

PRD project – case study

Building effective practice in partnership working to support young adults (18- 24) to progress to employment, including apprenticeships



Project title – ‘Stargazing’; the NEET Review Group – identifying and sharing progress in the efficacy of current provision

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Sharing practice and experiences across a range of partners

Contact information

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Name of Peer Review and Development (PRD) group:

Participating organisation(s): see appendix 1

The geographic focus for this work mirrored the spread of Learning Curve’s delivery partners and members; across the South West and part of Southern England – from Hampshire to Cornwall and up to Wiltshire and Gloucestershire

What the PRD group set out to do and why

Although the majority of young people succeed in education and make a positive transition to adult life and the world of work there is still a significant number who need further resources to enable them to succeed. Anecdotal evidence (gathered from meetings and other formal and informal contacts) indicate that individual providers do offer a tailored range of interventions, usually as a direct response to individuals. As a result, providers and partners often feel that they are re-inventing the wheel; that someone somewhere has already addressed this issue in their programmes, but they have not identified who or how to share experiences.

We decided to focus on facilitating partners to share the good practice that improves engagement, retention, achievement and sustained progression of learners – especially those who have come from the NEET cohort

The anticipated outcomes were:

- increased collaboration between partners;
- greater understanding of the needs of the NEET group;
- more effective programmes and progression support for the target group;
- an on-line resource of useful tips, information, links and comments;

..... with the ultimate aim of building capacity to establish, develop and sustain effective partnership working to respond to the needs of this group.

What has been achieved so far

In April an article was posted in the Learning Curve Newsletter as a precursor to a survey through Survey Monkey. This was to alert partners and others in the project (aims and outcomes) so it did not 'just appear out of nowhere'.

Later in April a survey was published through Survey Monkey. This had a number of tick-box and range-response questions as well as some free text boxes. The invitation to complete went out on Learning Curve's website, via Facebook and Twitter and also an email to the 700 recipients of the newsletter.

The aims of the survey were to;

- clarify what constitutes good practice – what partners did; what they tried that did not work; what they felt needed changed but was out of their control, eg needed done by another organisation such as the job centre, Skills Funding Agency;
- how to share this effectively to improve outcomes for target group – what they did already and what they felt they could/should do;
- their experience of gathering learner views – how and what they did with the evaluations;
- the format of future resources and support that Learning Curve could provide or support.

One set of questions in the survey was to establish any appetite for collaborative work and if so, the format and location. Following this a series of hub groups were planned, but in the event only one in Bristol was delivered.

The format of the Bristol event was based around an input of current policy on NEET, changes in the landscape such as changes in Connexions and the Raising of the Participation Age and exploring statistics, as well as exploratory sessions looking at themes and issues such as:

- are there any approaches that can be effective across a diverse range of learners and barriers?
- what does the jargon really mean and imply? – individualised learning, high quality etc.
- what are the priorities and who are the players when establishing and delivering successful provision.

The event also covered a brief description of other PRD projects and the on-line tools and resources on the Excellence Gateway as a precursor to a discussion as to what the attendees felt was appropriate on-going support and collaboration. Notes on the feedback of the exploratory sessions are attached at appendix 2 (although not all comments will be immediately understood by non-participants)

What still needs to be done

The project has now reached the stage of putting into practice some of the suggestions as to on-going support and collaboration, both online and face to face. A meeting has been set up with Learning Curve's IT and marketing specialists this month (September) to explore both existing and possible new options for creating an on-line platform for partners to share knowledge and expertise.

Resources to be shared with the sector

Work in progress

Key learning points

Surveys

Surveys can have very poor response rates. In this case the information and a link were sent in a 'scatter gun' approach to all contacts of Learning Curve. This resulted in some unexpected responses that did not fit with others. Out of 700 possible responses (the number of contacts it was sent to) just over 20 responded so nothing could be deemed to be statistically significant! However, it was considered enough to be a starting point for some of the questions in the subsequent event and also to establish an appetite for hub groups. (Although 78% said that they shared practice informally with other organisations known to them, 79% of respondents said that they would find formal sessions very or quite useful, with a further 21% stating 'of some use' – so that's 100% then that would find some use in hub sessions) . 84% said they wanted to participate regularly in a hub group.

Hub groups

The first one set up attracted less than six participants and was cancelled. Subsequent informal discussion led to the understanding that the timing was the key factor, rather than marketing or agenda (which were the same for a subsequent, oversubscribed event). The learning points here were:

- Do not schedule an event on a Friday.
- For a half day event, time so it is from mid-morning to mid-afternoon. This gives people traveling time (especially if covering a region such as the South West with long (private and public) transport times. Providing a lunch with time for informal networking worked well. It was pointed out that many people in the third sector work part-time and may work around care commitments, so the above timings were considered more appropriate.

Sharing practice and working collaboratively

See the event feedback at appendix 1. Some key points reiterated here include:

(In terms of working with the client group)

- Need to address aspirations/behaviours/attitudes, increase confidence and expand horizons before anything else. If these (and also Maslow's hierarchy of needs) are not addressed then formal learning does not have a firm foundation
- Staff training re motivational and aspirational work is as important as subject and teaching ability.
- Perceived lack of funding for 'emotional change work' or it is not long enough.
- Need to prepare for engagement prior to actual engagement.

(In terms of describing what is done – especially to funders)

Looking at the jargon that is often used and can be meaningless, the group felt that any statements or adjectives need explained and justified – say what it means, don't just state it, for example,

- Initial Assessment at what points and that covers xyz
- Flexible and individualised learning in order tothat covers/includes to meet the needs of what group/individual

A lot of the 'words' (creative & innovative; flexible; personalised) were seen to mean developing soft skills and providing additional opportunities over and above 'normal' qualification delivery. In other words – providing something beyond what is funded?

(In terms of setting up successful provision)

Networking was key here – for referrals of learners, being able to signpost learners on and to develop collaborative working to enhance the organisation's delivery.

(In terms of future networking)

Interestingly there was an age split in terms of the embracing of IT-based approaches, with the younger members advocating IT-based and the older (more experienced?) advocating face-to-face sessions, where there is both formal and informal aspects, where it is planned and work organised accordingly and a commitment is made to get as much as possible out of the event. However, a couple of points worth noting were:

- If using IT based – need to be able to opt-out to control the amount of emails. (Experiences were cited of signing up for a webinar or online resource and then getting weekly emails on unrelated themes, or of messages that alert you to every new message posted).
- A searchable directory of learning providers in an area was seen as useful for organisations to make their own links.
- Events should include 'strategy and policy' as well as frontline 'caring and sharing' of resources and networking.

A key message was around the influencing of policy – people felt more likely to attend an event if they felt that the organisers were able to pass comments, aspirations and expectations from 'front-line deliverers' up to government bodies in order to influence policy.

Appendix 1

Participating organisations

Survey

This was done anonymously as it was felt that some small organisations are often reluctant to give details to surveys in case of eliciting marketing or otherwise unwanted emails. The 'invite' to complete the survey went to recipients of the Learning Curve Newsletter and the wider list of contacts who were happy to receive information via email. This included all 'members' of the learning curve network and all delivery partners – in total 700 names

Workshop/seminar

Attendees for this included representatives from the following organisations:

- 1625 Independent People
- Addaction
- Alabaré Christian Care & Support
- Bristol Music Trust
- Bristol VQ Centre
- Community Resolve
- Develop Volunteer Centre Wiltshire
- Dorset Youth Association
- Engage Bristol
- Hedley Hall
- Life Change Initiative
- Life Cycle UK
- Prince's Trust
- Robert Owen Communities
- Somerset Wood Recycling
- St Loye's Foundation
- TCV
- The Trinity Centre
- Tribal
- TW Trust
- University of Bristol Students' Union
- Wiltshire Council
- Wiltshire Volunteer Centre
- Young Devon
- Youth Education Service

Appendix 2

Notes from Bristol session

Feedback from NEET event – exploratory sessions and future peer support

Session - Are all NEET young people the same? Are there certain themes? (..in what they present and/or what they need/want). Does being xx determine NEET or is it brought on by NEET? Does it matter? Is there something that works for all? If so what and why? If not – why not? Aim – to attempt to band themes together in order to rationalise approaches and stop being headless chickens!

- Rather than look at situations presented look at emotional needs
 - o Use Maslow's basic needs as start point
 - o Fear, comfort zones, confidence, social skills
 - o Peer support, role models
- Need to address aspirations / behaviours / attitudes; increase confidence and expand horizons before anything else
- Staff training ref motivational and aspirational work
- Comment that there is either no funding for 'emotional change work' or it is not long enough
- "Need to prepare for engagement prior to actual engagement"

Session - We hear the wonderful words that will change things – but what, in practice, do they mean? For example; Creative and innovative; Tailored programmes; Personalised learning; Experiences; Enhanced IAG; Robust Initial assessment; High quality ...; Supporting the learner to achieve and progress. Aim – to cut through the jargon and find the words that do describe what actually works!

- Explain and justify – say what it means
 - o eg Initial Assessment at what points and that covers xyz
 - o delivering learning flexibly in order to
- A lot refers back to quality and ability of tutors
- Record keeping to show travel of learner
- a lot of the 'words' (creative & innovative; flexible; personalised) can be seen to mean developing soft skills and providing additional opportunities over and above 'normal' qualification delivery. In other words – providing something beyond what is funded?

Session - A jigsaw? A game of chess? Or a duck race? What are the pieces? What order do the ducks need to be in? What journey does an organisation make in setting up and delivering a programme – and who do they meet on the way? Are some more important than others or is it just a case of getting the right order? Aim – to identify the various contributing elements/people/organisations to a successful programme and when they need to be accessed

- Networking was key here – for referrals of learners, being able to signpost learners on and develop collaborative working to enhance the organisations delivery
- Need for project management over several contributing 'themes' all at the same time
 - o Funding, marketing, recruitment, collaborative work to extend skills (of delivery)
- Differing 'priorities' if starting a project from scratch or if something is already in place – though all are important

- If existing need to find learners and funding to fit
- If new then you fit to funding and learners
- Good idea to know what you are aiming for
- Difference between nearly EET and longer term NEET (who are more on the preparation and engagement - as much as actual delivery programme)

How to take peer support forward

- Online peer discussion group
 - That you can dip and out of as you please that does not notify you of every message posted
- Anything online with opt-out buttons to control number of emails
- How do you find out who has been awarded contracts for NEET?
- Need a website by county listing all service providers so all people can access the info – both NEETs and organisations - plus the option for providers to ‘chat’ and yps to ask questions via chatrooms and moderators
- Collective lobbying to central government
- Forum workroom/workshops – so you can contact people who do similar projects; gain new contracts; joint working with similar partnerships
- More networking forums and good communication
- Some sort of virtual forum – where we can raise questions about ‘who’s tried this....; what resources are available for
- Prefer meetings as we value networking opportunities – 6 monthly to share policy updates and interpretations
- Simple database (owned by?; updated by?) with organisations working with NEET groups – contact details and brief description of work