

The Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education)

DRAFT (15 May 2008)

A joint working protocol between the Single Voice and the FE sector-led *information authority*, Bureaucracy Reduction Group, FE Communications Gateway Panel and FE Reputation Strategy Group.

Introduction.

1.1 The 2006 FE White Paper set out the Government's ambition to develop a new relationship with colleges and providers which would reinforce their autonomy within a significantly deregulated operating environment.

1.2 The FE *information authority*, the FE and Training Bureaucracy Reduction Group, and the FE Communications Gateway Panel are sector-led regulatory and gate-keeping mechanisms which support the action being taken by Government to simplify the system, including the organisational landscape, and reduce administrative burdens for the benefit of learners, employers and the system itself, including learning providers. The Groups are driving further deregulation - streamlining data standards and requirements; reducing bureaucracy at all levels, and improving communications. The sector-led FE Reputation Strategy Group has also been set up to promote the national reputation of the FE sector.

1.3 Through self regulation the sector is taking collective responsibility for regulatory matters and for improving performance across the sector which affect the sector's national reputation. The Single Voice - which is jointly owned and managed by the main organisations which represent further education colleges and providers - represents the collective view of the sector on regulatory matters through strategic dialogue with Government and its agencies.

1.4 The work of the Single Voice and the named sector-led groups is mutually reinforcing in terms of identifying strategic priorities for discussion with government and its agencies and acting as a challenge to Government policies and their implementation.

1.5 This document sets out how the Single Voice and the Groups will work together to the benefit of the sector and how, by working collectively, they can add value which is greater than the sum of their different parts.

Parties to the Protocol

2.1 The parties to this Protocol are:

- The Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education)
- The FE *information authority*
- The FE and Training Bureaucracy Reduction Group
- The FE Communications Gateway Panel
- The FE Reputation Strategy Group

Annex 1 sets out the headline terms of reference for each of the bodies ([each group to insert current ToR](#)).

Annex 2 shows draft Single Voice policy documents which refer to the parties to this protocol.

Annex 3 provides an agreed definition of 'sponsorship' in relation to shared responsibility for a Further Education sector-led body.

- 2.2 The Protocol is supported by DIUS and DIUS will facilitate the support of other government departments and agencies. The current accountabilities will be retained in order to ensure that the groups are seen to keep their independence.
- 2.3 **[pending confirmation:** The ambitions behind this protocol are also supported by the FE Improvement body.]

Key Principles of joint working

3.1 Working with the Single Voice, the named groups will work together to raise the reputation and performance of the sector and act as facilitators of positive change and innovation. Whilst it is recognised that each of the groups has a unique and distinctive role, they and the Single Voice believe that by working together they can bring added value to learners, employers and the sector.

3.2 The Single Voice will champion the Groups and ensure that their outcomes and impacts are communicated to the sector, to Government and more widely.

3.3 The key outcomes being collectively aimed for are to:

- 3.3.1 Introduce effective sector self-regulation
- 3.3.2 Achieve consistently high and improving standards of sector quality, data management and communication
- 3.3.3 Improve FE performance and reputation
- 3.3.4 Work effectively with the sector to improve resource utilisation at the front line through greater simplification of the FE landscape, systems/processes.

3.4 Work plans will be co-ordinated by:

- 3.4.1 The chairs of the Groups sharing their proposed annual plans with each other and with the Single Voice by July each year. Plans will be complementary and cross referenced in order to create synergy, support for each others' plans, and avoidance of duplication.
- 3.4.2 Bi-annual joint planning taking place to identify overlaps, issues for joint work and issues that could be simplified.
- 3.4.3 The Groups assisting the Single Voice to develop its policies and thinking in a way that takes account of issues identified as part of their work.

3.5 Meetings will be co-ordinated by:

- 3.5.1 The Groups exchanging agendas and minutes between themselves and with the Single Voice.
- 3.5.2 The Groups offering observer status membership to the Single Voice and to each other.
- 3.5.3 An annual working meeting of all groups with the Single Voice.
- 3.5.4 A bi-annual joint meeting of Chairs with the Single Voice.

3.6 Regarding representation on groups:

- 3.6.1 The Single Voice will facilitate representation from the sector onto the groups.
- 3.6.2 Members representing Single Voice member organisations will be responsible for feeding back to the Single Voice via the organisation they represent.
- 3.6.3 The Single Voice will monitor the contribution of the sector to meetings, to ensure that representation is effective.

3.7 Regarding working with and communicating with others:

- 3.7.1 Any Code of Conduct developed by the Single Voice for its members, will support the ambitions in this protocol.
- 3.7.2 The Groups will develop a high level communications plan/timetable with the Single Voice.
- 3.7.3 The Single Voice will use its communications channels to publicise the impact of the Groups and to report on issues that affect the Groups.
- 3.7.4 The Single Voice will consult the Groups on any communications they plan to make about the work of the Groups.
- 3.7.5 Existing communications networks will be used wherever possible.
- 3.7.6 The Single Voice will encourage colleges and providers to be responsive to the importance of simplification, reducing their own bureaucracy, handling data and MIS effectively and to use the FE Communications Gateway Panel to ensure that sector-led communications are fit for purpose.
- 3.7.7 All parties will work together to develop good external relations and promote the reputation of the sector.

3.8 Regarding monitoring and review:

- 3.8.1 The Groups will review and evaluate their impact on an annual basis.
- 3.8.2 The Groups will maintain their established reporting cycle (to ministers/LSC etc.) and copy their reports to the Single Voice so that the Single Voice can co-ordinate an annual joint 'impact report' on the effectiveness of their collective work.
- 3.8.3 The Single Voice will communicate the collective impact being made by the Groups to government departments and the sector.

Agreement

4.1 This agreement applies for the academic year 2008/9 and all parties agree its content and will work in the spirit of cooperation. The arrangements will be subject to review in May 2009 or earlier by agreement.

Signed:

Chair of the Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education)
Date

Chair of the *information authority*
Date

Chair of the FE and Training Bureaucracy Reduction Group
Date

Chair of the FE Communications Gateway Panel
Date

Chair of the FE Reputation Strategy Group
Date:

Annex 1: Respective roles and responsibilities of the Single Voice and the sector-led Groups

(Each group to insert current Terms of Reference and governance details)

The Single Voice's role is to: Need to add the role and responsibilities of the SV (e.g. to be confirmed)

- Secure greater provider autonomy through effective sector self-regulation
- Ensure that the sector focuses on meeting the needs of learners, employers and communities
- Bring simplification of regulatory requirements
- Raise Professional confidence and trust in the sector
- Achieve consistently high and improving standards of sector quality, data management and communication
- Improve FE performance and reputation.
- Be accountable to the sector and to government

Governance

SV Governance section to be added

The FE and Training Bureaucracy Reduction Group

To ensure significant government policies are implemented with the minimum amount of bureaucracy so that funding and time is released to frontline services that enhance learner and employer services

To identify and scrutinise significant schemes to minimise their impact at the front line

To work with Govt Agencies and Providers to achieve Simplification Plans

To identify across agencies opportunities for improved ways of working/ efficiency gains
To provide strategic support for self regulation within the sector

Governance

The BRG has a Board that meets 5 times per year. Representation is from the agencies, providers and staff representatives. The BRG produces an annual plan and annual report. It is formally accountable to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the LSC.

They look at forward policies to identify the issues where the greatest savings can be achieved/ or the greatest risk exists. They attempt to measure, benchmark and baseline savings and /or benefits from schemes.

Their main focus relates to the strategic direction of the sector therefore they operate with minimum resources and rely upon the sector to own their actions via leadership

Single Voice will be the nominating body for the sector provider representation on the group and they will be encouraged to input innovations at the pre agenda stage.

FE Communications Gateway Panel

[]to be inserted

FE information authority

To improve the quality and use of information in support of effective decision making by all stakeholders in the FE system

To reduce significantly bureaucracy across the FE system to release time, resources and energy for front line services

To improve accountability to learners, learning providers and data users for data standards, collections and reporting

To apply the principle of collect once, use often, used by all – making more data, more widely available

To observe the eight principles of the Data Protection Act

Governance

The information authority has a board which meets four times a year. Organisations represented are the main providers and users of data within the FE system. *The information authority* is accountable to the Minister of State, Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (DIUS) through the appointment of its independent chair. It also derives its authority through the signing of a protocol by member organisations which commits them to work together in the interests of the system as a whole.

The board is responsible for setting standards for data collection, analysis and reporting within the FE system. It is tasked with reducing the burden associated with data bureaucracy. It examines new initiatives to ensure that implementation maximises the benefit from information and minimises the associated burden. *The information authority* is responsible for specifying the main learner data collection, the individualised learner record. It sets standards for and authorises other data collections.

The FE Reputation Strategy Group

[]to be inserted

Annex 2: Draft Single Voice policy development document which refers to the parties to the protocol.

Background:

- a. This document has been developed as a paper for the Single Voice, along with other draft policy documents, to inform its thinking about how to achieve its aims.
- b. The format of this document is designed to identify a clear policy statement; associated activities and functions; respective responsibilities and desired impacts.
- c. This document deals with the Single Voice's role regarding sponsorship and co-ordination of sector-led activities, and contains an overall policy to cover the attached specific policies addressing 'Enhancing the Consumer Voice'; 'Sector-led Functions' and 'Reputation Management'.

Overall Policy Title: SINGLE VOICE RELATIONSHIPS TO ENHANCE THE CONSUMER VOICE AND SPONSOR AND CO-ORDINATE SECTOR-LED ACTIVITIES AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT.

Policy statement

The Single Voice will enhance the consumer voice within the FE system; sponsor and co-ordinate the sector-led regulatory/gate-keeping groups and the FE sector's reputation management.

SV Activities and Functions

- Develop strategies for engaging learners, employers and communities and for ensuring their feedback is listened to and acted upon (to include working with the National Learner Panel; the National Learner Satisfaction Survey and developing strategic partnerships and relationships with organisations representing community employer interests).
- Sponsor and co-ordinate the existing sector-led regulatory/gate-keeping groups for the FE sector. The three sector-led groups are:
 - the information authority*
 - The Bureaucracy Reduction Group
 - The FE Communications Gateway Panel
- Develop self-regulation in order to enhance the national reputation of the FE sector and sponsor and co-ordinate the sector-led FE Reputation Strategy Group.
- DIUS and the Single Voice will work together with the respective groups, within a shared protocol, to ensure that:
 - Providers engage effectively and actively with the groups.
 - Government respect for the sector's reputation is enhanced.
 - The sector's national reputation is enhanced by the sector having a coherent and authoritative single voice.
 - The code of conduct for the sector will include the roles of the sector-led groups within its principles.
 - Improving sector impact on Learners and Employers will be achieved.
 - The groups are accountable and regularly evaluate their impact.

Collective Responsibility

- Participate as members of the Single Voice and ensure adherence to the Code of Conduct.
- Support the strategic dialogue/partnerships/relationships developed by the Single Voice on behalf of its members and adhere to the strategies and arrangements agreed between the parties.
- Develop strategies for engaging learners, employers and communities and for listening and responding to their feedback.
- Effectively sponsor and champion the work of sector-led groups, preserving their independence so that they are seen to act in the interests of the FE system as a whole, including consumers.
- Contribute to the appointment of sector representative members of the groups.
- Communicate how the co-ordinating role of the Single Voice, and its sponsorship of the groups, adds value for the sector, enabling and encouraging sector understanding of and engagement with the groups' work.

Collective Impact

- Enhanced national reputation of the FE sector as being responsive, responsible and self-regulating will increase government trust and public confidence in the sector.
- Improving, positive national reputation for the sector will enhance recruitment and engagement of learners, consumers and stakeholders.
- Clarity and consistency of responsive practice across the sector in relation to national consumer organisations.
- More efficient, streamlined and stable sector practices.
- Efficiency savings enhance sector delivery at all levels.

Attached:

Annex A: Enhancing the Consumer Voice

Annex B: Sector-Led Regulatory/Gate-keeper Groups

Annex C: Reputation Management

These Annexes are attached below and set out policy statements, activities and functions, responsibilities and impacts which relate to enhancing the consumer voice, the work of the sector-led regulatory/gate-keeping groups and managing the sector's reputation.

Annex 2: Draft Single Voice policy development document which refers to the parties to the protocol.

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Annex A: ENHANCING THE CONSUMER VOICE

Policy statement

The Single Voice will ensure that the consumer voice is articulated to the FE sector that the FE sector responds to improve delivery and content that best meets consumer needs.

SV Activities and Functions

- Develop strategies for engaging learners, employers and communities and for ensuring their feedback is listened to and acted upon.
- Liaise with the National Learner Panel and NUS.
- Be involved with the development and analysis of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey and assist in planning for the Survey to transfer to a sector host by 2011.
- Develop strategic partnerships with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the Sector Skills Development Agency, the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils and local employer coalitions funded by Working Ventures UK.
- Develop strategic relationships with the LGA to ensure that local community interests are reflected in work on self regulation.

Collective Responsibility

- Develop strategies for engaging learners, employers and communities and for listening to their feedback.
- Actively use feedback to improve provision and drive up performance at the local and national level.
- Support the strategic dialogue/partnerships/relationships developed by the Single Voice on behalf of its members with national learner, employer and community organisations and adhere to the strategies and arrangements agreed between the parties.

Provider Responsibility

- Develop strategies for engaging learners, employers and communities and listen to their feedback in order to design appropriate provision .
- Develop strategic partnerships with the local employer coalitions funded by Working Ventures UK to understand their needs and ensure that provision meets these.

FE Sector Workforce Responsibility

- Actively seek feedback from learners, employers and communities and demonstrate how this is improving delivery

Consumer Responsibility

- Provide feedback to the FE sector workforce, providers and Single Voice members through surveys, consultation activities, complaints and suggestions.

Impacts for Providers

- Direct communication and negotiation between the sector (SV) and national representative

organisations to identify and resolve sector level issues.

- Clarity and consistency of responsive practice across the sector in relation to national consumer organisations.
- Greater autonomy and innovation in terms of delivery at the local level.
- Greater participation and higher success rates.

Impacts for Consumers

- Direct communication and negotiation between the sector (SV) and national representative organisations to identify and resolve sector level issues.
- Ability to influence delivery and performance at the national and local level by raising issues and identifying best practice.
- Clarity and consistency of responsive practice across the sector in relation to national consumer organisations
- (*Single Voice to perform an 'ombudsman' function re complaints and grievances?*)

Impacts for Agencies

- The Single Voice will work with DIUS and the LSC to ensure that by 2010 responsibility for the National Learner Panel and the National Learner Satisfaction Survey will pass to a sector host organisation.
- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills will engage in a strategic relationship with the Single Voice with a view to improving the FE Sector's responsiveness to employer needs in England.
- Refocus of roles to analyse information to enable them to ensure delivery of national policy outcomes.

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Annex B: SECTOR-LED REGULATORY/GATEKEEPER GROUPS

Policy statement

The Single Voice will be the sponsor (agreed definition attached) and co-ordinator of the existing sector-led regulatory/gatekeeper groups for the FE sector. The three groups are:

the information authority

The Bureaucracy Reduction Group
The Communications Gateway Panel

The Single Voice will preserve the independence of the named groups so that they are seen to act in the interests of the FE system as a whole, including consumers. In particular, that the groups are able to challenge both Government and its agencies and the sector itself.

SV Activities and Functions

- Sponsor and co-ordinate the named sector-led gatekeeper/regulatory groups for the FE sector.
- Provide the route through which the FE sector nominates and appoints FE sector members to the named groups. The groups will also have Departmental and agency members, who self appoint members.
- Identify and take forward opportunities for co-ordinating and rationalising the arrangements which support the groups.
- Work with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to ensure that the work of the groups takes account of the Commission's work to simplify arrangements for employers.
- As part of the respective boards, direct the work of each of the groups:

In the case of *the information authority*:

- Support the objectives of improving quality and use of data, reducing bureaucracy and improving accountability to learners, providers and users for data standards, collections and reporting.
- Promote common data standards and data sharing (from the single source) across national agencies, partners and the wider education sector, including adoption of the Managing Information across Partners services.

In the case of the **BRG**:

- Support the objectives of reducing bureaucracy in line with TASC (Trust, Accountability, Simplicity and Clarity) principles.
- Comment on, review and endorse the BRG's operational plan and annual report. Focus is on Departmental and Agency simplification plans and undertaking scrutiny of key policies.

In the case of the **Communications Gateway Panel**:

- Support the objectives of the Panel.
- Review and comment on the impact of the Panel in improving communications for the sector.

Collective Responsibility

- Effectively sponsor and develop the work of sector-led regulatory/gatekeeper groups, including with each other.
- Scrutinise and challenge (proportionate to risk) the bureaucracy within and surrounding the FE system, including by the sector itself.

Provider Responsibility

- Participate as members of the groups and contribute to the work to increase simplification and reduce bureaucracy.
- Accept and adhere to the findings and recommendations of the sector-led regulatory/gatekeeper groups, in order to achieve better and more efficient services for learners and employers.
- Develop opportunities for more coherent and effective collective working.

FE Sector Workforce Responsibility

- Participate as members of the groups and contribute to the work to increase simplification and reduce bureaucracy.
- Accept and adhere to the findings and recommendations of the sector-led regulatory/gatekeeper groups, in order to achieve better and more efficient services for learners and employers.

Consumer Responsibility

To highlight inefficient or bureaucratic practices where they are encountered in the FE system and suggest how these might be overcome.

Agencies Responsibility

- Participate as members of the gate-keeping groups
- Accept and adhere to the findings and recommendations of the regulatory/gatekeeper groups, in order to achieve better and more efficient services for learners and employers.

Impacts for Providers

- More efficient, streamlined and stable sector practices.
- Efficiency savings enhance sector delivery at all levels.

Impacts for Consumers

- More efficient, streamlined and stable sector practices.
- Greater time to focus on responding to learner and employer needs.

Impacts for Agencies

- More efficient, streamlined and stable sector practices.
- Efficiency savings enhance sector delivery at all levels.

Annex 2: Draft Single Voice policy development document which refers to the parties to the protocol.

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Annex C: REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Policy Statement

Developing self-regulation will enhance the national reputation of the sector by demonstrating that it can manage its business efficiently, effectively and to externally validated high standards.

SV Activities and Functions

- Sponsor (agreed definition attached) the work of the FE Reputation Strategy Group (FERSG) and co-ordinate it with other sector-led groups sponsored by the Single Voice.
- Inform the FERSG of relevant sector developments and policy announcements.
- Counsel the FERSG on direction and strategy.
- Obtain advice and guidance from the FERSG on sector communications and reputation.

Collective Responsibility

- Effectively sponsor and co-ordinate the work of the FE Reputation Strategy Group, with other sector-led groups.
- Ensure that members adhere to the Code of Conduct in order to enhance (and limit the risk of damage to) the national reputation of the FE sector.
- Actively participate in opportunities/activities, locally and nationally as recommended by the FERSG.

Provider Responsibility

- Adhere to the Code of Conduct in order to enhance (and limit the risk of damage to) the national reputation of the FE sector.
- Work to deliver the strategies identified by the FERSG as key to enhancing the sector's reputation and effectively act as ambassadors for the sector.

FE Sector Workforce Responsibility

- Adhere to the Code of Conduct in order to enhance (and limit the risk of damage to) the national reputation of the FE sector.
- Work to deliver the strategies identified by the FERSG as key to enhancing the sector's reputation and effectively act as ambassadors for the sector.

Consumer Responsibility

- Provide feedback to the sector about its national reputation.

Collective Impact

- Enhanced national reputation of the FE sector as being responsive, responsible and self-regulating will increase government trust and public confidence in the sector.

Impacts for Providers

- Improving, positive national reputation for the sector will enhance recruitment and engagement of learners, consumers and stakeholders.
- Enhanced value by the public of the sector's outputs will lead to education, training and qualifications being increasingly valued and 'repeat business' will grow.

Impacts for Consumers

- Improved national reputation of the sector and its providers and products will enhance the value of the sector's outputs so education, training and qualifications will be increasingly valued by individuals and their employers and communities who will also actively engage in learning and training to enhance skills development.

Impacts for Agencies

- . Enhanced national reputation of the FE sector as being responsive, responsible and self-regulating will increase government trust and public confidence in the sector.

Annex 3: Definition of ‘sponsorship’ in relation to shared responsibility for a Further Education sector-led body (DRAFT 15 MAY 2008)

As part of the development of joint working, key terms require definition to ensure clarity and consistency of use within Single Voice policies and communications.

1 The government is committed to the concepts of Simplification and Impact Assessments of government policies. Key publicly funded Agencies deliver the government’s strategies and policies in the most effective way possible within the FE sector. DIUS has established some sector-led regulatory and gate-keeping groups to help governance within the sector. The Single Voice will establish a self sustaining, coherent and coordinated delivery and self governance role for all providers with a clear focus on learners and employers.

2 [**pending confirmation:** *DIUS* will be responsible for and continue to work with the sector-led *information authority*, Bureaucracy Reduction Group, FE Communications Gateway Panel and the FE Reputation Strategy Group, to ensure that they are funded and briefed for delivery of a sector wide approach.]

3 *The Single Voice* will **sponsor** these named groups on behalf of the sector to ensure:

- That the groups’ outcomes add value to the sector
- That the groups work effectively together
- That there are common protocols and codes of conduct that enhance the sector’s reputation
- That the groups are respected for their independence and knowledge of the sector
- That the provider input to the groups is sustainable and actively representational.
- That the groups’ remits are appropriate for the sector’s needs, and make recommendation to DIUS for reasonable change should that be needed
- That communications to the sector from the groups are coordinated for the benefit of the front line providers’ understanding
- That the groups are championed by, and used to scrutinise and promote long term strategic sector improvements within the key Agencies
- That the groups’ roles will be developed to apply to the providers themselves with the aim of improving governance
- That accountability to DIUS is enhanced and supported.

4 The Single Voice Policy documents will include this definition:

Shared Responsibility. DIUS and the Single Voice will work together within a shared Protocol to ensure that:

- Providers engage effectively and actively with the sector-led *information authority*, Bureaucracy Reduction Group, FE Communications Gateway Panel and the FE Reputation Strategy Group
- Government respect for the sector’s reputation is enhanced.
- The (proposed) code of conduct for the sector includes the roles of the named groups within its principles
- Improving sector impact on Learners and Employers is achieved
- The named groups are accountable and regularly evaluate their impact.