

# Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

## Sharing tools to help the unemployed find and keep jobs



### Lincoln College and its provision for the unemployed

While conducting an analysis of the local labour market, Lincoln College identified a significant need for skilled workers in care homes, hospitality and tourism, in retail and in security.

"Lincolnshire has an ageing population and there are skills gaps to be found in care homes across the county," Carol Smith, the College's Employer Engagement Manager, said.

"Security is another area where there is a demand for jobs, not just for door work in shops, bars, and clubs locally, but security and events management at festivals and even at the Olympics."

Armed with this intelligence, Carol believes her team is best able to deliver the right training to help the unemployed find and hold down jobs available in their area.

"We look first at where the jobs are, and then we structure our courses to support those," she explained. "There are a lot of retail organisations in the process of expanding. One supermarket has opened a new store locally, another has doubled in size.

"We run courses to support their recruitment. For the long term- unemployed, it might mean confidence building and motivation courses."

In 2010, Lincoln College ran training courses for 1,300 unemployed people, of whom 26 per cent are now in employment. "That success rate figure of 26 per cent is reasonable but there is room for improvement," she added.

"We have an action plan to improve our success rates, and we are working with a Business Improvement Group, as part of the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme, on that project."

### The SER programme Business Improvement Group

Lincoln College is working with a group of organisations involved in job training programmes throughout Lincolnshire. It includes two other colleges, Boston and Grantham, and 14 private training companies.

In the first three months of 2011 Lincoln College hosted a series of workshops aimed at sharing ideas, expertise and good practice, in order to improve training for the unemployed and to ensure training is tailored to jobs.

"The objective of the group is finding innovative ways of engaging with employers to enable us to find work for our learners," Carol added.

"At our first meeting in January we focused on embedding recruitment activity into organisational strategy by working as a recruitment agency in some sort of guise.

"We have had three meetings since then. We have also looked at our organisational strategies and labour market intelligence, our marketing strategies and selling our courses to employers, and finding jobs for individuals.

"Finally we looked at the transition from being unemployed to employed, looking at the behaviours and attitudes that help people stay in a job."

### **Using the LSIS 'pre-employment tool'**

The workshops were structured around issues covered in an LSIS "pre-employment tool", a 28-page document which sets out a "framework to assess and improve the delivery of programmes for the unemployed".

Carol was on a team that worked on producing the pre-employment tool. The framework was devised with input from 18 managers, senior managers and practitioners working on Programmes for the Unemployed (PfU) who were recruited as "sector champions".

She explained: "The pre-employment tool is a framework that looks at all the different elements an organisation is likely to need to consider to get people into work. It looks at organisational strategy and communication strategy.

"It is a way of asking if we have looked at the market, is the training we are doing meeting the needs of employers and the individuals coming through, and have we got the right resources to deliver it?"

"I was involved in writing the tool, and we tested it in our own organisation. It was recognised that there was a requirement to engage more with employers in relation to getting learners into work."

She said the pre-employment tool sets out to enable training organisations to measure themselves as to their effectiveness and readiness to be delivering programmes for the unemployed, asking them to assess their performance on a five-point scale.

The framework was shared with the group attending the workshops. "It was very good for them as a starting point in terms of where they were with their strategy, their marketing and their organisational readiness. It was a very good spring board."

### **Identifying success factors**

The pre-employment tool highlights the importance of labour market intelligence (LMI) in developing training programmes. Carol explained how her team developed its LMI by looking at several source documents from organisations including Lincolnshire Enterprise and the Skills Board who had conducted surveys into the skills needs of employers in the area. They also carried out further research by speaking to the employers they work with about their particular needs.

Other elements that emerged as crucial to the success of PfU were good information, advice and guidance and the importance of screening the individual on what their skills are to enable the learner to make the right choices based on good information.

The workshops also shared expertise in conducting organisational needs analysis (ONA) to assess the training needs and job requirements of employers and in measuring impact and identifying the benefits for the employer.

## Impact of the Business Improvement Group

Participants gave feedback on how the workshops would help them develop their PfU. Natalie Spratt of Boston College said: "We will look at using a recruitment agency angle in our strategy to expand employer engagement."

Lisa Wilkinson of the Mouchel Learning Partnership said: "This will enable us to access and analyse information so we can develop our business and enter new areas." Ann Crockett-McClean of Focus Management added: "We will look at recruitment opportunities and identifying what we excel at."

The LSIS framework to assess and improve the delivery of programmes for the unemployed can be found on the Excellence Gateway at [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/293394](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/293394)

*Current as at March 2011*

The Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme is funded by LSIS. It is a sector led programme tasked with increasing the capacity of all providers in the learning and skills sector to work with employers and help address the current and future skills needs of their business and workforce.

The SER programme is managed in the **East of England, East Midlands and West Midlands** by ALP, the 157 Group, NIACE and AoC. It offers support in three key strands:

- Employer responsiveness
- Apprenticeship provision
- Pre-employment provision and transition into work.

The Programme offers a variety of support including workshops, webinars, coaching and tailored support.

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