



**Learning+Skills Council**  
Lancashire

# Evaluation Report of the ESF Rural Training Network Project, January 2004.



EUROPEAN UNION  
European Social Fund



**Myerscough**  
College

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## **EVALUATION OF THE RURAL TRAINING NETWORK PROJECT 01/08/02 TO 31/12/03**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Rural Training Network

**PROJECT REF NO:** ESF/0202/103

**LEAD ORGANISATION:** Myerscough College

**POLICY FIELD & MEASURE:** Field 3 measure 1

**LSC CONTRACT MANAGER:** S Bracken

- Did the project meet its overall aims and objectives?
  - Overview of the Project Activity and Partners

The main Project Activity was to provide training for businesses and communities in rural areas through learning at outreach / local learning centres and in the workplace. The rationale for this was to meet the skills needs arising from the changes in the rural economy and promote wider access and participation in lifelong learning in rural areas. It provided training for those living and working in rural areas through supporting and learning in local learning centres / workplace throughout the rural areas of the region. A large number of working age residents are devoid of any documented skills or qualifications and there is little evidence of a learning culture (Rural Renaissance 2002), added to this the changes in the rural economy have resulted in job losses and reduced incomes.

The main focus was to deliver a range of programmes in IT/ICT and Vocational Skills to meet the needs of rural businesses and individuals to enable skills progression and attainment of qualifications. Delivery was through a range of learning programmes offered from 'bite size' introductory courses, designed to engage new learners, to higher level qualifications. Venues used for delivery in rural areas included pubs,

village halls, local learning centres) and was offered at times to fit in with work / family commitments

The Regional Development Plan, Skills Foresight 2001 (LANTRA) identified a rapid development and spread of ICT within the workplace and this has led to a fast growing demand for those employed to have an understanding of ICT and its business application. The land-based industries, as with other industries, are increasingly requiring a broad range of key/generic skills. Lantra's employer research shows that across the land-based sector 17% of all estimated businesses reported 'skills gap' within their workforce. The most often reported gaps were in job specific skills, management skills, basic IT and generic skills such as communication skills, leadership, people management, customers service skills etc... These included;

Myerscough College

Winmarleigh Village Hall

Garstang High School

Chipping Village Hall

Gisburn (Stirk House Hotel)

Clitheroe Parish Hall

Goosnargh Village Hall

Bilsborrow Village Hall

St Michaels' Village Hall

There were one or two occasions when training was delivered in the workplace but the majority of the delivery was in the centres listed above.

Delivering learning in rural locations does have its advantages. Many of the barriers to learning are geographical and by providing local training this helps to overcome the barriers. There are many psychological barriers broken down by providing local delivery. This is especially noticeable in ICT related subjects where learners are naturally apprehensive. The fact that the venue is familiar to them and they know it,

perhaps relating it to other, more familiar activities, helps overcome initial trepidation. The fact that the tutor has to ask where the toilets are, where the kitchen is etc. all helps to break down barriers and help in developing a good rapport with tutor – essential if effective learning is to take place. There are instances where the tutor has become involved in other activities at the village hall (e.g. become a member of the table tennis committee) which helps to develop better communications between tutor and learners and therefore encourage further learning.

The learners often live in the same locality and the training provided by the project helps to establish a forum for the community to meet. This in itself is a valuable outcome, especially in farming communities where discussion inevitably revolves around business and this can then be related to the learning that's taking place.

There are several instances where the tutor has become synonymous with that centre and seen as the focal point for seeking further training. This provides initial advice and guidance on a local level while having the support of a large organisation such as the College. Many of the real benefits such as these are very important but are not quantifiable.

There are, however, difficulties encountered when delivering learning at out-centres. The cost of providing laptop computers, travel etc means that financial support is essential. The location of the venues means that travel is involved and inevitably means that tutors have to transport laptops to other venues. Providing evening sessions also means that tutors work late into the evening.

The type of training that was provided was mainly ICT related, ranging from absolute beginners through to ECDL. There were also specialist courses, e.g. digital photography, provided to meet demand. To provide a range of courses and learning opportunities, courses in other subject areas organised. These included; Basic food

hygiene – useful for many rural business involved in tourism, welding, practical sheep handling, and cattle handling.

- Did the project meet the aims and objectives of the organisation?

This project met the aims and objectives of the College very well. As a well-established College, serving the land-based industries, this project enabled us to provide relevant training and for individuals who may be looking to further their employment prospects in those industries.

The College is well-known in the rural communities due to its focus on land-based industries. However, attracting learners to the College can be challenging due to perceptions of College among more mature learners, many of whom would not attend college in their youth. By providing learning in their locality it helps to break down these perceptions and encourages more involvement with the College as a whole.

- Did you recruit the right number of beneficiaries?
  - Achievements of the Project

The original number of beneficiaries in the Project plan was 1100. The foot and mouth outbreak had ended a year beforehand but many farmers were still in a state of re-organisation and this had some effect on the numbers of beneficiaries in the early stages of the project.

The projected beneficiary numbers were re-profiled during the project and a revised figure of 826 beneficiaries was set. The reason for re-profiling and the lower target number was due in part to the initial over-estimation of potential beneficiaries. This was compounded by the relatively high number of ineligible beneficiaries ('housewives', unemployed (321) and retired (199)).

No Bens as per bid	1100
Reprofiled	826
Achieved	760
Total number bens eligible inc duplicates	894
Total number bens retired	199
Total number bens unemployed	321
Total number of courses ran	219

Although the unemployed and retired learners did not meet the criteria for beneficiaries there is anecdotal evidence that a proportion of these would be actively seeking employment in the near future and the project helped them to enhance their skills.

A high proportion of learners continued on to further courses. Although this did not prevent new learners taking advantage of the opportunity it did perhaps restrict the amount of promotion that went on to attract new learners.

Difficulties were encountered at the start of the project due to a change in contract management and the re-issuing and agreement of the contract appendices. This

delayed the confirmation of the project until April 2003.

### **Marketing approach**

Several methods were used to market the work of the project. The chosen method depended on; the location, the target beneficiaries, the course and, to some extent the time of year. Course guides were produced twice a year to provide potential beneficiaries with details of all courses available. These were distributed by mailing to contacts from our database, handed out at promotional events etc. Additional flyers were often produced to target particular areas or particular courses. The flyers were mailed, distributed to shops, libraries etc and sometimes distributed by hand to local houses. The conclusion regarding marketing was to use a variety of methods and to keep repeating the message wherever possible. Wherever possible, events were arranged to promote the work of the project by personal contact. Drop-in sessions were organised at venues where potential beneficiaries could call in for a cup of tea and chat about what was available. This proved to be a very useful way of overcoming any initial apprehension as they could see the facilities, meet the tutor and in many cases sample the learning. Word of mouth was one of the most successful methods of marketing the project and this in itself is indicative of how successful the project was.

The Project proposal included the production of 2 forms of learning materials. One example of the learning materials, to aid the delivery of Digital Camera courses is included in this report. The establishment of two learning networks was also part of the Project proposal. The original intention was to develop learning networks that would encourage learners from different areas to share knowledge and experiences. As the project progressed it was felt that this wasn't practical and what was developed was learning networks at the venues where people from the same locality could support each other and share information. The courses held in these venues provided a focus for this activity and an informal mentoring network evolved.

- Did you recruit the target beneficiaries according to the profile in the original application?

The target beneficiaries were predominantly employed people from rural areas. The majority of beneficiaries were from this target group but inevitably other learners were attracted to courses. This was not seen as a problem because some of the learners outside the target group could contribute to the overall aim of developing a learning culture. Retired people for instance have the time to be able to help others on an informal basis and contribute to achieving soft outcomes for the project (for example they are available to staff facilities in out centres where IT facilities are available for others to use).

### **Equal Opportunities**

The project set out to remove some of the barriers to learning by using various methods of promotion. This does mean that learners, who meet the specific requirements of the project, can't be targeted at the expense of others. Support for learners of all abilities is provided through support material and the learning networks that evolve from the classes.

- Did the beneficiaries stay as long as you expected?

In most cases the beneficiaries stayed longer than expected. The project provided enough motivation for many learners to engage in learning of this type and once the initial barriers were overcome, the beneficiaries took advantage of further training courses. A total of 219 courses ran as part of the project, some of these being follow-on courses to provide progression for learners.

- Were the outcomes of the project as you expected?

The outcomes were better than expected in that many learners continued with their learning after their initial course. In most areas a network of learners developed that supported each other and provided encouragement to progress. This included sharing materials, actual support at times other than the learning session and contact by telephone and/or e-mail. Many of the beneficiaries had been out of any formal learning for a considerable time and to get them back into learning and provide support for them to continue was a considerable achievement for the project.

A high proportion of the beneficiaries achieved either a full qualification or part qualification (unit(s)) of a unitised course.

- Areas of Innovation

The method of delivery was in itself innovative as it provided learning in rural areas in venues that are convenient for, and in many cases familiar to learners. The marketing of the courses involved drop-in 'advice' sessions at the venue. This had the perception of 'no obligation' and helped to overcome the initial fears that many learners have when starting something new. The advice sessions were then followed by free short courses. This was to provide opportunities that required little commitment and allowed learners to assess the suitability of the training for their needs.

The use of local venues had many soft outcomes that encouraged learning. The social aspect of meeting in a local venue provided support for the learning network. The groups would support each other outside the organised sessions and learning became a social activity. Refreshments provided during a short break in the teaching sessions encouraged the groups to gel and at the end of the course there

tended to be a 'group demand' to continue to further courses.

Learners were given the opportunity of accessing MOLLNET, the College's on-line learning system. This was used to provide complementary materials.

- What did the beneficiaries think about the programme?

As part of the project, end of course surveys were carried out to find out what the beneficiaries thought about their learning programme. An example of these is included in Appendix C.

Generally, the comments are favourable and the vast majority of beneficiaries were very satisfied. However, as with any learning, there were some beneficiaries who were not as satisfied as they could be. Sometimes learners want to learn specific skills to suit their own needs and what they are looking for is individual tuition. In a group environment this is not practical and the learning has to follow the needs of the group. This problem can be particularly noticeable when dealing with SME's who want specific learning to meet their needs. This is not a problem if the group size is large enough to be economically viable but many rural SME's are really micro-businesses and for economic reasons need to learn as part of a group.

- Did the beneficiaries meet their targets?

It is difficult for many beneficiaries to accurately identify their targets. In most cases they have very little knowledge in the subject area (e.g. ICT) and therefore do not know what they need. In terms of engaging in learning and developing some ICT skills then the beneficiaries generally did meet their targets.

It is worth noting that many beneficiaries are motivated by the prospect of gaining new skills and not by the acquisition of qualifications. Many mainstream qualifications are not suitable to meet the needs of learners and in some cases fail to motivate learners and can compound the problems associated with learning new skills.

- Did the project keep within its budget?

Yes – the project was within the projected budget

- Did the project provide value for money?

The project was delivered to groups of learners and the economics of delivery was always a consideration at the planning stage. Learning provision was assessed for financial viability and a minimum group size was considered for each course. This minimum group size would vary depending on location, as some location costs were lower than others, and the particular course in question. The outcomes from the project and the positive responses from beneficiaries do suggest that the project provided value for money.

- Did all of the partners and subcontractors deliver to specification?

Not applicable – no partners or subcontractors involved in delivery of the project.

- What lessons have you learned and which can help you to shape future provision?

It is very important that any delivery of training to SME's, particularly rural SME's where relatively large distances can be involved to attend courses, even though the venue may be relatively local, is flexible in terms of content and delivery. Allowances have to be made for learners being late or missing the occasional session. This is overcome by providing support materials to complement the courses and the opportunity to attend alternative venues wherever possible. Use of

the Colleges' on-line learning system (MOLLNET) is also encouraged to provide additional materials although poor Internet connectivity in some rural areas can cause difficulties of access. Many learners, especially on the introductory courses, don't have the required skills to access the Internet so its use for this purpose is limited.

Raising awareness by holding events in the venue is something that will be used in future provision. There is a degree of reluctance for potential learners to seek out learning opportunities and by holding events, where advice can be given, barriers are broken down.

The project also enabled us to develop and refine courses that are applicable to rural businesses and their workforce. It also enabled the establishment of informal networks in the various rural out centres that will form the foundation for future learning. The Countryside Agency's publication 'Connecting the countryside' identifies barriers to the take-up of learning in rural areas to include;

- Lack of outreach programmes – due to high running costs
- Low income households can find course fees prohibitive without subsidy

The project provided the opportunity for these barriers to be overcome due to the outreach delivery and subsidised cost of the courses. The publication goes on to identify that the key factors of success for rural UK online centres include;

- Developing a local network of contacts and collaborate with other learning and support organisations
- Gaining the support of organisations to champion the centre and provide additional support.

Although the project didn't use UK online centres for all delivery, some were used and the work of the project contributes to the long-term sustainability of these centres. In other, non UK online centres, the work of the project helped to establish the centre as a focal point for learning for local communities.

- Did you learn any administrative lessons and how can you run projects better in future?

We have previous experience of delivering ESF projects and therefore have developed administration systems and procedures to meet the requirements of ESF funding. College procedures include twice-yearly audits which provide financial verification well above the minimum requirement.

The system of tracking beneficiaries on the college database was refined during the project and regular monitoring of data accuracy was instigated. This helped to provide more relevant data for management and audit purposes.

Monthly returns to LSC did prove difficult in terms of time and demands on administrative resources. The change to quarterly returns for subsequent projects is therefore seen by us as an improvement in administrative procedures.

Internal procedures were changed during the project that will help with the running of future projects. The College Student Admin department initially grouped all LSC projects together for their purposes. This, obviously, presented difficulties for the Project Administration team. This situation has now been resolved and each project is clearly identified in communications between College departments.

### **Dissemination of Good Practice**

Dissemination of good practice from the project has been informal and has consisted of discussing outcomes with internal colleagues so that other, similar provision may benefit. The outcomes worthy of dissemination have been discussed previously in this report. The College also works with other partner organisations on a regional basis and good practices were also shared with them.

- What are your exit strategy plans for the project? Eg mainstream etc.

The project enabled us to generate interest in learning and many learners are now on a programme of learning that extends beyond the time-scale of the project. It is important that funding opportunities are sought to support the continued learning and to encourage new learners to maintain the learning culture that is now emerging from many of these rural venues. Many of the courses offered will be mainstream but there is still a requirement to provide support for learning that does not qualify for mainstream funding. Many learners are motivated by learning a skill and their main objectives are not the achievement of qualifications. Funding opportunities will be sought to support the work this project has helped to develop.

SIGNATURE:

DATE

# Appendix A

## Implementation Plan

### Rural Training Network Project

### Delivery Plan ESF Co-Finance Objective 3 2002 – 2003

This project aims to provide training for businesses and communities in rural areas through learning at outreach/local learning centres and in the workplace. It aims to meet the skills needs arising from the changes in the rural economy and will promote wider access and participation in lifelong learning in rural areas.

**Name of Project:** Rural Training Network

**Dossier Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Manager :** Martin Burkinshaw

**LSC Project Reference:** ESF/0203/103

Project Start Date: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2002

Project End Date: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2003

Date	Activities to be undertaken	Milestone (A clearly measurable output of what you will have achieved)	Date
By 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2002	Project start date 1 August 2002 Prepare and carry out course advertising & promotion Aim to recruit 150 learners	ICT qualifications research ed and Project promotional material prepared and delivered	31/10/02
Quarter 1	New venues identified Existing venues developed (advertising, increase usage) Recruit tutors Training of tutors in qualifications and delivery Develop Tracking systems for learners Monthly claims submitted LSC Lancashire	Tutors recruited in areas for delivery Tracking system developed by 1 <sup>st</sup> September 100 learners recruited 2 additional venues identified – existing venues developed.	31/10/02 31/10/02 01/09/02 31/10/02
		<b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries	No. 100
By 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2003	Monitor progress of learners Collate feedback from learners Process qualifications learners achieve Review follow-on qualifications Plan follow-on courses Recruit 240 new learners Plan recruitment of 200 new learners Advertise training and venues Hold ICT course awareness events at the venues Monthly claims submitted LSC Lancashire	240 beneficiaries enrolled New courses promoted ICT course awareness sessions held at venues in Ribble Valley and Myerscough	31/01/03 31/01/03 31/01/03
Quarter 2			

		<b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries Learners working towards a qualification Learners completing	Nos. 340 112 0
By 30th <sup>1</sup> April 2003  Quarter 3	Complete implementation plan Advertise courses/venues Hold awareness events at venues to promote courses Recruit learners Monitor progress of learners Evaluate courses through course evaluation Plan next phase of recruitment (100 learners) Start development of 2 learner networks Mid-project evaluation Monthly claims submitted LSC Lancashire	Implementation plan completed Courses/venues advertised Additional 200 learners recruited 150 Learners working towards a qualification Mid-project evaluation completed <b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries Learners working towards a qualifications Learners completing	30/04/03 30/04/03 30/04/03 30/04/03 30/04/03  Nos. 540 247 130
By 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2003  Quarter 4	Develop materials for delivery of new follow-on courses Train/update tutors in preparation for new courses Advertise/promote courses Take advantage of events such as College Open Day to promote courses Recruit 100 new learners Complete 220 learners with at least 80% achievement Establish 2 Learner networks Plan development of learner packages – establish working group Start development of 2 more learner networks	Materials developed Training delivered to tutors Courses advertised Courses promoted through College Open Day 100 new learners recruited 176 learners achieving qualifications 220 Learners completing 2 Learner networks established Establish working group for learning packages	31/07/03 31/07/03 31/07/03  31/07/03 31/07/03 31/07/03 31/07/03 31/07/03
		<b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries Learners working towards a qualifications Learners completing	Nos. 640 292 350

By 31 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2003	Promote courses for Autumn start Aim to recruit 450 learners Existing venues developed (advertising, increase usage)	Courses promoted through advertisements in press, at venues. Also direct mailing to potential learners/companies	31/10/03
Quarter 5	Training of tutors in qualifications and delivery Monthly claims submitted LSC Lancashire	450 learners recruited Tutors trained	31/10/03 31/10/03
		<b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries Learners working towards a qualification Learners completing	Nos. 1040 382 570
By 31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2003	Recruit 60 learners Complete 235 learners Establish 2 learner networks	60 Learners recruited 235 learners completed with 188 achieving accredited qualifications	31/12/03 31/12/03
Quarter 6	Establish 2 learning packages to aid delivery of lifelong learning to rural businesses. Conclude project paperwork Conduct project evaluation	2 Learner networks established 2 learning packages established Project paperwork completed Project evaluation completed	31/12/03 31/12/03 31/12/03 31/12/03
		<b>Cumulative Outputs</b> Beneficiaries Learners working towards a qualification Learners completing	Nos. 1100 472 805

# Appendix B

## Case study

The following case study shows the experiences of one of our learners.

# Case Study



Eileen, 51, from Abbeystead near Lancaster, for a number of years has worked part-time as a school secretary. She has divided her time between this job and that of the family farm where she lives with her husband and son. With this previous background of working in an office environment, Eileen was perfectly placed to undertake the jobs that required an understanding of IT. But her previous experience with computers, and what was needed for the farm, made Eileen realize she needed to advance her own level of IT knowledge.

'I had previously used computers but mainly only for word processing, but I wanted to use IT more for working on the farm. Digital photography is becoming a really useful tool to record livestock details and for marketing livestock so I decided to do a Digital Camera course at Myerscough College. This gave me the skills to use a digital camera more effectively and at the same time helped the business'

'The course covered the use of a camera, including settings for best results and then how to handle the photographs to get them onto the computer. After completing my digital camera course I am interested in doing further training'.

Eileen is now a firm believer that other people should take the opportunity to learn new skills as it can be fun as well as developing useful employment skills.

# Appendix C

## Learner Questionnaires

These are issued to learners at the end of each course with the aim of finding out the strengths and weaknesses of the course. This information is then used to develop and modify future learning.

# Appendix D

## Publicity Materials used as part of the project

# Appendix E

Learning materials developed to support learning as part of the project