

Response to the WYLLN Evaluation Report.

An external evaluation was undertaken by Lilian Black, which has already been presented to the Board. The report identifies 21 areas that should be further explored by the Board and the Executive. This report addresses each of those areas.

1. Consider Board membership in the light of institutional changes and mergers and the changing external landscape.

Institutional membership of the Board was addressed at the last Board meeting. With Leeds becoming a fore-runner City Region with high level skills being one of its priorities, Leeds City Region should be approached to send a representative to the Board. The membership of the Board will be further reviewed in 2011 to reflect the involvement of all stakeholders.

2. Consider their own roles within their own institutions to secure the legacy of the WYLLN's objectives on progression

This is not just an issue for Board members, but also members of the SAF, as not all institutions are represented on the Board. As part of the on-going evaluation of the West Yorkshire Progression Agreement Framework, the Credit and Progression Task Group should contact all signatories to the Framework to map where it sits within their institutional structures, how their progression agreements are monitored and future plans to embed it within their institution.

3. Ensure equality and diversity monitoring takes place on an agreed basis and the Board receives reports at agreed intervals.

Data on ethnicity and gender should be reviewed by the IAG Task Group to identify the issues emerging. This analysis will form the basis of the report presented to the following Board meeting, which will contain action points to address any issues raised. Such reports will be presented on an annual basis.

4. Some Board members did not feel well informed about the overall sector activity and some were not quite certain how performance was being measured. Similarly some sector officers would like better awareness of other sector activity. There should be a way perhaps of presenting sector progress in an easily comprehensible format.

A new format of presenting sector performance will be created by the sector officers. These reports will focus on headline developments, money spent, targets met and case studies. Board members representing a sector should ensure they are briefed by their sector officers prior to each Board meeting.

5. The original offer to HEFCE was to provide additional funding of £2,184,749 brought by the partners to the proposal. This information has never been asked for by HEFCE and it is recommended that this be explored further at this stage rather than leave this until the end of the project. The information is not being collated currently.

Although partners are given the opportunity to provide information on additional matched funding, little attention is paid to it. To make sure this information is captured would require a considerable amount of additional bureaucracy, particularly as HEFCE do not ask for this information in their formal reporting procedures. To reduce the bureaucracy, while maintaining the facility to respond to any future request from HEFCE, a calculation will be carried out on certain activities such as staff development and attendance at Sector Group meetings in order to provide the reassurance that the targets will be met if we are asked to report on this in more detail.

6. Consider the visibility of the main Board papers and minutes which are on the website but this is not generally known by members of the Strategic Advisory Forum.

The lay out of the web site has been re-designed to give the location of the Board papers more prominence.

7. Increase focus on the sustainability strategy for WYLLN overall and also through the sector groups which are continuing. It is important that sustainability is given priority whilst delivering on core objectives.

Sustainability discussions and any role for the WYLLN in the future are ongoing. The sustainability sub-group of the Board will continue to meet to provide the direction of thinking for the future of the Network and monitor progress made against the agreed plan.

8. Ensure tight focus on core objectives is maintained whilst responding to new challenges and ensure the structure is in place to deliver this. There is a risk that the range of projects and activities engaged in is very broad and extensive. This should not be stopped but there must be sufficient staff at the right level to manage this. There may be a risk of role overload.

There will be continued monitoring of the existing levels of activity to ensure the quality of the work and not just that targets are being met. Managing staffing levels as the overall activity of the WYLLN winds down will also require careful monitoring.

9. Ensure that the higher level skills work with the Work and Skills Boards in three local authority districts also includes Wakefield and Calderdale, especially as there are no universities located in these local authority districts; the decision to fund new HE centres is now delayed and it is therefore important that the communities of Wakefield and Calderdale are considered carefully by the WYLLN Board to secure higher level skills progression opportunities across the whole of West Yorkshire.

There are constraints on the opportunities to work with Wakefield and Calderdale, due to their initial lack of interest in taking up the opportunity presented and constraints on the funding available. Work is in progress to support Calderdale and further efforts will be made to engage with Wakefield.

10. There is a perception amongst some of the WYLLN partners that skills are not viewed by Yorkshire Forward as central to their economic brief. This needs to be addressed along with the potential future role of WYLLN as a higher level skills broker for further and higher education, working more closely with Yorkshire Forward to support them in their new strategic skills role.

There will be a continued dialogue with Yorkshire Forward on the role that WYLLN can play in supporting their higher level skills agenda. The relationship will be further developed through joint activity on the economic challenge facing the sub-region.

11. There is no direct awareness of WYLLN amongst learners as a result of the current marketing and delivery strategy for IAG. This needs to be considered carefully as part of the legacy going forward. Is it right that there is no public recognition that WYLLN will have assisted over 7000 people in West Yorkshire to make informed choices about their future?

This issue was debated at the start of the project and a clear decision was made that the branding of WYLLN learners will lead to confusion. The issue will be raised again at the SAF and Management Board, but unless there is significant opposition to the current situation, this recommendation is rejected. To raise the profile of WYLLN amongst partners, a membership plaque will be produced for each partner, which can be displayed as they see fit.

12. There is limited direct contact with employers by WYLLN. This is delivered through the sector groups with very limited budgets. Partners considered that more work was needed in this area. There is a need to explore connectivity with Business Link Yorkshire and the Regional Brokerage Operational Group. Employer engagement was viewed as requiring additional focus and attention

The WYLLN had good links with Business Link Yorkshire before recent changes. New attempts will be made to develop a better working relationship both centrally and using contacts established within the sector groups.

13. If the WYLLN applies for ASNs it will be critical for the WYLLN to support ASN growth in institutions where curriculum developments are well developed through the sector group developments. Although the ASNs would

be allocated to individual institutions, the Management Board should consider where strategic growth is really required and can be delivered to further the WYLLN objectives.

With limited opportunity to bid for additional student numbers, it is difficult to take a strategic approach. However, the Board has already prioritised new curriculum developments for any re-distribution of ASNs.

14. There is a risk that funding may not be spent in time. Invoices must be submitted by partners on a timely basis. The Accountable Body is a prompt payer. The Management Board and Executive Director need to ensure there is a contingency plan in place which is updated on a regular basis. A stronger project management approach should be considered.

All contracts are currently under review and deadlines will be set for any outstanding claims. The Management Board has asked for reports on partner performance to be presented in a similar way to the reports introduced for the Sectors. A list of activities will be presented to the Board to account for any underspend.

15. Consider how the provision of IAG links with work on progression and credit and whether more attention is required to align this more closely.

The West Yorkshire Progression Agreement Framework has brought together IAG and progression through the structure of the progression agreements. The lack of understanding of this principle among partners will be addressed through a combined working group formed from the Credit and Progression and the IAG Task Groups.

16. There may be a gap in WYLLN funded IAG provision for higher level skills in Kirklees and this should be reviewed.

This has arisen because a partnership agreement was not able to be established with Kirklees College in 2008/9. Such an agreement is now in place for 2009/10. While it will not address previous under-activity, it will provide an opportunity for the college to engage with WYLLN activities and be involved in new ways of working in the future.

17. The extent to which IAG is being delivered in the workplace should be considered and whether WYLLN is helping potential work place learners to improve their skills and qualifications, either paid by the employer or by themselves. The balance of this in the project should be considered as part of the next phase of the project.

Activities have already taken place, but with the economic downturn there was a general reluctance from employers for this activity to take place. However, the fourth year targets prioritise Work Place Progression Agreements delivered through the work of the secondments to the Work and Skills Boards. The IAG activity within these Agreements will ensure greater levels of IAG in the work place.

18. Some sector officers would like to contribute more to the strategic direction of the WYLLN and there are suggestions to attend planning events. There is a sense that more should be done at the centre to unify common strands of activity. This needs to be discussed further.

Sector officers are invited to all strategic meetings: Task Groups, SAF and of course Sector Officer meetings. In addition they are invited to away days. Establishing Action Learning Sets has played a major part in addressing this recommendation.

19. Progression agreements are being developed and the Management Board may wish to consider again whether to strengthen its prioritisation of the type of agreement to be developed in view of the number of agreements in development. Is less more?

This has been addressed in targeting certain types of progression agreements as part of the fourth year plan.

20. Is there a need to link with the private sector to aid the progression of all higher level learners?

Partnership with private providers has already taken place through EBTA (Employer Based Training Accreditation) and will be expanded in the fourth year. Contact has already been made with Kaplan and

opportunities to link with them through our Progression Agreement Framework are being explored. Continued effort is being made for some joint activity with WYLP (West Yorkshire Learning Providers) on apprenticeship progression.

21. Careful consideration of public investment in technological developments should be given to avoid wasting resources which will not sustain. There may be a role for private sector investment in these types of developments.

Plans have already been developed for sustainability in the medium term. Opportunities are still being explored with AXIA for commercial exploitation of WYLLN technology products.