



## 1 Introduction

1.1 “Lifelong Learning” is a powerful and extensive concept, well understood and contributed to across the post-compulsory sector. For it to be associated with an “initiative” sponsored by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) requires a commensurate breadth and generosity of commitment and support. To that end, the University of Brighton has brought together all of the major players in Sussex to create a “**network of networks.**” The business model is designed to bring greater coherence and added value to the current densely networked education economy in Sussex but without cutting across those existing networks, or losing their individual enthusiasm. This reflects the reality of the complex climate in which the Sussex Learning Network (SLN) proposal has developed as well as existing management and governance responsibilities of the SLN members. There will be a clear set of **accountabilities** both within the SLN to its members and externally, to funding and planning bodies. At the same time its success will depend upon the **sharing of strategic objectives and risk with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).**

1.2 The resulting **vision** is for the Sussex Learning Network:

- to stimulate and support the aspirations and needs of young and adult learners and employers for career-oriented learning, particularly among non-traditional and non-participants in learning;
- to improve the esteem and understanding of career-oriented routes amongst learners, their advisers and professionals;
- to maximise what we can do together to help individuals take control of their own learning and development;
- optimise the impact of the combined offer to employers; and
- to stimulate increased progression within and between the academic and vocational routes for local people.

1.3 The SLN will provide the means of achieving a community and economy across Sussex characterised by equitable access to learning and skills, high rates of – and a wider base to – participation at all levels, and effective dialogue between providers, learners, communities and employers. The members of the SLN will work **in partnership:**

- to develop and deliver high quality provision that is responsive, accessible and comprehensive in coverage -
  - by disciplinary or vocational area
  - by mode
  - by level
  - by geography;
- revitalise the Sussex learning infrastructure post-16 and deliver effective and accessible information, advice and guidance to individuals, communities and employers; and

- to create a comprehensive offer of opportunities for employers that brings together aspects of knowledge transfer and CPD, linking skills with innovation, for the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.
- 1.4 This vision requires **concentrated and sustained effort over a number of years**, supported by the injection of additional resources from HEFCE and from the members of the Network, as well as with support from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Sussex LSC.
- 1.5 The proposal is grounded in an assessment of the **strengths and weaknesses of the Sussex 'learning economy'**, in which there is much to encourage optimism but in which there are a number of significant weaknesses that need to be overcome.
- 1.6 In the light of the vision for the SLN and the assessment of the learning economy, **objectives** for the Network include:
- to promote and develop 16+ career related learning and progression opportunities in Sussex;
  - to support the learning needs of employers and the aspirations of employees; and
  - to promote the take-up of 16+ career-related learning opportunities in Sussex.
- 1.7 The SLN will have a number of **distinctive features**:
- concentration on a number of vocationally-relevant areas of high importance to the local economy;
  - working with those already in the workforce;
  - liaison across important boundaries with Kent, Hampshire, Surrey and south London;
  - building capacity and delivery for employer-facing activity in particular; and
  - revitalising aspects of the infrastructure for learning.
- 1.8 It will do this through **seven key strands of work**, which are closely integrated, and underpinned by a **supporting infrastructure**:
- strand 1 – curriculum development and delivery to support progression;
  - strand 2 – a Sussex progression and credit framework;
  - strand 3 – continuing professional development for employers/employees;
  - strand 4 – mapping and promotion of educational opportunities;
  - strand 5 – collaborative planning;
  - strand 6 – staff development;
  - strand 7 – tracking, research, evaluation and dissemination.
- 1.9 **Tangible outcomes** will include by 2008:

- a suite of progression routes for FE level 3 and HE entry in major skills sectors – *700 new learners starting Foundation Degrees and 325 new learners taking complementary learning skills modules;*
- a significant increase in the number of young people completing new programmes - *250 learners starting level 1 HE modules;*
- *a progression accord* that builds upon a highly successful “academic” foundation *to embrace vocational and academic learners;*
- a *credit framework* to support progression *endorsed and utilised* as appropriate *by all of the partners;*
- a network of CPD providers offering, over time, a ‘one-stop-shop’ for employers;
- structured *dialogue with Trades Union learning representatives and with the community and voluntary sectors* about their learning needs and aspirations;
- a significant increase in CPD delivery - *400 new CPD learners and 225 taking Masters level modules;*
- a complete *map of learning opportunities and progression pathways;*
- a programme of *staff development including discipline-based networks across all providers;*
- high quality advice for learners and those who advise them;
- tracking of individual participants;
- independent research and evaluation; and
- dissemination events.

1.10 The proposal set out in the business case followed detailed discussion about the possibilities and prospects for a Sussex LLN since the early summer of 2004, strongly encouraged by HEFCE. These initial discussions led to a request for £3.497m over three and a half years (HEFCE originally suggested that some £4m might be available). The LLN, as this document makes clear, reflects a well-established set of working arrangements across Sussex and could serve as a model nationally. The Sussex LLN proposal is **timely, nationally and locally**. It can offer a working laboratory for those interested in both policy and practice.

## **2 Progress since the approval of the business case in June 2005**

### **2.1 Funding**

HEFCE approved a budget of £3 millions to cover the three year period from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2005. A further £1 million is to be drawn from contributions from the Network over that same period.

### **2.2 Staffing**

Five members of the core team have been appointed and all will be in post by the end of March 2006. Details of staff, their location and contact details are given below.

Chris Baker  
Director

Tel. 01273 873395  
Email: Chris.Baker@brighton.ac.uk

Rebecca Duffy  
Administrator  
Tel. 01273 873398  
Email: [R.L.Duffy@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:R.L.Duffy@brighton.ac.uk)

Peter Rainger  
Information Officer  
Tel. 01273 873103  
Email: [P.F.Rainger@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:P.F.Rainger@brighton.ac.uk)

Sarah Hardman (will be in post 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006)  
Deputy Director  
Tel. tbc  
Email: tbc

Maureen Haywood (will be in post 27th March 2006)  
Staff Development Officer  
Tel. tbc  
Email: tbc

The core team will be based at:  
Sussex Learning Network  
Sussex Innovation Centre  
Science Park Square  
Falmer  
Brighton  
BN1 9SB

### 2.3 **Priorities for 2005-06**

The aim of the SLN is to improve the access to and progression through higher education for vocational learners. At its heart lies a partnership between four universities and further education colleges in Sussex. It will seek to develop opportunities for those on existing vocational courses as well as those who are not currently engaged in learning. The opportunities will extend from access to higher education through to postgraduate and continuing professional development. It is expected that the bulk of student recruitment will go into developing new or extending the reach of existing Foundation Degrees. The awareness of these opportunities will be extended to all those from fourteen upwards. The SLN will work with partner organisations to strengthen the delivery capacity locally and provide greater coherence to current initiatives and activity. In this way it is designed to add value to what already exists rather than duplicate it.

The objectives and associated targets for the SLN are specified in the Business Plan which can be seen at <http://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk>. Added to these are the objectives of the funding council, HEFCE, who are responsible for the development of Lifelong Learning Networks across England.

#### Outcomes for 2005-06

- To develop a number of new courses and build on existing HE provision in all of the six curriculum priority areas identified in the Business Plan.
- Developing a further curriculum strand linked to the needs of the voluntary sector.

- To recruit the equivalent of 205 new FTEs into the SLN sponsored provision in 2006.
- To review, with existing providers, the range of bridging provision to higher education that is available to support vocational learners and, where appropriate, develop new courses.
- To map and develop progression routes in these curriculum areas and make them available to potential learners, those advising them and employers across Sussex.
- To establish an accord between the partners in curriculum areas that guarantees progress for the vocational learner into and through higher education.
- To begin to use the national credit framework to draw up a credit transfer agreement that underpins progress.
- To establish a programme of staff development across the network that helps develop an understanding of the many issues surrounding vocational learning.
- To develop the infrastructure of the SLN so that it involves the full range of partners in its activities.
- To provide an information service that supports SLN development and that is accessible to all.
- To fund, where appropriate, partners in the network to undertake work that will support the achievement of these objectives.

#### 2.4 **Development of the Network**

At present the work of the SLN is overseen by the Foundation Group which is chaired by Professor Julian Crampton, Vice Chancellor of Brighton University. The Foundation Group contains representatives from the other three universities, further education, the LSC and a range of other stakeholders. They are charged with ensuring the objectives are met and seeking new ways to develop the SLN over the funding period.