

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL IN MEDWAY

INDEX

	Page No:
Introduction	1
Terms of reference, methodology and list of witnesses	3
Section One	
The Learning and Skills Council – national and local context	5
Section Two	
Funding arrangements and support to schools	9
Section Three	
Relationships with partners	13
Section Four	
Further education provision and skills shortages	17
Conclusions	21
Recommendations	23
Appendix A - Summaries of evidence sessions	
Learning and Skills Council representatives	25
Local Education Authority	33
Sue Glanville – Invicta Grammar School - Maidstone	41
Judith Armit – Medway Council	43
Mid Kent College Management Team	47
Jonathan Shaw MP	53
Appendix B – Membership of the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council	57
Appendix C – Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council officer structure	61
Appendix D – Response of LSC to draft report	63
Appendix E – Skills issues in the Thames Gateway area	65
Appendix F – Thames Gateway LIF/ESF Projects	67

INTRODUCTION

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a relatively new organisation having been launched on 2 April 2001. Upon being established its main remit was to carry out the functions of the former Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC's) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It now has responsibility for the funding and planning of all post 16 education, training and adult and community education. In addition the LSC are involved in many other activities that seek to increase the education, skills and training of the population. In particular they build links between educational institutions and the business world.

In 2002/03, the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council had a budget of £170 million. It is against this background the Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny decided to form a review group to conduct an inquiry into the work of the Learning and Skills Council in Medway. As a key council partner whose decisions directly impact upon the council's strategic priorities, it was felt to be tremendously important that member level dialogue was established with senior officials from the LSC.

The scrutiny function offers a valuable opportunity for elected members to hold other public bodies accountable for the decisions they take. The local authority must take a pro-active role in scrutinising the activities of others to ensure that council partners are reflecting the interests of the people of Medway in the decisions they take.

We would like to thank everyone who has given up their time to give evidence to the inquiry. In particular we are grateful to LSC witnesses, Simon Norton (Executive Director) and David Waggett (Head of Policy), for the positive way in which they participated in the evidence gathering process. We would also like to thank support staff at the Kent and Medway LSC for their timely response to requests for information.

In our view, this inquiry has been an extremely worthwhile exercise which we hope has been beneficial to all parties involved. We would urge all stakeholders in post-16 education provision to read our report and respond to its recommendations. A primary objective of this piece of work was to foster a greater understanding of the specific needs of Medway and its population amongst all partners with a stake in post-16 education. We hope that in this respect at least, we have been successful.

The review team

Councillor Ian Burt (Independent), Councillor Jane Etheridge (Conservative), Councillor Ron Hewett (Conservative), Councillor Geoff Juby (Liberal Democrat), Councillor Simon Rowan-Robinson (Labour)

Ian Chappell (Parent Governor representative), Jeff Hadaway (Medway Youth Parliament), Keith Williams (Headteacher representative)

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

1. The remit of the Learning and Skills Council is extremely large and as a project it was not felt appropriate or manageable to examine each of their functions in detail. Instead the focus of the work carried out was in respect of funding for post-16 education and the potential for lack of clarity that existed in responsibility for the 14 to 19 year age group.
2. The rather unusual nature of post-16 provision in Kent and Medway when compared to the national picture, with the majority of 16 to 18 year olds being taught in school sixth forms made the LSC's relationship with schools and support that is provided to them an important area on which to focus.
3. The full terms of reference for the review were agreed by the Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 December 2002. They were to :-
 - Hear how the Learning and Skills Council believe their work contributes to Medway's strategic learning agenda
 - Explore the Learning and Skills Council's relationship with the Local Education Authority, examining the respective roles and responsibilities for the education of 14 – 16 and 16 - 19 year olds
 - Analyse current funding arrangements to assess how they contribute to increasing participation and performance, the implications they have for schools and college staffing arrangements and course provision and other LSC/LEA targets
 - Explore the skills gap in the local economy, examining ways in which the LSC, LEA, schools and colleges can help to address shortages in key areas of employment
4. In addition key objectives were highlighted at this stage. It was decided that the inquiry would be carried out in order to :-
 - (i) Facilitate greater mutual understanding between the Learning and Skills Council, the Local Education Authority, schools and other further education and community learning providers.
 - (ii) Encourage improved partnership working between the Learning and Skills Council and further education and community learning providers, resulting in an increased range of choices for 14 – 19 year olds.
 - (iii) Be a 'critical friend' and by doing so contribute to a strengthening of the relationship between the Medway Local Education Authority and the local Learning and Skills Council

5. Information that forms the basis of this report was largely gathered through evidence hearings that were conducted between February and April 2003. The full programme of witnesses was as follows :-

6 February 2003	Simon Norton (Executive Director) and David Waggert (Head of Policy) – Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council
10 March 2003	Rose Collinson (Director of Education and Leisure) and Keith Morrison (Senior Advisor – Secondary) – Medway Local Education Authority
9 April 2003	Written evidence received from Sue Glanville (Headteacher, Invicta Grammar School, Maidstone) -member of the Kent and Medway LSC board
10 April 2003	Judith Armit (Chief Executive) – Medway Council and member of the Kent and Medway LSC board
	John Levett (Principal), Jon Pink (Director of Curriculum) and Peter Watson (Director of Finance) – Mid-Kent College
	Jonathan Shaw, Member of Parliament for Chatham and Aylesford and member of the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee

6. The review group met on 25 April 2003 to consider their recommendations, conclusions and content of this report.
7. A summary of the all the evidence produced can be found at appendix A of the report.
8. The draft report was circulated to the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council for their views prior to publication. Their response of 9 June 2003 was considered by the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee when finalising this report and is attached as Appendix D.

SECTION ONE

THE LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL – NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Expectations and Targets

1. The Learning and Skills Council has been tasked by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with raising standards and participation in the areas of post 16 education, training and skills. Funding to the LSC in 2002/03 via its 47 local councils amounted to £7.3 billion and this is expected to rise to around £9 Billion in 2005/06. Current funding levels have been highlighted by Charles Clarke, Education Secretary, as being the twice the government's annual budget for transport and more than six times that of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
2. Jonathan Shaw MP in his evidence to members highlighted the extent to which the UK was behind other developed countries in terms of participation rates in post-16 education. Out of 27 industrially advanced countries in the world, the United Kingdom was ranked only 24th. Significantly, participation rates amongst our leading European neighbours such as France and Germany are much higher. These are the circumstances that the LSC have inherited and must make a timely and significant impact on if they are to achieve their objectives.
3. In Medway post-16 participation rates mirror those of the national picture. This does place us slightly behind Kent however, as participation across the rest of the county is higher than the national average. The reason for this was felt by the Executive Director of the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council to be largely due to the lower percentage of young people in Medway achieving 5 A* - C grade GCSEs as compared to the Kent wide and national averages.
4. The Learning and Skills Council's six key priorities for Kent and Medway were set in early 2002 and they are :-
 - **Widening participation**
 - **Raising basic literacy and numeracy**
 - **Raising basic ICT skills**
 - **Raising level 2/3 achievement of young people**
 - **Raising level 3 achievement of adults**
 - **Developing workforce skills**
5. Amongst the targets that must be achieved by the end of 2004 include raising participation rates of 16 – 18 year olds by 6000 to 85% and ensuring that the basic literacy at level 2 is attained by 87% of the population at the age of 19. In addition the Council has a public service agreement to increase the number of young people going on to higher education. In 2001, 27.22% of young people under the age of 20 from

Medway were accepted for higher education courses, compared with 36.65% of young people from the South East of England. The LPSA Target 2 is to reduce the percentage gap between Medway and the South East of England to 2.05% by 2004.

6. These are very challenging targets that have been set by the DfES for the LSC to achieve. In his evidence to the review team, Jonathan Shaw MP explained that : -

'Medway has a higher proportion of need than many areas in Kent. Medway will have to have its fair share of funding if it the Learning and Skills Council are to meet their targets'.

7. Members certainly hope that this will be the case, but a key concern we have is that Medway is often not viewed as a distinct area from Kent in terms of statistics. Figures for post-16 results that the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council base judgements that cover the whole Kent and Medway area. Medway's needs and requirements are quite different from many areas of Kent and we believe that the LSC should have clear data on the performance of Medway pupils at post-16 level (**Conclusion A**).
8. Witnesses informed us that they believed that through the work that the LSC were carrying out locally, they were beginning to aid post-16 participation in Medway. It is felt to be an appropriate use of the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme to measure progress that the LSC are making against these ambitious targets (**Conclusion B**).

Kent and Medway LSC board

9. The Kent and Medway LSC board is made up of 16 voting members, a figure that has been set by the DfES. Judith Armit, Chief Executive of Medway Council, is a member of the board but not specifically as a representative of Medway Council. In her evidence to us, she explained that whilst she did not feel Medway's interests were marginalised, there were relatively few members of the board from Medway (from the public or private sector) or members with significant experience of the area. Positions on the board are filled through an interview process that is open to anyone to apply for.
10. We are aware that a former Medway Director of Education and Leisure, had been unsuccessful in their application to the board. The current Director, Rose Collinson, is a member of sub-groups that develop LSC policy and this is to be welcomed. However, it would be beneficial if more members of the board were familiar with Medway and able to promote our interests.
11. The review team is concerned that there are no representatives on the board for ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and small employers. With a limited membership, this may be something that will be difficult to address, but this should be borne in mind when vacancies

on the board arise (**Conclusion - C**). The LSC must be aware of the impact their decisions will have for the whole community.

SECTION TWO

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

Liasion with Schools

1. One of the main reasons that this piece of work was undertaken was due to concerns that members and particularly the headteacher representative had about funding arrangements for school sixth forms.
2. The LSC gained responsibility for funding all post-16 education provision in April 2002. By their own admission they are only now beginning to address support for schools as this is a relatively new area of their responsibility. Given that the Learning and Skills Council incorporated the former Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) it is perhaps understandable that expertise in respect of schools is less developed than that of other sectors.
3. We would argue that this is something that needs to be urgently addressed due to the atypical nature of post-16 provision in Medway from the national picture. We are aware that other local Learning and Skills Councils have employed a schools liaison officer to act as a central point of contact with schools. We would suggest that relationships with schools in Medway could be greatly improved if such a post was introduced locally (**Recommendation 1**).

Funding Arrangements

4. The review team membership was complemented by the inclusion of Keith Williams, Headteacher of the Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rochester. He explained to us that current complex funding arrangements were exacerbated by the fact that allocations for pre-16 provision are based on a financial year, whilst those for post-16 provision are based on an academic year. This made it extremely difficult for schools to plan ahead over the three to five year period that was recommended by the DfES. Learning and Skills Council representatives had agreed that the funding formula is viewed by some as a 'dog's breakfast' and it does appear complex. However, they did emphasise that it is now in their opinion a fairer system in that levels of funding now reflect what courses cost to deliver.
5. The review team recognise that we cannot recommend that the two funding regimes are harmonised. However, we would urge that efforts are made to minimise the impact on schools of the different funding streams, so they can embrace long term planning of their post-16 provision (**Conclusion D**).

Teaching Arrangements

6. The ability of schools to plan provision are further complicated by the fact that schools do not divide teaching arrangements between pre and post 16 education. This is an issue which the headteacher representative felt that Kent and Medway LSC has still to grasp. There needs to be greater understanding that schools do not have separate teaching support for post-16 education. We welcome the fact that the LSC acknowledged this division in their evidence to us and we believe that the recommended post of schools liaison officer, will assist the organisation in their greater understanding of way schools operate **(Conclusion E)**.

Bidding Opportunities

7. A number of witnesses did feel that the LSC promoted a short term approach that rested on a 'bidding culture'. Local Authority witnesses in particular highlighted concerns they had raised with Simon Norton (Executive Director – Kent and Medway LSC) about bidding opportunities that had extremely short timescales for the submission of bids. One example cited was a bidding opportunity submitted to the LEA on 14 February that had a deadline of 24 February. As Rose Collinson (Director of Education and Leisure – Medway Council) explained to us, such a short timescale made it virtually impossible to inform schools and allow them to make bids.
8. This illustrates an area where the LSC has a clear lack of understanding of the way schools work. Unlike further education colleges, schools do not generally have a dedicated person able to take advantage of funding opportunities. Where possible, if an indication of an forthcoming project could be given at an early stage, then this would greatly improve schools chances of responding to such opportunities.
9. It may reflect the fact that the LSC is a new organisation, but we were concerned to hear that according to Rose Collinson : -

'There is a feeling in schools that some projects are rushed through in order to deal with an underspend in a financial year, rather than examining strategic priorities'.
10. In addition Keith Morrison (Senior Adviser – secondary, Medway LEA) emphasised that objectives to increase participation needed to be supported through long term planning, as a short term approach does not encourage providers to commit to post-16 education growth.
11. We would urge the LSC to adopt a more strategic approach to allocating funding through bidding opportunities **(Recommendation 2)**. Any influence that could be exerted on the national LSC office in Coventry, in this respect, would be welcomed.

12. We also understand that currently there is one officer in the Local Authority who has a role in assisting schools to take advantage of bidding opportunities. Great opportunities exist to lever in funding to Medway post-16 providers and we recommend that the Council examines whether greater support could be provided to schools for this purpose (**Recommendation 3**).

School Capital Projects

13. It would be fair to say that there is, certainly amongst schools, a perception that the LSC favours post-16 provision in further education colleges. Much of this may be reflected by the large capital allocation that the Kent and Medway LSC provided to North West Kent College in Dartford (£4.5Million directly from LSC) and the fact that currently they do not provide capital funding to schools. Schools' capital funding is the responsibility of the LEA and this does create difficulties when post-16 funding rests with another organisation. Simon Norton was explicit in stating that :-

'The Learning and Skills Council does not have a brief to promote a certain type of institution, its primary concern was to get a good deal for learners'.

14. It is anticipated that a strategic area review of post-16 education in Medway (outlined in the next section) would enable the LSC to invest in post-16 school providers.

SECTION THREE

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS

Strategic Area Review

1. As highlighted in the previous section, it is unlikely that the Learning and Skills Council will make any capital investment in schools before a strategic area review is carried out. It appears likely that Medway may be selected as an appropriate area for a strategic area review for a number of reasons. First of all it is a distinct area from Kent and of reasonable size for a manageable review to take place. As highlighted by witnesses, the needs of Medway people are more acute than those of the rest of Kent due to lower participation rates in post-16 education and lower attainment at GCSE level.
2. We would welcome the prospect of a strategic area review being carried out in Medway as this would provide an excellent opportunity for the local area to benefit from much needed capital funding. There is a perception that Medway has not received its fair share of funding allocations from the local Learning and Skills Council and this will provide an excellent opportunity to invest in post-16 provision.
3. Where there are concerns however it is in the way that a review is carried out. It should not be simply a paper exercise that measures the cost of providing courses at various institutions. We believe that a review needs to incorporate or recognise the high regard in which many school sixth forms are held by students, parents and the wider community. Retention rates for instance, are far higher in schools than in further education colleges – factors that need to be measured and acknowledged. In addition, we are concerned that the real extent of post-16 provision in schools will not be apparent until the full effects of new collaborative arrangements have been allowed time to develop. Therefore we would urge the LSC to exercise caution when making key long term decisions about future post-16 provision. The LEA should work closely with the LSC to ensure that full value of school sixth forms are recognised and taken into account (**Recommendation 4**).
4. As mentioned above collaborative arrangements between schools are in their relative infancy. There needs to be a co-ordinated approach between the LSC and LEA to ensure that schools are allowed to develop their collaborative approaches without fears about the long-term future of their post-16 provision. Whilst we welcome the prospect of a strategic area review, the effects of collaboration cannot currently be accurately measured. The full picture of post-16 education in Medway should be clear before an extensive review is undertaken (**Recommendation 5**).
5. As a means of assisting all parties in carrying out the ground work for a review, it is suggested that the Education and Lifelong Learning

Overview and Scrutiny Committee should carry out a further work in relation to collaborative and partnership working in schools. By assessing the extent of current partnership working and analysing the success of such initiatives, it would provide both the LSC and LEA with a clearer picture of current provision (**Recommendation 6**).

Relationship with the LEA

6. The Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council view their organisation's relationship with the LEA in a very positive light. Simon Norton informed us that Medway LEA officers liaise with them closely and have helped to shape and influence the direction of policy at a local level. Regular meetings are held with senior LEA officers and the will to work in partnership with the local authority and schools is apparent.
7. Where problems exist it is with structures and the inflexibilities of an organisation where policies and approaches are often dictated by the national office. LEA witnesses were very positive about the relationship they have with LSC officials. Difficulties tend to arise due to the inability at times of the Kent and Medway LSC to be responsive to the needs of its local area and be flexible in its approach. At times ideas and suggestions are met with the response that they need to liaise with their national office. If the LSC is to meet its targets, we would argue that they require far more locally devolved decision making. Inflexible national 'one size fits all' approaches do not tend to reflect the needs of areas such as Medway where post-16 provision and participation is atypical (**Conclusion F**).

Agenda for 14 – 19 year olds

8. Confusion exists amongst schools as to where the respective responsibilities of the LSC and LEA lie. It appears that greater responsibilities are being allocated by the DfES to the LSC and schools are finding it hard to keep abreast of new developments. We would suggest that greater assistance could be provided to schools by the LEA, which is focused on helping sixth form teachers and governors as well as headteachers (**Recommendation 7**).
9. This situation is not helped by confusion that appears to have been sown by DfES statements about the LSC's role in respect of the 14 – 19 year age group. At the commencement of the review, there was a genuine concern that responsibility for the education of 14 – 16 year olds could be transferred to the LSC in the near future. All witnesses have assured us that they do not expect this scenario to become a reality in the near future. We were assured by Simon Norton that he felt he already had 'enough on his plate'.
10. There is clearly a legitimate reason to link the need to get GCSE provision right with post-16 participation rates. Performance at GCSE level and perceptions of education at this age will determine whether a young person stays on in full time education at the age of 16. Indeed, a

student's perception of whether to continue education beyond this age is usually formed before this. This makes it hugely important that the LSC and LEA maintain an excellent working relationship. Participation rates must be raised in order to improve the skills base of Medway **(Conclusion G)**.

Accountability

11. A key concern at the commencement of this review was the feeling that the LSC are not accountable for the decisions they take, particularly at a local level. A key focus for this review was to provide a member level check and balance for the work the LSC carry out in Medway. Whilst it is true that the LSC are accountable to a number of bodies (local board, Secretary of state for education and skills, National Audit Office), there is still felt to be a deficit at the local level for decisions that are taken.
12. We believe that the political arrangements that introduced a scrutiny function are well designed for elected members to perform this role. Given the potentially massive impact that decisions taken by the LSC could have for the people of Medway, effective dialogue with the local authority needs to be established. We suggest that an invitation is extended to the Executive Director of the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council to attend the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee on at least an annual basis, so the work of the LSC and their effectiveness in achieving their targets can be examined **(Conclusion H)**.
13. The Kent and Medway LSC informed us that they would like to have greater local flexibility for the way they work and they are lobbying hard for this. The ability of the LSC to target specific local needs should not be constrained by national initiatives that may have little relevance to Medway. Funded projects should reflect the needs of this area and we urge greater flexibility to be given to the Kent and Medway LSC by their national office.

Bureaucracy

14. There is a commitment from the LSC to be far less bureaucratic than the former organisations from whom it was established. It certainly is apparent that the LSC does not have a great number of staff. However if, as has been suggested to us, bureaucracy is simply being passed on to others, such as those bidding for funding, then this would not represent a step forward.

SECTION FOUR

FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION AND SKILLS SHORTAGES

Mid-Kent College

1. We were grateful to the Mid-Kent College management team for participating in this review. As Medway's main further education provider it was very important that their views on post-16 education and the role of the Learning and Skills Council were obtained.
2. John Levett, Principal of Mid-Kent College gave the review team a presentation on proposals that have been drawn up to relocate Mid-Kent College provision in Medway to a single site adjacent to the Royal School of Military Engineering in Gillingham. There are considerable difficulties in bringing the current City Way and Horsted sites up to the necessary standard of quality, so this is viewed as the ideal solution. Considerable financial assistance would be required from the LSC for this plan to become a reality and the Kent and Medway LSC have been supportive during initial discussions that have been held. The potential timescale involves the production of a plan for the LSC with an application for funding by August 2003, with a view to operating from a new single site in September 2007.
3. We welcome the pro-active steps which have been undertaken by Mid-Kent College to address demand for further education and seeking to secure improved provision in Medway with excellent modern learning facilities (**Conclusion I**).

Relationship with the LSC

4. We were pleased to hear that Mid-Kent College have an excellent relationship with the Kent and Medway LSC. Clearly knowledge of the further education sector is a key strength and it reflects well on the LSC that they are viewed as more responsive than the former Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) (**Conclusion J**).
5. A number of projects were highlighted that illustrated how the LSC were allocating funding to target specific needs which have been identified. These included teacher training and retention and achievement in level 1 and 2 programmes. John Levett summed up why the LSC is responsive to the further education sector :-

'The Learning and Skills Council has employed many people with knowledge and experience of further education since its inception. The reason that they do not have as much expertise of schools is that they have not been responsible for post-16 funding for very long'.

6. A challenge for the LSC in Kent and Medway is now to improve its standing amongst schools whilst retaining the positive way in which they are viewed by the further education sector.

Work with schools

7. Members were extremely impressed to hear of the positive links that Mid-Kent College have established with a number of schools in Medway. Excellent work is being carried out to allow many students to attend vocational taster courses at the college as part of their school programme. This pro-active work highlights post-16 education options to students who might otherwise drop out of learning at the age of 16.
8. Whilst Mid-Kent College emphasise that their intention is not to 'poach' students from their schools, it is understandable why some schools are suspicious of their motives. Greater understanding between the further education sector and schools need to be forged, so trust can be built and all can aspire to raise post-16 education participation levels across Medway.
9. Provision at the college that exists for 15 – 20 Key Stage 4 pupils who have been excluded from school is very much welcomed. The college offers an alternative to the LEA's oversubscribed Pupil Referral Unit. The value of this work cannot be underestimated, as excluded pupils who have no access to full time education are more likely to drift into youth crime or acts of anti-social behaviour. The college is keen to expand such initiatives in partnership with the LEA, which in light of continuing high rates of permanent exclusions, we would endorse **(Conclusion K)**.

Skills shortages

10. Skills in the economy is a huge topic that could have been the subject of a inquiry in itself. Whilst this piece of work largely focused on post-16 education it did also examine the role of the LSC in improving the skills base in Medway. A major criticism that we would have is that the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council do not appear to have data and information on skills shortages in Medway. Skills issues are being examined at a sub-regional level (Appendix D). Whilst many of these skills gaps which have been identified are relevant in Medway, others are not. We would suggest that if the LSC are serious about addressing skills gaps in the Medway economy, they should be working with more accurate figures and details of the local situation. Greater liaison with Medway Council's Development and Environment Directorate could assist the LSC in specific areas of need **(Recommendation 9)**.
11. It is abundantly clear that the LSC, despite being well funded, have to prioritise how it allocates funding for training. The LSC is very much geared to assist employers in identifying training needs and as Simon Norton explained : -

'we act as a form of a broker in helping employers identify publicly funded courses which exist'.

12. According to the LSC pouring public money into training would not be a solution as employers could correspondingly reduce their training budgets. We were interested in hearing about pilot exercises that are taking place elsewhere in the country, where small companies are recompensed for staff training absences. Such a scheme could address the difficulties that many small and medium enterprises have in releasing employees for training courses and is something that would be beneficial for Medway.
13. One particular area of concern are skill shortages in the health sector. At a national level, as well as locally, health authorities are having to seek workers from abroad to address shortages of doctors and particularly nurses. Whilst we recognise that the LSC do work hard locally with the health sector to address shortfalls, we believe more could be done to focus on ways to alleviate a skills shortage in this vital area of the economy. Therefore, we would urge the LSC to make this area a key priority so local people are able to access employment in this area with the reliance on overseas recruitment being reduced **(Recommendation 10)**.

Careers Advice

14. A number of witnesses felt that there were problems with careers advice, as it was seen to be not always impartial and offered the best option to the learner. Simon Norton and Jon Pink (Director of Curriculum - Mid-Kent College) suggested that schools were at times too keen on retaining pupils to post-16 level. Careers advice should encourage students to go for the most appropriate post-16 option that suits their needs, whether this is in a school sixth form or a further education college.
15. It has been suggested to us by Mid-Kent College representatives that careers advice is under resourced and that the new Connexions service is struggling in its early stages. Due to the limited evidence we have to support these statements we would suggest there needs to be further examination of careers advice in Medway **(Recommendation 11)**.

Work Experience

16. Work experience placements are an important means of enabling young people to make decisions about their future careers. The Education Business Partnership plays an important role in facilitating many of the placements but as Jonathan Shaw MP emphasised :-

'the local authority should not always look at others to take the lead, as there was much they could do as the largest employer in Medway could do to give young people work experience'.

18. Providing young people with experience of what it is like to work for a local authority is an important way of highlighting the attractions of working in the public sector. Whilst other employers need to be aware of what they can do to bring the world of work closer to students, there is a need for Medway Council to maximise such opportunities **(Recommendation 12)**.

Fees

19. The review team is of the view that tuition fees for further and higher education courses will not assist Medway Council's aspirations to increase participation rates. Whilst we welcome the proposals for education maintenance allowances to assist those in financial need to stay in education, we believe that fees will be a barrier to greater participation in further and higher education. They could particularly affect the take-up of foundation degree courses, as the cost would be prohibitive to many people. In our view, the government's target of having 50% of students in higher education by 2010, is unlikely to be met with fees being an important factor.

Adult Education

20. The Medway Adult and Community Learning Service (MACLS) now receives its grant from the LSC which previously funded via the LEA. There is confusion as to the extent of courses that are subsidised by the LSC and those which are funded from elsewhere.
21. Investigations into this area of the LSC's remit were very limited. It would therefore be difficult for this review to draw any meaningful conclusions. If members felt that Adult Education should be a priority for its overview and scrutiny work programme, then further in-depth work could be carried out into this area.

CONCLUSIONS

The recommendations arising from this report refer to a number of ways in which the review team believe that the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council could be more responsive to Medway's needs in terms of post-16 provision, training opportunities and relationships with partners.

Given the scale of their responsibility for post-16 provision and the potential impact they have for the future of Medway's secondary schools, we believe that discussion with the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council via the scrutiny process should take place on at least an annual basis. This will go some way towards addressing what is perceived by many as an 'accountability deficit' that exists with the people of Medway. This will also provide members of Medway Council with an opportunity to shape and influence the direction of future policy and decision making.

In addition to a number of recommendations, the review team have considered their conclusions which highlight their position following consideration of all the evidence that has been received.

- a) The review team has concerns that the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council do not base judgements on specific figures for post-16 results in Medway. Figures that relate to Kent and Medway do not show the whole picture and decisions about post-16 provision in Medway should be based on clear data.
- b) The Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council is beginning to aid post-16 participation in Medway. The Strategic Area Review will be an important part of this process as it will enable funding to be levered in for school capital projects. The targets that have been set are extremely challenging and it is clear the LSC are being placed under considerable pressure by government to deliver. It will be important for the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak to the Executive Director of the Learning and Skills Council in early 2004 to examine progress that they have made.
- c) Whilst it is understood that the figure of 16 members of a local board is set by government, we do have concerns that there is no ethnic minority representation on the board. There is also a gap in expertise on the board in terms of those who could speak on behalf of disability groups or small employers.
- d) The Learning and Skills Council and Local Education Authority should be aware of the difficulties that funding for pre and post-16 education causes when they are based on different funding regimes. We would urge both to do all they can to making funding simpler, so schools can adopt a long term planned approach.

- e) It is hoped that the employment of a schools liaison officer (recommendation 2) will greatly raise the Learning and Skills Council's awareness of school teaching arrangements.
- f) From the evidence received it appears that personal relationships with the Learning and Skills Council officers are extremely good. Where problems exist it is with the systems and structures that the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council operate within. Progress would be achieved if considerably more locally devolved decision making was given by the national LSC office.
- g) All witnesses were clear in their understanding that Learning and Skills Council responsibility was for post-16 funding and this would not be extended to cover provision for 14-16 year olds. With government increasingly talking about the need to view provision for 14 – 19 year olds as a unit, it is very important that the LSC and LEA work together in close partnership to encourage those taking their GCSEs to continue in education at post-16 level and the take-up of vocational options.
- h) We are aware that it is widely perceived that the LSC is not accountable at a local level. As a means to fulfil this role we recommend that the Executive Director of Kent and Medway LSC is invited to give evidence to the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.
- i) The proposals outlined to us for a new single site for Mid Kent College in Medway are welcomed. We applaud the way they are responding to the needs of the local community in looking to secure the future of further education provision in Medway.
- j) We were pleased to hear that Mid Kent College has an extremely positive relationship with the Learning and Skills Council.
- k) We are impressed with the pro-active work that Mid-Kent College are carrying out with schools, particularly its range of taster courses and provision for young people who have been excluded from school.
- l) The review welcomes the new proposals for education maintenance allowances but believes that efforts to widen participation in higher and further education could be compromised if other measures are not employed to address the impact of tuition fees.
- m) This inquiry's investigations into the area of Adult Education was limited. This could be the subject of a separate piece of more detailed scrutiny work if it was felt that this was required.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW

1. The Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council should take urgent action to increase their awareness of schools organisational structures and needs and consider employing a schools liaison officer, who could also act as a clear partnership link with the Local Education Authority.
2. The Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council should minimise the need for schools to bid for funding at short notice and adopt a more planned approach to way it allocates funding for projects in the future.
3. The Council should increase the level of support that is given to enable schools to take advantage of post-16 funding opportunities that are provided by the Learning and Skills Council.
4. We welcome the benefits in terms of potential capital investment that could accompany a strategic area review of post-16 education in Medway, but ask that it is conducted in a way that does not measure provision solely in terms of cost. We would encourage the Local Education Authority to work more closely with the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council to ensure that the value of school sixth forms is taken fully into account.
5. We urge the Learning and Skills Council to allow time for the emerging effects of partnership working and collaboration to become apparent before key decisions are taken on the future of post-16 education in Medway.
6. We recommend that the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee takes the opportunity to collect evidence on current post-16 provision in schools and obtain examples of existing collaborative arrangements.
7. The Local Education Authority are asked do more to assist schools in understanding the respective roles of the LSC and LEA in relation to education funding, focusing efforts on assistance to sixth form teaching staff and members of the governing body.
8. We urge the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council to continue their efforts to ensure that the national LSC allows them to have greater local flexibility for the decisions they take.
9. We wish to ensure that specific skills shortages in Medway are taken account of when they differ from those of Kent and the Thames Gateway area. The Director of Development and Environment is asked to make available to the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council any information that the council has in terms of areas of skills shortages in the Medway economy.
10. We urge the Learning and Skills Council to work with Medway hospital, the Primary Care Trust and the Health & Community

Services Directorate to try and address health skills gaps in Medway, so local people can gain access to such employment and reduce dependence on overseas recruitment.

11. From the limited evidence that we have heard, it appears that the Careers Service is under resourced. There would be merit in scrutiny work that examined careers advice and guidance and the Connexions service in Medway.
12. As the biggest employer in the local area, Medway Council are asked to maximise opportunities for students to have work experience placements across the local authority.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Summary of evidence received from Simon Norton (Executive Director) and David Waggett (Head of Policy) of the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council on Thursday 6 February 2003

Review Group members: -

Councillors Mrs Etheridge, Hewett, Juby and Rowan-Robinson
Ian Chappell – Parent Governor representative
Keith Williams – Headteacher representative

In attendance: -

Rose Collinson – Director of Education and Leisure

1. Simon Norton began by giving the group an overview of the work of the Learning and Skills Council in Medway outlining the main challenges and issues that they believe need to be taken forward. He highlighted that: -
 - The LSC are funded by the Department for Education and Skills and are accountable to central government as to how funding is allocated.
 - We work very closely with Medway Council and recognise you as essential partners in the work we do. We welcome this opportunity to come and speak to you and build on the good relationship we have with the LEA.
 - Kent and Medway LSC is one of 47 local councils which are charged with steering the work at a local level to meet local needs. Sixteen members are on the local LSC board, these are drawn from business, education, training and other community interest groups. The chief executive of Medway Council is a member of the board.
 - The role of LSC is the planning and funding of all post 16 education and training – with the exception of higher education. We are not deliverers of education, but fund schools and colleges. All sixth forms are now funded by the LSC. We also fund adult education and further education courses run by higher education institutions like the Kent Institute of Art and Design. Learn direct is also funded by us – there is a local hub in Medway which has the objective of making learning more accessible to the local community.
 - We also fund the Medway Adult and Community Learning Service (MACLS), which deliver mainstream adult education as well as some outreach projects and further education programmes. Modern

apprenticeships are also run by the LSC via a wide range of providers.

- In Kent and Medway we provide information, advice and guidance to adults on learning. The Education and Business Partnership is important in encouraging better links between businesses and schools/colleges – including work experience. We recognise that this still leave many gaps and we facilitate various community projects through funding from the European Social Fund and local discretionary monies. From April we'll also be funding the Medway Learning Partnership instead of the DfES. Other objectives are to increase participation, skills and standards by addressing duplication or gaps and raising quality. Equal opportunities are extremely important in opening up access for disadvantaged groups – this can only be achieved through effective working with partners such as the LEA.
- The percentage of young people gaining 5 A – C GCSE's in Medway is below the Kent and National average. Completion of post 16 course is comparable with the national figure and work based learning apprenticeships in Medway is higher than the national average.
- The six key priorities for Kent and Medway were set last year for a three year period, they are: -
 - Widening participation
 - Raising basic literacy and numeracy
 - Raising basic ICT skills
 - Raising Level 2/3 achievement of young people
 - Raising level 3 achievement of adults
 - Developing workforce skills
- The two main local targets in Medway focus on basic ICT skills and workforce skills
- We've carried out skills assessments to look at the needs of the local economy and have put plans into place to respond to these results. There is an awareness that we need to look at needs of the local economy and reflect this in what we do.
- We have a number of long term objectives and have had some good achievements in a number of areas. A number of Medway residents will benefit even where these improvements are not directly in Medway. For example the North West Kent College in Dartford received capital of £15 million to move to a new campus (4.5M directly from the LSC). We would like to make a number of large scale investments in Medway and have been speaking to the LEA and Mid Kent College about possible options to consider.

- We have identified key sectors that require investment in skills and want to work closely with businesses and the trade unions to identify these and find ways to tackle skills shortages.
- Raising basic numeracy and literacy is a key target for us and we've done a lot of work to raise standards in this area – including the setting up of five professional development centres throughout Kent.
- One of the main future challenges for the LSC's to achieve a significant increase in post 16 participation in learning, whether in schools, FE colleges or work based training. The range of choice and quality can sometimes not be right – and we need to address provision from the perspective of the learner. We will do this through a programme of Strategic Area Reviews.

Main issues highlighted during questioning: -

Accuracy of data

2. The group questioned whether the rates of achievement for 6th form courses were correct. The LSC representatives agreed to check these as the group were under the impression that if you took college students out of the data, Medway's performance was above the national average.

(Update: the LSC has checked this and agree that the figures cited relate to the overall post 16 position rather than schools alone).

Workforce skills and shortages

3. The group was concerned to find out what specific work has been carried out by the LSC to solve skills shortages in Medway, particularly with health care services. Simon Norton explained that the LSC do work locally in conjunction with the health sector, more so than in many other areas of the country. They use forecasting tools to assess the likely demand and examine where shortfalls exist. Many sectors are important but not all suffer from the same level of skills shortages. The LSC does not believe that any single public body can solve vocational skills gaps and much of the work needs to be done by the respective sectors. Employers spend £20 billion on the training of adults, in contrast to the public sector training funding systems that spend £2 billion. The public education/training system needs to work closely with employers to fill in gaps and try to incentivise them to do more.
4. Members clarified that they want to know what the LSC is doing to help solve skills gaps in other public bodies such as social services. Simon Norton explained that responsibility for training does largely lie with employers although the LSC had a role in assisting them. One concern is that education and training budgets are mainly geared to employees up to the age of nineteen and that beyond this the amount of money is far smaller. We need to recognise that, with our limited resources, we

won't be able to have massive impacts upon all of these industries. The LSC must be selective and look to lever funding into organisations – for example the Investors in People initiative is good in raising awareness of the need to invest in training for staff.

5. The LSC views workforce skills as a major challenge and there is a need to prioritise particular areas. We wish to act as a form of a broker in helping employers identify publicly funded courses which exist. We also need to work with employers to identify what they perceive to be the training needs of their employees and look ahead beyond skills shortages now to see what are going to be the skills needs in the future.
6. A member identified problems, particularly prevalent in the care sector, where employers cannot afford to release staff for training. Simon Norton agreed that 'Catch 22' situation was unfortunate but you also had to balance this against the huge investment made by companies in staff training per annum. He highlighted the danger of pouring public money into training, when the result could be that the private sector correspondingly cuts backs its training budget and in effect is subsidised by the taxpayer. The LSC is however closely monitoring a pilot exercise taking place elsewhere in the country, in which small employers are given funding to hire staff in to cover staff training absences. This is something the local LSC would like to try in Kent and Medway.
7. The LSC are looking at whether a centre for vocational excellence for transport can be provided because we see recognise driving skills as important due the nature of the area as a transport hub. We have a number of sectors that are made priorities which include high-tech manufacturing and construction. The response needs to be conditioned to the circumstances of the sector and what is available. In summary it's a question of looking at what value we can add as an organisation.

School capital projects

8. The query was raised as to whether the LSC were able to invest in capital projects in schools. Simon Norton explained that currently funding for school capital projects remained the responsibility of the LEA. Currently the issue of whether some funding should go via the LSC for this purpose was being considered and this was likely to be the subject of a consultation process in the near future. The LSC recognises that this potentially could create difficulties.
9. As the LSC do not have responsibility for capital projects in schools, there is a concern that the role of the organisation might be to run down good school 6th forms due to the their priorities being in funding 6th form colleges. Simon Norton emphasised that the LSC does not have a brief to promote a certain type of institution, its primary concern was to get a good deal for learners. They want to achieve greater collaboration across schools but there is no agenda to divert pupils from school sixth forms into further education.

Funding arrangements

10. The LSC did not gain responsibility for funding 6th forms until April 2002 so it is only starting to fully address the issue. The situation in Medway is atypical from the national picture, with the majority of young people being educated in school sixth forms. They recognise that their role with schools is different and the monitoring of quality between the LEA and LSC requires further clarification at national level. To date less work has been done with schools than with further education providers, but this will change.
 11. A concern to the headteacher representative was that the national LSC agenda was being driven in a way that was detrimental to the local circumstances in Medway. Resources are allocated across the whole school and are not separated out into pre-16 and post 16 chunks. Simon Norton agreed that further education colleges did have the flexibility to use its staff more easily than in schools. We recognise this locally and work hard to iron out many of the problems that have resulted through the way the funding process has been set up.
 12. The LSC recognises that where consultation takes place at a national level, this might not take account of the local circumstances in Medway. They work hard at a national level to make the LSC aware of the differences at the local level in Kent and Medway.
 13. In fact, the formula funding system tends to allocate more money to school sixth forms per pupil than it does to FE colleges. The LSC does not believe that schools are being short changed. However, the concern from members of the group is that the perception in schools is very different and this is perhaps linked to the capital funding of projects such as that at North West Kent College and the fact that the LSC do not fund capital projects for school 6th forms. Simon Norton replied that this perception might be understandable in Medway, but across Kent via the Private Finance Initiative route there has been substantial investment in schools.
 14. The LSC's administrative costs are fixed by the government and they also dictate the proportion of funding to be used for 6th form funding – which cannot be used for other purposes. Since the demise of the Training and Enterprise Councils, bureaucracy has been reduced in the sense that there are significantly less administrative staff.
 15. The budget for 2003/04 has not been finalised. It will be an increase on the figure for 2002/03 because the secretary of state has announced some large scale investments in post 16 education during the next financial year. Some funding is also related to performance – ie. further education colleges results are allocated extra resources depending on their results.
 16. It was highlighted that funding is very confusing for schools because allocations for pre-16 pupils is on the basis of a financial year whilst
-

post 16 funding was allocated by academic year. The headteacher representative explained that this was the first year that he was unable to provide his governing body with a five year business plan solely due to complexities in post 16 funding – which includes 42 pages of guidance! Simon Norton agreed that while the funding formula can appear to be complex, the formula is designed to reflect what courses cost to deliver and is fairer than the previous system. Its principles (as opposed to details) are easy to grasp.

17. A fundamental problem is that schools do not divide teaching arrangements between pre 16 and post 16 education. The LSC appreciates this division and does not want to dictate to schools how it delivers it's teaching.
18. The LSC recognises that funding arrangements are viewed as a 'dog's breakfast' by some but this is part of a route to much greater coherence across different forms of post 16 education. Their view is that the DfES should continue to make funding arrangements more flexible and this is an issue local LSC's need to press at the national level.

Monitoring arrangements and relationship with the LEA

19. The group were keen to establish what sort of monitoring arrangements were in place to measure the quality of services the LSC delivers to schools and colleges. Accountability for funding schools pre-16 lies with the LEA and post-16 with the LSC. Simon Norton explained that there are a number of bodies which hold the LSC accountable at a local level. The local LSC board forms a key part of this and its important for us to work in a very joined up way with the LEA.
20. From the start of the LSC's work locally, the LEA have worked with us to shape and influence our direction. Regular meetings are held with senior LEA officers and we ensure that before we communicate directly with schools we liase with the LEA to seek their views and ensure that the capacity for mixed messages to schools is brought down to the minimum. We may have disagreements at times but the LSC's view is that they have a very constructive relationship with the LEA.
21. The group further questioned the LSC representatives as to who the organisation was accountable to. Simon Norton explained that accountability was to the LSC Council locally and through the National LSC Council to the Secretary of State for Education. Whilst no formal inspection regime was in place to examine the LSC, all the provision we fund is inspected. ie Ofsted inspect school sixth forms and the Learning inspectorate inspect vocational qualifications, work based learning, further education colleges, work based learning providers and adult education. These inspection scores are collated and judgements are then made about provision. The LSC board ask critical questions about decisions (including an Audit Committee), national council examines our performance, the secretary of state assesses performance and the national audit office is also measuring the LSC's effectiveness. Scrutiny is taking place at many levels.

22. LSC representatives were extremely positive about their relationship with the LEA, They highlighted that there may be times when the LSC looks upon issues from a different perspective from the LEA and there have been minor disagreements on issues but there is a very clear mutual understanding about respective roles and responsibilities. In order to maximise funding opportunities we work closely with LEA officers. Rose Collinson agreed that there is a good positive relationship in place and that when problems do arise concerns can be raised openly and honestly. The focus needs to be on achieving what is best for the learners of Medway through effective partnership working.

Strategic Area Reviews

23. The LSC are keen to involve the LEA in strategic area reviews which look across the range of provision and assesses whether it meets the needs of the area, looks at whether there are gaps or duplication and considers quality. A main objective in carrying out this review is to encourage much greater collaboration between providers, through joint arrangements, sharing of provision etc. Funding will be available for key areas of need that are identified. There is a need to embark upon this work very soon to ensure that this area is well positioned to attract funding and we are aware that both Mid Kent College are keen to invest as well as schools wanting to work closer together. The LSC must make sure it doesn't push the interests of any one particular institution – but what is best for the learner.
24. A member of the group felt that the Horsted Mid Kent College site would be a worthy recipient of capital funding as temporary huts constructed a long time ago as temporary accommodation were still in use at the site.
25. A key question which needs resolving is whether the LSC has responsibility for 14 – 16 year olds. The LSC representatives are clear in their understanding that the remit of their organisation is 16+, although they are very aware that the government is talking about 14 – 19 year olds and are running a pilot for 14-16 collaborations between schools and colleges.
26. The headteacher representative highlighted how difficult it was schools to embrace the principles of collaboration, when for the last ten years they had been encouraged to believe that the standards agenda was best addressed through competition. He emphasised that it would take time for the culture to shift and there was a need for the LSC to understand the difficulties of schools in signing up to collaboration when they were continuing to compete with each other through league tables. There was also in his view a need for the LSC to value small sixth forms and recognise that many young people would not stay on into further education without the option of having a sixth form education at their school. Simon Norton agreed that a lot of young people did want to stay with their school, however the LSC did need to

question whether this was the right option for the student, especially in cases where only a small range of courses were offered.

Careers Advice

27. Simon Norton explained that in his view there are some schools who encourage students to stay on into their sixth forms when they would be better off elsewhere. Rose Collinson agreed with the view that in small sixth forms, not part of a wider consortium this is possible, but careers advice should suggest what is best for the learner.

Future remit of the LSC

28. LSC representatives were asked whether it was likely that their remit would be broadened in the future to the extent that they would take responsibility for LEA functions such as Key stages 1 – 4. Announcements from government seem to suggest that the LSC would be taking on more and more responsibility for the delivery of education. The group is concerned as to what the long term plans the government has for the LSC.
29. Simon Norton stated that he and his colleagues find their current brief of post 16 education challenging enough and would not welcome the remit of the LSC being expanded to this extent. Decisions such as these are made by the government following consultation. Recent information obtained from a senior government official suggested that there were no plans to move the LSC's remit beyond 16, apart from work already being done on 14 – 19. The government wants the LSC to deliver on post 16 education so it is unlikely that they would be asked to take on more responsibility.

Adult Education

30. A member of the group highlighted concerns about the funding of adult education. Until recently funding for adult education came mostly via LEA's. Now the LSC has responsibility for adult education funding overall. MACLS receive a grant from the LSC and funding for further education units. The rationale is a bit jumbled as to what is subsidised and what is not – the adult education service plays a good job in delivering basic skills courses and is valued.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Summary of evidence received from Rose Collinson (Director of Education and Leisure) and Keith Morrison (senior adviser – secondary) on Monday 10 March 2003

Review Group members: -

Councillors Mrs Etheridge, Hewett, Juby and Rowan-Robinson
Jeff Hadaway – Medway Youth Parliament
Keith Williams – Headteacher representative

1. Points were clarified concerning the summary of evidence with LSC representatives. Amendments to the notes were made to the sections on: -
 - Adult Education courses
 - Careers advice
2. Rose Collinson explained that there was more funding available for family learning and basic skills, but the targets set up by the LSC nationally were extremely challenging.

Aims/Targets of LSC Kent and Medway

3. From the LEA perspective, the Learning and Skills Council are still coming to terms with being created and taking responsibility for functions delivered by former organisations such as Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC's) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They are also having to respond to new and emerging responsibilities from government, ie the 14 – 19 agenda.
4. Initial comments on the role and experience of working with the LSC in Medway were as follows: -
 - They are working hard to reduce bureaucracy and address the top – down culture, but the benefits of this are still at an early stage.
 - There is work to be done on understanding ways of working with schools on quality – this will take time
 - There needs to be a fast and sharp learning curve nationally in understanding that the majority of post 16 education in Kent and Medway is through school sixth forms. LSC has to understand that resourcing in schools is very different from further education institutions and that schools do not look at post 16 in isolation from the rest of its provision.
 - Bidding/targeting culture – unless ownership of targets is achieved it is difficult to make them deliverable.

- LSC should recognise that schools are not just accountable to them for post 16 provision, but also to their governing body, parents and pupils. Targets must be negotiated not simply handed out.
5. Jeff Hadaway expressed concern that LSC targets were very generalised and there were not specific aims for Medway.

Roles and Responsibilities

6. The role of the LEA in relation to the LSC is growing as the latter is being given new powers by government. Roles and responsibilities are changing as a result of these.
7. Keith Williams highlighted that schools feel that the LSC communicates poorly with them. He explained a situation where it appeared that the LEA's finance manager appeared to have been given different information than schools on an issue. Schools are confused as to where responsibilities lie, because LSC take responsibility for post 16 and have an agenda of area reviews, Ofsted's role in inspecting and the LEA with its own responsibilities to provide support and challenge to schools. It's a confusing situation for schools to deal with.
8. It was confirmed that DfES are keen for schools to aim for a three year plan and they are providing them with more flexibility in their spending. The DfES are moving towards long term guarantees, whilst the LSC model is short term and very targeted. A wide debate on what constitutes a broad and balanced curriculum offer for students needs to take place. If funding is piecemeal – then particular subjects cannot be offered long term. Priority should be given to moving towards the funding of whole programmes by the LSC.

Staffing arrangements

9. Concern was expressed by a member of the group about the lack of understanding LSC representatives had of teaching arrangements in schools, where individuals were not dedicated to post 16 but taught pupils of all ages. This is very different from colleges who work on the basis of if there is enough interest in a course and funding is available it will be provided. They typically will have economies of scale and can move staff around to provide support. Schools on the other hand are statutorily obliged to deliver a curriculum for 11 – 18 year olds and they will construct a timetable for courses and staff support.
10. Keith Morrison added that a significant difference was that colleges used a lot of part time and sessional staff whilst schools were driven by three notice periods a year. Therefore colleges have a far greater deal of flexibility to arrange staff to support courses.

Bidding Opportunities

11. The LSC should be aware that not every secondary school has a bidding manager that can take advantage of opportunities. Rose

Collinson stated that there had been examples recently of very short deadlines for bids. One involved notice of a bidding opportunity being given to the LEA on 14 February which had a deadline of 24 February for receipt of bids from schools. This short timescale made it virtually impossible to consult and talk with schools, but the benefits available through obtaining the funding are great.

12. The LEA has made representations to the LSC highlighting these concerns and whilst Medway schools do not want preferential treatment, they want early alerts so liaison with schools can take place at the earliest opportunity about the possibility of bids opportunities coming up. Most schools, unlike colleges, do not have employees dedicated to leveraging in funding.
13. The difficulty schools face in having to address both collaborative and competition orientated messages from the DfES made life difficult for them. There have been many years of encouragement to promote competition and independence, now the emphasis is on collegiality and inter-dependence. Schools don't often find it easy to progress collaborative bids which the LSC are encouraging.
14. Keith Williams stated that the bidding culture was a barrier for the LSC to have effective working with schools. Planning at schools takes place over a minimum of 12 months and good practice is to look beyond this to three years time. In his view the LSC 'drip feeds' projects whilst schools have been asked to embrace long term planning. Money is allocated without much foresight about whether it is a good use of resources. Rose Collinson indicated that there is a feeling that some projects are rushed through in order to deal with an underspend in a financial year, rather than examining strategic priorities. The local LSC are very aware of this and are lobbying nationally to ensure understanding.
15. Keith Morrison highlighted that an agenda for increasing participation is not necessarily going to be addressed through short term bids. The schools/colleges delivering courses need support with long term protection of budgets, along the lines of the DfES 3 year approach. Short – term approaches do not encourage any providers to commit to growth.

Capital Funding for schools

16. Clarification was sought on the extent to which LSC capital funding allocations were earmarked solely for further education colleges rather than schools. Rose Collinson explained that the current position was that significant capital funding was going into further education and adult and community learning services, whilst for school sixth forms this is viewed as the LEA's role. Consultation on strategic area reviews is currently taking place and capital could flow out of this process, although this would not necessarily benefit schools.

Post 16 provision

17. In Medway schools new forms of distance learning with video links are taking place, but support systems are very important. Jeff Hadaway explained that whilst colleges offer an extensive range of courses – many are unavailable if insufficient interest is shown. At schools on the other hand, whilst choices are limited, you know that all subjects are virtually guaranteed to be run and this provides security for students. Additional security is also provided because you can be confident that a course will run for the two years – something which FE colleges often cannot guarantee.

Relationship with the LEA

18. In terms of the relationship between the LEA and LSC, Keith Morrison explained that there was a need to differentiate between personalities and the organisation. LEA officers meet regularly with LSC representatives and have an extremely positive relationship with these people. A member of the group commented that there is a feeling that the LSC do not have control over what they're told to do, which may be because they do not know how much funding is available at the start of the year.
19. Rose Collinson indicated that the LSC has to accept that it is dealing with two different authorities and their separate approaches. Medway does things differently from Kent in a number of respects, ie. the way we relate to schools, set up for adult and community learning services. The LSC struggle to relate to people at times where they are not telling people what to do, but are performing a negotiation role. Where problems do arise however, concerns can be raised openly and honestly.
20. Keith Morrison stated that there was too much of a dynamic where LSC Kent and Medway were looking to their central office for answers and a lack of 'local flexibility' in the way they work not being apparent.
21. It was highlighted that some LSC's have appointed a schools liaison officer, a post that doesn't currently exist locally. Rose Collinson stated that the LSC are keen to recruit someone from Medway to carry out work on Strategic Area Reviews. She is keen for a school based secondment to take place – as this would have an impact on helping the LSC understand how schools operate. One thing at a national level the LSC have is a national committee for young people – this is something the LEA would welcome at the local level.
23. The LEA has termly or twice termly meetings with LSC representatives and they will come to the secondary heads meetings (at the invitation of headteachers).
24. The Local Government Association has established a memorandum of understanding between LSC's and local authorities that covers

respective roles and responsibilities. The LEA spends time working with them to help the LSC's understanding of schools.

Bureaucracy

25. Rose Collinson outlined how when the LSC was established there was a commitment to drastically reduce the levels of bureaucracy that characterised the TEC's. There is now a commitment to reduce it even more. What is a critical point is that if bureaucracy is reduced by passing it on to others, this is not a solution. LSC staff should add value to work and aims being carried out by the LEA, which includes a clear understanding of how they relate to schools.

Representation on LSC Kent and Medway board

26. Judith Armit is a member of the local LSC board. In addition Angela Jenkins represents the University of Kent, but formerly worked in Medway Adult and Community Learning Services and is an important contributor to the Medway Lifelong Learning Partnership. They both represent Medway interests strongly. There is also a headteacher representative on the board, Sue Glanville of Invicta Grammar School, Maidstone.
27. Rose Collinson is represented on sub – groups, such as one at post 16 level. A member expressed concern that there is no Medway representative on the board who understands detailed issues relating to schools, its FE college and post 16 generally.
28. The group is concerned of the potential for Medway post 16 provision to be squeezed due to the LSC policies which promote a general view whether that is national or for Kent as a whole. Rose Collinson explained that they had worked hard to make the LSC fully aware of the differences between Kent and Medway and this was confirmed in the evidence given by Simon Norton and David Waggert.
29. It was explained that the post 16 – sub group has had some successes in helping the LSC to understand the notion of schools self – evaluation and a lot of work carried out has been taken on board by the LSC. In respect of strategic area reviews, a steering group has been established which Rose will be a member of.

Strategic Area Reviews

30. It is likely that a strategic area review (STAR) could be carried out in Medway in the near future. Medway is a useful size to consider starting the process, when looking at the whole county. The STAR might include examining sixth form college provision, assessing value added by school sixth forms, whether locally we need to look at 14 – 19 rather than focusing on post 16 etc. The LEA is concerned to ensure that the evidence taken account of in such a process is a full one.

31. There has been some pilot STAR work around the Dartford area and also now some work being carried out in Ashford – due to the urgent need for further provision in the latter area. Nationally two pilot STAR's have been carried out which will inform consultation on whether to proceed with these across the country.
32. A member of the group questioned as to what evidence the decision to invest in North West Kent College, Dartford was based on in the absence of any STAR. He was particularly concerned that such groundwork is carried out before resources are allocated to particular projects.
33. The advantage of a STAR being carried out in Medway is that it is likely to make capital funding available for post 16 provision.

Post 16 entitlement

34. It was explained that the LSC had adopted the post 16 entitlement booklet that had been developed by Medway LEA. This has been really positive as it is written from the student's perspective which says that he/she is should be entitled to a rich mix of academic and vocational opportunities. Schools are encouraged to share resources wherever possible and use distance learning.

Liaison with employers

35. An area that schools are generally seen as being weak is in the area of liaison with employers and training providers. The government is encouraging schools to work more with the world of work and there are not many examples of robust working across the schools market in this. Rose explained that a number of schools are now offering accredited qualifications, ie in IC T, this needs to be expanded to others.

Drop out rates

36. A member of the group highlighted the importance of bearing drop out rates in mind when considering post 16 education. Drop out rates in further education colleges are far higher than in schools and there is therefore a need to recognise it's not just what is on offer that is an important issue, but also the support that is provided. A nurturing support which provides mentoring is often offered by schools to students who require this level of support. Rose Collinson agreed that student support, particularly between years 11 and 13, is important. There is also a need to recognise students' needs to 'earn to learn' by having part time jobs. For this reason there may be a need to become more flexible in terms of offering courses outside of traditional school hours, providing different working hours for some teachers.

Higher Education

37. Rose Collinson explained that universities are likely to change the types of courses they offer with an expansion of foundation degree

courses. For the government to reach their target of 50% of students going into higher education, then this is one of the way this might be achieved. Medway has a range of pathways that will lead to these courses (ie schools, FE and Adult/Community learning).

Student preparation

38. Officers see more contact taking place now between the various sectors about their role in preparing students for the next stage. ie. an objective for primary schools is to prepare pupils for secondary school.

Mid Kent College

39. Keith Morrison explained that the LEA valued the choice that Mid Kent College provided to young people in Medway. There were support services provided by the college and it was important to retain the FE college as an option for students. It is important to recognise that not all secondary schools have sixth forms and for some students, Mid Kent College was the main post 16 option.

Funding arrangements

40. It is difficult to assess the level of increase in budget for Kent and Medway LSC in the next financial year. Keith Williams explained that he had tried to work out the figure, but due to the complexity of the formula it had been impossible for him to confirm the exact increase. For Adult and Community Learning funding it is possible for the LEA to confirm the exact funding figure. But it is very difficult to try to confirm Medway's overall share from Kent and Medway LSC.

Next meeting

41. Suggested witnesses for the next meeting were Judith Armitt, Jonathan Shaw MP, Mid Kent College and Sue Glanville to seek their attendance at the next meeting.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Written evidence received from Sue Glanville – Headteacher of Invicta Grammar School, Maidstone and member of the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council on 9 April 2003

1. The LSC is only two years old. It is, therefore, too early to expect tangible outcomes from their work. Looking at the knowledge base the LSC is building, the will and intention to raise standards is present.
2. LSC staff work hard to understand local needs, however these are wide and varied. Current skill shortages are now clearer and providers are being asked to respond. This however, will take time before courses, etc. are complete. Also, in a rapidly changing technological climate, the skills shortages today may be different in a few years.
3. Roles and responsibilities of the LEA and LSC need to more clearly defined, undoubtedly there has been much discussion about this. Partnership is the way forward and the two organisations building a good working relationship is crucial. Schools are not always in an easy position, working with the LEA and being funded by the LSC.
4. Further Education colleges are funded in the same way as they were by the Further Education Funding Council. For schools the downside of the old system was that a student attracted the same amount funding irrespective of the number of courses they took. This has changed now in that funding is based on the number of courses taken by a student.
5. Difficulties in planning are caused however because different subjects attract different amounts of funding. In addition as year 13 students take less courses than those in year 12, schools receive less funding for these pupils. This creates an imbalance and the question has been asked of the national LSC whether year 13 courses could attract more funding than year 12 – so far this hasn't been done. A particular problem of this way of funding is that some minority subjects prove to be uneconomic.
6. A particular strength of the local LSC is that it is very proactive about learning about the local area. A main weakness is that many decisions are made at the national level.
7. The LSC is accountable to the local council members and the national council. The amount of locally decided funding is relatively small. All public bodies have to account for the funds they spend.
8. Understanding of schools was a problem at first but LSC staff are now far more informed having undertaken school visits. I applied to be on the board to make sure that the voices of schools are heard.

9. I do not view short – termism or a perceived bidding culture as a particular matter of concern for the local LSC. Three – year planning is now required to take place and this will ensure there is continuity.
10. The new aim of the 14-19 national agenda is to put students and their choices first. which is a very positive step. The involvement of local employers on the local LSC is also a move forward. The new agenda requires all parties to listen to each other. However, what some students want, what the Government wants and local employers want are not always the same. Working towards a common agreement to which schools and colleges can then respond to is the way forward.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Summary of evidence received from Judith Armitt – Chief Executive, Medway Council on Thursday 10 April 2003

Review Group members: -

Councillors Burt, Mrs Etheridge, Hewett, Juby and Rowan-Robinson
Keith Williams – Headteacher representative

The LSC in Kent and Medway

1. Judith Armitt commented the local LSC was not fully effective yet in its contribution to Medway's strategic learning agenda. It is a relatively young organisation and is still establishing its role and partnership arrangements. It is becoming more effective, particularly with regard to its work with further education colleges and work based learning. Its relationship with schools and the LEA has a considerable way to go.
2. The learning curve which the LSC is on in terms of their working with schools could continue for some time. They are not well resourced enough to engage as much as they would like with schools and the LEA has an important support role in helping them to understand the needs of schools.
3. The headteacher representative highlighted the view amongst his colleagues was that the LSC was a remote organisation that has little flexibility to respond to local issues. An example was outlined where he had approached the LSC for funding for collaborative arrangements with other schools; their response was to explain that they'd contact their head office. Judith Armitt responded that the LSC was a nationally based organisation but pressure was being placed on the Executive Director and Chairman to establish more local flexibility. Local LSC's are consistently giving this message to central government in turn.
4. Judith Armitt anticipated Simon Norton would have highlighted the positive relationship the LSC has with Medway Council, much better than that with Kent County Council. Developing an adversarial relationship would not be useful for the LEA, as it is important for us to be involved in the strategic area review. Schools do feel that there is insufficient dialogue with them and the best way to address this is to ask LSC representatives to come and visit them to discuss matters. Mutual understanding can only increase through dialogue.

Capital funding/Strategic Area Reviews

5. In terms of capital funding, there are opportunities for local LSC's to access a national pot for projects. Kent and Medway are well placed in

comparison with many other LSC's to take advantage of this funding. A strategic area review for Medway is likely to be imminent and this will identify where need is and allow capital funding to be allocated to schools.

6. A member of the group raised concerns about the possible impact a Strategic Area Review could have on small school sixth forms, particularly high schools. Judith Armitth emphasised that the question needed to be asked whether small school sixth forms operating without a strong collaboration arrangement are providing the best offer for young people in Medway. In response to views about the value of sixth form colleges, she explained that she was not suggesting that it was necessarily better for students to go to a FE college. There is a need to look at making school offers better for the student through proposals such as collaboration.
7. A member followed this up with concerns that cost primarily might drive decisions made by the LSC on future post 16 provision. Judith Armitth responded that cost is not the only driver but nevertheless the cost differential between places at FE colleges and places in school sixth forms is difficult to justify. The LSC is willing to conduct a review in partnership with the LEA and we should foster this approach. We should be now asking ourselves how post 16 provision could be improved prior to this review being carried out.
8. Concerns were also expressed by group members that a Strategic Area Review would impact upon early work that is being carried out to encourage greater collaboration between school sixth forms. It was felt that time was required before assessing whether such arrangements are successful or not.
9. Judith Armitth indicated that a Strategic Area Review would take some time to be completed and it was not the case that the LSC has an automatic agenda for structural change of post –16 education provision in Medway. If progress can be shown of improvements in standards in school sixth forms, then this will have a bearing on the review.

Future remit of the LSC – 14/19 year olds

10. She did not anticipate any likelihood of the LSC taking over the LEA's responsibility for secondary education at pre - 16. The current examination of 14 – 16 year curriculum was carried out in order to be well placed for post 16 courses. The LSC understands that its function is responsibility for post 16 education.
11. In response to the headteacher representative's assertion that she favoured post-16 education within sixth form colleges rather than schools, Judith Armitth said she did not have such a hard and fast view. She was interested to see how successful collaborative arrangements would be. Her views were based on the range of provision and results of many providers. There is not currently a sufficient range of high quality post 16 courses in Medway and this needs to be addressed.

Accountability

12. Members of the group explored the issue of who the LSC was accountable to. Judith Armitz said ultimately the LSC was accountable to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. In addition, the Kent and Medway LSC are very interested in securing local partnerships and ensuring they are accountable locally. Simon Norton's attendance as part of this review is evidence of this.

Skills shortages

13. Judith Armitz believes the LSC is beginning to improve in addressing skills shortages in the local economy but more should be done. The Regional Development Agency also has responsibility for skills, which has made matters more complex. In terms of the Chair's concerns about the omission of the health sector from the LSC's work in this area, Judith Armitz explained that the principal of Christchurch University College, Canterbury (a major provider of health sector courses) is on the LSC board and argues the case strongly, but there is undoubtedly more to do.

Bureaucracy

14. She highlighted that the LSC had simplified some matters by bringing together funding arrangements for sixth forms, further education and adult and community learning services into one organisation. The LSC is an agency of the government, which delivers through its 47 local organisations. There is nevertheless some remaining duplication.

Staying on rates

15. In response to a suggestion that staying on rates in school sixth forms should be valued highly, she agreed that this was the case and it would be wrong for the LSC to generally promote colleges as being a better source of education. Schools have a more supportive ethos than colleges and this is reflected in retention rates.

Government targets for Higher Education

16. Concern was expressed about the government's target of 50% of all students to go into Higher Education by 2010 and that the proposal to introduce fees of up to £3,000 would be a barrier to participation. Judith Armitz suggested that the Scrutiny Committee could respond to the government white paper about funding for higher education, to argue that this was not consistent with proposals to widen participation.

Representation on the LSC board

17. Judith Armitz explained that strictly speaking she was not a Medway Council representative on the LSC board. Medway has relatively few

representatives on the Kent and Medway board (from the public or private sectors). Positions on the board are open to anyone to apply. On the other hand while Medway was not heavily represented on the board, she did not feel that our interests are marginalised.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Summary of evidence received from John Levett, Jon Pink and Peter Watson – Mid Kent College on Thursday 10 April 2003

Review Group members: -

Councillors Burt, Hewett, Juby and Rowan-Robinson

In attendance – Rose Collinson – Director of Education and Leisure

Mid-Kent College provision

1. Mid-Kent College is based on three sites (one in Maidstone and two in Medway) with a total of 15,000 students of which around 4,000 are full time (of which 2000 – 2200 are in Medway). Provision varies from foundation level through to HND's and through working in partnership with the University of Kent at Medway degree level courses can be delivered.
2. Following an LSC review carried out in October 2002, the college was rated as strong in all three categories, participation and recruitment, learner experience and performance finance and management. Our retention rate last year was 87% - this is the national benchmark and this year it is expected that this figure will be 1% higher.
3. Achievement rates at Mid Kent College are at 86%, which is 5% above the national average. This represents between 30,000 and 35,000 qualifications per year that are taken by their students.
4. An exciting development has been provision for 14 – 16 year olds, the college now has 500 students on a range of courses such as taster programmes and provision for students who have dropped out and are looking for more vocational options. Around 50% of students who attend these taster courses will then continue with post 16 education at Mid Kent College – when it is unlikely that many would have stayed on at 16. Close work with Medway LEA has enabled us to raise participation rates amongst a large number of pupils.
5. The college has this year had particular successes in areas of skills shortages such as construction and engineering. More opportunities are available for the local community to gain skills in these areas where there are good job prospects.

A new site for Mid-Kent College in Medway

6. The college's Maidstone site is in the process of being upgraded. For Medway a decision has been taken to go to one site in Medway. There are maintenance problems with the Horsted campus and the City Way

campus would have problems in being converted into a modern learning environment of sufficient capacity. The intention is to use a site adjacent to the Royal School of Military Engineering. This location would be near public transport and more accessible than the current Horsted site and would be better placed to encourage participation in courses for local economy skills shortages. The successful winning of the bid to undertake training at the RSME will make us one of the biggest trainers of building and civil engineering in the country.

7. The local LSC is keen to be involved with us on examining a new site in Medway. SEEDA are also involved due to the enormous regeneration benefits that there would be. This site will enable new facilities to be provided that would benefit the wider community.
8. The total cost of a new campus would be between £35 and £38 million. Of this it is anticipated that the LSC contribution and sale of Mid Kent College land would total £28M. The gap in funding is hoped will be provided by partners who have a common interest in having a modern learning environment for post 16 education.
9. The timescale is to seek commitment from partners between April and July 2003 and then produce a outline plan for the LSC with an application by August 2003. We would hope that the completion for moving both sites here would be September 2007.
10. The college is looking for Medway LEA to continue to develop joint provision of courses, so educational facilities can be improved for the learner of Medway. The Learning and Skills Council is the planning and funding authority that needs to support this area development and view it as part of the Strategic Area Review.

School post – 16 provision

11. In response to question as to whether the College were relying on the LSC favouring them above schools for post 16 provision, John Levett explained that there was enough capacity and training requirements in Medway for them to operate alongside schools. There may be some changes over what is offered by who in the future that will have to be taken forward through discussions. Jon Pink added that having a range of post 16 providers was positive because it provided students with a choice of different educational environments to which they are best suited.

Work with schools

12. Mid Kent College's relationships with schools tend to vary. Excellent partnership arrangements have been made with some schools, in encouraging their students to attend taster courses. Trust has been built up with many schools who not perceive the college to be a threat to their sixth forms.

13. The taster programmes involve a year 10 programme where a student will attend for half a day a week and pick 6 courses over the year. They will then choose one course in year 11 to study for half a day a week over the course of that year. The objective of the programme is for these students to stay in education as it is likely that the majority of this group would drop out at 16 otherwise.
14. There are also approximately 15 – 20 full time 14 - 16 students who have either been excluded from school or require alternative arrangements, they are placed in vocational programmes. Discussions have been held with the LEA about further provision the college could provide for more excluded pupils.
15. John Levett stated that the challenge for the college was to reach students that drop out of school at 16. Simply moving students from school to college provision will not increase the overall skills base in Medway. The choices document issued by the LEA last year that outlined all post 16 options was a positive move in this direction.
16. Jon Pink explained that there wasn't a great deal of dialogue with headteachers at present as schools were still quite suspicious of the college. Schools should be aware that the college is interested in attracting more students into post 16 education rather than take students away from sixth forms. Kent and Medway LSC want to have 6000 extra 16 – 18 year olds in full time education over the next three years and dialogue with schools is on the basis that they wish to increase levels of participation and attract many that would otherwise drop out of education.

Appropriateness of courses to the student

17. The college has developed more foundation and entry level programmes and assessment is made at an early stage by a personal tutor as to the appropriateness of the course that the student is studying. After a few weeks of the academic year there are opportunities for students to switch courses or level if this is necessary for the student to succeed.

Funding arrangements

18. In response to a question regarding current funding arrangements, John Levett explained that he would like to be on a level playing field with school sixth forms which often isn't the case.

Retention rates

19. The group sought clarification regarding the 87% retention rate. John Levett confirmed that this was overall for all students and that the rate for 16 – 18 year olds is likely to be lower – although this is still in line with national averages.

Responsiveness of LSC

20. Mid Kent College representatives feel that in comparison with the former Further Education Funding Council, the LSC is more responsive as there are people in the organisation that work well with the college at a local level. There is a need to recognise all the responsibilities that the LSC have been given over the last two years. In their view, the LSC are now becoming responsive to requests. In the early days there were some difficulties experienced that were perhaps understandable.
21. The LSC has provided various sources of funding for the college to target at specific projects such as £150,000 for training teachers and volunteer workers to teach basic skills and £50,000 to target increases in retention and achievement at Level 1 and 2 programmes. They are putting money for specific groups where need has been demonstrated.
22. The LSC has employed many people with knowledge and experience of further education since its inception. The reason they do not have as much expertise of schools is that they have not had responsibility for post – 16 funding for very long. At the moment the LSC does have a greater knowledge of what further education does in comparison to schools.

Strategic Area Review

23. Effective partnership working is in place with the LEA and the college has been preparing with LEA officers for the forthcoming strategic area review.

Accountability

24. As there are 47 local offices of the LSC, they are far more accountable locally than the former FEFC. They understand their local area and whilst their new responsibilities have led to a large learning curve for the organisation, they are open in the way they work which is to be welcomed.

Range of provision

25. Mid Kent College has provision in all areas of the curriculum except limited provision for horticulture (due to close proximity of Hadlow College). There are a few pockets of need that are currently not covered, such as logistics, transport and fork lift truck driving. We are always looking at ways of providing with partners courses such as these. The last inspection of the college concluded that there was a very broad range of provision.

Careers Advice

26. At the moment careers advice for colleges is underfunded and the careers service and Connexions appear to be struggling. John Levett explained that courses such as Performing Arts are designed so they

contain business studies units. It is often not possible to convince students to study a course that had a clear career path at the end of it, so the key was making courses as genuine as possible and relevant to the world of work.

27. In respect of careers advice in schools, Jon Pink stated that there was a need to examine whether pupils were disadvantaged by the keenness of schools to retain them into their sixth forms.

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW

Summary of evidence received from Jonathan Shaw MP for Chatham and Aylesford and member of the Education and Skills Select Committee on Thursday 10 April 2003

Review Group members: -

Councillors Burt, Hewett, Juby and Rowan-Robinson

In attendance – Rose Collinson – Director of Education and Leisure

Learning and Skills Council at national level

1. Jonathan Shaw explained that the Learning and Skills Council budget has grown considerably to £7.3 Billion – which is likely to rise by 2005/06 to around £9 Billion. Funds are allocated depending upon the learning needs that have been identified in the local area.
2. Staying on rates at post 16 level nationally are appalling, the UK is 24th out of 27 developed countries in the world for post 16 participation. Medway is I believe just above the national average for its rates. The LSC has tough targets to meet and Medway has higher proportions of need than many other areas in Kent. Medway will have to have its fair share of funding if the LSC are to meet their targets.
3. The Education Secretary recently had a meeting with all 47 of the local LSC Executive Directors to outline what he expects the organisation to achieve. In his view the LSC cannot deliver without close working with its partners such as Medway LEA, Mid Kent College, employers and schools. For too long institutions have operated in isolation from each other, this must change. Employers want to have a relationship with education institutions and now the LSC has the money to establish closer working between the world of business and education.
4. In respect of the delivery in Medway of post 16 education through schools, Jonathan Shaw emphasised that there was a need to look from the perspective of the learner rather than that of an institution. If we had got the right solution, we wouldn't have a skills deficit and be so far behind other developed nations.
5. He emphasised that society is failing the learner if a post 16 course is just designed to justify the existence of an institution. If institutions can get together to offer a broader curriculum more young people will get better qualifications, which will result in a higher skilled workforce.
6. The LSC is evolving locally, their understanding of education is improving. They have more of a handle on further education than the TEC's had and there is a FE representative on the LSC board as well

as one from schools. It is quite an achievement to have produced a strategy and targets for 2004 within the short period of time that the LSC has been in existence. Medway Council should not be passive recipients of what the LSC decides, you need to be actively working alongside them and this inquiry is a positive step in this process.

Relationship with schools

7. He emphasised the need to implement what is best in terms of education for the benefit of young people. It was unfortunate that at times there were situations where time is not given to assess the impact of new initiatives. In terms of the post 16 school collaborative arrangements, he was interested in these developments and hoped these were something the LSC was mindful of when examining current provision.

Increasing participation

8. Cost effectiveness as a way of judging provision was a concern to the group. Jonathan Shaw responded that the LSC does have flexibility at a local level to take account of the situation in Medway. He highlighted that tough choices may have to be made and that a Strategic Area Review is about assessing what is best for the learner in Medway. At the moment we are not getting it right and it is important that participation rates are increased. From 2004/05 education maintenance allowances (£500M per annum) will be introduced, these will allow students from poorer backgrounds to receive up to £1500 per year. Pilots have shown an increase of 5 – 6 % in participation and he would expect the LSC to be charged with mounting aggressive take up campaigns. We need to help students on Medway's poorer estates to participate in further education courses. A way of increasing participation could be to focus on improving attainment at GCSE level.
9. Jonathan Shaw highlighted a crucial decision in this years budget speech were proposals to allocate from 2005 half of the rates from new business start ups to local authorities. All the work carried out by the Economic Development department will deliver real financial benefits.

Accountability

10. The House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee takes evidence on a regular basis from the chief executive and the chair of the LSC. They are accountable to parliament and to the Secretary of State. Local LSC's have on their board individuals who represent various interests who the Executive Director reports to. One criticism is that there is no ethnic minority representation on our local LSC. Some accountability at a local level is in the hands of local people, with the local authority playing an important role in this.
11. A member followed up this issue with a further question in relation to accountability. It was highlighted how if the LEA wished to close a school, there was a consultation process to be adhered to and there

was concern that the LSC might not be so willing to place itself in the firing line.

Future role of the LSC

12. He does not believe there are plans to decrease the LEA's role. In fact the pendulum has swung back the other way but the role is different now. Schools do not operate in isolation from each other anymore and the LEA has a role in assessing how changes would affect other schools. Support arrangements to schools are stronger now budgets are largely devolved to schools. There is no likelihood of the LSC encroaching on education matter for under 16's.
13. In respect of 14 – 19 it struck a member as odd that the LEA would continue to be responsible for 14 – 16, whilst the LSC appeared to have been given some remit which covers this age group. Jonathan Shaw responded that it was clear that the LSC's remit was for post – 16 education and LEA responsibility for Key Stages 3 and 4 would not be removed

Bidding culture

14. In response to concerns that the LSC was wedded to a 'bidding culture' with often very little notice given to schools, he hoped that in the course of the Strategic Area Review this concern could be raised. There will always be some kind of bidding process, as funding cannot be allocated without having an understanding of proposed projects. In fact, there is less bidding now as the new deal for schools capital funding has been devolved to the LEA. It would be helpful if the rules were made clearer.

Skills Shortages

15. He informed the group that Mid-Kent College had now established a partnership with Kent Community Care Homes to make some inroads into the lack of qualifications that care workers have. This type of initiative is extremely welcome and more of this type are required. In addition more effort needs to be undertaken to encourage Medway students to be our doctors and teachers of the future. Innovative methods need to be employed to 'grow our own', rather than relying on recruiting people with such skills from outside of the area.
16. There is also far more that could be done to inspire young people to use a public service career. The image of teaching should be talked up and put across as an attractive career option. The Education and Skills Select Committee had spent a week in Birmingham, examining how this LEA had drastically improved its performance. This kind of in-depth work is extremely valuable.

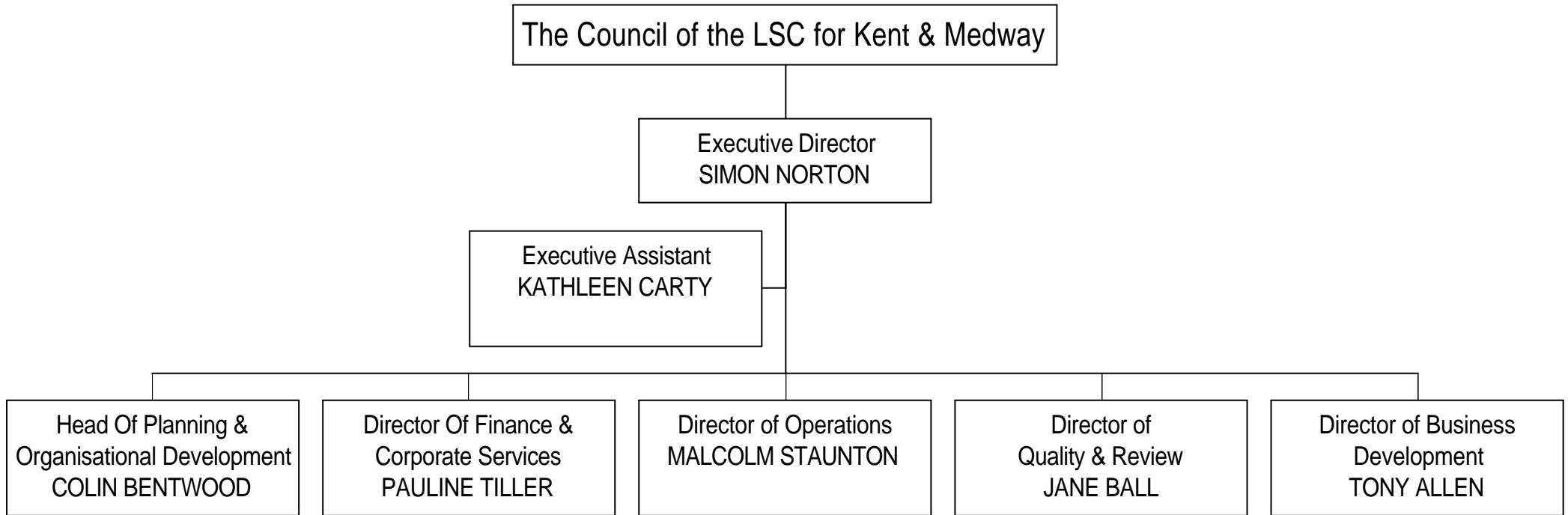
Training in Medway

17. In response to a question regarding the involvement of local employers in training in Medway, Jonathan Shaw explained that in respect of attendance at Employer Forums you do tend to see the same faces each time, most of whom tend to be from the larger employers. Larger firms tend to find it easier to be able to attend, whereas trying to engage with SME's is far more difficult.
18. Ambitions must be focused on increasing the number of modern apprenticeships and the LSC are carrying out work to help make this possible in SME's. The links however are not what they could or should be. There needs to be an over-arching strategy between business, education, further education to increase skills level amongst employees. Trade Unions also have an important role in ensuring that their members have access to training.
19. Another announcement in the budget was that a Job Centre plus scheme will enable funding for job centres to be used in a flexible manner to cater for local employment needs.

Work experience

20. Work experience was highlighted by the group as an important means helping young people to what sort of career they would like. Jonathan Shaw said that the local authority should not always look at others to take the lead as there was much they could do as a large employer to give young people work experience.

LSC FOR KENT AND MEDWAY



LSCKM COUNCIL MEMBERS' CONNECTIONS WITH ORGANISATIONS

MEMBER	INTEREST
Judith Armitt	Medway Council University of Kent
Malcolm Bell	North West College KAFEC Learning Shops, Bluewater University for Industry (UFI) Hub – Kent & Medway
Barry Camfield	Transport & General Workers Union SEEDA
Paul Carter	KCC Education and Libraries Policy Unit Carter Consultancy Fulham Brass & Ironmongers Ltd Decorating Centre Ltd Oldborough Manor School Governor of Leigh City Technology College Governor of West Kent FE College
Allan Chisholm	Lend Lease Europe Ltd Bluewater Learning Shop North West Kent SRB Partnership Bovis Lend Lease
Sue Glanville	Invicta Grammar School Kent LEA NAHT National Secondary Sector Committee KMEBA Kent LEA Central Costs Task Force Kent LEA Budget Committee Kent LEA ICT Strategy Group
Chris Hearn	Barclays Bank
Vernon Hull	Workers Educational Association Groundwork Trust Kent & Medway Kent Learning Partnership Mid Kent College
Angela Jenkins	University of Kent University of Greenwich Kent Adult Education Service Council for Voluntary Services (Medway) Art for Life

MEMBER	INTEREST
Carolyn Mason	Glaxosmithkline Chemical, Manufacturing & Processing NTO Council
Anne-Marie Nelson	Fairplay South East Ltd Individual Learning Co Ltd University of Greenwich Canterbury College Grange Park Health & Social Care Sector Group
Simon Norton	Executive Director of LSCKM
Professor Michael Wright	Canterbury Christ Church University College Thanet College Sandwich Technology School Duke of York's Royal Military School
Derek Hunter	GMB
Graham Badman	Kent County Council
Mary Sabalis	Business and Local Commerce Training Company Experience

OBSERVER	INTEREST
Claire Coday	Business Link (Kent)
Mark Bilsborough	GOSE
Gordon Bernard	Connexions
Paul Wyatt	Jobcentre Plus

Response from Simon Norton – Executive Director, Kent and Medway LSC to the draft report

Thank you for your invitation of 4 June to respond to the scrutiny report's conclusions and recommendations. In general I found the report fair and balanced, and a good foundation for developing further our very positive relationship with Medway.

I offer the following comments on those conclusions (a) to (h) which relate directly to the LSC.

Conclusions

- a) We are working very closely with Medway on data issues, particularly in the context of Strategic Area Reviews (StAR), with the aim of improving the level of data and information that is more specific to Medway. This will be critical to the success of StAR, by ensuring that judgements and decisions are made on the best possible information. The Committee may wish to be aware that the StAR of Medway will examine post-16 collaborative arrangements and this may offer the opportunity for further joint working and minimising duplication of effort at a time when resources are scarce.
- b) StAR may assist the process of attracting additional capital funding for schools by identifying opportunities for investment post-16. However, recent consultation by the Government indicates that it has no plans to implement significant changes to the LSC's responsibilities for schools' capital. The Scrutiny Committee should not therefore have great expectations that the LSC will be able to fund new school capital developments, although we may be able to bolster and support LEA initiatives.
- c) The Scrutiny Committee's concern about the balance of membership is shared by the Learning and Skills Council for Medway. The Council has been strengthened recently in respect of its business membership. However, despite sustained efforts to redress other imbalances, including seeking nominations, recommendations and targeted advertising, it has not yet been possible to achieve this. We will continue to seek to address this weakness.
- d) The LSC has been undertaking a review of the first year's experience of the mainstream sixth form funding arrangements, as part of its initiative to streamline all the funding arrangements it has with its providers. LEA colleagues have contributed a number of useful ideas about simplification. I am optimistic that the LSC will be able to move towards less bureaucratic and simpler arrangements for the next funding cycle.
- e) We have now employed several staff whose school experience we draw upon and who liaise directly with schools on a range of subjects. The Committee may also wish to know that Stephen Harvey, Head of

Sixth Form at The Howard School, will be joining the LSC for a year and will be directly involved in the StAR of Medway and parts of Kent. David Waggett will continue to have specific responsibility for linking with both Medway and Kent LEAs on policy.

- f) I am grateful for the recognition of the high quality relationship that exists between both Councils. I believe that joint working is essential: to do otherwise would be damaging for all those who rely upon us for their educational services.
- g) Although our initial priority has been to ensure that 16-19 issues have been addressed, we are now seeking to deepen our relationship and examine opportunities for ensuring that 14-19 pathways are not adversely affected by artificial boundaries. StAR will also take account of developments at 14-16, which have a critical impact on post-16 opportunities.
- h) I would be happy to give evidence to the Scrutiny Committee annually to help further strengthen the joint/collaborative working which already exists. Each local LSC publishes an Annual Report, and it may be helpful to focus a future meeting around that report.

Regards

Simon Norton

