



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

EVALUATION REPORT



Evaluation Report

Lancashire Learning and Skills Council

ESF Objective 3 Co-Financed Project

Project Title: IT Learning in the Workplace

Project Reference Number: ESF/0203/254

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 IT Learning in the Workplace 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

Lancashire's co-financing plan demonstrated that IT skills are one of the major skills gaps reported by Lancashire Employers. Evidence from the Employer Skills Survey (2002), highlighted a year on year increase in the percentage of employers reporting skills gaps in basic computing. This is now at 30%.

The evidence collected for the N&W Lancs LLP demonstrated that 22% of companies in North and West Lancs reported a potential skills gap in 'computer literacy' over the next 2 years. In East Lancashire the ELTEC Employer Survey found IT skills as being one of the areas where further training would be required within 3-5 years with over 60% of companies reporting a need in this area.

The most recent e-skills NTO IT User Skills LMI and Skills Foresight review (Sept 2001) highlighted:-

- Nearly one-third of employers believe skills gaps have a major effect on losing business orders.
- 40% of businesses that intended to introduce change to improve efficiency stated that they needed new or additional basic computing skills.
- One in ten employers report problems in recruiting people to fill a vacancy requiring IT skills.

The report also found that already approximately three-quarters of the 27 million people currently in employment are using IT at work and 44% of people said computer skills were essential to their jobs.

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

The following conclusions can be drawn from the evaluation processes:-

- Colleges have successfully engaged SMEs by utilising TNAs to ensure provision was tailored to business need and their IT skills issues
- Priority was placed on the achievement of qualifications however SMEs required bespoke support driven by business need to apply newly acquired ICT skills to work-related issues
- Colleges were concerned that the long-term needs of businesses was not being met, given that the funding ceased in December 2003. Colleges recognised that building relationships with SMEs was a long term commitment with results often not being yielded in the first year
- Barriers still exist when trying to encourage SMEs to pay for training. Often they can see the benefits of up-skilling their workforces, but continue to be reluctant to pay or release them for training

2. Project Context and Objectives

This project will enable enterprises to gain business/competitive advantage through identifying the IT user skills they need to meet business improvement goals, and through supporting the delivery of flexible programmes to meet these needs. Project objectives include:

- To organise reviews, via workshops/use of analysis and one-to-one reviews, to identify the ICT skills enterprises needed to meet business improvement goals.
- To set up and deliver training programmes to meet these needs.
- To complement the work with enterprises by creating materials to support workshops/reviews and through extending the range of specialist user training available to SMEs.
- To share the results of the work, including an evaluation study, with partners and other key players, identifying lessons for mainstreaming at a seminar to be held in December 2003.

Project activities included:

Stage 1

This stage involved workshops and/or one to one sessions coupled with TNA processes to identify skills issues in the workplace. For micro businesses skills analysis activities were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the owner-manager rather than via a workshop or formal TNA process.

Stage 2

Having established need and identified best practice in achieving the task/objectives set, the project reviewed the resource required to deliver training and the extent to which it was already 'held' by partner colleges, or Learndirect. The training was then set up and delivered using a combination of workplace and learning centre delivery, using online support backed up with live reviews with tutors/mentors where required. Colleges worked with SMEs and individuals to enable them to apply their newly acquired skills 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 (see Appendix 1).

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 (see Appendix 2).

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 our 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. Project implementation group meetings and 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.

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

The process of identifying companies was via a wide range of approaches these included:-

Cold calling
Mail shots
Events
E-marketing
Meetings with company reps

Of these approaches the most effective was direct meetings although reports from different colleges indicate that there was variability in local areas. The outcome of successful 'engagement' was the undertaking of a targeted training needs analysis which related to the IT needs of the company. (Please see the attached annex 'IT Learning in the Workplace report for a discussion with TNA issues involved). Specialist TNAs resulted in the establishment of training plans for the company specific to the IT area, at their best these

identified both current and future needs and were able to mesh into the companies strategic development plans. Once individual staff within companies who needed or would benefit from training were identified training programmes in colleges were offered to these individuals. All participants completed a beneficiary eligibility form and businesses were assessed to ensure that they were eligible for support (e.g. employed less than 250 people and met State Aid rules and regulations). Where possible College tutors liaised with the organisations' training representatives who were involved in the selection process to ensure College provision met the operational needs of the business. Each participant was assigned to a tutor and completed an individual action plan after they had been provided with initial guidance and advice prior to enrolling on the project.

To stimulate demand for the project local introductory IT sessions were delivered in community centres to encourage voluntary and community based organisations to participate on the project. In addition Colleges were able to offer SMEs access to informal workshops to gain an insight into the course materials, skills and qualifications gained by participating on the project.

One of the Colleges focused on rural businesses given their geographical location and was able to use their database of companies to promote the project and recruit/select participants.

In addition Colleges utilised existing company databases and extensive networking arrangements to "tap into" potential businesses located in the target area including: Business Links, Chambers of Commerce and Trade Union Representatives. A good example of close collaboration between Colleges and these intermediary bodies can be demonstrated by the robust relationship developed between Business Link East Lancashire and Nelson and Colne College who were able to gain access to Business Link's SMEs Skills Diagnostic Reports to enable them to build up knowledge of SME skills issues in their locality including ICT related skills deficiencies.

Matching Need to Provision

Participants were provided with an induction session to establish current knowledge and to provide them with the opportunity to discuss their training needs. Skills assessments formed part of a TNA process with the SME in order to match business needs with individual needs of employees participating on the project.

Project Adaptability

Post the induction session participants were able to determine which method of delivery would suit their circumstances offering access to tutorials, tasters and distance learning with provision ranging from foundation to intermediate. Participants also had access to tutors via email and phone should they require additional support. CD ROM, workbooks and handouts were useful materials participants could fully utilise in their own time to carry out preparatory work prior to attending taught sessions.

All participants were encouraged to develop an Individual Action Plan setting career and personal goals and aspirations and additional support mechanisms will be built into the project including adult guidance (IAG), ESOL and basic skills.

Project activities were delivered on a roll on roll off basis in locations and venues at times to suit participants' personal circumstances (e.g. work and family commitments) and where possible SMEs provided Colleges with access to their own facilities to reduce staff downtime and minimise disruption. For example, Colleges were able to set up "classroom style units" with a suite of PCs and support materials to deliver taught sessions. In addition, where possible micro businesses were encouraged to link-up to enable Colleges to deliver provision to 2/3 companies at the same time. (Delivering training to individual companies was possible, but labour intensive). In addition local community and voluntary organisations were offered access to project activities in local community venues for their staff and teams of volunteers.

Colleges were also aware that a significant proportion of participants worked shift patterns and flexi time, which resulted in the delivery of twilight training sessions. Home visits were also organised when requested if participants were not able to attend sessions at work or community venues.

Colleges working with companies in remote rural areas were able to deliver provision in local settings (e.g. village halls, hotels, community venues and public houses) to reduce travelling time. Portable ICT equipment (e.g. laptops, printers and PCs) and support materials were fully utilised and available to participants. Whilst Colleges recognised this approach was costly and labour intensive they accepted it was necessary to reach client groups that were least likely to participate in learning.

Publicity and Promotion

Colleges used their company databases to mailshot to potential SMEs that would benefit from the project. Business Links' learning websites (e.g. Lifetime Training and Link for Learning) were used to stimulate demand and raise awareness of the project. In addition a number of Colleges publicised the project by cold calling SMEs to stimulate demand.

Key intermediary bodies were also able to raise the profile of the project including: Lancashire West Partnership, District Councils and the Digital Development Agency.

All publicity materials declared that ESF and LSC funding supported the project.

Innovation

The nature of innovation is the delivery mechanisms of the project rather than the provision. For example, SMEs were able to select the most appropriate provision, closely match to business need as part of a TNA process and offer their employees access to provision on their premises to reduce staff downtime and minimise disruption in the workplace.

In addition Colleges were able to deliver when necessary, project activities in local community venues, which ensured provision was accessible to the most disadvantaged and disengaged client groups.

Participants were also able to adopt a flexible approach to their learning paths gaining access to taught sessions, distance learning and online support what has recently been tagged as “blended learning”.

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 by its very nature made significant use of ICT to enable them to gain a recognised qualification. In addition, part of the project’s activities required participants to access on-line learning materials and use CD ROM packages Participants were also able to use College ICT facilities (e.g. Learning and Technology Centres)

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

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

4.2. **Project Outputs and Outcomes**

| | Definition | Target | Actual |
|-------------------|--|---------------|---------------|
| Outputs | No of beneficiaries assisted | 455 | 437 |
| | No of which are female | 165 | 203 |
| | No working towards a qualification | 392 | 358 |
| Outcomes | No of leavers gaining a qualification | 391 | 81 |
| | No of beneficiaries completing their course | 366 | 188 |
| | No of beneficiaries in work or further study | 437 | 315 |
| Milestones | Development of Learning Materials | 1 | 1 |
| | Web Directory of Training Opportunities | 1 | 1 |
| | Mainstreaming Seminar | 1 | 1 |
| | Evaluation Report | 1 | 1 |

The project achieved 96% of the profiled target with more than 81% working towards a qualification. In addition more than 72% of participants committed to continuing in learning post completion with 81 participants achieving a qualification.

5. **Prospects**

Areas of Good Practice

The development of learning materials to support participants whilst they are attending class taught sessions have been extremely valuable. These have

been made available on CD ROM and include assessment practices that allow participants to test their knowledge and learn at their own pace.

Colleges have also been extremely successful in introducing a TNA process that has enabled them to design provision to suit business needs and address skill deficiencies in the workplace. Colleges have tested a number of models and have been able to develop a simplistic model that captures skills issues.

Lessons Learnt

The project has been too focused on the achievement of qualifications. SMEs want access to bespoke training driven by business needs that enable their employees to put their learning into practice to solve work related problems. Businesses place priority on the acquirement of the skill rather than the qualification. Colleges will seek to offer more bespoke support linked to particular work related issues and offer access to short courses and taster activities.

Problems were encountered with compilation of management information for LSC returns and College records and databases had to be adjusted to take account of the additional management information requirements. In addition tutors initially struggled to realise the relevance of completing additional paperwork and the linkages to LSC starts and outcome payments. Steps were taken to raise their understanding of payment processes and ESF requirements.

The SME eligibility form and state aid rule requirements were difficult to implement, primarily because SMEs were not always entirely sure of what they were declaring and had difficulty in interpreting the information on the form (e.g. euro exchange rates not provided). In addition a revised form was issued via the LSC late on which required Colleges to go back to companies and obtain signatures. This proved to be a labour intensive and a difficult exercise that was in danger of becoming burdensome for participating SMEs. Steps will be taken to ensure that future SME proformas are agreed centrally with the Consortium and the LSC prior to circulation.

Whilst access to the provision was flexible, Colleges recognised that it would be useful to offer breakfast and lunch-time taught sessions to reduce staff downtime and minimise disruption in the workplace. These sessions would also prove to be beneficial should participants struggle to be released from their core working hours.

This is a short-term project, which does not meet the long-term needs of local businesses. Building relationships with businesses takes time and resources with results often not being seen in Year 1. Project duration should be considered if similar provision is delivered in 2004.

Added Value

SMEs, community and voluntary organisations have benefited from gaining access to tailor made training delivered on work premises or in local community venues and structured around their skills needs with clear linkages to their organisation's business plan objectives.

Participants also gained from participating on the project, acquiring valuable transferable skills that increase the employability, securing their employment in the workplace and ultimately increasing productivity levels.

TNA activities also offered more flexible bespoke provision linked to business needs and enabled Colleges to identify additional skills issues in the workplace that will allow Colleges to offer additional customised support.

Mainstreaming

Unfortunately barriers still exist when trying to encourage SMEs to pay for training even if they value the training and can see the benefits of their staff participating in learning they are often reluctant to pay. In order to meet the skills gaps and LSC targets it is imperative that financial support is provided to this project to cover the costs of delivering bespoke packages of support.

Colleges are however keen to mainstream TNA processes into core provision and any future 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.

Appendix 1 – Structured Questionnaires



Lancashire College Consortium Co-financing

(ESF Objective 3)

Interim Evaluation Sheet

Project Name/Ref:

Provider:

Date of Visit:

Venue:

Attendees:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>3. How is the project adapted to meet client need (e.g. duration, timing, structure)?</p> <p>4. How has the project been scoped within the Department and who has been involved in scoping the project?</p> <p>5. How is the project delivered in your college?</p> <p>6. What elements of the project work well/less well and why at this stage?</p> <p>7. What marketing and promotional tools/mechanisms are used to publicise the project?</p> | |
|---|--|

OUTCOME QUESTIONS

1. What do you want from this evaluation process? What are your expectations?

Responses



Lancashire College Consortium Co-financing

(ESF Objective 3)

Final Evaluation Sheet

Project Name/Ref:

Provider:

Date of Visit:

Venue:

Attendees:

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <p><u>CONTEXT QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>1. Has the overall aim, objectives and milestones of the project been achieved? If not why not?</p> | <p><u>RESPONSES</u></p> |
| <p><u>PROCESS AND OUTCOME QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>2. What areas of good practice can be identified?</p> <p>3. What dissemination activities have taken place to date? (Please provide examples of dissemination materials)</p> | <p><u>RESPONSES</u></p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>4. How could the project be improved in relation to future project activities?</p> <p>5. What lessons have been learnt that could improve the effective operational management of the project (e.g. administrative system/procedures and reporting mechanisms)?</p> <p>6. How did the project demonstrate innovation?</p> <p>7. What publicity methods were used to promote the project (Please provide copies of courses advertising)?</p> | |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <p>8. How did the project address ICT, equal opportunities and sustainability cross cutting themes, which permeate the Objective 3 Programme?</p> <p>9. What elements of the project could be mainstreamed?</p> | |
| <p>10. How would you rate the overall value of the project?</p> | <p><u>RESPONSES</u></p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>11. Did the project meet the needs and expectations of client groups? (e.g. progression route and gaining positive outcomes)</p> <p>Please provide a selection of beneficiary course feedback sheets such (e.g customer feedback surveys/responses)</p> | |
|---|--|

Appendix 2 – Evaluation Indicators

| Activity | Quantitative Indicator | Target | Qualitative Indicator | Information Gathering | Responsible Person |
|---|---|---------------|---|--|---|
| Target Group | No of trainees | 455 | Type of trainees as per bid document (employees of SMEs) | Beneficiary starter form/company eligibility form | Providers/LCC |
| Impact and Outcomes | No. completing course | 366 | Perceived quality and relevance of provision to target group (Sample) | Attendance at project implementation group mtgs Beneficiary leaver form (e.g. satisfaction levels/progression routes) | LCC/DS Providers/LCC/DS |
| <u>Nature of Provision</u> TNA Process Training Provision Development of web-based learning materials | Production of training plans and delivery of customised support | 80 SMEs | Reduction of company skills gap Beneficiary satisfaction levels Perceived quality and usability | Skills audit/review (feedback) Beneficiary leaver form Action plans | Providers/LCC Employers/DS Providers/LCC/DS |
| Outputs | Number of trainees gaining a qualification | 391 | | Certificates | Providers/LCC |
| Publicity and Promotion Activities | Conference to disseminate findings and share best practice | 1 | | Event Feedback sheets | LCC |