

November 2008

Lifelong Learning Networks

Analysis of 2008 monitoring reports

Draft

Lifelong Learning Networks: Analysis by of 2008 monitoring reports (draft)

Introduction

1. In April 2008, HEFCE published the interim report of the progress of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) conducted and produced by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI). One of the key recommendations of the report was for HEFCE to develop a more standardised form of reporting for LLNs, allowing consistent financial and activity data to be captured. Acting upon this recommendation, HEFCE introduced a standardised monitoring procedure in August 2008. The new monitoring requirements for LLNs brought reporting dates into line, requiring all LLNs to report to HEFCE by October 31 of each year. The key element of the new requirements was a monitoring template aimed at collecting similar and comparable data from all LLNs.
2. The first monitoring returns from LLNs under the new requirements were made at the end of October 2008. This report sets out the early key findings from the monitoring returns. The findings in this report will be expanded into a fuller report to be distributed by the end of the year.
3. This report will also be sent electronically to all LLN directors.

Early key findings

Finance and Expenditure

4. The monitoring reports demonstrated that progression agreements and curriculum development were the activities which LLNs spent most on and plan increased expenditure in these areas. In some cases, LLNs were able to attribute staff costs to the key activities; however in other networks this was not possible due to the multi-faceted roles within the partnerships. Table One shows estimated amounts from each LLN for core LLN activities and processes, and shows planned expenditure for the year ahead.
5. Other key categories of expenditure were evaluation, research and dissemination and development project costs.
6. Overall in 2007-08, LLNs received £1,038,001 from other sources. The main sources of additional funding to support projects undertaken by the LLNs were the LSC, Aimhigher, Train to Gain, regional development agencies and sector skills councils. This figure also includes funding provided by HEFCE to LLNs to undertake five pathfinder projects for 14-19 diplomas, but does not include any other figures attributed to HEFCE (i.e. 'HEFCE contribution as per bid') in order to avoid double counting.

Table One

LLN activities and processes	Expenditure 2007-08	Planned expenditure 2008-09
Progression agreements (including staff costs)	4,356,292.27	5,325,178.14
Curriculum development (including staff costs)	5,435,030.25	7,604,408.88
IAG (including staff costs)	3,599,490.01	4,731,244.43
Marketing (including staff costs)	1,185,788.30	1,966,974.63
Staff development (including staff costs)	797,983.23	1,328,767.68
Employer engagement (including staff costs)	1,407,599.50	2,556,154.97
Salaries and staff costs (if not included in the above)	4,019,099.14	4,742,992.61

Progression agreements

7. The reports show us that the key area in which LLNs are working to clarify and create progression routes is through BTECs. The monitoring returns also show that LLNs are working to ensure not only progression into HE but through HE, particularly from Foundation Degrees. LLNs were diverse from their conception and as such have taken different approaches to developing progression agreements, tailoring approaches to meet identified local need. The figure in Table Two below shows the total number of progression agreements and includes:
 - i. an overarching agreement signed by all partner institutions
 - ii. a region wide agreement
 - iii. an agreement covering a range of courses into a single programme
 - iv. an agreement covering a single course into a range of programmes
 - v. course to course agreements
 - vi. single institution and multi-institution agreements
8. It is important to remember that progression agreements often relate to clusters of pathways, not individual pathways, of which there could be hundreds of individual pathways under one progression agreement. For example, at one LLN the 13 signed progression agreements involve a total of 57 different progression routes. Another LLN has facilitated the signing of 81 progression agreement documents linking 257 programmes. Other networks have put in place over 50 progression agreements and have used these to develop overarching regional progression agreements. One network has 52 implemented progression agreements but 15,000 pathways sit below it.
9. Table Three gives an indication of the types of level 3 and 4 courses that LLNs are developing progression agreements for.

Table Two: Key figures for progression agreements

Indicative figure for the total number of progression agreements	1,723
Draft	787
Individual signatures (at least)	488
Expected number of learners per year	32,844

Table Three: Progression agreements by selected sending courses

Sending course*	Implemented	Draft
BTEC	819	362
NVQ	55	8
Apprenticeship	12	5
FD	230	114
Access	120	52
14-19 diplomas	17	23

*A number of the sending courses were amalgamated e.g. NVQ/BTEC, these have not been included.

Curriculum development and employer engagement

10. A core process of LLN work has been to work with FE colleges, HE institutions and employers to develop and align curriculum for progression at Level 3 to Level 4 and beyond. As a result of this work, LLNs have reported that they have agreed over 700 new or modified courses (the split is around 50:50 for new and modified) to facilitate progression. Work in this area has ranged from developing new foundation and undergraduate degrees to developing CPD and Access courses. In many cases, LLNs have helped establish new modules on undergraduate level courses to facilitate vocational progression from Level 3.
11. Around three quarters of this new or modified provision has been undertaken with the involvement of employers, and to a slightly lesser extent has involved Sector Skills Councils. This demonstrates how for many LLNs the involvement of employers in designing curriculum is crucial, particularly for work-based learners. For example, one LLN worked with the Ambulance Service to develop a foundation degree for practicing paramedics. Another LLN has worked with professional bodies to support the development of an Fd in Construction Management.
12. Many LLNs have also stated that they are supporting partner institutions to deliver the wider employer engagement agenda.
13. There has however, been a limited amount of engagement with progression to professional qualifications – this is an area where we would be keen to see LLNs increasing activity.

14. Curriculum development has also been a key aspect of the process of developing progression agreements where LLNs have worked with partner institutions to align curriculum for vocational progression.

Staff development

15. LLNs reported that they had implemented over 350 staff development events and activities, estimating that over 16,000 staff in total had been involved. Staff development activities and events have been targeted at key personnel in institutions and further afield. The main target for a large proportion of activity was admissions staff/tutors in FE and in HE, arranging events to raise awareness of progression agreements, and progression pathways for vocational learners. LLNs have also arranged some staff development events for senior management teams in colleges, for teachers, careers advisors and for employers. The events have usually focused around progression agreements, employer engagement and the new 14-19 diplomas. A large number of events have also focused on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), credit and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). It is clear from the analysis that LLNs are targeting the key admissions staff in institutions. Clearly, the key to sustaining the work and activities of the LLNs is to ensure that culture change is encouraged, accepted and embedded at all levels of institutions, including senior management teams. Although there is some evidence of this in the reports, this may be an area which LLNs may wish to try to re-focus some of their activity.
16. Table Four shows the main targets of staff development events – please note: results have been aggregated into general categories and not all different categories of staff have been included for ease of reporting.

Table Four:

Target of staff development	Number
Academic staff	3756
Admissions	1769
IAG staff	1597
Employers/staff involved in employer engagement	748
FE and HE staff	849
Teaching staff/Tutors	1415
Student support staff	241
Practitioners (LLN and related)	1475
Senior Management Teams	100

17. LLNs are also using staff development events to link to improving information, advice and guidance for vocational learners, both through careers officers and teachers in schools and Connexions advisors. LLNs have also been working with

key school advisors to improve their knowledge of the UCAS system to assist vocational learners in applying and progressing to HE.

18. A further 250 events and activities have been undertaken for the benefit of LLN staff, including working across the local region with other LLNs to share best practice and attending conferences on vocational progression, admissions, foundation degrees and the 14-19 diplomas.

Information, advice and guidance

19. The monitoring reports showed that in developing information, advice and guidance (IAG), LLNs are being:
 - responsive to local need, identifying gaps and sustainability of tools/ activity are central to IAG development
 - careful not to re-invent structures that already exist. A considerable amount of IAG, both face to face and web-based has been developed, hosted or distributed with partners including Aimhigher, Connexions, SSCs, FDF and Unionlearn. This has also included securing funding and commitment for web based IAG from partners
20. LLNs have evolved in diverse ways and as such have viewed the core progress of IAG differently. Some LLNs have developed separate online IAG tools; others have contributed to existing tools in partner institutions.
21. Most LLNs that have developed web based IAG have focused on course finders and course finders which are based on progression agreements. 7 LLNs have live course finders based on progression routes and 9 LLNs are developing this. In Sussex, learners can access an online directory of courses and the progression routes available. They can then download a personalised version of the progression agreement which they can take along to interviews. In the North East Higher Skills Network, learners can identify a personalised progression route from their current level of qualification and experience to further career levels, or routes into other disciplines. They can also access online information on specific careers and courses through case studies based upon real learners.
22. Other web based IAG includes personal learning packs, e-portfolios, taster modules, FAQs and case studies.
23. Table Five shows the main types of IAG activity and the estimated number benefiting: please note – activities have been aggregated for this purpose and the figures are broad estimates. Further activities, such as production of paper-based information materials and subsequent distribution have been undertaken by LLNs but are very difficult to estimate how many people have benefited.
24. LLNs have also been undertaking IAG training for staff in partner institutions with a view to ensuring that this strand of work becomes embedded and sustainable. From the reports, this area of work has been communicated as a key priority in this strand of work.
25. The four LLNs in the South East have also worked with SEEDA and the LSC to fund the 'Learning at work information service' which will be implemented in 2008-09 and is funded until 2009-10 academic year. The five LLNs in London have worked with Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) to develop a foundation degree prospectus.

Table Five

Type IAG	Numbers benefiting (approximate figures to give an indication)	Examples of activity
One to one (inc telephone)	20,075	Interviews with work place learners; working with other agencies such as Next Step and Connexions to facilitate one to one interviews
Group support	36,654	Group sessions looking at completing UCAS forms; workshops for level 2 learners on progressing to HE
Website	211,833	Web-based IAG tools; course finders

Learner constituency

26. LLNs took different approaches to measuring the learner constituency. Most have identified the number of students on a range of 'target programmes' for the LLN and begun to track changes over time; others have recorded the number of learners entering identified programmes with *vocational* qualifications. The most significant differences in approach however relate to the basis on which the programmes to be monitored have been selected. Some LLNs have taken a narrow view and included only new programmes associated with the work of the LLN; others have identified a wider range of programmes associated with the core occupational groups that the LLN focuses on; some have identified a very much wider range, presumably because they believe that progression can and should be across all (or a very significant number) of the courses offered by HE providers in the network.
27. We anticipated a range of responses because we invited LLNs to define the boundaries around relevant programmes in the way that they saw appropriate and we hope that the information generated will be useful for individual networks.
28. However, it does not provide the basis for comparisons *across* LLNs or a way of measuring progress by LLNs as a whole. Given the additional burden of collecting data for monitoring purposes we will review the usefulness of asking about the 'learner constituency' in this way. The problem, in essence, remains the same: how to assess progress in facilitating progression into and through HE? One measure is the extent to which additional student numbers that have been awarded to LLNs are fully used, and the data about students taking up these places. But we clearly need a measure of the *wider* impact of LLNs on recruitment of learners with vocational qualifications across the courses and programmes offered by HE providers in the network. We will, therefore, talk to LLNs and to the practitioner

forum to see if (a) there is a manageable (low-burden) way of tightening definitions about the learner constituency so that data is at least broadly comparable or (b) focus on other measures of the wider impact of LLNs.

FE-HE progression links

29. The monitoring reports show that LLNs have taken a number of different approaches to building progression links between their FE partners and partners in HE. The core ways in which this has been achieved has been the formation of operational groups with members from both FE and HE which include: curriculum/sector groups – to discuss and implement curriculum development and alignment, progression agreements and research projects; credit agreement groups to discuss and implement a common approach to credit. The outputs for most FE-HE activity are progression agreements and improved communication between the two sectors on progression, credit and curriculum alignment. Other examples include meetings of groups to map curriculum; one to one interviews and small focus group meetings to inform research; employer engagement groups and 14-19 curriculum groups.
30. There is an overlap in FE-HE links with staff development in the case of a number of LLNs and we would fully expect to see this – staff development in partner institutions is central to sustaining the core processes of the LLN.

Conclusion

31. The monitoring returns have provided HEFCE with a much clearer insight into the progress being achieved by LLNs. By introducing a more standardised approach to monitoring, we are able to gain a snapshot of all LLNs at the same time.
32. As the programme matures, the data returned in the monitoring reports provides HEFCE with a clearer evidence base on which to assess and promote the progress of the programme as a whole.
33. The 2008 return has demonstrated the important and positive work that is being achieved by LLNs, and indeed the volume, particularly in the core processes of progression agreements, curriculum development and alignment and information, advice and guidance.