

FIFE AND TAYSIDE WIDER ACCESS FORUM

Senior Managers' Strategy Group

Thursday 24 May 2007

Present

Iain Ovens (Chair)	Dundee College
James Calderhead	University of Dundee
Bill McIntosh	Lauder College
Ruth Howard	SWAP-East
Jim Collins	Dundee City Council
Iverene Bromfield	Angus College
Keith Mackle	Chair, Transitions
Marie Dailly	Dundee City Council
Peter Wright	Fife Council
John Kemp	Scottish Funding Council
James Nicholson	University of Abertay, Dundee
Lindsay Hewitt	The Open University in Scotland
Margaret Dundas	Scottish Funding Council

In attendance

Wilma Clark	Forum Manager
Iain Luke	SWAP-East Project Officer
Sarah Morrison	LIFT OFF Development Officer
Fiona Williams	SCQF/PDP Project Officer

Apologies: Alison Lumsden, Perth College; Christina Potter, Elmwood College; Stephen Magee, St Andrews University

1. Welcome and Introduction

Iain Ovens welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Senior Managers' Strategy Group. Membership is drawn from senior representatives from colleges, universities, local authorities, Careers Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council. The purpose of the group is to meet annually to review the Forum strategy and elect members of the Executive Group that oversees the day to day running of the Forum. The main business of the first meeting is to review the Memorandum of Understanding, discuss the options for the future structure of the Forum in light of changes to funding and approve the draft strategy for the post 2008 period.

2. Revised membership and operation of the Forum

The draft Memorandum of Understanding was presented for discussion. It has been revised to update the aims and objectives and to take account of the new Senior Managers' Strategy Group and the role of the theme management groups in the operation of the Forum.

The following amendments were agreed:

The eligibility for representation from colleges and universities should be extended to include depute/assistant principals in colleges and depute principals in universities.

Elections to these positions would be held in May each year. Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.3 have been amended to reflect these changes.

Additional explanation of LIFT OFF and Transitions to be added and Section 2.5 has been amended accordingly.

The reference to the length of time that a member may hold office on the Executive Group has been removed from Section 2.7.

The amended Memorandum of Understanding is attached.

3. Forum structure – options for discussion

Iain Ovens outlined the reasons behind this options paper.

The Forum is currently hosted by the University of Abertay and has been since its inception. During the local consultation carried out on the future of the Forums in 2006, there were mixed views as to whether the hosting arrangements for the Forum should go out to tender. It was noted that the Forum had significantly changed since it was first set up in 1999/2000 and this would change further after August 2008 when the Forums moved to a more permanent footing.

It was suggested that if the Forum is to have a permanent and important role in future, that may require a different form of organisation, perhaps as a stand alone organisation.

John Kemp from SFC confirmed that the Forums would have a more permanent status on a two year rolling programme of funding and it was intended that they would deliver a core programme of services that would be open ended in line with the funding. However, the SFC would not want to see excessive sums spent on supporting the structure of the Forum and while he was happy that all options could be explored, he would not want to see a structure that added to the administrative costs.

James Nicholson confirmed that Abertay was happy to continue to host the Forum but equally was happy if the decision was that it went out to tender.

It was suggested that the first step should be to explore whether there was any interest from other partners to host the Forum. Keith Mackle suggested that an initial letter should be sent inviting expressions of interest and if there was sufficient, tender documents could then be drawn up.

It was noted that the new arrangements for the Forum would require a more detailed agreement with the host institution, whether it was Abertay or someone else. The main areas that need to be reviewed are staffing and financial reporting and accountability. Some of the issues relating to these were discussed:

Staffing

With a move to a more permanent structure, there is an opportunity to resolve some of the difficulties that have arisen as the Forum has expanded.

Due to the way the Forum has evolved, the core staff is currently employed by a number of different organisations across the region and this makes it difficult to develop a coherent team. Varying terms and conditions and different interpretations

from employers about where Forum staff fit within their organisational structure further complicate the picture. In some cases Forum staff have been included with organisational salary framework, although the Forum staff employed by Abertay were excluded from the new framework agreement. These kind of variations are also evident in where staff have been placed on salary scales and what they can expect in way of target, objective setting and career review. Short term contracts also create insecurity that inevitably results in staff seeking more permanent positions.

Financial reporting and accountability

The position of the Executive Group was discussed in relation to their accountability for proper use of public funds and how this is reflected in the relationship with the lead institution. As the Forum moves to its more permanent status the current arrangements would require to be reviewed as part of any new agreement.

Wilma Clark stated how important it was that the staffing issues are resolved and the core team is established as soon as is practicable to ensure that the Forum does not lose the momentum it has gained to date. Members of the Forum team expressed similar views.

4. Strategy 2008 – 2010

The draft strategy was discussed and approval given to develop the business plan based on it.

There was some discussion about target groups and the need to specify particular groups within the broader target groups.

These included care leavers and learners from BME backgrounds. Jim Collins identified looked after children as a particular priority for Dundee City Council and stated that they might need to give guidance to schools to make sure this group was not overlooked when young people were being identified for Forum activities. He also informed the group that Dundee had re-badged NEET as Discover Opportunities.

There was some discussion about how specific groups should be targeted and it was agreed that it was important that the Forum tried to maintain a project fund for new innovative bids.

It was also agreed that the minutes of the Executive Group will be circulated to the Senior Managers' Strategy Group to ensure that they are aware of the ongoing business of the Forum.

5. Election of members of Executive Group

Iain Ovens stood down as Chair and member of the Executive Group
James Calderhead, current Vice Chair becomes the Chair
Stephen Magee stood down as member of the Executive Group
John Palfreyman was nominated and elected to the vacant university position
There is one unfilled vacancy that will be filled by a representative from the college sector. Iain Ovens undertook to identify someone to be nominated to this role.

The new Executive Group is:

Chair: Professor James Calderhead
Members: Professor John Palfreyman
Ms Christina Potter

College position vacant
Keith Mackle, Chair, Transitions
Peter Wright, Chair, LIFT OFF

James Calderhead thanked Iain for his chairmanship of the Forum for the last two years.

6. Any other business

Evaluation

Iain Ovens drew attention to the positive interim evaluation report. The overall view from the evaluators is that while it is too early to measure impact, a good infrastructure has been developed which gives confidence that the Forum will be in a good position to achieve its objectives.

7. Date of next meeting

22 May 2008