

## **D2N2 Skills and Employability Strategy Refresh Consultation: Inclusion response on behalf of SIAEG**

### **Questions**

#### **Do the findings of the strategy refresh provide an effective evidence base to inform the needs of the local economy?**

The evidence base provides a very high level overview but at a local level it is insufficient to inform strategy and commissioning approaches as local circumstances, gaps and opportunities vary widely.

At a local level the largest employers / employment sectors may not align to the identified growth sectors and in those circumstances the evidence base might actually be detrimental to maximising local opportunities.

#### **Based on the evidence you have been provided with, what should the five key priorities for skills and employment be for D2N2?**

The obvious priorities raised by this evidence base are:

1. Improvement in the quality, consistency and strategic linkage of IAG services in schools. From an inclusion perspective the focus of this support should be in areas of most economic disadvantage and be accessible to individual communities with the greatest barriers. IAG must inform both students and parents / carers (as the primary influencer of student choices).
2. Future Jobs Fund is still greatly missed and was overwhelmingly felt to have delivered impact. Programmes which deliver a wage subsidy are likely to be most beneficially to the 87.7% micro-businesses identified.
3. Building work skills (expectation of what participation in a workplace will be like), work experience opportunities and structured volunteering opportunities are vital to prepare confidence amongst those who have never worked or are returning / retraining in work after a period of absence. Workplaces offering quality work experience placements (a quality standard exists) should be incentivised.
4. Skills delivery supply chains remains a massive issue. D2N2 has set clear delivery principles related to partnerships, local value, responsiveness and added value (additionality). However, commissioning to date does not necessarily maximise these principles or the value of local knowledge and linkages. Improving the role and contribution of local supply chains is essential to achieving long term objectives.
5. Improved system co-ordination – the evidence highlights a situation of insufficient dialogue between schools, colleges, universities and those with knowledge of local growth and development opportunities. This must be addressed in order to achieve a more efficient coordinated delivery that is of benefit to all.

Additional priorities identified during this consultation include:

6. The expected increase in female roles raises gender equality issues – how are women being prepared to meet these new challenges? A gender-focussed programme will need to be built in.
7. The quality of vacancies plays as much of a factor on application rates as local skills and experience – how do we know from the employer data whether employers are

simply not offering competitive terms? In the light of the Sports Direct findings there may be a case for the introduction of activity that influences employers with regard to employment terms (living wage, flexible working, zero hour contracts etc), working conditions and inclusivity.

8. From an Inclusion perspective issues such as mental health and disability remain relatively unaddressed with employers. There are some good examples of programmes which focus on workplace health and inclusion which could be extended such as *Health Workplaces Derbyshire*'.

**D2N2 aims to raise business productivity and competitiveness through training, skills and by having a long term strategy. Does the evidence base provide you with the data to inform your own skills strategies and why?**

The evidence base is useful in that it highlights the systematic issues within the skills arena that prevent or fail to maximise the contribution of each current component to growth. From an Inclusion perspective it highlights the need for organisations involved in inclusion activity to clearly articulate the role they can and do play within this continuum and agree to participate and shape future planning. We are committed to taking this on board and thinking about how best it can be achieved.

**The success of the refreshed strategy will require all stakeholders to be informed, influenced and involved. How will you use the D2N2 Skills Strategy 2016-2020?**

There is a fundamental inclusion concern that the evidence base presents the role of all skills activity purely as a contributor to employability and economic development. However, from the perspective of achieving wider inclusion, the development of skills in a supportive environment also has major implications for personal health and wellbeing, building social capital and providing a platform to build confidence to address other barriers.

In many cases, one of the outcomes of learning is progression into work or other economically productive activity such as formal volunteering. However, for many people the outcome may be a growth in confidence or social capital leading to a reduced reliance on public services. Depending on the starting point and barriers faced by the learner the progress towards any recognised outcome may be long and may require multiple interventions until it is achieved.

The SIAG recognise the importance of employment in inclusion but disagree that it is the only vehicle. As such we issue caution over the remit of influence of this evidence base across all skills funding and that to be used as such will be detrimental to inclusion as a whole. However, SIAG recognises the complexity of the task that D2N2 is being asked to consider and offers the practical contributions that may be of help:

- Identification of evidence and best practice in relation to social inclusion and skills.
- Consideration of how community learning budgets and community – based skills delivery can better integrate / coordinate with the wider adult skills budget and other skills delivery programmes.
- Analysis of VCS delivered and community learning to local growth.

**How can we better align the delivery of community, workplace and mainstream skills provision to meet the needs of D2N2 priority and growth sectors? Is the mix of provision appropriate to local need?**

Following on from the answer above, some concern is raised here about the proposal to align 'community, workplace and mainstream skills provision to meet the needs of D2N2 priority and growth sectors'. From an inclusion perspective, community learning holds a much deeper value than that of purely driving local growth.

A March 2014 research paper by BIS 'Community Learning Learner Survey Wave 2' clearly articulates the added value of community learning participation towards a range of factors including:

- personal development;
- personal wellbeing;
- social and community participation;
- children and families – impact on parenting;
- work and employability.

In addition, further research by WEA in 2015 (*Adult Education Changing Lives*) clearly demonstrates the equalities and inclusion benefits of community learning approaches. In particular the research demonstrates increased participation by women, by Black, Asian Minority Ethnic or refugee (BAMER) learners, for those with a limiting disability or health condition (including mental health).

For each of these learner groups the benefit of true community learning is that delivery is combined with a range of other holistic support services which those individuals also rely upon (beyond skills activity) to support them to address barriers and achieve progression.

The offer made from SIAG in the previous question applies equally here but in return a commitment from D2N2 to ensure that inclusion providers are included within strategic discussions and forums would be welcomed. SIAG would especially appreciate any influence that D2N2 can exert to ensure that inclusion and VCS voice is present with the D2 and N2 Employment and Skills Board to maximise connections and added value of local approaches.

**In line with D2N2 delivery principles it is important to evidence that all funded provision adds value and meets local need. How can we ensure that future funded provision meets local socio-economic need and which KPIs would be most appropriate?**

There is a mixed picture of community learning across D2N2, with provision spread across local authorities and subcontracted to various degrees to local providers (FE and VCS) for direct delivery filling longer term persistent gaps that mainstream local providers haven't been able to address. The volumes of subcontracting varies between areas. In Nottinghamshire there is diverse VCS involvement. Again, there is a need to identify the role community learning plays in relation to the skills strategy and how best it can be coordinated with wider delivery.

In relation to the above we would expect equalities and inclusion indicators to form part of the mix of outcomes anticipated within the skills strategy to encompass activity from the earliest point of intervention.

SIAG would again like to offer support in identifying appropriate outcomes / indicators for inclusion and monitoring performance against them.

**D2N2 is exploring the development of an outcome agreement framework for funded provision based on local priorities and indicators. Would you support the development of such an approach and what considerations need to be taken into account?**

An outcome agreement framework would be welcomed provided the outcomes included a range of indicators related to inclusion and equalities and did not limit innovation and new methods to improve overall performance.

**For and on behalf of the D2N2 Social Inclusion and Equalities Advisory Group  
October 2016**

## **D2N2 Skills and Employability Strategy Refresh Consultation: VCS response**

### **Questions**

#### **Do the findings of the strategy refresh provide an effective evidence base to inform the needs of the local economy?**

It depends on the definition of local. If local is D2N2 then the answer is yes. However, as skills and employability can only be applied to individuals, the 'local economy' must be smaller than D2N2 and should probably be by township. This would mean each township having a separate strategy and programme to match the needs of its people rather than a blanket approach that treats unemployment in the Derbyshire Dales in the same way as that in Nottingham City.

The information sets out the high level gaps and issues in the current system but does not begin to touch upon what is known to work most effectively in addressing those gaps. In order to avoid future wasted investment, effort needs to be made to identify examples of effective good practice and value for money in delivery to help inform local approaches.

#### **Based on the evidence you have been provided with, what should the five key priorities for skills and employment be for D2N2?**

The obvious priorities raised by this evidence base are:

1. Improvement in the quality, consistency and strategic linkage of IAG services in schools. In particular the extension of IAG to inform both students and parents (as the primary influencer of student choices) and from earlier in their school career. School engagement in this debate is key – what can D2N2 do to help facilitate this to happen? (Derby Uni is a leader in IAG provision and should be engaged in this process).
2. Future Jobs Fund is still greatly missed and was overwhelmingly felt to have delivered impact. Programmes which deliver a wage subsidy are likely to be most beneficially to the 87.7% micro-businesses identified.
3. Structured and supported volunteering opportunities play an important role in building confidence amongst those who have never worked (especially for those with additional barriers) or are returning / retraining in work after a period of absence.
4. VCS skills suppliers are often cut out of delivery chains as a result of the scale of commissioning arrangements despite high quality provision, reach, attainment record and positive OFSTED inspection results. D2N2 has set clear delivery principles related to partnerships, local value, responsiveness and added value (additionality). The VCS would like to see these delivery principles reinforced in order to improve the climate for the role and contribution of local supply chains in achieving long term objectives.
5. Improved system co-ordination – the VCS would like greater involvement in strategic dialogue with schools, colleges, universities and those with knowledge of local growth and development opportunities in order to help system improvement.

Additional priorities identified during this consultation include:

6. The VCS is itself an extensive and inclusive employment sector with active involvement in the delivery of apprenticeships, work placements and volunteering opportunities. VCS organisations would be willing to share working practice to improve work conditions across the whole of D2N2. As a sector the VCS would also like to be considered as recipients of programmes as the sector nationally employs over 820,000 people (roughly half the number employed by the NHS).

**D2N2 aims to raise business productivity and competitiveness through training, skills and by having a long term strategy. Does the evidence base provide you with the data to inform your own skills strategies and why?**

The evidence base is useful in that it gives an idea of the competitiveness of the jobs market and, therefore, an idea of the skills and experience level required by candidates. This knowledge is useful for local planning but remains dependent on a wider system that prepares individuals with the knowledge of and desire to undertake a particular learning route.

At a delivery level it highlights where organisations may want to focus attention in the future. However, there is a key barrier to developing skills provision for growing sectors (especially for technical roles) in that it is very difficult to attract experienced and qualified tutors into education when their skills are in high demand in the trade. Market forces work against the ability to fill those gaps and consideration must be given as to how educational openings could be further subsidised to encourage take up (in the same way that STEM subject teachers have been in the past).

**The success of the refreshed strategy will require all stakeholders to be informed, influenced and involved. How will you use the D2N2 Skills Strategy 2016-2020?**

Not answered

**How can we better align the delivery of community, workplace and mainstream skills provision to meet the needs of D2N2 priority and growth sectors? Is the mix of provision appropriate to local need?**

Within the definition of workplace learning the VCS would like included the role of structured volunteering. Volunteering is an area which is often overlooked and underestimated as a support mechanism for gaining skills & employment. It encompasses finding a flexible and appropriate volunteering role, work based learning, practical meaningful tasks, time management, team working and peer support. This model is often a starting point for a range of people including long term unemployed, those with convictions, physical disabilities, learning difficulty and disability, mental health issues, low confidence, lack of skills, education or training, opportunity – lone parents, carers, and language difficulties. Supported volunteering is practical work placed learning in an environment which encourages the volunteer to develop transferable skills needed for the workplace.

All this is done with a person centred approach to support that allows the individual to put some structure back in their week, build confidence and allow them to utilise skills they may not have used for some time and learn new ones. If the volunteer has been out of work for some time or recovering from a mental or physical illness then the small things like getting up at a certain time to go to your volunteering placement must not be underestimated. It can be a low pressure environment that can build confidence, gain skills, training and is a valid pathway into work. It can be a stepping stone to whatever their goal is at the time. SMART targets can be set, evaluated and changed along the way.

An example is at Community Action in Derby – in the previous twelve months 17 of 19 leavers have left to go into employment from volunteering roles. The volunteers who approach CA are predominately at the start of their journeys back to or into work or training. At their exit interview, they have stated an increase in motivation, confidence, feeling more positive about their emotional wellbeing, feeling positive about their employment prospects and less socially isolated.

**In line with D2N2 delivery principles it is important to evidence that all funded provision adds value and meets local need. How can we ensure that future funded provision meets local socio-economic need and which KPIs would be most appropriate?**

and

**D2N2 is exploring the development of an outcome agreement framework for funded provision based on local priorities and indicators. Would you support the development of such an approach and what considerations need to be taken into account?**

An outcome agreement framework would work for tested programmes. However, it could prevent new approaches where there are greater risks but also more chances of learning. It would be important to allow pilot schemes to run without an outcome agreement to test new ideas and reflect on them.

Indicators which also capture the 'softer' outcomes of learning would also be welcomed.