

Productive Skills for Devon

Held on Friday 22nd May 2009, 2pm
Okehampton Business Centre

Present:

Tim Jones (Chair)	DCBC	Andrew Lightfoot	DCC
Chris Lorimer	Exeter College	Philip Oldfield	Exeter City Council
Jeremy Filmer-Bennett	DCBC	Jen Brogan	DCC – Tourism Skills Network
Kate Foster	University of Exeter	Liz Abell	Devon Renaissance
Tony Skeel	LSC	Charlotte Hanson	Community Council of Devon
Tim Beavon	West Devon BC	Peter Harding	Community Council of Devon
Andrew Ashley	Enterprise Plymouth	Craig Marshall	Training Provider Network
Robin Makeig-Jones	North Devon +	Janet Sinclair	Job Centre Plus
Geoff Hallett	Connexions	John Davey	Connexions
David Rowe	University of Plymouth	Lucy Gough	DCC
Julia Foster	DCC	Ben Neild (in part)	SLIM
Debbie Passmore	South Devon Workforce Development Group		

Apologies:

Philip Done	NWDWDAG	Graham Morris	Plymouth Employment & Skills Board
Tracy Hill	Integria	Rosie Bates	DCC
Sally Kittle	Job Centre Plus	Karen Chapman	Job Centre Plus
John Willis	Skills for Life	Margaret Davidson	Adult & Community Learning
Janis Blacklaw	Skills for Life	Caroline Murphy	Train to Gain (Business Link)
Jenny Sparling	North Devon College		

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed the group. Introductions were given around the table.

Andrew L reported that the previous day the County Council Executive had decided that as PS4D has achieved 100% of its 4 targets, the LPSA Reward Grant should be given. £707,503 will go to DCC Children and Young People's Directorate for their role in achieving the GCSE target and £1,668,841 will go to PS4D for achieving the other 3 targets. Half of this money is capital. Discussion would take place at the next meeting as to how this money should be spent. Thanks and congratulations go to all who have been involved.

2. Research report from SLIM

Ben Neild from SLIM gave a presentation, based on the report that had been previously circulated. He emphasised that this is only statistical information, and that no analysis has been done on any of the figures to find out why they are as they are or whether they are good or bad. Also there is some lag in the data – this report covers up to September 2008. The next report is due in the Autumn.

It is important to remember that the national average for skills attainment has been increasing due to very poor areas improving their performance. Also, in the South West the Bath and North East Somerset area is one of the best performing areas in the country and so this increases the average figures for the region.

It is important that now that we have this data, that we have more discussion and debate on how we move forward and what the priorities should be. There is going to be money available through the Reward Grant. It was suggested that the Steering Group reconvene to discuss potential further areas for analysis.

Action: If anyone would like to be part of this Steering Group, please let Lucy know.

Action: Any thoughts or suggestions on areas for further analysis, please forward them to Ben directly - B.Neild@exeter.ac.uk

Also links should be made with the Devon Renaissance Business Survey, which could help with some of the analysis of the situation in rural areas. Liz commented that skills are now higher

on the investment agenda than they have been previously. There is also a marked increase in the desire for environmental skills.

Action: Liz to give a presentation on the results of the Devon Renaissance Business Survey in relation to skills at the next meeting.

3. Reports from each Employment and Skills Board and Workforce Development Group

Torbay and South Devon (Debbie Passmore):

- First employer's group meeting has been held – there was a skew towards businesses in Torbay which needs to be addressed. There was good attendance from the private sector, which is very positive. Customer service for younger employees and general all round management skills were identified as being required.
- Core partners are putting together bite sized projects to engage more partners and the wider public.
- Terms of reference have now been agreed. Contract details are still being dealt with for the Chair.
- Leadership and management training with South Devon College
- Employment Apprentice Reward Scheme for TQ1 – TQ5 postcodes.
- BOOST Event focusing on retail and hospitality sectors taking place on 11th June.

Plymouth (Andrew Ashley):

- Also trying to build on activities, similar to Torbay and South Devon.
- Aiming to set up a Retail Academy
- Have held providers meetings to find out what is currently being delivered and identify any gaps. These meetings were well attended, but met with mixed responses.
- City Development Corporation is awaiting a new Chief Executive so progress with skills development is on hold until then.

Exeter and Heart of Devon (Chris Lorimer/Philip Oldfield/Tony Skeel):

- Good participation, particularly from public sector. Need broader business engagement, and better engagement with voluntary sector.
- Have carried out business analysis of the legal sector to find out what skills are required.
- Janet from Job Centre Plus is involved – looking at the challenges that unemployment might bring. The situation has changed since ESBs were set up.

Exeter and Heart of Devon Workforce Development Group (Philip Oldfield):

- Generally good progress is being made – see statement sent out with the agenda for this meeting.
- Need for more funding and more analysis to be done.
- Trying to find out what activities providers would like to see developed/delivered and then exploring how they can be supported to provide this.
- Also looking at the 5 priority areas in the South West Recovery Framework, and trying to identify local key providers, whether there are any gaps and how would be best to help.

North Devon (Robin Makeig-Jones):

- The Board is still in the process of being set up – a meeting is being held in June to push things forward.
- Robin is keen to share best practice with other more established groups.

Andrew L commented that the Regional Employment Skills Partnership have produced a report on learning from each other. Also South West Council has a range of initiatives available, including support for research analysis of local skills requirements, consultancy and 2 annual networking events.

Action: Andrew L to circulate information to the group.



Also there is a second phase of RIEP funding available to look at ESB structures.

There was general discussion around the ESBs. Wider involvement is needed – FSB and Chambers of Commerce could be useful for this. Whilst the retail sector has been ignored by the RDA, it is important in Devon so should not be overlooked.

Generally events are more attractive than courses, as they tend to be more interactive and provide more networking opportunities. People will respond to slick presentations. There should be a focus on learner tailored delivery.

There is a problem that businesses are not looking strategically at the moment; they are focused more on survival. Examples from peers should be used to encourage investment in skills.

We should also be thinking about what we are trying to achieve for the economy in Devon in the long term and attempt to tailor training to this. For example the renewable energy and marine industries event that was held recently provided good networking opportunities for businesses operating in these sectors, which we should be encouraging to remain in Devon.

The role of PS4D is to provide the middle ground and encourage networking between related groups.

Jeremy gave an update to the group on the Area Action Force, which is an RDA facilitated group to deal with redundancies. Initially the focus was very much on Plymouth, but now they are looking to roll out into other areas, such as North Devon and EHOD. The strategic group covers the whole of Devon which is useful. In each area, work must be done with the appropriate Local Authority as political agreement is needed so that duplication is prevented.

The idea of a one stop shop has been piloted in Plymouth, but this concept may be more difficult to achieve in rural areas. Also Plymouth initially focused on redundancies at Princess Yachts, whereas in other areas the problem is more to do with cumulative redundancies rather than just one large employer.

Supply chain issues are also being looked at to try and identify potential problems before they arise.

4. Development of 'skills centres'

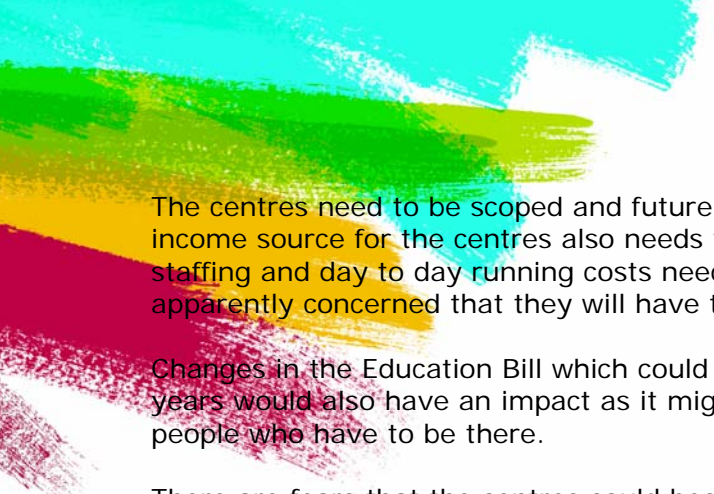
Julia Foster from DCC attended the meeting to talk to the group about 'skills centres'. This term means different things to different people, but generally it is about diversifying the curriculum for 14-19 year olds. Analysis needs to be done around where there are gaps in terms of what young people want and what is currently available to them. There is also then the difference between the perceived need and the actual need, what schools think is needed and what the economy needs in terms of skills.

Last summer there was the possibility of funding for 4 skills centres, one in each 14-19 partnership area, through Invest in Devon. It was agreed that one of these would be in Newton Abbot as there are sufficient numbers of people there. However, the other 3 area partnerships need to look at their own areas to see if there is a need and where.

Tony has previously written a paper on 'skills centres' which he can redistribute.

Action: Tony to redistribute his paper to the group.

There is drive from the government on the 14-19 agenda and in Devon there is the Employment Space strategy and the ICT strategy which could be used to help decide where these centres are built. There needs to be links to both the Regional Spatial Strategy which is due out this summer and the Building Schools for the Future project (BSF).



The centres need to be scoped and future proofed, but how should this be done? A sustainable income source for the centres also needs to be looked at. Craig commented that issues over staffing and day to day running costs need to be addressed as South Devon College are apparently concerned that they will have to take this on for the one in Newton Abbot.

Changes in the Education Bill which could raise the compulsory education age in the next 5 years would also have an impact as it might not be NEETs who are using the centres, but people who have to be there.

There are fears that the centres could become too schools led, it is important that there is business engagement too. Links need to be made between the 14-19 partnership areas and the ESBs. If skills are identified as being needed in an area, then this could influence courses that are available in the centres. Debbie Passmore reported that in Torbay and South Devon she is already attempting to engage with their 14-19 partnership.

Action: Andrew L to arrange a meeting between 14-19 partnership and ESB representatives

5. Application of the 'community learning host' model

Peter and Charlotte from Community Council of Devon gave a presentation on the 'community learning host' model which they have been applying successfully for a number of years now across Devon. It is a community led approach which aims to engage non traditional learners in rural areas.

After a general introduction to the model, Charlotte explained in more detail about one particular project known as WAM (Women and Micro Enterprise). This provides gender specific training, support and networking for women who run or are setting up their own businesses.

Key issues are sustainability – more stabling funding is needed – and the resourcing of the Learning Hosts, in terms of knowledge, skills and funding.

The presentation will be circulated shortly.

6. Proposals for NEO 3D and BOOM

Liz introduced these proposals, copies of which were distributed with the agenda for this meeting, which are from University College, London. It is a partnership approach, incorporating an IT package to link employers with unemployed people. They are keen to pilot the system in Devon and will provide match funding and resource staffing. Therefore, there is only a small funding requirement and engagement needed from this group.

Action: Liz to arrange a meeting / group to discuss these proposals in more detail.

Andrew A commented that there is already a similar system in Plymouth connecting neighbourhood and community organisations.

Andrew L mentioned PROMIS which provides similar services. Details can be found in the latest Devon Economy Strategy Quarterly Bulletin which is available on the DEP website, or on the Devon and Cornwall Business Council website.


7. Notes of meeting held on 18th March 2009

Minutes agreed.

8. News round up

PO – Exeter business support – an early intervention fund has been launched. 40% of companies have agreed to reduce their fees by 1/3 when providing advice/support.

JB – Tourism Skills Network – 200+ businesses trained in preparation for upcoming season. Autumn training is being planned. Targeted farm tourism courses through RDPE are available at Duchy College. Some generic courses have been run in conjunction with RE4D.



KF – Funding available to support graduates coming back into the area. More details at next meeting.

LA – 4 Local Action Programmes are now open – they are the only ones in the region. All have skills as part of the funding that can be offered. Funding is more likely to be offered for community led solutions to local problems/needs.

TB – Have been providing support to food and drink sector and promoting business improvement through skills training.

AA – There will be changes to business and enterprise support in the future. More details at the next meeting.

CM – DIUS consultation on apprenticeships is ending. The new guidance looks to be very prescriptive and this may cause problems, particularly for rural delivery.

GH – Work experience has not been as badly hit as previously thought. 25% of employers offering placements are new this year.

AL – Farm incomes seminar held on 18th May, providing information on both the past and the future. In the next 2-3 years all sectors are forecast to see a decline – this will have an impact on skills. There are also a number of other reports around that we need to be aware of such as Graduate Skills Torrington and the National Graduate Skills Survey. The Competitiveness programme is starting to take off too, with coaching and mentoring.

9. Date of next meeting:

Friday 17th July, 2pm at Job Centre Plus Offices, Exeter