



Case Study:
The Learning and Skills Council

KEY ASPECTS:

- Roadshows help raise awareness among target audience groups
- e-Tendering and more streamlined processes remove barriers to engagement
- Peer coaching service provides targeted support

“Being less prescriptive opens the door to providers who may not work in traditional ways.”

The Learning and Skills Council: Strengthening partnerships with the third sector

Transforming its procurement processes is helping the Learning and Skills Council open up new opportunities for voluntary sector and community providers.

The challenge: engaging with the third sector

In 2004, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) published *Working Together*, a strategy for increasing engagement with the third sector. The White Paper *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* published in 2006 called on the LSC to open up the learning and skills market to a wider range of providers. At the same time, a series of LSC strategy documents highlighted the need to do more for the most excluded and disadvantaged sections of society.

The solution: responding to providers' needs

The LSC has launched a number of initiatives designed to open up its procurement process. These include running roadshows to raise awareness among providers, working with providers to design tenders that better reflect the needs of their client groups and moving from a paper-based to an e-tendering process.



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The action: raising awareness and streamlining processes

The LSC's first step was to develop a comprehensive strategy for increasing engagement with the third sector. This included a set of regional roadshows designed to publicise the opportunities available for third sector providers to work with the LSC. The roadshows also gave providers a chance to network with each other, and explore the possibility of working together on funding bids.

The next step was to update the tender process. Consultation with a range of providers identified a need for specifications that better reflected the needs of client groups, such as unemployed people and young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS). 'Being less prescriptive in our specifications in some regions has opened the door to organisations who may not work in traditional ways but who are nevertheless effective and successful providers' says Cheryl Turner, senior policy manager at LSC's national office.

A new e-tendering system is boosting efficiency and further broadening access. 'It's much quicker and simpler,' says Cheryl Turner. 'Rather than completing many lengthy paper forms, providers can go through a quick online approval process. They're then free to bid for work anywhere in the country.'

The Council is working with NIACE to provide peer support for potential third sector bidders. 'The scheme is designed to put new and potential providers in touch with third sector coaches who already have an in-depth knowledge of working with the LSC,' says Cheryl Turner. 'It's proving extremely popular, and the feedback we get is very positive.'

The result: more partnerships with third sector providers

The LSC now has a procurement process that better addresses the needs of third sector providers. Many unnecessary barriers to entry have been removed, and technology has streamlined the whole process. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of third sector providers winning contracts: in some parts of the country, the figure has more than doubled. ■