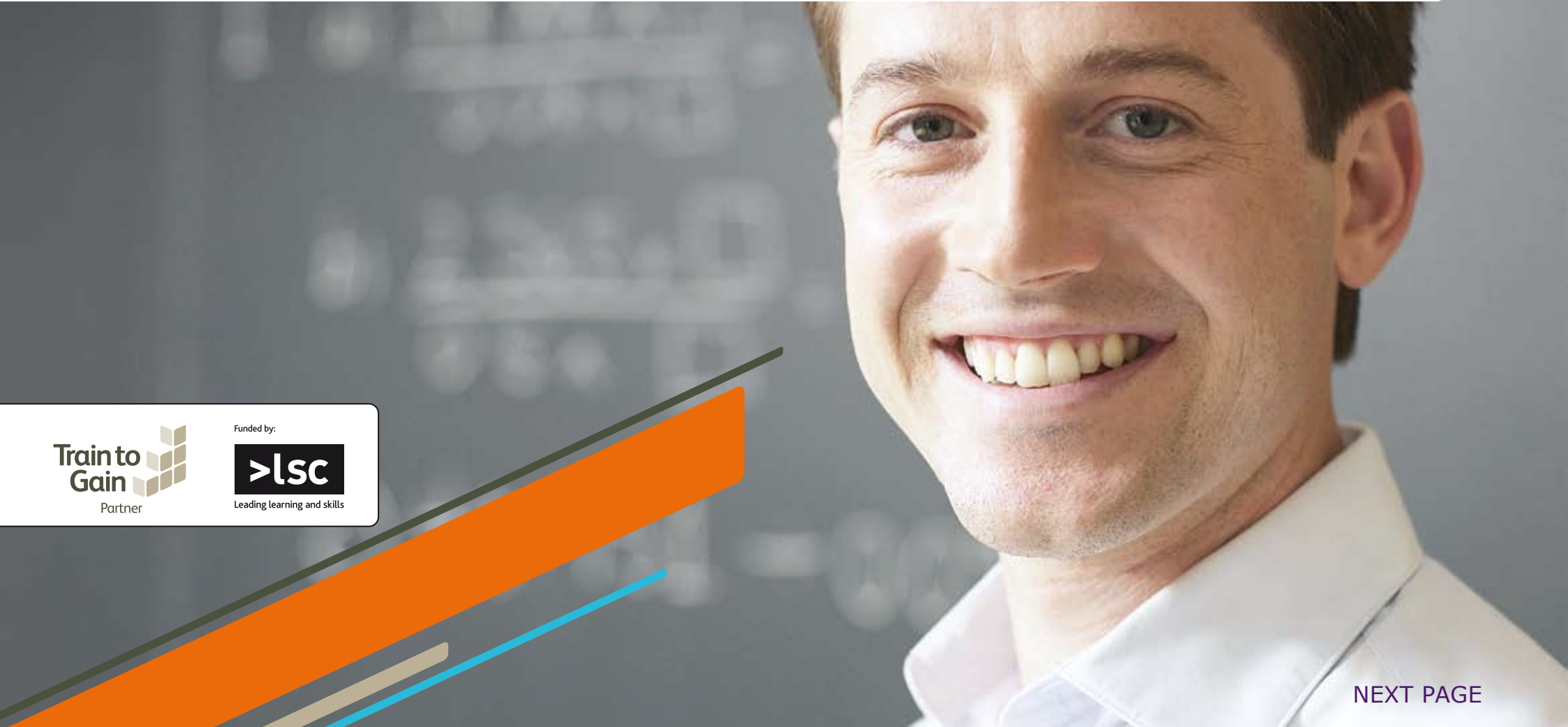


SKILLS FOR LIFE PROJECT

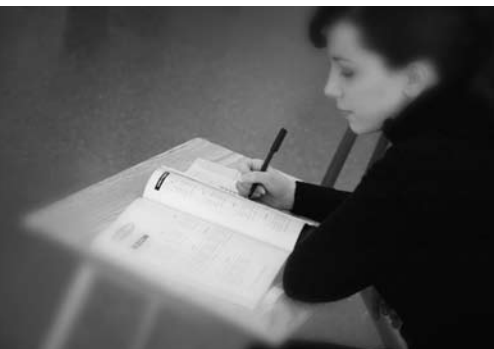


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Introduction

Linking Train to Gain Providers with Local Authorities for Delivery of Basic Skills Needs Integrated with Basic Information Technology



The skill needs within the workforces of the Local Authorities within the Yorkshire and the Humber region was identified as a Regional Priority following a meeting of Chief Executives in October 2007.

Subsequently the Local Government Yorkshire and Humber Skills Group agreed that the initial starting point to support these needs was to be Basic Skills with basic information technology (focusing on the E.Citizen programme) as the 'hook'. Advice was taken on how this fitted with the Go Award and it was seen as complementary to this award.

Versa Professional Services were awarded a contract by tender to work with each Local Authority, initially to help them develop a framework linking them to a Train to Gain provider for an integrated programme of basic information technology and Basic Skills. Versa's contract started in March 2008.

The project's next objective after the framework was for the authorities to agree and implement a delivery model for Basic Skills, integrated with basic IT. The delivery model was to be appropriate for each Local Authority in order to ensure that the needs of individual employees were covered. The providers had therefore to take into account such requirements as on/off-the-job training, training for shift workers etc. and to design a suitably flexible programme. (Providers contracted under Train to Gain to deliver this training provision were directed to deliver the basic information technology element within the funding they draw down for basic Maths and/or basic English.)

The Local Authorities' commitment under this programme was therefore to draw up and commit to a two year 'framework' for Skills For

Life training, commencing in autumn 2008. This framework would consist of the following elements:

1. A top-sheet signed by the Chief Executive or another authorised signatory, confirming the authority's commitment to the programme
2. A section showing the local policy and planning context
3. A delivery model which links to the Workforce Development Plan setting out the agreed arrangements for this training, including
 - a. the identification, prioritisation and recruitment of target learners
 - b. the identification of approved Train to Gain providers to deliver the training
 - c. the programmes of training to be undertaken
 - d. the proposed timescales and delivery arrangements.

The Skills Group were keen to ensure that through the project Local Authorities would develop robust and supportive links with providers who might then be able to work with them to meet the future skills needs of their workforce, (through NVQ programmes, funded by Train to Gain where eligible).

To deliver the requirements in this project Versa held a number of meetings with the designated Human Resources teams within each authority to explain the project and to assist them in preparing the framework; simultaneously Versa contacted all approved Train to Gain providers to invite them to offer training to the Local

Authorities under this project. A statement was provided by providers interested in offering programmes through this project describing what Skills For Life provision they could deliver, how and where. Each Local Authority was then supplied with the information for all the providers who wished to work with them. The Local Authority then selected the training provider(s) who they felt best met their requirements.

After the project started two significant changes took place:

1. in June 2008 the announcement that employers could contract directly through Train to Gain to provide training for their own workforce, subject to contracting requirements etc
2. in August 2008 the statement of Train to Gain Additional Flexibilities. Funding from Train to Gain would now include Literacy at Entry level 1, 2 and 3 and Levels 1 and 2, and Numeracy at Entry level 1, 2 and 3 and levels 1 and 2 for learners irrespective of prior qualifications.



Jill Gibbons

Skills for Life Coordinator, Leeds City Council

CLARIFICATION OF SKILLS FOR LIFE OBJECTIVES

Skills for Life training was not new to Leeds City Council but this project helped them clarify their corporate objectives and plans for Skills for Life. Previous work had been piecemeal and so the project gave them the framework they needed in order to work through what needed to be done.

THE SKILLS FOR LIFE AGENDA

The profile of Skills for Life was not high within the Local Authority before this project. This project allowed them to gain a 'big picture' perspective and a platform for ongoing work, which in turn will help them to raise and maintain the profile of Skills for Life in the future.

Leeds is a big authority, and consequently the process of setting up a cross-authority programme such as this is potentially slow. This project, and specifically the detailed framework and action plan they developed, provided the impetus to Leeds' commitment to the Skills Pledge and to putting in place real action.

TRAINING PROVIDERS

Prior to the project they felt that discussions with potential training providers had been restricted by their own uncertainty about what to ask in order to ensure that they got exactly what they needed from them. Now they feel that they know how to "speak the language of the training providers".

Prior to the project they knew of local colleges and of course their own internal provision, but

were not aware of the full list of Learning and Skills Council-approved providers. The improved knowledge they now have of the provider market is likely to impact on a broader range of training than just Skills for Life; as a result they are already working more closely with the Skills Broker.

BENEFITS AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The project brought about a number of significant benefits both within the authority and externally and they believe that there will be many positive long term outcomes from the project.

Internally it helped to raise the Skills for Life agenda within the authority. To take this raised profile forward into real involvement and to ensure that other directorates stay briefed about the progress of the project, plans were put in place to form a cross-authority project group.

The pilot opened up the potential of getting training delivered much quicker than in the past. Previously they allowed for 18 to 20 months for ground workers to achieve a basic NVQ; now they anticipate that they should be able to achieve this in four months. The fact that numeracy is also linked in is also a major benefit for all concerned.

One of the biggest benefits to come out of the project was the support that they received from other Local Authorities; as a result of this project, Leeds are now part of a regional support network. Similarly the initial signs from the pilot are that the project will help them to establish good long-term relationships with providers.



LESSONS

One of the main lessons learnt by this authority was the value of perseverance in pushing forward the Skills for Life agenda. Another was the benefit derived from working with other authorities. It was very useful to them to share ideas, documents and problems with other Local Authorities in the region, although they firmly believe that each one must find their own specific route.

It was commented that the programme has come a bit too late for the 40-60 year group who have struggled with the arrival of e-technology.

GENERAL FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROJECT

The early set-up work which this project set out to deliver gave them a momentum and confidence to take forward the next stages of the programme. One reason for this was the assistance given by Versa, whose consultant was a "friendly face speaking their language"; her clarity and prompting kept them on track to meet agreed deadlines and to help them generate their action plan. As a result the project was tailored to their needs and not simply a standard plan that was made to fit into their organization.

Helen Ezard

Learning and Development Officer, Scarborough Borough Council

CLARIFICATION OF THE SKILLS FOR LIFE AGENDA

Like many authorities Scarborough were already committed to looking at Skills for Life issues within the context of the Skills Pledge. Where the Skills for Life project gave them added value was in helping them to clarify corporate objectives and draw up focused plans for Skills for Life.

The project definitely helped a great deal in raising the Skills for Life agenda within their authority; the framework that the project prompted them to put in place will have an ongoing impact. It is highly likely that that they would not have been able to put such a framework in place without the project setting the agenda for them.

TRAINING PROVIDERS

The Skills for Life project helped them not only to identify suitable training providers but also to clarify what they wanted from a training provider in terms of Skills for Life. The opportunity to get together with other Local Authorities to discuss different options and approaches was very useful for them.

A BASIS FOR DELIVERY OF TRAINING

Prior to the project Scarborough had put in place some Skills for Life training but it was not part of a specific plan. The framework they developed through this project therefore has provided a basis for the delivery of this and future training.

BENEFITS AND POSTIVE OUTCOMES

First and foremost Scarborough now have an agreed Skills for Life plan which they are very happy with; they know what they are doing, why they are doing it and when it needs to be done by. The project gave a momentum to the Skills for Life agenda within the authority, which is something they are particularly pleased about.

As already noted, the project helped Scarborough create good relationships with other Local Authorities, and this was one of the most positive outcomes for them. While they already had good relationships with their training providers, the new focus that the project brought about will possibly lead to new and/or changed relationships emerging in the future.

Another benefit was the information they were able to access on funding. As a result they have identified and are hopeful that they will soon be able to draw down on other sources of funding.



Pat Martin

Learning and Development Consultant, Sheffield City Council

CLARIFICATION OF SKILLS FOR LIFE OBJECTIVES

Sheffield had committed to using the “Go Local” government award/framework before the Skills for Life project came around and had already put in place many of the elements of a structured approach to Skills for Life. Where the Skills for Life project itself added value was by helping them to pinpoint and focus on specific issues. As a result they now have a customised bespoke programme that integrates Skills for Life. Such a programme would not have been put in place without the project.

THE SKILLS FOR LIFE AGENDA

While there was already a commitment to Skills for Life before this project came into being, the project definitely helped to raise the Skills for Life agenda and its profile within the authority. It made them think about Skills for Life more strategically. The project helped them move on from ad-hoc delivery to concrete action planning from which came programmes that can be used as models for best practice. This will be a very useful outcome for them over the long term.

They are especially pleased with the impact the project will have on managers. Through this project they were able to challenge the idea that Skills for Life is just for the manual/lower paid worker. A wider benefit will be the boost it will give to the skills of managers who may face the possibility of being outsourced in the future; with these skills they will be better able to operate in the non-council environment.

TRAINING PROVIDERS

In order to achieve the GO award, Sheffield had been encouraged to look at more than one training provider, and had set out the criteria for deciding which would be most appropriate. First and foremost was that provision should be flexible and adapted to meeting the needs of individual learners. Another was that provision should reflect whether learners were identified through their appraisal or by their managers, or whether they had come forward as individuals identifying their own need. Three possible providers had already been identified as possible partners.

A BASIS FOR THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF TRAINING

The Skills for Life project extended their approach to the delivery of training programmes. They now have a key person dealing with Skills for Life provision who is responsible for logging training requirements and directing them to a suitable provider. They therefore can be much more specific in matching up the training need with a provider with the right strengths and resources. This is helpful as it doesn't overload any one provider and delivers a better match for the specific training need.

BENEFITS AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Although the project did not help them to identify any new providers, it strengthened their relationships with them. This was particularly true with Sheffield College, who at the selection meeting showed through their presentation that they had clearly understood what was required and how best to deliver it. This helped to make the experience and outcome for Sheffield very positive.

Two other major positive outcomes of the project were focus and flexibility. The project really helped them to focus on a specific piece of work - a bespoke business communications programme integrating Skills for Life. They also set up Working in the Workplace, an initiative for managers who find it difficult to spend a half-day away from their desks, but still want to be able to give time to Skills for Life.

LESSONS

Prior to this project Sheffield had not thought to access Train to Gain as a route to secure appropriate staff training. They can now see the potential benefits of working with Train to Gain brokers, and are now carrying out an operational analysis to investigate how each directorate will link into Train to Gain.

OVERALL SUMMARY

Overall the impact of the Skills for Life project was very positive. There was praise for the input and approach of the Versa consultant, who appreciated where Sheffield were with their development of Skills for Life and adapted her approach to Sheffield's situation.



Phil Armitt

Centre Manager, Tyro Training Scarborough

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Tyro Training had been working with Scarborough Borough Council since the end of last year and knew they were signing up for the Skills Pledge, so they had a good idea of Scarborough's agenda. What this project gave them was a better understanding of what the Council needs and why.

CLARIFICATION OF AND CHANGES IN OWN TRAINING PROVISION

Tyro Training, the commercial training arm of Craven College, found that the project complemented their current provision for Skills for Life. It provided them with a template for working with local authorities in this area of training. As a result of the project Tyro Training strengthened the Skills for Life delivery team in Scarborough and now has a dedicated team member to work with Scarborough Borough Council. Previously the services of Craven College staff (in Skipton) were utilised.

BENEFITS AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

One of the major benefits for Tyro was the boost it gave to its profile with the Local Authority and with other major employers. The project helped to create better links between organizations and other opportunities arose as a direct result of the project.

One area that Tyro Training would like to explore the possibility of future collaborative working with other providers involved this project.

LESSONS

The project helped Tyro to identify the needs of the Local Authority and the needs of the individuals within it. It also showed that there is always more to be learned about Skills for Life, how it is promoted and delivered to people with varying needs; as a result they are now more aware of the steps that are needed to get this type of training off the ground within local authorities and are identifying ways of using successful candidates to promote the training. In addition successful candidates will be used as mentors to others and ambassadors for the Skills for Life programme.

GENERAL FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROJECT

Tyro Training were happy with how the project was set up. They attended the initial Versa presentation which gave them the information they needed about the project - how, why and when things were going to take place.



About us

Versa Professional Services

Versa Professional Services was formed in 2006 by a group of consultants and professionals with considerable experience of the Post-16 Learning and Skills sector.

Versa was formed specifically to offer cost effective consulting support to organisations in the public sector; we aim to provide services that combine fresh thinking with practical know how in order to deliver measurable improvements in performance.

We provide a range of services to organisations at local, regional and national level, including:

- support with performance improvement, organisation design and project management
- the review and evaluation of existing activities
- the design of new programmes and initiatives, and
- support with strategic, operational and business planning.

Our clients have included non-departmental government bodies, national and regional agencies, local authorities and providers in FE, ACL and work-based learning.

For further information please visit www.versa.uk.com.

If you would like to speak with Versa about this project or to arrange a meeting to discuss how we can support your work, please contact:

Simon Tepper on 07980 211191
simon.tepper@versa.uk.com

Versa delivered this project on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council Yorkshire and Humber.

For further details of this Skills for Life programme, Train to Gain and other initiatives please contact:

Kay Butterfield on 01274 444138
kay.butterfield@lsc.gov.uk



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