



Women's Resource Centre

Elevate – Women into Leadership

Phase 3 Evaluation –Final Report

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Zennor Consulting

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1 BACKGROUND

The Women's Resource Centre, as lead partner, has been successful in securing £700,000 over 2 years of funding from the Learning and Skills Council ESF Objective 3 (5.1) Co-financing programme to provide, through a relevant and skilled partnership, high level business management, leadership training and support to 180 women from micro and small businesses including the voluntary and community sector and social enterprises.

1.1 Partners

The Partners involved in the delivery of the programme are: -

- The Innovatory
- Yvonne Field Associates
- Aspire Coaching and Training
- Advice UK
- Social Enterprise London (SEL)

1.2 Key project deliverables

1.2.1 Outputs

The key project outputs are as follows:

- 180 Personal development plans produced
- 10 -12 days training delivered per beneficiary (equivalent to 2,160 days)
- 60 beneficiaries to receive coaching (390 hours – equivalent to 6.5 hours per beneficiary)
- 90 beneficiaries to achieve units at NVQ level 3 or 4
- 3 networking events
- At least 4 trained NVQ assessors
- The project beneficiaries to include 40% BAME women, 170 in employment, 10 employment seekers

1.2.2 Outcomes

The required outcomes are as follows:

Improved skill level in business management and leadership for beneficiaries.
Improved quality, effectiveness and efficiency in training delivery through partnership working between providers.

1.2.3 Milestones

The milestones were as follows:

Year 1 (2004/2005)

- Qtr 1 Design and set up delivery framework/systems
- Qtr 2 Marketing, publicity and recruitment of beneficiaries
- Qtr 3 Delivery stage (first group of targeted beneficiaries)
- Qtr 4 First networking event delivered

Year 2 (2005/2006)

- Qtr 1 Delivery stage (second group of targeted beneficiaries)
- Qtr 2 Second networking event delivered
- Evaluation process commences
- Qtr 3 Delivery stage (third group targeted beneficiaries)
- Third Networking event delivered
- Qtr 4 Evaluation process completed
- Dissemination of report / good practice

1.2.4 Other project deliverables

The other project deliverables were as follows:

- Support mechanism for childcare travel and disability
- Pan London geographical coverage

2 EVALUATION

2.1 The purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to: -

- Assess the achievements and explore the impact of the project against its quantitative and qualitative outputs, outcomes and milestones
- Generate findings and recommendations for improving project management and delivery for the remainder of the project
- Identify and promote models of good practice, both internally to the project and externally in relation to the project's 'fit' in the context of achieving local and regional strategic alignment and how it might impact on the project's wider sectoral impact
- Examine appropriate ways in which it may be possible to promote 'Elevate' as an exemplar model to funders, policy makers and the women's business, voluntary and community sector

2.2 The objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were to: -

- Assess the extent to which the project has realised its objectives
- Assess the cost effectiveness of the project (best value) by identifying the ratio between costs and results (including unit cost)
- Assess the suitability and effectiveness of the (internal) delivery framework, including management (administrative and financial) and coordination
- Identify the factors that have contributed to the success (es) and / or weakness (es) of the project so far
- Assess the viability of replicating the delivery framework to fit other funding mechanisms
- Review the experiences and skills gained through partnership management and delivery frameworks
- Review the range of partnership agreements and make recommendations for the terms of these types of agreements in the future

2.3 Delivery

The intention was that the evaluation process be carried out over three phases

- Phase 1 July 2005 – **Preliminary report**, analysis of the project set up and performance
- Phase 2 April 2006 – **Interim Report**, comparison review of the delivery framework with recommendations for improvement for the rest of the delivery period

- Phase 3 October 2006 – **Final report**, culminating in the production of the dissemination – ready final evaluation report in December 2006

2.4 Approach

2.4.1. Phase 3 – Final Report

A preliminary evaluation took place in Phase 1 of the overall evaluation which provided an initial analysis of the project set up and performance. An interim evaluation took place in Phase 2 which compared the review of the delivery framework with recommendations for improvement for the rest of the delivery period. We continued to track the progress of the project by carrying out an on going desk review of the information provided to us by the Women' s Resource Centre, carrying out observations of the training and conducting stakeholder interviews with a view to possible adjustments and improvements of aspects of the project during its final stages.

Both the formative evaluations at the beginning and during the mid term of the projects lifecycle and the ongoing tracking have focused on providing information to project managers, implementers and others on how to improve or refine project activities. We considered whether the project achieved its objectives to the timescales set out in the work plan and was on target to achieve its aims, objectives and proposed delivery for the latter stage of the project.

We have also reflected on the operation of project structures and systems particularly in the context of partnership structures, as the project has required new delivery mechanisms and new ways of working for some of the projects partners.

Phase 1 & 2 evaluation have also brought together the collected data on the implementation and delivery of project activities and progress towards objectives and leading principles with a view to providing a focused small-scale analysis, and where appropriate making recommendations for development and change. This has included commentary on administration, management and monitoring systems, working with partners, outcomes, outputs and delivery processes.

The primary purpose of the Phase 3 final evaluation was to act as a summative evaluation and to assess the overall lessons from the project and draw conclusions on the design, implementation and performance of the project when measured against the initial project objectives and indicators. The final report should inform funding bodies and other stakeholders of the results, and the actual and potential impact of the projects activities. This in turn can be utilised to encourage support for transfer, replication and mainstreaming of innovative ideas and solutions.

2.4.2 Final evaluation approach and methodology

This final evaluation has been based on; a *comprehensive desk review* of existing documents related to planning and delivery, reporting and monitoring (as listed below); on *feedback questionnaires* from beneficiaries and staff, the questionnaires included both the training providers' own feedback process and questionnaires provided by the evaluators for beneficiaries; *training observations* and stakeholder interviews which reviewed the experiences and skills gained through the partnership management and delivery frameworks.

Review of documents related to planning and delivery, reporting and monitoring and included:

- Ecotec contract for services and funding agreement

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- Women's management and leadership training project 2005-2006 partnership agreement
 - Guidelines for eligibility, recruitment process, interview process, additional support, welcome speech
 - Guidance on financial administration
 - Elevate database information
 - Elevate work plan
 - Elevate marketing strategy
 - Action planning for the preliminary evaluation recommendations
 - Monthly monitoring reports to Ecotec (for February 05 – August 05)
 - Monthly LSC contract management visit and communications with LSC
 - Ecotec audit documentation
 - WRC Board Meetings Dec 05 & Feb 06
 - Monthly Steering Group minutes of meetings (Nov 04 – June 05)
 - Elevate staff, coordinators and team meetings Oct 05 – May 06
 - Syllabus and course details NVQ 3 & 4
 - 'Aiming Higher' project handbook
 - Aspire coaching workbook
 - Publicity material: leaflet, 'The Source', Women's Resource Centre newsletter, Elevate update, Elevate presentation
 - Policies governing the project: health and safety, equal opportunities and Environmental issues
 - Examples of beneficiary file; checklist, short record, application form, self assessment form, training needs analysis/ personal development plan
 - Report on target groups 30th October 06

Feedback questionnaires, case studies and self satisfaction reports:

- Zennor Consulting; trainer evaluation questionnaire
- Zennor Consulting; beneficiary evaluation questionnaire
- Beneficiary course evaluation and feedback incorporating;
 - Advice UK; end of course evaluation, Elevate end of course evaluation
 - Elevate final evaluation
 - Elevate exit feedback
- Case Study – September 05
- Elevate beneficiaries self satisfaction – Intake 2 interim report March 2006
- Elevate beneficiaries self satisfaction – Intake 3 interim report September 2006
- Elevate beneficiary self satisfaction - summary report
- Elevate beneficiary self satisfaction - final report
- Partnership evaluation proforma

Training Observation was undertaken as follows;

- Advice UK – Management Communication Skills, 5th July 2006

Stakeholder Interviews were undertaken as follows:

- September 7th 2006 : One to one interviews with Zeynep Kucuk, The Innovatory and Melanie Ross, Advice UK
- September 29th 2006: One to one telephone interview with Yvonne Field, Yvonne Field Associates
- October 5th 2006 One to one telephone interview with Joyce Francis, Social Enterprise London
- October 9th 2006 One to one telephone interview with Samantha Collins, Aspire Coaching and Training

3 FINAL REPORT

3.1 Performance

The evaluation has assessed the achievements of the project against aims and objectives and the deliverables against targets, milestones, outputs and outcomes. See Results Table 3.1 below

Table 3.1 : Results Table

Recruitment
There was a high number of women who made enquiries by e-mail and telephone
428 women filled in and sent back an expression of interest form
247 were interviewed
111 were not eligible
67 were placed on a waiting list because the course was over subscribed
228 were recruited
22 were signposted to relevant provision to meet their needs
Participation
222 beneficiaries started
222 received personal development plans
185 finished the course with 80% attendance
5 with 70 – 79 %
5 with 50 – 79 %
10 non achievers with less than 50% attendance
18 either didn't start or dropped out
Outcomes
92 women have achieved units at NVQ level 3 or above
140 NVQ units in management were accredited
3 network events were held attended by 174 women
3 NVQ assessors were trained
69% were BME women
215 were in employment / self employed
13 were employment seekers
Others
As a pan London project it was successful in recruiting from all the LSC identified priority London Boroughs
Support mechanism for childcare, travel and disability were in place
16 women took up the opportunity of childcare
107 women claimed travel expenses for those in need and
16 learning disabilities needs were supported
The projects achieved all quantitative and qualitative outputs, outcomes and milestones

3.1.1 Monitoring against Ecotec's contract for services and funding agreement

The contract outlined what the project was expected to deliver against the WRC's proposal, over what period of time and at what cost. It detailed all issues of responsibility, terms and conditions, accountability and arbitration, provided details of eligibility requirements, monitoring and evaluation, and contract delivery plan.

Monthly monitoring reports to Ecotec summarised the progress of the project against the various agreed outputs, outcomes and milestones achieved during the relevant month, the

cumulative totals and show the delivery against profile. It provided for a financial claim to be made and detailed the beneficiary activity. It also allowed the project to give a progress report against outputs, outcomes, milestones, sectoral and pan London along with progress in implementing cross cutting themes, evaluation and quality assurance, good practice and innovation, added value and general progress.

3.1.2 Quarterly monitoring reports February 2005 – February 2006

The quarterly reports appear to show that the project was delivered as per the contract and that it has met its projected outputs, outcomes and milestones and costings. The reports are comprehensively completed and show a good overall perception and vision of the project, considerable thought and forward planning, and reliable and frank communication, as well as clear explanations for project developments.

The contract is managed by Ecotec documented via a quarterly 'Visit Summary Report'. These show:-

- That there was a good relationship and communications between the contract manager of Ecotec and the project manager of WRC
- The contract was well managed and progressed successfully, to the extent that WRC are seeking any under spends to recruit more women and deliver more training within the project timescales
- There were well-documented regular steering group meetings with all partners attending
- There was effective action planning taking place and programme level issues were addressed. This included action plans/ work plans for delivery, marketing plans and action planning around Zennor Consulting's evaluation recommendations
- Training activity monitoring records good attendance and appeared to have been well organised and delivered
- The project appeared to be well monitored through effective collection of information and data including the close monitoring of ethnic minority breakdown and geographical coverage
- The project appeared to be effectively self monitored and 'continuously evaluated' and has recently introduced a beneficiaries self -satisfaction report
- Audit evidence (source documentation) was available and well documented. The files had been reorganised and all evidence was easily accessible. The example provided to Zennor Consulting showed a well-organised beneficiary file consisting of checklist, short record, application form, self-assessment form, training needs analysis/ personal development plan

3.1.3 Audit

The project was asked to complete a provider audit business environment questionnaire and it was audited by Ecotec on 15th of November 2005. Ecotec reported; "Whilst in most areas, our audit visit has been satisfied and the existence of appropriate systems has been evidenced", two key issues required WRC attention and needed to be resolved. These were:

- No evidence of beneficiary eligibility for 8 out of the 32 beneficiaries sampled
- No ESF/LSC logos on the partnership agreement as required by ESF rules

The Ecotec contract manager re-audited beneficiary eligibility and the partnership agreements at a monitoring visit in January 2006 and found the issues to have been resolved.

3.2 Project Management

In addition to the review of the quarterly monitoring report and the findings of Ecotec, we assessed the project management of the Elevate project through partnership questionnaires, staff questionnaires and stakeholder interviews. We found the following

3.2.1 The project partnership

We found that an effective partnership had been brought together in the project development stage by developing existing working relationships or by inviting organisations to participate from existing networks. This allowed the identification of those organisations that had the right profile to work on the project which resulted in a range of partner organisations with excellent track records and experience of working with women bringing different skills, knowledge, experience and resources to the project management and delivery.

Key to developing an effective partnership for the delivery of the project related to the following factors;

- All partners noted that the project linked with their own policies, strategies and plans
- All partners appeared to share a common vision and purpose that was understood and accepted as important throughout each partner organisation
- The partners appeared to clearly respect and trust each other and were committed to the project and felt a good sense of ownership
- Partners felt that the partnership recognised and respects the values and each partner's contribution
- Partners felt that their areas of responsibility were clear and understood and there was clear lines of accountability and that operational arrangements were simple, task orientated and focused on process, outcomes and innovation
- There was a perception of good communications and the performance of the partnership was well monitored and evaluated. Findings were widely shared and disseminated
- There was a strong "culture of commitment" and a view to continual development and improvement of the project promoted by all partners
- There were no power struggles
- Partners were able to inform the direction of the partnership and help to effectively work together
- The majority of partners were involved in the planning design and development of the project and were able to make recommendations based on past projects and the lessons learnt
- The partners all feel that there has been substantial achievement within the partnership

It is the view of the evaluator that this is a good, solid, effective and well thought through partnership which has succeeded and performed because it involved the right people in

the right place at the right time to make it happen. This helped to ensure the success of the project

Factors associated with the principal barriers and how to successfully work together were understood, however all partners felt that an opportunity was missed to explore and examine partnership working towards learning and innovating around key issues such as

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership
- How do we communicate with each other
- Exploring the relationships with other partners
- Identifying opportunities for the partnership in the future
- Sharing skills and knowledge
- Sharing good practice and developing best practice
- Strategic thinking

3.2.2 The steering group

The steering group minutes gave an impression of well-attended, consultative and participative meetings. They showed frank discussions and reviews of areas of interest or concern and arrival at consensus. They showed good forward planning and a shared project understanding as evidenced by discussions around consistency of branding across the partnership and discussion about practical issues such as budget and delivery profiles (outcomes, outputs and milestones), beneficiary and trainer profiles. There was evidence that the partners were involved in developing the application for funding and in the bid writing process (comments and editing) There was evidence of good communication and a proactive approach to seeking clarification and researching relevant points and best practice and addressing concerns (e.g. difficulties of childcare claims, hours of timetabling of courses for staff and beneficiary convenience). Minutes also showed generally prompt action and follow through.

The minutes also showed considerable effort and forward planning to ensure partners were confident and prepared about the specifics of the ESF regime with discussions featuring around financial and auditing monitoring systems and best practice, beneficiary profiling, eligibility and documentation, equal opportunities policies and ESF marketing.

WRC appear to have implemented a good system mirrored on the monthly monitoring returns in which all providers produced their own monthly monitoring returns. They have also produced a series of guidance documents on introduction and induction to the programme, eligibility, recruitment process, interview process, additional support, and financial administration.

WRC appear to have implemented a good partnership agreement that has clearly been well thought through and researched in advance of establishing an agreement. The partners sought out and drew on best practice from other partnership projects. The partnership agreement proved to be solid and comprehensive and fit for purpose

The reports overall gave an impression of a transparent and very dynamic and integrated project with constant review, questioning, planning, evaluation and a mainstreaming approach to project management and delivery. However some partners made the following comments:

- At times the WRC were too prescriptive in how the project was to be delivered and that there could have been a better understanding of the need to give partners “more independence to achieve some of their goals”
- The funding methodology ‘payments by outputs’ led to resource issues for providers as the ‘hidden’ costs of delivery such as management, administration, and quality assurance were not taken into account in the budget

Stakeholders commented that the steering group was the driving force behind the project, and was “where the business end of the partnership and project was carried out” It provided the only formal face to face interface between partners and WRC. They felt the steering group was effective in the management and operational delivery of the project. However all partners felt that improvements could have been made:

- Ensuring better attendance by some partners at the steering group meeting and /or commitment to send a representative
- Keeping everybody in the communication loop and improving information flow especially when Ecotec made changes to the audit and monitoring requirements to the project
- Providing a mechanism for decision making outside of the steering group to tackle issue as they arose and not wait for the next meeting
- Not to raise expectations and giving false promises, such as possibility of utilising funders under spends
- Providing more effective contract management arrangements through scheduled and face to face meetings. While the WRC visited all partners at least once or when they requested a meeting it was felt that far too much use of management by telephone, and e-mails occurred. Partners were always offered the opportunity to meet but not all providers had the skills to informally create and develop strong 1.1 relationships with WRC project management staff
- Develop more opportunities for staff to meet
- Providing stronger leadership instead of managing by consensus

It was however encouraging to note that the partnership encouraged informal meetings outside of the structured partnership meetings especially at a tutor and assessors level where tutors met to share good practice, discuss course content and assessors verifiers met to discuss the programme delivery, assessment and achievement

3.2.3 Initial project set up

There were a number of issues highlighted in our evaluation in relation to how the project was initially set up. We detail below our recommendations to improve any subsequent project set up

Policies - WRC provided copies of the WRC’s own policies under which the project operates, they highlight, as is further reflected in the partnership agreement, that all partners have their own equivalent policies such as, Health and Safety Policy, Environmental Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy.

We recommend in future that at the beginning of the project that all partners sign-up to one policy regime to ensure that all branches of the project were being held accountable to the same standard and to enable beneficiaries who may wish to bring complaints under a policy, for it to be quickly and easily seen. In addition there should be a standing agenda

on steering group meetings and team meetings items to review and monitor policies or any proactive development of strategy and /or action planning.

WRC however subsequently ensured that policy review is an issue discussed at Board, staff and team level meetings. WRC undertook a full and comprehensive review of all policies to ensure one policy regime was operating

Evaluation - The impact of the project on beneficiaries was measured through a range of documents such as the review of personal development plans, beneficiary questionnaires, staff questionnaires, beneficiary feedback forms – final and exit evaluations, training evaluation forms, individual coaching records, Elevate beneficiaries’ self-satisfaction survey, on – site observations, referral information and case studies.

As the list above shows there is quite a comprehensive array of evaluation forms in existence ranging from providers training evaluation forms, final and exit evaluation forms to the Zennor Consulting beneficiary and staff questionnaire. Whilst good evaluation has been recognised throughout the project, in some ways the project has been a ‘victim of its own success’

For future reference we would recommend at the initial stages of the project that a working group be set up to coordinate the design and streamline the implementation of the use of evaluation forms to:

- Avoid duplication of questions
- Define the correct meaning of terms used - In certain cases the terms used by the external evaluators (e.g. personal development plans) were slightly different to those used by the project that may have led to a misunderstanding
- Avoid too lengthy questionnaires

Use one common standardised evaluation form for training evaluation forms, final and exit evaluation forms so that effective comparative analysis can be made.

3.2.4 Relationship with Ecotec

Some partners commented that they felt that Ecotec’s (The fund programme manager) management style lacked empathy and understanding of the needs of providers. Partners felt that they had no understanding of the impact of their management style on provider’s workload and resources to manage and deliver the project. Some partners felt that Ecotec could improve their relationship and contract management. At times their planning and communications were poor, lacking clarity especially in what was needed regarding monitoring requirements. In some cases partners were required to gather information retrospectively. Some partners were also left frustrated when Ecotec raised provider’s expectations with promises of extra funding which never materialised.

Partners felt that the project management team at the Women’s Resource Centre could have managed the relationship with Ecotec better. Some partners felt that the relationship “was all one way” and that WRC were too accommodating when Ecotec wanted to move the boundaries and goal posts and / or alter the agreed delivery plan, which inevitably impacted on partner’s management and delivery of the programme offer. It was felt that WRC over the time of the project matured into the role of lead organisation and develop the negotiating skills needed to manage the relationship with ECOTEC

3.2.5 Publicity and marketing

All stakeholders were involved in developing a marketing plan and in the design of promotional literature, the content of press releases and information placed on websites.

The project was well branded, clients identified with "The Elevate Project" and not individual partner provision which was indicative of clients identifying with a seamless service and not its component parts.

All sample publicity materials provided by all partners, including Internet material clearly carries the EU logo and explained the role played by EU finances in enabling this project.

All stakeholders were identified on promotional literature and all trainers and clients were aware that this project was funded by Europe

Sample publicity material was generally clear and directly reflected the aims and objectives of the project, the target market for the project, the partners and finances of the project, the additional support available to the project (travel and childcare expenses) and practical information on how to contact the project. It also stressed the equal opportunities approach of the project.

There appears to have been good use of leaflets and 'The Source' - the Women's Resource Centre Newsletter and an Elevate update to disseminate the project to appropriate local community and targeted potential women beneficiaries on an ongoing basis.

There was good utilisation of partners existing marketing networks and infrastructures which included use of client database for mail shots, e-mail websites, open days, and networks.

The Project was effectively launched.

3.2.6 Conclusions on performance and project management

The project appears to have performed well against aims and objectives and the deliverables against targets, milestones, outputs and outcomes and is effectively managed and administered, including financial management control, monitoring and marketing.

A good, solid, effective and well thought through partnerships was in place.

We noted that effective steering group meetings took place which show good appreciation and communication of project management and delivery problems, issues and the application of well thought out solutions through evidence of effective action planning

There has been a good investment of time and resources in project set up.

The project is well managed by the full time project manager supported by two full time personal advisors and several part time staff. Any problems and / or issues could generally be worked through with the project manager and all providers found her very supportive and proactive. Communications were generally by regular e-mails, telephone calls and if requested 1.1 meetings.

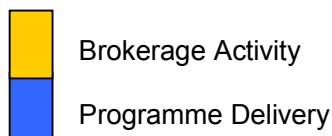
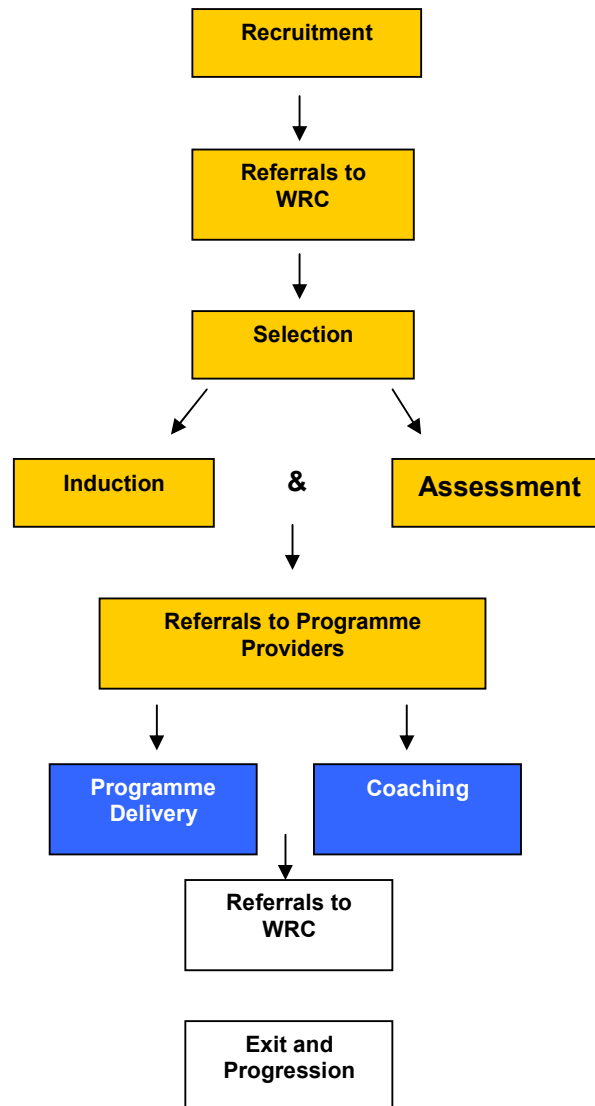
Partners felt that the appropriate structures were in place and were fit for purpose.

3.3 Delivery Model

The delivery model for the Elevate Project was an exemplar of best practice. This was as a direct result of the investment of time and resources in the initial partnership development and set up of the project where all organisations signed up to and were committed to working together not for their own organisational or service needs but for the needs of BME women. Without this commitment by women for women and the passion shown towards delivering the projects ethos, principles and values in a collaborative way perhaps the delivery of the project may not have been so successful The Delivery Model of the Elevate Project is detailed below in Figure 3.3.1.

Figure 3.3.1

The Delivery Model of the Elevate Project



Recruitment

Our review of the publicity and marketing showed that there was a good mix of recruitment techniques used which provided for equality of access.

Fundamental to the success of the delivery model was the process of engaging and referring clients. When a client was engaged through a partner's infrastructure and marketing effort the partner did not hold onto the client as their own, they were not "precious" or "their" client but referred them to the WRC knowing that in all possibility the client would be referred to another partner and the possibility that the client would be lost to them for further development work.

3.3.2 Referrals to WRC

The referral process was reported to work very well clients contacted WRC either directly or in response to direct marketing or by being referred by partners.

3.3.3 Induction

Once referred clients attended an initial registration interview and induction to the programme which included a basic assessment of their level in the management structure of the organisation they worked for and any support needs required.

There were a number of areas highlighted by client's staff and stakeholder that could give rise for improvement including:

- Communication was on occasions slow and insufficient at the outset of the project
- The precise NVQ elements of the course could have been better explained and also the benefits of doing an NVQ
- In some cases explanation as to availability and how to access expenses was insufficient

We are keen however to stress that the above aspects improved over time. Other improvements were required as follows:

- A more robust personal / training needs analysis and production of a learning plan could have been implemented
- A few of the evaluations indicated that disability access issues were insufficiently provided for, though the feedback does not elaborate in what way, and one participant stresses that every effort was nonetheless made even if the arrangement was not ideal. The evaluations did not suggest that attitudes and understanding around disabilities was lacking
- Clients expressed they would have liked to have a better understanding of what was expected of them

3.3.4 Referrals to the programme providers

Referral onto the programme was reported to work very well most women turned up for the first session. Prior to the first session WRC sent to each partner a list of women attending the courses, the level they were in of the management structure and any support needs. Partners commented that WRC could have provided better information on the profile of the women, what their expectations were and importantly what their current level of skills and learning skills were.

3.4 The Programme

The project delivered NVQ 3 and 4 level management qualifications through a range of partner agencies. The project provided the evaluators with the course information from each partner delivering a component of the project.

In each case the following was set out briefly, clearly and easily in a user-friendly format in the different house styles and headings of each provider but under the overall brand of the *Elevate* ESF project:

-
- The aims and objective of the course
 - Entry level requirements, target audience for the training which reflected, and where necessary, explained and justified the eligibility criteria
 - Units and modules to be covered and usually what element of a qualification they represented or contributed to
 - The learning context: this included details about the agency providing the course, the equal opportunities policy governing the course, the agency's role in the wider project partnership and the funding, including EU funding of the course
 - Learning methods to be used in the training and often some examples of slides about the course
 - Details as to who would teach which session and usually details about the experience and qualifications of trainers and practical details as to where and when the training would take place and relevant accessibility features of training venues

It is clear from the information provided that the partner agencies are all experienced and professional training agencies delivering the contracted service in the appropriate context for this ESF project. The elements of the training address the requirements of the units of the NVQ syllabus they are delivering although perhaps there are times where this could be more clearly set out and this is reflected in the learner and trainer questionnaires concerns too.

There is consistency across each provider as to what basic information is provided in their course details for beneficiaries, no matter which provider was delivering the training even if its presentation differs according to service provider. Similarly there was consistency across the material as to the overall project "brand" of *Elevate* and of ESF funding.

3.4.1 The syllabus and course

The project aimed to deliver units of an NVQ 3 and 4 level management qualification through a range of partner agencies. Each partner organisation addressed the delivery of the NVQ units quite differently.

The Innovatory initially offered a choice of units but it became apparent that this increased the need for more resources and the administration to deal with the paperwork. The Innovatory resulted in following the practice of Advice UK and Social Enterprise London who restricted their programmes to delivering one unit 'managing your own personal resource' while both Yvonne Field associates delivered an Institute of Leadership Management qualification equivalent to NVQ Level 3.

It could be argued that this approach did not provide consistence of the programme offer nor did it offer women a choice of programme matched to their needs. However the accreditation was not the key focus for women nor what the partnership wanted to achieve. The accreditation was only part of the training which was designed to develop the leadership and management skills of BME women, increase their confidence and be a motivator for change. The delivery of a unit of accreditation was seen as a tangible hook to encourage women to participate and inspire them in to life long learning.

3.4.2 Programme Improvements

The training appears from the course information provided to be delivering what is promised. There are some suggestions for improvement;

- Ensure, that all partner material covers the same basic headings; and that they lay out their course material in the same format, headings and order
- Provide a consistency in inducting clients to the programme
 - What is management and leadership
 - Getting to know the client
 - Introduction to the programme
 - Introduction to the tutor
 - Identifying support needs
 - A learning needs analysis
- It was accepted that there was a need to ensure the programme design and planning stage is well thought out and that you have the infrastructure capacity and resources to deliver
- In the trainers' own evaluation sheets a few participants felt that they would have liked more detail in the sessions and more resource references
- In one or two cases participants did not feel they had, as yet, had much feedback and review of their learning plans as they might like

However the evaluation is keen to stress that the above points were improved from the second intake

3.4.3 Assessment

The assessment process was seen to be effective and worked well. Organisations provided the assessment of the NVQ and the ILM through their own assessors. Where this was not possible Advice UK supplied the assessors. Advice UK also provided the role of internal verifiers.

3.4.4 Coaching

Coaching
135 women were recruited to the coaching programme. It was delivered in 6 sessions over 3 months.
117 started
96 finished
42 received 1.1 coaching
54 group coaching.

The women were selected through interview and matched with a personal coach. Coaching was seen as adding great value and an innovative aspect of the project. Clients found that there was a tremendous benefit of being coached along with being trained as it integrated learning and work together.

“It helped me put the theory into practice “

Figures suggest that you are 3 times more likely to apply what you have learnt through training to the workplace if you are coached. Coaching is very powerful and empowering

in a way that allows women to take action and be accountable while being provided with moral and emotional support in an empathic and supportive environment.

Funders should look to taking good practice from the business and corporate world and look to making more use of coaching in the delivery of education and training especially to support people in employment and into employment.

3.4.5 Achievement.

92 women have achieved units at NVQ level 3 or above and **140** NVQ units in management were accredited

3.4.6. Progression

Once the training had finished the majority of women were referred back to WRC for exit and destination interviews.

Progression can be measured by the impact that the programme had of women in terms of the changes that resulted in their leadership and management skills, development of their career, life changes such as entering self employment, whether or not they continued learning, development of soft skills and distance travelled such as confidence and motivation. Information from exit feedback/final evaluation forms are shown in Table 3.4.6 below

Table 3.4.6 Soft Outcomes

Soft Outcomes	
Improved confidence	74%
Improved support/networks	44%
Professional know how	34%
More clarity/focus/action	24%
Improved self awareness/value	22%
Valuable tools and resources	14%

Further evidence shows that 28 women were promoted while 4 started new businesses after attending Elevate.

A series of pen pictures are available from the WRC on request which show the impact the programme had had on the women who had engaged in the training.

3.4.7 Quality

A cornerstone to the Learning and Skills Council Strategic Plans is '**Raising the Standards**' in education and training. Providers, in this case the WRC, are responsible through the self assessment process to improve the quality and responsiveness of its provision. The Learning and Skills Council have introduced a framework for quality and success, **The Common Inspection Framework**, which focuses on ensuring that individual providers are able to meet the demands of learners, employers and local communities for learning and skills through the provision of high quality learning and training programmes that maximise learner's success.

The basis of self assessment will derive from the five questions in the Common Inspection Framework

- How well do learners achieve

-
- How effective are teaching, training and learning
 - How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners
 - How well are learners guided and supported
 - How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners [To include equality of opportunity and quality assurance]

Self assessment will provide the basis for inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate.

In discussion with the programme providers it was apparent that they all had comprehensive and robust internal quality assurance systems with three organisations were already engaged in the self assessment process.

The key to assessing quality of provision is that there is evidence to support the self assessment process.

There was evidence to show that the project engaged well qualified and experienced trainers

- All providers gathered feedback from clients, employers, and staff
- All providers formally observed the key learning processes in particular teaching and learning and on the job assessments
- All providers gathered information and data to analyse and report on recruitment, engagement, retention and achievements
- All providers' quality was tested externally in particular by awarding bodies and external verification as assessment centres, and in some cases by Investors in People, and ISO 9000+

The Women's Resource Centre implemented quality checks

- Clients were given the opportunity to feedback after every 3 sessions
- Teaching and learning observations were carried out
- Case studies were put together
- Engagement of Zennor Consulting as external evaluators
- Zennor observations (see teaching and learning observation report Appendix 1 to this report)
- Ecotec observations

We found that without exception the leadership and management of the project were good and the training and learning was exceptional.

However it is recommended that if the project was to continue WRC would have to invest time and resources in developing a formal quality assurance system to provide for self assessment and development action planning in line with ALI Inspection requirements and the common inspection framework.

3.4.8 Trainers experience

All trainers were recruited externally and were attracted to the project and opportunity to work with providers because they felt the trainers had an excellent reputation with regards to supporting and training people. They also felt that the position would provide the opportunity to put into practice their training and development skills they had developed over the years and enable them to work with new groups of people in a challenging environment and to allow them to both continually update their professional expertise and support their personal development.

They all felt that the beneficiaries recruited were appropriate for the course and style of delivery, and commented on the thoroughness of the recruitment process. It was noted that the groups were made up of people from diverse backgrounds and cultures which promoted lots of interesting discussions and the sharing of experiences, information and good practice. The fact that the groups are made up of women and trained by women in a less informal structured way has enabled beneficiaries to feel more comfortable to experiment and explore in an uninhibited way, feel much safer to discuss, speak out and ask for help and has made for a supportive, dynamic learning environment where strong relationships have been developed.

All trainers felt that that the experience had developed new skills and increased their potential and had an impact on their breadth of career options, self confidence and sense of job satisfaction and developed friendships and contacts. Although, they felt that the project could be improved by more opportunities to meet with other assessors from other partners and more direct communication with project leaders.

3.4.9 Beneficiary experience

Strengths

The added value of the course was highlighted by most beneficiaries who did not feel anything similar existed in their locality and certainly not at no cost. They felt particularly attracted by the 'women only' approach and often by the availability of individual coaching. The 'women only' approach was of particular importance to the women who participated. They felt safe and supported and more able to learn and be open in a women only environment.

"Less egos and more support"

"I feel it is really important to have women only safe spaces to learn and bring skills, and to solely be in the company of women."

"I have enjoyed the atmosphere and purposefulness and support of the women at WRC."

"Having a course dedicated for women is extremely important to help increase your confidence in a supportive environment."

"It's important to update and share common problems met by women in management position."

Coaching was also of particular importance in the Elevate beneficiary self-satisfaction report. The Aspire personal development survey showed that 85% of beneficiaries found that there was tremendous benefit of providing coaching along with training as it puts 'theory' into practice, and 95% said that it provided moral and emotional support in an empathic and supportive environment.

"As it is my first introduction and training in management, difficult to assess and/or compare. The combination of coaching and training was fantastic and overall the

opportunity was once in a lifetime. I have more confidence about going for promotion / setting up my own thing.”

Even beneficiaries who did not need to take up the support measures (childcare and travel) were attracted to the course and impressed by it for its having demonstrated thought and commitment to these points for its beneficiaries.

“I was dreading the course due to my physical impairment but it suited my needs and personal objective.”

The majority of beneficiaries completed the venue table as good and/or excellent throughout – the main areas where there were reservations involved spaciousness, audio/visual quality and in a couple of cases it was indicated that disability access issues were insufficiently provided for, though the feedback does not elaborate in what way. One beneficiary stresses that every effort was nonetheless made, even if the arrangement was not ideal. The evaluations did not suggest that attitudes and understanding around disabilities was lacking.

Without exception, all beneficiary feedback stressed that the quality, personality and teaching style of trainers was excellent. They were knowledgeable of the subject, planned well, supported the beneficiary facilitated learning, set clear learning goals, made it interesting, managed the group, and provided feedback.

All beneficiaries stressed a very positive atmosphere to the training and a very agreeable and interesting range of beneficiaries.

All beneficiaries were satisfied with the quality and content of the training and that it either matched their individual needs and / or exceeded their expectations.

“The course content met my training needs and personal objectives and exceeded them beyond my expectations.”

All beneficiaries would recommend the course and providers and, if contemplating further training, would happily return to the provider.

The quality and availability of teaching materials was good. The final evaluation showed overwhelming satisfaction with the learning materials, with well over 80% women stating that they were ‘Excellent’ and the rest of respondents that they were good.

“The course was fantastic. It met all my training needs. With the excellent training notes I can continue to refer to them after the course is over.”

Overall

“The course was very practical course and I felt it took into account my individual needs but at the same times provided me with the chance to learn the experiences and knowledge of other women of the group. I had certain reservations about an “only for women” course but all were dissipated from the start, in fact it was refreshing to see how women share similar values, challenges, experiences and goals. It made me realise that- even though women are intelligent and capable- it is undeniable the barriers to success we face are different. These barriers are not impossible to overcome and they are much better dealt with if we have tools, knowledge and confidence.”

Weaknesses

In some cases it was felt that communication was a little slow and insufficient at the outset of the project. It was also thought that the precise NVQ elements of the course could have been better explained, this sentiment was shared by some of the trainers.

A few beneficiaries felt that they would have liked more detail in the sessions and more resource references.

There were mixed responses as to the quality and accessibility of personal advisors some beneficiaries had not had to have recourse to the personal advice, and some seemed rather negative about the quality of the personal advice they had received that personal advisors did not understand their particular needs.

The training lacked to some extent an understanding and an appreciation of how the private business approach and other models related to those beneficiaries working in the voluntary sector.

3.4.10 Beneficiary Impact

All beneficiaries felt that the course had increased their confidence and almost all felt that it had improved their career opportunities and been relevant and useful to them.

All beneficiaries felt the training was of relevance in which all beneficiaries felt they expressly benefited from management specific training some beneficiaries were able to cite what they have learned and how they will apply it to their own working environment such as being (more able to):

- More confident
- More organised
- Manage time and responsibilities
- Make decisions
- Be creative
- Respond to change
- Deal with conflict
- Communicate better
- Delegate
- Be more proactive, assertive and purpose driven
- Understand management styles
- Strategically manage

All beneficiaries were asked about what they would do after the training the majority felt they have been inspired to learn and would like to continue in further education and training, while only a minority said they have been motivated to go for promotion, a career move or self employment.

3.5 Succession Strategy

Planning the Elevate's succession or exit strategy was an integral part of the management of the project It started relatively early and was part of good business planning in creating a 'sustainability culture' throughout the project's organisational structure and delivery approach from day one.

Detailed plans for succession depend upon and respond to a range of factors, not least the policy and funding environment at the time when the project is due to close.

Elevate is ready to move on, and is 'investor ready' in terms of being suitable for further grant or loan funding; mainstreaming by one of the main funders of statutory services of employment or skills development (e.g. Jobcentre Plus or the Learning and Skills Council). With the possibility of sufficient demand, or a market, for its services or products to generate its own income as a business.

The project needs to explore the scope for mainstreaming its successful delivery models and transfer the knowledge, lessons and best practice arising from the project's delivery to influence the strategic plans and actions of key learning and skills agencies. Crucial to this is the capacity building of employers, community groups and delivery agencies to adopt successful delivery principles tested within this project.

Elevate needs to engage and use the insights and experience of its partners to spot opportunities and lobby on behalf of the project ensuring an infrastructure of partners and networks is developed to raise the profile of the project amongst decision and policy makers to demonstrate how Elevate will help to deliver their objectives. And show to policy makers and custodians of large programme budgets who lack the capacity and connections to engage fully with those target communities and client groups which the government has committed to support. Furthermore, Elevate can demonstrate that the project is fully engaged with and have strong links to their clients and customers and is clearly shaped and driven by need and or demand of beneficiaries/users of the project and employers

Elevate exhibits a range of critical success factors in achieving a successful succession strategy

- The project has established an exemplar and best practice delivery model effectively engaging BME women in employment to raise their skills level in business management and leadership and challenge the gender bias
- Has access to the right mix of staff and skills to achieve high quality delivery and strategic planning for the future
- Has established a project management system that is "fit for purpose" to meet all the project management, evaluation and progress and expenditure monitoring requirements. Including quality assurance and a commitment to equality and diversity. This will provide a track record of evidencing effective project delivery, impact and value for money in accordance with targets and milestones which is, in many cases, pivotal to building a case that can sustain a project's future

4 MAIN ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences and skills gained through partnership working could have been enhanced if the partnership had explored and examined partnership working towards learning and innovating

Partnership and project management could be improved by;

- Improving communications strategy to keep everybody in the communication loop and to improve information flow
- Provide a mechanism for decision making outside of the steering group
- Providing more effective contract management arrangements through scheduled and face to face meetings
- Develop strategies to manage relationships with funders

It is recommended that at the beginning of the project that all partners sign-up to one policy regime to ensure that all branches of the project were being held accountable to the same standard and to enable beneficiaries who may wish for instance to bring complaints under a policy for it to be quickly and easily seen. In addition there should be a standing agenda on steering group meetings and team meetings items to review and monitor policies or any proactive development of strategy and /or action planning.

For future reference we would recommend at the initial stages of the project a working group be set up to coordinate the design and streamline the implementation of the use of evaluation forms.

Programme delivery could be improved by;

- Implementing more robust personal / training needs analysis and production of a learning plan to provide better information on the profile of the women, what their expectations were and importantly what their current level of skills and learning skills were
- Ensuring that all partner material covers the same basic headings; and lay out their course material in the same format, headings and order
- Providing a consistency in inducting clients to the programme
 - What is management and leadership
 - Getting to know the client
 - Introduction to the programme
 - Introduction to the tutor
 - Identifying support needs
 - A learning needs analysis
 - Ensure at the programme design and planning stage that it is well thought out and that you have the infrastructure capacity and resources to deliver
- Trainers especially those not well experienced in delivering NVQ's require clearer communication particularly around record keeping and their awareness of equalities, health and safety and environmental policies. Clarity especially

regarding the start up process and particularly around the NVQ elements of the training and better support in the initial stages of their delivery

- To develop the training to provide understanding and an appreciation of how the private business approach and other models related to those beneficiaries working in the voluntary sector
- Investing more in tracking beneficiaries post programme to explore in more depth the progression of beneficiaries and impact on the business community

The project needs to explore the scope for mainstreaming its successful delivery models and transfer the knowledge, lessons and best practice arising from the project's delivery to influence the strategic plans and actions of key learning and skills agencies. Crucial to this is the capacity building of employers, community groups and delivery agencies to adopt successful delivery principles tested within this project.

Elevate needs to engage and use the insights and experience of its partners to spot opportunities and lobby on behalf of the project ensuring an infrastructure of partners and networks is developed to raise the profile of the project amongst decision and policy makers to demonstrate how Elevate will help to deliver their objectives.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The project performed well against aims and objectives and the deliverables against quantitative and qualitative targets, milestones, outputs and outcomes.

The project was effectively managed and administered, including project coordination financial management control, monitoring and marketing.

Providers performed well against deliverables in their Service Level Agreements.

The project is an exemplar model of good practice in relation to achieving local and regional strategies and has provided evidence of sectoral impact. The delivery model is an example of developing best practice in its success and effectiveness.

The success of the project can be attributed to not only to effective project management but to the strength of the partnership which brought together a wide range of skills experience and knowledge of individuals with a commitment and passion to delivering the project's ethos, principles and values in a collaborative way, working together not for their own organisational needs but for the needs of BME women.

The Elevate programme offered women a unique opportunity for them to address their career aspirations in a supportive environment that recognises the often difficult balancing act of personal and work lives and the other challenges or discrimination women still face in achieving success in the workplace.

The project attracted women from a diverse background and different cultures. This has promoted lots of interesting discussions and sharing of experiences information and good practice and developed relationships. The fact that the groups are made up of women and trained by women in a less informal structured way has enabled women to feel more comfortable to experiment and explore in an uninhibited way, feeling much safer to discuss, speak out and ask for help and has made for a supportive, dynamic learning environment.

Women have experienced high quality management and delivery of an innovative programme and outstanding teaching, learning and support.

Women have been inspired, encouraged, motivated and challenged to take forward what they have learnt back into the workplace. The programme has made a difference to not only the working lives of women but to their personal development and attitudes to lifelong learning.

And finally a message to funders and mainstream deliverers

Elevate is ready to move on, and is 'investor ready' in terms of being suitable for further grant or loan funding and /or mainstreaming by one of the main funders of statutory services of employment or skills development (e.g. Jobcentre Plus or the Learning and Skills Council). With the possibility of sufficient demand, or a market, for its services or products to generate its own income as a business. The project needs to explore the scope for mainstreaming its successful delivery models and transfer the knowledge,

lessons and best practice arising from the project's delivery to influence the strategic plans and actions of key learning and skills agencies.

Elevate will help to deliver your objectives. And show policy makers and custodians of large programme budgets who lack the capacity and connections to engage fully with those target communities and client groups which the government has committed to support. Elevate can demonstrate that the project is fully engaged with and have strong links to their clients and customers and is clearly shaped and driven by need and or demand of beneficiaries/users of the project and employers

Funders should look to taking good practice from the business and corporate world and look to making more use of coaching in the delivery of education and training especially to support people in employment and into employment.

Elevate has established an exemplar and best practice delivery model effectively engaging women especially BME women in employment to raise their skills level in business management and leadership and challenge the gender bias.