

## **LSIS funded Improving training and related services for employers**

### **PROVIDER END OF PROJECT REPORT**

**Project title: Enquiry to Audit**

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

*(Give a brief introduction to your organisation and the project.)*

West Cheshire College is a College of Further Education specialising in vocational learning (34,000 plus vocational qualifications achieved each year). We have two state of the art “new build” campuses, based in Chester (Science and Technologies) and Ellesmere Port (Service and Creative Industries) which is approximately seven miles away towards the Wirral peninsula.

The College currently employs approximately 500 permanent members of staff with an additional 300 hourly paid staff members. We currently have in the region of 20,000 learners (40 per cent within the work place with 600+ Apprentices). Learners are based at the two campuses with additional learning taking place in the local community. We are currently working with over 1,500 employers ranging from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to multi-national organisations. The College is in the top 25 per cent of Colleges and recently renewed its Matrix Award for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in March 2010 and obtained Ofsted Grade 1 in employer engagement across all aspects in May 2010. We were awarded unconditional Training Quality Status (TQS) in June 2010 and were shortlisted for a Beacon Award for employer engagement in November 2010.

#### **Please explain how and why the project emerged?**

The project emerged due to a number of different factors that have influenced the process and systems that we currently have in place with regard to our work with employers. We have an employer journey that is a process of how we work with our employers from initial enquiry through to evaluation and impact of training. The employer journey should not change, but the processes and systems that underline the journey need to be evaluated regularly as part of the College’s quality cycle. However, recent factors have had a major impact on these processes. Systems and processes have had to be changed dramatically in order to maintain our high levels of service. The factors that have influenced the need to change are changes in funding with the shift of emphasis being on Apprenticeship provision and the “new build campuses” and the structural changes within the College which incorporated the whole of commercial services. The structural changes were necessary in order to shift the emphasis to increasing the number of frameworks and provision that we currently offer, in line with Government policy.

One of the main priorities during this time of change was to ensure minimum disruption to our services to employers, and the need to maintain the service that we currently offer.

Due to this it was identified that we had to raise commercial awareness amongst all employer facing staff including curriculum delivery areas, introduce new systems and processes to underline our employer journey procedure and increase the use of e-technology within delivery teams.

**What are you trying to achieve within the project?**

- Review and refine the processes and systems that make up the “Employer Journey.”
- Develop the College offer to employers during a time of funding restrictions.
- Stimulate employer investment in training, including bespoke provision.
- Raise the awareness of employer provision within the College.
- Improve communications and promote an ethos of ownership and accountability by individuals and teams.

**Section 2: Activities**

*Who has been involved? (Departments and/or job roles)*

The project has involved a large number of cross College staff members, ranging from a college assistant to senior managers. This has included both business support staff and curriculum staff working together in order to agree new processes and systems, in order to meet the needs of our employers.

**What’s happened so far?**

Following the commencement of the project we realised that in order to meet the above aims we would need to provide core training with existing systems and processes due to the recent structural changes, the move to the new buildings and the shift in emphasis from Train to Gain to Apprenticeship provision. The delivery of Apprenticeships involves not just one delivery area. It involves Key Skills/Functional Skills, underpinning knowledge delivery and the need to carry out reviews every 12 weeks on Apprenticeship progress. The structural changes altered the responsibility of this from the employer (commercial services) team to the curriculum areas. This change involved offering core training in current systems to curriculum areas. It was felt that we needed to alter the title, to reflect the processes and systems involved, to *Employer Enquiry to Audit*. The following objectives were then established in order to meet the overall project aims.

- Establish a short/medium term sales and marketing strategy.
- Build rapport and create a cohesive team within the new Sales and Account Advisor team.
- Improve communication and procedural knowledge (mainly around Apprenticeship delivery, monitoring and reviews) within the curriculum areas, to ensure accountability and ownership within each area.

- Due to changing roles and responsibilities, train staff on the customer relationship management (CRM) system.
- Improve/increase the use of the e-learning system within some curriculum areas to make assessment more efficient and responsive.
- Apprenticeship reviews: all curriculum areas to be responsible for the delivery, monitoring and recording of Apprenticeship reviews.
- Audit review: quality checks to ensure that the reviews are carried out effectively and meet audit requirements.
- Improve business opportunities.
- Improve staff survey results.

A programme of events was developed aimed at improving employer responsiveness by improving communications between the involved areas, managing change within the commercial team and curriculum areas in line with the employer journey procedure.

To date the programme has included a variety of workshops aimed at increasing the knowledge base and sharing good practice within the employer focused teams.

***Establish a short/medium term sales and marketing strategy***

The sales and marketing team met and worked together to create a sales and marketing strategy. This was necessary as we had new team members due to the change in structure. The information was then cascaded to the commercial services team, assessors, assistant managers and managers from cross college curriculum areas during the employer responsiveness development day.

At the start of the year when profiles have been agreed, a sales and marketing strategy is put together involving the commercial services and marketing manager. It was felt that in order to empower the team and value their contribution, knowledge and expertise that the sales and marketing team should meet to work together on a short term/medium strategy. The strategy would then be cascaded to other areas during the planned employer responsiveness development day.

***Build rapport and create a cohesive team within the new Sales and Advisor team***

The Sales and Account Advisor team now includes additional internal staff from other departments and two new external staff members. The team have spent one and a half days with an external trainer working on building rapport, and improving their negotiation skills by developing a mental tool kit. The aim was to create a “one team” approach, allowing the whole team to share knowledge and support each other.

***Improve communication and procedural knowledge within Curriculum areas, to ensure accountability and ownership is taken into account within each area***

This full day event followed a strict agenda and various workshops covering:

- Sales and marketing strategy;
- Funding update;
- Employer responsive profile update;
- Apprenticeship update including completion of reviews;
- Move from key skills to functional skills;
- Efficient and effective delivery methods; and
- Audit requirements.

This event was attended by the Vice Principal – Business Development, cross college curriculum and employer facing managers, assistant Manager, assessors, internal verifiers and support staff (administration, data input etc.)

### ***Update CRM system***

Due to an upgrade with Pro-engage, the College's CRM system, there was a need to upskill existing users to ensure accurate management information reporting. Due to changes within job roles and new appointments there was a need to train staff to the required level in order to use the system effectively.

### ***Improve/increase use of the e-learning system***

Several practical sessions have taken place introducing staff from a cross section of curriculum areas to the opportunity to learn how to utilise the new e-portfolio system called "Learning Assistant". This system will allow learners to upload evidence relevant to their work, track their own progress online, and speak to the assessor online and access online resources. This will give assessors and learners another method of communication. It has proven to be an effective and efficient system which allows greater control over completion deadlines, resulting in an increase in timely achievements. The sessions have improved confidence across the College with the new technology, and have reduced the number of visits that an assessor has to make to the workplace. It is an excellent "out of working" hours tool. Access to the system for internal and external verification activity is much improved as this can be accessed online remotely.

### ***Apprenticeship review updates***

Apprenticeship review updates have been delivered by the Partnership Advisor (which is a new role since the change in structure) to the curriculum delivery and quality teams. The Partnership Advisor's main role is to coordinate the organisation, delivery and monitoring of Apprenticeship provision. The object of the updates was to disseminate knowledge on how to complete the review process with learners and the importance of ensuring that the reviews meet our contractual agreement with the Skills Funding Agency. This responsibility of completing Apprenticeship reviews will now be the responsibility of curriculum areas.

**Initial findings established that curriculum areas still require additional support and have requested an audit review.**

### ***Audit Review***

The Partnership Advisor is now working with the curriculum areas in order to support Apprenticeship delivery to provide quality provision, consistency and

standardisation to meet audit requirements; particularly with regard to the Apprenticeship review process.

***Increase business opportunities***

Two members of the workforce team have enrolled onto qualifications (A1/V1) which will help to upskill them and allow the College to provide a wider curriculum offer, due to increasing skills gaps expressed by employers.

***Improve staff survey results***

Collation taking place currently, data to follow.

**What has been achieved?**

To date 103 members of staff have been involved in development activities with a total of 530 CPD hours being utilised. All curriculum areas are now linked to the Apprenticeship process.

Following the employer responsiveness development day the importance of the Partnership Advisors meeting is now more formalised and participation of the Sales team, Skills for Life and Curriculum Assistant Managers has improved, with full attendance and contribution from these teams taking place. The object of the meeting is to ensure that all necessary parties are aware of what employer provision is coming into the College, and to plan the appropriate delivery method to meet the employer requirements. It is a planning, problem solving and monitoring meeting with the relevant team representative contributing to their area of responsibility.

An agenda, minutes and follow up actions are produced and acted upon, demonstrating increased ownership and accountability, resulting in a smoother transition with regards to our employer provision.

Communications have improved and next step processes have been put in place for additional development sessions scheduled to take place during the annual staff conference, week commencing 2 July 2012.

There has been an increased usage of College systems with regard to Learning Assistant (e-portfolio) by assessors and verifiers. CRM training has taken place with new and existing users in order to ensure that this system is the main source of information for our employer engagement data.

Following the change in structure and new roles and responsibilities, communication and knowledge sharing have been a key factor in this project to maintain the service we provide to employers.

**Section 3: Success factors and challenges**

*In this project what have been the critical success factors (up to three) and why?*

1. Improved communications: staff now know who to go to for information relating to data and statistics, which enables them to respond to employers

in a timely manner.

2. There is a feeling of ownership. The programme has involved cross-College staff and teams which has in turn created a “College team” who have worked together, sharing knowledge, experience and ideas to make improvements for the College, learners and employers.
3. Raised awareness of the sales and marketing strategy, resulting in more efficient working methods, achieving greater results. Interim staff survey has shown an overall improvement

**What have been the key challenges? (up to three)**

1. Arranging for all relevant staff members to attend development sessions at the same time, resolving curriculum commitments and the logistical elements.
2. Maintaining the service to employers.
3. Overcoming the reluctance from some team members with reference to their attendance at development activities, and their ability to see the bigger picture.

**And how did you overcome the challenges?**

To release all curriculum staff would have been impossible therefore curriculum areas were represented by the Assistant Managers/Managers of the areas. They in turn cascaded information during their team talks. With the exception of Health and Social Care, curriculum representation was present from all the other areas at the Employer Responsiveness development event. The Assistant Manager for this area has strong links with the commercial team and is familiar with the process and attends their regular team meeting. so this was not seen as a barrier.

Support from the management team with development activities scheduled during quieter periods. As much information as possible was given out to the team prior to their attendance at each development activity, to reduce concerns and alleviate worries, with one to one discussions taking place if required.

**Section 4: How has something changed?**

**What difference has the project made?**

- Partnership Advisor Meetings are more structured with outcomes and actions, enabling more proactivity with employer needs.
- Sales and Account Advisors are now called Business Advisors following their request to ensure the title was in line with their more subtle sales approach.
- Commercial awareness across College has increased and accountability and ownership has transferred to curriculum areas, reporting now at

Senior Management Team meetings on a monthly basis.

- Apprenticeship provision is now part of the business planning cycle.

**What impact has the project had so far (for learners, staff, employers) -or what impact might it have?**

- Joined up thinking via improved communication.
- Progress of Apprenticeship learners added as a College management team agenda item, more accountability for the curriculum areas – resulting in a closer relationship with their learners and their outcomes.
- More effective and efficient delivery through e-technology.
- Quicker response time for Apprenticeship enrolment.
- Enquiry conversion quicker due to the discussions and agreements at Partnership Advisor Meeting – more proactive, than reactive.
- Curriculum areas now explaining their offer better to the commercial team who can cascade information to the employers.
- Faster completion due to area taking more ownership.

**How are you measuring the impact?**

- Achievement rates.
- Repeating staff survey.
- Auditing Apprenticeship files.
- Number of learners starting (turnaround times).

**Section 5: Reflections on learning**

*What changes did you make as you went along and why?*

The programme was revised throughout, following feedback from initial development sessions. It was felt that before we could move on, we needed to ensure that everyone was aware of the current processes and system relating to their area, and particularly with those staff who were affected by the change in structure and had new roles and responsibilities. The need for them to understand the whole of the employer journey and the processes and systems relating to that; we had to do base training on e learning assistant and the CRM to ensure that everyone had a good solid base of knowledge in these areas.

**What has worked well?**

Allowing different teams the opportunity to work more closely together, allowing their contribution and autonomy. The team provided numerous suggestions which have been acted upon, including the name change for the Sales and Account Advisors plus the individual learning record being completed at initial key skills assessment. The latter will save an extra visit to the workplace and speed up the enrolment process.

The project has kick-started momentum for continuous improvement, with future development activity planned for the Staff Conference.

**What needs improving?**

Project ongoing – with continuous development planned which will be cascaded through staff development week. Feedback is still not fully available as the project is still underway. The impact is too soon for it to be measured.

**If you did this project again what changes might you make?**

We presumed that we would require training at a higher level. In reality we needed core training in order to ensure the foundations of the team were established.

**Section 6: What learning and outcomes from the project could be shared with the wider sector?**

**What else could be useful to capture what's coming out of the project?**

The internal staff and external employer survey which will be conducted towards the end of the year. This will show the impact that the project has played in increasing staff satisfaction and motivation and our services to our employers.

**What resources will be created that would be useful to share?**

We are in the process of producing a good practice guide on “How to conduct an Apprenticeship review” in line with the College’s quality and Skills Funding Agency guidelines.

**How could we use the learning from the project to drive forward the Further Education and Skills sector?**

By ensuring that processes and systems are in place to provide efficient quality provision to meet employers’ bottom line objectives.

**Section 7: Future planning**

**What next?**

- Further discussion to continue with curriculum raising awareness of College/employer issues through Partnership Advisor meetings.
- Employer responsiveness development day: an additional day planned to take place during Staff Conference week to evaluate efficiency and success, and make any amendments in preparation for the new academic year.
- Each area to provide information on their involvement at each stage of the Employer Journey to ensure that everyone has an understanding of what happens (new starters).
- Job shadowing: commercial team understanding curriculum/curriculum understanding commercial.

**What is the legacy?**

Work closer together as one College team, sharing good practice.



**Section 8: Further information**

Please supply contact details to help people who want to know more about the project.

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