Learning Resource Centre Feasibility Study
Executive Summary

One Voice Network - Voluntary Sector Academy

Introduction

In December 2004, the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy (OVNVSA) issued a brief for a piece of work to assess the feasibility of establishing a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) in Spennymoor. In consultation with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), funding was made available by the LSC and DISC Ltd for this purpose. Both the OVNVSA and the LSC wanted to assess the demand for such a venue and assess its expected usage.

The One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy and DISC Ltd envisaged a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) which would be based in DISC Ltd's premises at Merrington House, Spennymoor and would be accessible to staff and volunteers from County Durham's voluntary and community organisations. The centre would deliver basic skills provision, level 1 to 5 online learning provision, IT qualifications, presentation and media qualifications/training, video-conferencing facilities/training and management development opportunities, all supported by a Centre Manager and a part-time development worker. A laptop loan scheme would also be available to support learner needs.

Purpose of the report

The full report outlines the nature of the work undertaken in conducting the feasibility of a Learning Resource Centre at DISC Ltd's premises and summarises the outcomes of the study. It details the nature and conclusions of the consultations, makes suggestions and recommendations regarding the establishment of an LRC and the provision of complementary services, and provides an indicative budget for an LRC project based on our recommendations.

This executive summary provides a highlight of the key points and recommendations made to the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy.

Background information on the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy

The OVNVSA is established to support the membership of the Network by facilitating training and workforce development across the sector, to raise awareness of career opportunities within the sector, and to improve recruitment and retention of staff. It works closely with organisations across the sector and the county and already provides a level of management training courses.

Demand for learning: A review of the sector and its workforce development needs

A review of the "Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce in County Durham" report, published in August 2004 identified that the key issues faced by the sector are:

1. Key skills needed for the future are:
   - Fundraising
   - Team working
   - Organising and planning
   - Oral and written communication
   - Customer handling
   - Problem solving
   - Leadership
   - Literacy and numeracy
   - Our consultation suggests that there is an additional significant need for training in governance and management of organisations and life skills support for volunteers entering the sector

2. The voluntary and community sector lags behind the private sector in offering accredited training to staff (one third of organisations compared to half the private sector). What qualifications are achieved tends to be at a low level. With the requirement for qualifications on entry limited to a small proportion of organisations, there is significant scope available to the sector to work on increasing the amount of accredited training made available to staff at all levels.

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3. Funding of training is one of the few barriers to training mentioned. This is increasingly perceived as a greater issue as there is a move towards increasing the amount of qualifications-based learning.

4. Accessing and availability of training does not appear to be an issue with many organisations actively sourcing training externally. A shift towards accredited training will require a wider search for training.

5. While the report also suggests that that are no major barriers to training, our research would suggest that distance and time do indeed present difficulties to organisations, which limit their opportunities to train staff and volunteers

6. The report identifies a low skills gap within the sector. Our consultation with stakeholders suggests a higher level of skills gaps and a need to make provision for those entering the sector.

Supply of learning
There are around 300 learning venues within County Durham. These range from village halls offering very locally focused learning, learndirect, UK Online and Education in the Community centres, through to commercial training providers based in the County. It should also be noted that providers based outside County Durham also operate within the area, such as freelance trainers and providers based in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Overall, the supply and distribution of learning venues throughout the county is considered adequate for the location of staff and volunteers within the sector and this has been confirmed via our consultations with the key stakeholders.

Recommendations for the role of OVNVSA sector specific learning centre
Throughout the consultations with stakeholders, the idea of a learning resource centre was supported. It was observed, however, that the scale of the centre should be considered very carefully and the services it delivers should extend beyond the straightforward delivery of learning. Two key areas for implementation have been identified:

1. Capacity building within the OVNVSA
2. Service delivery

1. Capacity Building
Staff **-** Additional staff are required to fulfil the role of peripatetic coordinators, facilitators, and ambassadors, building and maintaining relationships with the sector and with the existing training providers. Working in coordination with existing providers within the sector, this would in part constitute a continuous mapping and brokerage exercise of needs and provision.

2. Service Delivery
Co-ordination - There is substantial scope for the centre to co-ordinate information on learning and share best practice and good courses to a wider audience (by being made available in local areas where it may not have been previously available). A further coordination role would be in the provision of outreach teaching at existing centres to support centrally delivered training.
There would be a role too in helping the sector to perform training needs analyses, particularly in smaller organisations that do not generally have the capacity to understand and determine skills needs (because of the high number of low turnover/low or no staff organisations). The service may also help to coordinate relief support to help smaller organisations release staff for training.

Brokerage - The centre should explore the development of a brokerage service to ensure that localised demand is met by localised supply or where there is no local supplier, OVNVSA may negotiate with a 3rd party provider or could deliver through its own resources.

Learning Resource Centre - Establish a small ICT based learning resource centre in Merrington House, Spennymoor, to meet the needs of the sector. This might comprise four PC workstations and a traditional study area offering OVNVSA, learndirect and FE provision. The suggested scale will require

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a relatively small initial capital outlay and will allow for flexibility of provision as the sector grows and changes. The OVNVSA should also build on its expertise in management qualifications to offer more and tailored provision using new and emerging technologies. There are opportunities to develop distance learning materials for the sector in collaboration with partners. Moves towards modular, work-based accreditation in the social care sector may contribute towards these developments too.

Developing the existing roles
In addition to these 2 key areas, there is a need to continue to provide sector representation through networking and building relationships, in particular with the LSC in order to address barriers and assist in engaging the LSC with the sector. Working in partnership with learning organisations will create opportunities for experimentation with innovative provision.

Ensuring credibility
A set of underpinning values have been identified which must be reflected in any recommendations implemented. These must provide a clear focus and set of objectives from the outset, together with a sustainability strategy that ensures that it remains focused on supporting the voluntary and community sector. These points of focus will therefore include outreach provision, understanding and addressing the differences in skills needs between staff and volunteers, understanding and addressing the different requirements for different strata of the sector and giving careful consideration to the differing learning styles of individuals to ensure appropriate and consistent methods of delivery.

Any recommendations implemented should mirror the values and ethos of the OVNVSA which has worked hard to establish a high level of trust and close working partnerships with the One Voice Network's members, the voluntary and community sector and the Learning and Skills Council. This must continue for adopted recommendations to be a success.

Conclusion
With sufficient provision of training and learning resources within and close to the county to satisfy the demand in general, opening a learning resource centre in Spennymoor would be inappropriate and would probably duplicate existing provision. However a small resource centre to support and expand the OVNVSA's current provision would be sensible and would benefit the sectors as a whole.

Supporting this, the OVNVSA should, through peripatetic coordinators, provide an overall coordination role to ensure that the sector's needs are monitored, understood and met efficiently, maintain a detailed view of provision from all training providers and ensure that these two are "joined up". The OVNVSA could also have a role in identifying and supporting the sectors where there are funding issues and where appropriate work with the LSC and others to find solutions.

Finally, in recognition of some significant gaps in the training provision, we recommend that some further work should be commissioned to explore these needs in more detail with a view to finding a suitable method of providing specific training.

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