative ventures";

"links have been made between traditional providers and the voluntary and community sector";

"effective communication across partners and across the Partnership structures";

"the Learning Partnership accesses funds and delivers projects on behalf of partners – the Partnership operates in its own right".

Model 2: Strategic/joint working on planning and delivery of learning issues.

4.37 Learning Partnerships achieving this type of value **have sought to work strategically to address fundamental learning issues, barriers and priorities in the local area.** This has been through, for example, building on work to identify key needs and issues for the area to assess the best way forward and identify the most appropriate mechanisms and partners to address them.   A common example across the case study Learning Partnerships and other Learning Partnerships nationally is the basic skills theme, where a number of Learning Partnerships have been instrumental in setting up strategic approaches to addressing basic skills across the local area, and involving a variety of local partners.

4.38 **Seven of the case study Partnerships have been assessed as achieving added value associated with Model 2**.   In these cases Learning Partnerships have been binding together different elements of the learning sector, leading to more innovative thinking and understanding. They have been taking research to the next step, to identify the most appropriate strategic action to take forward to address the needs identified.

4.39 These Partnerships broker funding to ensure that it is targeted in priority areas and that the right partners are linked in and involved – this is more of a strategic, rather than a co-ordinating, approach. Other characteristics include establishing independence and developing connections with other Partnerships. These issues are articulated in their own words below:

> *"providing an independent and challenging focus, leading to influencing stakeholders and other partners";*
>
> *"there is now a recognition by the local council via representation of the Learning Partnership on the LSP that education is a key driver and, as a consequence, education is now a key priority area in the council's plans";*
>
> *"there is now more collectiveness/synergy of ideas";*
>
> *"there is coherence to the bidding process, rather than a competitive bidding environment between partners locally";*
>
> *"a co-ordinated and planned introduction of provision";*
>
> *"providing a strategic dimension to the development of learning across the area";*

> *"partner capacity building";*
>
> *"mapping and research that leads to outcomes in the form of strategy and activities";*
>
> *"providing the voice of the learning community where the community fora and local groups feed into assessment of needs and development of strategies";*
>
> *"mapping exercises, leading to the identification of gaps and duplication provision and subsequent";*
>
> *"influencing and challenging stakeholder agendas using research and information about local needs";*
>
> *"piloting and testing approaches to addressing learning issues and barriers in the area, followed by the identification of funding to expand and transfer good practice activities".*

Model 3: Collaborative planning and delivery of learning provision.

4.40 The third model is collaborative planning and delivery of learning provision. Learning Partnerships achieving this type of value added have **undertaken action aimed at improving the coherence of learning provision and support locally**. In particular, there is evidence that partners within, and across sectors, have undertaken some **joint planning and/or delivery of learning provision**.

4.41 **Two of the case studies have been identified as achieving value added associated with Model 3, and a further four case studies have been assessed as having made clear progress** towards achieving such added value.

4.42 These Learning Partnerships have played an active role in planning for, and developing action plans following area wide inspection. They have delivered real and effective change in working arrangements between partner organisations and are influencing local policy developments as a result of national policy in areas such as the 14-19 agenda.

4.43 A number of quotes from these Learning Partnerships help to articulate these characteristics in their own words:

"the Partnership is making considerable headway on the 14-19 Agenda and is looking at developing an integrated curriculum with the college and key schools working together to develop centres of expertise and a greater choice for learners. Each of the five schools has identified a specialism and is working with the local college to establish tertiary provision in these areas";

"area-wide review process – the county has not been inspected yet, but partners knew there were problems. It seemed important to pre-empt the inspection process and start working together to review learning provision in the area";

"Partnerships have been developed between libraries and the college/schools which have allowed the provision of adult education in a host of new premises at more convenient times";

"14-19 and exclusion task groups have been set up by the Learning Partnership to build bridges between schools and colleges which were previously considered to be poor. One of the outcomes of this work has been that the Learning Partnership has developed a common timetable which is helpful in terms of provision planning";

"utilising information from the area-wide inspection to encourage schools and colleges to work together";

"the Learning Partnership has set up a number of groups with representatives from key sectors to look at a range of issues surrounding learning provision across a range of providers – the learning experience, support and guidance, aspirations and opportunities, strategy and planning";

"the Learning Partnership provides feedback to programme managers within the range of providers, which helps them take account of learning issues";

"the 14-19 strategy that is being developed by the Learning Partnership sets out intended collaboration on the planning and delivery of curriculum across providers";

"the learner is at the heart of our systems and initiatives".

Exceptions to the three models.

4.44 For three of the case study Learning Partnerships, which are characterised by having an overarching strategic board together with a series of well-developed local geographical groups, our assessment of the model of added value achieved is different for the local groups than it is for the overarching strategic board.

4.45 In two of those cases, the overarching strategic board is assessed as not having achieved added value linked to any of our models, whereas the local groups have clearly added value in relation to delivering joint activity and projects (Model 1).

4.46 In the case of the third case study, the local groups again have achieved clear added value though joint working on projects and activities (Model 1), whereas the overarching strategic group has been able to achieve and demonstrate some added value in strategically addressing a series of learning themes across the Learning Partnership area (Model 2). It is interesting, however, to note that the local and overarching strategic board for this Learning Partnership appear to operate fairly independently of one another.

4.47 **Two of the case study Learning Partnerships are considered as not having achieved added value relating to any of the models presented**. In the case of one of these, the Partnership has faced particular difficulties in the past year, given that it lost its Partnership Manager and has been unable to replace him/her. Previously, however, this case study had been assessed as one of the more advanced Partnerships in terms of effective Partnership operation and achieving added value of the nature described within Model 1 (that is delivering a variety of project activities, with partners and sectors working jointly as opposed to independently). The other case study has struggled from its early days to develop some credibility in the local area. In particular, it covers a wide geographical area, with several smaller local groups feeding into it. A clear understanding of the purpose and focus of the larger area group has not been developed.

Analysis of Value Added by Learning Partnerships

4.48 In previous evaluation reports we have attempted to compare the levels of added value achieved by individual case study Learning Partnerships by judging them as having achieved basic, intermediate or advanced added value. In this report, however, we feel that it is inappropriate to make this assessment as to do so would be to undervalue the significant value associated with any one of the models. At face value, and considered out of context, Model 3 might be seen as a more advanced level of added value given that it involves a more strategic and coherent approach to learning provision. This does not, however, take into account the very varying local circumstances that individual Learning Partnerships face and the changes to their remit.

Factors influencing Added Value Achievements

4.49 The **characteristics of Learning Partnerships that have achieved added value associated with Model 1** include:

- partners do not believe that the Learning Partnership is the right forum for addressing strategic learning provision issues, such as addressing gaps and duplication;

- partners and Partnership managers have focused on getting on with achieving and delivering something, within an environment of lack of clarity and purpose nationally;

- Partnership activities are very focused on projects that directly impact on the learner and delivery through joint working, as opposed to more strategic information sharing and analysis or activities focused on encouraging partners to address gaps and duplication;

- Partnership projects and activities are generally those where individual partners are volunteering to get involved - they can see a shared and common interest;

- undertaking activities to aid the sharing of information across providers and sectors (for example websites, mapping exercises, conferences, email groups);

- partners work together on projects and activities relating to issues that they can all gain from, rather than attempting to address issues and agendas where they may benefit from working together but where there are clear competitive tensions;

- one of many Partnerships delivering activity – rather than providing a structure within which existing Partnerships and activities could be brought together within a more coherent approach;

- partners see the Learning Partnership as an entity in its own right - another player delivering activities, rather than providing co-ordination of individual partner activities.

4.50 Learning Partnerships that have been assessed as achieving **Model 2 added value have some of the characteristics of those assessed as Model 1**, however, Partnerships and personalities mean that they have been **better able to commit to developing a more strategic approach** to addressing learning issues.

4.51 Some of the **issues and constraints faced in those areas achieving added value relating to Models 1, and in some case Models 2, which may have prevented them from moving smoothly towards achieving the added value outlined in Model 3** include:

- a history of competition between providers, in particular between Further Education colleges;

- partners do not believe that the Learning Partnership is the right forum for addressing the strategic learning provision issues in the area, such as addressing gaps and duplication;

- a relatively low level of resources available to structure and manage the Partnership working activities, compared to some other Learning Partnership areas;

- national credibility and capacity issues have acted as a barrier locally, meaning that local partners have struggled to develop an agreed view of role and purpose.

4.52 In comparison, some of the **key strengths** of those case studies that have been assessed as **achieving Model 3** added value include:

- a number of factors related to the Chair, Partnership Manager and management group:

- Partnership Manager is dynamic and influential;

- effective leadership, management and coordination from the Partnership manager and the chair;

- understanding, skills and abilities of Partnership manager; strong proactive chair;

- personalities of Partnership chair and partner representatives – they recognise the value and capability associated with a strategic Learning Partnership;

- a strong and structured management and co-ordination team;

- the relationship with external organisations such as the LLSC and other strategic forums is also critical:

  - positive and supportive attitude of the Local Learning and Skills Council;

  - locked into economic forum, giving legitimacy and influence;

  - the Learning Partnership is well respected and firmly established in the area;

  - history of effective Partnership working;

- significant resources compared to some other Learning Partnership areas;

- one FE college/strong network of FE colleges;

- area inspection has provided a focus for Learning Partnership activity in some cases.

4.53 Whilst some of these features could be influenced by partners and the Partnership, a number of them represent characteristics that other Learning Partnership areas have no influence over. Therefore, case study Learning Partnerships that have achieved added value of the type described in Models 1 and 2 could be assessed as achieving advanced added value given the constraints and features that they face locally. They may now strive towards achieving Model 3, though many partners and Partnerships have expressed the view that these are unobtainable goals in the current environment and with current funding regimes.

5   FUTURE DIRECTION

5.1   In this section we consider the future direction which Learning Partnerships are likely to take. The analysis is presented in the context of the following key drivers:

(i)   Learning Partnership perceptions and ambitions;
(ii)   LSC perceptions and needs;
(iii)   development of Local Strategic Partnerships;
(iv)   potential Partnership delivery models.

5.2   In each case we explore some of the issues that have a bearing on Partnership decision making. The analysis highlights the range of both opportunity and concern. It also reveals a diversity of opinion, but perhaps more fundamental, a range of expectancy cast within a general framework of uncertainty. The issues raised are based on perceptions of consultees – sometimes these are based on misunderstanding or lack of effective dialogue.

(i) Learning Partnership Perceptions and Ambitions

5.3   An overview of the relationship between case study Learning Partnerships and their local Learning and Skills Councils is set out in **Table 5.1**. It sets out how Learning Partnerships feel about the manner in which LLSCs have been behaving towards them and any implications this might have for Partnership operation.

5.4   The analysis shows that more than three-quarters of the case study Partnerships believe that their LLSC is being strongly supportive towards the Partnership. There are only two examples of no or minimal support. This would appear to present, at least on the surface, a very positive picture.

5.5   While this level of LLSC support is welcomed by Learning Partnerships, there is a concern that in some quarters it may come at a price. Approximately one-third of Partnerships anticipate that the LLSC will want to achieve some form of Partnership restructuring. A further one-fifth expect that the Partnership will effectively be absorbed into the Learning and Skills Council. In a little under half of the case studies, it is expected that the general status quo will continue.

Table 5.1: Perceived Learning Partnership Relationship With The Local Learning And Skills Council	
Case Study	
1.	Strongly supportive and positive
2.	Strongly supportive but restructure
3.	Not supportive: Merge and absorb
4.	Strongly supportive – LSC focus group – absorb
5.	Strongly supportive and positive
6.	Strongly supportive – go alone – absorb
7.	Strongly supportive – absorb LSC
8.	Strongly supportive and positive
9.	Strongly supportive – shift LLLP focus – restructure
10.	Minimal contact – reviewing operation
11.	Strongly supportive and positive
12.	Strongly supportive – merger – restructure
13.	Supportive but restructure
14.	Supportive but future uncertain
15.	Strongly supportive and positive
16.	Strongly supportive and positive
17.	Strongly supportive – restructure
18.	Strongly supportive and positive
19.	Strongly supportive and positive
20.	Strongly supportive – dissolve over arching Partnership

5.6 We return to the likely Partnership delivery structures later in this section. First we consider a series of themes which serve to draw out the rich mixture of concern and opportunity implicit within a 'strongly supportive' LLSC environment.

General uncertainty

5.7 The general uncertainty of the future position of Learning Partnerships, despite warm overtures from the LLSC, is in some quarters taking its toll:

- *"the commitment of members is already starting to drift"*;

- *"this period of uncertainty has meant it has not been possible to identify a new Chair"*;

- *"it has made working with partners very difficult – they will not do much until the position is clarified"*;

- *"senior members of the Partnership have expressed consternation with the constant shifting of goal posts, feeling that they really have better things to do with their time"*;

- *"I suspect that the strategic board will disappear – partners do want to continue but see it as an uphill struggle"*.

5.8 It is worth noting that these comments relate primarily to the strategic board level of LPs and that **sub-groups and operational activity has not been affected in the same way**.

Funding uncertainty

5.9 Uncertainty over funding is acting as a constraint to Partnership activity and ambition. It affects delivery models and manager/co-ordinator retention. Many Partnerships are seeking a three-year funding commitment and agreement with the LLSC:

- *"we have not discussed funding, but we think the status quo will continue"*;

- *"too much uncertainty over funding is cramping the Learning Partnership activity. We would like a three year agreement"*;

- *"we are seeking an LLSC endorsement of our new strategic framework. This will involve a three year funding pledge"*;

- *"the LLSC is very supportive, but seems reluctant to commit to more than one year's funding"*;

- *"we have serious concerns about the future in terms of funding, role and survival"*.

Maintaining Partnership independence

5.10 There is evidence of potential tension between the desire of Learning Partnerships to maintain a degree of independence, but also to be funded and deliver outputs for the LLSC. This could yet prove to be a problem of principle rather than practice. In terms of project delivery on the ground, it might make little difference:

- *"The Learning Partnership is independent of the LLSC and sees its role to support and challenge"*;

- *"We will continue to act as a strategic independent Partnership, levering in additional funding as appropriate"*;

- *"The Learning Partnership is keen to retain its independence, but there is a tension between this and close working with the LSC"*;

- *"We have issues and principles about being funded by the LSC. In practice we will need to accommodate it"*;

- *"The Partnership is stronger now than ever. The LSC is supportive and works with us to maintain our independence"*.

Area inspection

5.11 Area inspections have provided an early opportunity for close working between LLSCs and Learning Partnerships. In many, but not all, areas where inspections have taken place, Partnerships have been able to deliver what is perceived to be clear 'value added'. This has helped clarify roles, responsibilities and credibility:

- *"We have established a strong relationship with the LLSC. Positive links were forged through area inspection. We were given the responsibility to take forward the action plan"*.

Integration with the LLSC

5.12 There is a view held by some that close working with the LLSC will mean that Partnerships will ultimately become part of the LLSC. In some cases this may happen sooner rather than later:

- *"It is likely that the Learning Partnership will be absorbed into the LLSC. The Board will probably only now meet once per year"*.

Greater emphasis to the local dimension

5.13 A common theme is the desire of LLSCs to bolster the local dimension of Partnerships. In many cases, this is likely to enhance the role of local Learning Partnerships, which are in some cases geographical sub groups or in others 'local community Partnerships'. In some situations it could be the source of top-down, bottom-up tension:

- *"The LLSC has been a shot in the arm to the activity of the local Learning Partnership. The new local focus will benefit everyone"*;

- *"The LLSC is seeking to work more closely with our local Learning Partnerships"*;

- *"The LLSC interest on local Learning Partnerships is placing greater tension on the top-down/bottom-up relationship within our Partnership"*;

- *"The LLSC wants our Partnership manager to work much more closely and directly with the local Learning Partnerships"*.

Stimulating Partnership refocus

5.14 The recent Learning Partnership review and the changing role of Learning Partnerships has been an opportunity for Partnerships to take stock and re-focus. This has helped restore clarity of purpose and provide joint action planning and dialogue with the LLSCs:

- *"We have taken positive action to respond to the new agenda. We have produced a new strategic framework and action plan"*.

Coterminous location

5.15 In some cases, LLSC commitment to a Learning Partnership has involved locating the Partnership secretariat at the LLSC. A number of Partnerships are keen on maintaining independence and are likely to be resistant to this. Interestingly, at least one LLSC has declined to offer accommodation on the same grounds.

Vulnerability of overarching Partnerships

5.16 Where Learning Partnership structures have two levels involving a central Partnership and a set of geographical, local Learning Partnerships the emphasis that LLSCs are placing on local delivery structures may pose a threat to overarching Partnerships. This is more likely to be the case where they represent a significant overhead and their local links are less well developed:

- *"There are some concerns that the LLSC may be less interested in the overarching Partnership. This makes the need to secure independent funding all the more important"*;

- *"Our overarching strategic group could become redundant"*.

Reviewing alternative delivery options

5.17 Some Partnerships facing both uncertainty and a short-term funding gap have been looking at alternative delivery models. At least one Partnership is considering incorporation:

- *"We are facing a potential funding gap which means that we have to reassess our options. One option is incorporation and direct delivery"*.

Distracted attention

5.18 Partnerships have spent a significant amount of time considering their future. In many cases this has crowded out delivery activity and perhaps understated their commitment and potential to the LLSC:

- *"The review has distracted our attention and, as a result, we have undertaken less project activity and been less successful at bidding for funds"*.

Purchasing specific outputs

5.19 There is a widely held concern that the LLSCs will see Learning Partnerships only as a deliverer of specified outputs. This could undermine Partnerships structures and relationships:

- *"We have some concerns that the LLSC may ask us to take on activity we cannot deal with e.g. Sixth Forms"*;

- *"We have now adopted the LLSCs targets"*;

- *"The LLSC is very output focused. We do not think it will value some of our softer sharing/co-ordination activity"*;

- *"The LLSC does not seem to see the importance of infrastructure"*;

- *"We are concerned that the LLSC may not wish to directly fund our Partnership co-ordinator"*.

LLSCs need Learning Partnerships

5.20 In most Learning Partnership case studies there is a common understanding, at least in theory, of why LLSCs and Learning Partnerships need each other:

- *"We have been told by the LLSC if we did not exist it would need to invent us"*;

- *"We have been extremely useful to the LLSC in establishing on the ground credibility. There is a concern, however, that at some point they may feel they can do it on their own. At this point they may prefer to deal with individual partners on a one-to-one basis"*;

- *"The LLSC has encouraged us to be more strategic. We now act more like a 'dating agency' than a project delivery organisation"*;

- *"The LLSC is still feeling its way and therefore needs the Learning Partnership. There is a concern that longer term it may decide to abandon the Partnership once it is fully established"*;

- *"We are totally indispensable to the LLSC. We are bottom-up. They are top-down"*.

Where does the Learning Partnership fit?

5.21 In a minority of Partnerships there is a strong feeling that the LLSC has either no desire to constructively engage, or can't work out how to do it:

- *"The LLSC is struggling to see where the Learning Partnership fits in"*;

- *"The LLSC is very supportive, despite the fact it is not sure how to use us"*.

Partnership mergers and de-mergers

5.22 There is clear evidence that a number of LLSCs will be seeking to change the structure of Learning Partnerships to fit with their specific models of delivery. This is likely to involve both Partnership merger and de-merger.

- *"We expect the LLSC to merge all the Learning Partnerships in the area. It is seeking to establish a single point of contact"*;

- *"The LLSC are encouraging us to merge with adjacent Partnerships"*;

- *"The LLSC is encouraging us to de-merge the Partnership. It plans to deal directly with local Learning Partnerships based on LLSC area team boundaries"*.

(ii) LLSC Perceptions and Needs

5.23 Here we consider the Learning Partnership relationship from an LLSC perspective.

Invaluable partner

5.24 In the majority of case studies, it is clear that LLSCs regards Learning Partnerships as an invaluable partner. The fundamental issue is likely to be mutual expectation:

- *"The Learning Partnership has been an invaluable partner to us in the last year and their ongoing programmes and projects will continue to be an important part of our work to develop further in this area"*;

- *"We expect the Partnership to help us to manage the politics"*;

- *"We very much value the Partnership manager. An excellent networker who seems to know everyone on the local scene"*.

Not action orientated

5.25 There is a concern amongst some LLSCs that Learning Partnerships may be ill suited to taking specific actions. There is a clear desire to see Learning Partnerships delivering actions on the ground:

- *"We have concerns that the Learning Partnership is not able to follow up research with specific actions"*;

- *"We are not convinced that the Learning Partnership will be able to help us make difficult decisions"*;

- *"The Learning Partnership is very much reflective and cannot easily address on-the-ground activity"*.

Not representative

5.26 The LLSCs have a concern that Partnerships are not truly representative of the learning arena. Community and employer links are regarded as particularly weak:

- *"The Learning Partnership is not totally representative and therefore cannot act as an intermediary for the LLSC across all partners"*;

- *"The lack of Learning Partnership involvement with grass roots action, particularly community groups and employers, is disappointing"*;

- *"The impression we get is that current Partnerships are a bit of a closed shop. We would like to see wider community and employer involvement"*;

- *"The Partnership appears to be a 'bidding club' for a group of like-minded suppliers"*.

Partnership overload

5.27 In the localities where the LLSCs are finding it difficult to agree a Learning Partnership role, it can be linked to both the role and volume of parallel Partnerships:

- *"The area is blessed with a number of strong Partnerships and therefore, as far as we are concerned, the Learning Partnership is almost superfluous"*.

LSC integration

5.28 A number of LLSCs can see clear benefits of their Learning Partnership being located at the LLSC. It reflects a desire to both resource and directly influence aspects of Learning Partnership delivery:

- *"The aim is to integrate the Learning Partnership co-ordinator into the LLSC. Currently this person is based with us three days per week"*.

Restructuring to provide greater local focus

5.29 Linked to the desire identified earlier for Learning Partnerships to deliver action on the ground, the LLSCs are likely to be more interested in local Learning Partnerships. The possible requirement for them to reflect local LLSC delivery has significant implications for Learning Partnership restructuring; both short and long-term:

- *"We are encouraging the Learning Partnership to restructure to fit our area team structures"*;

- *"We may seek to realign the local Learning Partnerships to travel to learning areas"*;

- *"The current model is not ideal but we can work with it. We have no plans for radical surgery. We will remould the Partnership on an incremental basis to address local needs"*;

- *"We want to put most of our resource where the action is. At the local level. This has implications for Partnership structure"*.

Demonstrate delivery of our agenda

5.30 In a significant number of case study Partnerships, including areas where there is, at present, strong LLSC support, there is a desire to observe Learning Partnerships in action. LLSCs want to see Learning Partnerships practically deliver aspects of the LLSC agenda. Until this happens, they are likely to adhere to the 'jury still out' school of thought and are unlikely to commit to longer term funding:

- *"The Partnership needs to demonstrate to us that they can support our primary agenda – area reviews"*;

- *"We are not prepared to enter into a three-year deal yet. The Learning Partnership must convince us that they can deliver"*;

- *"The Learning Partnership's strategy and action plan is rather disappointing. We expected something more ambitions and specific. It's all rather woolly and on the fringe. We will want to tighten up aspects of delivery before we can agree a longer term commitment"*.

Deliver not challenge

5.31 The LLSCs understand the need for Learning Partnerships to reserve their right to comment on LLSC activity. The manner in which this is done will be important. 'Challenge' is an emotive term. The LLSCs would like to see the Learning Partnerships concentrating on delivery first:

- *"We don't expect the Learning Partnership to challenge us, but deliver for us"*;

- *"We are under no central pressure to work with Learning Partnerships. We will not be pushed into long-term relationships until we are comfortable about delivery. If all they want to do is challenge, then they will be doing so from a distance"*.

(iii) Development of Local Strategic Partnerships

5.32 Here we consider the extent to which Learning Partnerships see their future with Local Strategic Partnerships. An overview of the current position across all 20 case studies is shown in **Table 5.2**.

5.33 Table 5.2 shows that the majority of Partnerships are seeking to become the learning arm of their Local Strategic Partnership. Three Partnerships have indicated that they have already achieved this status and another three have indicated that they have no wish to progress down the Local Strategic Partnership route.

5.34 Outlined below are some of the issues impacting on the potential relationship between Learning Partnerships and Local Strategic Partnerships.

The logical route for Learning Partnerships

5.35 The majority of case study Learning Partnerships see Local Strategic Partnerships as the clear direction for them to evolve towards, perhaps strategically more important than the LLSCs:

- *"All Learning Partnerships in the LLSC area are seeking to forge links with Local Strategic Partnerships. It is the only way forward"*.

Case Study	Are learning arm	Seek learning arm	Not seeking learning arm
Table 5.2: Learning Partnership Roles and Aspirations with Local Strategic Partnerships			
1.		■	
2.		■	
3.			■
4.			■
5.		■	
6.		■	
7.			■
8.		■	
9.		■	
10.		■	
11.		■	
12.	■		
13.	■		
14.		■	
15.		■	
16.	■		
17.		■	
18.		■	
19.		■	
20.		■	

Good links have been forged

5.36 A number of case study Partnerships have clearly established effective links with LSPs. These tend to be in the areas where there are strong LSPs:

- *"The Learning Partnership co-ordinator has been asked to act as the Vice Chair of one of the Local Strategic Partnerships"*;

- *"We are working with the Local Strategic Partnership, linking our basic skills strategy with their community planning activity"*;

- *"Key stakeholders of the Local Strategic Partnership have praised the development of the Learning Partnership over the past year"*;

- *"The Local Strategic Partnership has suggested that the Learning Partnership Co-ordinator post now needs to be more senior. They have indicated that they will be prepared to match-fund the post"*.

The learning arm

5.37 The majority of case study Partnerships are keen to become the learning arm of the LSP. Indeed, a few feel that they have already achieved this status:

- *"We have already talked to the Local Strategic Partnership about becoming their learning arm"*;

- *"The Learning Partnership is firmly established as the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership"*;

- *"Local Strategic Partnerships could be the saving grace for Learning Partnerships. Our only concern is that the LLSC may think it is the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership"*;

- *"The Learning Partnership cannot be the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership unless it is adequately funded"*;

- *"We have now been officially recognised as the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership"*.

Too many Local Strategic Partnerships

5.38 In some localities the number of LSPs within a Learning Partnership area may be perceived as a barrier to engagement:

- *"There are ten Local Strategic Partnerships in our area. It is not appropriate for the Learning Partnership to have a seat on all ten. The intention is that the Learning Partnership will become the learning arm of the county-wide LSP"*.

A measure of success

5.39 From an LLSC perspective, one measure of a Learning Partnership's success would be the willingness of the LSP to directly engage with the Partnership:

- *"The extent to which the Local Strategic Partnership will want the Learning Partnership will be a measure of their success, influence, credibility etc."*.

Local Strategic Partnerships are under-developed

5.40 In some localities LSPs have barely got off the ground, which has made it difficult for Learning Partnerships to make significant headway. The learning agenda is often not the top initial priority for developing LSPs:

- *"We keep saying we want to be the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnership. The problem is we are much more developed than they are. It's like the cart before the horse".*

Providing a clearer focus

5.41 Many Partnerships who have established close links with their LSP feel that they have gained greater focus and feel more comfortable with the regeneration agenda:

- *"The link to the Local Strategic Partnership has provided a more tangible focus".*

LLSC links to LSP credibility

5.42 There is a feeling in some quarters that LLSC credibility is linked to LSP credibility and vice versa:

- *"The Local Strategic Partnership does not appear to be clear on whether it wants the Learning Partnership or not. It is likely to follow the line of the LLSC. If the LLSC does not value us, it is unlikely that the LSP will".*

No desire to link to LSP

5.43 A small number of case study Partnerships have indicated that they have no desire to establish LSP links. In each case they have developed close links with their LLSC:

- *"No desire to link with Local Strategic Partnerships"*;

- *"We don't wish to go down the LSP route. We would prefer to become a sub-group of the LLSC".*

(iv) Likely Delivery Models

5.44 Here we consider the likely models of delivery that Learning Partnerships may have adopted in 12 months time. A review of the likely outcomes for all 20 case study Partnerships is set out in **Table 5.3**. This assessment is based on the perspectives we gained from both LLSC and Learning Partnership consultations.

Table 5.3: Learning Partnership Structures in 12 Months Time				
Case Study	LSC owned	Close LSC but independent	Disappear/ replaced	Declare independence wider agenda
1.		■		
2.	■		■	
3.	■		■	
4.	■			
5.		■		
6.			■	■
7.	■			
8.				■
9.		■	■	
10.		■	■	
11.				■
12.	■			
13.	■	■		
14.		■		
15.		■		
16.				■
17.	■			
18.		■		■
19.				■
20.		■	■	

5.45 Table 5.3 shows significant variation in the likely structures in 12 months time. Almost equal numbers fall into the four categories of:

- LSC owned;
- close to the LSC but independent;
- disappear/replaced;
- declare independence/wider agenda.

5.46 It should be noted that in a little over one-third of cases more than one outcome has been identified, reflecting significant uncertainty of Partnership/LLSC response.

5.47 Each of the four models is considered in turn below.

LLLSC owned

5.48 This relates to a situation where the Partnership is effectively driven or owned by the LLSC. It essentially becomes part of the supplier network, forming a portfolio of subject focused sub-groups.

5.49 This is favoured by LLSCs/Partnerships keen on a directional approach. Also, where Partnerships have been organisationally weak and lacking a clear local delivery focus.

5.50 Some of the potential areas/activities that LLSC/Partnerships have identified include:

- 14-19 Agenda;
- Basic Skills;
- IAG;
- e-learning and learndirect;
- responding to area reviews;
- linking to the regeneration agenda;
- capacity development for voluntary and community organisations.

5.51 A total of **seven Partnerships** in our view fall into this category. Two have indicated that they recognise this as likely, but as an alternative they may disappear or be replaced.

Close to the LSC but independent

5.52 Partnerships in this category are keen to deliver to aspects of the LLSC agenda, perhaps in similar areas to those identified in the previous model, but retain independence. Their position is reflected in statements like:

- *"we will not let the LLSC dictate to us"*;

- *"we do not want line management for Partnership managers to transfer to the LLSC"*;

- *"we will not dance to the tune of the LLSC"*;

- *"we have the same priorities and collaborate locally on a common agenda"*.

5.53 **Nine Partnerships** fall within this category, three however feel that if it does not work out they will disappear or be replaced.

Disappear/replaced

5.54 In this model the Partnership will either completely disappear or be replaced by another body. **Six Partnerships** feel that this is a distinct possible outcome, but only if an alternative strategy fails to materialise. In all 20 Partnerships, a continuing strategy is on the table and being pursued. In this context, what we are saying is that six are particularly pessimistic about the outcome.

Declared independence/wider agenda

5.55 Partnerships in this group wish to maintain their independence but also maintain their strategic high ground. Their position is perhaps encapsulated in the statement:

- *"the learning plan and skills plan is produced for the Learning Partnership and adopted by the LLSC"*.

5.56 Partnerships falling into this category tend to be in a stronger position than others, given that they have built up a range of other funding sources to draw upon to help them deliver a wide agenda. Some may also be considering incorporation.

5.57 A total of **six Partnerships** fall within this category. Two consider alternative scenarios to be distinctly possible - one would work closely but independently of the LSC and the other disappear/be replaced.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Evaluation Context

6.1 In drawing conclusions on the impact of Learning Partnerships there is perhaps a danger of repeating the conclusions of earlier evaluations, which are catalogued in **Annex A**. In this final assessment we try to take a step back to give a summative global prospective.

6.2 The view presented is inevitably a generalised one. This is a problem in itself given the wide variation in approach, performance and perception of Learning Partnerships.

6.3 Clearly the focus of the evaluation has changed with the changing remit of Learning Partnerships. We are therefore evaluating them against a moving backdrop. We are interested in how they have managed the transition and how they are positioned now for their new role.

6.4 This final phase of the evaluation is based predominantly on the experience of the 20 Learning Partnership case studies. We feel that there is sufficient variation within the case study group to be able to extract the findings to the wider Learning Partnership population.

6.5 The style and emphasis of the evaluation has been designed to help Partnerships move forward as well as draw a line under a particular phase of their development.

National Policy Agenda

6.6 From the beginning, Learning Partnerships have been subject to high expectations from national policy makers. The focus on a need for Learning Partnerships to demonstrate their value and impact from the beginning perhaps did not take full account of the time it takes for Partnerships to develop. Add to this the initial lack of clarity, changing roles and perpetual uncertainty then it should not be a surprise or a disappointment that progress has been slower in some areas than anticipated.

6.7 The failure to lock Learning Partnerships firmly into the national policy context has been an initial and recurrent blow to their development. They were from an early stage perceived nationally almost as a failed and forgotten initiative.

6.8 This view has been perpetuated and reinforced by poor performance in some Partnerships, to the extent that they were essentially perceived, in many quarters, as a tarnished product - all tarred with the same brush. This has made LLSC engagements all the more difficult. It has also inhibited a stronger lead from the national LSC.

Voluntary Nature of Partnership

6.9 Partnerships from the outset felt that as voluntary organisations they were ill equipped to deal with the more strategic roles they were initially given. It is perhaps to their credit that over half are assessed as achieving some added value through strategically working together to identify and address learning issues within the locality.

6.10 The voluntary and independent nature of Partnerships has been a problem in persuading them to deal with what some might regard as the "more pressing" and "difficult issues". In many respects they have displayed the 'Pareto optimality' syndrome: they are most keen to act where at least one partner is better off and none are worse off.

6.11 The other side of the coin of a voluntary structure is that a great deal of information sharing, coordination, coherence and development activity was achieved very cost effectively. Had this been commissioned centrally from a remote point the cost would have been significantly higher and the will to deliver possibly lower. You might therefore argue that Learning Partnerships have achieved more with the same money than what an LLSC might have done in isolation.

Barriers

6.12 The main barriers that Learning Partnerships have encountered have been around clarity of purpose, capacity to deliver and stakeholder credibility. Partnerships better able to deal with these issues have been those that are well resourced, have a proactive Partnership manager and chair, and an ability to link into a strong FE college network.

6.13 It has not always been recognised that Partnership development, which involves cultural change and 'changing hearts and minds', is a long term process. Everyone is at a different starting point and some are more able to deal with the practicalities and the politics than others. The situation is often dictated by local circumstances. For example, poor Learning Partnership development may be symptomatic of a general lack of 'local Partnership'.

Success Factors

6.14 It is quite clear from our analysis that Partnership managers and coordinators have played a major role in moving the Learning Partnership agenda forward in times of conflict and uncertainty. Over the past 12 months, in particular, despite job insecurity issues, over half of Partnerships have been assessed as having accelerated in terms of Partnership effectiveness and added value achieved. The Partnership managers and coordinators supported by their chairs have played a major role in holding things together.

Added Value

6.15 The vast majority of Partnerships have been able to demonstrate aspects of added value by increasing the level and amount of joint working and information sharing across partner organisations and sectors.

6.16 Some have also made significant inroads to developing the voice of the learner including local research and mapping exercises. While these activities are now the responsibility of the LLSC they are now perhaps further advanced than they might have been without Learning Partnership involvement. In some cases Learning Partnerships have retained this role through agreement with the LLSC.

6.17 Furthermore, there is evidence that Learning Partnerships have added value beyond the micro interventions in their individual localities. In a national policy context, in many respects, they filled an important gap, which appeared in the transition from TECs to LLSCs. Had they not been there not only would a number of projects be lost but there would have been a breach in both momentum and continuity.

6.18 Where the circumstances have been right Learning Partnerships have shown that they have been able to lay the ground for important local interventions such as Area Inspections and Area Reviews.

6.19 Early on in the evaluation we estimated that one quarter of Partnerships were performing very well, one quarter were making little/no progress and the remainder were somewhere in between. Our current assessment would be that 10% stand out as leading performers, 50% have made significant progress, 20% are showing positive signs of development and 20% are still close to base position. This represents both an overall performance improvement and a significant base to build upon.

Direct Impact

6.20 Almost all Learning Partnerships have failed to demonstrate the direct impact, which they have had on learners or the wider learning market. This is due to the fact that few had a clear structure for measuring performance or did not accept it as responsibility to do so. Demonstrating impact remains a major weakness and could prove to be a continuing problem in the context of highlighting achievements to LLSCs.

Value for Money

6.21 In some respects Learning Partnerships might be regarded from an Exchequer perspective as one of the most cost-efficient initiatives ever introduced. Relatively modest funding of approximately £100k per annum has levered in many times this in direct additional funding from, for example, ESF/SRB and in-kind support from individual partners. It has generated a significant fund in multiplier.

6.22 In terms of cost effectiveness we have shown that the majority of Partnerships have been able to demonstrate value added; some more than others. Once again from the point of the view of the Exchequer given a relatively modest central investment, this even on average Learning Partnership performance probably represents value for money. Where the Partnerships have worked particularly well it represents excellent value for money.

6.23 A relatively small resource has been used to facilitate and resource cultural change at a local level. Learning Partnerships have helped some local areas to take a step forward towards this change; partners working together rather than independently. This could represent a significant shift at a modest cost and bodes well for their revised remit of promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning and maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration.

The Future

6.24 We have identified a myriad of potential problems and uncertainties concerning the future of Learning Partnerships. These have been documented and are genuine enough. However, when one cuts through the general 'noise' of 'who's going to do what with whom and how' the position is actually very positive. More than three quarters of Partnerships have indicated that their LLSC are currently very supported towards them. This represents a significant step forward from earlier in the summer.

6.25 It is clear that LLSCs in the main already value or value in theory what Learning Partnerships can deliver.

6.26 There is evidence of some stability in Learning Partnerships moving forward with over half the Partnerships anticipating that status quo arrangements are likely to continue.

6.27 There will inevitably be organisational changes. It is likely that over one third of Partnerships may significantly restructure to reflect LLSC local delivery structures. In other cases, Learning Partnerships are keen to retain a 'cradle to grave' remit, which is broader than the LSC's direct interest. These different approaches should not pose major problems providing the process is handled well. The continuation of collaborative activity is more important than the method of delivery.

6.28 There is evidence of tension around aspects of Partnership independence. If handled sensitively by the LLSC this might yet prove to be more of a problem in theory than in practice.

6.29 A critical dimension for the LLSC to manage is 'expectation'. They need to understand what can be done and what is more difficult to do with Learning Partnerships. Asking Learning Partnerships to address the most difficult problems immediately may not be productive. They also need to recognise that Partnership is a continuous process which has to be nurtured, developed and valued. Learning Partnerships are not simply a delivery machine.

6.30 The focus of individual Learning Partnerships is thus set to diverge as changes are made to fit local circumstances. Ultimately, the national and regional network of Learning Partnerships is likely to weaken – this will be regarded as a great loss by some Learning Partnerships.

Final Comments

6.31 Over the past three and a half years Learning Partnerships have generally had a bad press. In many cases this has been undeserved. We conclude that in the main they have achieved an added value in a significant number of localities.

6.32 In some respects it is true that Learning Partnerships have failed to deliver policy expectations. As a national initiative it also failed to generate a national network of homogeneous Partnerships with common agendas and structures. This failure may be due more to the problem of policy reality rather than Partnership delivery.

6.33 Learning Partnerships are now in a process of renaissance. Whilst their destiny is not entirely in their own hands there are clear opportunities to grasp. For those who can add value the future is secure. They may also find the future path to be easier and more rewarding than the past. For those Partnerships that cannot add value there is no future beyond perhaps 'coffee club' meetings.

Recommendations

6.34 Both Learning Partnerships and LLSCs need to understand that there is no 'single' or 'right' model of Learning Partnerships/LLSCs/LSP delivery. Almost anything can be made to work. Local circumstances should dictate the approach.

6.35 Learning Partnerships in consultation with their LLSCs need to place the benefit of activity on the ground above historical structures that they have developed. While the old structures may have supported them in the past they may not be sufficient for the new agenda.

6.36 LLSCs should recognise the importance of the manager and coordinator to Learning Partnership activity. They are not simply an overhead. Their removal or downgrading could significantly affect Partnership working. The softer outputs they generate should be valued.

6.37 LLSCs should think twice before dismantling overarching Partnerships. Whilst the main LLSC interest may be at local level they may find it difficult to control independently. Some of the most successful Partnerships to date have built their achievements around an overarching strategic centre.

6.38 The LLSCs should seek to work towards establishing three year contracts with Learning Partnerships. While it is perhaps reasonable that they might be reluctant to do so in this first year they should be making undertakings that providing performance is satisfactory then a three year deal will be entered into from 2004/05.

6.39 The National Learning Skills Council should play a strong role in promoting Learning Partnership benefits and cascading good practice. An important co-ordination role, played by the Government Offices in terms of providing information on policy and funding, may not be so direct. The LSC should consider whether this role is required and if so who should undertake it.

6.40 Learning Partnerships should be encouraged to aspire to take on the learning arm role of the Local Strategic Partnerships. They are already good practice examples here which should be cascaded.

6.41 LLSCs should use this initial year to get to know and better understand Learning Partnerships. Although it is understandable that they may wish to make some changes, they should perhaps avoid major surgery until they are clear what can be delivered.

6.42 Learning Partnerships, with support from their LLSCs, should seek to establish clear performance measures, which are smart and can be evaluated. This has been a major failing in the past and is likely to secure a more productive future.

6.43 LLSCs might find it useful to use the framework within this final report to assess where their local Learning Partnership is. Government Offices have already identified the need to undertake such an assessment in preparation for the local Learning and Skills Councils.

6.44 LLSCs should study the examples of Learning Partnership good practice set out in the Learning Partnership Toolkit and promote its use.

Annex A - Previous Evaluation Findings

Introduction

1. In this section we set out the key points from the previous evaluation reports produced as part of this longitudinal study, thus providing a context for this final evaluation assessment. This analysis is based on information from the following reports:

    *   Baseline Report I (July 2000);
    *   Baseline Report II and Early Progress (November 2000);
    *   Case Study Findings (November 2000);
    *   Interim Progress and Early Impact (July 2001);
    *   Interim Impact Report 1 (January 2002).

2. These are examined separately below, providing a time series assessment of the progress of Learning Partnerships since the first Baseline Report in July 2000.

Baseline Report 1 – July 2000

3. This report set out the baseline position in July 2000 for the National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships and the Partnership Fund. It was intended to provide the starting point for a national assessment of the progress, impact and added value of Learning Partnerships at key stages over the following two years.

4. However, the report was very much a work in progress since, at the time, the establishment of a clear baseline was not possible. This was due to a mixture of significant resource constraints on Government Offices and therefore their ability to feed information through to the national evaluators, and the limited extent to which Learning Partnerships themselves had set out baseline positions, particularly in terms of identifying performance measures and targets. This second problem would be a theme that ran through all stages of the evaluation.

5. The report identified a number of key points with regard to the development of Learning Partnerships at this stage:

    *   A range of added-value activities were being achieved, including:

        –   developing a shared understanding of activities in the local area;
        –   mapping activities, for example, in relation to learner consultation;
        –   Partnership links with Connexions, EBPs etc;
        –   strategic responses to bids (e.g. ICT learning centres and SDF);
        –   schools/colleges working together where they haven't before;

- specific projects with learning being undertaken;
- joint procedures/protocols;

- Progress was slower than anticipated in some areas. The changing policy environment and its effects on individual partners was clearly playing a role here;

- To fulfil their role of "understanding and reflecting community needs" through engaging and involving employers and learners, Learning Partnerships **needed to facilitate a 'step-change' in culture, attitudes and approach**, amongst learning providers. They could not be expected to achieve this instantaneously;

- The **voluntary nature of Learning Partnerships** meant that in order to fulfil their strategic and co-ordination role on the ground, it was necessary for both:

  - regional/national support to raise the status of Learning Partnerships;

  - local commitment/understanding of purpose to be achieved;

- A series of success factors, lessons, constraints and good practice areas were identified, including:

  - **success factors** – the role of Government Office networking events, the role of key stakeholders such as the Government Office and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in raising the importance and status of Learning Partnerships, the strategic focus of Partnership facilitators, Partnership 'away days' and the role of regional support consultants;

  - **constraints** – large geographical areas, lack in clarity of role in relation to LLSCs, partner sensitivities and unwieldy Partnership structures, voluntary nature, lack of strategic push/direction, availability of resources for Partnership development, communication, and trust and uncertainty about the future of Partnerships;

- Partnerships were not **"shouting loud enough"** about their progress/successes;

- There were some delays and problems with obtaining regional evaluation pro formas and assessments;

- The **quality of learning plans** varied considerably. There were some good examples of comprehensive action plans that would support future achievements. On the whole, however, there were some key gaps in Learning Plans, which needed to be addressed if they were to provide the Partnerships with a tool for achievement.

Baseline Report 2 and Early Progress – November 2000

6. This was one of two reports providing the interim findings of the National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships in November 2000. This report provided both a revised Baseline Report and an update on progress at November 2000.

7. A number of findings emerged from this report:

- **Key characteristics of Learning Partnerships** – Partnerships were beginning by this stage to reach out to wider partners, particularly voluntary and community groups and private training providers;

- **National performance measures –** apart from the National Learning Targets, Partnerships had not begun to set performance measures and targets to any major extent. Consequently the development of aggregate performance measures at a national level was not possible;

- **Aims and objectives of Learning Partnerships** – analysis of information collected by York Consulting from all Partnerships allowed the identification of a baseline in relation to what Partnerships were seeking to achieve. This information was classified under the following headings:

    - **Headline Aims** – all Partnerships were focussing on attainment, participation and basic skills attainment;

    - **Delivery Objectives –** at this stage in their development there was little clear consensus on key delivery objectives, perhaps reflecting continuing difficulties in the definition of their role and areas for added value;

    - **Partnership Development Objectives** – Partnership plans and activities demonstrated considerable activity in this area but again this was not defined against clear objectives;

- **Reviewing their own progress** – as mentioned above there had been little activity in relation to the development of performance measures and targets. Even where performance measures had been developed these were often of variable quality and baselines had rarely been set;

- **Learning Partnership progress** – of those that had identified performance measures only a small proportion reported progress at this time and this was mainly in relation to the more defined delivery objectives;

- **Use of the Partnership Fund** - in 1999/2000, the majority of the Learning Partnership Fund was allocated towards 'Action Element' activities, with an average across the 7 regions available of 23% of the total allocation going towards Support Activities. The type of activities being undertaken through the 'Action Element' funding could be broadly split into those that appeared to be "one-off projects" and those that more clearly identified the "added value of the Partnership". In a large proportion of cases (up to 60% in one region), there was no clear added value link to the Partnership.

Case Study Findings – November 2000

8. This was the second of the two reports produced in November 2000. It focused on findings from the first round of visits to the 20 national evaluation Case Studies. The key conclusions from this study are outlined below.

Key Conclusions

9. **There was evidence to suggest that Learning Partnership activity was better on the ground than may be evident to the casual observer**. There was almost a whispering campaign, perpetuated by those not directly involved, which potentially could influence critical stakeholders and undermine achievement and planned activity.

10. In most cases, **Partnership development was still evolving. It was very much still at the 'establishing trust' stage**. Beyond essential process type activity, there was little quantifiable evidence of impact, value added, or value for money.

11. While it **seemed likely that planned actions would deliver on the ground impact**, the continued lack of clear performance measures, targets and baselines left Partnerships in a weak position to demonstrate this in the future.

12. While Partnerships were at variable stages of development, reflecting both past history and local circumstances, **over one-third demonstrated high levels of performance**, with around one-fifth falling within what was termed the 'early developer' categories and the remainder being spread fairly evenly between.

13. In order to make progress, many **Partnerships had concentrated on the immediate things they could agree on** and avoided some of the difficult issues around aspects of duplication and rationalisation. This was a necessary strategy, but represented a 'papering over of cracks' that might re-emerge at a future date.

14. Many Partnerships had **struggled with the concept of strategic focus** and had concentrated their attention on operational activity involving a combination of market research and the delivery of a portfolio of small projects.

15. Many Partnerships appeared to be **happier to take on the role of representing the learner**, rather than the more strategically embracing role as the local voice of learning. This reflects some delivery tensions and the wish of some partners to retain autonomy in this area. Given the planned changes in the education and training infrastructure the following year, this was perhaps hardly surprising.

16. Irrespective of problems encountered, the majority of **Partnerships were committed to overcoming obstacles** and to making the Partnership work for the benefit of the local area.

17. **The majority of Partnerships indicated that they were clear on their role** and the direction in which they were proceeding. Unfortunately, this was not always clearly articulated to those outside the immediate Partnership.

18. **Many Partnerships had been slow to establish clear structures and management arrangements**. The appointment of co-ordinators, rather than managers, held back progress in situations where there was a need to be led rather than organised.

19. **The quality of Partnership Chairs was generally of a high standard**, with most Partnerships describing them as strong and interventionist. In most cases, however, they lacked the time commitment to keep the process moving at the required speed. Bottom up, as well as top down, drives were required.

20. Without doubt, **the most critical success factor** for those Partnerships achieving the best performance **was the presence of an individual or individuals supplying a strong driving force** in terms of both enthusiasm and direction.

21. **Approximately one-third of Partnerships had been strongly reliant on TEC support** in developing both the Learning Plan and co-ordinating the Partnership. Concerns were emerging that when this support was withdrawn from April 2001, an insurmountable resource gap would emerge. Responses to this ranged from establishing independent legal entities to seeking direct support from the LSCs.

22. **There was a concern that Learning Partnerships**, which are essentially voluntary, **could be crowded out by new statutory Partnerships** in tangential areas such as Education Business Link Consortia and Connexions Partnerships.

23. **Activities in support of wider engagement of both partners and customers had been relatively subdued**. While plans were being developed to address this, there was a sense of waiting to see how the new education and training infrastructure evolved before total commitment.

Interim Progress and Early Impact Report – July 2001

24. This report, produced in July 2001, focussed on both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the evaluation of Learning Partnerships. The key points from the report are outlined below.

Characteristics of Learning Partnerships

25. **Partnerships had become more inclusive** over the previous 12 months, primarily in terms of Partnership Members. The National Evaluation Case Studies and Regional Evaluations, however, indicate some difficulties in achieving wider inclusiveness and "reaching out and involving partners at the grass roots level".

26. The demise of the TECs reduced the number of 'TEC Chairs' of Partnerships and also impacted on resources and drive for some Learning Partnerships.

27. The proportion of Partnerships with full-time (or seconded) managers/co-ordinators increased.

Learning Plan Executive Summaries

28. The Executive Summaries received demonstrated a much greater degree of focus and purpose within Partnerships. However, some concerns remained in relation to the plans, particularly around performance measurement.

29. Attainment and participation were still the key aims for Learning Partnerships and the most common objective was addressing barriers to learning, in particular, issues in relation to IAG and access.

30. Key roles that Partnerships were setting themselves included bringing coherence to provision, informing and influencing the LSC and other key funders and seeking to understand and articulate the voice of the learner.

Evidence of Performance

31. At the national level significant progress had been made towards the achievement of the adult attainment targets, but progress towards both young peoples' targets was disappointing. However, as the majority of Learning Partnerships were still very much in the development stage and there was little evidence of impact; it would have been unrealistic to attribute much of this progress to Learning Partnerships.

Clarity of Role

32. Compared to six months previously Partnerships had generally developed greater clarity in relation to understanding the (potential) 'role and purpose' of the Partnership itself. Members of Partnership Boards appear to have a shared understanding of the strategic purpose of the Partnership. However, in reality many partners are still protecting their own interests.

33. **Understanding, commitment and involvement of Partner organisations outside those represented on the Partnership Board or sub-groups had not yet been achieved**, though significant progress had been made in some areas.

Actions and Achievements

34. **The attraction of funding and the identification/delivery of collaborative projects was an overwhelming characteristic of the key achievements** reported by Learning Partnerships over the past twelve to eighteen months. The key collaborative activities now being taken forward appear very much driven by the DfES agenda and direction.

35. **Nine of the national evaluation case studies had not made any progress in tackling truly strategic issues through their key activities**. In 11 of the case studies, however, strategic interventions were starting to be higher on the agenda. Some case study Partnerships were taking proactive action to influence and challenge the way that partners work and plan together. Influence on 'stakeholders' was also evident in some Partnerships.

Key Features of Learning Partnership Development

36. **A significant proportion of Learning Partnerships still appeared to take largely 'reactive' rather than 'proactive' approaches to operation and delivery**.

37. Only one of the national case studies was considered to be at an 'advanced' stage of development in relation to the key features of operation and delivery, though around four appeared to have made 'significant progress'. Around half of the case studies had moved beyond the early development phase and could now provide clear evidence that they were making progress in developing aspects of their delivery.

38. On the whole Partnership members did not appear to have got to grips with their role in ensuring intelligence and information was communicated effectively to and from the Partnership.

39. There were still key 'sectors' that most Partnerships were struggling to fully involve and engage even at the 'representative' level, let alone the wider engagement and involvement level, including employers, schools and Trade Unions. Most Partnerships now had voluntary/community 'representatives' but, wider engagement across the sector was proving to be a longer-term development process.

The Local LSC

40. All of the national case study Learning Partnerships had had some contact with the local LSC. In some of the case study areas, it was clear that it was the LSC that was driving forward the development of a clear role for Learning Partnerships in relation to the LSC. There were also some positive examples of the Learning Partnerships themselves taking proactive roles.

Impact

41. The activities of Learning Partnerships were now starting to have some early impact, most obviously on the partner organisations themselves. The impact of Learning Partnerships' activity on the ways in which partners work and plan together was much more significant across all Partnerships. Though there was no real evidence that this impact had filtered out to all members of staff within partner organisations or to 'wider' partners.

42. Given both the long-term nature of Partnership development and the nature of Learning Partnerships' strategic aims, it was too early to expect to see any significant impact on learners and employers, although there were some qualitative examples cited by the National Case Study consultees.

43. Impact in relation to more strategic activity and decisions was also fairly limited, with only four of the National Case Studies identifying some clear evidence.

Added Value

44. **Learning Partnerships had not yet achieved significant added value for learners and employers**. However, the majority of the national case studies were classed as having achieved some 'basic added value', with commonly cited benefits such as successful collaborative bids for funding, discussing and sharing ideas, or mapping activities. No Partnerships were considered to have achieved 'advanced' added value. What is more encouraging, however, was that there were signs that some Partnerships had moved beyond the basic level of added value to achieve much more tangible outcomes in relation to Partnership working and strategic direction.

Progression of Learning Partnerships

45. Across the 20 national case studies, progression both in terms of collaboration and strategy development had taken place. Generally, Partnerships had been embedding and improving collaborative aspects that had already been set in train six months previously, whilst starting to look at the more strategic agenda.

46. Key factors that had most obviously provided a clearer focus for Learning Partnerships nationally included the establishment of the LSC, revision of Learning Plans/Production of Executive Summaries, co-ordinators/managers taking facilitating/strategic roles, 16-19 Area Inspection and the high importance placed on some initiatives by DfES and Government Offices in some areas, such as Basic Skills, Learner Feedback/Fora.

47. Factors that had had a more negative influence on Partnerships' progression included a pressure to demonstrate impact, waiting for the LSC, time and resource, and partner attitudes.

Interim Impact Report – January 2002

48. This was the fifth report produced for the National Evaluation of Learning Partnerships. It provided an update of the progress that Learning Partnerships had made nationally by late 2001.

Purpose and Focus of Learning Partnerships

49. The aims and objectives most commonly identified by Learning Partnerships in their learning plans relate to attainment, participation, basic skills and addressing barriers to learning. The key roles that Learning Partnerships identified included:

- bringing coherence to provision (71% of all Partnerships), especially through building collaborative processes (67% of all Partnerships);

- informing and influencing the LSC and other key funders (77% of all Partnerships), most notably through providing an authoritative voice (30% of all Partnerships) and being a vehicle for communication (27% of all Partnerships);

- 71% of all Learning Partnerships explicitly stated that they are seeking to understand and articulate the voice of the learner.

50. The majority of the **twenty Case Study** Partnerships appeared to be **clear about what they wanted to do** and how they should do it and many reported **significant improvements** in the previous last six months.

Key Activities Undertaken

51. Across the country Learning Partnerships were undertaking a wide variety of activities in relation to the achievement of their goals. These activities ranged from high-level strategic activity to operationally focused pilot projects looking at discrete areas of provision. Nationally, the delivery of collaborative development projects focused on specific themes and issues relevant to the area were the most common type of activity being undertaken by Learning Partnerships.

52. Specific activity focused on co-ordination, coherence and strategic decisions was less apparent across all Learning Partnerships. In some areas, such activity is constrained by a continuing *"reticence amongst partners about sharing information"*. However, in nine of the national Case Studies examples of such activity were identified, primarily relating to the coordination of bidding rounds and of responses to strategic consultation exercises.

Relationships

53. Overall, Learning Partnerships appeared to be developing some positive communication links with the *Local Learning and Skills Councils*. All but one of the twenty Case Study Learning Partnerships had some link with the LSC whether this was in the form of representation on the Learning Partnership Board and/or development of a protocol of working relationships. There was, however, evidence in a minority of the Case Studies that some are struggling to move beyond this point, since there appeared to be little value placed on the Partnership, by the LLSC.

54. In the main, local LSCs appeared to be keen to benefit from the co-ordination and collaborative roles that Learning Partnerships can bring to the learning agenda (and are doing so in many cases). They were less willing, on the whole, to develop relationships whereby Learning Partnerships were taking a more strategic and influencing stance.

55. Most Case Study areas reported that relationships were starting to develop with Local Strategic Partnerships, though the extent to which this is happening varied according to the proactivity of the Learning Partnership in relation to supporting the development of LSPs and the extent to which areas were coterminous.

Area Inspections

56. In the Case Study areas, Learning Partnership involvement in Area Inspections that had taken place had been mixed. There had been relatively little involvement in the pre-planning and actual inspection process for a number of reasons, but many had got more involved in the post-inspection process of action planning.

57. Where inspections had not yet taken place there seemed to be a growing awareness amongst Case Study Partnerships that there was a role for them throughout the inspection process and a number had already started to put structures in place and undertake some early preparatory work. This, in turn, was providing the Learning Partnerships in some Case Study areas with a greater focus.

Impact

58. The existence of the Learning Partnership and its access to the Learning Partnership Fund had, in many of the Case Studies, provided a catalyst for the attraction of other funding. In total, 11 of the Case Study Partnerships had accessed in excess of £7.5m in addition to the Learning Partnership Fund in the latest funding year. By far the most commonly accessed source of additional funding in the last year had been LSC Local Initiative Fund (LIF).

59. On average the Case Study Partnerships had been able to lever in approximately three and a half times their Partnership Fund allocation from other sources. However, it should be noted that around a third of the Case Studies had not accessed any additional external funding. Other evidence of the impact of Learning Partnerships had been self-reported by the Partnerships themselves, both quantitatively and qualitatively and included increases in the number of new learners; improved access to learning; improvements in Partnership working; and influencing stakeholder strategy and direction; and taking strategic decisions themselves.

Added Value

60. Key ways in which many Learning Partnerships were adding value included understanding the needs of the area; greater co-ordination and coherence; more collaborative activity; and leverage of additional and/or more cost-effectively used funding.

Conclusions

> *"The formation of Learning Partnerships has improved the relationships between stakeholders"*, David Starling, OfSTED.

61. Learning Partnerships had made progress in relation to all three of the key roles, which form their remit:

- **Greater Provider Collaboration and More Coherent, Relevant and Accessible Learning** was being achieved through a significant amount of collaborative activity focused on the development, bidding and delivery of learning improvement activities, and co-ordination of strategies for learning and aspects of delivery. There was also some specific individual examples where coherence and accessibility had been improved;

- **Identify and Respond to Local Learner, Community and Employer Needs**: The majority of Learning Partnerships were making headway in relation to identifying and developing a better understanding of the local needs of the area, though there continued to be problems in some areas where partners "remain reticent about sharing information due to competitive constraints". Achievements in relation to responding to the needs identified was less evident.

- **Mechanisms to Provide Feedback**: Mapping and strategy development to take forward the learner voice agenda had been a key focus for many Learning Partnerships. Again, not all Partnerships are making similar headway and as alluded to already, there was limited evidence that Learning Partnerships (and the LSC) had identified ways in which they could ensure the ability to respond to the needs identified.

62. The level of the achievement in relation to each role did, as might be expected, vary quite considerably across Learning Partnership areas. In a significant minority of Case Studies, the added value was 'on the margins'. There were a small number of examples, however, where advanced added value was being achieved.

63. The overall picture for Learning Partnerships was therefore one **where significant progress was being made in relation to improving collaboration and co-ordinating activities.** There was evidence that Learning Partnerships nationally were having some impact and achieving aspects of added value, though the extent to which this was true varies significantly from area to area. All the national Case Studies were achieving at least some 'basic' added value.

64. There had been less progress made in relation to the strategic and influencing roles that the DfES guidance set out for them. In many areas, this picture suited the environment at the time, often characterised by the approach of the local LSC, which was focused on the value of local collaborative groups and a more advisory (rather than strategic) role for the Learning Partnership.