

The aim of the assignment

To provide consultancy advice, expert writing skills and support and to design the Business Interchange aspect of the Catalyst programme following the initial pilot.

The purpose of the consultation was:

- To determine the lessons learned from the pilot, which would inform the design and delivery of BI as it moved forward.
- To put forward options for future delivery of Business Interchange
- To design a sustainable programme, which would be “owned” by the FE sector and continue to operate when funding and advisor support is no longer available
- To design a process of implementation, which would contribute to achieving the objectives of Business Interchange and the Catalyst Programme.

Who commissioned the work and what it contributed to

The work was commissioned by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the sector skills council for the Lifelong Learning sector. Business Interchange sits within the Catalyst Programme, a response to the Leitch report and demands for employer responsiveness. The 2006 White Paper ‘Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances’ raised the bar for the FE sector in meeting the challenge for the UK to become a



world leader in all skills levels by 2020. On the 1st April 2008 the launch of the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils took place- a collective body made up of all 25 SSCs. The full scope of the Alliance will develop over time, but its initial focus will be to represent and co-ordinate the strategic work of Sector Skills Councils to stakeholders across the four home nations. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) replacing the SSDA, began operation on 1 April 2008. The UKCES, which was set up as a result of Leitch, operates across the UK and plays a central role in raising the UK’s skills base, improving productivity and competitiveness, increasing employment and making a contribution to a fairer society. It will play a critical part in securing for the UK the ambitions of achieving a world class profile on skills by 2020 and the aspiration of an 80% employment rate. The Catalyst programme



has been driven by these changes and the future design of Business Interchange was critical to achieve practical step changes in FE and achieve the Governments ambitious targets. We were therefore conscious of the need to consult with the widest audience of stakeholders and intermediaries' to get maximum 'buy in' and commitment to the design and implementation.

The outcomes

A consultation and design paper was produced detailing the background to the programme, successes and lessons learnt from the pilot evaluation, feedback from stakeholders and intermediaries with detailed proposals for the design moving forward. This was written to meet the aim and criteria set out at the start of the project. The culmination of our activity was a presentation to the programme advisory group and programme board explaining the rationale and proposed designs. The concept promoted was of a sustainable design, owned by and led by the sector.

The impact

As a result of our consultation and design work a tender specification has recently been announced based on the model recommended. We recognise that as this takes on board the best practice principles and lessons learnt from all participants in the pilot as well as intermediaries and stakeholders the outcome of the programme should be even more successful than the pilot which met its aims and received excellent feedback. What it will do however is provide a

more sustainable model which can continue when the current funding finishes.

Integration and coordination with other developments and projects

This project is part of the wider government and LLUK agenda to drive employer responsiveness of FE provision and ensure that it is leading edge in line with World Class skills. The principles of a minimum of 30 hours CPD for teachers, tutors and trainers and mandatory requirement to evidence this and register with IfL are underpinned by the programme. Business Interchange offers FE providers a model for retaining and demonstrating currency of practice through quality placements with clear development aims and objectives. This also links to LLUK's aim to 'professionalise' the sector, developing practitioners' industry-specific, vocationally relevant skills and knowledge as well as their teaching professionalism through attaining qualifications such as PTLLS, DTLLS, Masters of Education etc. In undertaking the design we wanted to ensure the widest consultation took place and hence LSC, DIUS, AOC, ALP, SSC's etc were included and participated. This has ensured that the programme remains at the heart of government thinking but can also evolve to meet new emergent challenges and we are currently working on how it can potentially fit with rapid response to redundancy.

Who undertook the work?

The work was undertaken by the core specialist consultancy team at STAR as outlined above,



supported by regionally based associate and employed consultants with expertise in research. This team undertook the telephone interviews with FE provider line managers and participants who undertook placements, as well as host businesses. The information was collated and submitted for analysis. Through a focused meeting of all consultants we were able to draw together the statistical information from the consultations as well as anecdotal and verbal feedback. The activity was also supported by our administrative team based in York. The team has extensive experience of supporting training and consultancy professionals in the delivery of activities both small and large scale, including contracts in excess of £1 million.

Responding quickly and flexibly and working to tight deadlines

We have identified this project for the case study as it required us to respond to a very tight timeframe with the project commencing on the 25th of June 2008 and requiring presentation of findings to the board and final report delivered by the 29th of August. This required us to refocus our team and draft in associates for day to day activity, to ensure that there was no effect on our other contracts. All aims and outcomes were achieved within the timeframe. We received excellent feedback from the contractor on the quality and flexibility of our team and service and on our ability to be both proactive and reactive to achieve results.

For more information regarding this project please contact STAR using the details below.

