

# WCS

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Developing Responsive Provision

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## Promoting Skills for Life to employers

Hull Adult Education Service (AES, formerly Hull Adult and Community Learning) investigated how they could work more effectively across all the training services offered in Hull City Council.

### Introduction

Hull Adult Education Service is part of Skills and Employability within Hull City Council. Through Skills for Life provision it offers formal accredited learning and informal learning in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), literacy and numeracy. The City Council through the 'Get on in Local Government' campaign ensures that all employees have access to literacy, numeracy and language provision. Courses are delivered in five major centres and over 150 outreach locations.

Skills and Employability has a training arm (Hull City Council Training) comprising four work-based training providers that offer a wide variety of NVQs and apprenticeships.



*Figure 1: Workplace team development meeting*

### The organisation and the Programme

Hull AES applied for places on the 'Promoting Skills for Life to Employers' workshop as a result of reduced recruitment to their Skills for Life courses.

### Context

Hull AES realised that there was an opportunity through Train to Gain to extend their provision in Skills for Life, utilising their experience in this field and tutor expertise. One of the issues was that promoting ESOL to employers had been easy when it was fully funded, but was far more challenging once employers had to make a contribution.

Three members of staff from ICT, ESOL and Skills for Life areas attended the one-day workshop. They were operational staff with employer development as a key part of their role. They aimed to:

- improve their marketing skills, as they were not from marketing backgrounds
- learn how to engage with employers and to highlight the importance of Skills for Life in the workplace
- plan how to move forward in the workplace with employers as partners.

The workshop gave them a focus to start developing thinking about their current provision and the way forward in the workplace with new funding streams and opportunities. The first action the group identified was the need to consider the employer offering a more joined-up and planned approach, so they set up a workplace team with members from the whole City Council including the other four training providers. They aimed to look at offering a needs analysis service that would offer joint solutions from all the providers – a more professional approach.

The first meeting of the workplace team established an overview of all the work and costs, checking what could be delivered in the workplace (including NVQs and Skills for Life), so they could set up a joint database and start to sell each other's products.

## Challenges and solutions

The main challenges were identified as:

- getting common meeting times for a group of busy people from different organisations
- overcoming the historical competitive element where providers were offering the same qualifications.

There has been support from senior management at the Hull ACL but a restructuring process has made it impossible to engage senior management support more widely across the council.

Communication has been via email and the minutes of meetings are distributed to all members of the workplace team. It is early days but feedback has been positive, and the service is looking to reinforce and maintain this joined-up internal marketing approach.

*This was an excellent course that made us really think about what we were offering to employers. It also helped us to focus on what we need to do to be successful in meeting our targets.*

Joanne Joveini, ESOL tutor, Hull Adult and Community Learning

## Key messages / learning points / outcomes

- Establish local workforce needs across the city to identify current skills needs and future developments.
- When looking to promote to employers check the wider picture of what they want and not just what you can deliver.
- Work together across the organisation so that you can build effective relationships with employers.
- Put the employer first – before your targets.
- Send trained staff to go into an organisation to find out what exactly the employer wants and/or needs.



*Figure 2: A learner completing his Level 2 literacy within his work environment – catering*

## Links

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## **Impact**

The move was intended to improve recruitment through more effective promotion but there have been wider benefits too, as outlined below.

- Hull City Council is providing a more comprehensive service to its employers and avoiding them being approached by different organisations at the same time.
- Each member of the workplace team is gaining knowledge about other qualifications and how they can work for the good of the employer and the learner.
- This enhanced knowledge has already led to more referrals for the workplace team.
- This has led to a joined-up approach to promoting externally to brokers.
- Working together has allowed the team to offer an extensive progression route of qualifications.
- Work has started on building up company profiles (starting with larger organisations first) to better plan targeted promotional activities.

## **Top tips**

- Plan your promotional activities across the organisation in a joined-up way.
- Appoint an organiser to set up, plan and implement the workplace team so that they meet regularly with a common focus.
- Invite the right people onto the group.
- Know your own and others' products.
- Understand your market through company profiles.
- Consider marketing internally as well as externally and to brokers.

## **Useful information**

Hull AES found materials from the development programme useful, particularly:

- 'Get on at work – overcoming the barriers': which allowed them to look at how employers may view training and how they could respond to these views positively (positive sell)
- the marketing and promotion materials, which were useful for developing a joint marketing strategy - allowing them to think of branding, potential workplace providers and the best possible ways of marketing to them
- the Framework to Measure and Improve Employer Responsiveness which allowed them to assess their organisations and infrastructure to develop a marketing strategy.  
See <http://wcs.excellence.qia.org.uk/errp>

## **Next steps**

This work is still in its infancy as only two meetings have been held. However, there are plans to improve the professionalism of the marketing materials and to ensure that all the training providers are represented on them, including a planned joint brochure for Hull City Council's workplace training.

The intention is to move away from the current 'cold-calling' approach and develop more relationship selling, based on a comprehensive offer and an up-to-date database with details from all providers.