



scottish social services  
**learning network**  
south east

## **supporting the social care workforce – towards region-wide pre-employability provision for south east Scotland?**

Report of consultation held on 28 June 2007.  
Moray House, University of Edinburgh.

We held an initial consultation last June to examine existing models of pre-employability (access to work) provision in social care and to open preliminary discussion on a model of region-wide provision for South East Scotland. Over two dozen key stakeholders participated in the consultation, comprising representatives from across the sector's specialities. This report summarises the output and outcomes from the consultation process.

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**February 2008**

## remit

The project work of the Learning Network in South East Scotland comprises a number of interlocking 'change projects' designed to correspond to the organisation's national workforce development aims. A particular work strand for the South East Learning Network, drawn from stakeholder needs analysis, has been engagement in project work to support workforce recruitment and retention for organisations operating in social care in the Lothian and Borders region. The focus of this consultation project was to investigate the viability of developing a 'joined up' approach to regional pre-employability provision (sometimes known as 'access to work' training) involving organisations from public, private and voluntary sectors, with the central aim of supporting recruitment and retention in social care work in the Lothian and Borders area.

Learning Network South East's involvement in workforce development responds to the 'Changing Lives' theme of 'building the capacity of the workforce' (Scottish Government, 2006), through the provision of support to encourage the development of a learning culture that embeds early commitment to learning and development for all, including new entrants to the sector. Learning Network South East shares the vision described in the National Strategy for the Development of the Social Service Workforce in Scotland: A Plan for Action 2005-2010' (Scottish Government, 2005) of a 'confident, competent workforce' able to provide safe, high quality services.

## aims and objectives

The consultation had the following aims:

- to identify current practice (and the corresponding evidence base contributing to the development) of pre-employability provision among organisations working in social care in South East Scotland;
- to nurture joint working between public, private and voluntary sector organisations to explore the viability of shared approaches to recruitment and retention; and
- to ascertain threads of commonality in existing pre-employability provision in order to explore how the Learning Network could provide practical help and support to recruitment and retention initiatives in social care across the region.

Longer range outputs and outcomes, based on the first steps above, were to:

- support the development of an energised collaborative learning culture among organisations working in social care in South East Scotland;
- foster an understanding of effective practice in recruitment & retention among key stakeholders;
- contribute to eventual improvement in retention rates of trained and committed social care staff;
- contribute to eventual improvement in recruitment rates of new entrants to the sector; and to
- contribute to the development of a ‘confident, competent workforce.’

## **planning**

The decision to run the pre-employability provision consultation was taken on the basis of requests from stakeholders; notably from representatives from a number of local authorities, for Learning Network support in bringing together the region’s organisations to address long standing recruitment and retention issues. Planning for the consultation commenced in April 2007. It involved representatives from the region’s local authorities and some voluntary sector agencies who had attended the Learning Network’s earlier event in March which presented examples of induction provision from a variety of organisations working in social care.

## **participants**

Representatives from the following organisations participated in the consultation process:

Access to Industry - 'Prepare to Care'
Alzheimer Scotland
ARC Scotland
Carers Scotland (Action for Carers and Employment)
Choices Care

City of Edinburgh Council
East Lothian Council
Housecall
Jewel & Esk College
Job Centre Plus
MECOPP
Midlothian Council
Open University
Path Scotland
Scottish Enterprise
Scottish Social Services Council
Social Care Academy (Places for People)
Social Work Department, University of Edinburgh
Stevenson College
Telford College
Training for Care
Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit
WEA Scotland
West Lothian College
West Lothian Council

## **output**

The consultation provided focus on definition of market, content and delivery of future pre-employability provision. Participants noted the importance of encouraging young people into social care and engaging with those who provide(d) unpaid care. It was also felt that greater effort was required to recruit skilled workers from immigrant groups. There was some discussion questioning the validity of a 'one size fits all' approach to pre-employability provision. Nonetheless, delegates noted the importance of the following core knowledge/skills areas: an understanding of social care values, good language and communication skills, team working and social skills, problem solving capabilities and IT competency. The importance of the provision of sound placements and employer flexibility was noted in terms of both attracting and retaining new staff. Delegates also stressed the importance of better communication regarding existing initiatives and more information on career pathways for those considering social care work.

The consultation raised many issues regarding the development of regional provision, notably practicalities relating to processes of tendering and contracting among a pool of local authority, voluntary and private sector organisations. The Learning Network's involvement in this area and its role as a possible commissioner of service provision was a key discussion point. The delegates proposed a number of practical 'next steps' including better information dissemination on pre-employability initiatives and a careers fair to promote awareness of career pathways, learning and development opportunities and existing vacancies in the sector.

## **outcomes**

The consultation succeeded in the key outcome of identifying a wide range of practice in pre-employability provision and, importantly, in opening dialogue among agencies to support collaborative working. Delegate evaluation from the consultation noted that all who attended felt it was a useful networking opportunity with 82% noting a willingness to explore further collaborative working (delegate evaluation report available: <http://www.learningnetworks.org.uk/southeast-events-pre-employability.php>).

Additionally, work has progressed on proposals (further initiatives) suggested at the consultation: a practice database is currently under development to disseminate pre-employability provision (under the auspices of the national Learning Network web development team) and a careers fair involving over 40 of the region's employers and training organisations was held at the end of January.

It must be stressed that the Learning Network provides one of the few forums for representatives from the region's five local authorities, voluntary and private sector organisations to meet, share ideas and discuss collaborative ventures in a safe and neutral environment (with the Network facilitating as 'honest broker'). Whilst the change project did not result in the development of a plan for regional model of pre-employability provision, success was achieved in bringing together a wide variety of partners to share information on existing provision and to commence engagement in collaborative working to identify the needs of future provision. For the Learning Network, and for some participants too, it has led to the development of some new working relationships with organisations working to support further development in this field.

## **next steps**

Learning Network South East thanks everyone for their generous involvement in the consultation and subsequent activities (notably the careers fair). Further work is planned during 2008 to build on the initial work to enable the implementation of further approaches to support recruitment and retention in the South East Scotland region. Your involvement is actively encouraged and we encourage you to talk with us to discuss involvement – 0131 650 4660 or by email [learning.network@ed.ac.uk](mailto:learning.network@ed.ac.uk).