



LSC PAN LONDON ESF PROGRAMME 2 CASE STUDY – JANUARY 2007

Project: Retail Management Skills Network

The *Retail Management Skills Network* project, led by Kingston College aims to address skills shortages within the retail sector in London, with particular focus on the south and west sub-regions. This sector is affected by high staff turnover, a relatively unskilled or low skilled workforce, a poor image as an employer and limited culture of workforce development, particularly amongst smaller retailers.

The initiative supports the sector in London through two key elements:

- Recruitment and skills development for workless participants that wish to enter the sector; and,
- Management training for owners/ managers of SMEs.

Reaching Excluded Groups

As part of the project, Kingston College is piloting an innovative recruitment approach based on local collaboration between the College, schools, parents and local employers to target people who are economically inactive. The first successful pilot took place in Autumn 2006 in Charlton, an area of multiple deprivation in south-east London with a mixture of excluded BME and White groups. The pilot will be extended in 2007 to the Cambridge Estate in Kingston and potentially to other schools/employers interested in other areas.

During the Charlton pilot, the College targeted parents that had been out of work, often for long periods, through parents meetings at schools and other initiatives such as coffee mornings, to get them interested in training and working in retail. By approaching parents in familiar environments, the project helped learners to overcome barriers to learning such as low confidence and limited work experience. The training was delivered at Charlton Manor and the initiative enabled schools to engage more closely with the local community and to promote a culture of lifelong learning amongst parents and pupils.

Development of transferable skills included sessions on interviews skills, job application and customer service. Collaboration with a local employer, Asda (in Charlton), meant that a number of participants gained employment on a

seasonal / temporary basis. This gave learners the chance to put what they learned during the training into practice while enhancing work experience.

Enhancing Competitiveness of London Retail SMEs

The other element of the project offers small and medium retailers in London an opportunity to upskill and to formalise experience in the sector. The focus is on the delivery of Level 3 NVQ Introduction to Retail Management for owners and/or managers, but a wide range of management courses are available, depending on needs.

Recruitment to the project has recently started and takes place via two channels; contact following a mystery shopping visit or a more direct face-to-face cold-calling approach. Kingston College is also considering working with town centre managers and business networks, where appropriate, to reach SMEs. Management training follows needs assessment and is delivered locally through a rolling programme by tutors with experience of the sector and tailored to avoid busy times such as Christmas and sales. Small retailers are under significant competitive pressures from larger businesses and often feel isolated and unsupported. The fact that the training is free is a strong incentive but another benefit of the project is the chance for small retailers to network with businesses from the same area.

Both elements of *Retail Management Skills Network* are delivered in partnership with a range of training providers and the relevant Sector Skills Council, Skillsmart Retail. The project forms part of a consortium of initiatives funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Pan London 2 Programme. The College of North West London and the College of Arts (London) run complementary retail-based projects in other areas of London.

Project Delivery

The project started in August 2006 and will end by July 2008. It is set to achieve the following:

- 330 learners recruited and supported, including workless participants and employees of SMEs;
- 230 management qualifications at NVQ Level 3 delivered;
- 80 progressions to employment;
- 400 SMEs reviewed.

Project Beneficiaries

In addressing worklessness in line with overall Pan London programme objectives, economically inactive parents from a range of disadvantaged groups were recruited in autumn of 2006 through the Charlton pilot. In many cases, participants were female carers who had been out of work for 5-6 years or longer and were particularly affected by limited skills and experience, as well as low language skills and limited access to information about training / employment. The initiative provided unaccredited flexible training suitable to the needs of this group, access to work through collaboration with local retail employers and additional support (e.g. crèche provided). Six learners have benefited from work opportunities with Asda to date.

Funding

The project has been granted £999,680 of European Social Funding under Objective 3 (Specification 3.1d). The funding has come through the LSC Pan London ESF Programme 2 which is managed by ECOTEC Research & Consulting (www.ecotec.com) on behalf of the London region Learning & Skills Council.

Further information

For further information about European Social Funding and the LSC Pan London ESF Programme, please visit:

www.esf.gov.uk
www.lsc.gov.uk
www.LondonO3.ecotec.co.uk

Alternatively, please contact the Pan London O3 Team at ECOTEC (0845 630 8699; LondonO3@ecotec.co.uk).

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Learning & Skills Council

The Learning and Skills Council exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. The LSC is responsible for planning and funding high quality education and training for everyone in England other than those in universities. For any media enquiries about the LSC please contact Ryan Ansah (ryan.ansah@lsc.gov.uk T: 020 7904 0796).