Third Sector Learning and Skills Case Studies

Report
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Chapter 1

Project rationale and methodology

1.1. Project rationale

1.1.1. The Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) national strategy for its engagement with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), Working Together (2004), identified key strategic and operational roles for VCS sub-regional consortia. These emerging arrangements had diverse structures, purposes and processes but a common focus on enhancing VCS involvement with learning and skills.

1.1.2. Both the LSC and the VCS recognised the potential of consortia to act as a conduit between LSC funding and the broad range of largely small-scale VCS providers whose expertise was key to the delivery of the government’s learning and skills targets, particularly amongst more excluded communities. Over time, and to differing degrees, consortia were set up in all regions to deliver a range of functions including: advocacy; information synthesis and supply; representation; funding source; and direct delivery. Whilst consortia have always been independent VCS arrangements that are responsive to the needs of the VCS and their local communities, the scale and rapidity of their emergence was stimulated and supported by LSC policy, funding and brokerage, at local, regional and national levels.

1.1.3. Although the Working Together strategy, and its subsequent implementation, shaped the growth pattern of many individual consortia, the concept of VCS providers collaborating to secure contracts and to enhance programme quality and levels of accreditation, pre-dates the LSC.

1.1.4. As a relatively enduring feature of VCS infrastructure, therefore, learning and skills consortia have developed and functioned within a policy environment that has changed with bewildering speed and frequency – in relation to the Third Sector, the LSC, and the learning and skills sector as a whole. Inevitably, they have responded to these profound structural and policy shifts, variously expanding and contracting, and refocusing or disappearing. However, throughout, the strategic significance of consortia has continued to be recognised and promoted. Identifying the ways in which they have experienced and reacted to their external environment and capturing some of the detail of their individual journeys through case studies, will enable the LSC, and departments across government, to understand how best to engage with consortia in the future.

1.2. Aims and objectives

1.2.1. The project aim was to develop a detailed, current understanding of the diverse development patterns of VCS learning and skills consortia.

1.2.2. The project objectives were to:

- identify the drivers for change behind consortia development;
- consider the particular causes and impacts of the identified development patterns; and
- construct an evidence base to inform LSC planning for future engagement with Third Sector providers.
1.3. **Methodology**

1.3.1. The project was originally scheduled to take place between September 2008 and February 2009 with the aim of compiling largely qualitative information for a series of case studies. The focus was on established consortia in order to capture their developmental processes and any changes over time in response to external and internal pressures. Established consortia were identified using data from a consortia mapping exercise undertaken by NIACE, for the LSC, in February 2008.

1.3.2. The project followed a five-stage methodology

**Stage 1:** Development and agreement of sampling criteria and selection. Agreed sampling criteria were that consortia should:
- be well established (on the grounds that those at earlier development stages would not be able to demonstrate changes over time sufficiently);
- offer a geographical spread;
- range in their scale of operation and membership size;
- range in the percentage and type of learning and skills delivery undertaken and supported; and
- cover both rural and urban contexts.

**Stage 2:** Desk research and collection of materials from participating consortia in order to develop an understanding of their history and rationale (see Appendix 2).

**Stage 3:** Development of a visit framework (see Appendix 3) followed by case study visits by a NIACE researcher, including semi-structured interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders.

**Stage 4:** Case studies drafted and returned to participating consortia for amendment/confirmation.

**Stage 5:** Submission of draft report to LSC Senior Policy Manager, VCS.

1.3.3. The fieldwork was conducted in October and November 2008 (see Appendix 4) to the consortia selected using the agreed criteria. Six reserve consortia were identified and agreed with the LSC but as all consortia in the sample were able to participate, these were not involved.

1.3.4. The seven participating consortia were:

- Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium (North East Region)
- Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium (East Midland Region)
- Sussex VCS Learning Consortium (South East Region)
- Humber Learning Consortium (Yorkshire and the Humber Region)
- Cumbria Learning Links (North West Region)
- VC Train (Yorkshire and the Humber Region)
- South London Learning Consortium (London Region)

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1 See consortia map on [http://www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/employer/vcs.htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/employer/vcs.htm)
1.3.5. Five of the seven consortia were visited and face-to-face interviews were conducted with individuals, pairs, and small groups of key stakeholders. Interviewees included:

- consortia staff;
- Board members and Trustees;
- representatives of member organisations;
- founding or original consortium members;
- learners; and
- representatives of ‘parent’ or accountable bodies.

1.3.6. Due to time constraints and logistical challenges it provided impossible to arrange visits to two of the participating consortia (Cumbria Learning Links and South London Learning Consortium). In these cases, data was collected through telephone interviews. Table 1 provides details of the number and type of interviews conducted and the role of the interviewee in each consortium.

**Table 1 – Case study interview summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consortium</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Role of interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews conducted during visit to the consortium</td>
<td>1. Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Contracts Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Board member who is also a learner and who has undertaken assessor training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews conducted during visit to the consortium</td>
<td>1. Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Contracts Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Accreditation Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Three learners who had accessed training and were also representatives of member organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Three members of the Board of Trustees who were also representatives of member organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex VCS Learning Consortium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews conducted during visit to the consortium</td>
<td>1. Partnership Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Consortium member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Representative from the accountable body (Action in Rural Sussex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humberside Learning Consortium</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>1. Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Director of Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Director of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consortium</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Interviewer Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria Learning Links</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Telephone interview</td>
<td>1. Network Activities Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC Train</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>1. Consultant involved in setting up the consortium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>conducted during visit</td>
<td>2. Former chair of the Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to the consortium</td>
<td>3. Six members from five organisations representing the three thematic clusters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Trustee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Current Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Two long-standing staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South London Learning Consortium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Telephone interviews</td>
<td>1. Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>conducted during visit</td>
<td>2. Representative of member organisation and Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to the consortium</td>
<td>3. Local LSC representative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of interviews** 39

1.3.7. All interviews were recorded digitally to ensure information and quotations could be verified. Interview data was drafted into individual case studies and then returned to the respective consortia for verification. The final version of each case study is presented in Chapter 2.
Chapter 2

The case studies

Case Study 1

Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium

Case study summary

The Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium operates under the umbrella of the Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN) and does not have a separate governing body.

The consortium has a secretariat which is part of a full-time post hosted by NCDN.

Membership is free and open to all local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that offer workforce or community-based learning and have an interest in learning and skills in a community context.

Initially (2004/05), the consortium received £30,000 core funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) under national Capacity Building funding that was linked directly to the “Working Together” strategy. The aim was to develop and implement “…a ‘Working Together strategy for Northumberland’ to enable the sector to meet its skills needs”. The LSC awarded a further £104,000 for a workforce development programme which was matched by Capacity Builders funds to enable a more flexible development phase.

The learning element of NCDN’s turnover in 2006-7 and 2007-8 was approximately £200,000 each year and is estimated at £75,000 for 2008-9.

The Learning Consortium works collaboratively with a range of partners and is reportedly seen by the LSC as a significant learning and skills player in the region. It has a rural and workforce development focus.

The main challenges it faces are the effects of a perceived shift from sub-regional to regional LSC commissioning, and the restructuring of Northumberland local authorities into one Unitary Authority.

Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium considers its greatest achievement to be the number of learners it has been able to reach through partnership working. Its main short-term aim is to sustain and build its profile throughout the Machinery of Government transition period so that it is in a position to continue working in the area of learning and skills and community development in the future.

A  Context and background

1.1.  Rational for development

1.1.2. Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium is well established and covers the county of Northumberland in the North East region. The consortium grew out of Northumberland
Community Development Network (NCDN) which was established in 2002 by practitioners in the sub-region looking for coherence around community development work across the sub region. The learning consortium operates under the umbrella of NCDN and has no physical base of its own. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) gave the network £5,000 Local Intervention Development (LID) funding to “explore if a network approach within the community would help to align what they were doing around learning a bit better”. This led eventually to the establishment of a learning consortium as part of NCDN in 2005.

1.1.3. Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium predates the Northumberland VCS Consortium, which is a separate organisation. Both are concerned with the needs of local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. However, the former has a specific remit around learning and skills whilst, according to its website, the latter aims “…to provide a voice for the sector to secure a better deal for the huge variety of groups and organisations in the county”.

1.1.4. Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium’s early development was linked to Working Together (the LSC’s national strategy for its engagement with the VCS) following an event held by NCDN to explore the potential for collaboration between the LSC and the VCS. In particular, there was an interest from public sector partners in how VCS skills could be used to improve “access for people into the mainstream, and aspiration which was narrower than NCDNs for the sector”.

1.1.5 NCDN was seen as “pretty unique” and suited to this task because of its explicit commitment to community development work. Prior to establishing the learning consortium, NCDN secured LSC funding to undertake action research to “…explore VCS learning in terms of supply and demand”. The project consulted 100 people volunteering or working in the sector. Reportedly, “it gave this remarkable conclusion that we wanted to hear; that 70 percent of those people wanted their learning to be in the voluntary and community sector.” From the outset, the learning consortium regarded addressing the skills needs of VCS employees and volunteers as key. Although the Regional Skills Action Plan for the Voluntary and Community Sector 2005-2008 (produced by the North East VCS Regional Skills Forum) mentions community development, it is reportedly neither core nor explicit.

1.2. Initial funding sources

1.2.1. Initial funding in 2004 for the learning consortium came from LSC Working Together funding: £10,000 was allocated to each of the four North East sub regions to “kick-start” consortia; and a further £30,000 was provided in 2005-6 by the LSC via the VCS Skills Forum to deliver “VCS-style” Management Skills Training specifically tailored to the needs of the sector. The first part of the funding was used to explore and establish the learning consortium’s over-all approach, and the second was seen as “an opportunity to start collaborating” on delivery. Approximately 14 different aspects of VCS Management Skills were offered and delivered by a range of local providers to 72 people over a four month period between April and July 2005.

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In this capacity, NCDN has been a Community Development Assessment Centre since 2004 and a City and Guilds provider.

According to the ‘Let’s Work Together’ website, (http://www.letsworktogether.co.uk/?q=ne_vcs_ss_action), which is part of the North East VCS Regional Skills Forum and funded through ONE North East, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) for North East England, the Action Plan was drawn up in 2005 and led to the Implementation Plan that was subsequently launched in November 2006.
1.3. **Initial aims and objectives**

1.3.1 The original ‘Terms of Reference’ for the learning consortium (see appendix 2) indicated that there would be monthly meetings, that NCDN would provide secretariat support, and that the role of chair would rotate.

1.3.2. The learning consortium was established in order to “develop and implement a ‘Working Together’ strategy for Northumberland to enable the sector to meet its skills needs”. The main aim was to circulate “…a higher profile for the voluntary sector both as a workforce in need of skills and as a community that desired adult learning; secondly but equally important, as a provider and access to community learning. We chose to go the workforce development route first”. This was because fewer organisations were working in this area at the time therefore the consortium would not be “treading on anyone’s toes to go that way.”

1.3.3. The Terms of Reference set out six main objectives for the learning consortium:
- To act as a representative group for skills development in Northumberland.
- To influence the Sector Skills Action Plan.
- To drive the implementation of the Working Together strategy in Northumberland.
- Develop a sustainable learning and development consortium to act as a possible broker to meet the sectors needs.
- Raise the awareness and profile of VCS organisations locally.
- Ensure communication and representation at the Strategic Regional Working Together group.

1.4. **Initial membership**

1.4.1. Learning consortium membership was open to any VCS organisation within Northumberland that was engaged in providing learning and skills. Members were asked to work together to promote the needs and interests of the local VCS workforce. Public sector partners were invited to meetings as appropriate. The role of members included:
- having a ‘prime interest’ in ensuring the VCS workforce has the right skills and opportunities to fulfil its roles and responsibilities in delivering services to the wider community;
- influencing the local skills agenda and having a strategic voice;
- identifying and sharing funding opportunities and information; and
- disseminating learning opportunities in an accessible way.

1.5. **Barriers and enablers: past development**

1.5.1. Reportedly, the main factor supporting the development of the learning consortium was the “amazing amount of good will in Northumberland’s voluntary and community sector” to deliver around workforce development. The consortium considers “…it was genuinely felt that you could add value, achieve more, access funding that would otherwise be completely beyond anybody’s aspirations and work together and learn together.” There was a

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4 Terms of Reference Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium, July 2005 (sent by email from the Learning Consortium)
5 Consortium staff member
perception that by combining their efforts, VCS providers could reach many more organisations and learners.

1.5.2. There was also a Regional VCS Skills Forum in the North East that was “taking a bit of a lead”. However, the learning consortium wanted to implement a broader vision of learning and skills linked to community development approaches to its culture and development.

1.5.3. The open nature of learning consortium membership is viewed as helping to ensure the consortium reflected the diversity of the sector and offered participation in an inclusive way.

1.5.4. Initial barriers included some “very unrealistic self-assessment by some organisations of what they could deliver.” As a result, some partners leading on workforce development programmes were reportedly unable to deliver, leaving the learning consortium, as the lead body, to “pick up the pieces”. This issue was addressed partly by bringing in a Contract Coordinator in March 2007 to cover all aspects of contract monitoring and to ensure outputs were delivered on time and within budget. However, it became apparent that the Contract Coordinators role needed to reflect the ethos of the consortium and it was decided that a community development approach was needed.

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. The learning consortium delivers around three geographical clusters – Belford for north Northumberland, Hexham for the west, and Pegswood for the central and south-east areas, which will align with the Unitary Authority due to come into existence in April 2009. The main areas of delivery and work are:

- community development;
- health and social care;
- information, advice and guidance;
- health and safety;
- management training for the VCS;
- learning support – including literacy, language and numeracy; and
- leading of working force development.

These areas align with the skills gaps identified in the Regional Skills Action Plan (see paragraph 1.1.4.).

2.1.2. The learning consortium is also concerned with: equality and diversity training; linking with partners; community-based research (in conjunction with partners); and community engagement skills enabling the sector to “have a say”.

2.2. Income sources and size

2.2.1. Reportedly, the learning consortium is seen locally as “taking the lead on learning by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP)”. However, the regional Partnership was described as close to disintegrating on the grounds it was not in a position to bid for contracts in the latest LSC tendering round (2008), and there has been a similar impact in Northumberland in recent bidding rounds. “There were no contracts that we could have won, because they were asking for regional consortia, which we couldn't sustain; or because the VCS went in on multi-sectoral tenders (e.g. for NEET support, sports volunteering) because otherwise we would have been competing against the local public sector.”
2.2.2. Notwithstanding this, the learning consortium has received £50,000 from NSP regeneration funding (from support services funding stream) in view of its perceived status as one of the four core infrastructure services in the area and as taking the lead focus on learning. This funding is available for 12 months until spring 2009. In addition, it is investigating a range of non-LSC funding sources. For example, it co-hosts LINK (Local Involvement Network) which is a user network in health and social care services. Its partner in this is Adapt, an organisation that supports people, particularly those with disabilities and young people, with their transport needs.

2.2.3. Before May 2008, the learning consortium received £104,000 from the LSC under the national Capacity Builders funding for workforce development which was match-funded by a further £100,000 from Capacity Builders. Other sources were the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (£35,000), Northumberland Strategic Partnership for Equality and Diversity (£30,000), and funding from the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear (£28,000) to continue with the ‘Now What’ project (see paragraph 2.2.5).

2.2.4. The consortium forms bidding partnerships and bids in a collaborative manner. It shares information regarding potential tenders with its members and then “…seeks agreement to go for certain contracts on a collaborative basis; and invite[s] local VCS organisations to submit an expression of interest to take part. There is paperwork and a selection process for this that has been agreed by the consortium.” Alternatively the contracts are won first and then are sub-contracted later “…with specific VCS organisations being invited to bid for the work depending on demand.”

2.2.5. This process allows for transparency and openness. To date, 11 VCS learning consortium members have submitted a Pre Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) to the LSC, and a similar number are reported to have achieved Matrix standard. However, some concerns were experienced whilst they are encouraged to become contract ready, they will still not be successful unless working collaboratively.

2.2.6. The learning consortium has just completed delivery of five LSC contracts (as lead body in partnerships) and has several others in the pipeline.

Table 2 Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium: contracts and funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts and funding sources</th>
<th>What was delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Now What? Rural Youth Project</strong></td>
<td>With a rural focus, the project sought to engage 100 young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) and to get 75 into learning or work. The learning consortium reached 65 young people, approximately 20 of whom went into work, eight onto literacy, language and numeracy courses, and 27 gained a progression award at Level 1. Some learners were also accredited for their Action Planning. Additionally, ten young people received a scooter through Adapt to help them access work. The project was delivered in conjunction with eight VCS partners, most of whom focus on working with young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The ‘VCS Skills’ project</strong></td>
<td>The project focused on VCS Workforce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funded until July 2008 by the LSC to support VCS workforce development. development and training, including management skills, youth skills, community development, information advice and guidance (IAG), numeracy and literacy accredited at NVQ Levels 1-4, and National Open College Network (NOCN) Level 1-3, and non-accredited courses.

'Tailored Training Solutions'
An LSC contract for capacity building and VCS workforce training. The project provided a training needs analysis and additional support for learning to 20 VCS organisations, and provided NVQs for a further 37 VCS-based individuals.

'The Backfill' project
Funded out of the £104,000 match-funding, and topped up by local networks wanting to support engagement of their members in training. The funding covered some of the costs of attending training, provided staff cover, and some travel and care costs for smaller VCS groups, enabling VCS organisations to take advantage of training opportunities.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)
LSC funded and sub-contracted through CfBT Education Trust for Nextstep services, initially until March 2009. This project is delivered through a range of organisations all qualified to deliver IAG to Level 3. It aims to help 50 individuals to identify and meet their training and development goals.

Train to Gain VCS North East Pilot
This project offers free or subsidised training to VCS staff and volunteers. Its key aim is to enable more VCS organisations to access 'Train to Gain' government funds for vocational training in a range of skills for working within and managing community based organisations.

2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. Northumberland VCS Learning consortium governance is through NCDN. The Board consists of six part-time volunteers from member organisations. Three of the current Board were new this year, two have served since the network began, and the remaining member joined three years ago.

2.3.2. The learning consortium currently has over 50 members on its mailing list. Membership remains free to any VCS body with an interest in learning and skills and community development, and is open to larger organisations as well as smaller grass-roots bodies.

2.3.3. In addition, a small number of public sector representatives are invited to attend board meetings and events on an observer basis.

2.4. Staff and volunteers

2.4.1. There are no volunteers working at the NCDN learning consortium which is staffed by paid workers.

2.4.2. NCDN/learning consortium has recently completed a staffing review. There are three full-time and two part-time members of staff:
• Director/ Company Secretary
• Finance and Administration Officer
• Communications and Administration Officer (part-time)
• Community Development Team Leader, Learning
• Community Development Team Leader, Inclusion (part-time)

2.5. **Key partnerships**

2.5.1. The learning consortium has a range of partners at regional level including:
- Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE), Empowerment Partnership;
- North East VCS Equalities Coalition;
- Community Work Assessment consortium for North East England (CWACNEE); and
- Community Development Exchange – (CDX).

2.5.2. The learning consortium has a number of strategic links. It is represented (through the Director) on a range of local groups including the County Council’s mainstream 14-19 strategy group, the Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) task group, and the Business Skills and Enterprise Board. The consortium regards such involvement as extremely important, particularly in view of its current funding situation, “…at the moment, because we are not doing huge amounts of delivery that has more impact, by having a voice."

2.5.3. The NCDC / learning consortium is viewed locally as the fourth infrastructure organisation in Northumberland. The other three are the Rural Community Council, and Blyth Valley and Wansbeck CVSs.

2.6. **Communications**

2.6.1. Internal and external communication is mainly through email alerts and telephone contact. The learning consortium reported receiving many emails focused on employment issues and a wide range of other information circulated through Consortia+, the national network for learning and skills consortia. These are passed on to members.

2.6.2. Open meetings are held every two months. Approximately ten members attend regularly. The learning consortium also holds an annual event covering current issues for all members.

2.7. **Learning and skills offer**

2.7.1. The learning consortium offers programmes for a wide range of learners including: people living in deprived rural communities, young people, trainers, volunteers working for local VCS organisations, and paid staff. The consortium works with many of the government’s priority groups, particularly 16-19 year olds and those looking to engage in employment.

2.7.2. At least 15 assessors from member organisations have trained through the NCDN programme. A further 15 or so learner supporters have accessed IAG Level 3 training at the centre.

2.7.3. A member of staff at the learning consortium is responsible for managing a pool of people from partner organisations who act as assessors, tutors, and learning supporters. In so
doing, the learning consortium is “…actually funding other voluntary organisations by using staff to be assessors and trainers.”

2.7.4. There have been a number of variants to the Management Skills Programme:

- A VCS-tailored training programme around Management Evaluation Skills devised by an ex-IBM National Training Officer and a Project Manager Specialist. The course was later accredited and accessed by over 80 learners. The project has been described as “a hugely successful experiment”.

- Training for Management Training Assessors aimed to increase the number of Northumberland-based Management Assessors for the Better Community Voluntary Organisations (BCVO) Level 4 Management Skills programme. This was a partnership project with Project North East (PNE), a social enterprise based in Newcastle and supported by the Northern Rock Foundation.

- LearnDirect centres were used to deliver on-line management training. Following an evaluation to assess its effectiveness, the programme was discontinued. However, it led to a small number of people accessing Higher Education training.

- Core Leadership Skills. This concentrated on Managing People skills, run through Wansbeck CVS.

- Action learning programme, an area NCDN “has always been hot on trying to get people to reflect”.

- Training programmes were also run on ‘diversity issues.’

- Community Development NVQs also provide VCS practitioners and managers with relevant skills in managing community-based programmes and organisations, at Levels 3 and 4.

2.8. Contribution to Third Sector and the learning and skills sector

2.8.1. The learning consortium considers it has made a significant contribution to both the Third Sector and to the learning and skills sector. Before it was formed, there were few links to learning and skills in the local VCS and it has now become a “focal point”. Delivery by the learning consortium to the local VCS through direct contracts with the LSC is currently being “wound-up”. Internal and external verifiers are in the process of signing off courses and assessing learners. The next phase is beginning with resources through the pilot Train to Gain contract along with IAG sub-contracting. The Learning Consortium also finds itself working as a sub-contractor in a new programme for event volunteering and work with young people who are NEET, rather than managing its own partnerships.

C. Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. A key change reportedly affecting the learning consortium is the shift from sub-regional to regional LSC commissioning arrangements. This follows restructuring in March 2008 when the LSC moved from a number of local offices to one in the Tyne Valley. One consortium

7 The PNE Group was established in 1980 and “…designs, develops and manages innovative projects to help enterprising people and communities create wealth and employment” (http://www.pne.org/).
member commented there is no longer “…coherence between regional and sub-regional [and that the] regional machine is so far removed from what we need.” The LSC is viewed by some as now “remote” and lacking a designated contact person to whom members can turn for support and clarification. Some members considered the existence of the consortium and the network had “raised aspirations [which were] now left hanging” as a result of these changes.

3.1.2. However, the eventual replacement of the LSC by the Young People’s Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency, and the channelling of funding for young people through the Unitary Authority, are viewed optimistically by the learning consortium as opening-up the commissioning environment again and restoring sub-regional contracts. Accordingly, the learning consortium is focusing on creating an organisation “that isn’t going to be lost when the new changes occur”.

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. The learning consortium views the recent and impending changes in the learning and skills environment, and the setting up of the new Unitary Authority, as potentially very significant to its work. It considers it is important to retain a representation role for the VCS during this time of transition.

3.3. Distance travelled

3.3.1. The learning consortium suggested several indicators of how far it has travelled since it was first established. First, it points to the higher profile of the VCS in relation to the learning and skills agenda. It argues it is “a couple of steps to being seen as strategic, not just as delivering hard to reach learners into the mainstream using the Heineken effect”. Second, it reports a significant improvement in communication between partners. Third, the learning consortium cites its contribution to the sustainability of the NCDN. And fourth, it points to the number of learners it has reached through its activities who would otherwise have been excluded from learning.

3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. The consortium regards its most outstanding achievement as offering “more accessible learning” to more VCS organisations, and to have put VCS workforce development on the map.

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. The consortium regards VCS employability as a major potential growth area. It considers helping individuals develop a career in the VCS as key to its future plans.

4.1.2. The learning consortium would like to engage with a range of partners to extend its work, particularly around community development, for example, consolidating its partnership with Sunderland University to deliver a Community Development Foundation degree. It is hoping to participate in Northumbria University’s Community Campus with a view to increasing VCS opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It is also seeking to work with Union Learning Representatives and Community Learning Representatives. The learning consortium is participating in the Train to Gain VCS North East pilot.
4.1.3. The learning consortium has received £28,000 from the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear to continue in 2008/9 with the ‘Now What?’ project. The target is to get 40 young people through the programme; 20 new learners and 20 already recruited.

4.1.4. Under the lead of the local college, the learning consortium has submitted a bid to the LSC for the ‘Personal Best’ project involving sport and volunteering linked to the 2012 Olympics aimed to get 150 people involved in sport (from Jan 09 – 2010).

4.1.5. The consortium is also looking at the possibility of writing a course ‘Finding your way around the voluntary sector’, but this will need funding and accreditation.

4.2. **Barriers and enablers: future development**

4.2.1. Key barriers to future working were reported to be: changes in LSC commissioning arrangements and the creation of the new Unitary Authority; stereotyping of VCS organisations in terms of their ability to grow capacity; and insufficient time and resources - not skills.

4.2.2. Key enabling factors for future working were reported to be: the right size of organisation in the right place at the right time; and strong government policy that will assist rather than hinder community development. The learning consortium considers there needs to be a spread of organisations in the VCS that are in touch with the grass roots and the lived experiences or ordinary people. It regards its track record of success and advocacy with 14-19 year olds in particular, as a good platform for further development.

4.3. **Long-term vision**

4.3.1. The learning consortium's long-term vision is to have a spread of organisations in touch with the learning needs of ordinary people as well as the learning needs of VCS organisations. It would like to strengthen its track record in developing and delivering learning and skills, to capitalise on new interest in volunteering as a route to employability, and to undertake advocacy for 14 - 19 year olds. It considers that in order to achieve these aims it must “…hang on in there until 2010 post-LSC.” It does not “see a better way of addressing learning and skills than being in a consortium approach.”
Case Study 2

Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium

Case study summary

Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium (DLDC) began in 2000 as a project of the Derby Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). It was set up as an Accreditation Centre offering the voluntary and community sector (VCS) a direct route to Open College Network (OCN) accredited training. It became independent in 2007.

DLDC has 115 members of varying types and size drawn from the VCS in Derbyshire and Derby City. Whilst it is free to join the consortium, there is a small charge to use the accreditation centre.

The main challenges facing the consortium are financial and, in particular, surviving without Learning and Skills Council (LSC) core funding.

Organisations report many benefits from consortium membership, including being able to access training and obtaining a “united voice”. Many argue their engagement with the consortium is responsible for a growth in confidence and capability that is essential to their learning delivery.

The consortium’s greatest achievement was reported to be its status as a respected accreditation centre with a reputation for high-quality services.

A  Context and background

1.1.  Rational for development

1.1.1.  Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium (DLDC) is a well-established consortium with charitable status. Based in the East Midlands, its membership covers Derbyshire and Derby City. It was set up in 2000 as a project by Derby Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to oversee training for voluntary and community sector (VCS) staff, volunteers and learners. The impetus was discussion amongst local VCS organisations delivering Open College Network (OCN) accredited training that revealed dissatisfaction with current arrangements. Therefore, Derby CVS proposed setting up an accreditation centre that would deal directly with OCN, “…to be the college of the voluntary sector”. According to the DLDC Strategic Plan 2008-2011 “…early projects included supporting organisations in achieving the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO) standard and delivering training for VCS staff.” DLDC became an independent organisation and registered charity in 2007.

1.1.2.  The resulting accreditation centre was free to members. It offered OCN courses and DLDC units designed to meet the needs of local VCS organisations, for example; fundraising, and which were accredited through the centre and offered to members free of charge. DLDC stopped producing new VCS-specific units when OCN started charging for the development of locally-developed units not recognised by the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC) Learning Aims Database (LAD). The LSC required all funded units to be on the LAD. The opportunity to access LSC funding was viewed as an opportunity for a “…new way to push away from the local OCN units”.

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8 DLDC Strategic Plan 2008-2011, p.4
1.2. Initial funding sources

1.2.1. Initial funding (approximately £137,000) came from the LSC Local Intervention Development (LID) Funding. This paid for office space at Derby CVS and two full-time posts – the Chief Executive and one other staff member, and £5,000 for OCN accreditation costs.

1.3. Initial aims and objectives

1.3.1. The original objectives were to:
- offer an accreditation centre for those delivering teaching and learning in the VCS;
- provide quality learning opportunities; and
- cover workforce development.

1.4. Initial membership

1.4.1. A Board of 14 members was set up at the outset consisting of all the local CVS and volunteer bureaux; Derbyshire Rural Community Council; and Derby Millennium Network. These became known as the ‘original members’. Not all Board members were involved in delivery but all had an interest in the VCS and learning and skills.

1.5. Barriers and enablers: past developments

1.5.1. A key reported barrier for the consortium was that not all Board members delivered learning and skills. As a result, some members had a “different focus and specialism” and did not always “…see the importance of training”.

1.5.2. A key reported enabling factor was the commitment from VCS organisations to train their staff and volunteers and to provide opportunities for them to attend accredited programmes.

1.5.3. LSC funding was also reportedly important but apparently had some adverse unintended consequences. As the service was free to members, some enrolled on courses they did not complete. According to the consortium a high proportion of trainers (approximately 80 per cent) who began OCN courses through the accreditation centre failed to finish because there was no fee and therefore “…no drive from a tutor’s point of view to compete…”

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. The consortium covers the whole of Derbyshire. Just over half its members are based in and around the city of Derby, and approximately a quarter work in Chesterfield and the North East of the county.

2.1.2. The consortium has five core functions:
- information advice and guidance;
- representation;
- investment;
• capacity building; and
• accreditation.

2.1.3. Their current mission statement (March 2007) reads:

**AIM:** The Derbyshire Learning & Development Consortium exists to empower and improve the capacity of the Voluntary & Community Sector to meet learner needs by providing high quality learning and development for its personnel, service users and communities.

**Strategic Objective One:** To consult and represent the VCS on learning and development issues to the LSC and other bodies in the public, voluntary and private sector.

**Strategic Objective Two:** Provide information and support to members and the wider VCS on learning and development and workforce development policy and quality assurance to enable them to engage fully with the learning & skills agenda.

**Strategic Objective Three:** To increase the capacity within the VCS to identify, plan for and deliver quality assured learning and workforce development.

**Strategic Objective Four:** Facilitate collaboration, within the sector and with other sectors, to widen participation in learning and increase achievement.

2.2. **Income sources and size**

2.2.1. DLDC’s current annual income is approximately £1 million. The LSC has been the consortium’s principal funder, reportedly accounting for around 90 per cent of its income. DLDC estimates this will fall to approximately 65 per cent of its current level over the next two years. The consortium currently has a mix of funding. This is predominantly from the LSC but also from Capacity builders and Job Centre Plus European Social Fund (ESF).

2.2.2. DLDC has eight new contracts that have just started, or are about to begin. Most span the two years following October / November 2008, and all terminate by December 2010. These are divided into two broad categories: employability and workforce development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 – Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium: contracts and funding</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contracts and funding sources</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employability</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) Fund</strong></td>
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<td>Funded by LSC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall contract value - £354,798 (£180,798 capital and £174,000 revenue).</td>
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<td>A One year contract from October 2008 to September 2009.</td>
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<td>Number of participants – up to 700 learners.</td>
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| **Youth Pre-entry to Employment (E2E)** | Aimed at 16-19 year old or 16 – 24 year old learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, this project will provide mentoring, training and work placements within the VCS for disengaged young people or those at risk of disengagement. Delivery will be in conjunction with seven local partners. Specific outcomes are: 
- 78 Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and evidence of non-accredited input; 
- 26 progressions into formal learning; and 
- nine progressions into employment. |
| --- | --- |

| **Skills for Jobs** | This project will provide accredited vocational training and employability support to help ‘hard to reach’ unemployed adults achieve job outcomes. It will have a particular focus on: Food Preparation; Logistics; Business Administration; Childcare and Health and Social care. Specific outcomes are: 
- 137 starts; 
- 137 training inputs (OCN awards); and 
- 36 sustained jobs. |
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<tr>
<td>Funded by ESF (LSC) through Connexions Derbyshire.</td>
<td>Overall contract value - £298,000 (to be finalised). A two-year contract from January 2009 to December 2010. Number of participants – 137 learners.</td>
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| **Flexible Routeway** | The programme combines high levels of engagement with employability interventions to achieve job outcomes. It involves individual action planning to overcome barriers, signposting to appropriate provision, and customer tracking. For suitable clients there will be intensive employability support both before and after achievement of the job outcome. There are two contracts, one covering Derby City, the other covering High Peak, Derbyshire Dales, South Derbyshire, Erewash and Amber Valley. Clients must be unemployed, aged 19 and over, with 30 per cent on Incapacity Benefit; non-benefit claimants and economically inactive people; and clients must have the right to work in the UK. Specific outcomes are: 
- 2,500 engagement; 
- 1,000 employability interventions; and 
- 250 jobs. |
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<td>Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and ESF through Job Centre Plus and Working Links.</td>
<td>Overall contract value - £300,000 (approximately). A three-year contract from July 2008 to July 2011. Number of participants - 2,500 learners.</td>
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| **Workforce development** |  |
| Train to Gain | This project involves VCS Learning Representatives undertaking organisational needs analyses with VCS organisations to identify staff training needs leading to delivery of a range of training and development opportunities for VCS staff and volunteers. For example, entry level qualifications in subjects required by the learner and NVQ level 2 in Administration, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), Customer Service and Health and Social Care Support. . Specific outcomes are:  
- six Learning Reps supporting 30 organisations with training needs analyses and support with staff development;  
- 75 VCS employees or volunteers receive mentoring and career guidance;  
- 11 achieve entry level qualification;  
- two achieve Level 1 qualification;  
- basic skills where needed; and  
- 30 VCS employees or volunteers achieve Level 2 in Administration, IAG, Customer Service and Health and Social care. |
| --- | --- |
| Funded by ESF (LSC). | Overall contract value £140,000.  
A two-year contract from October 2008 to December 2010.  
Number of participants – 120 learners |
| VCS Apprenticeships | This project will provide access and training to VCS staff in relevant fields under an apprenticeship model requiring a Technical Certificate, NVQ Level 2/3 and Key Skills. Anyone who is working will be eligible. Specific outcomes are:  
- Approximately 24 apprenticeships (particularly Health & Social Care, Customer Care, Business Admin);  
- Approximately 12 achieve (8 Level 2 and 4 Level 3); and  
- five VCS employees become NVQ assessors.  
DLDC will work in partnership with Enable, the VCS learning consortium in Nottingham, to deliver this programme. |
| Funded by ESF (LSC). This is a regional Consortia project led by Enable, Nottingham. | Overall contract value - £75,000.  
A two year contract from October 2008 to December 2010.  
Number of participants – 24 apprenticeships. |
| Improving the Reach | This project will help frontline VCS organisations develop their capacity to deliver formal training to rural communities throughout Derbyshire. VCS staff in rural areas will receive training in ICT, Administration, IAG and outreach support in finance, governance and quality systems. Specific outcomes are:  
- 70 frontline rural VCS organisations improve their governance, systems and sustainability (only in High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and Amber Valley); 12 |
| Funded by Capacitybuilders. | Overall contract value - £270,000.  
A two year contract from August 2008 to September 2010.  
Number of participants – 37 learners and up to 82 organisations. |
frontline rural VCS organisations develop capacity to deliver accredited training.
- 12 rural VCS employees achieve PTLLS or Skills for Life qualifications.
- 25 rural VCS employees achieve qualifications in ICT, Administration, IAG, etc.

The project will be delivered in conjunction with three local partners.

**Community Grants**

Funded by ESF (LSC), this is a regional Consortia project led by Enable, Nottingham.

Overall contract value - £220,000 (approximately).

A two year contract from January 2009 to December 2010.

Number of participants - 50 small groups.

This will be a rolling programme of funding opportunities to support community organisations, especially new providers, to deliver grassroots non-accredited training. Unconstituted organisations can work through an accountable body.

Specific outcomes are:
- client progression towards further engagement; and
- grassroots VCS capacity developed.

2.2.3. DLDC describes its workforce development projects as the “juicy ones” and the employability projects as “marginal”. This is because the consortium is involved in the management and delivery of the workforce development projects rather than just the management. As a result, it retains a higher percentage of the funding. For example, the consortium’s management fee for NLDC, Pre-E2E, Community Grants and VCS Apprenticeships is between eight and ten per cent, but for Train to Gain, Improving the Reach and Workforce Development, it retains 25 – 35 per cent of the funding.

2.2.4. The consortium reports being propelled towards employability work by current funding priorities and that as a result, capacity-building and supporting informal learning is taking second place. This is causing tensions that are described as having feet in two chariots, one driven by a stallion and the other by an underfed donkey and the consortium has “…a strategic desire not to leave the undernourished donkey”.

2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. The Board of Trustees has 11 members and meets every two months. It has three subgroups: Finance and General Purposes; Learning Development; and Planning – which meet in advance of main Board meetings. Board members are drawn from the consortium’s general membership. Interested individuals put themselves forward for selection and receive a ‘Board Members’ Induction Pack’. Applications can be received at anytime. The selection process includes attendance at two meetings and an interview with the Chief Executive and the Chair who then decide to accept or reject the candidate. To date, no applicant has been turned down.

2.3.2. Board members expressed an interest in knowing more about other consortia. They felt they had “…very little sense of what [other consortia] are doing, how they are doing it [or]
lessons learned of how others are working." They would particularly like to share practice with consortia across the country\(^9\).

2.3.3. Consortium membership is free, although there is a charge per learner for using the accreditation centre. DLDC currently has 115 members including a wide range of organisational types and sizes from the Head Quarters of the Youth Hostel Association to small, unconstituted local drama groups. This diversity is seen as a great strength by the Board.

2.3.4. It is estimated that approximately three per cent of DLDC members are large organisations that belong in order to "keep in touch". Around ten per cent are reportedly large training providers where delivery is their core business and they can be relied on to deliver teaching and learning contracts. A further ten per cent deliver training, or have an interest in doing so, and require some support from the consortium to participate in mainstream funding contracts and bids. A further ten per cent undertake less training and have intermittent contact to maintain a dialogue. In relation to the remaining members, the consortium commented, "...the rest wouldn't necessarily know why they were members...perhaps in the past they had lots of reasons [such as] one-off contracting [they are] keeping their options open".

2.3.5. A new engagement category of ‘Affiliate’ has been set up recently. These are generally independent training organisations. There is a fee of £100 to join, £35 for every OCN Unit they use (inclusive of administration), and £50 per Internal Verifier visit. There are currently three Affiliates, all of which are small (less than three staff).

2.3.6. Consortium members can influence DLDC decisions through several means: attending the Annual General Meeting, going through the Board, standing for the Board, or attending the two annual forum events. In addition, DLDC undertook an informal consultation with members last year through a ‘road show’. This enabled the consortium to talk to existing members and to meet interested organisations, and led to three or four new members from “niche” organisations, including one working in the area of social care and another involved with community transport.

2.4. Staff and volunteers

2.4.1. DLDC does not work with volunteers. It has nine staff members, six full-time and three part-time. These consist of three managers, three project managers, two administration staff, and one employee who works on finance. The majority have been with the consortium for over three years.

2.5. Key partnerships

2.5.1. The consortium engages with a range of partnerships including the Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) partnerships in Derby and Derbyshire. It is an automatic member of 3D (the Derbyshire VCS Infrastructure Consortium) Steering Committee where it ensures “…learning and skills issues are kept central.”

\(^{9}\) DLDC is regularly represented at meetings of Consortia+, the national network for VCS learning and skills consortia, which also has an email group that is used to circulate information on practice and policy developments, and members’ queries.
2.6. Communications

2.6.1. Internal communication is through team meetings, informal staff discussions and team away-days. External communication methods include e-newsletters, a DLDC website\(^\text{10}\) (recently re-launched), the AGM which is viewed as an opportunity for consultation, and two annual member forums. The website aims to provide consortium members “…with the most up-to-date information on funding opportunities, quality issues, resources, sector job vacancies, progression opportunities, training and events and much more.”

2.7 Learning and skills offer

2.7.1. Originally, DLDC ran the accreditation centre but did not deliver learning and skills. However, after its first year of operation, DLDC staff noticed that folders being submitted for moderation were sometimes below standard. As a result, it was decided to offer free training to tutors working for member organisations to promote better understanding of OCN requirements. This was seen as the “start of the quality process” for the consortium and led to a team of trained tutors that could be called upon to moderate programmes.

2.7.2. Three 30-hour units on OCN qualifications were produced: Unit 1 - Accreditation; Unit 2 - Assessment and Evidencing; and Unit 3 - Verification and Monitoring. The majority of tutors delivering teaching and learning took all three. Unit 2 was seen as particularly key to delivering OCN programmes successfully and organisations with DLDC contracts are still required to ensure their tutors undertake it.

2.7.3. The main areas of delivery are through the accreditation centre. According to the consortium’s current Strategic Plan\(^\text{11}\), the centre processed 788 OCN learner units in 2007-8 academic year, of which 137 were through ESF and 135 were through NLDC funding.

2.7.4. Tutors who had taken the Assessment and Evidencing Units in the last 12 months reported finding them useful, constructive and applicable, helping them to formalise the skills needed to deliver all programmes, but particularly OCN. They welcomed the use of real portfolios as examples. Tutors enjoyed the course, describing it as a “one-stop shop” and “…a handbook on how to run OCN”. One commented that it “…gave me everything and made me think outside the box for evidence”. They all reported putting their new skills into practice and noted that the programme delivery had a “…very accessible style [and was] not a high-brow educationalist approach”.

2.7.5. At the beginning, learners accessing the accreditation centre were mainly adult volunteers, or potential volunteers, working in member organisations. The range of learners is now wider, covering:

- VCS staff and volunteers;
- unemployed people;
- residents of disadvantaged areas;
- young offenders; and
- those who have been, or are likely to be, excluded from mainstream education, some of whom are as young as ten.

2.7.6. DLDC is a City and Guilds Accreditation Centre and delivers a range of teaching qualifications including the 7302 and the 7303. Since September 2007 it has also offered the new learning and skills practitioner qualifications Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong

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\(^{10}\) Derbyshire Learning Development Consortium [http://www.consortium.org.uk/](http://www.consortium.org.uk/)

\(^{11}\) DLDC Strategic Plan 2008-2011 (September, 2008) p 23
Learning Sector (PTLLS) and the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTTLS).

2.7.7. The consortium offers a two-day Trainer Certificate (7300) that introduces tutors to training skills. This is reportedly particularly beneficial to tutors on short-term projects. Derby LSC agreed that the Certificate should be offered to avoid the exclusion of smaller organisations from LSC funding, whilst also building their capacity.

2.8. **Contribution to the Third Sector and the learning and skills sector**

2.8.1. The consortium considers a key contribution it has made to both the Third Sector and the learning and skills sector has been to “...see membership reach the parts no other beers reach”. Board members felt DLDC had “enabled a lot of relatively small organisations to engage in teaching and learning” that would otherwise not have done so through fostering a learning environment. The consortium’s role is seen as “…being the eyes, ears and voice for the sector”, to gather intelligence and take advantage of opportunities to draw people into learning. DLDC is in a position to develop partnerships that individual members do not have the time to build, and provide them with background and research information they cannot otherwise obtain.

2.8.2. The consortium’s main contribution to the learning and skills sector was reported to be an increase in the quality of teaching and learning delivered by member organisations. This was identified as “…a shift from non-accredited to accredited” delivery and a stronger focus on getting the best for learners.

2.8.3. Tutors who had accessed DLDC training supported this view. They liked the fact that the consortium requires “…quality in moderation” and that it insists on everything being “properly moderated”. They believe the “learners value it [the qualification] more because they’ve had to work for it [and there is] no rubber stamping of anything”. Practitioners had “pulled work if it was not right”, with some refusing to submit portfolios because they were below the expected standard and would “devalue” what other learners had produced.

Personal benefits reported by tutors who had received DLDC training included increased confidence to deliver and a “tightening-up on slack areas”. One tutor felt it “…highlighted that what worked for one unit doesn’t necessarily work for another” and “steered them away from a one-size fits all” delivery models. The tutors employed the skills and knowledge they gained through training on OCN and the new PTLLS qualification to all of their delivery. It had encouraged one to develop “…huge amounts of accessible resources for special needs learners…and know that they are appropriate.” The same tutor is now working as a freelance trainer delivering workshops under the Youth Inclusion Support Partnership (YISP) to disadvantaged young people and attributed this directly to the training s/he received at the consortium stating, “I wouldn’t have done it before.”

2.9. **Benefits of consortium membership**

2.9.1. Members reported many benefits from belonging to DLDC, including being able to access funding, information, help, advice, support, training and expertise. They also saw the consortium as providing a “united voice” for the third sector.

2.9.2. The consortium helps its members deliver teaching and learning in a range of ways. It offers support with becoming contract ready “…so that they [members] can stand on their own two feet”. Tutors commented on the helpfulness of DLDC staff who are “…always on the end of the phone to help them access what there is [and] to advise.”
2.9.3. Tutors who had accessed training through DLDC felt this had organisational benefits. One reported it had enabled them to reach people they could not previously have attracted. For another, it had changed the local community’s perception of their work and “opened doors for the organisation”. The ability to deliver accredited programmes gave them credibility with others.

C Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. The main reported change for the consortium since it was set up has been the reduction of LSC core Local Intervention Development (LID) funding from £95,000 per year to nothing. DLDC has secured several contracts for the next two years between October 2008 and December 2010, (see 2.2.2.) but it is looking into future strategies to remain solvent. It anticipates it will have to draw on reserves during this time of transition and change.

3.1.2. Changes in the structure for OCN modules are impending, potentially posing difficulties for the consortium. In future OCN will charge for producing local units and these costs will have to be met by the consortium.

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. Loss of LSC core funding has reportedly unsettled the consortium, its staff and members. The current situation is described as “uncertain [and] fragile”, leaving the consortium “fighting for survival”. Staff expressed concern about how they will retain the capacity to help others in the VCS and because they are now having to pursue target-driven outcomes that will require a “…fundamental shift in how we work…stifling the one thing that makes the sector successful…[the]…magic of human interaction”. Board members felt DLDC’s role could change from supporting its members in their tenders, to leading.

3.2.2. These changes were reportedly causing tensions within the organisation and a recognition of the need to shift operations to a business-like model within which financial feasibility becomes a determining factor in what it delivers.

3.2.3. The consortium’s Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011 has four operational objectives developed specifically to address the forthcoming challenges. These are:

- clarity and visibility of purpose;
- becoming member-driven;
- adding value to the sector; and
- achieving sustainability.

3.3. Distance travelled

3.3.1. Case study participants felt DLDC had travelled a “massive” distance in its development. The Board commented that it had grown from “…something of a nebulous concept – an idea – to something that has firm foundations with strategic objectives”.

3.3.2. The learning offer is described as very different now to that available at the start. Whilst DLDC remains first and foremost an accreditation centre, it is also a ‘voice’ for the local VCS. Members’ feedback their issues and concerns and DLDC acts as advocate to relevant bodies, for example the LSC. The consortium helps members access funding and
identify what they would like to bid for, and proposals are built around their ideas and areas of expertise.

3.3.3. DLDC also keeps its members up to speed with relevant changes in relation to teaching and learning. This is regarded as particularly important. One tutor commented, “…with all the changes in adult education, if it had not been the consortium it would have passed me by”.

3.3.4. Board members reported that the consortium has a “clear vision” but also felt that it needs “…to be clearer of what a core vision is [and] of where we would retract to” in times of difficulty and change.

3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. The consortium regards its most outstanding achievement to be “…a universally acclaimed reputation for high-quality services” through the accreditation centre. It is seen as a “flagship centre” that always delivers contracts on time and to target, and that is held in high regard by its members.

3.4.2. Members confirmed this view. The consortium is seen as a critical friend by them and a valued supporter that is always willing to help. It is described as a source of vital information in the field of VCS learning and skills. Members found the consortium “approachable”, “friendly”, “good humoured” and able to “practice what they preach”. One member stated they “wouldn’t think twice to call them”.

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. Train to Gain was identified as a main area of potential growth. However, there were some reservations about its appropriateness on the grounds that VCS staff are already “quite highly trained”.

4.1.2. Member organisations reported their intention to continue to work closely with the consortium, particularly its contracts manager. Anticipated areas of engagement include:

- helping them to build their capacity;
- helping them to put in place quality systems such as Matrix;
- re-writing courses;
- providing access to Train to Gain; and
- the development of learner progression routes.

4.2. Barriers and enablers: future development

4.2.1. Key enabling factors for future working were reported to be the expertise of staff and Board members. The Board argued the staff team needs to be expanded so that the scale of contracts can be increased.

4.2.2. Key barriers to future working were reported to be loss of core LSC funding; not knowing what will replace the LSC; and the reduction of ESF. A shift to demand-driven training was felt to be workable “…with a sophisticated market and a customer base that knows where it’s going…but in the Third Sector numbers of learners and providers are small [and it] doesn’t know that it needs training”.
4.2.3. Despite facing some real challenges in the next few years, the consortium was said to be in a strong financial position. According to Board members it is “…fortunate to have sustainability in the reserves” [that will help] “look after the rainy days”. The consortium has so far been largely “buffered” from the economic difficulties and engaged in “…business planning as soft play without getting hurt”. However the Board were aware “they have to be prepared for change.”

4.3. **Long-term vision**

4.3.1. The consortium’s long-term vision is to work towards its four strategic objectives (see paragraph 3.2.3). Prospects were described as “gloomy”, and, reportedly the only way forward is to “…survive the lean period until community engagement comes round again”.

Case Study 3

Sussex VCS Learning Consortium

Case study summary

Sussex VCS Learning Consortium was established in February 2003, following a development phase of about a year. It operates under the umbrella of Action in rural Sussex (AirS) which is the accountable partner. It has a small board consisting of four to eight volunteers drawn from its membership. It has part-time support from two members of staff who are employed by AirS. The consortium's income for 2007-8 was £363,970.63.

Membership is free and currently stands at about 60 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

The consortium does not deliver learning and skills directly. This is undertaken by its members through partnership projects. It manages a small number of contracts, organises up to four members’ meetings a year, and informs its membership of relevant changes and new requirements affecting learning and skills largely through email communication.

The main challenges facing the consortium are reduced Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding and a shift in LSC commissioning from a sub-regional to a primarily regional model.

The consortium’s most outstanding achievement is reportedly being included in the report of the 2008 Ofsted Thematic Review of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funding and being invited to attend the launch of the report.

Sussex VCS Learning Consortium is unsure of its future in light of LSC restructuring, shifts in government funding priorities towards skills and employability, and the impact of the impending Machinery of Government arrangements.

A Context and background

1.1. Rational for development

1.1.1. Sussex VCS Learning Consortium is a well-established learning consortium based in the South East region and covering East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. It was established in February 2003 after Action in rural Sussex (AirS) was approached by Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE) (the regional voluntary and community sector (VCS) network) with a view to forming a learning consortium in the area. This also addressed the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC) desire to work with larger group of VCS organisations to facilitate contracting.

1.1.2. AirS was also experiencing difficulties funding their NVQ Level 3 and 4 Management Training programme for the VCS. A learning consortium was seen as a possible way forward. The programme’s eventual demise is attributed to a shift in LSC priorities which focused funding on NVQ Levels 1 and 2.
1.2. **Initial funding sources**

1.2.1. The consortium was funded initially for three years by the LSC through the Local Intervention Development (LID) Fund. It received £50,000 a year for the first two years (August 2003 - July 2005) and £40,000 for the third year (August 2005 - July 2006).

1.3. **Initial aims and objectives**

1.3.1. The original Terms of Reference for the learning consortium were written by AirS and were produced as a result of discussion amongst those involved at the development stage. They focused on partnership working and networking within the VCS with the intention of encouraging joint funding bids to the LSC, and shared provision relative to the ability of organisations to deliver.

1.3.2. The Learning Consortium was, and remains, “...a group of voluntary and community organisations who share an interest in promoting learning opportunities.” It existed to:

  - "Research existing provision and gaps within the voluntary and community sector, in order to identify particular training that the sector is best placed to deliver."
  - "Raise awareness within voluntary and community organisations about the requirements and responsibilities of being a training provider and assist them to develop the management and quality systems required to deliver training."
  - "To work with voluntary and community organisations to access funds for mainstream provision, to meet training and learning needs and efficiently manage those funds into provider organisations."

1.4. **Initial membership**

1.4.1. The consortium had twelve VCS founding members. Reportedly, one of the attractions was the possibility of accessing mainstream LSC funding. Members varied in type and size and included Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS), organisations involved in workforce skills training, and community bodies working with specific client groups, for example unemployed or homeless people and those with mental health issues. Founding members had differing degrees of interest in learning and skills and this was reflected in their level of engagement with the consortium, with some never participating and others participating only in specific projects.

1.5. **Barriers and enablers: past developments**

1.5.1 Reportedly, one of the main early barriers for the consortium was the funding system. “As a small provider the consortium found it difficult to engage directly with the funding because of all the procedural checks and systems which were geared up to college provision.” Some delivery had been through VCS organisations, including AirS “but some funding was obtained through a franchise arrangement with a local college”. Many organisations regarded the ‘top-slicing’ in the sub-contracting arrangements as high with some colleges reportedly “…more helpful in supporting VCS providers than others.” Although the learning consortium was seen as a way of by-passing the colleges it did not initially have all of the administrative and quality systems needed to replace those of the colleges and reportedly “the challenge of the consortium was to develop ways to work more independently and engage directly with the LSC”.

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12 Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium (SVCSLC) (2003), Sussex LSC
1.5.2. The main enabling factors were reportedly the £140,000 LID funding received from the LSC and support from RAISE which included £2,375 funding. A few key individuals are described as having played an important role in moving the consortium forward in its early stages, particular an ex-college tutor who had an interest in working with the VCS and adult learning.

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. Sussex VCS Learning Consortium is not involved in direct delivery which is undertaken by its members and/or partners. Consortium members deliver in East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. However, a small number have a wider reach, for example into Surrey and Kent.

2.1.2. The consortium works with local VCS organisations to help them access funding and raise awareness of teaching and learning requirements. However, reportedly it no longer has sufficient resources to pursue any significant capacity building or development. Currently, its main functions are to circulate emails to members with useful information; hold a small number of meetings a year; and manage three partnership projects under contracts held by AirS on its behalf (see paragraph 2.2.3).

2.2. Income sources and size

2.2.1. The consortium has experienced a steady rise in income over the last five years (2003 – 2007), from an annual turnover in 2003-4 of approximately £45,000, to over £360,000 in 2007-8 an increase of approximately 800 per cent. However, it is predicting a reduction of almost 50 per cent over the next twelve months (2007/8 to 2008/9) to around £180,000 - its income level for 2005-6.

2.2.2. This decrease is attributed by the consortium to a lack of LSC core funding, changes in LSC structures, and a shift from sub-regional to regional LSC commissioning arrangements. According to the consortium, when the LSC restructured it sought to focus on contracts that could be delivered by one body working across the region. The consortium does not have sufficient regional networks or members to operate across such a large geographical area. It could tender for a limited number of smaller LSC contracts covering only parts of the region but would need to consider the likelihood of success when deciding whether to commit staff time to what is regarded as a lengthy tendering process.

2.2.3. AirS, on behalf of Sussex VCS Learning Consortium, holds two contracts, one running until July 2009 and the other from January 2008 until the end of December 2010. These are with the LSC (Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities - NLDC ) and Surrey Community Action (Big Lottery BASIS), respectively the consortium’s role is predominantly to coordinate the delivery and manage and administer sub-contracts. Its payment varies depending on the project, for example, £10,000 a year for staff costs, plus additional payment for certain direct costs, for the Surrey Community Action Big Lottery BASIS project.

Table 4 Sussex VCS Learning Consortium: contracts and funding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts and funding sources</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NLDC East Sussex.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC.</td>
<td>This project is a re-commissioning and builds on previous work. It will be delivered by six partners in Hastings and St Leonards. Each will receive between £2,000 and £14,000, depending on the size of their delivery contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £60,000 local revenue plus £25,630 local capital and £21,600 (approximately) capital bid this year.</td>
<td>There is a target of 400 learners and 50 courses over the duration of the project to engage adult learners to develop their skills and enable progression to employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning4Counties (L4C)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the Big Lottery BASIS programme</td>
<td>This is a partnership project led by Surrey Community Action. It aims to provide workforce skills training to the VCS in Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire. The consortium has contributed two very successful ‘Finding Funding’ training days in West Sussex in November 2008 and is planning other events and training courses for 2009 and 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for contract - £10,000 per year for coordinating.</td>
<td>The target is 75 training courses (15 in every six months) plus nine team building days, providing approximately 840 learner places.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.4. The NLDC revenue project is less than half its value in 2007/8. This is because the areas of Brighton and Hove have been removed from the bid. Delivery in 2008/9 will be in Hastings and St Leonards only.

2.2.5. The consortium is also involved in coordinating a piece of research for East Sussex County Council looking at current VCS involvement in adult learning. It will concentrate on Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) type activity that is not covered already under this funding stream, and consider how it can be improved. The contract is worth £10,000 but “…some of this will go to the CVS to compensate them for their time and input.”

2.2.6. Finally, until the end of July 2009, the consortium will be supporting six or more local VCS organisations using NLDC Capital Funding, which will be administered as a small grants scheme.

2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. The consortium is not legally constituted since it has always operated under the umbrella of AirS, its accountable partner. This close connection was reported to be beneficial, particularly in terms of having a robust, well-established organisation taking ultimate responsibility.

2.3.2. The consortium has a small steering body or Board which fluctuates in size from four to eight members. Ideally, it should consist of CVS, other VCS infrastructure and VCS frontline organisations, representatives from West and East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, and a representative of AirS. Current Board members come from AirS, Brighton and Hove Working Together Project, South Downs CVS, Hastings Voluntary Action, and Mid Sussex (South) CVS.
Board recruitment is by self-selection and volunteering. Members are usually made aware of vacancies through email alerts. It meets at least once a quarter to oversee the consortium’s development, strategy and planning and makes decisions on behalf of consortium members, although reportedly there are “…not a huge amount of decision[s]…to be made.” Members’ views are “amassed” throughout the year at various meetings and as a result of on-going correspondence in what is described as an “organic process”.

2.3.3. The Partnership Manager (see 2.4.1) also attends Board meetings to provide input. It is viewed as an opportunity for her to also “…bounce around ideas” before circulating them to the wider membership.

2.3.4. Consortium membership is free and currently stands at 60 VCS organisations of various types and size. Training is core business for some, but for others it is a small part of their work. Several members specialise in training people who work in the VCS, whilst others deliver programmes of a specific nature, such as childcare. Some organisations deliver to a range of learners, for example Age Concern offers learning for older people and training for its trainers. The consortium holds four members’ meetings every year, plus an Annual General Meeting.

2.3.5. The consortium member involved in the case study was described as a small CVS with approximately ten staff members. Its core business is providing training and funding, finance and community development opportunities to local VCS organisations. It has Big Lottery funding to look at how to engage people in outlying locations - around the coast and in rural areas - in training and networking. Most of its provision consists of one, two, or half-day non-accredited courses described as ‘soft training’.

2.4. Staff and volunteers

2.4.1. Sussex VCS Learning Consortium has part time support from two members of AirS staff: AirS Partnership Manager currently provides just over two days a week, and a member of the AirS Administration Team gives support on an ad hoc basis, although there is currently no firm budget allocation for this. In the past the consortium has employed three staff: a full-time Partnership Manager; a part-time Development Officer; and an Administrative Assistant who worked around one day a week. The staffing reduction was reported to have serious implications for the consortium’s capacity to develop and engage the VCS in the future. It does not have any volunteers, apart from those on the Board.

2.5. Key partnerships

2.5.1. The AirS Partnership Manager is involved with East Sussex Adult Learning and Skills Partnership Board and the West Sussex Learning Network as a consortium representative. The consortium also supports the Hastings and St Leonards Adult Learning Forum. This was done through funding available within the 2007-2008 Neighbourhood Learning Project. The consortium’s Partnership Manager chaired the group but to continue could mean providing her time on a voluntary basis outside work hours. The key aim is to “kick-start a wider, bigger network” in the area. The Forum reportedly now consists of “…a lot of good will.”
2.6. Communications

2.6.1 The consortium has produced newsletters and arranged road shows in the past but reduced funding and staffing mean this is no longer possible. Internal and external communication is predominantly by email or telephone.

3.7. Learning and skills offer

3.7.1. The profile of learners accessing training from member organisations reportedly varies, depending on who is delivering which contracts. In the beginning these were “...heavily skewed towards VCS workers”, for example, under the Learning Together Project (European Social Fund (ESF)/LSC co-financed) which provided training to over 765 people. This ran from January 2004 to December 2006 and involved four members of the consortium. For the Training Assessors in Childcare Together (TACT) ESF / LSC co-financed project, 70 learners came from the area of childcare. This ran from April 2005 to March 2008 and was delivered by two partners, one located in East Sussex and the other in West Sussex. Its main aim was to train people as NVQ assessors in Childcare. Those completing the programme successfully gained either A1 or A2 awards.

3.7.2. More recently, learners have tended to come from deprived communities with multiple economic and social difficulties. This reflects the large NLDC contract the consortium has been responsible for managing through its members. Last year, programmes delivered under NLDC by member organisations reached over 500 learners - exceeding their LSC target, - including unemployed people, ex-offenders, Asian women, people with mental health issues, lone parents, and recent immigrants including refugees and asylum seekers.

2.8. Contribution to the Third Sector and the learning and skills sector

2.8.1. It was felt that, until the end of the last financial year (2007/8), the consortium had made a “…valuable and increasing” contribution to the Third Sector and to learning and skills within it. However, those involved are now asking “…how can it have a contribution if it doesn’t have the resources or the funding?”

2.9. Benefits of consortium membership

2.9.1. The organisation involved in the case study had been a member since the beginning but had not accessed learning and skills training through the consortium until recently. Its own members prefer short courses such as Minute Taking, Report Writing and Fund Raising. However, the possibility of funding encouraged it to remain within the consortium and it views its membership as a good networking opportunity and means of keeping in touch with the learning sector: “…they keep us in the loop, even if we are not doing anything with them.” It will now be one of the providers involved in the Learning4Counties project that started in January 2008.

C Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. The main changes since the consortium was set-up have been external rather than internal. Key amongst these is a reduction in LSC funding from nearly 100 per cent in 2003/4 to approximately 75 per cent this year. The consortium reports no longer receiving any core LSC support.
3.1.2. A shift towards more regional LSC contracting is perceived as another key change. The consortium argues this has made it less possible for it to apply for LSC contracts and that consequently its role has reduced significantly to primarily a Sussex VCS communications and information network. The problem is reportedly exacerbated by the staffing reductions which limit the consortium’s capacity to go out and find new funding.

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. Despite passing the LSC’s Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire (PQQ) and tendering for bids, the consortium has been unsuccessful. Of the new system, staff commented, “...it's hard to know how we can engage with it, [and] it's difficult to see a way forward.” Currently it does not know where future funding will come from, especially with the “…sub-regional, regional mismatch.”

3.3. Distance travelled

3.3.1. The consortium feels it has built an “impressive” membership that has been stable for some time. It has also seen a substantial increase in its income since it started. Some in the Third Sector would have “…liked to see it [the consortium] float off as its own organisation” but this had not happened.

3.3.2. The consortium has undergone many changes but reportedly “…it still has a lot of power and meaning to the way the sector works.” Change is regarded as vital for its survival, “…it’s [the consortium] has to be a bit of a chameleon [but] the fact that it is still going is a success.” There was a view that “…organisations which are not too ‘fixed’ are more likely to survive change.”

3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. The consortium regards its most outstanding achievement as being included in the Ofsted Report on its Thematic Review of NLSC (2008) invited to be a key speaker at the Report’s launch event.13

3.4.2. Other achievements include being recognised by those working in the learning and skills sector as a well-established consortium, for example by the LSC and by NIACE through the consortium mapping exercise14 it conducted earlier this year; the build-up of membership; good partnership working; and increased income.

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. The consortium feels it needs to consider what it does and the services it offers carefully. It suggests it may have to start charging for its brokerage role, but this may depend on who is asking for help and what is requested.

4.1.2. The consortium has taken time to build its capacity but is concerned that it is not, under the current climate, sustainable.

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13 Ofsted (September 2008), The role of adult learning in community renewal: Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities programmes, Ofsted.
14 See reference 1
4.2. **Barriers and enablers: future development**

4.2.1. The key enabler for future development is seen as access to funding and particularly, a proportion available for capacity building as well as delivery.

4.2.2. According to the consortium, the main barrier to future development is, “...not knowing what's going to happen with the demise of the LSC.” It is concerned that in the future, “...it is highly likely that all adult learning will have skills attached, especially in the current economic climate” which is seen as detrimental to the consortium’s progress and out of line with its main aims and objectives, and that of its members. Concerns were expressed over the long-term prospects for people falling into unemployment. There was a feeling that more learning will be needed that does not necessarily have an employment or skills focus and which can help with community cohesion and individual well-being.

4.3. **Long-term vision**

4.3.1. The consortium hopes to maintain its strategic role but is uncertain about its sustainability in the current climate. There is a feeling that a reduction in its role would be unfortunate at a time of economic and financial uncertainty as it predicts an increase rather than decrease in demand for learning and skills provided by the VCS in the future.
Case Study 4

Humber (formerly Humberside) Learning Consortium (HLC)

Case study summary

Humber (formerly Humberside) Learning Consortium (HLC) is a well-established, independent Third Sector learning and skills consortium operating across the Humber sub-region.

The consortium does not deliver learning and skills itself but sub-contracts with a range of partner organisations. It manages contracts and provides infrastructure and quality support to Third Sector organisations in the area. Not all partners deliver learning and skills as their core business.

The consortium has 12 staff members, ten of whom are full-time. Its annual turnover at the end of March 2007 was just under £2 million (£1,956,213) but fell to just under £1.5 million (£1,478,768) at the end of March 2008, a reduction of approximately 25 per cent.

It has eight contracts funded through various funding streams that will run for the next two-years until 2010/2011. However, it no longer has any core funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The main reported challenge it faces is the dismantling of the LSC and the outcome of the government's sub-national review. It is unsure of which agencies will hold the appropriate learning budgets but it recognises the need to foster new strategic links with the Local Authority and the Regional Development Agency (RDA).

Its greatest reported achievements are surviving this long, and its reputation with the LSC for delivering contracts on time and to the highest standards.

A Context and background

1.1. Rational for development

1.1.1. Humberside Learning Consortium (HLC) was established in 1996 originally as the training arm of Hull Council for Voluntary Services (CVS). It engaged with local colleges and ran short courses. Hull CVS worked within Hull city, whilst the training arm (HLC) reached beyond the city boundaries.

1.1.2. When the LSC was established in 2000 it reportedly wanted “…a single portal into the voluntary sector at sub-regional level”. To assess if this was possible or viable in Humberside, a consultation exercise was carried out through the Yorkshire Forward Skills Development Fund. Yorkshire Forward is the Regional Development Agency (RDA) “…charged with improving the Yorkshire and Humber economy”\(^\text{15}\). The consultation involved all six CVSs in Humberside and aimed to “…test if there was a need and appetite for a learning consortium and if so what kind of support would be needed”. The six were: Hull CVS, Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire (Scunthorpe / Barton), Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (Grimsby), East Yorkshire CVS (Bridlington), East Riding (Central) CVS (Beverley) and Boothferry (Goole).

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1.1.3. The consultation consisted of eight focus groups in the main population centres for each CVS and a large postal survey to nearly 2,000 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in the area. The latter elicited 304 returns, a response rate of 26 per cent. The resulting report, “What’s Going On” (2001), showed clear support for a learning consortium. The LSC subsequently decided to support the initiative and, as Hull CVS was the only body in the area with the appropriate structures and staff experienced in course delivery (through its training department), it took the lead role in developing the consortium.

1.1.4. HLC was finally established in March 2002 when it became a Company Limited by Guarantee. Management functions remained with Hull CVS until September 2002 when it was set up as an independent entity. It became a Registered Charity in March 2003. The consortium changed its name to Humber Learning Consortium in 2008 as part of a rebranding exercise.

1.1.5. Reportedly, a key aspect of the new learning consortium for the LSC was good communication with the wider Third Sector. Therefore, it invested directly in this function – a contribution to capacity and a core function that was notable at the time. Relations with the LSC developed gradually as HLC convinced the LSC of its capability over time. The consortium decided at an early stage that it would not provide learning and skills direct.

1.2. Initial funding sources

1.2.1. Initial funding came from Yorkshire Forward to undertake the consultation along with a further £125,000 for “pump priming”. HLC received £120,000 a year Local Intervention Development (LID) funding from the LSC between March 2002 - 2008 to fund the Chief Executive and a Communications post. The consortium received the same level of core LSC funding until July 2008. HLC also received Skills for Life funding to “kick start” work in this area. As a result, it had an income of £400,000 in its first year, said to be comparable to its parent body, Hull CVS.

1.3. Initial aims and objectives

1.3.1. The consortium focused initially on developing communication systems and strategies for the Third Sector. This was achieved primarily through the regular publication of ‘Training News’ which became an “essential vehicle” for communication, particularly during the first 18 months before the internet “took over”. At its height, 7,000 copies per edition were distributed.

1.3.2. The consortium launched its website in March 2003, “…a significant communication channel which continues to attract growing number of visitor”. The website offers information on a range of topics including HLC partners, tendering opportunities, publications relevant to the Third Sector and learning and skills and covering policy and research, a range of resources such as e-learning, and the ‘Training News’ magazine.

1.4. Initial membership

1.4.1. Reportedly, the consortium was run originally by a steering group which later became the Board of Trustees. It consisted of eight representatives from the six CVSs, the Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council, and CERT! (Community Economic Regeneration Team), a local social enterprise. The steering group had an independent chair who was well known to the Third Sector and had experience of developing information technology (IT) systems in the community.

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16 Humber Learning Consortium Website http://www.hlc-vol.org/
17 Strategic Business Plan 2008-2011.p6
1.5. **Barriers and enablers: past developments**

1.5.1. Reportedly, there were two key enablers to the consortium’s early development. The first was the local Third Sector’s “stakeholder buy-in” and desire to see a consortium established. The second was the set-up funding received from Yorkshire Forward.

1.5.2. In addition, Hull CVS, the parent body, reportedly had a good reputation in the local Third Sector and staff experienced in training through the training department. The Lifetime Learning Team had knowledge and understanding of both the opportunities presented by the new LSC and the structures underpinning adult learning “that didn’t exist in other CVSs”. It was stated that “…if we hadn’t have had that level of expertise from one of the CVS then it’s highly unlikely that the learning consortium would have emerged in the time frame they were looking at.”

1.5.3. Initial barriers were reportedly the time investment needed by the steering group to ensure the consortium was up and running within the designated timescale, and geographical and physical barriers in the region. The latter are seen as leading to differences in attitudes between those on the north and south banks of the Humber. This was reflected in the level of involvement of CVSs “…initially the north bank CVSs tending to be more involved in the development of HLC”. However, “…that’s not the case now; there is much wider geographical buy-in.”

**B Current situation**

2.1. **Delivery areas**

2.1.1. According the Self Assessment Report (SAR) 2006/07 (reviewed April 2008) the consortium’s overall aim is “…to enable a learning culture in the voluntary and community sector in Humberside”. Specifically:

- To improve access to learning opportunities for users, volunteers, employees and trustees of voluntary and community organisations,
- To develop voluntary and community sector learning providers to meet stakeholder requirements including quality thresholds,
- To enable partnership approaches to the development and delivery of learning opportunities and promoting good practice,
- To enable the voice of the learner and of the voluntary and community sector to improve the influence of the sector on the learning agenda at strategic and operational levels.\(^{18}\)

2.1.2. The consortium focuses on Humberside. It has just completed a 12-month restructuring aimed at “…shaping ourselves for what’s coming, to be able to do it” (see paragraph 2.4.2.).

2.1.3. The consortium has extended its remit since it began to include acting as a managing agent for LSC contracts with the Third Sector. It is responsible for ensuring delivery to schedule, on target, and at the highest quality.

2.1.4. Communication remains a core priority and the consortium is in the process of launching a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which has been a long-standing ambition of the Communications and Research Officer. However, it is unclear how communications will be supported following the withdrawal of core LSC funding. HLC recently achieved Matrix

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\(^{18}\) Self Assessment Report 2006/7 Humberside Learning Consortium (April 2008), p.2
Standard for providing information, advice and guidance (IAG). It also has a Learning Management Information System (MIS) that complies with LSC requirements.

2.2. Income sources and contracts

2.2.1. The consortium is currently reliant on contracts for its income either through a top slicing management fee or a management fee plus additional costs to cover activities such as training events. The amount it receives varies depending on the type of contract and the funder. For example LSC and European Social Fund (ESF) contracts have a defined management fee set between 10 and 12 per cent. A tender submitted over this figure is not viewed as competitive and will not score on the LSC’s ‘value for money’ criteria. However, for mainstream LSC funding contracts (such as Safeguarded Learning), the fee is reported to be nearer 20 per cent. HLC negotiates with the funder and the final amount is based on the services it offers that are additional to contract management, such as training sessions for providers.

2.2.2. The consortium currently manages nine contracts divided into two types: VCS Infrastructure; and learning and delivery as outlined in Table 5 below. To ensure it has enough sub-contractors, HLC is using providers from the private and public as well as the Third Sector. This is seen as highlighting the difficulties the Third Sector is currently experiencing in securing sufficient contracts.

Table 5 Humberside Learning Consortium: contracts and funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VCS Infrastructure Contracts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contracts and funding source</strong></td>
<td><strong>Delivery</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development Track</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the Capacitybuilders Modernisation Fund.</td>
<td>This is a continuing professional development project for VCS infrastructure staff. HLC acts as accountable body for this grant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two and a half years from October 2008 to March 2011.</td>
<td>It employs 0.6 full-time equivalent staff at HLC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £205,472.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consortium Development Grant</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by Capacitybuilders.</td>
<td>This is a ‘core grant’ to support ongoing development and joint working of the Humber Infrastructure Consortium (known as FOLDA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three years from April 2008 to March 2011.</td>
<td>HLC acts as accountable body for this grant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £264,000.</td>
<td>The contract employs 0.8 full-time equivalent staff at HLC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality Hub</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by Big Lottery.</td>
<td>This is a grant to support 10 FOLDA organisations to implement and measure the impact of quality assurance system implementation on frontline VCOs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three years from February 2008 to January 2011.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of contract - £82,000.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humber Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by Big Lottery.</td>
<td>This project funds two HLC staff to carry out 80 diagnostics of VCS Leaders / Managers / Trustees and to deliver an information service for a minimum of 250 voluntary Community Service organisations in the Humber.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A three year contract from March 2008 – March 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts and funding source</td>
<td>Delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Delivery Contracts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEETS (in East Riding)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC/ESF co-financing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteen months from September 2008 to March 2010, with potential to extend into a third year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £400,000 each for the first two years, and £750,000 for year three.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This work is aimed at 14-16 and 16-18 activity and focuses on those not in education, employment or training (NEETS) in the East Riding area. It has a target of 150 learners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It looks at number of learners, achievement of non accredited and accredited learning and progression into learning or work.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Engagement (in Humber)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC / ESF co-financing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eighteen months from September 2008 to March 2010, with the potential to extend into a third year.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £500,000 each for two years and £750k for year three.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Post-19 adult engagement activity to support progression into mainstream learning and employment. It has a target of 400 learners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It looks at the achievement of both non-accredited and accredited learning, and progression into learning, work or volunteering.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) (in Humber)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC / ESF co-financing.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eighteen months from September 2008 to March 2010, with potential to extend into a third year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £500,000 each for two years, and £750,000 for year three.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAG sessions for participants on LSC/ESF programmes to support retention and progression. It has a target of 2,000 learners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Grants (in Yorkshire and Humber)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC / ESF co-financing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years from September 2008 to September 2010, with potential to extend into a third year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £2.8 million.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This involves grants to VCS organisations of between £2,000 and £12,000 to support access to learning for the most disadvantaged groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) and Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) (in Humber)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by LSC Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) mainstream funding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One yearly from August 2008 to July 2009.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £244,000.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning for enjoyment and learning to support neighbourhood development for the most disadvantaged.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. The Board of Trustees consists of ten members and three senior consortium staff. It includes: an independent chair; three CVSs; a voluntary Action Service; two partner organisations, two black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations; and a representative from a local college.

2.3.2. Four of the original member organisations remain active on the Board: Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire, Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire, Hull CVS, and CERT!

2.3.3. The Board of Trustees meets monthly. The first part of the meeting is “almost like a training session where [the Chief Executive] will pick up on something that is developing in the sector and brief us”. Decisions are made as a collective following “open and constructive dialogue”. Board members reported working closely with consortium staff, particularly in identifying future strategies and developing the current Business Plan. One of the main issues being discussed at the moment is the restructuring of the LSC, “…as the world changes it may become more of an issue particularly when HLC was built around responding on a sub-regional basis to LSC funding streams as they become deployed more into local authority areas…it will become more problematical.”

2.3.4. Many of the members were reported to be also involved in the “FOLDA” network – Federation of Local Development Agencies. FOLDA was set up to develop Third Sector infrastructure around the Capacitybuilders ChangeUp programme.

2.3.5. HLC does not have members. It describes itself as “…a consortium of providers that are fluid.” For many HLC delivery partners, learning and skills and LSC funding form only a small part of their work; for example, the Women’s Refuge that delivers a range of courses including self-defence and building confidence. According to HLC “…for many [Third Sector organisations] they need a cocktail of funding to survive.”

2.4. Staff and volunteers

2.4.1. HLC employs 12 staff, ten of whom are full time. There are no volunteers or apprentices, although the latter has been suggested as a possible area for future development.

2.4.2. The Chief Executive has been with HLC for 18 months. Since her arrival, the consortium has undergone significant restructuring to “…shape ourselves for what's coming”. There are several reasons for this. First, previous contracts reportedly funded significantly more staff than they do now. As a result, HLC “…need[s] to target support on delivery partners or potential delivery partners” in order to use staff time efficiently. This has led to a redefining of staff roles and responsibilities to ensure the structure is “fit for purpose” in a rapidly changing funding climate. Second, there were inconsistencies in how much staff were paid. Salaries were dependent upon contracts. The restructuring has reportedly led to a “…harmonising and consistency of staff roles, job titles and pay conditions.” Third, the consortium did not have a coherent strategic approach to income generation; it was “more reactive than strategic, with little forward thinking,” and decisions were often down to individuals. Following restructuring, there is a new senior management team with overall responsibility for identifying and pursuing funding opportunities in a strategic manner.

2.4.3. The consortium invites views, ideas and feedback from staff. For example its strap line, “passionate about learning”, was put forward by a long-standing employee during a consultation workshop.
2.5. **Key partnerships**

2.5.1. The consortium reportedly “links into” a range of partnerships where it represents the wider VCS and lobbies for the sector. Partnerships include all PCDL Strategy Partnerships in the area; some 14-19 partnerships; the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership; and the Social Economic Environmental Partnership. Predominantly engagement with key strategic partners is undertaken by the senior management team, although roles and levels of involvement differ, depending on the partnership and its focus. For example, on the 14 – 19 partnerships HLC represents the sector and looks for opportunities to work with others whilst it chairs the PCDL partnership in Hull reportedly “driving it, advocating changes and influencing the LSC [particularly in terms of] its new commissioning processes.” In addition, the Chief Executive sits on the Board of several regional and national organisations including the Regional Forum, the Children’s Trust Board of North Lincolnshire, the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Assembly, and the national Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Council.

2.6. **Communications**

2.6.1. Communication is largely undertaken by email and newsletter. The consortium has had to draw on its reserves which were reportedly “…fortunately in a healthy position” to meet its communications obligations, particularly to enable the setting up of a new website and VLE. However, this initiative was reported to be under threat unless funding can be found through new projects to sustain it.

2.7. **Learning and skills offer**

2.7.1. The teaching and learning offer outlined in Section 2.2. is extensive. HLC reported a “very good success rate [and being] respected by the LSC” particularly in delivering NLDC and PCDL contracts. It is surpassing national targets with a success rate of approximately 85 per cent for 2006/07, rising to around 95 per cent for 2007/08 against a national average of 75 per cent. A high proportion (over 60 per cent) of this delivery is non-accredited. The consortium and its partners feel that the Third Sector is well placed to carry out this type of work successfully.

2.7.2. Both the two delivery partners who participated in the case study have contracted with HLC Consortium since the beginning and still have a substantial learning and skills offer. The first is a social enterprise working across the Humber sub region, and the second is a local homeless charity based in Hull.

2.7.3. The social enterprise was set up in 1998 and works with long-term unemployed people in their local areas to support them back into employment or self-employment. It is primarily a job creation, business support and training organisation with a team of eight staff And an annual turnover of around £400,000. It works with partners to support their learners, referring them to the most appropriate help, and offers provision that is unavailable elsewhere or “…a step into…” education through non-accredited learning opportunities that may lead to short accredited courses in finance and marketing. It is an accredited centre for the Open College Network (OCN) and Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR). Once learners reach Level 1 and 2, they are signposted to local colleges and beyond.

2.7.4. Its main provision with HLC is “Preparation for Work and Life”. This offers accredited learning of what is described as “thin qualifications [that] allow learners to collect three or six credits at level 1 and 2 before moving onto more substantial courses”. Delivery focuses on building confidence, developing assertiveness, early development of team work, and citizenship. It is also delivering ASL, targeting 196 learners over one year to help them improve their lives, and Adult Engagement to 30 learners (which is ESF/ LSC co-financed).
2.7.5. The second organisation is a local registered charity with a board of six trustees that helps the homeless in Hull. Established in 1998, it has three full-time staff members and a long-standing partnership with the consortium. It worked with a local college pre-HLC. Describing itself as a “satellite provider”, it has two LSC contracts worth £18,000. One is NLDC funding to work with a target of 60 learners, and the other is PCDL to reach 40 learners. This type of provision is aimed at engaging hard to reach learners in the community.

2.7.6. As part of its contract management, the consortium offers quality improvement and development services to its delivery partners, for example, around the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). There are currently 18 delivery partners working in the city of Hull and across the surrounding area offering a mixture of programmes but predominantly Adult Community Learning and Skills for Life. Partners vary in type and size and include small community-based organisations, LearnDirect providers and branches of larger charities for example, Dyslexia Action. For many, learning and skills forms only part of their core business. They work with a wide range of learners including children and families, young people looking for employment, ex-offenders, the socially disadvantaged and economically isolated, and those from BME communities.

2.8. **Contribution to the Third Sector and the learning and skills sector**

2.8.1. HLC considers it has contributed to the Third Sector and the learning and skills sector in a range of ways. These include “always supporting organisations that are providers in many ways, not just in the delivery of teaching and learning”. Examples include, helping delivery partners to register with the Institute for Learning (IfL) and raising awareness in the Third Sector of the need to do so following the new learning and skills practitioner Continuing Professional Development (CDP) requirements. These include information meetings – called QINS (Quality Improvement Network meetings) – where delivery partners reported they “…get information on what’s available and what they should be doing so that the organisation is up to scratch with what’s required.”

2.8.2. HLC also lobbies on behalf of the Third Sector through its activities with local partnerships in the hope of influencing strategic decisions. The Chief Executive was pleased to discover on appointment that the “platform was already well-laid.”

2.8.3. The Consortium is approached frequently by other Third Sector bodies that are considering establishing consortia or developing existing arrangements. It is considering whether this should be a chargeable service in the future.

2.9. **Benefits of consortium membership**

2.9.1. Working with the consortium has been described by delivery partners as “a route to money they have never had access to before” and as “…a very good relationship for us”.

2.9.2. Three partners were involved in HLC’s first mainstream LSC-funded pilot in 2003 to prepare organisations to meet the Adult Learning Inspectorate’s (ALI) standards. They prepared for a “mock inspection” or “health check” which was viewed as a valuable experience, “…a beneficial developmental positive process” that helped the organisations grow.

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2.9.3. Delivery partners report that their staff regularly access free training provided by HLC to enable them to improve their delivery. This includes Evaluative Writing for Self-Assessment Reports, Observing Teaching and Learning sessions, workshops around lesson planning, and other CPD opportunities for tutors and managers.

2.9.4. Both the delivery partners that participated in the case study described having a good relationship with HLC that has changed over time. The consortium was described as “the mother-ship with the LSC relationship. They act as a conduit for ensuring policies and procedures are in the right order, they deal with all the paperwork type activities.” One partner felt “it could never be a lead agency to manage a contract” and therefore it was reliant on the consortium for this type of funding. The partnership was described as “mutually beneficial”, noting particularly the benefit of accessing staff training through the consortium.

2.9.5. One reported that the benefit of sub-contracting with the consortium was that it gave partners the ability to deliver contracts to a high standard whilst still engaging with ‘hard to reach’ learners. HLC removed the need for them to each have the systems needed to access LSC funding. One partner commented “…there are some great opportunities and the consortium is really, really useful”. The consortium was also seen as providing a “protective aspect” to LSC contract delivery in that providers “don’t have problems not being able to meet [their] outputs.”

2.9.6. HLC is reportedly a vehicle for lobbying and a source of information. It is “…our voice against the big machine…they speak our language and can translate to LSC language”. There is a recognition that the consortium has to balance LSC contract requirements with ensuring Third Sector providers understand their responsibilities. The consortium is seen as playing an important role in keeping partners informed of changes so they can “…keep on top of things…enabling learning not necessarily delivering learning”. This is viewed as particularly critical in relation to the imminent Machinery of Government (MoG) changes and frequent policy shifts for organisations where learning is only a part of what they do.

C  Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. Several internal and external changes were identified. Reportedly, the main external factor was the loss of core LSC funding earlier in 2008. Other key changes are the disappearance of franchising with colleges, and a shift from grants, such as capacity-building initiatives, to what is described as “output funded contracts”.

3.1.2. Internally, HLC has evolved considerably since it started, for example, staff numbers have increased from three at the beginning to 17 at one stage. The governance of the consortium has become more ‘hands-off’ than it was initially. It has recently completed a full restructuring (see paragraph 2.4.2) that has resulted in changes to working practices, roles and responsibilities.

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. The main impact of losing core LSC funding on HLC is that it can no longer deliver its services in the way it has previously. Although the consortium reported being the most successful provider in the Humber sub-region in securing ESF contracts this year, this will not cover its management costs. HLC reportedly needs “…a massive amount of contracts to get economies of scale”, for example, because the consortium management fee on ESF contracts is only ten percent and there are restrictions on what it can be used for.
3.2.2 The consortium is drawing on its reserves to maintain quality and competitiveness, for example, to purchase the MIS system “...just so we can get to the starting gate to bid for contracts”. Using reserves is seen as essential to “play catch up”.

3.2.3. The shift in the contracting culture was described as “rapidly moving staff from a VCS to a business/commercial-minded footing [which] left behind Trustees in terms of expertise in the early days”. HLC has identified a potential market and the need for a more structured approach to membership, and is considering introducing a paid membership for deliverers.

3.3. Distance travelled

3.3.1. HLC has described its development and progress as “significant” and estimates it at six or seven ‘on a scale of nought to ten’ in terms of growth in experience and track record. It considers it now has a reputation for delivering on every LSC contract to high standards, and sometimes to “Beacon Status”, ensuring high-level outputs and added value.

3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. Several outstanding achievements were reported. For one participant in the case study it was “convincing a cynical LSC that there is a professionalism in the sector” on the one hand, whilst “on the other hand convincing the sector that they had to evidence what they are doing.”

3.4.2. Another achievement was how far HLC had progressed “...from a standing start to delivering on par to some of the really well-established adult learning providers [being] up with the pack especially considering the level of resources and funding available”.

3.4.3. The continued existence of the consortium “on a sound platform to grow” was also cited as an achievement and its role as a “buffer between reality and policy” for its partners. It described being able “boil it [information] right down to what they [the partners] need to know.”

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. The forthcoming VLE is an area of potential growth: “…the main reason to set it up is it will deliver an on-going support mechanism for tutors’ on-going professional development in a real way.”

4.1.2. The consortium would like to extend its NLDC and PCDL funded work. However, HLC reports finding this difficult because contracts, (now awarded on an open competitive tendering basis), are secured primarily by local colleges and the local authorities. The consortium felt strongly there is “…no political interest in shifting the Adult Safeguarded funding to the best provider” and further, it is a “mistake to leave it where it is” on the grounds that colleges have a clear focus on the 14-19 agenda and employer engagement, rather than more community-based and informal learning.

4.1.3. HLC is looking for “breadth of funding” bodies, for example, opportunities with local authorities or the RDA to ensure its sustainability and that of its delivery partners. However, this is seen as a medium-term objective achievable over the next two years.
4.2. Barriers and enablers: future development

4.2.1. Key barriers to future developments identified by HLC are the reduction of LSC funding and the impact of the MoG changes. It argues that in the future, it will need to maintain its income by generating business. Future development was reported to “all hinge on where adult learning goes for fund management in the next two years” post LSC. It is unsure where the consortium will sit in the future but considers it is likely to be either linked strategically with the local authority or the RDA. The consortium describes itself as “…the jam in the sandwich that is being squeezed out”, and that “good LSC regional relationships will go and a great deal of effort will be spent on building relationships with funding bodies to see if they want a consortium.” HLC anticipates it will have to prove itself again, and is considering the scope for new roles, including direct delivery.

4.2.2. Partners reported uncertainty about the future, commenting that “…more money for more delivery” is needed from the LSC. One delivery partner “wants them to go forward [undertaking more delivery for the consortium] if only a little…but it is all dependent on government decisions”, factors that are external to the consortium. It was felt that once funding from successful LSC contracts is divided between eight to ten providers, each organisation does not receive very much for delivery - a maximum of £30,000 - leaving nothing for staff development or capacity building. Whilst these providers consider they do not require a lot of assistance themselves, they estimate that organisations that have joined HLC more recently do still need support.

4.2.3. Maintenance of the website was identified as potentially one of the areas most vulnerable to the effects of reduced funding. Running costs will have to be found from other funding which, according to HLC, will be “stretched to the limit.”

4.2.4. A further reported potential barrier was increased competition with other local providers for LSC and co-financing tenders. This was attributed to the reduction in traditional funding streams which could mean it will “butt up to their members”.

4.2.5. The Board of Trustees will review the Business Plan in December 2008 in consultation with the staff. In light of recent changes, it was felt that “some changes to the Business Plan were inevitable”.

4.2.6. Key enablers to future success were identified as HLC’s reputation, history, past success, experienced staff, and strong networks.

4.3. Long-term vision

4.3.1. According to HLC’s Strategic Business Plan20 its long-term vision is “to be recognised as the best consortium by all stakeholders”. Its mission is that “HLC will assist the voluntary and community sector in fostering social cohesion through learning based solutions.”

4.3.2. The medium-term future for the consortium (the next two years) was described as “bright” but there are many concerns over its long-term future. With the removal of the LSC, current ESF projects reported to be finishing in 2012 and Big Lottery and Capacity Builders by 2011, the consortium anticipated a “crunch point” in the future. It considers it is a sustainable organisation but not necessarily using the current consortium model.

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Consortium Case Study 5

VC Train

Case study summary

VC Train is a well-established learning consortium operating across Yorkshire and the Humber region. It has been a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity since October 2001. It was funded originally through the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward, with £5.4 million European Social Funding (ESF) and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) co-financing under ESF Objective 1.

The consortium membership structure was set up originally around three thematic clusters; lone parents, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, and disability groups, to accommodate ESF requirements. Whilst members remain in clusters for logistical reasons, the thematic clusters are reported to be less significant. Membership is free and open to Third Sector organisations that provide learning and skills as part of their work. The consortium currently has 102 members, and 17 members of staff, 13 full time and four part time.

VC Train’s annual turnover for 2007/8 was £2,990,490. This is forecast to fall to approximately £2,200,000 in 2008/9, representing a decrease of around 25 per cent.

The consortium describes its greatest achievement as the large number of individuals (over 30,000) it has reached since it began. It identifies an important learning point in the differences between what it set out to do at the beginning and the direction it has taken subsequently. This is attributed largely to external influences, particularly changing funding priorities.

A  Context and background

1.1.  Rational for development

1.1.1.  VC Train is a well-established learning consortium operating across Yorkshire and the Humber. It has been a Company Limited by Guarantee and Registered Charity since October 2001. It has its own premises which are referred to by staff and members as “the hub”.

1.1.2.  The original impetus for the consortium was a response to the Government’s White Paper “Learning to Succeed” (1999)\(^1\) which offered the prospect of funding for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) providers “…under the same arrangements as colleges and other providers so long as they [met] the essential quality and accountability thresholds [required by] Government.” This led to a call for a “…dedicated infrastructure…” to enable the VCS to fulfil its potential. The resulting organisation became known as VC Train.

1.1.3. It was decided at the outset not to involve Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) because they were not seen as “…dedicated specialists in learning and skills infrastructure, [rather] they had a broad generic brief around supporting the third sector…”

1.1.4. The newly formed Learning and Skills Council (LSC) reportedly sought to identify provider arrangements with the private, public and VCS sectors. The Yorkshire Training Partnership was a forum for private training providers and the public sector was serviced by the Partnership of Colleges, the South Yorkshire Further Education Consortium. The LSC apparently wanted “…something similar within the third sector…they saw VC Train as plugging a lot of gaps and giving them a real opportunity to create a more even and balanced, diverse supply base within the post-16 learning and skills sector.”

1.1.5. There were caveats. The LSC is described as struggling in the early stages to “…understand the third sector and they didn’t understand how a consortia works [therefore] we spent a lot of time trying to get them to understand what we were about…”. Once the LSC appreciated the consortium’s significance it “…really started to identify with it then and saw it as an ideal solution to solve all their problems”.

1.1.6. The benefits for the VCS were equally apparent: “…although we [VC Train] were set up as a response to the LSC [and] there was the opportunity at the time for voluntary organisations to access mainstream funding as individual organisations most of us didn’t have the capacity to do that. But bring us together and we have the economies of scale and the capacity to access it. A lot of small organisations were sub-contracting with the colleges…and in some of those colleges they were top-slicing up to 50 per cent…” for management fees. The learning consortium was viewed as “…an opportunity to directly contract with the LSC and cut out the middle man of the colleges because the top-slicing that we needed collectively would be far less than would be taken by the colleges. So that was the original guiding impetus of a lot of organisations putting their hands up and saying absolutely, I want to buy into this”.

1.2. Original Funding Sources

1.2.1. A key founding member was given a £5,000 grant by the Sheffield Community Advisory Development Unit to work on developing a learning consortium in what was described as “…a sponsorship arrangement”.

1.2.2. This was followed by £30,000 from the Regional Development Agency (RDA), Yorkshire Forward, from European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 1 under the “Access to Mainstream” initiative. VC Train did not receive LSC core funding.

1.2.3. The consortium also secured £7.5 million LSC / ESF co-financing for delivery over three years (2001 – 2004), and £1.5 million for infrastructure and capacity building through ESF and match funding over the same period as detailed below:

Infrastructure and capacity building:

- £5.4 million ESF Objective 1 for three thematic clusters: lone parents, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and disability groups (see paragraph 1.4.2.) amounting to £1.8 million each; and
- £2,079,000 from the Adult Community Learning (ACL) LSC / ESF co-financing to support organisations that fell outside the clusters, for example those delivering general vocational training and community learning.
Delivery:

- £804,375 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for infrastructure development and capacity building by the hub, representing 55 per cent of the funding, leaving the consortium to find the remaining 45 per cent through match funding; and
- £493,000 match-funding from RDA Skills Development funding through five contracts (ranging from £30,000 to £175,000) and £210,000 from the Single Regeneration Budget 6 (SRB) funding via the South Yorkshire Coalfield Partnership to work specifically in Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster.

1.2.4. Reportedly, the “…vast majority of the £7.5 million was able to go to members… quadrupling the amount of money going to the sector”. VC Train achieved this by giving members £10 per learner hour rather than the standard college return of £2.50. This enabled members to acquire sufficient surpluses to undertake capacity building. As a result, the consortium was seen as an attractive route to contracts compared with the colleges and other mainstream providers.

1.2.5. Once the ESF contracts were awarded, the consortium had to rapidly implement a range of systems and structures relating to quality assurance, development and membership, in order to ensure effective delivery. The ESF contracts were not “…solely focused on learning delivery…accessing ESF meant we were able to deliver on more things”, for example, capacity building, advice and guidance and training that benefited VC Train members. ESF funding was particularly advantageous because it enabled the consortium to support “…activities around training that actually enable our learners to learn. Had we just had straightforward mainstream training contracts…we would have had to have found funding elsewhere to provide the wrap-around work with our learners to enable them to participate in training…”

1.3. Initial key aims and objectives

1.3.1. The initial aim of the consortium was to enable VCS organisations to access mainstream funding contracts more competitively to:

“…provide a direct bidding and fund management mechanism through a partnership structure for voluntary and community sector learning providers. This aim will be focused upon the access, and maintenance of, mainstream and other funding from key funding bodies.”

1.3.2. However, due to changes in funding priorities in the region, VC Train’s initial work was to manage three contracts under ESF Objective 1.

1.3.3. The consortium’s mission remains:

“…to provide a mutually beneficial consortium structure for voluntary and community sector learning providers in Yorkshire and Humberside, in order to support and enable all member organisations to access funding, develop their capacity and achieve high standards of quality and performance in meeting the needs of learners and in tackling disadvantage and advancing equity and social inclusion.”

1.3.4. It has 14 objectives, including:

- “Creating an enabling and support infrastructure that will serve members needs…”

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- Generating economies of scale…
- Provide greater opportunity for a strategic overview of training and education…
- Employ expert and experienced staff…
- Develop and safeguard standards and quality in relation to the consortium overall and to the learning provision if individual member organisations to ensure that we can meet the rigorous quality assurance requirements…
- Build the capacity of the member organisations…

1.4. Membership

1.4.1. Initially 42 VCS organisations applied for membership, the majority of which (approximately 70 per cent) were Sheffield based. However, because VC Train was delivering ESF Object 1 contracts that were overseen by the Government Office for the region and distributed by the LSC, it was encouraged (as part of the contractual requirements) to have a membership that reached across South Yorkshire and not just district-wide. Its membership base eventually included 40 per cent from Sheffield and 20 per cent each from Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham. Reportedly, this led to some frustration amongst organisations that were fit for contracting but not in the desired areas.

1.4.2. The original membership has been described as a “…disparate group of organisations” that were not universally regarded as representative of the wider VCS. However, these initial decisions are viewed as pragmatic and consonant with the consortium’s primary focus on accessing mainstream funding.

1.5. Barriers and enablers

1.5.1. There were several key enablers to VC Train’s development. First, the drive and vision of the individuals involved at the beginning is regarded as a key factor in identifying both the need and potential for a VCS learning consortium.

1.5.2. Second, the steering group is credited with offering essential support and credibility. Particularly key was the inclusion of representatives from the Open College Network (OCN) who were reportedly “…incredibly supportive…and they gave us a degree of credibility that we wouldn’t have had had they not committed to us”.

1.5.3. Third, the RDA’s initial investment of £30,000 provided the pump priming needed to transform the concept into a reality: “They essentially invested in an organisation that did not exist”, and gave the consortium the opportunity to prove it could deliver.

1.5.4. Similarly, ESF Object 1 funding offered “…a huge opportunity” for development activity. The European programme provided large co-financed contracts with the LSC and other government agencies such as Job Centre Plus, that the VCS was well-placed to deliver. VC Train facilitated “access to those contracts and it enabled the LSC to deliver those contracts”. Reportedly the LSC “…needed to have only South Yorkshire-wide contracts, they did not want to have to contract with individual organisations, particularly in the third sector. [Hence] there was a necessity for a mechanism for the LSC to contract with the sector at a sub-regional level in order to meet its obligations and be able to deliver ESF co-financed programmes.” The consortium became that mechanism.

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1.5.5. It is important to note that Objective 1 funding has also been described as a “double-edged sword” in that it “skewed” the consortium from its “original path” and away from mainstream LSC funding to focus on delivering ESF contracts.

1.5.6. An initial difficulty arose from the reportedly high local expectations that VC Train would take on the role of developing the VCS.

1.5.7. Some less than positive media coverage over the consortium’s decision to encourage membership from across Yorkshire and the Humber reportedly made communication with the VCS more difficult.

1.5.8. The consortium identifies a dichotomy between “…what you set out to achieve and what the world outside does to you to change direction.” Whilst this was not necessarily viewed negatively, it was highlighted as a point of learning for all consortia, “…particularly for assisting other people in developing learning consortia.”

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. VC Train does not deliver directly. It sub-contracts to members and takes a 10 per cent management fee. It is also an accreditation centre for City and Guilds and ASDAN and offers this service free to members.

2.1.2. The consortium recently (July 2008) “withdrew” from all its mainstream LSC contracts. These were: Entry to Employment (E2E) which ran for two years from 1st August 2006 to 31st July 2008 valued at, £269,404 Train to Gain worth £117,383 and VCS Apprenticeships worth £186,388. Both the latter ran for one year between 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008. Whilst the consortium fulfilled its contractual obligations, it chose not to renew any of them. This was because delivery partners were reportedly “poor at evidencing their work” and did not have in place many of the LSC requirements for contract delivery. The consortium, as the body responsible to the LSC, was unable to produce evidence of delivery to Ofsted when notice of an inspection was given. VC Train currently has two contracts as detailed below (see section 2.2).

2.2. Income sources and size

2.2.1. VC Train has no core LSC funding. As outlined above, its income derives largely from ESF/LSC co-financed projects.

2.2.2. Its annual turnover for 2007/8 was £2,990,490. This is forecast at approximately £2,200,000 for 2008/9, a decline of around 25 per cent.

2.2.3. The consortium has two contracts at the moment: one is worth £4 million, and the other is for £465,000. Both run for approximately the next two years (see Table 6), between August 2008 and May 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6 Humber Learning Consortium: contracts and funding</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contracts and funding sources</strong></td>
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<td>Community Engagement Project</td>
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Value of contract - £4 million
Contract length - two years (August 2008 – March 2010) with a possible extension from April 2010 to March 2011. In addition, there will be a third phase from April 2011 – March 2013 but this may need to go out to tender.
Funding source - ESF, South Yorkshire Transitional status funding from Objective 1 to Objective 2 (enhanced ESF) and LSC co-financed.
Output - The target is 7,500 referrals over the two years.

VC Train is participating in the first part – the community engagement aspect. This involves identifying anyone who is over 19 years of age, unemployed and available and willing to work, and referring them to a key worker.
Referred individuals are helped with “barrier removal such as educational and other needs” to enable them to engage in employment and training.
Thirty-five Local Engagement Centres (LECs) in deprived communities are involved and delivery is by 29 VC Train members in 42 deprived wards.

Minerva
Value of contract - £465,000
Contract length - two years (May 2008 – May 2011)
Funding source - Big Lottery

The funding allows the consortium to undertake curriculum development with its membership in all areas to ensure they become fit for mainstream contracts.

2.3.4. The Community Engagement project is reportedly proving challenging. The consortium, and its sub-contracted deliverers are in discussion with DWP and the LSC over what constitutes a “meaningful referral”, as apparently some key workers had difficulties accepting some referrals. To date, VC Train members have made 600 referrals but only 27 per cent have been accepted. There is concern that the remaining 63 per cent are seen as “...too difficult to work with”.

2.3.5. Personal and Community Development Learning Funding (PCDL) is seen by the consortium as the “ideal vehicle” for VCS delivery and members express some frustration that it remains with the colleges who appear to see it as “…core funding and don't use it to deliver”.

2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. There are ten trustees on the governing Board. Six of these are members of the consortium and four are co-opted, independent individuals. The Board meets every two months. The Executive Director attends and can invite other members of staff as appropriate. The Board’s role is to steer the organisation strategically rather than operationally.

2.3.2. There are three sub-groups working across the consortium in the areas of: finance, human resources, and operations. These have a wider membership than the Board and include staff and individuals with relevant skills and expertise. All sub-group decisions are referred to the Board for final approval. The consortium holds an Annual General Meeting to which all full members are invited.

2.3.3. Membership of VC Train is free and falls into three categories: full; associate; and contracting. Overall, the consortium has 102 members.

2.3.4. Full members are usually training providers potentially sub contracting through the consortium. The only criterion for full membership is that the organisation is defined as VCS in its constitution and demonstrates this in its governance arrangements. Associate membership is granted to organisations that do not satisfy the full-membership criterion but
would still like access to information on learning and skills in the Third Sector, for example, OCN.

2.3.5. The category of contracting member is a recent introduction. These organisations have taken on contracts through the consortium but do not have a vote and are not involved in decision making.

2.3.6. Many VC Train members do not have teaching and learning as their core business. Most of them are about “…the human interface of barrier removal not education. Education and development form part of it but what isn’t there for them is ‘full fat’ level 2 and level 3 training courses.” Reportedly, there is a “steady stream of applications” from organisations wishing to become members.

2.4. **Staff and volunteers**

2.4.1. There are 17 members of staff, 13 of whom are full time. The staff team consists of:

- Director of Programmes;
- Contract Manager;
- Contracting Team
- Quality Manager;
- Management Information Systems (MIS) Officer;
- Finance Officer;
- Administration staff; and
- Executive Director.

2.4.2. The consortium recently undertook a major organisational review resulting in restructuring and the appointment of new staff. Job descriptions and roles have changed substantially, refocusing staff towards skills and knowledge “outcome” and “output” driven funding, rather than capacity building member organisations. It has created a “lean system” that is fit for purpose in the new funding climate where there is “no longer any consortium development money.”

2.4.3. Length of staff service varies. Some have been appointed recently, following the restructuring, whilst others have been with the consortium for five years or more. Despite the recent unsettling period, staff reported enjoying their work, finding the atmosphere relaxed and friendly, with one commenting, “I just love my job” and another describing it as “…a fun job.”

2.5. **Key partnerships**

2.5.1. Originally, the key partnership was with the RDA, which was the source of initial funding. The consortium currently has links with a range of partners covering particular areas of its work, namely: funding partners; strategic development partners that will shape future opportunities; and networking for sharing objectives and good practice. Current partnerships include the Sheffield and Yorkshire City Strategy Pathfinders; the Learning and Skills Partnership, and the Working and Skills Board. The level of engagement with each one varies, in some instances consortium staff represent the interests of member organisations and in others the role might be broader, for example, the Executive Director sits on several Boards including the Work and Skills Partnership and the South Yorkshire Open Forum.
2.5.2. The consortium was reported to have a “high-level of connectivity to local partners but sometimes this is [indirectly] through its member organisations”.

2.6. Communication

2.6.1 VC Train has a website that contains information on its mission, aims and objectives, training and events, members and partner organisations. It also has a designated members’ area where a range of documents (covering topics such as finance, quality assurance, monitoring and general information) can be accessed and downloaded free of charge.\(^25\)

2.6.2. Internal and external communication is predominantly through email or the website. In addition, members found telephoning or going into the VC Train offices helpful. Membership clusters and focus groups are used to disseminate information. Current suggested innovations are: staff members working with different groups of providers; and a short summary newsletter detailing Board discussions and decisions. The website has been used to disseminate such information in the past but this is currently being re-developed.

2.7. The teaching and learning offer

2.7.1. VC Train does not have a current learning offer. It was involved previously in LSC-funded E2E, Train to Gain Training Pays, and Apprenticeship programmes. However, at the end of the contracts (July 2008), VC Train gave the LSC notice of its intention to “withdraw”.

2.7.2. Consortium members are involved in delivering training and skills to their client groups at various levels. Initiatives are frequently aimed at getting people back to work or into training. For some members it is their core business, whilst for others it is a small part of what they do. They work with disadvantaged and excluded individuals and communities, and frequently offer training and skills as part of overall support packages. Delivery partners include BME organisations, adult community learning groups, and private training providers. They have a range of client groups such as young mothers and fathers, ethnic minorities, unemployed and those with mental health issues. Programmes cover employability skills, ICT, and Skills for Life. Many providers work in partnership with other non-learning organisations, for example Primary Care Trusts (PCT). All active delivery partners are involved in the Community Engagement project.

2.8. Contribution to the third and learning and skills sectors

2.8.1. The consortium feels it has learned a lot about the real aims, motivations and attitudes of the Third Sector in the areas of learning and skills. The LSC is perceived as approaching Third and private sector providers on the same terms, with reported concerns that this “…doesn’t work because we are dealing with people that cannot be fixed in 26 weeks. The private sector knows where these people are, they know how to mop them up…we’re left with the long-term disadvantaged and barriered…the seriously disadvantaged who are getting further from the job market. But what the LSC say is we will fund you just like the private sector”. Third Sector organisations were seen as having less capacity than private sector providers, with smaller, community-based organisations, in particular, viewed as requiring additional funding in order to deliver accredited training.

\(^25\) [http://www.vctrain.org/welcome.html](http://www.vctrain.org/welcome.html)
2.8.2. VC Train’s enduring ethos is to remove barriers to individual learning and to support organisational development. This was reflected in the capacity-building money embedded in the original Objective 1 contracts. However, the unit costs per learner of current contracts assume organisations no longer have development needs and, according to VC Train, this is not the case. There is reportedly “a strong desire to capacity build in the community to allow for better delivery”, and the Board has recently discussed the level of top-slicing required from current contracts to cover core costs and community development.

2.9. Benefits of being a consortium member

2.9.1. Six representatives from five member organisations across the three thematic clusters were interviewed. They varied in size from small community organisations to a branch of a national charity and employed from six to 14 members of staff. Turnover ranged from £280,000 to £1.8 million. Three of the five had subcontracted through the consortium since it began. Training and skills were the core business of one provider but formed only one aspect of the work of the remaining four. They are all contracting through VC Train to deliver the Community Engagement project.

2.9.2. The main reported reason for joining the consortium was access to mainstream LSC funding which was viewed as essential to their work. One commented “…without VC Train we wouldn’t be able to individually bid for contracts…it’s easier to leave it to the big boys to do…”

2.9.3. Benefits of membership include support from the consortium and the opportunity to share good practice and ideas. Frequent meetings of each cluster had facilitated this in the past but the recent funding reduction meant these are now restricted to those holding contracts with VC Train. Since September 2008, meetings have taken the form of focus groups arranged geographically rather than thematically.

2.9.4. The consortium also provides its members with quality systems and standards that improve their businesses as a whole and not just their learning and skills delivery. In addition, they offer accreditation in ASDAN and City and Guilds and one or two training days annually. These services are free to members.

C Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. VC Train has experienced significant difficulty recently in delivering its LSC contracts. In 2007, the consortium took on five LSC mainstream contracts under E2E and Train to Gain. Delivery was undertaken by a number of small organisations using a satellite model but restrictions (under the funding) on class sizes meant this was not cost effective. VC Train altered the delivery format so that the consortium provided venues and the delivery organisations supplied the tutors. This was not viable either, because learning and skills was not the core business of many of the organisations involved and they did not have the necessary tutor resources.

3.1.2. The situation was exacerbated when the consortium was awarded a Regional Employability Skills contract - a joint DWP/LSC initiative. There was some contention during the period of the contract over how the funding was calculated. According to VC Train, “…still today they can’t tell us how they [the LSC] work out their funding for it. They can’t give us a definitive formula.”

3.1.3. These complications mean the consortium was unable to evidence contract delivery. Work was underway and was reportedly “…of a higher quality than most of the private training
providers… What we did was of a high-quality high-standard, engaged well, worked with the beneficiary, moved them forward and they valued it [but] what we were poor at was mainstream evidence of all that work. It was too onerous on the lean amount of money, that all went into delivery. It didn’t leave anything to administer the reporting and evidence. They [the providers] paid it all to tutors. It left nothing for the organisation.” Therefore the consortium “…sat there potentially facing an Ofsted audit without sufficient evidence that wouldn’t truly reflect VC Train or its members. It would just take a snap-shot of paperwork” and so the consortium decided to withdraw from the contracts. Written notice was given to the LSC of VC Train’s intention and it offered to pay Education Maintenance Allowances to beneficiaries during the transition period. In addition, VC Train’s main funding stream (ESF through the RDA), concluded in December 2007.

3.1.4. Largely because of the difficulties outlined above, the organisation underwent significant restructuring from early 2008, leading to major shifts in staff requirements towards a more “commercially focused team”.

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. These changes have impacted significantly on VC Train’s operations. It has stopped much of the early stage development work it undertook with members and recruited a staff team with strong commercial as well as VCS expertise. Only a small number of members (29) now sub-contract with the consortium.

3.2.2. The loss of ESF funding also raises serious questions about how “…we survive beyond that full-fat funding. Particularly in the context of the… route that government has gone down with its private contracting through Job Centre Plus and the LSC…the competition…and the way they drive down the rates…that’s our challenge… how we economically can survive in that post-European funding system.”. There is concern that funders now assume that sufficient progress has been achieved in the VCS because South Yorkshire has received large amounts of Objective 1 ESF / LSC co-finance. However, those working in the VCS feel the “…job is not yet finished [and] if you threaten its capacity to deliver by cutting off money communities won’t make the progression that they might”.

3.3. Distance travelled

3.3.1. The consortium describes its early arrangements as “a disparate group of hopeful organisations that benefited from being in a poor place at the right time which helped those organisations and VC Train grow and develop. But now we are very much a highly professional competent contracting body with the latest skills, procedures and infrastructure”. The consortium estimates it could now manage up to £40 million turnover.

3.4. Consortium’s most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. VC Train considers its most outstanding achievement to be its work with more than 30,000 people since it began in 2001 who have “…moved away from their disadvantage”. Over 17,000 have progressed into further education or employment and training. Although some individuals would have accessed learning and skills through community organisations without the consortium “…it is clear the number of people brought into learning progression is much much greater than if constituent members had been left to get on with it themselves.” Further, the bigger providers such as the colleges “…don’t have that penetrative reach” that VC Train members have and they would not have been able make the same effective links into the community.
D  Future plans and vision

4.1.  Potential growth areas

4.1.1. The difficulties outlined above have informed VC Train’s perspectives on its future direction. It is currently considering a three-themed approach focusing on excellence, exploration and enterprise. The future strategy has still to be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval.

4.1.2. The first theme, excellence, entails the ambition to ensure every aspect of contract delivery through sub-contractors is achieved to Ofsted grade one standard.

4.1.3. The second, exploration, will encourage the consortium to engage with other funding bodies that take a holistic interest in “…the whole person with barrier issues”. The consortium realises its sub-contractors are expert at dealing with learners who face multiple disadvantage. It plans to compile a delivery package with key stakeholders to facilitate the “…knitting together of solutions”.

4.1.4. The third theme, enterprise, will involve supporting existing and emerging consortia with paid-for services. VC Train already has a full range of systems covering quality, finance, accounting, management information and policy. Over the past few years the consortium has invested around £350,000 in a Management Information System with the help of LSC West Yorkshire Data Mine Project funding (£114,000). Organisations, members and non-members, will be charged on a sliding scale proportionate to their use. The system has two servers located at separate sites and is capable of holding a range of data sets specific to each organisation, including on-line accounting and payroll. The consortium will maintain the system, ensuring that small organisations will not have to invest money in infrastructure to meet LSC mainstream funding requirements. In addition, it will offer the services of the accreditation centre. VC Train feels “…it knows what works” and that others can benefit from its knowledge and expertise, “unlike the level playing field it was promised the sector still doesn’t receive capital or core funding similar to FE Colleges”.

4.2.  Barriers and enablers: future development

4.2.1. The main enabler and barrier for future development is funding.

4.3.  Long-term vision

4.3.1. VC Train’s future vision is to protect its ethos whilst looking for new ways of working in an ever-changing funding climate. This includes considering if it is appropriate to restrict “all.activity to just education and learning or if a coming together of organisations for the hard to reach” would be more beneficial. The consortium reported a “…sense of entering a period of test and experimentation” out of which there could be a transmission from learning and skills to a broader remit, as yet to be determined.

4.3.2. Whilst the consortium has a proposed future strategy and has just completed restructuring, its long-term future appears uncertain. VC Train reports a real possibility that it will need to reduce staff numbers in the New Year. This would mean a loss of expertise and would be potentially “devastating for staff”.
Case Study 6

Cumbria Learning Links

Case study summary

Cumbria Learning Links (CLL) is hosted by Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) within its training department. CLL’s primary current function is to maintain a Third Sector communication network and it now describes itself as a ‘membership’ network rather than a consortium.

Servicing the Network is one element of the job of a part-time staff member working for a few hours a week. It does not carry out any teaching or learning activities itself and its contracts as a consortium ended between 18 months and two years ago.

Cumbria Learning Links is aware that it retains a profile as a well-established consortium but feels it no-longer fits this category.

A  Consortium context and background

1.1.  Rational for development

1.1.1. Cumbria Learning Links (CLL) was established in 1997 as a project of the Cumbria Association of Council for Voluntary Sector (CACVS) and was known as the Cumbria Voluntary Sector Training Forum. It has never functioned entirely independently and sat initially within the services of, CACVS, and subsequently within Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). Funding was secured for training and learning functions, and for activities that included some consortium roles. At its height, the structure employed a team of six staff, both full and part-time, doing blended consortium and core CVS work. The term Cumbria Learning Links has been used since 2004, but latterly it has been defined as referring to the Network.

1.2.  Initial Funding Sources

1.2.1. There was no specific initial funding to set the consortium up. It evolved from a number of different initiatives. However, it has accessed £5,000 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Local Intervention Development (LID) money to implement development activities around consortium/Network activity. Reportedly, European Social Funding (ESF) and LSC Capacity Builders contracts were instrumental in the consortium’s growth. The Capacity Builders project was valued at approximately £250,000, and the Quality in Learning programme (ESF funding) was worth around £40,000. Northern Rock and Big Lottery were sources of additional funding as part of larger applications by CACVS for training and learning support.

1.3.  Initial key aims and objectives

1.3.1. According to a report produced for Cumbria Learning Links in 2007\textsuperscript{26}, the consortium originally had two main functions:

\textsuperscript{26}Huxtable, G. (28th February 2007) Learning and Skills – Cumbria Learning Links and Public Sector Service Delivery, Wingspan Consulting Ltd, p.5
1. “Maintaining a network of around 130 organisations with an interest in training and learning in the third sector in Cumbria.

2. Delivery of training services in support of the needs of Cumbrian Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs).”

1.4. Membership

1.4.1. Membership was drawn initially from across the learning and skills sector including private training providers. However, the majority were voluntary community sector (VCS) organisations that were interested in, but not necessarily delivering, training.

1.4.2. According to CLL’s membership application form (2006), members were entitled to:

- all publications and Newsletters published by CLL;
- advice and information on quality and training opportunities;
- publicise their training courses and programmes in CLL publications;
- advice and information regarding funding for training and learning;
- active inclusion in bids for funding of training and learning activity;
- updates on current initiatives affecting the work of the training and learning sector locally, regionally and nationally;
- inclusion in the CLL web-based database;
- invitations to training and learning events regularly coordinated by CLL; and
- input into the current and future work of CLL.

1.5. Barriers and enablers: past development

1.5.1. Reportedly, one of the main enabling factors was the ESF contract which helped to fund the consortium’s development.

1.5.2. A key reported barrier was confusion between CLL and its parent organisation Cumbria CVS. Those outside the organisation were sometimes unclear about how the organisations differed.

1.5.3. The rural nature of Cumbria was cited as a further barrier, resulting in insufficient “volume in the area” to make service delivery viable.

1.5.4. A further substantial barrier has been staff capacity and dedicated resources to drive consortium activities forward.

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. In 2006/7 all five CVSs in the county were brought under the umbrella of Cumbria CVS. As a result of this merger, the consortium is currently located in the CVS’s training department. It is now described as “…a network rather than a consortium”.

2.1.2. Due to this relatively recent merger, CLL’s status and activity is currently being re-defined. The network has draft ‘Terms of Reference’ (January 2008) which set out its purpose, type of membership and proposed activities. These state “the purpose of the Network is to:
• **Support** local Third Sector involvement in learning, training and workforce development planning and delivery of services, enabling the sector to be an effective partner in local learning and skills initiatives and decision-making structures.

• **Enable** organisations in the Third Sector in Cumbria to play a full and equal part in the development and delivery of learning to the benefit of their volunteers, staff, members and/or target communities which in turn will promote a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector across the sub-region.

• **Advance** the interests of all Third Sector organisations who are concerned with learning and training in the sub-region.

• **Represent** the views and interests of the sector in the sub-region to key strategic partners in the field of education, training and learning.”

2.1.3. According to the ‘Terms of Reference’, proposed activities include:

- supporting communication;
- developing knowledge and understanding;
- seeking funding;
- providing information;
- responding to opportunities; and
- sharing good practice.

2.2. **Income sources and size**

2.2.1. All funding that contributed directly to CLL activity had ended by February 2007. In addition, the collapse of Northern Rock and “…the tightening of ESF contracts” have both been very problematic for the consortium/network are described as the biggest ‘hit’.

2.2.2. Whilst CLL does not have funding, Cumbria CVS has two LSC contracts: Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) and ESF Community Grants funding, worth £155,000 revenue and £73,000 capital; and approximately £10,000, respectively. The CLL network will be utilised as one conduit for communicating information to the VCS regarding both.

2.3. **Governance and current membership**

2.3.1. CLL does not have a governing body and is not formally constituted. Despite current difficulties, it retains a membership of 130 organisations but many of these are said to be “historical”. Only a small number are direct training providers.

2.4. **Staff and volunteers**

2.4.1. The network has one part-time member of staff working a few hours a week on network activities.
2.5. Key partnerships

2.5.1. The network retains contact with Cumbria Local Authority Adult Education Services, which is a county-wide service. Whilst the local authority provides £15,000 additional funding to the NLDC contract for referrals to its provision “…this is more Cumbria CVS than the Learning Links Network.”

2.5.2. The remaining staff member “…still out there on behalf of the network…” and is engaged with regional Learning and Skills Network activity, collaborating with other consortia in the region and sharing knowledge and experience. CLL is also currently engaged with the Consortia+ national network.

2.6. Communications

2.6.1. Communicating with the VCS is now CLL’s main activity. News and information is circulated bi-monthly by email. Information events are held every six months for members. The last one took place in October 2008 and was attended by 13 people who reportedly “…found it useful.”

2.7. Learning and skills offer

2.7.1. CLL no longer has a direct learning and skills offer although Cumbria CVS continues to provide a training programme for the Third Sector in Cumbria.

2.7.2. The network recently completed a Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire (PQQ) with the LSC “…with the express aim of providing Network members with a contracting "host". However once the tenders came out both size and complexity made it very difficult for us to address this...” A range of Third Sector providers delivering around Skills for Employability and programmes for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) were interested, but none was in a position to hold large contracts. They declined to go forward to Invitation to Tender (ITT) (although individual members have taken up sub-contracting opportunities), but it has been difficult for CLL to provide support or to monitor these.

2.8. Contribution to the Third Sector and learning and skills sector

2.8.1. In the past, CLL has helped its members to access LSC contracts and provided the quality systems needed in order for these to be delivered successfully. However, the current contracting environment makes it difficult for CLL to continue to provide this service. It would appear that there are low and declining numbers of VCS organisations in the area, and that these are increasingly unable, or reluctant, to engage in contracting, particularly in relation to learning and skills.

2.8.2. The rural context in which CLL operates is viewed as having been detrimental to its development. The number of VCS organisations in the area is small and the volume of demand for the CLL services has therefore been low, although arguably it is no less significant to the organisations concerned.

2.9. Benefits of consortium membership

2.9.1. Reported benefits of being a consortium member included access to large ESF contracts and the support structures supplied by the consortium.

2.9.2. Anecdotally, the communication provided by the consortium is useful to its members, providing a synthesis of essential information they would otherwise not have.
C Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. The key changes to CLL since it was set up are its merger into Cumbria CVS, the ending of ESF contracts, the subsequent loss of staff, and the demise of Northern Rock with which it had “...good plans before the crash.”

3.2. Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1. The main impact of these changes is that the consortium no longer exists in its original form. This transition is described as “…like its fallen like a pack of cards.”

3.2.2. Despite CLL’s profile as a well-established consortium, it has not proved to be sustainable. Reportedly there have been “…a lot of contributory factors…” to this including the demise locally of accessible contracting opportunities (for example Northern Rock as a main funder of the consortium), and the rural nature of the county. The learning consortium’s failure to reach its full potential is a source of frustration for the remaining staff member.

3.1. Distance travelled

3.3.1. The consortium is described as having travelled a “…considerable distance between 2002 and 2007”. This was a period of growth. However, since then it has reportedly declined “…it is depressing from where we were three to four years ago”.

3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. The consortium regards its most outstanding achievement as winning two successful ESF contracts at the start. These enabled 15 member organisations and the consortium to develop and grow, bringing “…them and us on”.

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. There are no reported potential growth areas at this time. However, communication is still a core function, particularly in light of the recently introduced learning and skills practitioners reforms and the need for VCS providers to be informed of such changes.

4.2. Barriers and enablers: future development

4.2.1. Key barriers to future development are the lack of funding and insufficient staff time to develop the network or to secure new contracts.

4.3. Long-term vision

4.3.1. At the moment, there is no long-term vision for CLL – this is seen as a subject for debate within Cumbria CVS. The latter will continue to offer its core training to Third Sector organisations under the CVS umbrella, but it is unclear as to whether this is CLL activity. However, there are hopes that the “…Learning Links Network will continue to operate as a network of communication but it will not aspire to more than that in the short-term.”
Case Study 7

South London Learning Consortium

Case study summary

South London Learning Consortium (SLLC) was set up in 2005. It has 109 members of varying types and size, including all six local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS). Consortium membership is free. Geographically, its members cover, to a greater or lesser degree, all five areas of the London region. The consortium has seven staff members.

SLLC was set up to help Third Sector organisations access mainstream Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding. Its main activity is delivering LSC Train to Gain contracts. This is sub-contracted to 11 providers drawn from its membership. The programme covers 16 different curriculum areas including Childcare, Business Administration and Customer Service. Courses are run on a roll-on roll-off basis. In November 2008, the consortium underwent a successful Train to Gain audit.

The consortium’s annual income in 2007/8 was £500,000. This is predicted to rise to £1.5 million in 2008/9, a three-fold increase.

A key change since the consortium began has been the increasing focus of the European Social Fund (ESF) away from social and personal adult learning to employability skills and full qualifications for those in work.

The consortium views its main challenge in the future is maintaining its business position in a highly competitive arena. It sees its greatest achievement as “…being here and being a credible organisation”.

A Context and background

1.1. Rational for development

1.1.1. South London Learning Consortium (SLLC) is a vigorous but relatively recent Third Sector learning and skills consortium. It is based in South London but its membership is pan-London. It operates as the trading arm of the South London Community CVS Partnership which is described as its “parent body”. It was set up in 2005 to help “…Third Sector organisations access mainstream money on a fair and equitable basis for the delivery of local services.” Prior to this, it was “incubated” within Sutton Community Voluntary Services (CVS).

1.1.2. Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and European Social Funding (ESF) contracts with the Third Sector increased rapidly between 2002 -2004, making it increasingly necessary “…to get people working together.” This led to a successful tender by Sutton CVS to secure funding to develop and pilot a VCS consortium. The outcome was two years LSC/ESF co-finance money (£650,000 each year) for the ‘Sustaining Community Learning’ project. This was extended into a third year at a value of £145,000 (2004/5 – 2007/8). According to SLLC’s Annual Report 2007-2008 it had two main aims:

- “….first was to set up a sustainable Third Sector consortium for South London and to capacity build sector organisations to deliver learning and skills contracts.
• “…secondly to use this structure to sub-contract accredited learning using Third Sector training providers under mainstream FE [Further Education] conditions.”

1.1.3. The project was evaluated in June 2007 by an independent consultant who found “the project has delivered an excellent programme of support and capacity building, representing value for money with many lasting and tangible outcomes.”

195 learners had completed courses funded through the project, with 95 per cent achieving Level 1 and 2 qualifications, and 66 per cent gaining a Level 4 qualification.

1.1.4. The current Chief Executive joined the organisation as a Consortium Development Manager with a remit to begin setting it up. He investigated other models of consortia already in operation and was particularly influenced by the Learning Curve (Wiltshire). After two years, the consortium was in a position “to deliver contracts”, and became a Community Interest Company in 2007.

1.2. Initial funding sources

1.2.1. Initial funding came from ESF / LSC to “…trial and set-up a consortium in South London and to contract to three Third Sector organisations under mainstream conditions.” It received £650,000 each year for the first two years (2005-07), and £145,000 for the third (2007/08). Its objectives were reportedly accomplished “successfully”.

1.2.2. ESF was viewed as “favourable” funding because it left a “surplus” for investment in consortium development. Just under 18 months ago (summer 2007), the consortium applied successfully for a Futurebuilders grant of £40,000 which paid for a range of core capabilities, such as financial systems, a learner tracking system, and the consortium’s website.

1.3. Initial aims and objectives

1.3.1. The consortium was set up to help Third Sector providers deliver “adult responsive work” through community-based learning, for example Level 1 and 2 qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

1.3.2. According to the consortium’s Annual Report for 2007-2008, its vision is “to support and promote the economic, social and educational prosperity of London through learning in the community.” Its mission is “to develop a representative strategic learning consortium that is rooted in London’s communities and which provides quality learning opportunities through Voluntary and Community provider partnerships.”

1.3.3. It has seven strategic aims. These are to:

• Develop a provider consortium for Voluntary and Community learners in London that is both appropriate and responsive.

• Develop a sustainable infrastructure for accessing funding for voluntary and community providers and their constituencies across London.

• Generate a strong strategic voice for community learners, partners and providers alike.

• Support capacity building within voluntary and community organisations to enable them to meet the requirements and responsibilities of being a training provider and assist them to develop the management and quality systems required to deliver training.

• Work for the ultimate benefit of learners rather than any one agency.

• Develop an accountable and representative provider base.

• Research provision within the London voluntary and community sector to identify and evidence synergies with Local, regional and National strategies30.

1.4. Membership

1.4.1. Following an initial investigation into the viability of a learning consortium in South London, a steering group of interested stakeholders was formed. The six local CVSs (one from each of the South London Boroughs) were invited to participate, along with two local colleges, one of which became involved.

1.4.2. After the consortium launch event, 30 Third Sector organisations signed up as members. Reportedly, the initial impetus for joining was access to mainstream LSC funding and accredited training. SLLC was “…developed with our needs in mind” and this responsiveness is seen as a key success factor. It now has over 100 members.

1.5. Barriers and enablers: past development

1.5.1. Reportedly, the consortium encountered some resistance to change or criticism from within the Third Sector. However, enabling factors include the commitment to the initiative from individuals at the LSC, “…if you can get results, they can enable…” Reportedly, prior to the development of SLLC, the Third Sector had “…never been able to access mainstream contracts” and had been limited to sub-contracting arrangements through colleges with “…high top-slicing, tight timescales and only half the money”. Until the consortium, the Third Sector “…never had enough oomph to make the competition take notice.”

B Current situation

2.1. Delivery areas

2.1.1. Whilst the consortium has a south-London focus, it does cover all five areas of the London region to a greater or lesser degree (north, south, east, west and central) and therefore it has a pan-London reach.

2.1.2. SLLC’s main function is to manage the delivery of mainstream contracts through its provider organisations which are drawn from the membership. Approximately one-third (30) of SLLC members are also delivery partners (see paragraphs 2.2. and 2.7.).

2.1.3. According to SLLC’s Annual Report 2007-8 its main business aims are:

• To manage accredited learning and employment programme opportunities to employed and unemployed learners.

• To support and develop our learning providers to meet the needs of their learners and their workforce and to support the local economy.

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To raise and promote standards, quality and performance.

To work collaboratively to support the transition of hard to reach learners into mainstream provision (achievement and retention)

To enable a higher percentage of funding to go directly to the benefit of the learner.

Act as a collaborative intermediary which values and develops effective and equal partnerships with others.

To promote the effectiveness of learning to reflect diverse communities.

2.1.4. SLLC also offers a range of support services to individuals and organisations including:

- contract management;
- research and representation;
- capacity building;
- information advice and guidance; and
- quality improvement.

2.1.5. The member organisation that participated in the case study currently delivers three contracts through SLLC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of programme</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Jobs</td>
<td>£15,000- £18,000</td>
<td>20 starts – 10 jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train to Gain</td>
<td>£35,000 – £40,000</td>
<td>35 starts – 28 completions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Upskill’ South London</td>
<td>£35,000</td>
<td>50 starts - 33 completions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.6. These contracts involve 35 learners that are young single homeless people, employed people in the community, and unemployed individuals from the wider community. Training is delivered in-house and by freelance trainers.

2.2. Income sources and size

2.2.1. SLLC’s income for 2007/8 was £500,000. It is predicted to rise to £1.5 million in 2008/9, a 300 per cent increase. Income and turnover were reported to be interchangeable as funding is drawn down for contracts and then sent out to sub-contracting members. The consortium covers its “core” costs by top slicing contracts between 10 per cent and 20 per cent “…depending on what it is and the provider’s status”

2.2.2. SLLC’s five current contracts are set out in Table 1 (below)

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### Table 7 South London Learning Consortium: contracts and funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts and funding sources</th>
<th>What will be delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Train to Gain</strong></td>
<td><strong>SLLC is a major Train to Gain provider in the area. (see section 2.7)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the LSC.</td>
<td><strong>This project identifies staff training needs in local VCS organisations and private sector Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) leading to delivery of a range of training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs – as many employer engagements as possible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills for Jobs</strong></td>
<td><strong>This programme offers short training and employability programmes across London. It started in January 2008 and was described as the “older version” which aims to get people into work and then into training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus / LSC.</td>
<td><strong>It is currently being delivered through a local college. Another college will be contracted in January 2009 to deliver adult basic skills learning focusing on adult responsive work at Levels 1 and 2. It is envisaged this project will go some way to addressing a reported shortfall of delivery in this area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract – £100,000 from January 2008 to April 2009, and a further £100,000 for January 2009 to April 2010.</td>
<td><strong>By November 2008, SLLC had engaged 116 people in the project, 40 of whom had accessed employment.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs – 160 people, 50 per cent of whom to go into work and 24 per cent into sustainable employment after 13 weeks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VCS Apprenticeships</strong></td>
<td><strong>This project is due to start in the New Year. It will provide access and training to VCS staff under an apprenticeship model. It will run initially for two to three years (2008 – 2010). Final details on funding levels and outputs are still being negotiated with the LSC.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the LSC.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract: <strong>Current value</strong> - £140,000 from January 2008 to July 2009.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next contract</strong> – £350,000 from September 2009 to August 2010.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs – 50 people starting apprenticeships with 35 completions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Up Skill’ South London</strong></td>
<td><strong>This project covers all six south London boroughs. It aims to help employers and employees in Third Sector organisations and SMEs with a particular focus on Health and Social Care and ICT Level 2.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by ESF.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £733,000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>This contract runs for two years from September 2008 to August 2010.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next Steps</strong></td>
<td><strong>Next Steps offers Information, advice and guidance (IAG) around learning and work. Prospect, a private training organisation, is the lead provider.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded by the LSC.</td>
<td><strong>SLLC has already delivered its target numbers for DPS clients, and over half its target for universal clients.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of contract - £60,000 from August 2008 to July 2009.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs – 1,049 places to universal clients and 200 to Differentiated and Personalised Service (DPS) Clients. DPS clients are those with multiple and complex employment needs. They include the unemployed, those living in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Governance and current membership

2.3.1. As the parent body, South London CVS Partnership provides SLLC’s governance. It takes a strategic perspective, ensuring it “stays locked into [its] communities.” This arrangement reportedly provides SLLC with a readymade “track record with political and social credibility” it would not otherwise have. Learning and skills is not the primary work of the CVS Partnership but as the availability of programmes affects Partnership members, close links between the two ensures maximum benefit to all involved. However, the consortium is a separate legal entity and has authority over day-to-day operational matters.

2.3.2. SLLC has both members and a separate category of engagement entitled ‘providers’. There are currently 109 members of varying types and sizes including a local college and all six CVSs in the area. Membership is free. In addition, SLLC has a Board with four members. There are plans to recruit more as the consortium grows.

2.3.3. Once an organisation becomes a member it can apply to be a provider. The consortium sends the applicant the “old LSC provider assessment check list” to establish “…if we can contract with them and at what level”. If the organisation is not suitable, the consortium works with the member using an agreed action plan in order for it to become ‘contract ready’. The consortium is reported to be “…risk aware in a supportive way” because it is dealing with public money. For example, it converts existing performance into LSC terminology, allowing the achievements of members to be translated into potential outputs and LSC targets.

2.3.4. The South London CVS Partnership members are;

- Community Links Bromley;
- Sutton CVS;
- Richmond Upon Thames CVS;
- Kingston Voluntary Action;
- Croydon Voluntary Action; and
- Merton CVS.

2.4. Staff and volunteers

2.4.1. SLLC currently employs seven staff members. These are: the Chief Executive, two Senior Managers, a Contract and Finance Manager, a Quality and Curriculum Manager, IAG officer and two administrative posts. It has appointed an Operational Manager and a Workforce Development advisor who both start in January 2009. The consortium also intends to advertise for three or four delivery staff for the VCS Apprenticeships contract early in 2009.

2.4.2. The consortium uses an “outsourcing” management model. In other words, it contracts out many functions, for example finances, pay role services, data input and IT support to Third Sector organisations or local SMEs. According to SLLC, this model was chosen “…to make sure that as a community interest company we are re-investing back into our communities.”
2.5. **Key partnerships**

2.5.1. SLLC works with a number of partners for a range of purposes including advocating and promoting Third Sector issues and representing its members. Partners are both strategic and operational for example; NIACE, Consortia+, the LSC London Regional Office – Economics Team, UK Workforce Hub, all six local CVSs, private training providers, Job Centre Plus, Skills and Learning for London Partnership (SLLP), and several of the local councils and partnerships across the Boroughs. In some instances, consortium staff are actively involved with the partners. The SLLC Chief Executive sits on several Boards including the SLLP and the Pan-London Consortium Group, which he also helped to set up.

2.6. **Communications**

2.6.1. The consortium communicates with its members and providers in a variety of ways. It has just launched its own website which is intended to become a "communications hub" supporting member organisations and delivery partners, particularly with Train to Gain. The members’ area of the site, which is password protected, offers a range of free downloadable resources to help with delivery. SLLC also uses emails, and marketing materials, and produces four newsletters a year.

2.7. **Learning and skills offer**

2.7.1. As outlined earlier (see section 2.2.2.), SLLC recently secured two large contracts, Train to Gain (LSC) and ‘UpSkill’ (ESF). Consortium providers are expected to reach their Skills for Jobs targets for getting learners into sustainable employment. Last year, SLLC and its providers delivered ‘Next Steps’ successfully to 300 people, exceeding the target of 125.

2.7.2. SLLC has a ‘negotiated mainstream contract’ to deliver Train to Gain through its providers. It is under the same contractual arrangements as the FE colleges and, providing it continues to perform, it should not have to tender competitively for future work in this area.

2.7.3. Train to Gain delivery is subcontracted to eleven providers drawn from SLLC membership. The Consortium manages the contracts and provides support, quality control, monitoring, and infrastructure services to ensure effective delivery. It has invested in systems that are reportedly on a par with those of the colleges giving the consortium the “… infrastructure to deliver to many more…”learners in the future.

2.7.4. By December 2007, SLLC providers had recruited 400 learners onto Train to Gain programmes using a roll-on, roll-off enrolment model. Learners can start Train to Gain programmes at anytime, as there are no set enrolment dates. The length of time it takes to complete a programme varies depending on the learners’ needs and availability. The LSC pays on “timely completions”. When learners enrol, providers are required to state how long it will take them to complete the course. Providers are then paid if learners finish early or on time. However, late completion is penalised and usually involves a reduction in the number of starts until the provider reaches nationally agreed completion targets. Reportedly, this payment method was is challenging for providers because it entails judging how long learners will take to finish, many of whom are working and have other commitments.

2.7.5. Many of the current learners are due to complete their individual programme in the next few months although exactly when this takes place varies from person to person. Already 60 people who started in August 2008 have completed NQVs under Train to Gain, and a further 100 finishes are imminent. The consortium anticipates around 600 new starts in early 2009. The national achievement rate for Train to Gain NVQs at Level 2 and 3 is set at 65 per cent by the LSC. To date, over 70 per cent of learners accessing Train to Gain
programmes through the consortium “...are set to achieve a full level 2 or 3 qualification”\textsuperscript{32}. Whilst most of these are achieving at Level 2, many are reported to be obtaining Level 3.

2.7.6 The consortium provides Train to Gain accredited programmes for the Third Sector in 16 curriculum areas including:

- Customer Service;
- Business Administration;
- ICT;
- Childcare;
- Housing;
- Youth Work; and
- IAG.

2.7.7 It also offers non-accredited programmes in:

- Team Building;
- Customer Service;
- Staff training and development; and
- Project Management.

SLLC offer Train to Gain programmes to a range of small organisations and SMEs, for example the local Tandoori Restaurant. A high percentage of learners are from BME communities (approximately 70\%)\textsuperscript{33}. Reportedly (by the Chief Executive) there is a low ratio of male BME learners in the Further Education (FE) sector in the London region and therefore the consortium estimates it is engaging “more than that which is standard for training providers and FE locally.” SLLC is located in South London where there are high numbers of BME communities. This is reflected in its membership that is estimated to include approximately 60 per cent BME organisations. SLLC employs a partnership delivery model. For example, in the case of the Tandoori restaurant, a local community group undertakes translation work with the learners before the trainers begin delivery.

The local LSC representative interviewed for the case study described SLLC as “a very good provider” particularly under Train to Gain.

2.8. Contribution to the Third Sector and learning and skills sector

2.8.1. The consortium considers it has contributed to the Third Sector in a variety of ways. This includes enabling Third Sector organisations to deliver accredited learning, and making Train to Gain more accessible to the Third Sector. The consortium has “made the difference on the ground to community groups and those they work with.” SLLC reportedly “invests back” into local organisations by outsourcing many of its key functions (see paragraph 2.4.2).

2.8.2. The consortium offers around 12 free training events a year for its members covering such topics as IAG, quality issues, and Health and Safety for organisations. These events are “demand led”, incorporating members’ concerns and development needs in relation to learning and skills. SLLC offers ‘How to accredit your learning’ training twice a year and holds provider meetings dealing with the “nitty gritty” of contract delivery, for example training in how to write individual learning plans on a quarterly basis.

2.9. Benefits of a consortium membership

2.9.1. Member organisations report many benefits from belonging to SLLC including access to mainstream funding, training, and peer mentoring. They view the consortium as “…invaluable as a support mechanism”. Furthermore, as delivering training is only part of the work of member organisations, the consortium “free[s] us to do what we want to do, to deliver front line services.”

C Reflections on the development process

3.1. Key changes since set-up

3.1.1. Reportedly, the key changes for the consortium since it began are a perceived ‘tightening’ (see paragraph 3.1.2.) of ESF contracts and a shift in the LSC’s funding priorities from ‘adult responsive’ to ‘employer responsive’ work. This is viewed by SLLC as “a complete 180 degree change”.

3.1.2. ESF funding was reported to be used increasingly by the LSC to deliver national targets focused on worklessness and the economic agenda. This was seen as exemplified by the recent launch of the governments’ apprenticeships through the LSC\(^{34}\). This shift in priorities is described as leaving little money in contracts for social and personal development, which is seen as “not on the scope” any longer.

3.1.3. Whilst the consortium reportedly “hit all its targets”, unfortunately it was unable to secure further LSC funding once the initial contracts were completed. Despite submitting several tenders to the LSC, it was unsuccessful and in December 2007 the consortium came very close to folding. In an attempt to save it, the Chief Executive made it clear to members and the LSC that the situation was critical. This led to a meeting with London South LSC and an offer to run the Train to Gain contract in the area.

3.2 Impact of changes on the learning consortium

3.2.1 As a result of these changes, the consortium has redirected its energies from ‘adult responsive’ to ‘employer responsive’ work and become very successfully involved with Train to Gain and VCS Apprenticeships. This change in direction is reflected in the type of members choosing to deliver provision. However, SLLC hopes to return to some of its original adult responsive work in the future.

3.3 Distance travelled

3.3.1 SLLC considers it has travelled “a very long way very quickly due to what we’ve been able to do but [we] still [have] a long way to go.” The consortium has just been very highly graded in its second Train to Gain audit (November 2008) with no funding errors and only a minor tightening up of systems recommended. It will also undergo an Ofsted inspection next year (expected March / April 2009) which the consortium hopes will provide further “proof” it can deliver.

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3.4. Most outstanding achievement

3.4.1. The consortium regards its most outstanding achievement to be “…being here and being a credible organisation. It’s almost a miracle we have made it. We have been given opportunities that others have had but we [still] had to prove that we can do it and we have. We are now a proven, but new, entity. We have demonstrated that you can get a consortium to work and deliver LSC mainstream programmes, but it’s still early days”. However, it considers it is now on a “fairer batting wicket” with mainstream providers in relation to obtaining funding.

D Future plans and vision

4.1. Potential growth areas

4.1.1. Delivering VCS Apprenticeships is identified as a main potential growth area. SLLC would also like to increase the number of Train to Gain contracts, especially in community development, housing, and youth work. Delivering “…in these areas are big aims for us, a big thing for us is to make them work…”.

4.2. Barriers and enablers: future development

4.2.1. Key enabling factors for future working were reported to be the consortium and its members “…recognising the trust the LSC has in us [and] having a sound idea and the commitment to get it to work.” The LSC is reportedly keen to support the development and growth of SLLC as a Third Sector and SME training provider, especially in the areas of Train to Gain and VCS Apprenticeships, commenting, “they have fingers in all our pies [and] they have the body mass to deliver the contracts.” Funding was viewed as both a key enabler and barrier. Without it, the consortium cannot function but with sufficient resources, SLLC will continue to develop.

4.3. Long-term vision

4.3.1. The consortium’s long-term vision is to “…be a recognised quality provider of training and skills services [and be] able to compete, develop and grow. Not to become an institution, but to continue to change” to meet the demands of its members and funders.
Appendix 1

Sampling Criteria - August 2008

Suggested sampling criteria:

- Well established Consortia. Those in the early stages of development will not be able to show changes or the developmental process sufficiently. Those ‘getting established’ may be included if the sample is not sufficiently big enough.
- The case studies need to show a geographical spread across England
- Consortia need to range in age and size – membership
- Consortia need to range in the percentage of learning and skills they deliver
- Consortia need to cover rural and urban areas or regions

Suggested case studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consortia</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Income*</th>
<th>T&amp;L*</th>
<th>Members*</th>
<th>Staff*</th>
<th>Legal*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria Learning links</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>£1-5M</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>500+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLDC, Derbyshire</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>EM</td>
<td>£500-1M</td>
<td>11-25%</td>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC Train</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>Y&amp;H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humber Learning Consortium</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>Y&amp;H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex VCS Learning Consortium</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reserves in case the above do not wish to participate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consortia</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Income*</th>
<th>T&amp;L*</th>
<th>Members*</th>
<th>Staff*</th>
<th>Legal*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Together, Cheshire &amp; Warrington</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Plus, Devon and Cornwall</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>£500-1M</td>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable, Nottingham</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>EM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Durham VCS Working Together</td>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td></td>
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## Appendix 2
### Sources consulted

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<td>Humber Learning Consortium – Strategic Business Plan 2008 -2011</td>
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<td>Quality Improvement Plan (7th January 2008 / reviewed July 2008)</td>
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<td>Self-Assessment Report 2006/07 (27th December 2007 / reviewed April 2008)</td>
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<td>Trainingnews – Your Learning Matters (Summer 2008, Issue 1), Humberside Learning Consortium</td>
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<td>Trainingnews (March 2008), Humberside Learning Consortium</td>
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<td>Articles of Association of South Yorkshire Voluntary and Community Sector Training Consortium (October 2000)</td>
<td>By hand from a members of the consortium</td>
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**Cumbria Learning Links**

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<tr>
<td>Cumbria Learning Links Network (January 2008) Draft Terms of Reference</td>
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<td>Cumbria Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (CACVS) (July 2006) Cumbria Learning Links Membership Form</td>
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**South London Learning Consortium**

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<td>Ryan, E. (June 2007) Sustaining Community Learning - Final Evaluation Report, Education and Regeneration Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matrix Assessment Report for South London Learning Consortium by Anita Hepplewhite, on behalf of EMQC LTD, 3rd July 2008</td>
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Appendix 3

Case study framework

Schedule 1 - The consortium

Section A: Rationale for establishing the Consortium

1. Why was the Consortium established?
2. What were the sources of funding?
3. Which organisations / individuals were involved?
4. When did the development process begin?
5. What were the original key aims and objectives?
6. What were the barriers and enablers faced in the initial stages? (sources/impact)
7. What were the responses to the barriers?

Section B: Current situation

1. Establishing the facts and figures - include:
   - Current funding courses
   - Number of staff and volunteers
   - Length and type of contract - differentiating between set-up and capacity building and contracts for delivery both direct and sub-contracted
   - Membership – e.g. types of organisations / cost
   - Geographical coverage
   - Partnership working
   - Local context and need
2. Current functions / services offered
3. Governance arrangements
4. The teaching and learning offer
5. Communications strategies (internal and external)
6. How does the Consortium view its contribution to the Third and Lifelong learning Sectors?

Section C: Reflections on the development process

1. How has the Consortium changed since it was initially set up? (internal and external factors such as changes in LSC priorities, local need or staff)
2. What were the identifiable:
   - Stages?
   - Milestones?
   - Triggers?
   - Players?
3. What were the main drivers behind that development process?
4. What have been the impact of these changes on:
   - members’ involvement in the Consortium
   - members’ delivery
   - the role of the Consortium in the Third Sector and the Learning and Skills Sector?
5. How far has the Consortium travelled from the beginning to now?
6. What is the Consortium’s most outstanding achievement to date?

Section D: Future plans

1. What are the areas for potential growth? (functions/status/membership/influence)
2. What are the likely barriers and enabling factors for achieving that potential?
3. What is the Consortium’s vision for the long term? (issues of sustainability)

Schedule 2 - Membership organisations and partners

1. Background information on consortium members:
   - Name and type of organisation
   - Size – income / staff / volunteers
   - When was the organisation established?
   - Core services / areas of teaching and learning
   - Type and number of learners reached annually
   - Future aspirations
2. Why, when and how did you become a member of the Consortium?
   (What they wanted to get out of it)
3. What are the benefits and added value of membership?
4. How do you engage with the Consortium?
5. How do you see the future of your organisation’s engagement with the Consortium?

Schedule 3 – Learners

NB – questions will very much depend on the type and level of learners

1. Age and gender
2. Type of programmes they are involved in
3. Reasons for learning
4. Previous involvement with learning
5. What are the intended benefits and outcomes from this learning?
6. Are learners aware of the Consortium?
7. What is the role of the provider / Consortium in IAG and progression?
8. What will they do next?

Schedule 4 - Staff and Volunteers

NB – shift here from an organisational focus to their personal experiences, motivations and views.

1. How long have they been with the Consortium?
2. Are they staff or volunteer / full-time or part-time?
3. What are their role(s) within the Consortium?
4. Why do they choose to work for a Consortium? (Motivation)
5. How involved are they in the Consortiums decision making processes / governance?
6. Staff only:
   - Why does the Consortium use Volunteers?
   - How many and in what roles?
   - Which volunteers are the most important to the Consortium and Why?
Appendix 4

Timetable of visits

Consortia case study visits/interviews timetable October and November 2008

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<td>Northumberland VCS</td>
<td>Tuesday 14\textsuperscript{th} October</td>
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<td>DLDC</td>
<td>Wednesday 29\textsuperscript{th} October</td>
<td>Derby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sussex VCS</td>
<td>Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} November After 11am</td>
<td>Lewis,</td>
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<td>Humber Learning Consortium</td>
<td>Monday 10\textsuperscript{th} November</td>
<td>Hull</td>
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