

Gram Training Ltd – Developing new areas of work with the help of the SER programme

Case study



About Gram Training

Gram Training Ltd is a small NVQ training provider based in Kent. Since the organisation was set up in 2008 it has trained over 600 learners with the support of Train to Gain funding.

Changes to funding meant that Gram Training needed to move into new areas, which is why they welcomed the opportunity to be involved with the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme.¹

The Managing Director of Gram Training took the lead in supporting this development.

Starting point

Changes in government policies and the reallocation of Train to Gain funding were the major catalysts for change within Gram Training. They were previously a Train to Gain subcontractor for two providers in London, with contracts worth over £800,000 yearly.

With the reallocation of Train to Gain funding to Apprenticeships, the organisation had to make staff and assessors redundant and restructure their whole operation.

They wanted to use involvement in the SER programme to explore opportunities in pre-employment provision and establish how they could position themselves for delivery of these opportunities.

¹ This resource was produced by CfBT for the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme. It was current at April 2011.

Support provided

Support took the form of three visits and a continuing professional development (CPD) workshop from the peer advisers plus regular email and telephone support. It also included leads to funding opportunities and participation in Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs) and master classes. Gram Training found the following master classes particularly valuable:

- Marketing to employers, funding and minimum contract values
- Supporting providers transitioning from Train to Gain to Apprenticeships.

The first visit offered an opportunity for relationship building between both providers with a view to sharing experiences and effective practice. They were also able to consider the support that could be offered and get an overview of the Employer Responsiveness Framework (ERF) and the Programmes for the Unemployed (PfU) checklist.

Conclusions from the ERF and PfU

“The SER programme has been especially good for us as a small training provider and we would definitely recommend the programme to others.”

**Managing Director,
Gram Training**

Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

contributed to Gram Training's development plans. These plans were agreed with the Managing Director who signed them and retained a copy.

The specialist peer support provided a more concentrated intervention in plugging gaps identified from the framework. This included the use of electronic Labour Market Information (e-LMI) data in planning and designing programmes, development of a pre-employment strategy, overview of existing and future pre-employment opportunities, and CPD on change management to prepare staff for new strategies and changes in the sector.

Priority development areas

Based on lessons learnt from Train to Gain, the results of the ERF and the PfU checklist, the following aims were highlighted as priority areas in the development plan.

- Use LMI for strategic planning and decision making.
- Evaluate strategies and policies for opportunities to support delivery of programmes for the unemployed.
- Investigate the idea of a Work Club² with a view to developing a relationship with local Jobcentre Plus offices and local providers.

Actions

Once these priorities were agreed, Gram Training took into consideration the amount of support available and possible quick wins and identified bite-size milestones. This made it easier for the Managing Director to manage her task – it became enjoyable as well as effective. She received a key task from each area after every visit, with support via phone and email to enable her to complete the tasks.

The specialist advisory visits were extremely valuable. They provided practical information

² Work Clubs are a Great Britain-wide initiative which aims to support the development of a network of locally-led, community-based support for the unemployed which will grow organically across the country.

and advice on, for example, working with the e-LMI tool available on the Excellence Gateway and how to register as a provider with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Just as important was the opportunity to glean information from a peer adviser with extensive experience and expertise within the sector, share effective practice and exchange ideas on delivery models, staffing, resources, quality assurance, accreditation, funding and commissioning opportunities.

Staff found the case studies particularly useful for reflection and identifying with senior management in making difficult strategic decisions.

The CPD workshop staff attended on change management provided an update on developments in the sector, including an overview of the new Work Programme, timetable for delivery, framework, supply chain and the Merlin Standards.³

It was also very timely in setting the scene for Gram Training's strategic plan for the new year.

The organisation has already started to improve working practices as a result of the training and the peer adviser support.

Moving the organisation forward

The organisation has already started to improve working practices as a result of the

³ The Merlin Standard is being designed by the DWP, with providers and representative bodies, to help evolve successful, high-performing supply chains, and champion positive behaviours and relationships.

Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

training and the peer adviser support. Changes include:

- embedding the use of LMI in planning programmes and completing tenders;
- a more strategic approach to networking and business development;
- less reliance on mainstream funding – the company is now seeking to explore other avenues such as housing associations, schools, local authorities, consultancy and other full-cost recovery work;
- developing a portfolio of projects to reduce risk, as experienced in the loss of Train to Gain funding; and
- achieving quality standards such as Matrix and the Training Quality Standard (TQS).

Gram Training's Managing Director was the main contact point throughout the SER programme. Her enthusiasm and willingness to learn and change were key in moving the whole process along.

Following advice received during the support visits, Gram Training also launched a UK Online centre.⁴ This will enable them to collaborate with Jobcentre Plus, Next Step, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Connexions, as well as local employers and other stakeholders, with a view to delivering Work Clubs for job seekers using courses from the UK Online curriculum.

It has also enabled them to tender for partner opportunities via the UK Online tendering portal for partners, thereby increasing the possibility of extra activity and revenue streams.

Gram Training also developed:

- relationships with housing associations with a view to delivering UK Online courses and related opportunities to priority groups such

as lone parents, people aged over 50, young people and minority ethnic groups, funded through alternative sources;

- relationships with prime contractors, who have direct contracts with DWP or Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) and the right to contract with other providers on the Work Programme, with a view to completing expressions of interest when the April window opens for providers to become sub contractors; and
- links with local authorities with a view to becoming involved in their planning for pre-employed provision.

Challenges and solutions

At the moment, Gram Training's key challenge is cash flow. With the introduction of Minimum Contract Levels by the Agency and significant reduction in income as a result of its loss of Train to Gain funding, the company has had to restructure significantly.

This has made it difficult to manage current demands for business development and networking. To overcome this challenge, Gram Training has had to concentrate on quick wins with a view to increasing revenue and activities before the launch of the new Work Programme in October.

Future plans

By July, Gram Training will be in a unique position within the sector, delivering a portfolio of interventions that includes pre-employment, work-based learning, foundation learning, consultancy and other full-cost recovery opportunities.

On the Work Programme, the company will be delivering end-to-end solutions for prime contractors as well as other similar opportunities with the Agency, local authorities and housing associations.

Total revenue forecast as a result of these activities is 50 per cent, with courses increasing by at least 70 per cent.

⁴ The UK Online centres network was set up by government in 1999 to provide public access to computers. The network has thousands of online centres across England supporting people to gain the skills and confidence to get online.

Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

Advice for others

- Take the support seriously; don't take for granted the fact that it is supported through external funding.
- Take time to work on actions on your development plan.
- Keep communication channels open with your peer adviser.
- Prepare time and space for adviser visits, avoid interruption or distractions.
- Involve others as much as you can.
- Don't procrastinate – commit and complete.
- Appreciate the knowledge and experience of your adviser.
- Keep an open mind.

Links

Gram Training found the following sources extremely useful:

- Google alerts:
Monitors the internet for information on a particular subject. Gram Training uses it to capture updates and developments on the

Work Programme –

www.google.com/alerts

- e-LMI:
Free and paid-for Labour Market Intelligence data accessible via the Excellence Gateway –
www.excellencegateway.org.uk
- UK Online:
Access to online courses for beginners. The UK Online Go On champion also provides opportunity for local providers to interface with Jobcentre Plus contacts with a view to reaching out and engaging people in basic ICT skills and employability support – www.ukonlinecentres.com
- Work Clubs:
For advice on setting up a Work Club within the South East, please contact
- Regional External Relationship Manager:
lynda.jones4@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 01483 446068