

SELF REGULATION COMMUNICATIONS CORE SCRIPT

The 2006 FE White Paper set out the Government's ambition to develop a new relationship with colleges and providers which would reinforce their autonomy within a significantly simplified system for planning and funding provision with clarity of roles and less bureaucracy at every level. Through the LSC's simplification programme, audit, planning and reporting requirements have been streamlined. The number of agencies in the FE system has been reduced i.e. through merging Ofsted and ALI and more recently through the creation of a new improvement body in place of QIA and CEL. This activity will free up revenue and create savings which can be redirected to the front line. Colleges and providers will also have opportunities to take advantage of greater freedoms to operate for example: they can apply to offer their own qualifications and become an awarding body and some colleges will have the ability to award their own Foundation Degrees.

Self regulation will create greater freedom for individual colleges and providers to operate their businesses with reduced intervention by Government and its agencies. It will enable providers to focus more resources to on their primary objective of delivering responsive, high quality and coherent provision that meets the needs of their customers: learners, employers and communities.

Central to the development of self regulation is the creation of a 'single voice' – a body that will speak on behalf of the whole of the FE sector. The bringing together of the key representative organisations¹ into a single body – the Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education) will provide a much more powerful voice with Government and its agencies than each organisation could achieve on their own. The Single Voice will be the main channel of dialogue between the sector, Government and its agencies on regulatory issues including the development of self regulation. It will articulate to providers the expectations of Government and its agencies in order to reduce the number of conversations a provider has with different agencies/ departments. It will also represent the needs of the sector in dialogue with government on regulatory matters. The Chair² of the Single Voice will meet Government ministers periodically to discuss self regulation and issues of key importance which the sector has identified.

With greater autonomy comes greater responsibility. Underpinning self regulation will be a performance management framework supported by a code of conduct to which all providers will be expected to adhere. The framework and the code of conduct will be developed by the Single Voice in collaboration and consultation with providers. The code of conduct will demonstrate providers' commitment to self regulation and the standards against which they are prepared to be held account, individually and collectively, by their stakeholders.

Improving performance is a crucial element of the self regulation framework. With achievement rates nearing 80%, providers have demonstrated that they can raise their game. But we are not complacent. Our aim should be the pursuit of excellence across the whole of our organisations, not only in the outcomes that we deliver. A much stronger focus

¹ AoC; ALP; 157 Group; Mixed Economy Group (MEG); the National Network of Local Adult Learning Providers (HOLEX); Land based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence (LANDEX); the Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC); National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE); and Sixth Form College Forum (SFCF).

² Sir George Sweeney has been appointed as the Chair for a period of office terminating 31 December 2008.

on organisational review and development will enable us to build institutions that are better able to adapt to meet external challenges and deliver even higher levels of achievement. The Single Voice will develop the means through which this will be achieved.

Achieving excellence requires the setting of high standards. The Single Voice will do this by ensuring that provision exceeds minimum levels of performance: the Framework for Excellence will provide benchmarks for providers to self-assess their performance. Collectively, providers will have an important role in challenging their peers' self assessments, through peer review or other methods, to ensure that these are rigorous and support the needs and priorities of their customers and government.

The Single Voice will work with LLUK and IfL to ensure that all those who work in the sector are professionally qualified and take responsibility for continuously improving their development.

Government will expect providers individually and collectively to tackle underperformance and performance which is satisfactory but not improving. The overriding objective is to ensure that the sector never gets to the stage where external agencies need to intervene and/or the formal intervention strategy is initiated. It should be an objective of every provider to weed out poor provision and, collectively, we should provide challenge, help and support to each other to do this.

Self regulation will therefore require greater collaboration. Providers, particularly those that perform well, will be expected to help others through, for example, the sharing of expertise or benchmarking of performance, so that the standard of performance across the whole sector becomes excellent.

The consultation document on the new improvement body proposed greater sector ownership of the body and the Single Voice will have a large share of the influence. This will enable providers to play a leading role in developing the national improvement strategy to meet the sector's needs and in ways that best suits it.

Self regulation will require strong leadership and governance at the local level to set and ensure delivery of goals and maintain the momentum for improvement. The Single Voice will facilitate local and regional networks of governors in order to exchange views and experiences and promote peer review to support provider governance development. The Single Voice will develop good governance guidance and promote governance improvement networks at regional and national level as appropriate. It will also explore with the AoC's Governors' Council how it can add value to the above developments.

Government and its agencies will take steps to deregulate³ and simplify the FE landscape. The Single Voice aims to assume sponsorship and co-ordination of the gate-keeping/regulatory functions performed by: the Bureaucracy Reduction Group, *the information authority* and the FE Communications Gateway Panel. These Groups are chaired by college principals with membership from providers. The Single Voice is in dialogue with these groups to agree how the relationship will work whilst allowing the groups to maintain the independent nature of their work. Through these groups, providers will be able to review policy decisions and how these impact on those delivering at the frontline, and question the need for data collection and challenge how these could be reduced so that

³ **Deregulation** is the term for the action being taken by Government and its intermediaries to deregulate through: ensuring the delivery chain and organisational landscape is as simple as possible; reducing the administrative burden; encouraging providers to work together more effectively through shared services and new models of delivery; and ensuring robust scrutiny arrangements are in place to police and monitor policy development, communication and information demands.

information is collected once and used many times. At the same time, these groups will act to challenge to the sector itself, to ensure that it does not knowingly or unwittingly create burdens. Through the FE Communications Gateway Panel, providers will continue to ensure that information from Government and its agencies is fit for purpose in terms of content, consistency and format and that it is directed to the right people.

In the same way that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so is the reputation of the sector. All providers have a key role to play in this. We will achieve an excellent reputation through a number of means:

- by ensuring that all our customers and those with an interest in FE understand what FE is: that we serve the needs of a wide range of individuals and those of Government; our strength in engaging with a wide cross section of individuals and organisations and providing a range of relevant progression routes for young people and adults;
- by regularly seeking the views of our customers on the provision and taking their views into account in the way we design and deliver learning and training;
- by demonstrating that we can raise our game by actively addressing poor or under-performing provision;
- by actively celebrating our successes and looking for advocates (within and outside the sector) who can speak positively on our behalf.

Government will rightly hold the sector to account. We spend £11.2 billion of public money. Our performance will be externally assessed through the Framework for Excellence. Ofsted will continue to provide external validation of the quality of provision in the sector but this will be a light touch and proportional inspection regime for providers who demonstrate high level performance.

How will we judge whether self regulation has been a success? By establishing an authoritative 'single voice' that commands the respect of providers and consumers as well as of Government and its agencies. And by having providers who are committed to a self regulation framework and actively demonstrate this through adherence to a performance management framework and an agreed code of conduct. Success will also come through actively tackling poor/underperformance so that we only have the highest standards of provision. Providers experiencing less bureaucracy, will feel empowered to make more decisions themselves and have greater control of how to deliver provision. Employers and learners are influencing the way that their training is designed and delivered. This should result in higher levels of satisfaction, participation in learning and training and higher success rates. This in turn will contribute to: building an inclusive society that creates opportunities for all its people; developing the skills of people to the fullest possible extent; and enabling them to apply both knowledge and skills to create an innovative and competitive economy to meet the global challenges of the 21st century.

Next Steps

DIUS and DCSF Ministers have agreed that self regulation is an intrinsic part of the FE landscape following the Machinery of Government changes: proposals for self regulation will therefore be included in the consultation document scheduled for publication in March. The Single Voice will continue to work with providers on developing the self regulation framework. In doing so, it will take account of the outcomes of the MoG consultation.