

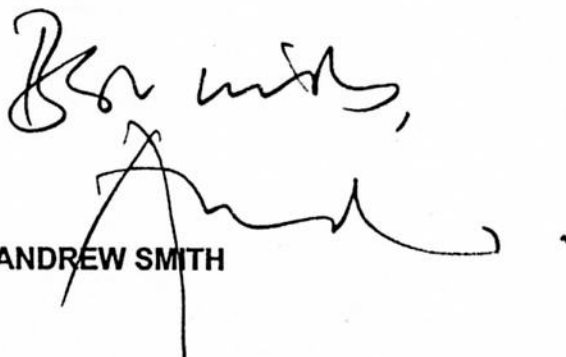
exercise but it was not possible to set out the detailed evaluation and scoring system, as this could have given an unfair advantage to some providers or partners. Now that contracts have been awarded LASER have offered to explain to unsuccessful organisations, the reasons why their tenders were not successful.

It is true that large organisations such as Training and Enterprise Councils and Local Authorities have an important part to play in the delivery of New Deal, everywhere. However, the contracting process has brought in a variety of providers at local level from the SME sector and the ES is committed to working with as wide a group of public and private sector partners as possible to maximise the opportunities available for all New Deal clients in each local community. In Lambeth for instance, Mr Sewell quotes that only one contract was awarded. There were in fact 14 main contracts awarded and these providers will then offer sub-contracts to smaller and more specialised organisations.

I would like to assure Mr Sewell that the ES is keen to listen to the concerns expressed by partners and other organisations to build on lessons learnt from the initial New Deal contracting activity. A wide range of issues have been already identified, including the need to encourage smaller organisations and ethnic communities to play a full part in New Deal. As part of the ES's commitment to look at these issues they, with the New Deal Task Force, are currently consulting with national partner organisations on developing an ethnic minority strategy for New Deal. The strategy is supported by an action plan, which will developed via the consultative process. Additionally, three working groups have been established including delegates from Black Training Enterprise; Groundwork; National Council for Voluntary Organisations; Home Office; Local Authorities and many other key players. The group will be working to identify practical, innovative solutions which will both inform the New Deal autumn pilots for unemployed people over 25 and provide longer term recommendations subject to wider consultation with relevant key stakeholders.

Thank you for your continued support and I will ensure that Mr Sewells comments are passed onto the necessary working group.

I hope this gives you sufficient details to respond to Mr Sewell on the New Deal aspects of his letter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Smith', with a large, stylized flourish underneath.

ANDREW SMITH