

# "The Way Forward" - 25/02/08

## Report on Meeting

### Meeting held at Kesgrave Community Centre

A Consortium meeting was held on the above date at which a number of issues were discussed. 35 people attended from a wide range of organisations (including two people from outside the county - Nikki Bennett from COVER who is the regional Working Together Officer co-ordinating meetings between the LSC and VCS regional representatives and Toby Cullingham from Norfolk who was responsible for devising the PAAVS accreditation toolkit.

The day included the following:

- Discussion and decisions on the functions, mission, aims and objectives of the Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium
- Discussion and decisions on the future structure and name of the Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium.
- A briefing by David Scates of TCHC on the new Train to Gain scheme involving volunteers
- An update on the new adult teaching qualifications
- A short briefing on E-Guides.

### Discussion and decisions on the Functions, Mission, Aims and Objectives of the Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium

Carol Deslandes, author of The Way Forward report from the Managed Network group introduced this item and the functions, mission, aims and objectives were discussed in small groups. Some minor amendments were made but there were no major changes except for ensuring that the future sustainability of the Learning Consortium was included amongst the objectives. There were some suggestions relating to simplifying some of the language, but the broad remit remained the same.

Feedback from the workshop included:

- Need member driven common values, involve/represent organisations of all sizes, need to maintain the diversity of learning delivered
- Information / Communication - must be transparent
- Advise / Support - include environment and Trustees
- Training - need trainer training
- Marketing - new heading
- Sharing - at county, region and national

### Discussion and decisions on the Future Structure and Name of the Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium.

Again Carol Deslandes introduced this section and referred to her report which detailed a number of options for how the structure of the Consortium could be developed. In her research she discovered that only six of the 23 VCS learning consortia in the country had registered with the Charity Commission and most, if not all, were also companies limited by guarantee.

Most of these had adopted this structure because they were concentrating a lot of their work on delivering training, as very little VCS training had been undertaken prior to the creation of the consortia in those areas. The other 17 had adopted a partnership model with one agency assuming the lead role as accountable body, similar to that which has been adopted by the Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium.

Again the group split into smaller groups to discuss this and feedback before voting was taken. It was agreed that ultimately there were three possible options. These were as follows, with the number of votes cast:

- Staying as a Managed Network i.e. as a partnership with one agency assuming the lead role as accountable body for the foreseeable future: **10 votes**
- Moving immediately to becoming an independent separate legally constituted body: **0 votes**
- Staying as a Managed Network for the time being but moving towards becoming an independent legally constituted body within a year: **14 votes.**

(There were a number of abstentions including the two out of county delegates, the Chair and Carol Deslandes as author of the report).

A number of concerns were put forward, particularly in rushing into independent status and these included the following:

- some delegates were outraged that the LSC could impose a structure on the Consortium before the Consortium had even got going - I think this is a case of the VCS flexing its muscles and saying that "we won't be dictated to"
- the fact that the majority of the VCS consortia around the country were surviving perfectly well as managed networks rather than independent bodies, particularly as the Consortium in Suffolk would be supporting rather than delivering a lot of training themselves
- there were some who felt that the present structure worked well i.e. "if it ain't broke, why fix it?"
- Several delegates could not see what could be gained by being a legal entity - that this would add even more costs to running the Consortium and more admin burdens. It might damage the Consortium's reputation if it were seen as a separate body competing for the same funds as other organisations that it was purportedly trying to help
- Several delegates were concerned as to whether it would be easy to find trustee/directors. Whilst many people might be happy to be on a steering group, they were less likely to want/did not have the time to be directors. It was pointed out the directors whilst playing a monitoring role and keeping an eye on the finances may not need to meet very often and could invest a lot of the day to day running of the Consortium to a steering group.
- the issue of transparency was discussed and here it was acknowledged that a separate legal entity would be an advantage.
- The major argument against creating a legal entity straight away rested on the financial sustainability of the Consortium. Whilst there is a bid going in for approximately £40,000 a year (three years) to Capacity Builders, until this and ideas about income generation were further developed, it was felt that creating an independent body was "running before we could walk".

- The recent LSC/ESF round of funding bids had demonstrated that bids were being developed on a regional rather than county basis. Suffolk VCS was, at the moment, leading the region in terms of VCS consortia but that efforts were being made in the other Eastern counties to develop VCS learning consortia. It was acknowledged that some of the main potential income generation would only come when VCS consortia were active in all eastern counties and different consortia could bid regionally for LSC/ESF work and then devolve the work through the different county consortia.
- There was also some disagreement as to what would be the most appropriate structure – whilst probably the majority felt that incorporated status was probably the best, there were one or two who felt that a social enterprise might be better.

It was agreed therefore that the Managed Network status would continue but that moves should be made to create a separate legal entity within a year, once future funding and sustainability became clearer. Taking into account the transparency issue, it was further agreed that a scrutiny committee, independent of the Steering Group, should be set up to keep an eye on Consortium activities.

### The Name of the Consortium

A number of suggestions were put forward. Two issues that arose were whether the title should specify an area i.e. Suffolk, particularly as the Consortium may wish to undertake activities outside Suffolk boundaries. The other issue was whether VCS should remain in the title. Again many of the consortia in different areas of the country had opted not to include VCS in their name. The following suggestions were put forward and the numbers of votes were as follows:

Learning Consortium East	8
Voluntary Learning Consortium Suffolk	2
Learn2Share	3
Life Skills Group	1
Suffolk VCS Learning Consortium	2
<b>Suffolk Learning Consortium</b>	<b>15</b>
The Learning Consortium Suffolk	1
Upskill	2

It was agreed that VCS should appear in the strapline to the consortium name.

Brief mention was made towards the end of the morning about whether organisations would be willing to pay a membership fee and pay for certain Consortium services. It was agreed that this would need further discussion by the Steering Group.

### Train to Gain - launch to Suffolk VCS Organisations

The following 23 organisations were briefed on the Train to Gain service for the VCS organisations in Suffolk:

Age Concern Suffolk	East Suffolk Mind	Ipswich Caribbean
AndAction	Felixstowe Radio	Association
Anglia Care Trust	HAVO	Meridian East
Babergh Communities	Heart Foyers	Mid Suffolk Axis
Together	Ipswich Buddhist Centre	Mid Suffolk Vol. Org. Forum
CSV Media		New Thresholds

Papworth Trust  
SAVO  
St Giles Trust

St John Ambulance  
St Johns Housing Trust  
Suffolk Connect

Suffolk Solutions  
Waveney Community Forum

## "Learning Matters"

Two briefings were also presented to delegates on 'Teacher Qualifications' and 'E-Guides'

## Feedback

The following feedback was provided by delegates through a questionnaire:

"Please rate the following aspects of the event, from 1 (poor) to 6 (excellent)"

<b>General</b>	Organisation of the event prior to the day	4.6
	Organisation of the event on to the day	4.9
	Venue	4.8
	Refreshments	4.5
	Achieving your objectives for the day	4.4
<b>'The Way Forward'</b>	Speakers presentation	4.8
	Opportunity to contribute	4.9
	Time allowed	4.4
<b>Train to Gain for the VCS</b>	Speakers presentation	4.8
	Knowledge of speaker	4.6
	Opportunity to contribute	4.8
	Time allowed	4.8
<b>New Teaching Qualifications</b>	Speakers presentation	4.9
	Knowledge of speaker	4.6
	Opportunity to contribute	4.6
	Time allowed	4.7
<b>E-Guides</b>	Speakers presentation	4.5
	Knowledge of speaker	4.4
	Opportunity to contribute	4.3
	Time allowed	4.1
<b>Would you like to a more detailed briefing on any of the following:</b>		<b>YES</b>
	Train to Gain for the VCS	57%
	New Teaching Qualifications	21%
	E-Guides	57%
<b>Are there any other subjects you would like more information on?</b>		<b>YES</b>
	Common Inspection Framework (accreditation of training)	43%
	Quality Standards for Learning Providers	71%
	Anything else - Investors In People	7%
<b>Can you suggest improvements we could make when planning another event?</b>		
Info on current providers needed / Better system of voting / Additional help for small orgs. / Ensure small orgs come to future events / More time to network		
<b>Any other comments?</b>		
Very informative and useful / Very enlightening / Get more info. out to smaller orgs. / A lot learnt - thank you / Useful day, morning a bit rushed / Well organised		

Travel expenses, totalling £300, were paid to 14 of the delegates.