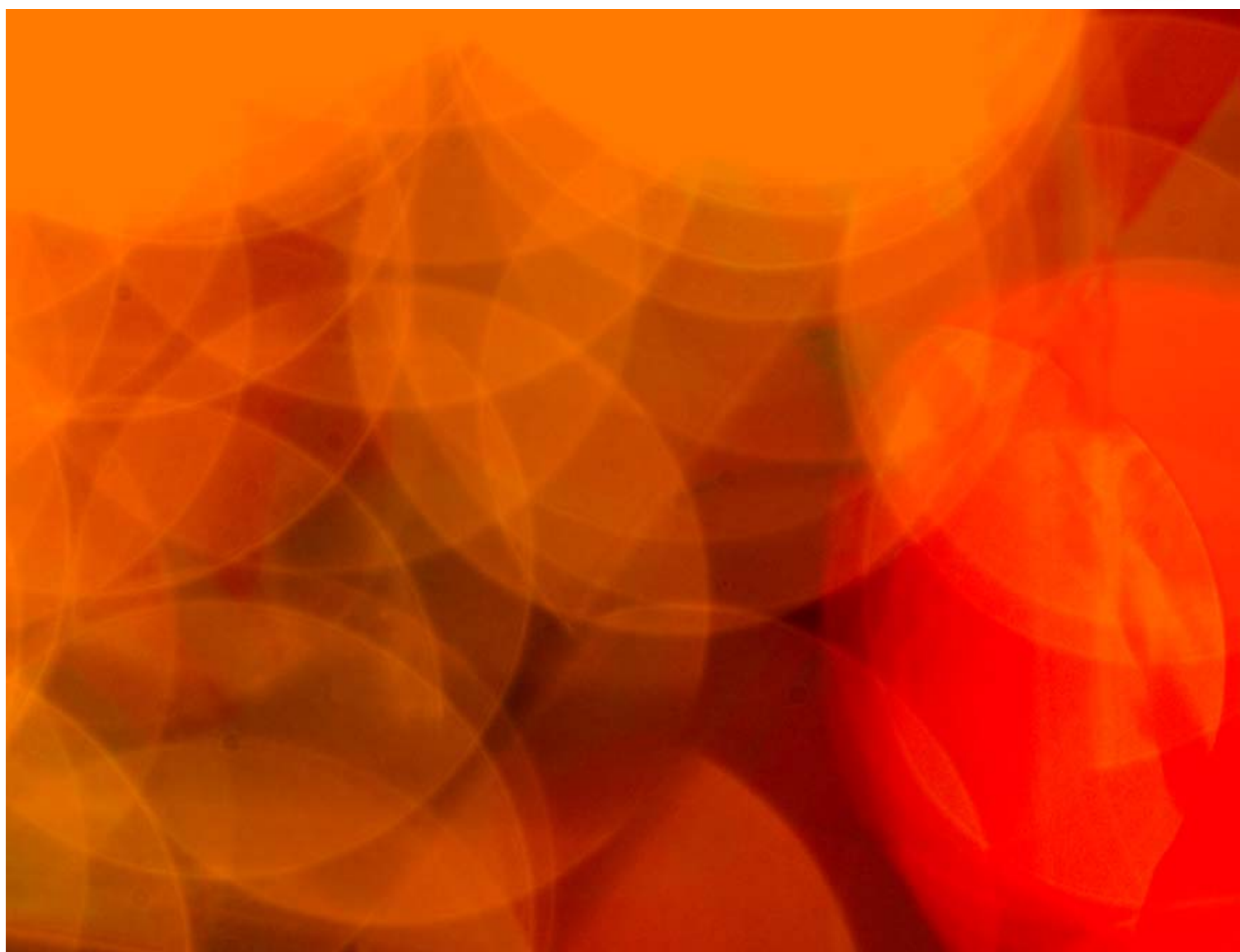


# WCS

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Developing Responsive Provision

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## Developing high quality, low risk delivery

<b>Organisation</b>	New College Durham
<b>Location</b>	Durham
<b>Type of Organisation</b>	FE / HE College
<b>Scale of Programme</b>	500 TtG Learners in 2007-08
<b>Subject</b>	Waste management, labouring, plant and weighbridge operations Level 2

New College Durham's mission is to provide first class learning and training for individuals, business and the community. Its longstanding core business is 14-18 and Higher Education. While it has worked on employer initiatives for a long time, following the publication of the Foster Report, Realising the Potential – A review of the future role of FE Colleges, the College's Senior Executive Group decided in 2005 to move strategically into employer-responsive provision.

A core team of three staff – Len Stule, Head of Business Development, Bev Hart, Business Development Manager and Peter McLoughlin, Project Manager – were appointed to develop this new income stream.

Len thinks that the Whole Organisation Consultancy (WOC) received through the Development Programme for TtG was critical in enabling the College to move forward, but notes "You get as much out of the consultancy as you put in. The consultant doesn't do the work - they assist you in doing it and establish timelines for you to achieve it."

He's an advocate of the QIA Framework to measure and improve employer responsiveness. " Once we had that, and a position audit, that's when senior managers sat down together and said 'We're going to do something about this' ... it produces a logical reasoned approach ... it got buy-in."

The College now has a development plan approved and resourced by the Senior Management Team (SMT). An Employer Engagement Steering Group involving three members of the SMT leads the development activity. They have developed a strategic plan, brand, website, client relationship

management (CRM) system, quality procedures, curriculum planning process, a business plan and risk assessment – and set a deadline for obtaining the Training Quality Standard (TQS). Len points out that the clock starts ticking as soon as you register for the TQS. He recommends attending an awareness workshop and obtaining the 'blue book' (Assessment Guidance and Evidence Framework) to find out what is involved, then setting a realistic timeframe for making an application.

The Development Programme for TtG was crucial, Len says, in getting the senior management team of the College to buy in fully to the development of employer responsive provision. This meant taking a commercial risk – which so far has paid off handsomely.

Part of the development activity has been to evolve a method of minimising risk in delivering Train to Gain (TtG) activity, by working closely with a range of external delivery partners. This case study illustrates this approach.

### Matching customers and partners: the first project

Len and Bev reviewed the opportunities for employer engagement locally, and identified quarries as one of their potential markets, with ongoing needs for health & safety and operational compliance.

In discussion with Premier Waste Management, a delivery partner providing Level 4 Qualifications at W&M Thompsons (Quarries Ltd), they identified that the quarry workforce had other learning needs that could be met by the College. Premier is a waste

management company that has set up its own training arm, and its assessors have an excellent reputation in the quarries and landfill market in the North East. So Thompsons were keen to work with them in tandem with the College.

Bev Hart, Business Development Manager – with a passion for bringing training and qualifications to people who have traditionally not been served by the education system – went to meet Eddie Collins, Quarry Operations Manager. The quarry is in Bishop Middleham, a small village outside Durham, and has a workforce of some 35 longstanding employees, typically men aged 40+ who have lived and worked in the North East all their lives.

Bev and Eddie identified that a Level 2 NVQ in Waste Management would build the skills and confidence of the workforce and demonstrate that the quarry complied with requirements.

### **Getting the programme up and running**

Skill levels were assessed and a training plan was developed with the candidates, management, and Premier as the delivery agency. Training was then rolled out over a 4 week period, covering the agreed areas for development, prior to assessment for the NVQ. The training covered health & safety, but also softer skills such as customer service and team building.

There were many reasons why the workforce didn't want to get involved at first, not least a track record of limited exam success and a fear of training and assessment. Bev says constant communication was key to success: explaining what's involved in a warm and friendly way.

Initially eleven men at the quarry completed a qualification. Eddie says: "From a business point of view, the New College offer was ideal for us. Everything happened on site during working hours, so there was no loss of time and little loss of production. What Bev offered fitted perfectly with our training plan. The men enjoyed the course - they were a bit

apprehensive at first, thought it would be like being back at school, but the trainers were excellent at handling the lads and it got to the point where they really looked forward to the next session."

Len and Bev were delighted too:

"This is Train to Gain at its absolute best. It's more rewarding than anything else I've done in my professional career." (Bev Hart)

"This is the true spirit of Train to Gain – training people with skills to the required standard to be recognised through a qualification. It simply wouldn't have happened without Train to Gain – these people would not have gained training and qualifications in any other way." (Len Stule)

### **Building on success – repeat and new business results**

As a result of this first successful initiative, New College have been invited back by W&M Thompsons (Quarries Ltd), to provide Level 2 qualifications for plant operators and weighbridge operators, at several different quarries. To date, some 50 qualifications have been achieved overall, and the employees appreciate both the training and the recognition of their skills. For many, this is the first and only qualification they have achieved.

The business, too, is in no doubt about the value of the training: "There's a real difference in attitudes to health and safety at work" comments Eddie Collins. "Work areas are much tidier now, and the men come forward more with ideas about how things could be improved. As a manager, I'm delighted that they've got really involved in looking after their own and others' safety."

### **Extending the provider and employer network**

To provide the plant operation qualification, New College chose to work in partnership with KD Construction, based in Yeovil, which specialises in plant operations. This partnership grew out of local networking which led them to John Gray, a former pit man with extensive quarry experience and now Partner in KD Construction.

The College is also now active in another organisation – the John Wade Group in Aycliffe, County Durham - a mixed company covering the waste sector, quarrying, and plant hire. Here again they have returned a number of times to deliver TtG funded NVQs. Topics include waste management, labouring, plant and weighbridge operations.

“There are three main business drivers” explains Bruce Whitley, Operations Director. “Within the industry there’s an expectation - and pressure from the Health & Safety Executive – that all staff will have at least Level 2 qualifications. For the business there’s a definite benefit of greater safety awareness - there’s a noticeable difference in attitude and approach when staff have been through formal, structured training. We add on specific updates ourselves through Toolbox Talks, and now we feel we’re building on solid foundations. Then there’s the benefit to individuals – the men really feel they’ve achieved something with the qualification.”

So far, 60 qualifications have been achieved. The programme is ongoing, picking up changes of staff role and new staff. Going through the relevant NVQs is now part of everyone’s induction. As Bruce Whitley says “Once you’ve caught up, there’s no point in falling behind again”.

### **Lessons learnt and next steps – honing the business model**

The overriding lessons learnt are that:

- This business model for employer responsive provision works well for New College!
- The QIA Framework to measure and improve employer responsiveness is very helpful tool in development planning.

Of the business model, Len Stule says “We make it a true three-way partnership. The College takes care of all the customer care, financial, project and quality management, and the contract with LSC. Our delivery partners focus on what they do best – training and assessment – and together we give employers a seamless service.”

Bev Hart is responsible for sourcing all the employer-responsive contracts, providing employers with learner and assessor packs, and ensuring that all the data that employers need to provide is collected in a single, simple process.

She and Len select and quality assure delivery partners on a project by project basis. This minimises the financial risk for the College, while maximising its flexibility to respond to employer need. The College currently works with seven partner agencies and is expanding their delivery network as new learning needs come on stream.

Len and Bev are aware that it’s possible to saturate a training market, and that changing economic circumstances mean some sectors may shrink as others grow. They are constantly reviewing labour market intelligence to identify new product lines. Currently employer responsive work stands at £4.5m turnover, almost 20% of income, and New College is committed to maintaining and increasing the level of employer engagement.

#### **Tools and links**

*The framework to measure and improve employer responsiveness* is available at:

<http://wcs.excellence.qia.org.uk/errp>

This diagnostic tool is recommended to assess a provider organisation's current position and to enable internal agreement on strategy for improvement.

The homepage for TQS, the Training Quality Standard (formerly called the New Standard) is:

<http://www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk/>