

Unite 06/03/07

Conference Report

Commissioned by
Vsipd

Produced by
Development Etc

vsipd

Advancing the Third Sector Workforce



Leading learning and skills

Unite in Context

For around 5 years, the Learning and Skills Councils have contracted with Voluntary and Third Sector Organisations on an individual basis. The responsibility for delivering all of the contractual requirements has, for some, been difficult and time consuming and a distraction from their core business.

LSC Norfolk is looking to contract with just one consortium of VCS member organisations in the county. This will provide individual member organisations with a number of benefits, including being able to contract with the LSC under the umbrella of a single consortium and having a unified and representative voice when tendering for funding.

As the lead organisation for Workforce Development, and as a member of the Norfolk Infrastructure Consortium Learning and Skills Strategy Group, Vsipd were asked to organise a conference on behalf of LSC Norfolk that would:



Inform VCS organisations about the LSC's future plans to contract with one single consortium of VCS organisations for the delivery of LSC contracts



Provide an opportunity for those present to hear about different models already in place in other parts of the country



Give an opportunity for organisations to consider whether they would be interested in taking part in a consortium to deliver LSC work

Vsipd contracted with a local company - Development Etc to manage the conference.

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The Day in Context

An innovative approach to the conference was adopted to ensure that it was interesting, informative, challenging and thought-provoking.

The key features of the day were:



69
Delegates

60
Organisations

- Voluntary Sector
- Third Sector
- Community Groups
- Social Enterprises
- Training and Development Providers
- Stakeholders

Copies of all speeches and presentations are available from the [Vsidp Website](#)



Key Speeches

The event was chaired by Chris Bailey, a local business man with extensive experience of event management and chairing.

Key speeches were given by:

Nikki Bennett (Vsipd). Nikki gave a well-rounded introduction to the event, putting the local VCS landscape into context.

"The purpose of today's event is to explore the potential for a VCS learning consortium for Norfolk. I encourage all of you to be open minded about the possibilities that this new proposed way of working could open up."

Howard Foale (LSC Norfolk). Howard's speech focused on the current local LSC position and gave background as to why the conference was both vital and welcomed.

"I would like to stress once again the LSC's commitment to 'Working Together' and to help funding and procurement in the VCS through the development of learning and skills consortia and wider publicity for the availability of contracts, training and support and through focussing on results and outcomes in the future rather than on processes"



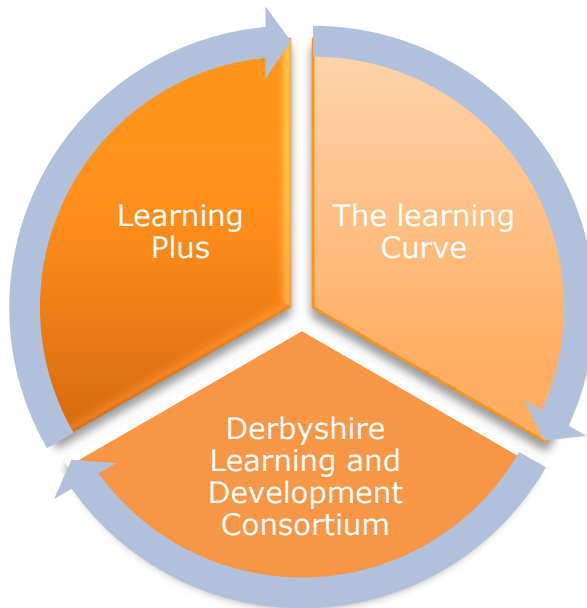
Steph Luke (LSC Regional Office). Focussing on the LSC's 'Working Together Strategy' Steph described the LSC's expectations of consortia and on the refreshment of the strategy.

- *Regional Action plan being developed in liaison with the VCS*
- *Establishing a regional VCS steering group to monitor and review the action plan.*
- *Identifying funds to help establish consortia arrangements*

Copies of all speeches and presentations are available from the [Vsipd Website](#)

Workshops

To ensure that every delegate had sufficient information to make informed decisions on the next stages of consortium development in Norfolk, there were 3 different workshops held throughout the day.



Each delegate was allocated a workshop room and a facilitator who stayed with them throughout the day. The workshop presenters then joined the group for their session.

The sessions were informative, lively and prompted much discussion amongst the delegates.



View the full presentations at [Vspid Website](#)

Workshops

During the workshops delegates were asked to list their 'Hopes' and 'Fears' with respect to setting up a VCS Learning Consortium in Norfolk.

Hopes

- **Strategy**
 - Long-term planning
 - Easier way for VCS to interact with LSC
 - Partnership working
- **Opportunity for Improvement**
 - Reduced administration
 - Increased knowledge and experience
- **Funding**
 - Greater opportunity to secure funding from the LSC
 - Funding for specialist programmes
- **Equality & Diversity**
 - Better access for 'Hard-to-Reach' groups / real inclusion
 - Additional learning and support for learners

Fears

- **Politics/ Ethos**
 - Consortium not impartial
 - Loss of some organisations
 - Trust / Ownership / Regulation
- **Funding & Sustainability**
 - Loss of control / Competition – 'big boys' get it all
 - What happens if unsuccessful in bidding?
- **Learner experience**
 - Specific needs may get lost / Must ensure every learner included
- **Organisational / Infrastructure Issues**
 - Time & resources
 - Loss of local decision -making

“Strong Voice
– Power &
Status”

“New funding
for exciting
projects”

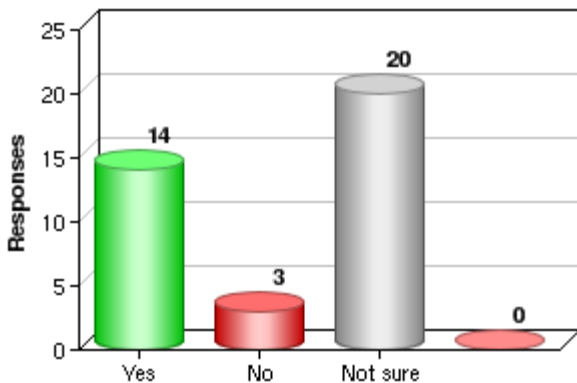
“What if we
don't fit –
where does it
leave us?”

Text Voting

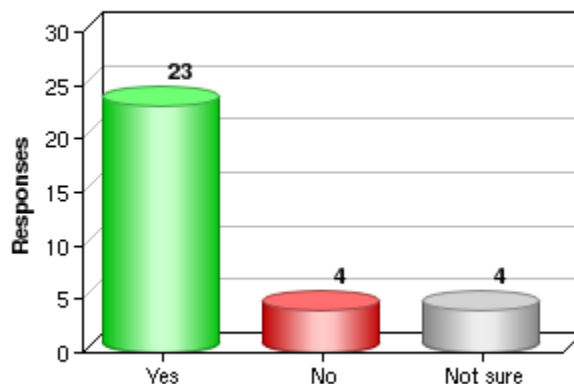
The use of modern technology allowed for an immediate insight into the feelings of delegates as the day progressed. It also provided an opportunity for delegates to comment on the models presented.

Intended only as a gauge of 'gut feelings' the vote, which was carried out twice throughout the day, showed a significant change in the way delegates were feeling before and after they had seen the 3 different models presented in the workshops.

Pre-event Q1. Do you think that the processes to improve VCS/LSC relationships outlined today will result in any direct benefits to your own organisation?



Post-event Q2. Do you feel that the development of a VCS Learning Consortium for Norfolk should go ahead, along the lines of one of the approaches discussed in the workshops?



The vote was only intended to seek a 'gut feeling' of those in attendance on the day. It was not representative of the sector as a whole and therefore no decisions will result from the outcome of the text vote.

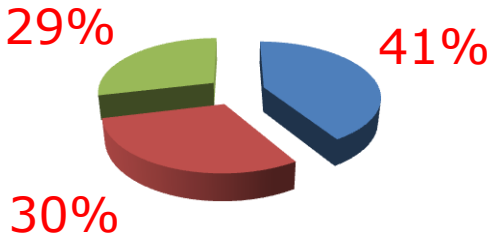
Ballot Vote

At the end of the conference delegates were asked to complete a final questionnaire to assist in **taking things forward**. The results of this vote and an on-line version, available to those who didn't attend or didn't vote at the event, will be used to inform future planning by highlighting the suggestions, needs and concerns of those present.

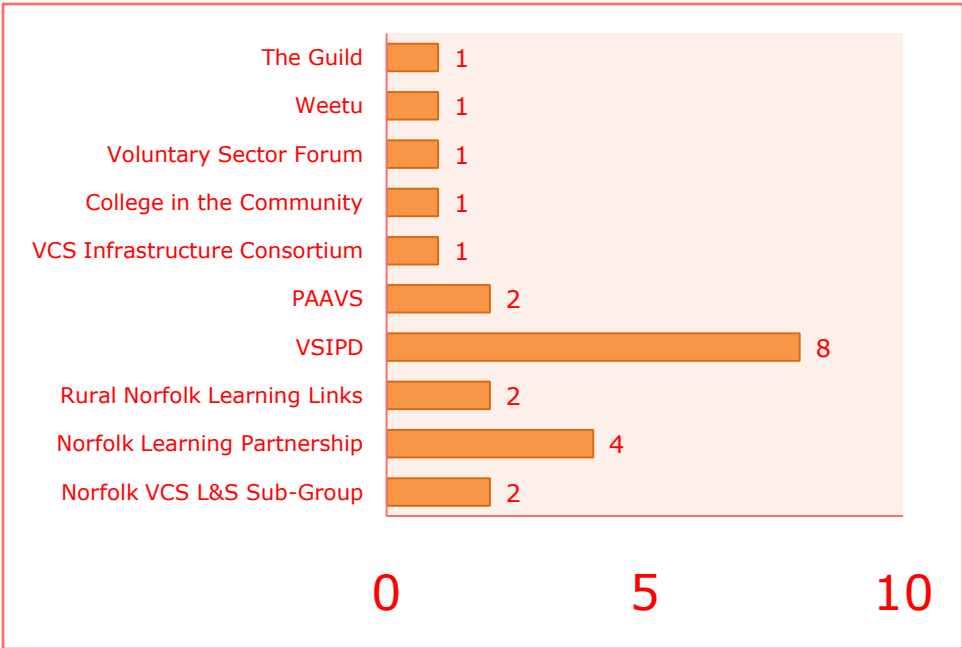
The questionnaire asked 6 key questions.

Q1. Would you be interested in setting up a consortium?

■ Yes ■ Kept Informed ■ Involved once established



Q2. Are you aware of any existing /partnerships that the Consortium could be built upon?



50% of delegates completed a questionnaire at the event

2 Responses were received via the online vote

The results shown for all questions are representative of those responses received via the ballot vote at the event / online

Ballot Vote

Q3. Following the conference what would you like to see as the next priority steps towards setting up a VCS Learning Consortium in Norfolk ?

Exploring Options

- Keep the discussion going
- Norfolk to achieve an effective Learning Consortium sooner rather than later
- Set-up steering groups
- Conference to look at options
- Further discussion including financial information
- Further local consultation
- Further meeting of those expressing an interest
- Process mapping of outcome and responsibilities

Identifying Models

- Liaise with existing consortia
- Meeting for interested organisations to discuss and identify a range of possible models

Skills Audit / Research

- Secure funding to employ a researcher
- Research further into feasibility – should it happen? / How will it happen?
- Scope out a consortium organisation – vote, cost, structure, Terms of Reference etc.
- Establish minimum requirements for member orgs. – standards, qualifications etc

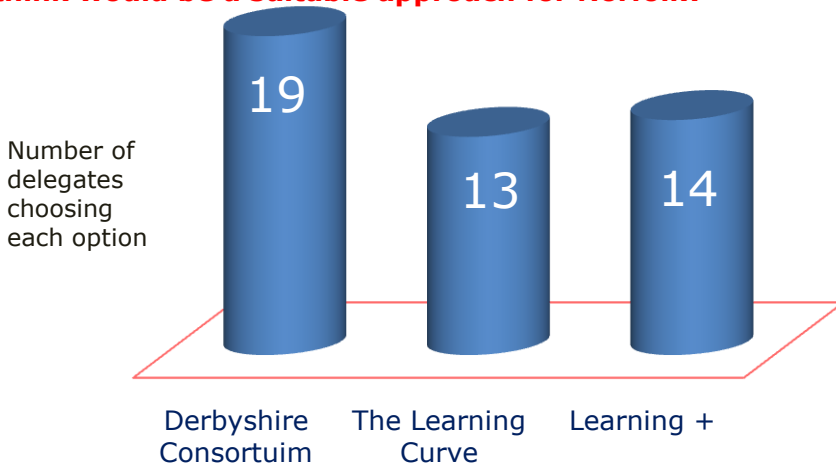
Strategic / Operational Issues

- Agree leadership / internal politics and first practical steps
- Pilot project
- Identify a lead organisation to set-up a steering group
- steering group to represent delivery partners and infrastructure orgs. Smaller organisations to be fully involved.
- Working groups

50%
of delegates
completed a
questionnaire at
the event

Ballot Vote

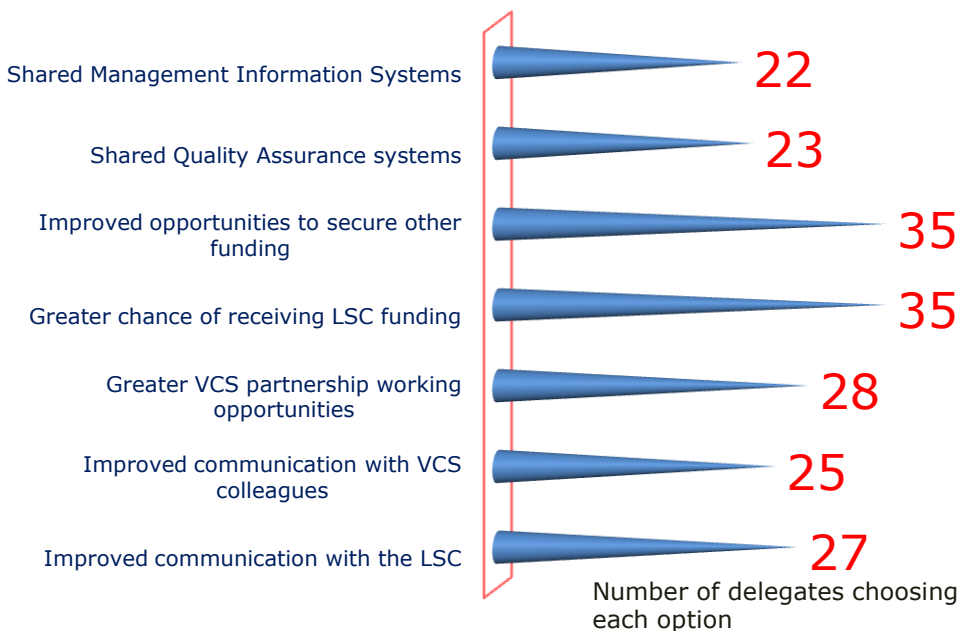
Q4. Which, if any, of the approaches to developing a learning consortium that you have received information about, do you think would be a suitable approach for Norfolk?



76% of delegates believe that a consortium will improve their chances of receiving LSC and other funding

Additionally 13 delegates commented that Norfolk needs to develop its own model. This could possibly be a mixture of the models shown but with extensive discussion amongst partners in the county and drawing on the experiences of others.

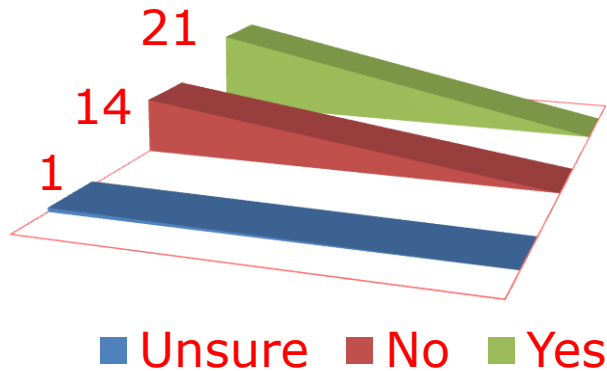
Q5. Which of the following do you feel could be of particular benefit to your organisation should you decide to be a part of a learning consortium?



Other comments included the benefit of improved communications with other partners and the opportunity to share training programmes etc.

Ballot Vote

Q6. Do you see any barriers that might prevent your organisation becoming **involved** in a VCS Learning Consortium for Norfolk?



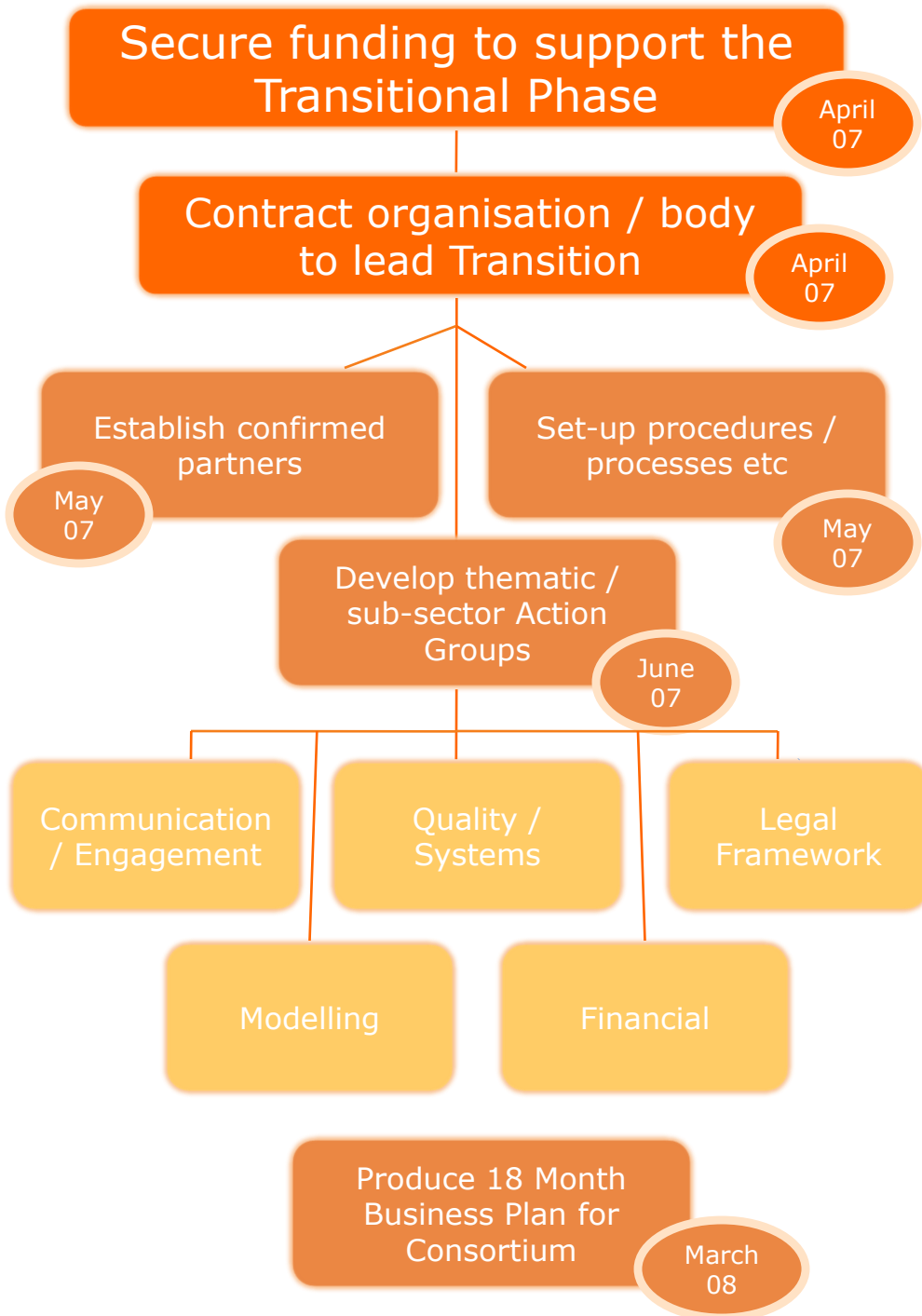
46%
of delegates
thought there
might be barriers
to their becoming
a member of the
consortium

The reasons specified included;

- ❑ Need to obtain board / trustee agreement.
 - ❑ The plan will need to be clear and convincing.
 - ❑ Staff and resource time.
 - ❑ Legal and contractual issues – high risk strategy in terms of quality and accountability.
- ❑ Funding and Sustainability
 - ❑ Commitment to a consortium may be affected by the individual organisations' life-span. Some organisations only short-term funded.
 - ❑ Capacity and cost of time versus benefits to service users.
 - ❑ Profitability and 'Value for Money'?
- ❑ Time and resources
 - ❑ Organisation too small to participate effectively.
 - ❑ Lack of practical tools on strategies, mechanisms and finance.
 - ❑ Lack of relevantly qualified tutors.
- ❑ Status of Organisations involved
 - ❑ Only open to VCS organisations.
- ❑ Working Together – true collaboration
 - ❑ Needs to be treated as a priority.
 - ❑ Partnership between leaders required.
 - ❑ Politics!
 - ❑ Building trust between organisations.

Proposed Transitional Plan

April 07 – March 08



Following the conference and taking all views and opinions into account, it is suggested that the following Transitional Plan be adopted in order to take the network forward into the final stage of full consortium operation.

A more detailed copy of the Action Plan will be posted on the [Vspid Website](#)



Acknowledgements

Thanks go to the following people / organisations for their part in making UNITE the success it has been and for helping Norfolk move closer to the development of a Norfolk VCS Learning Consortium



Leading learning and skills

LSC Norfolk – for funding the event

Vsipd – for bringing together the event on behalf of the sector



Development Etc for full event management including all pre and post event information & communication.



Lyndon Green Marketing Ltd who worked in partnership with Development Etc on the event marketing.



Chris Bailey of EMS for chairing the day.



About with Friends for their delicious catering.

"It was the most smooth running, contemporary, innovative and informative event that I have attended in a long while."

"I think it went very well – especially the use of technology / texts."

"Excellent event – well managed, well presented and very enjoyable."

"Thanks and congratulations on a really well organised event."

"Thank you for such a fab lunch. It's was just great to find delicious food that suited my diet."

