

## LSIS funded Improving training and related services for employers

### PROVIDER END OF PROJECT REPORT

**Project title:** Building and sustaining mutually beneficial learning relationships with employers – helping them develop their greatest asset.

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

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

Chichester College is a large general further education college in the south east of England. We work with many employers and have held Action for Business College, the Training Quality Standard and EFQM 5 stars.

The project aims to strip away jargon and bureaucracy when engaging with employers, concentrating on building meaningful, long lasting learning relationships.

The project emerged because although Chichester College works hard to build and sustain employer relationships, we were process driven and sales orientated. Other employer facing teams did not see it as their job role to engage with employers to help them solve their problems. Our vision statement, Changing Lives through Learning applies to everyone and we wanted to ensure that it was accessible to all. It also aligns with two of our key core values.

- Commitment to excellence in all that we do.
- Having a can do attitude.

We wanted to look at things from the employers' perspective, test out how they want to engage with us, and alter our methodology to match it.

Our aim is to become a critical friend who listens effectively, understands what the problems are, proposes and provides meaningful, workable solutions and delivers. Staff who are employer facing will have the confidence through training and a tool kit to become that critical friend, and will build the trust and sustainable relationships to ensure that our approach will endure, meeting employers needs, with a consistent approach. We want to be the first port of call for employers, whatever those problems may be. We want to be able to show them how our help has provided measurable solutions and had a demonstrably positive impact on their business.

#### **Section 2: Activities**

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

The following teams and people were involved in the project.

- The employer sales teams.
- The skills centre teams.

- The apprentice liaison teams.
- Managers from the Workforce Skills Directorate and the Learning and Development unit.
- Internal and external trainers and lecturers.

#### **What's happened so far?**

- Various meetings to explain what the project is about and to get buy-in from other managers.
- Two training events have taken place so far, the third is scheduled for the 25 April 2012.
- Joined up team meetings have taken place to talk about employers.
- Staff and managers from other teams have attended and assisted with great confidence and ability at employer events.
- The sales team have re-designed the organisational needs analysis through a facilitated training session; this will form part of the toolkit that employers may not see.
- Four case studies have been produced on very different employers and these will also form part of the toolkit.
- The sales team have suggested that they mentor assessors to build up their confidence when speaking with employers.

#### **What has been achieved?**

- Staff that did not have the confidence to interact with employers are now empowered to do so, and have helped with training events and also to clarify training and skills needs with them.
- Teams now recognise that they are one big team, working towards one goal with employers so the approach is becoming consistent.
- Regular monthly meetings now take place with all of the teams present to discuss our work with employers.
- Trainers and lecturers now have the confidence and skills to design training solutions specifically for individual employers, either by adapting existing material or by designing bespoke solutions. They also have the confidence to clarify through effective listening exactly what the employer needs.

### **Section 3: Success factors and challenges**

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

- Staff feel empowered to work with employers without using forms and processes as props.
- The teams see where they fit into one big team and how their roles are critical to our work with employers as a result of training and buy-in from their managers.
- Our approach to working with employers is far more consistent and much simpler.

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

- The trainer identified originally to deliver for us pulled out at the last minute due to other commitments, so we had to find another trainer and ensure that they received a very thorough brief on what the project aimed to achieve.
- One of the attendees on the second training course for trainers and lecturers could not visualise or grasp the relevance of how they could alter training to suit the needs of employers in their sector.
- Logistics, as we struggled to accommodate 20 people for the first training session as we originally only planned for four attendees (this is also a positive point as the project clearly had robust buy in from managers and teams.)

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

- For a replacement trainer we offered the work to a trusted external trainer who had management, College and employer experience themselves.
- One of our other trainers produced some key pointers for the attendee who could not grasp the relevance of the training to try and reinforce the benefits of designing and delivering contextualised or bespoke training solutions.
- Booking accommodation for the third training event that anticipates high attendance.

**Section 4: How has something changed?****What difference has the project made?**

- Teams are empowered, enthused and confident when engaging with employers and own the solutions.
- We have stripped away some bureaucratic layers and processes.
- A toolkit is being produced for all employer facing staff which will continue to evolve.
- There is now a one team approach as opposed to the silo effect where teams did not interact with each other.
- The sales team will mentor the assessing team.

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

- A unified, simplified and consistent approach to working with employers is being developed which is easily understood by all who are involved.
- Learners will get the training and skills they need to provide or be part of the solution to their employers' problems.
- Staff see how this approach aligns with our vision, strategy and core values and how their contribution is critical for success.
- Staff have embraced the one team, consistent approach and willingly cooperate with each other as they own the solutions.
- Employers will not be subject to process driven interactions, laden with jargon or be the recipients of a scatter gun communication approach.
- Employers will be able to see and measure impact simply via problem identified, solution proposed, solution delivered and difference to business.

- Mutually beneficial relationships are and will be developed and sustained between the College and employers.

#### **How are you measuring the impact?**

- We are beginning to build up a toolkit which includes employer case studies.
- We have identified a customer relationship management system administrator who will help build and run reports on repeat business (thus measuring longevity and sustainability of relationships.)
- Employer activity is now a standing agenda item at our joint team meetings where we discuss all aspects of employer engagement.
- We will carry out annual employer surveys and will build in questions to measure the impact of our work with employers.
- Assessors will be assigned a mentor from the sales team.

### **Section 5: Reflections on learning**

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

- We changed the length of the training sessions and opened them up to more attendees. This was as a result of the initial briefing session with managers who wanted more staff to benefit but could not commit two day blocks of time.
- We took the emphasis away from selling and market share as it became evident that these became barriers to building and sustaining productive relationships with employers. Listening skills became more appropriate.
- We decided to facilitate rather than train the sales team when re-designing the organisational needs analysis as the feedback verbally from the first training session indicated that they wanted to take ownership for it, rather than have the finished version presented to them.

#### **What has worked well?**

- The one team approach and joint meetings.
- The toolkit approach.
- Training to empower all employer facing staff with the confidence and skills to work directly with employers.

#### **What needs improving?**

- Capturing employer feedback for the customer relationship management system.
- The toolkit is an ongoing portfolio and is not developed fully yet. This must be sustained and grown.
- Some employer facing delivery staff would benefit from a fresh look at their roles, and there needs to be exploration of why they work with employers.

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

- Include and target staff and managers from specific curriculum areas who have indirect contact with employers via their learners.
- Include some appropriate executive managers and possibly governors as they have a lot of experience and often engage with employers.

## **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?**

- We would be happy to deliver training sessions to other beneficiaries.
- We would be happy to share our organisational needs analysis once it has been tested out fully.
- We would be happy to feedback on how successful the mentoring activities between the sales team and assessors have been.

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

- Training materials.
- Organisational needs analysis which may not be completed in the presence of the employer.
- Format for an employer engagement toolkit.

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

- To drive and develop sustainable employer relationships without jargon or bureaucracy.
- To use a simple approach based around listening skills looking at identifying a problem, suggesting a solution, delivering a solution, measuring the impact of the solution.
- Above all, to ensure that there is a consistent approach to employer engagement and buy-in from all employer facing teams.

## **Section 7: Future planning**

### **What next?**

- Continue to build the toolkit.
- Elicit feedback from employers on our approach to employer engagement.
- To ensure that continuous professional development takes place for employer facing staff.

### **What is the legacy?**

- An employer engagement business model that works for all stakeholders, thus increasing business for all stakeholders.

## **Section 8: Further information**

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

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