

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

Background

As reported in the one year progress report, the time taken to appoint staff to the WYLLN team at the University of Huddersfield and to establish the sectors resulted in a delay starting the Network's activities. Following, careful monitoring of performance and discussions at both the Strategic Advisory Forum (SAF) and the Management Board, the Director was asked to put together a proposal based on the paper presented to Management Board on 25th September 2008. This paper presents an outline proposal for consideration and comment by HEFCE before a final proposal is presented.

Rationale for extension

When both groups – the SAF and Management Board – considered the performance of the Network against the key indicators, there was general agreement that all but one of the targets will be achieved by the end of the original funding period as illustrated in the diagram below:

Measure	2010 Target	2007/8 Performance	Planned
Progression agreements in place	25	0	25
Number of vocational and work-based learners progressing	3000	132	
Foundation degrees (or new programmes) developed	21	4	39
Number of learners supported (IAG)	7500	2439	>7500
Additional Student Numbers	100 (2007)	120	>1168
No of staff developed	500	336	549

(The data is taken from that in the One Year Progress Report, which was collated in July 2008.)

Planned numbers are based on what is known in terms of current activity; consequently it is expected that at the end of the three years the final achievements will be far in excess of these figures. The figures for numbers progressing are harder to predict as there are few progression agreements in place to date (the first four have just been recognised). Although some students may progress on these developing agreements this year, the majority will not progress until 2010/11.

The success of the project and any future the WYLLN may have will depend on this key indicator. Moreover, the Network is concerned that progression does not result in simple achievement of the targets, but that it has a major impact on progression in West Yorkshire.

Extending the project for another year will allow the impact of the HEFCE funded activities to be properly assessed and will also allow the partners to evaluate the effectiveness of a possible business models for future operations. In extending the project, the Management Board expects new targets to be developed particularly relating to the quality of progression agreements.

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
- 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 framework will continue to be further developed and new progression agreements recognised by the Network.

Additional student numbers have been allocated to the Network for 2010/11 (subject to approval of the HEFCE Board). By the end of 2010 funding for these will have moved from Model 2 to Model 1. Extension of the project into a fourth year will ensure the use of the numbers will continue to be closely monitored and an assessment of their impact made.

The Network has developed an IT system which manages IAG interventions and provides the Network with data on learners progressing between partners, including those funded through ASNs. It is planned that these services will be available for partners and funded by the project in the fourth year.

It is not intended that any project funded staff development will be undertaken in the fourth year. However, some activity, funded directly by partners, may be considered. Project funding will be used in the fourth year to maintain a level of communication with partners mainly through the website and our social network, if it turns out to be successful.

We are in the process of commissioning an external evaluation of the project. The first part is planned to be completed this year with the findings informing the third year of operation. The second part of the evaluation will look at impact and inform decisions as to how and if the project should continue beyond HEFCE funding. A fourth year will ensure better use of the findings from the second part of the evaluation, as they will be able to be incorporated into an existing structure. Without a fourth year, a new structure would have to be re-created if the findings were to recommend continuation and the partners supported them. The Management Board are also keen to use a fourth year to carry out an academic exercise on aspects of the work of the WYLLN outside the remit of the external evaluation.

The WYLLN has already for some become a major contact for strategic developments which involve several of our partners. For example, we are working with all five local authorities in West Yorkshire on progression into HE from the new diplomas; we are working with Yorkshire and Humber East LLN on the development of a new Regional Skills Academy for Logistics; and we have become the major vehicle for introducing employer based training and accreditation (EBTA) into West Yorkshire. Extending the project into a fourth year will help the partners evaluate whether this is a role truly desired by external agencies and partners or whether it has emerged as a consequence of the ability of the WYLLN to fund progression projects and activities.

The main areas of activity for a fourth year will therefore be

- To monitor and report on the allocation of ASNs through the WYLLN in 2010/11
 - To provide support for partners in developing new partnership agreements
 - To administer the progression agreement recognition procedures
 - To further develop the progression agreement framework
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- To provide a co-ordinating role for activities supported and funded by WYLLN partners
- To maintain the IT systems developed by WYLLN
- To provide reports on the activities and performance against targets of the WYLLN to the Management Board, partner institutions and HEFCE.
- To facilitate communications between partners
- To liaise with the external evaluator and develop proposals for the future of the WYLLN based on those findings.
- To carry out research and publish academic papers on aspects of WYLLN's activities.
- To provide a useful vehicle for co-ordinating strategic developments, particular those associated with the introduction of the new diplomas and employer engagement

Targets

If extension of the project into the final year is agreed new targets will be set. These have yet to be finalised with the partnership – it is an agenda item for the next SAF – but the Management Board have requested that as well as increasing the targets, they are looking for targets that give a qualitative aspect to progression agreements. In particular, they are looking at introducing new targets for multi-exit agreements – a course that has progression agreements to more than one institution – and with a focus on level 3 to 4 progression. A full set of targets will be submitted in the formal request.

Funding

Funding models are still being developed, but on the work carried out to date between £292,753 and £352,779 will need to be carried forward to fund a fourth year. The actual amount will depend on how much of the fourth year funding is made available to partners. A full spend profile will be submitted in the formal request.

An alternative model

If the HEFCE does not support an extension into a fourth year, future financial budgets will assume that the current level of staffing in the central team will continue until the end of September 2010 (the final payment from HEFCE will have been received in July). This will allow time for appropriated reports to be completed following the end of the previous academic year.
