

Minutes of Voluntary Value: Skills, Employment and Worklessness Forum

At the CREATE Centre

Date: Thursday 22 July 2010

Attending:

Name

Organisation

Simon Charters

South West Forum (speaker)

Christine Vine

Jobcentre Plus (speaker)

David Draycott

West of England Skills and Competitiveness
Board (speaker)

Wendy Stephenson

Voscur (speaker)

Martin Gregg

CVS South Gloucestershire (workshop facilitator)

Bob Snow

Voluntary Action North Somerset (workshop
facilitator)

Paula Cannings

DEVELOP Enhancing Community Support
(workshop facilitator)

Brian McInally

Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers (workshop
facilitator)

Ruth Pitter

Voscur (chair)

Ann Millard

CSV

Alphonse Moore

Sul' Art

Aroona Smith

Silai for Skills

Ayannah Griffithh

Black Development Agency (BDA)

Ben Sansum

Advice Network

Billy Odumuzor

PAC Ltd

Carla Wyatt

City Academy, Bristol

Christian Moore

West of England Skills and Competitiveness
Board

Dan Lus

BADAS

David Glossop

Wheels Project

Rev Dawnecia Palmer

Peace Makers

Emma Rice

Voscur

Geoff Brain

Hedley Hall

Henry Lawes

Fairbridge West

Jane Taylor

Bristol City Council (BCC)

Jo Watson

City of Bristol College

Julian Williams

SOFA Project

Liz Jones

Easton Community Centre

Louise Martin

Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd

Maggie Waldon

Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd

Mark Hubbard

Bristol Compact

Matt Jacobs

City Academy, Bristol

Matthew Hewitt

Trinity Centre

Nicholas Bonnie	The Prince's Trust
Pat Mundy	Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers
Pat Penny	Developing Health and Independence (DHI)
Paul Mitton	City of Bristol College
Rashida Horhey	West of England Skills and Competitiveness Board
Roisin Tobin	West of England Skills and Competitiveness Board
Sue Altwell	West of England Skills and Competitiveness Board
Tony Ricketts	2 nd Change Project CIC

Apologies:

Name	Organisation
Simon Llewellyn	Wheels Project

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

Wendy Stephenson (WS), Voscur welcomed everyone. She introduced the event as a partnership event with: CVS South Glos; DEVELOP; Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS); and the Black Development Agency (BDA). She also thanked South West Forum for their support.

Wendy explained the aim of Voluntary Value (VV) is to increase the Sector involvement in the European Social Fund (ESF) skills, training and worklessness agenda by connecting regional policy makers with frontline organisations.

Voluntary Value had hoped to have been able to provide updated information on ESF developments but this is not possible. However we decided to continue with this meeting as there is still important information to discuss.

The aim of the event is to find out how the sector can influence the agenda of agencies present here today, through presentations, Q&A and discussion groups.

Ruth Pitter (RP), Voscur warmly welcomed and introduced the speakers:

Simon Charters, Regional Co-ordinator, Voluntary Value, South West Forum (SWF) (see **section two** of these notes)

Christine Vine, EST Manager, Jobcentre Plus (see **section three** of these notes)

David Draycott, Director of Skills and Competitiveness, West of England Partnership (see **section four** of these notes)

Jane Taylor, Service Manager, Community and Adult Skills, Bristol City Council (see **section five** of these notes).

2. Simon Charters (SC), South West Forum (SWF) (PowerPoint presentation on the Voscur website)

SC thanked West of England VV partners for the invitation to speak. He outlined the 3 themes of his presentation:

- Brief background of the VV Project and SWF's involvement
- Where things are with the ESF commissioning timetable
- The development of a Regional Third Sector Consortium

Background

VV is the means of trying to increase the involvement of Third Sector organisations (TSOs) in the delivery of ESF funded projects in the South West area (excluding Cornwall). ESF has the objective of building skills and creating job opportunities for those outside of the labour market.

Three main ESF agencies prioritising spending are:

1. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA, formerly the Learning and Skills Council)
2. National Offender Management (NOMS)
3. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Within WoE, these 3 organisations spend approximately £10million, and SWF is trying to influence them to commission TSOs. Simon outlined the 6 main providers that this £10m is split between (please see Simon Charters' PowerPoint presentation); there is a resounding voice that TSOs are overwhelmingly underrepresented in this group of providers, hence the idea of a Regional Consortium towards the aim of addressing this.

While some TSOs are better represented than others they are competing against public providers. SWF is trying to encourage providers to sub contract with TSOs.

Commissioning Timetable

Many projects finish at the end of 2010. New projects will be commissioned from January 2011 or later. The contracts for these projects are not yet out to tender because of a delay due to the change of Government.

Only NOMS have pressed on regardless with their commissioning

timetable and though receiving initial bids at this point they have a relatively small amount of the money.

Regional Consortium

The idea for the Consortium came from discussions at local events in Bristol, Chippenham, Dorset and other areas. The feeling was that TSOs could be accessing ESF money but needed to work together to do so.

A Community Learning Employment and Skills Partnership (CLESP) has therefore been established – it does not yet have any legal status. CLESP is a collection of TSOs that have shown an interest in working together; it includes those with specialist knowledge of learning and skills.

There is also a CLESP steering group that supports TSOs to become members of CLESP.

To be eligible to join TSOs must meet 4 criteria:

1. Be a VCSE organisation
2. Have accountability or a governance mechanism based in the South West
3. Have an active interest in skills, employment or learning
4. Must sign the Declaration of Values.

CLESP is currently developing its membership pack and application form. The aim is to pull together organisations that share the same principles.

CLESP is aware of the need to support smaller organisations that want to be part of the consortium. SWF has been looking at various models around the country to see how best to provide a mechanism for smaller organisations to be involved in service delivery. For example smaller organisations without the capacity to meet Quality Assurance targets could work with larger organisations equipped with these skills.

Simon asserted that 95% of ESF contracts will not be accessed by CLESP and these contracts will continue to go through the sub contracting route; he felt it was important to note that CLESP would not be the only method for tendering for contracts.

Questions invited:

Mark Hubbard, Compact Liaison Officer: explained his role in connection to Compact and commissioning. He wanted to know if SWF had made a deal with the public sector bodies concerning track records pointing out that as CLESP does not have a track record with bids or delivery then its tenders may get rejected.

SC: CLESP has agreed that Learning Curve was the best placed TSO that could be the lead body because of its track record of bids and experience of delivery. SWF is trying to negotiate that the lead body does not have 51% of outputs required at the moment. The track record argument exists only in that funding agencies want to adhere to it.

Henry Lawes, Fairbridge West: How do you define 'governance arrangements' as mentioned in the criteria for joining?

SC: defined it as:

- A representation, or staff of the organisation based in the South West or
- A Board of Trustees based in the South West or
- An Advisory Group based in the South West

Wendy Stephenson, Voscur: expressed concern that this could be seen as a replica of the prime provider model but this time the prime provider is the regional consortium. How does CLESP ensure the involvement of smaller organisations becomes a prime objective?

SC: acknowledged the need for a realistic approach in where the expertise lies around commissioning, for example, meeting Ofsted requirements. Larger organisations in CLESP will bring these skills. TSOs have their own business needs and reasons for joining CLESP.

Matthew Hewitt, the Trinity Centre: What if an organisation comes into CLESP but has an existing relationship with a provider such as the colleges. Would this be a conflict of interest issue?

SC: felt that there was no real issue of competing loyalties as the contracts that they are involved with would be different. The Consortium membership pack will detail what constitutes a conflict of interest.

Bob Snow, VANS: Will major members of CLESP only bid through the consortium for ESF money? This would be a big commitment on their part.

SC: The bid that CLESP aims to go for will be one/two/three out of many ESF contracts available. There will be plenty of other ESF contracts that CLESP will not bid for, which major CLESP members may be interested in bidding for in their own right.

RP thanked SC. SC will be around for the rest of the meeting to take further questions and stressed that some of these issues can be raised in the discussion groups.

3.Christine Vine (CV), Jobcentre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (PowerPoint presentation on the Voscur website)

CV thanked for the invitation to speak and explained she would be discussing:

1. The role of the DWP in ESF funding
2. The current position
3. The future

Role: CV has been involved in ESF for the last 7 years. DWP is co-financing organisations using central Government money as match funding to draw down ESF money. Jobcentre Plus is part of DWP and has ESF staff in each of the Jobcentre Plus Districts. Though the bureaucracy has reduced slightly ESF money still comes with rules and regulations attached.

The current position: across the region there are 9 ESF contracts which started in July 2008, of which 2 are in the West of England District. Two new contracts started in December 2009, of which one is in West of England, focusing on those who are victims of the recession involving projects working with people who are workless, parents or those who have been unemployed for 6 months or more. Jobcentre Plus relies on TSOs to be out there in the community with these groups. Jobcentre Plus operates through a system of prime providers and the breakdown is a 50 / 50 split. TSOs come in through the sub contracting route.

CV mentioned that Jobcentre Plus is doing particularly well in meeting targets; the job entry rate of 40% makes the South West one of the best performing regions. In terms of groups they have achieved targets for disabled people, those who are 50 plus and are almost meeting 7% BME target.

The Future: Jobcentre Plus has to operate through the ESF framework that was set out last year. A co-financing plan has been produced in response to the framework and was submitted prior to the General Election. The change of Government means the plan will need to be revised to fit in with the priorities of the current Government. ESF has to demonstrate added value to the mainstream provision; information seems to change on a daily basis. At present DWP nationally have around 80 ESF contracts and are seeking to reduce that number.

There is an argument for having more localised contract. On a regional basis the framework for potential providers will be decided in due course. To be part of this framework, providers need to make an expression of interest now.

Jobcentre Plus has previously held events where prime providers are able to meet potential sub contractors. These events could prove to be even more useful if a large national provider become the main provider and does not have the knowledge of provision in the South West.

Questions Invited:

Billy Odumuzor, PAC Ltd:

1. What criterion is there for an organisation to be awarded a contract?
2. The BME targets are set very low compared to other targets, who decides the targets?

CV

1. The tendering is an open and competitive process and looks at the legal viability of an organisation, the financial viability, what the organisation could deliver and how they would work with other sub contractors. The criterion is decided at national level and the bids are also accessed by a national team.
2. The targets are set by the European Union.

Matt Jacobs, City Academy

1. The referral mechanisms only refer to the prime provider, this can disadvantage sub contractors, and so will this process change?
2. There is a focus on getting people into work in a short amount of time, but some clients, particularly those who are furthest away from the job market need long term support to get to this point.

CV

1. The prime provider decides who the sub contractors are. Jobcentre Plus only deals with the prime providers.
2. The project at the moment with those unemployed for 6 months or more has a minimum term of 10 weeks. There is a need to speak to prime providers about these programmes as sometimes they do have expectations of getting people into work too quickly.

Henry Lawes, Fairbridge West: Do you do spot checks with sub contractors to see if they are happy with the terms and conditions of the contract?

CV: Jobcentre Plus' relationship is with the prime provider only. (CV agreed to take this forward for discussion to see if it was something Jobcentre Plus could do in the future.)

CV

4. David Draycott (DD), West of England Partnership,

Competiveness and Skills. (PowerPoint presentation on the Voscur website)

DD is waiting for more information about what is happening in relation to ESF funding after the change of Government and policy decisions. DD was aware it was hard to find a way forward so acknowledged some of the areas of confusion including:

- The future of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
- The likely impact of local development partnerships?
- The changes to the new Skills Funding Agency
- The FSA spend on employability is likely to sit within a single work programme

DD said current seismic proposals will create the biggest single change to the welfare system in a long time.

DD explained the West of England Skills and Competiveness Partnership has been established since April; it grew out of a Multi Area Agreement (MAA) target aimed at effectively dealing with skills and employment in the South West.

Influencing funding in the South West is a key issue and the Partnership aims to add value to what is being done within the Local Authorities and to link together activities towards meeting the agenda.

A Board has been set up with a number of private sector representatives and a number of elected members (councillors). The VCSE was not included in the original recruitment round but a rep has now recently been recruited.

The underpinning priorities of the Partnership are:

- To develop a sustainable / low carbon economy
- To develop a digital infrastructure

The key stake holders may be different next year due to all the changes. Ensuring that the public sector is contributing is even more important in this time of reduced public spending. Bristol has different demands from other areas in the South West and these needs have to be reflected and targeted in any provision. The Partnership has spent time looking at plans and programmes that reflect the specific needs of communities.

The Partnership would support any initiative which encourages the VCSE working together.

Questions invited:

Paula Cannings: questioned why B&NES Council did not appear on the diagram of stakeholders.

DD explained that this was a mistake and they are represented!

5. Jane Taylor (JT), Community and Adult Skills, Bristol City Council.

JT said she wanted to talk about what is known and what is not known at this point in time.

It is known that in Bristol and its surrounding area there is a dire need for developing the skills of people at age 19+. The present provision for post 19 education is very bleak and adult learner issues are increasing.

There is a strong rumour that contracts that are given out will not be under £1 million in future. This is a significant change for local authorities and work based training providers. This could aid a push towards organisations merging.

The Skills and Competiveness Board provides a good focus on the work the VCSE is completing towards worklessness.

In Wales they have moved to a system where a Partnership is invited to apply to become a community learning network. When inspections are held they are focussed on the network as a whole.

WS: explained to delegates that the possibility of establishing a learning network for the sub-region could be talked about in the discussion groups. JT will be attending one of the groups so delegates who had questions for her should attend this specific group.

6. Round Table Discussions

(Please see appendices)

7. Feedback Quick Points

Group 1: Martin Greg and Brian McInally

- Is a learning consortium duplicating anything?
- CLESP issue – relationships and local knowledge will be important
- Opportunity to work in partnership at regional level – what would the nature of the contract be?
- How can we influence the shape?

- How can smaller bodies get involved?
- What about current recognised networks of providers?
- The WoE Partnership needs to support the VCSE rep as joining an existing group can be challenging
- There is a need for independence and impartiality

Group 2 – Bob Snow

- Is there a need for a Bristol wide or a WoE Partnership? The group decided there should be a WoE Partnership. Care was required not to duplicate the existing networks in Bristol. The picture is confused slightly by the history of the WoE area.
- There was a view that a BME component would be required in a partnership group.
- A WoE partnership group could be a significant bidder for VCOs in WoE.
- Debate over how certain/uncertain we can be over what ESF will fund in the future.
- Are small forums already in existence? A mapping exercise should be completed to make sure this would offer something different.
- There is a growing momentum towards a consortium
- CLESP wording for 'conflict of interest' should be careful, so as not to discourage organisations from participating: they need to protect their best interests.
- Delivery partners need be allowed to influence the nature of tenders early on.
- There remains a lack of awareness of ESF opportunities in parts of the region – go back to basics in explaining ESF!

Group 3 – Jane Taylor

- Would need to define the purpose of a learning partnership
- Sub contractor has very little power
- Would have to be wider than just Bristol
- Who funds set up stage?
- Who would lead on this?
- Can we link in with WoE Partnership for initial stages?

8. Each speaker was given one minute to sum up

Simon Charters

South West Forum is currently building up a shopping list of activities to take to the Skills meeting on 2 August. This will detail what organisations want funded. To contribute please email Simon on:
Simon@southwestforum.org.uk

There is a necessity to go back to basics as there is an assumption that

people understand what ESF is, perhaps this needs a rethink.

Christine Vine

As soon as Jobcentre Plus is able to move forward on commissioning opportunities CV will let everyone know.

Jane Taylor

Is looking forward to working with people on some of the conclusions.

9. CLOSE

RP Moving forward is a little out of everyone's control at the moment but VV hopes to run a further event in the Autumn. She thanked everyone for being involved today and thanked speakers, and the facilitators from the group discussions.