
Sector Skills Programme: 2005 – 2007

Executive Overview

What is Sector Skills?

In August 2005, The Wheel initiated a three-tiered pilot programme to address the training needs of the community and voluntary sector. Called 'Sector Skills,' the programme was part-funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the National Training Fund¹, and ran until July 2007.

Sector Skills comprised three elements:

1. **Stronger Leaders** - a twelve-day, part-residential, tailored professional development course for leaders of community and voluntary organisations.
2. **Training Links** - a training networking programme that encouraged organisations to come together in one of eleven networks to identify shared training needs and to apply for a subsidy for training to address the identified need.
3. **Learningpoint.ie** - a searchable training opportunities website.

A Successful Pilot Programme

According to an independent evaluation of the programme² Sector Skills was an important initiative which is 'highly relevant and appropriate to the needs of the community and voluntary sector.'

'It is not only intrinsically valuable to organisations in the sector,' the report stated, 'it has also helped to meet Government policy objectives, particularly with respect to employment, poverty and equality, developing human capital, and combating social exclusion.'

The report also pointed out that Sector Skills

- Provided relevant job or skills related training to large numbers of people
- Built recognition of the need for a collective and focused approach to skills and training needs in the community and voluntary sector
- Provided a platform for networking opportunities for organisations, Board members, and individuals.

It concluded that the Sector Skills initiative 'is, in effect, a catalyst for change, focus, and a new dynamic relating to the up-skilling of people in the voluntary and community sector.'

Below is a summary of the evaluation of the three components of Sector Skills:

Stronger Leaders

Stronger Leaders is an excellent, effective and relevant response to meet the leadership and management training requirements of the sector...

1. 100% of the 32 participants reported a very significant growth in their knowledge and understanding of the themes and issues dealt with in the 12-day Stronger Leaders course.

¹ The National Training Fund funded 80% of the costs and The Wheel sourced the remaining 20%.

² The full report, prepared by Susan Coughlan & Bridie Corrigan Matthews, is available from The Wheel.

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2. Participants were extremely happy with the course content and most particularly on the course emphasis on linking theory to practice.
3. Participants reported unanticipated positive outcomes which they found to be equally important. These tended to relate to networking, Board support and how the course complemented activities they were already engaged in such areas as strategic planning or team development.
4. All participants have clear intentions to implement the learning, and many have initiated change at multiple levels within their organisations.

Training Links

The evaluation of the eleven networks shows that the training delivered was of very high quality, based closely on a needs analysis. The network structure adopted worked very well, enabling networks to be organised and effective.

1. Training Links provided organisations in a network the opportunity to come together to pool resources and experiences in order to access, develop and deliver training to both voluntary staff and employees.
2. A total of 186 organisations participated in the eleven networks that were part of the programme, against an original target of 149. This indicates clear need within the sector and the attractiveness of the networking model in enabling organisations to access and deliver training.
3. Nearly 3,000 participants from these organisations attended one or more of the 203 training courses offered – ranging from a half-day to five-days in length.
4. Training courses organised by the networks included the following:
 - a. Governance, legal issues, strategic planning, fund-raising, policy, media and PR, campaigning, employment law, equality, identifying volunteers, management training programme (including planning, team building and staff management skills and competencies), mentoring, building local leadership, training of trainers, social auditing, collaborative working, health and safety, first aid, stress, self-management.
 - b. The programme also provided training relating to the work area of the specific network, e.g. community television, musical software, support for volunteers working on a phone help-line, child protection, science for non-scientists, suicide prevention, elder abuse, induction programme to the homeless sector.

Learning Point

The www.learningpoint.ie project has established itself as an efficient model for provision of up to date and relevant information on training to the sector. It provides, in a single location, a reliable source of information on which organisations in the community and voluntary sector can base their training planning.

1. From October 2006 to end August 2007 it had 15,241 unique visitors.
2. An average of 1,050 training courses are advertised on it at any one time.
3. It can and continues to be used interactively by training providers to update and amend their own records

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