

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 413

CE 081 922

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TITLE Developing Responsiveness in Vocational Education and Training.
INSTITUTION Learning and Skills Development Agency, London (England).
ISBN ISBN-1-85338-653-7
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 84p.; With contributions from Dave Brookes and case study colleges. Formerly Further Education Development Agency (FEDA).
AVAILABLE FROM Learning and Skills Development Agency, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH, United Kingdom. Tel: 020 7962 1066; Fax: 020 7840 5401; Web site: <http://www.LSagency.org.uk> (15 British pounds). For full text: <http://www.LSagency.org.uk/PDF/R1041/05/01/5000.PDF>.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Learning; Case Studies; Check Lists; College Role; Cooperative Planning; Curriculum Development; Demand Occupations; *Education Work Relationship; Educational Needs; Educational Planning; Employment Patterns; Foreign Countries; Guidelines; Information Needs; Information Sources; Information Utilization; *Instructional Development; Job Skills; Job Training; *Labor Force Development; Labor Market; National Surveys; Needs Assessment; Occupational Information; Partnerships in Education; Questionnaires; *Relevance (Education); Research Utilization; Retraining; School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; Skill Development; *Systems Approach; Technical Institutes; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Customized Training; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The extent to which providers of post-16 vocational education and training (VET) in the United Kingdom are able to secure timely and relevant learning programs to meet sudden and unpredicted changes in local or national skills profiles was examined in a study that included interviews of nine private training providers and 11 further education (FE) providers and case studies of 5 FE colleges. Forward planning by FE providers did not, by itself, appear to be sufficient to prepare for unexpected demands for VET. A nimble, responsive system is required that can rapidly customize provision to meet emerging needs. The following are among key ingredients of such a system: (1) the capacity to identify skills gaps and assess individuals' development needs; (2) clear articulation of needs in a common language; (3) expert staff who are able to work flexibly without detriment to regular provision; (4) the capacity to customize training packages; and (5) sensitive funding regimens that enable employers, individuals, and the local economy to upskill rapidly. The bibliography lists 14 references. (The following items are appended: an interview topic guide; a list of survey participants; and an example of the use of skills and labor market information in planning.) (MN)

developing responsiveness in vocational education and training

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Developing responsiveness

In vocational education and training

Maria Hughes and Sally MacPherson

**With contributions from
Dave Brookes and case study colleges**

Published by the
Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.LSagency.org.uk

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Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Anne Priestley
Designers: Dave Shaw and Tania Field
Printer: Stephen Austin and Sons Ltd, Hertford

ISBN 1 85338 653 7

R1041/05/01/5000

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Note

The Learning and Skills Development Agency
was formerly known as FEDA.

Developing responsiveness is a report on the
Learning and Skills Development Agency projects
'Predicting and meeting long-term skills needs'
(RPM 290 – undertaken in collaboration with LETEC)
and 'Rapid responses to skills needs' (RPM 317).

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Summary

Background

To remain competitive, the UK's current and future workforce will continually need to develop new skills and make use of more and different information.

- The learning and skills initiative has placed great emphasis on the need to obtain and use information about skills trends to secure relevance in the FE curriculum and to inform students' choice of courses and careers. However, there are concerns about the usefulness of some labour market information (LMI) and its effectiveness as a strategic decision-making tool.
- The longer-term implications of developments in technology and new working practices are difficult to predict.
- Previous FEDA research (Hughes and Cottam, 2000) explored the potential of sustained collaboration between education and training providers and employers as a means of securing responsive provision. Such alliances could prepare for, and manage the impact of, technological change and its consequence for working practices.

Research questions

Anticipating new demands on providers from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Learning and Skills Development Agency undertook a research project which sought to answer the following questions:

1. How can providers of post-16 education and training ensure that their provision is informed by predictions of long-term skills needs?
2. Would strategic partnerships with employers assist this process?
3. How should provision change to meet the emerging needs of learning for, at and through work?
4. How can providers rapidly develop learning opportunities to meet skills needs, and thereby extend and develop the skills of the workforce?

The project explored the extent to which providers are able to secure timely and relevant learning programmes to meet sudden and unpredicted changes in the local or national skills profile.

Key messages

- Skills gaps and shortages, and the resultant difficulties in recruitment, are a contributory factor to the lack of British industry's competitiveness. Although the identification of new demands on the workforce is important, using this information within a system geared to adapting provision and developing new learning programmes is equally vital.
- Planners and providers need to ensure that upskilling programmes are based on a careful analysis of the skills of the individual and those required in the specific job role.
- There are many difficulties to be overcome, such as:
 - achieving clarity in the description of the skills and knowledge required
 - accurately assessing the individual's current skills levels
 - effectively measuring motivation and aptitude
 - developing affordable customised provision to update skills rapidly.
- The elements of best practice in responding to skills need would include the ability to:
 - identify and articulate the need and the match or mismatch with the individual's current skills and knowledge profile – is there a skills gap or a skills shortage?
 - design education and training appropriate to the identified needs – not necessarily through existing programmes – which rapidly update the skills to the levels required.
- Employers' practices and expertise in selecting and recruiting staff are also influential in matching skills needs with job roles.
- In cases of skills shortages, employers almost invariably look to the workforce and to the training and education system to address the situation. There is a view that there is very little that can effectively be done to resolve quantitative skills shortages by anyone other than the employers themselves.
- Given that the various drivers of quantitative skills shortages are unpredictable, training speculatively or for 'stock' is also seen not to be viable. This view is reinforced by a perception that colleges and training providers cannot respond to these immediate and often very short-lived situations because of the short lead-in time.
- An alternative view is that:
 - unpredicted shifts in both quantitative and qualitative skills shortages are inevitable and likely to increase in the global market economy
 - it should be possible to manage the impact of these shifts by having in place a flexible and responsive vocational education and training (VET) system.

- A responsive system would need to remove inhibitors present in the current system and would require:
 - regular and frequent information from employers about their skills gaps and shortages, gathered electronically, and collated and disaggregated on local, sectoral and national bases
 - a workforce already highly skilled and competent, able to learn new things quickly
 - quality assurance and funding structures which enable training responses to be assembled quickly. Where external accreditation for this learning is required, a unitised qualifications framework would also assist this process
 - changes in employers' attitudes to paying for training – such customised approaches would need to be jointly resourced by the state and the employer.
- A vast range of public and private sources of LMI and skills forecasts is available, and the information produced is increasingly sophisticated. Within the learning and skills arena, many bodies are responsible for producing skills forecasts and LMI:
 - regionally – by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
 - by sector – produced individually by the National Training Organisations (NTOs) and collaboratively by the Skills Dialogues Groups
 - nationally – by the DfEE and, in future, by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
 - locally – by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and, in future, by local learning and skills councils (local LSCs).
- There are many types of research studies available, which gather different types of information on skills needs.
- Some research asks employers, employees and those seeking work to rate the importance of a range of skills within specific jobs at given occupational levels. In contrast, other research attempts to match skills demand with supply of available resources. Sector-based information may reveal both specific and generic skills needs. Local variations in skills bases also need to be taken into account.
- After April 2001, a provider's effectiveness and viability will be judged on their ability to effectively respond to local economic issues and priorities determined by the LSC. This will present a challenge to providers and place a renewed emphasis on planning provision in relation to skills forecasts, rather than the demands of individuals.
- Colleges and training providers need to plan ahead both strategically and operationally to:
 - respond to market developments and new opportunities
 - plan internal capacity to meet needs
 - secure funding
 - respond to local economic issues and priorities.

- Although the use of labour market information in planning post-16 provision has been limited, the people interviewed were conscious of the pressure to increase its use. Respondents from private training organisations in particular, however, thought that they were missing out because they did not understand how to use labour market information and were unsure where to obtain it. College respondents confirmed that skills forecasts are used to check that the provision synchronised with changes in the labour market, but are insufficiently detailed to be of much use in curriculum planning and development.

A responsive system

- Forward planning can only go some way to prepare for the unexpected. A nimble and responsive system is required which can rapidly customise provision to meet emerging needs.
- Key ingredients of this system would be:
 - the capacity to identify skills gaps and assess individuals' development needs
 - clear articulation of needs in a common language
 - expert staff, able to work flexibly without detriment to regular provision
 - the capacity to customise training packages
 - sensitive funding regimes which enable employers, individuals and the local economy to upskill rapidly.

Examples of providers' responses to skills needs

- Examples of providers' contributions to urgent upskilling needs are provided in this report. They demonstrate a range of contexts where education and training form part of the solution to increasing competitiveness by addressing skills gaps and skills shortages.
- A checklist intended to prompt the effective use of information about the labour market and emerging skills needs in all aspects of curriculum planning, development and delivery is provided.

As we enter the 21st century, rapid and far-reaching change to the way we live and work continues to be driven by:

- dramatic growth in information technology and telecommunications
- innovations which continue to create new forms of work though they displace others
- strong economic competition both nationally and internationally
- global markets, increasingly made accessible by advances in telecommunications.

To remain competitive in this rapidly changing context, the UK's current and future workforce will need continually to develop new skills and make use of more and different information. These needs place unprecedented demands on the education and training infrastructure. The government's response to these demands has been an extensive review of the post-16 learning infrastructure (DfEE, 1999). It has also undertaken radical reform of the planning, funding, delivery and quality assurance of post-16 education and training.

At the centre of these new arrangements is the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which will, from April 2001, oversee and implement education and training strategies focused on the needs of individuals, businesses and communities in partnership with other key bodies. The government's aim is to create a new system of post-16 learning in this country which is clear, coherent and accessible. Responsiveness on the part of providers to secure a better match between the demands of the labour market and learning opportunities supported by government funds is a central theme.

Anticipating these demands on providers, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (formerly FEDA) undertook a research project with two related strands:

- predicting and meeting long-term skills needs (RPM 290), undertaken in collaboration with London East TEC (LETEC)
- rapid responses to skills needs (RPM 317).

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- How can providers of post-16 education and training ensure that their provision is informed by predictions of long-term skills needs?
- Would strategic partnerships with employers assist this process?
- How should provision change to meet the emerging needs of learning for, at and through work?
- How can providers rapidly develop learning opportunities to meet skills needs and thereby extend and develop the skills of the workforce?

The projects aimed to:

- identify current practice in predicting skills needs through labour market intelligence
- promote the potential of strategic partnerships and sustained relationships between education providers and industry to predict and meet future skills needs effectively
- identify frameworks to support incremental responses to match provision to emerging skills needs
- describe and analyse successful practice in providing learning opportunities to meet skills gaps and skills shortages
- provide guidance and exemplar material for providers of workforce development and training to further develop and disseminate this practice.

Rationale for responsiveness

The *Learning to succeed* white paper and the second report of the National Skills Task Force (National Skills Task Force, 1999) place great emphasis on the need to obtain and use information about skills trends to secure relevance in the FE curriculum and to inform students' choice of courses and careers. Accurate and detailed labour market information is seen as a useful tool in enabling providers and employers to identify current skills held by the existing workforce and any short-term skills gaps.

There are concerns about the usefulness of some labour market information and its effectiveness as a strategic decision-making tool, particularly around how useful it is in shorter-term planning and in helping to inform curriculum content and facilitating more immediate responsiveness. The longer-term skills implications of developments in technology and new working practices are more difficult to predict. This difficulty is likely to increase as, in a knowledge-driven economy, the patterns of work and jobs that will be required in the next decade are likely to be very different from those of today.

However, the general, if not specific, direction of skills can be anticipated. In 1999 the think-tank Demos proposed that, in the near future, there will be a need for greater depth of knowledge and understanding, the ability to manage greater amounts of information and make judgements about the relative value of information (Demos, 1999).

The DTI (1999) reflects on the impact of changing ways of doing business and organising work, driven by technological developments, global competition and changing demands. Two contrasting scenarios are proposed: 'wired world' and 'built to last', each of which describes work in the UK economy in 15 years' time. 'Wired world' is characterised by temporary alliances of economic agents coming together via secure information and communication technology. Self-employment and portfolio working, and small, innovative and responsive businesses predominate. In contrast, 'built to last' organisations capture and retain individuals in whom knowledge is vested, believing that knowledge is the principal source of competitive advantage. Employment patterns in this scenario are characterised by stable companies staffed by full-time, salaried employees with relatively few temporary contracts and little self-employment.

Although views about the detail differ, there is broad agreement about the unpredictability of the future world of work and the need to manage change. A continuum of skills is likely to be required – ranging from specific vocational competence in a defined area to generic ability to adapt to meet changing demands. A recent Learning and Skills Development Agency project ‘Understanding and sustaining employability’ (RPM 291), investigated the generic skills and attributes that are likely to be an essential ingredient of longer-term skills requirements. The project concluded that employability is not just about preparation for employment but is also concerned with:

- transfer into employment from education and training
- development of employability *at* work
- progression in employment
- adapting to change
- transfer of skills from one work setting to another
- transition from periods of unemployment to employment.

Previous FEDA research (Hughes and Cottam, 2000) explored the potential of sustained collaboration between education and training providers and employers in securing a more coherent and forward-looking approach to learning and development which supports business success. Such alliances could prepare for, and manage the impact of, technological change on products and services and its consequence for working practices. Regular and sustained dialogue between employers and providers, exploiting the intellectual capital of FE providers, could produce a more strategic response to developing learning programmes that develop skills for the future.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency research into rapid responses to skills needs (RPM 317) has explored the extent to which providers are able to secure timely and relevant learning programmes to meet sudden and unpredicted changes in the local or national skills profile. The research considered current practice in responding to skills shortages and skills gaps and suggested ways in which this work could be extended.

Skills gaps, skills shortages and recruitment difficulties

Skills gaps and shortages, and the resultant difficulties in recruitment, are frequently cited as a contributory factor to the lack of British industry’s competitiveness. The first report of the National Skills Task Force (National Skills Task Force, 1998) observed,

The consequences of skills shortages, skills gaps and other recruitment difficulties can be broadly similar – but they have significant economic consequences for affected employers, and, in aggregate, the potential exists for serious knock-on effects for the whole economy.

Para 3.7

It is important to clarify the essential differences between skills gaps and skills shortages:

- **skills gaps** are found when a company’s existing workers do not have the necessary skills to achieve the business objectives
- **skills shortages** are found where there is a shortfall of adequately skilled people available in the accessible labour market – be it due to a rapid increase in the demand for such people or an actual decline in the number of people who are appropriately skilled.

The Skills Task Force suggests measures to tackle these issues. For skills shortages, it suggests retraining for unemployed people, while addressing skills gaps is seen to be directly related to getting the underpinning structure of the education and training system right. There may well be essential differences between these two issues for employers, and for the economy as a whole. However, skills gaps and shortages present a common problem to planners and providers of vocational education and training. Modern economies require flexible VET systems where long-term planning can be supplemented by rapid responses to skills needs, tailored to the individuals and employers concerned.

Although the identification of new demands on the workforce is important, using this information within a system geared to adapting provision and developing new learning programmes is equally vital. Providers, however, face a dilemma in reconciling the robust quality assurance process in place to secure quality and maintain standards within national qualifications and government-funded provision with rapid responses to meet emerging demands for new knowledge and skills.

Such responses will need to be based on a careful analysis of the skills of the individual and the match with those required in the specific job role to inform the development of a flexible and relevant curriculum offer. Recent developments in RDA's regional skills assessments and in the sectoral analyses being undertaken by the NTOs should enable this match to be more exact, as should the more detailed work that will be undertaken on sub-regional labour markets by the local LSCs. Examples of this responsiveness in action, and case studies demonstrating what can be done – if the will is there – are provided later in this report.

The impact of labour market imbalances

The impact on the local and national economy of imbalances in the labour market may be profound. After factors related to cash flow and market share, issues relating to the labour market are high on the list of barriers to business growth (LETEC, 2000). In an economy where business performance increasingly depends on the quality of human capital, many businesses see specific skills shortages as constraints on their performance, and report recruitment problems related directly to skills supply.

The National Skills Task Force confirmed that employers are indeed facing skills shortages, and this problem seems to be most acute when changing job requirements place new demands on staff faster than they can react.

Planners and providers should ensure that upskilling programmes are based on a careful analysis of the skills of the individual and matched with those required in the specific job role. This, in turn, should inform the development of flexible and relevant learning programmes.

Re-training and upskilling workers and collaborating with employers to develop new learning programmes presents a challenge for providers. In many cases, a common taxonomy of skills and shared language to describe the training problem and propose a learning solution is lacking. It is therefore difficult for employers to articulate their skills requirements and for planners and providers to understand the precise nature of learning needs. Developing an appropriate response in terms of learning solutions is therefore problematic.

There are many difficulties to be overcome, such as:

- achieving clarity in the description of the skills and knowledge required
- accurately assessing the individual's current skills levels
- effectively measuring motivation and aptitude
- developing affordable customised provision to update skills rapidly.

The elements of best practice in responding to skills need should include the ability to:

- identify and articulate the need and the match or mismatch with the individual's current skills and knowledge profile – is there a skills gap or a skills shortage?
- design education and training appropriate to the identified needs – not necessarily through existing programmes – which rapidly update the skills to the levels required.

Employers' practices and expertise in selecting and recruiting staff is also an issue relating to matching skills needs with job roles. A project looking at the development of a framework for the clear identification of employers' skills needs is underway at LETEC, and should be available during 2001 as a London East LSC publication. Detailed information on how employers identify, describe and assess the skills they need for each occupation or role could be used to further develop a template for the precise identification by employers of their skills needs.

Clarification and definition of terms

While 'skills shortage' is a familiar term, there are considerable differences between actual quantitative shortages and those shortages which result from qualitative factors.

- **Quantitative shortages** are found when employers are unable to recruit all the staff they require, usually during times of rapid economic or business growth; hence a high percentage of employers reported recruitment problems or skills shortages when coming out of the recession of 1993/4. These are short-term, but immediate, shortages which ease as growth/expansion slows.
- **Qualitative shortages** are found when staff currently employed or those seeking employment are perceived by employers not to have the skills required for the job or to meet the firm's business objectives. These shortages have longer-term implications and, on the whole, do not wax and wane quite so dramatically with the economic cycle.

Issues surrounding, for example, pay and conditions, accessibility and image contribute to both these types of shortages and must be borne in mind when examining ways to ease recruitment difficulties.

In both quantitative and qualitative cases of skills shortages, employers almost invariably look to the workforce and to the training and education system to address the situation. However, there is a view that there is very little that can effectively be done to resolve quantitative skills shortages in the short- or long-term by anyone other than the employers themselves. This would involve attention to forward planning; location decisions; expansion, training needs, succession, human resources planning; increased recruitment efforts and incentives. Given that the various drivers of quantitative skills shortages are unpredictable, training speculatively or for 'stock' is also seen not to be viable. This view is reinforced by a perception that because of the short lead-in time colleges and training providers cannot respond to these immediate and often very short-lived situations by providing speedy and effective responses.

The premise of this view is that the prime responsibility for these situations must remain with employers, although in terms of qualitative shortages, the case for intervention is stronger as the increasing skills shortages and gaps are, arguably, indicative of the failure of the free market.

An alternative view is that:

- Unpredicted shifts in both quantitative and qualitative skills shortages are inevitable and likely to increase in the global market economy.
- It should be possible to manage the impact of these shifts by having in place a flexible and responsive VET system.

A responsive system would need to remove inhibitors present in the current system and would require:

- regular and frequent information from employers about their skills gaps and shortages, gathered electronically and collated and disaggregated on local, sectoral and national bases
- a workforce already highly skilled and competent, able to learn new things quickly
- quality assurance and funding structures which enable training responses to be assembled quickly. Where external accreditation for this learning is required, a unitised qualifications framework would also assist this process
- changes in employers' attitudes to paying for training – such customised approaches would need to be jointly resourced by the state and the employer.

Sources of LMI, skills forecasts and long-term planning

A vast range of public and private sources of LMI and skills forecasts is available, and the information produced is increasingly sophisticated. Several bodies are responsible for producing skills forecasts and labour market information to inform Government and associated agencies about skills needs. Information is gathered:

- regionally – by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
- by sector – individually by the National Training Organisations (NTOs) and collaboratively by the Skills Dialogues Groups
- nationally – by the DfEE and, in future, by the Learning Skills Council (LSC)
- locally – by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and, in future, by local learning skills councils (local LSCs).

Providers and planners need to interpret trends to inform long-term planning for potentially major shifts in skills needs. They need to consider the appropriateness of different types of information and be aware of the basis on which it was gathered. A selection of skills and labour market information is reviewed in the section that follows.

There are many sources of information about skills needs and a range of models attempting to match the supply and demand of people to jobs. Although detailed manpower planning has largely been rejected as a viable option, information about the local labour market and sector training needs will play an important role in targeting resources of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Planners and practitioners therefore need to be aware of sources of information and the use to which they may be put.

The section which follows describes a range of research studies and indicates their possible use in curriculum planning and development. It also reports on the extent to which providers are actively using information on skills needs in curriculum planning and development.

Adjusting to change

Many Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and development agencies undertake research into the nature of change in skills and occupations, and consider ways in which employers and employees can adjust to change. This type of information can indicate the predisposition to change and therefore to engage in training. The information is largely based on the view of employers and employees. For example, the London Skills Forecasting Unit examines the nature of change in skills and occupations and considers ways in which employers and employees can adjust to change. It uses employment projections, data derived from sector studies and data from the London TEC Council's annual employer and employee surveys which are conducted on behalf of, and funded by, the seven London TECs.

The employer survey identifies skills gaps and shortages through vacancy levels, high labour turnover and employers' perceptions. It also provides information on willingness of employers and employees to contribute to raising skill levels.

The approach uses five indicators of a sector's ability to adjust to change:

- 1. learning environment** (willingness to provide or participate in training)
- 2. skills gaps**
- 3. VAT turnover**
- 4. previous occupations of the long-term unemployed**
- 5. labour turnover.**

The Unit publishes data in book form and on its website, with localised analysis available from the local TECs.

This type of information can indicate the predisposition to change and therefore to engage in training. The information is largely based on the view of employers and employees and job vacancy statistics.

Identifying skills for the economy

The Future Skills Wales Research Study is one such study, and is described as 'the largest and most comprehensive project yet to have been undertaken in Europe aimed at identifying and analysing the skills which will be required by a national or regional economy' (Lawson, 1999). Employers and both working residents and those seeking work were asked to rate the importance of a range of (core rather than vocational) skills within specific jobs at specific occupational levels. This produced a rating of the importance of skills. Forecasts for change in occupational structure were then applied to forecast the changing importance of skill sets. The forecasts were completed in 1999 and covered the period 1997 to 2007.

Matching demand with supply

In contrast, some research attempts to match skills demand with supply of available resources. For example, a Microsoft Excel-based model has been developed to forecast employment opportunities in Birmingham and Solihull. The model enables comparisons to be made between emerging employment opportunities and current employment patterns, and between residents' qualifications and the qualifications of those working in the area. It involves combining data from the Census of Population, the Annual Employment Survey and the TEC's household surveys, to ensure that the model reflects the scale of leavers from industries, due to retirement and mortality, and entrants and leavers, due to people changing jobs (Smith, 1999).

Construction is generally regarded as a sector for which it is possible to produce relatively detailed skills requirements. An initiative undertaken in London used a quantitative matching model by matching job vacancies with available trained labour. This involved reclassifying construction activity into key skills clusters. Specific sector output forecasts can be derived from DETR projections of spending and client demand. Detailed forecast models can be produced by establishing, from surveys of construction firms, the skills they would need to construct each type of building. The numbers of operatives with each skills set are then aggregated across building types, according to the mix set out in the spending forecasts.

The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) produces forecasts and analyses of skill demand in the construction industry annually, and also conducts an annual survey of colleges and training centres to assess the number of trainees attending construction courses. The results are used to project the number of skilled workers entering the industry in two years' time.

Specific versus generic skills

Sector-based information may reveal both specific and generic skills. Focus Central London commissioned research (Focus Central London, 1999) to investigate the nature of IT training and education provision. It also covered the specific IT skills requirements of employers in central London in the financial services and hospitality sectors, with regard to two groups of workers:

- **IT practitioners**, such as software engineers, hardware managers and helpdesk staff
- **IT users**, such as receptionists, secretaries, managers and accountants.

The research highlighted a major difficulty in clarifying more precisely the particular skills that existing computer users and new entrants to the labour market are missing, and suggested that four areas require attention:

1. Understanding skills needs

Employers are not adept at defining IT skills requirements and there is an absence of systems for describing an individual's specific or generic IT skill level. Deficiencies are thus only apparent after recruitment.

2. Assessing skills levels

The majority of employers do not have a formal means of grading IT skills. Different skills' classifications for practitioners and users are required, as user ability is dependent on understanding how applications can facilitate and enhance business functions as well as technical skills.

3. Non-IT skills deficiencies

The biggest shortfall is in non-technical areas, eg communication, project management and customer service, and this deficit has a serious impact on perceptions of the quality of the service, and to views on how technical staff match the corporate environment in some companies. Deficiencies in general business skills further exacerbate the overall problem.

4. Staff retention

IT skills shortages relate also to a wider failure of recruitment, development and retention of staff. Often retention of people with appropriate skills is a bigger problem than recruiting them, and reducing staff turnover is a common objective in many industries. Managers need to be better equipped to recruit and retain staff. Offering broader skills training and more challenges could help to create a more loyal and committed practitioner workforce.

Local and niche markets

Local variations in skills bases also need to be taken into account. The shift in the local skills base may be profound and information on niche markets may also be useful in some circumstances. TECs, local authorities and local learning partnerships may be good sources of local skills needs, and NTOs should also provide information on specialisms within sectors.

Some studies attempt to take a longer-term view of developing needs in relation to a geographical area where regeneration activity is required. For example, a new focus, large-scale employer survey has been commissioned by LETEC which, among other objectives, is seeking to do the following:

- Go beyond general statistical data on firms and employees in the area, and look deeper at what local employers actually do and need. This reflects earlier FEDA work, which noted:

It is important that colleges are fully aware of the SME profile in their catchment area. One of the most frequent criticisms of education and training providers is their tendency to make assumptions about what people want. As the needs of SMEs vary depending on their size and disposition, it is important to identify the profile of SMEs in a particular area before deciding what support the college may be able to provide.

Hughes and Gray 1998

- Identify, quantify and qualify the recruitment practices, skills demands and needs, and training practices of (SME) employers in the Thames Gateway area (the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Havering, Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley).
- Gain detailed information on vacancies, skills needs, anticipated future skills needs, nature and extent of skills gaps and the employer response to these.

The detailed information it will gather, through a series of face-to-face interviews with employers in key sectors, on how they identify, describe and assess the skills needed for each occupation or role, will be used to further develop the template for the precise identification of skills' needs. It is hoped that it will set the standard for employer surveys under the local LSCs.

National skills needs

An innovative and forward-looking approach to determining future skills needs is being undertaken through a national initiative in Ireland (Forfas, 1998). The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is part of the Business Education and Training Partnership established by the Irish Government to:

- systematically identify the skill needs of sectors and advise on actions to address them
- develop estimating techniques to assist in anticipating future skills needs of the economy and associated resource requirements
- advise on the promotion of education/continuous training and business links at national and local level, and consider strategic issues in developing partnerships between business and the education/continuous training sectors in meeting skills needs of business
- advise on how to improve awareness of job seekers and school-leavers of sectors where there are demand for skills, qualifications required and how they can be obtained.

The initial focus is on the IT sector. To date, the Expert Group has undertaken a detailed assessment of third-level-provided (degree, diploma and certificate) technology skills needs of the hardware electronics and software sectors. The approach involved:

- Economy-wide projections derived from the ESRI/FAS Manpower Forecasting Model, supplemented by employment growth projections from sectoral studies to compensate for shortfalls in information about the IT sector in the ESRI projections.
- Three demand projections for engineering and computer studies technologists – high, basic and reduced employment growth.
- Estimating the supply of technologists, based on new graduates, returned emigrants with appropriate qualifications and existing employees' up-skilling.
- Identifying the gap between the demand for, and supply of, skilled workers.

In addition to identifying the problem, solutions to increase the supply of professionals and technicians have been recommended. These include:

- conversion courses
- employee up-skilling
- full-time education
- improved completion rates.

An implementation strategy has been identified, which includes:

- recruiting skilled people from abroad
- in-company training
- multi-skilling/conversion education
- accelerated learning programmes
- modular delivery of programmes
- extension of existing cooperation between companies and educational establishments
- work to attract a greater number of school-leavers into relevant courses.

Skills forecasting

Economists generally attempt to anticipate skill needs by forecasting occupations using employment forecasts. Employment forecasting has been going on for over 20 years. One of the first sets of projections was published by Warwick University's Institute of Employment Research (IER) in 1978. In principle, it should be relatively straightforward to look back on these early projections and assess how accurate they have been. However, major changes over the years in classification systems, data gathering methods etc have made straightforward comparisons extremely problematic and this has meant that there have been few systematic attempts to undertake such an analysis. It is also the case that forecasts are often used at a local level, but the smaller the geographical area concerned, the greater the margin for error as the reliability of official data declines as geographies get smaller. Nevertheless, despite being unable to assess the accuracy of the detail of past projections, it should still be possible to look at the accuracy of the overall trends forecasted.

A review by IER of the accuracy of their own forecasts reveals that there were indeed discrepancies in the detail, but the overall outcomes were in most major respects in line with projections: changes in occupational structure continued to follow the patterns predicted in broad terms. In fact, many of the inaccuracies were found to be due to revisions in historical databases (upon which the projections were based) rather than on forecasting error.

The IER concludes, perhaps not unexpectedly, that 'employment projections can still provide valuable information to both individuals and institutions about the kind of labour market they are likely to face' (Forfas, 1998). It suggests that when looking at small area forecasts, local information should be used to influence and amend the forecasts.

The National Skills Task Research Paper 1 (Haskell and Holt, 1999) states that these forecasts perform reasonably well in capturing occupational change, and can be usefully extended into forecasts of qualifications and of job opportunities. It goes on to state, however, that the real question is whether occupational forecasts are successful at picking up changing skills needs, and that multi-tasking may be blurring the distinction between occupations and skills (only half of all changes in skill requirements are associated with occupational change). 'This means that such forecasting should be supplemented by studies of the tasks and skills needs underlying occupations, not that we should abandon occupational forecasting. The latter remains a useful framework for systematically thinking about the future.'

Occupational change as a proxy for skill change

While occupational change may provide clues to the skills needed for the future, there are limits to the level of detail and accuracy which can be relied upon. For example, as the skills levels of certain occupations change, this may accurately manifest itself as both a decline in one occupation and an increase in another. This is indicative of the proportion of skilled to unskilled occupations at any given time. However, where skills change *within* occupations, occupational change is not so transparent. For example, the number of people classed as skilled engineers is in decline, but it is possible that (due to changes in technology and new products) the skills of those who remain are much higher than they used to be. In this case the occupational data will be giving a false signal as to the direction of skills change (Haskell and Holt, 1999).

While occupational change may indicate changes in skills needs, care must be taken when interpreting such information.

Using research to inform curriculum planning and development

The examples described above illustrate the varied focus and scope of research into skills needs. When not specifically commissioned to investigate a particular problem, the results may provide a useful steer in suggesting skills needs and inform the type of provision that is required. Information from labour market surveys may be of great use to providers and planners in terms of general curriculum development, for example in revealing the need to incorporate general business skills training and the development of business acumen in a wide range of courses. However, judgements still need to be made on the basis of imperfect information and strategies to bring about timely changes to provision are still required.

Using LMI to predict skills needs

Like other public and private organisations providing a service, colleges and training providers need to plan ahead both strategically and operationally to:

- respond to market developments and new opportunities
- plan internal capacity to meet needs
- secure funding
- respond, to varying degrees, to local economic issues and priorities.

From March 2001 a provider's effectiveness and viability will be judged on its ability to effectively respond to local economic issues and priorities that are determined by the LSC. This will be a major change for all providers eligible to draw down government funds for post-16 education and training. It will also present a challenge to the LSC nationally and locally as the new system is envisaged as being both more responsive to needs and highly managed.

Changing emphasis in planning provision

Since the incorporation of colleges in 1993, college-based FE provision has been driven by funding based on the number of students attracted to courses eligible for public funding, as defined by Schedule 2 of the F/HE Act. The education and training programmes on offer have been primarily determined by the demand for them by individual learners rather than the needs of the labour market.

The DfEE (1995) provided guidance on more effective use of LMI. This suggested the role of LMI in:

Strategic planning

A college's effectiveness and viability can be considerably improved if the use of LMI helps in the forward planning of provision.

The guidance notes that the planning of future provision based on take-up and success of courses in previous years does not necessarily anticipate trends and can therefore be an inefficient process.

Good LMI should help in forward planning so that the closest possible tailoring of supply (of provision) to demand can be achieved.

LMI may therefore help to identify deficit skills and new skill areas not addressed by current provision.

Operational planning

A good understanding of local LMI can help in the scheduling of courses; improving the relevance of course content; ensuring customer-focused provision; informing on local careers and employment opportunities.

Management and marketing

LMI may help in the positioning of the college's products and services, the identification of potential target groups, and the communication of college activities.

Perceptions and use of information on skills needs

While colleges now have considerable experience in strategic planning, the requirement to produce a strategic plan for provision, based on an assessment of skills needs, has not been routine for private and voluntary sector providers. Their experience of using skills assessments to determine the content and volume of their provision is therefore likely to be limited.

In order to ascertain the extent of use of LMI and perceptions of its usefulness in strategic, operational and curriculum planning, a small number of in-depth interviews were held with key staff in over 25 colleges and private training organisations across England during May and July 2000. The list of organisations interviewed can be found in Appendix 2 of this report, and the topic guide for these semi-structured interviews in Appendix 1.

The people interviewed were increasingly conscious of the pressure to use LMI and the majority wished to increase the extent to which they do so.

The interviews with the FE sector in particular revealed that occupational forecasting is used in the main for long-term and strategic planning – for seeking to ensure that the college is moving in synchronisation with the labour market. There is not enough detail in the information available for it to be used in the planning of the curriculum, for example, where other more detailed sources are sought and used. Given the nature of forecasting it is unlikely that this method could ever be developed to the extent and level of detail and accuracy necessary to inform day-to-day provision.

Perceptions of LMI

There was a general belief that the use of LMI had the potential to bring great benefit to the business and enable the organisation to be far more responsive. Some, but by no means all, highly specialist, niche providers with relatively stable demand for the foreseeable future – such as IT, hairdressing or training for black cab drivers – or who are solely serving a specific community, were certain that LMI was irrelevant to them.

- An ESOL provider explained that it would like to gear its provision to meet the needs of specific industrial sectors.
- One respondent, newly recruited to his company, was planning to increase the company's use of LMI. He explained that, in the past, the company had simply continued to deliver the same training provision year after year with no regard to changes in the market. He described this approach as 'crazy' and explained that he planned to use LMI in the future to respond to market demands.
- Another felt that the company should develop a role as broker between the supply and demand sides of the labour market.
- Adult Education providers, delivering mainly non Schedule 2 training, also thought that they should be looking to develop their provision to be more geared towards employability.
- A respondent from a college noted that it would lose out to its competitors in the market for vocational training and would become solely a sixth form centre for local schools if it did not become more in touch with, and responsive to, the needs of the labour market. While this, in itself, was not a bad thing, it ran counter to the strategic aim of the college.

There was a general feeling in each case that the use of LMI had the potential to bring great benefit to the business and enable the organisation to be far more responsive. However, there was also a view, particularly among respondents from private training providers, that they did not have a good understanding of LMI, were missing out on information that was available to them if only they knew where to get it or had the time to identify and analyse it. This may not, in fact, reflect reality given the difficulty that many college respondents found in applying the LMI available to their specific situations.

Adjusting the range of provision

Several private training providers and all the FE providers surveyed reported that they use LMI to decide what training to offer, seeking to address skills gaps and meet the needs of growing industrial sectors. However, some training providers felt that they could not use LMI in this way, or not to the extent they would wish, because the right information was not available or the information was not available in the right format.

Some training providers felt that there was little point in them using LMI to decide what training to offer since they could only bid for contracts offered by the TEC anyway. Further, they would expect these contracts to address market needs based on analysis of the labour market undertaken by the TEC itself.

Changing course content

Some training providers said that they would like to use skills forecasts and LMI to adjust the content of individual courses but that the appropriate information was not available to them on the specific skills needs of specific industrial sectors. Others explained that the make-up of courses was not in their control but was dictated by national standards through awarding bodies, TECs and NTOs.

Demonstrating accountability

Most respondents did not use demographic information or LMI to ensure they meet accountability requirements in terms of equal opportunities. One training provider explained that borough-based demographic information was used to assess their equal opportunities policy – comparing the distribution of their intake to the distribution of the borough's population. One FE college used it to demonstrate added value when submitting management information to the Further Education Funding Council.

Securing funding

LMI was widely used to back up funding bids, particularly for ESF funding, but also bids to TECs. In some cases, this was the only way in which LMI was used. One FE provider predicted that the need to provide a rationale for funding bids based on LMI would increase under the LSC.

Creating a competent workforce

Specialised training providers did not see LMI impacting on their ability to create a competent workforce. For example, the management and staff of a training provider, which provides training only in hairdressing, maintain their understanding of the requirements of hairdressing employers from their own experience of the industry. Many are practising hairdressers and all have contact with employers through the employment of their trainees. This is not always recognised as a valuable primary source of information by providers. If aggregated, the information could be a useful indicator of national trends, and so inform employers of customer demands.

Others commented that their trainees needed to ensure that their skills remained current and up to date and that LMI did not provide information regarding this.

However, the less specialised training providers and FE colleges were keen to use LMI to ensure that their provision responded to the needs of the labour market and that they contributed to the creation of a competent workforce in the area.

Demonstrating the benefits of training to employers and potential learners

All types of providers interviewed appeared to rely on their own information when making the case for the economic or social benefits of training. For example, they use individual success stories to show what can be achieved and present figures on progression routes to HE.

One private training provider, however, was developing a project, with partner funding, with the aim of developing a two-way relationship with employer placement providers. Providing placements for trainees may be seen as a drain on employers' resources and the project aims to use LMI to inform the provider about skills shortages in specific sectors and to enable employers in those sectors to have access to suitably trained staff.

A few respondents used LMI to demonstrate that training brings benefits in terms of employment and pay. Some respondents thought that information available was not specific enough or publicly available to facilitate this. For example, one training provider referred to the closure of the Romford Brewery site and explained that, if they knew which businesses would be occupying the redeveloped site, they would be able to inform trainees of opportunities that would be open to them if they developed the appropriate skills.

Some training providers offer new trainees guidance on their career and training choices. Trainees need assistance to shape realistic aspirations. New trainees are given guidance on what vacancies exist in the labour market, progression routes and the qualifications that employers require for specific jobs.

One Adult Education and Further Education provider was developing a resource centre to link all students and tutors online to job vacancy information.

Several respondents explained that they found it more effective to use the stories and experiences of ex-trainees to show potential and new trainees what could be achieved.

A few training providers observed that it was not necessary to 'sell' training to their trainees in this way since there was such a strong demand for the training that they were offering.

Adequacy, sufficiency and quality of provision

Most training providers felt that, because of their small size, LMI was not relevant to assessing the adequacy or quality of their provision. Quality and effectiveness was evaluated through course evaluations and training inspections. Training providers were, however, keen to gain access to market information such as national benchmarking information, particularly regarding the performance of other training providers and the extent to which they were achieving target outcomes.

One training provider was keen to use LMI to see whether it was addressing skills shortages but felt that the necessary information was not available.

Informing and fulfilling the mission statement

Private training providers do not have 'mission statements' and this was seen as relevant only to FE colleges. The FE college respondents interviewed did not consider themselves to be responsible for developing or shaping the college's mission and so did not think of LMI as a contributory factor.

Extent of changes in provision

Most training providers, particularly those specialising in providing training in the use of software packages or in a specific vocational area, do not alter their range of provision a great deal year by year. A few reported that they change their provision substantially in response to TEC contracts or because they were expanding and constantly offering new courses or qualifications.

The college respondents claimed to alter their programme and delivery mechanisms substantially from year to year with changes in each curriculum area. However, on further exploration it was clear that changes are brought about primarily by demand from individuals. While they identify new niche markets for training provision and reduce or cancel courses for which there are not sufficient enrolments; new courses are largely introduced in response to student demand.

Influences on provision

Respondents were asked to comment on the key influences on the make-up of their provision. Their responses highlighted several important drivers:

Demand from students

Demand from students and, in the case of young people, their parents, was seen as the most important driver of change to provision by all training providers and most FE colleges. Colleges stay in touch with student demand through their links with schools and parents' open days as well as through direct enquiries. For training providers, direct enquiries were the main way of keeping informed of demand, although none had formal systems for recording and analysing enquiry information.

One college respondent reported that student demand was not a main driver because students tended to need guidance as to which courses were likely to lead to employment. Several training providers explained that, although they were driven by learner demand, they often managed demand in the sense that they assisted trainees to shape their aspirations and to understand what training they would need to achieve them.

Demand from employers

Employers were generally not seen as proficient at identifying their skills needs and several training providers worked closely with employers to undertake skills need analyses. Those providers who contracted directly with employers saw employer demand as a main driver of provision, while others recognised it as important in terms of their need to be responsive to the labour market.

Providers who used employers for placements tended to use these contacts employers to explore changing skills needs with them so as to influence the range of training provision and be more responsive.

Some training providers observed that there were few large employers in the area and, college respondents in particular, noted that it was difficult to build relationships with SMEs because of the time constraints under which they operate. SMEs cannot afford to pay for one-to-one training and, in addition, to provide value for money, colleges need at least 14 people on a course.

Respondents from colleges appeared to be less driven by employer demand. Most learners were not in employment and employers tended to require small-scale, specific activities that the general FE college curriculum is not responsive enough to offer.

Economic climate

Most respondents said that they were not greatly affected by the economic climate. One training provider explained that the academic ability of their trainees tended to be higher during a recession because some young people, who began by pursuing jobs in banks etc, were unable to get these jobs and so turned to more craft-based vocational areas. In contrast, another reported that a recession reduced the demand for training from employers and that it was always trainees that were laid off first. An FE provider observed that staying-on rates at schools tended to be higher during a recession, thus reducing the college's 16–19 year-old market.

Perceived skill requirements

Respondents reported that employers were most likely to demand specific training in basic and IT skills, and wanted tightly focused vocational training rather than generic courses. Some training providers were concerned about the pressure to deliver key skills as part of all courses, firstly because they felt that many trainees did not need these skills to undertake the craft-based jobs for which they were training and, secondly, because providers lacked resources for delivering them. Others agreed with the relevance of key skills and did not find it problematic to integrate them with other learning.

Technological change

Providers of training in IT were profoundly affected by changes in technology, having constantly to update their facilities and equipment. Some providers, training in craft-based occupations that were not heavily reliant on IT, were not so affected. Technological changes had led to demand for new areas of training, such as web-page design.

FE providers reported that students now expected access to a range of digital technology across most vocational areas.

Sources of Information on skills needs and the local and national economy

Published material

The first source of published LMI mentioned by almost all respondents was the local TEC's Economic Assessment. However, providers found it of limited value because the information in it is too general for them to use. They require very specific information about the precise skills needs of specific sub-sectors of industry, if not of individual employers. On the other hand, one training provider with a pan-London operation found it difficult to use TEC Economic Assessments because they had to refer to so many. It was difficult to synthesise the information, particularly since each TEC used a different format for its Economic Assessment.

Tables of raw data provided by one TEC were not found useful by training providers, who have neither the time nor the analytical expertise to interpret them. More helpful was a four-sided A4 glossy brochure which highlights key trends and sets the local economy in the context of the UK. Training providers want the published information simply to highlight the key points and to signpost them to another contact for more detailed information, if appropriate.

One training provider called for a timetable for the release of LMI to be made available to them.

Several training providers reported that they regularly scan job advertisements in newspapers to keep informed of the vacancies in the local area and of the qualifications which employers are seeking. Some also find articles in local papers about specific employers useful. Occasionally, such an article will contain information on training needs, as a result of which the training provider can contact them to offer assistance.

Some training providers found information produced by local authorities to be useful. For example, one cited a fact-sheet produced by Lewisham Borough Council that presents trend information regarding such things as unemployment by gender. Other sources of published information cited include information from Government Office London, trade journals, company directories, NTO research and surveys undertaken by community and welfare groups (these latter tended to be relevant to training providers serving specific communities).

Only one respondent, a FE provider, mentioned *Skill trends*, which provides national rather than regional or local information and so was not of much use to training providers.

Two FE colleges used agencies which provide a collation service of, for example, borough level LMI, enabling the customer to specify the boroughs for which they wanted information. Another explained that, while there were many useful, detailed sources of information, none of them provided exactly what was required on its own. Thus work had to be done to analyse and synthesise the data.

One respondent felt that LMI reports are not written with a view to informing training providers. These reports relate to Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships rather than bespoke training or school leaver recruitment. In addition, they tended to reflect the needs of large and medium sized employers, who were scarce in the area where that provider was operating. Training providers wanted reports to be easy to read and free of jargon.

Systems for using information

FE colleges tended to have more formal systems for the use of LMI within their planning process than did private training providers. It was reported that generally a senior manager has responsibility for drawing together various sources of LMI and producing a report which is then presented to the planning team. By contrast, collating, analysing and disseminating LMI appears not to be a formal part of anyone's role within private training providers. Where it is undertaken it is usually by senior staff – within smaller providers, by the owner or managing director.

Direct customer contact

Private training providers saw direct customer contact as by far the most useful source of information on individual and employer demands. Some FE colleges undertake formal surveys of students and/or visit schools to meet and survey students, parents and teachers. FE college staff (and sometimes the staff of private training providers) are often members of local business organisations, such as Chambers of Commerce or Business Forums, and this enables them to stay in touch with employers. Most training providers rely on their perception of demand based on enquiries they receive and the contact they have with their employer placement providers.

In response to learner demand, training providers will liaise with the TECs to secure funding to deliver the requested training. However, they are also prepared to explain to trainees that there is little point developing a skill that is not in demand by local employers.

Staff knowledge, experience and contacts

Both FE colleges and private training providers saw staff knowledge of their own occupational sector as important. One private training provider said, 'Our placement officer probably knows as much about the local labour market as anyone. She trawls through the papers and calls employers all the time'. In some cases, the staff were also working within their specialist field and so were well aware of developments within their industry. FE colleges often enabled their staff to attend relevant conferences etc. One FE college had recently formalised the management of such staff knowledge, introducing tracking sheets and team meetings to share information.

Primary research

Very few private training providers had the resources to undertake any primary research, although one was just embarking on an exercise whereby members of staff were working through the Yellow Pages, telephoning employers to undertake market research with them. Another had undertaken research for LETEC – mapping the care sector.

All the FE colleges interviewed undertook primary research. Examples of this included:

- Six pieces of research undertaken in the last three years, looking at the skills needs of specific sectors. The college and its partners commissioned consultants to undertake face-to-face interviews with employers.
- Analysis of local authority data.
- Plans to collect information from parents at childcare centres about their employment aspirations and the extent to which these were constrained by childcare issues.
- Plans to build labour market related questions into their customer satisfaction surveys.
- An ADAPT-funded telephone survey of 2,500 companies within a specific sector, investigating training and skills requirements.
- A questionnaire in the college prospectus to collect information on additional support, barriers to learning and preferred modes of delivery.

Other sources

One private training provider reported that employment agencies with whom they spoke regularly, were a good source of information on employer needs. They suggested that TECs should make more use of them. Other training providers received useful information from the Careers Service, the Employment Service, Government internet sites, partnerships and, in the case of FE colleges, networks with other FE colleges and liaison with HE institutions regarding progression routes.

Geographical focus

Training providers tend to work within a relatively small geographical area. Their trainees tend to live locally and seek work within their local area. Thus labour market information with a national or regional focus was of little use to them. In some cases, training providers' focus was even smaller, for example, a particular borough or a part of a borough.

If a provider is located in a dormitory town, the relevant labour market for them might be a city within the travel-to-work area, for example, central London.

FE colleges were more interested in regional information than private training providers and recognised that national trends were likely to be reflected locally.

Detailed information required

Training providers were clear that micro, rather than macro, information about the skills needs of specific local employers was of most use to them. So, for example, one provider wanted information as to precisely which companies were likely to occupy the former Romford Brewery site and precisely what their skills needs would be. They want to know which employers are moving into the area, what skill needs existing employers have, and what the plans are regarding mass redundancies, eg Ford. One provider called for information on the core skills required by each sector.

Information in TEC Economic Assessments regarding the need for 'IT' training or growth in 'professional occupations' or skills shortages in 'manufacturing' begged the questions: 'Which precise IT skills are needed?' 'Which professional occupations?' 'Which sub-sectors of manufacturing?' or even 'Which local companies are being referred to?'

Although this was particularly true for private training providers FE colleges also called for micro information. For example, one respondent explained: 'If we knew there were 20 young mothers keen on training in a particular area and there were jobs available in an expanding local company, we could take the training to them by establishing a local centre'.

They also called for more information on what other providers offer, to use for benchmarking and to monitor their market position and to develop niche markets.

There was a perception that TECs are protective about their employer databases and unwilling to share contact details. Some training providers reported that TECs would contact them saying that they knew of an employer who wanted some training. The provider wanted to contact the employer directly but the TEC insisted on managing the process themselves, even though they might not have an in-depth understanding of what the provider offered. It was suggested that TECs' raw LMI data could be made available to training providers so that they could undertake analysis themselves although, as mentioned above, the expertise to analyse and make use of this data may be lacking.

One FE college, providing training in a vocational area in which most workers are freelance, called for more information to be made available on self-employment. In the absence of such information, the college had to undertake complex analysis of vacancies for other types of occupation that might indicate growth in industries that would provide work for freelancers.

Planning timetables

FE colleges have been required to produce a three-year strategic plan, annually updated. They are thus largely concerned with longer-term skills issues and development needs, particularly when preparing young people for future careers, which may not be secured until after a significant period of further and/or higher education. A college respondent noted that the report on collated LMI is produced by July to influence planning for September of the following year. Another said that, since the TEC's Economic Assessment was not published until Easter, it was not possible to use it for the same year's planning. Instead, it was used to inform the planning for the academic year starting in September – 18 months ahead.

One training provider reported that it was forced to delay planning for the contract year (starting in March) until December/January rather than September/October because they had to wait for information from the TEC.

On the other hand, most training providers operate an ongoing rather than long-term planning process. Activity is often undertaken ad hoc as a response to the timetable of funding programmes. Training providers, or indeed college business units, who may be delivering a limited range of provision and on a smaller scale, may be better placed to respond to short-term needs and change their provision to meet labour market demand. If a new company moves into the area or a local company urgently needs new staff, smaller providers are in a position to rapidly introduce the necessary training provision.

Constraints on using LMI

For some providers, LMI was thought to be irrelevant because they were reliant on contracts awarded by the TEC, and it was assumed, indeed expected, that these contracts were being issued because of a market need already identified by the TEC itself. However, there was an awareness that because of the way funding is tied to government programmes, however, the award of a training contract often has more to do with the availability of funding than a response to a real labour market demand.

Planning partnerships

It is rare for private training providers to have partnerships in place for planning purposes, although some described the employers they work with (as customers or providers of work placements) as partners, and some regarded TECs as partners in that the contract management relationship involved two-way dialogue. One training provider ran joint seminars and programmes for the members of local associations of ethnic minority businesses.

It is more common for FE colleges to have partnerships in place. Examples quoted by respondents included:

- a number of colleges and a large employer planning to develop a training centre on the employer's site
- Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects with local authorities
- collaborative funding bids
- liaison with HEIs regarding progression routes
- mutual sign-posting with the local business centre (offering business consultancy).

Internal market research resources

Very few training providers interviewed had an internal market research resource, and this appears to be the case across the board. When they do undertake market research, it is generally ad hoc and small scale and undertaken by staff alongside their other responsibilities.

FE colleges were more likely to have dedicated marketing and research resources.

One college had employed a graduate on a gap year in the marketing department and had decided to establish a permanent post to analyse the student database.

Another commissioned outside research about twice a year.

The new post-16 education and training system

Most respondents felt it was too soon to predict the implications of the introduction of the LSC since the management arrangements had not yet been clearly specified. The uncertainty was preventing a few training providers from investing in expansion or diversifying.

Several respondents expressed concern about the skills of people coming into posts in the LSC and Employment Service (ES). Some questioned whether the contract management expertise that the TECs had built up would transfer. The transfer of responsibility could lead to a lot of unnecessary extra bureaucracy and paperwork. It was felt that weaker training providers might be forced out of business (which was seen as an opportunity by some respondents). One respondent stated that if the ES was slower in settling invoices than the TECs has been, their company would consider moving out of the training market to concentrate on human resources consultancy.

One FE college, which had small contracts with several TECs, welcomed the fact that all these contracts would now come under one umbrella, expecting this to reduce bureaucracy.

One training provider hoped that, once the ES was responsible for adult training, the quality of the trainees referred to them would improve, since there would be a greater incentive for the ES to get people into work.

Some respondents expected little change, predicting that the individuals currently involved would remain in place.

Development needs

There are many issues arising from the survey which indicate the need for further support and development. The interviews with the FE sector in particular reveal that occupational forecasting is used in the main for long-term and strategic planning – for seeking to ensure that the college is moving in synchronisation with the labour market. There is not enough detail in the information available for it to be used in the planning of the curriculum, for example, where other more informative sources are sought and used. Given the nature of forecasting, it is unlikely that this method could ever be developed to the level of detail and accuracy necessary to inform day-to-day provision.

Skills forecasts and LMI – awareness and applications

Providers in the survey were aware of the increasing pressure to relate their provision to skills' needs. Most of those interviewed wanted to increase their awareness of needs, but some of those delivering training in highly specialised areas did not see the relevance to their business. However, these providers may benefit from skills forecasts to assist in identifying and meeting the needs of specific industrial sectors or in identifying new groups of potential trainees.

It is important that the growing awareness of the usefulness of LMI is capitalised upon and further developed to secure greater relevance to the world of work in provision. Training in strategic planning and in the use of skills forecasts and LMI will undoubtedly be required. More needs to be done to encourage the pro-active sourcing of available LMI among training providers for example through use of the internet and especially in training staff to use it. Dissemination and extension of good practice is required.

(An example of good practice can be found in Appendix 3 of this report.)

Targeted information

There is much evidence that a targeted, rather than a 'one size fits all', approach to the provision of LMI will need to be developed if responsive provision is to become a reality. Information is needed on a local, regional, national and sector basis, and providers need to be able to select the kind of information which is most useful to their particular circumstances. Learners also require usable and comprehensible information.

Improving the accuracy and communication of skill needs

Providers who were in direct contact with employers saw employer demand as a main driver of provision, while others recognised it as important in terms of their need to be responsive to the labour market. However, the accuracy of reports of employers' skills was questioned, particularly in relation to key skills. Some training providers were concerned about the pressure to deliver key skills as a part of all courses, feeling that many trainees did not need these skills to undertake the jobs for which they were training. There may be a significant difference in the opinions of employers, who may report the need for key skills in surveys, and their behaviour, which may display scant regard for key skills in the commitment or training of their staff.

The role of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

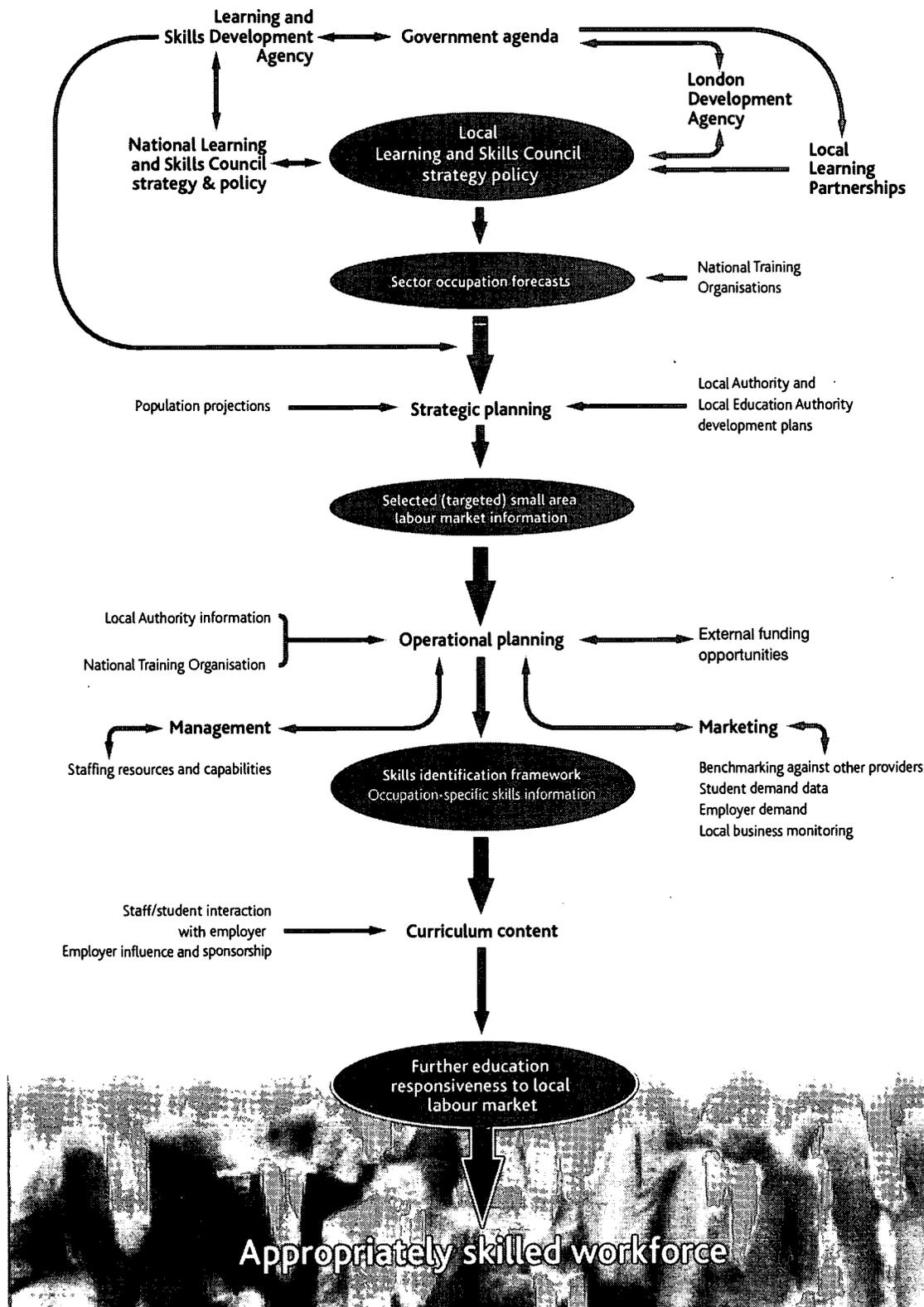
The LSC and local LSCs have a key role in promoting providers' responsiveness to skills forecasts and labour market information. There is also a need to ensure that employers clearly articulate the skills needs of their employees. Matching these needs to learning programmes which bring about effective learning is often complicated by the lack of a shared language and taxonomy of skills. London East LSC (formerly LETEC) has been working on a skills identification framework to assist this process.¹ As the diagram opposite indicates, there are many players involved in the skills identification and planning processes. Central to this is clear communication between the respective bodies and an understanding of each others' roles and contribution to the development of an appropriately skilled workforce.

The diagram illustrates the role the local LSC will need to play to secure labour market responsiveness by the further education and training sector. Strategic and operational planning must continue to be informed by skills forecasts and LMI, although the quality and timeliness could be improved. What is currently lacking is detailed information on skills and skills levels needed in specific occupations. The diagram shows where this would fit into the planning process.

1. Further details or information on how your organisation could be involved in this development is available from Sally MacPherson, Head of Research and Evaluation, London East LSC.

Equipped for the job

The role of the local Learning and Skills Council in promoting labour market responsiveness in the enlarged further education sector



This Skills Identification Framework is being developed by London East LSC, in partnership with the Agency, and will be piloted and launched during 2001/2.

A responsive VET system needs to be underpinned by long-term strategic planning informed by reliable and insightful information about skills needs. However, even the most insightful of plans cannot take into account unexpected changes in skills needs such as the collapse of a local company, inward investment on a significant scale or time-limited demands such as the Millennium Dome. Such developments are fairly commonplace, but the precise nature of needs, their location and the existing capacity of the indigenous workforce are likely to be unique.

Forward planning, therefore, can only go so far in preparing for the unexpected. A nimble and responsive supply system, capable of rapidly customising education and training provision to meet emerging needs, is required. Key ingredients of this system would be:

- well-developed capacity to identify skills gaps and to assess individuals' development needs
- clear articulation of needs through a commonly agreed lexicon of skills
- expert staff, able to work flexibly without detriment to regular provision
- capacity to produce customised learning packages, accredited to national standards through unitised qualifications
- sensitive funding regimes, which support employers, individuals and the local economy in urgent upskilling of needs.

Different types of responses will be needed, although similar principles apply:

- Being 'in the know' about the industry, leading developments (state of the art), building alliances with suppliers
- Having sustained, long-term relationships between providers and employers – to enable long- and short-term needs to be addressed strategically
- Having flexible physical and human resources
- Possessing a good reputation and high standing in the business community.

To explore the state of provider responsiveness to skills needs, the Learning and Skills Development Agency commissioned case studies demonstrating how colleges have responded to adapt provision to provide appropriate education and skills training.

Telford College of Arts & Technology was faced with the problems created by the collapse of a well-established company that was a major employer in the region. Their development of a 'rapid response' to local redundancies is the key feature of the case study.

Leeds College of Technology recognised that it was in the position of being the key provider of training and support for a substantial proportion of a major national industry. Using the specialised expertise and experience of the college staff, and in collaboration with local, national and international companies, they created a 'Print Media Centre' as a centre of excellence for the print industry.

In the competitive world of vocational education and training, *Carmarthenshire College* realised the importance of building long-term relationships with key clients. This resulted in the evolution of the 'manufacturing workforce development partnership'.

As colleges are more and more expected to diversify their funding sources, *Plymouth College of Further Education* took up the challenge of competitive tendering. The case study describes their success in bidding for and providing training for a major Government department, the Benefits Agency.

Newham Sixth Form College had to respond quickly with a range of training solutions for a major national project with a short initial life-span but the potential for long-term development. With a high level of long-term unemployed in their area, a Pre-employment Training programme was developed to encourage a return to work for this client group.

These examples are by no means the exception. Many other colleges are engaged in similar work. However, this is often in the face of major difficulties, largely due to the inflexibility of the current funding and accreditation systems. In the case of Telford College, their response to the major redundancies in the town was possible because of the existing links between the planning and development agencies in the town and the college. Such links need to be nurtured, and are best developed where there is a fair degree of common purpose in the mindsets of the development agencies and providers of education and training.

CASE STUDY 1

Rapid response to major redundancies

During the first nine months of 1999, 2,214 jobs were lost in Shropshire, 90% of these being in Telford. The vast majority of the jobs lost were in manufacturing and in the semi-skilled sector. Many individuals had been in steady employment for a number of years, some up to 25 years. In many cases, this was their first experience of unemployment.

Existing skills levels of the people made redundant were insufficient to secure new jobs. Many lacked basic numeracy/literacy and ICT skills. A number also had skills which were not tested or accredited and were therefore not able to market these to prospective new employers. Many of the new jobs created in Telford were service sector, such as Call Centre and Logistics, which required very different skills from those in the manufacturing sector.

The Employment Service supported four large redundancy programmes in the Telford area during the year 2000. The companies involved were either subject to total closure or a high percentage redundancy programme, and all employed staff were engaged in semi-skilled manufacturing. The companies were major employers in Telford and, in total, 1,340 people were to be made redundant during the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 July 2000.

All of the companies' redundancy programmes were phased over a period of time and arranged around production needs – their staff being released from their employment over a period of up to six months.

Working in conjunction with a number of Government agencies, Telford College bid for funds from Advantage West Midlands (Government Office) and the Rapid Response Fund (a regional fund to support redundancy programmes), to develop skills for job seeking and re-employment as soon as the redundancies were announced. The main aim was to enable individuals to gain new jobs by quickly developing their 'employability skills'.

The College decided that its approach to each company would be similar in the first instance. However, they were very aware that flexibility would have to be built into the training and guidance options, as individual needs would vary considerably. The College proposal was as follows:

1. Within 24 hours of receiving the redundancy notice, Telford College would complete a company audit. The audit would provide information on time-scales, employees involved, how much time employees would be allowed away from their place of work, and a review of facilities that could be used to support the project.
2. A Company Report would be generated within three working days and would outline the project plan, project time-scales and equipment/facilities and staffing required to support the programme.
3. On acceptance of the project plan, a presentation would be made to the company's senior management to inform them of the proposals and what was expected of them to enable their staff to receive maximum benefit from the project.
4. All members of the company's staff would attend a seminar in groups of 20. The seminar would detail how the project would operate and how it would help individuals to seek re-employment by providing guidance and training.
5. Very quickly after the workforce seminar, all employees would attend an individual interview to discuss and agree their needs. This would result in a personal action plan, which would highlight their individual needs.
6. Training and guidance options would be discussed on an individual basis, bearing in mind the different needs expected to be required. The College would then offer a range of 'pick and mix' options including:
 - guidance and counselling on career options
 - auditing current skill levels and identifying training requirements
 - CV writing and job/interview skills
 - accreditation of prior learning and NVQ credits
 - delivery of vocational training as identified by the skills audit
 - basic IT training
 - basic numeracy and literacy teaching
 - customised training.
7. Training would be provided for a period of up to 12 weeks after an employee left the company (other than for NVQs, training for which would be for a period up to 12 months).

A timing plan was submitted showing activities completed against time-scales and costs. In the spirit of the Rapid Response Fund, within 48 hours Advantage West Midlands advised Telford College and its partners that the bid was successful and to carry out the project as soon as possible.

To make a project of this nature work effectively, a dedicated team was deployed using existing college personnel. A Project Manager was appointed along with a number of advisers and trainers. The staff all had a Personnel/Training background and, very importantly, they were flexible in terms of their skills and working hours.

This was especially important as up to 200 people per month required interviewing and training. IT suites were set up within the College with the appropriate learning materials and staff made available.

As soon as possible after a redundancy announcement, college staff were on-site to run information seminars and arrange individual interviews. With one of the companies making 650 staff redundant, it was important that the interviews were arranged to coincide with the schedule of people leaving the company. Many of the redundancies were staggered over the statutory period of 12 weeks' notice and it was vital that individual needs were addressed.

At an early stage in the project, the personal interviews revealed that the majority of the staff had only the skills needed to complete their current job. They had been out of learning for many years with the result that confidence in their own ability was very low, and they had a fear of entering a learning environment. As an example, a large percentage had never used a computer but desperately wanted to develop skills in this area and needed an easy solution for their training.

During the interviews, it was necessary to guide and advise people to undertake training that would make them more employable. This was a vital process and proved to be the key to individuals of any age making a commitment to undertake training and therefore enhancing their chances of gaining successful re-employment.

Usually, once through the first step of training, people were sold on the concept and their fears were overcome. For many people the ability to gain basic computer keyboard skills proved a tremendous advantage with the result that their own confidence was enhanced.

All of the training was aimed at making people more employable. With the ability to 'pick and mix' from a wide selection of options, a training plan was successfully tailored to each individual. This had the result that, when they had completed the training, they were able to market themselves to prospective employers in new sectors.

Examples of how the training worked for individual people are as follows:

- A sewing machinist who had been employed for 20 years in the same company, with no marketable skills, attended basic IT courses, moved onto CLAIT and gained employment in the Civil Service in an administration role. She is now undertaking an NVQ Level 2 in Administration.
- Business managers with no formal qualifications attended college courses to have their management skills validated.
- Administrators and receptionists were able to undertake NVQs in Administration and Customer Service. The ability to be able to demonstrate to prospective employers that they were undertaking an NVQ and that it could continue to be assessed with their new employer enabled them to gain employment.

Throughout the project the individuals receiving training, the company's management and the College quality procedures evaluated all aspects of the project, from a lecturer's suitability to subject relevance and facilities.

The most important aspect of the project was to develop the skills of the people who had been made redundant, thus enhancing their chance of gaining employment. Throughout the project, using an independent call centre, all the people who had undertaken training were contacted and monitored.

The Rapid Response project proved to be an enormous success for all concerned, from the management of the companies to the people who had been made redundant.

The personnel and effort required to make the project work should not be under-estimated. A dedicated team that is flexible and willing to work hours to meet the needs of both the companies and the individuals is vital to achieve the desired results. The ability to deliver a wide range of courses within a short time-scale enabled large numbers of people to gain the training they required.

The main reason for not being able to train some of the employees made redundant was lack of support from their employer. Often prior to their release and due to production pressures by the company's management, the College team was unable to see the staff. It is important to gain access to the people as soon as possible and get them on board because once they have left you have effectively lost them. The major lesson from this aspect of the project is that the company must be managed and contact with them must be on a daily basis.

If any one factor were highlighted as to why the project was so successful, it would be the interview skills, flexibility and 'rapid response' of college staff in following up each individual. For many people the redundancy process causes enormous personal problems, and the need for guidance and support is vital. The caring attitude of the College's staff enabled individuals to achieve the training that would help them seek employment.

The project achieved the following outcomes:

Activity	Numbers
Individual interviews/personal action plans	802
Skills audit	21
Counselling	802
CV and job search/interview techniques	19
Basic information technology	516
CLAIT/IBT 2	50
Job-related up-skilling and health and safety training	132
Management training	23
NVQ training	20
Basic skills	46
Customised training	42

As a final testament that the project worked, the following is one of many statements received from participants:

I have found the job I never thought I would get and it's all down to the Rapid Response team at Telford College. I was previously a sewing machinist and had no computer knowledge before completing the IT courses. With my new skills I have secured a new job with a very large insurance provider.

CASE STUDY 2

Planning for major change in the print media industry

The high concentration of jobs related to the print industry in the Leeds area prompted Leeds College of Technology to strategically review its commitment to the industry and the particular requirements of employers. The College is the major training provider for the print industry in the North of England, and the effectiveness with which it meets skills needs is crucial to the success and economy of the area. Twenty per cent of the UK's printing industry is in Yorkshire and Humberside, which is the largest concentration of printing and related employers outside of London. Printing employs 35,000 people in the region and accounts for 16% of total manufacturing output, earning £278m per annum for the city.

Labour market statistics suggested the need for 950 new entrants to the industry annually, and the dynamics of change and technological development in the sector necessitate rapid up-skilling of the existing workforce.

The College principal led a consultation process to ensure that the College knew what the industry wanted. College representatives, including the principal, with first-hand knowledge of the print industry, visited more than 200 companies over a period of four months.

Formal consultations were also held with Business Links, Leeds, Sheffield and Humberside Training and Enterprise Companies, Hull and Leeds Economic Development Agencies, Print Unions, Government Office, the Yorkshire and Humberside RIS and the British Printing Industry Federation. The prior knowledge of the sector by the staff undertaking the consultation was a key factor in its success. This initiative enabled the industry to identify the need for a Print Media Centre to serve the needs of the Yorkshire and Humberside printing, packaging and publishing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The outcomes of this consultation was a joint vision which aimed to:

1. Work with the local and regional industry to establish a centre of excellence for printing, publishing and electronic publishing
2. Provide SMEs with flexible access to training, technical expertise and high technology communication, conferencing and production technologies.

Turning the concept into reality required commitment and persistence from all concerned. The College made the strategic decision to allocate £296,000 of its budget to the project and was able to secure a further £112,000 from the Leeds Training and Enterprise Company Competitiveness Fund. The major achievement in funding support was, however, the securing of private sponsorship from companies such as Heidelberg, Komori, 3M Imation, Xerox and Agfa, totalling £1,750,000.

To ensure the relevance and development of the Print Media Centre's programme, it was agreed to form a steering group, drawing upon both public and private sector organisations, with the principal, chair of governors and head of department representing the College. This group identified the key objectives for the Centre to secure cost-effective, high-tech training for individuals and companies, these being consistent with the College mission.

The College was able to attract money and resources for the project, and continues to do so, because the industry saw the College was addressing its specific needs and because the industry was itself closely involved in expressing these needs and the means to fulfil them. Many other companies now provide support through donations of materials, equipment and assistance towards the annual running costs of the Centre.

The needs of industry change rapidly, and consultation with employers must be ongoing. The College now employs a field officer to visit companies and obtain feedback and market information. Employers are consulted annually using a questionnaire. The result is that College provision is keeping pace with technological developments in the industry, particularly digital and electronic advances.

The Print Media Centre has a membership scheme to allow companies and individuals with an interest in the printing industry to participate in the Centre programmes. There is a high demand for the training provided, with 100 Modern Apprenticeships starting each year. This provides the College with deep roots in the industry. Many customised courses have been developed and full cost income from the project has risen dramatically. The two universities in Leeds have sought partnership with the College. A new degree with the University of Leeds Colour Chemistry department is planned and the College has successfully negotiated to become a print sector base hub for the University for Industry.

Through its contributions to sector publications, alumni and personal contacts, the Print Media Centre has achieved international recognition and is being used by the Irish Printing Federation and the Germany Institute of Printing.

Current targets include the integration of new technology into the training, the expansion of Print Online and the establishment of a dedicated remote technology access and video conferencing suite – all achieved in negotiation with the industry.

The Print Media Centre has resulted in:

- sponsorship in excess of £3m
- 24 print publishing courses
- 100 Modern Apprenticeships starts annually
- a virtual classroom in Hull
- commissioned research from the University of Middlesex and BPIF
- a joint degree with the University of Leeds
- widespread publicity for the College and all its activities.

The success of the Leeds College of Technology Print Media Centre illustrates the role further education can play in supporting specific industry needs. The success grew out of a lot of hard work but perhaps the critical success factors were:

- the College formulated a strategy to speak, and more importantly, to listen to the industry
- the initiative had the total support of the principal and governors
- the College was able to exploit the knowledge and intellectual property it had within the principal and its staff
- the involvement of industrialists on the steering group
- the consequent confidence of the industry to trust in and invest in the College's resource
- the continuing consultation with the industry
- the involvement of print unions as well as print employers.

Employers are not interested in choosing from a list of outdated, off-the-shelf courses. More than anything, employers want colleges to listen to them and act upon what they want and provide it, not just offer what the college thinks it should!

CASE STUDY 3

The benefits of sustained partnerships for workforce development

The Engineering Faculty of Carmarthenshire College has a long tradition of working closely with local engineering companies, offering a broad range of courses from basic engineering skills at operative level up to and including specialised HND/degree level courses in technical areas. Renowned as a manufacturing town, Llanelli's industrial base stemmed from a large steel works, large tin plate factories and foundries. This led to the proliferation of both SMEs and some large manufacturing businesses using steel and tin as their raw materials.

Since the 1960s the major economic activity in Llanelli has been the production of automotive components such as car radiators and pressed steel car body parts. The decline of manufacturing, loss of the local steel works and the reduction in size of the tin plate works reflects the enormous global pressure under which local manufacturing companies now operate. Whilst being very committed to the training of their labour forces, manufacturing companies have, in this competitive environment, been constrained by issues of time and cost. Close, regular contact and dialogue between companies and College staff has meant that lecturers have an in-depth appreciation of the actual business 'drivers'. These are:

- market forces
- industrial and economic problems
- training needs
- the identification of skills gaps as they impact on company performance in 'real time'.

This appreciation and awareness led, amongst other initiatives, to the development of in-company training programmes.

In 1996 Calsonic Llanelli Radiators, a world-leading manufacturer of engine cooling systems employing over 1,200 personnel, had set themselves the challenging goal of improving the skills base of the entire workforce to world-class levels. The company had identified an acute need to train their manufacturing operatives if they were to meet the benchmark of their Japanese sister company's performance. Concurrently, Carmarthenshire College's Faculty of Engineering had set itself the target to reverse the decline in engineering recruitment and training that was occurring both locally and nationally.

Calsonic were very clear in their training objectives. They wanted training to be NVQ-based, to give them objective targets against which to measure current company-wide skill and ability levels, be a benchmark in evaluating future internal performance, and as a means of identifying training and development needs. After thoroughly investigating the range of training providers offering engineering NVQs, they chose the College, in part because of both the existing relationship with Foundation Engineering off-job training and short course training and because of the College's reputation as a high quality provider as confirmed by EMTA (then ENTRA). However, the predominant reason was the level of support the College was prepared to offer, in the form of a senior engineering lecturer based within the company on a full-time basis.

It was a considerable achievement for the College to become involved in the project as the company had considered the full range of Welsh-based providers. Calsonic is very much a 'flagship' company in the area and the competition for gaining business from the company is correspondingly intense. The company was also very aware about what the NVQ process would involve and were not convinced by rival providers' claims that the whole workforce could get NVQ Level 2 in six months after two visits from an assessor.

An initial and extensive training needs analysis identified three major elements which together provided a framework of training and development for the entire manufacturing workforce. These elements were:

- the role-specific training of production operators
- team leader development
- basic engineering skills development for all manufacturing staff.

A joint management team was set up comprising two or three senior staff from Calsonic and from the College.

A high proportion of the workforce was over 50 years of age and few had any formal qualifications. There was concern that the operatives would interpret assessment questioning, measuring and observing as a 'time and motion' study or as a threat of some sort. The company was determined to make the process simple for them to operate and, to maintain credibility; it had to be applied widely across the company without any element of compulsion.

As a result the joint management team agreed essential design parameters, in that all training had to be NVQ accredited and undertaken in the workplace on a voluntary basis with no financial incentives attached.

Once the company had agreed the guidelines, the College was given free rein to begin the design and development.

By enlisting the support of the College's Managing Agency, the Engineering Faculty was able to design a suitable package which met the company's time and cost constraints.

The programme was funded by drawing in money from a number of sources, including FEFCW, TEC Modern Apprenticeship/National Traineeship and some European Objective 4 funding. Calsonic accepted 55% of the costs of the programme and all other direct costs were borne by the College. Indirect costs were incurred by the company in terms of accommodation – a suite of rooms was allocated, Calsonic staff management time, the development of a system for tracking individuals' progress through the NVQs, and so on. The main cost to the College was a dedicated full-time member of staff. The College considered it to be important that this level of resources should be dedicated to the project to ensure success. The project would then become more cost-effective after the initial 'pilot' phase. It was recognised that NVQs were rapidly becoming an important new market that needed such resources to be allocated to ensure development in the longer term.

A learning programme leading to NVQs for over 500 manufacturing staff was designed. Great care was taken in selecting the correct NVQs for the work activity of the company. This required becoming familiar with the work of every stage of the manufacturing process and talking to workers, plant supervisors, team leaders and plant managers. Careful scrutiny of the NVQ Units and Elements had to be carried out to ensure the correct choice, and getting 'behind' the specifications was an essential but time-consuming task. EMTA were consulted regularly during the whole period of six to eight weeks that it took to do this analysis and were invited to add their expertise before the decisions were finalised. The College and the company through the joint management team agreed all decisions.

The role-specific training of production operators led to the selection of a range of appropriate NVQ Level 1 awards, including Engineering Machining, Engineering Assembly and Engineering Materials Processing. The initial level of achievement of these operatives was low, with about half of them having no formal qualifications but, by 1998/99, Level 2 NVQ awards were available, concentrating on the Performing Manufacturing Operations award.

Modern Apprenticeships were already an established activity in the company at NVQ Level 3. NVQs at Level 4, funded under the Welsh Office's Adult Technician Training Programme for senior technical staff, were also developed during this time but as the number of staff in these programmes was inevitably smaller, they were not seen to be a major element of the project.

The original idea was to train approximately 15 Calsonic staff as assessors in Units D32 and D33, who would then use oral questioning lists, observation checklists and assessment plans written and designed by the resident College lecturer who acted as the internal verifier to ensure standardisation. Given the absolute requirement of keeping production disruption to the minimum, the design and implementation of the assessment processes had to be efficient; they also had to be user friendly because of the learner group's lack of experience in undertaking formal training.

The preparation work was very time-consuming but a great learning opportunity. Phrasing oral questions is a skill in itself, but ensuring that they were clearly comprehensible, at the right pitch for the workforce, met the performance criteria of the NVQ, asked for the right information, and could also be quickly carried out was a stretching task. After testing and several re-drafts, complete 'Assessor Packs' were published and ready for use. The preparation of assessment materials relevant to every job in the manufacturing workforce took 10–12 months to complete. Once the assessment packs had been approved by EMTA the programme was ready to start.

However, surges in orders, the introduction of new production lines and the everyday problems of business took assessors back to their normal work duties and progress was slower than either the company or the College wanted. After a formal review, the company decided to make some changes. At this point, it is reasonable to assume that a less committed company might have allowed the programme to decline. Calsonic, however, were very committed and, seeing that the original strategy of using team leaders for assessment could not work, took the decision to employ three full-time assessors to work with the college lecturer. This transformed the situation and the programme moved forward rapidly.

Three hundred and fifty seven employees have now achieved NVQ Level 1 and 35 have achieved NVQ Level 2. Although at the start not everyone chose to register on the programme, such was the enthusiasm and support given by the company, with celebrations of success appearing in Calsonic's own Newsletters, 90% of the workforce eventually elected to join the programme. The voluntary nature of the scheme acted as a great incentive. Some operating staff were exceedingly pleased to gain a full qualification – in some instances the first formal award of their lives.

The College is now involved in all of the Engineering Modern Apprenticeships in the company, and within Calsonic; training in other areas has mushroomed:

- Key skills are now being delivered at Level 1 in significant numbers.
- Information Technology training in-company has been set up by the College Computing Faculty.
- 28 team leaders are undertaking a World Class Team Leaders Award incorporating the NVQ in Supervisory Management.
- 20 candidates are undergoing Train the Trainer programmes in preparation for C24 and C25 awards.
- Individuals are being released by the company for high level skills training in specialised areas such as Hydraulics and Pneumatics.

A project that was originally intended to take between two and three years to complete will now, as a result of staff turnover and changing company requirements, continue into the foreseeable future.

The project has been very effective in generating more training opportunities for the College. Other companies within a 25-mile radius of the College have now joined the programme, with the work carried out at Calsonic being transferred successfully to other manufacturing areas such as bearings, aerosol cans and plastic mouldings. An encouraging feature of this transferability of the programme is the fact that one of the companies is a SME. It has taken considerable effort to get this small company up to speed on the organisation and arrangement of in-company training but now that they do understand what is involved they are fully committed, and have even set pay scales and promotion against the pre-requisite of staff holding the relevant NVQ.

The programme has been a resounding success, with tangible benefits to all parties, individual employees, the company and the College. The success of the Carmarthenshire College/Calsonic workforce development programme is an excellent example of the way in which working with key employers can generate new business for colleges.

A number of important lessons were learnt during the course of the project:

- The college must have a full understanding of the processes and the business system of the company, and understand exactly what the company is trying to achieve.
- NVQs are easy to do badly and difficult to implement well. Many pitfalls exist unless the planning, preparation, testing and attention to detail are executed thoroughly during the development phase.
- Resourcing must be adequate. Contrary to popular belief, NVQs carried out wholly in the workplace require substantial time and effort if world-class standards are to be achieved as well as meet the company's expectations in terms of minimising disruption to production schedules.
- Working in partnership and locating a full time member of staff at the workplace was an essential factor in sustaining success. The person chosen must have excellent inter-personal skills and a robust disposition to balance the 'nutcracker' effect of pressures from two organisations.
- Sufficient time must be built into the programme with reasonable goals and objectives to ensure all parties' expectations can be met. The project took much longer than anticipated before it took off.

CASE STUDY 4

Gearing up for national contracts

This case study explores the implications for a large further education college (Plymouth College of FE) for bidding for and delivering a training contract for the Executive Agency of the Department of Social Security. This contract was first awarded in 1994 for a three-year period and later extended for a further two years. A larger contract was then signed with the customer in 1999 and this is still in operation.

This was the first major regional training contract for the College and involved the development of specific short training courses; employer-dedicated booking and billing systems; delivery off site, initially throughout the West Country and latterly throughout the United Kingdom; and the adoption of a 'customer first' culture. Existing staff had to be seconded to management, development and delivery duties which were, in some cases, significantly different from 'normal' further education duties. New staff had to be recruited on atypical contracts and managed at a distance.

The Benefits Agency offered the opportunity to bid as a result of the Government's initiative regarding competitive tendering to improve value for money in its activities that are sub-contracted. The Benefits Agency had to face the potential of initial resistance to an external organisation delivering a service traditionally provided in-house, and encourage an attitude change to training in the midst of significant cultural and legislative change affecting the whole organisation.

The initial contract was for the design and delivery of all non-technical training via short courses covering personal development, IT, and management training to the West Country offices of the Benefits Agency. A significant amount of time and resources were committed to the preparation and delivery of the bid. It was apparent that there was a large number of potential bidders and that the final shortlist included both local and national private training companies as well as further education colleges. Significant paper-based submissions and attendance at a sequence of presentations to the employer bid team were required over a four month period.

Once the contract was awarded, delivery had to commence within six weeks. From a standing start, the College had to recruit staff to deliver the programmes, commission the development of a large number (72) of short courses, produce and distribute a prospectus of courses to all 3,500 employees, and set up an administrative and management structure to support the contract.

Initially one administration officer (who was eventually joined by another) worked closely with the new business manager (later to become contract manager) in order to set up course booking systems that met the needs of the customer. At the same time, a range of liaison meetings was held with customer representatives to explore both the formal requirements of the contract and the underlying culture of the organisation. The Benefit Agency's own training team was being absorbed within the organisation and some tension was apparent in meetings.

The range of courses developed was extensive, as the following examples show:

- IT in Access, Excel and Word
- Interviewing skills
- Managing work-related stress
- Dealing with the public
- Employment law
- Handling difficult situations
- Health and safety awareness
- Mid-life – planning ahead
- Novell systems administration
- Performance appraisal
- Project management
- Equal opportunities
- Running staff clubs
- Using role-play in training.

These courses were normally between one to three days' duration.

It soon became apparent that a stance of openness and willingness to admit to mistakes encouraged a cooperative and supportive approach from the Benefits Agency contract manager. This allowed for successful negotiations regarding the contract and its implementation, as the following examples demonstrate.

1. Whilst the norm was the delivery of one- and two-day programmes by experienced tutors to an appreciative audience, there were occasions when the delivery was not up to the required standard. In those cases it was normal not to charge the customer and to offer a repetition at no further cost.
2. Quite often when a specific office requested a programme for their own staff, they wished for amendments to the agreed programme to meet their specific needs. Sending the relevant tutor to visit the customer to discuss their particular requirements in order to amend the programme usually accommodated this.

It became necessary to develop a very close working relationship with the customer. This meant that not only were regular meetings, both formal and informal, held with the customer's representative, but that close liaison occurred between administrative staff and that all trainers were effectively inducted into the culture of the organisation.

This was achieved by:

- Preparation of an induction pack for new tutors that not only included information on College terms and conditions of service but also details on customer policies and procedures.
- Secondment of lecturers to the customer – one member of staff found themselves out at 6am with the Fraud Team raiding teams of daffodil pickers also claiming benefit!
- The issuing of a regular newsletter to all trainers that included information on developments and policies within the Benefits Agency.

A key part of the culture related to equal opportunities. The College staff were delivering equal opportunities training to all Agency staff who required a detailed knowledge of both the issues and the organisation's policies and procedures. It was also necessary to ensure that equal opportunities were embedded in the development and delivery of all programmes.

The content of programmes, the images presented on audio visual aids, the venues and timing of events, the production of an audio version of the course prospectus, and the conduct of staff delivering programmes were all under the microscope.

Course content and supporting materials had to be internally approved by the PMBC contract manager prior to submission to a representative panel of customer staff acting in a quality assurance role. Equal opportunities issues were addressed as part of this quality assurance process. There was also an agreed procedure for dealing with customer complaints. All new staff on the programme were made aware of the customer's equal opportunities policy as a part of their induction. The normal practice for an upheld complaint against a member of staff, thankfully rare, was initially a warning followed by removal from delivery of the contract.

Regular formal monitoring and evaluation was conducted by the following mechanisms:

- After each event, tutors completed an 'event reaction sheet' which was returned to the College contract manager. This sheet identified how the event had gone with any suggestions for improvements from the tutor's point of view.
- Students were required to complete a questionnaire at the end of each event, which gave feedback on the quality of the event, its administration, and the level of learning achieved. These forms were seen by the individual tutor and reviewed by the contract manager who reported the analysis to the Benefits Agency contract manager.

- Students completed an action plan at the end of each event, a copy of which was forwarded to them after three months as a reminder to assist in embedding the learning achieved into their normal duties.
- Samples of students were regularly surveyed to evaluate the learning gains achieved by the training programmes attended.
- The results of the above surveys and information were discussed at scheduled quarterly meetings with the Benefits Agency at which a formal evaluation of contract performance was discussed and agreed.

This contractual relationship continues and the following lessons emerged, many of which would apply to any college considering such an area of activity.

- Do not underestimate either the management time or administrative resource necessary to adequately service such a contract. In costing such a resource it is advisable to assume that for every pound spent on direct delivery at least a further pound is necessary to fund support activities.
- Customers operate in an evolving environment with changes in policies and procedures. They therefore have constantly changing training needs and priorities. The training provider must have the resources and contract mechanisms to cope with changes in demand, course design and content. Not all permanent staff were used to the concept of producing and updating material and programmes tailor-made for specific employers. Whilst some were supported and developed in this role, it was necessary to seek external resources from self-employed trainers used to such an approach.
- Irrespective of any drives emanating from the FEFC, inspectors, or college quality systems, customers rightly demand a quality service and expect the college to meet their quality standards and procedures. Compliance with standardised college quality systems is not enough. Both the contract manager and individual tutors, via the completion of tutor feedback sheets, 100% review of course validation forms and written and verbal feedback from the customer, encouraged and supported a culture of continuous improvement.
- There is a need to proactively evaluate the service being provided, and to be willing to share the responsibility for that evaluation with the customer and to be open with its results.
- Consider the impact of all of the above on pricing structures for the original bid and be clear as to the costs to be incurred. It is counter productive to land a large contract and then find that it is costing the college more than the income received to service it. As mentioned earlier, colleges need to double their direct costs to cover overheads. There is a tension between setting a competitive price the customer will accept with sufficient margin to make it worthwhile. A surplus of about 20% over all direct and indirect costs would appear to be a minimum to make such an activity worthwhile for the college.
- Have a clearly separate management information system to provide financial and other information to support contract management. College MIS systems are often based on the ISR whilst a more simple database that is course focused to allow data to be drawn down under a number of headings can be developed by college IT staff in conjunction with the customer.

- Recognise you will make mistakes, and that the benefit of mistakes is what you learn from them for future contract management and further contract bids. For example, care in the selection and induction of trainers, and their briefing in customer culture and requirements, can bear enormous dividends in customer satisfaction and avoid costly complaints. Also, with large corporate customers it is vital to be clear who the customer is – homework needs doing to identify the managers who are the decision-makers, the influencers, and the budget holders.

There are some tensions in how to report on the quality of a customer-driven, non qualification output, short course programme in terms that are acceptable to FEFC inspectors and compliant with college systems. Colleges also need to be clear as to how such contracts, especially if they deliver out of the traditional geographical area of the college, contribute to the college's mission. They must communicate this clearly to all staff.

Staff support can be encouraged by:

- showing how delivering such a contract makes the college more responsive to and skilled in meeting the needs of local customers
- demonstrating that the contract contributes to the financial health of the college
- illustrating that the contract contributes to employment and earning potential for the existing college staff.

Plymouth College of Further Education has been sufficiently successful in its conduct of the original West Country contract not only to achieve a renewal of the contract last year for a further number of years, but also to have achieved similar contracts with this customer for Wales and the South of England and a national pilot contract for telematically linked computer training.

The first five-year contract contributed a gross income to the College in excess of £1,000,000 by delivering over 2000 training days on courses from one to four days' duration throughout the West Country on all aspects of the Business and IT curriculum. The new contract is exceeding its budget of £330,000 per annum and contributing a surplus to College finances in its first year, including set-up costs.

CASE STUDY 5

Upskilling for the millennium

The Millennium Experience at the Greenwich Dome was one of the most ambitious millennial events and consisted of a yearlong programme up to December 2000. It was originally anticipated that 12 million people would visit the Dome during the 12 months it was open and that approximately 2,300 staff would be required, with a further 3000 jobs created through franchises. Most of the jobs would be available from November 1999 but others would be developed during the year and, although only for the duration of 2000, it was to be hoped that regeneration of the area would leave a permanent legacy. It seemed obvious, therefore, that the opening of Dome was a good source of new customer service type jobs in East London.

The London Borough of Newham is situated directly north of Greenwich across the Thames and overlooks the site, so the borough's Access to Jobs partnership was quick to realise the potential for local residents. Most of the new jobs would be hospitality-based posts such as 'dome hosts' and would be attractive to people from all over London and surrounding areas. Therefore it was essential that local people were given the skills to take advantage the opportunities available.

Newham has a high rate of unemployment and, at the time of the initiative, was the second most deprived borough in the country on the national index of deprivation. There is a high incidence of residents with no or low qualifications so it was obvious that many people would need training to help them to gain interviews and eventual jobs.

The Newham Access to Jobs partnership is made up of all the major training, guidance and employment agencies, including the further education colleges, Newham Training Network, Futures Careers Guidance, the Employment Service, the University of East London, Newham Community Education and Youth Service, the East London Partnership and LETEC. It was set up in 1998. The purpose of the Newham Access to Jobs partnership was to work on integrated projects to help residents into work, to collate statistics for training planning purposes and to generally raise the skills base of Newham residents. The partnership proposed to apply for funding to run a project that would prepare local unemployed people for Dome jobs. Several organisations were interested in the proposed programme and Newham Sixth Form College agreed to bid for funds on behalf of the group and to manage the project.

The main funding body applied to was Skillswork, which is a local Round 4 Single Regeneration Budget agency. Newham Sixth Form College worked closely with the Skillswork project manager to design a viable programme. The content of the programme was largely decided by Manpower, the company contracted to handle the recruitment of trained staff to the New Millennium Experience Company. Details, such as the expected outputs and the level of funding, had to be agreed with Skillswork. The programme was to last a year and make provision for training throughout this time. Staff from the providers involved met regularly to agree details and the whole bidding and agreement process was completed within three or four months, with every assistance being given by those providing the funding.

The main decisions to be made concerned what was to be delivered and how to deliver it.

On the first question there was little choice. The New Millennium Experience Company required exemplary levels of customer service and had identified specific skills to deliver this. It had already developed a specification for provision by local further education colleges for a pre-employment training programme that focused on applicants who might not already have these skills.

The process was to be as follows:

1. Trainees would be enrolled on the programme. There were to be no entry requirements but those without basic communications and IT skills would need to attend longer courses, possibly over several weeks, to reach a minimum standard.
2. When trainees had completed all the elements required they would complete an application form that would be forwarded to Manpower.
3. Every person who submitted a form would be called for a first screening interview.
4. Successful candidates from the screening interview would then be called for a second interview, after which most would be offered jobs.

Manpower undertook to inform the partnership of the results of all interviews.

This was the first time the partnership had embarked on a joint training programme and, whilst its aim was to upskill local residents to enable them to access employment, the objective of the New Millennium Experience Company was simply to recruit the best staff possible. It was likely therefore that there would be a great deal of competition but it was felt that the training involved would increase the confidence and skills of trainees whether or not it resulted in jobs. There were a number of elements to this training, most of which the Newham Sixth Form College partnership took on board. The elements of the training were chosen by Manpower and concentrated on the skills required for hospitality hosting. Within each element, however, there was some choice of qualification.

- Candidates firstly needed a qualification that included Customer Service – this could be, for example, a GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism or an NVQ at any level in Catering and Hospitality. The one chosen for Newham Pre-employment Training was the ‘Welcome Host’ certificate awarded by the English Tourist Board and part of its ‘Welcome’ family of qualifications. This was because it was a well-structured course which could be delivered in a day and focused very much on customer service in a hospitality environment.
- Candidates additionally needed:
 - an awareness of the needs of visitors with disabilities
 - an awareness of the different cultures and customs of overseas visitors
 - a first aid qualification to enable employees to act in an emergency
 - knowledge of health and safety issues
 - a certain amount of local knowledge.
- Optional qualifications could be in food hygiene or supervisory skills, depending on the post applied for.

The partnership decided to use the ‘Welcome All’ and ‘Welcome Host International’ certificates for the first two of these requirements, an in-house programme with internal certificate for health and safety, and a special unit called ‘Greenwich, the Millennium Borough’ was designed especially to provide local knowledge to participants.

Optional modules such as food hygiene and supervisory skills were not included in the basic pre-employment training as it was felt that most applicants would be applying for the basic Dome Host posts. Applicants with existing qualifications in communications and IT (such as the relevant key skills at any level, either stand-alone or as part of another course, or programmes such as CLAIT) were able to include these certificates in their portfolio. However, one of the main features of the project was the emphasis on basic skills and attitudes so units on basic IT and communications with in-house certificates provided for anyone not already holding these. These could be of varying length depending on need, as assessed by the experienced tutors at each participating organisation.

Curriculum vitae, interview skills workshops and sessions on how to present oneself were also included in the programme as these were felt to be vital both for the Dome jobs and also any other jobs that trainees might apply for.

The second decision to be made was on how the partnership would deliver the programme. It was felt that it was crucial that applicants could access training at a time and place convenient to them. Newham Sixth Form College along with the main partners – Newham College of Further Education and Newham Training Network, a voluntary sector umbrella body – all undertook to deliver the units in a way which allowed applicants to mix and match venues and times, although in practice this happened very infrequently. The two colleges, along with Newham Training Network's central staff, delivered most of the training, with some activity taking place within voluntary training providers. This gave a maximum of six locations in the borough involved. Once the content of the training programme had been decided, an action plan was drawn up jointly by the project managers from each college.

The first step was to set up training for the prospective trainers from each institution and these sessions were held at Newham Sixth Form College. Trainers from Career Concepts, a company set up by the English Tourist Board to oversee and carry out training, came in and delivered the courses to staff who were then certificated to carry out the training themselves in their respective organisations. Five training sessions were held in this way involving staff from nine organisations. Both colleges and all members of Newham Training Network were given up to three places on each course, and University of East London careers staff were also invited to the 'Welcome Host' training session. This element of the project was very successful as training providers in the borough now have the capacity to deliver these well-respected qualifications to many students and trainees who wish to go into the hospitality industry. In addition, the qualifications are eligible for FEFC funding and can be incorporated into both full and part-time programmes.

The next stage was to set up marketing for the programme. A pre-employment training administrator was appointed, posters and leaflets were designed and a system of booking was devised so that trainees could attend the venue(s) most convenient to them regardless of provider. All institutions undertook to provide information on where and when they would be delivering the various modules of the courses. Not all organisations delivered all the modules. Marketing was to be targeted both at existing students of the colleges and training providers who were looking for employment and, more generally, unemployed Newham residents who were not currently undertaking any training.

Another stage was appointing external trainers to run the first aid course.

It was decided on the one day 'appointed persons' programme.

The appropriate content for the communications, IT, job-seeking and local tourism modules was also determined.

Finally, administration systems were set up so that recruitment, attendance and achievement could be reported back to Newham Sixth Form College which was responsible for collating and monitoring information for financial claims and for reporting outputs. Partners undertook to provide information on trainees that was needed for monitoring and reporting to the funding body, such as their ethnic origin and the numbers awarded certificates. They also undertook to provide information on match funding supplied, mostly in the form of trainers and accommodation. Costs such as marketing, the first aid training, folders and certificates, staff training and training materials were met by Skillswork, as was the central administration cost and the freephone number. Information on first and second interviews and jobs awarded was provided by Manpower, and all trainees were followed up by a telephone survey to get information about other jobs that were accessed apart from at the Millennium Dome.

The programme got under way in the summer of 1999 and the first sessions were a great success. At Newham Sixth Form College the first cohort consisted of students who were leaving the college and wished to access jobs at the Dome and other tourist destinations. These were mainly Leisure and Tourism students but not exclusively as the course was advertised throughout the college as open to anyone seeking employment.

Over 30 students enrolled and attended the 10-day programme; all the sessions were popular and successful. During this first course the college held a one-day tourism conference which many major tourism companies attended and this was great motivation to the students and demonstrated the importance of the tourism industry to the economy.

For the first few weeks advertisements were placed in the local newspaper and several hundred leaflets and posters were distributed to libraries, job centres, community centres and many other places where people gather. All forms of advertisement gave a freephone number that connected to Newham Sixth Form College and callers were asked to give their name and address. A Newham pre-employment training programme and booking form was then mailed to them. There was a good initial response from the public and many leaflets and booking forms were sent out. Programmes started at the partner institutions and trainees began to complete their schedule of modules. An eye-catching Newham pre-employment training folder was designed for the certificates obtained. Trainees were given application forms and, once completed, these were forwarded to our contact at Manpower.

Recruitment to the programme was good at first although not as high as anticipated. Another disappointment was that, despite many initial calls as a result of external advertising, not all of these turned into firm bookings. The reasons for this are unclear. It may be that by making the different elements of the programme as accessible as possible, the booking process had become difficult to understand. Or it could be that people were not prepared, or able, to give as much time to the programme as required and expected an 'instant job'. This will be investigated and addressed in the next programme. Adverse publicity about the Dome may also have affected recruitment although, at the beginning of the campaign, hopes and expectations were high.

Many more students were recruited internally from those who were already attending the colleges and training organisations for other courses. These were usually very committed and successful trainees. Altogether 156 students completed the training at Newham Sixth Form College and partner institutions. In addition, over 40 trainers were trained to deliver the English Tourist Board's 'Welcome' qualifications.

The training plan worked very well with students rating the various modules as enjoyable and useful. One very popular module was that which dealt with tourism in Greenwich. However, this was only run once in its original form as it was found to be too expensive to continue due to the high price of admission fees and travel costs to the various attractions such as the Cutty Sark and other Greenwich tourist spots. The funding did not cover this expenditure and the unemployed trainees were not able to pay the costs themselves. To enable this element to be included in future courses, a computer-based tourism package was devised by one of the partners (Pier Training Shop) and this was used successfully in subsequent programmes.

The part of the plan that was not so successful was the application and interview stage. Interviews were delayed for several trainees due to the original local Manpower office closing and operations moving to another office. Another reason for trainees not getting interviews on completion was that most were looking for part-time work and initial recruitment was for full-time posts only. For this project it was necessary to get the programme up and running in a very short space of time due to the inherent time constraints, and future courses will be able to match employment needs to jobs available much more closely.

While it was disappointing that only 23 people found jobs at the Dome directly from the project, 44 trainees altogether found some kind of employment within six months of finishing the programme – which is over a quarter of all those completing the training. Against this must be set the fact that many of the trainees were looking for part-time work only, perhaps to fund their further or higher education, and the Dome was not recruiting for part-time positions during the project period.

More worrying was the feedback from Manpower on the reasons why more applicants were not getting through to second interview. These included things such as inappropriate behaviour, dress or language during the interview, skill deficiencies particularly in language and communication, and a basic lack of understanding of customer service type work. Whilst these comments only related to 14 out of 156 interviewees they are still of concern to the college as it shows that, even though these elements were emphasised during the programme, more needs to be done with trainees to change attitudes and instil appropriate behaviour. This has been one of the major items to be considered in planning for the next programme.

All trainees who enrolled onto the programme achieved a portfolio of certificates. They were all given basic training in IT and communications and also job search and interview skills training. All participants were given the opportunity to produce curriculum vitae. The programme gave these trainees confidence and qualifications which could be used in future job interviews as well as those for the Dome.

The colleges and many voluntary organisations were able to train staff to deliver 'Welcome' qualifications. They will continue to offer these, either as part of future programmes or as stand-alone courses.

The Access to Jobs Partnership has done a great deal of work since the beginning of the pre-employment training programme. It is now working with a new employer, ExCeL, to design a programme that will include the best of the old with a renewed emphasis on self-presentation and with an even stronger customer service focus. ExCeL Exhibition Centre is a major development in the area and will include nine hotels, retail outlets and entertainment venues; working with this initiative will enable us to put into practice what we have learned. From this point of view the original project has been a success as it has provided information to enable us to improve the offer and increase participants' chances of employment. The Access to Jobs Partnership will continue to work with employers and will forge a close relationship with the new Local Learning and Skills Council to continue its ground-breaking work, including the development across the sub-region of a matrix which can be used strategically to match training to employment needs.

Lessons from the case studies

As well as providing interesting reading, the case studies provide useful exemplars of the challenges facing providers in their attempts to anticipate and respond to emerging skills needs.

The challenges

These include:

- becoming focused on the needs of a specific industry
- building long-term relationships with clients
- entering the competitive tendering arena and responding to the needs of corporate clients
- responding quickly to avert the consequences of large-scale local redundancies
- preparing the long-term unemployed to gain the confidence for a return to work.

The solutions

Providers may need to:

- take the initiative, talk to and listen to employers and ensure that suggestions are turned into actions
- show commitment to clients and be prepared to work alongside them to achieve shared goals
- adapt to the 'culture' of the client and share responsibility for outcomes
- prepare joint action plans with employers that can be implemented rapidly and effectively
- provide individualised programmes, guidance and support for the long-term unemployed trying to enter the workforce.

The lessons

Providers need to:

- provide what industry needs not what they think they should offer
- get 'inside the business' and gain the confidence and trust of the client
- be prepared to take risks, make mistakes and learn from them
- work closely with all those involved in local workforce training to prepare contingency plans to avert the worst consequences of possible redundancies in the area
- develop realistic programmes of training and support to help raise the confidence and standards of the long-term unemployed.

Action to be taken

- Most colleges and providers could identify a specific local concentration of industries of any kind and use the idea of a special centre for that industry as a starting point for discussion with key players in their area.
- It is essential for all providers who are serious contenders in the development of the current and future workforce to develop long-term good relationships with corporate clients by building on existing contacts and by being seen to understand and respond to their needs.
- Providers wishing to compete in the wider arena of corporate learning need to develop their capacity to engage in competitive tendering. Such undertakings will require providers to be innovative, flexible and willing to take a calculated risk.
- Redundancy can occur anywhere and all colleges could take the lead in making contingency plans for a rapid response to local events, in partnership with other players.
- Most areas of the country have pockets of long-term unemployed people. Colleges can take a lead in getting them back into work and contributing to the prosperity of their locality.

A curriculum planning tool to match provision to skills needs

4

Guidance notes

- The following checklist (based on earlier Agency work in this area) is intended to prompt the effective use of information about the labour market and emerging skills needs in all aspects of curriculum planning, development and delivery.
- It is intended as a starting point for action and is not definitive or prescriptive. Users should adapt and customise the list to suit their own purposes and needs.
- The prompt statements suggest good practice and the examples column lists ways in which the statements can be put into practice. There is no expectation that the examples should all be present or that they represent an exhaustive list.
- The providers' current practice should be completed in response to the prompt statements. Matching current practice against the examples given will provide information for comparison and benchmarking.
- An action plan for improvement could be derived from the responses to the current profile.

A checklist for providers

PROMPT STATEMENTS

EXAMPLES

1. Infrastructure

1.1. Use of Information

Is the use of information about skills needs and the labour market an integral part of the provider's information strategy?

- Key skills needs and how they will be met are set out.

Is there effective use of this across a range of functions?

- Information is built into: determining market share and dealing with competition, triggering change and improvement, meeting demand and supply requirements, planning provision, winning resources, making efficient use of existing resources, HRM/HRD, relevant and motivational curriculum development, management information, achieving learning outcomes, monitoring and evaluation, demonstrating accountability and value.

Are all sources of information exploited?

- Use incorporates:
 - data/analysis/forecasts
 - sources of published/ 'hard' information
 - 'soft' information
 - local/regional/national/international/ sector dimensions
 - desk research/primary research
 - feedback from staff, learners, Learning and Skills Council, NTOs, RDAs and employers
 - monitoring systems.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance indicators	Target date

PROMPT STATEMENTS

EXAMPLES

Are responsibilities for gathering information defined?

- Strengths and limitations of different types of information are recognised.
- Where possible, receipt of information is negotiated and agreed.
- Expectations are realistic and cost-conscious.

What factors govern the provider's own generation of market information?

- Full exploitation of the organisation's potential for generating information.
- Audit of LMI needs and how they can be met.
- Commitment to invest in necessary market research against established priorities and defined criteria.

What negotiable assets does the provider have in the form of information?

- Audit in-house generated information that has an external value, or traded with benefit.

1.2. Staff development

Does the staffing policy enable the provider to respond positively to labour market needs?

- Staff are enabled to update their occupational knowledge and experience, and encouraged to propose and contribute to new provision.
- Staff are equipped to work with different categories of client.
- Recruitment is used when appropriate to match staffing needs for new provision.

Is development geared towards staff competence in the handling and use of LMI?

- The capacity of staff to handle and use LMI is valued.
- Staff are aware of the full range of LMI usage.
- They are able to source LMI appropriate to their own functions from college reference points, from professional and awarding bodies and the like, and from contact with learners and employers.
- LMI is used as a tool and resource in transactions with actual and potential students and business clients.
- Staff consider LMI broadly for connections and transfer of ideas.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN		Performance Indicators	Target date
	Action needed			

1.3. Communications/systems

Is LMI, acquired from a combination of sources, used corporately?

- LMI is treated as a pan-organisation resource, accessible to all staff and contributed by all staff.
- It is an integral factor in planning and review at all levels, and in all sectors.

Are there efficient and multi-directional systems and channels of communication for this purpose?

- Responsibilities for LMI are defined and recognised as part of quality management.
- LMI obtained externally at senior and middle management levels is transmitted in a suitable form to points of use.
- Delivery staff with occupational and client contacts report LMI findings to peer groups and line management as a matter of routine.
- Meetings are used as structured opportunities to convey and use LMI.

Are cross-organisation posts used strategically to improve the use of LMI?

- Industry Liaison, Services to Business, Marketing and Market Research posts have major coordinating, facilitating and promotional roles, act as a focal point to receive LMI from external sources and add significantly to the acquisition, dissemination and effective use of LMI.
- There is a complementary relationship with line management.

Is information technology used to harness LMI?

- Priority is given to the telematic accessing of LMI, by means of client databases, external databases, and networking/links to related websites.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN		Performance Indicators	Target date
	Action needed			

1.4. External links

Are there constructive collaborative partnerships with other agencies which fund, produce and act on LMI?

- There is active participation in all accessible multi-agency groups combining LMI providers and users for a particular purpose.
- Information flow is multi-directional.

Are there perceived benefits from such partnerships?

- Feedback is effective.
- The value of participation can be justified by a positive gain in terms of:
 - obtaining pooled information over a wider range
 - cost reduction and avoidance of duplication
 - influencing the collection process
 - agreement on data interpretation
 - obtaining funding for LMI
 - creating working partnerships
 - addressing common problems
 - applying LMI to a college objective
 - staff development.
- External links are used to benchmark practice.

What methods are used to search out and establish congruency of need between the provider and other organisations?

- There are contacts, networks, fora and systems through which agendas can be matched and opportunities identified.

Are the limits to cooperation recognised? Is action taken to reduce them?

- Variance of interest and areas of competition are clearly and openly understood, and are not allowed to cloud the scope for collaboration.
- Cooperative ventures are used to extend partnership even further, to gain understanding for the provider's position, and to reduce sources of conflict.

2. Strategic and operational planning

Is there full use of LMI in the strategic and operational planning processes?

- Use is neither restricted nor token.
- LMI has both a confirmatory and an evidential role.
- It informs the planning processes with a set of key messages, derived from key questions about labour supply and demand, customers, qualifications and catchments.
- It is a prerequisite for:
 - competitive bidding for both internal and external development funding
 - external accountability
 - programme review
 - the introduction of new or modified provision
- There is an internal validation procedure for new provision.

Does strategic planning combine the different types of LMI?

- The planning process combines a top-down strategic use of LMI with a bottom-up operational perspective through a combination of occupational and other segments.
- All types of LMI are valued, and used in a complementary way.
- LMI is owned by all staff as a planning tool.

How well does strategic planning define the organisation's provision for labour market needs?

- Provision is matched against labour market needs; the extent to which it does not cater directly can be specified and justified.
- Planning makes appropriate use of all available economic analysis, structural information and labour market data at national/international, regional, local and sector levels.
- There is a methodology for responding to skill shortage information.
- Provider catchments and their implications are defined.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

3. Curriculum delivery

Is there a clear relationship between LMI and the curriculum? Is LMI evaluated?

- LMI is actively used in curriculum delivery for:
 - programme development
 - teaching and learning
 - providing learning resources
 - assessment, attaining occupational understanding and competence
 - building in work experience
 - keeping abreast of change
 - maintaining relevance and motivation.

Do staff engaged in face-to-face delivery of provision consciously and actively contribute LMI?

- LMI is consciously communicated to learners as a basic ingredient of education and training, incorporating both specific and generic skills, and not limited to programmes which are occupationally specific.
- It is presented and illustrated as a common, core resource to which all parties to the learning process can actively contribute.
- The influence of LMI on learning and curriculum management, with a high input through staff themselves, is regular and demonstrable.

Does LMI feature significantly in course or programme review and innovation?

- At course or programme level, there is a process of annual review which, amongst other things, matches the curriculum against indicators/perceptions of labour market demand and need, and provides evidence of responsiveness.
- Curriculum innovation requires the positive results of market research and consultation for it to win stage acceptance.

Is the effectiveness of LMI evaluated?

- Programme review includes the confirmation of the LMI premises upon which provision was based, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the programme itself.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

4. Guidance and choice

What use is made of LMI to enable potential learners and business clients to make informed decisions about their education and training choices?

- Appropriate LMI is combined with other kinds of information to ensure that clients have an objective and well-informed basis for choice.
- Potential misconceptions are countered.
- Wherever possible, the provider works with schools, the careers service and other agencies to ensure that such information is available to inform choice at the pre-16 stage.

5. Career planning

What use is made of LMI to enable learners and business clients to make informed occupational decisions and use of qualifications?

- Recruitment and enrolment of students and trainees to specific programmes is secondary to ensuring, through the use of LMI and other information, the best possible fit of aspirations to learning objective and qualifying route.

Is there an international/
European dimension?

- Best available use is made of EU and overseas LMI, combined with role models and international visits, exchanges and work experience, to widen learner opportunities with a realistic, attainable international perspective.

Does LMI contribute to retention and attainment?

- Relevant LMI directly contributes to the action planning of learning and training programmes and thereby helps to safeguard retention and attainment, for the mutual benefit of individuals, sponsors and the provider itself.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

6. Client groups

What are the distinguishing characteristics of LMI in relation to these main market segments?

16–19

- LMI is used to raise awareness of employment and career opportunities, and in the setting of learning goals – even when destinations are unclear and there is no direct entry to the labour market.

Adults

- LMI plays a part in directing interventions to reduce social and economic deprivation.
- LMI is used to link Return to Learn/ Work and retraining guidance and provision to a profile of economic activity and resultant employment opportunities.

Business clients

- LMI plays a part in maintaining the provider's sensitivity to technological and other changes affecting the business environment.
- LMI is used to closely align services to business clients with new developments in the industry.
- Issues of provision connected with business size and ethos are addressed through LMI.
- All students, trainees and business clients are systematically treated as sources of LMI.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

PROMPT STATEMENTS

To what extent are they contributors of LMI?

EXAMPLES**16-19**

- Students and trainees are encouraged to regard themselves as generators of LMI, particularly through research, observation and work experience.

Adults

- Adult learners are encouraged to exploit their experience of life as an LMI asset.

Business clients

- Business clients are used as sources of LMI at micro level.

What mixes of LMI are appropriate?

16-19

- The use of LMI takes account of the fact that a significant proportion of learners will not be entering the labour market directly or locally.

Adults

- The use of LMI takes account of the fact that a substantial proportion of learners will relate to the local economy.

Business clients

- The use of LMI takes account of the fact that, for the great majority of business clients, provision must be aligned to local needs.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

PROMPT STATEMENTS

How is geographical or catchment focus determined?

EXAMPLES**16-19**

- Markets are linked to:
 - local/regional travel patterns and transportation systems
 - the location/activity of competing providers.
- Market information addresses issues of parochialism, isolation and access.
- Marketing is directed to:
 - the standing of the organisation within its own community
 - reputation as a centre of excellence within a wider catchment area
 - opportunities for niche marketing.

Adults

- Market information is used to address issues of cost, time and flexibility in provision.
- Strategic planning relates national education and training policies and their manifestations to labour supply and demand factors within the provider's catchment areas, and resolves discordance.
- Market information systems include the capacity to test equity of provision.
- LMI is used to help provide encouragement and incentives to under-represented groups.

Business clients

- The development of new qualifications is monitored and assessed for possible application, including customisation to client needs.
- LMI is used to demonstrate value for money.
- Work for business clients provides an LMI base for extending the range of the curriculum.

What measures of adequacy and sufficiency of provision are employed?
Are they subject to external alignment?

- Through the planning process, internal evaluations of adequacy and sufficiency are checked externally against the expectations of key players, and re-evaluated if necessary to achieve consensus.

CURRENT PROFILE	ACTION PLAN Action needed	Performance Indicators	Target date

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Interview topic guide

1. In what ways is LMI useful to you? In what ways would it be useful to you if the right information was available at the right time? For example:

- a. Monitoring/evaluating your market position
- b. Adjusting the college offer/range of training provision
- c. Adjusting the curriculum of individual courses
- d. Meeting accountability requirements
- e. Securing funding
- f. Human resource development
- g. Demonstrating the benefit of training to potential trainees
- h. Creating a competent workforce
- i. Meeting lifelong learning goals
- j. Demonstrating the socio-economic value of FE/training (eg through destination data)
- k. Monitoring/evaluating the adequacy, sufficiency and quality of the College offer/range of provision
- l. Informing and fulfilling the College mission/your company's mission
- m. Other.

2. How much does the College offer/range of training provision alter each year?

3. How do each of the following influence the range of training you provide?

- a. The status quo (ie areas where the College/training provider is strong, provision refined in response to demand over time)
- b. Existing resources (facilities, environment, accommodation, human resources)
- c. National education and training policy (to what extent does it constrain your flexibility?)
- d. Sources of funding (FEFC, TECs, European, SRB etc)
- e. Market demand (students) (To what extent does the pressure to respond to student demand conflict with the pressure to respond to LMI? How can this be overcome?)
- f. Market demand (employers) (How do you identify employers' demands? Do you have a particular post with responsibility for employer liaison? What barriers do you experience to involving employers in the strategic planning process? eg lack of understanding, negative attitudes to training, scale of employer base, range of SMEs, dispersed populations in rural areas)
- g. Provision from other providers
- h. Economic climate (growth or reduction in specific industries, employment levels)
- i. Perceived skill requirements (eg pressures to provide generic/core skills training and broad-based programmes rather than tightly defined vocational courses)
- j. Impact of technological change (both on delivery methods and on LM skill requirements)
- k. Other.

- 4. What else influences the strategic planning process and how?**
- 5. By what mechanisms is LMI built into your curriculum planning process?**
- 6. Who has responsibility for gathering and disseminating LMI?**
- 7. Please give details of your use of each of the following sources of LMI.
(eg What do you use? How is it useful? By what mechanisms do you make use of it?):**
- a. Published material
 - b. Professional bodies
 - c. Accrediting, validating and awarding bodies
 - d. Direct customer contact
 - e. Staff knowledge, experience and contacts
 - f. Students, trainees and employers
 - g. Primary research
 - h. Other.
- 8. For each source used (see answer to question 7):**
- a. What does it provide? eg changes in employment base, changing employment patterns, new businesses starting-up moving into area, significant market opportunities for local businesses, demographic information, HE provision, progression routes
 - b. How can it be classified re: internal/external generation, formal/informal, paper-based/people-centred, ad hoc/systematic, short/medium/long term, geographically wide/narrow focus, occupationally wide/narrow focus?
 - c. Is the information provided in a useful format for you? How could this be improved?
 - d. Is it too general? Too specific? Too quantitative? Too qualitative?
 - e. Do you understand all the terminology used?
 - f. Is it available at the right time?
 - g. Is it compatible with other sources?
 - h. Is it impartial?
 - i. How regularly is it updated?
- 9. What is the relative weight given to local, regional and national LMI?**
- 10. To what extent should provision be/is provision tailored to match local/regional/national/European/International economic demand for training in specific areas from:**
- a. 16–19 year olds
 - b. Adults
 - c. Business/corporate clients.

11. What proportion of your intake are:

- d. 16–19 year olds
- e. Adults
- f. Corporate/business clients?

12. What additional LMI would you like to be able to access that is not currently available and how would you use it?

**13. What disincentives are there for your provision to be shaped by LMI?
(eg lack of interest among potential trainees in skills demanded by employers.)**

14. Please give details of the partnerships that have been developed with outside organisations to assist your strategic planning process. Who are these partnerships with? What are the mechanisms for facilitating the partnership? How does the partnership assist the planning process?

APPENDIX 2

Participants in the survey

This report is based on consultations with the following private training providers:

- Chelmer Training
- Direct Computer Training
- TR TEC
- Network Training & Research
- Sandra Robinson Language Training
- CPL Training
- Bexley College Managing Agency
- Shears Training
- Input Outputs Centres

the following FE providers:

- Redbridge Institute of Adult Education
- Redbridge College
- Epping Forest College
- Barking College
- Lewes Tertiary College
- Newbury College
- Bradford College
- Sheffield College
- several other un-attributed colleges based outside London (telephone interviews)

and the following FE providers who also provide some training on a private basis:

- Newham College of FE
- Warwickshire College (through Zenith Partnership)

An example of the use of skills and labour market information in planning

Redbridge College pulls together LMI from a variety of sources. This is then presented to the planning team in the form of an annual report which contains the following:

Part One

- Market position
- The demographics of the population and the College's students (eg age, ethnicity)
- Demographic changes (such as the rise in refugees and asylum seekers)
- LETEC information on skills shortages (eg IT and Level III qualifications generally)
- Opportunities in the local patch based on business activity – bearing in mind that the borough is a dormitory town
- Competitors for the various client groups
- Employment opportunities in the LETEC area and the borough – taking the sub-region into account (eg there are no knowledge-based businesses in Redbridge so, if a young person has an interest in this area, they have to go further afield for work)
- Exceptional aspects, eg there are a lot of care homes in the area (and care is a LETEC priority so this sector is seen as very important)
- Unemployment (by sub-groups of the population)
- Skills needs of specific sectors
- Demand for HE
- Market segments:
 - a. Young people (15–19)
 - College's strengths and weaknesses
 - College's competitors (eg schools do GCSEs better)
 - Ethnicity
 - Trends
 - Employment (eg of day-release students)
 - What schools want from the College
 - Students with learning difficulties and disabilities
 - b. 19+ year-olds (same information as for 15–19 year-olds)
 - c. Leisure classes (non Schedule 2)
 - d. Employers in Redbridge

Part Two covers the College's current recruitment patterns.

Part Three covers Action Points for the six Heads of School.

The approach is to identify around six key points regarding marketing and recruitment.

To remain competitive the UK's current and future workforce will need to keep developing new skills and making use of more and different information. This demands an increased capacity on the part of providers in the new learning and skills sector to understand emerging skills priorities and adapt their learning programmes to develop the skills of the workforce. The Learning and Skills Development Agency has been researching into the extent to which providers are using skills forecasts and labour market information to inform their provision in the long and short term.

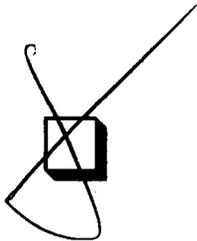


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EFF-089 (3/2000)