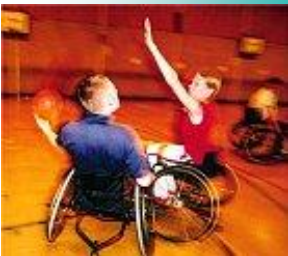




Working in partnership with learning providers to research effective practice

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LSIS Research Conference

19 June 2012

niace
promoting adult learning

Introduction

NIACE: Works to ensure all adults can learn throughout their lives

Area of work: Supporting the provision of training for unemployed adult learners

Project: Engaging micro-businesses, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

What is a micro-business?

Businesses employing fewer than 10 employees and with a turnover of less than 2,000,000 euros

Source: European Union

Some statistics

In 2009, micro-businesses employed 20.2% of all private sector employees (*SME statistics for the UK and regions, BIS, 2009*)

Micro-businesses with just 1 to 4 employees held 24% of all job vacancies (*Employer Skills Survey First Findings, UKCES, 2011*)

In 2007, micro-businesses employed a greater proportion of people who had been unemployed 12 months previously than any other size of business (*Small businesses in the UK: New Perspectives on Evidence and Policy, University of Westminster, 2008*)

Engaging micro-businesses project

In 2011, a NIACE survey of providers delivering skills provision for unemployed adults revealed 9 out of 10 providers found it challenging to engage employers of any size.

In response, BIS commissioned NIACE to undertake exploratory research into the engagement of micro-businesses by learning providers and to produce a guide.

The guide

Published this week and available on the NIACE website at:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/learning-for-unemployed-adult-learners>

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The research process

- A call for information to providers
- Interviews with learning providers
- Interviews with other key stakeholders e.g. small business support providers, small business membership organisations
- Working with a provider consultation group

Provider Consultation Group

Purpose:

- To contribute to the data analysis process, and the structure and content of the guide
- To draw out additional information for the guide
- To help ensure the guide is relevant and useful to learning providers

Participants

- Six providers took part in the group
- All had participated in an interview as part of the project
- We tried to balance the group in terms of:
 - the provider context
 - the nature of their experience in engaging micro-businesses
 - Seniority within their organisations
- Providers were paid a fee to cover their time and expenses

Format

- A 1 day meeting held at the NIACE office, facilitated by the project manager
- Full details of the meeting were provided in advance and at the start of the day
- Activities included:
 - Reviewing sections of the guide to check for accuracy of descriptions and feasibility of suggestions
 - Identifying any gaps to be addressed
 - Discussing issues and arriving at solutions

What went well

- Met the objectives set
- Providers were happy to take part and share their views with each other
- Open questioning and the variety of providers ensured healthy debate
- Facilitator able to remain impartial throughout
- Confirmed an approach through which learning providers can engage micro-businesses
- Providers enthusiastic to submit case studies for the guide following the meeting

Issues and challenges

- Staff capacity to take part in this type of activity
- There was a lot of ground to cover in one day
- Group members had their own experience which influenced their view of approaches recommended by other providers during interviews
- Encouraging and supporting all members of the group to participate

Key lessons learnt

- Issue name badges
- Have a shorter agenda, stick to it closely, and build in more breaks
- Revise the 'introductions' session
- Introduce the material in a wider variety of formats
- Have more than one facilitator, and also a dedicated note taker
- Six people is a good number for this type of activity
- Ask participants for feedback on the session

A provider perspective

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