

Proposal for extending the operation of the West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network's Activity into the fourth year.

Introduction

Following careful monitoring of performance and discussions at the Strategic Advisory Forum (SAF) and the Management Board, the Director was asked to put together a proposal to extend the project into the fourth year. Following initial discussions with HEFCE, the Network was asked to provide more detail on the outcomes and added value that would arise from extending the project. This paper sets out a rationale for extending the funding over a longer period of time, new targets for the fourth year and a financial plan to deliver the proposals.

Rationale for extension

Since the Network began new initiatives and developments have begun, which were either not in the business plan or had a low profile in the business plan. In particular the WYLLN has decided to support progression from the 14-19 Diplomas into higher education, to work more closely with the Skills and Work Boards of the sub-region, to encourage the accreditation of employers' training working in association with EBTA and Fdf, to proactively encourage Network partners to make greater use of APEL, to introduce a sub-region IAG learner database and to pilot the introduction of XCRi with partners. In addition, three of our seven sector groups have been particularly successful in providing strategic fora for a range of intermediary bodies, including suppliers and funders, to engage with the HE providers. There are six broad areas an extension will address

Support for the introduction of the new Diplomas

The WYLLN is currently working with the five local education authorities and the regional DCSF 14-19 Co-ordinator to establish Progression Agreements for each of the Diplomas available in the sub-region from 2009. Extending the duration of the Network beyond July 2010, will allow Progression Agreements to be developed for the next introduction phase of Diploma lines; and sustaining the Network beyond 2011 will allow Agreements to be established for the remaining lines of learning.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the WY Progression Agreement Framework

While meeting business plan targets is important, the WYLLN has always focused on the impact the work of the Network, particularly through the West Yorkshire Progression Agreement Framework (PAF), has on learners and employers. This will form the basis of the Network's sustainability strategy. For partners to fully assess how the Network may retain and further develop the Progression Agreement Framework, an external evaluation of the performance is being undertaken. By extending the time frame of the project, it will be possible to assess the effectiveness of a streamlined Network, as proposed below, in relation to the Progression Agreement Framework. It will not be possible to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the Progression Agreement Framework by July 2010, as very few of the Progression Agreements will have run for their full cycle by the end of the academic year 2009/10.

Closer alignment with Skills and Work Boards

The WYLLN is working with the Skills and Work Boards in three local authorities to improve linkages with HE providers. This both addresses the immediate issues associated with the recession, and assists in enabling providers to work in a demand-led system, as most Boards have aims and strategies associated with high level skills and a higher skilled economy.

Strategic role of Sector Groups

Three of our seven sector groups have developed a strategic role within West Yorkshire and the region has a whole and there is no approximation to them. They are currently providing an

effective communication and collaborative working route between sector skills councils, employer groups, and employers with HE providers. Extending the time frame of the WYLLN project will enable these three sector groups to continue to gain maximum benefit from their strategic contacts and enable the lead institutions that convene each of these sector groups to develop a self-sustaining model of operations.

Addressing a new skills agenda

To date the WYLLN has made excellent progress towards delivering its business plan and adding value to the opportunities for vocational learners to benefit from the higher level skills and education on offer within West Yorkshire. The impact of the recession on employers' expectations of how they want to or need to engage with higher level skills, coupled with the current funding landscape for HE provision potentially creates even greater challenges to the HE sector maintaining and extending the principle of "fair access" to vocational learners wishing to progress into and through higher education.

In summary, following the delay in appointing staff, the WYLLN has been managing an under spend. In spite of this, the Network has worked efficiently and effectively and it is expected that it will meet its targets set out in the business plan. Extending the period of operation of the Network will enable the transition to a self-sustaining entity to be properly evaluated, to enable effective communications with employers and their intermediaries, and to continue and enable recent and additional activities to be undertaken.

The Proposal

The proposal is to reduce the level of staffing of the Network to a core minimum of:

- A part-time Director
- An Operations Manager
- A part-time Finance Officer
- An Administrator

During the fourth year of the project, it is expected that there will be minimal funded activity taking place, although some activities already taking place may be completed in the first part of the additional year. No new activities funded by HEFCE will take place. It is anticipated, however, that some new activities will be initiated funded solely by the partners. In particular, it is expected that the Progression Agreement Framework will continue to be further developed and new progression agreements recognised by the Network. Limited financial support will also be provided for those sector groups that have developed a unique strategic role within the sub-region.

The main aims for a fourth year will therefore be

- To create new progression agreements for the new Diplomas and employers
 - To enable strategic linkages with the Skills and Work Boards
 - To provide support for partners in developing new partnership agreements
 - To administer the progression agreement recognition procedures
 - To further develop the Progression Agreement Framework
 - To further support the use of APEL
 - To maintain the IT systems developed by WYLLN
 - To facilitate communications between partners
 - To liaise with the external evaluator and develop a sustainability strategy for the WYLLN based on those findings.
-

- To carry out research and publish academic papers on aspects of WYLLN's activities.
- To provide reports on the activities and performance against targets of the WYLLN to the Management Board, partner institutions and HEFCE.

Targets

As a result of these activities, further outcomes will be achieved. These with associated targets are given in the table below:

Outcomes	Target
*Additional diploma progression agreements	10
*Additional multi exit/entry progression agreements	10
*Additional employer progression agreements	5
*Additional learners supported through the new progression agreements	400
*Additional learners progressing	150

*Additional targets to those set out in the original business plan.

Finances

The estimated under spend for the 3 year WYLLN project currently stands at £436,000. This figure is a minimum amount of under spend available because it reflects the actual under spend against the original project budget for the 07/08 and 08/09 financial years. This under spend has been generated through the late recruitment of the core staff team and the decision not to recruit a dedicated MIS officer, a greatly reduced MIS system cost and some of the early partnership funding available not being fully utilised.

It is proposed that of the £436,000 available, £355,020 would be used to extend the operation of WYLLN activities into the fourth year with £60,000 of this supporting the completion of projects.

From the £436,000 total under spend available, £80,901 would be used in the existing 3rd year to start up extra project activity to support the new initiatives identified. This would increase the total project fund by £140,901 (£80,901 and £60,000) across the 3rd year and into the proposed 4th year to support the progression from 14-19 Diplomas into higher education, the planned activity with the Skills and Work Boards of the sub region, and working with EBTA and Fdf to encourage the accreditation of employers' training.

The direction and administration of the proposed 4th year activity would be carried out by the reduced core staff team already outlined. The core staff team would also facilitate the sustainability of Network activities, in particular the further development of the Progression Agreement Framework.

The funding reserved for the core staff team in the 4th year is the highest portion of the total under spend at £294,270. However, a large amount of this will indirectly go towards supporting partners in the proposed 4th year and the sustainability of Network activities. WYLLN will run dissemination events, update the WYLLN website and produce relevant publications connected to the completion of activities to maintain high level communication with partners. Budget has been allocated to MIS so that the IAGnow system will continue to be present for partners to utilise. Provision has been made to support developments that come out of XCRi pilots.

The 4th year proposal is a realistic approach to using the full budget that was originally awarded to the WYLLN project and the West Yorkshire area. The 4th year would have key benefits. The central support required to sustain the Network would be available and this would enable the delivery of outputs that were not identified in the original WYLLN business plan but are now a high priority.

The revised budget and notes to support this 4th year proposal and revised payment profile from HEFCE are available to support this proposal.

(See attached spreadsheet for budget details)