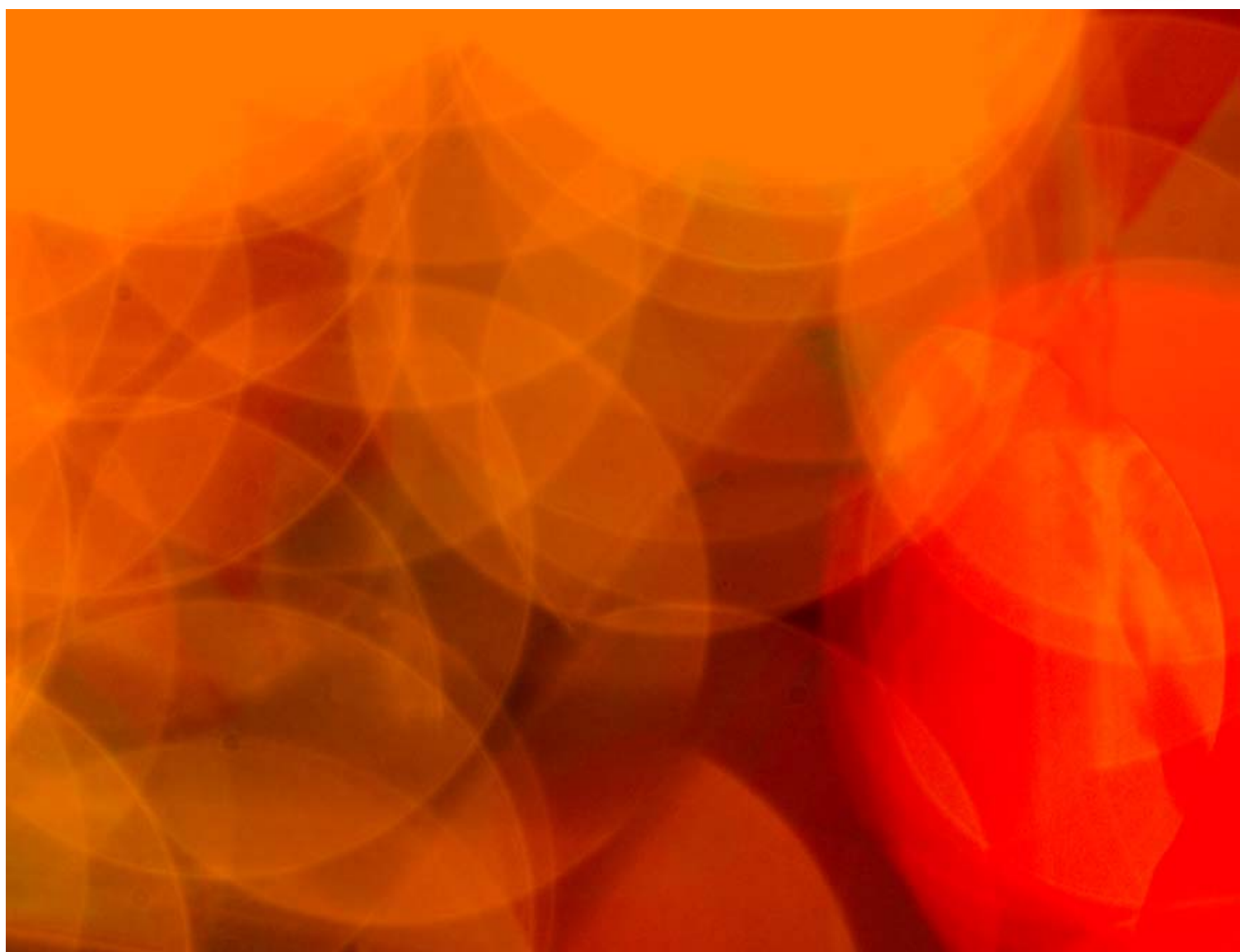


WCS

Developing Responsive Provision



Promoting the benefits of training to employers

Preston College's employer engagement team investigated employers' perceptions of the benefits of training and adapted promotional materials accordingly.

Introduction

Preston College currently has one of the largest Train to Gain contracts in the North West at around £1.8 million in total for 06-07. The College's employer engagement team initially conducted an audit with three sectors: **retail, management development and technology/manufacturing**. Based on the audit and feedback from stakeholders, a project action plan was designed to:

- 1) consider working with larger organisations/ sector bodies to tailor materials to better meet the needs of business
- 2) develop marketing materials that demonstrate specific bottom line improvements
- 3) emphasise, through marketing materials and in face-to-face discussions, the benefits and convenience of sourcing training locally.

The organisation and the Programme

The project proposal was accepted as one of eight improvement projects supported in the 06-07 Development Programme under the topic: 'Marketing the benefits of training to employers'. The need for this work arose from recognition that the College was not promoting the business case for training to employers even though it had evidence that their training was making a difference to employers' 'bottom line'.

Context

The College's work on Business Improvement Techniques and 'bottom line' impact measures led them to investigate the benefits of training as perceived by employers. The project set out to demonstrate how these perceived benefits can be used in promotional and marketing materials to influence the employers' purchase of training.

The Head of Employer Engagement oversaw the project with six members of staff being involved in the audit – three teams of two. The project was viewed as a developmental activity for the team so each pair included an experienced Business Development Manager coupled with a more junior Business Development Officer. The audit was completed for the three identified sectors from internal information in the College, with the views of stakeholders (mostly employers) being gathered from brief questionnaires and a number of face-to-face meetings.

The team developed action plans for the three priorities (see above) that arose from the audit and stakeholder views. They then worked with the Development Programme consultant who guided them into adopting a more strategic direction that linked the approach to both the College's Development Plan and to the requirements of the New Standard for employer engagement. This also resulted in a refocusing on just the latter two priorities within the timescale for this project. Senior management was directly involved in agreeing the action plans and the backing of the College Directors was invaluable in progressing the project.

Challenges and Solutions

- Some employers were less inclined to identify measurable business benefits. Such companies were introduced to other employers who had already experienced the impact of this approach.
- Small businesses wanted 'on site' training but had low delegate numbers. Training was offered for clusters of 'like' businesses in an appropriate central location.
- The re-focus of the project to look at the impact of employer activity on the College as well as the impact of training for employers was a major challenge and identified gaps in the College's current regular management reports. Support for this was gained from senior management and subsequent meetings with the College's finance and central data areas produced an agreed solution that is now being implemented as part of the monthly reporting cycle.

Testimonial

'Some of the original plans and actions were of great interest to us but were mainly operational – the strategic influences that emerged will be of greater and more sustaining benefit to the College.' 'The identification and sharing of good practice with colleagues from other colleges has been a major benefit of being involved in this project.'

Janet Rogers
Head of Employer Engagement,
Preston College

Key messages / learning points

- Having clear measures relating to employer led activity will help enhance your reputation as a key provider of employer-led training internally, externally with clients and also with other key stakeholders such as the LSC and Sector Skills Councils.
- It is better to focus on one key priority and do it really well rather than try to address several at once – even if they all seem important at the time.
- Using a common template for generating case studies and promotional material helps to ensure consistency of approach and guarantees that all key issues are addressed.

Impact

The project has been a catalyst that has moved the College forward in developing systems and practices that will improve its position in relation to the New Standard and Framework for Excellence. Some of the data work will be capable of transfer into a balanced scorecard for curriculum and support teams.

The project has also enabled the College to develop innovative approaches in its marketing to small businesses – this will be trialled further and cascaded to other areas of the College.

The employer case studies relating to the delivery of Business Improvement Techniques have proved to be valuable tools in the selling and marketing of this provision. Employers are keen to see what other employers are doing.

Top Tips

- Focus on 'what they want' rather than 'what we do'
- Identify planned, measurable improvements at the start of the programme with an employer. Document these improvements and refer to the progress being made towards them during regular review meetings.
- Liaise with network groups that represent small businesses in the locality e.g. Chamber of Trade etc.
- Strategies to further the employer engagement agenda within a College must have the support (and involvement where possible) of senior managers.

Case Studies

Case studies were produced (see below for a sample), using a standard format for four of the College's clients that have accessed Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) programmes. The case studies have been used as examples of successful training interventions when sales and business development staff are in discussion with prospective clients. They have also been supplied to the local Train to Gain brokerage service to demonstrate the potential impact of the College's BIT provision.

A set of employer impact measures has been generated and the College's directors propose to select which of these will be included as part of the regular reporting cycle for 07/08.

A programme of short courses with associated measures of success was developed to market test local provision with retailers. This initiative is currently being evaluated.

Next Steps

The college plans to develop more case studies using the same template style and by adopting a similar approach in respect of internal and external stakeholder engagement. This bank of case studies will form part of the College's evidence in relation to 'measuring' the impact of training with employers that will be required when the College seeks accreditation for the New Quality Standard.

Appendix A – Sample Case Study

Company Profile

Bosal (UK) Limited is the UK subsidiary of Bosal International, a world leading manufacturer of exhaust systems, catalytic converters and towbars for both the OE (original equipment) and aftermarket. The company also supplies the industrial market with precision steel tubing and storage systems. The company's local plant, which employs 330 people and covers 45,000 square metres, is the second largest of the 39 plants that the Belgium company operates worldwide along with three research and development centres. In a highly competitive market, Bosal recognised that the way forward for their business was to harness the skills of the workforce in identifying and implementing improvements which would impact on the bottom line.

Approach

The company have been involved with continuous improvement programmes with the College for three years. In 2006 they conducted initial diagnosis with the assessor to identify three particular areas for improvement - the bend shop, the press shop and robot assembly. Candidates were split

into three project teams to identify which processes added value to the product and which didn't in order to inform improvement projects. From there, projects were mapped to appropriate units of the NVQ. As the candidates worked through the projects, evidence of competence was generated.

Initial Findings

The initial findings were as follows: -

- Machine utilization rates appeared low
- Data was required to calculate Overall equipment efficiency (OEE)
- Wastes of transport and inventory delays were identified
- Set up times appeared excessive in some areas.
- Processes needed mapping to identify lead and cycle times to improve production

Outcomes

The following outcomes were identified:

- OEE improved by over 50%
- Machine set up times were reduced by 40%
- Unit cost of the selected product for improvement was reduced by 30%
- Production cycle time was reduced by 23%

Other Employer Benefits

- Quantifiable benefits impacting on the bottom line
- Employees equipped with a toolset to address issues and continually improve business performance
- Highly motivated employees taking on ownership of processes and offering solutions to problems
- Continuous Improvement processes were established

Employee Benefits

Quotes from individuals who completed the programme:

"I enjoyed the programme, particularly the practical work"

"The blend of theory and practice was about right"

"Peter's experience and his down to earth approach made it seem easy"

"I've been on lean training courses before but this time I felt involved"

"I am delighted with the outcomes and the achievements of our staff."

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