Future Proofing All Adult Learning
Report
Event on 22nd May 2018
High Lodge
Darsham

1. Introduction

Following the jointly commissioned report by Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Councils titled East Suffolk Adult Learning, published in August 2017, it was subsequently agreed by the board that a number of points raised should be addressed. One of these was recommendation 5:

The potential in the creation of an Adult Learning Network in East Suffolk which would support training providers and avoid duplication. An additional benefit to such a network could be providers working together to apply for funding.

This investigation included a recent 'East Suffolk Partnership on the Road' event at High Lodge in Darsham on Tuesday 22nd May 2018. The aims of the event were to:

- Raise awareness of the report and the importance of supporting adult learning across East Suffolk
- Facilitate the opportunity for providers to share ideas, views and discuss issues and opportunities on adult learning
- Investigate providers' opinions and views of a potential future network and if and how this could work moving forward

The event was promoted to over 200 organisations by Suffolk County Council; other partners also helped to promote the event via their mailing lists. Promotion was in the form of a leaflet, a poster, emails and the Eventbrite online portal.

1.2 Overview of the day

The day was attended by almost 30 delegates from a diverse range of organisations including small formal training providers, informal and community learning organisations, libraries, charities, social enterprises, The Department of Work and Pensions, specialist trainers, Suffolk County Council and Realise Futures.

The event was designed to collect views, ideas and comments regarding delegates' opinions on a potential providers network, how this would work, who would be prepared to be an active member and what it may look like, including what next steps could be.

The programme

The event included guest speakers, a presentation on the research in the East Suffolk Adult Learning Report published in August 2017, and two workshops. Guest speakers were able to demonstrate examples of the benefits of adult learning to both individuals and their communities and also the advantages of partnership working.

10.00 am Registration and networking

10.30 am Introduction – Chris McGuinness

10.40 am Summary of report findings - Emily Oxborrow and Cheryl Willis, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils

10.50 am Keynote speaker – Stephen Amer, The Voice cLoud

11.15 am Workshops

12 noon Plenary – Chris McGuinness

12.30 pm Lunch and networking

Workshops subjects were selected on topical issues that would promote registration and discussion.

Workshop 1: Chris Abraham - Community Action Suffolk

"Sustainability – what does it mean in today's climate with regard to funding?"

Workshop 2: – Sabrina Ward - Menta

"Commercialisation – the different models to consider"

Ideas, comments and views were recorded in many ways including open discussion, groupwork, workshops, comments, a 'feedback wall' and a questionnaire.

Notetakers were allocated to workshops to capture relevant information.

2. Feedback

All feedback is taken direct from delegates either verbal, during workshops/discussions, notetakers' information or via the questionnaire.

Workshop 1 - "Sustainability – what does it mean in today's climate with regards to funding?"

Issues:

- Only 1 of 13 delegates said they would be sustainable in three years' time if they didn't make significant changes or cuts
- Location of learning events is most important particularly for those in rural areas or with health needs
- Lack of transport for rural communities. Community transport is often used by school limiting the times adults and other community groups can access this form of transport

- CSR impact and how this could be interpreted by micro or small to medium employers
- Tougher landscape on funding grants. There is only a 1:15 chance of being awarded funding even if you do meet all the criteria
- The challenge and balance of funding to quality
- What about the 'fourth age'? How do we take learning to them as they are often unable to leave their homes or residential care
- The Rural Services Report undertaken by Community Action Suffolk directed at Parish Councils records a significant decrease in Adult Learning

Actions/opportunities:

- Investigate access to school-owned minibuses, could these be used when schools do not need them?
- Could a conversation be held with Vertas around possible transport? Are there contracts or a Social Value policy that may help Local Authorities with this process?
- A network would give a higher chance of funding via partnership
- Delegates noted 65+ members of the community are often accessing new meeting places including coffee shop chains; should negation take place to investigate these areas for learning?

Workshop 2 - "Commercialisation – the different models to consider"

Issues:

- Keeping marketing materials relevant and timely
- The challenge of finding all available courses across Suffolk to support and advise possible learners
- The relevance of a partnership is critical. Making sure the partnership is effective and continues to focus on changing needs
- Motivation and time for a network to succeed, good mix of members. These could change depending on project but core group needed
- Partnership breakdown due to lack of sharing and one sidedness, internal competition, different missions

Actions/opportunities:

- Opportunity to look at local need and the 'Greater Good' and Stronger Together' models
- Identify goal sharing
- Sharing skills around projects, resources, knowledge, expertise and risk
- Highlighting positive partnership working within the community
- Partnership approach to funding bids

Across both workshops there was a common theme of how to build a positive network and collaboration as this requires open and honest conversations and actions with agreed aims and outcomes.

Questionnaire

Question 1. What do you think the possible partnership network should look like? How could we regularly communicate together?

- Email distribution (monthly/quarterly) depending on relevant updates/news that affect the sector. Quarterly meetings of stakeholders to look at priorities and opportunities to collaborate
- Steering group who can disseminate all areas of concern/barriers to sustaining offer
- Regular meetings – face to face if time allows. Not sure what network would look like, could be virtual /online
- 'Hard nut to crack' Suffolk Adult Learning has struggled to engage all stakeholders due to capacity being tight but if it could meet 2 – 3 times a year to talk through plans, look at opportunities for partnership this may work
- Social network – linked to existing groups or new ones. National network with a membership. East Suffolk Partnership
- Networking group with chair and sub. Face to face quarterly meetings. Specialist adult learning website
- I think the Adult Learning Partnership needs a 'rallying call' or message about its objectives and what it could achieve
- VCS/educational providers/funding/structured organisations
- Bi monthly meeting. Social media is OK for updates and opportunities but can wither in time
- The partnership could easily mirror the Waveney Learning Community or other successful existing groups, with equal emphasis on non-funded learning as a percentage split provision within the report focused on non-funded. Email and social media for communication
- Two separate networks (north and south) meeting on a monthly /six week basis and holding whole network meetings a year with specific focus
- Evening events so trainers who are training during the day time can attend
- Previously the Youth Training Scheme providers had a good network hosted by the LSC. We learnt to collaborate having gone through the usual forming, storming, norming etc. We learnt to survive. ESP could co -ordinate and enable as a trusted friend.
- Occasional meetings like this one or an online group but I don't think this would work. Not sure how formal and informal learning are connected with one possibly leading into the other
- Face to face meeting bi monthly/Email newsletter
- Forum of members meeting every six months. Communicate through email group between meetings

Question 2. What do you think the priorities should be for the next 3 to 6 months?

- Joining providers together to aid collaboration
- Identify the transport links/barriers
- Refocus on support from Local Enterprise Partnerships to support growth/opportunities
- Develop and maintain private/public/voluntary and charitable offer to Suffolk County
- Transport
- Location
- Taking forward info raised today to shape future meetings and what the network will look like
- Link in with the Waveney Learning Group
- Gap analysis and a further event
- Engage business communities into benefit of social and community based learning – how can they contribute?
- Prioritise long term health of the adult learning sector locally by dealing with short term problems
- Find similar organisations who have gone off the radar
- Increase local understanding of the adult learning offer
- Sustainability
- Depending on the objective the order of priority needs to be determined based on urgency, time, resources, capacity of organisations and individuals
- Setting up and establishing network
- Funding, resources, sustainability, capacity, relevance
- The impact both providing education provision and appetite for network
- Review responses and extend further opportunities if deemed appropriate
- Identifying all learning providers both formal and informal and offer further networking opportunities
- Build an information website that is up to date, inform trainers here today of the opportunity of being able to upload their information
- Get the network going and ask individuals to identify what they think their own priorities should be, what sacred cow should they sacrifice possibly? Then start looking at network priorities and collaboration opportunities to start working together
- Share research findings
- Identify needs mapped to areas and let learning providers know what are the gaps and where
- Establish priorities for network to achieve
- How to motivate partners to join network

Question 3. Do you think there are organisations/individuals who are not here today who could be an important part of the network?

- Head of Skills, Suffolk County Council
- Suffolk Programme Manager, The Consultancy Home Counties
- Health organisations, Trusts and Community Outreach
- Lowestoft Rising
- Statutory providers, potential sub contractors and sources of funding
- Schools, colleges and Pupil Referral Units
- Business/enterprise links
- Health – sports for adults, dance for improving mental and physical health
- The big colleges mustn't be allowed to stand above this
- Consider how to invite other representatives occasionally e.g. village halls or parish councils, transport operations, etc.
- Other libraries
- Yes, I'm quite sure
- East Coast College
- University of Suffolk
- YMCA
- WEA
- Realise Futures

Question 4. Would you be interested in being an active member of the network? If yes, please give your name and organisation.

Eight out of sixteen gave a positive response.

Question 5. Do you have any further comments or suggestions?

- Apply for some large grants and benefit from the opportunity to collaborate on consortium bids where we would add significant value with our expertise, especially in working with mental health needs, severe educational needs and disabilities
- Digital prospectus of training providers by locality. Portal support.
- Pleased to see East Coast leading the way in the County – thank you
- Can we share this practice with other areas of Suffolk
- Interesting morning, would have appreciated 'round robin' to aid what other providers do as I am new to a Suffolk organisation
- Much appreciated that East Suffolk Partnership are sharing the results but felt the tone was very much for funded and accredited provision
- Move meetings around to allow host to make short presentations of their offer. Surprising how often this leads to collaboration

- Partners will only stay involved if this is something with direct benefit to them
- The network would need to address how members do not restrict each other's activities
- There is always the risk that organisations from outside the area will fill gaps in provision as they are able to access larger grants (ESF)
- Network should enable smaller organisations to compete with the larger ones

3. Summary

The event has provided useful feedback, ideas and views on the potential success of a future network. As seen in the feedback those attending the event generally responded positively to the idea of an East Coast network, and could see advantages in doing this. The questionnaire noted a number of missing organisations from the event that would be important members of a network. The largest percentage of those attending recorded face to face meetings would be beneficial with differing opinions on the regularity of these. Some welcomed social media or email activity or additional social media or email to support the face to face. However, only eight of those present agreed to be active members with no organisation/ individual offering to lead the network.

4. Recommendations:

- Circulate the questionnaire to those who were unable to attend the event to ensure we gather their views and strengthen any future network, including using specialist skills as and when needed for projects.
- Target organisations named in delegates' feedback to widen skills and knowledge of the network.
- Continue to share research.
- Consider the starting of a network with an ESP appointed lead who could facilitate the setting up of the network for up to a year. Once established, the members of the network will be responsible for leading and driving it forward.
- Communicate outcomes of event to all delegates.