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Tourism South East Surrey Tourism Skills Network project

Final Project Evaluation January 2007

The Asphaleia Boost approach to evaluation: *Boost aims to present an honest, independent perspective on projects that it evaluates. Integrity is paramount, and Boost does not avoid difficult issues. We inspect processes and documentation and listen to all stakeholders in order to form opinion. We aim to offer constructive recommendations that can be usefully responded to in order to improve the quality of delivery of projects and of the administration that leads to this delivery in the future.*

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1. Introduction

Tourism South East (TSE) was awarded an ESF co-financing contract worth £133,000 by Surrey Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to manage the Surrey Tourism Skills Network project between 1st July 2004 and 31st December 2006. This final project evaluation was carried out by Asphaleia Boost (Boost) to assess progress against targets and the quality of provision, as well as to identify lessons learnt and areas of best practice.

1.1 Project Overview

As outlined in the original bid to Surrey LSC, the objectives of the project were to:

- Create a collaborative partnership comprising employers, training providers and tourism groups who would share best practice, establish needs and identify training capacity.
- Formulate and implement a three-year tourism skills strategy for Surrey.
- Commission a research study into the barriers to skills development in the tourism sector.
- Develop and deliver a portfolio of demand-led training at a range of levels.
- Establish a brokerage service to signpost to new and existing provision.

TSE was the lead partner responsible for overall project management and they employed a Project Co-ordinator for three days a week with specific responsibility to deliver outcomes and targets. This was a partnership project with Guildford College, Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Waverley Borough Council, Surrey Museums Consultative Committee and Business Link Surrey acting in an advisory and supportive capacity.

2. Executive Summary

The project was managed on a day-to-day basis by a Project Co-ordinator based in Guildford, Surrey, who was supported by central administrative, financial, monitoring and managerial staff based at the TSE Head Office in Eastleigh.

TSE already had well-established project management and monitoring systems, which were modified to suit the needs of this project.

TSE obtained feedback from beneficiaries after each course to help ensure the quality of delivery. Trainers were selected from a pre-assessed pool of trainers, venue checks were conducted before venues were used and a member of TSE staff attended training, where possible, to ensure paperwork was completed correctly. TSE ensured equality of opportunity by promoting the project to all.

The project was led and delivered by TSE with advice and support from partners.

A sample of 50 randomly-selected beneficiary feedback sheets were analysed for this evaluation. The majority of feedback was positive and 67% of respondents rated the day they attended highly, at over nine out of ten. On the whole, beneficiaries felt the activity or course was beneficial and many specified elements that would be useful in their workplace.

Feedback was obtained from TSE project staff and partner representatives through telephone interviews and written questionnaires. On the whole, staff and partners felt the project was highly successful in achieving its objectives.

2.1 Summary of Project Successes

The project was highly successful in its delivery of demand-led training for the tourism industry and the training on offer was adapted throughout the project to take account of employers' needs. A major success was the production of 130 TNAs on behalf of tourism SMEs, which led to 391 tourism employers and employees participating in tailored training programmes and 88 owners/proprietors/managers participating in management and business related programmes (against a target of 50).

A major and key success criterion for the Surrey Tourism Skills Network was that for the very first time, tourism businesses had access to a single point of contact for support. This helped develop and build trust and made it easier to engage with them.

Links to the regional Tourism Skills Network added value to the Surrey project through the ability to share best practice with colleagues in the five other sub-regions.

Project funding enabled the Co-ordinator to develop and implement a three-year tourism skills strategy and action plan specifically for Surrey which, with five other sub-regional plans, led to the development of a regional skills strategy.

One key benefit of the project was that the Co-ordinator was able to offer tourism SMEs a holistic approach in terms of advising on the full range of activities available to them. This proved to be of great benefit and value in terms of saving precious resources and time. This brokerage work will continue after the project has ended through Skills South East – Train to Gain, but it is recommended Surrey LSC and other funding bodies recognise there is a need within the industry for this type of sector specific service.

A further benefit of the brokerage service was that relationships with new partners helped to shape training and increased attendance numbers making it more cost-effective to run some courses.

Those interviewed believed employers have received a range of benefits from participating in the project including increased awareness of training opportunities, demand-led training which met their needs, improved staff retention, an improved relationship with TSE as their regional tourist board and networking opportunities.

As a result of the networking approach, local authorities are now working more closely. For example, Guildford, Mole Valley, Waverley and Woking Borough Councils were brought together through the Network and are now working together on a tourism strategy for the region.

One important factor in the success of this project was the Project Co-ordinator's participation in other networks and sector groups. This not only helped with promotion of the project but also enabled her to keep abreast of other opportunities employers could be signposted to.

The Project Co-ordinator and the Skills Advisor for Business Link at Guildford College had an excellent working relationship, leading to a high number of cross-referrals which will continue after the project has ended.

The fact TSE had an industry-recognised national training programme, Welcome to Excellence, leading to an NCFE Level 2 qualification if desired, was a useful in-road to discussions with employers and without this it might have been more difficult to attract so many beneficiaries.

Although the project was led by TSE whose Head Office is in Eastleigh, the Project Co-ordinator was based in Guildford. This was another factor in the success of this project as employers need to have confidence the person they are seeking advice from really understands the issues faced in their area.

2.2 Summary of Lessons Learnt

There was a very high demand for a brokerage service from employers in the tourism industry, particularly from B&B establishments who often require a very diverse range of training.

As the project progressed central data systems, which were already in place at TSE were refined, and these will continue to be developed in future projects.

There were several different Surrey LSC contract managers and it took time for them to fully understand the project, which sometimes hindered support especially during the re-profiling process.

Employers showed little interest in full NVQ qualifications. Reasons cited were previous bad experiences with NVQ providers, high levels of staff turnover, a perceived lack of confidence in the NVQ system and the length of time required to complete them. To overcome this, a VRQ was offered as a shorter alternative, the NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Customer Service for Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism. However a better solution might be to offer NVQ units as 'tasters', which has worked successfully in a similar ESF tourism project run by the Project Co-ordinator in West Sussex .

Fewer employers than anticipated were interested in receiving in-house and bespoke training because of the difficulties of bringing a large enough group of employees together with similar skills needs at the same time.

Employers who participated in the evaluation said they would have been prepared to pay between £40 and £80 to attend the training. Through the project, the courses were heavily subsidised and the average cost paid per person to attend a one-day short course was £20.

Setting the project up was time consuming as TSE had few contacts in Surrey at the outset, and building relationships with local authorities, sector groups and employers was a slow process. However, as the project built momentum Network members have become much more proactive.

One partner, Guildford Borough Council, said they had learnt a great deal about working with small businesses as a result of the project, and they would now have the courage to support other similar projects in the future.

The project has established there is a huge need for ongoing training and support for businesses in the tourism industry. There are many new business start-ups, there are a high number of Eastern European employees with poor English language skills and there is a high staff turnover, all of which compound this need. Surrey LSC and other funding bodies must recognise this issue and endeavour to address it in future funding rounds.

3. Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation has been undertaken by Boost, to provide an assessment of the Surrey Tourism Skills Network project. It was carried out between November 2006 and January 2007.

To conduct this evaluation, information was collected using a variety of methods:

- Written feedback sheets completed by individual beneficiaries.
- Written questionnaires completed by employer beneficiaries.
- Written questionnaires and telephone interviews with project staff and partners.
- Quantitative data relating to numeric targets.
- Inspection of project management and record keeping systems.
- Inspection of reports submitted to SLSC, internal reports and minutes of Steering Group meetings.

Boost has analysed this information and the final evaluation report is a result of this analysis. The opinions expressed in the report are those of Boost.

4. Findings and Outcomes

4.1 Achievement of Outputs, Outcomes and Milestones

The Surrey LSC contract, agreed at the start of the project, set out certain quantitative output, outcome and milestone targets the project was required to meet. As the project progressed it became clear there was less demand than anticipated in some areas of training (e.g. IT and full NVQs) and more in others (e.g. marketing). To ensure the project remained demand-led as intended, the LSC agreed to re-profile the output, outcome and milestone targets to take account of this.

Outputs

The table below shows actual delivery against the re-profiled output targets:

| Output | Target | Actual | Variance |
|---|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| OP10 Marketing materials and information literature for partnership | 3 | 5 | +2 |
| OP11 Beneficiary starters | 391 | 391 | 0 |
| OP12 Beneficiary completers | 391 | 391 | 0 |
| OP13 Early leavers | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OP1n Training places on marketing courses | 50 | 44 | -6 |
| OP2 Customer care skills at level 2 | 70 | 23 | -47* |
| OP3 Customer care skills at level 3 | 65 | 10 | -55* |
| OP3n Customer care skills at level 2 or 3 | 306 | 314 | +8 |
| OP4 TNAs for SMEs | 130 | 130 | 0 |
| OP5n Individuals starting NVQ or VRQ at level 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| OP6 Research into barriers to skills development in tourism | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OP7 Map existing training in tourism | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OP8 Promotional events | 35 | 84 | +49 |
| OP9 Create branding for the partnership | 1 | 1 | 0 |

**The outputs OP2 and OP3 were replaced by OP3n which was delivered on target. Therefore these outputs did not under-perform.*

The project was successful in achieving or exceeding all of its re-profiled output targets. 391 individual beneficiaries received training and 130 tourism SMEs received Training Needs Analyses (TNAs).

Part-way through the project, it became clear that employers in the tourism sector were reluctant to sign up for full NVQ qualifications. As the project was intended to be demand-led, Surrey LSC agreed the targets, and therefore the training on offer, could be re-profiled to better reflect the needs of employers. Targets for full NVQ qualifications were amended and an increased number of short courses were added. The output OP3n was introduced to replace OP2 and OP3, and had a higher target than the two it replaced. These courses were popular with employers and 306 were delivered under this new output. The outstanding targets for OP2 and OP3

were written off and the project is therefore not considered to have under-achieved in its outputs.

Outcomes

The table below shows actual delivery against the re-profiled outcome targets:

| Outcome | Target | Actual | Variance |
|---|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| OC10 Signpost companies/individuals through brokerage service | 200 | 202 | +2 |
| OC1n Beneficiaries to achieve NVQ or VRQ at level 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| OC2 Provide training for organisations | 130 | 78 | -52 |
| OC3 Deliver in-house training courses | 55 | 26 | -29 |
| OC4 Produce 3-year tourism strategy | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OC5 Create brokerage service | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OC6 Establish core group of training providers | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OC7 Bespoke training programmes for companies | 20 | 16 | -4 |
| OC8 Create Surrey Tourism Skills Partnership | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OC9 Managers to receive specific management training | 50 | 88 | +38 |

Surrey Tourism Skills Network had anticipated providing management training for 50 managers but actually exceeded this target and trained 88 managers, indicating a higher than anticipated demand. The project had intended to provide training for 130 organisations but by the end of the project 78 had received this, a variance of 52. However, as the project did conduct TNAs for 130 organisations it was able to provide advice or support to 130 as planned, although some of these declined to take up the training offer or their needs changed. The project had also intended to deliver 55 in-house training courses and create 20 bespoke training programmes, but it actually delivered 26 and 16 of these respectively. The main reason was that organisations participating in these courses had to employ a large enough group of workers with similar skills gaps to undertake the training at the same time.

Milestones

The table below shows actual delivery against the re-profiled milestone targets:

| Milestone | Target | Actual | Variance |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| MS1 Project start | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MS2 Research produced | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MS3 Steering group meetings | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| MS4 Project Co-ordinator appointed | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MS5 Project end | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MS6n Final evaluation and report | 1 | 1 | 0 |

The project was successful in achieving all of its milestone targets.

4.2 Project Management

The project was managed on a day-to-day basis by a Project Co-ordinator based in Guildford, Surrey. She was supported by a team based at the TSE Head Office in Eastleigh, which included administrative, financial, quality, data and managerial support.

The Project Co-ordinator's role included liaising with employers, conducting TNAs with employers to identify their needs, identifying existing provision and developing new courses where a need existed, co-ordinating and communicating with partners, liaising with beneficiaries to ensure they are aware of arrangements, monitoring the budget, monitoring targets and participating in sector groups to remain abreast of needs and skills brokerage.

The Project Co-ordinator was supported at a strategic level by the Head of Skills and Training based at the TSE Head Office, who also chaired the Steering Group.

The Finance and Quality Officer was responsible for monitoring expenditure, monitoring progress against targets, producing claims and overseeing quality. She was supported by two other members of staff.

The Training Officer provided administrative support to the project including taking course bookings, liaising with training venues, distributing information to beneficiaries, maintaining beneficiary databases and keeping Steering Group minutes.

Monitoring Systems

TSE already had established project systems at the Eastleigh Head Office which were used to monitor administration, finance and data, and these systems were modified to meet the project's specific needs. The Project Co-ordinator used these systems as well as her own to monitor progress on the project. Regular update meetings between the Project Co-ordinator and Head Office based staff ensured all records were consistent and accurate.

Evidence was checked by the Project Co-ordinator and passed to the Finance and Quality Officer and Training Projects Officer, who collated project files at the TSE Head Office, including paperwork such as ESF SR forms, course registers and beneficiary feedback forms. Information from ESF SR forms was entered onto the LSC Provider On-Line system at Head Office and the Training Officer recorded employer and course attendee information on TSE's training database, which was updated weekly. Both the Finance and Quality Officer and the Project Co-ordinator recorded outputs, outcomes and milestones on tracking spreadsheets each month. Regular update meetings were held to discuss the evidence present, to check figures held centrally and by the Project Manager were consistent, and to agree what to claim for.

Figures entered on the CMR were based on complete evidence only, which ensured claims were correct. The LSC visited the project at quarterly monitoring meetings where evidence was checked.

To monitor demand and make provision for new courses, the Project Co-ordinator analysed forms that showed what training requests there had been and where they came from. This information fed into TSE databases and TSE were able to track outcomes to ensure people attended.

Several LSC audits took place during the project, both internal and external. At the interim audit by the LSC one issue was raised in particular; the third page of the De Minimis form was not being used as TSE were not aware of it. As a result of the audit this action was put into place immediately. Subsequently, internal and external auditors were satisfied records were being properly maintained.

Quality

TSE places a high importance on quality and checked all trainers, venues and courses before delivery took place. The Finance and Quality Officer was responsible for monitoring the quality of delivery. All trainers were appropriately qualified and selected from a pool of trainers who have been subject to TSE's assessment criteria. TSE had Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with all trainers who worked on the project. Prior to using a venue, a check of the venue was undertaken, including an assessment of its services and facilities, health and safety policy and public liability insurance. In addition, each trainer completed a venue quality form on the day of the training. TSE staff were often present at training sessions to help ensure paperwork was completed correctly, to provide support to the trainer and to monitor delivery.

Individual beneficiaries were asked to complete feedback forms at the end of each session, the results of which were reviewed regularly. If a beneficiary had given an overall score for the day of six out of ten or less, it was passed to the master trainer to investigate. There was one instance where a trainer received very mixed feedback and was not used again. Further feedback was obtained from employers through sector groups and acted on, and most of this was enthusiastic and encouraged others to attend.

As a sub-region, Surrey produced a Self Assessment Review (SAR) which fed in to TSE's over-arching SAR for the south east region.

Spend

Money was allocated to the project based on the original profile agreed with Surrey LSC. All finance was managed at the Head Office using TSE's established processes (for example purchase orders and accounts systems). Financial reports were sent to the Project Co-ordinator monthly. The Project

Co-ordinator and Head of Skills and Training would liaise regularly to discuss budgets. Project management meetings were held monthly and agenda items included quality and finance.

Partners

Project partners contributed to and supported the project by way of regular communication with the Project Co-ordinator and attendance at Steering Group meetings. The Steering Group facilitated communication between the partners, where they were encouraged to offer ideas to help shape future training activity. Partners were also involved in publicising the training courses to their own employer contacts.

As a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for Travel and Tourism, Guildford College provided office space to TSE's Project Co-ordinator as match funding to underline their support.

The involvement of the partners changed throughout the duration of the project. Initially the partnership was strong and Steering Group attendance was good, however due to restructuring within the County Council, local authorities and Surrey LSC, there were often several points of contact and it was difficult to form a cohesive group.

Equal Opportunities

TSE made every effort to promote equal opportunities throughout the project by ensuring training was available to all employers in the industry who were eligible, and to all employees within these businesses. The project was not just open to TSE members but was promoted widely to all in the sector. If an employer was too large and therefore not eligible to receive support through the project they were signposted on to other provision, thus ensuring no organisations were excluded from receiving training support if they wanted it.

Beneficiaries were asked if they had any special requirements before attending training. The ethnicity of participants was tracked to ensure it was representative of the area. Training was delivered in a flexible manner to help meet individual requirements.

TSE has an equalities statement which is adhered to at all times.

4.3 Feedback from Learners

At the end of each course, learners were asked to complete feedback sheets to provide their views on the training undertaken. For the purposes of this evaluation, a sample of 50 randomly-selected learner feedback forms were analysed.

Beneficiaries were asked to rate various elements of the course they had undertaken and the results from the sample were as follows:

| Element | Very Good | Good | Satisfactory | Poor | No Answer | Total |
|--|-----------|----------|--------------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| Training venue | 33 (66%) | 12 (24%) | 5 (10%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 50 (100%) |
| Accessibility / ease of parking | 27 (54%) | 13 (26%) | 2 (4%) | 4 (8%) | 4 (8%) | 50 (100%) |
| Content of programme | 39 (78%) | 11 (22%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 50 (100%) |
| Value to you of programme | 31 (62%) | 16 (32%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 50 (100%) |
| Programme met expectations | 32 (64%) | 16 (32%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 50 (100%) |
| Support materials provided | 34 (68%) | 13 (26%) | 2 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 50 (100%) |
| Trainer's presentation skills | 46 (92%) | 4 (8%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 50 (100%) |
| Trainer's ability to maintain interest | 41 (82%) | 6 (12%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 50 (100%) |

These results indicate that in general beneficiaries had a positive attitude towards the courses they had undertaken. It should be noted that these were all one-day courses.

Several elements received good or very good responses suggesting beneficiaries felt the content of the programmes was appropriate, that programmes met expectations and that trainers' presentation skills were good.

The least positive responses related to training venues and accessibility. Four people felt accessibility and ease of parking had been poor and two felt this had been satisfactory. Five people felt the training venue had been no better than satisfactory. Although TSE undertakes venue checks prior to training taking place, Boost recommends the venues receiving poor responses are not used in the future for similar training provision or that accessibility issues are resolved beforehand.

Beneficiaries were asked to rate the day as a whole against a scale of one to ten, where ten was good and one was poor. The results from the sample were as follows:

| Rating: | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | No Answer | Total |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|------------------|--------------|
| Number of responses: | 19 | 14 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 50 |

All of those that responded to this question rated the day at seven or above. 33 of the 49 respondents (67%) rated the day at nine or above. These figures indicate the majority of those attending courses found them to be beneficial.

On feedback sheets, beneficiaries were asked to provide further comments on which parts of the course they found useful and which were not so relevant, as well as elements that would specifically apply to their own workplace. A large majority of respondents listed elements they had found useful and identified many parts they would use in their workplace. A few respondents said there were some elements they had found not to be so relevant for them or their business, but these tended to be specific items which had formed only a small part of the day. There were a variety of other comments made regarding the courses, the majority of which were favourable and showed the courses had been useful for beneficiaries.

The few negative comments were:

- Don't assume we understand jargon
- A later start would be useful as people from B&Bs have to serve breakfast in the mornings
- It was irritating not to be told the car park was pay and display

Examples of the more positive comments included:

- It was much better than expected
- It worked well with a small group
- Very interesting
- Very good content from a one-day course
- Extremely impressed with the trainer's presentation
- It was useful to meet other B&B people
- The information was easy to digest
- It was a very nice day with a friendly atmosphere
- It was a great day out

4.4 Feedback from Employers

For this evaluation, employers that participated in the project were asked to complete a questionnaire to provide their views on the Network. Six employers completed questionnaires and this section summarises their responses.

The employers that responded had undertaken a variety of short courses, including Welcome Host, Welcome Management, Welcome All, internet and website training, Welcome Walkers and Cyclists, marketing and DDA. None of the six employers perceived that they had used the brokerage service available through the Network however by virtue of the fact they contacted the Co-ordinator to visit them, it was deemed that they had used the service. Employers were asked if they had been informed of how the training had been funded, and all said this had been explained by the Project Co-ordinator at the outset.

Employers found out about the project from a variety of sources including via a B&B Association, directly from TSE staff and through Surrey Business Link. When asked what attracted them to participating in the Network, the employers said they had wanted to receive locally-delivered, subsidised training and that a variety of good-quality relevant training was on offer. All employers said they received a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and that this was useful in helping them identify their training needs and familiarising them with what training was on offer.

All employers said they had gained something by participating in the project citing, for example, developing a website within a tight budget, focusing on a business plan, basic management, customer service training which has had an impact on how customers are dealt with, information on legal and industry issues, and marketing and networking opportunities. One employer felt there had been other benefits in terms of motivating their employees, encouraging loyalty and rewarding their work.

When asked which aspects of the training had been most and least useful, employers felt all the training had been useful. One mentioned that Smarter Marketing was the best course they had attended in a long time and one said the training in search engine maximisation had increased the number of hits on their website.

Employers were asked how much they would have been prepared to pay for their one-day training session if it had not been subsidised. They felt this would depend on the training, but those who provided a figure said between £40 and £80. Through the project, the average cost paid per person to attend a one-day short course was £20. The Smarter Marketing course was offered in other sub-regions free of charge as it was funded through a regional project. Therefore it was felt that it should be fully subsidised

through the Surrey project and as a result was the most heavily subscribed course.

Other comments made by the six employers included:

- Please do a follow up on Smarter Marketing via the internet, concentrating mainly on producing a budget website.
- It would be extremely good to continue the Network as the B&B sector needs to continue to grow and meet increasingly complex needs of tourists, and adapt to the internet age especially.
- I was sorry not to be able to get onto the Walkers and Cyclists, Welcome and Housekeeping courses.
- Bring it back!!

4.5 Feedback from Project Team and Partners

Boost obtained feedback from the following members of TSE staff and partners using written questionnaires and telephone interviews:

- Carrie Tripp, Project Co-ordinator, TSE
- Sue Gill, Head of Skills and Training, TSE
- Samantha Cawte, Finance and Quality Officer, TSE
- Jessica Lacey, Training Officer, TSE
- Darren Rivers, Training Projects Officer, TSE
- Donna Timlin, Training & Development Support Officer, TSE
- Iain Lynch, Corporate Services Manager, Waverley Borough Council
- Pat Reynolds, Heritage Manager, Surrey County Council
- Christine King, Equality and Diversity Manager, Guildford College
- Andy Carr, Tourism and Business Partnership Manager, Guildford Borough Council

On the whole, staff and partners felt the project was successful in developing the skills of those working in the tourism industry in Surrey.

Staff felt the aims of the project were clear and believed it had been successful in meeting its aims. In terms of the research into barriers to skills development in the tourism industry, staff and partners felt this had been achieved fairly early on in the project. The Project Co-ordinator felt the research formed a useful document to feed into the South East England Regional Tourism Skills Strategy and Workforce Development Plan.

On the whole, staff and partners felt the project had been successful in the development and delivery of a portfolio of demand-led training for the tourism industry. One member of staff said although TSE had very few contacts in Surrey at the start of the project, thanks to a proactive approach and the hard work of the Project Co-ordinator links with employers were developed quickly. Several members of staff and partners pointed out the training was truly demand-led as the training offer was adjusted throughout the project to take account of employers' needs. The Project Co-ordinator believed it was fortunate the LSC recognised the need for flexibility in the training and were agreeable to amending the delivery profile to ensure industry needs could be met. One partner felt the training was a particular success as the feedback he had received from employers had been highly positive and had indicated they were receiving practical skills they really needed. He also felt the project had achieved a high rate of penetration into local tourism SMEs who are normally very difficult to attract to training.

Staff and partners felt the project was successful in developing and implementing a three-year tourism skills strategy for Surrey. It was mentioned this led to the development of a regional skills strategy and was linked with the local authority tourism strategy. One partner believed the work on the project provided a real understanding of the needs of the sector, and this resulted in a particularly useful skills strategy. Another partner

thought work on the strategy would continue to a limited extent after the project has ended, but a lack of resources would limit this. He believes Surrey LSC must recognise there is an ongoing need for funding in this area as tourism is one of the key sectors for the 2012 Olympic Games.

Overall, staff and partners felt the most successful aspect of the project was the establishment of a tourism sector specific brokerage service to signpost employers to a variety of new and existing training. Several members of staff mentioned employers in Surrey now recognise the Project Co-ordinator as the face of tourism in the County. One partner felt a key benefit of the brokerage service was that the Project Co-ordinator worked with employers to help them identify wider benefits and was not there solely to sign them up to the project. Another partner mentioned they had received highly positive feedback from employers about the brokerage service. At the start, only those who had received training used the brokerage service but now it is more widespread and many other employers also use the service. The Project Co-ordinator said it was surprising how much of a need there was for a brokerage service for employers, albeit they may not be familiar with the term "brokerage". She believed the B&B sector has particularly benefited from this service as they require such a diverse range of training (including pre-start training to help set up as a B&B) and they have been able to access this through the brokerage service. A further benefit of the brokerage service was that relationships with new partners helped to shape training and increased attendance numbers making it more cost-effective to run some courses. Through working in conjunction with Skills South East and Train to Gain, the Network has the potential to offer specific tourism related services.

Staff and partners believe participating in the Network has made a difference to Network members in a variety of ways including:

- Increased awareness of training available;
- Encouraged an ethos of training amongst employers;
- Delivered demand-led training so employers' needs were met and they were not just offered a standard range of NVQs;
- Provided training to very small and new businesses who would normally not be contacted by Business Link or other services;
- Helped with staff retention;
- Provided an awareness of funding streams and other support services such as Business Link, which employers would otherwise not know existed;
- Developed employers' relationships with TSE as their regional tourist board allowing them to keep abreast of other relevant developments and opportunities;
- Encouraged networking and sharing of best practice across the sector;
- Links to other sub-regions to share best practice through the SEEDA funded Tourism Skills Network SE
- Enabled the sector to act more strategically;

- Provided in-house courses where all staff were trained at once which would have been too expensive without the subsidy offered through the network;
- Local authorities are now working more closely, e.g. Guildford, Mole Valley, Waverley and Woking councils were brought together through the Network and are now working together on a tourism strategy for the region.

Staff and partners were asked if they felt any additional results could have been achieved if additional funding had been available. Many believed there was sufficient demand to offer an increased number of short courses and to offer some longer courses. One partner felt additional funding would have allowed training to be more tailored to different sizes of business or to those in different sectors, however this was not an aim within the project, nor was funding allocated to it. One member of staff believed more bespoke training could have been offered with additional funding. The costs of developing this were significant and it was therefore not widely available on the project. One partner felt better research could have been conducted with additional funding and that research could have been published. Another suggested it would have been useful to conduct an in-depth assessment of the real difference participating in the project has made to business, for example in terms of staff turnover. One partner felt the most beneficial use of additional funding would have been to deliver the project for a longer period as there is still a huge need for it.

Staff and partners identified a variety of lessons learnt throughout the project, including:

- Existing data systems were improved throughout the project and these new systems will continue to be used in future projects.
- There were several different Surrey LSC contract managers and it took time for them to understand the project, which sometimes hindered support.
- There was little interest from employers in full NVQ qualifications. Reasons cited were high levels of staff turnover, a perceived lack of confidence in the NVQ system and the length of time required in completing them. To overcome this, a VRQ was offered as a shorter alternative, the NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Customer Service for Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism. However a better solution might be to offer NVQ units as 'tasters', which has worked successfully in a similar ESF tourism project run by the Project Co-ordinator in West Sussex.
- Setting up the project was time consuming as TSE had few contacts in Surrey at the start of the project, and building relationships with local authorities, sector groups and employers was a slow process. However, as the project built momentum Network members have become much more proactive.

- Guildford Borough Council said they had learnt a great deal about working with small businesses as a result of the project, and they would now have the courage to support other similar projects in the future.

Staff and partners mentioned one of the important factors which made the project such a success was the Project Co-ordinator's participation in other networks and sector groups (e.g. Regional Tourism Skills Network, Conference and Hospitality Group, Attractions Group, B&B Associations, tourism sector groups, sub-regional committees, Surrey Skills Network - brokerage service led by Business Link, etc). This networking not only helped with promotion of the project but also enabled the Project Co-ordinator to keep abreast of other funded opportunities that employers could be signposted to. The Project Co-ordinator gained a high level of support from the Skills Advisor for Business Link based at Guildford College, and there had been a high level of cross-referral between them which will continue after the project has ended.

Partners generally felt the Network worked well and all said they had attended some Steering Group meetings. Several partners praised the Project Co-ordinator for maintaining good communication with them throughout the project. One partner mentioned the Steering Group was useful for networking with other organisations which could benefit other areas of work and another confirmed a benefit of the project was being able to expand their contacts. One partner felt the Steering Group was effective because partners had the opportunity to discuss the best ways of delivering to achieve the best results. Another partner said the Steering Group was well-organised and useful for sharing information about the project. However one partner felt the Steering Group did not have enough decision making powers and became more of a networking group. One member of staff thought it was unrealistic for employers to spend their time attending Steering Group meetings; instead it was more effective for the Project Co-ordinator to meet with them individually.

The Project Co-ordinator felt it was useful that TSE had an industry-recognised national training programme, Welcome to Excellence, which led to a Level 2 qualification if desired. This was a useful in-road to discussions with employers as they recognised it as credible training attached to the Tourist Board, which often helped to engage them. Without this it might have been more difficult to attract so many beneficiaries.

The Project Co-ordinator also felt the project would not have been as effective if she had been based at the TSE Head Office in Eastleigh, rather than in Surrey. She believes employers need to have confidence the person they are seeking advice from really understands the issues faced in their area.

Staff felt there was potential for some of the activities developed on the project to continue on a commercial basis once the project ends, as it was so well-received amongst employers. However, it is likely take-up would decrease significantly as many would not be prepared to pay these increased rates.

If further funding was available in the future, staff felt more demand-led training could be offered. The project found there was a high demand for this and delivered more than originally anticipated. Staff and partners believed some of the brokerage work would continue anyway, as the Project Co-ordinator will have the role of tourism sector Skills Co-ordinator for Surrey two days per week and employers will still be able to contact her for brokerage advice. However, with a reduced amount of time to spend on keeping up the contacts the effectiveness of the service may reduce over time. The Co-ordinator now has a wide knowledge of available training opportunities and will be able to continue using and sharing this knowledge. One partner mentioned that the sub-regional committee, the "Surrey Tourism Partnership Group" will be continuing and will have many of the same members as this network. Partnerships developed on the project will continue. The bespoke courses were very popular and one local authority is considering funding more of these in the future so in this respect the project may have been useful in leveraging in additional funds.

Staff and partners felt it was important that future funding is made available to the sector as there is a continuing need for support. One partner stressed there are many new businesses opening in this sector and many of these will have training and support needs in areas such as business management and customer care. As well as a high staff turnover compounding the industry's training needs, there is an influx of Eastern European staff many of whom require support to learn English. With the 2012 Olympic Games looming and Surrey's proximity to London, staff believe it will be important for future funding rounds to promote this in the area. TSE will be looking into designing and delivering a Welcome Olympics customer service based training programme, on the strength of the Welcome to Excellence suite of courses. One partner commented that local authority funding for tourism in Surrey would always be very limited without a tourism function at County level and it is therefore important other agencies understand the need for additional funding to be made available.

5. Case Study

In the summer of 2005, Chris and Jill Capstick decided to turn part of their 15th century listed house, Rookery Nook, into a B&B. They had no experience, but a neighbour told them about a B&B workshop they had attended locally through TSE (funded by the Surrey Tourism Skills Network project), and highly recommended contacting the Project Co-ordinator, Carrie Tripp, as a first point of contact for advice on getting started. Following a meeting and Training Needs Analysis with Carrie, they were helped to identify they needed support with marketing and setting up their website. They decided to embark on the Smarter Marketing course, which helped inspire them with their website. According to Chris and Jill, this was the most useful course they attended and, along with the subsequent courses and workshops (Managing your B&B, Winning Websites and Search Engine Optimism), has helped make their first year of business a highly successful one.

They also used the brokerage service to be signposted to join the South West Surrey and Guildford B&B Association. Through networking within this group, advice was given to help them set their room rates and become aware of local issues and opportunities such as how to advertise in local authority guides.

Rookery Nook B&B, Shere, Surrey

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Successes

The Surrey Tourism Skills Network project was well-managed and delivered in line with its objectives and quantitative targets. It appears to have been particularly successful in developing a holistic demand-led approach to training for the tourism industry in Surrey.

The successes and areas of best practice the project has achieved along with recommendations for the future, where relevant, are as follows:

- The aims of the project were clear and most of those interviewed believed it had been successful in meeting its aims.
- The project was successful in its delivery of demand-led training for the tourism industry and the training on offer was amended throughout the project to take account of employers' needs.
- The project was successful in meeting the majority of its output and outcome targets. Its successes included providing TNAs to 130 tourism SMEs, training to 391 individual beneficiaries and management training to 88 managers.
- Having a Project Co-ordinator as a single point of contact for tourism employers helped develop their trust and made it easy for them to know who to contact for support.
- Links to the Regional Tourism Skills Network added value to the Surrey project through the ability to share best practice with colleagues in the five other sub-regions.
- The project developed and implemented a three-year tourism skills strategy for Surrey which, with five other sub-regions, fed in to the regional skills strategy. It is important Surrey LSC recognises there is an ongoing need for funding in this area, particularly with the forthcoming 2012 Olympic Games.
- The most successful aspect of the project was the establishment of a tourism brokerage service, and employers in Surrey now recognise the Project Co-ordinator as the face of tourism in the County for skills and training. One key benefit was that the Project Co-ordinator helped employers to identify wider benefits and did not visit them solely to sign them up to the project. Some aspects of this brokerage work will continue after the project has ended, but it is recommended Surrey LSC and other funding bodies recognise there is a need within this industry for this type of service.

- A further benefit of the brokerage service was that relationships with new partners helped to shape training and increased attendance numbers making it more cost-effective to run some courses.
- Those interviewed believed employers have received a range of benefits from participating in the project including increased awareness of training opportunities, demand-led training which met their needs, improved staff retention, improved relationship with TSE as their regional tourist board and networking opportunities.
- Local authorities are now working more closely, e.g. Guildford, Mole Valley, Waverley and Woking Borough Councils were brought together through the Network and are now working together on a tourism strategy for the region.
- One important factor in the success of this project was the Project Co-ordinator's participation in other networks and sector groups. This not only helped with promotion of the project but also enabled her to share best practice and keep abreast of other opportunities employers could be signposted to, especially through the SEEDA funded Tourism Skills Network SE.
- The Project Co-ordinator and the Skills Advisor for Business Link at Guildford College had an excellent working relationship which led to a high number of cross-referrals, and which will continue after the project has ended.
- Partners generally felt the Network worked well and all said they had attended some Steering Group meetings.
- The fact TSE had an industry-recognised national training programme (Welcome to Excellence) was a useful in-road to discussions with employers and without this it might have been more difficult to attract so many beneficiaries.
- Although the project was managed by TSE whose Head Office is in Eastleigh, the Project Co-ordinator was based in Surrey. This was another factor in the success of this project as employers need to have confidence the person they are seeking advice from really understands the issues faced in their area.

6.2 Lessons Learnt

This was the first time a specific tourism related ESF co-financed project was run in Surrey. This initially proved to be very challenging in terms of employer engagement and gaining participation in project activities. However as the project began to roll out across the County it was clear that some adjustments and amendments had to be made. A major part of the Delivery

Plan was to offer demand-led training and so activity evolved over the course of the project, as employer input was elicited and related needs met. Specific learning points are as follows:

- There was a very high demand for the tourism specific brokerage service for employers in the tourism industry, particularly from B&B establishments who often require such a diverse range of training.
- As the project progressed, central data systems which were already in place at TSE evolved, and these will continue to be used in the future.
- There were several different LSC contract managers and it took time for them to fully understand the project, which hindered support. Surrey LSC should consider this issue in future funded projects.
- Employers had little interest in full NVQ qualifications due to reported high levels of staff turnover, a lack of confidence in the NVQ system and the length of time required in completing them. A solution might be to offer NVQ units as 'taster sessions' instead.
- Fewer employers than anticipated were interested in attending in-house and bespoke training because of the difficulties in bringing a large enough group of employees together with similar skills gaps at the same time.
- Many employers participated in the project because the training was heavily subsidised. However, those who participated in this evaluation said if they had been expected to pay they would have paid between £40 and £80 depending on the training. It would be useful for TSE to consider this in its future training delivery.
- Setting up the project was time consuming as TSE had few contacts in Surrey at the start, and building relationships with local authorities, sector groups and employers was a slow process. However, as the project built momentum Network members have become much more proactive.
- One partner, Guildford Borough Council, said they had learnt a great deal about working with small businesses as a result of the project, and they would now have the courage to support other similar projects in the future.
- The project has established there is a huge need for ongoing training and support to tourism businesses. There are many new business start-ups, a high number of Eastern European employees with poor English skills and a high staff turnover, all of which compound this need. Surrey LSC and other funding bodies must recognise this issue and endeavour to address it in future funding rounds.