

# **Analysis of consultation responses: a new approach to the National Improvement Strategy**

## **Introduction**

On 10 December 2008 the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) in partnership with the national partners<sup>1</sup> launched a consultation to refresh the National Improvement Strategy (NIS) on behalf of the sector. The consultation closed on Friday 27 February 2009.

The new approach was to build consensus among providers and partners for a manageable number of core self-improvement principles based on trust and ownership. Once finalised, these principles would provide the platform for a coherent, concentrated set of improvement activities by LSIS and the national partners to further improve the performance of the learning and skills sector.

The consultation asked respondents to indicate their agreement with six core principles to underpin improvement and support for the learning and skills sector in coming years. It also asked how these principles should be put into practice.

This document summarises the responses to the consultation and sets out the next steps for the national partners in response to the issues raised.

LSIS and the national partners are grateful to all those who took the time to respond to the consultation and in particular for the suggestions and comments which will inform the development of the New NIS.

## **Summary of responses**

In total, 168 responses were received. The vast majority of responses were from individuals working in provider organisations; 10% were from national representative bodies. By far the largest group of respondents were from FE colleges (37%), and there was reasonable representation from independent training providers (14%). A wide range of other organisations including sixth form colleges, schools, local authorities, employers, trade unions and higher education institutions also contributed. A full list of respondents is included at the annex.

Overall, the respondents showed strong agreement across the sector with the six principles. There was overwhelming agreement that self-improvement should be the key priority. Providers/ partners collectively agreed that embedding a culture of continuous improvement is critical to the success of an organisation. Likewise, nearly all respondents agreed that individual

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<sup>1</sup> The national partners make up the National Improvement Partnership Board. They are: AoC, ALP, Becta, DCSF, DIUS, DWP, HOLEX, Institute for Learning, Landex, LSC, LSIS, LLUK, NATSPEC, NIACE, Ofsted, QCA, 157 Group, Single Voice and the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum.

professionalism of staff will be crucial in the future. The vast majority agreed that the sector should influence national policy development.

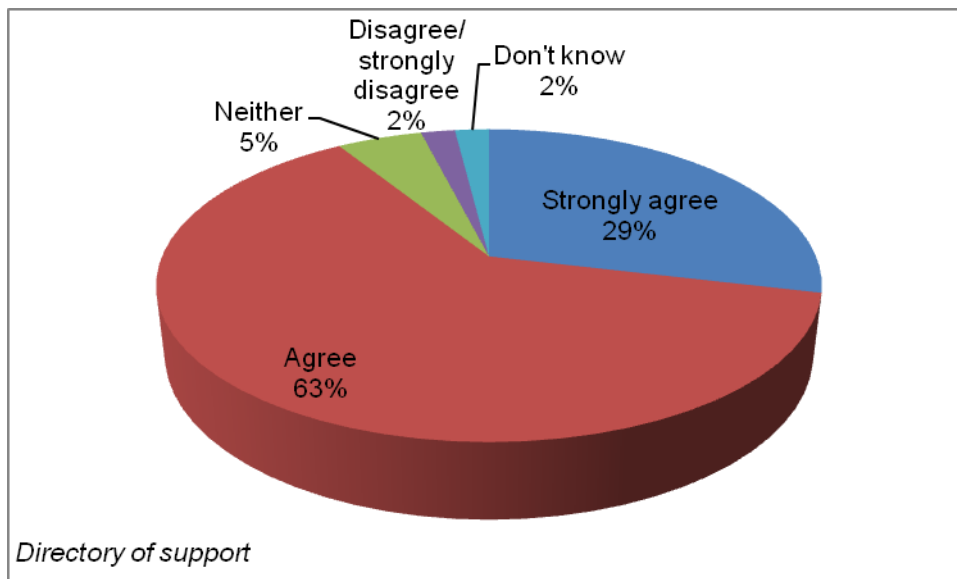
## Key results

The analysis in this document is based on the findings from the 168 consultation responses. However, it should be noted that not all respondents answered all questions. There was no weighting applied to the responses. Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is due to the rounding of the individual components.

### *Directory of national partner programmes*

It was proposed in the consultation that following the publication of the New NIS, LSIS and the national partners could produce a directory or prospectus of their programmes and services that will be easily accessible to providers. Respondents were asked how far they agreed this directory of support was the best way forward.

Encouragingly nearly all respondents agreed that it was, with 29% agreeing strongly and a further 63% agreeing. Only 2% disagreed to any degree.



The precise format and medium of the directory is undecided and views on whether it should be a hard copy sent to all providers or web-based were sought from providers and partners.

There was a majority preference for a web-based directory over a hardcopy publication (73% respondents compared with 25%). Nineteen respondents selected both options. Just one respondent did not think a support directory was necessary.

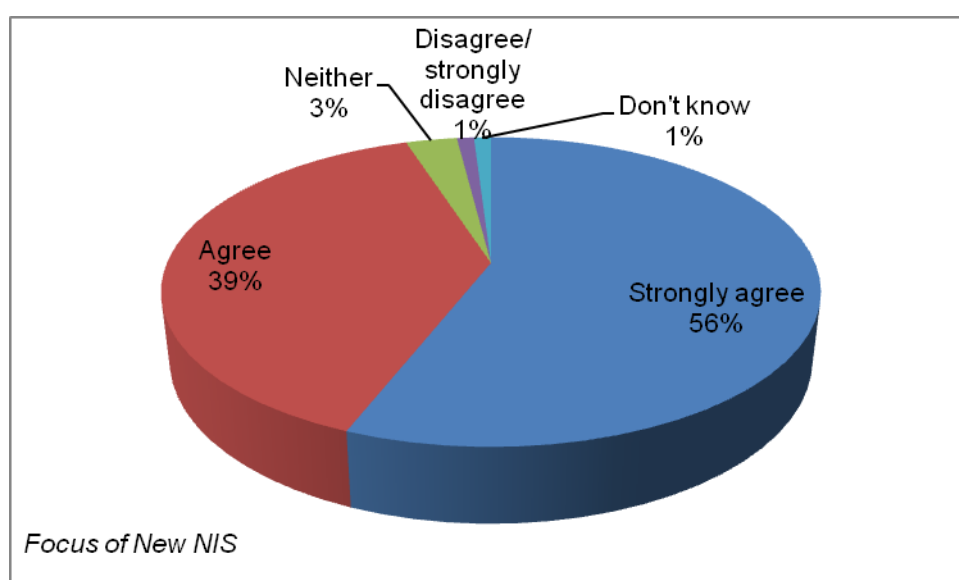
A significant minority of respondents added a wide range of caveats to their general agreement. Respondents wanted assurances mainly about the

coherence of the directory and that it would engage the full diversity of the sector.

### ***Focus of the New NIS***

The six proposed principles in the New NIS consultation all sought to contribute to the self-improvement agenda. To assess the extent of buy-in to this idea, respondents were asked how far they agreed that self-improvement should be the focus of the New NIS.

Opinion was clearly in favour with 95% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that self-improvement should indeed be the focus of the New NIS. Only 1% disagreed. More strongly agreed than agreed (56% versus 39%), which is further endorsement of the idea.



A few respondents expressed doubts over the capacity of some providers to rigorously self-assess and the need for a clear pedagogic framework on which to base improvement activity. Self-assessment was seen as important but not the sole driver of self-improvement and there was a feeling that external assessment was also required, especially if the sector was to become 'world class'.

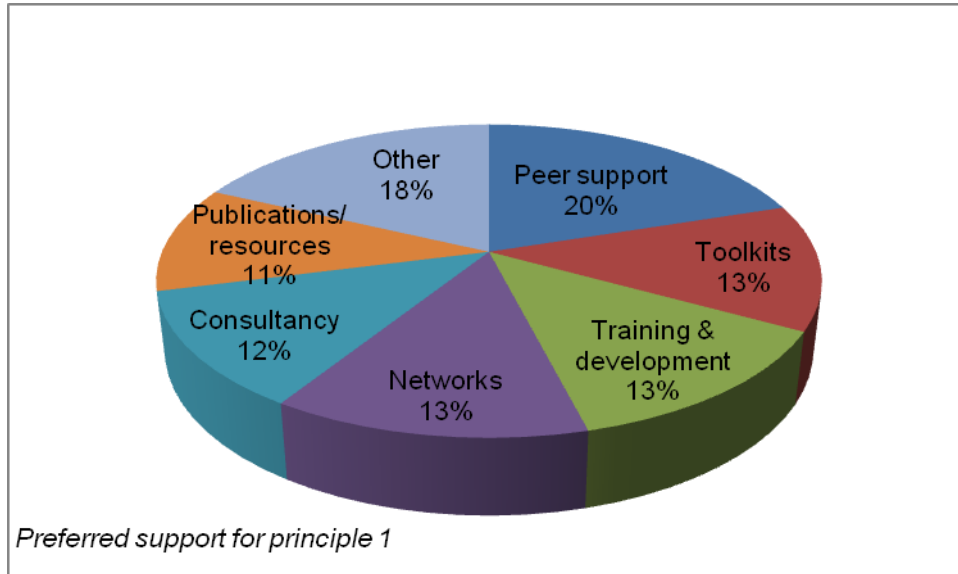
### ***Principle 1: Every single provider activity is directed towards providing each learner with just what they need***

Firstly, respondents were asked how much help their organisation needs to develop and deliver personalised teaching and learning. Nearly all respondents needed support but mostly to a limited extent; most stated that they needed a little (37%) or a fair amount (25%) of support.

Secondly, respondents were then asked which of a list of possible support would be most effectively. The top preferred method was peer support (20%). Five further methods were mentioned by between 10% and 15% of

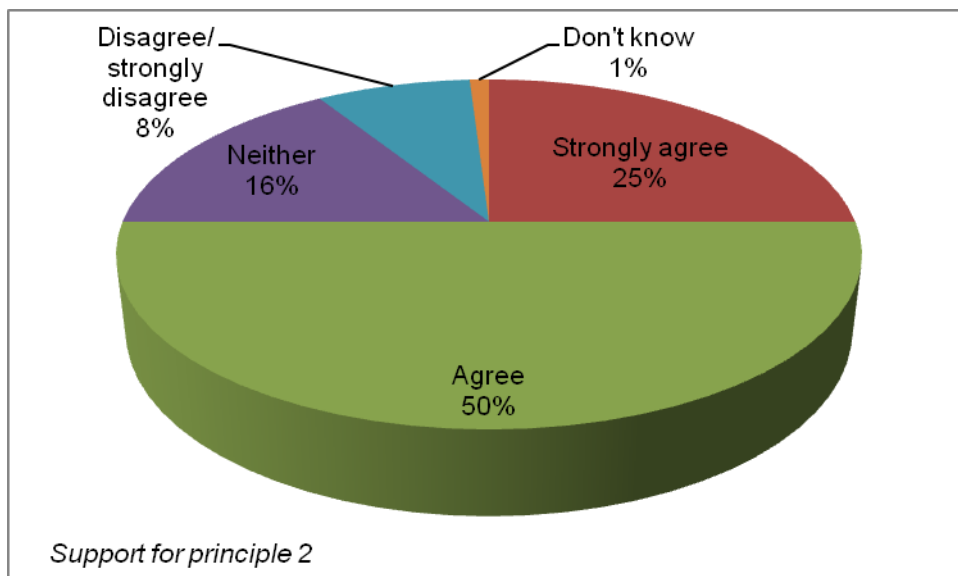
respondents: toolkits (13%), training and development (13%), and networks (13%), consultancy (12%) and publications and resources (11%).

There was recognition that this can be difficult especially for offender learning institutions when learners/inmates are moved between establishments.



**Principle 2: Each board (or equivalent) takes full responsibility for all aspects of the performance of its organisation**

Respondents were asked how far they agreed that this proposed principle should be a key focus of the New NIS. In general respondents were in favour with 25% of respondents agreeing strongly and a further 50% agreeing but to a lesser extent. Only 8% disagreed to any extent and 16% responded neutrally.



Respondents were also asked how much help they would need to implement this principle. Two fifths (42%) stated their organisation would require a little help with this and 28% required more than a little help.

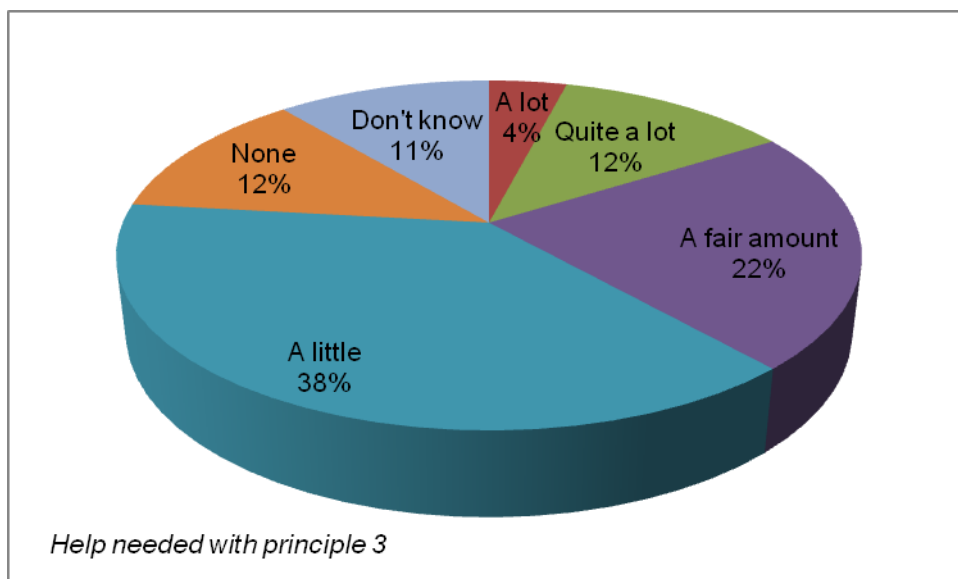
In terms of how this help could be provided, respondents were presented with the same list of possible options as for principle 1 and they could select as many as applicable. As with principle 1, there was a mix of preference with peer support/ sector led approach (18%) coming out on top by a small margin. Also highly favoured were consultancy support (15%) and training and development (15%).

Many issues were raised in response to this principle, mostly calling for a realistic view and clarity over the role governors in those organisations that have them and recognition of alternative forms of governance used in different parts of the sector. In particular, respondents suggested that the principle needs to include the reality of structures and experience in offender learning, independent training providers and the voluntary sector.

***Principal 3: A restless search for higher quality performance in everything it does is firmly embedded in the culture of every single provider***

All who responded agreed that a culture of continuous improvement is critical to success – the vast majority (89%) strongly agreed.

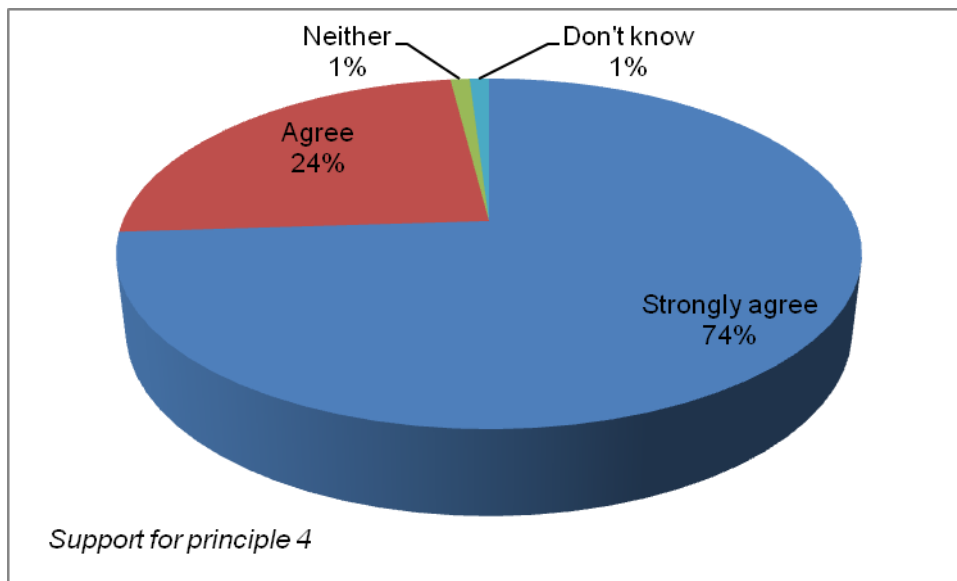
Respondents were then asked how much help would be needed to embed a culture of continuous improvement in their organisation. The pattern of results is similar to those for other principles with the largest proportion stating they would need a little help (38%) and slightly fewer wanting a fair amount of help (22%). Only a small proportion would need a lot or quite a lot of help (4% and 12% respectively).



When asked about the most effective way in which such help could be provided, peer support/ sector-led approach was preferred by the most people (24%) with a further four types of support preferred by around 10% of responses (toolkits, training/development, networks and consultancy support).

***Principle 4: Every single member of staff is a professional – they own what they do and take pride in it***

When asked to what extent individual professionalism of staff will be crucial in the future all but three respondents agreed (74% strongly agreed and a further 24% agreed).

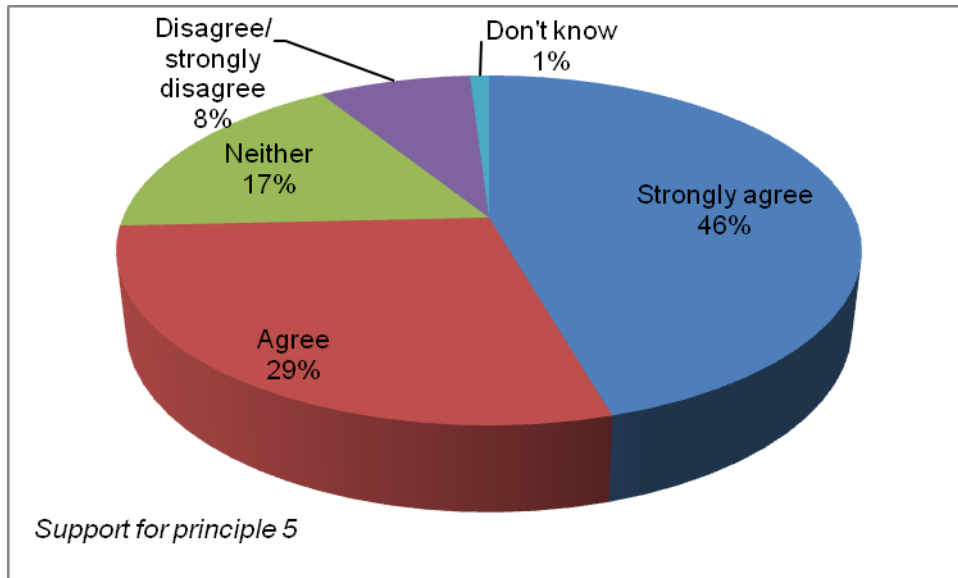


In terms of the amount of help their organisation needs to build this culture of professionalism, respondents were again most likely to state that their organisation would need a little (44%) or a fair amount (19%). A significant minority (17%) needing quite a lot or a lot.

The two joint most favoured ways the national partners could support respondents' organisations is by providing training and development opportunities, and peer support/sector-led approach (preference by 21% and 20% respectively).

***Principle 5: The greatest effective use is made of sector expertise and experience to develop all aspects of individual provider performance, particularly teaching and learning***

In the consultation, respondents were first asked how far they agreed with this shift in funding arrangements. Though still quite positive there was a more negative response than seen in relation to the other principles. More than three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that there should be a shift in funding arrangements towards peer support but 8% disagreed to any degree and a further 17% responded neutrally to this.



Competition among providers for learners, contracts and employer-partners was cited by the greatest number of individuals as a barrier to this principle. Some respondents talked about this issue in terms of ‘securing local agreements’ and agreeing associated costs. Local politics and protecting vested interests were also mentioned.

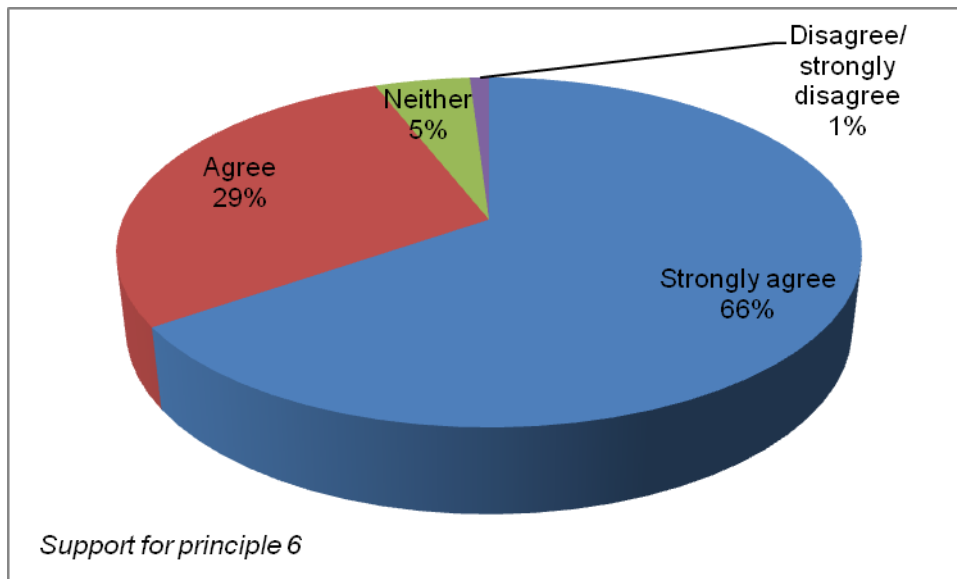
The second most common comment was around the time and resource requirements of and institutions’ willingness to release high quality staff to help other organisations. There was a need for ‘minimal adverse impact on the home institution’. Other barriers cited were to do with funding, decreasing general budgets and funding arrangements actively discouraging collaboration.

It is interesting to note that in earlier responses ‘peer support’ is the preferred method.

***Principle 6: Effective collective advice from providers is given to government on all aspects of learning and skills policy development and implementation***

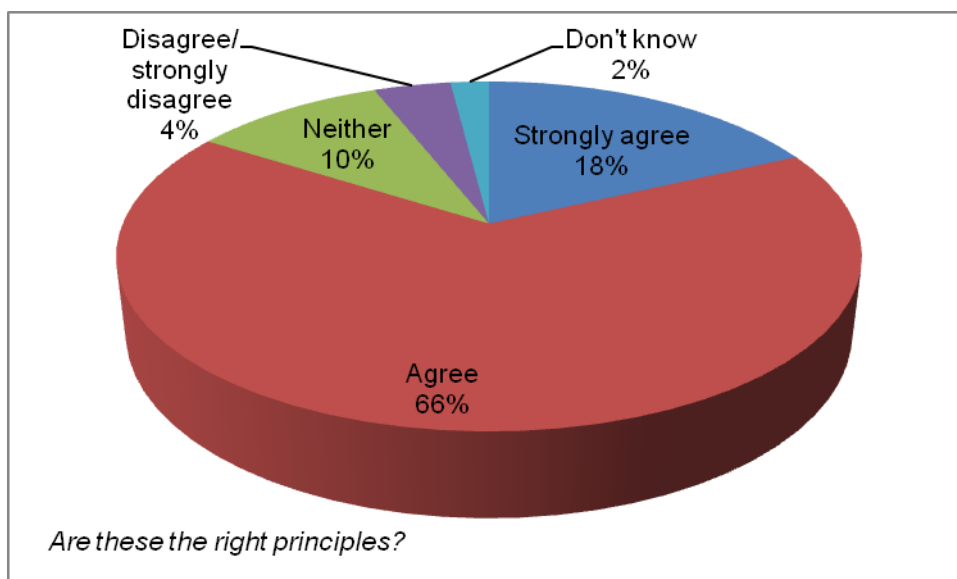
Respondents were asked how far they agreed that the FE sector should influence national policy development. This was another principle with very high levels of agreement (66% strongly agreed and a further 29% agreed).

Suggestions of how this should be done fell into five areas; at a national, regional, local and individual level and through research.



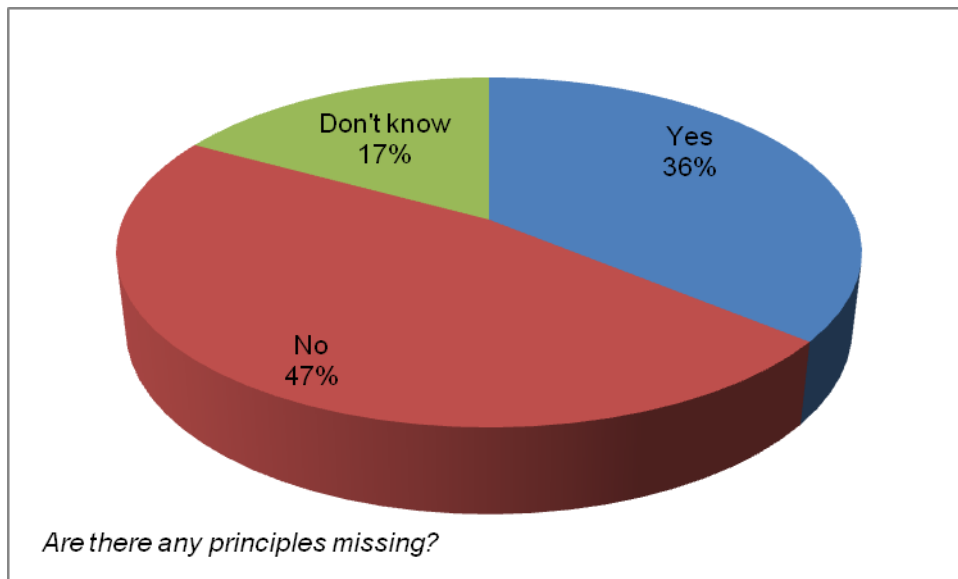
### **Overview of the principles**

When asked about the extent they agree that these are the right six principles to sign up to in order to become a highly effective self-improving sector, the majority of respondents agreed (65%) or strongly agreed (18%). A small but notable minority were neutral (10%) or disagreed (4%, including 1% that disagreed strongly).



When asked whether there were any principles missing, a sizable minority said there were (36%).

Respondents felt that leadership and management should be explicit rather than implicit and that there needs to be clear illustrations of what the implications are for strategic leadership, operational management and individual staff. Other gaps were felt to be around: equality, diversity, fairness and social cohesion; the employer, business agenda, employability skills and sustainability; and measures of performance.



### **Next steps**

The results from the consultation have been shared with the national partners and work is already underway to amend the draft New NIS principles based on the responses. Feedback from other workshops and consultation events will also contribute to the further development of the New NIS.

Discussions have also begun amongst the national partners on the process for developing the directory for providers. There is agreement that the directory must be user-friendly, intuitive and issue driven so that providers can work through a route map that signposts them to the suitable support. The national partners will also ensure that any directory does not duplicate existing systems but will align with and build on these.

As work develops further, progress updates will be provided on the New NIS page on the LSIS website:

<http://www.lsis.org.uk/consultation/NISPrinciples.aspx>

**List of responding organisations**

157 Group
AJC Training Solutions
Aquila Training and Education Services
Association for Learning Technology
Association of Colleges
Association of Learning Providers
Association of Managers in Education
Association of School and College Leaders
Avanta
Babington Business College
Barnfield College
Becta
Bedfordshire Adult and Community Learning
Bexley College
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Blackpool Sixth Form College
Bognor Regis Community College
Bordesley Management and Leadership Centre
Bridge Training and Education Opportunities for Women
Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College
Bromley College
Cahro Ltd
Camden Jobtrain Ltd
Canterbury College
Care Training East Midlands
Castle College Nottingham
CfBT Education Trust
Cheyne's Training
City and Islington College
City of Bath College
City of Sunderland College
Construction Learning World
Coulsdon College
Coventry and Warwickshire Learning Consortium
Craven College
Dearne Valley College
Deloitte MCS Ltd
Derby City Council
Derby College
Dorset Adult Learning
Downfield Sixth Form
Dudley College
East Berkshire College
East Midlands Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training

East Riding College
East Riding of Yorkshire Adult Education Service
ECOTEC
Edexcel
Expedient Training Services Ltd
Franklin College
Gemstone Training Ltd
Gloucestershire College
Grantham College
Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation
Hartpury College
Hastings College
Havering Sixth Form College
Hawk Training
Henshaws Yorkshire
Hereford College of Technology
Hereward College
HIT Training Ltd
HMP Belmarsh
HMP Hewell
HMP/YOI Drake Hall
HOLEX
Huddersfield New College
Institute for Learning
Institute of Directors
Institute of Education
Jim Douglas Consultancy
Keeping Excellence in Training Standards
Kidderminster College
King Edward VI College
King George V College
Knowsley Community College
KT Associates
Landex
Langdon College
Lantra Sector Skills Council
Learning and Skills Council, National Office
Learning and Skills Council, Yorkshire and Humberside
Learning and Skills Network
Learning etc Ltd
Learning Innovations Training Team Ltd
Learning World
Leicester College
Lewisham College
Lifelong Learning UK
Local Authority Adult Learning (South West)
Luton Sixth Form College

Macclesfield College
Metropole College Ltd
Mid Kent College
Moulton College
Myerscough College
National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education
National Union of Students
NATSPEC
NESCOT College
Network for Black Professionals
New College Nottingham
Newbury College
Newcastle College
NIACE
North Lindsey College
Norton Radstock College
Notre Dame High School
Ofsted
Orrell Community Education Centre
Padworth College
Phil Barnett Associates Ltd
Plymouth College of Art
Poole NHS Foundation Trust
Preston College
Prospects Services Ltd
Rathbone
Reaseheath College
Richard Huish College
Richmond Upon Thames College
Riverside Training
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Rutland County Council
Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College
Salford City College
Sandy Upper School
Scarborough Sixth Form College
Sir William Ramsay School
Sixth Form Colleges' Forum
Skills for Justice
Skills for Logistics
Skipton Girls' High School
Solihull College
South Birmingham College
South West Lakes Trust
Southwark College
St Francis Xavier College

Stanmore College
Suffolk New College
SUNCETT
Surrey Hills Onward Learning
The Atomic Weapons Establishment
The Catholic Education Service
The College of North East London
The Learning Trust
The Royal National College for the Blind
Training Plus Merseyside
Tyne Metropolitan College
The University and College Union
UFI/learndirect
University for the Creative Arts
Wakefield College
West Nottinghamshire College
West Thames College
Westing House
Westminster Partnership CETT
Weymouth College
Winstanley College
Worcester College of Technology
Worthing College
Yale College

*It should be noted that the number of organisations listed here does not total 168. This is because a few organisations submitted multiple responses and there were a number of responses from individuals.*