

Preston College

Workplace Training Services Department

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

Promoting Training in the Construction Industry

EVALUATION REPORT

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Section One: Introduction

- 1.1 This report is the evaluation of an ESF project, Promoting Training in the Construction Industry, which sought to support work to build the capacity of 20 SMEs in the construction industry to support workforce learning and accreditation within the NTO On-Site Assessment and Training Framework (OSAT), by working with SMEs in the sector to profile the skills held by their workforce, key business challenges and skills development needed, putting in place the resources to support OSAT and producing learning plans for the SMEs, identifying training and development issues and the continuing support required by each company. The project involved partnership between Preston College Workplace Training Services Department (OSAT Team), UCATT, the National House Builders Federation, CITB and two large employers in the construction industry.
- 1.2 The project was to have begun in September 2002, although in the event it received approval only in January 2003 when the original profiles were revised; 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 project supported SMEs in the construction sector, which employs some 4.3% of the Lancashire workforce. This sector is suffering skill and labour shortages, and research/development, training and quality management are seen as key factors in enabling the industry to meet the challenges posed by the pace of technological change and the introduction of novel materials and techniques.
- 1.4 The project contributed to ESF Policy Field Four, Measure Two, and to LSC Lancashire priorities:
- to raise the demand by employers for skilled people, to increase skills investment and improve workforce development capacity
 - to encourage better human resource planning in Lancashire
 - to work with large employers and indirectly with small employers through the emerging Sector Skills Councils, trade groups and Business Links to engage with them to define skill needs
 - to identify and meet skills shortages, including those at higher levels
 - to increase the number of people with a recognised qualification
 - to support new and creative methods to deliver training that could not be supported with existing levels of resources
 - to introduce more effective targeting of employer investment in training

Project aims and objectives

- 1.5 The project aimed to support work to build the capacity of 20 SMEs to support workforce learning and accreditation within the OSAT framework, to enable unqualified workers in the construction sector to gain qualifications, and SMEs to meet challenges set for the sector in the DETR 'Rethinking Construction' report.
- 1.6 It sought to achieve this by:
- Working with reach SME to profile the skills held by their workforce, and the key business challenges that require accreditation of skills
 - Identifying and putting in place the resource they need to support OSAT, including linking them with off-site facilities
 - Involving the workforce through one-to-one interviews
 - Producing learning plans for SMEs, identifying training and development issues and the continuing support required by each company

Evaluation Methodology

- 1.7 The evaluator attended a number of meetings with the project manager, and a separate one with the OSAT Team Manager and an assessor team member. 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 employed for this project was similar to that used in last year's 'Benchmarking' project – the team would identify potential participants, through referrals from CITB, links with UCATT, referrals from other companies – often sub-contractors, also suppliers and others – and from amongst companies they had already worked with on previous OSAT projects. According to the project team it was not too difficult to identify participants, because of the growing pressure on the industry for its employees to hold the CSCS card.
- 2.2 Having secured the commitment of the SME to participate, team members would visit the company to meet the manager or person responsible for HR to describe the purpose of the project and to carry out an analysis of the company's perception of the skills already held by the workforce, skills required and accreditation needs in relation to existing, emerging and anticipated business conditions, and the training regime in place. Induction sessions with the workforce were held to explain the purpose of the project and their role in it, and TNA questionnaires were issued and analysed, to identify the workforce perception of skills held and training received.
- 2.3 As a result of this research the OSAT team prepared a comprehensive report for the company, detailing the employment patterns and training history, training, health and safety and equal opportunities policies in place, skills and accreditation needs (including personal development needs).
- 2.4 The team would then work with the company to draw up a training plan and to design a training/accreditation process to match the skills and operational needs of the company; the team also worked with employees to develop individual training plans that dovetailed with the company training plan and operational needs.
- 2.5 On the surface this seems a straightforward enough process, yet it involved considerable complexity, and some wasted effort on the part of the OSAT team. As far as the latter issue is concerned, the problem revolved around companies indicating interest, and thus occupying team time in developing their approach and holding exploratory meetings, to find further down the line, that the company was not after all, willing to participate, or preferred to defer participation beyond project end date; in one or two cases, development work and TNAs went ahead only for the team to find that the company or its employees was out of scope of the project (for example, perhaps the employees were Lancashire residents, but the company's base was outside the county, or vice versa). This did not mean that the work was not completed, but it was frustrating and time consuming for the team.

- 2.6 As far as the former issue is concerned, the complexities centre on the requirements of the CITB and of other testing bodies. The OSAT team not only had to educate the companies on how to construct a plan, they also had to ensure that what was produced fit the CITB criteria on payment of training grant, and that individual plans met testing body criteria (e.g. Thompson Pro-Metric). In a number of cases the support included helping companies through the CITB registration process, helping them identify what actually constitutes training (e.g. Health & Safety assessments), and explaining the complex rules on claiming of grant.
- 2.7 In addition to fully meeting the target for 20 SME training plans, and the target of four SME reps to join the Steering Group, the project encouraged a considerable number of participants' employees to begin training/assessment. Overall the project fully met its aim and objectives.

Supplementary issues

QUESTION ONE

How did the project fit in with local initiatives? See Section One, 1.4.

Involvement of local partners. See Section Two, 2.1 and 2.4, Section Five, 5.1 and 5.2, and Section Six, 6.1.

Flexibility to respond to local needs. See Section Two, 2.5 and 2.6, and Section Three, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4

QUESTION TWO

The project did not specifically deliver capacity building activities, although the awareness raising of company managers and individuals of OSAT and the use of training to reach business solutions, and the support provided to companies in registering with CITB and to individuals applying for CSCS applications are described in Section Three.

QUESTION THREE

Measurement of soft outcomes. The project's main thrust was to raise awareness amongst SMEs of the linkage between business benefits and training/accreditation, and the company visits, including to those who did not actively participate in the project, achieved this.

Section Three: Innovation and Good Practice

- 3.1 The whole of the project was innovative. The OSAT team were always examining their own practice and what additional support was required that they could provide.
- 3.2 Further examples of innovation are referred to above – the closer contact with Basic and Key Skills colleagues in introducing mechanisms to introduce basic skills into individual training plans, and the provision of additional courses to meet the needs of candidates with learning difficulties.
- 3.3 Good practice examples include that managers attended Health & Safety tests at the college, demonstrating their commitment; and again, in relation to the tests, the provision by the team of individual coaching for people with special needs, to help them cope with and pass the tests.
- 3.4 Any training team will, as a matter of course, update and develop learning materials, and the OSAT team is no exception; however, the need to do this was crucial in this case because of the need to adapt instantly to changing circumstances, in particular, changing CITB rules, updated Thompson Pro-Metric requirements and tests, which impacted on the materials in use, and on the advice or coaching given by the team.
- 3.5 Finally, the project encouraged hundreds of non-traditional learners into subsequent learning and made a major contribution to the upskilling and modernisation of the construction industry.

Section Four: Lessons Learnt

- 4.1 As indicated above, the project team regularly reviewed the approach, training and coaching programmes and materials in line with user feedback or need, or in response to externally attributable factors, thus ensuring the need for changes or different approaches to the programme were automatically built in.
- 4.2 But the overall approach adopted in this project has been tried and tested extensively, and it suffered no real setbacks or circumstances in which mistakes were made or fundamental changes were necessary.

Section Five

Dissemination of Good Practice, Publicity

- 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.
- 5.3 Furthermore, a member of the OSAT team had been involved (representing UCATT) with CITB Occupational Working Groups, and it was through this medium that CITB were persuaded to include colleges delivering the NVQ on all Occupational Working Groups).
- 5.4 No publicity materials were developed specifically for this project – as recorded above recruitment was done at a personal level via the routes described. However, the advertorial in trade and union publications did provide contact details for the project and an example is appended.

Section Six: Case Study and Views of Customers/Partners

Case Study

JOHN TURNER & SONS

This company has been working with Preston College OSAT team for some time, and speak highly indeed of the level of support and detailed information consistently provided. Although the company is comparatively well placed in terms of numbers of staff qualified, it nevertheless benefited from participating in the project to promote training, largely in terms of the help it received in drawing up its training plan in line with CITB requirements. The OSAT team worked closely with the company to explain the complexities of the requirements of the CITB and of other testing bodies, ensure that what was produced fit the CITB criteria on payment of training grant, and that the plan met testing body criteria.

The company is clear that despite its track record of putting employees through NVQs, participation in the project served as a timely reminder of the importance of linking training and assessment of skills to business needs, as distinct perhaps from forcing employees to gain accreditation simply to meet CSCS card criteria or to claim CITB grant. It is also delighted with the help on CITB criteria, which helped it to maximise the value of its own investment in training, and pleased that employees have been encouraged to go on to undertake learning following the support they received with individual training plans.

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. In addition, the project team took the views of company managers and of individuals in the development of training plans and delivery of training. The need to keep up to date with CITB rules and testing body criteria was central to the success of the project and has been recorded above.
- 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 While ICT was used to support the management of the project, and to deliver certain elements of the training at off-site locations, the bulk of the project concentrated on research, analysis and drawing up training plans (for which, clearly, the OSAT team used IT).
- 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 work of the project to increase participation in learning by equal opportunity priority groups directly addressed equal opportunities policies. Company training plans provided a brief summary of the employment demographics and learner data shows participation was broadly in line with demographics in this sector.
- 7.4 As the original proposal said, the work of the project linked directly to existing OSAT arrangements, and to Preston College's recently acquired status as a Health & Safety test centre; the work of the project will thus be continued in one form or another, in light of the major market and huge demand for OSAT and general upskilling within the sector. Already, OSAT has expanded beyond Lancashire (a second centre is soon to be opened in Liverpool in partnership with UCATT) and the North West, and the need for promoting qualifications as a route to CSCS, and solutions to business challenges through training, gives the work of this project a sound future.
- 7.5 Internal dissemination at Preston College has resulted in an agreement that Modern Apprentices on the Preston College construction course will all go through the Health & Safety tests.

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.

Additionality

- 8.3 There can be little doubt that had it not been for the increased awareness resulting from this project significant numbers of people would not otherwise have gone on to enrol and achieve accreditation. This is because there is no comparable other programme in existence, and because without ESF funding the work carried out would have been outwith the scope of activity for which Preston College receives mainstream funding. The project encouraged into learning and assessment significant numbers of non-traditional learners, and has increased registrations with CITB and for the CSCS.