

# Promoting partnerships

Working in partnership has never been more important for the learning and skills sector, as the recent Foster Review of FE colleges emphasised. But while few disagree with the rhetoric, making partnerships work is hard. Partner organisations invariably have different ways of working, different priorities and even conflicting values.

To address these issues, LSDA has produced a service called *facilitating effective partnerships*, designed for organisations developing partnerships or enhancing existing ones. The service combines assessment, training and direct support.

Much of West Kent's adult learning provision is delivered by West Kent College and Kent Adult Education Service. Over the past 2 years, senior and operational managers have laid the foundations for collaboration, aiming to improve their service.

'Both organisations provide valuable services for adult learners in West Kent. However, more joint planning was required to ensure local needs of employers and the wider community were fully met,' says Malcolm Staunton, Director of Learning, Kent and Medway LSC. 'We were already discussing the potential for collaboration but LSDA's

facilitation helped to develop the partnership by exploring the benefits of collaboration on a wider range of issues, with the involvement of key personnel from both partners.'

LSDA consultants attended meetings and undertook telephone interviews with Des Crilley, Principal of Kent Adult Education

Service, Bill Fearon, Principal of West Kent College and the Skills for Life management teams, who were identified as key to collaboration. LSDA then ran a workshop with the organisations to identify what helps and hinders their partnership. They decided to develop a partnership agreement and pilot a joint Skills for Life project.



In Kent, three organisations – West Kent College, Kent Adult Education Service and Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council – pioneered joint approaches to enhance adult learning delivery in West Kent. They then engaged LSDA Solutions' *facilitating effective partnerships* service to bring structure to their emerging partnership.

The LSDA Solutions support packages focus on specific issues, challenges and priorities. The idea is to bring the best of what LSDA knows how to do and make it available for direct commission by local LSCs, learning providers and others. The support packages combine tried-and-tested methods such as evaluation, toolkits, training, consultancy and project support. *Facilitating effective partnerships* concentrates on supporting the formation of new partnerships and working with existing partnerships to ensure they deliver to their envisaged potential. For further information contact Frank Villeneuve-Smith on 020 7297 9212.

## Key principles

- ▶ **Only a bespoke approach will work – the solution must be tailored to the needs of the partnership.**
- ▶ **Partners must identify their own problems and solutions – together – backed up by commitment to identified, realistic actions. It is important that participants develop a shared action plan to ensure ownership and commitment.**
- ▶ **Top management must be closely involved in the process and outcomes of the partnership development process.**
- ▶ **Delivery is not optional; following up with actions is essential.**

'This approach kept our focus on a joint enterprise with both institutions seeking to develop sustainable links for the benefit of all our customers across West Kent,' said Des Crilley.

When LSDA reviewed the workshop it became clear that the service could help the partnership where it extended across the full range of adult learning.

'The involvement of an external consultant gave the necessary impetus to a more formal, focused commitment to the partnership,' says Bill Fearon. 'Senior managers advised on the broad strategy but were deliberately excluded from workshops in which staff from both institutions forged agreement on a set of key objectives and actions.'

The key actions included reviewing curriculum areas and geographical locations where both operate to determine gaps and overlap, and coordinating joint planning for 2006/07. The organisations are working together and sharing their draft strategic plans to ensure these meetings are followed through with actions.