



# Collage Arts

## Rinova Consortium Provider Quality Partnership

Collage Arts is an established learning provider and operates as a charity and a company limited by guarantee. It has implemented learning, skills and employability programmes for more than 17 years.

It is a founding and leading member of the Rinova Consortium, which was established in late 2010. The particular focus of the consortium is the utilisation of dynamic and innovative learning provision in Creative and Media, Performing Arts, Sport, Active Leisure, Fitness and Fashion to engage and re-engage young people, particularly those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), aged 16 to 25.

During the course of 2011, the consortium, led by Collage Arts, contracted for the first time with North Hertfordshire College to design and implement new sector apprenticeship provision.

### **The catalyst / driver for reviewing the governance structure**

In late 2011 Collage Arts was appointed by the Skills Funding Agency to operate a major pan-London European Social Fund programme

to provide learning and progression to young people NEET aged 16-19 years. This programme, 'Aspire 2 Apprenticeships', built on the fact that, for the first time, Collage Arts was funded by the SFA in 2011 for apprenticeships (via North Hertfordshire College).

Both of these initiatives were developed through a consortium, co-ordinated by a new social enterprise formed in part for this purpose (Rinova Ltd), and consisting of experienced, community-based third sector learning providers including WAC Performing Arts and Media College, Transforming a Generation (TAG), 15Billion (formerly London East Connexions) and Fashion Enter.

The particular focus of the Consortium is the utilisation of dynamic and innovative learning provision in Creative and Media, Performing Arts, Sport, Active Leisure, Fitness and Fashion to engage and re-engage young people, particularly those who are NEET, aged 16 to 25, working closely together to implement Skills Funding Agency and Department of Work and Pensions learning and employability provision for FE colleges, local authorities and 'prime' contractors.

North Hertfordshire College was the first college to work with the Consortium; they led the way in addressing the governance and contracting issues that arose from Skills Funding Agency rules about working with a consortium that was itself un-constituted and co-ordinated by a managing body. This helped remove unnecessary barriers to innovation and diversity of provision, thus increasing learner choice. As a founding college of the National Skills Academy (NSA) for the Sector Skills Council for Creative and Cultural Skills, the College was keen to support the NSA in extending the number of available sector apprenticeships.

Collage Arts has progressed from sub-contracting to become a directly-funded Skills Funding Agency provider for NEET provision for 2011-15, and in this context wished to develop a shared governance model within its consortium of delivery partners. There was a need to review its partnership governance with a view to formalising structures that could support new partnerships arising from the introduction of Minimum Contract Levels by the Skills Funding Agency. Reviewing governance was also driven by the desire to move towards collaborative quality assurance through the Consortium, bringing together both experienced and less experienced providers of Skills Funding Agency-funded learning provision, partnering established FE colleges and looking to make the most of the call for innovation and the new freedoms in **'New Challenges, New Chances'**.

## **The review process**

The Consortium manager, Rinova, co-ordinated the review and worked closely with Collage Arts, who to date have been the main contractor with North Hertfordshire College and who have been contracted to the pan-London SFA NEET programme. The process consisted of a number of specific

strands. Each consortium partner involved in the review appointed a lead contact. The review process began with three actions:

- a consortium meeting at which the rationale to the review was discussed and priorities were identified;
- consultation with and advice from the LSIS-appointed officer; and
- the production of an action plan, arising from the above.

During a six-week period in February and March, a series of individual review meetings was held between each participating partner and the Development Manager at Rinova. This review included a focus on some of the governance and contracting issues that arose in 2011: the successes, and some of the barriers (for instance, Skills Funding Agency strictures on sub-contracting). It reviewed the experience to date of developing the capacity and capabilities to deliver apprenticeships and examined the mechanisms that have been developed to date to govern these relationships.

## **Stakeholder involvement and questions**

The Consortium had set out to differentiate itself in a number of ways. It is focused on young people aged 16-25 and on the thematic use of non-formal learning through the creative industries, sport and active leisure.

It also set out to develop a new, innovative practitioner-led approach to collaborative working as an alternative to the situation where a lead body or college simply sub-contracts to a 'middle-man' – referred to in some regimes as a 'sub-prime' – which in turn sub-contracts further to other parties. There is a tendency to move in this direction, which began in Welfare to Work circles and

is now appearing in SFA and Young People's Learning Agency contracting at an ever greater pace. It is the stated intention of government and the Skills Funding Agency to increase the size of the skills, learning and employment contracts that it lets, while simultaneously reducing the number of organisations that it contracts with. At the same time, it is moving ever more rapidly towards payment on results (e.g. qualification and employment outcomes) through the appointment of 'prime contractors' who in turn work with 'sub-primes' operating at various tiers in the supply chain.

The Consortium has attempted to cultivate a new model of peer leadership and open up these experiences to the wider consortium, by offering a more 'bottom-up' approach. In this, the 'practice' organisations are working together with the College, which is supported as an enabler, to bring together people, strategies, partnerships and resources, with a process of embedded quality at the centre of the learner journey, (initial assessment, induction, progress reviews, achievement and progression), giving stronger ownership to the developing providers and providing FE with successful delivery. This is consistent with the culture of most of the partners, who have origins in non-formal learning environments, but which need to be complemented with new robust processes.

As a strictly governance initiative, therefore, the process raised a number of governance questions in our consultations and review. In particular, this pilot work has raised an issue regarding the nature of successful and appropriate business models suitable for both the College and the training providers (separately and collectively). European Social Funds are now included in many mainstream Skills Funding Agency learning programmes and have a requirement that limits tiers of sub-contracting. How can we contract collectively and collaboratively as a consortium

partnership without falling foul of these rules, i.e. where one consortium member or the Consortium coordinator holds a contract on behalf of all?

## Conclusions, lessons and next steps

In addressing the drivers for the review and the questions above, the Consortium partners concluded that in governance terms the project had added-value benefits by highlighting a number of key issues that would need to be addressed, and acted as a catalyst in making some early progress against them. In terms of its aims going forward, the Consortium would measure its success against a set of performance indicators, which would include:

- formalising the Consortium's public statements of its aims and rationale through the development and implementation of MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) that would set out the Consortium's operating rationale;
- the creation and implementation of a robust Service Level Agreement (SLA) framework to govern collaborative partnership working as a contractual mechanism;
- the development and improvement of consortium member self-assessment reports (SARs) and quality improvement plans (QIPs) to incorporate collaborative partnership working; and
- agreement on a strategy to accept additional new consortium members and effectively capacity- build them to college delivery standards.

Specifically, as a result, a new SLA has been developed by Collage Arts to support the partners in contracting with SFA provision, and

a draft MoU has been drawn up between two consortium members (15Billion and TAG) and the Consortium coordinator, with others due to follow.

The Consortium also concluded that as a relatively new network, its method of governance as an un-constituted association of independent organisations was, for the time being, fit for purpose. Although there have been some complications in presentation, branding and contracting, it is felt that the current approach (where each consortium member contracts individually with the College, or where one of the consortium acts as a contract or sub-contract lead on behalf of the members, supported by the Consortium coordinator) is preferable to the alternatives at this stage. However, it will continuously review the experience of collaborative working with the option remaining of forming a joint vehicle, such as a Community Interest Company (CIC).

The partnership between the Rinova Consortium through Collage Arts and North Hertfordshire College has been an excellent and innovative example of how to facilitate the community involvement called for by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in the Colleges in their Communities Inquiry, chaired by Baroness Sharp. This has resulted in new provision being located and implemented at the local level and is ensuring that long-standing and quality learning provision, which may be impacted on negatively by the new requirements for Minimum Contract Levels, can be protected and improved.

This partnership has highlighted the measurable benefits of collaborative working in terms of 'New Challenges, New Chances', which has given all colleges greater flexibility to develop this joint venture model through 'strategic governance for an dynamic FE sector' and, through the creation of new provision, supporting 'a ladder of opportunity of comprehensive vocational education and training programmes'.

In terms of addressing the quality agenda, the Consortium wishes to build on its first year by developing its collective capability more strategically, taking advantage of the benefits of working as a consortium as opposed to operating as single providers. It is committed to constituting a Peer Review and Development (PRD) group to explore improvement through self-assessment and the development needs that would form the basis for further collaborative quality assurance improvements. It has recently secured LSIS support to focus on improvements in teaching and learning.