

Our ref: SR/010804

To:

Rt Hon John Denham MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills

Rt Hon Ed Balls MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of Children, Schools and Families

### **Re: Machinery of Government changes – the way forward**

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing on behalf of the Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education) (Single Voice). The Single Voice was formed on 18 December 2007 by the Association of Colleges (AoC), Association of Learning Providers (ALP), HOLEX - the National Network of Local Adult Learning Providers (HOLEX), Land Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence (Landex), Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG), The Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC), National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), Sixth Form Colleges Forum (SFCF) and the 157 Group. Its purpose is:

- to promote, pursue, foster, support and work towards the establishment of itself as a Single Voice collating the views of its members on regulatory matters;
- to design, implement, maintain and evaluate a self regulatory framework for the Further Education sector and its provider base in England including (without limitation) the development and maintenance of self governance and accountability structures, codes of practice and behaviour, mechanisms for interactions with learners, employers and other stakeholders, benchmarks and mechanisms for performance management measurement and quality improvement;
- to work in collaboration with and assume responsibility partially or wholly for existing functions of the LSC, QIA, CEL, LLUK, Becta and such other persons, organisations and bodies as may be agreed by the Board of the Company.

At the inaugural meeting on 18 December 2007, members considered your letter of 22 November 2007 and requested that I write to you to express their views.

We warmly welcome your letter and the principles that will underpin the progression in the changes of the Machinery of Government. We share your confidence that the changes offer a tremendous opportunity for the sector and are proud that the performance of our members has provided a strong foundation on which to build. However, the outstanding success of the sector in recent years has not left us complacent and we are determined that we will deliver even better

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outcomes in the new context. We also believe that the purpose of the changes in enabling more effective delivery for the benefit of employers, communities and individuals is integral to our own work developing self regulation within the sector. We are firmly of the view that the release of resources from regulatory purposes to frontline delivery will play an important part in the fulfilment of this purpose.

We endorse without reservation the underlying principles outlined in Annex 1, and offer our support in helping to define and take forward the simplification of processes, the greater autonomy of providers and the securing of good value for money in the allocation and use of public funds, as we believe this is central to our current work and planned agenda.

Concerning the principles pertinent to the 14-19 system, we recognise that it is essential that there should be effective links to pre-14 and post-19 provision. We are engaged in productive discussions with the Local Government Association (LGA) to develop a Memorandum of Understanding to enable and the underlying principles outlined in your letter to be practised and for the objects to be delivered.

We welcome the confirmation that there will be a national and not a local funding formula, as this will enable more effective operations and simplification of processes for providers. We would also recommend that early consideration be given to ensuring that the any quality regimes also operate under a national process rather than local processes in order to achieve the same objective.

We also notice that within your letter and in subsequent communications, a number of terms are used such as 'simplification', 'self governance' and 'self regulation'. At times this may cause confusion or indicate a lack of resolve to achieve the objectives of the self regulation proposition. We would strongly recommend that the agenda is clearly a *self regulatory* agenda and that while simplification and self governance may be elements of this agenda, they are not terms that can be used as alternatives.

Concerning the principles pertinent to the 14-19 system, we wholeheartedly endorse the Annex. Putting the user's needs first must be central to the system; the objectives of simplification, and working in cooperation are as welcome as they are necessary. We welcome the explicit statement of the need to support and maintain services to deprived communities as this has always been at the heart of the sector's mission and it is very welcome that it has been made so explicit.

Concerning the desire for simplicity and efficiency in administration and the embracing of self regulation in governance, we are pleased that this has been stated so clearly. We recognise that far too much of the further education resource is invested in the regulatory overhead that we have calculated to be in the order of £400 million. We believe that this is misplaced; that the sector now has the record of achievement and confidence to assume many of the regulatory activities and to direct the resources to the frontline in order to achieve our shared ultimate goal. We request that the redistribution of the resource be measured, quantified and monitored to ensure that we are able to support and sustain the initiatives.

We are excited by the agenda that we are now progressing. For your information, I enclose a copy of the minutes of the Single Voice's inaugural meeting. We stand ready to work with your

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colleagues within the Departments of Government in order to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the ultimate goal of the quality of the learner's experience within our institutions.

Yours sincerely,



Sir George Sweeney  
Chair, Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education)