

The Redcar and Cleveland Adult Learning Service – The drive to develop employer responsive provision

Case study



About Redcar and Cleveland Adult Learning Service

The Redcar and Cleveland Adult Learning Service (R&C ALS) is part of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. It has 20 permanent employees with a further 110 sessional tutors delivering to approximately 5,000 learners each year. Over 60 per cent of the provision is adult and community learning (ACL) funded activity, delivered in various community venues across the borough. The remainder includes adult learner responsiveness activity and covers NVQs, information and communication technologies (ICT) and literacy, language and numeracy provision. R&C ALS received a Grade 2 in its 2008 Ofsted inspection.

The Acting Principal Officer led the organisation's participation in the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme with other members of the management team involved in key activities.¹

Starting point

The driver for applying for support from the SER programme was the need to build R&C ALS' employer responsive provision. The emphasis was on Programmes for the Unemployed (PfU) and workplace provision to support sustainable employment goals. Historically, the focus had been on the relationship with the learners, with limited time spent determining and responding to the

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

needs of employers in the borough. However, to grow provision this had to become a strategic priority.

Working with the SER programme peer adviser, the organisation created a focused development plan that aimed to:

- develop and implement a coherent approach to working with employers in order to grow adult responsiveness provision;
- develop a delivery model for PfU provision with a view to achieving high job outcome levels. The model would be based on effective practice and lessons learnt within the peer adviser's own organisation and wider knowledge of others in the sector.

Utilising the SER programme

The R&C ALS Programme Coordination Team took part in a range of SER programme activities including two master classes, one-to-one advisory support with the peer adviser and an internal continuing professional development (CPD) workshop.

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Acting Principal Officer

Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

The master classes covered practical marketing and effective planning of programmes for the unemployed, while the one-to-one support provided the opportunity to develop further ideas for the employer responsiveness strategy.

The CPD event was attended by members of the R&C ALS Programme Coordination Team. It covered development of the learner journey specifically tailored to programmes for the unemployed, including practical strategies for developing job outcomes.

The organisation benefited greatly from the peer adviser's own experience of setting up programmes for the unemployed. Support was given on:

- who to involve in setting up a pre-employability programme;
- funding options;
- identifying a sector with a recruitment need in the local economy;
- building employer relationships.
- the pre-employment framework;
- developing programme content including initial assessment, vocational and employability requirements;
- identification of suitable staff and the need for professional updating;
- development of the learner journey.

Outcomes

Based on information gained from the peer adviser and from master classes, the Acting Principal Officer developed a new vision position statement and proposed model of employer responsiveness delivery, in accordance with the priorities of the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership. Further work will be done on each element of the model to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) objectives.

Within the strategy, work has already taken place to develop relationships with key regional organisations with the same or complementary aims as the R&C ALS, such as Tees Valley Limited and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

On a practical level, the SER programme support helped the team define a model for PfU provision that covered:

- effective engagement and referral routes with employers and agencies;
- effective information, advice and guidance and induction;
- a holistic approach to programmes for the unemployed to improve employability skills and vocational content;
- gaining and maintaining employment;
- a systematic approach to job outcome tracking.

It is early days but activity so far has resulted in a planned approach to achieving this goal before September 2011.

Impact

The anticipated impacts for the developments to date follow.

Short term

- Increased understanding among the team of the need to change the existing strategy, to ensure that residents in the borough are job-ready and achieve sustainable employment
- A documented strategy with SMART objectives to provide focus and direction
- A network of contacts who can inform the strategy and support its achievement
- A new model for PfU provision along with an implementation plan.

Medium term

- A new model for PfU, to be in place by September 2011
- Activities detailed in a strategy document, with measurable changes in place to demonstrate growth in employer responsiveness provision by December 2011.

Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme

Overall, the experience of being involved in the SER programme was very positive. In the words of the Acting Principal Officer:

“The Service has benefited from being part of the SER programme. The support we have had from our peer adviser has certainly helped us to focus the team. This has been particularly useful in developing our action plan and introduced us to new ways of engaging with employers.”

Advice for other providers

Do...

- Involve as many of your team as possible in the planning stage if working with employers is new to you, as the change will be cultural as well as activity-based and their support will be needed.
- Develop an approach to PfU delivery in the first instance. Once you have defined this you can slot in the content of programmes with relative ease without reinventing it each time.
- Identify and develop key strategic relationships in your region with organisations that have similar or complementary goals to you.

Don't...

- Miss out or spend minimal time on the planning phase. If you leap into delivery without giving the preparation the time it needs, you are likely to pay in terms of quality, relationship building or inefficiency in the longer term.
- Think you are starting from scratch. Other providers are likely to have been on the same journey as you, so look to the resources available to you such as peers or web-based resources, for example on the [Excellence Gateway](#).
- Become fixated with working with a particular large employer in your area, as you may lose sight of other opportunities. Instead, use feedback from your team to understand where learners are finding jobs and build a strategy that covers a range of employers in your area.