

VSA Learning Representatives Report January 2007

What's been going on?

There are so many changes/developments going on in the world of training and learning. It has become even more glaringly obvious to me that the VCS needs, more than ever before, to be as active as possible. There have been local changes in the restructuring of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and Herefordshire Learning Partnership (HLP). Government has announced its new priorities and targets. The VCS faces changes in how the LSC will contract with us. In the future we will be contracted via consortiums. Many of you may say that the LSC is not the only source of funding, that is true but the LSC is a major government body and plays a vital strategic role for many of us in the learning world. It follows that other funding bodies will soon follow the consortium route.

It is evident that we need to more widely promote our sector and its provision to ensure that our voices and the needs of our beneficiaries are heard. We must get out there and lobby to influence future strategies and planning, not only locally but regionally and nationally. VCS providers are often models of good practice working with learners who are the most hard to reach and at risk of social exclusion. I urge you to take up every opportunity offered to promote our sector and voice your views and concerns.

The Herefordshire Learning Partnership

I reported to you last year that the Herefordshire Learning Partnership Board had had gone through a consultation process and decided to become a smaller group which would meet less often. I did not agree with some of the decisions and felt that to be effective the board has to engage regularly with the thematic groups and other networks to be fully informed and devise and implement sound strategies. The new board does still include a place for the VSA rep but I am sad to tell you that this important strategic group has not met for a very long time.

I am concerned about this lack of activity and raised my concerns with Sarah Tulk who manages the new Herefordshire LSC. Sarah tells me this is on her list and that she is looking into this matter. Hopefully HLP board will meet in the near future.

The Adult and Community Learning (ACL), Basic Skills and Family Learning Thematic Groups have, I am happy to report, remained active despite no strategic lead from the HLP board. These groups are successful in bringing providers cross sector together and fulfil a range of roles, for example- information sharing, devising local strategy and plans, avoiding duplication, sharing good practice and keeping up to date on regional/national priorities. Well worth attending or being on the mailing list. I have posted the minutes of the meetings on the website.

Agenda for Change Road show

In October, at the kind invitation of the LSC, I attend the Learning and Skills Councils 'Agenda for Change Road Show' in Westminster. The Road show was specifically for the VCS. This was an exciting informative event with delegates who were VCS provider from many regions. It was a golden opportunity to discuss priorities, ask questions and meet LSC national office key figures. The road show launched two documents-

- *The LSC Progress Report 2006* (lsc Oct 2006)
- *Raising Our Game Our Annual Statement of Priorities* (lsc Oct 2006)

Please find attached links to the presentations given at the above event, and the items arising from the Q&A session.

<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/A4CAutumnRoadShow18Oct06.pdf>

<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/ASP-Presentation-VCS-Event18Oct06.pdf>

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/et4jxmnpwajbe7qcyfug4kqih2hmbssok6gjqikhoi6gcmo3iuaswiuorrv52u3g2bizzxxryo65l/QAVCSEvent18Oct06.pdf>

Please also find below links to the following documents - *Raising Our Game: Our Annual Statement of Priorities*; *Delivering Learning and Skills Progress Report 2006*; and the *LSC Grant Letter 2007-08*.

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/eoiyvl4hf222v3m3c367j5ynnokvg3ydc4it6t4brmmwexpvxesg3g36uckuf2ajzit5hsfplnqv4g/annualstatementofpriorities1.pdf>

http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/10712_Learn_Skills_bkmk.pdf

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/e7g73kp5awisy2ndigrypz64ogo2qdssweypjiizr6jj2smlothlml2myt7iuuff4zekarm7oeimtf/lscgrantletter0708.pdf>

I found this event a motivating experience, not in that it was all good news, it was not! There is a lot of hard work ahead of us, less funding available, more/new challenges to face but it was great to be with other VCS organisations and to feel part of a national community and to see the bigger picture. I came back confident and happy in the knowledge that we do a good job in Herefordshire putting learner needs first. We may have our problems, of which we are all aware, a rural county with all the difficulties/challenges this brings.

We may not have the money we would like but we do have a good infrastructure and networks, we are trying to make a difference and pull together. There are many good people from all sectors, VCS/HC//LSC who are dedicated to learners throughout the county, people who really care. Having said this there is still plenty of room for improvement and many challenges ahead.

It was sad to hear feedback from organisations that had bad experiences and do not know/ feel they have access their LLSC advisors or have a learning partnership, thematic groups and VSA's to join. The national LSC stated that it wanted more effective communication with the VCS. I suggested that they take a look at the good practice of our LLSC and how they have interacted and supported not Herefordshire across the sectors.

VCS Training Providers Consortiums/Networks

Please read the notes and minutes of the VSA consultation meetings regarding consortium options and the proposed Community First led Training Providers Consortium posted on the website. If you require hard copies please contact the VSA co coordinator or me.

You may remember that the VSA responded to requests from members who felt that they had not been consulted or taken part in the consultation regarding the feasibility of a VCS training provider consortium. The VSA facilitated 2 Herefordshire meetings and several mail outs.

I am very proud to say that 75 VCS organisations responded to the call and took part by attending meetings, postal response or emailing their views. Our thanks go to Sue Blazendale who has now left the VSA and Peter Ding of Lifelong Learning Development Unit for their assistance in reaching VCS groups and to Peter for chairing the meetings.

We have made our best endeavours to ensure that as many organisations as possible involved in learning have taken part in this important consultation and that you will hopefully now have the information/contacts to make informed choices.

There seems to be no set answer, some may join one group and for others may find membership of a few to be appropriate. It is up to individual organisations to decide upon which option(s) which meet their individual needs. Consultation meetings are now taking place in Shropshire. I will post all minutes on the VSA website for you information.

Listed below are the contact details of existing and proposed consortia and networks-

Colleges Consortium Hereford and Worcester (hold Train to Gain Contract),
Led by Worcester College of Technology. Members from all sectors, members include
HCT, CSV and Community First.
Contact- Mark Westbury 01905 743503

Hereford and Worcester Training Providers Association. Members from all sectors
Contact- Mike Smith 07813 338890

Proposed VCS Consortium led by Community First. Membership Voluntary Sector
only.
Contact- Mark Herriott markh@comfirst.org.uk

**Herefordshire Adult and Community Learning Group (ACL Group) and Basic
Skills Group.** Members from all sectors.
Contact- Peter Ding 01432 260637 pding@herefordshire.gov.uk

Family Learning Development Group. Members from all sectors.
Contact- Gillian Scott-Lee 01423 260000 gscottlee@herefordshire.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Council VCS Contacts-
National Office- Voluntary Sector Strategy Team- Cheryl Turner Cheryl.Turner@lsc.gov.uk
Local Learning and Skills Council- Frances Roberts Frances.Roberts@lsc.gov.uk

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above or
raise any new issues and concerns. You can reach me through the VSA or email
Julie@helpvcs.co.uk or telephone 07734 297 200. I look forward to hearing from
you.