



Evaluation of the 2000-2006 Co-financing of the ESF Programme in the South West Region

Case Study Report

by

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Introduction and Context

In March 2008, HOST Policy Research (HOST) was awarded a contract to produce an independent assessment of achievements and impact of the LSC's co-financing programme in the South West region over the six years 2000-2006.

Specifically, the evaluation looked at:

- The achievement and impact of the programme on supporting and addressing the priorities of the LSC.
- How ESF was managed across the region.
- A range of individually funded projects to identify examples of effective project practice, particularly those which have been successful at forming or aiding progression and collaborative working.

HOST undertook 12 case studies which were chosen by the Project Steering Group as examples of effective practice from a longer list of suggestions from ESF managers throughout the region. These case studies included projects in a range of different contexts and South West areas, and addressed different target groups in both rural and urban settings.

The case studies are summarised in a series of comparative matrices in the main report but are presented here in full; each case is about five pages in length. They are an account of why each of the projects was set up, how they were managed, how learners were recruited, the issues and challenges that each of the projects faced at different times, and how these were addressed. They also examine some of the main reasons for their achievement and why they are considered good examples of effective practice. To assist the reader we have, at the beginning of each case, highlighted the main learning points from each project.

The cases show in particular how the South West European Social Fund (SWESF) Co-financing Programme 2001-2006 has enabled many individuals and businesses to take a further step, and for some a first step, in engagement with learning, and how good partnership working can enhance and enlarge capability and capacity within organisations and communities.

Case Study A: Learning Notes (Somerset)

Project highlights

Taster sessions, workshops, and using existing community links, were all effective tools to engage interest and recruit beneficiaries.

Value of staff with specialist knowledge and background related to the project and who could easily gain rapport with individuals was crucial to project success.

Project staff encouraged in their own learning needs, including achievement of teacher training qualifications.

Project was a catalyst to increase the breadth of opportunity of the Adult Learning and Leisure programme in the area.

Context

Learning Notes was a widening participation project using music as the vehicle to attract people into learning. It was managed by the current Education and Training Manager in Somerset County Council's Adult Learning & Leisure (AL&L) Department; at the time of the Learning Notes project, she had a 'widening participation' role in managing contracts with external providers. The bid for Learning Notes was prepared by her predecessor. As a result of the ESF funding, this project, with its enhanced staffing levels, extensive outreach and strategies to engage learners, was able to reach significant sections of the community who had previously not been involved in Adult Learning, and without the ESF finance would not have been able to take place.

Following research for the project which looked at qualification levels and recruitment by area, the original bid was written to take place in three main geographical areas where there was a higher proportion of the population without higher-level qualifications. However, as there were requests from people who met the eligibility criteria but lived outside these geographical areas, the project sought to extend the areas. The local LSC agreed to this and the contract was renegotiated. The local LSC was a member of the Steering Group, and although there were several staff changes during the life of the project, were regular attenders at meetings.

Partnership working

The contract was signed in April 2004, but the project did not start effectively until late 2004, running until end of December 2006, which in reality made it a two-year project. It was led by a senior manager within AL&L who chaired the project's Steering Group made up of representatives from the LSC, National Children's Homes, Sure Start, Bridgwater College and Somerset Music, and AL&L's own Return to Learn/Learning Advice Team.

There were up to 20 partners involved in supporting Learning Notes in various ways, eg by providing venues, supporting recruitment, and management of the project through the steering group. The Steering Group had a changing

membership with the LSC being represented throughout; the group were later pleased to add a beneficiary as a user representative.

There were synergies with Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) to which the Mendip Drumming Group applied successfully (with the project's support) for funding to buy drumming kits for use on the project.

Focus of the project

The focus was on recruiting those adults not in any learning or training, and those with disabilities or Basic Skills needs in the areas of Somerset, where more than 30 per cent have no formal qualifications. As well as the manager who oversaw the project, there was a small team of part-time staff working on the project, consisting of a project co-ordinator, who was also responsible for one of the geographical areas, and two other project workers.

All the project workers were on a fixed term contract for this project; two of the workers had a particular interest in the performing arts, with partners who were also musicians, who offered valuable background knowledge. The value of having some staff with such subject specialist insight was increasingly evident as the project progressed.

Engaging beneficiaries

Various information was circulated by the project to assist in the recruitment of individuals, with flyers being distributed to pubs, supermarkets and playgroups, and leaflets specifically targeting 16-18 year olds (*Mixing Sound: Get to Use a Sound Record Studio; Make your own Drum*, etc). Project workers visited different community organisations, and potential beneficiaries were offered opportunities to attend taster sessions. Singing and dancing workshops were used successfully to engage interest, and for some initiatives, the project used an approach of working through the children to reach the parents; this was particularly effective within smaller rural settings, and around Family Centres where excellent links with parents already existed.

Delivery and achievement

The project used music and music technology to reach targeted beneficiaries and provide them with progression opportunities. All delivery was local to beneficiaries, using a mixed approach and a range of musical activities to meet their needs. Development workers were seasoned Adult Learning professionals supported by an administrator and community musicians who provided tutoring, and targets were set for recruitment, progression to further provision, and IAG, all of which were met or exceeded.

In addition, a target that 90 eligible participants would take part in one musical performance was surpassed, with 130 participating. Many participants said they felt more confident about communication, and most workshops led to some type of performance. Although it was not an aim, people who had said previously that they had felt isolated acknowledged the benefit of the project in enabling them to make contact with others within their own community.

An independent external evaluation had been predetermined and was carried out towards the end of the project. The evaluation included group interviews with

learners, and highlighted four activities as being particularly innovative and effective: The Lace Walk for equality of opportunity, partnership, progression and embedding SfL; MAD (Mendip All Drummers) for sustainable development, community enterprise and use of ICT; Community Champions courses for progression and sustainable development; and activities which surrounded Adult Learners Week.

The target of 30 eligible participants progressing to further provision resulted in the following outputs: 30 on AL&L course, 19 ASDAN, 3 SfL, and 12 on Return to Learn courses/workshops. A survey of beneficiaries found that a significant number had moved from unemployment to employment, with 21 per cent indicating that they had moved into employment.

IAG was provided through learning advisers on a one-to-one basis at beneficiaries' induction sessions or drop-in sessions. On exit, participants saw a learning adviser again, and 43 learners received one-to-one advice (against a target of 40). These sessions took place through outreach in community venues such as Family Centres and playgroups.

What was described as a 'successful and dynamic celebration event' was organised as a culmination to the project. It was particularly significant in that it was organised as a learning experience by those participants engaged in the Learning Champions course, and was held in the Working Men's Club near Glastonbury and attended by current and former participants from many of the other Learning Notes projects.

Issues and challenges

Some months into the project there was quite a long process of contract renegotiation, mainly related to the geographical areas to be covered, which involved working closely with the LSC. This proved quite a complex task, but the LSC tried hard to make it reasonable and were extremely co-operative, renegotiating the contract to include these. The LSC were very flexible in negotiations and were described as brilliant by the project manager. Some of the other issues and challenges were as follows.

- Although facilitating partnership was an important part of the project and worked well locally, the project workers were frustrated at a higher level. They tried hard to engage partners, trying to arrange to see them, but there was not a good response. Keeping people involved in the Steering Group proved to be the least successful aspect of the project.
- Many beneficiaries needed help completing forms. The administrative side of the project became somewhat onerous, and the project leader found the paperwork too bureaucratic for the target group of participants.
- The audits were very demanding and further increased the required evidence, resulting in the need for the project to devise additional learner forms to secure further output evidence. It was felt that this placed heavy demands on learners, some of whom had literacy issues.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

Project staff were encouraged to address their own learning needs and participate in SfL training. Five of the musicians who were involved began their training as

tutors and gained the City and Guilds 7302, the first level teacher training qualification; two have found employment in mainstream Adult Learning.

One of the project's target outcomes was that ten eligible beneficiaries should achieve accreditation as 'learning champions' who would promote benefits of learning to others in their communities; 11 achieved this and went on to organise the celebration event. A souvenir poster which celebrated and promoted the project's activities was produced.

Some groups which were established through the project have continued to meet, eg Mendip All Drummers practise and perform and hire themselves out. However, opportunities for other groups have been lost because of changes in funding methodology.

The drumming group was a huge success and access to local community venues was an important factor. Feedback from participants indicated that a large part of the success was attributable to the staff involved, who were 'charismatic' without being too 'in your face'; they were passionate about the project and they were also excellent tutors, offering constructive criticism and advice.

Overview

Being long-term unemployed frequently results in low self-esteem and lack of confidence. This project clearly demonstrated that group activity, particularly one that is totally involving, dynamic and related, in this case, to music, can generate interest and encourage participants to plan and consider the future more optimistically. Participants constantly spoke of the positive effect of the project which provided a different sort of experience, enabling beneficiaries to think constructively about their future through an activity that engaged them in an artistic interest. A significant number of people demonstrated progression, and many obtained employment as a direct result of what they had achieved from this project.

From an organisational perspective, the project manager confirmed that Learning Notes had had a long-term impact on service provision. Prior to the project, there had been limited performing arts within AL&L's overall programme; Learning Notes had been a catalyst which has led to an increasing breadth in their programme, offering others opportunities in these areas.

Case Study B: Matchmaker (Dorset)

Project highlights

Origins of the project stemmed from research and consultation with target beneficiaries and deliverers.

Project delivery effectively mixed college-based learning with outreach work which required both flexibility and adaptability in working with a target group whose needs evolved as the project progressed.

Staff and main delivery providers acknowledged a much greater awareness of equal opportunities and diversity as a direct result of working on this project.

Context

The Matchmaker Project was managed by the Equality and Diversity Manager at Kingston Maurward College, whose mission, as:

'...Dorset's College of the Countryside is to provide inspiring and challenging education and training opportunities to equip our learners with the knowledge and skills to succeed in life and work'.

The college offers a large range of full-and part-time work-based courses which include agriculture, horticulture, floristry, countryside management, outdoor recreation and leisure, animal care, veterinary nursing, equine studies, business, secretarial and computer skills.

The Matchmaker Project came about for several reasons. During the early 2000s, a report was commissioned by the Race Equality Council which identified that one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the area was the Gypsy and Traveller population. Also, through Kingston Maurward's own equality and diversity monitoring, they had identified Gypsies and Travellers as being a substantial minority group. Research was carried out with Gypsies and Travellers, asking them what they needed to improve their education, skills and employment opportunities, and it also identified certain families within the communities. As a consequence, a conference was held at Wareham for interested parties, using Gypsies and Travellers to spread the message. The LSC attended this conference, and subsequently drew up a tender specification related to these needs, and asked Kingston Maurward College to take the lead with an alliance of providers.

This was the project manager's first experience of an ESF bid, and he admitted that he experienced some difficulty with the language used. A professional bid writer was therefore brought in to help with the final draft of the bid. The bid was successful, and subsequently the LSC provided considerable support and training to a member of staff to assist the administration for contract compliance. Relationships with the LSC were described as very good; they dealt effectively with any queries and attended meetings regularly with project managers.

The Matchmaker Project was called *Going Places* in the original tender, but as this was also the name of a well-known travel agent, it later became known as Matchmaker, which is the name the Gypsies and Travellers preferred.

Partnership working

The Matchmaker Project ran from October 2005-December 2007. It was an alliance of many partners rather than a formal partnership, with 15 provider partners offering training. The Steering Group was made up of partners from: Bournemouth and Poole College; Kingston Maurward College (Chair); Travellers' Education Support Service (TESS); TOPS Day Nursery. This group met monthly to exchange information and best practice, and to self-monitor consistency, costs, target outcomes and quality.

Partners took the view that it was better to spend as much time and effort as possible working with the beneficiaries and delivering the project successfully, so a 'lean' management team was agreed and appointed.

Focus of the project

The project aimed to reach and engage with local Gypsies and Travelling People (the largest ethnic minority group in Dorset), offering and developing student-agreed flexible, broad learning options. Beneficiaries aged 13 plus from the Gypsy and Travelling People Communities received a mix of IAG, enhanced support, and education/training places in a variety of skills areas which met their agreed Individual Learning Plan career and lifestyle needs. Training was delivered in FE provider establishments and via outreach work. There was little change in focus from the start, apart from having identified through further research that preferences had changed; for example, support was needed in helping beneficiaries to complete forms. Also, nobody had identified LGV driving, as a real need, but this proved to be in demand, as Travellers do a lot of driving of large vehicles.

Engaging beneficiaries

The project engaged many of the younger learners through a series of short practical taster courses which resulted in college certificates. A survey of beneficiaries at the end of the project found that 66 per cent of respondents heard about it through word of mouth, and 34 per cent accessed the project through the project team's direct marketing (leaflets, for example), or by speaking to partner organisations. A conscious decision was taken not to publicly promote the project too vigorously, as the managers were unsure of community reaction and were concerned about possible hostility. This was with the full approval of the project beneficiaries, who had themselves expressed some fears about this.

Delivery and achievement

The bulk of learning was in such things as landscape construction, which was provided by Kingston Maurward. Although those aged 13 years and above could enrol, the vast majority were aged 18 plus, and there was no upper age limit, with some learners into their fifties. They were fairly evenly split by gender.

There was a good mix of participants across the county, although there were fewer communities in the east of the county, ie Poole and Bournemouth, than in the west. The contract was for 50 beneficiaries, stipulating that 25 (50%) learners participating in this project should gain a qualification. The project delivered 78 starts (exceeding the target of 50), all of whom had initial IAG, and 73 ILPs. Thirty units and 35 qualifications were delivered, as against targets of 30 and 35 respectively. Only one student dropped out; aged about 18, he started a game-keeping course with the support of his family, but despite everyone's advice, he withdrew because he could earn more money working for a chicken processor.

The project team was a small one, made up of part-time staff consisting of a project manager, a co-ordinator and an administrator. Management meetings were held monthly, and reviewed progress against targets and expenditure against budget. The project manager estimated that approximately 85 per cent of the budget went on direct education costs and support, while 15 per cent went on overheads and management.

The project set up what was originally called a sustainability team, which came to be known as *Kushti Bok* (Romany for Good Luck). This group was made up of four Gypsies, four Travellers, the project manager and the administrator. This group, which met monthly at Kingston Maurward:

'...had a significant influence, and with the support of the project team engaged with many agencies - working much better now with health, education and police'.

They also had a significant input to the three conferences which were arranged, all of which have been opened and closed by the Gypsies and Travellers themselves.

The project had also directly employed some of the student beneficiaries on self-employed and part-time bases throughout the life of the project to provide bespoke services, which was very successful. There was an increase in self-employment, and interest in services for the self-employed, including safer working practice. Employer links were substantially improved through private sector providers who offered work experience placements; for example, Wessex Transport Training arranged placements with a number of new employers.

Issues and challenges

There were issues and challenges throughout the life of the project. For example, at the very first conference, there were some tutors who admitted to having negative feelings about working with Gypsies and Travellers, and expressed their initial fears which, however, were later dispelled. Nevertheless, the project team took account of these concerns and worked hard to overcome them, guiding tutors to get to know beneficiaries personally and form good working relationships with them. Other issues included:

- Having to do a lot of work with two communities who: *'...needed loads of encouragement'* as well as support: *'...a lot of them are not used to putting a date in a diary...so the co-ordinator would ring them all up...just to remind them that they had to be somewhere'*, and so project staff were more heavily involved in the day-to-day lives of the beneficiaries than they would normally have expected to be.

- *'Not having enough money...we could have spent more - far more'*, had they known that demand would be as great as it turned out to be. This was a major issue and one that, despite good research, they could not have foreseen.
- *'One or two providers perhaps let us down a bit'*, although they had a genuine desire to help but, mainly through their inability to be flexible, could not actually deliver. Issues again came to the fore about the common perceptions of Gypsies and Travellers, and in some cases providers were unable to overcome some prejudice.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

A survey conducted by an independent evaluator and a participant learner found that 62 per cent of beneficiaries said that their new skills had directly impacted on their life and what they had now decided they wanted to do. The project manager pointed to an increase in confidence within the Gypsy and Travelling People Communities in working with a range of local employers and educationalists, overcoming their own concerns about formal learning and what would be expected of them. A staff and partnership survey conducted in 2007 showed that their knowledge had been increased, and working practice had become more flexible and equal opportunities aware because of this project.

Kingston Maurward College was recently highly commended at the AoC's Beacon Awards in the widening participation category for its work on the Matchmaker Project with Gypsy and Travellers. It is also the first college in the country to achieve the criteria for Excellence in Customer Care, with special mention being made of its work on this project. Employer links have been improved with private sector providers, and their work experience placement database enlarged and enhanced. The project manager believed that the Matchmaker Project was about: *'...opening doors and holding hands'* and complemented the college's equality and diversity policy. The Principal was very supportive, and attended all of the conferences. What particularly worked well was establishing mutual trust and confidence which previously had been: *'...easy to say but difficult to achieve'*.

The project manager wrote another ESF bid in the next round, hoping to develop more of their work with Gypsies and Travellers and widening it to include other ethnic minorities, using the same approach, but this bid was not approved. The College Principal from discretionary funds financed a continuation, providing time for the project manager to continue to support the Kushti Bok sustainability group; the College has also applied for funding to the Allen Lane Foundation.

The Kushti Bok group aims to become the voice for the Gypsy and Traveller Community in Dorset and to establish itself as a voluntary organisation, working with Kingston Maurward and other agencies in identifying education and training needs, as well as with the police, housing and health, identifying community needs. The project has therefore identified training for members of this group in relevant fields such as meetings management, IT skills, and the financial aspects of running a voluntary group. Their objective is to improve awareness through, special events in the South West, such as workshops, and conferences demonstrating Gypsy and Traveller skills and traditions. The College Principal's hope is that at some time they will become an autonomous self-funding group. It is hoped that they will be able to apply for finance from other funding streams so that they can replicate what the project co-ordinator does currently, ie acting as a sign-poster.

At the end of the project, the LSC funded a National Conference, the last and biggest of the three, following which a number of potential partners approached Kingston Maurward College looking to discuss partnership possibilities within the project, and developmental and sustainable ideas arising from it.

Overview

This project required a fundamental change from the traditional FE approach, meaning that providers needed to be responsive and able to set things up quickly to meet the needs of the beneficiaries, so flexibility and adaptability were very important.

Establishing mutual trust and confidence between the communities and the project team and the providers was crucial to the success of the project. It was acknowledged that in the past, getting Gypsies and Travellers to work together had been difficult to achieve, because of the different factions involved, and so the Kushti Bok has made substantial progress to this end. It had played a major role in the project through its monthly meetings, which fed through ideas, thoughts and concerns into the management process. Successful practice and conference dissemination brought additional partners on board who were willing to work to the standards of the project, and marked a possible path for the future.

Case Study C: The NOVA Project

Project highlights

Management of the project undertaken by partnership of an Education Business consortium and a number of secondary schools who had a sound knowledge of the target group (disengaged young people).

To overcome the challenge of obtaining output evidence, the management team worked closely with schools devising forms and guidance notes to simplify/explain the procedures.

The project has contributed to an increase in knowledge and capacity within the schools involved, and the development of a stronger multi-agency approach to disengagement.

Context

This project was based around the delivery of an activity that strengthened the provision of a work-related curriculum for disengaged 14-16 year olds in danger of not meeting their full potential, to support their re-engagement whilst still on the school register. Participants in NOVA came from mainstream schools; colleges were involved as delivery partners.

The chief executive of Links4Learning directed the NOVA Project, which was the Education Business Links consortium for the Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole LSC area from 2002 until the end of July 2008.

Links4Learning was established with the Borough of Poole in 2002 as the co-ordinating body for Education Business Links; it then became the Education Business Links consortium for the Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole LSC area. The NOVA project is not the first ESF project which Links4Learning has had; there was a previous one (Education Business Links Project 2003-2005) which was of a similar nature for disengaged students, and worked basically with the same schools as NOVA. Prior to the NOVA Project, Links4Learning worked with the three Local Authorities to establish a continuing need, working with the 14-19 chief officers who were responsible for disengaged young people. The LSC invited Links4Learning to put in a closed tender for finance for the project.

Partnership working

The NOVA Project ran from October 2005-December 2007, and was led by Links4Learning, working with its LA strategic partners to identify young people from within the mainstream secondary schools across the county that met the ESF participant criteria. Links4Learning undertook the management and administration of this project, while each school identified a named Project Co-ordinator to oversee the delivery of the project within their organisation. Allocations were offered to all schools based on the Local Authority's knowledge of need, but not all of them took up the offer, in which case funding was re-allocated amongst the schools. The model was one in which each school was responsible for engaging students, while Links4Learning determined the

management, which was contained within a formal Partnership Agreement with each participating school.

Links4Learning had a management board with representatives from the Local Authorities, secondary heads and *Connexions*, which acted as the reporting body, to whom the team would feed back at every Board Meeting. Schools were required to give termly reports on each student.

The LSC offered training in completing the short event record forms and inputting into the system, and the managers had regular meetings with the LSC officers, although the LSC staff did undergo changes during this time, which sometimes made for difficulties with continuity.

Focus of the project

The main focus for the NOVA Project was to reduce the effect that disadvantage has on excluded learners in the 14 - 16 age group and to support their inclusion in learning, ultimately securing them a future place in the labour market. The focus remained unchanged throughout the life of project.

The project worked only with the 14 - 16 age group, ie Years 10 and 11. Some schools decided to fund students from Year 10 for a two-year programme, while others chose to target Year 11 students for one year only in two consecutive years, based on their need. The structure of the in-school programme needed to be flexible and to react quickly in cases where initial work-related programme choices proved to be unsuccessful.

Engaging beneficiaries

A clear strategy was adopted by schools for targeting and recruiting young people to the programme, based on an initial assessment and guidance programme that was key to engaging and motivating them, and making sure that interventions took place at a stage where re-engagement was realistic and achievable. Partner schools worked closely with individual students and, where possible, with their parents/guardians, to identify the most appropriate work-related activity for each student. To achieve re-engagement, it was important that the work-related programme selected met the individual needs of the young person.

Delivery and achievement

On the whole, students engaged on the programme were on extended work experience, to a great extent involving local employers. Placements were generally for one or two days per week over a long period of time, and relationships were built up with the employer or employers. Work experience placements made up the highest proportion, followed by work-related college courses and then in-school re-engagement programmes. The project strengthened links between schools and colleges, and in some areas new courses were established as a result of the funding being available, eg an agricultural course for pre-16 learners at Kingston Maurward College.

Forms were designed centrally by Links4Learning, based on what evidence needed to be collected, and also to record progress made by learners. Records

were kept for every learner. There was an ongoing evaluation by the Links4Learning management board, but no external evaluation.

Links4Learning staff also met with students at end-of-term meetings without teachers being present. JM thought it was good that her administrator was able to see the outcomes of the project work at these end-of-term meetings:

'...it was quite emotional at times actually because these students had moved such a long way'.

Particularly during a two-year course, the project staff would therefore see the students twice and:

'...it was quite incredible to see the growth as well...it was exciting for us as well actually to see where they were going to move on to'.

The participation target of 200 was surpassed, with the NOVA Project providing opportunities for 333 young people disengaged from learning, of whom 283 gained NVQ Level 1 (or equivalent), exceeding the target of 150 by 133; there were 41 early leavers, accounting for 12 per cent of the 333 participants, representing a low percentage for the challenging disengaged target group. The target of 76 learners to progress into employment was not achieved, falling short by 16 learners. However, the target for progression into training or further education was significantly over-achieved by 102 per cent.

It was important that the project staff had previous experience through its Education/Business Links of working in this way with the schools, in terms of collecting administrative and financial data from them, and: *'...it was very important to our success in terms of knowing what the pitfalls would be'.* It was part of the agreement that each school had to provide a co-ordinator. An important aspect of the relationship was that there was one-on-one contact with the School Co-ordinator: *'...it had to be one single point of contact'.*

In some cases, new links were established, eg some of the funding was used to bring in small employers who could not afford to buy employers' liability insurance, and therefore could not have offered work experience.

Issues and challenges

There were some issues and challenges which needed to be overcome. One of the key features of the project was that to make optimum use of the funding, Links4Learning had to ensure rapid replacement of early leavers, which often involved contacting and re-contacting schools in order to re-allocate funding. Some of the major challenges included the following:

- Links4Learning found the ESF procedures quite bureaucratic, and it proved extremely time-consuming to manage the project, as they had to claim for actual costs rather than learner outcomes; they had to set up a system to collate specific information from schools relating to the costs for each participant learner with a set of procedures and forms. To facilitate this, they offered at the start a half-day training programme to School Co-ordinators on how to complete ESF short record forms.
- Obtaining output evidence did prove very tough and challenging for Links4Learning in managing the project: *'...because for some co-ordinators, it wasn't their greatest strength'.* It was important that

schools were allowed to claim funding, and Links4Learning devised a number of forms to facilitate this, giving guidance on every issue. The administrator had to do: *'...a huge amount of chasing up, as if evidence was not provided, then funding could not be provided'*.

- Supporting work experience placements was an expensive external activity, so some of the project funding was used to support school staff to monitor placements in terms of their time and travel costs, plus support and guidance. In some cases, funding was used for purchasing special clothing and also for buying employers' liability insurance for small employers, thus enabling micro businesses and sole traders, who might not otherwise have been able to participate, to take part.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

The outcomes indicated that there must have been improved information advice and guidance, because these students actually ended up either in employment or Further Education. Commenting on working with the disengaged, the Project Director observed that it: *'...does very much rely on one-to-one support, and also the success of the programme is about meeting individual needs'*.

The project staff had previous experience of working in this way with schools, and it was an important aspect of the relationship that there was one-on-one contact with the School Co-ordinator.

One of the key success factors was ensuring that recruitment to the programme was made at an appropriate stage of disengagement. It was important to identify the level of individual support needed and to allocate staff and resources quickly. Another feature of the project was that Links4Learning had to ensure the rapid replacement of early leavers.

Beneficiaries welcomed the opportunity to 'reinvent' themselves in a work-related context, which raised their aspirations and improved confidence and self-esteem. There was an improvement in their ability to relate better to others. By participating in the project, they had their awareness raised of the value of work-related qualifications and the variety of pathways open to them.

Project funding has been continued through South West LSC, which decided that 25 per cent of the Education Business Links budget should be used to target potential NEETs, so the 14-19 steering group, many of whom were members of the Link4Learning board, decided that this funding should be used to carry on support of the NOVA Project, but on a smaller scale. With the end of the ESF funding and reduced EBL funding, in terms of beneficiaries for the current school year there have been 132 beneficiaries, thus representing a significant decrease on the NOVA figures.

Overview

ESF funding enabled partner schools to develop capacity within their infrastructure to provide the level of individual support needed by beneficiaries. It also supported the development of a multi-agency approach, building capacity amongst teachers, advisers and school support staff.

Individuals' working relationships were crucial to the success of meeting ESF procedures and evidence requirements: *'...because without that we wouldn't have the money so it is key to the success of the student as well'*.

One of the main benefits of the project was that learners were offered the chance to change their behaviour patterns: *'...they could actually start afresh...without being judged on their old behaviour'*.

Case Study D: REAL (Somerset)

Project highlights

In-depth flexible support offered at home locations and maintained through regular contact which reduced numbers of early leavers.

'Soft' outcomes were captured through a system of case studies which recorded progression as well as formal achievement.

Working relationships between project and Connexions and other key agencies notably improved as a direct result of this project which augurs well for future collaboration and successful delivery.

Context

The REAL Team Project was established by the chief executive of the Somerset Rural Youth Project (SRYP), which provides IAG assistance as well as advice (on health, budgeting, employment, training, sports, etc) to help rural young people into work or college or to gain marketable skills. The SRYP had previously had an ESF-funded project in 2003 for the Exmoor rural skills workshop under Objective Two.

The REAL Team Project derived from an incident related to SRYP's Mopeds Loans Scheme, which identified a need to provide specific support to young people in rural surroundings. Following an unsuccessful proposal that had been written for another funder, SRYP became aware of the LSC's criteria for funding, realised that this project would fit well with ESF criteria, and submitted a successful bid. SRYP is currently running nine projects, and the REAL Team accounted for about ten per cent of the organisation's income. SRYP employs the equivalent of 24 full-time staff, two of whom were engaged full-time, along with support staff, on the REAL Team Project.

Partnership working

The REAL Project ran originally from January 2004–March 2006, but a contract variation agreed to extend the project with additional ESF co-financing until 31.March 2007. There was not a formal partnership for the project, but SRYP worked with partner agencies including Jobcentre Plus and Somerset *Connexions*, who, along with the LSC, were part of the project advisory group.

Focus of the project

The project aimed to identify, engage, motivate and support vulnerable, isolated and hard-to-reach rural young adults to increase their take-up of training opportunities and to broker work opportunities using a variety of youth work methods. The REAL Team was therefore fundamentally a brokerage scheme, and the project's target group was not only NEET young people but also those who were under-employed and at risk. The focus did not change, and the REAL Team

worked with young people up to the age of 25 years. The model that the REAL Team worked to can be summarised as:

- Identify beneficiary.
- Work with the young person to write an action plan
- Develop short-term and medium-term aims.
- Look at who is best to help the young person.
- Meet those aims with appropriate brokerage.
- Support that process until the young person has moved on.

Engaging beneficiaries

Engaging beneficiaries was described as a two-stage process, the first being through profiling, ie targeting geographical areas based on statistical data relating to distribution of young people, followed by detached work: walking the streets, talking to locals and trying to establish contact with groups of young people. The second was through referrals from other agencies, which, as the project developed, significantly increased, so that this engagement accounted for 70 per cent of recruitment in the final stages.

Delivery and achievement

The project targeted 100 under-employed, unemployed or unqualified young adults (16-25) from parishes of less than 3,000 population in Somerset. The project exceeded its contract requirements by identifying and engaging with 137 beneficiaries.

One of the strengths of the REAL Team, which was made up of youth workers, was that they were able to give flexible support, whereas Connexions staff were not able to be as flexible; for example, they were constrained by their opening times. They were also able to provide in-depth support to the young people where they are in their home location, and were able to maintain that level of support through different means of informal contact, such as the use of mobile phones and MSN.

At the start of the project, there were 30 beneficiaries employed and 70 who were unemployed, and by the end of the project these figures had changed to 55 employed (45 full-time and 10 part-time), with only five unemployed. The number in full-time education or training also increased significantly from 35 to 45 beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries were provided with appropriate IAG by the project workers, who were all qualified to give IAG, as well as being qualified youth workers who had also trained in drugs and sexual health. The project captured 'soft outcomes' through the production of case studies for each young person, all of whom were also given exit interviews.

They provided three tiers of support dependent upon the level required and judged by an initial risk assessment: beneficiaries were tracked through a six-month recall system. Much use was made of mobile phones to keep contact with

individuals; Team workers had laptops and Internet provision, which greatly assisted the process.

Although the team felt that there is still some way to go in developing employer links, some good links were made and success stories resulted from those links. For example, three young people went on to apprenticeships with Ford Brothers, a construction company, following work placements.

Issues and challenges

Not all aspects of the project ran smoothly. Where there were issues or challenges, these were mainly of an administrative or financial nature, such as:

- There were lots of problems relating to the on-line data collection system, eg during the audit when project staff were having to ensure that every record was up to date, spending a great deal of time on inputting data.
- The financial side was considered: '*...a bit of a nightmare*'. The project is still awaiting payment for an evaluation, and conversely was overpaid for something else. It was acknowledged that there had been problems on both sides when, for example, SRYP were without a financial manager at one time, the person at the LSC responsible for finance of the project had been on maternity leave, and both factors resulted in much confusion about what had been paid and not paid.
- They did not have core cost recovery, so funding was very tight, amounting to £50,000 pa maximum, whereas they felt they needed more which would have enabled them to have had a third worker in the team to give greater flexibility. More administrative support would have been useful, too, because of the scale of data-inputting.
- There was a heavy reliance on the quality of the mobile phones' signal strength, so that workers in the field often had to physically move to other locations to locate a suitable signal.
- Although the SRYP has always had links with the *Connexions* Service, there were issues around the professional responsibility in working with young people, but through the REAL Team these links have been strengthened and developed, and there is now a closer working relationship.
- One of the issues was that once the young people develop a relationship with a worker, they were reluctant to go to other professionals, and the young person might have had to be in contact regularly with three or four different agencies, so the REAL Team became the central contact.
- Although some employer links were developed, more could have been done if project workers had had more time available, as it is extremely time consuming to identify and build relationships with employers.
- The biggest challenge currently was how to sustain the funding for a product that works, when there is no mainstream money available and, therefore, projects: '*are at the beck and call of grants and funding agencies*'. Help from the LSC at an early stage would be useful with this, it was felt, to signpost to possible financial sources.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

The REAL Project has been able to continue beyond the ESF funding, through funding from the Children's and Young People's Partnership in Somerset (CHYPPS) and also with money from Defra, which enabled them to continue, albeit at about half the funding level; Defra funding, however, finished in March 2008. The REAL Project currently has LSC funding from its discretionary fund until July 2008. SRYP is awaiting the outcome of a new round of ESF funding (for two years from July 2008). The new bid, which is led by *Connexions*, has a clear partnership approach, with approximately £40,000 a year going to the REAL Project.

If the REAL Project had not been funded by the ESF, SRYP would have lobbied the LSC for the money from the discretionary fund. As an organisation, SRYP believes that the REAL Project is a very important project, and would therefore try to support its continuation even at a reduced level.

Project staff considered that the chief reasons for success were:

- The methodology, being needs-based, flexible and quick to respond.
- Extensive experience within the organisation of working with rural young people.
- They were working with people aged 18-25 years, not covered by *Connexions*, who could have been forgotten, especially if they were not registered as unemployed.

Overview

Although the REAL Team Project was, as one manager reported: '*...done on a shoestring*', it had exceeded its targets and established itself as a project in Somerset, known and respected by a number of key agencies. For the beneficiaries, there had been an impact on their employability and skills. There was an area of need which the REAL Project had identified, and they have been able to provide a quality service.

Case Study E: VT Southern Careers Ltd

Project highlights

Delivery based on existing partnership arrangement ensured prompt start; all partners understood their role and ESF administrative systems.

Project filled a clearly defined gap in existing provision, reducing the need to signpost individuals to other organisations.

Sound project marketing strategy routed through employers meant that support for the needs of individuals facing an uncertain future was timely and appropriate.

Context

VT Southern Careers Ltd is a subsidiary of VT PLC, and held the contract for delivering the Nextsteps contract in Wiltshire and Swindon from 2005 until July 2008. The Nextsteps service was delivered through a group of between 13 and 15 delivery partners, selected to ensure that they could meet the needs of the Nextsteps client group - adults needing information, advice and guidance services, and who had qualifications below a Level 2. VT Southern Careers Ltd had run ESF projects before, so when advised by their LSC contract manager during 2006 that there was potential to bid for further funds from ESF, they were interested.

Partnership working

VT elected to deliver the project through a sub-set of five of its delivery partners, and ensured that advisers at each of these partners understood the range of paperwork required to prove a beneficiary and trigger payment. As part of their programme of CPD for all advisers, VT also developed an information sheet describing the project and eligibility criteria, which was shared among all advisers, so that if an eligible client went to a partner who was not delivering the ESF programme, they would be able to refer that person on to someone who could help them. This signposting was a feature of the project.

Focus of project

VT was eventually contracted to deliver a programme named 'IAG in the Workplace - Moving the Workforce On' in the Wiltshire and Swindon area. The purpose of the work was to deliver information, advice and enhanced services to employed adults aged over 25 years in the Wiltshire and Swindon area who held at least a Level 2 qualification. Beneficiaries could either live in the area or work in the area, and in the latter case had to produce evidence from their employer that this was the case.

VT was particularly keen to offer this programme, as it meant that they were able to work with a wider range of clients, their main contract limiting them to those below Level 2. It also meant that they were able to deliver a fuller programme of

support rather than a single meeting advice and guidance session. Delivery was restricted to the calendar year 2007.

Wiltshire faced a number of mass redundancies in companies during 2007, including Bowyers, Dyson, Avon Tyres and Bookclub Associates. Many of these were in traditional food and drink processing industries, where staff had been in stable employment for a number of years and consequently needed support in job search skills in particular, and in identifying their transferable skills. While the project was not developed on the basis of foreknowledge of these redundancies, it meant that support was available to local employers and their workers at exactly the time it was needed.

Engaging beneficiaries

Delivery partners approached the project in different ways, with some pro-actively going out and marketing the project to employers, with a particular focus on those who were having to make staff redundant. Other organisations had a steady stream of clients coming through their door, and were able to deliver the project to these clients as another opportunity in their portfolio of support. In addition, the VT management team in Wiltshire and Swindon also followed up with firms that they knew from the press or local radio would be making staff redundant, to offer the service to them and their workers. The VT management team also attended jobs fairs, where they were able to offer services to people seeking to change jobs.

Jobs fairs were more effective for VT Southern Careers during the ESF contract. Their previous experience had been that individuals without a Level 2 qualification were unlikely to attend these events. Consequently, there was an initial reluctance to attend, as previously much staffing resource had been invested for little return. During 2007, VT attended several of these events, interacted with individuals who had not come across the service at all before, assisted a number of individuals, and promoted the Nextsteps brand. After the contract ended, they attended one more fair, but found the experience frustrating, as few enquiries were from eligible individuals, and most of the referrals were sent to learndirect.

The contract was reprofiled at the half-way point of the contract in terms of numbers of starts and therefore the numbers of paying outputs. The original profile had been set without any initial research in likely response rates, and when reprofiling took place, it was relatively straightforward to achieve the required numbers of beneficiaries. The service filled a notable gap within the portfolio of Nextsteps services available, with limited free assistance available to those who had already achieved their first Level 2.

Project delivery and achievement

The project programme involved up to two sessions with an individual to help them assess their options for work and for further learning. The second session included more active participation by the beneficiary, including the requirement to engage in some learning or development activity. This did not necessarily have to be structured, but could include activities such as developing a revised CV or completing *Adult Directions*, but a certificate would need to be achieved to demonstrate that learning or development was involved. One adviser was able to develop packs of information for this client group to assist with job search and future directions - a pack that was well received by the employer and those employees that he was aiming to assist. It has also been possible to adapt this

pack to the needs of other employers and other employee groups, and this, too, became a feature of the programme.

Issues and challenges

The key paying outcomes, other than numbers of starts, were employment or training. These were evidenced through completion of a tracking questionnaire and returns were low, and this was the first contract run by VT where payments had been linked to returns to the tracking system. This was the only area of underperformance on the contract. VT then improved their approach to tracking returns and addressed this through telephone follow-up and offering an incentive in the form of a prize draw. Internal VT operating guidelines strictly limit the times when beneficiaries can be contacted by telephone, including not at weekends or evenings, which limits the power of this method of follow-up. These efforts, however, although they have increased the numbers of tracking returns, were outside the project time frame.

The beneficiary recording requirements for the project were onerous, with advisers having to fill in ESF short record forms, Nextsteps AMIS forms, and certificates of achievement for the second of the two beneficiary sessions. Beneficiaries had to sign ESF short record forms, and would also receive satisfaction surveys, tracking surveys and impact surveys. The paperwork for this project was therefore significant. However, VT were pleased with the support they were given by the LSC on the paperwork trails and audit, which helped them to ensure they were able to claim the maximum outputs that they could evidence.

Individual advisers were given packs, training, 'crib sheets' and partially completed ESF short record forms to work with, and while initially the new paperwork was unfamiliar and therefore more difficult, advisers said that after a while, and with the support of the VT team, it was less difficult than expected. The VT central team did find it more time consuming, but they had responsibility for data entry onto the LSC systems, and each beneficiary generated a large amount of paper. One thing the VT team noted was that evidence requirements changed after three months of the contract, and they had to change what they were collecting, and the support information provided to advisers. While the changes were not large, with a short contract of 12 months and so early into the contract, they found this confusing.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

Once the project ended, some of the work could be continued using funds from different sources on a case-by-case basis, and some delivery partners were able to continue to deliver to the target group through alternative funding methods. It was noted that in some instances, where whole organisation support was required, private consultants were provided for management, while blue collar staff were more likely to be supported through Nextsteps.

During the early part of 2008, the Nextsteps contracts were re-tendered nationally. VT Southern Careers Ltd found out in May 2008 that they had not won the contract for the South West region. Consequently, since that time, VT have been withdrawing from their operations, and the office closed at the end of July 2008. Some delivery partners continue to deliver services in Wiltshire and Swindon, in particular the colleges and North Wessex Training, while other small and specialist delivery partners are also facing closure.

Overview

This was a small-scale project aimed at assisting an often overlooked client group who could not be supported through other finance. In some ways, it was very timely, as it was able to offer very practical assistance to a number of employees on the threshold of redundancy. Despite not being awarded a renewal contract, the organisation felt they had learnt much from the exercise, including the development of bespoke packages, the process of which was transferable to other IAG delivery.

Case Study F: The Richmond Fellowship (Wiltshire)

Project highlights

Sound project management was the key, working with a network of contacts to engage beneficiaries from a particularly hard to reach target group, and working with specialist providers to deliver learning.

'Soft' skill development and individual mentoring were more effective than structured Level 1 qualifications with this target group, for whom comparatively minor setbacks could adversely affect their motivation.

Context

The Richmond Fellowship is a national charity working particularly with people with mental health issues. There are two main strands to its operations: providing sheltered housing support for short-term and long-term needs, and providing support to individuals to enable them to access education, training, voluntary work and employment. In Wiltshire and Swindon, their activity is particularly focused on providing individuals with the support and skills necessary to enter employment.

RFET Wiltshire QEST, now called Richmond Fellowship, Wiltshire (Employment Services) had won ESF co-financing funds before this programme through Wiltshire County Council, in order to deliver a project to support individuals into employment. As the organisation had had a positive experience with ESF funds, they applied to the LSC under Objective 3 to deliver activities for those who are not employed. The project specification was issued in November 2005 and tenders submitted to the LSC in December 2005, while projects had to be completed by December 2007. The Richmond Fellowship knew that there were a number of individuals in the Wiltshire and Swindon area who were likely to benefit from a programme with this focus, so submitted a tender. They found the tendering process reasonably straightforward, if time consuming, and their contract ran from July 2006 to December 2007.

Focus of project

The project involved working with individuals without Level 1 qualifications, who were aged 25 years and over, and who were without work, whether claiming benefit or not. The focus of the project was provision of advice and guidance, non-accredited training including IT skills, and accredited training to a Level 1 qualification. The eligibility criteria for beneficiaries were very strict, as the individual could not hold any type of qualifications that would count as being a Level 1 or higher. This meant that if a beneficiary had an inappropriate Level 1 qualification that was not relevant to their current needs and/or labour market conditions, they were unable to re-train to update their skills and engage with this learning opportunity. They also had to be aged 25 years or over, which meant that younger potential beneficiaries had to look elsewhere. Individuals were clearly in the 'hard-to-reach' category and challenging to work with. The project specification issued by the LSC called for 320 beneficiaries, 208 working

towards a qualification, 192 achieving a qualification, and four trainers receiving training, as paid outcomes.

The project outcomes were demanding, and with the project contract not being signed until July 2006, the Richmond Fellowship was aware that the targets would be difficult to achieve, and raised this at contract signing. There was, however, no scope for flexibility on the contract at this stage. With the tight beneficiary eligibility criteria and a shortened timescale for delivery, the provider focused heavily on publicising the scheme widely with existing partners and new contacts. While it had not been possible to do any concrete work before the contract was signed, workers had been identifying potential partners and marketing methods, so once the contract was received, materials could be developed and potential partners engaged as quickly as possible.

Engaging beneficiaries

The variety of routes for publicising the project was large and diverse. The project engaged with local groups, colleges and training providers, specific groups working with refugees, asylum seekers, black and minority ethnic groups, carer support groups, and voluntary action services, as well as their more usual partners - community health teams, occupational health workers, social workers, Jobcentre Plus advisers including lone parent advisers, disability employment advisers and normal jobseeker advisers. They also undertook a number of presentations to Jobcentre staff, and did mail shots and presentations to relevant organisations and individuals. Despite the wide awareness raising campaign, the Richmond Fellowship found that it was either the Jobcentre or their existing partners that provided most of the referrals to the project.

Once beneficiaries were found, they received a range of support and training. The first stage in the process was a session with an employment adviser from the Richmond Fellowship. This initial interview was used to undertake a preliminary skills audit and develop an action plan. It involved taking a detailed skills, employment and medical history, identifying support networks, any qualifications, issues such as benefits, housing, barriers to learning and employment, and any medication being taken. The action plan was used to identify the required training and development process, and to provide background information to ensure the beneficiary received the support they needed.

Delivery and achievement

The beneficiaries were offered two specific learning strands. One set was non-accredited and included generic skills such as CV writing, skills and interview techniques, and the other was a structured accredited learning strand.

The non-accredited training was delivered by the Richmond Fellowship team, and four members of staff received Train the Trainer training in order to support this delivery. The second set of training was delivered by one of two specialist training providers sub-contracted for the project, and led to a relevant Level 1 qualification, such as Level 1 IT and Communications, ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence), Problem Solving, and Literacy and Numeracy Basic Skills. The communications skills had a particular focus on personal communications, as this was found to be an area of particular difficulty for many of the client group.

Because the project managers monitored the project constantly, they could respond promptly to any changes that were needed. A good example of this is

the Level 1 problem-solving skills training which was reviewed and then abandoned by Richmond when it was found to be too challenging for clients, and the reason some clients were leaving the programme.

Beneficiary progress on the Level 1 qualifications was slow, however, given the multiple needs of the client group. The Richmond Fellowship believes that while under normal circumstances a Level 1 should be achievable in three to six months, this client group often needed between six and 12 months, and in some cases up to 18 months. In addition, clients required preparation before they undertook the Level 1 qualification, which involved assessment of Basic Skills, Literacy and Numeracy and study skills. This made achieving the qualifications targets challenging at best.

Alongside the training offered, the beneficiaries had regular sessions with their employment advisers, and were also able to contact the adviser by telephone. The project deliverer found that some individuals required a considerable amount of one-to-one support and assistance, but this practice enabled some beneficiaries to make very real progress.

One of the areas of effective practice was in the preparation of beneficiary handling. Provider delivery staff were well prepared for dealing with different types of clients. They were, for example, given a number of sessions on the difficulties and issues of working with a client group with mental health issues.

While only 19 qualifications were ultimately achieved during the life of the project, a few further outcomes have been attained since the project closed, because once an individual was engaged, and if they had attended the training sessions, the Richmond Fellowship ensured that they completed the programme, giving them support if required.

The Richmond Fellowship ultimately engaged with 212 individuals, and feel they have given them all a learning foundation on which to build other skills and progress into further training and employment. No formal evaluation was conducted for this project, although a final report was submitted outlining achievements and areas of engagement that had worked particularly effectively.

Issues and challenges

Given the challenges faced by the Richmond Fellowship with the client group, and their concern at the delay to the start of the contract, it is not surprising that after six months it was necessary to reprofile the outputs of the project with the LSC. This involved reducing the numbers of beneficiaries, and consequently the numbers entering training and achieving qualifications. Despite the value of the contract being reduced, there was still a shortfall in the amount of money drawn down by the project. Final outputs were 212 beneficiaries, 89 training starts, 19 qualifications achieved, and four members of staff trained. In addition, but not funded, 54 beneficiaries left the programme to take up employment.

The Richmond Fellowship worked closely with the LSC to make certain that beneficiary data and paperwork was completed correctly to ensure that there were no audit issues, and praised the support they received from their LSC contact with the learner data systems.

They were, however, forced to keep two sets of data in order to manage the contract properly. One of the main reasons for this was that while the project specification for the project was issued under measure 1.2, some of the funding

was provided under measure 2.2, which meant that the Richmond Fellowship had to enter beneficiary data under two different dossier numbers, causing extra difficulty and potential for error. Additionally, and following the reprofiling exercise, the contract profile information on the Provider Online system did not match their contract, so they had to resort to maintaining a spreadsheet system for their own monitoring purposes.

This extra complexity forced the Richmond Fellowship project manager to admit that: *'...the most work we have ever had to do for a contract, was this LSC one'*.

There were also some real challenges for clients, including the inaccessibility of public transport, which had to be overcome. Outreach provision was provided, and considerable support was put in place to ensure regular attendance and the setting up of quick payments for travel costs incurred by the clients who were on low incomes and benefits, but this required time and additional staff resources.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

The Richmond Fellowship was able to pinpoint a number of positive experiences from the ESF contract. They had been able to consolidate and improve relationships with some training providers, thus being able to offer a better service to their standard client base, while also identifying those providers who were not flexible enough for this client group. They were also able to consolidate their relationships with a number of partners who they work with to identify individuals needing support, and this collaboration has continued beyond the life of the project.

There were also a number of important learning points that will influence the activities of the Richmond Fellowship in future. Chief among these is the need to tailor learning for clients and customise learning packages, adapting the requirements of the qualifications to make them more relevant to the needs of the individual. The project underpinned the importance of individual support for clients who are involved in programmes outside those offered by mainstream provision.

With the experience gained during this LSC contract, the Richmond Fellowship are keen to have the opportunity to tender again for this type of provision, but feel that the timescale would need to be long enough to deliver learning effectively to this complex client group, and ideally for three years.

Overview

Sound project management was the key to this project, with extensive marketing activity to draw in beneficiaries, and concerted partnership working with training providers to ensure an understanding of the client group, and to reduce or remove barriers to participation of beneficiaries both to ensure sound outcomes and outputs, and to minimise the numbers of early leavers.

Case Study G: The Dynamite Project (Devon and Cornwall)

Project highlights

Strong working relationship between work-based training organisation and specialist FE Colleges whose roles and responsibilities were clearly defined at the outset.

Existing business relationship between small farmers and Vets was used effectively as a conduit both to generate interest and to deliver learning.

Project managers used sector networking organisations to promote the project and engage learners.

Project delivered successfully a mixture of non-accredited activities with a sector-specific focus and structured NVQ qualifications and units towards qualifications.

Context

The genesis of this project, which was funded under Objectives 2 and 3, began in 2004 when three providers - one in Cornwall and two in Devon - met with the LSC to discuss funding to more effectively service employers in the land-based sectors in the sub-region. The organisations involved - Duchy College (part of Cornwall College), Bicton College and Drake Training - provided 95 per cent of NVQ-based training for work-based learners in the sector in the two counties, and although they had collaborated previously on a very small scale, this was the first time they had developed a working partnership involving large volumes of learning-based activity. The project would not have taken place without ESF funding¹ as the beneficiaries were either ineligible under mainstream provision, or mainstream provision was not set up to address their specific needs.

The proposal to apply for ESF finance from the LSC was made against a context of change in the land-based sector, such as modifications to the subsidy system, the introduction of single farm payments, and new cross-compliance requirements. The project was based around offering flexible learning and development programmes to farmers who were also at that time experiencing falling incomes and high levels of uncertainty, in order to widen employment prospects for individuals and increase business sustainability for smaller producers. Farmers are subject to many time constraints, and it is often difficult to persuade them of the benefits of training. The LSC wholeheartedly supported the project from the start because it actively encourages partnership working; it set out to increase capability and capacity for both the providers and the beneficiaries, and was sector-driven.

Partnership working

The partnership was led by Duchy College as the accountable body, who in turn appointed a project manager to oversee the day-to-day operation of the project. An industry Steering Group was also appointed which advised on project direction

¹ Just under two million pounds was secured for this project.
Evaluation of the 2000–2006
Co-financing of the ESF Programme
in the South West Region
Case study report

and curriculum issues, and provided opportunities for the partners to consult with the industry as the project progressed to continue to ensure a demand-led approach. The project began in 2004 and continued until late 2005. Initially, there were many planning meetings where agreement on marketing (especially branding), finance, and the submission of a formal proposal was finalised. The partners met monthly and the LSC were invited to each meeting.

At the outset, the partners agreed their roles and responsibilities and project quotas. Duchy were to deliver 58 per cent, with the other organisations delivering an equal split of 21 per cent each. They also agreed that some aspects of delivery would be undertaken individually, but that other elements would be joint enterprises.

Numbers were constantly reviewed by the partners during the life of the project, and if necessary reallocated according to current circumstances.

Indeed, so used did the partners become to this technique that when early in 2005 Drake Training closed down (for reasons not connected with the project), the remaining partners were able to accommodate the Drake allocation without difficulty. Duchy College's representative commented that:

'...because we had planned this project well from the start and had kept abreast of what was happening not only about our own delivery but also our partners, and because we had appointed a project manager with the right skill set for the role, the collapse of Drake was not a major catastrophe but a challenge that we were easily able to overcome.'

Focus of the project

The focus of the project was comprehensive and was concentrated in two main areas:

- A range of bespoke non-qualification-based activities for small farming businesses, such as delivery of basic IT courses, tractor driving, instructional techniques and introduction to organic farming.
- Structured learning which resulted in Level 2, 3 or 4 qualifications, but which also allowed achievement of units of learning *towards* full qualifications.

Training was delivered by provider staff and industry specialists to owner managers, supervisors, employed and self-employed workers in the sector. The mix of full and part awards, and the bespoke activities, aimed to promote individual and workforce development as well as widening participation in learning, and to signpost progression routes for those involved both during the project and subsequently. Sixteen to 24 year olds who were accessing mainstream funding were supported through the bespoke element, because research and experience had shown the partners that short-course enhancements can often be critical to learner retention and achievement rates. Additionally, there was money available to enable new entrants to the industry to begin an apprenticeship programme through a form of wage subsidy. Little of this latter pool of money was ultimately used, but it was available primarily as an added value incentive. There were no restrictions on age for entry to the project, but beneficiaries had to be 'economically active'.

Engaging beneficiaries

The project partners went to great lengths to develop networking as a means of engaging individuals in this project. For example, they worked extensively with the National Farmers Union (NFU) to ensure that marketing material about the project was appropriate, attractive and widely distributed to appeal to different types of individuals and sectors of the industry.

Partners accepted all invitations to promote the project, and staff took part in equal opportunities training to ensure that all beneficiary possibilities were explored.

A key feature of the project was the engagement of small business beneficiaries though the use of their existing veterinary surgeons as the 'conduit' to learning. Nine veterinary practice vets were charged with delivering workshops to their existing customers in herd health planning and disease prevention, especially relevant in the post-foot and mouth years. The vets' own delivery techniques were enhanced through training also provided by the programme, and provider assessors subsequently visited the farms to review the health plan and validate a single unit outcome towards an NVQ for individual farm owner/managers.

Duchy College attained the College Engagement with Employers Beacon Award from the LSC in 2004 for delivery of this unique model. The model also led to subsequent engagement with the veterinary practices involved outside the ESF programme. Currently, in north Devon for example, IT systems have been installed in a new veterinary hospital which is used for the delivery of training to land-based businesses, and vets have become engaged in herd health planning initiatives in both counties - both developments which stemmed from the working relationships which evolved during the Dynamite project.

Delivery and achievement

The delivery of this project was made as flexible as possible and contributed to the strong achievement rate - 85 per cent of beneficiaries attained an award or units toward a national award from 1,300 engaged. The use of information technology played a major role in this through communication, websites and wide use of PowerPoint for presentations to market and deliver. Assessors additionally used laptops for recording information when visiting beneficiaries, and candidates e-mailed completed projects back to the partner providers for comment/assessment. There was a two-day event in February 2005 which included demonstrations of IT equipment, workshops and expert panel sessions organised to appeal to different segments of the industry. Specialist IT packages were used across all skills levels for training, and one-to-one and group delivery took place on farms using the travelling Internet bus - a bus which doubled as a classroom and had Internet capability.

One of the most successful developments involved the Lloyd Maunder group in Devon, a major poultry supplier who initially approached Duchy College for help in training their sub-contractors in the county to attain a Level 3 qualification in poultry rearing. Many of the individual growers were small farming businesses, and thus could access ESF funds through Dynamite. This was an outstandingly successful activity delivered by all the partners which continues to be delivered and operated by them, though using other funding sources.

Before this project, there were no work-based assessors in poultry rearing, and the project enabled a whole raft of work-based development to begin and thrive,

build both capacity and capability among poultry rearers, increase numbers of apprentices, and thus contribute to LSC targets.

Issues and challenges

Not all aspects of the project ran smoothly at all times, but partners report that the key is to address issues promptly. Some of the major challenges included:

- The length of the project was short, and this put pressure on staff and partners to achieve targets. All partners ran the project without a full complement of staff, and there was insufficient lead time to allow a marketing campaign to be fully effective for some months.
- There were six separate bid streams within the project, which created complex operating systems, and the available Objective 2/3 areas did not always match demand.
- Bicton College lost some learners through a change of management at one horticultural company which resulted in the beneficiaries not being able to continue in training. Numbers were replaced, but these learners had less time to achieve certificated awards, and needed additional support.
- There were some difficulties with Awarding Bodies and the evidence requirements for NVQs, and a different system for work-based evidence is still now being developed.
- Gauging the impact of the project was not systematically undertaken, and the partners recognise this. Despite the size of the project finance involved, there was, for example, no independent evaluation of either the project processes or its impact. In previous projects, the LSC had commissioned an independent evaluation.
- Travel costs were high, and sometimes group training had to be curtailed because of transport problems. The need to build delivery and assessment around the cyclical nature of each area of the industry was difficult and time consuming for staff.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

There have undoubtedly been both economic and industry benefits stemming from this project. What worked especially well was the working relationship and dynamic between the three partners, the project management, the LSC support, and the delivery of NVQ subjects, which has had a direct impact on such critical areas as environmental protection, developing of relationships with the NFU, cattle breeder groups, dairy farmer groups, specialised industry experts and vets in both counties, and the numbers of small businesses who became involved, and remain involved, in learning and learning programmes, many of which are certification-based.

Sustaining what was achieved on this project is now supported through other funding streams, both mainstream and other direct project funding. Bespoke delivery continues through a number of vets who wanted to duplicate what was begun on this project, and the two colleges have been greatly assisted here by Defra and the NFU.

Overview

The project partners believe that this project was outstandingly successful in terms of both achievement and usefulness to the industry. They feel they have clearly demonstrated what can be achieved through a concerted collaboration that builds on existing sector relationships, sound planning techniques, good working relationships between providers, and the ability to think flexibly and imaginatively when delivering to a complex sector with large numbers of small business owners, many of whom are traditionally cynical about formal training.

Case Study H: Rural Connections (Gloucestershire)

Project highlights

Collaborative working between two organisations who offered different experience and expertise, and whose working association continued after the project finished.

Project delivered learning packages to small rural accommodation businesses at times and locations which were suitable for them; learning subject areas were chosen after detailed consultation with beneficiaries.

A mixture of different types of delivery helped to maintain interest, and encouraged networking and exchange of good business practice among beneficiaries.

Context

This project was led by the Royal Forest of Dean College (RFDC), which is a small general FE College serving a predominantly rural area. It offers a range of academic qualifications for young people and adults on two main campuses, and numerous part-time courses, recreational and certificated, run in various outreach centres around the Forest of Dean area. The College is a critical strand of learning provision in the area for businesses, especially smaller employers. The RFDC manager for this project was recruited specifically for the role and has since been appointed the Business Development Manager at the College's Business Training Centre at the Mitcheldean campus. At the same time that the RFDC was awarded this contract, they were awarded three other ESF contracts.

The Rural Connections project, the proposal for which was written by the Tourism and Skills Network (TSN) in conjunction with RFDC, was prompted by identified local need. The college has a CoVE in Hospitality and Leisure, and was disappointed by the recruitment figures for its NVQ-based provision, especially from small-scale accommodation businesses in the area. Research in 2003/2004 showed that these businesses were not interested in certificated courses or provision which required a long-term commitment, but wanted short, very focused workshops and training - for example, in such things as website design, marketing, legislative changes - which were geared to their specific requirements and could be delivered at a time and place convenient for them.

Partnership working

From the start, this was a collaborative venture between RFDC and TSN. TSN was established in 2002 via a Regional Development Agency initiative, and continues to work with local providers to improve the skills base and capacity of the workforce, as well as promoting tourism as a career. The strength of the working relationship between RFDC and TSN was the cornerstone of this project. TSN, reportedly a 'brand' name in the area and synonymous with quality provision, gave vital support at the bidding stage, and through its contacts at private training companies and individual consultants worked with the RFDC

project manager to tailor training flexibly. The partnership has grown and prospered beyond the life of the ESF project.

The project manager commented that:

'The reputation of TSN and the College as a major presence in the Forest of Dean offered numerous opportunities when engaging business in the early days of the project.'

The project management reports that they were well supported by the LSC throughout, who assisted with further finance, interpreted contractual obligations, and took an active interest in recruitment and achievements.

Focus of the project

The objective of the project was to offer and deliver a 'menu' of opportunities for SME owners/managers who were engaged in small rural hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation, and whose business skills needed upgrading or enhancing.

The project aimed to promote business competitiveness and contribute to Gloucestershire's economy by improving what small-scale accommodation could offer tourists through such things as a more focused customer service. In particular, the college was keen to involve those SMEs that had not previously been engaged in workforce development, and to encourage beneficiaries of the project to network and exchange best practice through the formation of cluster groups. Two project managers were involved in facilitating both the groups and the training, and ensuring that the programme of provision remained relevant to learner needs.

There were no age or gender restrictions for the project, though eligibility was limited to small accommodation providers. This posed very few problems, as the project gathered a momentum once the initial options had been delivered and businesses could see the added value; courses and workshops were often over-subscribed. Indeed, during the project, other businesses that were not eligible under ESF funding were allowed to attend the workshops for free if places were available, and some individuals who attended these have been encouraged to take up learning opportunities which they self-financed.

Engaging beneficiaries

After the contract was awarded, the project was launched in 2004 at two marketing events - one at the Business Training Centre and one at a venue in the Cotswolds. Invitations were sent via the Tourism Council's database, and in the Cotswolds area a telesales company was also employed. The prime objective at these events was first to gain the interest of possible beneficiaries, and then to undertake a needs analysis that would ensure that the training programme menu was developed to reflect the current interests and needs of the client group. This was accomplished using a simple training needs form completed on the day.

These events were followed by three meetings to which small businesses were invited and which took place between the hours of 11 am and 3 pm, which had already been established by TSN as times to appeal to potential beneficiaries. At these events, individual businesses were recruited, the majority fitting the micro business profile of those with less than five employees. Such was the demand

that, unusual for a project with a limited timescale, Rural Connections continued to recruit almost to the very end of the project.

Delivery and achievement

The original project profile numbers were exceeded and the project was given further finance to meet increasing demand. The project successfully engaged with 130 businesses across the two geographical areas against an original project target of sixty-four. Three hundred and forty learning opportunities (original target 308) that met the project criteria were provided to learners through a short-course mixture of college courses and accredited programmes through Awarding Bodies. Additionally, the target of 60 learners achieving at least one unit of an NVQ Level 2 or equivalent was achieved. The 'equivalents' in this case have included foundation food hygiene, and foundation courses in wine tasting and personal licensing. The NVQ qualifications were mainly in Customer Service and Food Preparation.

Training was always scheduled after 10.30 am and before 3 pm in half-day 'chunks', and avoiding those times of year which are considered peak tourist weeks, and no charges were made of beneficiaries. This was in direct response to the original research which had listed barriers to learning as cost, timing and location. Only occasionally were beneficiaries asked to attend college premises, as most provision was delivered in local halls and business premises. Childcare provision was available but not taken up. To keep costs to a minimum, independent consultants or contract staff were used for *ad hoc* events, and college staff utilised wherever possible. At one time, beneficiaries requested and were provided with one-to-one counselling from experts on a whole range of issues pertinent to their business situation.

Four cluster groups were set up and managed by the project across the whole geographical area - two in the Forest of Dean, and in North and South Cotswolds. The objective of these groups was as a vehicle for exchange of good practice, but small businesses were encouraged to attend initially by the project organising speakers to talk about specific subject areas, or to update invitees on such things as current legislation. The agenda allowed time for networking, which businesses found invaluable, and strong working relationships have resulted. Meetings were again held on business premises or in community halls, and again at times of day to suit the SMEs and their business commitments. One of these cluster groups survives in its original form.

Very rarely did beneficiaries attend only one course or workshop. This ESF project was different than others the college had managed, in that individual businesses were part of the project for the life of the project, and not just until they had achieved a qualification/part qualification. The project manager reports that:

'...this gave them a stake in the project's success because they could see that by continuing to attend the project it was sustained and new topics/courses could be requested. In this way the project was demand-driven in every sense.'

Issues and challenges

There were a number of challenges and constraints that emerged during the project. Chief among these were:

- Part of the remit was to permit four learning opportunities per engaged business. This became an issue when husband/wife-managed micro businesses were allowed the same number of opportunities as a medium-sized hotel. The project managers therefore allowed individuals a free place on subsequent courses if they hit this constraint, and it was in any case not a problem when additional funds were secured in April 2006.
- The project received enquiries from tourist attraction sites who wanted to take part in the programme but were ineligible. Where capacity allowed, free access was granted on college-based provision, but charges were made for certificated courses.
- There were some administrative problems. For example, in May 2006, when a member of staff resigned who was fully familiar with the evidence and filing system introduced at the start of the project. This did not impact on project achievements, but was a timely reminder that training of more than one person in administrative requirements is a sensible precaution.
- There were issues connected with data requirements of the LSC and connected with postcodes and eligibility (the county is near the Welsh border and this caused some confusion), and problems with project aims which were not cohesive with LSC targets because initially the wrong information had been input. These, too, were overcome but required additional work/time.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

- The impact of this project is that ESF made training accessible to micro business and candidates whose needs could not be met in other ways at low or no cost. In particular, this greatly assisted the over-25 age group.
- This project has helped to promote and embed a learning culture among small businesses which has continued beyond the project through the continuation of forum meetings, cluster groups, and progression into training, for which engaged businesses were offered a 25 per cent discount on any commercial provision offered by RFDC.
- Publicity for the project has raised the profile of the College and TSN, and the image of small accommodation businesses as ones who want to offer a better service, have credible skills in customer service areas, and a firmer knowledge of legislation and marketing techniques.
- Some beneficiaries have progressed to other training either through Train to Gain or by paying for commercial courses. Only a very few have gone on to take NVQ units.
- The project manager undertook an evaluation of the project which was submitted to the LSC. This outlined the main achievements of the project and what had been learnt in the process which could be transferred to other projects. No impact measures were identified at the start, and this

was not a requirement of the contract, but it is something that RFDC might consider in future, though recognising that they may need LSC guidance on this.

Overview

The key to the success of Rural Connections was flexibility and the variety of ways it was prepared to meet the learning needs of small local businesses. The programme was not driven by the need to achieve NVQs which the small businesses neither understood nor wanted, but by relevance and skill/knowledge of business requirements. The project manager said:

'These businesses are owned and managed by people interested in skills not certificates.'

Beneficiaries were kept informed about opportunities, advised by experts about issues that might affect their businesses, and totally dictated what they wanted to learn. The project management offered a transparent approach about eligibility - what could and could not be provided - and any financial constraints to which the project was governed, and the whole project could be said to have met the needs of a pivotal business group while simultaneously improving the quality of service available to visitors in the county.

Case Study I: Education Unlimited Limited (EUL) (West of England)

Project highlights

A varied range of activities and work placement opportunities were offered, including arts, music and sports-based provision, together with innovative approaches to initial assessment.

Focus of the project predicated on belief that building confidence and motivation through participation in leisure interests leads more readily to formal learning.

Capacity building was a feature of the project; delivery partners' staff built knowledge and skills which led to their involvement in accredited learning.

Context

This project stemmed from ideas that were discussed at the West of England LSC in 2002 about the perceived high numbers of young people in the Greater Bristol area who did not, for various reasons, realise their full potential, and who had invariably rejected education and formal learning frameworks. This client group are now designated as those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), but when this project was conceived, that terminology was not in general use. This project was managed by the head of the School of Continuing Education, within the City of Bristol College, a part of the college which has traditionally assisted those in the community who are disaffected or disengaged.

A pilot project to address the issue was financed through Local Initiative Funding (LIF) finance in 2003/2004, but encountered operational and administrative problems. The LSC asked City of Bristol College to run the programme for about a year thereafter, during which time the LSC put together a proposal which allowed the project to continue from 2005 with an ESF programme budget. The project manager, who has considerable experience of running ESF schemes, ran this project from its start date in 2005 until it finished in 2007. Since then, LIF funding has continued to support the project aims and objectives, and from 2009 it will again be financed through ESF.

Partnership working

The School of Continuing Education, which has always collaborated extensively with public sector agencies, and also with those in the voluntary and community sector, worked with ten delivery partners for this project. Four of these were private training providers, but six were voluntary and community sector groups who had not previously worked on any learning and education programmes funded by either the LSC or the Local Authority. These six delivery partners were mainly arts and sports centres; for example, a local community theatre group and boxing club figured prominently.

The partners were critical to the programme because, in addition to delivering project activities, they also acted as access points from which young people could be directly recruited or signposted to other organisations more appropriate to

their specific needs. Their work with beneficiaries underpinned the whole ethos of the project, which was to build confidence and motivation in young people on activities that they enjoyed before progression to more structured learning paths. Additionally, the organisations have, through this ESF project, been able to build their knowledge, skills and capacity and continue to be involved with EUL; they are now considering other ways that they can support this client group through Skills for Life delivery, for example, which will mean their staff will themselves undergo formal training to gain the necessary qualifications.

Focus of the project

The project's overall aim was to raise the motivation, aspirations and skills of disengaged young people in Greater Bristol, and to provide flexible, relevant and supportive pathways into learning and work. The main thrust of the delivery was on 16-18 year olds, but there was also a smaller-scale focus on young people in year 11 still attending school.

Key outcomes for the project were the completion of the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) *Improving Own Learning & Performance* unit, or a job or learning that lasted for longer than four weeks. Continuous support for beneficiaries was a feature of the project, and this support was customised to client needs and could include help to reduce personal social or financial barriers that the beneficiaries might face.

The project manager feels that the usual designations for NEET clients (at risk of becoming NEET, short-term NEET or long-term NEET) can be misleading, and individual customised support, which was the hub of this project, is essential if this target group are ever to be meaningfully engaged in work/learning-related activities. He commented:

'...you cannot take a young person who is not engaged and then immediately try to fit him into one of three categories to address his needs with a rigid structure and expect this to be successful, if the very idea of restrictions on what he can do and when is the thing that has put him off learning in the first place'.

Engaging beneficiaries

There was no active marketing campaign to engage beneficiaries. The project manager and his staff relied heavily on outreach centres, community organisations and the arts/sports centres to identify young people who might be likely candidates for this project. *Connexions*, local clubs for young people, Social Services and Jobcentre Plus also referred many individuals.

Delivery and achievement

The project manager was assisted by five staff who became young people's advisers during the life of the project. All the delivery partners were given targets to achieve, and these were constantly monitored and adjusted according to circumstances. Partners met regularly and communicated often. The delivery contracts mirrored the College's contract with the LSC; deliverers were expected to undertake initial assessments, and beneficiaries achieve a positive outcome, ie progress to more formal learning or employment.

The four private trainer delivery partners incorporated this project, with some additions, into their usual E2E-style delivery framework. They offered a broad range of training and work placement opportunities. This worked best with young people who, in NEET terms, would be categorised as at risk or short-term NEET. The arts and sports club deliverers took a less conventional approach, first by gaining the trust of beneficiaries before attempting to engage them in learning activities, and building confidence with the achievement of small tasks.

One of the most positive achievements of this project was the way in which it built the skills of advisers to young people as much as it increased the skills of young people themselves. Good examples of this include the EUL team training on the 'ELLI' (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) software programme, which considers individual learning styles. This was used to measure 'soft' outcomes and provided evidence for the ASDAN *Improving Own Learning & Performance* unit. All advisers were offered training in areas related to the project either to update their skills/knowledge, or gain knowledge in a new area. This included training in Managing Diversity and Culture, Child Protection, Dealing with Challenging Behaviour, and Health and Safety.

The overall target for young people recruited was 600, and the project exceeded its targets in numbers of certificates achieved, and in numbers of Learning Plans written. Two hundred and fifty-two young people moved into learning education or employment following their exit from this project, and although this was a shortfall of around 130 on the profile target, it nevertheless represents a real achievement in terms of the client group. Soft outcomes were recorded systematically, and although these could not be counted as outcomes in ESF terms, they were used as evidence for the ASDAN unit, and used by beneficiaries when writing their CVs.

Issues and challenges

This project does not believe it was well supported by the local LSC, although one of the regional LSC representatives was said to have made a: *'...very useful input at a critical stage of the project'*. The project Manager never felt that the LSC totally understood what they were trying to achieve, which he thinks ironic given that the original idea of this programme was theirs. The LSC representative was reported to be more interested in numbers and finance, and did not assist the project to overcome difficulties at certain stages through such things as re-profiling, for example, or by taking a real interest in the project achievements. They were never offered the opportunity to talk to other ESF providers in Bristol or elsewhere.

During the early stages of the project, the project manager felt that the tools used to assess the barriers that individual clients faced were inadequate. Consequently, a new assessment tool was devised and used successfully, and additionally provided important evidence relevant to ESF auditing requirements. This assessment tool has since been taken up by other community projects and College departments.

There were many issues regarding the input of project data to the LSC which, during the life of the project, were never overcome. The LSC regional portal would not accept certain figures, therefore the project administrators often input data that would be accepted rather than the correct figures. They are consequently somewhat cynical about ESF achievement rates for the whole region, because they cannot believe that they were the only provider who did this.

Not all young people were successful on this course, despite individual help and support. Although some progressed significantly, others left the programme early or refused to get involved in any activities that included formal learning. Many of these young people had already rejected conventional approaches to education and learning at school over many years, and advisers in this project acknowledged that it would probably take many more before they would consider changing this behavioural pattern. Advisers firmly believe, however, that those that *did* successfully achieve would not have had a suitable vehicle to do so without the assistance of the opportunities this ESF project gave them.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

There were a number of notable successes of this project. These included discrete programmes undertaken by individual beneficiaries which motivated them and markedly increased their self-esteem, activities which involved young people working together where they had to consider the skills of others and the dynamics of team work, and effective working relationships between advisers and delivery partners which underlined the commitment of the project team to positive networking and collaboration. Communication between advisers and agencies was a very important strand of this project, was sustained throughout the life of the project, and has continued beyond it. Examples of project activities which were especially effective include:

- Young people engaged in music technology through music courses, lasting five months, designed to appeal to a variety of different musical tastes, which also contributed to ASDAN unit evidence.
- A five-week collaboration between Education Unlimited young people and a local artist, resulting in a major new commission of work presented as part of the *British Art Show*, which is a national event held bi-annually.
- Young people actively involved in peer support sessions at Job Clubs offering encouragement and positive feedback to one another.
- Courses in construction sector skills which led to beneficiaries taking a test to acquire a CSCS² card allowing them to work on construction sites. The young people learnt trade basics and had short taster sessions to introduce them to the different disciplines within the construction industry.
- An arts course designed by an EUL adviser to help young people to investigate how they can view and present themselves in a positive way. It covered 12 different forms of media, and encouraged beneficiaries to work in teams as well as on an individual basis.
- Two sports projects - boxing and football - which began as simple leisure activities but progressed into increasing beneficiary knowledge about diet and nutrition, and a greater understanding of the human body and how it functions.

² Construction Skills Certification Scheme: construction operatives are tested according to their level of experience/expertise and get an individual registration card. This enables them to apply for employment on building sites, and verifies their level of skill and Health and Safety knowledge.

The project was evaluated internally and also externally by the University of Bristol. In its report, the University concludes that this project supports the finding that:

'...attending to NEET learners' capabilities for learning leads to positive growth and changes in their perceptions of themselves'.

Overview

This project was highly successful in addressing the needs of NEET individuals by motivating their desire to learn, mainly through the use of customised support packages and participation in arts and sports projects, and for many of the organisations delivering the project, it has been a capacity builder and an opportunity to work collaboratively with both the College and the public sector agencies.

It provides a workable model showing that learners can be enabled to function more effectively both as individuals and as part of a group through the use of activities which they choose, help design, and which act as a stepping stone to learning progression.

Case Study J: Community ICT in Cornwall

Project highlights

Variety of expertise and experience contributed to successful delivery. The project involved community groups and large educational establishments, and was co-ordinated by a company set up to facilitate partnership working.

Flexibility in recruitment and learning activities assisted achievement, as did regular exchange of good practice among partners.

Community learning facilities were enhanced by this project, which has additionally built the capacity of delivery groups operating in the third sector.

Context

This project, enabled under Objective 1 ESF finance, was organised by the Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (LPC), a company set up in the late 1990s by Cornwall County Council, Government Office of the South West and the (then) Training and Enterprise Council to facilitate partner collaboration by those involved in projects centred on training and learning. The organisation's partners include FE Colleges, private training companies, businesses, the voluntary and community sector, and the Local Authority, all based in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The organisation has held a number of co-financed ESF projects to date and delivered through its partner organisations, which currently number around fifty.

The rationale for the project was the perceived need to develop partnerships between mainstream and community learning partners, and simultaneously increase the capacity and quality of delivery in community partners through a project whose objectives were centred on increasing Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills in Cornwall.

Partnership working

Ofsted, in an inspection in 2007, described the working relationships between partners of LPC as 'outstanding', praising the opportunities they enjoyed to share good practice, the strong focus of workforce delivery, and the clearly written contracts and partners' protocols. Senior Managers at LPC consider this is primarily because there is total transparency in the way projects are run. Partners are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, and the ESF contracts are always vigorously monitored by them for contract compliance.

There were 14 partners associated with this project when it began in 2004. These ranged from large mainstream deliverers, such as Cornwall College, to small community centres and youth groups. At the contract signature stage, one community centre decided not to participate in the project, and another ran out of funding and had to close down. During the course of the project, two other organisations withdrew, one because they were unable to recruit sufficient beneficiaries. When partners withdrew, the funding and outputs were taken up by other partners.

There was a project Steering Group which met every three months throughout the life of the project. There were also Best Practice groups which considered such topics as record keeping, disability and ICT, and themes which were common to much of the work of the project.

Focus of the project

The focus of the project was to deliver ICT training in the community as flexibly as possible to those whose experience of ICT was limited, or who had had very few opportunities to take part in formal education and learning support.

Deliverers, working alone or in partnership, particularly targeted those individuals who were normally considered hard to reach due to personal circumstances, or because they lived in a location that was distant from the training premises and had poor public transport facilities. Small businesses were also targeted by many of the partners involved in this project. There were no age restrictions, but beneficiaries were ineligible if they worked for more than 16 hours per week.

Engaging beneficiaries

Marketing to beneficiaries was undertaken in a variety of different ways. One partner/deliverer reported that due to the short timescale for delivery, recruitment was passed to the Pathways advisers, who identified and targeted individuals. For some partners, recruitment was relatively straightforward, because they operated in close knit communities where information and course details were simple to publicise. One such partner, for example, had an initial target of 46, and recruited 78 within two weeks.

Other partners targeted particular types of beneficiaries, such as those with physical or mental disabilities, older learners or those with obvious Key Skill needs. One partner recruited through local advertising, targeting those with very little or no ICT experience in the 16-18 age group, and provided transport for all these learners to attend their training centre.

The larger mainstream providers took a pragmatic line. For example, one had a number of years' experience in working in the community, and recognised at the start of the project that reaching specifically targeted adults for project work would be challenging. To find viable groups of people all fitting the beneficiary requirements, in a particular outreach locality, was difficult, but to advertise a free course for those who work less than 16 hours a week, but exclude rurally isolated people who work 17 hours a week, they felt, would cause resentment. For this reason, they adopted a mixed group policy; the course was offered to all, but only eligible beneficiaries counted towards the project targets.

Delivery and achievement

Whenever possible, delivery partners tried to accommodate individual learners at times and locations to suit them, while others targeted micro businesses and sole traders offering computer courses which were linked to marketing and the legal and governmental obligations with which they had to conform, such as use of accounting packages to enable completion of tax returns.

Flexibility was the key. Good examples of this were the intensive courses delivered for parenting groups where childcare was provided on site, and the deliverers that offered computer courses for both absolute beginners and more advanced learners, some very specialised such as Photo Manipulation, Databases and Garden Design. Others ran a mix of short taster sessions and long 16-week courses. Desktop PCs, laptops, digital cameras, the Internet, specialist software, and a data projector were among the equipment used to run these courses, often delivered in simple yet innovative ways, focusing on people's hobbies and interests, and demonstrated the relevance of ICT in everyday lives; this was particularly successful when engaging those normally viewed as the 'hard to reach'.

Providers commented that offering non-accredited courses within the community was a very welcome activity, as so many non-traditional learners will not commit to a qualification course at first. One deliverer reported that:

'Our tutors designed an initial course that was, above all, fun to complete. One course was specifically designed to appeal to very young mums, and learners produced a portfolio of work based on their own children and family...most importantly the delivery enabled students to work at their own pace without pressure.'

The overall total of outcomes exceeded profile numbers in the majority of cases and the project recruited nearly 1,400 individuals. Although the numbers of beneficiaries achieving Level 1 and 2 qualifications fell below the contract profile, the number working *towards* qualifications exceeded expectations by 35 per cent, and 911 beneficiaries completed an ICT course. Some individuals undertook more than one course during the life of the project, although their recruitment and achievement could only be counted once. This does, however, offer evidence of progression, as many of the courses they subsequently took required a basic computer skill.

Issues and challenges

At the very early stages of this project, there was still some reluctance on the part of partners to work collaboratively to gain the ESF contract. There were a number of reasons for this, largely centred on the influence of perceived competition between them for the same clients. LPC talked to many of the potential partners, explaining the benefits of consultation and the need for this in order to produce a tender that would be meaningful for everyone and subsequently successful. Most organisations who were uncertain eventually gave the proposal their wholehearted support, and consequently benefited from the working relationships they established during the life of the project.

LPC recognise that measuring impact and recording progression of beneficiaries were two weak areas of the project. Although many individual partners observed an impact on individuals, there was no means whereby they could conveniently record this impact, citing sources of evidence which demonstrated the effects of outcomes, because they did not have sufficient knowledge about the subject area. LPC, for their part, did not have enough time built into the management of this project to seriously consider offering some basic principles for impact assessment, or how to set up incorporated impact measures. They concentrated their support on contract compliance, assisting partners with operational challenges, facilitating best practice, and re-profiling numbers when partners did not meet targets, or closed down.

At delivery level, there were some minor issues. For example, all beneficiaries were expected to complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), but there was some resistance to doing this by many when what they really wanted to do was to learn to use the computer. Several partners found that most learners saw ILPs as less than useful as a means to monitor their own learning. Providers had to find ways around this by integrating achievement records within computer exercises, so that individuals would understand the benefits of such an exercise and comply with bureaucratic obligations.

There were some problems related to quality improvement and quality assurance arrangements which were noted by Ofsted and recognised by the partnership. Where providers had their own quality improvement arrangements, there were some issues about the systematic monitoring of these in some smaller providers who do not have their own procedures, and observations of teaching and learning did not take place. This was an issue that figured latterly on the agendas of the Best Practice groups, but partners have learnt from this, and it is expected to be a main strand of future collaborative projects.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

The partnership approach was important in a number of ways and assisted successful delivery. Activities were offered which were specifically aimed at people with physical disabilities, those with mental health problems, older learners and people with low Basic Skills. If deliverers were not able to support a particular learner, they utilised their links with partner organisations to ensure that the appropriate support was provided. Thus, the collaboration which many felt at the beginning would be very difficult to operate and sustain became a feature of the project, and enabled many of its most notable individual achievements.

A good example of this is the small centre which reports that it has achieved far more than it thought possible at the outset. Both its volunteers and employed staff have benefited from teaching to the varied skills levels of the beneficiaries, and the capacity and capability of the centre has grown as a result. This is reflected in the final reports from many other small learning organisations, and in these areas there is now much more awareness by the community of the locally-based deliverers and what they can offer.

Some deliverers have helped participants to take advantage of online learning initiatives, in order to make services more accessible to them and reduce travel needs as part of the county's ongoing initiative to protect the environment and manage resources more carefully. Other achievements included the high number of learners in the Caradon area who used their ICT training to develop their own small businesses, and three providers in another area who have used the project to make more effective use of their volunteers. Many learners have, through this project, been introduced to e-government services, online shopping opportunities, and been made aware of e-learning opportunities.

Since project completion, a number of additional benefits have emerged that came about as a direct result of the project. Some community deliverers now have agreements with the larger colleges to provide learning through formal franchise arrangements. Delivery partners are now involved with bidding for further ESF finance, again in partnership with other providers; this would not have been possible without the CICT project. The project has also added value to the Train to Gain programme, as 90 beneficiaries were referred to the programme on exit from this project.

Overview

This project has been underpinned by a collaborative will that was prepared to consider not only different ways of delivering to beneficiaries, but also different ways of working with other learning deliverers.

The project has also demonstrated what can be achieved by individuals when learning is delivered flexibly and customised to their needs. Models and methodologies that could have a positive impact on future mainstream delivery have been recognised by the project organiser and the LSC, in particular organising and delivering courses to suit individual needs whilst still remaining within the qualification framework. The link between Skills for Life, language, numeracy and entry-level ICT, and the need for adequate information, advice and guidance for adult learners, was also reinforced.

Case Study K: Cotswolds Rural and Heritage Skills (Gloucestershire)

Project highlights

This project was a collaboration between HE, FE, voluntary and community groups and the commercial sector to engage individuals and develop courses based on defined local skill needs.

Project added value through helping to establish a locally based employer-led academy which will ensure regular consultation with businesses about demand and supply of rural skills.

Clear evidence that the project enabled self-employment, assisted business networking, and addressed the needs of volunteer workers in the rural heritage sector.

Context

This Objective 2-financed project began as the result of a scoping exercise completed in 2004 which identified the skills that would be required in order to complete the Cotswold Canal regeneration project. The findings suggested that there was locally a considerable shortfall in heritage skills (eg drystone walling, stonemasonry, hedge laying), all of which would be required if the canal development was to be completed successfully. The Cirencester-based Royal Agricultural College (RAC) subsequently bid for, and were successful in securing ESF finance, primarily in order to develop rural and heritage skills locally to meet this shortfall.

The RAC is a leading university college offering education and training for the agricultural, land, food, equine and property industries. Established in 1845, its academic tradition has now been enhanced by a Business Development Centre and a Rural Skills Centre, both of which provide support services to industry and to local employers through business and skills development programmes, many of them government-funded.

This was, however, the first time that the RAC had undertaken an ESF-financed project, so it was also seen as a learning opportunity for the organisation and staff involved, and an extension of its partnership working ethos. There were two project managers for the life of the project who each managed for about 12 months, although the first manager remained on the staff of the college, and project continuity was not lost.

Partnership working

The RAC was the accountable partner for the purposes of this project, but was supported in their bid for funding by British Waterways and the Cotswold Canal Trust as the key partner organisations. The Project Manager said:

'It was designed from the start as a collaborative working exercise which was in part successful, although the RAC was the prime mover and it was us who drove the project.'

The RAC relied on a number of other organisations to deliver learning activities, as there were multiple strands within the project objectives. The RAC worked with the voluntary and community sector, the commercial sector and a number of FE colleges. In total, there were four main training delivery partners, but many others who had some involvement either through engaging of beneficiaries or in course development.

Partners met bi-monthly to discuss the status of the project, its delivery, achievements, student support, effective methods of recruitment, and sustainability.

Throughout the project, the partners felt well supported by the LSC, with whom they had a sound working relationship. The LSC representative reportedly understood the main constraint of the project, which was that the team needed to strike a fair balance between developing a market-driven skills programme and ensuring that LSC/ESF targets were met. This necessitated negotiation with the LSC at the start, and a readjustment of target profiles midway through the programme. The LSC were also involved in discussions to refocus the delivery options when difficulties were encountered in identifying existing and available courses in specific skill areas.

Examples of effective partnership activities include the provision of complementary expertise through the sub-contracting of some NVQ modules, the sharing of physical resources between partners, and the sharing of effective practice, which has helped to inform future provision at all learning delivery establishments.

Focus of the project

The overall aim of this project, which ran from 2005 until early 2008, was to develop the local workforce in rural and heritage skills to meet increased local demand by providing accredited training. In addition to targets for achievement of accredited qualifications, the project aimed to support new rural business through the provision of information, advice and guidance that would enable beneficiaries to progress into self-employment or other learning, and to facilitate networking between micro businesses.

Engaging beneficiaries

Eligibility rules dictated that beneficiaries had to have a Gloucestershire postcode, they could be employed, self-employed or unemployed, but could not be in full-time education; they also had to be aged 18 years or older.

Individuals were recruited in all types of ways, and there was a very good response from the start. Many methods were used, among them local advertising, website advertising, 'flyers' prepared by the RAC and distributed in the area, and through local industry networks, Project Managers attended craft fairs and talked to people interested in rural crafts. Job Centres were very helpful and referred many applicants. A number of individuals applied who were under threat of redundancy. The voluntary and community sector were very helpful with recruitment. The Nelson Trust, for example, which works with drug

misusers, identified potential beneficiaries and held discussions with the RAC about the support these learners might need to complete their training.

Delivery and achievement

Delivery targets were 50 one-day training courses, 48 NVQ Level 2s and 5 NVQ Level 3s (renegotiated down from ten with the LSC), and all target numbers were achieved. The programme was delivered both by the RAC and their learning partners, together with FE and Sixth Form Colleges, who delivered a mix of college-based training, and training and assessment of skills on site.

Archaeology, for example, was delivered at Cirencester, but brick and block and lime mortaring was undertaken by Stroud College at sites on the Brimscome Canal, with Woodchester providing masonry training, also on site.

Initial assessment was very important to gauge student capability and ensure that the course, as it was delivered, was neither too tough nor too undemanding. Too difficult and learners became de-motivated; too easy (and some felt this at different times), and learners said they did not feel challenged. This required systematic monitoring, which the Project Manager saw as one of his main roles.

The RAC had to be adaptable when addressing the challenges of course design and delivery. At the start of the project, it was intended to use a combination of Open College Network courses augmented by local provision from Stroud College. This would have suited the RAC and the Canal Trust, but the courses were OCN-accredited and not NVQ-based. Consequently, this part of the training had to be restructured, and combinations of college-based and work-based learning and assessment were introduced.

The development of the Cotswold Canal Trust volunteers was a key feature of the programme, mainly in order to build capacity in the voluntary sector. This was seen as training not just for technical skills, but also to build a supervisory infrastructure. Skills developed during this programme led to direct employment. Of the 55 unwaged beneficiaries, half were in employment when the project finished, including 19 who had become sole traders.

Issues and challenges

The procedures for data input to the LSC were not considered user-friendly, and the Project Manager had to have additional administrative support in order to ensure the correct information was entered and acceptable. In particular, entering personal detail codes proved frustrating, as the system would not accept certain inputs and could not be amended subsequently, forcing the user to start the entry again; this was time consuming and costly to the project. Again, the LSC representative was considered very helpful with this, advising and suggesting how difficulties might be overcome.

One of the output requirements of the contract was the achievement of NVQ Level 3s by beneficiaries. RAC could at first only identify one suitable NVQ (Volunteer Management) and could only find one individual willing to take the course, but he gave it up after only a few weeks because of the amount of written assignments needed for achieving the full award. Eventually, Cirencester College (a Sixth Form College) provided a suitable course of Level 3 elements, but beneficiaries needed a lot of support during its delivery because of its complexity.

Transport was a huge issue for some beneficiaries living in rural areas not well served by public transport. The Project Manager used project resources to help overcome the problems, and solutions for any future similar projects are being considered now, and include a college minibus and a scooter-sharing system.

The characteristics of those who embarked on this programme were unusually diverse; most needed support but in different ways. Many of the volunteers on the canal project, for example, were retired and did not want to consider gaining qualifications, yet their skills underpin many of the heritage regeneration developments in the area. There are issues here with wider implications for the industry, and which affect the potential market for learning and future employment.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

Partnership with the Cotswold Canal Trust continues with the trust commissioning further training. The Heritage Centre established at Cirencester College also continues to have an effective dialogue with the RAC and its partners.

Collaboration on this project has subsequently led to cross-partnership benefits. The British Waterways' Volunteer Co-ordinator has, with the RAC, put together a guide for the next round of volunteer training which will be totally driven by skills needs. Individuals who have taken commercial courses at the RAC have been signposted to Stroud College to consider a publicly-funded and accredited BTEC course, if appropriate.

The drystone walling courses were the most successfully delivered in terms of achievement, as there is clear evidence that this led to self-employment for many of the beneficiaries on exit from the programme. Business elements included in the course have enabled individuals to write appropriate business plans and understand the most useful marketing tool to use. One of the chief reasons that the Regional Development Agency set up a local Rural Enterprise Gateway group was as a result of the numbers who had been trained on this programme. This group provides information training and advice to rural businesses, and has been hugely beneficial for former ESF course participants in terms of networking, exchanging good practice, and increasing business confidence.

The programme has demonstrated that it is able to support those students who have to overcome personal difficulties or have chaotic lifestyles, and addressed some of the challenges regarding volunteers. The project was externally evaluated, but project management acknowledge that a more systematic measure of impact, integrated in the project from the start, could have provided evidence of added value which could be useful when applying for, and planning, further programmes of this type.

The main funding source for this programme was ESF-based. As a Higher Education establishment, the RAC does not have access funding for NVQs or FE skills-based courses.

One way forward is to franchise delivery to FE colleges, but other sources of funding are still being explored. An FE College in Gloucestershire is considering working with the RAC to develop NVQ Level 2 courses in heritage skills, and incorporating many of the more successful aspects of this programme. A draft schedule of training needs and provision for 2008/2009 showing the range of heritage skills that will be needed to meet demand has been developed jointly by

the two main partners. Funding shortfall may limit the extent to which the delivery model can be developed and enlarged to meet this demand.

The project added value through helping to establish the Cotswold Heritage Academy at Cirencester College. This was conceived as an employer-led academy to ensure employers were consulted about skills needs, shortages, shortfall and development of training, and is likely to be an important element in the development of heritage skills in the Cotswolds. The launch of the academy as the regional branch of the National Heritage Training Group³ at about the same time was fortuitous, and together they are likely to be an important focus for the development of heritage skills, and to progress many of the ideas which were developed as a result of this project.

Overview

The programme has demonstrated that they are interested both in people taking rural heritage courses, and employers and organisations demanding the skills that they attain. The project has achieved its targets, worked collaboratively with local learning providers, helped to build capacity within a regeneration project, and successfully developed information and business centres as local support and advice vehicles. Through this project, a pool of skill labour for local heritage employment has been expanded, and it is accepted that only through ESF funding could this have been achieved.

³ The National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) provides assistance with all aspects of recruiting, training, and qualifying the UK's construction workforce in traditional building crafts.

Case Study L: Crystal Chandelier (All South West areas except Cornwall)

Project highlights

Wide-ranging partnership base of both delivering and consulting organisations integral to the successful working operation and how it evolved.

Mentoring provided individual support for learners and simultaneously built the capacity of the mentor organisation.

Project enabled a vast SfL networking infrastructure to develop throughout the SW region for practitioners, communities and institutions.

Context

This project effectively began when a meeting organised by the SWLSC, in the autumn of 2004, informed the learning providers invited to attend that they would shortly be able to bid for ESF funding to finance projects to build the capacity of Skills for Life (SfL) delivery in the South West. Evidence suggested at that time that in the South West a larger number of better skilled and qualified SfL teachers were needed in order to meet demand.

Learning South West (LSW), an independent education organisation with charitable status which works cross-sector to develop professional practice in learning and enable partnership working, attended that meeting. They felt that this funding was an opportunity to help build the regional SfL workforce through a co-ordinated partnership programme rather than through assisting individual organisations to access funding independently. LSW subsequently met with other meeting attendees, agreed a broad strategy, and prepared a bid to drive a region-wide programme that would enhance SfL capacity and simultaneously create a support framework for providers of SfL training and their staff.

Collaboration underpins all the work of LSW, and it was in the interests of the project partners that this organisation with its vast experience would be the one to co-ordinate the project. The project was designed to run from July 2005 for two full years, but was extended for a further year in order to utilise the networks that had been set up to support the implementation of the new teacher training qualifications introduced in September 2007, although no additional funding was received for this extension.

Partnership working

There was an early recognition by LSW that every partner involved in this project could make a tangible contribution, and the image of a co-ordinated unit, stemming from a central thread, providing support for partners and a conduit for information (like a chandelier has a central light with numerous reflecting branches), was expressed in the title of the project, which became a metaphor for the working model.

The concept that all partners could and should make a meaningful contribution was critical. As the project manager remarked:

'...people have to be encouraged to buy into a vision and then understand that however small their contribution, real progress in the area of learning is only significant when it is a true collaboration and where everyone's voice is heard'.

Partnership working was therefore always the hub of Crystal Chandelier. All partners not only have a consultative role but became an integral part of the regional framework. Membership of the project Steering Group, for example, had wide representation from regional and national organisations such as the Association of Colleges, Awarding Bodies, SVUK, NIACE and higher education establishments; Plymouth University, for example, was a significant contributor to the course design working group. The project also enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the LSC throughout, working particularly closely with members of the regional Skills for Life Unit.

The Steering Group comprised a number of senior leaders in the field of education and learning in the South West, as well as practitioners. A number of working groups were established, also consisting of a mix of strategists and practitioners, which considered specific issues such as how the project could make better use of ICT and training for trainers. Intelligence obtained from delivery partners, development centres, co-ordinators and teachers enabled the Steering Group and the working groups to develop a number of things, including a process to support new providers, develop an effective APL process, and design new 'blended' courses.

Focus of the project

The project, funded under ESF Objective 3 finance, centred on providing support to individuals, be they specialists, vocational trainers in colleges, employed by work-based learning providers, or voluntary organisations, in order that they would gain Level 3 and Level 4 qualifications related to the delivery of SfL, with accompanying support and provision of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG). All areas of the South West were covered by the project except for Cornwall, which received funding for SfL delivery under a separate ESF Objective funding stream.

A number of Professional Development Centres for SfL previously established throughout the region (some actual and some virtual) were important cogs in the design of the co-ordinated framework, charged with providing intelligence and information about demand and supply of SfL training in their area, as well as being involved in the engagement of beneficiaries and working with delivery partners.

Engaging beneficiaries

The intended beneficiaries of Crystal Chandelier, as outlined in the ESF proposal, included new or returning teachers of SfL, learning support workers, volunteer teachers, teachers and tutors in non-college settings, as well as existing teachers in the post-16 sector who wish to move into SfL from other specialisms.

Professional Development Co-ordinators who operated in each sub-region worked with delivery partners to engage interest, recruit beneficiaries and assist with

initial assessment, including matching learners to appropriate provision. This was underpinned by a well-conceived marketing campaign which set out to create a strong brand with professionally designed stationery, European logo and website. Advertising was especially effective in encouraging beneficiaries, but a particularly good strategy was to publicise case studies of existing participants as press releases in each sub-region in the week prior to Adult Learners Week. These were copied in local papers and picked up by many local radio stations, and resulted in increased recruitment throughout the region.

Delivery and achievement

The project began slowly, chiefly because the Professional Development Co-ordinators, who worked with training providers, were not established in all areas of the region. The project team therefore employed consultants to carry out this development co-ordination role until more permanent arrangements could be put in place. Project managers acknowledge that these appointments should have been included in the pre-contract negotiations. An effect of not having a full complement of co-ordinators was that initially some providers were not fully committed to the project, and a higher than anticipated level of input was consequently required of the central team.

At the start, there were 30 delivery partners whose responsibility it was to provide the SfL training on behalf of the project and meet the target figures for qualifications agreed with the LSC. Each of these had very clear service-level agreements with LSW, as did the personnel who work for the Professional Development Centres. These agreements included a marked degree of flexibility with incentives that could be offered to trainees by deliverers. Payment for all service agreement providers was based on results, and target number allocations for each area were based on numbers of people living in each area.

Many beneficiaries took far longer to achieve a qualification than LSW had initially anticipated. This was largely because for an individual to undertake specialist training whilst also sustaining a teaching role - for some full-time - is very difficult and time consuming, but at the start of the project LSW were unaware of just how big a challenge this was, especially for some individuals. Very early in delivery, providers alerted the central team at LSW to this issue, and while this was overcome to some extent by the one-year extension granted to the project, which gave beneficiaries additional time to achieve, it remained one of the main learning points from the project.

Mentoring was especially successful. Mentors for learners were mainly recruited from the cohort that had completed their training immediately before Crystal Chandelier began, and learners appreciated the importance of support from individuals had recently been through the same learning route. Trained to assist beneficiaries only for this project, many are continuing in the role. This is of itself a significant capacity building achievement.

Learner feedback was used very positively to improve the learner experience, and comments about improving teaching quality, course targets, and blended learning ensured that the project remained true to its vision of adding value through improvements as a result of learner experience. The project also had a detailed strategy and operational plan for 'training the trainers', and events to support this were well attended. The critical factor was to respond to expressed needs promptly and ensure that event delivery met quality expectations.

By June 2008, the numbers of beneficiary enrolments were totalled at 1,509 against a contract profile of 1,516;⁴ 259 beneficiaries went on to achieve a qualification within the timescale of the project; 495 beneficiaries achieved a Level 3, and 468 a Level 4 award.

Issues and challenges

There were a number of barriers to delivery of contractual requirements. Chief among these was the lack of alignment between the LSC management information systems and those of LSW and their partners. It also proved difficult to make a real impact in the voluntary sector, as there were insufficient means to tackle this without a considerable injection of additional resources.

Targets for the engagement of small training companies in the project were also very difficult to achieve. The agreed target was 96 (renegotiated down from 165 at the start), and even with assistance from a consultant who suggested a number of strategies, including marketing material specifically designed for training company SMEs, only 55 small training companies were ever recruited.

The planned project structure was modified at an early stage of the project regarding exchange of effective practice. Originally, only a small good practice working group was envisaged, but it quickly became obvious that there were real needs to be dealt with that could only be significantly addressed by resource sharing, and a Good Practice Network for Level 3 and Level 4 tutors was set up. ICT was used to enhance this network, and a 'huddle' was introduced which allowed partners to upload and download information to improve practice.

Half-way through this two-year project, the government's changes to qualifications for initial teacher training took effect, introducing a completely new set of qualifications to be implemented from September 2007. Some of the smaller providers became unnerved by this exercise, and it was then that the value of the project's partnership with Awarding Bodies was well demonstrated, as the project team promptly staged events and presentations in collaboration with these partners to ensure that all providers understood the new qualifications and what this meant for them.

There were issues about beneficiary eligibility. The project was unable to support some SfL teachers due to central regulations - for example, those teaching literacy who were employed as Skills for Life teachers after September 2002. This caused difficulties, because on some courses there were participants who were supported through the project and some who were not. Crystal Chandelier may therefore have delivered many more qualifications for SfL teachers than could actually be counted towards the output achievements.

Achievement, impact and sustainability

Impact has been identified through an independent evaluation which concluded that:

- There are now a significantly higher number of trained qualified SfL tutors in the region and trained mentoring staff as a direct result of the programme.

⁴ Figures are still subject to final verification.
Evaluation of the 2000–2006
Co-financing of the ESF Programme
in the South West Region
Case study report

- The project enabled networking across the region for practitioners. Communities and networks were welcomed by employers, as these offered access to good practice, professional discussion, events and conferences, and the opportunities to exchange ideas.
- The funding was useful for courses, especially in ensuring funding was there for external candidates in FE colleges.
- Tutors are now considered to be confident by their employers in classes and feel more able to answer questions, and this applies even when teaching entry-level students.
- Current practice of teachers has been improved, recognised by learners themselves, even if they did not complete the course qualification.
- SfL now has a much higher profile, and the specialist teachers are more valued for the contribution they make to college and private provider delivery and achievement.

Partnership working was identified by an Ofsted report of 2007 as a real strength of this project, and the report wrote of good working relationships and effective support groups. While Ofsted had some reservations about the formal arrangements for the quality assurance of training delivery by partners, it also praised the priority that the project afforded the 'student voice' and the quick response to learner feedback.

Learning South West is the lead organisation for the South West Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (Switch), one of the South West's two Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). CETTs are networks or partnerships of organisations involved in initial teacher training and the Continuous Professional Development of teachers in the Lifelong Learning sector, and financed by QIA. Switch has 45 members, and is commissioning project work which encourages constituent organisations to develop projects and disseminate learning.

The most successful elements of Crystal Chandelier have now been incorporated into the CETT, thereby ensuring that the Good Practice Network will continue and be enhanced by CETT work, and using many of the Crystal Chandelier models has influenced the CETT approach to CPD. This has ensured that what has been achieved under this ESF project will not be lost, but will be sustained and further developed.

Overview

Crystal Chandelier developed a number of different models and approaches in training teachers and tutors to deliver SfL that are all expected to impact on future ESF projects and mainstream provision. This has been achieved through an ethos which has placed collaboration at the heart of all the project activities. Challenges faced by this project were addressed not by the accountable organisation's central team, but always in partnership with the organisations that formed the project network. There is clear evidence that despite shortfall in delivery in some areas, notably recruiting SMEs and engaging with the voluntary sector, the work of Crystal Chandelier has strengthened important developments such as the CETTs initiative, and helped to develop quality improvement in learning across much of the South West region.

