

2007 - 2010



Fresh Skills for Chefs Training Project

Project Evaluation Report Summary



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Project Evaluation Report Summary

The Fresh Skills for Chefs Project ran from October 2004 to March 2010. It was managed by Tourism South East (TSE), the regional tourist board for the south east region, and funded by SEEDA's "Training Pools" Programme. The project was developed in response to the People 1st National Strategy that identified a shortage of skilled chefs in the hospitality sector and a lack of basic skills amongst 50% of those in employment; the growing consumer interest in tasting local produce on holiday; and the opportunities presented by the emphasis on sustainability and the use of local food in the delivery of the 2012 Olympics.

The total cost of the project was £288,292 of which £197,696 was funded by SEEDA's "Training Pools" programme.

The programme, designed as a pilot for the region, ran from October 2007 to March 2010 and delivered a range of flexible training courses for Chefs already in employment with the aim of equipping them with the knowledge and skills to source and prepare local produce. This was achieved through working with key partners including Colleges, County based Food Groups, and local authorities. Feedback from the course delegates was collected and evaluated continually through the life of the project and the final evaluation report was based on this data and project end surveys of participating Chefs, business managers and partner agencies.

The overall Aim of the project was to *"develop and pilot a new, flexible training programme for chefs in employment that would equip them with the skills to prepare and cook local ingredients"*. Its Objectives covered the increase in skilled chefs in the region, the development of stronger links between the tourism and hospitality sector and local producers, improved local supply chains and greater take up of local produce, and improved profitability amongst the participating businesses.

A total of 303 delegates split between the 9 counties in the region were involved in the range of courses that included bite-sized Master Classes on specific topics or areas of food and how to source and prepare local produce; a series of familiarisation visits - "Chefs Tours" - that introduced them to local producers and allowed the producers to show how they worked, the quality to which they operated, and the range of products they had available; and networking and peer-to-peer chef events. In all a total of 70 training interventions were made.

Colleges were primarily involved in designing and delivering the Master Classes and Fine Dining networking events, and the Food Groups were key to creating and delivering the networking events and "Chefs Tours". The local authorities supported the project through promotion of the courses to businesses in their area.

Chefs are predominately focussed on their own businesses, staff and service. The largely small scale nature of the food sector in the region, the hours worked by chefs and the lack of opportunity to get out and meet others have all worked against engagement with this group in the past. Discussions with the Food Group Managers, all of whom have worked with Chefs, showed that they all felt that engagement at this level was excellent given the difficulties they had all faced in the past in getting chefs out of their kitchens.

The two headline outputs were exceeded with 52 more beneficiaries engaging with the project than originally envisaged, drawn from 69 more businesses.

<p>Skills: Number of people assisted in improving their performance</p>	<p>250</p>
<p>Business Support: Number of businesses assisted in improving their performance</p>	<p>100</p>

The beneficiaries and businesses came from across the whole South East region, drawn predominately from small/micro businesses e.g. pubs, restaurants, small hotels, attractions, catering companies. The majority of beneficiaries were in the 25-49 age range which was to be expected as the project was aimed at chefs in employment, but with a significant number (12%) of over 50's learning new skills, and 14% coming from the 18-24 age band. 24% of the beneficiaries were female reflecting a growing trend in women working in what for a long time has been a male dominated profession.

The secondary objectives of engaging a wide range of businesses, providing information for participants, and creating templates for new types of course engagement with Chefs were largely achieved. Original plans to work with the Sector Skills Council to accredit the courses and roll out Skills Passports did not come to fruition as a result of the national organisation not being flexible enough to take on board local requirements to support specific projects.

Delegate feedback from the courses was very good and the surveys revealed strong support and satisfaction with the course design and content, the opportunity to network with other chefs, and in TSE's running of the project. Based on the feedback and surveys the evaluation is that the project Aims and Objectives were achieved or that the groundwork has been laid for longer term Objectives to be realised. The project delivered anticipated Strategic Added Value within its scope as a pilot programme.

The wider gains to be had from the work will only be secured if the ideas, enthusiasm and initial momentum generated by the project are taken forward on a larger scale in the future. There is enthusiasm amongst the delegates and partners to see the work continued and some activity has taken place outside of the project, initiated by the delegates themselves. However, building on the initial achievement is by no means guaranteed as external factors - government and regional funding programmes and policies, and the retention of local capacity for broader engagement (particularly the shape of the Food Groups) - are critical to success. The economic recession, potential changes in government, and re-focused national training priorities all potentially mitigate against effective development of the initial wins made through the project.