

Preston College

Workplace Training Services Department

*European Social Fund (Policy Field Three, Measure Two)
2002/2003*

Training for the Construction Industry

EVALUATION REPORT

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Prepared for Preston College by

MERLIN MINDS LTD

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Section One: Introduction

- 1.1 This report is the evaluation of an ESF project, Training for the Construction Industry, which sought to support training and accreditation for construction workers via On-Site Assessment and Training (OSAT). The project involved partnership between Preston College Workplace Training Services Department (OSAT Team), UCATT, construction companies (including Bovis Lendlease, Heyrod Construction, Speakmans and Laings), and CITB.
- 1.2 The project was to have begun in August 2002, although in the event it received approval only in January 2003; it completed in December 2003. In October 2003 Preston College WTSD appointed John P G Smith of Merlin Minds Ltd to evaluate and report on the project.

Background to the project

- 1.3 The construction industry is a major employer in the North West, and employment is expected to grow substantially in the near future. The sector is one which will require a major skills uplift, including improving workers' basic skills, but it has traditionally suffered from major barriers to employee participation in learning and accreditation, such as the peripatetic nature of the workforce, pressures on company margins, and lack of opportunities for learning and accreditation.
- 1.4 The project built on previous work undertaken by the Preston College and UCATT to develop and deliver on and off site learning opportunities and to deliver on-site assessment of skills and competence, through NVQ partnerships involving the employers, the college and the trade union.
- 1.5 The project contributed to ESF Policy Field 3, Measure 2 and to LSC Lancashire priorities –
- To support employers in making available appropriate basic skills support
 - To bring new people into learning and help them to develop employability skills to meet changing employer needs
 - To develop the infrastructure to support learning in the workplace
 - To ensure the content of training is relevant to industry needs
 - To identify and tackle basic skills needs and supporting beneficiaries to map out progression routes
 - To improve employers' capacity to identify and assess their vocational skill needs

Project aims and objectives

- 1.6 The project aimed to support the accreditation of 300 workers in the construction industry to NVQ Level 2, through On-Site Assessment and Training (OSAT), addressing any basic skills needs, and supporting them in developing further learning plans/upskilling.
- 1.7 The objectives were:
- To promote participation of SMEs and to work with them to put in place systems to support OSAT
 - To reach individual workers, identifying their prior experience and any supplementary support/learning, to include in basic skills, that is required to achieve accreditation at Level 2
 - To support accreditation, by assessors in the workplace with additional support being offered at local/workplace learning centres
 - To identify with employers/employees next steps plans
 - To prepare a final report for review by the industry and funding bodies

Evaluation Methodology

- 1.8 The evaluator attended a number of meetings with the project manager, and a separate one with the OSAT Team Manager and a number of trainers/assessors. He had access to all project records and reports, including statistics on participation and achievement, exemplar materials and background information.

Section Two: Project Activity and Achievements

- 2.1 The methodology for the project was based on the approach so successfully adopted and refined in previous similar projects. Employers were recruited through existing networks, built and developed since 1999, through links to UCATT and other unions, and through the contractor/sub-contractor chain. The presence of key partners on the Steering Group facilitated this.
- 2.2 Once a positive contact was made, an OSAT team member would visit the company and explain to managers and workers the project and the roles and responsibilities of those to be involved. This process was facilitated by the development of a PowerPoint presentation and an information pack. If the meetings and talks were successful, and the employer signed up to the project, a formal offer letter and information pack were sent to the company.
- 2.3 Working with the employer, the team member would scope training against business needs and identify the training requirements for OSAT; the employer would identify candidates, and the project team would work with them, carrying out an initial needs assessment, to identify prior experience and supplementary support required (including in basic skills), and drawing up an individual action plan.
- 2.4 Candidates were supported with portfolio building, and with supplementary training as required, and assessed on-site against the various competences to be accredited. Portfolios and action plans were regularly reviewed with candidates. Under this project the OSAT team were able to offer support in sixteen occupational areas, having introduced into the OSAT programme additional NVQs covering Partitions, Relocating Interior Systems, Ceiling Fixing and Road Building, thus broadening the appeal and accessibility of assessment to a wider audience.
- 2.5 A key element of the project was for the team to work with employers and employees in drawing up a next steps plan, to provide for progression to higher levels and to embed learning into company policies and practice.
- 2.6 The project succeeded in attracting some 25 companies to OSAT, from a contact list of over 250. The project team report, however, some factors that will have impeded progress on recruitment. Not all companies that signed up actually participated actively – that is, their candidates did not come forward and training/assessment and next steps plans were not drawn up. One explanation for this lies, ironically, in the fact that the construction industry is booming, and companies were reluctant to become involved in anything that might affect productivity (this despite the fact that OSAT has

been developed to minimise impact on production), and a general attitude amongst some that they will not undertake training and assessment unless forced to do so.

- 2.7 Another factor, that has affected another Preston College ESF project, is that while there was no shortage of companies coming forward (the impetus a mixture of sound promotional activity and the need to equip employees with CSCS cards), the team frequently found that companies or employees were out of scope of the project.
- 2.8 A further factor is that LSC Lancashire piloted a project – Qualifying the Workforce – that may have distracted potential participants; these factors will all have been compounded by the fact that the project was some six months late in starting (hence the reprofiling of beneficiary targets).
- 2.9 Nevertheless, the project achieved its aim and objectives, met its target for company visits, and fell just nine short of the original target of 300 beneficiaries (reprofiled in October to 280, the revised target thus being exceeded by 11), with 142 having completed training, 110 still actively involved in learning at project end, and 150 NVQ2 having been achieved so far. Just 39 people left the programme for various reasons, including moving out of area.

Supplementary issues

QUESTION ONE

How did the project fit in with local initiatives? See Section One, 1.5.

Involvement of local partners. See Section Two, 2.1, 2.3, 2.5

Flexibility to respond to local needs. See Section Three, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3

QUESTION TWO

Capacity building activities. The initial scoping and subsequent next steps planning described in Section Two, 2.3 and 2.5 helped employers to recognise the link between meeting business needs and employee training/accreditation, and the portfolio support to candidates has left them equipped to undertake assessment in progression qualifications. The introduction of basic skills needs assessments and support in addressing them provided those involved with the wherewithal to undertake training and assessment.

QUESTION THREE

Measurement of soft outcomes. The project did not specifically measure soft outcomes. However, tutor and learner feedback shows the acquisition of personal skills by learners including motivation and confidence.

Section Three: Innovation and Good Practice

- 3.1 As well as the expansion of the OSAT team's offering to 16 occupational areas, to include an additional four occupations, the team was able to offer an additional service to candidates, the Touchscreen Health and Safety Test, introduced by CITB and CGLI, a multiple choice system; hitherto the test had only been available at DVLA offices, but the establishment of the system at Preston, along with the expansion in offerings referred to above, made assessment that much more accessible to a greater number of people.
- 3.2 The long established OSAT system had already helped large numbers of construction workers to gain qualifications than would have been possible through conventional routes, but the introduction in this project of basic skills needs identification and support mechanisms provided much needed additional help to construction workers; not only valuable in their own right, basic skills are the essential stepping stones to achieving occupational qualifications and to further personal and professional development, rendering it more likely that significant numbers of beneficiaries will go on to become lifelong learners.
- 3.3 The next steps plans for companies and individuals will help underpin this, with companies able to relate the achievement of business objectives to the upskilling of the workforce, thus better able to respond to changing business conditions, and individual employees better equipped and prepared to contribute to business needs through training.
- 3.4 The information pack and formal offer letter represent good operational and administrative practice.
- 3.5 During the life of the project the OSAT team underwent an inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and received extremely positive feedback.

Section Four: Lessons Learnt

- 4.1 In line with common established practice in the OSAT department, the project team regularly reviewed the programmes and materials in line with user feedback or need, thus ensuring the need for changes or different approaches to the programme were automatically built in.
- 4.2 Despite the urgent need for construction workers to gain formal qualifications, stimulated by the fast approaching deadline for CSCS cards to link to NVQs, companies and individuals remain frustratingly reluctant to become involved in learning and assessment; the team spent significant time 'warming up' and gaining the 'commitment' of companies, only for them not to take matters any further. And the team had to work hard with some companies to persuade them of the importance in business terms of having their workforces' skills accredited. Future projects will need to take these factors into account when setting any performance targets.
- 4.3 On the other hand, a major positive lesson is that despite the reluctance to get involved on the part of some companies, the marketplace for OSAT remains a huge one, with the future for the Preston College team ensured.

Section Five

Dissemination of Good Practice, Publicity

Good Practice

- 5.1 Good practice and project outcomes were disseminated through a wide variety of methodologies and media. The Steering Group, which included the CITB and industry groups, as well as individual construction companies, received regular updates from the project team, and will have forwarded information to other contacts in the industry (some of whom will have become participants themselves). In addition, the OSAT team were regularly in contact with other colleges and training providers through various occupational and geographical fora and networks, in turn linking to LSCs, via which practice was disseminated.
- 5.2 Articles and features appeared in UCATT's Construction News and in the CITB's publications, while the systems and materials used and developed were disseminated within Preston College. The Workplace Training Services Department also produced a newsletter on ESF project achievements which dedicated major coverage to the Construction Training Project.
- 5.3 Internally, project outcomes and methodologies have been disseminated to other college departments and to the other teams in the Workplace Training Services Department.

Publicity

- 5.4 The media described above were used as publicity vehicles for the project, and were distributed widely as part of the comprehensive information pack referred to above, to prospective participants. Relevant materials are attached.

Section Six: Case Study and Views of Customers/Partners

Case Study

KIERNAN CONSTRUCTION

The company has been working with the Preston College team for some years now and has been delighted at the level of support and expertise provided by the OSAT team. The majority of the workforce now hold or are working towards a NVQ, and the company is aiming to achieve 100% in the next year or two.

The company is keen to refer to the benefits of having participated in this project, and similar previous projects. Clear business benefits cited include a better motivated and more stable workforce (i.e., lower turnover of labour), a much safer working environment, with heightened awareness amongst employees of health and safety issues, and lower premiums for Employer Liability Insurance as a result.

Kiernans have provided an example (name supplied) of a typical employee, a Skilled Operative, who had been with the company for some ten years, and in the industry for more than thirty. During this time he had clearly gained much experience and considerable skills, but like many in the industry had never had his abilities accredited. Also like many of his colleagues he was sceptical about becoming involved in OSAT and a little nervous about being assessed and undertaking learning, but the individual support he received from his assessor helped allay his fears and he has now achieved his NVQ and Health & Safety award.

According to the company, this case exemplifies the reasons for its enthusiasm for the OSAT process – it is effective, and also involves minimal disruption to productivity; managers describe a very close working relationship between team and managers that they are keen to continue.

Views of Customers/Partners

- 6.1 As recorded above, key partners were members of the Steering Group, through which their views were expressed and minuted. As recorded above, tutors regularly took the views of learners and employers while developing and delivering the programme, modifying or adapting content as appropriate in response. Furthermore, internal moderation within team meetings centred on the views of learners and of their managers, which were fed back as part of the process.
- 6.2 The case study above is another example of how customer views were sought and taken into account.

Section Seven: ICT, Equal Opportunities and Sustainability

- 7.1 ICT was used to support the management of the project. The programme provided basic IT training linked to basic skills, and the project team used IT diagnostic tools and to support learning. The OSAT team also provided access to the Touchscreen Health and Safety test, and ICT was readily available to candidates using workplace or Preston College's network of learning centres. Learners were encouraged to use IT where possible and appropriate, and were offered taster sessions to help them get started.
- 7.2 Equal Opportunities is embedded in all Preston College's activities, in the form of an Equal Opportunities policy, which covers commitment to equality of opportunity in staff/personnel appointment and management, complaints and grievance procedures, and ensuring participation in the project is not limited by disability, family responsibilities, ESOL needs. The project was managed in accordance with this policy.
- 7.3 The project carried forward the agenda in Blueprint for Change which highlighted the need for new initiatives to overcome gender and ethnic barriers to participation in lifelong learning. The project supported increased participation in learning and accreditation by equal opportunity priority groups, including women and ethnic minorities, and specifically people aged 50+ who had significant experience of working in the sector but no formal accreditation. The project took account of the needs of people with disabilities in terms of access, and it targeted those with basic skills needs. Learner data shows participation was broadly in line with demographics in the companies involved.
- 7.4 As indicated above, there is considerable pressure on employers and employees in the construction industry, through the requirements of the CSCS card scheme and the increasing emphasis on upskilling as a route to business success, for companies to adopt robust and meaningful training and development policies and practices, and for individuals to be given every encouragement and support to have their skills and competences accredited.
- 7.5 Thus there is a ready and growing marketplace for NVQs in the sector, and in particular for the OSAT approach pioneered and successfully delivered over the years by the Preston College/UCATT team. The Preston College team have been successful in securing ESF funding to roll out OSAT nationally amongst SMEs in the Construction and Glazing sectors, a demonstration of the long term sustainability of the approach.

Section Eight: Project Management

- 8.1 The Management Team reviewed the project monthly, examining finance, recruitment and achievement against profile, provided oversight and direction, and it sought also to identify good practice. The rest of the delivery team too performed well and mutually supportively, using team meetings to supplement formal moderation arrangements described above and to review progress. Project records are comprehensive and informative, and all computer programmes are backed up by hard copy archives.
- 8.2 It is worth noting that the project recently received a successful audit from the LSC. As recorded above, the OSAT team were inspected by ALI and received highly positive feedback.

Additionality

- 8.3 There can be little doubt that candidates under this project would not otherwise have enrolled and achieved accreditation. This is because there is no comparable other programme in existence. The project brought into learning and assessment significant numbers of non-traditional learners, and resulted in 150 qualifications to date.