

Minutes

Date	11 September 2012
Subject	Skills Funding Agency Advisory Board
Attendees	As per Annex

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 Kim Thorneywork welcomed members to the tenth meeting of the Advisory Board which was her first meeting as Chief Executive of the Agency. As Kim was leading some of the items on the agenda, she asked Mark Farrar to step in and chair the meeting.

2. Minutes and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on 17 April 2012 were agreed and these would now be published on the Agency's website.

3. Update on the Agency Review and the role of the Advisory Board

3.1 Kim Thorneywork updated the Board on progress of the Skills Funding Agency review where Ministers had agreed that the organisation would move to become an Executive Agency. It had been agreed that although the legal changes would probably take place next year, there would be a move towards shadow arrangements earlier where this is possible.

3.2 Strands of work had been agreed with BIS as part of the transitional arrangements. This includes a strand on governance and accountability which has implications for the role of the Advisory Board. Advice had been received from Cabinet Office who had recommended that the Advisory Board has an independent chair and have a role in reporting to Ministers on the performance of the Agency and the Chief Executive, whilst recognising that this would not form part of the formal accountability framework. The Agency would like to take this forward immediately and Kim was keen to get the Board's views on this. Another suggestion was the potential to appoint non-executive directors to sit on the Agency's internal strategy board which Kim was considering and she asked for the Board's views on this also.

3.3 The Board noted the update and in discussion made the following comments:

- The work on structures and accountability should not detract from the focus on the outcomes of learners which is important.
- This repositioning of the Board is welcomed but there is a need to continue with the inclusive perspective of the sector that the Board has.

- This new approach is supported and an independent chair is necessary. Also a stakeholder view is needed on Agency performance.
- Consider what skills and expertise non-executives can bring to the executive when deciding if they should attend management meetings.
- Understand that the Board needs to be formalised but wouldn't want to lose the wider debate and conversation that takes place here.
- As part of the transition, the organisation can learn from other Executive Agencies, as the change in status can bring challenges e.g. speed of decision making.
- Feedback on performance is wider than a focus on delivery, but also covers how the organisation relates to Government departments and other organisations.
- Feedback from individual organisations from the sector is needed by the Board, in addition to the view of representative bodies.

3.4 The Chair thanked members for their comments. Mark added that in his role as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, he was concerned about the level of cumulative risk associated with change that had already taken place in the organisation, and the risk of further change had been discussed at the last Committee meeting.

4. Renewing the Agency

4.1 Kim Thorneywork gave a short presentation outlining some 'themes' or 'touchstones' for the FE system/sector and the Agency.

4.2 The Board were asked to comment on the presentation and in response made the following comments:

- It is important to tell the FE story and demonstrate persuasively the sector is achieving and what can be achieved.
- Should celebrate FE as well as tell the story, but also acknowledge that all parts don't need deliver excellence - as long as the overall outcome is excellent.
- Local providers and colleges have good stories to tell, but the perspective of others can have an impact - including employers.
- Any activity on 'telling the FE story' should link in with the work of the FE Reputation Group and the creation of an FE Guild.
- Need to tackle the sometimes cynical view that the system is bureaucratic and not delivering growth.
- There is a perception that skills don't deliver what is needed locally, but this needs to be based on data and information as it is only anecdotal
- Need to maintain the autonomy of providers and colleges to deliver locally.
- The opportunity to build the reputation of FE is now and this is critical to success going forward.
- The change to an Executive Agency will bring challenges and risks, such as bureaucracy, which should be recognised.
- Some stability for the sector is needed. Simplification is welcomed but brings change which can be diverting for the sector.

4.3 The Chair thanked the Board for their comments and asked if they had any further reflections to let Kim know by email.

5. Round up of 2011/12

5.1 Keith Smith gave a presentation which highlighted areas of progress over the last year.

5.2 The Board made the following comments in response to the presentation:

- A wider debate is needed on the participation figures and the detail that sits behind these, as there are a number of issues that need to be considered by the Agency.
- The satisfaction rates of the careers service in Wales is higher than in England and it is worth looking at student feedback from this.
- There may be unintended consequences of the changes to discretionary support for fully funded learners.

5.3 The Chair thanked Keith for his presentation and the Board for their comments.

6. Challenges for 2012/13

6.1 Verity gave a short presentation which built on Kim's earlier presentation and highlighted some challenges for the sector and the Agency.

6.2 In the discussion that followed, the Board raised a number of points including:

- Measures of success are more than just success rates.
- These are opportunities as well as challenges for the sector and the Agency.
- Communications and promotion is difficult if there is no marketing support.
- There is a need to address areas that need improvement rather than just reporting on performance management.
- Stakeholders need to hold the system to account recognising that this is a long term change which will take time and will be different for each organisation.
- Some organisations need to take a strategic decision as to who they are accountable to.
- The sector needs to consider who it wants to influence and where it wants to build its reputation.

6.3 The Chair thanked Board members for the views and pointed out that there were a number of possible items for discussion at future meetings that had arisen from the discussion. Kim offered to circulate this list for Board members to comment on and add to as necessary.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business and the meeting drew to a close.

List of attendees at Skills Funding Agency Advisory Board Meeting
11 September 2012

Members:

Neil Couling	Jobcentre Plus
Martin Doel	AOC
Mark Farrar	Construction Skills
Prof Ruth Farwell	Bucks New University
Ian Forward	Kent County Council/ LEA FEA
Jon Graham	CIPFA
Sue Husband	McDonalds
Toni Pearce	NUS
Ian Pryce	Bedford College/ 157 Group
Rachel Sandby Thomas	BIS
Kim Thorneywork	Skills Funding Agency
Les Walton	EFA
Tim Ward	Learning Curve/ TSNLA

In Attendance:

Verity Hancock	Skills Funding Agency
Keith Smith	Skills Funding Agency
Priya Gossain	Skills Funding Agency

Apologies:

Derrick Anderson	Lambeth Borough Council
Michael Davies	UKCES
James Fothergill	CBI
Graham Hoyle	AELP
John Longworth	BCC
Frances O'Grady	TUC