

DEVON COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

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MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING

Wednesday 4th October 2011 at 2pm in the Ockment Centre

1. Present

Peter Harding, Community Council of Devon (Chair)
Margaret Davidson, Devon ACL
Danni Goff, Exeter College
George Curry, Westward Pathfinder Trust

In attendance:

John Willis, Secretary / Project Manager
Wendy Head, Learn Devon 2 Project Officer (minutes)

1. Apologies

Jenny Thorns, Devon ACL
Ian Fleming, Pluss
John Demeger, South Devon College & Torbay ACL

2. Minutes of July meeting

The Partnership had supported Westward Pathfinder with their proposal for Leader 4 Local Action Group – less funding was available than initially advised but this is still being pursued by Pathfinder.

Minutes agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Update on national policy on adult/community learning and its effect on partner organisations

- Danni reported (Exeter College) that there is a lower number of people claiming concessions as these are only for those people actively seeking work now. Numbers for Access to H.E. have remained good, but learners do have to leave the

programme if they secure employment. NOCN units are being used for Entry Level NEETS (16-18 years) through a project with Petroc.

- Margaret (Devon ACL) said that learners were finding it difficult to understand eligibility criteria when applying for courses; information from Skills Funding Agency is often late, and with constant changes this has meant courses were sometimes advertised with incorrect information on fees and eligibility for concessions. There has not been the increase in numbers that it was hoped there would be.
- George (Westward Pathfinder) reported that JCP and SFA ESF contracts are paid on outcomes that are job related; this in itself is difficult and has implications on the success rate of programmes. Learn Direct learners have to take a full diagnostic test: if a learner scores 15% for example, Pathfinder can only claim 85% of the funding for that learner, with obvious practical problems as a result. There are concerns that this model may be taken up elsewhere.
- John (DCLP) shared information from the Unit Funding Trials evaluation report which has just been published. Devon ACL, Learning Plus, Inverteign and Petroc were listed as providers having taken part in the trials. The conclusions were similar to those in the Learn Devon evaluation in that the main areas were I.T. Employment Skills, Foundation Learning, Social Care, Hospitality and Customer Service with ¾ of those participating unemployed at the time. Most learners did not plan to use it as a building block to going on to do a qualification, but clearly wanted to improve prospects of employment, gain new or improve on existing skills or gain extra responsibility at work. Most learners were aware of the fact that they were completing units and could potentially go on to achieve a qualification and most liked the flexibility of short units and that they could complete learning in 'small chunks'. They also liked the fact that they were regularly assessed and the sense of achievement when completing relatively small units of learning. The full report can be found on

http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Qualifications_and_Credit_Framework_Unit_Delivery_Trials_201011_%28Final_Evaluation_Report%29_September_2011.pdf

All providers can now draw down funding for units from the SFA approved list, but only for unemployed learners.

- John also reported that the Personal Learning record is still not working as well as it should, the Awarding Bodies are slow to add achievements, and providers and learners are not really aware of the Lifelong Learning Account.
- Peter (CCD) confirmed that the bid for the Adult Informal Learning fund was not successful but we do know that Eat That Frog – a community interest company in Torbay - were successful in securing funding.

4. Learn Devon 2 - Progress Report

The PSfD funding has now finished but LSIS is funding the second year of the project until September 2012, managed by Westward Pathfinder. Final claims under PSfD funding are needed from providers as soon as possible. This second year focuses on single unit delivery and with a tighter approach to progression to qualifications or work; in vocational areas not already covered by the project e.g. construction, business/accountancy, hospitality and health & social care; in geographical areas not already covered by the project such as Exeter, West Devon, Torrridge and other rural communities.

The first year's evaluation report is being finalised which shows the range of learners we have reached and how many were likely to progress onto further learning opportunities. There is evidence that some learners did progress onto further units or full qualifications and some learners reported gaining employment following their learning activities. A copy of the final report will be circulated when complete.

Most of the learner monitoring and evaluation has taken place by phone and was inevitably limited by the fact that many learners did not provide contact details, their numbers were not obtainable, or they did not return calls. However, this can be supplemented by providers' September enrolment information and some of this is still awaited.

Action point: Providers to send in any progression information for learners from taster or units - Westward Pathfinder.

Budget

The detail of the budget for the whole project was discussed and although there was under-spend on some areas there was over-spend on others. The proposal for year 2 is to put the majority of the funds into unit delivery with some also allocated to development work which was under-spent in year 1. It was agreed that the funding for unit delivery phases would be front loaded with the first phase having an allocation of £12500, the second phase £10000 and the final phase £7500, to allow us to gain more experience of delivery and provide further feedback earlier in this second and final year. It was also agreed that we need to make providers more aware of the opportunity for funding for development and trials, which links in with the outcomes of the LSIS funding. The budget outline was agreed by the executive.

Plans for the second/final year

The evaluation report highlights the fact that it is not possible to do credit accumulation without the facility to access the Lifelong Learning Account (LLA). The lack of familiarity with it (by providers as well as learners) has been compounded by constant changes to the name and format. In the light of all this, Westward Pathfinder is developing an advice module centred around use of the LLA & Personal Learning Record which could be used by other providers. This will be a specific outcome for LSI S funding. It could also be a way of delivering a career progression unit, e.g. towards Edexcel Work Skills, but there is still work to be done on this. Pathfinder aim to pilot the module with some of their learners who have recently achieved so as to trial the whole process and evaluate the module in practice.

It is acknowledged that the website is not proving to be very effective, with insufficient new visitors each month. We should update with new project provision, check that all providers have links to it, and at next meeting review its success. Does it warrant spending any more funds developing it?

Action Point: John / Wendy to update, check that links from provider sites exist.

Proposals from Providers

Applications have been received for the second round of phase 4 applications. We still hope to have applications submitted from providers who have not taken part in the project so far – Bicton and Exeter College.

George, as manager of the LSI S contract, will be the referral point for the approval process which was previously carried out by Jenny Thorns (DAFL) for the PSfD funding. We decided that the first tranche should be considered by this group, especially as George declared an interest. He left the room so the executive could discuss the new applications which included the Pathfinder to Work Programme. A decision was made on which units to support which will be communicated to the providers as soon as possible.

5. Further meetings and Spring Conference

Discussion regarding the conference was around possible themes with suggestions including:

- Experiences of unit funding
- Community Learning & Localism
- Informal Learning Report
- All age careers guidance service
- Future of DCLP

It was agreed that a decision on when to hold a conference and what the theme would be needs to be deferred until further information and reports are available in the New Year – this can be revisited at the January meeting.

6. Any Other Business

Peter Harding has carried out his role as Chair for 4 years and is considering standing down – the CCD is less involved with community learning now, but he is happy to continue the role until the end of March 2012. Consideration therefore needs to be given to inviting a new Chair, and also to the future of the Partnership. Whilst it is acknowledged that the role of the Partnership has been vital in securing funding for projects and provides a network for sharing good practice, it needs to have something tangible to work on to ensure it remains worthwhile and viable. One suggestion would be to have an annual membership subscription to fund the Partnership activities and retain the Secretary as an administrative & support role. This would also enable the Partnership to remain in its present form should there be the opportunity to submit bids for future project funding.

Action point: All to look for possible funding bids in the meantime and to feed any information to John to circulate to the group.

Next meeting

This is on **Wednesday 18th January 2012 at 2.00pm until 4.30pm in the Ockment Centre.**