

Learning and training for the Voluntary Sector in Shropshire

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CHANGES AT THE LSC in 2006

The LSC is to launch a major transformation programme that will make it a smaller, more dynamic organisation. Detailed proposals have now been announced for consultation with staff and the union. These new arrangements at the LSC are part of the Agenda for Change enabling simpler processes and systems, allowing greater collaboration within the sector and releasing more resources for frontline delivery.

The aim is to achieve better quality and more consistent delivery at a local level through the creation of Local Partnership Teams, fully aware of their local communities, understanding the needs of individuals and employers at the grass roots level, and able to build strategic relationships with their local training providers and key local partners such as local authorities and local MPs.

The Partnership Teams will work alongside an Economic Development Team covering a wider geographical area, focusing on skills for employment, regeneration and economic development. The area currently covered by the Shropshire Local LSC Council and the Hereford and Worcestershire Local LSC Council will have one Director, 3 Local Partnership Teams and an Economic Development Team.

In the West Midlands there will be 5 Area Directors reporting to the Regional Director. Local work will be supported by a regional centre which will provide operational services such as finance, external assurance and marketing and co-ordinate work with the Regional Development Agency, Sector Skills Councils and Regional Skills Partnership.

The LSC National office (which will have approximately half the current number of staff) will manage relationships with national stakeholders; develop policy frameworks; provide national expertise such as legal services; work with the National Council and its Statutory Committees; and ensure consistency across the country whilst not restricting flexibility for regions and local areas to reflect their own circumstances.



Susan Edmonds, one of the Getting Qualified NVQ candidates, is an assistant at Ruyton XI Towns Pre-school and has undertaken an NVQ in Children's Care, Learning & Development. "The Getting Qualified project suits me perfectly because it allows me access to training on the job and I can choose when the assessments will take place."

This is the first of two Newsletters about the learning and training opportunities available to the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) in Shropshire. As part of the Working Together strategy it is designed to raise awareness of schemes and grants that may be of interest to voluntary organisations and to publicise good examples of what is already being delivered in the voluntary sector. In March we will be holding a Shropshire Learning Conference to exchange ideas and good practice on VCS training and publicise what's available, so the second Newsletter will report back on that day and its outcomes. We will be circulating you with details of date and venue as soon as we have them.

(Sorry about all the INITIALS but they save such a lot of space and they are all explained the first time they are used. We are assuming you are reading this from cover to cover!)

Working Together is the Learning & Skills Council's (LSC) strategy for work with the voluntary and community sector (see www.lsc.gov.uk). The strategy identifies three key roles for voluntary and community organisations:

- ◆ As providers of education and training services
- ◆ As a major group of employers
- ◆ As a source of expertise and a channel for communication

In each of these areas the aim is to build on existing effective practice. 'Working Together in Practice: a Toolkit to support LSC work with the voluntary and community sector' (2005) was published to enhance collaboration and deliver 'key actions'.

Working Together in Shropshire for 2005/06 has involved:

- ◆ Production of this newsletter to provide two-way information
- ◆ A Shropshire Learning conference to be held in March 2006
- ◆ Updating of the Community Council of Shropshire's (CCS) Voluntary Sector Learning Information Point (VSLIP) website to co-ordinate information on voluntary sector learning and training information
- ◆ Updating the CCS Directories: Community Venues for Learning and Training; Trainers; Voluntary Organisations' Equalities Information and Support Services; and the Training Digest
- ◆ Maintaining the Voluntary Sector Learning Network
- ◆ Regular review meetings between the CCS and the LSC
- ◆ A well-attended presentation on the voluntary sector which was given to LSC staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of the organisations and sector.
- ◆ Research work into the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people living and working in Shropshire. Aston University's final report is available from Lorraine Smart on 01743 360641 email lorraine.smart@shropshire-rcc.org.uk

For more information about any of the above please contact Jean Garner at the CCS on 01743 360641 email jean.garner@shropshire-rcc.org.uk



GETTING QUALIFIED

The "Getting Qualified" project offers FREE NVQ Level 3 training for volunteers, management committees and paid staff in the community and voluntary sector. The scheme was launched in July of this year at a very well-attended Open Day in Shrewsbury and already over 100 people have responded and at least 35 people have already started on their NVQ.

This is a joint project involving 6 CVS partners in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin who are working with Walford & North Shropshire College and Telford College of Arts and Technology. Funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the LSC the scheme is able to offer free information, advice and guidance and a free opportunity to undertake the NVQ, but places are obviously limited so it's important to register your interest while funding lasts.

NVQs are nationally recognised and respected qualifications. In some areas – for example work with pre-school children or with the elderly – they are also obligatory for all those above assistant level. They are not conventional courses, undertaken at college with a start and finish date. Instead they are a way of assessing and recognising the skills people employ in the work/volunteering that they do. So the Assessor comes to the candidate to help them create a portfolio of evidence and work-based assessment of what they are currently doing.

The most popular subject so far has been Children's Care, Learning and Development, closely followed by Health & Social Care (which is concerned with care

of vulnerable adults). Other subjects with high take-up are Advice & Guidance and Management but there is a broad choice of subjects ranging from Business & Administration, and NVQ for IT Users, to Hospitality & Catering and Learning & Development.

After the first one-to-one session, where the candidate can discuss the options available, they are referred to one of the colleges in the scheme. The college will do an initial assessment and assign an Assessor who will meet and work with the candidate at their workplace or wherever suits them better. One of the first students on the scheme was Caroline Crunden, who works in the Witness Service, part of Victim Support. She says "I am really enjoying my NVQ. I haven't studied since I left school. Now I can't believe the difference it makes to the way I work. I have been a scheme manager for 3

years and I was coasting along. The NVQ has really made me look at myself and how I work. In everything I do I now think "Why do I do it this way? Could I do it better?" It has improved my self-confidence as well as benefiting my organisation. I have already made changes because of my NVQ."

Because the NVQ is based upon the work that people are actually doing, it can also be a recognition of the value of their contribution. Candidates for the Management NVQ, for example, may have been serving their charity or community group for years and may have developed a whole range of skills that they are not even aware of.

The project's organisers are very pleased with the uptake and the feedback. Susie Hancock, based at the CCS, says "The project has been of great benefit for the

"The NVQ has really made me look at myself and how I work. In everything I do I now think "Why do I do it this way? Could I do it better?""

NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are the basis of NVQs. There are standards for Advice, Guidance & Advocacy, Managing Volunteers, Fundraising, and many others relevant to the voluntary sector. The NOS for Trustees and Management Committee members is in process of development.

The NOS are a breakdown of the knowledge and skills that are required in order to perform effectively and allow individuals to be very clear about what is expected of them. So they can be used as a checklist to help with

- ◆ Recruitment and selection
- ◆ Role design and evaluation
- ◆ Management of individual and team performance
- ◆ Identifying and fulfilling training needs

Information about all these can be found on:

<http://www.voluntarysectorskills.org.uk/Homepage.asp?NodeID=21130>

It is a very user friendly site containing, among other things, the latest sector news; the Charity Trainers' Network; and the facility to download the NOS for Fundraising and for Managing Volunteers free of charge.

USEFUL (ESSENTIAL!) DIRECTORIES

The Voluntary Sector Learning Information Point at the Community Council of Shropshire produces a number of Directories which could be invaluable for voluntary and community organisations' training programmes. These publications are free. To order copies contact Nickie Edwards on 01743 237872 email nickie.edwards@shropshire-rcc.org.uk

Training Digest	A quarterly round-up of training courses suitable for voluntary and community groups. Please let us have details of any courses you are running.
Directory of Trainers for the Voluntary Sector in Shropshire	A listing of voluntary organisations, training providers and independent trainers that offer courses. This Directory is currently being updated so please provide details of any training you are able to offer.
Directory of Shropshire Community Venues for Learning & Training	A listing of all community-owned venues that are suitable for delivering learning. There are over 100 community centres and village halls in Shropshire that have disabled access. The venues appear on the VSLIP website with a search facility www.vslip.org.uk The Directory is in the process of being updated from CCS's community venues database.
Directory of Voluntary Organisations' Equalities Information and Support Services	A listing of voluntary sector services to members of the community who may face discrimination or disadvantage. Services include information, help-lines and specialist training on subjects such as disability, ageing, etc.

work for Home-Start. And if/when they do leave, the training is not regarded as wasted input but as a means of both giving something back to the volunteers and of spreading good practice in whatever field they go onto.

It also reflects well on the organisation. As the statutory and voluntary sectors work increasingly closely it is important for the latter to operate, and be seen to operate, in a professional way. The Moving Up project has re-inforced that image in the eyes of statutory care providers. It has also confirmed their standing within the national Home-Start organisation. And just as importantly it has re-inforced the already good relationship between staff and volunteers within the organisation. Regular contact with their supervisors and access to training, trips, events, and fundraising initiatives mean that volunteers feel part of an inclusive family. All this has been confirmed by the training programme.

The assessment qualification achieved by the 2 staff members also makes the project sustainable, enabling further training within the organisation and potentially generating income through providing assessment for other Home-Starts. The NVQ provider was Shropshire Business Centre (SBC). The newly qualified Assessors are now part of the SBC assessment team and will be working jointly with them and Walford & North Shropshire college to offer delivery of Level 2 qualifications. So the project has been part of capacity building for the organisation. In all it has been a very cost-effective input of funding.

As for the outcome for the individual volunteers - they have become

significantly more confident and engaged. It has re-inforced them in the knowledge that they already have and encourages them to participate in the other training that Home-Start offers, as relevant issues arise in their work. Helen, one of these first candidates, said "I had not studied for a long time so felt slightly apprehensive. Having

"I had no idea your volunteers were so well-trained"

now completed the qualification I realise that the achievement has increased my confidence... recognised skills that I already have as well as enabling me to learn new ones... (and) made me feel more involved with Home-Start." And it shows. A local social worker remarked and has asked to come on some of the Home-Start training herself.

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OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Among the other initiatives that the LSC are running in Shropshire are three projects that support the Working Together Agenda.

One is **Rural Inclusion Training & Essential Skills** (RITES), which runs from November 2005 to December 2007. The project's aim is to tackle the barriers to accredited learning and achievement, and the resulting economic inactivity, experienced in Shropshire. The project pays particular attention to reaching the long-term unemployed, the economically inactive - such as volunteers - and low skilled workers in the Manufacturing and Engineering, Care, Food and Retail sectors.

To be eligible you must be aged between 16 and 64 years and work-based in Shropshire i.e. you could be unemployed, under-employed, or volunteering. The programme is designed to increase confidence, provide a recognised qualification and increase your opportunities in the labour market. It gives access to:

- ◆ Matrix accredited Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)
- ◆ Individual Learner Action Plan
- ◆ Skills for Life qualification at Entry Level 3 and Level 1, 2.

For further information contact Phil Ridley (Head of Enterprise & Development) 01939 262154

The second project is the **Pre-employment Training Programme** which runs from January 2006 to December 2007. With the same target group the project aims to instil a sense of achievement and thereby motivate and encourage low-skilled and unemployed individuals to find employment. The core activity of the project is a training programme called 'Confidence to Work'. Participants also undertake a vocational qualification in their chosen profession (e.g. Retail). A high level of support and guidance is given to ensure that participants are ready to re-enter the job market or be signposted to further training opportunities. This includes practical support such as help towards the costs of childcare or help with transport. The programme gives access to:

- ◆ Matrix accredited IAG
- ◆ Individual Learner Action Plan
- ◆ A minimum of two modules for the 'Confidence to Work' Programme
- ◆ An ICT and Vocational course tailored to your needs
- ◆ Skills for Life Level 1

For further information contact Caroline Morris (Project Manager) 01939 262106

The third project called **Capacity Building and Partnership Working** has three separate strands. The Shropshire Professional Development Partnership (PDP) has a remit to support staff development within the 6 Shropshire F.E. Colleges but also across all of the post-16 delivery network.

Strand one:

Focuses on the upskilling and re-skilling of ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups of workers/volunteers in Shropshire. It will provide opportunities for 75 candidates to develop their basic skills, to gain advocacy skills or to get work experience on a work placement. The aim is to build the capacity of the BME/VCS to articulate their needs and build on their own skills as well as advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

Strand two:

As part of the National Basic Skills agenda targeting those with literacy, language and numeracy needs, this strand focuses on the awareness raising of front line staff so that they can work effectively with clients. To engage with these potentially hard to reach learners it is necessary to work in partnership with intermediaries with whom they are more likely to feel comfortable, i.e. the voluntary and community sector.

The PDP has just won an ESF/LSC contract to raise awareness of the basic skills agenda within the VCS. This will fund the delivery of 30 Awareness

Raising Events across the county to outline the relevance of the Skills for Life agenda to a range of client groups. It is particularly appropriate for workers who are in any sort of role that provides them with the opportunity to signpost clients to learning opportunities. These events can be offered on request, at your chosen time and venue, if any organisation, or group of organisations can get 7 or more people together.

Following these there will be 20 'Short Courses' to up-skill staff and volunteers to give them the knowledge necessary to be able to advise and guide clients with confidence.

Strand three:

Focuses on improving the subject specialist skills (Language, Literacy & Numeracy) of teachers who want to teach adults through embedded learning or discrete delivery.

For further information contact: Katie McCombe. (Manager of Professional Development Partnership). 01691 688041

ADULT LEARNING GRANTS

Want to get qualified but worried about money?

Adult Learning Grants (ALG) could give you up to £30 per week to get your first full Level 2 or first full Level 3 qualification. This could fund books and equipment and travel costs and help you get the qualifications you need for your future career.

Level 2 is 5 GCSEs at grades A to C or an NVQ2 or its equivalent.
Level 3 is 2 A levels or an NVQ3 or its equivalent.

ALG is normally available for up to two years but can be extended to three years if

the learner takes a Level 2 course before progressing to a Level 3 course.

To qualify for the grant

- ◆ you need to be over 19 for Level 2 and aged between 19 and 30 for Level 3. (You can apply one month before your 19th birthday)
- ◆ you need to be studying at a college or with a learning provider in the Shropshire area
- ◆ the course must involve 150 guided learning hours per term (about 12 or 13 hours per week)
- ◆ the course must be part of the 2005-6 academic year, but retrospective claims for ALG can be made and the grant can be backdated to the start of the term in which you applied.

You won't be eligible if you are already receiving other government grants, training allowances or out-of-work benefits but if you are getting Carer's Allowance you can apply. The amount you receive will depend upon your income in the previous tax year, and possibly the joint income of a couple. If you are interested you can call 0800100 900 (free phone), see www.adultlearninggrant.com or contact the colleges below.

Ludlow College 01584 872846	New College 01952 641892
Shrewsbury College 01743 342342	Telford College 01952 642200
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College 01743 235491	Walford and North Shropshire College 01691 688000

voluntary sector, particularly for tiny charities struggling on a small budget but determined to offer the best quality care. And there are still places left but they are going fast. Contact us now!"

More events are planned. There will be a Funding Fair at Ellesmere on 10th December. For details of this, or to register an interest in doing an NVQ, contact the Community Council of Shropshire (01743 360641) or Telford & Wrekin CVS (01952 291350) or check the website:

www.gettingqualified.org.uk



MOVING UP PROJECT – GETTING VOLUNTEERS QUALIFIED

The 'Moving Up' project run by Home-Start North Shropshire and Oswestry (HSNS&O) has been a first in providing volunteers with the opportunity to gain National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 in Advice & Guidance for Volunteers. Using Pilot Project funding from VSLIP, 3 volunteers completed their NVQ Level 2, while 2 members of staff undertook the Assessors qualification.

The opportunity to do the NVQ was discussed with volunteers in their monthly support/supervision sessions. In addition to the 8-week Preparation Course that all volunteers with Home-Start do when they join, they had to have done at least 50 hours of home visiting, normally extending over 20 or 25 weeks. So in practice they were the more long-standing volunteers. One candidate had in fact been working with Home-Start for more than 6 years. There was some

understandable nervousness about 'going back to school' but once they realised that it was quite a different process and that there was no exam looming at the end, they became increasingly enthusiastic.

In addition it helped that the assessment was being done by people who they already knew and who knew what was involved in their work (and were in fact themselves being assessed at the same time). Dee Beckett, one of the two members of staff doing the Assessors qualification, felt that she learned from the supportive approach of her own Assessor, techniques to put the volunteer candidates at their ease and to give effective feedback on their work.

This has carried over into her general work with the volunteers, in terms of being able to pick up on and re-inforce their individual strengths and point them in the direction of appropriate training. Other volunteers have since expressed an interest in the NVQ. The NVQ level 2 process takes 6 months on average but is designed to be flexible to the circumstances of the volunteer. Volunteers also have the option of gaining accreditation in the initial Preparation Course. This will give them credits that could help towards an NVQ. The whole process could take up to 2 years.

So the possibility of volunteers seeing the qualification as a means to paid employment is not seen as a problem. The fact that training is available may in fact help to recruit volunteers, keep them longer in the organisation, and extend the work they do. Because volunteers had to have 3 separate settings for their portfolio some candidates took on additional areas of