

Circular 03/06

For Information

Strategic Area Reviews

Arrangements and Guidance for Strategic Area Reviews

Summary

This circular confirms the arrangements made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for strategic area reviews (StARs) of all LSC-funded post-16 learning and skills provision across England in response to *Success for All*, the Government's reform strategy for further education and training.

Local LSCs are responsible for leading StARs and will ensure that the process is effectively managed, stakeholders are engaged and that the timetable is met and outputs are achieved.

This circular is of interest to Local Authorities (LAs)/Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Jobcentre Plus, schools with post-14 provision/sixth forms, further education colleges, former external institutions, specialist colleges, adult education centres, community and voluntary providers, work based training providers, **learnirect** hubs and Ufi Ltd, higher education institutions, employers, Trade Unions, National Connexions Service, Learning Partnerships and heads of other key organisations.

This circular supersedes Circular 02/21 *Strategic Area Reviews*.



March 2003

Learning+Skills Council

Foreword

Success for All sets out the Government's strategy for reforming further education and training and the impact Strategic Area Reviews will make on learning and skills provision across England.

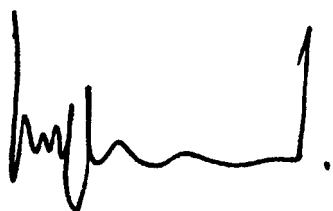
Strategic Area Reviews will ensure provision is well planned and will aim to build upon the high standard of existing provision in many parts of the post-16 sector. It will also identify options for improving weaker provision and filling gaps helping to build a learning society in which everyone is well educated and able to learn throughout their lives.

The Council will be bold in its approach to Strategic Area Reviews; it will work together with stakeholders to enhance 'tried and tested' forms of delivery and to identify and consider new, radical and innovative options for change ensuring that learners in each part of the country have high quality, safe and accessible learning opportunities capable of meeting their needs and those of employers and local communities.

This will be the first time that the pattern of provision of all post-16 learning (other than HE) will be reviewed using a common approach across England and lessons will need to be learned by the LSC and stakeholders. To learn these lessons quickly, the LSC has identified a pioneer in each English region to pave the way for the rest of England so that good practice can be identified and shared. There will be one pioneering local LSC for eight of the English regions and for the London region, all the five London LSCs will be a collective pioneer to reflect the pan-London approach. The LSC will evaluate the ways of working and local planning processes adopted by these pioneers and identify areas of good practice that can be exploited across England.

Local LSCs are responsible for getting the balance of provision right in their area and I strongly support this common, national approach to ensuring quality and cost-effectiveness, which is complemented by considerable flexibility for local LSCs to design processes to take account of local conditions.

The LSC fully embraces and supports the Governments priorities within Skills for Life, the 14–19 Strategy, *Success for All*, the Higher Education Strategy and the forthcoming Skills Strategy; and these priorities will be reflected in decisions that arise from Strategic Area Reviews.



John Harwood, Chief Executive

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For further information, please contact the appropriate local Learning and Skills Council.

Executive Summary

Date: March 2003

Subject: Strategic area reviews

This circular confirms the arrangements made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for strategic area reviews (StARs) of all LSC-funded post-16 learning and skills provision across England in response to ***Success for All***, the Government's reform strategy for further education and training.

StARs aim to meet learner, employer and community needs, and to improve the choice and quality of post-16 education and skills provision. They will cover all LSC-funded provision for learners of all ability levels aged over 16.

Local LSCs are responsible for leading StARs and will ensure that the process is effectively managed, stakeholders are engaged and that the timetable is met and outputs are achieved. Each local LSC will put in place a project plan with clear management arrangements for the StAR by 31 July 2003.

By 31 March 2005, following all review activity, local LSCs will put in place and publish a plan for reform outlining clear actions for meeting needs and improving choice. This plan will be incorporated into the local LSC strategic plan.

Intended recipients: Local Authorities (LAs)/Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Jobcentre Plus, schools with post-14 provision/sixth forms, further education colleges, former external institutions, specialist colleges, adult education centres, community and voluntary providers, work based training providers, **learn**direct hubs and Ufi Ltd, higher education institutions, employers, Trade Unions, National Connexions

Service, Learning Partnerships and heads of other key organisations.

Status: For information

Arrangements and Guidance for Strategic Area Reviews

Section 1: Arrangements for Strategic Area Reviews

Introduction

1 This circular confirms the arrangements made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for strategic area reviews (StARs) of all LSC-funded post-16 learning and skills provision across England. These arrangements come in response to *Success for All*, the Government's reform strategy for further education and training. The circular has been produced following extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders. To ensure a consistent and coherent approach across England, these arrangements are to be followed by local LSCs and their partners when undertaking StAR activities.

2 These arrangements are new and, as such, unforeseen questions or issues may arise as the StAR process is implemented. The LSC recognises the importance of listening to partners and stakeholders and values the significant response to the three-month consultation on Circular 02/21 *Strategic Area Reviews*. The LSC will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to refine and improve these arrangements as StARs are undertaken. Further questions that arise will be published in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQ) on the website (www.lsc.gov.uk - under documents/strategic area reviews)

Background

3 *Success for All* outlines the rationale for StARs. The strategy recognises that all people, whatever their background, should have

opportunities for progression and personal development. It also recognises that achieving the right mix of provision in an area is one of the most critical steps in strategic planning within the learning and skills sector.

4 The StARs will cover every provider in the LSC-funded learning and skills sector with the aims that learning provided in an area must meet local, regional, national and sectoral skill needs, and will be responsive to local employer and community requirements.

5 *Success for All* aims to raise standards within the learning and skills sector, so that all learners can meet their potential regardless of where they live, or where they learn. It also aims to increase participation and improve outcomes for learners and employers.

6 StARs will support the raising of standards and will ensure that learners have a wide choice of high-quality local provision. They will also ensure that providers are clear about, and focus on, their strengths and develop their education and training missions accordingly. This in turn will ensure that employers have confidence that providers are meeting their skill needs.

7 The purpose of StARs is to make a fundamental examination of learning provision, both that is currently offered and that is required in each part of the country against:

- the priorities and needs of learners, employers and local communities;
- the need to drive up quality and increase success rates in many areas of provision and to improve its cost-effectiveness; and

- the volume and type of education and training needed to meet the LSC's targets.

8 StARs also need to take account of the key priority areas outlined in:

- the DfES 14–19 Strategy, *Success for All Strategy*, Higher Education Strategy and the forthcoming Skills Strategy;
and
- the LSC Basic Skills Strategy, Widening Adult Participation Strategy and Equality and Diversity Strategy.

LSC Corporate Objectives

9 The LSC is the lead planning body for post-16 education and skills. Its mission is 'to raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training that puts learners first'. Its vision is that 'by 2010, young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world'.

10 The key objectives in achieving the LSC's mission and vision are:

- to extend participation in education, learning and training;
- to increase the engagement of employers in workforce development;
- to raise the achievement of young people;
- to raise the achievement of adults; and
- to raise quality and learner satisfaction.

11 StARs are a key driver in achieving these objectives and are the catalysts to bring about reform and deliver radical improvements. At the heart of this change is the creation of an integrated and inclusive lifelong learning and skills community.

Aims and Objectives of Strategic Area Reviews

12 The overall aims of StARs are to ensure learner, employer and community needs are met, and to improve the choice and quality of post-16 education and skills provision. This will only be achieved by understanding and responding rapidly to the diverse learning cultures and priorities of employment and the local community.

13 StARs have four broad objectives in bringing about change:

- a. to ensure that the pattern and mix of provision, including e-learning, meets the current needs and future priorities for all learners and communities while enhancing quality and improving choice;
- b. to create a more responsive infrastructure that directly engages employers and meets current and future sectoral, national, regional and local skill, and socio-economic needs and priorities – **further supporting the Skills Strategy**;
- c. to achieve better choice for young people and more parental confidence through improved 16–19 provision - including where appropriate through more distinct 16–19 provision whether in new sixth forms, sixth form colleges or sixth form centres including centres in further education colleges - and to strengthen the links between 14–19 providers and achieve greater choice, including vocational opportunities – **further supporting the 14–19 Strategy** (collaboration will enable greater choice, improved progression and ways in which more distinct 16–19 provision can be developed); and
- d. to strengthen the links with higher education providers and achieve better pathways, including foundation degrees – **further supporting the Higher Education (HE) Strategy** (collaboration will enable greater choice and improved progression).

14 The outcomes of the StAR process will aim to provide:

- the right mix of high-quality provision to meet existing and future learner, employer and community needs, raising standards and success rates; meeting the LSC's vision for 2010 and delivering the Government's education and training priorities;
- a confident integrated post-16 sector built on excellent provision, with each provider clear about their unique contribution and working collaboratively to achieve educational, social and economic success; and
- a forward programme of reviews to tackle areas that need to be strengthened in different parts of the local LSC area or in meeting the future needs of different types of learner, employer or community more effectively.

Provision to be Reviewed

15 StARs will cover all LSC-funded provision across England for learners of all ability levels aged over 16. This will include provision delivered by a diverse range of providers such as:

- sixth forms in foundation, voluntary and community schools, including those with religious character;
- colleges, including general further education, designated, specialist (such as colleges for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD), or those for Agriculture, Performing Arts, Art and Design etc.), sixth forms and associated sixth-form centres;
- HE institutions offering further education;
- adult and community learning and voluntary sector provision;

- former external institutions;
- work-based learning, including modern apprenticeships and other vocational routes; and
- all **learndirect** provision.

16 It also includes provision aimed at a wide range of recipients such as refugees and asylum seekers and other minority groups. While most provision is planned locally, the LSC will need to work regionally and nationally in some areas, such as:

- national contracts, which are held by large multi-sited national employers, specialist national providers and national sector hubs;
- planning the delivery of highly specialised services for learners with special learning needs requiring residential provision;
- planning specialist provision in strategically important occupations, such as Art and Design and Agriculture, including provision in centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs); and
- planning provision with the emerging sector skills councils (SSCs) and regional development agencies to ensure sectoral and regional skill needs are met.

17 StARs should consider provision funded by other agencies in the area, including that financed by local authorities (LAs), local education authorities (LEAs), Jobcentre Plus, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), employers, regional development agencies (RDAs), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). A coherent approach should be developed to minimise risk of duplication, competition or confusion.

18 Although the focus of StARs is on LSC-funded provision, it is not intended that this should create new barriers between this and other local provision. Rather, every opportunity should be taken to encourage collaborative

working between different funding agencies and promote coherent 'offers' of learning to individuals and employers.

Arrangements for Strategic Area Reviews

19 Responses received to the consultation circular 02/21 *Strategic Area Reviews* have emphasised the need for arrangements to be sufficiently 'tight' to ensure consistency of the overall approach, but sufficiently 'loose' to ensure that local LSCs and their stakeholders have flexibility to develop and implement local solutions to meet local needs. The key objective in formulating these arrangements has been to provide for this 'tight' and 'loose' fit whilst at the same time promoting clarity and simplicity in what StARs are seeking to achieve.

20 Local LSCs are responsible for leading StARs and will ensure the process is effectively managed, stakeholders are engaged, and that the timetable is met and outputs are achieved. Each local LSC will put in place a project plan with clear management and consultation arrangements and an identified lead manager by 31 July 2003. In leading the process, local LSCs will need to manage the balance between giving the StAR a sense of direction and purpose while not undermining the value of the stakeholders' contributions to informing local decisions. This will involve leadership in planning the StAR, developing options for change and delivering the outcomes.

21 Stakeholder participation and widespread consultation will be vital to the success of StARs. StARs are 'core business' for the LSC, and local LSCs and their executive directors have an important leadership role throughout the process, a role that includes setting the scene for the way in which the process will be carried out. Local LSCs should be conscious of the need for clarity, openness and effective communication with all involved or affected by emerging proposals.

22 All stakeholders should be given the

opportunity to be fully involved in StARs from the outset and each local LSC should establish a local stakeholder group to inform the StAR process and ensure appropriate representation of stakeholder views. See paragraph 37 for a comprehensive list of stakeholders. Stakeholders should expect local LSCs to lead the process in an objective and inclusive way.

23 The process should allow a flexible approach to reflect differences in local conditions, including previous reviews of local provision. Each local LSC should determine, in the context of past work and local need, how best to cover all provision, differentiating the approach as necessary. Local LSCs will need to make clear to stakeholders and partners the style of the StAR, and its purpose, scope and status (for example, in relation to other planning processes).

24 There will be key decision points such as the identification of strategic options, when local LSCs will carry out formal public consultation to inform the decision-making process and to ensure that all views are taken into account. Responses to the consultation must be considered by the local LSC board, which will then decide on the way forward based on the evidence presented from the options appraisal and consultation.

25 A set of minimum requirements for local public consultation on the strategic options under consideration as part of the StAR process will be published with the supporting materials outlined in paragraph 112. Local LSCs will follow these minimum requirements unless there is specific agreement to make modifications by the local stakeholder group. Local LSCs should notify the *Success for All* implementation team at national office of any modifications or deviations to the minimum requirements, who in turn will advise on whether the proposed modifications are compatible with the LSC's overall obligation to ensure consistency of approach.

26 StARs are themselves a fully consultative process providing stakeholders with the means to fully explore any concerns as they arise. In light of this, the LSC does not intend to create

an additional process for appeals to those that already exist. Local LSCs will, however, need to fully address all responses to the consultation and provide opportunity to discuss and debate differing views that arise.

27 Decisions on the structure and profile of learning and skills provision should be influenced by individual and employment priorities, geography and the quality and pattern of provision. The LSC does not intend to reorganise for reorganisation sake and care will be taken not to destabilise the existing learning infrastructure. Advised by the stakeholder group, the local LSC Board will make final decisions on which options should be taken forward.

28 In line with statutory processes, the Young People's Learning Committee must be informed of any potential options involving structural change to organisational arrangements for school sixth forms and colleges. There are legal consultation arrangements that must be adhered to where proposals are brought forward for the reorganisation of colleges and changes to schools with sixth forms. The LSC has the legal responsibility to ensure that these statutory processes are followed and local LSCs should follow published guidance and seek further clarification where necessary from the LSC national office.

29 By 31 March 2005, following all review activity, each local LSC will put in place and publish a plan for reform outlining clear actions for meeting needs and improving choice. These plans will take account of the need to improve choice, in particular the 'choice of provision' across an area to best meet the needs of individuals, and 'choice in ways of delivery' to best meet the needs of diverse circumstances of individuals. This plan for reform will be incorporated into the local LSC strategic plan.

30 Although it is not the LSC's intention to set in place a formal approval process for local StAR plans at national level, local LSCs will send a copy of the project plan and plans for

reform to the *Success for All* implementation team at the LSC national office to ensure an overview of activity and progress across England.

Decision-making Criteria

31 There will be transparent local decision-making against criteria established by the local stakeholder group. The criteria should be customer-focused reflecting local circumstances, but must include how proposals will:

- meet learner, employment and community needs;
- improve choice of provision, ways of delivery and learner experience including, where appropriate, developing more distinct provision for 16–19 year olds;
- raise standards and participation;
- enhance the responsiveness of the infrastructure together with employers' involvement; and
- strengthen collaboration and progression in the 14–19 phase, the post 19 phase and with HE including supporting the development of foundation degrees.

32 Local LSCs are encouraged to consider radical and innovative proposals to deliver the necessary impact and change that leads to improvements in standards for learners.

Seven Strategic Area Review Activities

33 The StAR process comprises seven activities. These activities in part or in full may be carried out consecutively or concurrently. Local LSCs may choose to discharge the StAR in a variety of planned ways (geographical, sectoral or thematic) providing the process as a whole covers the local area in its entirety.

The activities are outlined below and guidance relating to each activity can be found in Section 2:

- a. preparatory planning work;
- b. information gathering and analysis;
- c. developing and appraising strategic options;
- d. appropriate local consultation;
- e. publishing outcomes;
- f. implementing outcomes; and
- g. evaluating the process and outcomes.

Core Values

34 A set of common core values will underpin all StARs. Due regard must be given to these core values to maximise the effectiveness of StARs. They are:

- strong and sustained focus on learner, employment and community needs;
- active and continuing participation in StARs by learners, employers and community groups and representatives;
- active partnership working with collective ownership and steering of StARs, led by local LSCs;
- active promotion of equality, diversity and inclusive provision to meet the distinct needs of different and disadvantaged groups, including learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- active promotion of collaboration and co-operation between providers and localities in meeting learner, employment and community needs;
- valuing and building on previous review activity of local provision or institutions;
- sustaining excellent provision and driving up quality;

- not imposing extra burdens or bureaucracy on employers, individual learners or providers;
- open, transparent and consultative decision-making arrangements consistent with commercial confidentiality and security of personal data;
- fairness and consistency of approach across England;
- considering new and innovative forms of learning such as e-learning and out reach programmes;
- safe, healthy and accessible learning environments for all; and
- reflecting the priorities and principles emerging from 14–19 Strategy, *Success for All* Strategy, Basic Skills Strategy, Widening Adult Participation Strategy, HE Strategy and Skills Strategy.

Core Principles of Partnership

35 The following core partnership principles will also underpin all StARs. To:

- know, trust and value each other;
- recognise and respect each other's views and priorities, taking account of where these differ;
- make explicit the shared vision and objectives and each other's roles in delivery;
- work jointly through all stages of policy or product development to delivery;
- systematically examine all activities and agree who is best placed to carry them out;
- share information and maintain good communication links;
- ensure regular feedback loops on strategy, plans, delivery and performance; and
- share success and agree goals for

continuous performance improvement.

Learner, Employer and Community Involvement

36 Engaging and encouraging contributions from learners, employers and local communities should be evident throughout the StAR process. This engagement is central to the overall success of StARs, particularly as one of their key outputs is to ensure that the profile of provision meets the current needs and future priorities of learners, employers and communities. It is important that disadvantaged and underrepresented groups are actively involved in StARs.

Stakeholder Involvement

37 The LSC is committed to establishing a true partnership with all stakeholders, in the spirit of its response to *Trust in the Future*. It will also embrace *Getting the Best from Each Other* – the framework for Government relationships with providers of post-16 training, learning and community programmes. The full range of stakeholders in post-16 learning and skills will need to be provided with an early opportunity to be involved in StARs. The following list highlights key stakeholders that should be involved throughout the StAR process. It is recognised that some stakeholders will wish to be more involved in the process than others. Therefore, the level, extent and timing of involvement will be determined locally. However, LEAs, colleges and providers, employers, Jobcentre Plus and local LSC members must be represented on the stakeholder group and actively involved in carrying out StARs.

- Individual learners and potential learners, in particular underrepresented groups and groups, such as the National Union of Students (NUS) and student governors, that represent learners.
- Individual employers, chambers of commerce, local branches of the

Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Business Link operators and local or regional branches of the Federation of Small Businesses.

- Community groups and representatives of the voluntary sector and community.
- Colleges, former external institutions, work based providers, adult and community providers, **learnirect**, private and voluntary sector providers and employers.
- Secondary and sixth form schools such as maintained post-14 foundation, voluntary and community schools, including those with religious character and independence.
- Ufi hubs and **Learndirect**.
- Regional development agencies.
- Sector skills councils.
- LAs and LEAs (representing school and adult education services and providers).
- School organisation committees.
- Diocesan authorities and faith groups.
- Jobcentre Plus.
- Connexions.
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG) partnerships.
- Local strategic partnerships, sub-regional strategic partnerships and learning partnerships.
- Trade unions and employee associations.
- Local councillors and constituency MPs, including Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).
- HE.
- Prison service and other public sector bodies locally.

- National Health Service workforce development confederations.
- Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) link inspectors.

Cross-boundary Activity and Learner Travel Patterns

38 Many learners travel across boundaries to undertake their learning. Local LSCs and partners will need to ensure that the needs of these learners and potential learners are met through collaborative working. National, regional and sector skills needs will need to be taken into account. Working closely with neighbouring local LSCs and partners should ensure that issues relating to the needs of learners in travel-to-learn areas and any other cross-boundary issues are identified, understood and fully considered.

39 The following factors should be considered when examining the importance of cross-boundary activity and learner travel patterns:

- the pattern of migration of learners and potential learners;
- the patterns of travel to learn;
- support available to learners, including strategies to encourage individuals to take up and remain in learning (for example, access and payment of travel costs);
- workplace geography and travel-to-work patterns which can influence provision;
- distance and e-learning provision; including information and communications technologies (ICT)-based providers (especially Ufi hubs and **learnirect** provision);
- expansion of providers beyond local boundaries and provision that has a regional and national impact;

- the impact of provision for which national contracts are held, including, for example, that of major national employers;
- the impact of specialist provision, for example schools with specialist status and CoVEs; and
- the impact of national and short/long-term residential provision, for example independent specialist and agricultural colleges.

40 Provision that has regional and national recruitment patterns other than LLDD and dance and drama, should be reviewed by the lead local LSC with involvement of relevant partners and in conjunction with other local LSCs. Where this involves specialist provision, for example Agriculture and Art and Design, the lead local LSC may wish to undertake a thematic review with relevant local LSCs and stakeholders, including SSCs. When taking decisions on local patterns of provision, there will be a need to ensure that specialist provision is not disadvantaged where there is demand from outside local boundaries.

41 Arrangements for provision of LLDD will need to reflect the outcome of a national mapping exercise of the needs for LLDD provision, which will be made available in the summer to local LSCs to inform StARs. Where changes to LLDD provision are being considered locally, the national LLDD team will need to be consulted at an early stage in the discussions.

42 The LSC and the DfES are exploring how dance and drama colleges are included in StARs.

43 Provision linked to national contracts generally has local recruitment patterns, although it is recognised that this is not always the case. This provision should be reviewed in line with the lead arrangements for individual contracts.

London Approach

44 London learning patterns are extremely complicated owing to the significant movement of learners and workers across a wide geographic but densely populated area, especially in central London and from the South East into London. The patterns of travel to learn and travel to work are equally important as many learners (especially adult learners) link learning to the proximity of the workplace.

45 LSCs in London will continue to work closely together to develop with stakeholders a pan-London approach to StARs. The five LSCs in London have established an executive group to examine pan-London planning issues and StARs will be built into these existing arrangements and take account of and support the London Challenge and the further development of shared Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESAs).

46 The five London LSCs will be a collective regional pioneer to reflect their pan-London approach. Refer to paragraph 107 for more information on the regional pioneers.

Provider Mission Reviews

47 Reviews of provider missions are part of the wider reform strategy and all LSC-funded providers will reconsider their unique educational and training missions as outlined in *Success for All*. Local LSCs should discuss with providers at the earliest opportunity the arrangements for an interactive process by which providers will review their mission. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has provided a framework as part of its research *Provider Missions and their Development* for the DfES, which local LSCs and partners should aim to follow. *Provider missions and their development*, by Afiong Edem, Paul Spencer and Barry Fyfield is free from Information Services, LSDA, Regent Arcade House, 19-25 Argyll Street, London W1F 7LS. phone: 020 7297 9144. e-mail: enquiries@LSDA.org.uk

48 Reviews of mission for some providers will involve little change. Others will wish to establish more distinctive missions defined in terms of particular groups of customers. Local LSCs will seek to encourage this and work with the grain of the existing and developing strengths of providers. While respecting the diversity and breadth of provision, local LSCs will encourage providers to ensure they are fully responsive to the changing needs of learners, employers and communities.

49 Local LSCs need to have confidence that the role and mission of each provider is distinct and focused on its strengths; and that the different provision it offers supports the local LSC strategic plan and is meeting the overall needs of learners, employment and local communities. Part of the local planning process should include the development of a clear understanding of each provider's role, how they are engaging employers and how needs are being met.

50 It is essential that in every local LSC area there is a range of providers committed to meeting regional and sectoral skill needs and providing training to meet the needs of local employers and are recognised as such by employers, Regional Development Agencies and, where applicable, emerging Sector Skills Councils.

51 The review of missions will need to be discussed in the context of three-year development/delivery plans and three-year funding. The LSC will issue further guidance at the end of May 2003 in this area following the end of its consultation on the framework for quality and success. Colleges' and providers' development/delivery plans will increase customer focus, help ensure excellent teaching and learning and develop the capability of the college or provider staff. StARs will involve consideration of each institution's development/delivery plan and its identified areas of strength, as well as the improvements it intends to secure each year over the next three years. It is likely that the first set of development/delivery plans will be based on existing missions and mission review will be

phased with the StAR process over the coming months until 30 April 2004.

Equality and Diversity

52 The learning and skills sector must be inclusive in its approach. It should seek to reduce the existing inequalities in access to learning while raising substantially success rates and narrowing significantly the difference between the highest and lowest achievements.

53 The LSC has published its national Equality and Diversity Strategy and this should be embraced and actively promoted through all StAR activities. The LSC has also produced equality and diversity impact measures and these should be taken into account when StARs are being carried out and as part of the process of appraising options.

54 The needs of disadvantaged groups, who are typically underrepresented in the learning and skills sector, should be fully considered. This includes those from socially excluded or minority communities, or with special needs. The future needs and priorities of individuals, employers and communities who are not currently participating in learning should also be taken into account when developing options for change. Appropriate support to enable these learners to succeed is vital and should be considered.

Innovative Delivery and E-learning

55 The LSC recognises that new innovative forms of delivery and e-learning should be an integral part of the post-16 learning and skills sector. It is important to acknowledge that the diverse needs of learners cannot in every case be satisfied in one place or by one mode of delivery. It is vital that the potential of new or 'tried and tested' forms of delivery and e-learning are exploited and included in the StAR process to maximise effectiveness of provision and learning experience.

56 Adapting existing programmes and ways of working to widen participation and reach out to those groups whose experiences or circumstances inhibit participation can bring many advantages and these should be explored by embracing strategies, such as, widening adult participation and neighbourhood renewal.

57 The LSC considers e-learning to be 'an approach to learning delivery in which a substantial part of the learning resources used is made available to the learner via a computer, television or other electronic communications device, or a combination of these with printed materials'. E-learning can be represented as a spectrum ranging from internet-supported distance learning in which the learner has limited face-to-face contact with the tutor or other learners, to teacher-led, classroom-based activity which is interspersed with occasional computer-delivered or facilitated assignments.

58 As part of the StARs, local LSCs should consider and maximise the opportunities that new innovative forms of delivery and e-learning can make to meet the needs of learners, employers and communities in making strategic decisions on how to organise provision and shape the related infrastructure.

Timetable

59 Each local LSC will aim to establish local arrangements and an appropriate timetable by 31 July 2003, which will enable StARs to be completed by 31 March 2005. The outcomes will feed into the strategic planning process for 2005/06 and beyond. The local arrangements and timetable should be presented in the form of a project plan.

60 By 30 April 2004 and following the review of provider missions, there should be a clear understanding of each provider's role and the local LSCs should have confidence in the role and the different provision they offer.

61 Following all StAR activity, each local LSC will put in place and publish a plan for reform

outlining clear actions for meeting needs and improving choice by 31 March 2005. The plan should be incorporated into the local strategic plan.

Key Milestones and Dates to Consider

62 Each local LSC will develop its own timetable for the roll-out of the StAR within its area. However, there are several key milestones, outlined in Table 1, that will need to be included in all plans.

Table 1 Key milestones and dates

Milestones	Completion dates
Local stakeholder group established and terms of reference determined	By 31 May 2003
Local arrangements and timetable in place in the form of a project plan	By 31 July 2003
Mission review arrangements established with each provider	By 31 July 2003
All mission reviews completed – providers focusing on strengths with distinct mission	By 30 April 2004
StAR completed and outcomes published in the plan for reform	By 31 March 2005

Record-keeping

63 Local LSCs will keep accurate and sufficiently detailed records of all activities of the StAR process, including the information and data gathered and used, development of strategic options, consultations, advice and guidance of local stakeholder groups and local decision-making. This documentation will help to inform the evaluation process and strengthen the quality of openness in the way that decisions are made.

Support and Performance

64 The LSC will monitor its overall performance to ensure the successful delivery of StARs. This monitoring will form part of the support and performance arrangements for the implementation of Success for All.

Section 2: Guidance

65 This guidance should not be seen as exhaustive and will be further developed in the light of experience. It is designed to steer but not constrain appropriate local processes.

Context of Reviews

66 A major benefit of the StAR process is that this will be the first time that the pattern of provision of all post-16 learning (other than HE) has been reviewed with a common approach across England.

67 Local LSCs should undertake StARs with full consideration of the implications for the following:

a. 14–19 education and training:

- the benefits of distinct provision for 16–19 year olds whether in new sixth forms, sixth form colleges or sixth form centres including centres in further education colleges;
- greater flexibility and choice in the curriculum at 14–16 Key Stage 4 provision;
- the capacity of post-16 learning institutions to contribute to the wider 14–16 curriculum;
- meeting the increased expectations of young people entering the post-16 sector as school standards rise;
- creating new pathways of learning (general, specialist and work-based) to meet young people's needs and aspirations;
- making high-quality vocational options available to all young people;
- young peoples entitlement to continue until age 19 with study towards literacy, numeracy, and ICT awards until at least level 2;

- allowing young people to develop and progress at a pace consistent with their abilities;
- promoting increased collaboration between education providers; and
- ensuring effective transition between providers, including school to college, college to university, school to work-based learning.

b. sixth forms in non-LSC funded institutions:

- the impact of city technology colleges and city academies on the nature and scale of LSC-funded provision; and
- the impact of independent and private schools on the nature and scale of LSC-funded provision, and the opportunities for collaboration to meet learner needs more effectively and to offer facilities or places not otherwise available locally.

c. post 19 provision

- greater flexibility and choice of provision and mode of delivery;
- the capacity of providers to contribute to the Widening Adult Participation Strategy and Basic Skills Strategy and meet adult participation and attainment targets;
- creating new delivery mechanisms to meet adults' needs and aspirations;
- making high-quality provision available to all adults with increased progression opportunities; and
- allowing adults to develop and progress at a pace consistent with their abilities.

d. higher education:

- the delivery of HE, especially in general further education colleges with HEFCE funding;
- progression to HE and widening participation, particularly the supply and demand for new forms of HE such

as foundation degrees and the time needed to address the challenges presented to young people and adults by transition into HE; and

- collaborative work with HE to meet employer skill needs, especially intermediate level workforce development needs and foundation degrees.

e. Jobcentre Plus provision:

- providers under contract to Jobcentre Plus;
- the nature and scale of LSC-funded provision used by unemployed and economically inactive people on benefits;
- progression from Jobcentre Plus-funded learning to LSC- or HEFCE-funded learning; and
- LSC-funded provision of changes in Jobcentre Plus provision.

f. Connexions services:

- Personal, social and careers education from 13–19.

g. IAG services:

- strategic management of IAG across the full range of LSC-funded provision and other stakeholders;
- access to high-quality information and advice services on learning and work opportunities;
- ensuring that provision of high-quality information on learning and training opportunities means that individuals and employers are:

i aware of the opportunities on offer;

ii know which choices would be most appropriate and effective for them; and

iii know how to access their chosen course or programme.

h. projects involving learning funded by ESF (projects without LSC matched funding), SRB, New Opportunities Fund and others:

- the capacity of project managers to meet their commitments;
- the quality of learning provision in projects; and
- opportunities for progression to post-16 and HEFCE-funded learning.

i community or family learning:

- joint funding arrangements for provision;
- extending school provision to meet community needs;
- widening adult participation, including neighbourhood renewal, supporting social enterprise initiatives and outreach programmes; and
- contribution of voluntary agencies and information and library services.

j. health and social care provision:

- complementary arrangements with primary care trusts, NHS and social services.

k. distance and e-learning provision:

- the implementation of e-learning strategies;
- the network of **learnirect** and UK Online centres; and
- delivery, nature and scale of the significant contribution of **learnirect** to meeting local needs for LSC-funded provision.

l. learning purchased by individuals and employers:

- LSC funding on the availability and structure of learning available for learners and employers to purchase direct from providers.

- m. prison education and training:
 - continuity of participation in education and training on release; and
 - the Government's drive to develop a robust and coherent approach to the rehabilitation of offenders.
- n. non qualification bearing provision
 - effective integration and coherence of non qualification bearing provision, including provision made by online centres, Ufi learndirect centres, adult and community learning, neighbourhood learning centres and non-qualification bearing programmes provided by colleges;
 - the need to set priorities for this range of provision using an agreed local typology.

Key Factors to Consider

68 The outcome of StARs should enhance the LSC's ability to fulfil its duties to ensure proper and reasonable facilities for education and training, under the *Learning and Skills Act 2000*.

69 The outcomes, and in particular the evidence (research, information, analysis) should identify and take account of local, regional and national sectoral implications. The data used should be auditable and the analysis including projected outcomes and targets should be well founded with due diligence given to any assumptions made.

70 In constructing project plans and plans for reform, risk analysis should be completed and contingency plans drawn up, clearly demonstrating action to be undertaken should the underlying assumptions not be realised.

71 The outcomes of the overall StAR should be consistent with the objectives set out in local strategic plans. StARs need to take into account how best to support the creation of a coherent, well-balanced 14-19 phase of learning while embracing the priorities around

basic skills, widening adult participation, the emerging Skills Strategy and progression to HE.

72 StARs are not inspections and should not involve direct observation of teaching and learning, which is the role of the inspectorates not the LSC and not replicate work already completed by local LSCs and their partners.

Seven Review Activities

73 Section 1 outlined seven review activities that local LSCs will complete. These activities are described in more detail below.

A Preparatory planning work

74 All stakeholders must be identified and provided with the opportunity to be involved in the StAR from the outset to ensure they fully understand and are committed to the process. This early contact will provide an opportunity to inform stakeholders about StARs, to seek their co-operation and contribution to the process and to address early concerns.

75 Early engagement in StARs will allow stakeholders to share ideas and explore future options and different ways of working. These might focus on strengthening missions, joining up services and delivery including possibilities for distinct 16–19 provision. New ways of collaborating might be explored where standards of provision are to be enhanced. Involvement throughout the process should create a willingness to make improvements and recognition of the need to change, if change is necessary, which should lead to the collective achievement of outcomes.

76 Local arrangements and timetables for carrying out the StAR should build on the arrangements, core values and principles in this guidance, reflecting local circumstances to ensure consistency of approach across England. Previous and existing local review work should be considered and built upon to avoid duplication. The full remit of StARs should be established locally and embraced while encompassing the wider perspective of

14–19 learning, Skills for Life, widening adult participation, the forthcoming Skills Strategy and progression to HE.

77 The preparatory planning work needs to consider a range of issues to ensure that StARs can realistically be completed to a high standard, on time and within the resources available while minimising risks. The planning arrangements should embrace the core values and principles in paragraphs 34 and 35 and include:

- how learners, employers and communities will be involved;
- how stakeholders will be involved and supported to develop the skills needed to play their full part in the process;
- how communication with stakeholders and partners will take place;
- local management and timescales;
- resource allocation and risk management;
- contribution of previous review work;
- working with providers to review their missions;
- cross-boundary issues and the involvement of other local LSCs and stakeholders, including regional and national provision; and
- record-keeping.

78 Previous review work undertaken has often made an important contribution to improving provision and meeting local needs. Use of valid evidence from these reviews is fully encouraged and should be set in the current strategic context.

79 Local LSCs that have undertaken previous reviews will not need to duplicate this activity and should build on the strengths of this work. Others will wish to supplement previous work where gaps exist. For example, where only a single phase of learning, such as 16–19, in one part of the area covered by the local LSC was covered. Or, in considering the skills

requirements of an occupational sector, an earlier review may have been focused more narrowly than a strategic review of the needs of that sector. In cases such as these, prior evidence should be matched against local objectives to identify any additional work or analysis needed.

80 Local LSCs will work with regional development agencies, sector skills councils and the Sector Skills Development Agency to secure the pattern of specialist provision needed to tackle sector and regional skills priorities.

81 Local LSCs should continue to work closely with RDAs, LAs including the LEAs and Jobcentre Plus in developing shared FRESAs. These incorporate the LSC's commitments to address the skills and employment needs of employers and individuals within each region. FRESAs recognise diversity and contain commitments to building opportunities to improve the prosperity and prospects of businesses and individuals within the region. The FRESA gives focus to what needs to happen in the region to maintain and grow a healthy labour market, in which:

- a wide range of job opportunities exists;
- every individual has the opportunity and skills to find and progress in employment;
- employers are able to recruit the people they need with the skills they require (including basic skills); and
- the workforce develops in order to improve productivity and enhance the employability of individuals.

B Information gathering and analysis

82 This activity of the StAR process will involve the collection and analysis of information on the needs of learners, employment and communities; and the quality and performance of existing provision and value for money. When gathering and

analysing this information, the supply of provision, its quality and the projected improvements set out in the institution's three-year development/delivery plan should be considered. The demand for provision over the longterm across the area should also be considered.

83 Information that is readily available should be used to inform StARs to avoid placing additional burdens for data collection on the LSC and providers. The active engagement of the local learning and skills community will help ensure that data and intelligence to be utilised are robust and valid. For example, Jobcentre Plus has a great deal of information on the labour market, employers' needs, and the needs of unemployed people, and is also able to comment on the relevance of training provision. Connexions hold information on young learners' needs and choices.

84 Where possible, information used in the StAR should be 'hard' data, as statistics are quantified, measurable and open to scrutiny. In certain situations it may be necessary to use less consistent and less complete data to inform the StARs. All data and research used should be sourced, accurately referenced, logical and able to withstand scrutiny. StARs should draw on information already held by the LSC, including LSC performance review assessments and inspection findings.

85 Additional research on the demand side (learners, employer and community surveys) may be needed in order to inform the process to fill gaps in knowledge. In certain circumstances this may be carried out in partnership with others, such as RDAs, SSCs, Connexions and Jobcentre Plus. Once the supply side information has been disaggregated for the local area from existing data collection processes, it will need to be evaluated critically against learner, employment and community needs; the quality and performance of existing provision; and value for money. Analysis of information must be objective, transparent and robust.

C Developing and appraising strategic options

86 Local LSCs must work with their partners to analyse and develop clear choices, including radical options, for change to determine the scale and shape of provision needed locally. This is to ensure that the right mix of high-quality provision is available to meet existing and future learner, employment and community needs.

87 The benefits and risks of different approaches to meeting new needs, replacing poor provision, improving cost-effectiveness and filling gaps must be drawn up and evaluated. The impact of these choices should be assessed, in consultation with stakeholders. Radical options should be considered and as recommendations may involve radical changes to provision locally, it is essential that decisions are based on robust evidence.

88 These choices should be developed and appraised in conjunction with neighbouring local LSCs where cross-boundary issues exist relating to travel-to-learn or travel-to-work patterns, regional skills strategies and specialist provision and so on.

89 To ensure the best overall mix of provision in the local area for learners, employers and communities, the local LSCs together with partners should be:

- extending choice for learners, especially at the 14-19 phase of learning;
- developing further the contribution of excellent provision;
- working with providers to improve poor or underperforming provision, including responding to inspection findings;
- drawing in and developing new provision to fill gaps and exploring the contribution of new innovative and radical approaches;
- rapidly replacing unacceptable

provision that has poor prospects of improvement; and

- clear about providers' missions and how they are focusing on their strengths.

90 Before considering strategic options, priorities should be clearly established with stakeholders. When considering the options:

- the main focus should be given to the options that help develop the best quality and range of provision to meet the needs of learners, employers and communities and have a lasting impact;
- local risks and assessment of impact should be undertaken; and
- reorganisation should only be considered where other options are unlikely to provide the same benefits or impact. The costs involved and time taken to implement and embed reorganisation should be taken into account.

91 Local LSCs must ensure the options comply with the legal framework for making and carrying out decisions affecting schools, colleges and provider contracts. Certain options will require endorsement from the appropriate authority, such as the Capital Committee and Young People's Learning Committee within the LSC or the secretary of state for college and school reorganisations. Endorsement will be required from the appropriate School Organisation Committee where LEAs and schools are making related proposals.

D Appropriate local consultation

92 To ensure all views are taken account of, a strategy for consulting stakeholders, partners and interested parties should be developed. This strategy should:

- identify stakeholders whose views will be taken into account (see paragraph 37);

- set a timeframe for consultation;
- ensure involvement of all stakeholders in the wider learning and skills community;
- establish methods of consultation that encourages participation and is appropriate to the diversity of individuals and 'hard-to-reach' groups;
- describe how the views of learners, employers and communities, including those excluded currently from learning, will be taken into account;
- ensure the process of obtaining responses encourages contributions from all groups and does not discriminate against any particular group; and
- go across local boundaries where learners travel patterns cross them.

93 Organisations and services that are not within the funding or planning responsibilities of the LSC should be reasonably included in the consultation process where their services have a direct impact on the LSC's policies or provision. This includes schools serving 14–16 year olds (through the appropriate LEA), Jobcentre Plus, UK Online centres and HE institutions. There may also be local statutory or voluntary services whose work is important to the learning community, such as social services, the NHS, family support or disability groups.

94 The consultation process, including timescales and the process for considering its outcomes, should be publicised within the consultation documentation circulated. A copy of this document should be sent to the *Success for All* implementation team at the LSC national office.

E Publishing the planned outcomes

95 Local LSCs will publish the planned outcomes of StAR activity in high-level local plans for reform that will be incorporated into

local LSC strategic plans. A copy of the plan should be forwarded to the *Success for All* implementation team at national office as soon as it is available. These plans will be integrated into the local planning process and decisions should be reported through the local planning process accordingly. The plan for reform should outline key priorities. These priorities may be staged in order to minimise disruption to or for current learners, or for resource reasons.

96 Plans for reform should set out actions already taken to improve local provision and incorporate decisions arising from StARs. This will be published as part of each local LSC strategic plan by early 2005. It should include timetables for actions and details of the implications for spending on such areas as capital projects, student support and other forms of access.

97 The objectives of the StAR should be structured in such a way that the outcomes set are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related). Baseline data and appropriate targets should be set using qualitative and quantitative information.

98 Plans should include a forward programme of local sectoral or cross-cutting reviews on areas that need to be strengthened. It will address all DfES and LSC policy goals expected from the StAR process, in contributing to the delivery of objectives towards 2010.

99 Roles and responsibilities for implementation of the outcomes should be established within existing structures where possible and published. These may include arrangements for ownership of delivering actions, checking progress and adjusting the plan to reflect changing needs, policy priorities and new circumstances.

100 Publication should be in a format of most benefit to the local learning community. There should be one overarching plan for reform for each local LSC. Sections of the plans may be established collaboratively with neighbouring local LSCs where there are common interests,

such as cross-boundary review activity, in the development of provision or services.

101 Outcomes should be published in a format that takes into account the needs of different groups in accessing information on StAR outcomes including minority languages. Local LSCs are encouraged to use imaginative, innovative and responsive engagement and communications with learners, employers and the wider community. One of the main aims in publicising StAR outcomes should be to reach those not currently participating in learning, through their communities or workplaces, including trade unions.

102 By 31 March 2005, each local LSC should have reviewed all LSC-funded provision in its area and published plan for reform that covers the entire post-16 learning and skills provision in its area. This plan will be incorporated into the local LSC strategic plan to produce a single plan.

F Implementing the outcomes

103 Implementation of the outcomes of StARs will be under way as soon as practicable. Actions should be planned to maintain the degree of stability needed in the sector at a time of change. However, implementation timescales must give all stakeholders and partners confidence that, by the end of 2005, plans are in place for provision to meet learner, employment and community needs and improve the range and quality of provision according to local priorities.

104 Effective implementation will require action on the key priorities in the first instance, taking account of legislative and resourcing requirements, which should have been given full consideration through the options appraisal.

105 It is expected that the local LSC, having endorsed the plan for reform, will lead and systematically monitor progress during implementation of the StAR outcomes as part of the normal planning process. First-year targets (likely to be 2005–06) will be particularly important. Bringing greater

coherence and focus of mission may well be first-year actions.

106 Where reorganisation of provision and large-scale capital projects are agreed, targets are likely to cover more than a single year, to safeguard provision for learners and to ensure resource availability. In most cases, timescales for implementation are likely to be detailed over at least a two/three-year period. Some estimation of future reviews towards 2010 is also encouraged.

G Evaluating the process and outcomes

107 The LSC is developing evaluation arrangements for StARs and stakeholders will be fully involved in contributing to this work. As an initial step, the LSC has identified nine

regional pioneers to be involved in formative evaluation. There will be one local LSC from eight of the English regions and all the five London LSCs will be a collective pioneer for the London region to reflect the pan-London approach. These arrangements have been put in place so that the LSC and its stakeholders can identify challenging areas and share lessons learned. As pioneers, the local LSCs identified in table 2 will be given a degree of flexibility around their initial arrangements and timetable.

Table 2 The StAR Pioneers

Region	Local LSC
East Midlands	Nottinghamshire
East of England	Bedfordshire & Luton
North East	Northumberland
North West	Cheshire & Warrington
South East	Berkshire
South West	Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole
West Midlands	Birmingham & Solihull
Yorkshire & Humberside	North Yorkshire
London	London West London South London North London East London Central

108 The evaluation will cover two areas, the StAR process and outcomes. The arrangements, where appropriate, will integrate and draw on existing evaluation and review processes (for example, capital, CoVEs, reorganisations, performance review, self-assessment and inspection outcomes) ensuring coherence and consistency across the post-16 learning and skills sector.

109 The LSC will need to consider the effectiveness of each of the activities undertaken locally and evaluate the efficiency of the review process as a whole, including its impact on other elements of LSC work. Strengths and weaknesses will be brought out, to enable lessons to be learned.

110 The LSC is considering the most appropriate procedures to be utilised so that a realistic assessment can be made of:

- the overall process; and
- the impact of local outcomes against key objectives of meeting needs and improving choice.

111 Further guidance will be provided to assist local LSCs and partners with the evaluation and an outline of this guidance should be in place by 30 June 2003.

Supporting Material

112 Supporting material, such as practical case studies, tools and related research will be made available on the website (www.lsc.gov.uk - under documents/strategic area reviews) to support the StAR process. Table 3 below provides an indication of the supporting material available.

113 Some of the very early development work on tools to support StARs was published as part of the consultation and, although the concept of a toolkit was very well received, the responses indicated that further work was needed to ensure many of the tools were fit for purpose. These materials and tools will therefore be tested with the pioneer LSCs and then refined to ensure they are fit for purpose.

114 The LSC is also considering developing further case studies in the light of experience that local LSCs can draw on.

Table 3 Supporting Material

Previous Review Work and Lessons Learnt
<p>Previous review work undertaken by local LSCs</p> <p>Lessons learnt from simulation activity</p>
Supporting Materials
<p>Information sources and analysis of supply against demand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What provision currently exists? • What provision does the LSC need to meet the needs of learners, employers and communities? • What does the LSC need to meet its targets? <p>Appraisal of strategic options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What choices does the LSC need to make? <p>Consultation arrangements</p> <p>Policy implications</p> <p>Legal considerations</p>
Tools
<p>Effective Partnerships Self-assessment questionnaire</p> <p>Getting the Best from Each Other questionnaire</p>
Links to Related Published Research
<p>Provider Missions and their Development</p> <p>Assessing Value for Money of Provision</p> <p>Organisation of Provision of Post-16 Education and Training</p> <p>Engaging Employers and Ways of Consulting Learners</p> <p>Post-16 Collaboration</p>

Notes

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