



Introduction from chair and vice-chair

We would like to welcome you to the first bulletin of the 2008-09 National Learner Panel and hope you find the work described in the bulletin to be both informative and interesting. The panel was selected in October 2008 and we have been busy already looking at plans for the Skills Funding Agency, the adult advancement and careers service and Skills Accounts, with much more planned for 2009.

We will draw on our experience as members of last year's panel to encourage and support this year's panel and look forward to the challenges we will undoubtedly be offered as the FE system undergoes a period of huge change.

As the new chair and vice-chair of the 2008-09 panel, we feel privileged to be working with a hugely diverse and talented group of learners taken from across the sector. This diversity is one of the strengths the NLP has to offer, alongside our enthusiasm

and first-hand experience as FE learners. As a reference group the NLP will continue to promote the role that the learner voice can play in policy development to create a better FE system for everyone.

We hope you enjoy this bulletin.

Best wishes,

Oliver Wood, chair

and Graeme Brinded, vice-chair.



What is the National Learner Panel?

www.direct.gov.uk/nationallearnerpanel

The National Learner Panel is a reference group set up by the Government to provide a learner perspective on emerging further education policies and initiatives and to put the learner voice at the heart of the policymaking process. It consists of 20 part-time volunteers aged between 18 and 65, drawn from across all forms of further education from A-levels to apprenticeships, from adult and community learning to work-based learning.

Our work in 2008–09



Anthony Spelman

I am 65 and have just started the ECDL at Failsworth Lifelong Learning Centre in Manchester. Learning has changed my life so much that I want to inspire others to carry on their learning too. I enjoy being part of a team who can make a significant difference. I won the NIACE North West Regional Senior Learners award in May 2008 and the Oldham User Committee overall award for ICT.



Amadou Bah

I attended my primary and secondary schools in Guinea where I was born. I am studying business at Nescot College in Surrey and am a class rep. I deliver the Total Respect training course for CROA to local authorities across the country and am committed to contributing positively to the development and welfare of the UK. I am a friendly and hard-working young man.



Sharon Schulz

I am studying for O and A levels through the adult education system and have obtained my personal goal of achieving these qualifications. I would very much like to go to University and study German and European Business Studies. I am a member of the NIACE learner panel in Leicester and a logical, confident and focussed person. I love reading and literature and have a wide experience of learning.



Beth Walker

I am 21 and attended Chichester College for three years and was heavily involved with the students' union. In my third year I became the college's student governor. In March 2007, I was elected Vice-President (FE) for the National Union of Students. Within my remit, I have developed a particular interest in ESOL provision and faith within FE.



Victoria Fowler

I am currently studying A-level Politics, English Literature and Language and Law. I am Female Chair of King Edward College Council and a Student Governor. I am a confident public speaker and I am a manager/director of my own young volunteer performance group. I take a keen interest in both local education issues and national policies concerning education and am an enthusiastic and insightful young learner.



Lucy Atkinson

I am 19 years old and am an apprentice. I have been vice-chair of the Humber Apprentice Panel since October 2007 and am currently working as an IT technician thanks to my NVQ. In my spare time I enjoy reading, watching films and running my own personal website which now has over 300 members. I am innovative, confident, and down to earth and my aim is to improve the quality of the learning experience for everyone involved.

Panel outputs

1

Providing a learner perspective on the proposals for the Skills Funding Agency

The NLP met with DIUS on 24 November 2008 to discuss how to make its proposals for the Skills Funding Agency (the funding agency for post-19 learning and skills that will supersede the Learning and Skills Council in 2010) work for learners. The NLP believes that proposals for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) should create a simplified, joined-up funding system for learners to access, with enhanced online services. In our view, it is essential that the Government consults a wide range of learner voices when setting up the SFA and then continues to do so on an ongoing basis from 2010. We would like to see improvements to the content and delivery of IAG, to ensure that learners are able to derive maximum benefit from the services provided by the new agency. We also recommended an increase in public funding options for learners over 25. Bobbie McClelland from the DIUS post-19 unit said, "I found the panel's experience really valuable and it was great to meet such a lively and engaged set of people who are determined to make a difference. The views of the group - both in terms of the benefits and challenges they see for the Skills Funding Agency - will help shape the thinking that is now being done to develop the structure, design and ways of working, so that it is truly learner and employer focused."

2

Ensuring proposals for adult IAG and funding meet adult learners' needs

The panel held a second working session on 24 November 2008 to work in more detail on the proposals for two particular features of the SFA: the new adult advancement and careers service (aacs) and Skills Accounts. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) on course and career options and available public funding will be provided by the new aacs. Learners will soon be able to open an online Skills Account, which will be linked to aacs online services and will contain a voucher for their portion of public funding (available through the SFA). We believe online Skills Accounts have the potential to increase access to IAG and funding, and they could increase awareness of the different learning pathways available. In our view Skills Account vouchers will be more meaningful to learners if their value is expressed in terms of qualification levels and units, rather than placing the emphasis on the vouchers' monetary value. We think it is important that IAG is available face-to-face with centres offering accessible opening hours at reasonably close proximity (as well as online and via telephone). We highlighted the importance of impartial IAG that is not steered by government targets. Christine Doubleday from DIUS said, "The purpose of the adult advancement and careers service and Skills Accounts is to enable individuals to progress in life and work through improving or gaining skills, whatever the starting point or circumstances. The panel discussion was informative and I was grateful for the attention and time participants gave. Those views, along with a range of other stakeholder views, are informing policy development."

3

Ensuring the Framework for Excellence meets learners' needs

The Framework for Excellence (FfE) is a new approach to measuring the performance of learning providers according to how responsive they are to learners' and employers' needs. The 2006–07 NLP first inputted into the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) proposals for the FfE at an early stage of development in 2007. We reconvened to discuss the learner responsiveness strand of the Framework for Excellence on 9 December 2008. We outlined the most important factors for us in choosing a course and provider: cost, sources of financial support, locality, and the timing of the course in question. We most like to access this information about courses and providers through open days, personal contact with careers advisers or course tutors and through college websites or Learndirect. Amongst other recommendations, we suggested that learners are involved in the design of the Framework for Excellence webpages and that each webpage features a helpline number (a helpline with accessible opening hours for full-time employees) offering personal contact for additional information and clarifications. Berni Henson from the LSC said, "The LSC is delighted to continue working with the NLP on seeking the views of learners on many developing policy areas. We look forward to active discussions and input over the coming year."

4

AoC conference seminar: effective and inclusive approaches to learner involvement

On 18 November 2008, the NLP sponsored a seminar at the Association of Colleges (AoC) annual conference. The seminar was entitled 'How to involve learners: effective and inclusive approaches'. Two members of the 2007–08 NLP, Gaye Warwick and Bob Tidmarsh, joined three college principals (Peter Davies from City Lit, Richard Atkins from Exeter College and Maggie Galliers from Leicester College) for a panel discussion on this topic. The two panel members, both part-time adult learners, spoke about their personal experiences of learner involvement – what has worked well for them and what would have improved their experience. They recommended a number of ways to give learners an increased sense of ownership over their learning experience. They suggested colleges need to foster an environment and timetable during the working day that caters to older learners' needs as well as to teenagers. They would like to see colleges targeting information and invitations explicitly at part-time learners, in order to raise awareness of opportunities to get involved in college life.

Promoting the work of the panel



The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is the sponsor body for the National Learner Panel for 2008–09. LSIS is working closely with the panel to further develop the links with FE sector bodies and ensure the work of the panel is promoted as widely as possible.

On **4 November 2008** Oliver Wood took part in the annual Skill conference in London. Oliver was a member of the Q&A panel at the end of the conference.

On **20 November 2008** Lucy Atkinson took part in the inaugural National Apprenticeship Service stakeholder group meeting.

On **24 November 2008** the NLP 2008–09 held its first full panel meeting. The details of its work are inside this bulletin.

On **9 December 2008** several panel members met with policy leads from DIUS, the LSC and LSIS for training to improve their understanding of policy development.

On **21 January 2009** panel members participated in the LSIS Leading Learners Conference.

On **29 January 2009** Chris Larkin gave a presentation at the Student Governor Forum in London about his experience of being a student governor at Aylesbury College and being a member of the NLP.



Keeping informed

Full versions of the panel's recommendations on a range of issues can be ordered via the website at www.direct.gov.uk/nationallearnerpanel.

If you'd like to be added to the NLP's distribution list and receive copies of our responses in the future, please email us at nlp@shm-ltd.co.uk and title your email 'subscribe'. Alternatively please contact Kate Peden or Sarah Tyler on 020 7242 5504 for further information.



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