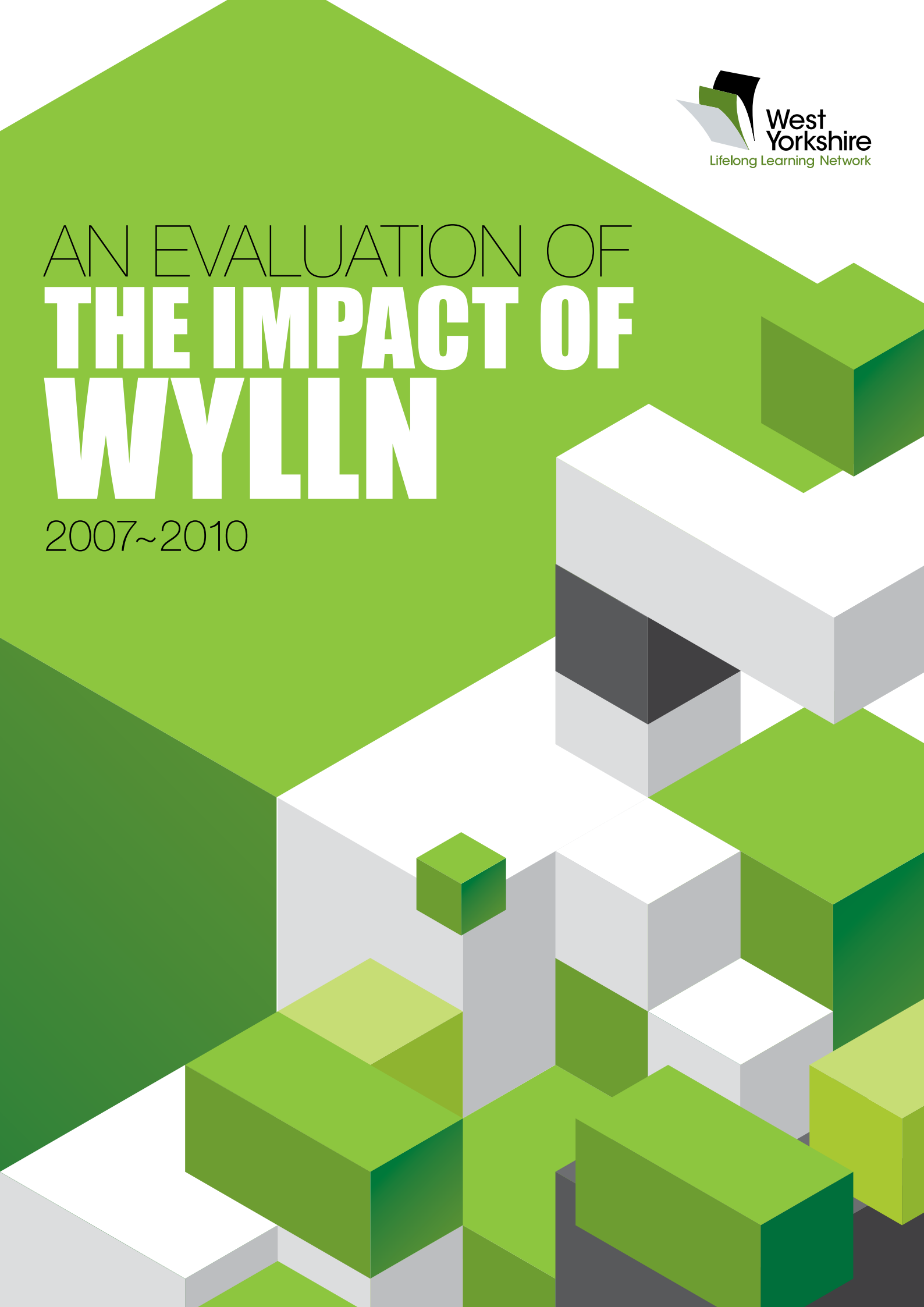


AN EVALUATION OF
**THE IMPACT OF
WYLLN**

2007~2010





FOREWORD



Professor Vivien Jones, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds and Chair of the West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network (WYLLN) Management Board

Monitoring and evaluating our activity has been hugely important to WYLLN since the very beginning. The external evaluation report summarised in this brochure was commissioned by the Management Board as the final part of this continuous monitoring of business performance.

In fulfilment of the original business plan, both internal and external evaluations have been conducted throughout the project, with external scrutiny taking the form of an interim independent evaluation, annual reports to HEFCE and this final evaluation report.

This has provided assurance throughout that the plan was being delivered effectively and on target and has meant that where issues were identified, action plans could be put in place.

The Management Board has been responsible for overseeing the delivery of the business plan and the overall strategic direction of the project. To ensure that all partners were able to influence the project and express their views on activity a Strategic Advisory Forum also met on a regular basis.

No other body brings further and higher education into a working partnership as WYLLN has done and it is important that the lessons learned and the invaluable work and resources which have come out of the project are not lost.

The external final evaluation helps ensure that they are captured in full, and on behalf of all the WYLLN partners I would like to thank Lillian Black for the many hours of hard work spent preparing her full and comprehensive report.

This brochure draws on that longer document to celebrate the main successes of the project and highlight lessons for the future.

WYLLN – A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Lifelong Learning Networks were introduced to improve the progression of vocational and work-based learners between different programmes and institutions at a time of relative economic prosperity, low unemployment and high levels of public sector investment. The pathways to higher education were often unclear and not consistently applied for these learners.

HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) funded the Lifelong Learning Networks with WYLLN being one of the last and largest to be approved.

Originally WYLLN had a 3 year business plan which was later extended to 4 years, for conclusion by July 2011. This evaluation report focuses on the original 3 years and the focus of the 4th year, it also considers sustainability beyond year 4. £5,998,163 was awarded by HEFCE with additional funding of £2,184,749 promised by partners.

In 2007 when WYLLN came into effect the partnership consisted of West Yorkshire's 5 Universities (including the Open University), 13 Further Education Colleges, 3 Higher Education Institutions and 4 Sixth Form Colleges.

During the life of the project there have been several significant changes to the partnership, i.e. the formation of Leeds City College (merging several of West Yorkshire's Further Education Colleges), Huddersfield Technical College merging with Dewsbury College to become Kirklees College and Leeds Trinity & All Saints College receiving taught degree awarding powers and becoming Leeds Trinity University College.

The original business plan for WYLLN laid out a number of numerical and qualitative targets to be achieved over the course of the project (2007-2010).

Overall WYLLN has exceeded all numerical targets producing 122 Progression Agreements, delivering IAG to over 11,000 learners and working with over 3000 businesses.



University of Huddersfield - the accountable body for WYLLN

This brochure captures the lessons learned and celebrates the successes of the project and the legacy it leaves behind. The economic backdrop has changed radically since WYLLN was originally established, presenting challenges for the project and for future learner choices. We hope that the positive foundations that WYLLN has laid will continue to be built on and that the successful partnership platform will be sustained.

For a copy of the full WYLLN evaluation report email wylln@hud.ac.uk

	TARGET	ACHIEVEMENT
Progression Agreements	25	122
IAG to learners	7,000	11,000
Employers engaged	1,000	3,000
Staff development	500	1,300

PROGRESSION AND CREDIT

The main aim of WYLLN was *“to strengthen the performance of West Yorkshire businesses and the regional economy through improved vocational and work-based progression of young people and adults into and through higher education”*.

Vocational and work-based learners in West Yorkshire do not always enjoy the same opportunities as students taking more ‘traditional’ academic routes into and through higher education. WYLLN aimed to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for all vocational learners by developing Progression Agreements with clear articulation arrangements, student support activities and joint curriculum planning and review processes.

Since 2007 WYLLN has made outstanding achievements in the area of progression and credit and there is now evidence of much stronger and more productive partnerships in place than before.

An excellent strategic Progression Agreement Framework has been signed up to by all partner institutions except one and is applicable for other uses more widely.

Thanks to partnership working and clearly laid out and accessible systems and processes it has been possible to facilitate Progression Agreements for vocational and work-based learners.

WYLLN has far exceeded expectations in this area, delivering 122 Progression Agreements against an original target of 25.

There has been good progress in securing multi-entry and multi-exit progression agreements between a wider range of partners and there are examples of organisations working together to create improved progression for work-based and vocational learners.

A minimum of 5,500 learners have benefited against a target of 3000.

One of the objectives in the original business plan was to develop a recognised credit framework portable across institutions and which recognises and values vocational and work-based learners. It was however decided early on that it would be difficult to achieve this on a sub-regional level and that WYLLN would not pursue this objective in isolation of national developments. However WYLLN did aim to improve the understanding and processes in institutions for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and good progress has been made towards this.



INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (IAG)

One of WYLLN's objectives at the start of the project was to *'improve the coherence and accessibility of higher education through information, advice and guidance for employers and vocational learners'*.

Impartial IAG is essential in helping learners or employers make decisions for their future and more transparent, accessible and recognisable IAG systems needed to be in place for employers and vocational learners.

It has not been possible to measure overall the impact of IAG on learners due to the decision taken not to brand WYLLN IAG interventions, however the numbers required have been exceeded.

WYLLN has delivered IAG to 11,000 work-based and vocational learners against a target of 7,500.

As part of the WYLLN legacy, good systems and excellent resource materials have been produced and strong partnerships have been formed between operational IAG staff across West Yorkshire.

IAG has been delivered in a wide variety of settings through one-to-one and group sessions. The IAG Now system which has been developed by WYLLN is adaptable and is in place to record IAG interventions.

This innovation in product development offers real benefit to the target group and there is also an excellent bank of on-line resources developed including a Guidance Pack for staff (www.wylln.ac.uk/Home/partner_zone/resources) and Trans:it, a suite of support tools in preparation for higher education, for students and tutors in FE to work through (www.transitwestyorkshire.ac.uk).

The IAG provided reflects the diversity of West Yorkshire, WYLLN has demonstrated well its commitment to equality and diversity on gender and ethnicity. There are many learner case studies promoting positive images of men and women in non-traditional settings and of the ethnic diversity of West Yorkshire.



SECTOR GROUPS AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Sector Groups were established based on the priority growth sectors for the region and were led by different partner institutions:

- **Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, including Food Manufacturing and Related Industrial Chemistry (led by the University of Huddersfield)**
- **Business Services including the Finance Sector, Logistics and Retail (led by Park Lane College – now Leeds City College)**
- **Construction and the Built Environment (led by Leeds College of Building)**
- **Culture, Media, Sports and the Arts; Leisure, Hospitality and Tourism (led by Leeds Metropolitan University)**
- **Digital Services including Creative Digital, ICT and Print (led by the Northern Technology Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University)**
- **Health, Social Care and Early Years (led by the University of Bradford)**
- **Leadership, Management, Innovation and Enterprise (led by Wakefield College)**



Through the Sector Groups WYLLN aimed to develop stronger links between businesses and HE and FE and work-based learning providers with more relevant and responsive higher level skills provision as a result.

Through 7 Sector Groups WYLLN has engaged with over 3000 employers (against an original target of 1000).

Feedback from employers has shown that they have had positive experiences working with WYLLN partners and they can explain a range of business benefits.

Enabling different institutions to lead Sector Groups has developed a broader leadership model contributing to likely greater sustainability.

WYLLN aimed to develop a minimum of 21 Foundation Degrees or equivalent per sector in areas relevant and important to employers and the economy.

The Sector Groups have collectively delivered 78 curriculum developments of which 34 are new courses (23 Foundation Degrees, 5 BA Hons, 2 HNDs, 2 HNCs and 2 MScs) plus 64 marketing events/ activities and engaged with 22 Sector Skills Councils.

The number of Sector Groups put in place was ambitious but all achieved their targets in different ways and enabled a greater shared leadership model to emerge.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In order for WYLLN to achieve its ambitious targets it would need better trained staff to be able to support progression within and between vocational and academic learning.

Between 2007 and 2010 WYLLN delivered 1300 staff development opportunities against a target of 500 and has become a 'learning organisation'.

Those who have benefited from the staff development opportunities offered include staff from further and higher education, training providers, community and voluntary sector organisations, schools, Sector Skills Councils, key stakeholders and employers.

There is now improved awareness and knowledge around a wide range of subjects relevant to WYLLN's objectives and evidence suggests that the learning has been taken back to the workplace and changes put in place as a result.

34 staff development activities have taken place over 3 years at a cost of £55,287 representing good value for money with an average cost of £42 per participant.

As part of the evaluation report a survey was undertaken on those who have participated in WYLLN staff development activities. The results show that participants have particularly valued networking with colleagues from other institutions and the wider partnership and professional knowledge gained at events. Participants would like WYLLN to continue to provide more on accreditation systems, progression and strengthen work with employers.



ADDITIONAL STUDENT NUMBERS AND FUNDING

The strategic and bottom line benefits of partnership working are outlined in the funding figures generated by WYLLN.

WYLLN was the largest Lifelong Learning Network developed in the UK with an investment from HEFCE of £5,998,163 awarded.

Between 2007 and 2010 600 Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) were received and mainstreamed by WYLLN for West Yorkshire Institutions to support vocational learners, these ASNs represent a value of approximately £2.5 million.

Unfortunately the cancellation by HEFCE of ASNs in year 3 prevented more strategic use of ASNs.

As well as the funding provided by HEFCE, WYLLN has provided great added value by delivering a wide range of products and services over and above the original plan including attracting additional funding. This demonstrates the benefits of a partnership approach and WYLLN's capacity to lead partners.

Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF): £2 million was awarded to WYLLN for demonstrating the partnership's capacity to respond to the economic downturn. Using the ECIF, WYLLN has provided careers advice and short training interventions to 1140 individuals who were either threatened by redundancy or already redundant. Partner institutions involved in the ECIF project were:

- University of Huddersfield
- University of Leeds
- University of Bradford
- Leeds Metropolitan University
- Leeds Trinity University College
- Leeds City College
- Bradford College
- Leeds College of Building
- Joseph Priestley College
- Calderdale College
- Wakefield College

JISC funds for technological development: WYLLN has demonstrated the capacity to lead partners to respond to employers through the introduction of a shared course database (XCRi). WYLLN was awarded £30,000 by JISC for this project.

Extra value added by WYLLN includes the value of resources provided by institutions in staff time and a minimum of 15 jobs generated.

RESOURCES AND OUTPUTS

Part of the legacy of WYLLN over the course of the project has been the bank of resources it has created. The following is a list of just some of the resources which are available and it is hoped that the hard work that has been carried out is not lost and will be built on.

- A knowledge bank of the curriculum development projects which have been completed as part of WYLLN, serving as a best practice repository and store of lessons learned
- A good adaptable IAGNow system to record interventions
- A website of the short course and accredited 'offer' to local employers across Leeds City Region
- An e-portfolio platform which has been specifically designed to support part-time, distance and/or work-based FD students
- An easy to navigate, simple website holding a wide range of materials for partners and employers and giving easy access to meetings, policy papers, projects, progression agreement resources and the whole range of WYLLN activity
- A guidance pack for IAG staff
- The Progression Agreement Framework documentation including guidelines and application form
- A range of easy to understand brochures and flyers on relevant topics including APEL, Progression, the Advanced Diploma and Higher Level Skills
- Open access maths materials for construction as part of the motivational maths project (www.virtualmaths.org)
- Trans:it, a suite of support tools in preparation for higher education (www.transitwestyorkshire.ac.uk)
- Many learner case studies
- Many employer case studies

This list is in no way exhaustive and there are many other examples of materials and resources created through WYLLN projects and partnership working which can be found at www.wylln.ac.uk



There is a legacy for the future which WYLLN has created including a range of embedded progression, curriculum and credit developments, a repository of best practice, networks of people, Knowledge Bank, materials and case studies and systems which could be exploited commercially.

THE WYLLN PARTNERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND YEAR 4

WYLLN has succeeded in its aim to provide a sustainable higher level skills partnership, there are now **much higher levels of trust** and joint working between institutions providing higher level skills and with external agencies.

If WYLLN does not continue there is a danger that the excellent results will be lost and any future external partnership opportunities will require the wheel to be reinvented. It is small amounts of funding that would be required to sustain the partnerships.

WYLLN has created a **successful partnership platform with a good reputation for future sustainability**. The platform now in place would allow partners to work more responsively, cohesively and flexibly to meet employers' higher level skills needs.

Partners and institutional staff have expressed that they value the opportunities WYLLN offers to network and share new developments under one banner. WYLLN has created a **unique communications forum** for further and higher education in West Yorkshire.

Although the economic backdrop is vastly different from when WYLLN first came into existence this partnership provides an opportunity to reshape WYLLN's focus to address new challenges and externalities. There is now increased unemployment, impact of the recession on businesses, removal of regional infrastructures including the government office and Yorkshire Forward.

Sector Groups could form the basis of future working with the new Leeds City Region LEP once its powers are determined.

Evidence demonstrates that external partners and institutional staff are keen to see WYLLN continue, even in a changed and reduced format. There was absolute consensus in this during discussions.

The future of WYLLN should be considered in line with institutions' widening participation and 'Aimhigher' plans and the need to engage more coherently with employers. Continuation of WYLLN would facilitate future working with the Local Economic Partnership's Employment and Skills Board.

There is still **more work to be done** by WYLLN and partners to secure a cohesive response mechanism to **meet the higher level skills needs of employers**. There is a view that 3 years was an unrealistic timescale for such a complex project and it may have been preferable to stage the project over 5 years with the same level of funding.

“Business Link Yorkshire & WYLLN have developed a productive working relationship to support skills development and growth of businesses in the region. Effective communication channels have been developed for referrals and sharing management information, in relation to the identified skills needs in Yorkshire & Humber. Business Link & WYLLN continue to work in partnership to meet the higher level skills needs of employers within the region.”

Linda Herriott, Specialist Partnership Manager (Skills), Business Link Yorkshire

“WYLLN has been highly proactive in pulling together providers of higher level skills into a focused network across the wider labour market of the city region: keen to pilot new developments, effective at involving employers directly and exceptional at partnership working.”

Sue Cooke, Project Director – Leeds City Region Employment & Skills Board

“I didn’t have much to do with universities before attending the SAF, I feel more confident now and know who to approach if I want to help students progress.”

Member of the Strategic Advisory Forum

“Before WYLLN there was no real forum where we could get together with universities to look at progressing our learners.”

FE individual

There is currently no coherent interface with employers in place and variable levels of responsiveness by different institutions to employer enquiries. Institutions need to consider very carefully how they respond to the employer market on pricing, flexibility of provision and responsiveness.

Employers remain confused about ‘education speak’ and how to access higher level skills provision.

The five Higher Level Skills Co-ordinators located in West Yorkshire local authorities and who provide a higher level skills brokerage for employers could form the basis of skills brokers for the future if funding is secured.

WYLLN has created the opportunity to become the business interface for institutions in a wide variety of ways.

WYLLN could be part of an institution’s solution to external pressures.

WYLLN Beyond Year 4

Proposals are currently being considered to sustain the partnership of HE providers in some form beyond year 4. Once these proposals have been finalised further information will be available on the WYLLN website www.wylln.ac.uk.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WYLLN Partners



Strategic Partners



Member of WYLLN Board. WYLLN and Leeds City Region have developed joint activity to support the work of the LCR Employment and Skills Board. WYLLN is a member of the recently formed Leeds City Region Skills Network.



The Skills Funding Agency is an agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Member of the WYLLN Board. WYLLN and the Skills Funding Agency have worked together to utilise the Skills Enhancement Fund to support the delivery of higher level skills to employees and staff at risk of redundancy or who have been made redundant.



Member of the WYLLN Board. WYLLN and Yorkshire Forward have worked together to secure additional funding through the Economic Challenge Investment Fund to deliver higher level skills to employees, employers and those at risk of redundancy.



Member of the WYLLN Board. WYLLN and Careers Yorkshire and the Humber have worked together to ensure the delivery of IAG services to vocational and work-based learners and to engage IAG workforce in staff development activities focused on enabling progression into HE.



Funding body and Member of the WYLLN Board.