

Investment in Productive Skills for Devon

Following the work of the Productive Skills for Devon partnership which contributed to the LPSA2 skills targets, we expect to receive over £2.1, in 'reward grant'.

A third of this goes to the County Council as the lead on the GCSE target and the remainder should be available to the partnership. This is still to be signed off by the government so we have made tentative allocations, but cannot make commitments for the moment. There is a 50:50 split between revenue and capital, as described below.

Revenue

The partnership reviewed its Delivery Plan and agreed that funding would be allocated under six headings:

1. Research
2. Organisational Support
3. Backing Young Devon
4. Transforming Devon's Skills
5. Growing Productive Skills
6. New Skills For Devon

Members of the partnership were invited to submit proposals against these themes and over 20 applications were received. The review panel was pleased with this level of interest but there is clearly much more to be done to foster cooperation between parties and to stimulate more innovative thinking. Also the proposals reflected the increasing shortage of match funding. Tentative decisions, pending confirmation of the availability of the reward grant, are:

1. Research

The Skills and Learning Intelligence Module (SLIM) at Exeter University will be commissioned to undertake more in depth work on skills gaps. A steering group is being formed which includes representatives of the four Local Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs) covering Devon, Torbay and Plymouth to ensure that the research informs and is informed by employer experience. There will be a special focus on the implications of the Growth Points of East of Exeter, Newton Abbot and Langage / Sherford.

2. Organisational Support

Each of the three Workforce Development Groups will be allocated £15k and the Exeter and Heart of Devon (EHOD) and North Devon ESBs will be eligible for £20k each to support their development.

3. Backing Young Devon

A proposal from Exeter College to provide business support for young people in the Exeter area was one of the most innovative proposals and the approach has potential for extension to other parts of the county.

Another £150k will be used to encourage the creation and take up of more apprentices, especially related to a 'green' theme. This initiative will flow from the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) for Devon and Torbay which is intended in the first phase to provide 157 jobs of 6 months duration. Apprentice opportunities should enable extension of some of this employment for beyond 6 months and would accommodate a range of skills levels.

4. Transforming Devon's Skills

Concentrating on more basic skills levels, funds will help to establish a Skills Shop in Exeter, extend the Learn Devon project by developing the infrastructure to improve access to QCF and support the outreach work of North Devon Pathfinder Trust.

5. Growing Productive Skills

This theme will be pursued through support for women's enterprise in Devon, managed by the Community Council of Devon, and by channelling resources for employee skills development to businesses in North Devon.

6. New Skills 4 Devon

This was a category which was under subscribed but there were two very appropriate initiatives which we were happy to support. One will flow from the research to be undertaken on the skills needs which will be generated by the employment creation in the Exeter Growth Point. The second is the Devon School of Social Entrepreneurs which will be formally launched on 12 January at Darlington when 20 students will embark on the course.

Capital

'Expressions of interest' were requested in order to provide an initial sieve of the schemes under development which might contribute to the partnerships targets. Eight proposals have been received which represent some very exciting potential developments in all corners of the county. As with the revenue funding, there is need for dialogue between partners to clarify how ideas are complementary, especially in Bideford and Newton Abbot. This review will be complete in January after which we shall be in a position to invite more detailed submissions from selected schemes.

Details of all this work and future updates can be found on the www.devoneconomy.co.uk website. If you would be interested in further involvement with the Productive Skills 4 Devon partnership, please contact Andrew Lightfoot at andrew.lightfoot@devon.gov.uk.