

Evaluation report on the Joint SW Region AoC/ITPN/LSC Train to Gain contract management support workshops

Introduction

As a result of both college and independent provider feedback following the LSC's Train to Gain provider events held in June, 2009, the AoC SW and the SW ITPN, together with the SW LSC, organised a series of four one-day contract management support days in late November and early December.

Following the April 1st revision of national Train to Gain policy from one of contract growth to one of contract management within tight parameters, two very focussed objectives were agreed, comprising:

- Profiling and Managing a contract effectively within its Maximum Contract Value (MCV)
- Understanding and achieving Minimum Levels of Performance (MLPs)

The events were facilitated by the AoC and ITPN representatives Rod Brookes and Rod Davis and used realistic contract scenarios for small groups of delegates to work through and achieve the objectives. Feedback from the scenarios was facilitated to encourage peer to peer knowledge transfer and a group approach to exploring solutions. A support panel of LSC specialists was present at each event to respond to particular questions arising. There was a specific plenary session in the afternoons to identify further issues and development needs

Provider network context

This was the first completely joint programme of its kind between the SW LSC, the AoC SW and the SW ITPN. From a history of mainly competition, the networks – as with the providers themselves - have moved through a process of collaboration to a point where they now both compete **and** collaborate to achieve common goals. Earlier this year, the networks collaborated on a series of very successful assessor training events, where the same content and delivery style of training days were nonetheless staged separately. With this sequence of support workshops however, the whole process was jointly conceived and carried out, bringing together both independent and college providers to work collaboratively on the same tasks.

LSC support panel

The support panel offered information or support on specialised topic areas that arose, including:

- Contracts
- Quality
- Audit
- Finance & cash-flow
- LSC policy

Dates & venues

Date	Venue
24 th November 2009	Yeovil Innovation Centre, Barracks Close, Copse Road, Yeovil Somerset. BA22 8RN
26 th November 2009	The Wessex Room, The Corn Exchange, Devizes. SN10 1HS
1 st December 2009	The Hucclecote Centre, Churchdown Lane, Hucclecote, Gloucester GL3 3QN
3 rd December 2009	The Eagle House Hotel, 3 Castle Street, Launceston, Cornwall. PL15 8BA

Delegates

With scenarios based on a detailed dummy contract comprising a PFR and profiling tool, it was recognised early on that delegates to the events would need to be carefully selected to ensure that they had at least some basic knowledge to enable them to work on the tasks. Network meetings and numerous personal visits to providers were used to help ensure that only relevant people within providers applied, but in addition, weekly checks of those signing up were jointly undertaken to filter applications. In the event, only two applicants were asked not to attend, the remainder being very much the target audience of two per provider, one with managerial or supervisory contract responsibility, the other with operational contract responsibility. Approximately 40 delegates attended each event, with a total attending of approximately 150, representing 84 providers. All four events were 'sold out' a week before the start

Scenarios

Scenarios needed to be realistic and pitched at a level which would be challenging to experienced providers, yet also achievable for those who were inexperienced. Using timed tasks, it had to be feasible for peers to transfer knowledge around the tables in an effective learning process. Draft scenarios were drawn up and agreed by the steering group, then 'tested' with provider representatives. Further valuable refinements were achieved by checking the evolving draft scenarios with members from the LSC support panel.

There was a risk that, even with carefully pitched scenarios and the right choice of delegates, peer-group dynamics and differing levels of expertise might have negative consequences. To guard against this, the facilitators moved between tables to monitor progress and decide when new scenario information might best be introduced, and then the support panel was introduced after the first twenty minutes of each task, informally making their way around the tables to assist. The success of this approach can best be seen in the evaluation graphs (below), in which, in response to Question 2 (use of peer-group method), 79% thought it 'Excellent', with 29% rating it as 'Good'

Quotes from delegates

1. "The group activities were very useful for discussion and to clarify the processes. They enabled us to think through solutions to the issues raised" (Locomotivation Company)
2. "Having sessions like this would have been very useful at the start of our contracts" (Poole HHS Trust)
3. "Learnt a lot with this approach. Let's have more of this as we progress with 'managing the beast!'" (Strode College)
4. "I found the format extremely interesting; everyone participated very well and it was enjoyable as well as being informative" (Key Training)
5. "Very useful to have the LSC Audit people available for round-table discussion" (Wiltshire College)
6. "Probably the most useful event I have been to" (South West Highways)
7. "Very very useful. Thank you!" (South Devon College)
8. "Great not to have 'death by PowerPoint' for a change! Much better way of doing it! (Anon, Launceston)
9. "This approach was great and allowed lively debate. Frustrations aired and support offered" (Prospect Training)
10. "Ten out of Ten" (Royal Forest of Dean College)

Conclusions

1. **The delegate evaluation forms (see summary graph below) show consistently high levels of satisfaction, with the overwhelming majority being 'Excellent' or 'Good'.**
2. **With the evidence of high attendance levels and advance sell-outs, jointly conceived and executed support programmes can be seen to achieve high levels of 'buy-in' from providers**
3. **Peer-group methods of knowledge transfer, with specialists in support, rather than 'experts presenting from the front', can be seen as a valuable technique in the raising of standards**
4. **With the new SFA/NAS structures of nationally driven delivery and the anticipated reduction of local infrastructures support, the extension of the role and resourcing of provider networks in the delivery of this kind of facilitated, peer-group support could prove invaluable.**
5. **Choice and costs of locations: Networks have valuable local knowledge of appropriate, good quality, accessible and cost-effective venues**
6. **Training and support programmes conceived and carried out in partnership between funders and networks can be seen as being a comparable if not better model to use rather than reliance on 'arms length consultancy' models**

SATISFACTION SCORES FOR CONTRACT TRAINING AT YEOVIL/DEVIZES/ GLOS/ LAUNCESTON

■ POOR
 ■ SATISFACTORY
 ■ GOOD
 ■ EXCELLENT



