

SSCLLN FINAL EVALUATION

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1. Executive Summary

The Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network (SSCLLN) submitted its Business Development Plan to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in June 2006. The LLN has adhered to HEFCE's remit to increase progression into vocational education through supporting a wide range of initiatives and developments.

An analysis of the region's higher education curriculum needs prompted the LLN to concentrate on four areas:

- Health and Social Care including Children and Young People's Services
- Construction
- Food and Drink
- Creative Industries

The organisation's Governance and Management structure has been effective and capable of adapting to changed conditions. Examples include the changed circumstances for the delivery of Individual Advice and Guidance and Staff Development and the New Business Plan (June 2009). Reporting systems have been sound. The Project Management Team has provided considerable cohesion across a wide range of activities.

Partners have been engaged by such means as the Steering Group, the Partnership Forum, the appointment of the Action Based Task Group (ABTG) Leaders and curriculum development initiatives. The LLN has worked closely with such regional stakeholders as the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA), Sector Skills Councils, Aimhigher, Connexions and Foundation Degree Forward.

It is important to note the working relationship with the other East Midlands LLN – Leap Ahead Lifelong Learning Network. A number of joint initiatives have taken place in areas of common interest. This has increased efficiency, avoided duplication, reduced cost and increased participation. One example is 'constructionsite,' a web based higher level teaching and learning facility.

The organisation has followed a devolved structure for curriculum development through Action Based Task Groups rather than a centrally managed system. Whilst there are some risks inherent in this model these have been addressed mainly through the work of the Project Management Team. The evidence shows that the model has been a success. It has increased partnership working, curriculum development and sustainability. It has been stated that the working, sustainable partnerships that have developed would have been less likely to have prospered if the arrangements had been more centrally controlled.

ABTG meeting attendance has been an issue with some sectors, particularly Construction and Food and Drink. This has been compounded by a lack of consistency in partner membership attendance i.e. there has not always been the same representative attending on behalf of an individual partner organisation. Reasons stated include lack of time and

changes in institutional responsibilities. The lack of institutional ‘buy-in’ has also been quoted in some cases.

Despite these factors the ABTG structure has been well received. The achievement of hard targets has been impressive with many targets being exceeded. The development of innovative delivery systems such as ‘constructionsite’ and the considerable increase in the number of regional Foundation Degrees should greatly aid vocational progression.

Individual Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Staff Development activity has been commensurate with the LLN’s aims and objectives. The Project Management Team has ensured that the curriculum areas have been engaged with the IAG and Staff Development activities. The development of the XCRi system for retrieving higher level course information has become an important part of the IAG remit and strong partnership working has been established.

IAG, together with curriculum development initiatives have had some success in breaking down some stereotypical ideas regarding employment possibilities. Examples include opportunities for boys in textiles and girls in engineering.

The good practice, fostered by the LLN in both IAG and Staff Development, has been featured in Good Practice Guides. This should help to further embed the salient features. The published Curriculum Good Practice Guide is but one example.

A large number of Progression Agreements have been signed and much attention has been paid to embedding these within institutions. The exercise has also greatly aided partnership working in a broader curriculum development sense. Research, at the time of writing, is currently being undertaken to determine the quantitative success in progression to higher education. Results to date show positive outcomes regarding nine institutions. The changed HE funding regime and the current economic situation are of concern with their impact upon Progression Agreements uncertain.

The New Business Plan has clearly been followed. The engagement with the Advanced Apprenticeship programmes has included arrangements with the National Apprentice Service to continue with certain aspects of the LLN’s programme after the project ends, for example, IAG.

Support has also been provided for the regional 14-19 Diplomas and for the continuation of the ‘constructionsite’ project.

2. Introduction

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Important partners were the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and, before their abolition, the Learning and Skills Councils.

HEFCE's objective, regarding the LLNs, was to increase progression into vocational education through supporting a wide range of initiatives and developments. These included the following:

- Curriculum Development - including removing barriers to progression, employer involvement, bridging courses, e-learning and work-based learning
- Information, Advice and Guidance - encouragement of systems facilitating learners to engage with lifelong learning opportunities
- Progression Agreements – to aid learners regarding what they can reasonably expect about their progression together with institutional commitments that these expectations will be met.

The Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network (SSCLLN) covered a geographical area encompassing Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland. In terms of the labour market the sub region is noted for its low wages and low skill levels.

The organisation adhered to the HEFCE objectives together with supporting the region's priorities regarding higher education. This included supporting the East Midlands Development Agency in its drive to provide greater access for employed adult learners to engage with courses at Level 4. Additional aims included increased contact between Further and Higher education in order to facilitate both greater progression opportunities and curriculum development.

Key SSCLLN Aims

The SSCLLN Business Development Plan, submitted to HEFCE in June 2006 provided a framework for the network's development. The focus was to 'provide vocational routes into, and through, higher education for learners from a range of entry points' (SSCLLN Network Development Plan p.3). The specific aims were:

- To focus on the needs of the learner and ensure that all elements that make up the learner experience, from information on course choice to onward progression, are met to the same high standard.
- To focus on the priorities of the region and engage closely with employers to support the development of relevant skills.
- To improve collaborative planning between partners in education together with key stakeholders
- To develop programmes that support non-traditional learners and are flexible and accessible in their delivery. Amending the modes of delivery and places of

delivery of courses where necessary, so that they meet the needs of the learners.

- To develop progression agreements, agree and implement a credit frame work and CAT scheme to be used by partners of the LLN to enable guaranteed progression to suitably qualified students.
- To develop shared staff development opportunities across the network to address gaps in knowledge and understanding, therefore building capacity to ensure sustainability.

SSCLLN Partnership

The partnership consists of Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges. The partnership has also encouraged a wide rang of stakeholders to be actively involved. These included HEFCE, the Learning and Skills Council, Aimhigher, Sector Skills Councils, East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA), Foundation Degree Forward and Lifelong Learning Networks.

The educational institutional representation included the following:

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Bishop Grosseteste University College,
Lincoln

De Montfort University

University of Leicester

University of Lincoln

University of Loughborough

Open University East Midlands

University of Northampton

Sixth Form Colleges

Gateway College

John Leggott College

Regent College

Wigston and QE College

Further Education Colleges (FECs)

Brooksby Melton College

Grantham College

Leicester College

Lincoln College

Loughborough College

Moulton College

Northampton College

North Warwickshire & Hinckley College

South Leicestershire College

New College Stamford

Stephenson College

Tresham Institute

3 The Brief

The report was commissioned in July 2010 by the Project Director.

The report's purpose is to provide a summative evaluation of the Network's activity during the period of its existence from 2006 to December 2010.

Key areas for evaluation include the following:

- Governance and Management
- Action Based Task Group (ABTG) activity
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Staff Development
- Marketing
- Progression Agreements
- New Business Plan (operative from June 2009)
- Best Practice Guides
- Sustainability

Each area is seen within the context of the original business plan and the updated plan as appropriate. Any key variations will be summarised together with activities which were successful and any which did not meet the original expectations.

The report's findings are based on a review of the relevant documentation including the original and updated business plans, HEFCE annual monitoring reports, HEFCE feedback reports, peer evaluation (conducted by Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull LLN Skills for Sustainable Communities [BBC&S/SSC LLN]), the CFE independent external evaluation concentrating on the ABTGs, individual ABTG reviews, strategic and operational meetings. Statistical information underpins the research findings. Interviews with members of the LLN Central Team, ABTG members, employers and learners will supply additional information.

It is important to note that the original aims and objectives must be considered in the light of considerably changed circumstances in the skills, employment and educational fields since the original business plan was formulated. The updated Business Plan of June 2009, in part, reflects some of these changes.

4. Governance and Management

The 2006 Business Plan explained how the SSCLLN governance and management structure operated. It is led by the University of Leicester. The plan emphasises the need for a streamlined structure to avoid a complex bureaucracy and duplication.

The guiding principles of managing the network were stated as follows:

- Inclusivity
- Flexibility
- Commitment
- Sustainability
- Value-added

The partners, identified in the introduction, agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding detailing how they would work collaboratively.

4.1 The Steering Group

This was the senior decision making body of the LLN initially chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester, the lead institution. This role then became the responsibility of the University's Director of the Institute of Lifelong Learning.

The Project Director was a member of the group and in this capacity contributed to strategic planning. The Director also had one-to-one meetings with the Chair to ensure updating between meetings.

The Steering Group membership reflected the partnership institutions with seven HEIs and four FE colleges represented. Key stake holders were also included with representatives from HEFCE, the Regional Learning and Skills Council, EMDA, Aimhigher, Foundation Degree Forward (fdf), Sector Skills Councils and the Learning and Skills Council.

The group's role was to oversee the strategic development of the Network, receive reports from the Director regarding the LLN and financial reports from the University of Leicester. It also received strategic papers from group members as appropriate.

4.2 The Partnership Forum

This body was established to provide partner institutions and stake holders the opportunity to receive updates and to contribute to planning future developments. They were held twice a year. The theme of the first event, on 24th May, 2007, was vocational progression (Annual Report to HEFCE Year 1 p. 11). Participants included educational institutions, Sector Skills Councils, local Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) groups. The outcomes of the discussion contributed to the development of the Network's Progression Agreement documents. Other events have included the following topics:

- Real progression routes re apprenticeships and Diplomas
- Construction Repository

- Progression Agreements
- ‘Renewables’ relating to the construction industry
- Regional Foundation Degree developments
- Staff Development
- IAG

4.3 Project Management Team

The Project Management Team initially consisted of five members. The posts were as follows:

- Project Director
- Project Manager
- Project Development Manager (Communications)
- Senior Project Administrator
- Principal Clerk

The team was the conduit through which the strategic plans of the Steering Group were implemented. It met each week for briefing sessions, monthly for business meetings and quarterly for review. Team members sat on local, regional and national committees and groups in order to represent the LLN’s aims and to ensure that the organisation was informed of relevant developments.

During the first year a part time consultant worked on the development of Progression Agreements and was joined in Year 2 by two additional 0.5 Progression Agreement Managers.

4.4 Action Based Task Groups

The original plan was for six Action based task Groups covering four curriculum and two generic areas. The curriculum areas were to be led by partners from across the Network. The ABTGs were defined as:

- Health and Social Care including Children and Young People’s Services
- Construction (initially focusing on Leadership, Management and Enterprise Skills)
- Food and Drink (initially focusing on Leadership, Management and Enterprise Skills)
- Creative Industries (initially focusing on Leadership, Management and Enterprise Skills)
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Staff Development

See Section 5 for Action Based task Group Activity.

4.5 Communication Strategy

The Business Plan emphasised this initiative as being central to the embedding of the SSCLLN in the educational landscape for learners and practitioners. It was also seen as a key priority for the Project Director. The SSCLLN website was quickly established and initially targeted the deliverers rather than the learners with plans to fully develop the site to include learners and all partners. (Business Plan 2006-2008 p. 12)

Part of the Steering Group's remit was to ensure that the project details were disseminated widely and were acceptable to all partners in order to facilitate partnership working. The strategy included: learners, practitioners, senior managers, task group members, key messages to various identified groups, a variety of communication methods and a communications activity table.

4.6 Conclusions

4.6.1 The Steering Group

The BBC&SSC/ LLN peer evaluation highlighted the fact that the Steering Group membership included three Pro -Vice Chancellors, one Further Education Assistant Principal, a University Widening Participation Director, the Regional Director for the Open University, four Higher Education Co-ordinators within Further Education together with the ABTG leads. All seven HEIs have representation and four FEs. Consideration was given to the fact that all regional FEs were not on the Steering Committee and whether this led to them feeling under represented. This was not deemed to be an issue. There was no evidence of any Learning Skills Council involvement in the SSCLLN Steering Group Meetings. LSC members have, however, presented at the Partnership Forum. EMDA has shown significant involvement.

The level of attendance has been good – on average fifteen members have been present. Issues have been fully discussed and strategic decisions taken as can be seen in the development of the Business Plan prior to funding being made available, the formal constitution and contract authorisation. The group endorsed the Progression Agreements Framework and identified the areas of overlap with Aimhigher so as to avoid duplication.

Additional observations show clear financial monitoring arrangements, clear communication lines both within the group and with the network as a whole. Examples include: the annual report, monitoring of ABTG progress, the devolvement of staff development and IAG, progression agreements, ASNs, New Diplomas and apprenticeships. All are clearly referenced in the minutes together with the relevant action points.

4.6.2 The Partnership Forum

BBC&SSSC/LLN commented on the sound attendance at these events and that the evaluation forms to date showed that a majority rated the Forum as excellent.

Additional observations show the impact which the group has had in the formulation of new developments such as Progression Agreements together with acting as a sounding board and networking opportunity. One partnership facility to aid this process has been the 'round table' sessions after the main presentations. This was stated to be a successful process at the 14th June 2008 Steering Group Meeting.

4.6.3 Project Management Team

BBC&SSSC/LLN found that generally the staff numbers were sufficient to cope with the workload and that when additional resources were seen to be required these were forthcoming. This was the case regarding progression agreements where the SSCLLN agreed to the appointment of two 0.5 additional staff. This was seen to be an indication of responding to need in a timely manner.

Weekly briefings were held on an informal basis. Monthly meetings were formal but did not work through the original target action plan, as this was seen to be too time consuming. The preference was to complete the relevant template individually and forward this to the administrator for inputting on the central record. The information was then reviewed by the Project Manager who then authorised the final version. This process may have involved additional contact with the contributors to ensure total accuracy. This procedure allowed the members more time to concentrate on those areas where discussion and decision making could be more effective. Topics have included: employer engagement, ABTG progress, progression agreements, work programmes, finance, news letters, conferences and planning.

Additional observations:

The Project Team has not only been fundamental to the LLN's internal co-ordination, it has also been very active in such regional activity as Your Future East Midlands and partnership arrangements with Leap Ahead LLN (Annual Report to HEFCE 2009 p. 6). Such external working has enabled the Network to contribute to the region's agenda. From the outset one of the LNN's stated aims was to develop links with other counties in the region including the Employment Skills and Productivity Partnership (ESP) and the Extended Regional Advisory Group (RAGe). (Annual Report to HEFCE 2007 p.13)

4.6.4 Action Based Task Groups

See Section 5

5. Action Based Task Groups' Activity

Section 3 of the Business Plan explains the development stage of the LLN's curriculum planning and how this had been influenced by the regional priorities together with those of educational partners and other key stakeholders. The four areas chosen, as a result of the SSCLLN's research are as follows:

- Health and Social Care (including Children's and Young People's Services)
- Creative Industries
- Food and Drink
- Construction

Leadership, Management and Enterprise were overarching regional priorities across all the sectors contained in the East Midland Development Agency's Regional Economic Strategy. Three of these sectors overlapped with the LLN's curriculum areas. Leadership, Management and Enterprise, therefore, became a part of the remits for the Creative Industries, Food and Drink and Construction ABTGs. They were also included as a project within Health and Social Care.

Whilst these themes remained as an element in some ABTG activity it was not the dominant theme. The reason for this was that as the groups became established their curriculum developments were strongly influenced by information provided through their networks. Adjustments were made accordingly through the LLN's management structure which included project submissions. The Construction ABTG is one example where its members considered that the development of an online facility to support HE learners in the industry was of great importance. Hence the development of the 'constructionsite' was seen as a priority.

The ABTGs were established as autonomous bodies which reported to the Steering Group. At a senior level the ABTGs were managed, initially, by the Steering Group and then became the responsibility of the Project Management Team reporting back, on ABTG activity, through established mechanisms. The financial and operational management of the ABTGs became the responsibility of a lead organisation from within the partnership. Institutions with the required experience for the development of higher level skills courses were invited to submit tenders. Successful bids were approved by the Steering Group at their meeting on the 13th February 2007.

5.1 ABTG Lead Organisations

- Health and Social Care (including Children and Young People's Services)
– University of Northampton
- Creative Industries – De Montfort University
- Food and Drink – University of Lincoln and the East Midlands New Technology Initiative (NTI)

- Construction – Lincoln College of Further Education and NTI

The ABTG Handbook states that the role of the Lead Organisation was as follows:

- Meeting the ABTG milestones and targets
- Agree to a fair distribution of ASNs and funding across the membership
- Provide staff to manage the ABTG and provide a base for them
- Offer delivery and/or validation of newly developed courses from across the partnership
- Provide regular reports on ABTG progress including financial monitoring statements
- Comply with HEFCE SDF standard terms and conditions
- Hold regular ABTG meetings and encourage participation across the Network
- Participate in bi-monthly meetings with the Project Management Team to discuss progress

5.2 ABTG Management

ABTGs were provided with considerable funds with the predicted total funding, as stated in the Annual Report to HEFCE Year 1 Appendix 2, ranging from £188,000 for Construction to £500,000 for Health and Social Care. These sums were to be distributed to partner institutions. In order to assist ABTGs to plan for this distribution the following advice was provided by the Network at the outset:

- ABTGs should develop a strategy, for the duration of the three year period, to meet the soft and hard targets. Funds should be focused on activities that will clearly demonstrate a link to the strategy
- A strategy will have as a minimum:
 - a. A commitment to have regional coverage including FECs, HEIs, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), and other stakeholders
 - b. Defined sub-sectors, although it is not envisaged that all sub-sectors could have the same amount of coverage
 - c. Focus on learners moving from Level 3 to Level 4, including adults
 - d. Activities to meet the strategy should be planned and mapped over the funding period so that it will be clear when, and how, each sub-sector will be addressed
 - e. Allocation of funds between a variety of activities and sub-sectors to address the overall targets and attract the requisite student numbers

As a result of national policy developments over the funding period, the ABTG focus on employer engagement increased. The Steering Group Meeting on 19th March 2008

recommended the ‘development of other areas of interest not included in the Business Plan for example employer engagement.’

5.3 Hard Targets

Identifying needs and addressing gaps

Each ABTG identified courses within its curriculum area where changes could make courses more accessible to vocational learners paying particular attention to:

- Access
- Mode of delivery
- Assessment and methodology
- Intensity of study
- Entry qualifications
- Exit routes

Each ABTG worked with key stakeholders to carry out the changes required.

5.4 Soft Targets

These included progression agreements learner and employer engagement.

5.5 Operational Aspects

The research and consultancy specialists CFE were commissioned, by SSCLLN, in May 2009 to conduct an independent, external evaluation of its four curriculum ABTGs. They commented that many LLNs adopted a more centralised approach to curriculum development. The path followed by SSCLLN, a devolved structure, provided the potential benefit of being managed and driven by people with the knowledge and expertise in the appropriate industry/curriculum sector:

‘they felt that there would be expertise there and people with contacts and knowledge of the sector....it was felt that they could then really take a lead in a way that would be sustained because they were away from the Central Team’ (Central Team Member statement to CFE – CFE Report p.20)

The joint management of two of the ABTGs by NTI (Food and Drink – NTI and Lincoln University and Construction – NTI and Lincoln College) was anticipated to provide links to existing NTI forums thus providing a strong resource base.

An additional stated benefit of the ABTG operational model was envisaged to be improved institutional buy-in because the partners would have ownership of key aspects of the LLN’s operations.

CFE's online consultation showed that the majority of ABTG members who responded (58%) agreed that the ABTG structure was the best way to achieve their objectives. (CFE Report p.20)

5.6 Institutional Buy-In

Considerable efforts have been made to encourage all partners to be involved in the ABTG activities. These have included project proposals and attendance at meetings. The LLN staff, at all levels, have communicated fully with the partners to ensure that they were aware of the opportunities available and that attendance at meetings was an important aspect of achieving the LLNs aims and objectives. The latter did not just involve the numbers attending, but also a consistency in membership i.e. the same people attending.

Despite these efforts, meeting attendance in some ABTGs has been poor. In the case of the Food and Drink ABTG Evaluation it was stated that 'the ABTG membership list includes 23 members, but meeting attendance has been an issue although the use of email correspondence has alleviated the problem. From June 2009 no further meetings have taken place and effective business has continued via electronic means.....' (Food and Drink ABTG Evaluation 2010 p.31). In the case of Construction 'meeting attendance has been an issue. Low attendance and changes in representation have impacted on the smooth operation of some initiatives' (Construction ABTG Evaluation 2010 p.4)

Limited participation in some ABTGs has led to the activities being dominated by the Lead organisation. Sometimes this is the result of a limited number of partners with that sector's expertise. One such example is the Food and Drink ABTG where the University of Lincoln was the Lead (in partnership with NTI) but there were only two other institutions with this area of expertise – Leicester College and Loughborough College

CFE identified the reasons for poor attendance as the lack of staff time, the perceived dominance of the ABTG Lead organisations, lack of institutional specialisms in the target curriculum areas for some partners and a lack of institutional buy in from some partners. The CFE survey identified that the overwhelming barrier to membership and active participation was the limited availability of time and existing workloads.

'I believe, as with most LLNs, it has been very difficult to engage with all the LLN partner institutions and then the right individuals within the Colleges and Universities. For a whole range of reasons the work of the LLN is just a small part of the everyday work of the LLN partners. Some partners may not be in a position to engage with the sector or at an HE level' (Online consultation respondent) [CFE Evaluation p. 27].

The CFE evaluation also stated that some respondents reported that the devolved structure may have hindered regional representation as ABTGs were perceived to be dominated by the Lead Institution. The more this perception prevailed, the less likely it would be for others to be actively involved. The research findings suggested that there has been a stronger buy-in at the individual level rather than the institutional level. The need for greater institutional involvement was clearly recognised by the LLN and was stated in the early Annual Reports

to HEFCE e.g. ensuring that ‘partners stay fully engaged with the Network and promote developments within the organisation’ was identified as a key priority in the 2007 Annual Report.

Despite these difficulties the data from the online CFE consultation suggest that once the partners were engaged with the ABTGs they rate their experience positively. Two-thirds rated the ABTG meeting experience as good or very good. (CFE Evaluation P31)

5.7 Involvement of the East Midlands New Technology Initiative (NTI)

The CFE evaluation states that the NTI brought the benefit of its project management and facilitation expertise to the Construction and Food and Drink ABTGs, but the hope that there would be a working partnership between the membership of both the NTI and LLN did not fully materialise. Both sectors were constituent members of both organisations and this prompted the opportunity for joint initiatives.

There have been meetings where at least some joint membership has been present but no joint initiatives. The sharing of information has been useful and the consecutive meeting arrangement between the NTI and certain ABTGs has facilitated communication e.g. construction meetings in Nottingham and at Stephenson College, Coalville.

5.8 Funding

The total sums allocated to the four curriculum ABTGs in the 2006 Business Plan for the duration of the project was as follows:

Health and Social Care	£500,000
Food & Drink	£250,000
Construction	£188,000
Creative Industries	£250,000

Partner organisations were invited to bid for resources from the appropriate ABTG and these have been submitted on a Pro Forma. They were then presented at the relevant ABTG meeting and ‘judged’ according to the merits of the proposal. Accepted proposals were logged and forwarded to the LLN Project Manager. The Project Management Team reported all activity to the Steering Group. Guidelines for acceptable levels of spending were developed including Director approval for amounts exceeding £15,000. CFE concluded that the ABTGs proved to be a successful sounding board for project proposals. (CFE Evaluation p.33)

Monitoring has involved target achievements and some reporting back via the ABTG meetings. Formal reviews of each ABTG were completed in February 2010

5.9 An Overview of ABTG Activity

Each ABTG has been the subject of an independent evaluation. A brief outline of each is provided below. Abbreviated statistical information is seen in **5.11**. Full information is provided in the ABTG evaluations and the reports to HEFCE.

5.9.1 Health and Social Care

The ABTG was successful in gaining funding for 50 projects including those for Foundation Degrees (FD) in Palliative Care, Healthcare Science, Dental Nursing, Management of Healthy Lifestyles and Leadership and Management in the Public Sector (Health).

Distance learning, the modification of existing FDs, scoping studies, development of stand alone certificates together with actively supporting the development of allied FDs across the region were all part of the ABTG's activity. (H&SC ABTG Evaluation p.7-8)

In the evaluation's conclusions positive comments were made relating to:

- The substantial legacy left by the ABTG's activity
- Robust structural framework
- Well attended meetings averaging 16 members. (H&SC ABTG Evaluation p.11)
- Scope and diversity
- Positive relationship between academic partners, employers and other stakeholders
- The established network of contacts has a significant role to play in the sustainability of the ABTG

Lessons learnt include:

- Possibility of underestimating the time required to develop new FDs and other learning material
- In distance learning projects, proposers not being experts in technical aspects leading to timescale issues and the realisation that there was a need for small teams working together rather than in isolation. Considered preferential to start with a complete 'plan of works' (H&SC ABTG Evaluation p.17)
- Importance of collaboration and networking
- Awareness of fast moving agendas e.g. Children's Workforce agenda
- Investing in marketing with a clear strategy and timescales
- Organising the process of curriculum development e.g. the possibility of a lead co-ordinator
- Work-based learning – being aware of the special requirements such as the training of workplace mentors
- Access to up-to-date market research including that which led to the prevention of duplication

5.9.2 Food and Drink

The ABTG's major objectives were to ensure that vocational higher level courses in this curriculum area were more widely available, appropriate and flexible in their delivery. Considerable effort was made to provide appropriate provision in technical language, bridging courses and events which informed potential learners of the opportunities available. Attention was also paid to employer engagement, the likely demand patterns for training and the impact of new technology. (Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 4)

In the evaluation's conclusions positive comments were made relating to a number of the project advantages including:

- Greater industrial engagement
- Improved, accurate data collection
- Indication of the need for new progression opportunities
- Allowed greater potential for APEL and distance learning
- Collaboration
- Attempts to incorporate professional body qualifications
- More efficient delivery
- Enhanced staff development opportunities

The above provide sound indicators regarding the sustainability of many of the project themes after the LLN's lifetime. (Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 31)

Lessons learnt include:

- The need for more time in some cases and the prioritisation of work load
(Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 24)
- The need for greater understanding of the assessment methodologies between FE and HE particularly those relating to work-based learning
(Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 24)
- The difficulty of institutional partner engagement even when the number involved is very small
(Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 32)
- The significant problem of meeting attendance even with an original membership list of 23 very few attended subsequent meetings. This, in part, contributed to the majority of proposals emanating from one institution despite great efforts to involve more.
(Food & Drink ABTG Evaluation p. 31)

5.9.3 Construction

The ABTG has made considerable effort to increase awareness of the changes that are occurring regarding the new technologies together with the opportunities that these changes present. Awareness raising for learners, providers, employers and professional bodies has featured strongly. Major objectives have been to ensure that vocational higher level courses

in Construction are more available, appropriate and flexible in delivery. (Construction ABTG Evaluation p. 4)

Initially one of the major areas considered for improving provision for vocational learners was Leadership and Management. Whilst this remained an important element of the overall project the dominating activity was the development of a construction web-based repository entitled 'constructionsite'.

In the evaluation's conclusions positive comments were made relating to a number of the projects which include a large proportion directly, or indirectly, linked to the development of 'constructionsite':

- Strong partnership working with the SSCLLN Construction membership involving Leap Ahead LLN as a joint partner in the 'constructionsite' initiative. Additional partners included – NTI East Midlands, East Midlands Further Education Council (EMFEC), Foundation Degree Forward, the Collaborative Higher Education Alliance, Nottingham Trent University, Derby University and Gates MacBain Associates
- Provided greater impetus to curriculum development
- Encouraged co-operation between the two Midlands LLNs resulting in a greater resource base with enhanced outcomes and avoidance of duplication
- Greater clarity regarding the relationship of course content to industry standards which further informed FD developments
- Successful engagement of an e. learning company
- Greatly aided material development and shared purpose
- Further development of a partnership open access resource avoiding the possibility of duplication
- Greatly assured quality standards and copyright safeguards
(All the above comments - Construction ABTG Evaluation p. 29)
- The quest for sustainability is seen in the establishment of a new Steering Group for the 'constructionsite' initiative. This is responsible for the financial planning and resourcing of a sustainable 'constructionsite'. The Steering Group Chair is held by EMFEC as an objective and representational body working across the East Midlands. The decision making is informed, in part, through monthly statistical reports on the site's use based on the Google Analytics program.

Lessons learnt include:

- Not all regional colleges and universities offering construction fully engaged. Those who did are clearly identified by their attendance at meetings and by their project proposals (Construction ABTG Evaluation p. 28)
- A more robust 'constructionsite' module author appointment procedure was required at the outset. In the spirit of equality, staff from partner institutions were offered the opportunity to apply. A smoother process would have been to

circulate the task specifications at the beginning of the process and arrange meetings with interested parties

- Low levels of attendance at meetings during the later ABTG stages. Conflict of some member's time constraints was one stated reason.

Changes in partnership representation were sometimes caused by line management reorganisation

(Construction ABTG Evaluation p. 31)

5.9.4 Creative Industries

The ABTG projects have covered the development of new FDs in Interior Design, Media, Community Theatre, Production and Performance Theatre, together with Performance (Acting) and Performance (Dance).

The development of specific modules e.g. UCPD in Community Theatre, scoping studies and research to ascertain proposal viability, the development of distance learning and a toolkit for self-employed Creative Industry workers are all evidenced. (Creative Industries Evaluation p. 7-8)

In the evaluation's conclusions positive comments were made relating to:

- Scope and breadth of the projects which have led to an overachievement of the targets established in the plan
- Relationship building between academic partners, employers and other stakeholders. Breaking down of barriers (Creative Industries Evaluation p.15) and the establishment of greater employer engagement links
- Greater employer involvement (Creative Industries Evaluation p. 11)
- Development of 'Good Practice' Guides
- The sharing of expertise
- The investment in creating more flexible programmes has enabled greater student participation from groups who would not have had access to higher education previously and has provided employers with 'work ready' applicants. (Creative Industries Evaluation p.15)

Lessons learnt include:

- The need for longer preparation time
- Changing the development sequence. Some project members felt that they should have established a strategy in the first instance that covered all aspects of the project, in particular gaining senior management 'buy in' of all partners before commencing. Others felt that holding certain meetings earlier may have made the outcomes more straightforward
- Unforeseen changes e.g. the economic climate and HEFCE funding
- Review of delivery modes. The use of blended learning was an option some new course providers would like to see introduced on the new FDs

- Creative employer engagement. As a large number of SMEs are involved in this sector some project members felt that it was important to be creative in how employers could contribute to the programme and promote enterprise.
- Access to up-to-date market research including avoiding duplication
- Investing in staff development. Through initial seminar input for staff involved in FD development, informing them of course structures, assessment methodologies and validating partner requirements. This process was considered to be very useful. (Creative Industries Evaluation p.13-14)

5.10 Targets

The 2006 Business Plan established the targets. The target numbers were apportioned to the ABTGs as seen below. The achievement figures are those presented in the Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 4 2010 (p.25-26)

Target Domain	Target	Number Achieved
Curriculum Change	60	91
Bridging Courses	12	26
Foundation Degrees	10	19
Learners	2,080	2,349

5.10.1 'Hard Target' outcomes

The LLN has performed well and its achievements have been acknowledged in the individual ABTG Evaluations, the Peer Review, the CFE Review and in HEFCE feedback “The LLN has made good progress against the key milestones and has done well to meet many of the targets set....”(HEFCE feedback letter to the 2008 LLN Report).

The following are examples of the progress made by the end of year 4 by each ABTG:

Health and Social Care

Changes		Bridging Courses		Foundation Degrees		Learner Numbers	
Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
18	35	3	6	4	6	805	1080

This ABTG performed well against its targets. CFE stated that this group was very well attended and achieved representation from across a spectrum of members and that it was very target focused.

Construction

Changes		Bridging Courses		Foundation Degrees		Learner Numbers	
Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
14	17	3	8	2	2	325	332

Construction exceeded its targets for changes, bridging and learner numbers and met its target for Foundation Degrees. Particular progress has been made in the development of the ‘constructionsite’ repository which, as well as affording opportunities to meet the targets, has facilitated staff development and assisted partnership development within the LLN area and beyond (Construction ABTG Evaluation Feb. 2010 p.4)

Creative Industries

Changes		Bridging Courses		Foundation Degrees		Learner Numbers	
Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
14	23	3	8	2	6	325	550

The Creative Industries ABTG has exceeded all its hard targets. Much of its work should promote sustainability.

Food and Drink

Changes		Bridging Courses		Foundation Degrees		Learner Numbers	
Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
14	16	3	4	3	3	325	387

This ABTG exceeded its targets in changes, bridging and learner numbers and achieved its target for Foundation Degrees. Special characteristics of this group include the fact that there were very few providers in this specialised field and the meeting attendance was very low. Hence the number of project submissions was low. This is despite the considerable efforts of both the ABTG Lead and the Central Project Team.

All **5.10.1** statistics – Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 4 Appendices B and C

5.10.2 ‘Soft’ Targets

In the Business Plan these included Progression Agreements (**See Section 9**), AP(E)L and CAT. The Central Project Team was given the responsibility for the Progression Agreements with the remainder being the responsibility of the ABTGs. As the CFE evaluation states very little project funding was directed to these areas. There was only one project relating to credit and one AP(E)L

5.11 Appropriateness of Targets

CFE conducted a number of interviews during their research. Questions asked included a number relating to the ‘hard’ targets and whether they were appropriate.

The targets had been decided upon during the business planning stage before the LLN teams were in post. The ABTGs, therefore, were not in existence during this stage. Some ABTG leads felt that this had “left a legacy of unrealistic expectations.”(CFE Evaluation p. 42)

The evidence shows, however, that 100% of all the hard targets have been met with many having been exceeded. There is little evidence within the ABTG minutes to show disagreement with the original aspirations.

5.12 LLN Partner Perspective

Through an online consultation CFE asked members what impact they thought that the LLN had made regarding vocational learners, partner institutions and employers in the region.

The perception was that the ABTGs had made a positive impact on both vocational learners and institutions, but that the impact on employers was less certain. Beyond the achievement of targets the evidence strongly suggested that the institutions had gained from networking and the sharing of good practice. This impact would have been greater if participation had been greater.

“I think that’s been a big success, in getting collaboration between FE and HE partners. Doing collaborative work on curriculum between partners has been key to getting people engaged and working on a specific thing.” (ABTG Lead) [CFE Evaluation p.43].

Employers have been engaged with the majority of curriculum development either in their own right or through the relevant Sector Skills Council.

“We’ve pushed through scopes on five Foundation Degrees and all of those have been in consultation with the.... industry, because we wouldn’t begin to deliver them unless those people can commit a certain number of people to send on them.”(ABTG Lead) [CFE Evaluation p.44].

5.13 Conclusions

Strengths associated with the ABTG model:

- Industry knowledge. Activities were driven by people who have a knowledge of the local industries’ skill requirements and networks
- Responsiveness. Flexible nature of the ABTGs means that they have been responsive to changed market conditions be that a change of policy, demand patterns or learner needs
- Institutional co-operation. Activities undertaken can become embedded and therefore nurture sustainability

- Partnership development. Strengthens existing partnerships and encourages new ones. Bodes well for sustainability
- Project development. Many have commented on the open nature of the ABTG decision making process and this has aided new development and co-operation
- Employer engagement. This has greatly aided the development of relevant vocational course content
- Impact. Aided the aspirations and progression opportunities for vocational learners to engage with higher level learning
- Factors which have proved to be the most beneficial for this model of delivery are seen where:
 - a. Meetings were well attended
 - b. There was a range of partners and stakeholders consistently engaged
 - c. Activities were encouraged by the achievement of key targets and objectives

Inhibitors associated with the ABTG model

- Very poor attendance at some meetings
- Potential for less central control. There were, however, reporting back structures through, for example, Project Team attendance and participation in meetings, ABTG meeting minutes and reporting mechanisms to the Steering Group. These measures alleviated this situation.
- Evidence suggests that some ABTG leads may not have been afforded the time required by their employer to perform all the required ABTG tasks. This prompts a number of questions regarding absolute clarity about the role and the commitment of the institutions involved. An alternative may be a full time post or secondment from a partner institution. In the latter case, however, a three year secondment may not be attractive for either the individual or the individual's institution.
- The lack of full partner participation meant, in some cases, an unequal distribution of funds. It was noted, however, that the evidence clearly shows that considerable effort was made by the LLN to engage all partners and to emphasise the advantages of participation. In some specialised areas e.g. Food and Drink there were very few institutions offering this curriculum.

One very important consideration is the impact of the ABTG model on sustainability. The evidence suggests that the working relationships established through this mechanism, not just within the LNN but across the region, bodes well for further advances in vocational HE provision.

6. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

The Business Plan presented the initial target of a One-Stop- Shop. The aim was to harness the support of the relevant Sector Skills Councils, employers and networks established by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Links were also to be further developed with colleges

and universities. It was envisaged that this approach would provide a simplified process for users.

Initial feedback from employers, regarding their needs, was as follows:

- Clear, unambiguous course information available to partners across the network
- Route planning providing information on how courses link together to provide a route through to a chosen career
- Information aimed at employers and employees from SMEs to large public sector employers
- Information aimed at learners and prospective learners, be they school leavers or adults. This should include all aspects including the funding and loans available
- Services to learners and employers to take them from enquiry to enrolment
- Broker service to handle all aspects of enquiries related to any course offered by the network (Business Plan p.44)

Wherever possible the process was to use systems which were already in place. The development of the One-Stop-Shop was to be developed through a specific IAG Action Based Task Group.

The Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 1 (2007) states that the One-Stop-Shop was replaced by a plan to work with Aimhigher's East Midlands Progression Pathways Project for information and advice, together with such organisations as Nextsteps and Connexions. (Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 1 p.19)

In their peer review BBC&SSSC/LLN commented that the IAG ABTG membership was 'inconsistent and partner involvement in the practical delivery of initiatives became none existent' (BBC&SSSC/LLN Peer Evaluation p. 11). The lack of partnership support was apparent by the fact that the research and mapping had to be conducted by one of the Project Management Team. The review states that the ABTG's work was effectively taken over by the Project Management Team. There were also concerns expressed by other ABTG leads regarding the separation of IAG from core curriculum ABTG activity. The Project Team submitted a proposal to the Steering Group on 19th March 2008 with the intension of these concerns being addressed. This culminated in the Project Management Team continuing to co-ordinate and encourage IAG projects with funding being allocated to Project Leads. Some resources were devolved to ABTGs for IAG statistical information gathering within their partnerships. The Project Management Team held the remainder and allocated funds according to accepted proposals.

6.1 BBC&SSSC/LLN Conclusions and Recommendations

The BBC&SSSC/LLN team observed that different levels of information were available depending on the Sector and that this gave patchy access to IAG. The range of information

available included: web sites, self-assessment tools, career paths, local market information, virtual tours and signposting.

Research findings showed that FE/HE providers tended to focus on their own programmes and that their advice was not impartial. Employers were often not clear as to the range of qualifications on offer and government agencies were frequently focusing on different age groups, for example, those often relating to Levels 1-3 and not higher level skills.

Whilst IAG was available it was not offered universally by one provider. It was also found that learners and IAG providers may not have been aware of the range of services available to them.

A number of recommendations were made by the team. These were allied to three of the IAG ABTG target areas in the Network Development plan.

- A. To develop information and advice services for learners, employees and employers in relevant occupational areas.

Recommendations – signposting, staff development and a guidance pilot project

- B. IAG working with external agencies to compile comprehensive electronic prospectus.

Recommendation – signposting

- C. IAG working with key agencies to explore funding models for guidance which will address the increased need for guidance as a result of increased choice and flexibility which the LLN will stimulate

Recommendation – staff development, guidance pilot project

The team stated that there was evidence to support the decision to disband the IAG ABTG citing section 1.1 in the Business Plan that one of the LLN's stated aims was to 'create a climate for genuine collaboration between the institutions and their partners that is sustainable'. In the teams opinion there was neither genuine collaboration nor sustainability of the IAG ABTG. They considered that by devolving the IAG activity to the curriculum ABTGs there would be increased opportunities for collaboration and opportunities to achieve the IAG targets. The Project Management Team had introduced a number of measures to ensure that all curriculum areas were engaged with IAG activities. This had been achieved by the following mechanisms:

- Project Management Team itself co-ordinated staff development and IAG activities
- Project Management Team attended all ABTG meetings

- IAG was a standing item on all curriculum ABTG meetings
- Each ABTG Chair was charged with ensuring that all new curriculum projects had an IAG co-ordinator to undertake monitoring together with IAG signposting targets, including target numbers and evidence that IAG had been provided. (The BBC&SSC/ LLN Peer Review p.15)

The BBC&SSC/ LLN team expressed some concern about the additional Project Team workload which may have come about through the changes.

In the area of research and projects the BBC&SSC/ LLN team considered that the Project Management Team provided a clear focus and that the outcomes enabled decisions to be made about the priorities. They were confident that there would be successful outcomes from such projects as a result of the staff developing IAG materials, promotional activities, awareness raising and dissemination events.

6.2 Additional observations.

- A. Since the publication of the BBC&SSC/ LLN Peer Review there has been the successful launch of the Your Future East Midlands website, in 2008, which was partly funded by the LLN. The facility allows access to information regarding progression routes, education, careers and courses. It provides information for the 14-19 sector, adult learners, practitioners, and employers. In addition there is a career role data base.
- B. In keeping with the LLN's new procedures for furthering IAG through the curriculum ABTGs the following are examples of some of the activities which have taken place:
 - Food and Drink ABTG developed an information pack for work based learners.
 - The Colleges-University of Leicester Network (CULN) has been supported by the LLN in two IAG events. Other IAG activities have included a Focus on Fashion event supported by the John Lewis Partnership. This event combined industry representation with relevant advice on related higher education courses. This activity was allied to the Creative Industries ABTG. 70% of the students participating felt that they knew more about higher education and progression routes as a result of the event
 - Health and Social Care ABTG event aimed to raise awareness of the careers and educational opportunities in Health and Social Care for Leicestershire students. 300 students participated in interactive workshops provided by Network partners. Topics included; podiatry, play assistants, dentistry, clinical psychology, childcare, biomechanics, social work and complementary therapy.
 - Leicestershire and Rutland Hospice (LOROS) organised a series of taster sessions for Health and Social Care work-based learners which included information and advice on progression opportunities from NVQ programmes.

- 14-19 Diploma engagement activity included joint activity with CULN. Partnership working has involved representatives from across the region including 6 HEIs, 7 FEs and 3 Sector Skills Councils to consider Diploma developments. An additional event took place for parents and students. Further partnership work continued to ensure that there was accurate information regarding progression opportunities. (Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 3 [2009] p.12)
 - IAG work which has been undertaken since the Peer Review confirms that the new arrangements are working and that the process has led to greater cohesion even though this had led to a greater work load for the Project Management Team.
- C. XCRi developments. The LLN is a fully committed member of the JISC XCRi project. The project's aim is to establish specifications to exchange course related information. It is envisaged that this will enable course providers to publish their course information in a standard format enabling its easy collection for course search organisations such as UCAS and Your Futures.
- A general point is that the national initiative will be hindered if some institutions do not wish to supply the relevant information.
- D Partnership working has been a strong feature of the IAG activity. This has displayed the benefits of avoiding duplication and greatly increasing awareness of developments across the region. The work has identified progression routes across the ABTG curriculum areas, informed all interested parties of developments and related course provision to practical work based application.
- F The IAG statistics are impressive with 1,163 one to one contacts having being made 974 group support actions and 10,122 website hits. (Annual Report to HEFCE Year 3 Expenditure and Spending Profile - IAG)

6.3 Conclusions

The early informed action to move away from the original concept of a One - Stop – Shop and adopt a strategy managed from the centre but progressed with the full involvement of the ABTGs has proved to be a successful initiative.

Lessons learnt have included the need to ensure the commitment of colleges and schools before proceeding with planning and that interactive events are preferred to concentrated information giving sessions.

The activity over the whole period again shows the LLN partnership working ethos e.g. the Your Futures and XCRi projects together with a very determined effort in the LLN's own right to fully promote IAG across all partner activity and to strive for clear communication channels.

7. Staff Development

The Staff Development ABTG was established to provide support for all four curriculum task groups in order to enrich their development. Strong links were established between the Staff Development ABTG and the IAG ABTG (Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 1 [2007] p.22). This was in order to provide training for advice and guidance workers already employed by partner organisations so that they would be well equipped to support potential learners. The Staff Development ABTG included representatives from higher education, further education, training providers, Connexions, VESA and a Sector Skills Council.

7.1 First Year Activity

This included:

- Admissions Tutor Event. Raising awareness of vocational qualifications including BTECs, new Vocational Diplomas, OCRs and Foundation Degrees
- Development of staff training reference materials and a case study to explore the topic of vocational learning and their admissions issues.
- Web site resources were made known including data on demographic change and its impact on course demand, new vocational qualifications and barriers to Higher Education encountered by vocational learners

Needs identified:

- Admissions tutors in both FE and HE required greater understanding of the new vocational diplomas and their impact upon admissions policies
- Additional staff for workshops to support bridging activity for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) students
- Raising awareness to inform business support brokers of Network activity and how they may support this work including the new courses and modules
- Promotional events to raise awareness of the new Foundation Degrees including FE, HE staff, Training Providers, Connexions, Nextsteps and employers.
- ‘Train the Trainer’ events to raise awareness by training staff to inform their client groups about Foundation Degrees
- Staff training in Foundation Degree validation processes
- Providing the opportunity for staff from HE and FE to ‘shadow’ colleagues from neighbouring institutions to heighten awareness of the content and methods of delivery within their respective departments
- Progression Agreement training to support the development of agreements at the curriculum level ((Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 1 [2007] p.24)

7.2 Staff Development ABTG Meetings

In total five of these took place spanning a period from 6th December 2006 to 18th February 2008. Attendance numbers ranged from 12 at the highest (6th December 2006) to the lowest of 5 (10th December 2007) In the latter case three of the participants were from the LLN. The attendance over the period of the ABTG's existence showed little evidence of membership consistency. At the initial meeting it was stated that there needed to be 'buy in' from the top to the bottom of the partner institutions. This does not appear to have happened. Attempts were made to both achieve greater consistency of the core membership and also to extend the membership but without success.

The decision was made to devolve the Staff Development ABTG's duties to the Curriculum ABTGs. This action was endorsed by the curriculum ABTG leads and confirmed at the SSCLLN Steering Group Meeting on the 19th March 2008. The decision was made at the same time as that for the IAG ABTG (Minute 08/005). As with IAG, Staff Development was to be directly managed by the Project Management Team.

7.3 Staff Development Activity.

There is no doubt that the Staff Development has been very comprehensive and has responded to the expressed needs of the Network members. Staff Development has been a standing order on the Curriculum ABTGs' agendas and their requests have been processed through these bodies working with the Project Management Team.

Each activity has been accompanied by a detailed evaluation by the Project Management Team. The scope has been wide as seen in the examples from the first year's activities.

It is disappointing that, despite a focused marketing drive, a number of events have had to be cancelled due to a poor uptake. These included Foundation Degree promotional events, guidance for staff seeking to establish APEL systems, Train the Trainer events to support careers guidance professionals and an 'Accrediting Company Training' development day. The Project Management Team's evaluation of Projects SD3-0011 to SD3-018 showed that only one event out of the twelve planned took place. 80% of those emailed about the events deleted the messages without even opening them.

Those events which have recruited well related more to curriculum development, employer engagement, further education staff delivery and the promotion of the new 14-16 Diploma (Annual Report to HEFCE Year 3 2009 p. 11).

Where events have taken place the feedback has been very encouraging with many stating that the event they attended was excellent. (Staff Development Feedback returns)

7.4 Conclusion

Following on from an opening comment from the first Staff Development Meeting (6th December 2006) there needs to be 'buy in' from the top to the bottom of Network partners. Greater representational attendance at the early meetings would have more clearly informed

activities and consistency of attendance would have ensured process continuity. Clear report back procedures from meeting attendees to their institutions would also have been beneficial.

The early Staff Development ABTG experiences emphasised that activities needed to be far more closely linked to the delivery of programmes developed through the Curriculum ABTGs. Particular attention was to be focused on the skills needs of further education staff delivering on programmes at the higher level for the first time, particularly Foundation Degrees.

As is appropriate, the final year's activity has included a series of assessor training events with the emphasis on apprenticeships. The events have been designed to raise awareness amongst assessors of the higher level opportunities available to apprentices. The events have been attended by assessors from partner colleges, the NHS, clinical educators and teachers.

The initiative has also been taken to inform of other types of employment possibilities including social enterprises with an example from the Creative Industries. Information has been made available through a case study DVD and a dissemination event.

Despite some setbacks over the four years the SSCLLN Staff Development has made a very significant contribution to the partnership. Teams have responded quickly to changing situations with considerable success. 890 staff have undergone some element of staff development (Annual Report to HEFCE Year 3 2009 Appendix J supporting statistical information).

Individual institutional support is key to success and cannot be overemphasised.

8. Marketing

In 2008 the Network offered marketing support to ABTG members who were involved in the development and adaptation of the curriculum. This was, in part, because of the realisation that the traditional marketing methods employed by partner institutions were deemed not to have been sufficient to achieve the Network's target number of learners.

The traditional methods included:

- Open days
- Prospectus
- Course leaflets
- Advertising in web directories

Network additional support included:

- Production of additional paper based materials
- Road shows for community groups
- Organisation of open evenings
- Visits to employers

8.1 Specific Marketing Initiatives

- SSCLLN Website Development. An essential Marketing and dissemination facility
- Promoting new developments in the regional creative industry initially increasing awareness of the provision at the recently restructured Brooksby Melton College.
- Information regarding taster courses
- Promotional DVDs
- Supporting the Health and Social Care ABTG with the development of an E Learning package focussing on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Wellbeing
- Stimulate interest in Food and Drink related courses at Leicester College (one of only two institutions who have effectively engaged with the ABTG)
- Open Day for migrant workers in the food and drink industry to be informed of work based courses

8.2 Conclusions

Marketing has played a vital role in SSCLLN awareness raising and encouraging widening participation not just within the academic institutions but with employers and the wider community. It has also helped to inform where support should be provided.

One example is the E-learning package focusing on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Wellbeing stated in **8.1**. This project supported educational and social care sector staff who wished to hold focus groups to inform effective marketing for the proposed provision. The first group included school nurses, the second trainee youth workers.(Project Evaluation 02-001 Focus Group e-Learning Package). 100% of participants agreed with the need for the product and that e. learning was the appropriate means of delivery.

The dissemination of information in a different manner, where possible, has provided the opportunity for partners to consider incorporating these practices into their own marketing.

9. Progression Agreements

The LNN saw the progression of vocational learners to higher education as being at the centre of the Network's vision from the start. The prime aim of the Progression Agreement is to promote progression to higher education.

The Progression Agreement consists of a document signed by educational partners. It establishes the number of conditions which need to be met in order for applicants to a specific HE programme to be given a guaranteed place or the enhanced offer of a place.

The agreements have been implemented in the curriculum priority areas which correspond to the ABTGs i.e. Health and Social Care, Food and Drink, the Creative Industries. Construction

has experienced difficulties in this area (See 9.4). In the New Business Plan attention has been focused on Advanced Apprentices and the 14-19 Diploma in all sectors.

Leap Ahead Lifelong Learning Network has also promoted Progression Agreements within its geographical area of the East Midlands

9.1 Processes

- A Progression Agreement Group was formed
- Progression Agreements were the key item at the Partnership Forum Meeting on 24th May 2007
- Research into the attitudes of HE institutions
- After an initial period (See 4.3) Progression Agreement development was devolved to the Project Management Team.
- Bi-lateral, fact finding, meetings with HEIs and FECs involving academic staff, admissions tutors and student tutorial managers

9.2 Examples of expressed issues and concerns

- How to include a guarantee of places
- How to ensure that a Progression Agreement did not create an exclusive arrangement that constricted learner progression
- Whether to include a common core of learning as a suite of additional qualifications
- How to ensure buy-in from senior management and at course team level
- What would be required of course/programme teams?
- What would be the staff development needs?

9.3 Progression Agreement Facilitating Documentation

Draft Progression Agreement Protocols

- Draft Course/ Programme Level Agreement
- Details of what is required of HEIs and other level 4 providers
- Details of what is required of Level 3 learners
- Examples of Progression Agreement models
- Guidance notes for developing course/Programme Level Agreements (9.1-9.3 above Annual Report to HEFCE Year 1 Sept 2007 p. 26-27).

9.4 Outcomes

The Annual Report to HEFCE for Year 2 (October 2008) stated that a strategic level agreement had been reached and signed by all 23 College Principals and Higher Education Institution Vice-Chancellors within the Network. By so doing they agreed to endorse a set of protocols that established the parameters of the Progression Agreement.

In addition there was a course/programme level agreement leading to the ABTGs promoting the development of course/programme level agreements between specified courses and programmes.

Both the strategic and course/programme level agreements comprehensively cover the general principles and protocols. Examples of good practice, at course/programme level, include the agreement to:

- Encourage and facilitate staff participation in staff development activities that enhance the developing of progression agreements
- Provide a range of information, advice and guidance services to learners that outline progression routes and opportunities
- Develop jointly planned enhancement activities that increase Level 3 learners knowledge and understanding of HE. (Annual Report to HEFCE Year 2 October 2008 p17)

By the end of 2008 progression agreements had been established within the Food and Drink Sector ABTG (assisting vocational Level 3 students to progress to Foundation Degree) and Health and Social Care e.g. BTEC students studying Applied Science at Leicester College being given access to a range of courses at De Montfort University. All students would have to be suitably qualified under the terms of the agreement.

In their Peer Evaluation BBC&S/SSC LLN states that the Progression Agreement implemented provided ‘a lever to good effect operationally when negotiating agreements at course level with faculty staff’ (Peer Evaluation p. 9). The evaluation also comments that most of the SSCLLN agreements under consideration have been single course onto single course and that this may more easily guarantee progression.

The 2008 and 2009 Reports to HEFCE confirm the appointment of two 0.5 posts, during this period, to assist with the Progression Agreement procedures.

9.5 Conclusions

There is no doubting the determination of the LLN to further the cause of Progression Agreements as a fundamental part of its mission. The work has not just involved the mechanisms for reaching and implementing the agreements but also facilitating student academic and application preparation for entering a Level 4 programme.

The strategic level agreement has been a considerable achievement and has, in a very practical manner, opened the door for course/programme level agreements.

The close working relationship between the teaching staff from FEs and HEIs has meant that there is far greater knowledge of each others provision. Students have benefitted from a range of enhancement activities that have been designed to provide an insight into the specialist skills and career options which are relevant to the degrees in the Progression Agreements.

The LLN's commitment to Progression Agreements continued into 2010 with one of the 0.5 posts being extended beyond the original contract to develop Progression Agreements between partner colleges and training providers to enhance opportunities for Advanced Apprentices and New Diploma students to proceed to H.E.

A number of challenges have been identified in the Annual Report to HEFCE 2010:

- The current economic downturn has resulted in some universities being reluctant to develop progression agreements because of the potential for there to be an excess of student applications over the number of places available. They are, therefore, reluctant to commit in case they may have to disappoint some potential students.
- In the case of Advanced Diplomas, very few have been developed in the region which has led to difficulties in establishing partnership arrangements. Despite this, agreements have been developed between the Diploma in Engineering at Stephenson College and relevant degree programmes at De Montfort University (DMU). In addition progression agreement activities have taken place between Diplomas in Society, Health and Development and Business Administration and Finance at John Leggott College, Lincolnshire with DMU.
- In the case of Advanced Apprenticeships some university staff were unfamiliar with the value of functional skills.
- Some enhancement activities for potential students and employers were required due to the employers' reluctance to fund higher education courses, or to release apprentices, in the current economic downturn.

Successes

- The development of an academic literacy toolkit by DMU to facilitate those students lacking in confidence to proceed to HE. New Diploma staff at John Leggott College have undergone staff development in embedding this programme in three diploma courses.
- The mapping of five progression agreements in Engineering from FE to HE identified the barriers as the differing methods of study and the additional development of mathematics. This resulted in part of the progression agreement for Loughborough College including the development of mathematics study skills modules. The model was then used in other colleges. (Annual Report to HEFCE 2010 p.12-13)
- Most progress to date has been made in Health and Social Care, Creative Industries and Food and Drink. Construction has experienced difficulties in achieving Progression Agreements, but has developed flexible pathways for achieving progression through its constructionsite initiative. **(See constructionsite Section 5.10.1)**
- Statistics from the Annual Report to HEFCE for 2009 state that there were 1,200 students with a potential to benefit from this project. Actual number

who will be participating has not yet been confirmed. The number of progression agreements signed is 361 (Annual Report to HEFCE 2010 – Monitoring Report)

- The number of progression routes is now 341 ((Annual Report to HEFCE 2010 p.4)
- Research is currently being carried out to determine quantitative success in progression to higher education. Early feedback has shown progression involving the following institutions: Regent College, Grantham College, Leicester College, Loughborough College, De Montfort University, Lincoln University, Leicester University, Loughborough University and Bishop Grosseteste University College. In each of these institutions it was ascertained that the relationship would be sustained. (Project Management Team Feedback Grid)
- Despite some of the difficulties which could not have been foreseen at the time of original Business Plan the LLN has persevered and adapted to the new situation through its partnership working. It is to be hoped that the LLN's endeavours will be sustained by the close working relationships which have been established.

10. New Business Plan June 2009 to December 2010

The LLN was originally funded until March 2010. Excess funds were remaining at this time enabling HEFCE to be approached with the proposal to extend the project lifespan until December 2010. HEFCE feedback to the LLN has been complementary especially in the organisation's support for curriculum development at HE level and progression agreements from BTEC programmes to HE. The New Business Plan supported the HEFCE and Department for Business Innovation and Skills wishes to encourage more progression opportunities for non-standard entry learners including those in employment. The New Business Plan concentrated on employees, apprentices and 14-19 Diploma students. It also strongly promoted sustainability.

In contrast to the original Business Plan, with a key role being played by the ABTGs, the new Plan's objectives were managed by the Project Team. The reduced funding has been directed to specific, well defined activities.

10.1 Aim and Objectives

Aim To increase the opportunities for progression to higher education for non-standard entry groups

Objectives

- A. To work with apprentices and training providers to support and encourage their progression to higher education
- B. To support the promotion of 14-19 Diplomas and the development of progression agreements

- C. To support brokerage services to promote higher level learning and to raise awareness of SSCLLN programmes

10.2 Stakeholders

- A. Apprentices, assessors, training providers networks, schools and Unionlearn
- B. HE staff, parents, students, FE colleges, Nextstep and IAG providers
- C. Train to Gain, Business Link Advisors, HE and FE partners, Beyond Brokerage brokers

10.3 Sustaining the Plan post December 2010

The priorities were the three key activities included in the plan:

- A. Supporting apprentice progression to higher education through the LSC/Local Education Authority and the ‘Your Futures’ website. A blueprint for developing progression agreements as one part of the legacy left by the LLN
- B. Support for students on the 14-19 Diplomas should continue through partner FE and HE institutions again including the blueprint for the development of progression agreements
- C. Support for the brokerage of higher level learning should be managed through EMDA and regional HEIs

10.4 Progress to Date

In order to accommodate the new business plan’s purposes the SSCLLN Steering Group was slightly reconfigured. This is to best reflect the changed direction i.e. apprenticeships, the 14-19 Diplomas and support for business brokers.

10.4.1 IAG

The Your Future East Midlands website (www.yourfuture-eastmidlands.co.uk) has been refined and expanded to include information on higher level part time progression opportunities for Advanced Apprentices. This is a comprehensive range of options including:

- NVQs at Level 4
- HNCs and HNDs
- Professional qualifications at Level 4 and above
- Foundation Degrees
- Degrees

All have been mapped against the apprentice frameworks offered in the East Midlands. Care has been taken, with the providing institutions, to ensure that the opportunities are ‘real’, that they are suitable for advanced apprentices and that an Advanced Apprentice’s qualifications are commensurate with what the institutions require.

The information has been supplemented by the Higher Education and Career Opportunities DVD produced in partnership with Aimhigher Nottinghamshire. This includes four case studies on four Advanced Apprentices who have progressed to higher education.

10.4.2 Curriculum Development

All targets have now been reached for curriculum change, Foundation Degrees and Bridging courses (See 5.10.1)

The arrangements for the continuation of support for the construction site project have been established. This is part of the initiative to try to ensure the site's sustainability. The LLN has continued to support the initiative even though the Construction ABTG has ceased and the co-developer of the site (Leap Ahead LLN) has closed at the end of its project life span.

The construction site project is now managed by a steering group chaired by the Director of the East Midlands Further Education Council.

The site has been visited by 2,500 people between March and August 2010 from all over the country. Google Analytics is used to plot the statistical details and further enhance the provision including the potential to widen the partnership e.g. City of Westminster College.

10.4.3 Employers

The LLN has continued with its employer engagement work delivering a collection of training programmes to business advisors including those from Business Link and Beyond Brokerage.

The completed resources will be made available to all the LLN's partners. They can be adapted to meet the needs and markets of the individual institutions. This is another example of promoting sustainability.

An employer support pack has been developed with The Leading Edge (the employer engagement team at the University of Leicester) to enable the long term development of the resource. Examples of the material include: visual diagrams showing levels and qualifications, a guide to the types of HE qualifications, identifying training needs, case studies and the return on investment.

10.4.4 Equality and Diversity

By their very nature, LLNs encourage equality and diversity. Particular examples in the LLN's last year include enrichment activities for apprentices providing them with an insight into practical HE activities and part time provision. Girls from Stephenson College have attended events to promote progression to engineering at De Montfort University. The promotion of careers in textiles for boys has continued ensuring that they were aware of the full range of employment opportunities e.g. within the motor industry and health as well as fashion. (Annual Report to HEFCE 2010 p.10)

10.4.5 XCRi (See 6.2 C)

This provides another example of the drive for sustainability. Partners have been encouraged to engage with the XCRi standard.

A technical community has been established with facilities for online discussion and informal meetings. The group does not require any specific funding, but does rely on the good will and shared purpose of the group members together with a willingness to promote the initiative. UCAS is committed to using this system.

10.5 Conclusions

The New Business plan has clearly been adhered to. The engagement with the advanced apprentice programmes has been pursued. This is illustrated by the negotiations with the National Apprenticeship Service to make IAG an essential part of their provision. This has been supported by materials, supplied by the LLN, which can be disseminated by the National Apprenticeship Service after the LLN ceases to operate. The production of the toolkit for assessors, the progression route brochure and related staff development activity support the New Business Plan's aim and objectives. Support has been provided for the 14-19 Diplomas and the continuation of the 'constructionsite' initiative.

The quest for sustainability is clearly seen in many of the areas.

11. Best Practice Guides

Best Practice Guides have been produced to provide a means of sharing the LLN's experiences in promoting vocational education and progression. It is clear that a wealth of experience has been gained. The sharing of this information with interested parties may enable them to have an overview of the issues and strategies involved and therefore be aware from the outset. This is particularly true of new initiatives.

The guides are listed below with a brief outline of their contents.

11.1 Blueprint for Curriculum Development

- Concentrates on the experiences within the Creative Industries ABTG and the procedures to assess curriculum proposals presented to the group.
- Formation of a Curriculum Development Committee
- Checklist for standardised approach
- Skills shortage information

11.2 Developing a Theatre Company Business within an FE/HE Environment – Bishop Grosseteste Touring Company

- Sources of Finance
- 'Best fit' business model

- Finances
- Types of social enterprise
- Company Registration
- Sustainability
- Management role case studies

11.3 Targeting Vocational Learners – Innovative Marketing and Information, Advice and Guidance Techniques

- Development of IAG services available to vocational learners
- Highlights key activities e.g. online resources, working with Sector Skills Councils, working with existing networks and Unionlearn
- Emphasises the need for interaction and practical tasks as means of engagement

11.4 Developing Vocational Curriculum

- Emphasis on the types of programme required to suite the working lifestyles of vocational learners
- Supporting case studies include the Performance Foundation Degree with Leicester College, ‘constructionsite,’ the Lorus led FD in Health and Social Care (Palliative and Supportive Care) together with scoping studies in Food and Drink Manufacturing

11.5 ‘constructionsite.’ Developing a shared website resource

- Produced in response to information requests from other sectors
- Suggestions are provided as to how to proceed based on the LLN’s experience in this area
- Includes all the development stages and process examples

11.6 Delivering/Developing the University Certificate in Professional Development

- Focuses on Creative Industries courses
- Module planning to develop business and enterprise skills. The module is part of an FD but can be studied independently, at De Montfort University, as a University Certificate in Professional Development
- Includes module pack, teaching methodology, learning strategies and assessment rational

11.7 Development of Progression Agreements

- Benefits
- Challenges
- Step by step process guide
- Case studies
- Protocols

11.8 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

- Explains the terms APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), APCL (recognition and use of certified learning towards a new programme of study) and APEL (incidental prior learning which has not been assessed)
- Considers the advantages, challenges and solutions supported by current examples

11.9 Additional Shared resources

In addition to the Best Practice Guides the LLN has also produced the following resources :

- DVD ‘Inspiring Apprentices to Progress – Higher Education and Career Opportunities.’ Provides four case studies of student progression in Construction, Food Processing, Early Years and Engineering. Jointly produced by SSCLLN and Aimhigher Nottinghamshire.
- Information, Advice and Guidance – Examples of best practice co-produced by SSCLLN and Leap Ahead LLN
- Progression – Examples of best practice co-produced by SSCLLN and Leap Ahead LLN
- Employer Responsive Curriculum co-produced by SSCLLN and Leap Ahead LLN
- The Creative’s Journey to Success. Experiences and advice concerning entering the Creative Industries as a self employed freelancer or establishing a small business. (Working from Dusk to Dawn)

11.10 Conclusions

The guides provide a very useful insight for those embarking on any related ventures. Many aspects have been placed within the context of real situations which will not be dissimilar to those faced by other institutions or curriculum areas. Considerable time may be saved by considering the materials available. It is unlikely that any one guide will produce the complete solution, but they may well inform as to the best way to proceed.

This initiative is an important strand of the Network’s legacy and, hopefully, may help to avoid costly duplication.

The material has been distributed to LLN partners and other stakeholder groups (Annual Report to HEFCE 2010 p.6).

Consideration may be given to approaching appropriate national bodies to widen the distribution still further.

12. Final Report Conclusions

The LLN has made significant efforts to address the issue of vocational learner progression to higher level courses. Its strategy of partner engagement within the SSCLLN area, and the wider East Midlands, has greatly enhanced funding opportunities and avoided duplication. One example is the partnership with Leap Ahead LLN. Another is NTI.

The organisation has striven to achieve the target set in both the first and second Business Plans, but has not been afraid to adjust according to changed conditions. The hard target achievement rate is impressive not just in numerical terms but, more importantly, in the work's content and the clear intention of sustainability.

The soft target strategy has not received the same amount of financial assistance as the hard targets, but has been very active as can be seen, for example, by the degree of employer engagement and the progression initiatives.

Sustainability has been a vital component throughout, but has received greater impetus in the final year with the arrangements, for example, of the continuation of 'constructionsite', the relationship the National Apprenticeship Service and the Good Practice Guides.

It is disappointing that all the potential partners did not engage. Some of those who did participate experienced difficulties in attending meetings and in being consistent in their representation. Any future projects may benefit from a robust statement of commitment.

It must be stated that the majority of partners did engage and led to very successful outcomes

Future developments, built on the project's work, will probably be influenced as much by the changed HEFCE funding regime and economic scenario as by the LLN's legacy. It is to be hoped that the latter succeeds.