

Tourism Skills Network South East 2006-2009 Evaluation

Skyblue Research Limited

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1 Executive Summary

Context

1.

The Tourism Skills Network South East (TSNSE or the 'Skills Network') has been in existence since September 2004, and was independently evaluated in 2006 at which point it successfully negotiated a three-year funding extension from SEEDA based on its impressive performance in a short period of time. This evaluation report focuses on the performance and impact of Skills Network between October 2006 and the end of August 2009.

2.

A range of contractual targets were agreed that would contribute to South East regional targets and core outputs specifically from October 2006 as follows:

- **Employment support:** helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry
- **Business support:** helping tourism businesses improve their performance
- **Skills:** helping people working in tourism to improve their skills development

3.

Furthermore, the over-riding driver for having a Tourism Skills Network in the first place was to tackle significant challenges across the hospitality, travel, leisure and tourism sector in the region, as expressed in its core objectives as follows:

- Driving up skills and professionalism in the sector
- Ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered
- Helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector
- Providing co-ordination / a single point of contact for tourism training and skills on a local basis
- Saving employers time by finding out what is available for them in terms of skills and training and simplifying it

4.

This evaluation seeks to consolidate a range of intelligence gathered through both secondary and primary sources in order to inform any decisions to be made by the Skills Network about how best to sustain its essential function from April 2010 in conjunction with Tourism South East, SEEDA and local Area Tourism Partnerships.

Evaluation Participants

5.

A sample of forty-one tourism businesses and partners were interviewed by the evaluation team during October 2009 to seek their views about and experiences of the Skills Network since 2006. The sample comprised a mix of business types, size and sub-regional location. In addition, the evaluators interviewed key representatives from SEEDA, People 1st and each of the Skills Network's Coordinators for their perspectives on the 2006-2009 period, experiences and learning lessons for the future.

Management Information – Headline Performance

6.

SEEDA provided contract funding of £159,000 to the Tourism Skills Network for the achievement of specific contractual outputs between 1st October 2006 and end August 2009 as detailed in point 7 below. In addition, £57,800 of funding (from SEEDA and Train to Gain) was provided for the achievement of additional outputs also included in the table below specifically for the delivery of the Train to Gain Brokerage pilot. SEEDA funding has therefore contributed to the achievement of the outputs described which in our independent view represents **excellent value for money**. Moreover, the Network has achieved significant financial leverage to support its activities in this period from other sources. Total income in this period was £459,000 (including SEEDA funding of £159,000) and £300,000 from other external sources including Train to Gain; New Vision; Learning and Skills Councils, Business Links, Sussex Enterprise and local authority partners.

7.

A review of the management information suggests that the Tourism Skills Network South East has over-performed in **all** contractual delivery areas as follows with some very impressive outputs being delivered:

Core Outputs	Objective for the Skills Network	Target	Actual ¹	Performance
Core 2: Employment Support – number of people assisted to get a job	Employment Support Provide employment support to economically inactive individuals seeking employment in the leisure, tourism & hospitality sector.	115	116	100%
Core 4: Business support – number of businesses assisted to improve their performance	Quality Workshops for Employers Roll out a programme of quality workshops to employers.*	45	69	153%
	TNAs (Training Needs Analyses) Undertake company diagnostics/action plans (TNAs).	410²	583	142%
	‡ Train to Gain ONAs (organisational needs analyses)	80	93	116%
	‡ Train to Gain Referrals	150	178	119%
Core 6: Skills – number of people assisted in their skills development as a result of RDA programmes	Quality Workshops for Employees Roll out a programme of quality workshops to employees.*	90	145	161%
	Olympics Create an Olympics derivative of 'Welcome to Excellence' suite and pilot with employees in the Olympic host areas.	100	108	108%

NB. The activities with a ‡ symbol in the table were funded separately to the £159,000 core funding for the Skills Network

¹ Figures confirmed by SEEDA and Tourism South East 10th December 2009

² This contractual target includes an increase agreed with the Network when additional funding was levered in for a specific project called the Train to Gain Brokerage pilot project which has been evaluated separately in 2008

8.

The evaluation team also learned that the wider contribution of the Network may be much larger than the metrics suggest. For example, key performance indicator information provided to us by the Network's Regional Manager suggests that for the 2008-2009 period alone the Skills Network had achieved the following outstanding results:

- 3,410 participants on training and skills activities
- 880+ businesses engaged in activity
- Overall contribution to tasking framework points 80% (total 3,755 points from Training)
- Additional 739 points through the Skills Network

If one then considers the wider potential impact of the Skills Network's activities the TSE Training Team contend that over the three year period since 1st October 2006, together with the Skills Network their Team has delivered positive outcomes to over 17,000 participants on Welcome to Excellence courses and engaged over 4,800 businesses in activity. It has also produced 24 best practice case studies and quarterly skills newsletters with the aim of disseminating good practice throughout the industry in the South East region. The important point here is that the Network did not just achieve contractual targets in the 2006-2009 period, rather it **exceeded every single one** and achieved additional outputs and outcomes by virtue of the way in which its services integrate with wider regional and sub-regional activity.

9.

Between October 2006 and August 2009 the Skills Network comprised a team of seven part-time members of staff including a Regional Coordinator³ and six sub-regional Tourism Skills Coordinators. Each of these team members were employed on a **part-time basis** for between 1 and 3 days depending on their agreed localised employment arrangements and the extent to which external funding was leveraged in to support their activity in the region and area tourism partnerships. It is extremely important to bear this point in mind when considering the impact the Network has managed to achieve on essentially a part-time resource only throughout this time period.

Tourism Skills Network Team Perspectives

10.

The Network is viewed as highly successful by the Team despite working in different local area tourism partnerships under different deployment contracts and regimes and despite the heavy workload. They feel that it has out-performed compared to contractual objectives and adds significant strategic added value in terms of marketing, relationship management and brokerage as well as direct delivery of funded projects. Some Coordinators believe it adds significant value to Tourism South East's membership offer and that there are further opportunities to build on this work in the future should the Network be sustained post-March 2010. The Network provides TSE and the industry at large in the South East with a collective voice on issues relating to business support, skills and training

11.

The Network adds value to businesses – particularly SMEs – in the way that it can give the employer a supportive role when it comes to training and development, saving them time and maximising funding available for training courses. Moreover, the Network provides much more than training – it provides vital networking services for businesses who might otherwise

³ The Regional Coordinator was also able to call on administrative and strategic support on a matched funded basis during this period with Tourism South East's financial support

feel isolated or unconnected to other businesses in the industry despite sharing common challenges and issues in respect of workforce development

12.

The Network has levered in funding from a range of sources so that it can continue to innovate and service industry's skills and training needs. However, there is still a feeling that so much more needs to be done and could be done particularly regarding following up on all the training needs analysis information that has been so painstakingly collected from employers in the field

13.

Relationships with strategic partners were at an all-time high at the time of this evaluation, and are the consequence of five years' hard work and investment by the Co-ordinators at regional and local level. On the ground activity is also critical to success – the time out in the field engaging with employers and stakeholders in the industry is extremely valuable. Going forward, the majority view, in an ideal scenario, would be for each Coordinator to have two days per week (minimum) for Skills Network activity

Tourism Skills Network – Strategic Partner Perspectives

14.

Representatives from key partner organisations, including SEEDA and People 1st, view the Network as highly successful. They highlight the fact that the Network is now fully embedded in the region; it has proven itself to be successful above and beyond contract core objectives and outputs; employers in the tourism industry value the Network greatly; and the Network has continually come up with ideas and proposals to take new developments forward to the benefit of the tourism industry

15.

These representatives feel that the critical success factors have included: the skills and competencies of the individual Network Coordinators; the quality of relationships they have built up with tourism businesses over time; the quality of service delivery; their ability to be the 'eyes and ears' for the industry's skills and training needs; and their robust and credible reputation at local and regional levels

16.

Looking to the future these representatives express concern at the idea that the Network could not be sustained at a time of such importance for the tourism industry – through recession, out of recession, and maximising the positive opportunities (and mitigating against any loss of skills to London) catalysed by the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. They also feel that without the Network Tourism South East would experience a major reduction in terms of their ability to achieve core tasking framework points and therefore suggest that the TSE Board considers ring-fencing a proportion of its core funding from SEEDA to sustain the Network's essential activities from April 2010 onwards. Other opportunities include exploring relationships with organisations that may also have members of staff working with tourism businesses in the region (such as Business Link) to ensure that relationships are managed effectively and intelligence shared to the benefit of the industry.

Tourism Skills Network Business and Partner Perspectives

17.

A sample of 41 tourism businesses and partner organisations were interviewed by the evaluators in October 2009 to identify their experience of and attitudes towards the Skills Network. Participants were diverse in terms of sub-sector, workforce size, sub-region and length of relationship with the Skills Network⁴

18.

Respondents had enjoyed a range of dealings with the Skills Network including the receipt of useful information (93%), support from at least one Tourism Skills Coordinator (88%), training (81% had paid for this service) and / or attendance at one of the Network's many events (51%). Other dealings with the Network have included helping develop the tourism skills strategy in the local area, funding some of the Network's activities (strategic partners only), taking advantage of heavily subsidised training, helping set up HR Forums, participating in best practice and networking events, offering up rooms / venue for training courses and events, helping to organise events for other tourism businesses and advising on content (e.g. quality workshops/recession busting) and taking part in product knowledge and familiarisation tours.

19.

Consultees were asked what had been the main benefits of their organisation's involvement with the Tourism Skills Network between 2006 and 2009. The varied and detailed responses suggest that the Network is extremely well-regarded and particular benefits have included support from the Network's team of local, knowledgeable, sector specific Coordinators; the receipt of high quality, relevant business support and training; the opportunity to network with other businesses; and to have someone to help them source training provision and funding (where appropriate).

20.

88% of respondents felt that tourism businesses (employers) had been the main beneficiary of the Network's activities, whilst 66% also thought that tourism employees had been major beneficiaries of their work. 37% felt that other networks had also benefited from a relationship with the Tourism Skills Network at regional and local levels. The evaluators noticed a major shift in beneficiary profile since the Network's early years (2004-2006) and the new survey findings in 2009 emphasise how much more focused the Network has been on deriving benefits for tourism businesses and employees since 2006 compared to its foundation years when it was perhaps attempting to service too many audiences and expectations.

21.

Businesses and partners were asked to comment on how successful they felt the Network had been if they had taken part in any of their activities. The survey suggests that of those services accessed by the majority of this sample they have all proven very / successful particularly in respect of:

- the general advice and signposting received (100% rated this very successful or successful)
- quality workshops for employees that have been delivered through the Network (100% rated these as very successful or successful)
- quality workshops for employers that have been delivered through the Network (93% rated these as very successful or successful)

⁴ Please refer to the full report for further sampling information

Respondents were asked, without prompting what they felt had been the most important achievements by the Network. Responses were grouped as follows based on independent respondent views and opinions:

- The personal, tailored support and valuable connections that the Network provides including 'hard working Coordinators that go the extra mile'
- The proactive service by the Network to encourage tourism businesses to train and upskill their people, including the service to make businesses aware of cost effective and sector specific training provision
- Increasing the skills and abilities of people working in tourism by identifying needs and then organising local, specific and relevant training courses
- Raising the profile of tourism careers, employment opportunities and qualifications
- Making it easy to find out what was available i.e. unpicking the plethora of schemes and initiatives and making it easier for employer to understand
- Bringing about a coherent approach amongst a wide range of strategic bodies that have an interest in promoting a successful tourism industry in the South East

22.

Respondents felt that the main factors contributing to the Network's success were:

- **fit for purpose Network Coordinators**
 - The Network Coordinators are reliable, knowledgeable and provide the support requested by tourism businesses often exceeding expectations
 - The communication skills of the Skills Network Coordinators are first class
 - The Coordinators provide reassurance and useful intelligence and good practice for the businesses to learn from
- **fit for purpose service**
 - The service provided matched the business' needs
 - The service accessed was affordable
- **fit for purpose training provision**
 - The training is sector-specific and tailored to the industry's needs
 - The training topics are relevant and delivered by specialist facilitators / presenters
 - The training provision received good feedback from employees and has helped them do their job more effectively
 - The training received has helped business participants save money or implement new practices
 - The training has been accessible sometimes in-house at the company's request
 - The training topics are driven by the industry not imposed on them by the Network
 - The training is practical and action-oriented

23.

A key consideration for this evaluation is trying to assess to what extent the Tourism Skills Network made an impact in the specific areas it had been set up to achieve. Encouragingly 34 out of 41 respondents (83%) said that the Skills Network has definitely or probably made a positive impact on skills specifically helping people in tourism to improve their skills development. Moreover, 35 out of 41 (85%) said the Skills Network has definitely or probably made a positive impact on business support helping tourism businesses improve their performance. Only 15 respondents were aware of the Network's employment support output activity (helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry) and of those, 53% felt the Network had definitely or probably made a positive impact.

In respect of the Network's five stated core objectives (See Table 8b in the full report) between 73% and 78% in each instance, felt that the Network had definitely or probably made a positive impact. The Network appears to have been especially successful (in the view of this sample of respondents) in its pursuit of: driving up skills and professionalism in the sector (88%); ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered (88%); and helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector (86%).

Compared to evaluation results in 2006, the latest survey suggests that the Network has made significant increases in impact across eight agreed evaluation measures with notable success and impact in terms of:

- engaging tourism businesses / employers (83% definite or probable impact)
- developing initiatives (83% definite or probable impact)
- acting as a broker between tourism businesses and training providers (81% definite or probable impact)

24.

Respondents were asked how much they valued their relationship with the Tourism Skills Network and all those taking part in the research said they genuinely appreciate the services provided to them 'at the coalface' particularly by the Tourism Skills Network Coordinators. 96% value the relationship with their local Coordinator. Looking at those businesses and partners who have had any direct dealings with the Regional / Head Office Team we find a similar result with 82% saying they value that relationship very much or quite a lot.

This is perhaps the most significant result of the survey. The Coordinators in particular are the face of the Network – trusted by tourism businesses in their local area, well regarded for their expertise their attitude, their willingness to provide service above and beyond contractual requirement and to genuinely help and support the businesses that they deal with on a continuous basis. Many testimonials were freely provided by the businesses contacted through our independent survey included in the full report which we encourage the reader to review to get a true sense for how genuinely appreciated this team is. 83% of respondents feel it is very important to have direct access to someone local with the skills and knowledge exemplified by Network Coordinators and a further 12% think this is quite important.

25.

When asked what impact, if any, there would be on their business or partner organisation if they could no longer access the services / personnel provided by the Tourism Skills Network in future respondents could be categorised into three segments who predicted either high (the largest segment), medium (the second largest segment) or low (the smallest segment) impact. (Please see table 11 for a detailed listing of impacts).

26.

Respondents were asked to suggest up to three priorities for the Tourism Skills Network from 2010 to 2012 in terms of supporting tourism businesses and their workforce. The most prevalent priorities were very clear as follows:

- Priority 1: Delivery of affordable and relevant training to the industry (56%)
- Priority 2: Personalised, local support, advice, guidance and training brokerage (44%)
- Priority 3: Information provision, good practice updates and networking events (29%)

Future Demand for the Network and Key Drivers

27.

Given the strength of positive feedback about the Network by those businesses and partners that have been engaged by its activities since 2006 (and even before that), it is highly likely that demand for its continued services will be high. The Network is in our view a significant 'engagement network' with the tourism industry in the South East that, at the time of recession is perhaps even more important than in 'normal' economic conditions. It is precisely during this period that tourism organisations – particularly SMEs – need to continue to invest in their business and their workforce, but they need help to do it. And they need skilled professionals, such as the Network's Coordinators and Regional Team, to proactively prompt businesses to continue to invest so that they are ready for the recovery. On the horizon are the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games – again another significant driver of demand and impact on the tourism industry in the South East region. For some businesses this may provide opportunities, for others it may provide threats – in either scenario the Network can play a vital role in maximising the benefits and / or mitigate against the risks presented by the largest event on the planet.

Conclusions

28.

It is the evaluator's independent opinion, that the Tourism Skills Network has provided excellent value for money between 2006 and 2009 given its clear achievement – and in all cases, over-performance – compared to contractual output areas agreed with SEEDA. It is also the evaluator's opinion that the metrics only tell a part of the story about the real value of the Network and its team of local, knowledgeable, sector specific co-ordinators. The testimonials, employer quotations and myriad case studies suggest a highly effective and motivated network of individuals who seek to provide excellence as standard to the benefit of the tourism industry in the region.

29.

It is the evaluator's independent opinion that the Network is:

- providing an effective service and represents good value for money
- for some an invaluable, and for others at very least a useful and highly respected, resource both at regional and local levels
- in a good position as a trusted resource to help businesses either through the recession or to pull out of the recession and plan for the future
- something that virtually all respondents would like to see continued and would feel disappointed if the services were no longer available in the form required and appreciated
- an important external, objective point of contact and source of support for tourism businesses
- in a position to provide quality training and upskilling where it is needed the most
- a vital conduit for networking and brokerage between business and training providers
- an effective vehicle for working with other partners
- well positioned, and mature enough to complement wider destination management objectives at area tourism partnership level
- a genuine success story to be celebrated in the South East and is deserving of further support from 2010 onwards
- providing a cohesive and structured approach to business support, training and skills for the tourism sector in the South East
- making it easier for the tourism businesses they work with to understand and then adopt an appropriate business solution from the many initiatives and schemes available, ultimately saving them time and money

30.

The Network is a mature and established solution that not only aligns with South East strategic policy objectives i.e. it supports the economic development of the region helping businesses reach their full potential', but is it is also operationally very effective. Its team works at the coal-face with real businesses. It has the ability to be 'fleet of foot' in terms of identifying and responding to business' genuine training and skills needs and has the expertise and knowledge about all the different programmes available, to advise and guide a business to a solution that will make a difference to the business' bottom line. The Network is 'an expert intervention' that continues to offer a vital service to address known market failures that the sector will not and can not solve for itself. Without the Network, one wonders how any claim might be made that the region has an in-depth knowledge of the industry's needs, the economic conditions in which they operate and can put in place training or skills solutions that have a direct impact on tourism businesses in the various localities of the South East.

Recommendations for the future

31. Recommendation 1:

Sustain the Tourism Skills Network model post March 2010 ensuring there is still a regional team and critically a presence at local level. This report needs to be shared with the Board of Directors of Tourism South East, SEEDA Skills/tourism/2012 teams and Area Tourism Partnerships to identify the best funding and employment models that will sustain the Network and its essential functions in the longer term. It may be necessary to manage employer expectations where demand for Co-ordinator activity is particularly high. Potentially the role can only be successfully delivered if funding is available to cover a minimum of 2 days each week at ATP level.

32. Recommendation 2:

Ensure that the Network remains focused on a small number of achievable, high impact targets in line with TSE's business plan that provide synergies with ATPs, SEEDA and other stakeholder requirements.

33. Recommendation 3:

Ensure that any memorandum of understanding between the Network, People 1st and the managing agent for Business Link in future is up to date and reflective of mutually agreed strategic objectives to support the tourism industry in the region post March 2010. The important point of this recommendation is to ensure that wherever synergies can be created between these organisations they should be explored and reflected in any joint action plan to support tourism in the region in future.

34. Recommendation 4:

Use this evaluation report to help prioritise the focus of activity to be targeted at the tourism industry between 2010 and 2015, and the types of service that the Network should continue to offer and / or develop in tune with industry's articulated needs as determined by the independent survey completed during this evaluation.

Priority 1: Delivery of affordable and relevant training to the industry (56%)

Priority 2: Personalised, local support, advice, guidance and training brokerage (44%)

Priority 3: Information provision, good practice updates and networking events (29%)

In this way the Network retains its credibility as an honest broker that is truly employer or sector led. In reality, there will be a balance to be achieved in terms of meeting employer needs and demands and delivering on specific targets such as SEEDA 2012 customer care targets, Accentuate, Welcome All, Rural Development Programme for England targets, other courses, and signposting to other TSE activity projects including Interreg.

2 Introduction

This evaluation report focuses on the performance of the Tourism Skills Network between 2006 and 2009. It draws on a range of evidence in order to provide an objective assessment of the Network's performance in this period notably including:

- the Tourism Skills Network Evaluation Report (2004-2006)
- management information provided by the Tourism Skills Network to the evaluators including 2006-2009 SEEDA contract documentation, core outputs and targets and performance data at regional and sub-regional levels
- other source material provided by the Skills Network, for example The Train to Gain Brokerage Pilot evaluation report (2008), strategic added value (SAV) reports, case studies, and examples of Network newsletters and public relations coverage between 2006 and 2009
- the independent findings from structured telephone interviews in October 2009 with:
 - the Network's Regional Manager and sub-regional Tourism Skills Network Coordinators
 - SEEDA (Fiona Wickins) and People 1st (Gerry Brown)
 - 41 tourism businesses and stakeholder organisations across the sub-regions
- testimonials offered by the survey participants during the fieldwork period

2.1 Tourism Skills Network contractual objectives 2006-2009

A range of contractual targets were agreed that would contribute to South East regional targets and core outputs specifically from October 2006 as follows:

- Employment support: helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry
- Business support: helping tourism businesses improve their performance
- Skills: helping people in tourism to improve their skills development

Moreover, the over-riding driver for having a Tourism Skills Network in the first place was to tackle significant challenges across the hospitality, travel, leisure and tourism sector in the region, as expressed in its core objectives as follows:

- Driving up skills and professionalism in the sector
- Ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered
- Helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector
- Providing co-ordination / a single point of contact for tourism training and skills on a local basis
- Saving employers time by finding out what is available for them in terms of skills and training and simplifying it

This evaluation seeks to identify whether the Network has achieved its objectives and also to provide a qualitative assessment of the impact the Network has had on a sample of businesses and partners willing to provide independent comment.

3 Tourism Skills Network Performance - Management Information

3.1 Core Outputs

SEEDA provided contract funding of £159,000 to the Tourism Skills Network for the achievement of specific contractual outputs between 1st October 2006 and end August 2009 as detailed in the table below. In addition, £57,800 of funding (from SEEDA and Train to Gain) was provided for the achievement of additional outputs also included in the table below specifically for the delivery of the Train to Gain Brokerage pilot. SEEDA funding has therefore contributed to the achievement of the outputs described which in our independent view represents **excellent value for money**. Moreover, the Network has achieved significant financial leverage to support its activities in this period from other sources. Total income in this period was £459,000 (including SEEDA funding of £159,000) and £300,000 from other external sources including Train to Gain; New Vision; Learning and Skills Councils, Business Links, Sussex Enterprise and local authority partners. A review of the management information suggests that the Tourism Skills Network South East has over-performed in **all** contractual delivery areas as follows with some very impressive outputs being delivered:

Core Outputs	Objective for the Skills Network	Target	Actual ⁵	Performance
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	Olympics Create an Olympics derivative of 'Welcome to Excellence' suite and pilot with employees in the Olympic host areas.	100	108	108%

NB. The activities with a ‡ symbol in the table were funded separately to the £159,000 core funding for the Skills Network

⁵ Figures confirmed by SEEDA and Tourism South East 10th December 2009

⁶ This contractual target includes an increase agreed with the Network when additional funding was levered in for a specific project called the Train to Gain Brokerage pilot project which has been evaluated separately in 2008

The evaluation team also learned that the wider contribution of the Network may be much larger than the metrics suggest. For example, key performance indicator information provided to us by the Network's Regional Manager suggests that for the 2008-2009 period alone the Skills Network had achieved the following outstanding results:

- 3,410 participants on training and skills activities
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- Overall contribution to tasking framework points 80% (total 3,755 points from Training)
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If one then considers the wider potential impact of the Skills Network's activities the TSE Training Team contend that over the three year period since 1st October 2006, together with the Skills Network their Team has delivered positive outcomes to over 17,000 participants on Welcome to Excellence courses and engaged over 4,800 businesses in activity. It has also produced 24 best practice case studies and quarterly skills newsletters with the aim of disseminating good practice throughout the industry in the South East region. The important point here is that the Network did not just achieve contractual targets in the 2006-2009 period, rather it **exceeded every single one** and achieved additional outputs and outcomes by virtue of the way in which its services integrate with wider regional and sub-regional activity.

The Skills Network will continue to deliver activity until the end of March 2010 through funding provision agreed with the Board of Directors of Tourism South East and in line with agreed targets and outcomes including

- Continued implementation of the Regional Tourism Skills Strategy and Workforce Development Plan and six local Tourism Skills Action Plans (live until 2010)
- Continued partnership working with People 1st based on mutual priorities to be agreed and in line with the regional and local agenda
- Continued employer referral and signposting arrangements regionally and through Coordinators at ATP level
- Production of individual employer TNAs
- Signposting businesses to the Hosting the World project until the end of March 2010.
- Continued partnership activity with Jobcentre Plus around the economically inactive programme
- Signposting employers to Quality workshops and the mystery shoppers initiative
- On-going activity to achieve SEEDA customer care targets/TSE targets numbers/financial and tasking framework points for SEEDA core funding
- Achieving employer engagement relating to externally funded projects such as the RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) and Welcome All courses for Accentuate⁷
- Continued marketing and public relations activity to showcase and promote good practice
- Liaison at ATP level as required

⁷ Accentuate is a programme for the South East funded by the [Legacy Trust UK](#). The overall aim of the programme is to use the inspiration provided by the International Paralympic Movement to tackle disadvantage, raise aspirations and celebrate excellence. Accentuate intends to change the lives of disabled people by putting them at the heart of a programme that takes its inspiration from the South East region's unique heritage as the birthplace of the Paralympics.

4 Tourism Skills Network Team Perspectives

4.1 Views about the Performance of the Network between 2006 and 2009

The evaluators interviewed all members of the Tourism Skills Network Team during October 2009 to get their views about performance between 2006 and 2009, learning lessons, impact and their thoughts about the future of the Network. Summarising all these interviews, we would like to highlight these key points made by the Team:

- The Network is viewed as **highly successful** by the Team despite working in different sub-regions, under different deployment contracts and regimes and despite the heavy workload. They know that it has out-performed compared to contractual objectives and adds significant strategic added value in terms of marketing, relationship management and brokerage as well as direct delivery of funded projects. Some Coordinators believe it adds significant value to Tourism South East's membership offer
- The Network is the **catalyst for genuine partnership** working to the benefit of the tourism industry in the region and many projects have been delivered through effective partnerships being formed as a direct result of the Network
- The Network is a **route to market** – it is the “face and personality of the Tourism South East Training Department”. This is important because so many other points of TSE's activity doesn't ‘touch the customers’ whereas the Network does
- The Network **adds value to businesses** – particularly SMEs – in the way that it can give the employer a supportive role when it comes to training and development, saving them time and maximising funding available for training courses. Moreover, the Network provides much more than training – it provides vital networking services for businesses who might otherwise feel isolated or unconnected to other businesses in the industry despite sharing common challenges and issues in respect of workforce development
- It has **levered in funding** from a range of sources so that it can continue to innovate and service industry's skills and training needs. However, there is still a feeling that so much more needs to be done and could be done particularly regarding following up on all the training needs analysis information that was so painstakingly collected from employers in the field
- The Network provides an opportunity to **raise the profile** of TSE's training courses as well as other training options to tourism businesses and many thousands of individuals and businesses have benefited directly from the Network's activities.
- The Network is an **'honest broker'** and it has established an unparalleled credibility and trust amongst the industry' business base so that it can identify training and skills gaps in those businesses and then shape provision around those gaps, for example by delivering Quality workshops
- The Network provides TSE and the industry at large in the South East with a **collective voice** on issues relating to business support, skills and training

- The Network comprises a team of **highly skilled individuals** including central team and local Coordinators who share ideas, best practice and resources, and yet still feel much more can be done in this regard in future
- **Relationships** with strategic partners are at an all-time high at the time of this evaluation, and are the consequence of five years' hard work investing in those relations
- Coordinators have been encouraged to undertake '**additional**' activities that they would not otherwise have undertaken were they not part of the Network e.g. pilots with schools, working with tourism students, linking up with Jobcentre Plus on joint activities or working with partners to raise the profile of the industry and its image as an employer
- Coordinators feel that the management information and metrics – despite being impressive at face value – still fail to recognise the actual work that goes in to achieve stated outputs. They stress that in real life they don't ever have 'just one touch with the customer' as it's rare to get a conversion (e.g. from a first visit to a training course booking) with just one touch i.e. it needs multiple visits / calls to get to a point of the business acting / buying something. Thus they stress that success has been down to an **incremental and continuous service** that requires them to i) establish rapport / listen / find needs of an employer ii) discuss and talk about training courses iii) consider taster sessions or mechanisms for helping encourage an employer to 'take a toe in the water' with training and then iv) develop the relationship and reinforce their commitment to skills and training for themselves and their staff
- The Team is particularly proud of scenarios where they feel they have identified a genuine skills or training need and then had the freedom and flexibility to develop and **deliver a solution** whether this be putting place an effective HR Forum, developing tailored training courses or indeed helping employers run in-house training courses for perhaps the first time. They are all proud of their quality to 'go the extra mile' for a client and this ultimately gives them a dividend in future in the form of a loyal and trusting relationship with the business
- **Synergies** have been achieved with Area Tourism Partnerships and some Coordinators split their time between ATP core roles and Skills Network activity. In reality it is very hard to demarcate these activities because if you are with an employer in the field you can't wear one hat only and ignore the opportunity to help them if you have the knowledge and contacts to be able to do so
- Some Coordinators feel a little out of tune with the emerging changes in the education system and how this might impact on young people aspiring to enter the tourism industry in future so there is perhaps an opportunity for **sharing intelligence** on this topic in future
- **On the ground activity** is critical to success – the time out in the field with the industry is so valuable. The majority view, in an ideal scenario, would be for each Coordinator to have two days per week (minimum) for Skills Network activity

5 Strategic Partner Perspectives

5.1 Views from SEEDA

The evaluators interviewed Fiona Wickins from SEEDA who says her organisation is interested in this evaluation because they wish to be confident that funding from SEEDA has been spent wisely by the Network and that value for money has been achieved. Moreover, they wish to appreciate fully the impact that the Skills Network Team has had. Fiona is clearly impressed by the Network's achievements since it was created in 2004 and feels that:

- the Network is now fully embedded in the region and ATPs
- it has proven itself to be successful above and beyond contract core objectives and outputs
- it works and therefore should be funded in the future - albeit not directly by SEEDA after 30 September 2009 - to maintain relationships in the industry, and to further add value to Tourism South East corporate objectives
- the return on investment has been significant – and perhaps under-rated – when one considers that the majority of the Tourism Skills Network Team are part-time resources
- employers in the tourism industry value the Network greatly
- the Network has never stood still – it has worked as a collective and has continually come up with ideas and proposals to take new developments forward to the benefit of the tourism industry whether this be with programmes like Hosting the World, Fresh Skills for Chefs, Quality Workshops and the Mystery Shopping initiative

Through funding and joint working with the Network, SEEDA has gained numerous benefits too. The success of the Network has helped SEEDA at Ministerial level through being able to actively demonstrate to central government their ability to engage with employers through strategic partners and stakeholders. In addition it has helped SEEDA demonstrate that they have the ability to shape and inform strategies and policies for the tourism sector in the region that is based on up-to-date market intelligence gained from direct interventions.

Critical success factors have included:

- the skills and competencies of the individual Network Coordinators: *“they can build a rapport with businesses; they have a credible industry base, experience and knowledge and they understand their local industry.”*
- Coordinators have built up relationships over a number of years and have delivered meaning that employers trust them and know that is worth their time to engage with the Network

Looking to the future, Fiona felt that the impact of not sustaining the Network after March 2010 would be significant for the industry and for Tourism South East who would experience a major reduction in terms of their ability to achieve core tasking framework points. They believe that going forward, there are additional opportunities within the region for the Network to deliver a range of TSE objectives, as well as continuing to explore synergies and ways in which to work more closely with Business Link and organisations with responsibility for skills in the region currently going through major transition. In particular this could build on experiences gained from the Train to Gain Brokerage pilot.

5.2 Views from People 1st

The evaluators interviewed Gerry Brown from People 1st who says his organisation is interested in this evaluation because they have enjoyed positive relations with the Tourism Skills Network over the years and this relationship is getting stronger as time progresses.

Gerry thinks the Network is very successful and would be deeply saddened were its activities not continue to be funded after the end of March 2010. He feels it would be myopic to cut the Network now that it has developed all the right foundations plus, as he affirmed, *“it really does deliver – look at all the evidence, the training, the engagement, the investment it brings to the industry through getting businesses to train and upskill their staff.”*

People 1st benefits in a number of ways from their strategic relationship with the Network and feels that:

- the Network is People 1st's *“partner in the region...our eyes and ears....can always be relied on...”*
- their reputation is positive and credible with partners and industry
- the model of a regional centre and local Coordinators works and is effective
- the Network delivers relevant projects as they are very in tune with what the industry and the region needs
- the evidence of the network's performance is irrefutable
- *“...some of the Coordinators do in one day a week what some people would take a week to do, a full time job, we must remember that.....”*

He feels that the impact of not sustaining the Network's activities would be hugely detrimental because:

- the Network is the vehicle through which the region drives up business demand to invest in skills and training
- the industry and region as a whole will have entirely misinterpreted the potential impact (opportunities and threats in terms of workforce deployment) in relation to the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games i.e. to lose contact with so many SMEs that the Network engages with would be a retrograde step
- for businesses who invest in training there is a direct benefit and impact and whilst we are in recession now, we might not be in a year and the South East region needs to be prepared to support the industry during this period – the work of the Network is vital to this objective and sustaining relationships and momentum

Looking to the future, Gerry believes that it will be important to ensure the Network achieves integration or a genuine partnership with Business Link and the Train to Gain service that can work for the industry. Like Fiona, Gerry feels that there is an opportunity for TSE to use – indeed ring-fence -a proportion of its core funding from SEEDA to continue the activity of the Network whilst also using the opportunity to learn from the Network's five years of experience and make service improvements where necessary. There is also a continued need to focus on key areas of skills development in the industry including customer service, leadership and management and chef skills.

6 Key Findings: survey of tourism businesses and partners

6.1 Research Sample

A sample of 41 tourism businesses and partner organisations was interviewed by telephone in October 2009 by Skyblue Research Ltd. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and sought to identify the business' experience of and attitudes towards the Skills Network. Interviews were completed with Proprietors or senior managers in each establishment. The sample of businesses included visitor attractions, museums, hotels, bed and breakfasts, self catering, a property lettings company, a restaurant, a theatre, a pub, a local accommodation association, and other types of partner engaged by the Skills Network such as an Economic Partnership, a college, a town council, Business Link and Jobcentre Plus.

Table 1: List of Research Participants

Tourism Businesses		Other Partners
National Motor Museum - Beaulieu (Hampshire)	The Garlic Farm (Isle of Wight)	Jobcentre Plus
Carey's Manor Hotel (Hampshire)	River and Rowing Museum (Oxfordshire)	Guildford Borough Council
Mayflower Theatre Southampton (Hampshire)	Rural Life Centre (Surrey)	IoW College
Paulton's Park Attraction (Hampshire)	Claremont Cottage (Surrey)	Business Link
The Lambert Arms (Oxfordshire)	The Lightbox (Surrey)	Isle of Wight Council
Fallowfields Restaurant and Country Hotel (Oxfordshire)	Fenton House (Surrey)	Oxfordshire Economic Partnership
Shanklin Hotel and Accommodation Association (Isle of Wight)	Brook Farm B&B (Kent)	
QHotels (Hampshire)	Pinball Museum (Kent)	
Majestic Holiday Lettings (Kent)	Crampton Tower (Kent)	
Four Oaks B&B (Kent)	Yew House (Sussex)	
Little Silver Hotel (Kent)	Amberley Museum (Sussex)	
Royal British Legion Industries (Surrey)	Tun Cottage Guest House (Berkshire)	
Kingfisher Barn (Oxfordshire)	Rosemary Cottages (Isle of Wight)	
Arundel Castle (Sussex)	Ditchling Museum (Sussex)	
Nash Manor (Sussex)	Chewton Glen (Hampshire)	
Nova Lifestyles (Isle of Wight)	Marwell Wildlife Park (Hampshire)	
Classic Hotels Group Hickstead (Sussex)	Goodleaf Tree Climbing (Isle of Wight)	
Botley Park Hotel (Hampshire)		



Employed Workforce

Excluding the six 'partners' in the sample this leaves 35 tourism businesses who collectively employ between 1,271 (low season) and 2,197 (high season) individuals including full-, part-time and casual labour. Seventeen of the businesses employ 10 or less people; nine employ between 11 and 49 people and nine employ more than 100 staff.

Table 2: Location of organisations interviewed for this evaluation

Location (Area Tourism Partnership)	Number	% of sample
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (BBO)	6	15%
Hampshire	9	22%
Isle of Wight (IOW)	8	20%
Surrey	6	15%
Sussex	5	12%
Kent	7	17%
Total	41	100%
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%		

This section reports on business and partner participants’:

relationship with the Tourism Skills Network

benefits of the relationship with the Network

6.2 Relationship with the Tourism Skills Network

Nearly a half of the sample of organisations interviewed have had a relationship with the Tourism Skills Network since before 2006, whilst just over a quarter have had dealings with the Network within the last three years. Just over a quarter have only recently had some dealings (within the last year) with the Network.

Table 3: Prior dealings with Tourism Skills Network South East

How long have you been dealing with the Skills Network?	Number	% of sample
Only within the last year	11	27%
Between one and three years	12	29%
More than three years	18	44%
Total	41	100%
Base: 41 organisations		

Table 4 describes the kind of dealings each participant has had with the Skills Network.

- 93% have received useful information
- 88% have received support from at least one Tourism Skills Coordinator;
- 81% have paid for at least one of the Network’s services such as training;
- Just over half (51%) have taken part in at least one of the Network’s many events.

Other dealings with the Network have included helping deliver Network services, helping develop the skills strategy in the local area, funding some of the Network’s activities and advising on content of training and workshops/shaping content in line with sector need (strategic partners only), taking advantage of heavily subsidised business support and training provision , helping set up an HR Forum, sharing best practice, letting the Skills Network have use of rooms / venue for training courses, attending network meetings, do we need something in about? helping to organise events for other tourism businesses (e.g. handling recession) and taking part in local product knowledge and familiarisation tours.

Table 4: Type of Dealings with the Tourism Skills Network

How would you describe your organisation's involvement with the Tourism Skills Network since 2006? Have you....	Number	% of sample
Received useful information from the Network?	38	93%
Received face to face or phone / email support from the Skills Coordinator?	36	88%
Paid for Network services e.g. training courses or business support?	33	81%
Taken part in Network events?	21	51%
Helped deliver services for or with the Network (delivery partner)?	15	37%
Helped the Network develop the overall skills strategy for tourism in your area?	4	10%
Funded any Skills Network activities at a strategic level?	2	5%
Total	41	100%
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%		

The next table provides a record of which Tourism Skills Network team members each of the participants has had dealings with between 2006 and 2009. Respondents may have had dealings with more than one member of the Skills Network team between 2006 and 2009

Table 5: Dealings with the Tourism Skills Network Team since 2006

Which of the Tourism Skills Network South East's sub-regions or team members have you worked with since 2006?	Number	% of sample
Berks, Bucks and Oxon - Ros Bear	6	15%
Isle of Wight – Cat Carkeet/Marilyn Hughes	7	17%
Surrey – Carrie Tripp/Catherine Knight	6	15%
Kent – Hilary Moger (Quality Programme Manager) or Kerstin Beeching	6	15%
Hampshire - Gill Heighington	11	27%
Sussex - Gill Bonner/Cat Carkeet	8	20%
Regional Team – Sue Gill	1	2%
Total	41	100%
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%		

6.3 Benefits of the Tourism Skills Network

Consultees were asked what had been the main benefits of their organisation's involvement with the Tourism Skills Network between 2006 and 2009. The varied and detailed responses suggest that the Network – and its team of Coordinators – is particularly valued by tourism businesses that have been engaged in this period. Only a selective list of the 41 quotations received is illustrated below, but they seek to capture the general mood of the sample for the reader.

“They helped supply excellent training.”

“They (the Coordinators) provide local knowledge on events in the area. This was useful because I had just changed industry. They were really my lifeline.”

“She (the local Coordinator) has been able to put me in touch with training providers and help me find funding.”

“They help you keep in touch with people with similar issues. They encourage the pooling of ideas and resources and help you keep up to date in the industry.”

“The Coordinator is very diligent. She provides an opportunity for our staff to improve our skills.”

“The HR Forum is a great collaboration – we all get together quarterly and we collaborate for example around the cost of training.”

“It's very useful to have someone who can point you in the right direction for training and grants and to raise the profile generally of your business.”

“The training courses were very good.” (multiple examples were provided about specific courses by participants)

“They are fantastic - I can't fault them.”

“The fact that we've been able to network with the tourism industry at a variety of levels and been able to enrich what we offer through the knowledge that we've gleaned. They provide a means to get to know other businesses.”

“Makes you think about what's going on out there. Good networking.”

“The Coordinator has lots of contacts e.g. helping us deal with difficult situations. They've helped source a trainer and the HR forum is a great benefit for sharing skills and experiences.”

“Understanding employers' demands and making sure we have the right skills training to avoid skills shortage.”

“Keeps me up to date with what training is available and how it can meet our needs.”



6.4 Network improvements in hindsight

When asked if their involvement with the Network could have been improved in any way since 2006 only five participants produced useful comments as follows:

“I could have taken more advantage of all the training. But they’ve been great. Lots of information coming out to us and a really useful website.”

“I wasn’t clear on the Network’s role initially but this got better over time.”

“Would be useful if very occasionally people who are enthusiastic about training could get together to talk as a group about what’s needed.”

“Is there a list of what courses are available somewhere?”

“With one project - fresh skills for chefs - didn’t go as we would have liked - local politics.”

6.5 Network beneficiaries

Respondents were asked which of the following people or organisations have benefited from their involvement with the Network? Table 6 shows that the main beneficiaries between 2006 and 2009 were:

- tourism businesses (88%)
- tourism employees (66%)
- networks (37%)

It also highlights the difference in beneficiary profile since the Network's early performance (2004-2006) and emphasises how much more focused the Network has been on deriving benefits for tourism businesses and employees since 2006 compared to its foundation years.

Table 6: Beneficiaries of Skills Network Activity

Who has benefited from involvement with the Tourism Skills Network?	2004-2006		2006-2009		Change
	No.	%	No.	%	
Tourism businesses	18	60%	36	88%	↑ 28%
Tourism employees	15	50%	27	66%	↑ 16%
Networks	11	37%	15	37%	↔
Students/learners	14	47%	14	34%	↓ 13%
Entrants to the tourism sector	11	37%	7	17%	↓ 20%
Job seekers	8	27%	7	17%	↓ 10%
Partner/stakeholder organisations	10	33%	9	22%	↓ 11%
Policy makers	9	30%	6	15%	↓ 15%
Educational establishments	11	37%	9	22%	↓ 15%
Base	30		41		

This next section reports on business and partner participants’:

perceptions of how successful the Network has been

views about the impact of the Network

views about the most significant achievements of the Network

6.6 Overall Success of Tourism Skills Network South East

The table below provides a list of some of the activities of Tourism Skills Network South East linked directly to their contract with SEEDA for delivering specific activities and projects. Businesses and partners were asked to comment on how successful they felt the Network had been if they had taken part in any of them. The table suggests that of those services accessed by the majority of this sample they have proven very / successful particularly in respect of the general advice, signposting and quality workshops that have been delivered through the Network.

Table 7: Successful of contractual Network activities since 2006

Activity/product	Number in the sample that had participated	Very successful	Successful	Not very successful
General advice / signposting	38	36	2	-
Quality workshops / training for tourism <u>employees</u>	27	20	5	2
Quality workshops / training for tourism <u>employers</u>	20	16	4	-
Training Needs Analysis where a Coordinator undertakes a company diagnostics/action plans with your business	11	5	4	2
Welcome to Olympics Excellence Training Courses (WTOE)	5	3	2	-
Employment support aimed at helping economically inactive individuals seeking employment in the leisure, tourism & hospitality sector in the South East	3	3		-
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%				

When asked why they thought the various activities had been successful respondents highlighted a number of pertinent factors including:

- **fit for purpose Network Coordinators**
 - The Network Coordinators are reliable, knowledgeable and provide the support requested by tourism businesses often exceeding expectations
 - The communication skills of the Skills Network Coordinators are first class
 - The Coordinators provide reassurance and useful intelligence and good practice for the businesses to learn from
- **fit for purpose service**
 - The service provided matched the business' needs
 - The service accessed was affordable
- **fit for purpose training provision**
 - The training is sector-specific and tailored to the industry's needs
 - The training topics are relevant and delivered by able tutors / presenters
 - The training provision received good feedback from employees / trainees and has helped them do their job more effectively
 - The training received has helped business participants save money or implement new practices
 - The training has been accessible sometimes in-house at the company's request
 - The training topics are driven by the industry not imposed on them by the Network
 - The training is practical and action-oriented

Only two comments by the small minority of respondents who had found some aspect of their relationship with the Network unsuccessful explained why this was and it revolved around the need to ensure that any event speakers are 'suitable' for the audience i.e. they a 'big-name' speaker from a large corporation or company can somehow relate their business practices to small bed and breakfasts or operations, otherwise the business practice is not always easily translated.

In addition to the SEEDA contracted services described in Table 7 previously, the Network has been providing a range of additional services and support between 2006 and 2009 enjoyed by businesses and partners. Here are just some of the services mentioned by respondents that they said they had particularly valued from the Network:

- Human Resources (HR) Forums
- Receipt of useful intelligence e.g. salary survey
- Referrals to suppliers
- Introductions to other partners such as People 1st/Business Link
- Networking events with other businesses
- Support in accessing funding for training
- Participation in / success at tourism awards and ceremonies
- Sharing of best practice via the Coordinators
- New links made with a local University
- Opportunity to host (as well as attend) training courses which has been an opportunity to showcase the business' venue to others
- Ability to increase product knowledge through familiarisation trips (organised with key partners)

6.7 Tourism Skills Network South East Achievements

When asked what they felt the most outstanding achievement of the Tourism Skills Network had been in the past 3 years there were some trends in respondents' opinions summarised as follows:

- **Personal support and valuable connections**
 - Putting small businesses in touch with 'all the necessary people' to provide support
 - Businesses reported that they have valued the opportunity to phone a Coordinator and receive good, pleasant service and useful, relevant intelligence and advice
 - Hard working Coordinators who go that extra mile to help tourism businesses
 - Being introduced to other businesses in the area and benefiting from localised networking events
 - Meeting other HR professionals in the industry
 - Having someone a business or partner can contact – a named contact that they can meet and work with and discuss collaborative working
- **Proactively encouraging tourism businesses to train their people**
 - Making businesses aware of cost effective and sector specific provision at all levels within their workforce (where they employed staff) and within the local area
 - Helping employers access Business Link/Train to Gain where appropriate
 - Unpicking the plethora of schemes and initiatives and making it easier for employers to understand - advising on best options for participation that relate to tourism businesses (in –house, flexibility of delivery)
- **Increasing the skills and abilities of people working in tourism**
 - Setting up a range of local and specific e-marketing courses that helped employers save time and money
 - Advising on the implementation of green practices to boost business and benefit bottom line through attendance on Green Advantage courses, funded via Business Link
 - Promoting the benefits of investing in customer service training to improve performance
 - Delivering a range of local Quality Workshops to assist accommodation providers improve gradings
 - Offering a service that is demand and employer led e.g. helping businesses keep up to date with employment law and legislation affecting the industry
- **Raising the profile of jobs and careers in the tourism sector**
 - Being the catalyst for key stakeholder events that bring together employers and relevant agencies with potential new recruits
 - Promoting the range of jobs, careers and qualifications that give credibility to the sector in general
 - With the encouragement of the Network smaller businesses have been able to 'punch above their weight' and celebrate what they are good at
 - Delivering a cohesive and structured approach in the SE by working at strategic level with City and Guilds, Colleges, People 1st and Business Link/Train to Gain/SEEDA to promote the relevant initiatives including new Diplomas, UKSPs, Sector Routeways

- Some businesses report that because of the Network their overall credibility had increased and that they were 'on the radar' and that people are more willing to invest in them accordingly
- Working with relevant agencies such as JobCentre Plus/training providers to deliver short and relevant training courses for the economically inactive and working with employers to promote potential availability
- Promoting awards and people related initiatives (one business reported they had won a prize from an employee award ceremony) and this led to the generation of new business – all catalysed by the dealings with the Network

Common themes emerging from employers relating to future potential for the Network included:

- Production of templates for delivering standardised induction programme aimed at new entrants to the industry.
- Development of additional and sector specific courses at an even more localised level
- One-to-one discussions with employers to explain options for courses to be delivered on an in-house basis

6.8 The impact of the Tourism Skills Network South East

A key consideration for this evaluation is trying to assess to what extent the Tourism Skills Network made an **impact** relating to the targets it had been set up to achieve. The following table considers the extent to which the Network has had an impact on core outputs (SEEDA contract); the Network's core objectives; and compared to previous evaluation measures used to assess the Network performance between 2004 and 2006.

Table 8a: Impact: SEEDA Contract Core Output Areas

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
Core Outputs	Employment support: helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry	3 (7%)	5 (12%)	7 (17%)	26 (63%)
	Business support: helping tourism businesses improve their performance	29 (70%)	6 (15%)	-	6 (15%)
	Skills: helping people in tourism to improve their skills development	30 (73%)	4 (10%)	-	7 (17%)
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%					

Encouragingly 34 out of 41 respondents (83%) said that the Skills Network has definitely or probably made a positive impact on skills specifically helping people in tourism to improve their skills development.

Moreover, 35 out of 41 (85%) said the Skills Network has definitely or probably made a positive impact on business helping tourism businesses improve their performance.

Only 15 respondents were aware of the Network's employment support output activity (helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry) and of those, 53% felt the Network had definitely or probably made a positive impact.

In respect of the Network's five stated core objectives (see next table) between 73% and 78% in each instance, felt that the Network had definitely or probably made a positive impact. The Network appears to have been especially successful (in the view of this sample of respondents) in its pursuit of:

- Driving up skills and professionalism in the sector (88%)
- Ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered (88%)
- Helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector (86%)

It has also definitely or probably made a positive impact, in the view of this sample of businesses and partners in respect of:

- Bringing about a cohesive and structured approach by providing a single point of contact for tourism training and skills on a local basis (78%)
- Saving employers time by finding out what is available for businesses in terms of skills and training and simplifying it (73%)

Table 8b: Impact: Network Core Objectives

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
Core Objectives	Driving up skills and professionalism in the sector	32 (78%)	4 (10%)	-	5 (12%)
	Ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered	31 (76%)	5 (12%)	-	5 (12%)
	Helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector	31 (76%)	4 (10%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)
	Providing co-ordination / a single point of contact for tourism training and skills on a local basis	30 (73%)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)	8 (20%)
	Saving employers time by finding out what is available for businesses in terms of skills and training and simplifying it	26 (63%)	4 (10%)	1 (2%)	10 (24%)
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%					

Table 8c: Impact: Network Evaluation Measures

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
2003-2005 Evaluation Measures	Engaging tourism businesses / employers	27 (66%)	7 (17%)	-	7 (17%)
	Identifying and then addressing industry needs	26 (63%)	5 (12%)	3 (7%)	7 (17%)
	Liaising with training providers	27 (66%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	10 (24%)
	Developing initiatives	30 (73%)	4 (10%)	2 (5%)	5 (12%)
	Co-ordinating events	27 (66%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	10 (24%)
	Developing tourism networks	29 (71%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	8 (20%)
	Acting as a broker between tourism businesses and training providers	29 (71%)	4 (10%)	1 (2%)	7 (17%)
	Influencing decision makers	11 (27%)	4 (10%)	5 (13%)	21 (51%)
Base: 41 organisations. %s have been rounded and therefore may not add to 100%					

Table 8c suggests that the Network has made definite and probable positive impact in seven of the eight measurable areas scoring an extremely encouraging 71% and 83% for each element of activity. Notable success appears to have been achieved in respect of:

- engaging tourism businesses / employers (83% definite or probable impact)
- developing initiatives (83% definite or probable impact)
- acting as a broker between tourism businesses and training providers (81% definite or probable impact)

Remembering that this sample comprised mostly tourism businesses it is perhaps unsurprising that the Network scored lower for its activity in relation to influencing decision-makers. Many of the businesses simply could not make comment about this aspect of the Network's ongoing activity since 2006.

What is interesting, is that when compared to the exact same evaluation measures produced in 2006 for the Network's early performance (2004-2006) we find that there has been a significant shift upwards in respect of the perceived impact in every activity area as follows:

Table 8d: Impact: Comparative impact with the Network's 2004-2006 performance

Evaluation Measure	2004 - 2006	2006 - 2009	Change
Engaging employers	27%	83%	↑ 56%
Identifying and addressing industry needs	23%	75%	↑ 52%
Liaising with training providers	17%	73%	↑ 56%
Developing initiatives	27%	83%	↑ 56%
Co-ordinating events	10%	71%	↑ 61%
Influencing decision makers	3%	37%	↑ 34%
Developing networks	13%	78%	↑ 65%
Broker between tourism businesses & training providers	33%	81%	↑ 48%
Base	30	41	<i>Positive shift in all areas</i>

This next section reports on business and partner participants’:

views about the importance of the local and regional support from the Network

views about the impact of not being able to sustain the Network from 2010 onwards

views about the future priorities that should be addressed by the Network

6.9 Views about the importance of the local and regional support from the Network

Respondents were asked how much they valued their relationship with the Tourism Skills Network and the results demonstrate that they genuinely appreciate the services provided to them ‘at the coalface’ particularly by the Tourism Skills Network Coordinators. 96% value the relationship with their local Coordinator. Looking at those businesses and partners who have had any direct dealings with the Regional / Head Office Team we find a similar result with 82% saying they value that relationship very much or quite a lot.

Table 9: Value of the relationship with the Tourism Skills Network

	Very much	Quite a lot	Not very much	Not at all / blank
Your local Tourism Skills Network South East Skills Coordinator	33 (81%)	6 (15%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
The Regional / Central Head Office Team for the Tourism Skills Network	8 (20%)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)	29 (71%)

This is perhaps the most significant result of the survey. The Coordinators in particular are the face of the Network – trusted by tourism businesses in their local area, well regarded for their expertise their attitude, their willingness to provide service above and beyond contractual requirement and to genuinely help and support the businesses that they deal with on a continuous basis. Many testimonials were freely provided by the businesses contacted through our independent survey and they are worthy of inclusion to give funding partners just a sense for how important the localised, sector specific Coordinator role is to businesses who have experienced and benefited from it.

“She will always do what she can to help or put me in touch with the right people.”

“On a personal level she is very good at her job – she knows everyone. She has been there a long time. It’s nice to have long term contact. She always gets back promptly.”

“She’s always friendly and has lots of information for me - she’s great!”

“She’s one of those people who’ll phone you up to ensure you’re alright. She emails you with up-to-date and relevant information. She gives you support and ideas and is always available for you.”

“She is very proactive and helpful.”

“The Network is a tremendous back up. Good and solid and would like it to continue.”

“She is amazing. She always returns calls. Any troubles I had were resolved very quickly. If I need anything relating to tourism business support, training or skills provision I go straight to her. She’s been fantastic.”

"I really value what she does. It's excellent."

"I can bounce ideas off her and this helps me get more (or some new) business."

"She has been great in helping us set up the training course."

"We have a good friendship now. She knows what our needs are."

"She was excellent. Always had a constructive response or found out promptly."

"They're there when I need them."

"They're excellent for networking and ideas."

"She's very approachable and open to working with us."

"Her local knowledge is so good."

"She's excellent. Brilliant. Very impressed."

"They are reactive and responsive. If you want something - you get an efficient response."

"Having that local person who can tailor and shape things to suit your business needs is excellent."

Further, questions were asked in the survey about this critical component of the Tourism Skills Network and results reinforce the importance of locally available tourism sector skills Coordinators. 83% of respondents feel it is very important to have direct access to someone local with the skills and knowledge exemplified by Network Coordinators and a further 12% think this is quite important.

Table 10: Value of local Tourism Skills Network Coordinators

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not sure / Can't say
How important is for you to have direct access to someone local (the Coordinator) with sector specific knowledge and experience to help you meet your skills and training needs in the tourism industry?	34 (83%)	5 (12%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

The following select quotations endeavour to explain why respondents feel this local support is so important to them:

"A lot of hotel managers feel and are very isolated – the local contact is invaluable."

"Because they know what's going on locally. They're always doing something in the area."

"She's my first port of call."

"It's especially important on the Isle of Wight – we're all in it together."

"It's especially important here in Surrey to have someone local plugging our cause. Not only do they give good support they help ensure we get good public relations which is really important."

“If it were to be all centrally organised, you wouldn't get that same level of seeing local issues through employer eyes.”

“It is essential to have local insight. It's all about local issues and delivering locally.”

“It's important that you have someone who knows the area and knows who we are – that personal contact is important. Not just a number. They make us feel like we're an individual.”

“She [the Coordinator] comes, we talk, she looks around and learns about us. She's not just faceless – it's a really personal service.”

“They are willing to fight for us.”

“It's totally vital.”

“Very helpful to have someone local. Good for them to be in touch with grass roots.”

Respondents provided some real life examples of things that the Tourism Skills Network team or Coordinator(s) had done for their organisation and the following demonstrates the breadth and scope of the role, in many instances exceeding employer expectations:

- Made businesses aware of Train to Gain opportunities
- Saved businesses money
- Provided training that made a difference especially customer care courses
- Provided networking opportunities above and beyond expectations
- Provided direct support to resolve specific issues with training providers
- Helped push forward a specific business' in-house Welcome Trainer course
- Identified training subsidies for small rural tourism businesses on the Isle of Wight
- Identified opportunities to take part in a skills fair at the Rosebowl which allowed hospitality businesses to promote local jobs and careers to potential new recruits
- Helped set up tailored Welcome Host courses for several businesses
- Essential support to a business when feeling concerned about fire regulations
- Became the catalyst for tailored customer care training provision within the retail sector (viewed by the Network as completely new and innovative)
- Improved performance through participating in a mystery shop visit and assisted in incorporating results into induction/customer care training provision
- Specific support that helped a business secure their 4 stars rating
- Targeted activity that helped a business win a variety of tourism awards and resulted in increased kudos and new business opportunities
- Suggested setting up training courses that impacted directly on recycling policy and other green practices within the business
- Helped one business with signage (wording and layout)
- Co-operated with the pre-employment training programme to shape content and provide sector knowledge. This will ultimately help employers recruit better trained staff

“Just think it's the delivery - always exceeds expectation.”

6.10 Views about the sustainability of the Network from 2010

When asked what impact, if any, there would be on their business or partner organisation if they could no longer access the services / personnel provided by the Tourism Skills Network in future respondents offered these scenarios of high, medium and low level impact:

Table 11: Impact of not being able to sustain the Network from 2010

High impact	Medium impact	Low impact
"Someone else would have to organise it all and take the lead. Would all fall to pieces."	"Would be a frustration. Would miss out on some good training opportunities."	"Wouldn't have a huge impact. I avail myself of free training but that's it really."
"I would consider going independent like everyone else. Wonder why I'm paying out so much money to TSE otherwise."	"It would cut off a possible revenue source and general guidance."	"Wouldn't be earth shattering but we'd miss it."
"It would be negative because the Network saves you time and going down avenues that aren't right for your business."	"You'd feel further away from other people in a similar industry in the area."	"It would be sad, actually. I think that it wouldn't be the end of things, but it wouldn't be so interesting."
"It would be annoying if I couldn't pick of the phone to speak to the Coordinator. Plus, the Forum is really useful - wouldn't want to see that go."	"It would be a shame because we'd lose out on the networking and access to information, support and also the training."	"Would have to look for someone else in TSE. It would be sad. One could survive if experienced but might be harder for new people in the industry."
"The courses wouldn't happen."	"I would be in the dark about quite a lot of things."	"Would have some impact, but would latch on to another quango instead."
"Would participate less in training courses and rely on email or newsletter. Lose personal contact and courses would just be standard and not tailored to our needs."	"I'd have to do much more research and source training providers, courses - nice to have all that drama taken away from me."	"We'd still trade but it's nice to know what's going on in the industry and the modern approach to tourism. You never stop learning."
"We'd be struggling. It's not easy at the moment."	"It would definitely be detrimental."	"Would make life harder."
"I wouldn't have access to course funding."	"We like a regional network – it's an overview we don't have."	
"Would be a loss. No one to understand our needs, source training etc."	"We'd miss it. It's really useful to have objective professionals."	
"I would be very annoyed. I pay a lot of money to TSE/VisitBritain and it's a very, very good service."	"Would involve more work on my part. Would have to go looking for stuff."	
"Would be a great loss – they provide a specialist and personal service"	"Would lose out on networking side of things."	
"Great loss because she has so much involvement in things that we do - HR meetings, training."	"Would be a real shame. The Coordinator is key to our industry locally."	
"Would mean I'd have to start again looking for resources to deliver training and might put the whole thing back for considerable time as not the resources within the Council to do that."	"We'd get lost and become a number."	
"Would be disastrous."		
"Would be a great detriment to the tourist businesses if we don't have a co-ordinating body looking after tourism."		

6.11 Views about the future priorities of the Network

Respondents were asked to suggest up to 3 priorities for the Tourism Skills Network from 2010 to 2012 in terms of supporting tourism businesses and their workforce. The most prevalent priorities were very clear as follows:

Priority 1: Delivery of affordable and relevant training to the industry

- 23 out of 41 respondents referenced this as a priority for the Network
- Many of the training requests were non-specific in terms of topic but specific in terms of ensuring they are a) local and b) affordable
- Specific topic areas mentioned were customer service, food hygiene, essential skills, restaurant and housekeeping skills, marketing, IT, internet and training aimed at new entrants

Priority 2: Personalised and local support, advice, guidance and training brokerage

- 18 out of 41 respondents referenced this as a priority for the Network
- Many of the requests for support were above and beyond what might be achieved through universal means, emails, bulletins or self-help style support resources.
- They were specific requests for help to develop their business' capacity, their workforce skills (not just delivery of training courses rather skills audit and planning) and / or their business' profitability and performance

Priority 3: Information provision, good practice updates and networking events

- 12 out of 41 respondents referenced this as a priority for the Network
- Areas of interest included: business networking events at a local level; legislation updates; clarifications about inspections; good practice tips about how to add value in a recession, cope with the downturn and retain staff; how to maximise the opportunities of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012; and general information about marketing and how to advertise effectively

Other suggestions could not be regarded as being trends of opinion but are nevertheless worth referencing as follows:

- Raising profile of industry as an employer (4)
- Joint working and niche marketing (3)
- Employability skills and training activity (2)
- Engagement with schools and colleges (2)
- Promoting and explaining the benefits of the new 14-19 Diplomas (2)
- Support with employment and recruitment (1)
- Links to Pride of Thanet activity (1)
- Skills benchmarking (1)
- Improving product knowledge through cultural tours (1)
- Activity to attract new entrants to the industry (1)

6.12 Demand for the Network in Future

Given the strength of positive feedback about the Network by those businesses and partners that have been engaged by its activities since 2006 (and even before that), it is highly likely that demand for its continued services will be high. The Network is a significant **'engagement network'** with the tourism industry in the South East that, at the time of recession is perhaps even more important than in 'normal' economic conditions. It is precisely during this period that tourism organisations – particularly SMEs – need to continue to invest in their business and their workforce, but they need help to do it. And they need skilled professionals, such as the Network's Coordinators and Regional Team, to proactively prompt businesses to continue to invest so that they are ready for the recovery.

On the horizon are the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games – again another significant driver of demand and impact on the tourism industry in the South East region. For some businesses this may provide opportunities, for others it may provide threats – in either scenario the Network can play a vital role in maximising the benefits and / or mitigate against the risks presented by the largest event on the planet.

The Network is a mature and established solution that not only aligns with South East strategic policy objectives i.e. it supports the economic development of the region helping businesses reach their full potential', but is it is also operationally very effective. Its team works at the coal-face with real businesses. It has the ability to be 'fleet of foot' in terms of identifying and responding to business' genuine training and skills needs and has the expertise and knowledge about all the different programmes available, to advise and guide a business to a solution that will make a difference to the business' bottom line. The Network is 'an expert intervention' that continues to offer a vital service to address known market failures that the sector will not and cannot solve for itself. Without the Network, one wonders how any claim might be made that the region has an in-depth knowledge of the industry's needs, the economic conditions in which they operate and can put in place training or skills solutions that have a direct impact on tourism businesses in the various localities of the South East.

7 Conclusions

Contractual Performance

It is the evaluator's independent opinion, that the Tourism Skills Network has provided excellent value for money between 2006 and 2009 given its clear achievement – and in most cases, over-performance – compared to contractual output areas agreed with SEEDA.

Strategic Added Value

It is also the evaluator's opinion that the metrics only tell a part of the story about the real impact and strategic added value of the Network and its team of local, knowledgeable, sector specific co-ordinators. The testimonials, employer quotations and myriad case studies suggest a highly effective and motivated network of individuals who seek to provide excellence as standard to the benefit of the tourism industry in the region.

Concluding Statement

It is the evaluator's independent opinion based on comments provided by tourism businesses and partners in the recent telephone survey that the Network is:

- for some an invaluable, and for others at very least a useful and highly respected, resource both at regional and local levels
- providing an effective service
- in a good position as a trusted resource to help businesses either through the recession or to pull out of the recession and plan for the future
- something that virtually all respondents would like to see continued and would feel disappointed if the services were no longer available in the form required and appreciated
- an important external, objective point of contact and source of support for tourism businesses
- in a position to provide quality training and upskilling where it is needed the most
- a vital conduit for networking and brokerage between business and training providers
- an effective vehicle for working with other partners
- well positioned, and mature enough to complement wider destination management objectives at area tourism partnership level
- a genuine success story to be celebrated in the South East and is deserving of further support from 2010 onwards
- providing a cohesive and structured approach to business support, training and skills for the tourism sector in the South East
- making it easier for the tourism businesses they work with to understand and then adopt an appropriate business solution from the many initiatives and schemes available, ultimately saving them time and money

8 Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Sustain the Tourism Skills Network model post March 2010 ensuring there is still a regional team and critically a presence at local level. This report needs to be shared with the Board of Directors of Tourism South East, SEEDA Skills/tourism/2012 teams and Area Tourism Partnerships to identify the best funding and employment models that will sustain the Network in the longer term. It may be necessary to manage employer expectations where demand for Co-ordinator activity is particularly high. Potentially the role can only be successfully delivered if funding is available to cover a minimum of 2 days each week at ATP level.

Recommendation 2:

Ensure that the Network remains focused on a small number of achievable, high impact targets in line with TSE's business plan that provide synergies with ATPs, SEEDA and other stakeholder requirements.

Recommendation 3:

Ensure that any memorandum of understanding between the Network, People 1st and Business Link is up to date and reflective of mutually agreed strategic objectives to support the tourism industry in the region post March 2010. The important point of this recommendation is to ensure that wherever synergies can be created between these organisations they should be explored and reflected in any joint action plan to support tourism in the region in future.

Recommendation 4:

Use this evaluation report to help prioritise the focus of activity to be targeted at the tourism industry between 2010 and 2015, and the types of service that the Network should continue to offer and / or develop in tune with industry's articulated needs as determined by the independent survey completed during this evaluation.

- Priority 1: Delivery of affordable and relevant training to the industry (56%)
- Priority 2: Personalised, local support, advice, guidance and training brokerage (44%)
- Priority 3: Information provision, good practice updates and networking events (29%)

In this way the Network retains its credibility as an honest broker that is truly employer or sector led. In reality, there will be a balance to be achieved in terms of meeting employer needs and demands and delivering on specific targets such as SEEDA 2012 customer care targets, Accentuate, Welcome All, Rural Development Programme for England targets, other courses, and signposting to other TSE activity projects including Interreg.

9 Testimonials

"Myself and the business I'm representing have profited tremendously from the help, advice, talks, suggestions and familiarisation tours arranged by Gill Heighington, the Hampshire Skills Co-ordinator.. Gill points us in the directions of heavily subsidised training. Through the HR forum we have become a group of likeminded people helping each other out if we run courses, asking advice on policies etc. If you don't know the answer to a problem, you can always ring up Gill who will do her best to help. Without Gill there wouldn't be an HR forum and therefore no information and guidance. The visitor attractions in the area are so far apart that we probably would not talk to each other. Gill makes the introduction and I think the smaller companies like the Owl centre and Langdown Dairy Farm (just to mention the closest ones near to us) would really benefit from joining our group.

Karin Gray, Personnel Manager, National Motor Museum, Beaulieu

"I am very pleased with the services of the Tourism Skills Network South East and particularly the service that Gill Heighington provides. The HR & Training Managers network events are invaluable in providing information and advice from others in the industry. I joined this industry two years ago and found Gill to be very supportive and helpful when I was finding my feet. Gill always seems to have her finger on the pulse of what is going on in the industry and provides a very useful resource for advice on training. The courses available are of a good quality and very accessible."

Stacey Richards, HR Manager, Carey's Manor Hotel, Brockenhurst, Hampshire

"The Garlic Farm has been pleased to work with the Skills Network over the course of this year and their expertise has proved very useful. We look forward to an ongoing relationship which, we feel sure, will be beneficial for The Garlic Farm's business."

Linda Applegate, Administrator, The Garlic Farm, Isle of Wight

"We feel comfortable knowing there's someone in the background who can give you advice and information. The Co-ordinator is a very good back up for us should we need help. When we're at a loss, they are there for us."

Julie Hedge, Proprietor, Claremont Cottage, Dorking, Surrey

"The support and the knowledge are so important. They can give you everything - they're such qualified people. They've worked in the industry."

Joyce Abbey, Proprietor, Fenton House, Woking, Surrey

"I can't fault them."

Nichola Liddiard, Proprietor, Brook Farm B&B, Tenterden, Kent

"They provide valuable assistance to a valuable industry."

Peter Shaw, Chair, Campton Tower, Broadstairs, Kent

"Great for support when you need it. Not intrusive."

Rosanne Thick, Proprietor, Four Oaks B&B, Headcorn, Kent

"I've just returned to England from New Zealand after 5 years away and the Network has allowed me to hit the ground running for training and networking."

Paul Hashfield, Museum Director, Amberley Museum, Sussex

"As a new B&B provider the network has been invaluable on numerous levels - providing informative and practical training events and offering guidance and facilitating events that encourage other providers to liaise with each other. The Network has encouraged me to strongly consider services that support the national initiatives."

Jo Brown, Proprietor, Tun Cottage Guest House, Berkshire

"Having that named contact who understands your business and your need is invaluable."

Jenni Charity, Lead officer for learning and development, Isle of Wight Council

"Really very, very useful."

Steve Baker, Business Link Adviser Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

"I have attended a number of courses run by the Tourism Skills Network. They are always well organised, the trainers are excellent and I come away feeling inspired and full of practical ideas with which to take our business forward."

Abigail, Goodleaf Tree Climbing, Isle of Wight

"The Welcome Host Course was a very positive experience."

Chris Howard, Town Centre Manager, Guildford Town Council

10 A Selection of Case Studies

Surrey

Case study: Fenton House, Woking, Surrey - “B&B is starry-eyed over new award”

Joyce Abbey, owner of Fenton House B&B, explains: "I have run Fenton House as a bed and breakfast for 10 years but, having attended two of the Tourism South East quality-assessment workshops recently, I decided that to become star rated was a good thing to do in the current economic climate. This scheme recognises the high level of service I provide and gives me access to additional marketing and support from the tourist board. I am really delighted to have achieved this award, especially as I am the first in Woking to receive four stars."

How Fenton House, B&B reached this rating and obtained local press coverage was an achievement created directly by Quality in Tourism, the local council -Woking and Tourism South East working together.

With the local tourist information centre recently closed Joyce Abbey was frustrated at the lack of support provided for her business. After attending a free Visit Surrey networking event at the Lightbox she was persuaded by Catherine Knight the Surrey Tourism Skills Coordinator to attend a free workshop to introduce quality assessment – the process by which achieve a star rating to local accommodation owners. She arrived with a friend and instantly dismissed the need to pay to be assessed. However by the end of the day Joyce could see that when accommodation establishments become quality-assessed, their customers can easily identify them by their rating as somewhere that would match their expectations. The owner also benefits from having their top-notch service recognised with a national award, plus they can benefit from national marketing through tourist board websites and publications. In addition, the local area gains the reputation of a quality place to stay.

By the end of the Workshop she was converted and left to convert her husband.

The second Surrey introduction to quality Workshop took place several months later and Joyce attended with the aim of telling the group about her positive experiences culminating in her business being awarded 4 stars. She advised the other attendees to take advantage of the advertising opportunities available to star-rated establishments and encouraged them to participate in the scheme.

From cynic to ambassador! Joyce says about her work with Catherine Knight, the Skills Network's Co-ordinator: "Catherine is amazing. She always returns calls. The support and the knowledge she has is so important. She can give you everything you need to reassure that you are on the right track – the Co-ordinators like Catherine are such qualified people. They've worked in the industry. Her support has been totally vital."

To find out more, see www.enjoyengland.com/stay/quality-ratings

www.visitsurrey.com/site/accommodation/fenton-house-p439051

Sussex

Case study: Arundel Castle, West Sussex: Network Impacts on Volunteer Customer Service Skills

In 2008, the Sussex Skills Coordinator worked in partnership with the Head of Operations of Arundel Castle, West Sussex to deliver a series of customised "Welcome Host" courses to all volunteers.

The aim of the project was to help participants improve and build upon their customer service and communication skills, ensuring every visitor leaves Arundel Castle looking forward to returning and will recommend it to their friends and colleagues.

Arundel Castle operates within a very competitive market so the management teams were keen to not only meet customers' expectations but to exceed them. Welcome Host was considered the best training programme available in the UK that could meet these objectives. The Skills Coordinator worked closely with the management of Arundel Castle and customised the content of the course to meet their needs, ensuring it addressed relevant issues, such as improving communication skills. It was mandatory for all volunteers to attend the course from all sections of the castle, including the management team.

Over 120 volunteers completed the "Welcome Host" training and excellent feedback was received, many commented on how useful the training was, in particular being able to meet colleagues from other areas of the castle. Bryan MacDonald, Head of Operations, Arundel Castle said "The training has been a great success and will provide our team with the additional skills to enable them to deliver world – class customer service that will ensure every visitor will have an experience they value, influencing the memories they take away".

Hampshire

Case study: Skills Network Develops Innovative Hampshire Tourism HR Forum

The Hampshire HR Forum was set up within the first year of the Skills network at the request of a few of the HR managers within large tourism establishments. It was felt that it would help them form a cohesive structure within the County for tourism skills and training issues. Tourism businesses can be very fragmented because of the diverse nature of the sector and many in Hampshire are situated in rural locations. Those participating wanted to share and exchange experiences and ideas, save valuable time and resource and in addition create a professionalism structure.

Initially the gatherings were small and informal with the agenda steered by the HR Managers themselves and facilitated by Gill Heighington, the Hampshire Tourism Skills Co-ordinator. The only cost being their time and use of business premises to hold the meetings.

As the reputation of the group has grown and others have seen the positive impact, more tourism business HR managers have joined the group. There is now a core of 30 'members' with at least 20 regularly attending quarterly get-togethers and passing information onto those who are unable to come along. Gill regularly makes suggestions for and arranges attendance by outside speakers such as the Health and Safety Executive, People 1st, Business Link, the Immigration Authority, and Solicitors. One recent evaluation participant commented: "It's very, very useful to hear what's going in the industry. It's a really informative forum for learning and sharing. It's great for best practice. We also do salary

surveys, share ideas, learn about suppliers and industry partners such as People 1st.” (HR Manager, Carey’s Manor)

Other content has included updates on:

- New laws and HR regulations
- Recruitment difficulties/challenges
- Training opportunities and emerging requirements
- School liaison and work experience codes of conduct
- Identified skills gaps

Over the years the group has made recommendations for new courses, advised on and shaped content accordingly, jointly distributed a salary survey, and undertaken a familiarisation trip to Dorney Lake the South East’s 2012 venue.

“Meeting other HR professionals in the industry is a huge benefit. You realise common issues and that you're not alone. The speakers at the Forum are also very good allowing you to keep up to date with issues such as employment (HR Manager Botley Park Hotel)

Isle of Wight

Case study: Skills Network Drives Partnership on the Isle of Wight

The Isle of Wight Tourism Skills Co-ordinator, Marilyn Hughes, has been working on a collaborative basis with stakeholders on the Island, including, Train to Gain, Business Link, the IW College and IW Chamber of Commerce Tourism and Industry. This has resulted in a cohesive and structured approach that has benefited the business community across the Island.

In October 2009 Tourism South East delivered Welcome Host to 20 employees and managers from Island Waste Ltd. The booking was as a result of a Train to Gain referral to the Isle of Wight Coordinator, who subsequently booked the course on behalf of Island Waste.

In November 2009 a holiday park in West Wight was seeking support to access funding to provide a training course for one of their managers. The Island Skills Coordinator was able to directly liaise with IW College and Business Link – Train to Gain, and as a result a special package was put together which resulted in their manager signing up to an NVQ Level 3 Institute of Leadership and Management qualification.

Case study: Kent Skills Co-ordinators Greets

As part of the Tourism Skills Network, Kerstin Beeching, the Kent Co-ordinator was able to dovetail activity across the County through her role as Training Manager for Visit Kent at Kent County Council. Kerstin was also responsible for delivering a multi-faceted Interreg project which enabled her to offer places on a range of business support and training programmes at heavily discounted rates.

There were some major successes such as training local volunteer residents as Kent Greeters. The Greeters were keen to share their passion for the local area and Kerstin organised customer care and Greeter training workshops so that they could form part of the international Greeter 'network' within Kent. The Greeters are now welcoming visitors from around the world and in the run up to 2012 their services will be invaluable.

Other work included organising customer care training courses for taxi drivers in Thanet. The taxi drivers all took the Welcome Host City and Guilds accredited course and this proved to be a huge success. More taxi driver programmes are scheduled to take place in Medway and Shepway during 2010.

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire**Case study: Skills Co-ordinator prepares the Eton Corridor to 'Host the World'**

Dorney Lake is a world-class rowing and flat-water canoeing centre in a spectacular, 400-acre parkland setting near Windsor, and is a host venue for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. For businesses in the Eton Dorney and Thames Valley corridors - across Windsor, Maidenhead and further into Berkshire and Buckinghamshire - the opportunities are huge. But with a mixed economy of employer size and type across the tourism, hospitality and leisure sectors, how could they come together to fully leverage the Olympics opportunity and secure a legacy for the visitor economy?

SEEDA engaged local employers from the start. Research aimed to identify opportunities, employment and recruitment challenges, skills gaps, training needs, and support programmes that would make a real impact. Key issues included the need to:

- Offer consistent, world-class customer service
- Effectively train a diverse, often transient and flexible workforce
- Deliver flexible training programmes to varied tourism, leisure and hospitality organisations, mainly SMEs
- Improve cultural understanding, disability awareness, basic language abilities, commercial skills, general communications, local knowledge and overall welcome and customer service standards amongst staff

With an estimated 30,000 visitors per day to the Dorney Lakes events plus the ongoing global spotlight, businesses identified a unique chance to raise their game and secure long-term sustainability.

Solution: Hosting the World - world-class customer service

Tourism South East developed an integrated training and development programme - Hosting the World - combined a focussed Training Needs Analysis, undertaken by the Area Tourism Partnership Tourism Skills Co-ordinator, with a series of 10 specialist courses and support materials. This highly tailored programme gave SME owners and managers new knowledge, skills and targeted training for delivery to their staff, and helped drive improved performance. Thanks to SEEDA funding, businesses in the Eton Dorney Corridor were able to benefit from an individual and personal visit by the Skills Co-ordinator to clarify training and skills needs and offer highly subsidised, sector specific 2012 related activity including topics how to welcome international visitors; looking after customers with specific needs; selecting, coaching and reviewing teams; marketing and managing customers' experiences; maximising media opportunities; and creating and delivering a vision for world-class customer service.

The impact for business

Leading River Thames passenger boat operators French Brothers identified a clear business opportunity. With experience of transporting thousands of people by boat locally, they were looking to see how they could build a 2012 focused approach to support visitor transport needs - in a highly sustainable way.



French Brothers were one of the first businesses to sign up for the training because they recognised the potential long-term benefits for the area's entire visitor economy, especially through raising customer care standards. The company plans to roll out training to potentially hundreds of staff over the coming years.

Don Yates, the sales and marketing manager wanted the company to deliver customer service at a level that customers from around the world expected and believes that 2012 will act as a catalyst for improving standards and gaining repeat business. French Brothers used the Tourism Skills Co-ordinator to help them identify training and skills requirements because they provided a sector specific approach that will make a real difference to the business in the longer term.

11 Questionnaire (October 2009)



Tourism Skills Network South East – Evaluation 2006-2009

Section One: Introduction and confirmation details

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this evaluation of the Tourism Skills Network South East. We appreciate your valuable time. The purpose of our interview, which is strictly confidential, is to establish your personal views about the Network and to get a sense for whether you have benefited from its services or activities at all since 2006. We would like to invite you to help us measure the success and impact of the Network's activities. This may include your views about the Skills Co-ordinator(s) you have been dealing with during this period.

<i>Name of respondent</i>	
<i>Position / Job Title</i>	
<i>Organisation</i>	
<i>Telephone</i>	
<i>Email</i>	
<i>What is the main location of your business (please tick all that apply)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Berks, Bucks and Oxon <input type="checkbox"/> Hampshire <input type="checkbox"/> Isle of Wight <input type="checkbox"/> Kent <input type="checkbox"/> Surrey <input type="checkbox"/> Sussex <input type="checkbox"/> SE Regional <input type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please write in: _____
<i>What is your main business activity?</i>	
<i>How many staff are directly employed at your business?</i>	<i>Peak time (inc all full / part time / casual staff):</i> _____ <i>Off-season / lowest period (inc. as above):</i> _____

Section Two: Relationship with the Tourism Skills Network

1: How long have you been dealing with the Tourism Skills Network?

- Only within the last year
- About 1-3 years (i.e. since 2006 onwards)
- More than 3 years

2: How would you describe your organisation's involvement with the Tourism Skills Network since 2006? (please tick all that apply)

- Have you paid for Network services e.g. training courses or business support?
- Have you received face to face or phone / email support from the Skills Co-ordinator
- Have you taken part in Network events?
- Have you actually helped deliver services for or with the Network (delivery partner)?

- Have you funded any Skills Network activities at a strategic level?
- Have you received useful information from the Network
- Have you helped the Network develop the overall skills strategy for tourism in your area?
- Other, please describe: _____

3: Which of the Tourism Skills Network South East's sub-regions or team members have you worked with since 2006? (please tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Ros Bear, Berks, Bucks and Oxon	<input type="checkbox"/> Gill Heighington, Hampshire
<input type="checkbox"/> Marilyn Hughes, Isle of Wight	<input type="checkbox"/> Kerstin Beeching, Kent
<input type="checkbox"/> Catherine Knight, Surrey (since 2007)	<input type="checkbox"/> Gill Bonner, Sussex (since Apr 2009)
<input type="checkbox"/> Carrie Tripp, Surrey (2006-2007)	<input type="checkbox"/> Cat Carkeet, Sussex (2006-09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Hilary Moger, Kent Quality Programme Manager	<input type="checkbox"/> Sue Gill, Skills Network Manager (Regional)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Please write in: _____	

4: What have been the main benefits of your organisation's involvement with the Network between 2006 and 2009?

5: Could your involvement with Network have been improved in any way?

Section Three: Overall Success of Tourism Skills Network South East

6. Below is a list of some of the activities of Tourism Skills Network South East. Please indicate how successful you feel they were if you have taken part in any of them.

Activity/product	Very successful	Successful	Not very successful	Not successful at all	Not aware of activity/service
Welcome to Olympics Excellence Training Courses (WTOE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment support aimed at helping economically inactive individuals seeking employment in the leisure, tourism & hospitality sector in the South East	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality workshops / training for tourism <u>employers</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality workshops / training for tourism <u>employees</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training Needs Analysis where a co-ordinator undertakes a company diagnostics/action plans with your business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General advice / signposting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7: Thinking about those activities you identified as successful in Q6, why do you think they were successful?

8. Thinking about those activities you identified as unsuccessful in Q6, why do you think they were unsuccessful?

9: Have you accessed any other services or activities provided by the Tourism Skills network that you have particularly valued but which were not mentioned in question 6? (For example any employer forums, networking events, good practice events, other sorts of training opportunities, familiarisation tours, awards ceremonies, educational activities / links with schools, colleges or universities or others etc?)

Please write in and say why you particularly valued services / activities?

10. What do you think has been the most outstanding achievement of the Tourism Skills Network in the past 3 years?

11. To what extent has the Tourism Skills Network South East made an impact on the following over the past 3 years in your opinion?

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
Regional Targets / Core Outputs	Employment support: helping individuals get a job in the tourism industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Business support: helping tourism businesses improve their performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Skills: helping people in tourism to improve their skills development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
Core Objectives	Driving up skills and professionalism in the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ensuring sector specific, needs based skills / training provision is identified and delivered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Helping achieve a step change in customer care in the region's tourism sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Providing co-ordination / a single point of contact for tourism training and skills on a local basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Saving employers time by finding out what is available for businesses in terms of skills and training and simplifying it				

		Definitely made an impact	Probably made a positive impact	Not really made an impact	Can't say / not sure
2003-2005 Evaluation Measures	Engaging tourism businesses / employers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Identifying and then addressing industry needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Liaising with training providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Developing initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Co-ordinating events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Developing tourism networks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Acting as a broker between tourism businesses and training providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Influencing decision makers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other impacts – please describe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Were there any other activities you feel the Network could have delivered but didn't between 2006 and 2009?

13. Which of the following people or organisations have benefited from your involvement with the Network? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism businesses | <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Students/learners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entrants to the tourism sector | <input type="checkbox"/> Job seekers | <input type="checkbox"/> Partner/stakeholder organisations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy makers | <input type="checkbox"/> Networks | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational establishments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) _____ | | |

Section Four: Added Value

14: How much do you value the relationship you have / support you receive from:

	Very much	Quite a lot	Not very much	Not at all	<i>Why do you say this?</i>
Your local Tourism Skills Network South East Skills Co-ordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The Regional / Central Head Office Team for the Tourism Skills Network	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

15: Can you provide a real life example of anything in particular the Tourism Skills Network team or Co-ordinator(s) have done for your organisation that proved very beneficial or additional to your expectations?

16a: How important is for you to have direct access to someone local (the Co-ordinator) with sector specific knowledge and experience to help you meet your skills and training needs in the tourism industry?

Very important Quite important Not very important Can't say / not sure

16b: Why do you say this?

17: What impact, if any, would it have on your business if you could no longer access the services / personnel provided by the Tourism Skills Network in future i.e. what would you most miss were it not possible to continue to sustain the Network's many activities from 2010?

Sustaining the Activities of Tourism Skills Network South East

18. Thinking about the future activities of the Tourism Skills Network what do you feel their top three priorities should be to support tourism businesses / their workforce from 2010 to 2012?

Priority 1	
Priority 2	
Priority 3	

19. Do you have any additional comments about the work of the Tourism Skills Network South East that will help us evaluate its success and impact between 2006 and 2009 and / or provide evidence of your continued demand for its services from 2010 onwards?

20: Would you be willing to provide a quote or testimonial about the Tourism Skills Network for use in our evaluation report?

Yes No