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**TOURISM
SOUTH EAST**

Hosting the World

Training Project 2008-2010

Independent Evaluation Summary



Hosting the World Project Evaluation Summary

The Hosting the World Training Project is an innovative initiative that ran from May 2008 to March 2010. It was managed Tourism South East (TSE), the regional tourist board for the south east region, and funded by the South East of England Development Agency's "Training Pools" Skills Programme. The Project is a compelling example of how a training Project can be shaped by employers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry to meet their needs whilst also making the very best of the once in a lifetime opportunity that is the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Project is an excellent demonstration of how to inspire businesses to improve workforce skills in areas that really matter – in the lead up to, during and importantly as a legacy of the Games.

The main aim of the Project was to assist tourism, leisure and hospitality organisations in the Eton Dorney Corridor to provide world class standards of customer service by delivering innovative skill development programmes. In fact the Hosting the World Project gave rise to the creation of nine highly relevant training courses and associated seminar, workshop, podcast and even vodcast resources as well as myriad conference and networking opportunities between 2008 and 2010. All this, successfully achieved at a time when the recession was truly at its most savage in the United Kingdom and when many businesses had felt forced to reduce staff and training in their organisations.

In fact this harsh business reality, did impact directly on the Hosting the World Project, but in a way that ultimately served to benefit more businesses and the South East region than was perhaps originally intended because both the timescale for the Project and the geographical scope for its delivery was extended. This meant that Tourism South East was able to overcome the significant challenges they had faced in recruiting businesses to the Hosting the World training courses experienced in 2009 and build up momentum and bookings more successfully across the South East region, and amongst different types of business in the industry during the year. In the evaluator's opinion, these decisions were both correct and critical to the success of the Project overall.

How do we know the Project was successful?

First and foremost because it over performed despite the economic conditions within which the Project was being delivered. The Project funding from SEEDA (£119,661) and the Learning and Skills Council (£10,000) came with a range of conditions and an expectation that the Project would lead to 100 tourism businesses being assisted in the Eton Dorney Corridor, and that 200 individuals (usually employees but often times the owner managers too) would be assisted in their skills development. There was also an expectation that each individual should complete at least 6 hours skills development activity to count towards the contractual objectives.

Contractual Outputs	Target	Actual
Business Support: Number of businesses assisted in improving their performance	100	158
Skills: Number of people assisted in improving their performance	200	255

Secondly, we know the Project was a success, because independent interviews with samples of business and employee participants confirm that the training was of the highest quality, and delivered results that met with their expectations and had impact and application in their workplaces.

Thirdly, many of these businesses made an important decision to invest both cash and time in the Project. Although the courses were heavily subsidised (typically from £120 down to £20) they still had to invest an amount of money per participant, and cover the cost of staff cover. In total, TSE calculated that amongst these businesses, and other strategic partners involved in the Project a total of £30,176 of beneficiary in-kind match funding was contributed during the lifetime of the Project to the end of March 2010 - an impressive achievement again in the context of an economic downturn and recession.

Finally, the Project is deemed a success by the evaluation team because it has demonstrated 'additionality', that is to say, it has given rise to a range of unexpected and positive benefits for the TSE team, the funding agent, the businesses, partners and training participants not originally envisaged. This could range from the extra networking and business opportunities created for delegates attending each training session; to the significant cost savings achieved by working with partners to help raise awareness of the Project at jointly delivered promotional events; through to simply delivering more 'product' than was originally expected in the contract, for example more seminars and workshops than required to respond to changing industry needs.

What stands out about this Project compared to other training Projects?

The evaluators have significant experience of undertaking training Project evaluations and it is not uncommon to find that Projects perform well in terms of achieving or exceeding outputs, but what stands out about Hosting the World Project for them is:

- The way it exceeded targets at a time of economic downturn
- The way in which it achieved an excellent spread of engagement with the Project across the South East region and tourism, leisure and hospitality industry i.e. it was not reliant on one type of business in one sub-region
- That despite the contractual stipulations (i.e. minimum 6 hours skills development activity per individual to count towards contractual targets), the TSE team did not make the targets its overarching motivation for engagement. Instead they focused on the genuine opportunity to create a meaningful legacy from the Games and therefore engaged many more businesses and individuals than required to do so – in fact 304 individuals were in some way impacted on by the Project
- The Project has not been afraid to evolve if aspects were not working as well as hoped. The Project Manager was not afraid to try different types of marketing and engagement techniques to recruit businesses to the Project, and was very driven to ensure its success
- The quality of the trainers delivering the courses were absolutely integral to its overall impact i.e. if the right team of experienced trainers had not been in place we are certain that delegate feedback would not have been as positive as it has proven to be

Has the Project made a difference?

It would certainly appear so if we are to base our assessment on the results from independent surveys completed with 6 of the participating businesses, 49 of the learners in receipt of Hosting the World training and feedback from 5 of the trainers involved in the Project. There were extremely high levels of satisfaction and impact recorded by these people, and some strikingly positive results in respect of expectations being met overall (90%-100%) and the new learning that had been achieved (91% of training delegates). Moreover, the Project appears to have genuinely helped develop business performance and capability in a number of ways that were envisioned when the Project was conceived.

- 82% of learners (employees) felt that their course would help owners, managers and supervisors in their business to train and coach employees and volunteers and generally have a more positive attitude towards training and career development



- 73% of learners (employees) thought that their training course would contribute to helping create a culture and reputation for customer service excellence at their business
- 71% of learners (employees) reported that they felt their training would help them / their organisations maximise the benefits of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games
- Encouragingly, nearly seven in ten learners have already or are likely to change working practices positively as a result of undertaking their Hosting the World training

The full report provides a range of survey statistics that help to reinforce the overall findings above, but the numbers don't always tell the full story. The evaluators were therefore also impressed by some of the comments that employers and learners made about their experience of the Project, a small selection of which are extracted below:

“The training was of a very good quality and highly relevant to our needs. The course has provided valuable development in a number of areas, for example it has helped those attending the courses to more effectively appraise, encourage, and monitor in the workplace. It has opened their minds in realising the importance of effective appraisals and providing feedback to staff in their job role.”

Karin Gray, Personnel Manager for the Complex and the entire Beaulieu Estate talking about the impact of her supervisors attending the ‘Reviewing the Performance’ training course:

“It’s given me ways to have greater appeal to ‘green thinking’ visitors through appropriate marketing. Tourism South East has been doing the right thing with the Hosting the World Project and its approach. I think it’s a case of little and often regarding training and learning and local events are especially good for small businesses like ours.”

Roger Taylor, Owner Manager of Granny Anne’s Bed and Breakfast in Marlow, Buckinghamshire talking about his experience of the ‘Green Awareness / Sustainability’ seminar:

The evaluation confirms that there have been many important **outcomes** from the Project including:

- Improving business and workplace performance through higher staff motivation levels thereby helping staff retention
- Being able to impart skills and knowledge to bring a structured approach to cascading information to staff and other team members
- Continuous professional development for tourism employers and employees which will enable them to build better and more professional businesses
- Increased awareness amongst businesses of the business opportunities in the run up to 2012 and beyond
- Many participating employers went on to attend and participate in a range of other learning and development activities which in the longer term will result in more professional and better run tourism businesses

What learning lessons have there been?

It is very rare indeed that any Project goes exactly to plan, and the Hosting the World Project was no different in this regard. There were significant challenges in the early stages of the Project in engaging businesses which were overcome, and even some disappointments in the way in which all aspects of the Project might develop with all the partners involved in its delivery. The main learning lessons appear to include:



- The need for Project funders and delivery organisations to be flexible regarding contractual timescales and parameters is critical if they are truly wishing to respond to changing demands and experiences in the tourism, leisure and hospitality marketplace
- The use of top quality trainers with industry experience and insights is highly valuable to Projects of this nature - they bring course materials to life for learners and impact directly on the overall experience and results achieved
- Training course content must be 'malleable' enough to cater for businesses of all sizes (from micros to larger concerns) and types in the industry for it to be perceived a) as attractive on the first place and b) as useful in its application back in the workplace
- Managing partner expectations is important in Projects like Hosting the World, and it is important to have processes and protocols in place should these expectations change or not be realised
- The subsidy for the training has been important to businesses in order to engage with the Project, but this does not mean that the training should proceed in precisely the same way in future. Survey results suggest that most learners value the training between £61 and £200 per course in real market terms

What is the future for Hosting the World?

The Project Manager confirmed in April 2010 that Hosting the World had enabled TSE to pilot a range of 2012-specific customer care courses at level 3 that had previously not been available. Through this pilot Project TSE was able to develop and run a programme of ten courses which will result in the best elements from five to six of these courses being taken forward over the next 18 to 24 months as part of TSE's wider programme of customer care training in the run up to and beyond 2012. The Hosting the World branding will form part of TSE's overall 2012 campaign.

This vision is applauded by the independent evaluation team, as our work confirms the Hosting the World Project has delivered value for money¹ and funding partners should be reassured that it has been an excellent use of public money to exceed contractual outputs and achieve meaningful outcomes for the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry in the South East region. Moreover, the value of the training courses in 'market rate' terms appears to be somewhere in the range of £61 to £200 per course, and with all the creative and technical time that has now gone in to developing the content of the Project courses it will be important to ensure that a further return on that investment is achieved in future by the partners, and it is recommended that those deemed most successful and in highest demand, be continued at least up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in July 2012.

¹ The Hosting the World Project has offered a good return on the funding investment made by SEEDA and other partners, primarily because it has significantly over-performed in respect of its two contractual outputs. The number of businesses assisted was much greater than expected, as was the total number of individuals assisted with skills development. If we consider that £119,661 of funding from SEEDA was agreed to catalyse 100 business assists and 200 skills development assists the funding cost per output would have been £432.20¹. The Project delivered 158 business assists and 255 skills development assists meaning that the unit cost per output was much lower at £289.74. Moreover, although they could not be included in the contractual outputs, a further 49 individuals were engaged through the Project and each of these benefit from 4 hours (as opposed to 6 hours) skills development activity (equivalent in real time terms to a further 33 engagements at 6 hours). Had this activity been included in the outputs, then the unit cost per output would have been even lower at £268.30