



Contents:

- [Introduction](#)
- [14-19 Education](#)
- [Employers and Skills](#)
- [International Comparisons](#)
- [Hot Topic](#)

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[]

(X) Add () Remove

[X] Send as HTML

[Submit]

Archive:

- [Issue 17](#)
November 3, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 17
- [Issue 16](#)
September 25, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 16
- [Issue 15](#)
July 25, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 15
- [LSC newsletter Issue 14](#)
May 29, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 14
- [LSC Newsletter Issue 13](#)
April 16, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 13
- [Issue 12 LSC Newsletter](#)
March 6, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 12
- [LSC Newsletter Issue 11](#)
January 22, 2008
Vol. 1 Issue 11
- [LSC Newsletter Issue 10](#)
December 10, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 10
- [LSC Newsletter Issue 9](#)
November 9, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 9
- [LSC Newsletter Issue 8](#)
September 26, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 8

Introduction

In light of the Machinery of Government changes from February 2009 the LSC Research newsletter will be discontinued. The last newsletter will be distributed during January 2009. We would like to thank readers for their interest and feedback over the last 2 years and hope that the newsletter has provided a value resource. An alternative source of research news can be accessed via The UK Commission for Employment and Skills [newsletter](#) called Intelligence which looks at the latest news on employment and skills from a research and policy perspective and contains a monthly spotlight looking at an issue each month in more depth.

14-19 Education

International Strategy for Further Education

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills has published an international strategy for further education (FE) in England. It aims to provide foundation for all individual FE providers to create their own strategies, tailor their own organisations and relevant to the needs of their own communities . clients. It acknowledges that companies not only increasingly require staff ca of working effectively in international markets, but also need to draw on the international talent pool to meet their workforce needs in the UK. The goals strategy relate to: supporting social cohesion and global citizenship; support engagement with international partners; maximising the contribution of the service to overseas trade and inward investment; and developing an underpin infrastructure to support international engagement. A high level action plan is presented which prioritises the following areas:

- Consider starting a sector research unit to map international activity co-ordinate investigation into related issues.
- Working with partners to explore how international activity can be integrated into mainstream practice.
- Looking into the development of systematic FE workforce development programmes and toolkits.
- Developing effective consortia to respond to opportunities and encouraging greater co-operation and information sharing between relevant organisations and agencies.

Full details [here](#)

The True Cost of College

The Learning and Skills Network (LSN), in partnership with the National Union of Students (NUS), has produced a report with the aim of providing an overview of the cost of studying in further education (FE). It also investigated the impact student financial support has on an individual's learning experience. The research found evidence that financial hardship still presents a barrier to further education for many students and for others it prevents them getting the most out of their studies. The other main findings were that:

- Students in FE have to look to mainly their own earnings, and to fa

[LSC Newsletter Issue 7](#)
August 13, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 7

[LSC Newsletter Issue 6](#)
July 17, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 6

[LSC Newsletter Issue 5](#)
June 19, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 5

[LSC Newsletter Issue 4](#)
May 30, 2007

[LSC Newsletter Issue 3](#)
May 8, 2007

[LSC Newsletter Issue 2](#)
March 16, 2007

[LSC Newsletter Issue 1](#)
February 15, 2007
Vol. 1 Issue 1

Tell a Colleague >>

and friends, for financial support.

- Many students contemplate dropping out because of a lack of financial support.
- Many students report that they have lost, in some cases substantial, earnings as a result of participating in FE.
- There is evidence that financial support from public funds makes a difference, but most schemes of support are not well known to potential students.

Full details [here](#)

Employers and Skills

ESOL in Post-Compulsory Learning

An Ofsted survey has been published that evaluates the quality of provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) offered in the post-compulsory learning and skills sector. Ofsted inspectors visited FE colleges, adult and community learning providers and independent work-based learning providers. They found ESOL provision to have improved steadily since inspections that took place between 2001 and 2005. This is measured in terms of the proportion of provision with a satisfactory grading. However, the survey also found that the proportion that is good or outstanding has not increased and remains too low.

Full details [here](#)

The Sectoral Approach in European Training Cooperation

An article in the *European Journal of Vocational Training* discusses what is understood by the term 'sector' in the context of vocational training in Europe. It considers different categorisations of the economy and also definitions of a sector for the purposes of vocational training initiatives. It is suggested that the definition of the term 'sector' should be introduced that is suitable for training practice policy and can at the same time assume all relevant data from the sectoral statistics. It is argued that sectoral approaches are particularly useful in Europe where a high degree of cross-border networking is required.

The full reference of the article is: Tutschner, H., Heß, E. and Spöttl, G. (2006) 'The relevance of the sectoral approach in European training cooperation', *European Journal of Vocational Training*, 44-2, pp.162-180.

Bosses turn to training to credit-crunch proof their business

New research by the Association of Colleges (AoC) has found that employers are pledging to train their staff to protect themselves against the economic downturn. Three quarters of company directors (77 per cent) believe it is important to invest in staff training in the current economic climate and nearly one in five (18 per cent) said their organisation would increase the amount of training it provides during the credit crunch with half (55 per cent) saying it would remain at the current level.

The research also found that 76 per cent of company directors said that training helps to diversify skills in the workforce, 84 per cent claimed that employees are far more efficient following training and 82 per cent reported an uplift in staff productivity.

Full details [here](#)

New Flexible Qualifications and Credit Framework

Learners will be more able to study in 'bite-sized chunks', building up a portfolio

accredited training which suits their individual needs under a new system devised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

The new Qualifications and Credit Framework will enable people to gain qualifications at their own pace, from a number of sources, in a way that suits them - and to carry the modules with them if, for example, they change jobs. Employers will find it easier to find or develop employees with the skills they need for business success. By 2010 all key vocational qualifications will be approved by Sector Skills Councils and readily available to learners in small, credit-based units of learning.

For more information click [here](#)

Simplification of Skills in England

A plan for the simplification of skills has been developed by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Its aim is to make publicly funded training provision more flexible and responsive to business needs by providing employers with access to a team of brokers who will advise on the business and training support best suited to their businesses. A new web-based tool will complement the work of the brokers whereby employers will be able to create a skills development plan for their organisation and find out what courses are available.

The report concludes that "Whilst the above descriptions may suggest further complexity, the proposals effectively provide employers with two connected points of access to education, employment and skills services - the Talent Map and the Integrated Brokerage Service - and a single programme offer under Train to Gain which, by matching an agreed company training and development plan to a background menu of tariffs, provides each company with a single training support offer and a tailored and managed programme of skills and employment interventions matched to their business opportunities or challenges".

Full details [here](#)

Findings from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS)

NLSS: Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD) Report

As part of the NLSS 2007 project, which provided feedback on the quality of teaching, responsiveness and support that learners experience from their providers, supplementary reports were produced to explore the experiences of learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in more detail. A total of 43,756 interviews with learners were conducted to identify learner characteristics and their satisfaction with the learning experience. Overall attitudes towards courses and learning providers were consistently high amongst learners with a disability and/or with learning difficulties, as amongst learners as a whole. Those with learning difficulties were more likely to mention lack of support as a reason for dissatisfaction and those with a disability were most likely to leave their course early (often through ill health).

An LLDD overview report is available [here](#), a report on learners with disabilities [here](#) and on learners with learning difficulties [here](#).

NLSS: Early Leavers Report

The NLSS 2007 findings on the total learner base (43,756) also highlighted that learners who left their course early are most dissatisfied with their learning experience. This prompted further analysis to look specifically at this group of learners. The NLSS research explores the reasons for non-completion (such as choice of course or problems with tutors) and the type of learners who are more likely to leave early (relating to personal or educational background). The early leavers report is available [here](#).

International Comparisons

VET in labour market integration

A report by research consultancy ECOTEC maps progress against the priorities for vocational education and training (VET) set out in the Maastricht Communiqué in December 2004. This was part of 'The Copenhagen Process' on linking VET to higher education and the role of VET in supporting the labour market and social integration of groups at risk. The report examines the most recent developments in the labour market which are affecting demands on VET systems and tries to develop an understanding of how VET systems are generally configured to respond to these demands. Among the conclusions are:

- Although low skills play a key role in disadvantage and exclusion and although VET is clearly central to addressing the problem of low skills, it is not *the* panacea.
- The training needs of 'at risk' groups are not just for occupationally specific training but also for training in generic transferable skills.
- Employers tend to be engaged in integration policies through incentives or subsidies and considerable scope remains for them to play a more active role.
- Few examples were found of programmes that follow up low-skilled people after they have secured employment and ensure they receive further training with their new employer.

Full details [here](#)

Measuring Improvements in Learning Outcomes

How can school performance be measured accurately to improve learning outcomes? This is explored in a new OECD publication which proposes a value-added model of measuring which provides a fair, precise and quantitative tool for assessing students' progress. Unlike some league tables which rely on raw test scores, value-added modelling measures what students have learnt while in school by monitoring their performance at two or more points in time.

For more details click [here](#)

Hot Topic

This month we focus on a report from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills which presents findings from a skills-related survey of UK employers.

To view the Hot Topic click [here](#)
