

**Chair's Notes  
Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

**Meeting Topics**

**Scrutiny – Proposals for YPLA Commissioning Framework**

**Information Session - National Employer Service**

**Information Session - System Interoperability**

**Monitoring – Actions taken on issues identified during 08-09**

***Scrutiny of proposals – YPLA Commissioning Framework***

Having studied the documentation provided, the meeting questioned representatives from DCSF on the proposals for the YPLA National Commissioning Framework with regard to the likely bureaucratic impact under four theme headings.

**Overall system design**

The meeting questioned whether the system design was actually bringing together any duplicate systems and whether any existing bureaucracy was being removed or simply replaced. Reassurance was given that it was not the intention for more staff to be employed to operate the new Framework once responsibility for planning and commissioning was transferred from the LSC and that it was not possible for programme funds to be top sliced by LAs to employ additional bureaucrats. It was pointed out that there may not be a reduced amount of "wiring", but it was not intended that the complexity would increase. Members felt that there would inevitably be an increase in bureaucracy in the implementation stages where a high degree of system disaggregation was experienced, but with providers in future dealing only with a single 14-19 Local Authority Team instead of with the LSC as well, it was likely that the move would eventually be positive in reducing bureaucracy in the sector. Concern was expressed that although the Framework was intended to be open and transparent for all providers, the plan seemed to be for Academies to continue to be funded outside of the system. It was felt that the sector was more likely to accept a change to this new system if it was clear that a level playing field for all providers would eventually be achieved.

### Bureaucracy surrounding planning and negotiations

The concept of a single Lead Commissioning Authority for a provider was welcomed, although there was still uncertainty about how this would operate in Sub Regional Groups. The draft Framework provides for the YPLA to directly commission GFE providers in the event that a developing SRG does not mature in good time. DCSF representatives gave assurance that this provision was unlikely to be needed and that it was there as a backstop position. Members felt that it was important that SRGs developed quickly and established sufficient capacity to implement a thorough commissioning process which dealt with sub regional travel-to-learn issues in a fair manner. An appeals process for agreeing which body is to be a provider's Lead Commissioner (LC) was requested to be developed so that concerns over the ability of a small LA to properly commission all 14-19 provision at a large GFE college serving regional and possibly national needs could be dealt with at an early stage in the process. It was explained that although taking the planning closer to the learner should result in better local outcomes, there was an understanding that too much parochialism must be avoided. Within this theme, it was felt that the changes would be initially neutral in terms of bureaucracy reduction, with an eventual hope for a positive effect as the system beds down.

### Bureaucracy surrounding funding allocations and payment

The DCSF representatives explained that Local Authorities would receive a total allocation which was an aggregation of existing funding for all providers for which they were the LC but that they would be able to vary the amount allocated to each provider according to their local commissioning decisions. There was uncertainty as to whether this applied to virement between local Learning provision and Apprenticeship provision which was a separate funding stream allocated through the SFA/NAS. It was felt that the NCF proposals were not fully developed yet to cope with Apprenticeship provision, particularly in areas where the travel-to-work area included several LC Authorities and possibly nationally based Training Providers who were working in the area but who were not very visible to the LCs. It was felt that there was a danger that the NCF would increase bureaucracy and lead to more complexity in the commissioning of Apprenticeships unless the Framework placed more emphasis on the issues in this area.

### Regulation, Financial Assurance, Performance Management and Audit

The DCSF representatives requested that this area not be subject to scrutiny at this stage as much development work was still in progress. Members agree to return to the matter in the near future when proposals were clearer. It was felt that this was an area where considerable reductions in bureaucracy could be made with this opportunity of moving to a new system. Close working together between the YPLA and the SFA as the two regulatory and performance management bodies is needed to ensure that providers who deliver several types of provision are subject only to a single assurance and audit regime. If this can be achieved it could be seen as the single major benefit to the sector in reducing bureaucracy and such a move would greatly assist in bringing about acceptance and welcome for the new Framework.

The BRG was invited to take part in designing the testing and walk-through procedures to be developed and implemented over the next six months. It was also suggested that the two Transition Boards might benefit from an increased and direct BRG input. [Return to top](#)

### **Information Session – National Employer Service**

Members were interested in the presentation from the Relationship Director of the NES explaining the work of the unit in encouraging large employers to build on their in-house training schemes to produce nationally recognised outcomes for employees instead of ending with in-company certification. Several examples were given where it was noted that allowing amendment of the normal rules and systems for assuring the value and quality of publicly funded training had greatly increased the willingness of large employers to produce recognised training outcomes. Such schemes were considered to be very cost-effective and simple for the employers to manage as much of the existing bureaucracy was able to be simplified, amended or removed.

Examples of areas where bureaucracy had been reduced were:

- Assembling bespoke Apprentice Frameworks from units of existing Frameworks
- Development of electronic platforms for evidence recording
- Conversion of existing evidence and assessment
- Amendments to assessment and verification procedures
- Reduction in size and complexity of contracting procedures
- Rewriting documentation
- Embedding of Skills for Life programmes into company Intranets
- Reduction in the need for LLUK qualifications for trainers
- Change in payment profiles – Target Cost Contracting instead of fixed rates

It was considered that in these special cases bureaucracy had been reduced without loss of assurance or quality through “not taking no for an answer”, bringing organisations together as a “Solutions Panel” to work out how to amend processes and most importantly by obtaining top level commitment from all organisations to bring about the changes needed.

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### **Information Session – System Interoperability**

A paper explaining this topic had been produced by the BRG member from BECTA (shortly to be published on website) and members felt that understanding and acceptance of the need for true System Interoperability could be a major factor in reduction of bureaucracy in the sector.

Agreements to embed interoperability in sector systems could produce great benefits for all system users, and the members agreed to support the development of this matter wherever possible.

Suppliers of MIS software would need to be persuaded that including embedded SI Agents in their products was necessary and communities of users would need to come together to develop and operate Zone Interoperability Systems once a set of interoperability standards have been chosen and adopted. If such systems could be put into place, then changes in data made in one system could automatically be published to other systems which used the same data. Instead of attempting to build a single national database where all data was centrally held for use by many users, SI allows for all users to operate their own systems with separate databases kept up

to date through data change synchronisation.

BRG members agreed to include questioning on the degree of SI being built into new systems in future scrutinies.

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### **Simplification Plan Monitoring**

Following recent discussions with the BRG sponsoring department, it was decided to move away from the monitoring of all Simplification Plans in detail, and to reduce the number of proposals to reduce bureaucracy that the Group monitors. A paper summarising the major action plans that are currently underway following BRG scrutinies during 2008-2009 was presented and discussed.

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Tony Craven  
Chair

Further information about all the discussion at this meeting or contact details for members can be found on [www.fe-brg.org.uk](http://www.fe-brg.org.uk)