

## Newham College

### Getting people into work – a shared agenda



#### Background

“If you’re going to have any influence on improving local economic conditions, you must have a close relationship with any initiatives to get people into work.”

So says Julia Bollam, Head of the Centre for Innovation and Partnerships (CIPs) at Newham College, a provider **that** has been at the forefront of the **Employer Responsive agenda**. Funded through the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsive (SER) programme, the College hosted a ground-breaking conference entitled “Working in Partnership to Support JCP Clients into Work” in July 2011.<sup>1</sup>

The first of its kind in East London, this one-day event was designed exclusively for the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) East London District and was attended by over 70 participants representing providers, funding agencies, recruitment companies, JCP managers and operational staff. The event was designed to bring together providers and JCP staff to:

- develop a Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) pre-employment offer that would meet client and employer needs;
- streamline systems and processes resulting in appropriate referrals, maximum programme participation and progression to work.

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<sup>1</sup> This resource was produced for the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme. It was current at August 2011.

#### Activities

The morning workshops focused on information sharing and included presentations led by JCP and the Agency on issues such as the current funding methodology and job outcome incentive payments, the implications of delivering Agency-funded courses to clients on active benefits and how to work in partnership to maximise job outputs.

“Historically, employment programmes have been project funded,” explained Julia. “Whilst there is no more money, there is more flexibility with pre-employment programmes. And now, JCP is a major stakeholder and JCP clients, who make up a large part of our client base, can be funded from our core Agency allocation.”

Having JCP and the Agency on the same platform sent a clear message to participants of the shared employability agenda – it was the first time most colleagues had heard Agency requirements so closely aligned with those of JCP and it provided greater impetus for provider management information system (MIS) teams to change accordingly.

The afternoon session offered an opportunity for colleagues to tackle priority issues with local JCP offices. A number of key JCP messages emerged, including:

- Getting people into work is a shared agenda.
- Providers should talk to JCP about concerns and look for joint solutions.

JCP may be able to draw down funding for additional job-related services where colleges cannot.

- Providers must respond to the demands of the local labour market. The London 2012 Olympics – with 17 contractors offering thousands of vacancies – presents unique opportunities for London East providers; they have a crucial role to play in capacity building and regeneration.

## Outcomes

The conference resulted in action points for individual providers, as well as general information points for all, such as JCP requests for CVs for retail and hospitality vacancies at the Westfield Shopping Complex.

Graham Houghton, District Manager for JCP East London undertook to highlight the issues raised at the conference with his JCP counterparts and endorsed the need for further forums. JCP staff appreciated the need to fully understand clients' needs prior to referral and made a commitment to meet their local provider teams regularly to monitor client progress and review programmes.

Newham College was recognised as a beacon provider for its proactive stance in driving forward the employer responsive agenda. It will continue to play a leading role in bringing together the consortium of local providers to share information and to identify good practice across the sector.

## Impact

Julia believes that the overriding effect of the conference was to crystallise colleges' views on the importance of working with JCP, not least the implications of skills conditionality.

For Newham College, the focus continues to be on refining its provision, developing stakeholder relationships with JCP, Newham Council and others, and improving systems and processes. All Newham College pre-employment programmes are now allocated a 'unique opportunity number', which is directly linked to the JCP labour market statistics (LMS) database.

Examples of the College's "shorter and sharper" provision include curriculum development for pre-Apprenticeship programmes to incorporate roll-on, roll-off courses and, in anticipation of employer needs, technical certificates such as food hygiene being included in the standard programme offer.

CIPs is currently delivering its 14th Employment 1st pre-employment programme, funded by the London Borough of Newham to support local residents into exciting new job opportunities in Westfield Stratford City. Employment 1st is a two-week programme that combines vocational and employability training, where "job seekers come on a retail or hospitality course because they want a job in these sectors". Almost 500 learners have enrolled on the programme to date and retention is over 90 per cent. For those who need additional training and support, there are opportunities to gain a qualification in volunteering skills at the College and get valuable work experience by volunteering at the World Skills event in Newham in October 2011.

These programmes are at the heart of moves towards what Julia calls a "24-7 service" and have resulted in employers feeling confident enough to recruit directly from the programmes. But Julia doesn't want to stop here – the next major development is for CIPs to identify higher-level job opportunities for local people.

The Principal of Newham College, Denise Brown Sackey, is on board and provides the strategic leadership required to implement operational changes. She believes this will ultimately lead to a "universal mindset" in

the College so that all staff routinely ask: what can I do to create employment opportunities?

## Learning points

- Link your provision to local labour market needs.
- Streamline your communications so that there is a single communication channel with JCP.
- Share key data with JCP and the borough.
- Meet regularly with JCP staff to monitor progress
- Don't forget to manage your internal consortia – bring MIS teams and other service areas up to speed with funding changes and realign systems as necessary.
- Rethink your standard programme offer to anticipate employer needs, e.g. food hygiene certificates for all courses.

## Contact details

For further information, contact Julia Bollam, Head of Centre for Innovations and Partnerships (CIPs). Email: [Julia.bollam@newham.ac.uk](mailto:Julia.bollam@newham.ac.uk)

## Useful links

[www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=ser](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=ser)

[www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=324357](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=324357)

