



Learning Resource Centre Feasibility Study

One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy



One Voice Network – Learning Resource Centre Feasibility Study

Contents

Executive summary	1
Full report	4
The brief	4
Background information on the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy	5
Methodology	5
Demand for learning: A review of the sector and its workforce development needs	6
Summary of the 2004 report	6
Skills within the sector	7
Recruitment.....	7
Issues faced by the sector	7
Verification of the Developing the Workforce Report via the Consultation	7
Supply of learning	8
The sector within County Durham.....	8
Location of staff and volunteers	9
Location of learning venues	10
Funder’s strategy - County Durham LSC	13
Consultation with stakeholders.....	13
County Durham Voluntary and Community Sector Working Together Forum.....	13
Interviews with other stakeholders	15
Summaries of Meetings with Ufi/learndirect and E-Learning North East.....	16
Interviews with learning co-ordinators	17
Recommendations for the role of OVNVA sector specific learning centre	18
Capacity Building	18
Service Delivery	18
Sector Representation	19
Underpinning values to be reflected in any recommendations implemented.....	19
Costings	20
Learning Resource Centre.....	20
Brokerage and Consultancy services	20
Funding Options	21
Learning and Skills Council.....	21
Learndirect/Ufi.....	21
Charitable trusts	21
Big Lottery Fund	21
Other funding	21
Income generation – charges for services	21
Conclusion	22
Appendices	
Appendix I - Case studies of practice in learning delivery	23
Walkers Learning Centre, Peterlee – Case Study I.....	23
Tees Valley Voluntary Sector Training Unit – Case Study II.....	25
AWPL – Case Study III	26
Appendix II - TalkingHat Associates	27
Appendix III - Questionnaires used in the consultation	28
Questionnaire for voluntary and community sector training organisations.....	28
Questionnaire for voluntary and community sector organisations.....	29
Appendix IV - Summary of learning venues by district.....	30
Appendix V - Explanation of key acronyms.....	31

Executive summary

Introduction

In December 2004, the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy (OVNVSA) issued a brief for a piece of work to assess the feasibility of establishing a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) in Spennymoor. In consultation with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), funding was made available by the LSC and DISC Ltd for this purpose. Both the OVNVSA and the LSC wanted to assess the demand for such a venue and assess its expected usage.

The One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy and DISC Ltd envisaged a Learning Resource Centre (LRC), which would be based in DISC Ltd's premises at Merrington House, Spennymoor and would be accessible to staff and volunteers from County Durham's voluntary and community organisations. The centre would deliver basic skills provision, level 1 to 5 online learning provision, IT qualifications, presentation and media qualifications/training, video-conferencing facilities/training and management development opportunities, all supported by a Centre Manager and a part-time development worker. A laptop loan scheme would also be available to support learner needs.

Purpose of the report

The full report outlines the nature of the work undertaken in conducting the feasibility of a Learning Resource Centre at DISC Ltd's premises and summarises the outcomes of the study. It details the nature and conclusions of the consultations, makes suggestions and recommendations regarding the establishment of an LRC and the provision of complementary services, and provides an indicative budget for an LRC project based on our recommendations.

This executive summary provides a highlight of the key points and recommendations made to the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy.

Background information on the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy

The OVNVSA is established to support the membership of the One Voice Network by facilitating training and workforce development across the sector, to raise awareness of career opportunities within the sector, and to improve recruitment and retention of staff. It works closely with organisations across the sector and the county and already provides a level of management training courses.

Demand for learning: A review of the sector and its workforce development needs

A review of the "Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce in County Durham" report, published in August 2004 identified that the key issues faced by the sector are:

1. Key skills needed for the future are:

- Fundraising
- Team working
- Organising and planning
- Oral and written communication
- Customer handling
- Problem solving
- Leadership
- Literacy and numeracy
- Our consultation suggests that there is an additional significant need for training in governance and management of organisations and life skills support for volunteers entering the sector

2. The voluntary and community sector lags behind the private sector in offering accredited training to staff (one third of organisations compared to half the private sector). What qualifications are achieved tends to be at a low level. With the requirement for qualifications on entry limited to a small

proportion of organisations, there is significant scope available to the sector to work on increasing the amount of accredited training made available to staff at all levels.

3. Funding of training is one of the few barriers to training mentioned. This is increasingly perceived as a greater issue as there is a move towards increasing the amount of qualifications-based learning.

4. Accessing and availability of training does not appear to be an issue with many organisations actively sourcing training externally. A shift towards accredited training will require a wider search for training.

5. While the report also suggests that there are no major barriers to training, our research would suggest that distance and time do indeed present difficulties to organisations, which limit their opportunities to train staff and volunteers

6. The report identifies a low skills gap within the sector. Our consultation with stakeholders suggests a higher level of skills gaps and a need to make provision for those entering the sector.

Supply of learning

There are around 300 learning venues within County Durham. These range from village halls offering very locally focused learning, learndirect, UK Online and Education in the Community centres, through to commercial training providers based in the County. It should also be noted that providers based outside County Durham also operate within the area, such as freelance trainers and providers based in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Overall, the supply and distribution of learning venues throughout the county is considered adequate for the location of staff and volunteers within the sector and this has been confirmed via our consultations with the key stakeholders.

Recommendations for the role of OVNVA sector specific learning centre

Throughout the consultations with stakeholders, the idea of a learning resource centre was supported. It was observed, however, that the scale of the centre should be considered very carefully and the services it delivers should extend beyond the straightforward delivery of learning. Two key areas for implementation have been identified:

1. Capacity building within the OVNVA
2. Service delivery

1. Capacity Building

Staff - Additional staff are required to fulfil the role of peripatetic coordinators, facilitators, and ambassadors, building and maintaining relationships with the sector and with the existing training providers. Working in coordination with existing providers within the sector, this would in part constitute a continuous mapping and brokerage exercise of needs and provision.

2. Service Delivery

Co-ordination - There is substantial scope for the centre to co-ordinate information on learning and share best practice and good courses to a wider audience (by being made available in local areas where it may not have been previously available). A further coordination role would be in the provision of outreach teaching at existing centres to support centrally delivered training. There would be a role too in helping the sector to perform training needs analyses, particularly in smaller organisations that do not generally have the capacity to understand and determine skills needs (because of the high number of low turnover/low or no staff organisations). The service may also help to coordinate relief support to help smaller organisations release staff for training.

Brokerage - The centre should explore the development of a brokerage service to ensure that localised demand is met by localised supply or where there is no local supplier, OVNVA may negotiate with a 3rd party provider or could deliver through its own resources.

Learning Resource Centre - Establish a small ICT based learning resource centre in Merrington House, Spennymoor, to meet the needs of the sector. This might comprise four PC workstations and a traditional study area offering OVNVA, learndirect and Further Education (FE) provision. The suggested scale will require a relatively small initial capital outlay and will allow for flexibility of provision as the sector grows and changes. The OVNVA should also build on its expertise in management qualifications to offer more and tailored provision using new and emerging technologies. There are opportunities to develop distance learning materials for the sector in collaboration with partners. Moves towards modular, work-based accreditation in the social care sector may contribute towards these developments too.

Developing the existing roles

In addition to these 2 key areas, there is a need to continue to provide sector representation through networking and building relationships, in particular with the LSC in order to address barriers and assist in engaging the LSC with the sector. Working in partnership with learning organisations will create opportunities for experimentation with innovative provision.

Ensuring credibility

A set of underpinning values have been identified which must be reflected in any recommendations implemented. These must provide a clear focus and set of objectives from the outset, together with a sustainability strategy that ensures that it remains focused on supporting the voluntary and community sector. These points of focus will therefore include outreach provision, understanding and addressing the differences in skills needs between staff and volunteers, understanding and addressing the different requirements for different strata of the sector and giving careful consideration to the differing learning styles of individuals to ensure appropriate and consistent methods of delivery.

Any recommendations implemented should mirror the values and ethos of the OVNVA which has worked hard to establish a high level of trust and close working partnerships with the One Voice Network's members, the voluntary and community sector and the Learning and Skills Council. This must continue for adopted recommendations to be a success.

Conclusion

With sufficient provision of training and learning resources within and close to the county to satisfy the demand in general, opening a learning resource centre in Spennymoor would be inappropriate and would probably duplicate existing provision. However a small resource centre to support and expand the OVNVA's current provision would be sensible and would benefit the sectors as a whole.

Supporting this, the OVNVA should, through peripatetic coordinators, provide an overall coordination role to ensure that the sector's needs are monitored, understood and met efficiently, maintain a detailed view of provision from all training providers and ensure that these two are "joined up". The OVNVA could also have a role in identifying and supporting the sectors where there are funding issues and where appropriate work with the LSC and others to find solutions.

Finally, in recognition of some significant gaps in the training provision, we recommend that some further work should be commissioned to explore these needs in more detail with a view to finding a suitable method of providing specific training.

Full report

The brief

Introduction

In December 2004, the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy (OVNVSA) issued a brief for a piece of work to assess the feasibility of establishing a Learning Resource Centre (LRC) in Spennymoor. In consultation with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), funding was made available by the LSC and DISC Ltd for this purpose. Both the OVNVSA and the LSC wanted to assess the demand for such a venue and assess its expected usage.

The County Durham Voluntary & Community Sector Learning Resource Centre

The One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy and DISC Ltd are proposing to host and facilitate a Learning Resource Centre. The proposed LRC would be based in DISC Ltd's premises at Merrington House, Spennymoor and would be accessible to staff and volunteers from County Durham's voluntary and community organisations.

The LRC would house a computer suite with broadband access to on-line learning, video-conferencing facilities and a resource library supporting voluntary and community sector activities.

The LRC would plan to deliver basic skills provision, level 1 to 5 on-line learning provision, IT qualifications, presentation and media qualifications/training, video-conferencing facilities/training and management development opportunities.

The LRC would need to be staffed by a Centre Manager and supported by a part-time development worker. It is proposed to offer a laptop loan scheme to support learner needs.

The estimated first year costs are £110,000 and therefore a feasibility study would be required to assess the viability of the project against the following criteria

- Existing provision in the county
- Demand for learning
- The location of a LRC in Spennymoor
- DISC Ltd's support and commitment to a LRC
- Knowledge gained from existing LRCs e.g. Walkers Crisps and Electrolux
- Knowledge gained from previous Voluntary and Community Sector projects eg Tees Valley Voluntary Sector Training Unit (VSTU)
- Sustainability with consideration given to learndirect and Unison Bridges to Learning for example

Consultation would be carried out with:

- DISC Ltd
- Walkers Crisps and Electrolux
- One Voice Network (OVN) infrastructure organisations including the 6 County Durham CVS organisations, Groundworks and WEA.
- Durham County Council Education in the Community inc. East Durham & Houghall Community College, Learn East
- Durham County Council UK Online Project
- Shotton IT Resource Centre
- Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe Learning shops
- New College Durham Advice, Support, Careers

Reference will be made to research recently undertaken by One Voice Network in relation to economic impact and workforce development in the voluntary and community sector of County Durham.

Purpose of this report

This report outlines the nature of the work undertaken and summarises the outcomes of the study. It details the nature and conclusions of the consultations, makes suggestions and recommendations regarding the establishment of an LRC and provides an indicative budget for an LRC project based on our recommendations.

Background information on the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy

OVNVSA is established to support the membership of the One Voice Network by facilitating training and workforce development across the sector, to raise awareness of career opportunities within the sector, and to improve recruitment and retention of staff. It works closely with organisations across the sector and the county and already provides a level of management training courses.

One Voice Network's objectives are to improve communications and develop networking opportunities for community and voluntary and community organisations in County Durham and assist with cross-sector consultations: lobbying on behalf of, supporting and unifying the voluntary and community sector in the sub-region. It comprises a secretariat and a steering group, comprising area Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and some of the larger voluntary and community organisations from County Durham and over 300 members from organisations throughout County Durham.

Methodology

Activities carried out

The project's activities were split into 2 key areas:

An analysis of the demand for, and supply of learning throughout County Durham

As a result of the project start-up meeting with OVNVA and DISC Ltd, the initial suggestion to review specific learning centres such as the Spennymoor Learning Shop was reviewed and replaced with a need to assess the extent of the network of learning venues and facilities available throughout County Durham.

The idea discussed at the commissioning meeting was that the venue would serve as a physical resource centre for the voluntary and community sector, with limited access for any other groups such as local businesses or the general public. Opening to a wider audience presented difficulties such as extended opening hours, and limited public transport to the centre presented a major barrier to access by the general public. As a result of this, the analysis of demand was limited to the voluntary and community sector.

The basis of the analysis of demand is an assessment of the work carried out in 2004 by Research Solutions. Their report, entitled "Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce in County Durham" published in August 2004 was deemed to be suitable for the purposes of the feasibility as we had no wish to duplicate work carried out only 6 months previously. We did however undertake to verify some of the key outcomes of this report with the stakeholders and participants in the consultation, as there were some interesting conclusions that required further consideration. For example, the report states that 46% of organisations suggested that there were no barriers to training and a further 19% suggested that lack of funding for training was an issue. There were no other significant major barriers to training suggested. Yet experience of the OVNVA in setting up training courses suggests that there is a real difficulty for staff in the sector to travel to training and this was subsequently verified by participants in the consultation.

Regarding the supply of available provision, the dispersed nature of the sector means that a full review of all learning provision throughout the county would be more relevant. This would then lead to an indication of some examples of best practice that could be subsequently investigated in more detail via centre visits.

Consultation with partners and stakeholders

At the start up meeting, it became apparent that there was scope, following the recent establishment of the County Durham Voluntary and Community Sector Working Together Forum, (WTF), to shift the consultation from the OVNVA steering group to this wider and more inclusive audience. This required approval of the OVNVA steering group, which was duly granted and an item to cover the OVNVA LRC was added to the agenda for the Forum meeting of 25 January 2005.

This resulted in a focus group being set up together with a list of interested participants. The resultant consultation therefore consisted of the following means:

- meetings with key stakeholders and members of the WTF
- the focus group which took place on 1 February 2005
- telephone interviews with members of the WTF unable to attend the focus group
- telephone interviews with others with an interest in learning in County Durham

Problems with contacting participants

It should be noted that the timescale for this project was tight and some difficulties were experienced in consulting with a number of participants. Inevitably, some were too busy to participate. For example, one major learning provider was about to be inspected/audited and was therefore unable to devote much time to the consultation. They were however able to provide details of their learning venues and provision available throughout County Durham which allowed us to proceed with the mapping.

Input from the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy

Regular contact was maintained with staff from the OVNVA to ensure that they were kept up to date with progress and issues. They were an intrinsic part of the focus group and were able therefore to share their views and listen to those of others.

Project timescale

Following the award of the contract in mid January, work started after the start up meeting on 14 January 2005. A first draft report was available on 3rd March 2005, which was reviewed and discussed with OVNVA staff. The final report was published on 23 March 2005

Demand for learning: A review of the sector and its workforce development needs

Summary of the 2004 report

Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce in County Durham

This report was published by Research Solutions in August 2004. It is particularly relevant to the feasibility study and has formed the basis of the mapping exercise. Many of its observations, which were used as a framework for our consultations with stakeholders, held true.

Characteristics of the sector

The sector consists of around 1,300 organisations, employing 5,300 staff (2.9% of all the county's employees) and around 33,000 volunteers. Two thirds of organisations have no staff, and just over half of all organisations have a turnover of less than £10,000. The voluntary and community sector is a growth employment sector (reflecting a national trend).

The majority of voluntary and community organisations provide services, advocacy/advice/information or buildings/facilities/open space. The client group is mainly the general public, with a number of organisations focusing on particular communities or neighbourhoods.

The main occupation group is associate professional and technical staff (eg youth and community workers, counsellors, care support staff) with customer service at less than 1% of all staff.

Skills within the sector

There is a perception that skills gaps are low within the sector (only 11% of organisations reported a skill gap). Skill gaps tend to be addressed by training, but one third of organisations were doing nothing about a skill gap. Causes of skill gaps tended to focus on motivation and lack of time.

Availability of training does not appear to be a significant issue – with a significant proportion of organisations offering training, generally non-accredited and mainly externally sourced and delivered.

Organisations employing no staff generally do not produce training and development plans for staff and paid staff are more likely to be trained than volunteers.

Recruitment

Only one fifth of organisations require qualifications on entry to posts – these are mainly management positions and at level 3 or above. Recruitment is perceived to be not a problem, with only a small number of organisations reporting hard to fill vacancies mainly within the main occupation group (in particular, future hard to fill posts are expected amongst childcare, youth, development and care workers).

Issues faced by the sector

1. Key skills needed for the future (as identified by reporting organisations) are:
 - Fundraising
 - Team working
 - Organising and planning
 - Oral and written communication
 - Customer handling
 - Problem solving
 - Leadership
 - Literacy and numeracy
2. The voluntary and community sector lags behind the private sector in offering accredited training to staff (one third of organisations compared to half the private sector). What qualifications are achieved tends to be low level. With the requirement for qualifications on entry limited to a small proportion of organisations, there is significant scope available to the sector to work on increasing the amount of accredited training made available to staff, in particular at higher levels, although basic skills qualifications at levels 1 and 2 are also a key requirement.
3. Funding of training is one of the few barriers to training mentioned. This could be perceived as a greater issue if there is a move towards increasing the amount of qualifications-based learning. This could be addressed by sourcing information on the availability of free or low cost qualifications available throughout County Durham.

Accessing and availability of training does not appear to be an issue with many organisations actively sourcing training externally. A shift towards accredited training will require a wider search for training. There are over 90 UK Online centres and over 20 learndirect centres in County Durham, as well as the FE colleges and commercial training organisations, so there is ample scope for sourcing and accessing learning and training.

Verification of the Developing the Workforce Report via the Consultation

The voluntary and community sector skills agenda is undergoing rapid changes at present. With the release of the Working Together Strategy and the imminent Launch of Draft Regional Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Action Plan, much has and is being done, since the issue of the Developing the Workforce report, to address the skills agenda within the sector.

The Developing the Workforce report identifies a range of valid issues and our consultation suggests, in general, that it still presents a wholly representative picture, although our research reveals that there are a small number of deeper issues that should be addressed.

In particular, with the passing of time, there is an increased awareness in the sector of the impending threats to training funding. The report identifies a low skills gap within the sector. Our consultation with stakeholders suggests a higher level of skills gaps and a need to make provision for those entering the sector. It identifies a range of skills training provision thought to be appropriate. Consultation suggests that there is an additional significant need for training in governance and management of organisations together with life skills support for volunteers entering the sector. While the report also suggests that there are no major barriers to training, our research would suggest that distance and time do indeed present difficulties to organisations, which limit their opportunities to train staff and volunteers.

Supply of learning

The sector within County Durham

The voluntary and community sector in County Durham employs over 5,000 staff and 33,000 volunteers¹. County Durham itself has a population of around 493,000², so the sector creates opportunities for around 8% of the population of the County as a whole. At district level, the figure varies from over 15% of the population in Teesdale to 4% in Easington (see figure 1 below). The sector is therefore a significant feature of the County’s social and economic structure.

Figure 1 – proportion of population engaged in work in the sector

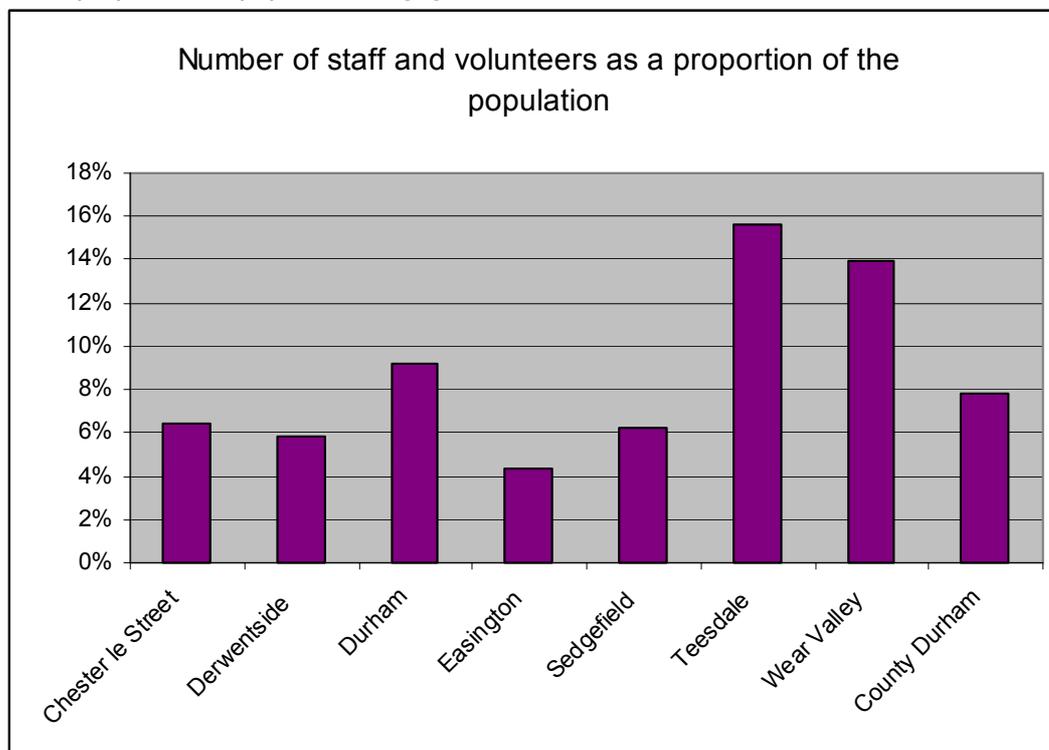
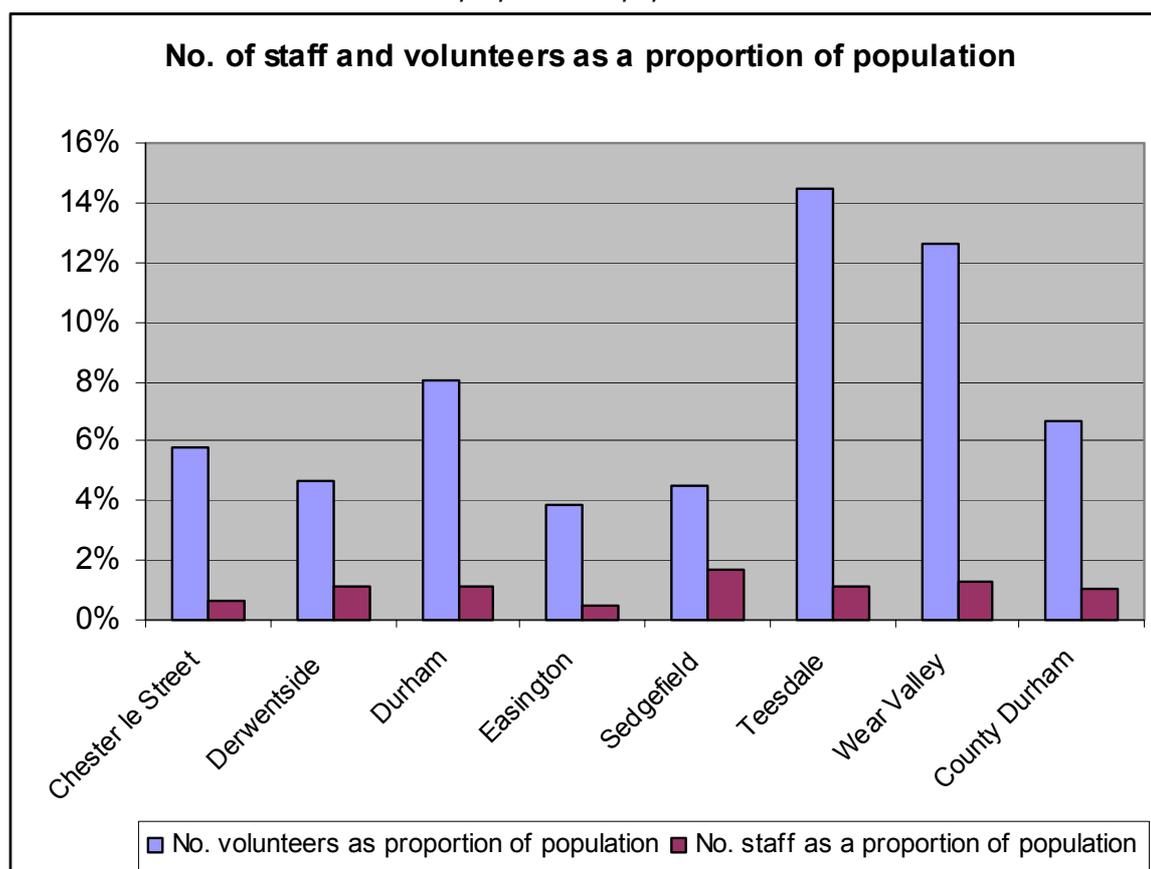


Figure 2 below breaks this down into staff and volunteers, as a proportion of the population.

¹ Developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce in County Durham report August 2004. All estimates of volunteer and paid staff numbers included in this report are based on the August 2004 report

² Census Data for 2001, available from www.statistics.gov.uk

Figure 2 – sector staff and volunteers as a proportion of population



The above chart indicates that there is a significant proportion of the population who are volunteers in Teesdale and Wear Valley and Sedgfield has the highest proportion of paid staff in the sector. The actual figures are detailed in Table 1 below.

Location of staff and volunteers

Table 1 – Estimated Staff and Volunteers in the Sector

District	No. Employees	No. Volunteers
Chester le Street	355	3,097
Derwentside	969	3,987
Durham	1,013	7,078
Easington	490	3,625
Sedgfield	1,442	3,950
Teesdale	281	3,541
Wear Valley	786	7,746
County Durham	5,336	33,024

The table provides information on the location of staff and volunteers. Figures 3 and 4 also provide a helpful indication of the location, showing that Sedgfield has the highest number of all paid staff in the sector and Wear Valley the highest proportion of all volunteers in the sector.

Figure 3 – Paid employees by district

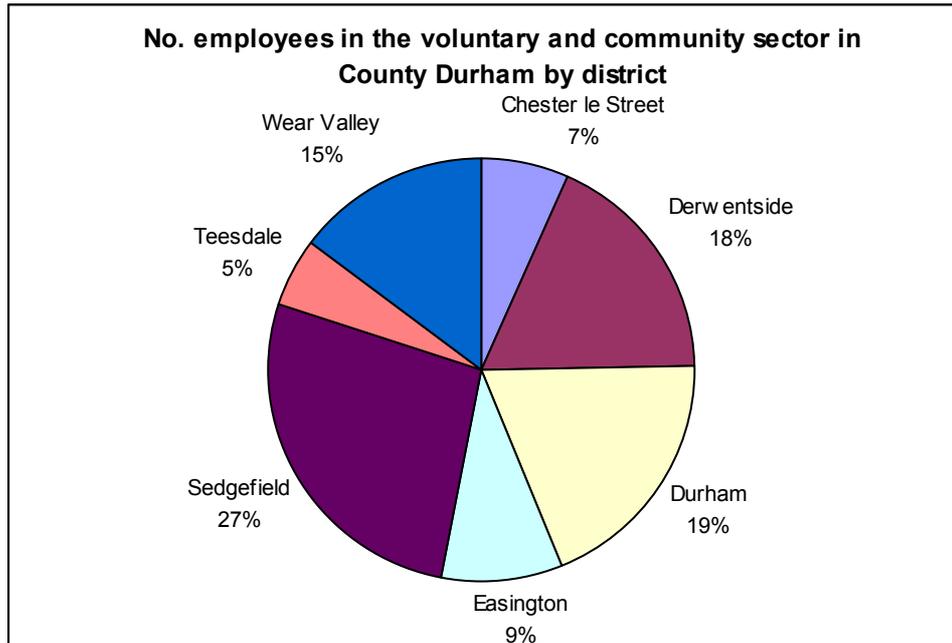
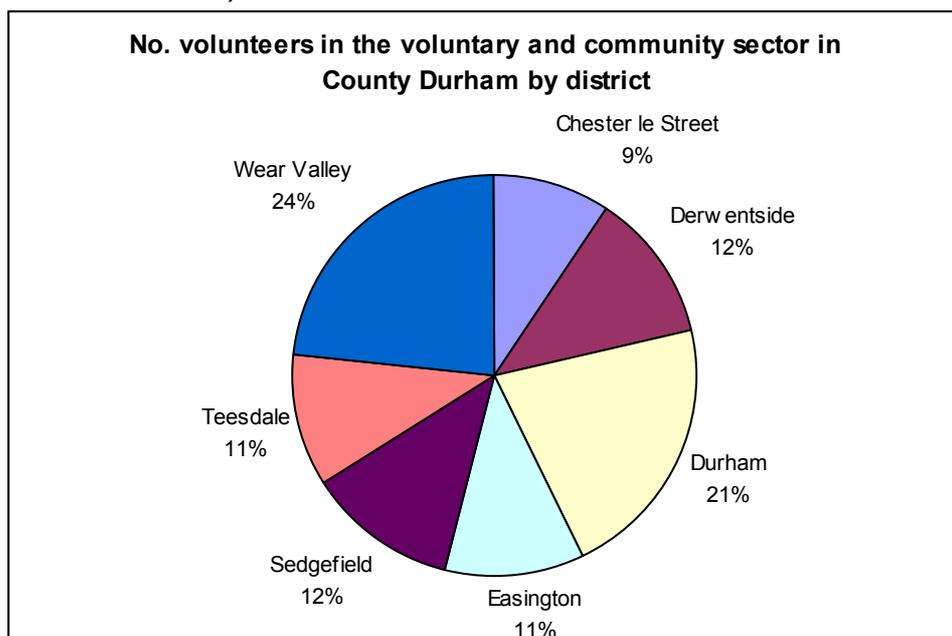


Figure 4 – Volunteers by district



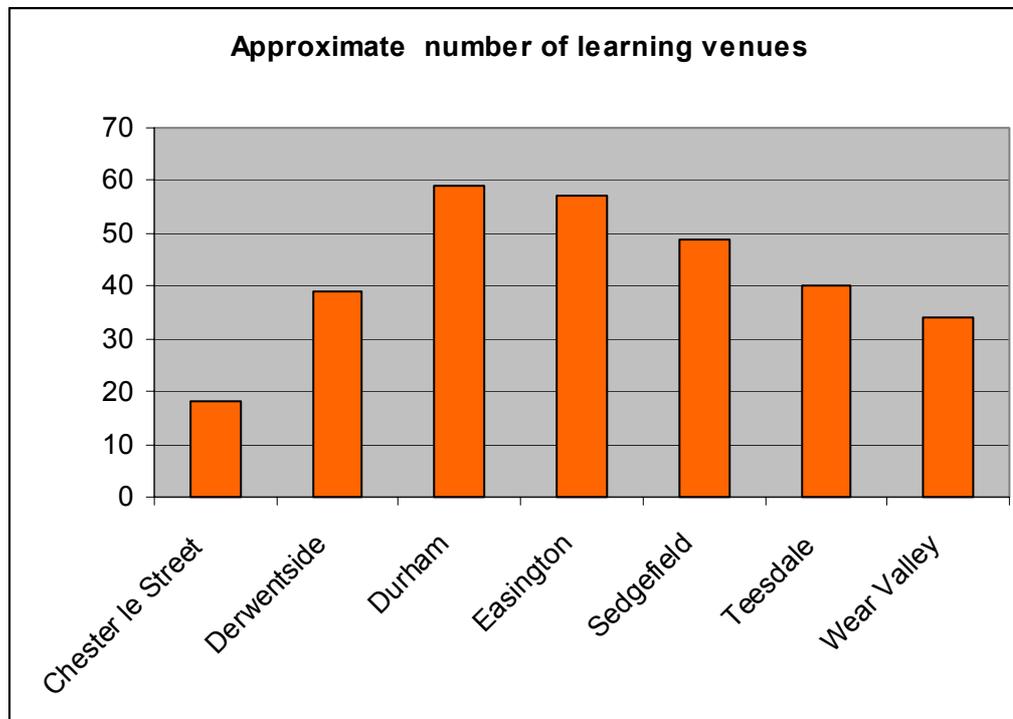
Location of learning venues

Our research has indicated that there are around 300 learning venues within County Durham. These range from village halls offering very locally focused learning, learndirect, UK Online and Education in the Community centres, through to commercial training providers based in the County. It should also be noted that providers based outside County Durham also operate within the area, such as freelance trainers and providers based in Newcastle upon Tyne. These have been excluded.

The purpose of this mapping exercise was to provide us with an indication of the supply of learning facilities available. Our research has really only scratched the surface of provision, as this study could in no way cover the detail needed to assess the extent and detail of learning provision in terms of courses and their relevance to the sector. We are aware that there are a number of venues not included in the list, (such as 19 community buildings in Chester le Street). This is partly because we

were unable to consult with a number of due to their work commitments and the time constraints of and scope of this study. Figure 5 below, otherwise provides a reasonable indication of the spread of learning venues in the County.

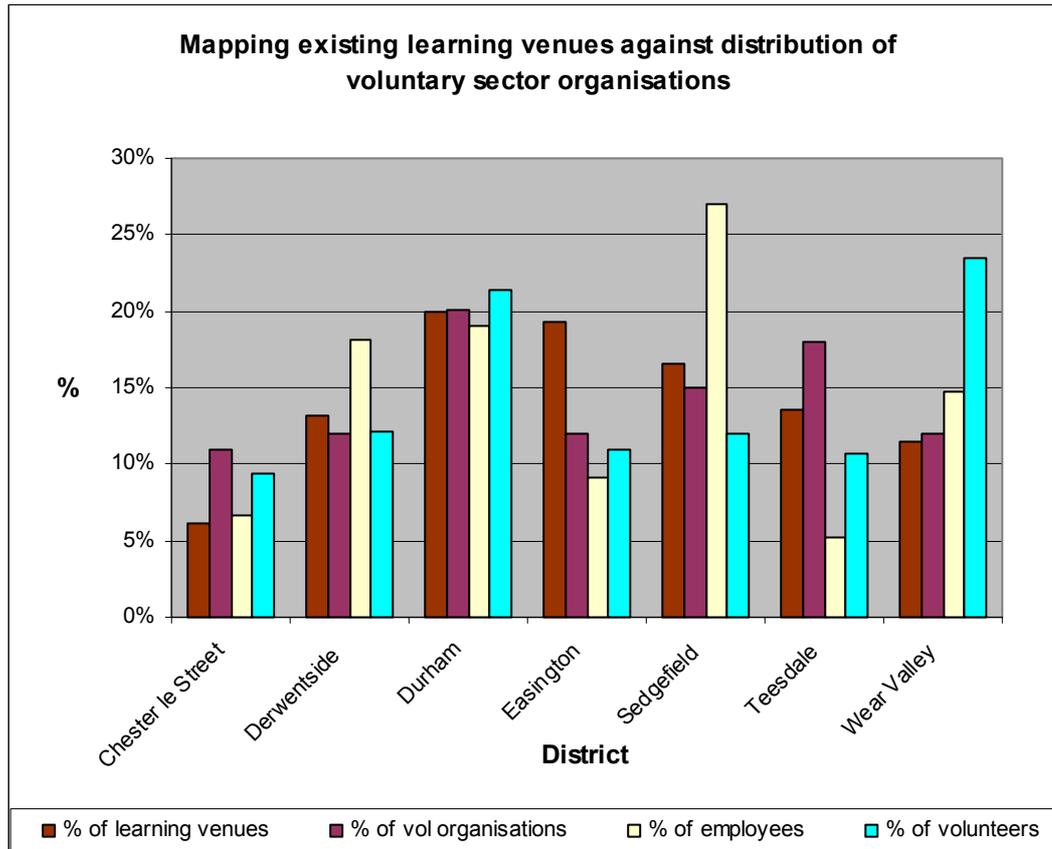
Figure 5 –Approximate spread of learning venues in County Durham



Within these limitations, we have made general observations about the availability of learning. Our consultation has indicated that there are some generic skills needs such as skills for life, management skills and sector-focused learning including managing volunteers and governance, which are readily available within this network of learning venues. Many of the above centres offer lifestyle and leisure courses which are considered to be a valuable part of any learning offer as the experience of the Walkers Learning Centre (see Appendix I) suggests that such courses are a key to engaging learners who would otherwise not participate in lifelong learning.

When comparing the location of venues against the spread of staff and volunteers (see Figure 6 below), this presents a useful comparison of the potential for the sector to better access existing learning provision. The Workforce Development report indicates that travel to training is not a barrier (indeed it indicates that there are effectively no barriers to training), but we questioned this during our consultation and it was generally agreed that staff and volunteers are reluctant to travel far for training, so having learning venues within reasonable distance is essential.

Figure 6 – mapping of venues against location of staff and volunteers



This chart suggests that, with exceptions like the number of paid staff in Sedgefield and the number of volunteers in Wear Valley, there is an adequate spread of learning venues when compared to location of staff and volunteers. Figure 6 could also suggest that there is a gap in provision for the sector in Chester le Street, however Chester le Street CVS’s Bullion Hall is currently providing a venue for IT and other training and there are 19 community buildings all offering training in various forms.

Summary

The staff and volunteers working within the voluntary and community sector represent a significant proportion of the population of County Durham. A proportion of these will already be engaged in learning, either of their own choice as individuals utilising the huge range of learning services available throughout the county, or as participants in work-related learning.

The west of the county, rural in its nature, tends to exhibit higher levels of participation within the voluntary and community sector, than the more urban east, which also has some of the most deprived wards in the country. Easington has the highest proportion of the number of residents with no qualifications in the north east and the third highest in the country. In terms of the number of learning venues, Easington has the second highest number of learning centres in County Durham (reflecting the need to address the education and skills issues apparent in this district) while the numbers of centre in Teesdale and Wear Valley are lower, reflecting the dispersal of a lower population over a larger geographic area.

Overall, the supply of learning venues throughout the county is considered adequate for the location of staff and volunteers within the sector and this has been confirmed via our consultations with the key stakeholders in the funding of learning and the voluntary and community sector.

Funder's strategy - County Durham LSC

As part of the consultation process, the views of the LSC were sought.

The LSC have been involved in consultations on this proposal from the beginning. Whilst the initial proposal was for a sector specific Learning Resource Centre, the LSC raised the issue of over-provision and duplication and suggested that some research into the sector's needs should be undertaken.

The LSC is supportive of the work being done by OVN and in particular the OVNNSA. It believes that there is an important opportunity for the OVNNSA to coordinate and broker training across what it recognises to be a huge growth sector. The current co-financing round includes a focus on the voluntary and community sectors.

Consultation with stakeholders

Methodology

The consultation exercise took place over a four-week period with a number of key stakeholders in a group meeting and in face-to-face and telephone interviews.

Discussion

In the first instance a meeting with representatives of five learning organisations revealed a high level of support for the concept of a Learning Resource Centre and highlighted a range of significant needs within the sector.

A series of structured interviews with individuals, both by telephone and in person reinforced the sector's support for a learning centre in some form, identified a number of training needs and remarked on a number of barriers to learning that may be encountered.

There is clearly a need for sector-related training for both staff and volunteers. The range of needs is varied, and this may relate to the nature of the organisation, and the methods used to identify a training need are not always formalised. There is a consistent message from all the participants, that there is a wealth of provision, that there is a need to coordinate it and that cooperation and partnerships are the way forward.

County Durham Voluntary and Community Sector Working Together Forum

A focus group took place in early February with some members of the Forum. This was attended by a number of Forum members of whom a series of pre-defined questions were asked. The focus group approach enabled us to pose a set of broad questions which then elicited both individual and group-shared responses, enabling us to conduct a deeper analysis of relevant points raised. It also gave participants the opportunity to suggest other individuals and organisations that should also have an input into the research.

As the spread of learning venues throughout the county is extensive, a centre in the OVNNSA must have some significant additionality and be different to what is already available. There is no point in adding a resource which creates additional competition unless such a centre offers a specialism such as high level qualifications. Some work needs to be done in assessing whether or not the 300 or so centres in County Durham meet or can meet the needs of the sector.

Policies of the public agencies change regularly and the sector is highly sensitive to changes to the funding of learning (the sector's ability to deliver staff development because of its dependency on public funding). Some suggest that the sector needs a funding expert - the OVNNSA could play a role in facilitating sourcing of funding via an awareness of funding policy and availability together with assisting organisations to apply for funding. While funding is an issue for the voluntary and community sector, the LSC's Employer Training Pilot EQ8 has not been adopted fully by the voluntary and community sector. Reasons for this include the fact that the voluntary and community sector has difficulty in releasing staff for training (despite the fact that EQ8 funds could cover the cost of this) and that EQ8 is focused on qualifications at level 2 (much training in the voluntary and community sector is non-accredited), and is only available to paid staff.

The sector needs to differentiate carefully the differing training needs of staff and volunteers and establish engagement and marketing strategies which best enable the value of training to be recognised. It was agreed that many organisations in the sector lack the capacity to plan training – including training needs analysis, training and development planning – and to budget for it. However, there are structures in place to provide this – for example, the CVS has a development worker who helps organisations develop suitable structures.

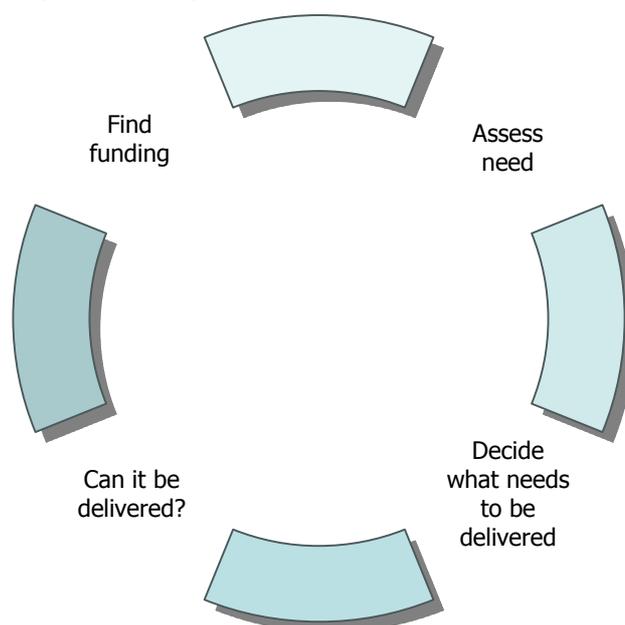
In addition to the skills listed as required in the future, the following areas were also identified:

- Training needs analysis skills
- Representation skills (ie contributing to meetings)
- Chairing meeting skills
- Managing funding (once funding is raised – rather than fund raising)
- Bid writing
- Business planning

It was noted that these needs are already being addressed sporadically throughout the county and it was agreed that online or other means of distributed learning could address the issue of unwillingness and inability to travel or limited demand.

While there is general support for what the OVNVA would like to achieve for the sector, any investment in capital or revenue activity needs to ensure that it works in partnership and co-operation with existing providers to share best practice and replicates, not duplicates: there is a clear role identified in improving the co-ordination of learning provision through an opportunity to identify local needs and facilitate local delivery which replicates and builds on good practice elsewhere in the county.

This can be presented diagrammatically:



Some excellent web resources have already been identified as useful to the sector:

- www.onevoice.co.uk
- www.charityskills.com
- www.coursefinder.co.uk
- www.voluntarysectorskills.org.uk
- www.voluntaryskills.com

However the project evolves, it will need to market itself through partnership:

- using the existing partnership networks to promote its work
- putting the learner first and marketing a range of courses from a range of providers (so there is no distinction between providers)

Interviews with other stakeholders

As part of our telephone research with the Forum, we spoke with a number of members of this Forum and asked a series of pre-defined questions. Below is a summary of the individual discussions.

Participant 1

Workforce development via training does take place within the sector. However, the approaches to dealing with it vary across the sector and also within individual organisations. This is mainly because of a lack of structure for workforce development. The sector can however be creative in its approach to staff development, often engaging with providers of training to offer to take up free places on pre-arranged courses at little or no cost. Unfortunately, the ability to conduct effective training needs analysis and performance appraisals is limited within much of the sector. The idea of taster days offering an insight into a range of skills areas could present organisations with an opportunity to start to develop an understanding of organisational structure and how training can impact on service delivery.

Training of volunteers is a major issue for the sector – there are some key points that impact on training decisions:

- Who picks up the cost? (the individual or the organisation?)
- The volunteer's motivation (how far can you push someone's goodwill?)
- Timing of training (for those who also work, training during a weekday is not an option)

The easiest way to engage staff and volunteers is to make it as easy as possible to access and ensuring that the funding is readily in place. Training budgets are few and far between in the sector and the sector is reliant on public funding to help. But with pressure from public bodies to secure qualifications (something that is not a priority for the sector), funding issues are increasingly restricting the sector's ability to train its staff.

With a huge range of learning venues and opportunities throughout County Durham, the OVNVA could use its services to map and co-ordinate learning provision for the sector, and distribute this information to the organisations. There has been so much money invested in the community sector, that the OVNVA could play an instrumental role in facilitating the sustainability of community venues, particularly when resources are becoming scarcer. The OVNVA has a role to play in consolidating what is already available, facilitating "joining things up" and lobbying the LSC to engage with the local learning partnerships to improve what is already available to truly meet the needs of the sector.

Participant 2

We met with Participant 2 as it was felt that she had an excellent insight into issues around a previously established (but now closed) voluntary and community sector learning resource facility. This insight has enabled us to consider the following, which should be incorporated into any proposal developed by the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy:

- Sustainability of the proposed activity should be considered up front. It is essential to ensure that the centre is sustainable and that exit strategies once initial capital and revenue funds have ceased must be in place
- The proposed activity must be built upon the core values and ethos of the OVNVA. These values must be reflected in the proposal. There is a great deal of trust and partnership already in place and nothing must jeopardise this
- It is essential to build outreach activity into the proposal from day one. County Durham is such a geographically unique county that travel by participants is a real barrier.
- There are many examples of good practice in learning and training and these must be shared as part of the proposed activities, providing the opportunity to replicate what works
- The proposed activity will need to recognise and incorporate the differing needs of different parts of the sector

Summaries of Meetings with Ufi/learndirect and E-Learning North East

Consultations were held with representatives of these organisations.

E-learning provides an opportunity and a means to enable individuals to access quality learning without being tied to traditional forms of delivery. Typically, the voluntary and community sector is actively engaging learners in taught, classroom or workshop based learning and training which is held in a specific location on pre-arranged dates and times. For some groups within the sector, this may hinder their chances of participating in learning.

The learndirect provision in the north east is managed by Ufi/learndirect who contract with the region's hub E-Learning North East who subsequently contract with learning centres. Centres are expected to offer a range of services to support learndirect learners including personal and/or subject tutors, access to PCs and other facilities. In return, centres are able to earn about £100 per course completion. A link venue offers fewer services than a centre and earnings are flexible, dependant on what is negotiated with its host centre (who normally provides the tutor support and administration). There are currently 21 public access venues in County Durham offering learndirect (as either a centre or a link). The nearest learndirect provision is currently Sedgefield Borough Council's Training Centre on Merrington Lane but status can change regularly and following a February 2005 tendering round for centres, there is likely to be scope for further provision within Spennymoor.

Ufi's current priorities are:

- Targeting learners with low level or no qualifications (ie pre level 2)
- Skills for life – addressing literacy and numeracy
- SMEs

Neither Ufi/learndirect nor E-Learning North East is actively working strategically with the voluntary and community sector, although at a centre level, there may well be some co-operation.

There is a range of courses which could be appropriate for the sector (based on identified skills requirements):

Skills need	Possible learndirect materials
Fundraising	None available
Team working	Personal Development courses including Personal Development Toolkit
Organising and planning	Planning Work, Planning Change, Planning Development, Management and Organisation
Oral and written communication	Communication Skills (100130SM003)
Customer handling	A range of courses including Customer Service Skills (100130SM007)
Problem solving	Effective Problem Solving (100451SM021)
Leadership	Leadership Skills (100130SM001) Managing Volunteers (100408SM001) Leadership (100594SM026)
Literacy and numeracy	A comprehensive range of courses including the national tests

With the exception of "Managing Volunteers," all courses are generic skills courses, not related specifically to the voluntary and community sector.

There is increasing pressure on learning providers to expect all learners to contribute to the cost of learning and learndirect is no different. Its centres are expected to charge for courses (unless a learner is on benefit enabling the centre to claim fee remission) although discretion is left to the centres at the moment.

Learndirect has 2 distant ways of engaging learners – firstly outreach where people go into companies and offer learndirect within the workforce (although there is no formal training needs assessment for whole organisations) and secondly community based learning provision where learndirect is an add-on to local services already available. Learndirect is on offer as part of a range of learning and services –

an integrated service available to all current and potential users of a venue and as such while it increases choice available, it does not offer full sustainability for a learning venue.

Interviews with learning co-ordinators

Interviews were also held with five of the six learning co-ordinators in the county. A standard set of questions was used. These interviews resulted in a list of key issues for the sector arising from the consultation and the OVNVA's role in addressing them.

Barriers to learning

There are barriers to learning, perceived by training organisations, employers, volunteers and staff. These include the geographic nature of the county not always being conducive to easy travel to training venues. Spennymoor is regarded by some (mainly in the eastern sector) as being fairly straightforward, whilst those in the more rural areas to the west see themselves as disadvantaged. The cost of travel, particularly for volunteers is regarded as a barrier. The time involved in travelling is cited as a barrier, particularly where evening study is required. Most organisations recognise the value of training their staff and volunteers and indicated that in principle, release from work would not be a problem. In reality, however, there are often logistical problems in providing cover for key staff, particularly in smaller organisations. A further issue relates to staff and their need to catch up with their workload when they have been released for training in work hours. This often induces a feeling of guilt - "Should I really be taking a day out for training when I have so much to do?" - resulting in some reluctance to participate. Organisations taking a fully supportive role in training their staff do not seem to suffer from this problem. In respect of the proposed centre, it was generally felt that it would be inappropriate to locate a single resource in Spennymoor, but that a range of options should be considered. These included a scaled down resource in Merrington House to complement the established provision, the development of blended learning, including online delivery and the establishment of peripatetic coordinators.

Resources – around 300 community learning venues and training providers

There is a full acknowledgment and understanding of the wealth of resources spread across the county. Whilst creating a sector-centred resource centre in Spennymoor is generally regarded as a beneficial idea, there are some concerns about the potential duplication of resources and the possibility of a culture of competition that might arise. Without exception our consultation demonstrated a consolidated wish to work in partnership to ensure a coordinated provision.

Understanding training needs and skills gaps

In organisations, the procedures for identifying skills gaps vary. There are some who have an appraisal system which identifies needs and addresses them formally; in others it may be more haphazard. Some of the participants had spent time with organisations in helping to identify training needs and had been able to facilitate some training as a result. This is an area where the skills of the learning coordinator could be utilised on a rather more formal basis.

Co-ordination of information

An important and respected role of the OVNVA is in encouraging a forum of learning organisations to address some of these issues. Stakeholders in the consultation clearly believed that there was a significant role for OVNVA in providing a fulcrum for the exchange and dissemination of related information.

Addressing the future development of the sector – qualifications, IT

The participants were all aware of the period of change that the voluntary and community sector is experiencing. There was some concern expressed over the imminent changes in funding and some were already actively seeking alternative ways of supporting learners in the sector.

Innovation in delivery

The notion of innovative delivery was welcomed. Exploiting new technologies and pedagogies was felt to be a valuable concept. There was, however, some reservation about the reluctance of some learners to embrace new ways of learning. It was acknowledged, however, that given the sector's aim to attract younger people into volunteering and work, that this would be a worthwhile route to take.

Recommendations for the role of OVNVA sector specific learning centre

Overall, the idea of a Learning Resource Centre was supported, although the scale of the centre should be considered very carefully and the services it delivers need to extend beyond straightforward delivery of learning. Below, we have identified the 2 key areas – building the capacity of the OVNVA through additional staff and identifying the service delivery requirements.

Capacity Building Staff

Consider additional staff to fulfil the role of peripatetic coordinators, facilitators, and ambassadors, building and maintaining relationships with the sector and with the existing training providers. The centre should work closely with organisations providing training for the voluntary and community sector, such as CVS, as these organisations have a great deal of resources already available to the sector. This would in part constitute a continuous mapping and brokerage exercise of needs and provision.

Service Delivery Co-ordination

There is substantial scope for the centre to co-ordinate information on learning and share best practice and good courses to a wider audience (by being made available in local areas where it may not have been previously available)

A further coordination role would be in the provision of outreach teaching at existing centres to support centrally delivered training.

There would be a role too in helping the sector to perform training needs analyses, particularly in smaller organisations. Voluntary and community organisations do not generally have the capacity to understand and determine skills needs (because of the high number of low turnover/low or no staff organisations). The centre could offer such a service. This work may also help to coordinate relief support to help smaller organisations release staff for training.

Brokerage

The centre should explore the development of a brokerage service to ensure that localised demand is met by localised supply or where there is no local supplier, OVNVA may negotiate with a 3rd party provider or could deliver through its own resources.

Learning Resource Centre

Establish a small ICT based Learning Resource Centre in Merrington House, Spennymoor, to meet the needs of the sector. This might comprise four PC workstations and a traditional study area offering OVNVA, learndirect and FE provision. The suggested scale will require a relatively small initial capital outlay and will allow for flexibility of provision as the sector grows and changes.

The OVNVA should build on its expertise in management qualifications to offer more and tailored provision using new and emerging technologies. Video conferencing, for example still has to make a significant impact in supporting learning. This is mainly because the technology has not provided a stable and robust infrastructure to make it easy to use. Advances in technology and software, together with lower cost, higher bandwidth communications are paving the way to break down these barriers and it may be appropriate to explore its use to support countywide training.

There are opportunities to develop distance learning materials for the sector in collaboration with partners. Moves towards modular, work-based accreditation in the social care sector may contribute towards these developments too³. It would be worthwhile to explore shared values in the work being done by the Accreditation of WorkPlace Learning Project in Houghton-le-Spring (AWPL).

³ Appendix I - Case Study - Accreditation of WorkPlace Learning Project

Sector Representation Networking

There is a perceived need to continue and build the relationship with the LSC in order to address barriers and assist in engaging the LSC with the sector.

Working in partnership with learning organisations there is a role for OVNUSA encourage some degree of experimentation with innovative provision. Working with partners, particularly the FE sector, there are opportunities for developing technological solutions to some of the barriers mentioned earlier.

Underpinning values to be reflected in any recommendations implemented

Any recommendations implemented will need to have a clear focus and set of objectives from the outset, together with a sustainability strategy which ensures that it remains focused on supporting the voluntary and community sector.

These points of focus will include:

- Outreach provision – enabling barriers to participation in training to be addressed
- Understanding and addressing the differences in skills needs between staff and volunteers
- Understanding and addressing the different requirements for different strata of the sector (eg care v training) – training needs to be sector and sub-sector specific
- Careful consideration for the differing learning styles of individuals to ensure appropriate and consistent methods of delivery

Any recommendations implemented will need to mirror the values and ethos of the OVNUSA – the OVNUSA has worked hard to establish a high level of trust and close working partnerships with the One Voice Network, the voluntary and community sector and the Learning and Skills Council. This must continue for adopted recommendations to be a success.

Costings

Review of budget

The OVNVA had initially developed a proposal based on a fully equipped Learning Resource Centre operating 10 PCs. While the initial budget allowed for capital expenditure, as our research continued, it became apparent that what was needed was not a fully equipped Learning Resource Centre. We therefore decided that an analysis of the budget was not appropriate.

Based on the recommendations, we have indicated a suggested budget for the 2 areas of capacity building and service delivery; however opportunities which arise from innovative technology or the development of distance materials have not been costed, as these are not fully scoped

In compiling these outline costs, we have made the following assumptions:

- The small LRC will be added to the existing network available via DISC Ltd and no extra servers, bandwidth or network security is required
- There is a disabled toilet on the ground floor of the building in which the LRC would be situated and this is accessible by lift, requiring no building alterations
- The LRC will need to address the issue of accessibility hardware and software if required and no allowance has been made for this
- Teaching and tutoring support for the LRC will be provided by external providers, since it is expected that much of the learning to be made available will be delivered in partnership with these providers
- For all of the recommendations, website development will be required. We have not costed this as it would need to be carefully scoped
- Overheads have been omitted from the budget but will need to be established when the final proposal is costed

Learning Resource Centre

Costs	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
4 computers including cabling and networking (hardwired or wireless)	4,000.00	-	-
2 printers including cabling and networking (hardwired or wireless)	1,000.00	-	-
Software - MS Office	1,200.00	-	-
Furniture - desks, chairs, tables, coatstands	1,000.00	-	-
Whiteboard and projector	3,240.00	-	-
Peripherals - flipcharts, pens, scanners, consumables (paper, toner, tea, coffee)	1,000.00	500.00	500.00
Window blinds are in place	-	-	-
Refreshment facilities are in place	-	-	-
Additional support materials and resources	2,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00
Facilitation and technical support 2.5 days per week	9,000.00	9,450.00	9,922.50
Overheads	See Overheads note above		
Staff oncosts (22% of salary costs)	1,980.00	2,079.00	2,182.95
Total	24,420.00	13,029.00	13,605.45

Brokerage and Consultancy services

Costs	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
2 skills coordinators at £25,000 pa	50,000.00	52,500.00	55,125.00
1 administrator at £14,000 pa	14,000.00	14,700.00	15,435.00
Staff oncosts (22% of salary costs)	14,080.00	14,784.00	15,523.20
Travel expenses	9,600.00	9,600.00	9,600.00
Equipment - desks, computers, laptops as appropriate	3,000.00	-	-
Overheads	See Overheads note above		
Telephones	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00
Marketing and promotions	5,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00
Miscellaneous	3,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00
Total	99,680.00	91,584.00	95,683.20

Funding Options

There is a range of funding opportunities, public and private, which could support the development of the recommendations. These are summarised below.

Learning and Skills Council

As the key funder of learning and skills in the UK, the Learning and Skills Council would be the primary funder, however, focused priorities (such as Skills for Life, level 2 qualifications, Modern Apprenticeships) will limit the scope to which mainstream funding could be used to fulfil the OVNVA's objectives. Therefore the greatest opportunity lies with discretionary funding and co-financing. These funds will be focused on priorities and objectives set out in the LSC's plans and availability of funds is limited and competitive. The OVNVA will need to ensure that it is aware of the timing of tendering opportunities, together with levels of resources and expected outcomes and targets to ensure that it seeks the appropriate resources.

Learndirect/Ufi

As a learndirect link centre, an LRC would need to negotiate a referral fee with its managing learndirect centre. There is no formal contract arrangement prescribed by learndirect/Ufi for a link centre, nor any prescribed referral fees. This is because a link centre can take many forms including the supply of tutoring support if appropriate for which something more than a referral fee would be required. Furthermore, a contribution to overheads may also be appropriate if learners spend much of the time following learndirect courses in the link centre (rather than the managing centre). While learndirect could provide a potential lucrative income, the fact that for most learndirect centres, learndirect is only part of its offer means that learndirect income alone could not fully sustain a learning centre.

Charitable trusts

There are a huge number of charitable trusts in the UK, some of which make funds available nationally. For example, the Abbey National Charitable Trust (their website is http://www.abbeynational.com/home/comm_inv/comm_inv-trust.htm) includes education and training as a priority. Like most charitable trusts, there is a maximum grant payable and in the case of the Abbey it is £20,000.

Locally, The Northern Rock Foundation (<http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/>) supports a range of projects in the north east which contribute to its objectives (6 key programmes). These objectives are quite broad and offer scope for funding, in particular via the "Better Sector" Programme, which is focused on making the sector more capable of helping itself and others, articulating its needs and fighting its corner. The Foundation has £18.5m available for 2005.

Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund (<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>) is the organisation which manages funds raised via the national lottery. To be eligible to apply, organisations must be registered charities, or have philanthropic or charitable objectives. The Fund has a range of programmes, some of which are currently being restructured – this includes the Community Fund which would have provided an ideal source of funding, given that its priorities included funding projects that support and develop voluntary and community organisations and facilities. Funding is still theoretically available (applications are being accepted until 31 May 2005) so this does present some opportunity.

Other funding

Other funding may be available via a range of opportunities such as single programme funds and funds managed by strategic partnerships in County Durham. The Integrated Regeneration in County Durham website (www.ircd.co.uk) provides information on a wide range of funding opportunities as well as contact details for the County Council's Regeneration Team.

Income generation – charges for services

With increasing pressure from funders to ensure that individuals and employers are making a contribution to training (there are many exceptions, including the level 2 entitlement to free learning and skills for life), it is likely that some services could be charged for and a small amount of income could be generated. Organisations within the sector have indicated a willingness to pay for training and this could particularly apply where there is recognition of the value and quality of what is on offer.

Conclusion

We have made an assessment of earlier research and conducted our own research into the state of learning provision and demand in the county by means of desk research, telephone and face to face interviews with stakeholders and providers to assess the feasibility of establishing a Learning Resource Centre to support the voluntary and community sector in County Durham.

Learning resource centre

Our conclusion is that there is currently a sufficient provision of training and learning resources within and close to the county to satisfy the demand in general and that to make a significant physical provision in the form of a permanent resource in Spennymoor would be inappropriate at this time and would probably duplicate existing provision. We do acknowledge, however, that a small resource centre to support and expand the OVNVA's current provision would be sensible and would benefit the sector as a whole.

Training supply and demand

Our findings have established that there are some significant gaps in the training provision; those that address in particular, the governance and management training needs of the sector and we recommend that some further work should be commissioned to explore these needs in more detail with a view to finding a suitable method of providing specific training. There is evidence of other training needs for staff and volunteers within the sector, ranging from basic life skills to accountancy.

Coordination and brokerage

It is clear from the interviews that the work of the OVNVA is respected and that there are aspects of their role that should be expanded. A significant comment emerging from discussions was (i) that there is a need for an overall coordination role to ensure that the sector's needs are monitored, understood and met efficiently, (ii) that there is a detailed view maintained of the current provision from all training providers and (iii) that the two are "joined up". We believe that the OVNVA could provide this service through peripatetic coordinators whose role it would be to establish and foster relationships with both the sector and providers. They would identify training needs by liaising closely with voluntary and community organisations and matching those needs to appropriate sources of training through their knowledge of the training sector. This will involve the use of the OVNVA's own resources or external providers where necessary.

Funding

There is a degree of concern about the future of funding for training within the sectors. Some of the more established training providers have already begun to explore alternative sources of funding for learning. We would suggest that the OVNVA has a role in identifying and supporting the voluntary and community sector where there are funding issues and where appropriate working with the LSC and others to find solutions.

Appendix I - Case studies of practice in learning delivery

As part of the consultation we were asked to study a number of learning venues more closely. One such centre is the Walkers Learning Centre, which has been flagged as a model of good practice. However this is not the only example of best practice in the county, there are many such examples. In addition, we do not wish to advocate this as a model to for the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy to replicate.

Walkers Learning Centre, Peterlee – Case Study I

The Walkers Learning Centre is recognised as a centre of excellence for learning and has recently won an award for adult literacy and numeracy (Business in the Community). The centre maintains a high profile in the local community and also the wider community – the BBC Radio Newcastle bus has broadcast live from the site and the University of London is conducting research into the impact of learning with 10 of the centre's learners.

Background

Walkers has a culture of learning – the 500 staff are briefed regularly on the status of the company and do seek the views of staff on issues affecting them. The company introduced an in-house learning centre within the factory (with 5 PCs) a number of years ago, but found that a lack of dedicated staff (it was effectively being run by factory staff on their own time) meant that the facility was under-utilised. In response to the emerging issue of basic skills, in partnership with One North East and Easington District Council, the company agreed a funding package to enable staff to be employed to develop the facility further. The initial objective was to address basic skills needs, as it was recognised that there was a high level of literacy and numeracy needs within the district, which implied that a proportion of the Walkers workforce would fall into this group. The initial objectives of the centre included delivering basic skills and other training, which would increase people's skills and the productivity of staff within the workplace.

It became apparent that the initial venue was not suitable and the centre moved to a location outside the factory, but still on Walkers site. This venue is larger, offered greater scope for delivering a wider range of courses and, being located next to the main road, offered scope for direct access to the centre without passing through site security.

Description

The Walkers centre is well equipped and well staffed. It offers:

- Four training rooms, each suitable for different purposes – the main room houses the IT suite, and can also be used for yoga and Tai Chi; a second room has a multimedia whiteboard and plasma TV; a third room, divided from the second room by a movable wall (which enables a larger space to be created if needed) has audio-visual facilities; and a fourth room has 2 plasma TVs and is set up for video-conferencing
- The IT suite has 15 computers, including one suitable for disabled users, a 2 meg broadband connection, 2 printers, 1 scanner, 1 photocopier, a multimedia whiteboard and 4 laptops (for loan). There is also video editing equipment
- Other equipment in the centre includes digital camera and digital camcorder, DVD recorders and players, a TV/video combo as well as the 3 44" plasma TVs
- 2 full time staff, both multi-functional. One acts as centre manager and liaises with partners as well as his centre based duties; one acts as centre administrator; both carry out advice and guidance functions and tutoring duties. There is also a cleaner and IT maintenance is provided by Walkers IT department based in Coventry
- The centre also buys in additional tutoring support when required (mainly in the area of basic skills)

Courses offered

The centre is a learndirect centre so offers the wide range of learndirect courses including IT, basic skills and personal development/employability/management courses. It is an accredited centre for CLAIT, ECDL and City and Guilds basic skills so can offer learners a qualification.

The centre also offers a wide range of taught leisure courses including 10 week courses including flower arranging, Tai Chi, digital photography, antiques, aromatherapy, yoga and PC building and maintenance. The centre is only able to do this because of the flexibility of the space to adapt to the requirements for these courses. The delivery and funding (to be discussed later) of these courses is key to the success of the centre as they are the hooks to those users who would otherwise not engage in learning. Once involved, they are then given advice and options for further learning.

Other uses

In addition to courses, the centre also offers free Internet access (for any legitimate purpose), video games sessions and access to advice and guidance through video conferencing as part of Durham Online (www.durham-online.org.uk). The centre is therefore a social venue, offering a range of services in a relaxed environment.

The centre's users

Looking at the diary of use for one week alone (week commencing 24 January), it is obvious that the success of the centre is through engaging a wide range of users. The centre is open to

- staff (who are offered free learning – paid for by Walkers) to use outside of their working hours
- family and friends of staff (the centre operates a membership system to monitor users)
- the local community
- groups of people who are on learning programmes that are arranged in conjunction with partnerships developed with Walkers (eg Business in the Community).

The centre is open 53 hours per week, offering access 6 days per week, and offers access until midnight on Thursdays. The opening hours are managed by the 2 staff working shifts around the opening hours, so the centre is always staffed when open. Users book in so that the staff can manage the usage effectively.

Walkers is a non-unionised workplace and therefore does not have the advantage of union learning reps. As a result, the centre's staff actively go into the workplace to talk to factory workers about the learning centre and what it has to offer. The centre produces regular newsletters and flyers. Newly employed staff are required to spend time in the centre during their induction finding out about what the centre has to offer. The company also rewards staff who carry out learning by, not only covering the cost of their learning, but with gifts such as centre T-shirts and USB drives for successful learning.

While there is no crèche facility in or near the centre, the centre offers sessions for children (homework, fun and games) every day. This encourages family learning and enables parents to study without distraction.

The centre, building on Walkers' community programme (which is a very positive and open approach to engaging the local community), is able to work with the community sector and other partners to market the facility to a wider audience. Programmes on offer include tasters and tours of the Walkers factory, enabling unemployed people to develop an understanding of what working there would be like.

Walkers has a number of sites around the UK, all of which are monitoring the development of the Peterlee centre. The Peterlee centre is also able to offer its provision to staff at other sites and has a number of learners following its programmes remotely (online learning facilitates this).

The centre currently has 254 members (since June 2004) and engages around 20 new members per month. There are around 80 regular users per month, 30-40 course enrolments per month with 20 course completions. Withdrawal rates are very low. Usage by staff tends to reflect shift patterns (ie increased usage for the 2 hours before shifts start and after shifts finish) and low staff usage periods are filled by partnership activities and fun/leisure provision for everyone.

Sustainability

The centre operates as a learndirect centre, which creates a lucrative revenue stream for the centre. Learndirect funding is managed by the University of Sunderland on behalf of the Learning and Skills

Council. The centre does not currently charge its users. The centre is able to retain and re-invest all income earned from its activity – the company does not take a share of this.

One of the key success factors is the partnership with external providers. These providers are able to offer a wider range of courses to the centre's users, by bringing in their own staff to deliver courses. Partnerships exist with Aim High, East Durham and Houghall College and Bishop Auckland College who deliver outreach within the centre. Participants on courses are students of the college and it is the college who earns and retains the funding for such provision. At present, Walkers do not make any charges to the colleges for use of the centre, although this is being reviewed.

The company views the centre as integral to its training and development strategy. Company-specified training (most recently in spreadsheets) is delivered to staff in the centre and this type of use is increasing.

Conclusions

The success of the centre is down to a number of key factors:

- the learning culture adopted by Walkers and its willingness to invest its own resources in the centre.
- the "captive audience" of 500 staff on site
- the company's active community engagement policy, thereby opening its doors to the wider community to share Walkers resources and provide an insight into working at Walkers. The company actively supports the centre
- the ability of the centre to work in partnership with other agencies to offer access to specific groups of individuals
- the partnerships with other providers of learning to deliver a wide range of leisure courses within the centre
- being able to offer learners qualifications through its status as an accredited centre, providing more choice
- the dedication of the staff, both through their employment status and their attitudes, training and experiences to be committed to lifelong learning. The centre is well managed
- the membership status of learners, meaning that learners can feel part of a learning community; and staff can effectively engage and track learners proactively (for example, learners are encouraged to book their next session as they leave)
- the marketing strategy adopted by the centre and the company
- the ability of the centre to offer and support remote learning for staff at other sites
- the ease of access for the local community (avoiding site security)
- the flexibility of the centre provided by the range of rooms available
- support for the centre by local and regional agencies – in particular Easington District Council and One North East

Tees Valley Voluntary Sector Training Unit – Case Study II

By contrast, it is helpful to understand the pitfalls of workplace based learning centres, an example of which was the Tees Valley Voluntary Sector Training Unit (VSTU) that is no longer in existence. This was a centre that struggled to deliver its intended objectives and in the end, closed down.

The VSTU was set up following research which indicated a need for further, possibly more formalised and accredited training to build on the work of training organisations such as Skillshare, who tended to offer non-accredited training which was focused on strengthening the voluntary and community sector. At the time, Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) were interested in the idea and agreed to fund the establishment of the Unit. The Unit was established in Middlesbrough offering training from its premises, with 6 or 7 key staff (including tutors) and buying in additional tutor support when needed. The Unit offered mainly IT courses, but also offered management committee training, financial management and interpersonal skills.

As with all funded projects, sustainability became an issue as the TEC funding which supported the centre was time limited. The Unit was pushed down a route of generating money in its own right and focused on delivering to the business sector in an attempt to subsidise its work with the voluntary and

community sector. As a result, it soon lost focus on its initial objectives of supporting the voluntary and community sector and lost its underlying ethos. Another major problem identified was the fact that sector staff and volunteers were not prepared to travel to one point – they wanted locally based and locally controlled training. As a result of this, the VSTU decided to offer outreach provision, but by this time, the Unit had lost its credibility with the sector and so this was unsuccessful. The Unit finally closed about 1998.

AWPL – Case Study III

Accreditation of WorkPlace Learning Project

A £689,000 scheme aimed at providing social workers and care staff with new opportunities to gain accredited national qualifications while working has recently been launched in the region. It is the first of its kind in the country.

The Accreditation of WorkPlace Learning Project (AWPL) is targeting employers in the voluntary and private sectors across the region to sign up their organisations. The scheme has been funded by the Adult Skills Pilot, through the Learning and Skills Council and is being delivered by Topss England. Its objectives are to retain, recruit, and retrain more staff across the region in view of the fact that by 2010 a third more employees in the social care sector will be required to meet the needs of more vulnerable people, including an expanding elderly population. Recruitment and retention of staff is a problem in social care and if it is to be solved, more must be done to encourage and inspire employees to stay in the job they are doing, to attain qualifications, and to seek career opportunities within the sector.

Employers who sign up to the project may become Accredited Organisations so that they can credit rate their staffs' work based learning through all the levels, from basic NVQs through to post graduate level. The system is to be piloted in 2005. This will build on the work already undertaken by employers to enhance the skills of their staff. The objectives are designed to meet Government targets in staff training and the need to increase the number of qualified Social Workers. By encouraging organisations to explore alternative ways to train staff, via the accreditation route, it is anticipated that employers will begin to see themselves in addition as learning organisations.

Appendix II - TalkingHat Associates

The organisation

TalkingHat Associates is a consultancy formed to share the expertise gained in the development of e-learning on a national basis. Peter Rodger and Helen Gardner have a combined experience of over 20 years of the delivery and management of learning and skills. Most recently they have worked together on the development of vision2learn (www.vision2learn.com), a nation-wide web-based learning platform set up by Creating Careers Ltd, which has over 300,000 registrations supported by over 500 online tutors and is used by in excess of 50 FE colleges.

Our expertise

Peter's expertise is in the development, implementation and management of the learning environment, particularly ensuring that it meets the needs of all users (learners, tutors, administrators, college operations managers). In the course of his work he has undertaken some significant pieces of research. These have included learning resources mapping exercises in Tynedale, Wansbeck, North and North East Northumberland, South Tyneside and across the region. The South Tyneside research is particularly significant in that it sought to identify resources, highlight good and best practice and map them against the community's needs. He has also worked with clusters of schools in the north east and north west of England to identify ways in which on-line supported learning strategies can be adopted.

Helen's expertise is in the establishment of learning centres and in the development and management of online tutor recruitment and quality of online learning support. She has been involved in the management and development of e-learning since 1999. An experienced project manager, Helen initially focused on introducing and expanding delivery of e-learning locally within the county of Northumberland through the establishment of learndirect learning centres. Recognising that facilitation of e-learning is critical to successful delivery outcomes, Helen then worked on the development of a national pool of online tutor experts and advising colleges on quality and tutor resource development. Helen has created a wide range of tutoring resources, including quality standards, templates, tutoring courses and workshops and best practice and tutor management guides.

<http://www.talkinghat.co.uk>

Appendix III - Questionnaires used in the consultation

Questionnaire for voluntary and community sector training organisations

On behalf of the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy, we have been mapping the availability of learning against the spread of voluntary and community sector organisations, staff and volunteers. Can we ask you about a dozen questions about the sector and its training please – they should take about 20 minutes? I would be happy to phone back at another time if it is more convenient.

1. Do you work with the voluntary and community sector and on what level? (eg training needs analysis of whole organisation, volunteer skills needs, staff skills needs, training delivery etc)
2. Do you feel that the sector's staff and volunteers need qualifications? If so, what levels?
3. Do you feel that you can cater for the training needs of the voluntary and community sector?
4. Are you aware of any skills shortages amongst staff and volunteers? If so, what are they how are you addressing them?
5. Funding has been identified as a barrier to learning in the sector. Do you think this is going to change as pressure increases for qualifications based learning? (ie do you think funding is going to become more or less of a barrier?)
6. The OVNVA is considering setting up a Learning Resource Centre. What do you think the OVNVA should offer in its LRC (eg courses, qualifications, resources? How could the FE sector contribute)?
7. If a centre was established at the OVNVA in Spennymoor, how appropriate is it's location for sector staff and volunteers?
8. Would it be appropriate for voluntary and community organisations to access the centre through distance learning (eg online) – would this help address their training needs and plans?
9. Do voluntary and community organisations release staff from normal duties for training?
10. What barriers do volunteers face to carry out training?
11. What is the best way to engage sector staff and volunteers in learning?
12. Do you have any examples of best practice in getting staff and volunteers to do some learning?

Questionnaire for voluntary and community sector organisations

On behalf of the One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy, we have been mapping the availability of learning against the spread of voluntary and community sector organisations, staff and volunteers. Can we ask you about a dozen questions please – they should take about 20 minutes? I would be happy to phone back at another time if it is more convenient.

1. Tell me about the needs of your staff and volunteers in terms of training needs and how you address and support them (ie what training is needed and how do you address it – do you have a training plan and budget, contracts with providers etc etc)
2. Do your staff and volunteers need qualifications? If so, what levels?
3. Do you source training externally for your staff and volunteers? If so, who do you use (eg college, local community centre, learndirect, commercial training provider etc)?
4. Do you feel that your training needs are adequately catered for?
5. Did you know that there is a network of around 300 learning venues throughout County Durham?
6. Are you aware of any skills shortages amongst your staff and volunteers? If so, how are you addressing them?
7. Funding has been identified as a barrier to learning. Do you think this is going to change as pressure increases for qualifications based learning? (ie do you think funding is going to become more or less of a barrier?)
8. How important are qualifications to the development of your staff, volunteers and organisation?
9. The OVNVA is considering setting up a Learning Resource Centre. As a potential user of the centre, what do you think the OVNVA should offer in its LRC (eg courses, qualifications, resources? How could the FE sector contribute?)
10. If a centre was established at the OVNVA in Spennymoor, how appropriate is it's location for you, your staff and volunteers (would you use it)?
11. Would it be appropriate for your organisation to access the centre through distance learning (eg online) – would this help address your training needs and plans?
12. Does (or would) your organisation release staff from normal duties for training?
13. What barriers do volunteers face to carry out training?
14. What is the best way to engage your staff and volunteers in learning?
15. Do you have any examples of best practice in getting staff and volunteers to do some learning?

Appendix IV - Summary of learning venues by district

The table below gives an indication of the approximate numbers of learning venues for each district.

While numbers have been adjusted to remove some duplicate entries, the duplication of community based venues (for example, against UK Online Centres) has not been verified because of time constraints. Community based venues include primarily the Education in the Community venues and also, for purposes of categorisation, the 31 village halls in the Teesdale Village Halls Consortium.

'Joint branded centres' are those that are both UK Online and learndirect centres (or links).

Summary of learning venues by district

	UK Online	Learndirect	Joint branded centres	FE	Community based	Training Services	Total
Chester le Street	5	0	0	0	8	5	18
Derwentside	11	4	0	2	19	3	39
Durham	20	2	3	2	19	13	59
Easington	20	2	2	4	18	11	57
Sedgefield	15	4	1	1	20	8	49
Teesdale	5	0	0	2	32	2	41
Wear Valley	17	2	1	1	7	6	34
Total	93	14	7	12	123	48	297

Appendix V - Explanation of key acronyms

Abbreviation used	Full Title	Information
OVNVSA	One Voice Network Voluntary Sector Academy	<p>The OVNVSA supports members of the One Voice Network by facilitating training and workforce development across the sector, raises awareness of career opportunities within the sector, and helps to improve recruitment and retention of staff. It works closely with other organisations across the sector and the county providing management training courses.</p> <p>Sue Northcott Manager OVNVSA Merrington House Merrington Lane Spennymoor 01388 424450</p>
OVN	One Voice Network	OVN is hosted by the Rural Community Council for County Durham. It works to bring together organisations and find practical benefits of working together.
LSC	Learning and Skills Council	The LSC is a national Government organisation with a local office in Durham. Nationally, the LSC is responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training that will improve the skills of England's young people and adults to ensure a workforce of world-class standards.
LRC	Learning and Resource Centre	A facility with ICT and other learning resources.
DISC Ltd	Developing Initiatives for Support in the Community	DISC Ltd is a charity based in the Spennymoor that Develops Initiatives by Supporting Communities, DISC focuses on deprivation and exclusion.