

Workforce Hub

Background Paper for Capacity Builders, Feb 2006

1. What are the objectives of the hub? How do you understand these objectives in relation to the overall aim of ChangeUp for 2014?

The vision driving the ChangeUP framework is “of frontline organisations playing their full potential in improving the quality of life for communities. The aim is to ensure that they have the capacity, skills and infrastructure support they require to fulfil that role”. The role of the workforce hub within this framework is “Developing a Highly Effective Workforce”, by taking a leading role in promoting skills development and good employment practice throughout the voluntary and community sector and within infrastructure itself”. For the Hub, workforce means paid staff, volunteers, trustees and board members.

Voluntary and community organisations are only as good as the people who run them and work in them – whether as paid staff, as trustees or as volunteers. Given that recruiting, retaining and developing the skills of individuals in the sector is dependent on good organisational structures and practices, the hub’s work to develop a highly effective workforce must integrate with the work of the Performance and Governance hubs.

The hub is UK wide, with partners in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. UK work with Sector Skills Councils on skills development is funded by the Sector Skills Development Agency. The ACU only supports the Hub’s work in England.

Hub Objectives

1. To lead and facilitate action that enables all voluntary and community organisations to access resources to support a culture of learning and development underpinned by leadership, good management and employment practice.
2. To lead and facilitate action that makes it easier for all voluntary and community organisations to recruit and retain a skilled workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities they work in.

2. What are the key activities the hub has undertaken/plans to undertake?

Completed

- Recruitment of 4 new staff for the core hub team and 3 new staff for the hub’s leadership centre
- Recruitment and induction of independent England Committee to steer the work of the Hub, and interim independent Chair
- Hub communications and media strategies in place and being implemented (47 press mentions/articles between July05 and Jan 06)
- Internal monitoring systems in place
- Bi-weekly e-briefings going to over 3900 individuals in voluntary and community organisations
- Quarterly meetings of the hub’s diversity, personnel and trainers networks
- www.voluntarysectorskills.org.uk functioning as interim hub website with information, learning resources and signposts to relevant partners and resources (23979 visits in Jan 06)
- Full website commissioned for launch in March 2006
- National Conference on good employment practice
- Published new *Good Employment Guide*

- Published *Making Equality Simple*, a equalities recruitment guide
- Developed national standards for trustees and board members, and a shared implementation plan to promote the standards in partnership with the Governance hub
- Published *Working for a Better World*, a guide to careers in the sector for young people
- Committed over £300,000 in grants to partners at local, regional and national levels for workforce development projects (list of projects included)
- Presentations at events and networks

In Process

- Developing the leadership centre for the sector in partnership with ACEVO
- Recruiting the steering group for the leadership centre
- Commissioning skills foresight research in the sector in partnership with Sector Skills Councils
- Recruiting a permanent independent Chair for the hub's England Committee
- Developing an e-learning programme for potential recruits to the sector
- Working with the Learning and Skills Council, the ACU, DfES, DTI and the Sector Skills Development Agency to identify sustainable funding for regional Workforce Development Co-ordinators (a key recommendation in ChangeUP)
- Developing links and plans with stakeholders to achieve equal access to hub resources for diverse groups
- Working with NACVS on a 2 year programme to develop a Skills and Knowledge Framework for development workers in generic and specialist local infrastructure organisations. This includes an ongoing training programme for development workers.
- Working with NACVS to develop a national resource to support and promote Action Learning Sets as a key tool for developing and sharing skills, following a successful pilot in 2004/05
- Developing the growing library of employment practice guides and policies, commissioned from experts recognised in their fields
- Produce a First Year Report on the Hub's work
- Development of full website, informed by new web developments and feedback from consultation on interim website and future needs of VCOs and infrastructure organisations
- Launch of hub helpdesk
- Ongoing presentations to events
- Regular meetings with regional workforce development co-ordinators
- Working with Performance Hub on co-ordination of inter-hub communications with ChangeUp Consortia
- Mapping of and network building with ChangeUp Consortia workforce development activity across England
- Commissioning of external evaluation

Upcoming

- Research on the role of volunteering in developing individuals' skills and career plans
- Commissioning of specialist infrastructure outreach project
- Launch of full website
- Workforce Hub annual conference, June 2006
- Ongoing presentations at events
- Reprinting of *Making Equality Simple*, following distribution of first 3000 on request
- Producing a *Making Equality Simple* guide to recruiting workers of all ages
- Production of costing tool kit and best practice guidelines on skills and employment practice for funders and policy-makers (in collaboration with other hub's work with funders)
- Working with the Volunteering Hub on learning resources and networks for managers of volunteers, based on the national standards for managing volunteers

- Delivery of training programme on using national standards in fundraising and managing of volunteers for recruitment, appraisal, career development and short training courses, following an evaluated pilot programme
- Evaluation of learning from funded workforce projects to inform future work plans
- Report of external evaluation

3. What are the quick wins the hub has put or is putting in place?

- 3 accessible and relevant publications, *Good Employment Guide*, *Making Equality Simple* and *Working for a Better World*.
- The launch of an excellent website, which has the capacity for individuals and learning networks and communities to run their own mini sites, as well as a full range of relevant and accessible information, resources and signposts on learning, leadership and good employment practice
- National standards for trustees, which compliment the Code of Governance
- Direct financial support for specialist infrastructure organisations in every English region, supporting their provision of workforce development support to BME, rural and faith front line organisations
- Skills and Knowledge framework and training programme for infrastructure development workers, who are key partners for developing a highly effective workforce at local level and across the diverse range of BME, Faith, rural and community groups.

We are confident that these five quick wins will both raise our profile across the sector and deliver progress on two of our key outcomes:

- increasing the number of VCOs that have plans and policies in place to recruit, manage and develop their workforce so that they are great places in which to work and volunteer
- Advisers in generic and specialist infrastructure organisations across England have what they need to advise and support front line organisations on all forms of learning and good employment practice

4. How will the hub's work be evaluated and what systems are already in place?

The Workforce Hub is combining independent external evaluation with internal self-monitoring. The following self-monitoring systems are already in place:

- enquiries monitoring: covers topics, enquirer data, and responses
- website monitoring and traffic data
- website 'comments' data, through 'live' user comments on every page and on particular resources as they are developed and posted
- e-briefing feedback survey: covers satisfaction and outcomes
- event evaluations – where we run an event: assesses satisfaction and outcomes
- speaker evaluations – where we speak at another organisation's event – assessing audience response, key topics requested and other learning
- evaluation of pilot programmes such as e-learning pilot and national standards training programme for infrastructure staff

We are currently finalising our specification for the external evaluation. It will cover the processes, the outputs and, where possible, the outcomes of our work.

5. How is diversity being addressed within the hub's plans?

The hub will follow the recommendations of ACU's Mainstreaming Diversity Report. This work clarifies the importance of making resources accessible and appropriate, and addressing capacity issues of BME, refugee, faith and rural organisations to access and use resources that meet their needs.

We will regularly consult with key infrastructure organisations, national and regional, for guidance on achieving accessibility. We can draw on the expertise in BME, faith and community groups on the Hub's England Committee and are currently talking to ACRE on how to tap into expertise on access issues and appropriate information and resources for rural organisations. Where possible we will fund organisations within each of the currently marginalized groups to produce appropriate materials for their peers.

Accessibility

Our website and paper based materials and resources are written in accessible language, using AAA standards and the Crystal Mark/Plain English Commission. We will work with the relevant infrastructure organisations and networks so that they can signpost and promote access to the hub's resources, through their web sites and newsletters, focussing on those resources most relevant to the organisations they support.

Appropriateness

The hub will produce a range of resources and information to meet diverse needs. For example small organisations with few staff will need advice on good employment practice and planning tailored to their needs, rather than the *Good Employment Guide*, which contains more than they can effectively use. Case studies, which are a proven tool for sharing learning and good practice, will include examples from across the range of diverse VCOs.

Capacity

We are addressing the disproportionate **capacity issues** of BME, faith, refugee and rural organisations through:

- Developing an outreach project, collaborating with the Performance Hub to ensure a co-ordinated approach to collating key contacts and networks
- Providing direct resources to BME regional organisations/networks to disseminate Hub activities and promote workforce development
- Monitoring activity to produce data on the proportion of BEFR and rural groups that join our network and use our resources to inform further action
- Continuing to make good use of case studies and ensuring that these also reflect the diversity of the sector.
- Promoting and monitoring the engagement of infrastructure for currently marginalized groups in the Skills and Knowledge Framework and training for development workers

6. In your area of expertise:

- What do you know about good practice in your area? How are you sharing this?

What we know about good practice

The Workforce Hub is building on the work of three pre-existing teams, which have come together in the Hub, each with a track record of identifying and sharing good practice. In addition, we are using a well-resourced mainstream business school to enhance the knowledge and resources of the new leadership centre team.

The pre-existing teams of expertise are:

- **Working For A Charity**, which has a successful track record for delivering courses and placements to people interested in coming to work in the sector

- NCVO's **Employment Practice Team** have been promoting good employment practice for 5 years, with funding from the Big Lottery for work to develop effective connections between VCOs and local infrastructure organisations with national mainstream resources like ACAS and the CIPD to share good practice and resources.
- The former **Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation (VSNTO)**, which carried out regular research on skills gaps and shortages and developed *Improving our Skills*, the National Skills Strategy for voluntary and community organisations in 2005. VSNTO also developed the national standards for fundraisers and managers of volunteers and has worked with the Learning and Skills Council since its inception to work for better access to affordable and flexible learning programmes for paid staff and volunteers.

New Team: The Leadership Centre Team is based at Henley Management College, to ensure that the team can benefit from the research and constantly developing knowledge and good practice that this institution can provide.

How We Share Good Practice

The Hub operates as a forum where expertise can be brought together, both from inside and outside the Hub. For example, to develop the Hub's work programme to raise the profile of the sector as a career, we invited a wide range of Human Resource experts from the voluntary, public and private sectors to come together to share experience and ideas for achieving this.

We will continue to make current and developing good practice available to everyone, in the clearest language possible. In addition to using the website, e-briefings and the media to communicate, we share good practice through networks such as Consortia+, the national network of VCS learning networks, through the Hub's national networks for Personnel, Charity Trainers and Diversity and through the regional voluntary sector networks' workforce development co-ordinators

Our bi-weekly e-briefings go to our database of 3,900 individuals working in the sector, and we write a regular column in the NACVS newsletter. Part of our media strategy is to build on this to negotiate regular columns in a range of specialist infrastructure newsletters for organisations working in the fields of care, disability, community development etc.

Our key work for sharing good practice via infrastructure is the partnership project with NACVS on the Skills and Knowledge Framework and training programme, which is for staff in both generic and specialist local infrastructure organisations.

- What do you identify as the overlaps and gaps in provision in the VCS?

Gaps.

Our research report, *A Stitch in Time*, shows that few local infrastructure organisations have the capacity to provide information, advice and guidance (IAG) on employment practice and do not currently make good use of mainstream resources such as ACAS. We have been working with ACAS and pro bono sources of expertise to enable them to be more accessible and relevant to VCOs.

Local infrastructure provides generic advice and signposting on skills, and some provide training programmes. However, some local areas have more developed support systems than others. Local and regional learning networks do not exist evenly across the country and not all regional voluntary sector networks have funded workforce development posts as yet.

Specialist infrastructure for BME, faith and rural groups has significant gaps in capacity to give IAG on workforce development, especially resources aimed at very small organisations

Many funders still lack understanding of the real costs of recruiting, retaining and developing an effective workforce and do not pay towards these costs, even when they are included in funding bids from VCOs.

Overlaps

As a Hub, we work closely with local, sub-regional and regional infrastructure and with relevant networks to create consistent, multiple routes for people to find the information, knowledge and tools they require to develop their workforce. We will do more work with ChangeUp Consortia and Regional Voluntary Sector Networks to ensure that their websites and newsletters are complimentary and to ensure that the web links to the Hub website are in place across the piece.

From my experience of being on the ACU Diversity Project Steering Group, it is clear that specialist infrastructure for marginalized groups do not currently overlap with mainstream providers because of access issues. Over time the investment from ChangeUp should enable more sharing of roles and signposting between generic and specialist infrastructure so that they can both make more effective use of resources to support more organisations.

- What views do you have on what is required at regional/sub-regional level?
- Sustainable funding for Regional Workforce Development Co-ordinators, who have been able to make a clear impact in those few regions such as Yorkshire that have had a post for more than one year. There they have been able to build effective relationships with the Regional Development Agency, Sector Skills Councils and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which has enabled them to develop a VCS Skills Brokerage, mainstream funding for the Assessment Centre for Voluntary Organisations in York, resources to support the sub-regional learning networks and funding for regional skills foresight research and a regional Workforce Development Plan.
- Sub-regional learning networks and consortia need resources to work effectively at sharing learning and good practice and to work with and influence the new Learning and Skills Council Local Partnership Teams. Most currently have short term funding from the LSC to pay for co-ordination/communication posts.
- Continued support for the Regional Voluntary Sector Networks, with support to share learning across the regions on what has worked work in terms of complimentary working with specialist and with local infrastructure
- A commitment from Capacity Builders to three year funding cycles for regional and sub-regional Consortia, so that they can build on the learning from projects carried out in the first phase.