

Stakeholder Event 14/09/11

Discussion Topics



Discussion Topic 1

Questions from the Enquiry.

1. Are the issues raised true for your organisations?

- to some extent: VCS working with colleges is good, can be hard for colleges to engage with all VCS
- agree with barriers but there were also some examples of positive collaboration.

2. How can we overcome these barriers and challenges?

- Grass roots networks (EECETT), but recent cuts have stopped attendance.
- System – size / money / reaching right person – mitigates against VCS engagement (particularly money & more for ESF).

3. What are the potential benefits for colleges and the VCS of collaboration?

- sharing expertise, knowledge and resources
- increased coverage.

4. How can collaboration with the VCS help colleges meet their community needs?

- sharing expertise, knowledge & resources.
- increased coverage.
- event / forum opportunity to bring colleges and VCS together and start the local conversation.

Issue's Raised

- Quote of college who has vision to work in the community but not progressed although other VCS have engaged.
- Competiveness amongst VCS
- College gave example of wanting to have discussions with community and this conversation being 'forced' at the time when less funding available
- Better collaboration amongst providers to ensure learner numbers retained. Different sectors delivering similar courses.
- Recognise partnerships driven by personal relationships not strategy led.
- Mistrust between sectors.
- Conversations – 'protect own patch'.
- Can be challenging to move discussions forward for real collaboration – how do we do it?
- What is the vision we can generally share? Make the most of what we are each good at.
- Norfolk Unites example of good practice for promoting partnership opportunities.
- Barriers – funding agencies limitations / restrictions – how do we work with them to facilitate collaboration.
- Local colleges know they need to work/improve reach to diverse communities – brave step (potential benefits).
- Impact of ofstep (H-).

ISSUE'S

- FUNDING
- agreement on complexity
 - ability to respond – can be limited
 - tight timescales (applications / problem contracts) limit partnerships

Allocation drives the strategy

Disconnect with the need – e.g. if working with 16-25's crosses boundaries.

Are we retrenching?

- HRC / Safer Places (but may be seen as peripheral to college activities) – collaboration is helping to get around funding issues to meet needs – by pooling.

VCS – “good at finding money”

Colleges approaching VCS if the tick box for funder

- forces the collaboration
- must need each other
- can be dropped when no longer needed

District Learning Partnerships – worked well in Herts. Funding has gone / commitment not always there. Bitty landscape.

Slavery to success rates – risky outcomes – the system can work for or against the people.

- Issue's raised are true!
- Colleges quite clearly tied by funding (to work comms).
- National branding would aid residents in communities – better understanding of what they do / offer.
- Protocol of working between VCS and Colleges – will create much more partnership working
- Partnership / collaboration ticks boxes to meet Ofsted requirements.
- Establishing better communications between colleges? VCS – colleges to take responsibility
- FORUM to bring both together!

Discussion Topic 2

Engaging with Voluntary & Community Sector organisations as sub contractors, knowledge banks for local need and as employers.

1. What mechanisms exist, or could be developed, to enable and improve dialogue between colleges and VCS organisations?

- Cambs – exists through GET Group.
- Suffolk – referral through the Learning Consortium.
- Norwich – exists through Learning City/UNITES.
- Two levels Strategic with Principal/VP;

Operational with Grass Roots.

- Learning Partnership – Beds & Luton
 - Adult Learning & Skills
 - Board – Cambs. Wider Agenda – local authorities / stake holders.
 - Development could be to have mechanisms for colleges & VCS organisations to have open dialogue discussions.
 - VCS have understanding of communications as does college but could be different – draw valuable information together.
2. How can VCS organisations and colleges work together to share valuable information about the needs of local communities?
- Community Learning Champions invite EOI's from colleges for TS consortium bids.
 - Colleges hold meet & greet for VCS.
 - Suffolk – LEAP centre's, one stop shop.
 - Communicate – HTDC, Learning Partnership, ACL
 - don't always know what's going on
 - college structures difficult to navigate
 - colleges cant navigate VCS
3. What needs to be put in place to increase the opportunities for VCS organisations to work with colleges as sub contractors?
- Colleges advertise the consortia (as do Prime Contractors).
 - Capacity building of VCS to meet quality assurance and success rates – colleges to get more involved.
 - Audit of need of VCS to be sub contractors.
 - Quality assurance in infrastructure organisations: Learning Partnerships.
 - Resource for capital – no longer available!! REAL issue for VCS/colleges.
4. How can colleges gain a better understanding of the needs of VCS organisations as employees?
- Communication key – forums / events / briefings.
 - Allow to fund the needs of the communications – flexibility.
 - Introduce community liaison officer? Funding!
 - Establish database of capability of VCS – quality marketing.
 - Communication mechanisms needed – would benefit HTDC, colleges, member organisations.
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- Funding restrictions have resulted in forums/meetings coming to an end.
 - “99K talkback” website – community focus; means of communication, good although areas develop. Community visitors use, partnerships develop. Facebook, Twitter pages – Ltd funds to support.
 - “Norwich Learning City” Facebook page – promotes learning.
 - TSNLA – develop national understanding of learning – got to colleges and 157 group.
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- Quality, governance, liability, safe-guarding, accountability.
 - Colleges might feel they can do it themselves.
 - 80/20 book – concentrate on what we are good at, work with others who meet the gap.

- VCS provide strong referral route for colleges.
- Funding drives providers to engage specific groups of learners.
- How does funding meet the learning needs of our community?
- Pockets of mechanisms which enable VCS / FE discussions.

Discussion Topic 3

Developing effective partnerships to meet the needs of communities and respond to Big Society opportunities.

1. How can long term, strategic links be built between FE Colleges and Voluntary Sector Organisations?

- Acknowledge / focus on strengths not weaknesses.
- VCS need to respond to QA needs etc.
- Colleges offer staff training for VCS.
- 5 year strategy – National Guidelines (regional/local) (funding, lifelong learning).
- Strategic links – “buy in” from principals
 - not a peripheral activity.
- What do we want from it – built in, community strategy, should the VCS be involved in shaping it?
- Making it happen – the culture, internal/external.
- Colleges natural candidate as collective to start strategic lead (Norfolk).
- Learning Partnership models worked – don't have a 'lead' to take forward (Learn East?).
- Creative idea's e.g. secondment of tutor?
- VCS meet brick wall when making contact with colleges.

2. How would working through consortia of VCS organisations, like Learn East, help this process?

- Pre-agreed joint working.
- Sharing the same vision (framework) – Learn East (mechanisms to cascade downwards).
- HTDC – help to make the links, sharing timebank model for skills practice / peer review / LOBS.
- Tackle locality – (NCC?) no consensus amongst group. Could Learn East support in obtaining funding?

3. What other strategic stakeholders should be involved?

- Job Centre plus, employee's, ACL, universities, private providers.
- Local authorities, LEP's, NHS, PCT, LSIS.

4. How can we progress what we have started today?

- Use today's output as action plan to try and move forward.
- LP – local event – between VCS – colleges. Wider: stakeholders.
- AL skills event.
- Discussions today feed into consultation.
- Can we build on the half stakeholder idea?
- NCC and Adult education.

* **GTU will host a breakfast for meeting with VCS ***