

Val Chiesa
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Learning and Skills Council
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26 January 2010

Dear Val

New Skills New Lives – Offender Learning in Kent

In October 2009 Tunbridge Wells Together (the Local Strategic Partnership) benefitted from a presentation given by Steve Hyland from West Kent College, regarding their highly innovative and effective New Skills New Lives project.

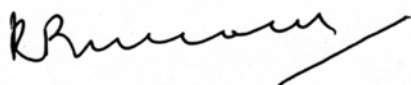
The project, funded by LSC OLASS Discretionary funding, is making great strides in increasing the skill level and qualifications of offenders supervised by Kent Probation, as well as providing effective Information, Advice and Guidance services to prepare these individuals for employment and help to resolve issues which would otherwise distance them from education, training and employment.

To date, New Skills New Lives has supported learners in achieving over 230 Skills for Life qualifications, and has seen over 30 people move into sustainable employment. Significantly for the LSP and its members, less than 4% of offenders who have engaged with the service have gone on to reoffend, which is a tangible and highly desirable outcome for our local communities. Understandably we would like to see this valuable work continue.

The LSC is represented in our LSP and we understand that among several changes due in April 2010, adult education and training funding will move from the LSC to the Skills Funding Agency. In these changes there is some uncertainty as to whether OLASS Discretionary Funding will continue, and some concern that the efforts of West Kent College to contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of our communities will be at best significantly hindered, and at worst, lost.

The LSP highly commends the work undertaken by West Kent College, and requests that OLASS Discretionary Funding continues to be made available to support offender-learning and appropriate support mechanisms for the future.

Yours sincerely



Roy Bullock
Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Chair of Tunbridge Wells Together

Response from Val Chiesa dated 29 January 2010:

I am writing to acknowledge the letter from Cllr Roy Bullock of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council with regard to the New Skills New Lives project run by West Kent College.

As indicated in Cllr Bullock's letter, the responsibility for offender learning and skills for adults currently held by the LSC will pass to the Skills Funding Agency from April this year. The OLASS Discretionary funding will continue to July 2010 but its continuation cannot be guaranteed beyond that date. The LSC (and the Skills Funding Agency) is committed to supporting the skills development of offenders in the community as effectively as possible within the resources available. We are therefore undertaking a review nationally of how we can best meet these needs under the new arrangements, which include an integrated approach to directing more offenders into LSC and Jobcentre Plus funded programmes to support offenders into employment and develop their skills. Regional colleagues are currently collecting the information from providers and probation to support this review and there will be a conference in each workshop to focus on this. We can send through details of the conference in the SE if this is of interest.

We will write to Cllr Bullock once this review has been completed.

Kind regards,

Val Chiesa