



**Evaluation Report**

**Lancashire Learning and Skills Council**

**ESF Objective 3 Co-Financed Project**

Project Title: Managing Change

Project Reference Number: ESF/0203/099

Lead Organisation: Lancashire College Consortium  
Skelmersdale College  
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## 1. Executive Summary

### 1.1. Report Context

This report forms an end of project evaluation of the ESF funded Managing Change project. It aims to evaluate the performance of the project over its lifetime. The report is structured against the following headings:-

- Executive Summary
- Project Context and Objectives
- Methodology
- Project Results (qualitative and quantitative data)
- Prospects

The evaluation framework adheres to LSC evaluation guidance notes published last year and includes the minimum requirements. Separate appendices are also attached which include: project evaluation indicators, structured questionnaires (interim and final) and case studies. Good practice guides published by ICOM and the ESF national website have been referenced to develop the report.

### 1.2 Economic Context

National research points to the need for new skill sets, driven largely by development of the knowledge economy. DfES Research Study 182 (2000) into 'Future Skills Needs of Managers' identified technology, organisational change, globalisation and the primacy of knowledge as a wealth creator requiring a greater emphasis on people management skills, change management and enterprise skills.

Regional and sub-regional studies also point to need. The FSB 'Barriers to the Survival and Growth in UK Small Firms' points to the need for flexible, customised provision. 34% of businesses surveyed in the North West expressed themselves as dissatisfied with the relevance of available training (p48). However, LMI studies show businesses reporting skills gaps. The NWDA Skills and Learning Strategy itself highlights managerial and professional skills as a 'gap' area (including in East Lancs), and in the East Lancs Workforce Development Survey 1999/2000 24.9% of the businesses surveyed gave management as one of the areas in which they identified a need for extra workforce skills in the next 3.5 years, while 22.1% identified business skills.

### 1.3 Evaluation Approach

The approach taken in order to develop the end of project evaluation utilises both qualitative and quantitative data. It was formulated by building on the project's output data and softer information derived from interviews with colleges and the consortium, building in case studies from the project's participants. The process of project delivery is examined as well as its achievement of targets. Section 3 describes the project's methodology and evaluation processes.

#### 1.4 Conclusions

- Colleges remain convinced that there is a direct relationship between developing management and leadership skills to increase companies' productivity and profitability whilst at the same time reduce absenteeism and create a highly motivated workforce.
- Colleges have tested new methods of delivery to engage SMEs and recognised that a balance of workload and class contact time needs to be achieved in order to engage SMEs and enable participants to gain a manageable workload/training balance
- SMES were reluctant to pay for training and release staff from the workplace. Non-mainstream funding must continue if Colleges are to engage SMEs and meet skills needs

#### 2. Project Context and Objectives

The purpose of this project was to support the growth of businesses through by raising the level of supervisory and management skills, and competencies of managers in the workplace. A co-ordinated approach was adopted through Further Education Colleges, supporting the concept of blended learning coupled with workplace mentoring support. The project also fully utilised ICT to enhance the flexibility of our provision, enabling Colleges to more effectively match training provision with business and individual needs. It also enabled Colleges to offer access to bite size and accredited workplace learning to gain credits towards awards. Project objectives included:-

- To review the range of supervisory/management training available and capacity to support blended learning against needs/preferred learning styles.
- To carry out developmental work to ensure provision is better co-ordinated and more responsive to need.
- To offer supervisory and management development programmes, both meeting immediate needs and testing new approaches developed through the project.

Project activities included:-

- Work with individual businesses to identify a learning plan against business needs.
- Action planning with individual beneficiaries
- Delivery of bespoke learning programmes, including ICT and Open Learning to overcome barriers to participation adopting a "blended learning technique"
- Accredited competencies to nationally recognised standards
- Provided performance support tools and supported skill applications in the workplace

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation report is twofold, firstly to satisfy LSC requirements and secondly to assist FE colleges and partner organisations to align current and future projects more closely with the changing needs of its target audiences. The following evaluation objectives were established and informed our evaluation methods and processes:-

- Document project's experiences and achievements for internal and external audiences
- Create a platform for future development
- Support dissemination activities

The following evaluation methods were adopted to analyse and present findings:-

- **Formative evaluation:** - producing interim evaluation findings as the basis for adjusting and improving activities as the project progressed.
- **Summative evaluation:** – producing final reports to draw lessons learnt from the project after results were captured and recorded.

Types of evaluation approaches adopted included:

- **process evaluation** – evaluating the design of the project to review if the provision was appropriate to the client group and to establish if College plans were appropriate to meeting project objectives
- **outcome evaluation** – reviewed results, progression routes and positive outcomes

#### Structured Interviews

Interviews were arranged with FE Colleges and partner organisations to gather qualitative data. A structured questionnaire was used to form the basis of these interviews to ensure a consistent approach was adopted and that information was gathered and documented which had clear linkages with the project's evaluation indicators and evaluation objectives (e.g. process and outcome questions).

A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this report for information purposes.

#### Evaluation Indicators

The project was set a range of evaluation indicators to assess the success or failure of any particular aspects of the project. Quantitative and qualitative indicators were developed and formed part of a simple matrix of indicators.

#### Project Management process

The process of implementation and delivery had a number of elements that allowed for development and facilitated and supported project delivery. These elements consisted of the following steps: -

- Contract clarification between the Consortium and the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council. This process was somewhat protracted because the system was new to both sides

- A “Project definition workshop” with all the partners to develop an agreed understanding of the project, to discuss issues and to develop an overall implementation plan. This activity should have come after contracting with the LSC but because of the protracted nature of that process this took place early within the project life.
- The establishment of local “delivery” or “implementation” groups. The form of these groups varied from College to College but typically involved a project manager or leader, curriculum staff from vocational areas and in some cases representatives of local agencies and / or local employers.
- The formation of a local delivery plan giving volumes, proposed achievement dates and outcomes. When these were agreed with the Consortium they provided the basis of the formal contract entered into by the Consortium with each project partner.
- Regular project meetings between the Consortium and staff delivering projects within the Colleges. These meetings had a common format :
  - Overall review of progress against targets identifying any shortfalls in local delivery
  - Reports from each project member of activity and progress on delivery of targets – including inputs from specialist administrative staff and teaching staff
  - Discussion of issues and contingency management
  - Progress report (including on occasion the distribution of draft reports) on milestone activity.

These meetings provided an essential forum for the sharing of good practice amongst Consortium members, formulation of contingency plans, sharing of targets across the Consortium and reporting on difficulties encountered and how they were overcome.

- Local evaluation activities – including obtaining feedback from beneficiaries and employers
- Final project dissemination activity –the event facilitated the sharing of good practice, promotion of the impact of ESF and the role of the LSC in the projects.

#### Project Monitoring Procedures

During the operational life of this project the Consortium established a comprehensive process of reporting to ensure effective and timely delivery of project activities and to address any delivery difficulties.

Management information was captured and recorded on a monthly basis centrally and quantitative data has been compiled from management information returns to the LSC and included in this evaluation report (see Project Results Section 4.2).

In addition regular evaluation review meetings were scheduled to review progress against the evaluation indicators and objectives with the Consortium’s management team. Project Implementation Group (PIG) meetings and Consortium Steering Group meetings were also used as a vehicle to review evaluation activities, discuss key findings and raise any concerns or issues regarding the evaluation processes. Colleges found the

quarterly PIG meetings to be an extremely useful and valuable forum enabling them to discuss operational issues and difficulties during both the development and delivery stages of the project.

Feedback from participants has also been included in this evaluation report by analysing and interpreting comments contained on FE Exit Questionnaires.

#### 4. **Project Results**

##### 4.1. **Delivery Mechanisms**

###### Recruitment and selection processes

Selection processes were based on participants' and their employer's recommendations. Employers attempted to identify the level and type of skills development needed to ensure provision is appropriate to business operational needs in addition to professional development for their employees. However, what did transpire is that employers were not always aware of the skills and qualifications their staff possessed.

In addition Colleges also gained access to Business Link's Skills Diagnostic Reports that provided an overview of skills needs and deficiencies within the business.

The project also delivered taster sessions to enable participants to gain an understanding of the project including, the NVQ process, continuing professional development (CPD) and business benefits.

###### Matching Need to Provision

Each participant attended an advice and guidance session to discuss skills needs and career aspirations. During this session an individual action plan was produced which included goals, steps to learning and barriers to participation.

###### Project Adaptation

Project activities were flexible and adopted a "blended learning" approach, which consisted of distance learning coupled with tutorials. Participants also gained access to tutors by phone and email for additional support if they were having difficulties with the curriculum. Every effort was made to ensure that participants were learning at the own pace and took into consideration their work and family commitments. Participants also gained access to the Colleges facilities and resources (e.g. IT, laptops and College libraries).

One of the Colleges delivered the project on a 3 weekly cycle in terms of classroom attendance. Sessions were organised on a Friday afternoon, which appeared to fit with participants work commitments. Other Colleges adopted a more flexible approach and participants fully exploited distance learning coupled with tutorial support and email/phone support.

The project adopted a modular approach to learning including workshop sessions, tutorials, assignment work and developmental workbooks that provided useful reference points for participants. CD ROMS were also used to deliver part of the provision.

#### Publicity and Promotion

Colleges relied on local knowledge and direct mailing to SMEs with advertising in local papers to stimulate demand and promote the project. In addition resources were used to cold call SMEs in the target areas.

Publicity materials were also produced and circulated to raise the profile of the project these included: newsletters and extracts in College prospectuses. Other medias included networking with local partners including: Lancashire West Partnership, District Councils and the Digital Development Agency.

Publicity materials declared that ESF and LSC funding supported the project.

#### Innovation

The nature of innovation can be demonstrated through this project's delivery mechanisms. Colleges have introduced, in some cases for the first time, robust TNA models that enabled Colleges to tailor provision to SME business needs and introduced blended learning that provides flexibility for participants and minimises staff downtime and disruption in the workplace. Colleges also tested for the first time a 3 weekly cycle of tutorials.

#### Cross Cutting Theme Issues

The Lancashire College Consortium managed the project with all activities falling within the purview of their equal opportunities policy. Commitment to equal opportunities was apparent during delivery of the project with a commitment to equality of opportunity in staff and participants. For example, participation was not limited by disability, family responsibilities or ESOL with effective mechanisms being built into the project to overcome these discriminatory hurdles.

The project made use of ICT enabling participants to update their IT skills utilising College resources and facilities. Participants also used CD ROM learning materials for part of their courses.

Colleges and the Consortium also utilised ICT facilities to effectively manage the project and monitor progression. ICT facilities were fully utilised as part of planned dissemination activities to exchange and share best practice.

All Colleges have a written environmental policy and a significant number of them are working towards achieving ISO1400.

#### 4.2. **Project Outputs and Outcomes**

|  | <b>Definition</b> | <b>Target</b> | <b>Actual</b> |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|

|                   |                               |     |     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----|
| <b>Outputs</b>    | No of companies supported     | 122 | 127 |
|                   | No of labour market projects  | 122 | 125 |
| <b>Outcomes</b>   | TNA implemented               | 80  | 89  |
|                   | No of qualifications achieved | 129 | 46  |
| <b>Milestones</b> | Steering group                | 1   | 1   |
|                   | Progression map               | 1   | 1   |
|                   | Good practice guide           | 1   | 1   |
|                   | Evaluation                    | 1   | 1   |

The project has over-achieved against the SME target and TNA activities. The qualifications target has been difficult to achieve given the timescales allocated to this project, however all participants have gained a positive outcome in terms of raising their key employability skills and softer skills (e.g. interpersonal skills, teambuilding etc). In addition SMEs will reap the benefit of a more motivated workforce that will have a positive impact on staff morale.

## 5. Prospects

### Areas of Good Practice

Colleges have embraced TNA activities and have successfully developed and implemented TNA processes that have been able to identify skills issues that have an impact on business performance. Colleges have fully exploited this process to bring onboard SMEs that would normally be reluctant to release staff for training purposes.

Other areas of best practice include the delivery mechanisms, for example introducing a 3 weekly cycle of tutorials on Friday afternoons coupled with distance learning, workbooks, CD ROMS and access to College resources and facilities (e.g. ICT equipment).

A good practice guide is in the process of being finalised with the Consortium and will be circulated to Colleges and partners in 2004.

### Lessons Learnt

The SME eligibility form and state aid rule requirements have been difficult to implement, primarily because SMEs are not always entirely sure of what they were declaring. In addition a revised form was issued via the LSC late on which required Colleges to go back to companies and obtain signatures. The paperwork side of the project is in danger of becoming burdensome for SMEs. Consultation will take place with the Consortium and LSC to review ESF requirements and wording of the document (e.g. euro transfer rates).

Administration (day to day control, tracking individuals progress etc.) has proved far more time consuming than some of the Colleges envisaged. One College has introduced a project management system to log progression of participants and this enabled them to have a clear understanding of progression towards completion. The College will seek to appoint a member

of staff to take responsibility for this system should the project secure additional funding.

Colleges advised that at the beginning of the project, tutors allocated nominal hours to develop learning materials, which proved to be inadequate. Future provision would ensure that a developmental period was built into the front end of the project for the production of learning materials.

Colleges were keen to develop the project into higher-level provision (e.g. NVQ Level 4). This will be discussed with Lancashire Colleges and the Consortium in 2004.

Level 3 activities were tight in terms of the project cycle (e.g. one week class contact time followed by two weeks off). In hindsight it would seem more beneficial for participants to have a four week cycle given the amount of study, personal and work commitments they have. This will be taken into consideration by Colleges should additional funding be secured in 2004.

Colleges recognised that some of the participants lacked basic IT skills. Additional support will be built into any future provision offering participants access to ECDL modules

One of the major outcomes of the project that will impact on future activity undertaken with companies is that because of the project partner colleges understand both the complexity and need for rigour in undertaking the TNA process and the variety of TNA models and proformas in use by statutory and other organisations (see attached).

Subsequent to the project a number of colleges involved in this area of activity have agreed to share TNA models and will seek to develop a standardised model that can be used across the Lancashire Colleges Consortium partner organisations. Issues raised during the process surrounded the role of Business Links and how their approach is not currently integrated with the activity of colleges. Through the project relationships with a number of organisations which support SMEs in a variety of ways have been developed and it is hoped that the Business Links in East and North / West Lancashire will be able to support the colleges in a number of new projects through sign posting.

One of the lessons that has been learnt through the project is the fundamental importance of investing in the TNA process. Whilst this process is costly in terms of staff time it leads to the creation of strong and effective relationships and an understanding of company needs. Within the project this process was limited by the time constraints of project working but the potential value for colleges in terms of repeat business is enormous and must not be underestimated.

The process if properly undertaken may support colleges in meeting their targets but more particularly stimulates local economic development through meeting the needs of employers. It can develop the skill base which allows companies to respond to challenge and change and exploit market opportunities. The implementation of a training plan based on a rigorous TNA will give the opportunity of identifying the necessary skills and knowledge and then implementing training and recruitment to meet these needs. Such an approach takes time and it is about a longer-term need than the projects time constraints allow.

### Added Value

The value of the project can be measured by the success rates of participants gaining recognised qualifications/units towards. SMEs will reap the benefits of upskilling their workforces increasing productivity and performance in addition to producing some of the softer outcomes e.g. reduction in staff absenteeism and increased productivity/profitability.

The project has also enabled Colleges to build good working relationships with SMEs and opened doors to deliver future provision in 2004.

### Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming provision could result in SMEs not participating on the project. Often they are reluctant to pay for provision and release staff for training. ESF intervention needs to continue if Colleges are to engage SMEs, which represent a large proportion of the local business community. In addition the manufacturing sector continues to be in decline and affordability may be an issue for this sector.

The project has proved to be labour intensive and the introduction of TNAs is still a new approach being developed by Colleges. The use of TNAs to create a proper understanding and long term relationship with employers is essential. This longer-term relationship does not offer short, sharp solutions but are the future strengths of building the economy in the area. ESF funding would be required to continue this project prior to considering mainstreaming activities.

### Dissemination

All dissemination materials produced for this project were shared with members of the Consortium and the wider partnership. A dissemination event was arranged in January post completion to raise the profile of the project, share best practice, lessons learnt and discuss the project's heritage.

Key partner organisations were invited to attend including representatives from Business Links, Ufi Hub and the Learning and Skills Council. Copies of the materials produced for the event are attached as separate Appendices.

### Additional information

One of the major advantages of working in a consortium is the opportunity for information developed in relation to one project to be utilised within another. An example of this is the analysis undertaken as part of the IT Learning in the Workplace project (02/03/254). An extract from that analysis was shared with project delivery organisations and is reproduced below:

#### **'Developing Relationships with SMEs**

According to the Colleges participating in the project, one of the main problems being encountered stems from setting up and establishing communication with employers, and then trying to adhere to the time restraints placed on them through LSC funding. The Colleges are concerned that, while they are able to identify the immediate training needs of the businesses involved in the project, the long term needs of the employer are not being recognised. This concern stemmed from the Training Needs

Analysis (TNA) colleges were undertaking within organisations where it was identified that often, companies had very different IT training needs and that time needs to be taken to build relations with these organisations in order to effectively identify and deliver the individual training requirements. While, for Colleges, the main focus has been on delivery of the product, the need to go back and build relations with employers to ensure that that Colleges are the first port of call for organisation also needs to be considered.

The 'Workforce Development in SMEs' report, undertaken by Ufi (University for industry) and the AoC (Association of Colleges), notes that some of the barriers associated with developing and maintaining relationships with SMEs can sometimes be due to the provider being too narrowly focused. While some learning needs can be identified fairly easily, the full range of products available to the organisation is not discussed with the employer. Therefore, the report recommends nominating an individual who can promote and who is aware of the available products and support.

In relation to the Colleges involved within the 'IT Learning in the Workplace' project, a more effective way of addressing this concern would be to introduce specialised staff that are aware of all the products available within all of the Colleges involved not just their particular College. Furthermore, a 'Work-Based learning Toolkit' could be developed which would include a more generic TNA in order for Colleges to provide a more structured approach to building relations with organisations, and to ensure that they are providing the right product to businesses.

### **Relationship Management**

The issue of relationship management between the two partners, the Colleges and the organisations, needs to be managed more effectively in order to ensure that the needs of the employer are being met. A more co-ordinated infrastructure needs to be put in place in order to engage with the employer as one of the major problems the Colleges are experiencing is that different areas and departments within their organisation may also engage with the employer independently. As a consequence, many organisations have been contacted on up to three occasions by different departments within the College. This duplication of effort has caused problems for the Colleges in building and maintaining relationships with organisations and also represents a waste of valuable resources.

Contained within the 'Workforce Development in SMEs' report, similar barriers in relationship management were identified that are near identical to those experienced by the 'IT Learning in the Workplace' project within Lancashire. The report pointed out that identifying the learning needs of an organisation can be time consuming and suggested making use of experienced staff to perform the task. Moreover, the report acknowledged that other departments within Colleges and education providers are also approaching the same organisations on a number of occasions and recommended the development of a partnership approach to collecting and disseminating information.

Colleges within the consortium project could usefully develop a specialised 'business unit' where all contact to and from organisations can be recorded and where the dissemination of information can be shared between Colleges and organisations, with the aim of supporting business development. By

producing and maintaining a pooled database of SME needs, and through controlling the process, and the products available, fewer problems will be encountered and a more effective and productive system can be established.

In the 'Reviewing LSDA support for skills' (2003) report, six findings were highlighted that Colleges needed to be aware of when engaging with businesses in work placed learning.

- The first point raised by the report highlighted the need for employers to be aware of the benefits of investing in learning, followed by the importance of maintaining relationships with organisations that is going to add more value to learning prospects than traditional producer/supplier relationship.
- The second finding points out that College's need to support organisations not only through identifying learning needs, but also in other aspects of businesses development, including relationship marketing and in proving specialist support in areas such as technical support and developing new working practices.
- The forth point emphasises the need for a range of systematic approaches in dealing with a range of organisations because of their size and sector, therefore the development of good practices and direct contact with organisations is important.
- The fifth finding suggests the use of 'Brokers' in engaging with businesses because they can promote the benefits of workplace learning through indicate the rewards to the organisation.
- The last of the six findings highlights some of the key characteristics of responsiveness to both the organisation and the learner, these include having the means to identify skills gaps and address the individual's needs as well as producing specialised training packages.

The finding of the 'Reviewing LSDA support for skills' (2003) report reflects some of issues raised by the Colleges within the Lancashire Colleges Consortium involved in the 'IT Learning in the Workplace project'. The problem of addressing the needs of the organisation and delivering the correct product for purpose is essential to overcome barriers to learning in the workplace.