

Getting Smarter – Part II

A Learning and Skills Strategy for the
Voluntary and Community Sector in Norfolk
2006 – 2011

by The Guild



GETTING SMARTER – PART II

A review of the strategic framework for voluntary and community sector learning and skills development in Norfolk

1. Introduction

This report summarises work undertaken to develop 'Getting Smarter' - the Norfolk Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consortium's strategy for learning and skills development in Norfolk. It does not aim to be an in-depth research report; rather it seeks to set out the strategic framework for VCS learning and skills development in Norfolk, creating a context for the priorities and actions set out in the strategy.

2. Methodology

A steering group formed from the Learning and Skills Sub-group of the Norfolk Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consortium oversaw the production of this strategy.

The consultation process ran from 15th July 2005 to 30th November 2005. Qualitative data was collected through a series of semi-structured telephone interviews with 19 key stakeholder organisations from both the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector. Although only a small number of organisations were interviewed at this stage, it was felt a significant amount of consultation has already occurred and it would be more positive to focus on collating existing data and ensuring that a clear and agreed strategy was produced.

Using the findings from this first research phase alongside key strategic documents (see references) and other research reports, a draft strategy was produced. Three focus groups were held. One on the outskirts of Norwich (18 delegates in attendance), one in Great Yarmouth (16 delegates in attendance) and one in King's Lynn (5 delegates in attendance). In total, 39 delegates attended.

At each event, participants were given an overview of the key findings from the first research phase. They were then split into groups consisting of 4–5 people to participate in a visioning exercise. In this exercise, groups were asked to develop a list of underlying principles and an overall vision that should be used to guide the priorities and actions within the strategy as well as future decisions and activity in relation to VCS learning and skills development in Norfolk. The main recurring themes from this exercise were then used to develop the vision and underlying principles for the strategy.

Groups were then given a copy of the strategy's implementation plan and asked to work through each strategic priority to identify specific actions to address each of the issues identified. They were also asked to suggest possible lead partners for each action. To widen up access to this process,

the implementation plan was also posted on The Guild's website to ensure that those who were unable to attend the focus groups were given the opportunity to review and comment on it.

Following feedback from the focus groups and comments on the implementation plan, a final draft strategy was produced. Electronic copies were e-mailed to all those who attended the focus groups and to the Learning and Skills Sub-group members for further dissemination through their networks. It was also circulated via the networks of the Norfolk Voluntary Organisations Learning and Skills Officer. In addition to this, the final draft strategy was posted on The Guild's website.

Following these two consultation phases, the feedback on the draft strategy was collated and presented to the Learning and Skills Sub-group. Once all feedback had been considered by the Sub-group and the researchers, the final strategy was produced. This was then presented to the Norfolk Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consortium on the 2nd February 2006 to be signed off.

3. A quick overview of the sector

The last comprehensive survey of the voluntary and community sector in Norfolk was the Voldata Report, carried out in 1999/2000. The work was undertaken as part of VOLCAAN (Voluntary and Community Alliance Across Norfolk), a European Social Fund capacity building project. Below is a summary of the key findings from the report, largely based on a sample of 806 respondents (23%). Since the survey was carried out it is likely that the sector has increased in size and scope but the findings still provide a useful insight into the VCS in Norfolk.

- Norfolk boasts a dynamic and vibrant VCS consisting of at least 3,500 organisations.
- The sector is an important provider of lifelong learning and training opportunities and has substantial impact on unemployment and employability.
- The sector is a major provider of services working in the following key fields: health and social care, arts, the environment, heritage, education, information, advice, advocacy, community regeneration and development.
- Volunteers in Norfolk make an enormous contribution to the county – economically, socially and culturally. Over 31,500 volunteers supported the respondent organisations which in economic terms, represents a contribution of almost £10 million each year. From these figures, it can be estimated that the total contribution for the whole sector is likely to be much higher.

- 54% of the respondent organisations rely entirely on unpaid workers to exist.
- The sector is a significant employer in Norfolk, providing a range of full time, part time and contract jobs. 338 of the respondents alone provided over 2500 jobs in 1998/1999.
- In 1998/99 almost 250,000 people benefited from the services of respondent organisations.
- Funding and fundraising are key issues for voluntary and community organisations.
- Over 60 organisations had annual incomes of over £100,000 in 1998/99.

4. County-wide learning and skills services in Norfolk

The development of a county learning and skills strategy must be rooted in work that has been developed over a number of years. If we were starting with a blank sheet of paper, it is likely that the proposals would be different to those we have suggested. Therefore, it is helpful, in this context, to review how the existing infrastructure was developed.

The current Learning and Skills Officer Post originally grew out of a project funded by the county Social Services in the early 1990s. The aim was to help increase skill levels within voluntary and community sector organisations to enable them to take on Service Level Agreements, as opposed to being wholly reliant on grants. The project was run throughout the 90s as a training programme for the VCS, consisting of one-day training courses on aspects to do with managing a voluntary and community organisation, and was coordinated through a part-time coordinator post. It was managed by Norfolk Rural Community Council on behalf of the Norfolk Voluntary Resources Group (NVRG) – an alliance of the main four generic infrastructure organisations for the VCS in Norfolk.

During this period there was a significant imbalance between these four agencies. Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services (NVS) was by far the biggest and the best resourced, due mainly to a contract with the health authority over a large part of the county. Norfolk Rural Community Council (NRCC) was also a well-resourced agency but its remit to work in rural communities meant that it was not able to lead in some county-wide developments. The other two agencies in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn had historically been much smaller and less able to participate in county-wide or strategic actions. Since the restructuring of both these agencies there has been a dramatic change in their capacity. However, it is evident that for a long period NVS was the agency best resourced to take on the leadership of county-wide programmes.

Initially the Training Programme was a success but it began to run into problems. A number of the courses were cancelled because of lack of participants, despite evidence of apparent need. The NVRG was also beginning to face problems, with many of the partners struggling to find the time to commit to the group. Consequently, it was felt that the training programme needed to be reevaluated. This coincided with the establishment of the Voluntary and Community Alliance Across Norfolk (VOLCAAN) partnership – a major partnership project led by Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services, with 30 other partner organisations, and funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).

One of the projects to emerge out of VOLCAAN was the Training Development Project, which the county Social Services agreed to match fund in place of its previous support. The project enabled the training programme to step back from direct provision and analyse the apparent disparity between evidence of need and provision. The analysis revealed that many VCOs faced problems with overall organisational development and not just management training. As a result, the project set up a 'brokerage' service that would provide access to information on a wide range of available learning opportunities to enable organisations to better match their needs with appropriate provision via both online and telephone/email support. The 'Portfolio' digest was also set up. This bi-monthly bulletin pulled together information on available courses alongside information on learning and skills initiatives relevant to VCS. As well as information provision, a cross-sector network of training providers and VCOs (The Norfolk Training Network) was set up to enable stronger networking and create better intersectoral awareness. All of these activities were coordinated through a Training Development Officer post.

As part of the training development programme, a feasibility study for establishing a training resource centre for the VCS was carried out. This resulted in an information, advice and support service for locally based voluntary organisations and community groups being set up by Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services.

When the funding for the VOLCAAN project ended in June 2000, Norfolk Social Services increased funding to maintain the renamed Learning and Skills Officer post and to continue the development of the Portfolio Brokerage Service and Portfolio Training Digest. However, without match funding from ESF, the Learning and Skills Officer post could only operate on a part time basis. In the period from VOLCAAN ending to the present, further ESF monies were secured, but there have been periods when no ESF match support was available. It was during these times that the Learning and Skills Officer had to take on other work, such as the management of the Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) project, which has sometimes been a distraction from the core function of the post. The Learning and Skills Officer also became responsible for implementing and managing a number of other projects that emerged from the Norfolk Training Network and acting as its secretariat - extending beyond the original remit of the post.

The development of the brokerage service uncovered additional barriers to organisational development and training. For example, it was found that whilst the brokerage service enabled VCOs to access information on a wide variety of learning opportunities, they simply couldn't afford to attend. Therefore in later ESF rounds, funding was secured to offer bursaries administered by the Learning and Skills Officer to enable VCOs to access learning they would otherwise be unable to afford. West Norfolk CVS have also implemented a bursary scheme. Other issues also emerged as new activities became operational. For example, as described above, various pots of short term funding have resulted in mission drift and an increasing lack of clarity about the remit of different organisations, resulting in confusion both inside and outside the VCS. Notwithstanding, a lot of these earlier developments in Norfolk have been pioneering in terms of VCS learning and skills development and evidence still indicates an apparent need. However, the sector is constantly moving forward - technology is advancing, as is the sectors expectation from services. The new challenge therefore, is in ensuring that existing structures and services are reviewed so that they meet progressive demand.

A further outcome of the VOLCAAN project was the establishment of a cross-sector group to look at developing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework for the voluntary and community sector. The group set up a consortium which bid for lottery funding to carry out a piece of research into the professional development needs of the sector, availability and appropriateness of current training provision, and the development of a framework offering progression from entry level qualifications to masters level. The final report, 'Meeting the Challenge', recommended setting up a body that could to participate in the development and monitoring of CPD framework qualifications; to provide voluntary and community sector careers and CPD information, advice and guidance (IAG); and to continue to raise the profile of voluntary and community sector CPD. In response, the Voluntary Sector Initiative for Professional Development (VSIPD) was formally established in 2001 to help address the needs identified through the research.

Since VSIPD was set up, the organisation has made progress in supporting and facilitating the growth of learning and professional development within the VCS. This has focused mainly on paid staff working in the sector, to enable them to develop their professional skills and competences. However, in some organisations, trustees or other volunteers have benefited from the opportunities. VSIPD has been able to offer an information, advice and guidance service (IAG) that supports individuals who may work or want to work in the voluntary and community sector. The PAVVS (Partnership for Access to Accreditation for the Voluntary and Community Sector) learning framework model was also recently launched. This is set to play a significant role in the development of accredited learning opportunities for continuing professional development in the sector. In addition, VSIPD has become an Open College Network (OCN) approved centre of accreditation working with VCOs across Norfolk to enable them to implement OCN accredited learning opportunities.

The current lottery funding that is supporting SOUL ends in February 2006. There have also been recent changes to Norfolk Social Services, which has seen the department split into two areas - Adult Social Services and Children's Services. This is likely to have an impact when the current contract ends in March 2006 and is renegotiated with Adult Social Services, particularly for the learning and skills development of young people. VSIPD also face challenges in securing long-term funding.

Many of the services outlined above are fundamental to the implementation of the strategy, which seeks to build on and improve existing provision rather than to reinvent it. New sources of funding will need to be identified not only to ensure their continuation but also to develop their capacity to become more effective and in some cases, expand to meet the additional requirements set out for them in the strategy.

Whilst there is not scope within this short narrative to give a more encompassing picture of the work that has taken place to shape the structures and services that are available today; it must be acknowledged that a significant number of other organisations across Norfolk have contributed to shaping VCS learning and skills development. Many which have played a major role in informing and setting up the structures and services mentioned above. Moreover, a range of other learning and skills structures and services have been set up within the different localities across Norfolk.

5. The national framework

The national skills strategy: 21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential

In July 2003, the government launched the national skills strategy, entitled '21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential'¹. The strategy aims to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and that individuals have the right skills to realise their potential. This is the broader skills framework within which skills strategies and sector skills strategies, at all levels, should be designed and implemented.

Key measures within the national skills strategy include:

- Introduce a new entitlement of free tuition for any adult studying for their first level 2 qualification.
- Provide targeted support for higher qualifications (level 3) in priority areas to meet sectoral and regional needs.
- Make qualifications more flexible by dividing learning programmes into units so that accreditation can be built up more easily.

¹ 21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential – available at www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/_pdfs/whitePaper_PDFID4.pdf

- Introducing a credit framework for adults, to help learners and employers package the training programmes how they want and build up a record of achievement over time towards qualifications.
- Provide better information, advice and guidance on skills, training and qualifications.
- Help adults gain ICT skills, as a third basic skill alongside literacy and numeracy in the governments 'Skills for Life' programme.
- Reforming funding arrangements for adult learning and skills whilst reducing bureaucracy.
- Giving employers and employees greater choice in, and control over, their training.
- Learning provision to be shaped by skills needs within sectors and within different localities.
- Setting up a network of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which will be employer-led organisations, operating in industry or business sectors of economic or strategic significance.

Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work

On 22 March 2005, the government published the White Paper 'Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work'. This White Paper builds on the original skills strategy to assist the government, and its partners, in raising the nations skill levels.

Key proposals and reforms include:

- A National Employers Training Programme (NETP) will implement training that is designed to meet employer's needs and will be delivered in the workplace to suit their operational requirements. The design of the programme will draw on the experiences of the 18 Employer Training Pilots which ran to Autumn 2005 in England. The pilots featured a package of free or heavily subsidised training for low-skilled employees to achieve Level 2² qualifications, as well as financial support for employers to give employees time off work to train and information and advice to employers and employees. Central to the NETP will be a brokerage service to support the analysis of current and future skills needs and provide advice about how local training providers can best meet those needs. The programme will be rolled out nationally from 2006-2007 and unlike the pilots, will not be limited to training for low-skilled staff.

² A full Level 2 refers to any qualification equivalent in standard and breadth to 5 GCSEs at A* - C or a National Vocational Qualification at Level 2.

- The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) will fund, support and build upon the new UK-wide network of Sector Skills Councils. Each SSC will draw up a Sector Skills Agreement for the industry they represent. This will pull together key stakeholders who plan, fund and support learning to discuss and agree what the skills requirements are now and in the future for that particular industry, and propose how these can best be met.

Not all groups meet the criteria to form a separate SSC, including the voluntary and community sector. However, the VCS still has a role to play in defining the skill needs for particular industry sectors and a Memorandum of Understanding has been already published between the VCS and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), the body set up to fund and support the SSCs. This sets out a number of objectives to be achieved through close collaboration between the VCS and the Skills for Business SSC.

Other recommendations within the White Paper include:

- Skills for adult learners will be promoted through clear progression routes.
- From 2006/07 there will be national entitlement for a first full level 2 qualification and new extensive support for learning at level 3.
- A new one-stop telephone and on-line advice service will be set up to help adult learners make decisions about their training needs and careers.
- Programmes will be put in place to help colleges and other training providers respond effectively to the demands of employers and learners.

The Learning and Skills Council strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector: Working Together

'Working Together' sets out the strategy the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) intends to adopt for working effectively with the VCS. The strategy identifies 3 broad categories for effective joint working between the two bodies, these are:

- As providers of learning opportunities
- As a major group of employers
- As a source of expertise and a channel of communication

The document recognises that the VCS is vital to the LSC's goal to meet the education and training needs of individuals, communities and employers. To optimise the VCS role, it is important to develop the skills and qualifications of those working within the sector (paid and voluntary), as this also develops the sector's capacity to deliver high-quality learning. Equally, in addressing the broader learning needs of the VCS workforce, this will enable it to deliver high quality services to its users.

The strategy also focuses on involving the VCS in a more systematic way in the teaching and support of basic skills, to help the government and the LSC meet the objectives set out within the adult basic skills strategy *Skills for Life*.

This focus is not only on improving the skills of VCS paid staff and volunteers but also its users – many of whom are disadvantaged, and who are not undertaking learning through formal institutions or statutory agencies.

The LSC has been closely involved with the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation in the development of its Skills Strategy for the Voluntary and Community Sector, and will remain involved during its implementation.

Summary of key actions for VCS learning and skill development

The LSC proposes to:

- Explore ways of maximising the VCS contribution to e-learning.
- Review contracting, reporting and funding arrangements with the aim to open up more mainstream budgets to VCS providers to encourage *'longer-term stability and strategic planning in the sector, sustainability of work of proven quality, and coherent progression routes within the VCS and beyond'* (p.17).
- Work with the VCS to develop a strategic approach to capacity building for sector providers, taking into account the particular needs of black and minority ethnic led VCS organisations.
- Ensure that local workforce development plans support the agreed needs of VCS staff, paid and unpaid, and are set in the context of VSNTO skills strategy and appropriate occupational standards.
- Explore a range of practical ways of reducing barriers to VCS workforce development, such as 'backfilling', and access to IAG.
- Encourage cross-sector clusters among small and medium-sized VCS and private sector organisations.
- Continue to work with the VSNTO at national level on the implementation of its skills strategy, ensuring that it meets the needs of the learning and skills sector.

The strategy states that *'the role of the VCS as a learning provider is probably its most significant relationship with the LSC and key to developing the VCS'*. In particular, it acknowledges the VCS as a key partner in delivering or supporting basic skills learning. It also recognises that a number of barriers need to be addressed to enable the VCS to better fulfil this role, including issues around funding and capacity building. However, increasing constraints on how the LSC uses its funding for adult learning³ are likely to inhibit its

³ The Government is advising LSCs to focus on increasing participation and achievement amongst 16-19 year olds, to further develop apprenticeship programmes and increase the number of adults with basic skills and level 2 qualifications. The result is that colleges and

capacity to take action on the strategies recommendations. Notwithstanding, progress to date includes:

- Publication of the Toolkit, Working Together in Practice, Volume 1, intended to help the LSC, the VCS and their partners deliver best practice and key actions identified in Working Together, and Volume 2, which offers a mixture of information, guidance about suitable approaches and case studies. Copies can be obtained from www.niace.org.uk
- Benchmarking exercises are being carried out by local LSC offices and at regional level to assess the sector's current level of engagement with the LSC and to provide a firm baseline for future work.
- The Working Together strategy provided a £2 million capacity-building fund for VCS towards workforce development, infrastructure, quality and responsiveness. Each of the nine English regions was allocated £200,000 and in most cases this was divided equally across the region. In the Eastern region, the LSCs worked jointly in clusters. Norfolk LSC partnered up with Cambridge LSC to develop a training needs analysis tool for frontline staff with the regional Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The LSC has worked with VCS and partner organisations to develop and pilot a new five-stage quality system for non-accredited learning - Recording and Recognising Progress and Achievement (RARPA). From September 2006, all providers receiving LSC funding will be expected to apply the RARPA approach to non-accredited programmes.

At local level, Norfolk LSCs achievements include:

- Designating a staff contact for the VCS. A key element of their role will be to improve communication, increase mutual understanding, circulate best practice and carry out a benchmarking exercise of LSC engagement with the VCS.
- Contributing £10,000 to the sector through the Acorn Grants programme to support small community based organisations and help them develop so they are able to enter into contracts with the public sector.
- Supporting a number of VCO through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities and Widening Adult Participation Funding to deliver Skills for Life activity.
- Funding a post at Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services for Working Together which will concentrate on the sector as a provider of and a link to those who need Basic Skills and ESOL. This post will be initially for 6 months.

other learning providers are under pressure to cut courses which do not meet these priorities or increase fees.

The Learning and Skills Council Agenda for Change

The LSC is also currently embarking on a dynamic programme of change. The Agenda for Change has been developed to address the challenges of putting the skills strategy and 14-19 reforms into practice and meeting future skills demands. Whilst this work so far has primarily focused on the FE sector, the LSC believe that the issues and approaches have a wider application across the whole post-16 sector. Therefore, the LSC will be arranging dialogue with representatives from other sectors, including voluntary and community providers, with whom they wish to take the agenda forward more widely. Key areas in taking this agenda forward include:

- Skills for employers - ensuring that employers have the skilled employees they need.
- Quality - ensuring there is consistent delivery of outstanding quality.
- Funding - streamlining funding to make it less complex and bureaucratic.
- Data - improving the way data is collected for more effective management.
- Business excellence - enabling providers to become better businesses to reduce administration overheads and release resources for frontline delivery.
- Reputation - enable providers to improve their reputation locally, regionally and nationally.

Improving Our Skills - A skills strategy for the voluntary and community sector

The Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation was funded by the Home Office to develop an agreed VCS Skills Strategy. The strategy focuses on addressing the skills of the sector's paid and voluntary workforce which are fundamental for the effectiveness of the sector. It acknowledges that the sector is also a major provider of learning opportunities but this is not the main focus of the strategy.

The strategy highlights a variety of ways in which the skills of the VCS can be improved, and emphasises the need for joint working between the sector, funders and planners of learning, and mainstream providers. These include:

- Some VCOs need to better recognise the importance of investing resources in developing the skills of their paid and unpaid staff.
- Some organisations need to take a more strategic and systematic approach to identifying learning needs, linking this to their business planning process and ensuring the cost of skills development is included in funding bids.

- Use more alternative learning methodologies such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, distance learning.
- Trustees and senior staff need to continue developing their skills.
- Small VCOs need advice, information and good practice tools to help them plan for and meet the needs of their staff.
- Funders need to create a more enabling environment for VCOs to plan for, and cover the costs of, learning and skills development.
- The quality of training provision by VCOs, colleges, universities and private sector organisations is variable. There is a role for traditional formal learning, but there is also a need for more widespread adoption of other approaches such as mentoring, coaching, distance learning etc. More provision should be accredited, and should be linked to individuals' long term goals as well as the immediate organisational needs.
- There is a need for those organisations providing short unaccredited courses to demonstrate quality of provision by ensuring that each course is based on the relevant national occupational standards, such as those for managing volunteers or for administration.
- Current provision to support and enable learning at all levels can be geographically patchy. Additional *FLEXIBLE* resources are needed to enable local, regional, sub-regional and national infrastructure organisation to successfully promote, support and share good practice in learning and skills.

The strategy highlights the need to attract more people to the sector and promote it as a source of paid employment. It also recommends that resources should be provided to support and develop consortia of VCS learning providers and a national workforce hub should be set up that will cover all areas related to VCS workforce development.

Workforce Development Hub

The UK Workforce Hub is one of six national hubs of expertise that form part of the Government's ChangeUp programme. The Hub will be a one stop shop for information on skills and good employment practice. The Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation (VSNTO), NCVO's Employment Practice Project and Working For A Charity have all become part of the National Hub for Workforce Development.

The two key objectives of the Hub are:

Objective 1: Voluntary and community organisations have easy access to information and resources to support a culture of learning and development, underpinned by good management and employment practice.

This will be achieved by:

- Developing a website with resources, information and example of good practice.
- Working with mainstream providers to enable them to identify and meet the needs of VCOs.
- Working with infrastructure organisations to identify best practice and develop a competency framework for advisors and development officers.
- Updating, commissioning and publishing tools and guides to good practice
- Working with infrastructure organisations to promote and support ways of sharing learning and good practice.
- Building regional networks of practitioners.
- Working with the LSC and SSCs to ensure colleges and universities meet the needs of small and medium VCOs.
- Work with other Hubs to develop a shared strategy for working with funders.

Objective 2: Voluntary and community organisations are able to recruit and retain a skilled workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities they work in.

This will be achieved by:

- Promoting 'Working for a Charity' to deliver its courses and charity placements for potential workers and volunteers to a larger audience.
- Developing / commissioning a range of career guidance materials and case studies for different target groups of potential workers.
- Supporting VCOs to attract and interest young people in the sector by offering well-structured placements and internships.
- Promoting collaboration amongst voluntary and community sector organisations working in the same field to develop a career path to potential recruits.
- Promoting and signposting to organisations that enable people who may face discrimination or barriers, to obtain employment.

6. The regional framework

The East of England Regional Economic Strategy

- **Goal 1** - A skills base that can support a world-class economy

There is a clear link between this goal and the sectors role as a provider of learning opportunities. This goal places strong emphasis on increasing employment rates in disadvantaged communities and links this with access to continued learning and skills development. A key strength of the VCS is in reaching those people who are disadvantaged. Therefore, VCS organisations may be well positioned to deliver under this goal. There is also emphasis on developing skills to meet businesses (service providers) needs, including: developing information, advice and guidance (IAG) services for adults, increasing the number of people participating in learning and gaining qualifications at levels 2 and 3, and creating a demand-led system of learning that is more responsive to individuals, businesses and sectoral needs - all which impact on the sector as an employer.

- **Goal 4** – High quality places to live, work and visit

The voluntary and community sector operates across a number of economic fields, providing services, facilities and innovative solutions to communities across the region. In line with the priorities under this goal, the VCS is particularly active in the areas of culture and heritage, the environment, health and social care. Therefore the contribution of VCS, through its workers skills and expertise, is vital to ensuring this goal is achieved.

- **Goal 5** - Social inclusion and broader participation in the regional economy

One of the most significant skills of VCOs is in working with the most excluded and disadvantaged communities. Therefore as a provider of learning opportunities, as well as other services, the VCS is a vital link to ensuring this goal is achieved.

Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA)

The East of England Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action is an integrated framework for improving employment and skills in the region. The VCS is seen as having a role in addressing the following issues:

- Skills for employability
- Young people, career choices and continued learning
- Under exploited sources of labour (hard to reach)
- Access to learning and information and communication technology skills
- Skills for the aging workforce
- Support for enterprise
- Increasing employment rates (particularly with hard to reach)

Clear Vision: Clear Thinking – A Workforce Development Strategy for the East of England

This document is currently in draft format and under consultation. Therefore it is likely to be subject to some changes. It will be important to ensure that this broader regional framework encompasses the actions identified for Norfolk before it is finalised. Key areas for regional action within the draft document include:

- Recruitment – developing clear career pathways, promoting the sector as a place to work, developing and disseminating good employment and recruitment practice and ensuring that affordable and timely employment advice is available.
- Skills for Life – ensuring that VCS staff have basic skills and ensuring that they are trained to deliver basic skills advice and training where appropriate.
- Communications – developing and improving communication channels within the sector and with other bodies and ensuring there are clear methods for disseminating good practice between county, regional and national levels.
- Joint working – developing training consortia and developing more equal partnerships to ensure that the role of the VCS is recognised.
- Accreditation – developing or listing appropriate accredited train the trainer courses and looking at models of accreditation for the VCS that do not lose the successful nature of existing training.

Other actions which do not sit within these broader headings include: developing mechanisms to help VCOs sell their training to generate income; work to develop models of full cost recovery; and embedding quality in all aspects of workforce development by promoting the use of quality systems.

7. Sub-regional strategies

Norfolk Regeneration Strategy (Draft)

The strategy provides a framework to address social and economic deprivation in Norfolk. It is of particular importance as funding for regeneration activity is currently undergoing significant change, with key funding streams such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Objective 2 drawing to an end. At the same time, new funding streams such as the East of England Development Agency's Investing in Communities (IiC) programme, which focus on joint planning and pooling resources to ensure regeneration activity is sustainable, are currently at the early stages of implementation.

With this strong emphasis on collaboration and maximising the impact of funding streams, it is likely that available resources will need to be targeted in a

much more focused and strategic way; and clear links must be established across and between national, regional, and local policy frameworks which impact on social and economic deprivation in the county.

Skills - from basic life skills through to sector based skills - play a fundamental role in an individual's ability to play an active part in society and access employment opportunities. Therefore, there is a direct link between achieving the Norfolk Regeneration Strategy and the VCS role as a provider of learning opportunities to those from disadvantaged communities and as an employer of paid staff and volunteers (including trustees). There are four main strategic objectives which relate to the Norfolk VCS learning and skills, these are:

- SO1 – Improve levels of literacy and numeracy.
- SO2 – Increase life skills for those most in need to enable them to achieve their potential.
- SO3 – Increase aspirations and widen horizons for those in learning, their carers and mentors.
- SO4 – Developing the capacity of local communities, through coordinated support, to enable them to be proactive in identifying and addressing their own regeneration needs.

Under this last strategic objective a key success measure is the increase in training qualifications held by paid staff and volunteers in voluntary and community sector organisations.

Reaching Our Potential – A Strategy for Raising Aspirations in Norfolk 2005 –2010 (Draft)

The strategy aims to enable relevant organisations and key stakeholders to work together to raise the aspirations of people in Norfolk. To achieve this the strategy has identified some of the issues which contribute to low aspirations and provides recommendations to address them. Raising aspirations has also been identified as a major issue in the County Strategic Partnership Community Strategy, where it is a cross cutting theme, within Shaping the Future, the economic partnership for Norfolk, and is identified as a county-wide intervention within the new Norfolk Regeneration Strategy.

The strategy focuses on 6 key themes, each with its own set of priorities:

1. Leadership
2. Knowledgeable and skilled
3. Making choices
4. Economically thriving
5. Active and engaged communities
6. Culture

Within each of the themes there is considerable overlap. In relation to VCS learning and skills development, it is recognised that having limited aspirations is a barrier to take up of learning, and only once aspirations have been raised, are people more likely to engage with learning. Therefore raising aspirations cuts across many of the strategic priorities within the VCS learning and skills strategy for Norfolk.

LSC Sector Skills Plan: Voluntary and Community Sector (Draft)

The plan sets out the priorities for joint action between the LSC, employers, providers and other organisations responsible for planning, funding and delivering against the sector's skills needs in Norfolk. These priorities aim to address 3 key challenges that the sector faces:

- Strengthen the capacity of the sector to promote itself as a positive employment alternative to the public and private sector.
- Progressively increase the resources available to front-line activity by developing a skilled employed and volunteer workforce working within increasingly professional voluntary and community organisations.
- Ensure that new skills interventions developed enhance and extend the offer provided to the sector by its existing strong provision, brokerage and networking partnerships.

The plan is still to be agreed with the VCS but proposed actions to strengthen existing achievements and meet these challenges, include:

- Develop improved labour market and skills information to assist skills planning by VCOs and providers.
- Develop approaches to improving knowledge about the sector amongst funders, planners and partners.
- Map the skills and competencies needed to meet VCOs future needs.
- Develop the role of umbrella organisations as 'capacity developers' consultants to smaller organisations in the sector.
- Develop approaches which will better inform the public, partners, and potential entrants about the nature of the work done by VCOs and the opportunities they offer.
- Investigate entry and progression routes and retention strategies and identify options for change.
- Using the existing training and development networks, develop awareness amongst VCOs on how appropriately skilled workers can increase organisational resources available to front-line activities.

- Benchmark the present offer to VCOs of business and management support and identify change.
- Build knowledge of critical success factors to be addressed to increase penetration of skills provision and support services.
- Review how skills needs are currently being met and develop sector-endorsed options for change.
- Promote awareness of all development opportunities by developing a 'road map' which covers accredited and non-accredited routes as well as other opportunities for development.

8. Crosscutting themes

There are several themes which feature in the strategies reviewed above which link with the issues and priorities identified for Norfolk VCS learning and skills. These include:

Issue / priority	Featured Strategy	Address in Norfolk VCS Learning and Skills Strategy
1. More flexible and modular delivery of learning programmes so accreditation can be built up over time, with clear progression routes from introductory to advanced learning	'21 st Century Skills' 'Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work' 'Working Together' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking' 'LSC VCS Sector Skills Plan' 'Norfolk Regeneration Strategy (Draft)'	SP4 – Tackle Barriers to Effective Provision
2. Ensure people have access to information, advice and resources to support learning and skills development	'21 st Century Skills' 'Regional Economic Strategy' 'Norfolk Regeneration Strategy (Draft)' 'Raising Aspirations'	SP1 – Smarter Use of Existing Resources SP2 – Smarter Use of New Resources SP3 – Enable VCOs to Prioritise Workforce Development
3. Help adults gain basic skills / widening participation in learning agenda	'21 st Century Skills' 'Working Together' 'Regional Economic Strategy' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking' 'Norfolk Regeneration Strategy (Draft)' 'Raising Aspirations'	SP6 – Address skill shortages

4. Giving employers and employees greater choice over their training and ensure training provision is shaped by needs within sectors and different localities	'21 st Century Skills' 'Regional Economic Strategy' 'Raising Aspirations'	SP1 – Smarter Use of Existing Resources SP2 – Smarter Use of New Resources SP5 – Become More Strategic
5. VCS to develop a strategic approach to building the capacity of sector providers	'Working Together'	SP1 – Smarter Use of Existing Resources SP2 – Smarter Use of New Resources SP5 – Become More Strategic
6. Explore practical ways to reducing barriers to VCS workforce development	'Working Together'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
7. Implement tools for measuring soft outcomes in non-accredited learning	'Working Together' 'Improving Our Skills' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking'	SP4 – Tackle Barrier to Effective Provision
8. Enable VCOs to better recognise the importance of investing resources in developing the skills of their paid and unpaid staff	'Improving Our Skills – a skills strategy for the VCS'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
9. Enable VCOs to take a strategic approach to identifying learning needs and link this to business planning	'Improving Our Skills'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
8. Ensure the cost of skills development is included in funding bids	'Improving Our Skills' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
9. More use of alternative learning methodologies such as coaching, mentoring etc.	'Improving Our Skills' 'Raising Aspirations'	SP4 – Tackle Barrier to Effective Provision
10. Develop good practice guides for small organisations to help them plan and meet the needs of their staff	'Improving Our Skills'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
11. Encourage funders to create a more enabling environment for VCOs to plan for and cover the costs of learning and skills development	'Improving Our Skills'	SP3 - Enable VCS to Prioritise Workforce Development
12. Improve the variable quality of training provision by VCOs	'Improving Our Skills' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking' 'Raising Aspirations'	SP4 – Tackle Barrier to Effective Provision

13. Promote, support and share good practice in learning and skills	'Improving Our Skills'	SP1 – Smarter Use of Existing Resources SP2 – Smarter Use of New Resources SP3 – Enable VCOs to Prioritise Workforce Development
14. Attract more people to the sector, including young people and promote it as a source of paid employment.	'Improving Our Skills' 'Workforce Development Hub' 'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking' 'LSC VCS Sector Skills Plan'	SP6 – Address skill shortages
15. Develop and improve communication channels	'Clear Vision: Clear Thinking' 'Raising Aspirations Strategy'	Implicit in the underlying principles of the strategy and must be explicitly addressed in the Terms of Reference for the new structures (Strategy & Delivery Groups)
16. Develop approaches to improving knowledge about the sector amongst funders, planners and partners	'LSC VCS Sector Skills Plan'	Role of Strategy Group
17. Map the skills and competencies needed to meet VCOs future needs	'LSC VCS Sector Skills Plan'	SP6 – Address skill shortages

8. Skills within the sector

There is clear evidence that VCOs face considerable skills gaps and shortages. In 2003, a large-scale research study⁴ took place to identify the key workforce issues which face VCOs. The findings demonstrated that there are a number of areas in which the VCS experiences specific skills shortage. These include:

- Generic skills such as management, leadership and ICT
- Occupationally specific skills for care, conservation, etc
- Sector-specific skills like fundraising or managing volunteers

It also highlights a range of reasons for these shortages, including:

- Learning opportunities provided to the sector's workforce vary in quality, availability, appropriateness and affordability
- Some organisations lack the level of knowledge and/or resources to plan and access different approaches to develop skills

⁴ Futureskills 2003 – A skills foresight research report on the voluntary sector paid staff, VSNT0.

The top 12 skills shortages identified in Futureskills 2003

1. Planning and Organising
2. Problem Solving
3. Team Working
4. Strategic Use of IT
5. Project Development/Management
6. Written Communication Skills
7. Strategic/Business Planning Skills
8. Basic Computer Literacy/Using ICT
9. Oral Communication
10. Leadership Skills
11. Customer Handling
12. Skills to Deliver/Negotiate Contracts

In Norfolk, the LSC undertook work with VCS partners to develop its Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Plan. It identified the following skills as being in demand:

- Managers and trainers
- Project managers
- Professional work opportunities in a wide range of jobs
- Development workers
- Volunteers, Trustees and Management, and Committee Members

It was also identified skills which need to be developed as:

- Management Skills (operational and strategic)
- Strategic partnership working skills
- ICT (basic skills and business application)
- Financial, fundraising and project management skills
- Professional, specialist and technical

Key issues for VCS learning and skills development

'Who Needs Learning?'⁵ was a study carried out between January and March 2003, in order to identify current issues related to learning in the voluntary and community sector. The aim was to assess the training currently being accessed by voluntary and community organisations in Norfolk and any barriers that exist between these groups and the learning opportunities that are currently available to them.

Key findings from the research include:

- 54 organisations (51%) said they have a training budget. This finding was similar to a previous study carried out in 2001, which identified that 55% of respondents had a dedicated training budget and 32% of respondents

⁵ Who Needs Learning (2003), The Guild.

identified that their organisation had a training plan⁶. Whilst there are methodological difficulties in making a direct comparison between these studies because different organisations may have responded, there is likely to be some degree of overlap because the initial samples were roughly the same size and included only voluntary and community organisations in Norfolk. This suggests that progress has been slow and that there is still a long distance to travel before VCOs are readily allocating part of their budget for learning and skills development.

- For those that had training budgets, this represents an average of between 1% and 1.5% of the overall budget.
- Of the 80 organisations with paid staff, 80% and 81% respectively are undertaking formal induction training and regular appraisals. 80% enable individuals to attend external training courses, this being the most popular route to access training. Only 6% of organisations use secondments, 12% use distance learning and 23% use job shadowing.
- 75% of organisations with paid staff are undertaking formal appraisals and this is how they identify people's learning needs. Over half are undertaking organisational reviews and strategic planning. This is a marked improvement on the findings from the 2001 research, in which just over half (55%) of the paid workers had their training needs identified through supervision and formal appraisal systems. This demonstrates that the VCS has made some progress in establishing internal systems that foster a more systematic approach to staff development.
- 58% (61) of respondents said that they measure the effectiveness of learning.
- 75 organisations must meet legal requirements that require them to provide training for staff and volunteers.
- Most organisations are getting information about learning opportunities from within their sector, but only 15% of respondents are receiving information from the Portfolio Training Digest or its website.

Key issues from the research

- *People don't value free training* – there is always a cost and the issue should be promoted differently.
- *Some volunteers don't want to learn* – people volunteer for different reasons and organisations that require them to acquire new skills need to develop new approaches.
- *Raise the profile of learning targeted at trustees* – trustees do not currently take up training opportunities.

⁶ Meeting the Challenge (2001), Suzanne Crouch.

- *Better planning / more notice of training issues* – people wanted more advance notice of opportunities.
- *Accreditation can be a disincentive, as it can become too big a commitment* – people wanted flexibility so that they could take up the accreditation option or not.
- *More modular training needed / more locally based training needed so time is spent on a programme not travelling to and from it* – a more flexible range of options about how, when and over what period they learn.
- *More accessible – user friendly and centralised training/funding initiative* – collective and strategic bidding for funds to support learning.
- *More information about in-house training – what is available? – how to buy in the right training support.*
- *Mapping information on grants for organisations and individuals.*
- *Better marketing of learning opportunities.*
- *Greater sharing between organisations around training needs/requirements* – more information to be produced and shared, plus building up the brokerage service.
- *User friendly website* – to supplement paper based communication.
- *Yearly networking session like Who Needs Learning?*

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