



# Learning for Life - Including All Our Voices

Yorkshire & Humber Voluntary & Community Sector  
Learning & Skills Manifesto

January 2007

## Why a manifesto

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Learning transforms individuals, groups and communities – it is a key contributor to quality of life, social justice, civil renewal and the economy. This manifesto is a prompt to the Third Sector itself and all public sector partners that the Third Sector makes a difference and that this difference can grow.

It is essential that all stakeholders (public, private and third sector) have a full understanding of the nature, roles and contribution of the voluntary and community sector (VCS). This manifesto aims to share this understanding. The VCS makes a massive contribution to society in relation to both social and economic regeneration – it carries this out in part through its significant roles as:

- an employer
- a provider of learning
- a source of expertise, communication and co-ordination.

What is often recognised at national government level is that the VCS has a special ability to reach out and work with the most disadvantaged of society's individuals and communities – this recognition needs to be translated to all other levels: regional, sub-regional and local.

**“There is enormous and brilliant work going on in the voluntary sector. We should break down whatever barriers are necessary in order to liberate some of that energy, talent and potential and achieve the objectives that we all want to see.”**

*Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, speaking at the Future Services Network Conference, 22 June 2006*

**“I will be looking for the Council to continue to include the voluntary sector in future commissioning strategies, and to work closely with colleges and providers to bring further improvements in efficiency and value for money across the whole of the further education system...”**

*LSC Grant letter 2007-08 from Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education, to Chris Banks (Chair of LSC Council)*

## Manifesto headlines

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There are some key development issues to be tackled if we are to break down the barriers identified by the Prime Minister and thus liberate the energy, talent and potential of the Third Sector.

- **Strategic investment in the VCS is needed:** by the public sector on a long term sustainable basis – in relation to its key roles of employer with skills needs, provider of learning and skills and as a source of expertise, communication and co-ordination through its learning and skills infrastructure.
- **Recognition of the contribution and roles of the VCS** should be given in the regeneration and renewal of society both socially and economically.
- Government and its agencies must **recognise the increased investment of time and funding needed in order to engage people back into learning** and to support them in their progression.
- **The VCS has to embrace a culture of continuous improvement** and commitment to recognised quality standards – to support its service delivery and its provision of learning and skills work.



- **A credit accumulation framework should be developed which enables learners to progress through a range of pathways.**
- The Regional Learning and Skills Group, the Workforce Development Hub and regional public partners should **co-ordinate the collection of VCS labour market and workforce development issues and needs.**
- The sector and funding agencies must **collect evidence of the impact of its learning and skills work on individuals, communities, community groups and society**, and also evidence of how this supports the priorities of key planners and funders.
- The Regional Learning and Skills Group should **develop a “lobbying plan” aimed at influencing future policy and funding decisions** in favour of a broad social inclusion agenda which will help disaffected and disadvantaged people and communities.
- The VCS must **develop a strategy of engagement with the public sector** – a strategy which brings together all aspects of the VCS contribution, capacity and potential to support the priorities and objectives within public service.
- The VCS must grow its leadership and direction through the firm foundation **of a strong, healthy and transparent learning and skills infrastructure and support for partnership development** – at all levels.

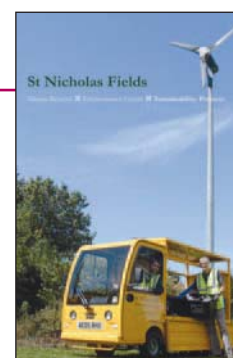


## Snapshot of a diverse and dynamic sector

The facts and figures speak volumes:	
<p>There are between 30,000 and 50,000 voluntary organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber.</p> <p>The total turnover is of the order of 3-4% of regional GDP (Gross Domestic Product).</p>	<p>Yorkshire and the Humber voluntary and community organisations employ between 45,000 and 90,000 paid staff – around 3-4% of the workforce – more than agriculture.</p> <p>They work with over 3 million informal volunteers and over 2 million formal volunteers – again making an enormous contribution to social and economic life in the region.</p>
<p><i>Craig, G. et al. (2005) A 21st Century Voluntary and Community Sector for Yorkshire and Humber, University of Hull.</i></p>	

## The context for this manifesto

The wide range of policy areas where the VCS contributes strongly through learning and skills includes: the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) “Agenda for Change” and the “Working Together” strategy, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal through Local Area Agreements and Neighbourhood Learning In Deprived Communities, children and young people through



“Every Child Matters”, the rehabilitation and integration of offenders through NOMS (the National Offender Management Service), the ESF (European Social Fund) programme, the Home Office ChangeUp programme and now Capacitybuilders, the Health and Social Care agenda, older people’s agenda, the active citizenship agenda, sustainable communities - community engagement and community empowerment, “Every Action Counts” and “Together We Can”.



Photo courtesy of Artlink West Yorkshire

At the regional level, learning and skills and employability are key aspects of the Regional Economic Strategy and the forthcoming ESF programme and the VCS has a key role to play in fulfilling this significant work for the region and its people experiencing disadvantage. The sector will be engaging with the increasingly important Regional Skills Partnership Board in order to represent Third Sector interests and contribution.

The LSC’s “Widening Participation” strategy notes that the VCS is particularly good at:

- Establishing trusting relationships with excluded and disadvantaged communities and individuals.
- Developing provision in direct response to needs identified by communities and individuals themselves, growing out of learners’ experiences and offered in ways and settings with which people feel comfortable.
- Developing informal learning opportunities, whether explicitly identified or embedded in other activities.
- Responding quickly to changes in demand and using resources creatively.
- Working holistically across boundaries to maximise ideas, skills and resources.

*The LSC “Working Together” strategy 2004*

## The Voluntary and Community Sector provides learning

The learning and skills provided by the VCS take many forms and cross many divides. Many people have been failed by the compulsory education system and are disadvantaged in life. The VCS provides a wide range of support to people and communities and part of this support is learning – where individuals and groups are encouraged back into learning, learning that is based on their needs, be these for life skills, learning for fulfilment or learning for employment. The role of volunteers as well as professional and qualified staff is crucial.

The VCS provides programmes of accredited learning and skills at all levels– for the benefit of individuals and organisations. These include skills for life (basic skills), life skills, skills for employability and skills for the staff, volunteers, trustees and activists of VCS organisations. The range of learning provided by the VCS is wide – from entry level through to levels 4/5 – and much of this provision is delivered to recognised quality standards.

This can be understood as a framework of learning which people at different stages can use to access the kinds of learning they need at any particular time.

The VCS is committed to providing quality learning and skills and delivers learning across the spectrum of levels of achievement as can be seen in the work that the sector has undertaken to develop the Community Development Work (CDW) learning and qualifications framework – from tasters to postgraduate programmes, all based on CDW national occupational standards.

## The Voluntary and Community Sector is an employer with skills needs

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The Third Sector makes its significant contribution to society through the efforts of its workforce, both paid and unpaid. What should be noted is that the VCS is significant in both scope and size – providing between 3 and 4% of the total regional workforce and working with and through over 3 million volunteers.

The Government is concerned about the low skills base in the United Kingdom (UK) economy and also the lower level of productivity per worker than in many other developed nations. The VCS is committed to meeting the challenge of continuous improvement in its delivery of services and this can only be achieved by building the capacity of VCS organisations, staff, volunteers, activists and trustees.

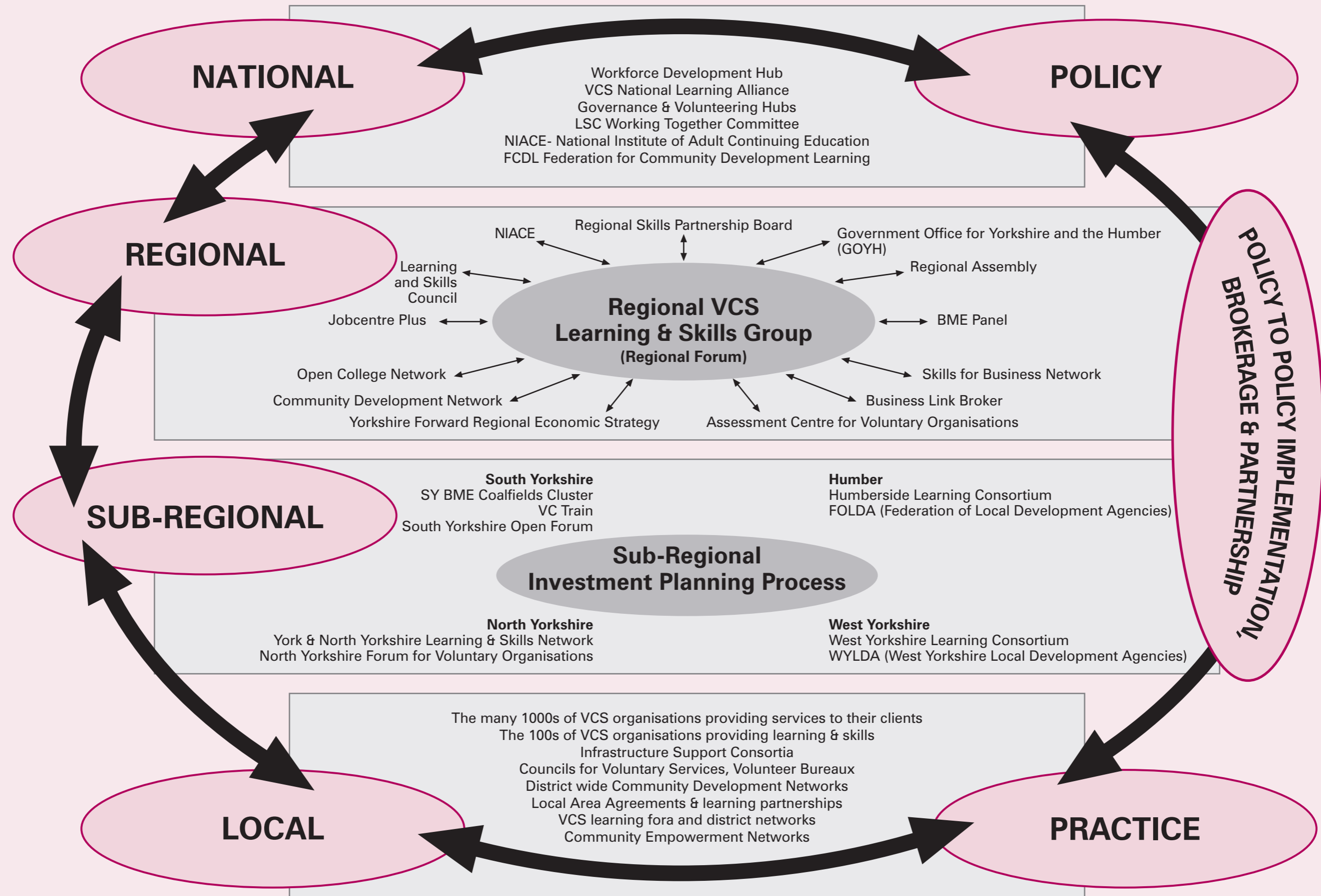
*Futureskills* is the VCS Regional Skills Action Plan – based on workforce data from the LSC Sector Brokers and written to guide planning and funding by the key public skills agencies.

### The Hit List – the top 11 priorities for workforce development:

- Develop and promote a way of collecting workforce development information that is consistent, constant and easy to collect.
- Undertake a biennial state of the voluntary sector workforce and provision survey in Yorkshire and the Humber.
- Run a trustee recruitment campaign across the region.
- Develop a regional publicity programme that promotes the voluntary sector as a work and career option - to include both general and targeted campaigns (e.g. BME communities, young people, men, people with disabilities, long term unemployed etc.).
- Implement a region-wide framework for strategic and business planning – to include progression pathways and programmes for voluntary sector managers.
- Establish a region-wide programme of human resource management support.
- Undertake a feasibility study into a voluntary sector governance and leadership centre for Yorkshire and the Humber in collaboration with the Third Sector Leadership Centre.
- Develop an e-bulletin service for leadership and management, capable of sending out the latest information on skills issues and learning opportunities directly to managers' desktops.
- Invest in improved volunteer management and development by volunteer involving organisations and lobby for the inclusion of volunteers in the Train to Gain programme.
- Improve regional dialogue with Sector Skills Councils that have a significant "footprint" in the voluntary sector, e.g. Skills for Care, Skills for Justice, Asset, Skills Active.
- Support the role of community development work in engaging people in informal learning, supporting them into accredited programmes and into work.



# Making Sense, Making Connections, Having Influence





## REGIONAL LEARNING AND SKILLS GROUP – A Success Story

Once the LSC published its “Working Together” strategy there was a clear framework within which the VCS could work in partnership. On the VCS side we had the RLSG – the two parties came together to form the Regional Working Together Steering Group. This dialogue has led to a joint identification of priorities and the LSC commissioning a range of projects at regional, sub-regional and district levels.

These projects represent a mature approach to collaboration and include:

- developing the VCS Regional Skills Plan
- writing a paper to position the VCS in relation to the LSC “Agenda for Change” transformation
- developing an e-learning benchmarking tool for the VCS
- developing Management Information and Quality systems for VCS learning providers
- creating an online learning and training repository and Virtual Learning Environment
- developing the five West Yorkshire districts in relation to learning networks, support and improve the relationship with the LSC.

This investment is a significant and strategic one – and with the changes within the LSC through “Agenda for Change” the partnership with the VCS looks set to improve further.

**In 2006 the Prime Minister created the new Office for the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office** – in a letter from Hilary Armstrong, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to the Prime Minister, she wrote:

“The Office of the Third Sector is focused on enabling the Government and the Sector to work in partnership to achieve common objectives, including fostering a stronger and more cohesive society, empowering people, further improving public services and increasing the contribution of social enterprise to our economy and society. *The Government intends to use the full potential of the Third Sector to improve our public services.*”

## How the manifesto came about

The Manifesto draws on the active discussion of many delegates at recent consultation and showcase events held by the VCS – the Learning for Life conference, the Including All Our Voices event for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Faith and Rural organisations, the Manifesto and Working Together Showcase event. It is rooted in this participation and has been tested in wider consultation processes.



### Values : what VCS learning and skills work is built on:

- ✓ The belief that all individuals and communities are intrinsically valuable – irrespective of difference.
- ✓ The sector's learning and skills work is based on quality learning delivered according to individual, group and community needs – with the belief that meeting these needs and maximising individual and community groups potential will also meet the wider needs of society and the economy.
- ✓ The assertion that there is vital need for a system of lifelong learning inclusive of all ages – and we will campaign at all levels for the removal of all barriers to learning and employment.
- ✓ The knowledge that learning and the development of skills pays dividends – the health and wellbeing of individuals and the civil renewal and community cohesion within neighbourhoods are improved and economic prosperity grows.
- ✓ The principle that communities should be supported through community development to act on their own behalf towards the aims of reducing disadvantage and achieving social and economic justice.
- ✓ The challenge for the VCS in actively addressing oppressive practices and discrimination in the workplace – reducing direct and indirect discrimination.
- ✓ The bottom line that the sector will reach out to where the need is, rather than expect those alienated from the mainstream to be able to opt in - the role of community development workers is crucial to this.
- ✓ A commitment to the highest standards through a culture of continuous improvement and appropriate quality systems.
- ✓ A recognition that the voluntary sector and the community sector have differing needs and challenges and that support for both is essential.
- ✓ A determination to celebrate and recognise achievement, and encourage progression of all kinds.



The above photo and the photo from page 3 courtesy of St. Nicholas Fields, York.

# Membership of the Regional Learning and Skills Group

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## VCS members

The Regional Forum – Chair and secretariat  
ACVO – Assessment Centre for Voluntary organisations  
Doncaster Ethnic Minority Regeneration Partnership  
Open College Network – Yorkshire and the Humber  
NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)  
York and North Yorkshire Learning Network (North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations)  
South Yorkshire Open Forum

BME Regional Panel  
Humberside Learning Consortium  
VC Train  
West Yorkshire Learning Consortium  
Voluntary Action Sheffield

## Stakeholder members

Business Link – Sector Broker  
Jobcentre Plus

Skills for Care  
Skills for Justice

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