In November 2010 the Scottish Parliament recognised the Quest for Employment (QFE) project as an Employability Model of Excellence. This brief paper attempts to identify the key performances that led to this accolade in the belief that such success can be learned from, sustained and replicated to assist other employability services.

As a community based NGO focussed on the deprived former coalfield communities in West/Central Fife, the QFE project undertook the toughest of challenges. It targeted only groups who were far away from the labour market, with the least to offer, particularly young people and through our “full journey” employability intervention, up skill and progress them to sustainable destinations. Operating across 2008-2010, the project’s task was exacerbated by the recession which, for the area served, saw a 79% increase in unemployment and a 38% decrease in available job vacancies. The following performances are based on the final independent evaluation of the project produced in 2011.

Area 1 – Client Targeting

- 293 Clients took part and 100% were workless/ economically inactive.
- 194 (66%) were residents of the top 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.
- 219 (75%) were young people aged 16-24 years of whom 163 (56% of total) were aged 16-19 and NEET.
- 100% were multiply disadvantaged in the labour market with an average of 4 distinct barriers per client.

Entirely client focused, the project engaged and supported a wide range of key target groups including: 17% who were long term unemployed over 2 years; 10% from ethnic minorities; 9% who were homeless; 22% who were disabled; 13% who suffered physical illness, alcohol and substance abuse problems; 3% who were lone parents; 20% had pronounced literacy/numeracy issues; 34% had no or poor qualifications and 100% lacked work experience.

Area 2 – Client Distances Travelled

Hard Indicator – 272 (93%) achieved part/full vocational qualifications.
Soft Indicators – 90% improved employability confidence; 92% learned new skills; 91% improved job prospects; 88% had a more positive direction for the future.

Area 3 – Client Progression

Sustainability

6 months after leaving 176 (81%) were sustaining their positive destinations. A further 15 (5%) who left without a positive destination had also secured one.

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Area 5 – Client Satisfaction with Project

- Rated as very good – excellent 96.3%
- Recommend project to others 99%

Area 6 – Project performance compared to national programmes

Quest for Employment 74% success; Get Ready for Work 40%; Training for Work 54%; Activity Agreements 40%

Area 7 – Employer Engagement

125 companies worked with the project to provide work placements, tasters, trials and brokerage into filling vacancies, a number of whom were repeat customers.
Area 8 – Client Occupational Destinations (by SOC 1-9)

75% of occupations secured were above the elementary level with highest cluster around SOC 4 and 5 - 51%, enhancing sustainability and progression prospects.

Area 9 – Contribution to Key and Enabling Fife/Scottish business sectors

Key sectors - 73 (34%) of clients secured a positive destination in Tourism, Creative Industries, Financial and Business Services, Food and Drink, Energy, Life Sciences and University sectors.

Enabling Sectors - 145 (66%) of clients secured a positive destination in Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale Retail and Distribution and Personal Services sectors.

A clear gap between those furthest from the labour market and employers needs has been bridged.

Area 10 – Employer Feedback

100% found candidates a suitable match, would work with the project again and recommend it to other employers.

Area 11 – Cost Per Hard Outcome (Positive Destinations)

Total project cost £1,925,500/218 positive destinations - £8,833 per positive destination.

Cost to funding partners – ESF (43% £3,798); Local Authority (24% £2,120); Fairer Scotland Fund (14% £1,237); Further Education (13.5% £1,192); Coalfields Trust (5% £442); Revenue (0.5% £44).

Area 12 – Partners Investment Returns

Partners funding has supported so much more than positive destinations - For every 10 clients supported all 10 were workless; all 10 were multiply disadvantaged and far from the labour market (mostly young people); 7 out of 10 were from the most deprived areas; 9 out of 10 achieved a qualification; 9 out of 10 travelled a measurable distance in soft employability skills; nearly 8 out of 10 went to a job or further education/training; 8 out of 10 sustained their positive destination 6 months after leaving; virtually all rated the programme highly and would recommend it to others.

Area 13 – Return on Investment

Without this project at least 60% of the positive destinations would not have been achieved at an average cost of £104,300 for a disadvantaged person to remain workless. Therefore, a total cost to society of £13,663,300 would have been incurred. For an investment of £1,925,500, £11,737,800 has been saved, a return on investment of 610%.

Area 14 – Administrative Compliance with ESF funding

As the largest funding partner, ESF LUPS 2007-2013 has extremely rigorous financial compliance procedures. The whole programme is recording average project underspends of 13.22% and irregular expenditure levels of 2.98%. The QFE project had 0% underspend and an irregular expenditure level of 0.01%.

Area 15 – Client Quotation

"The first step or the next step to a better future"

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