

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE WELCOME E-LEARNING PROJECT



**Career Concepts Ltd
on behalf of
Tourism South East
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Produced by Career Concepts Ltd on behalf of Tourism South East with the support of Martin Brunner.

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Executive summary

The Welcome E-Learning project

Welcome E-Learning was an ESF co-financed project, which received funding of £343,980 through the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), which ran from January 2004 to March 2007. The project was led by Tourism South East (TSE), working in partnership with a number of other organisations in South East England.

Welcome E-Learning aimed to address underskilling and to boost ICT usage among managers and key workers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality in South East England by delivering a series of awareness-raising events, providing outreach tourism business advisor visits to engage with businesses, developing e-learning and online business support opportunities, and delivering e-learning, blended learning and other training programmes to meet identified business needs.

This evaluation report on the Welcome E-Learning project has been prepared by Career Concepts Ltd with the support of Martin Brunner, on behalf of Tourism South East.

Project delivery

TSE was responsible for overall project management and delivery, working with a number of partner organisations and a project steering group.

A series of activities were undertaken to promote the project to potential beneficiaries and recruit participants, including six awareness raising events. Outreach business advisor visits were made to beneficiary businesses to provide information and advice on the project and ICT issues, undertake a training needs analysis, introduce the Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus schemes and e-skills Passports, and signpost businesses to other agencies and sources of support.

Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus were mapped to available Learn Direct e-learning programmes and other relevant training courses at the start of the project. A series of e-learning and online business support materials were developed including an online version of the Partners in Success toolkit and a CD version of the Partners in Success Plus self-assessment process. Dedicated Welcome E-Learning pages within the TSE website were developed to enable beneficiaries to access online materials.

An extensive programme of short training programmes was devised and delivered to address individual manager and key worker needs in beneficiary businesses. A group of 49 beneficiaries were assisted to study for an Institute of Leadership and Management level 3 qualification.

Project achievements

The awareness raising activities undertaken and the programme of outreach visits were very successful at engaging businesses and their employees, and performance exceeded all of the main beneficiary targets by a considerable margin. There were 438 business beneficiaries against a target of 250, and 856 individual beneficiaries against a target of 600. Partnership working contributed significantly to the achievement of beneficiary targets, as partner organisations participated in raising awareness of the project and referring potential beneficiaries to TSE.

As well as being successful in terms of beneficiary targets, the project also performed very well against other quantitative targets, almost all of which were met or exceeded. Targets for outreach visits by business advisors and the delivery of training courses were exceeded by a considerable margin.

A number of innovative developments were incorporated into the project, including the creation of the Smarter Marketing training course and the delivery of an Institute of Leadership and Management qualification using a new, blended learning approach.

A number of dissemination events were held throughout the region and a series of case studies were produced to recognise achievement and demonstrate the value of project activities.

The impact of the project

An end of project survey was carried out among beneficiary businesses. Responses showed that over 90% of respondents considered that the project had been helpful or very helpful in developing their business and/or management skills, that the advice and support they received had been helpful or very helpful, and that the project had met or exceeded their expectations. 56% of respondents considered that the project had led to increased profitability.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 beneficiaries, a process which was designed to elicit more detailed feedback, including qualitative information on the impact of the project. Feedback was positive on all aspects of the project other than the e-skills Passports, which were not considered to have been helpful by 50% of the interviewees.

Feedback from the project partners, business advisors and the TSE project team on project delivery and its impact was sought at the end of the project. Their comments were overwhelmingly positive, although they highlighted a few areas where improvements could be made in future projects.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the evaluation activities undertaken, it was concluded that the project engaged successfully with micro, small and medium sized businesses, met or exceeded all key beneficiary and output targets, reducing underskilling, boosted ICT usage among businesses, and made an impact on key business issues, such as profitability, productivity and legislative compliance. It was well managed and the partnership approach to delivery was successful.

The project also developed innovative learning and business support materials, and contributed to meeting key strategic objectives in the region.

It was also concluded that e-learning proved less popular with managers and key workers than traditional short courses, and that the use of e-skills Passports was not particularly successful.

Based on the project successes, challenges faced and the lessons learned from the project, a series of recommendations are made for future projects.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project overview

Welcome E-Learning was an ESF co-financed project, which received funding of £343,980 through the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). Work commenced in January 2004 and the project was completed in March 2007.

The project was led by Tourism South East (TSE), working in partnership with a number of other organisations in South East England and a project steering group.

Welcome E-Learning aimed to address underskilling and boost ICT usage among 600 managers and key workers in 200 micro and small tourism, leisure and hospitality sector businesses through:

- providing an outreach mentoring service to advice on ICT issues and training needs;
- providing online access to learning and business support;
- delivering an extensive short course programme.

1.2 Project evaluation

This evaluation report on the Welcome E-Learning project has been prepared by Career Concepts Ltd with the support of Martin Brunner, on behalf of Tourism South East.

The project evaluation aims to:

- assess the degree to which the project's aims and objectives were met;
- measure the impact of the project;
- reflect upon and understand what the project has achieved;
- highlight the lessons learned from the project, particularly those that can be applied to future project design and delivery.

Welcome E-Learning has been evaluated using a variety of methods including:

- quantitative data relating to beneficiary and output targets;
- completion of feedback forms by learners at the end of every training programme;
- an online/postal survey of beneficiaries at the end of the project;
- in-depth interviews with a small group of beneficiaries;

- a review of the opinions of TSE project team and the partner organisations on the delivery, achievements, challenges and lessons learned from the project;
- feedback received from business advisors and trainers.

1.3 Strategic linkages

The project objectives and delivery mechanisms were linked to the achievement of a number of key strategic objectives including those outlined in:

- The Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016;
- Tourism ExSEllence: The Strategy for Tourism in the South East;
- South East England Tourism Skills Strategy and Workforce Development Plan 2006-10;
- the sub-regional tourism skills strategies and action plans.

Welcome E-Learning addressed some of the key competitive challenges and strategic objectives identified by People 1st, the sector skills council for hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism.

The project also linked with and supported work being undertaken by the Tourism Skills Network South East and the sub-regional skills co-ordinators.

2. Project aim, objectives and targets

2.1 Project aims

Welcome E-Learning aimed to address underskilling and to boost ICT usage among managers and key workers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality in South East England by:

- delivering a series of awareness-raising events to motivate a wide cohort of SMEs to appreciate the benefits of using ICT to boost business performance and develop skills;
- providing outreach tourism business advisor visits to engage with businesses and assist them to:
 - overcome ICT limitations and build confidence in ICT usage and its ability to assist marketing and other business development activities
 - identify training and business support needs that could be met by e-learning and other provision;
- developing an innovative and accessible platform for e-learning delivery to overcome traditional barriers to learning among small businesses and their employees;
- delivering e-learning, blended learning and other training programmes to meet identified business needs.

The project was designed to contribute to the goal of achieving a wired business community capable of extracting maximum benefit from new technology.

2.2 Project objectives

The objectives of the Welcome E-Learning project, as outlined in the original project specification, were as follows.

■ **Objective 1: Awareness raising events**

To organise a series of five awareness raising events in the TSE sub-regions to:

- provide advice and guidance on the potential of e-business to boost sales;
- generate interest in blended learning and e-learning as a tool to develop staff skills and confirm key management and ICT skills that are currently insufficient.

■ **Objective 2: Advisory services**

To provide an outreach mentor for participating SMEs to:

- advise on ICT issues;
- assess training needs;
- assess the scope for developing ICT based training tailored to established needs, delivered in a way that meets individual and SME needs.

■ **Objective 3: Online access to e-learning materials**

To design and develop a portal website with access to e-learning materials compiled as starter briefings, with learning materials available:

- in summary as a mix of images and bullet points
- in detail, such as the use of documents/pdfs/PowerPoint presentations/video or audio clips, attached to the briefing system via a resources option.

■ **Objective 4: Online access to a 'one-stop-shop' for business support**

To develop the website to offer a 'one-stop-shop' capability, where businesses, employees and prospective entrants can obtain comprehensive information about business and learning support within each of the South East England sub-regions.

■ **Objective 5: Website accessibility and forecasting tools**

To enhance the website by developing high levels of accessibility and host a variety of business forecast tools for business planning.

■ **Objective 6: Multi-media learning tools**

To develop and produce a CD-Rom as a supplementary multimedia learning tool.

■ **Objective 7: Short course programme**

To devise and deliver an extensive, short course training programme at times and costs that will suit most participants, sometimes on a one-to-one basis, at other times bringing several SMEs together to address individual manager and key worker training needs with access to expertise from a range of support organisations.

■ **Objective 8: Impact assessment**

To assess the overall impact of objectives 3 and 4 on business profitability.

It was also agreed at the start of the project, in response to a request from SEEDA, that Welcome E-Learning should incorporate the issue of e-skills Passports to appropriate beneficiaries. Developed by e-skills UK, the sector skills council for ICT and Telecoms, the e-skills Passport initiative is an online skills management system that helps people to establish current work-based IT and technology skills, build a plan to improve them and obtain a relevant qualification.

The Thames Valley University report Web-assisted Learning in Tourism, Hotel Management and Catering, published in July 2003, was instrumental in developing the project objectives. Although the study found that, for the target group, the preferred learning route was face-to-face lectures and workshops, it recommended a move towards a blended learning/e-learning approach to skills development, tailored to meet the requirements of specific organisations.

2.3 Beneficiary targets

The original beneficiary targets for the Welcome E-Learning project were a total 200 micro and small businesses and a total of 600 employees in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector.

Revised business beneficiary targets were agreed with SEEDA in December 2005 to enable TSE to include a small number of medium sized businesses, and to increase the number of business beneficiaries to a total of 250.

Details of business and individual beneficiary targets are given in the charts below.

Beneficiary targets: businesses		
	Original target	Revised target
Micro businesses (up to 10 employees)	180	180
Small businesses (10-49 employees)	20	20
Medium sized businesses (50-249 employees)	0	A small number
Total	200	250

Beneficiary targets: individuals			
	Male	Female	Total
Employment targets			
Employed	250	350	600
Age group			
Adults (19-24)	50	70	120
Adults (25-49)	100	120	220
Adults (50+)	100	160	260
Ethnicity			
White – British	220	314	534
White – Irish	2	4	6
White – other	6	12	18
Mixed – White and Asian	2	2	4
Asian or Asian British – Indian	8	6	14
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	6	4	10
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	4	6
Black or Black British – African	4	4	8
Disability			
Unspecified	25	35	60
None	225	315	540
Total	250	350	600

2.4 Output targets

A series of output targets were specified at the start of the Welcome E-Learning project.

A target for the issue of 200 e-skills Passports was introduced by SEEDA at the start of the project, although this did not form part of the original project proposal. In June 2005, TSE agreed with SEEDA to reduce the target for E-Skills Passports from 200 to 150.

Output targets		
	Original target	Revised target
Awareness raising events	5	5
Outreach business advisor workshops	3	3
Outreach business advisory visits to SMEs	50	50
Beneficiaries assisted with information, advice and guidance	600	600
Beneficiaries assisted to participate in Partners in Success/Partners in Success Plus	100	100
SME employees completing short courses (3-30 hours)	600	600
SME employees commencing training (over 30 hours)	50	50
SME employees obtaining a qualification (training under 30 hours)	5	5
SME employees obtaining a qualification (training over 30 hours)	45	45
Issue of e-skills Passports	200	150

Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus

It was agreed with SEEDA that the well-established Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus schemes, developed by TSE, should be used within the project to assist the business advisors to diagnose training and business development needs and to provide accreditation of achievement.

Partners in Success is an accreditation and improvement programme designed to encourage and help service sector businesses of all sizes to adopt good employment practices. Accreditation is based on a code of practice, with which businesses are committed to comply. This code covers

areas important to both employers and employees at all levels including employment, training, health and safety, communication, equal opportunities and customer service.

Partners in Success Plus builds upon what has been achieved by Partners in Success, and moves from a 'compliance' to a 'continuous improvement' ethos. It is designed to help businesses of all sizes work towards business excellence and is broadly based on the EFQM Excellence model. It covers the following key business development areas: business planning, marketing, e-commerce, managing people, delivering service excellence, and financial and resource management.

3. Project delivery

3.1 Project management

The role of Tourism South East

TSE was responsible for overall project management and delivery, including recruiting beneficiaries, organising delivery of learning and business support opportunities, contract management, making claims and payments, maintaining project records, monitoring performance, producing and disseminating management information, equality and diversity issues, and quality.

TSE established an infrastructure to:

- manage the project finances, activities and outputs;
- track and monitor business and individual beneficiaries;
- review progress against objectives and milestones.

Service level agreements were put in place between TSE and all delivery partners. These outlined the responsibilities of each partner, project delivery arrangements, milestones, targets and associated costs.

An existing TSE database was used to capture beneficiary and output data, and to maintain appropriate financial records.

Milestones and outputs were monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that any deviation could be reported and remedial action taken as soon as possible.

An annual audit of the project finances was undertaken by TSE's auditors, BDO Stoy Hayward LLP.

Key project personnel

Sue Gill, Head of Skills and Training for TSE, acted as the project manager. Her responsibilities included liaison with SEEDA and overseeing development, delivery and project management activities.

Michelle Grant, Training Projects Manager for TSE, acted as the project co-ordinator. She was responsible for operational management of the project including:

- project planning and administration;
- co-ordination of partner input;

- management of, and liaison with, contractors;
- recruitment of beneficiaries;
- development of learning materials;
- organising delivery of learning and business support;
- project administration and co-ordination;
- maintenance of beneficiary, financial and other data;
- monitoring of progress and audit requirements;
- liaison with SEEDA, including reporting on actions and outcomes against the delivery plan.

Project steering group

A project steering group was established at the start of the project to guide TSE in the delivery of the project and the achievement of beneficiary and output targets. Membership was as follows:

- Michelle Grant, Tourism South East (chair);
- Malcolm Alder-Smith, Isle of Wight College;
- Kerstin Beeching, Kent County Council;
- Vivienne Boucher, Manifold Associates (business advisor);
- Martin Brunner (business advisor);
- Catherine Carkeet, Isle of Wight Tourism;
- Sarah Harfield, Tourism South East;
- Gill Heighington, Hampshire Skills Co-ordinator;
- Gillian Pope (business advisor);
- Debbie Rouget, Tourism Better Business Scheme (Berkshire, Buckingham and Oxfordshire);
- Mike Rowlands, Isle of Wight Tourism;
- Carrie Tripp, Surrey Tourism Skills Network.

The project steering group met quarterly for the duration of the project. It worked well and made a valuable input to steering the project and the achievement of the project targets.

3.2 Partners

Tourism South East worked with a number of key partner organisations to undertake the Welcome E-Learning project. These organisations are listed, together with their main roles, in the chart on page 15.

Partner organisations	
Organisation	Main role
1066 Country Marketing	Hosting of training courses and promotional activities.
Academy Internet	Development of e-learning materials.
Broadband East Sussex	Support for ICT development by beneficiary businesses.
Connected Surrey Broadband Partnership	Support for ICT development by beneficiary businesses.
e-skills UK	Provision of e-skills Passports.
Hampshire Countryside	Support for, and promotion of, project activities. Provision of training venues.
Hampshire Tourism Skills Partnership	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Institute of Leadership and Management	Provision of management qualification
Isle of Wight College	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Isle of Wight Tourism	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Kent Tourism Academy	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Learn Direct	Provision of e-learning programmes.
Lewes District Council	Support for, and promotion of, project activities. Provision of training venues.
North Hampshire Tourism	Promotional activities.
Quality Edge	Promotional activities.
Surrey Premier Business Hub	Support for ICT development by beneficiary businesses. Provision of e-learning programmes.
Surrey Tourism Skills Partnership	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Totton College Services to Businesses	Delivery of ILM qualification through blended learning.
Tourism Better Business Scheme	Membership of the project steering group and promotional activities.
Tourism Skills Network South East	Promotional activities and awareness raising.

In addition, help was received from other organisations in the South East. For example, local authority tourism officers provided beneficiary referrals.

3.3 Awareness raising and promotion

A series of activities were undertaken to raise awareness, promote the project to potential beneficiaries and recruit participants. These included:

- presentations at six events, which were attended by a total of 506 people (as outlined in the chart below);
- production of a Welcome E-Learning marketing flyer;
- direct mail shots to tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses;
- featuring details of the project on the Tourism South East industry website (www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com);
- promotion in the Hotline and Tourism Skills Network South East newsletters;
- public relations activities.

Awareness raising events			
Date	Event	Location	Number of attendees
23.8.04	Four Keys to Success	Guildhall, Portsmouth, Hampshire	17
15.7.04	Tourism South East Annual General Meeting	Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking, Surrey	102
22.9.04	Tourism South East sub-region meeting	Millets Farm, near Abingdon, Oxfordshire	52
21.10.04	Oxford Business Workshop	Westwood Country Hotel, Oxfordshire	15
24.11.04	Kent Tourism Conference	Canterbury Cathedral, Kent	240
30.11.04	Tourism South East Members' Day	The Spread Eagle Hotel, Midhurst, Sussex	80

Beneficiaries were also engaged in the project through:

- signposting from other projects and organisations;
- referrals from sub-regional tourism skills co-ordinators;
- referrals from members of the Hampshire HR Forum;

- referrals from local authority tourism officers and other staff;
- referrals from tourism sector groups and trade associations;
- word-of-mouth recommendations from beneficiaries.

An appropriate acknowledgement of ESF funding, and the ESF logo, were included in all presentations and promotional materials.

3.4 Advisory visits

The following business advisors were recruited by TSE to undertake the outreach business advisory visits in the South East sub-regions:

- Malcolm Alder-Smith;
- Steve Baker;
- Martin Brunner;
- Vivienne Boucher;
- Steve Palmer;
- Gillian Pope;
- Debbie Rouget.

In advance of undertaking these visits, the business advisors:

- entered into a Service Level Agreement with TSE;
- attended a mentoring workshop, together with the project partners;
- were supplied with a project procedures manual and a CD of project documentation;
- were trained to deliver and accredit the Partners in Success good employer scheme and the Partners in Success Plus business excellence scheme;
- were advised of TSE's policies and the project requirements in relation to equality and diversity.

All beneficiary businesses were visited at operationally-friendly times, when the advisors:

- provided information on the Welcome E-Learning project;
- offered advice and guidance on ICT issues;
- undertook a training needs analysis;
- introduced the Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus schemes;
- if appropriate, issued an e-skills passport;

- if appropriate, signposted the beneficiary business to external training or business support agencies.

A number of businesses were signposted to other agencies and sources of support including to Business Link, ProfitNet, environmental health and trading standards departments of local authorities, and fire services.

Where appropriate, they were also referred for participation in other TSE-led projects, such as Welcome Sussex and Rural Welcome.

3.5 Developing and delivering online access to e-learning materials and business support

Development of diagnostic tools and e-learning materials

Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus were mapped to available Learn Direct e-learning programmes and other training courses. E-learning programmes were then made available through a new section of the TSE website and via Learn Direct, where traditional training courses were also promoted.

The Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus programmes were redeveloped to enable advisors to use them as an additional diagnostic tool and to offer scheme accreditation. An online version of the Partners in Success toolkit was also developed in partnership with Academy Internet, together with a CD version of the Partners in Success Plus self-assessment process.

A CD-based customer service self-assessment tool and an organisational service improvement tool was created for participants in the Welcome Management training programme.

Towards the end of the project, it was also decided that the e-learning ‘bursts’ developed as a part of the Welcome Sussex project should be made available to beneficiaries. These are short interactive online sessions, which guide participants through a series of thought provoking scenarios and quizzes. They focus on three key topic areas: managing the customer experience, respecting differences and disabilities, and making the most of the Internet.

Website development

Dedicated Welcome E-Learning pages within the TSE website were developed including:

- information on the project and the benefits of participation;
- hyperlinks to the Learn Direct website where tasters of relevant e-learning programmes were available;

- an online version of the Partners in Success toolkit;
- e-learning bursts developed for the Welcome Sussex project;
- details of traditional training courses available to participating businesses and their employees;
- signposts to the Partners in Success Plus CD.

In agreement with SEEDA, the original objective of creating a 'one-stop-shop' capability (where businesses, employees and prospective entrants could obtain comprehensive information about business and learning support within each of the South East England sub-regions) was not taken forward.

Participation in e-learning and online business support activities

In the early stages of the project, some businesses experienced difficulties in accessing e-learning materials and online business support as they only had a 'dial-up' connection to the Internet, rather than broadband. Problems were also experienced when two of the University for Industry (Ufi) learning hubs in the South East (Computeach and the Southern Learning Hub), which were being used to support delivery of Learn Direct e-learning courses, went into administration.

Although a number of beneficiaries used e-learning opportunities successfully, this learning method proved less popular with beneficiary businesses than traditional courses. E-learning sometimes failed to engage and motivate learners and some learners failed to complete the e-learning programmes. Beneficiaries also highlighted the lack of networking opportunities with other businesses and immediate support.

3.6 Delivery of short courses

An extensive programme of short training programmes was devised and delivered to address individual manager and key worker needs in beneficiary businesses and link them to expertise from a range of organisations offering business support services. A list of short courses delivered to beneficiaries is given in the chart on page 20.

In response to demand identified during the business advisor visits, a Smarter Marketing training course was developed, based in part on the existing Welcome E-Business course. This aimed to assist beneficiaries to identify the benefits of e-commerce and to undertake activities designed to boost profitability through the use of e-commerce.

A total of 116 short courses were delivered, involving 4318 beneficiary learning hours. Five short courses led to beneficiaries achieving the Practical Training Certificate, which is accredited by Stonebow.

Throughout the project, the most popular short courses were the Business Excellence workshops, Smarter Marketing, Welcome Host and Welcome All.

Delivery of short courses		
Course title	Course length (hours)	Number of courses delivered
Business Excellence workshop	3	16
Communication and presentation	7	1
Dealing with difficult people	7	3
E-Tourism	4	2
I See (selling skills)	7	1
Learning consultancy	3	1
Lead, motivate and succeed	7	1
Maintaining your website	3	1
Merchandising and selling	7	2
Partners in Success workshop	5	3
Performance development	7	2
Practical Training Certificate	7	2
Preparing a marketing strategy	7	1
Selling	7	2
Smarter Marketing	7	20
Successful showarounds	7	1
Trainer briefing	7	1
Welcome All	7	13
Welcome Host	7	29
Welcome Host Plus	7	4
Welcome International	7	3
Welcome Line	7	1
Welcome Management	7	6
Total		116

3.7 Management qualifications

A group of 49 beneficiaries were assisted to study for the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualification, the level 3 Introductory Certificate in First Line Management. This was

delivered through a blend of three, two-hour, face-to-face training sessions, some of which were delivered in beneficiary workplaces, and online learning. 34 beneficiaries were successful in achieving the ILM qualification.

3.8 Equality of access

An Equality of Access Plan was developed at the start of the project, which covered promotional activities, the recruitment and selection of contractors and beneficiaries, project delivery, beneficiary support, project targets and remedial action.

The plan was used throughout the project and equality of access was an agenda item at each meeting of the project steering group, with action taken as appropriate for identified issues.

3.9 Dissemination activities

The project was disseminated in a variety of ways including newsletter articles and celebration activities. These events included:

- certification presentation at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu and the TSE Hampshire Members' Day;
- a celebration lunch at Alfriston in East Sussex;
- presentation of ILM certificates at the launch of the South East England Tourism Skills Strategy and Workforce Development Plan, which was attended by James Purnell, Minister for Creative Industries and Tourism.

In addition, a series of case studies were produced to recognise achievement and demonstrate the value of project activities to beneficiaries in different geographical locations and tourism sub-sectors.

Case studies were produced for the following businesses:

- A White Lodge B&B, Battle, East Sussex;
- Anglesey Hotel, Gosport, Hampshire;
- Farncombe Boat House, Godalming, Surrey (narrow boat hire);
- Lullingstone Castle, Eynesford, Kent (tourist attraction);
- Old Store Guest House, Chichester, West Sussex;
- Orchard Cottage, Rochester, Kent (B&B);
- Paradise Park, Newhaven, East Sussex (tourist attraction and garden centre);

- Rural Ways Woodcraft, Arreton, Isle of Wight (woodcraft workshop);
- Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton, West Sussex (museum of historic buildings).

These case studies are available to beneficiaries and other tourism businesses in the South East via the TSE industry website.

Tom Hart-Dyke of Lullingstone Castle, who participated in the Welcome E-Learning project, was featured in the BBC2 television series entitled Return to Lullingstone.

4. Project achievements

4.1 Project beneficiaries

The awareness raising activities undertaken and the programme of outreach visits were very successful at engaging businesses and their employees, and performance exceeded all of the main beneficiary targets by a considerable margin.

There were 438 business beneficiaries against a target of 250, and 856 individual beneficiaries against a target of 600, all of whom were employed. Details are provided in the chart below.

Partnership working contributed significantly to the achievement of beneficiary targets, as partner organisations participated in raising awareness of the project and referring potential beneficiaries to TSE.

Performance on main beneficiary targets				
	Target	Actual	Variance	% of target
Businesses				
Micro businesses (up to 10 employees)	180	328	+148	182%
Small businesses (10-49 employees)	20	84	+64	420%
Medium sized businesses (50-249 employees)	A small number	26		
Total	250	438	+185	174%
Individuals				
Male	250	349	+99	139%
Female	350	507	+157	145%
Total	600	856	+256	142%

Individual beneficiaries listed above received information, advice and guidance and/or participated in training courses.

Beneficiaries were well spread throughout the six sub-regions, with a total 41 beneficiaries from deprived wards in East Sussex, the Isle of Wight and Kent. A chart showing the geographical spread of beneficiary businesses is given on page 24.

Geographical spread of beneficiary businesses			
County	Number of businesses	Percentage of businesses (%)	Number of businesses in deprived wards
Berkshire	7	2	0
Buckinghamshire	11	3	0
East Sussex	59	13	5
Hampshire	96	22	0
Isle of Wight	77	17	17
Kent	86	20	19
Oxfordshire	29	7	0
Surrey	32	7	0
West Sussex	41	9	0
Total	438		41

4.2 Equality and diversity

The chart below shows the range of individual beneficiaries in terms of ethnicity.

Project beneficiaries: ethnicity						
Age	Male		Female		Total	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
White – British	220	298	314	441	534	739
White – Irish	2	3	4	5	6	8
White – other	6	29	12	50	18	79
Mixed – White and Asian	2	3	2	3	4	6
Asian or Asian British – Indian	8	7	6	3	14	10
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	6	1	4	0	10	1
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	1	4	0	6	1
Black or Black British – African	4	2	4	2	8	4
Any other		4		2		4

The chart below shows the range of individual beneficiaries in terms of age.

Project beneficiaries: age						
Age	Male		Female		Total	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Adults 19-24	50	36	70	57	120	93
Adults 25-49	100	180	120	271	220	451
Adults 50+	100	133	160	179	260	312
Total	250	349	350	507	600	856

The project underperformed the target set for disabled employees – there were only 19 known disabled participants against a target of 60. This underperformance is considered to result from:

- setting an unrealistically high target of 10% of beneficiaries;
- the percentage of disabled people managing and working in tourism businesses in the South East being lower than the percentage of disabled people in the working population of the region;
- a reluctance on the part of some beneficiaries to declare a disability on the relevant form.

The chart below shows the range of individual beneficiaries in terms of disability.

Project beneficiaries: disability						
	Male		Female		Total	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
People with a disability	25	6	35	13	60	19
People without a disability	225	332	315	486	540	818
Information not provided					260	19

4.3 Output targets

As well as being successful in terms of beneficiary targets, the project also performed very well against other quantitative targets, almost all of which were met or exceeded.

Targets for outreach visits by business advisors and the delivery of training courses were exceeded by a considerable margin.

Details of performance against output targets are shown in the chart on page 26.

Performance against quantitative output targets				
	Target	Actual	Variance	% of target
Awareness raising events	5	6	+1	120%
Outreach business advisor workshops	3	3	0	100%
Outreach business advisory visits to SMEs	50	328	+278	656%
Beneficiaries assisted with information, advice and guidance	600	672	+72	111%
Beneficiaries assisted to participate in Partners in Success/Partners in Success Plus	100	102	+2	102%
SME employees completing short courses (3-30 hours)	600	668	+68	111%
SME employees commencing training (over 30 hours)	50	49	-1	98%
SME employees obtaining a qualification (training under 30 hours)	5	5	0	100%
SME employees obtaining a qualification (training over 30 hours)	45	23	-22	51%
Issue of e-skills Passports	150	150	0	100%

4.4 Delivery of training courses and workshops

Every participant in a training course was requested to complete a feedback form at the end of the training.

This feedback was helpful in measuring:

- the quality of training delivery as perceived by beneficiaries;
- whether the training met expectations;
- the value of the training to beneficiaries.

The chart on page 27 shows the minimum, maximum and average percentage rating for all short training courses.

With the exception of accessibility and ease of parking, average scores for the short courses were 85% or above for all aspects of delivery, including whether the training met participant expectations and the value of the training. The quality of delivery scored exceptionally well, with

average scores of 95% or above for the content of the training, the trainer’s ability to maintain interest and the trainer’s presentation skills.

These average scores compared well when benchmarked against training delivered as a part of other TSE projects, such as Rural Welcome.

Beneficiary feedback on short courses			
	Minimum score (%)	Maximum score (%)	Average score (%)
Content of the training	75	100	95
Trainer’s ability to maintain interest	88	100	98
Trainer’s presentation skills	88	100	98
Training/support materials provided	75	100	91
How well the training met expectations	75	100	85
Value of the programme	75	100	88
Accessibility and ease of parking	25	100	76
Training event as a whole	80	100	88

The low minimum score for accessibility and ease of parking related to a training venue used for delivery of a short course delivered early in the project. This training venue was not used again.

4.5 Innovation

A number of innovative developments were incorporated into the Welcome E-Learning project, including:

- creation of the Smarter Marketing training course, which proved very popular with beneficiaries. This programme has now been adopted by other regional tourism organisations in England and a Smarter Marketing 2 course is being developed;
- piloting of a new approach to learning for the Institute of Leadership and Management qualification through a blended learning delivery method that included face-to-face sessions, some in the workplace, as well as online learning;
- development of a CD version of the Partners in Success toolkit to enable businesses to use it in a flexible manner, at times to suit their business activities;
- enhancement of the Welcome Management training programme by the development of a CD-based customer service questionnaire and an organisational service improvement tool.

In addition, many small and micro tourism businesses were introduced to e-learning or blended learning as methods of extending and updating skills for the first time.

5. The impact of the project

5.1 The impact on beneficiaries

To assist in the evaluation of the impact of the project on beneficiaries and their businesses, the following activities were undertaken:

- an end of project survey of beneficiary businesses;
- in-depth interviews with 14 beneficiaries.
- obtaining feedback via business advisors and trainers.

The end of project survey was made available to beneficiary businesses through sending an email with a link to an online version of the survey, and by posting a hard copy to be returned to TSE. A total of 102 beneficiaries completed the survey.

A summary of the responses to the survey questions is given in Appendix A.

Key results for this impact survey were as follows.

- 95% of respondents considered that the project had been helpful or very helpful in developing their business and/or management skills.
- 93% of respondents considered that the advice and support they received had been helpful or very helpful.
- 69% of respondents considered that the project had enabled them to make better use of the Internet, resulting in benefits such as increased occupancy and lower marketing costs.
- 56% of respondents considered that the project had led to increased profitability.
- 95% of respondents considered that the project had met or exceeded their expectations.
- 91% would recommend similar future projects to a business colleague.

Beneficiaries were asked to comment on the impact that training had on their business. The following key themes emerged from the responses:

- greater understanding of, and improvements to, websites;
- greater awareness of customer needs and expectations;
- more effective and targeted marketing;
- improved management and business skills, and more confidence;
- greater efficiency;
- improved customer service;

- greater understanding of the needs of disabled customers;
- improved staff skills;
- legislative compliance.

These results demonstrate that the project had a considerable impact on key projects aims, such as enabling businesses to make better use of ICT, increasing business profitability and improving skills.

Other impacts, such as legislative compliance and greater understanding of the needs of disabled customers were not specific project aims, but are clearly desirable business improvements that are likely to have a positive impact on business profitability and growth.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 beneficiaries, a process which was designed to elicit more detailed feedback, including qualitative information on the impact of the project. 71% of the interviewees had employees.

Participants were asked about:

- how helpful key aspects of the project were in meeting their needs;
- how helpful the project had been in enabling them to develop their business and management skills;
- the main changes or developments that they had introduced as a result of taking part in the project;
- the impact of these changes on their business.

How helpful were aspects of the project at meeting needs			
	Not very helpful	Helpful	Very helpful
Individual business support/advice from a business advisor	0	7%	93%
Support, advice and information from the TSE project team	0	18%	82%
e-skills Passports	50%	37%	13%
Partners in Success	0	25%	75%
Partners in Success Plus	0	0	100%
Training programmes	0	46%	54%

Business support and advice from the business advisors was considered as very helpful by almost interviewees. Comments on this aspect of the project included:

- *This has helped us focus on producing essential documentation.*
- *Advisor provided useful contacts and information.*
- *Having someone visit me personally was a great motivator.*
- *The key thing is that you get access to information you are not familiar with, and it is targeted to your business needs.*
- *At the start we were quite green and needed help on how to set up the business.*
- *Appreciated a locally coordinated approach.*
- *Very helpful for a 'one man band'; good motivation from an external source.*

Support, advice and information from TSE was considered as helpful by over 80% of interviewees.

Although developed by e-skills UK, the sector skills council for ICT and Telecoms, the e-skills Passports were significantly less favourably received than any other aspect of the project, with 50% of interviewees considering them to have been unhelpful. Comments included:

- *I want training not self assessment; now looking at adult education for IT training.*
- *Not hugely helpful. Not finished. Questions not specific enough to pursue score in each section – too prescriptive. Busy people find it tedious.*
- *Staff found them frustrating and boring.*

Partners in Success was considered to be helpful or very helpful by all interviewees, and Partners in Success very helpful by 100% of interviewees. Comments included:

- *Invaluable documentation CD and 1:1 support.*
- *The recent updates on legislation were very useful.*
- *Advisor had good knowledge of local produce and suppliers.*
- *Made me write down what we were doing, and in addition benchmark against standards of good practice.*
- *You forget how many strides you have taken as a result of doing it. We feel much more confident now - more professional about things. When you are running a B&B it gives you the chance to set a standard for yourself when running the business commercially.*
- *Useful as a reference. Target users and keep information updated. More value for start ups and 'dinosaurs'.*
- *Good to focus on issues – legislation.*

- *Getting whole management team involved in creating the hotel's future was powerful. Promoted open discussion. Real sense that everyone was involved. Enabled clear delegation of actions the team had agreed to.*

The training programmes were also considered to have been helpful by all interviewees. Comments on the training included:

- *Met and exchanged views with similar businesses, which was very useful.*
- *Most interesting was hearing about other people's experiences.*
- *Smarter Marketing opened your eyes to many levels of marketing, especially what is achievable and cost effective.*
- *Training has been most commendable and made a difference to service levels. Everyone has been through Welcome Host.*
- *It has been superb. More than anything it was a huge confidence booster – meeting other people in the same position and taking in really useful information. It helped me get the marketing effort on its feet.*

It is interesting to note that the networking aspects of traditional courses were highlighted by a number of beneficiaries – an element of provision that cannot be achieved through e-learning.

When asked how helpful the project had been in assisting with the development of business and management skills, 29% of interviewees considered the project had been helpful and 71% very helpful. The reasons for this included:

- *We are becoming more focussed on training and development.*
- *We are new to the business and there were many things we needed to know.*
- *Introduction of systems and policies.*
- *Understanding the importance of good practice.*
- *From the training, getting impetus to do website. Keeps you aware you are running a business and that it is a commercial enterprise and you should be making a profit.*
- *Developed website, got help from local tourism officer, got introduced to useful people, now active member of Medway Tourism Association.*
- *ILM has provided me with confidence and ability.*
- *Formal training filled in many gaps.*
- *Marketing and started on Investors in People.*
- *Good to know there is now an action plan in place to manage the way forward and keep on track. Made us focus on areas for improvement and put plans in place to address them.*
- *Funding available to evaluate business and learn more about website content and links.*

- *Overall very helpful and informative, particularly in the way we handle people. More aware of how to deal with different people.*
- *Input into the museum's ongoing commitment to acquiring information and training staff.*

Beneficiaries identified a wide range of changes or developments that they had introduced to their businesses as a result of the project, many of which related to ICT development. Comments on these changes included:

- *Induction training, policies, practices.*
- *More structured approach to two-way communication with staff.*
- *Introduction of new policies, improved knowledge of health and safety.*
- *Production of a structured induction pack for new staff.*
- *Introduction of new website and health and safety policy.*
- *Website and Internet; awareness of DMS system; development of risk assessment and knowledge of regulations.*
- *Developed and commissioned a website.*
- *It has helped me to 're-jig' the way I charge for my cottages.*
- *Been able to use work based assessment in the workplace.*
- *Essential element of manager training.*
- *Investors in People.*
- *More structure with weekly planning meetings with key staff. More staff meetings. Introduced culture of action plans.*
- *Changes to appearance of website. Loaded toolbar to show ranking with Google.*
- *Writing down of policies and procedures.*
- *More email updates planned. Disability information confirmed museum is pretty good and previous attention to the subject and simple improvements are working.*
- *Further development of the website and using it for blogging about the latest developments in the Wood Garden. Getting inbound links set up from the Kent Tourism site and local district sites.*

Many of these comments indicate that the project triggered action both within the business and in collaboration with other organisations. A business decision to seek Investors in People accreditation was also a very positive impact.

Interviewees were asked to comment on the impact that these changes had made to their businesses. Comments on the impact included:

- *We believe that our business will become more efficient and reduce staff turnover.*
- *All staff becoming more customer aware.*
- *More structured approach to employment and induction of staff.*
- *Positive feedback from staff.*
- *Made me get closer to the customer.*
- *Increased enquiries and bookings – 20-30%. Bookings coming from website. Profits up 23% year-on-year.*
- *Helped me look at the value offered by the business instead of focussing on price. I realise it is about the value of the customer experience on offer.*
- *New loyalty programme developed.*
- *Stabilised the business – turnover of staff dropped.*
- *Improved managerial effectiveness, prioritisation, planning. Improved communications and understanding throughout. Team work has improved.*
- *Moved up Google ranking from 4 to 2 and now have Google Analytics to analyse number of hits to website, etc.*
- *Confidence that policies and procedures are there in case they are needed at any time.*
- *More email updates to be actioned soon.*
- *Clearer web directions have made it easier for people to find the Castle; the frequently asked questions page saves people time in having to phone up to ask about prices, opening days, whether weddings can be held, etc. Lots of marketing ideas we have implemented were low cost or even free.*

5.2 Partner views on the strengths, successes and impact of the project and areas for improvement

The views of the project partners, business advisors and the TSE project team on project delivery and impact were sought at the end of the project. This review involves the individuals outlined in the chart on page 35.

Partner review	
Organisation	Individuals
SEEDA	Charlotte Ayling
1066 Country Marketing	Kevin Boorman, Debbie Clifford, Emma Oldham
Connected Surrey Broadband Partnership	Lauren Read
Hampshire Countryside	Jo Pocklington, Debbie Vodden
Lewes District Council	Clare Onslow
Business advisors	Steve Baker, Vivienne Boucher, Martin Brunner, Steve Palmer, Gillian Pope
Sub-regional skills co-ordinators	Catherine Carkeet, Gill Heighington, Carrie Tripp
TSE	Peter Colling, Sue Gill, Michelle Grant, Sarah Harfield

Partner organisations, business advisors and the TSE team were asked for their views on:

- the strengths, successes and positive impact of the project – what went well;
- the challenges faced and areas for improvement - what went less well.

Views on the strengths, successes and impact of the project are given in the charts below and on page 36.

Partner views on the strengths, successes and impact of the project	
Partner	Strengths, successes and positive impacts
Charlotte Ayling, Contract Manager, SEEDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good in all respects. ■ The staff were friendly, helpful and efficient, and dealt with queries in the same manner. ■ Particularly helpful was the fact that I was kept informed and was therefore able to assist the project more as a result. ■ Project management was excellent in terms of level of detail and in looking ahead to events that might affect the project.

Partner	Strengths, successes and positive impacts
1066 Country Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We believe this to have been an excellent initiative, definitely one of the best examples of true partnership working we have been involved with. ■ We particularly appreciated the way the courses developed over the year, tailored to meet our needs. ■ It certainly helped build relationships between the partner organisations ourselves, and between 1066 Country Marketing and our own tourism industry partners: – a real win/win. ■ Breaking down barriers to entry; building good relationships with industry partners; providing a tailored training programme geared to the needs of the industry. One accommodation provider has developed a new website as a result of attending these courses.
Connected Surrey Broadband Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Breaking down myths of e-marketing and encouraging participation ■ The project strengthened our links to and relationship with this important sector of the Surrey economy. It also enabled us to bring the benefits of the Connected Surrey programme to the sector in a focused and meaningful way. This in turn has strengthened our own organisation's work. ■ Although we already had a good working relationship with TSE in Surrey, by working jointly on the delivery of workshops/training, it has developed those relationships further. ■ It gave us a means of offering tourism businesses in Surrey additional opportunities through the Connected Surrey programme including grants and one-to-one advice.
Hampshire Countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased marketing knowledge and practical skills of participants. ■ Excellent B&B case study used. ■ Improved relationship with accommodation providers and TSE. ■ Attendees are still updating their availability on the VISIT website.
Clare Onslow, Cultural Services, Manager, Lewes District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The project has been very successful; via the project I was able to deliver a range of opportunities to the local industry to raise professionalism etc that we would not have been able to do ourselves. ■ Enabled us to develop links with the industry and specific businesses that might not have been forged. Also strengthened links with the Regional Tourist Board for local development needs.

The strengths, successes and impact of the project were also reviewed by the five business advisors, the sub-regional skills co-ordinators and TSE. Key comments are given in the charts below and on page 38.

Other views on the strengths, successes and impact of the project

Business advisors

- A wide and diverse group of beneficiaries were engaged.
- New accommodation owners particularly welcomed the opportunity to discuss personally business and training needs and opportunities, and tourism generally in their area.
- Project management was effective and responsive to the needs of both the beneficiaries and those delivering the service (trainers, advisors, etc).
- The steering group worked well to help deliver a successful project and develop tactics to ensure targets were met and issues addressed in a timely way. It was also an excellent opportunity to exchange good practice and ideas. At appropriate times, members were also given updates on key legislation, changes to products, etc.
- Promotional events successfully engages with businesses and raised their levels of understanding of key legislation.
- Working with local partners added value to their work and helped further to join the industry up.
- New programmes were developed directly as a result of beneficiary demand.
- The ILM programme (blended learning approach) was particularly successful, well received and effective in driving change.
- The development of Smarter Marketing seems to offer a successful introduction to the subject. It provides a launch pad and demystifies the Internet for small business owners, giving them the confidence to develop, commission or improve their own website. It has opened up opportunities for them to work on search engine optimisation and take part in a Destination Management System, which would previously have seemed far too technical and intimidating, as well as seeming too costly and unnecessary for their business.

<p>Sub-regional skills co-ordinators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The awareness raising events raised the profile of the project and engaged the industry. ■ Most businesses could see a direct benefit from participating in the project, as the project delivered the training and business support that was required. ■ The project enabled new relationships and linkages with colleges and associations. ■ A key benefit was the perception of a more 'joined-up' approach which helped to overcome previously held views about a rather fragmented approach. ■ The project was responsive to the needs of the businesses. ■ The project was managed effectively at all times. The support and guidance provided by the management team was relentless and appreciated. ■ Excellent team work – very responsive to industry need ■ Offers of in-house training programmes in response to identified need.
<p>Tourism South East</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The steering group meeting each quarter helped to review project progress and shape provision to meet identified needs. ■ Having a dedicated project team ensured a seamless and cohesive approach throughout the project. ■ Weekly project team meetings helped to ensure best use of resources, and exploited synergies with other projects to add value. ■ Forms and paperwork from SEEDA were refined as the project progressed in liaison with SEEDA, beneficiaries and business advisors. ■ A major success was the overachievement of most outputs, despite a slow start resulting from issues relating to the e-skills Passports. ■ The project addressed key objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy including the goal of achieving a wired business community capable of extracting maximum benefit from new technology. ■ Project funding allowed innovative approaches to learning delivery, which would not otherwise have been possible. ■ The project was the catalyst for some small tourism operators to take up longer term learning, such as ILM qualifications. This is a significant achievement, which will ultimately help to improve performance, enhance quality standards and boost competitiveness.

As in any major project, there were aspects of delivery that presented challenges to the project partners – some aspects were less successful than others. These challenges highlight a number of lessons that can be learned and incorporated into other relevant projects. Comments on these challenges are given in the charts on pages 39-40.

Views on the project challenges and recommendations for the future

Partner	Project challenges and recommendations for the future
Charlotte Ayling, Contract Manager, SEEDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More a point for future projects would be a suggestion that either the intended project manager, or a current project manager, be involved in the tender writing process to ensure that the project is designed in a realistic fashion that can be delivered and reflects what is happening on the ground.
Business advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ E-Learning aspects did not work, largely because of partnership issues, but also because it is not a preferred method of learning with the target group. ■ It would be helpful to look for smarter ways of capturing beneficiary and other data to reduce the volume of paperwork. ■ Project timing/launch – many tourism businesses were too involved with guests and activities to consider a new project and their training needs during summer months. ■ For the future, have a planned timetable of promotional activities for new projects, co-ordinated in all areas of a county or region. ■ The problem at the beginning was that many businesses were on a dial up connection and not broadband, so they had difficulty in downloading information. ■ For the Learn Direct courses there was a lot of paperwork to sign up clients, which was repetitive of general project information collection. Once signed up, not many businesses continued with the online training. Learn Direct was not very helpful with support. Computeach and the Southern Learning Hub going into administration also caused difficulties. ■ Little interest in online courses, mainly because of difficulty in finding time and motivation to start and complete them on own initiative. ■ Some businesses expressed disappointment that funding was only available to key staff, especially where new and/or younger staff were employed and could have benefited from opportunities available.
Sub-regional skills co-ordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The amount of paperwork for delegates is an ongoing issue. ■ E-skills Passports did not work well. ■ The name of the project was misleading and caused confusion on a couple of occasions. ■ Further training opportunities are required, in particular for migrant workers and chefs. ■ There is an increasing need for cultural awareness and other training in preparation for the Olympic Games.

Partner	Project challenges and recommendations for the future
Tourism South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="438 293 1404 405">■ E-skills Passports were not a success because of difficulties with the Passports themselves and because they were generally unpopular with micro and small businesses. <li data-bbox="438 421 1404 577">■ Running new and innovative projects for the tourism sector can be difficult initially – setting up regional and sub regional partnerships. Can suffer from a scattergun approach but need to focus on small clusters and peer groups to facilitate successful delivery. <li data-bbox="438 593 1404 750">■ Seasonality and peaks and troughs within the sector are also a challenge. There needs to be good forward planning to offer activity at the right time. However this leads to intense administrative workloads when activity takes place. <li data-bbox="438 766 1404 828">■ Delegates not turning up for programmes at the last minute was an issue.

5.3 The impact on strategic objectives

The Welcome E-Learning project is considered to have made a significant impact on meeting strategic objectives related to ICT, business performance and skills development.

Smart growth is identified as a key challenge in the Regional Economic Strategy for South East England, including improving the productivity of the workforce and raising skill levels. ICT is viewed as a key enabler of innovation and enterprise, and the largest single contributor to productivity growth. This project has pioneered innovative learning delivery, increased ICT usage by a number of businesses, and raised the skill levels of managers and other workers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector, thereby contributing to the achievement of the key SEEDA goals.

The project addressed a number of the key competitive challenges identified in the South East England Tourism Skills Strategy and Workforce Development Plan 2006-10 produced by TSE in collaboration with SEEDA and People 1st, particularly the need to boost productivity, increase investment in the tourism workforce and reduce skill gaps. It contributed towards achievement of strategic objectives related to management and leadership, employer engagement, the qualifications of the workforce, the skill levels of employees and partnership working. In addition, it contributed to delivering some of the objectives of the sub-regional tourism skill strategies.

The project addressed priority skill issues identified by People 1st for the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, including ICT skills, management and leadership and customer service.

5.4 Added value

The project achieved significant added value beyond that required to meet the beneficiary and output targets. In particular:

- a larger number of businesses and individuals were assisted within the available project funding than expected, resulting in more cost-effective delivery of services and a wider impact;
- partnership working became better established and more effective within the sector in the South East, and relationships between organisations were strengthened;
- networking opportunities provided by the project have strengthened business-to-business collaboration in local areas throughout the region;
- the project assisted with the successful development of the Tourism Skills Network South East and helped the sub-regional skills co-ordinators to engage with employers;
- beneficiary businesses have been signposted to other sources of information, advice and guidance, such as ProfitNet, fire services and local authority environmental health and trading standards departments;
- the project contributed to meeting wider strategic goals of SEEDA and People 1st.

Welcome E-Learning's achievements related to improvements in the performance of tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses may also have an impact on their ability to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

5.5 Sustainability

The project initiated a number of sustainable developments. These include:

- the use of the Smarter Marketing training course within South East England and its adoption by other regional tourism organisations in England;
- the new Welcome Management CD is being made available to Welcome Management participants by TSE;
- e-learning and business support materials developed as a part of the project are now being used to support other initiatives in the South East and, in some cases, elsewhere in England;
- the updated versions of the Partners in Success and Partners in Success Plus schemes are being used successfully within other tourism projects in the South East.

In addition, TSE and Business Link Kent are working together to enable resources developed as a part of the Welcome E-Learning project to be made available across the South East through a series of 'webinars', which will assist in preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. This is a SEEDA funded project.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

From the evaluation activities undertaken, it can be concluded that the Welcome E-Learning project has:

- engaged successfully with micro, small and medium sized tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses and established ongoing, sustainable relationships;
- met, and in most areas exceeded, all key beneficiary targets;
- met, and in most areas exceeded, most key output targets;
- been managed effectively using a partnership approach to delivery;
- made a significant contribution to improving co-operation and co-ordination between partner organisations;
- met the aim of reducing underskilling among managers and key workers, enabled some beneficiaries to achieve nationally recognised qualifications and introduced businesses to e-learning and blended learning;
- boosted ICT usage among micro and small tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses;
- developed innovative learning and business support materials, which are now being used for other initiatives, and piloted new learning delivery methods;
- provided beneficiaries with learning and business support opportunities that they have perceived to be high quality, and that almost always met their expectations;
- made a significant impact on key business issues, such as profitability, productivity and legislative compliance;
- contributed towards the achievement of regional strategic objectives.

On a less positive note, it can be concluded that:

- e-learning proved less popular with managers and key workers in micro, small and medium sized businesses than traditional short courses. The reasons for this appear to include difficulties related to access to the e-learning materials, support being more limited and that there are no opportunities for networking with other managers. The fact that some e-learning programmes on offer were not tailored to the specific needs of the sector may also be a contributory factor. However, blended learning, where e-learning is combined with other delivery formats, appeared to be far more successful;
- the use of e-skills Passports to boost ICT usage and develop IT skills was not particularly successful. Beneficiary feedback was very poor when compared with other elements of the project.

6.2 Recommendations for future projects

Based on the project successes, challenges faced and the lessons learned from the project, the following recommendations are made for future projects.

- The partnership approach to delivery should be adopted where appropriate within the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector as this not only assisted the project to meet its targets, but provided wider benefits in terms of co-operation, co-ordination and effective use of resources.
- The inclusion of outreach visits to individual businesses should be considered as a very effective way of engaging with employers, signposting them to sources of information, advice and practical assistance, and of triggering action to boost business performance.
- As there appears to be very strong demand for externally funded short courses to meet identified business needs and this element of the project was identified by beneficiaries as one that had a significant impact on business performance, this element of delivery should be included in all relevant projects.
- There are identified needs for training programmes geared to meeting the needs of migrant workers and relating to cultural diversity. More short courses are also needed to upgrade the skills of employed chefs.
- Care should be taken when included the delivery of e-learning within projects targeted at micro and small businesses in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector. In particular, it would be desirable to ensure that e-learning materials were easily accessible, effective support mechanisms were put in place and that materials were tailored to the specific needs of sector businesses. The availability of some business networking opportunities alongside e-learning opportunities might also prove beneficial in engaging with employers and in driving forward business improvements.
- The delivery of longer training programmes (30 hours +) through a blended learning approach should be considered as this proved as an effective method of delivering learning for a programme leading to a nationally recognised qualification.
- Realistic targets should be set for disabled beneficiaries, which reflect the actual percentage of disabled workers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector, and new strategies developed to engage disabled people in similar projects.
- Work should be undertaken to ensure that innovative learning and business support materials developed as a part of this project continue to be used within the South East region and that, where appropriate, they are made available elsewhere in the UK. There are identified needs for the development of additional learning and business support materials geared to the specific needs of the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector.
- Where practical, the documentation that needs to be completed by beneficiaries should be reduced. In particular, the same information should not be requested on numerous different occasions.

- Where practical, the intended project manager should be involved in writing of project bids to ensure that the project is designed in a realistic fashion.
- Consideration should be given to making a small charge to employers for participation in short training programmes to reduce last minute cancellations.
- Micro, small and medium sized tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses should receive further assistance to ensure that they are able to enhance further the visitor experience and capitalise on the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, and to ensure that the Games result in a lasting legacy for the sector in the South East.

Appendix A: Results of end of project survey

Q1: In which areas of the project did your business participate (can be more than one)? (Base: 102)

Individual business support from a TSE advisor	38
E-skills Passports	32
Partners in Success	26
Partners in Success Plus	8
Training programmes	84

Q2: How helpful has the project been in helping you to develop your business and/or management skills? (Base: 102)

Not very helpful	5%
Helpful	42%
Very helpful	53%

Q3: How helpful was the advice and support you received from your business advisor and Tourism South East project team in terms of meeting your needs? (Base: 102)

Not very helpful	7%
Helpful	37%
Very helpful	56%

Q4: Has the project enabled you to make better use of the Internet? (Base: 102)

Yes	69%
No	31%

Q5: If you answered yes to question 4, please indicate whether this has enabled you to achieve increased occupancy and lower marketing costs? (Base: 70)

	Yes	No
Increased occupancy	64%	36%
Lower marketing costs	56%	44%

Q6: Has the project enabled you to increase your profitability? (Base: 102)	
Yes	56%
No	44%

Q7: Do you have employees? (Base: 102)	
Yes	39%
No	61%

Q8: If you answered yes to question 7, have any of your employees been involved with additional skills training as a result of the project? (Base: 40)	
Yes	55%
No	45%

Q9: What impact has this training had on your business? (Base: 33)	
Key themes identified were as follows.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Greater understanding of, and improvements to, website. ■ Greater awareness of customer needs and expectations. ■ More effective and targeted marketing. ■ Improved management and business skills, and more confidence. ■ Greater efficiency. ■ Improved customer service. ■ Greater understanding of the needs of disabled customers. ■ Improved staff skills. ■ Legislative compliance. 	

Q10: Overall, to what extent did your experience of the Welcome E-Learning project meet your expectations? (Base: 102)	
Below expectations	5%
Met expectations	61%
Exceeded expectations	34%

Q11: Would you recommend similar future projects to a business colleague? (Base: 102)	
Yes	91%
No	9%

Q12: Do you have any other suggestions for future projects or project content?

Key themes identified were as follows.

- More of the same.
- Networking and business-to-business activities, including joint marketing.
- Keeping up with legislative changes: information and advice.
- Continuous improvement activities.
- Increased inclusion of non-accommodation businesses and those employing volunteers.
- Courses on pricing strategies, cost control and profitability, book-keeping, decoration/maintenance, disability, PR and food hygiene.
- Further website and e-commerce related activities.
- Further IT training.
- More green tourism and advice on sustainable practice.
- Local area familiarisation.
- Qualifications (for those that do not have them).
- An initiative to encourage school pupils to consider a future in the industry.