

Lifelong Learning – Engaging Adult Learners Pilot Project

Introduction

This pilot project aimed to draw on the experience and skills of existing local networks and partnerships to, engage adult learners, promote and disseminate higher education information and support adult learners through to recruitment and enrolment where possible. By working together with the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) at the University of Worcester this activity supported the LLN vision “Moving on up”: creating new opportunities for vocational learners in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to achieve and progress in higher education. (*Moving on up* ... LLN Herefordshire and Worcestershire, June 2006)

Project Objectives

Increase awareness of progression opportunities and vocational pathways in Herefordshire and Worcestershire through direct delivery of information to Small and Medium Enterprises, Voluntary and Community sector organisations

Develop a trained team of LLN advisers to deliver information

Provide a follow-up information and signposting service to other support agencies

Conduct learner needs analysis research through initial assessment interviews with learners

Support the engagement and recruitment of adult learners to higher education opportunities

To identify barriers to higher education learning (either full or part time) and feed these back to the LLN

To promote the higher education LLN through partnership working

Partner Information

Work-Based Learning Partner

The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Training Provider Association is a consortium of private work based learning providers and FE Colleges work based divisions. The association is a limited company and is managed by a Board of Directors appointed from provider organisations across the two counties. The association has many years of delivering work based learning programmes for employers ranging from small to large organisations across all occupational sectors. The association has a track record of engaging with schools, employers and advice and guidance organisations in promoting Education-Business partnerships and life long learning. Among activities they concentrate on raising awareness of progression routes to HE through vocational training using the Government’s Apprenticeship programme as a vehicle to engage young learners. The Association extends activities to engage adults in under-represented areas for example those not in education, employment or training and women in non-traditional occupations such as engineering and construction. Also included are older learners, women returnees to employment and those with disabilities or long-term illnesses seeking to return to the workplace.

Community Partner (Worcestershire)

The Worcestershire Learning Partnership currently manages partnership activity within the Adult and Community Learning Service of the Worcestershire County Council. The Learning Partnership co-ordinates 6 district-based Lifelong Learning Networks across the county. It

promotes lifelong learning, identifies adult learners' needs and avoids duplication of provision to make the best use of limited resources. It project manages a successful ESF Widening Adult Participation Project working with Voluntary and Community sector organisations in the community. The Service is the lead partner for the Community element of the Aimhigher project for Herefordshire and Worcestershire and links closely with the Work Based Learning element of this project.

Community (Herefordshire)

The Herefordshire community element of the project is managed through Herefordshire County Council under the leadership of the Worcestershire Adult Learning Partnership. It works with Voluntary and Community organisations in mainly rural areas to promote higher education and raise aspirations.

Project Teams

The work-based learning team consisted of 3 Advisers, 1 Co-ordinator and 1 Manager. The Herefordshire team consisted of 3 Advisers and 1 Co-ordinator. The Worcestershire team consisted of 4 Advisers, 1 Co-ordinator and 1 Project Manager. In total 18 project meetings were held during the activity period to induct the advisers into the project, share information and resources and to monitor and collect evidence to inform this report.

Project Activity (June – September 2007)

A team of 10 Advisers was asked to make contact and visit 60 employers in Herefordshire and Worcestershire during the pilot project activity period. They were available to discuss training needs, local courses, vocational progression routes and to signpost to professionals working in 'nextstep' Information Advice and Guidance, (IAG) impartial HE IAG, local FE Colleges, Private Providers and Train to Gain (an initiative to support employers access training to level 2). 10 information packs were available for each visit. The resources included in these packs were tailored to meet the needs of the employer/employees and Advisers could draw from,

- Qualifications and job levels framework
- Sector skills top 12 Employability Skills in Health and Social Care, Children's and Young People's Workforce, Engineering, IT
- Higher Education guide in Herefordshire 2007
- Get up and go CD – information and advice on Higher Education for advanced apprentices and NVQ3 students
- UoW laptop resource
- Aimhigher Steps to Higher Education
- UoW Prospectus
- OU Prospectus
- Local FE and Community Based Learning Centre leaflets where appropriate.

The Advisers sign-posted employers and employees to IAG services and websites, including Community Based 'nextstep' IAG and Impartial HE IAG at UoW

Fast Tomato and ALPS, www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.
University of Worcester, Open University, University of Gloucester, Herefordshire College of Technology, Herefordshire College of Art and Design, Holme Lacy College website, Worcestershire FE Colleges.

Project Outcomes

The Advisers recorded each visit on activity logs (appendix 1). The following outcomes summarise the activity of the Work-Based Learning Advisers,

- 15 Employers and 38 employees engaged for Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Overall the project raised the awareness of Higher Education but a third of the employers approached already had HE routes for staff development.
- Taster sessions to be arranged for 1 childcare nursery and 1 interested in courses for work-experience students
- 2 girls interested in vocational childcare training when they leave school
- For some employers it was a good opportunity to discuss the sort of issues that prevent them from supporting people. For example, there are employees who do not want to make the commitment to training, so in cases like this follow-up sessions were arranged to engage on a one-to-one basis with the employer and the coordinator to offer support and further signposting. From the employees who were engaged there was positive feedback from a work based learning perspective and the enjoyment of the 'hands on approach to training'.

The following outcomes summarise the activity of the Herefordshire Advisers,

- 18 employers and 940+ employees engaged (some seasonal)
- Some organisations contacted were interested in receiving information later and will be followed up through Aimhigher or LLN activity
- Packs of information were well received
- A positive interest from some staff looking at vocational routes; many were interested in courses that may create a new vocation/change in career direction
- Two employers were very interested in Train to Gain in the childcare sector for the future, particularly for voluntary workers who had not considered vocational training to embark upon a career
- 1 referral to HE IAG and information researched on 4 staff members at Herefordshire Council
- 3 learners wished to progress within the leisure industry

The following outcomes summarise the activity of the Worcestershire Advisers,

- 32 employers and 600 employees engaged
- 207 information packs were disseminated to mainly voluntary and community sector organisations. Packs of information were well received
- All organisations contacted were interested in receiving regular information and will be followed up through Aimhigher or LLN activity
- 12 learners referred to HE IAG (1 will be starting the BA in Social Welfare at UoW in January 2008, 1 started a Foundation course at UoW in September 2007)
- 3 learners wish to apply for OU Openings course
- 1 learner interested in ESOL
- 5 learners currently registered on NVQ programme, 1 learner interested in NVQ2
- 1 learner referred to ITQ, 1 for computer beginners course and 1 for Powerpoint course
- 1 learner interested in working towards a degree but has financial problems
- 3 Libraries are interested in hosting an Openings group and Train to Gain opportunities
- 1 employer interested in Openings courses

- Long Lartin Prison want to offer Openings and computer training to all staff, 2 interested in teacher training courses, possible 8 interested in Computer courses or advanced ECDL course
- 1 employer aware of the need to train all staff to Level 2, Adviser is researching self advocacy opportunities
- 1 employer would like to offer apprenticeship training on their own premises suitable for learners with sight impairment
- 1 employer interested in Teacher training courses, UoW or OU degree courses and childcare for those working in their crèche, contact made with Worcester Sixth Form and Worcester College of Technology

Good Practice

- Building relationships with employers takes time and trust, by using work based learning expertise and sharing this with other advisers employers were successfully engaged. Clear explanations, short phone calls and letters to confirm the appointment and thank employers for their time and interest were seen as good practice
- Realistic time allocations when talking to employers and keeping within that time frame were important
- Respecting employers training needs within the work they do is vital and then working with possible progressions. Sometimes higher education is not always appropriate for staff and courses are not always available
- Employers/employees contacted through this pilot will continue to be monitored by Advisers and followed up by Aimhigher or LLN activity to maintain the relationship and build in sustainability. This will support employers training needs in the future and ensure progression route information is up to date
- Face-to-face contact is the most effective method for engaging employers
- Appropriate signposting for the relevant level and type of learning required is appreciated and when follow up information is requested this must be “actioned” to support current and future employer engagement and support

Evaluation Comments

Evaluation of this pilot was in the form of collected feedback from employers and also the partners involved. The main point from employees was that what they enjoyed most about their training was spending most of their time in the workplace and that they felt they had learnt so much more this way.

Employer Feedback

- Employers generally welcomed the personal one-to-one approach and follow-up evaluation has been positive. Targeting voluntary sector organisation proved most successful, as they were less informed of vocational routes of progression than conventional SMEs. There was also some success with Libraries and Government organisations
- Generally, engagement to Train to Gain was not successful because employers had already been approached by several other agencies but the interest in other progression routes were extremely successful
- Appreciated looking at job levels and qualifications
- Will support and encourage employees to look at professional development in the future
- They already refer employees to courses and discuss training options

- Public sector organisations were much more readily accepting of information and success was easier than with private sector companies
- They do their own training as “in-house” is appropriate and cost effective
- Higher education would not always be the appropriate training route, especially in specialized vocational areas
- SMEs are generally small and very busy so time for discussion and training is an issue

Partners Feedback

- This pilot project was an opportunity for the Adviser teams to make contact with new employers that can be continued and expanded in the future. The team’s knowledge of local provision, different progression routes and efficient signposting was invaluable
- Networking was a great opportunity to share good practice in engaging employers
- Gave them the opportunity to focus on vocational higher education information
- Better informed being able to access and disseminate up to date information
- Not a good time to work with employers, but extension into September useful
- Have to be careful with duplication of initiatives targeting the same groups so that we are not overloading – Train to Gain, the brokerage service, Aimhigher, LLN, as employers can get bombarded and lose interest
- In the timescale the pilot went well and reached its objectives

Summary key strengths

- Advisers’ expertise in meeting with employers and building working relationships
- Advisers’ knowledge and experience of Work Based Learning opportunities, vocational pathways and working with employers on a day-to-day basis
- Tapping into a strong existing team with support networks and good patch knowledge
- Links with voluntary sector organisations which may not have been targeted before

Summary key weaknesses

- Availability of laptops and mapping information in subject sector areas although interesting delayed the project and was not as useful as first thought. Advisers’ local knowledge proved to be more appropriate: a large proportion of in-house training is met by private providers
- Timescales of the project and office/factory shut down being in August
- Employers’ and employees’ perceived problems and costs involved
- Subject area provision does not always allow for local progression
- Lack of HE provision in some sector areas
- HE Vocational routes through colleges are not for all
- Other agencies doing similar work
- No advertising prior to project
- Lack of enthusiasm of some employer managers and lack of access to workers
- Raising expectation
- Low employment opportunities
- Companies have own training schemes
- Difficulty for volunteers (without contracts) to qualify for Train to Gain support

Opportunities and Recommendations for future developments

- For a full project ensure marketing and publicity occur in the set-up period to positively influence and engage the target groups
- Consider 3G Wireless internet access with the laptops to access websites, allowing instant access to signposting information
- In a full project build in time to network widely and to build relationships
- Further partnership working between LLN and Aimhigher so that information about improved progression routes can be disseminated as part of aspiration and engagement activity to widen adult participation
- A sector focused pilot activity for example, childcare sector where employees have much experience but many lack level 2 qualifications
- Central resource area for information on HE vocational routes perhaps as part of UoW careers information/impartial IAG
- Referral information to Train to Gain Advisers can be used by Aimhigher team and LLN in the future
- Mapping exercise required to produce a comprehensive list of vocational courses leading to HE, a good database needed to keep track of changes to that information is up to date
- Potential for retail sector to be targeted, particularly those being made redundant through fall-off in trade. Employees may need to re-train or up-skill to gain further employment
- Organisations in the care sector need more help to teach/deliver self advocacy as their clients need help to help themselves
- There is a need for ESOL training for tutors and courses for employees across the 2 counties. An increase in availability would increase access to both vocational and educational routes to higher education

In summary, this pilot project has been able to visit a wide range of organisations in a short timeframe and increase the information available about vocational progression routes. Good contacts and relationships have been established which will provide a sound platform for future developments. Information packs and contact details have been left with organisations and follow-up visits have been planned. Learners have successfully been referred to IAG and HE IAG services and have been supported in enrolments for courses in WBL, FE and HE sectors.

Further information can be obtained from Annette Wright Learning Partnership Manager
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APPENDIX 1

Not available on website

Please email d.obrey@worc.ac.uk if you wish to view this information