



**Date** Thursday 3 April 2014  
**Subject** Skills Funding Agency Advisory Board  
**Attendees** As per Annex

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## 1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 Paul Drechsler welcomed Board members to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Chairman informed the Board that today's meeting would focus on the emerging strategy for consumer services. Paul welcomed Heather Miller, Deputy Director for Pathways to Higher Skills (BIS), Joe Billington, Deputy Director of National Careers and Learner Services, and Val Chiesa (Head of NAS – simplification), all of whom are attending for this item.
- 1.3 Paul also welcomed Helen Knee, Deputy Director for the Chief Executive's Office.

## 2. Minutes and matters arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the last meeting, held on 27 February 2014, were agreed. These would now be published on the Agency's website. The Board noted that all actions on the action log had been closed.
- 2.2 Under matters arising, it was noted that the Funding letter for the 2014-15 financial year was yet to be received by the Agency but it was expected to arrive within the next few weeks.
- 2.3 It was further noted that the Audit and Risk Committee met on 20 March 2014. Mark Farrar informed the Board that the items considered by the Committee were largely business as usual. The Annual Report and Accounts for the 2013-14 financial year would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting on 22 May. A formal update on this will be put to the Advisory Board at its next meeting.

### **3. The future strategy and business model of Consumer Services**

- 3.1 Barbara informed the Board that as part of the Reform Programme, the Executive Management Team was reviewing the consumer services offered by the Skills Funding Agency and its brands going forward. The purpose of this item was to seek the Board's advice, challenge and support on the proposed future strategy for these services.

#### National Careers Service

- 3.2 Joe Billington introduced a paper setting out the background and priorities of the National Careers Service (NCS). The Board noted that the NCS was established in April 2010 and the service consists of three distinct but connected channels: a telephone service; a website; and a local face-to-face service. These services aim to provide impartial information, advice and guidance to young people and adults.
- 3.3 The Board discussed the main target audience and purpose of the NCS. It was noted that face-to-face guidance sessions were available for any adult over the age of 19. (Schools and Local Authorities are responsible for providing careers guidance for people under that age). Jobseekers and people facing redundancy are amongst the priority groups using this particular service. The web and telephone services aim to provide careers advice and information to anyone above the age of 13.
- 3.4 The Board felt that the NCS needed a clear indication of exactly who the target audience is so that any future strategy provides a solution to meet the needs of those target groups. The same solution would not necessarily suit a 16 year old and a 60 year old, for example.
- 3.5 Heather Miller from BIS, confirmed that the NCS was not the sole delivery method of providing careers guidance to the nation. The services it provides complement the work being done by schools, local authorities, Job Centre Plus etc. The Board raised the broader question of who, or which department, was accountable for careers guidance in the country. Was the NCS expected to coordinate careers advice for England in its entirety or was it just one of the key stakeholders? The Board agreed this was a critical question for the department, the Minister and employers to consider in order for the NCS to be clear on its exact role and remit. Heather confirmed that the Minister, and working to him the joint DfE/BIS policy team, are accountable for the success of the Inspiration agenda. Nevertheless officials do look to the NCS to show leadership in communicating the required culture change and contractors are explicitly tasked with mobilising local partnerships to increase the quality and quantity of employer-education engagement.

- 3.6 In terms of the services currently provided and the future strategy for them, the Board advised that analysis of the market segmentation is an important piece of work that will help the NCS tailor the services it provides to its users. It was also agreed that the NCS should engage fully with employers and other stakeholders to ensure the information available to service users is rich in content.
- 3.7 It was noted that the NCS had 12 area-based contracts. In procuring future provision, the Board advised that the Agency should be clear on what success looks like; the cost of delivering that success; and whether it provides value for money from the taxpayer's perspective. Joe informed the Board that the NCS would push for a service in each area that responds directly to local skills demands and tailors advice to each individual as well.
- 3.8 Joe led the Board through a proposal to establish a single infrastructure to support both the National Apprenticeships Service (NAS) and the NCS, whilst retaining their powerful external brands. The two brands would be kept separate as NAS promotes apprenticeships whilst the NCS provides impartial careers advice. This proposal means there would be two websites and two helplines but one call centre and one digital platform supporting them both. The Board noted the customer journey as outlined in paper 3B.
- 3.9 The Board commented that the NCS was of a different character to much of the Agency's business and could potentially be reassigned elsewhere within BIS as a freestanding agency in itself or perhaps located in another department, for example DWP. Any move to outsource shared services between NAS and NCS could cement their position within the Agency; this may or may not be what is intended. There was a view that any outsourcing proposal would need to take account of the possibility of separating the services. The Board advised that clear criteria should be set for any aspects of the service that are outsourced and that outsourcing should only be considered as a solution if there are genuine synergies to be made. The Board further advised that the resulting service should also be consistent across the 12 areas.

#### Apprenticeship Applications Exemplar

- 3.10 Val Chiesa provided the Board with a brief overview of the Apprenticeship Vacancies (AV) service, an online system that advertises vacancies for employers and promotes them to candidates. This system was developed on the basis that it would serve a few hundred thousand users, but it was noted that numbers have now reached 1.4 million candidate applications in the last year alone. For this reason, the department nominated AV as an exemplar digital service.
- 3.11 It was noted that AV will be redesigned and rebuilt according to the guidelines set by the Government Digital Service for 'exemplar' services.

Val informed the Board that the changes would result in a clearer, easier to use service for employers wishing to post apprenticeship vacancies and traineeship opportunities online and a clear self-service process for candidates to apply for those positions. The Board noted the additional benefits outlined in paper 3C.

- 3.12 The Board welcomed the update and supported the move to provide an easier to use, modern service for advertising and applying for apprenticeship vacancies. Val suggested the Board might like to see a demonstration of the early prototype to show how the new service is being designed and built iteratively based on user research.

#### **4. Any other business**

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

**List of attendees at Skills Funding Agency Advisory Board Meeting**  
**3 April 2014**

**Members:**

Paul Drechsler (Chair)	Teach First
Barbara Spicer	Skills Funding Agency
Jon Graham	CIPFA
Mark Farrar	Association of Accounting Technicians
Martin Doel	AOC
Michael Davis	UKCES
Prof Ruth Farwell	Bucks New University
Stewart Segal	AELP
Tom Wilson	TUC/ Union Learn

**In Attendance:**

Heather Miller	BIS
Helen Knee	Skills Funding Agency
Joe Billington	Skills Funding Agency
Keith Smith	Skills Funding Agency
Kiran Virdee	Skills Funding Agency
Sue Husband	Skills Funding Agency
Val Chiesa	Skills Funding Agency

**Apologies:**

Ian Pryce	Bedford College/157 Group
Joe Vinson	NUS
Les Walton	EFA
Rachel Sandby Thomas	BIS
Rob Wall	CBI
Tim Ward	Learning Curve/TSNLA