

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

Responses sought by 20th February 2002

Summary of Key Recommendations:

Labour Market Information

1. **PAULO** should agree with major stakeholders where the sector boundaries lie. These should be regularly reviewed in light of changes and new initiatives affecting the sector.
2. A system to collect consistent and accurate labour market intelligence and data on a regular basis is urgently needed. This must be able to identify more easily information about the voluntary and community organisations in the sector.

Promotion of career opportunities and widening participation to the sector

3. **PAULO** should create and disseminate a range of leaflets and publicity material about work in the sector for use in promoting career options in the **PAULO** sector. These should actively promote the issue of equal opportunities to all social groups
4. Similar work should be undertaken to relate case studies of people working in the sector showing the variety of routes into the sector and the diversity of the employees working in the **PAULO** sector.
5. Information on access to existing training and qualification opportunities should be easily accessible through **PAULO's** web site and constantly updated. Wherever possible this should include direct links to relevant web sites of training providers and employers.

Linking sector qualifications and standards to national developments

6. **PAULO** should continue work on developing common core standards as a basis for creating a clear, coherent and flexible framework of qualifications.
7. Clarification of existing systems for professional endorsement is needed with rapid harmonisation of requirements and cross country/cross occupation recognition.
8. **PAULO** should consider, with key employer and trades union stakeholders, the development of a national professional register, building on work in Youth Work to agree a professional Code of Conduct in England and trials of a voluntary registration scheme in Wales.

Developing new access routes into the sector

9. There is some evidence to suggest that Modern Apprenticeships could provide an acceptable, alternative route into the sector. **PAULO** should consider developing this option with key employers and training providers as soon as possible.
10. **PAULO** should explore the potential for graduate apprenticeship training courses for those coming into the sector with high-level qualifications in other areas.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

Influencing strategic change

11. PAULO should review its structures and committees to strengthen its ability to gather competent, informed stakeholder views and to make and implement decisions quickly.
12. Networks of local employing organisations should be established and clearly linked to relevant government and funding structures in the English regions and devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
13. A PAULO 'Think Tank' of practitioners and academics should be set up to include the most highly respected individuals in all parts of the sector. Their role should be to think 'the impossible' and advise both government and the sector on likely future challenges to the sector.
14. PAULO must use all of the communications mechanisms available to it to ensure that the largest number of sector employers and employees are kept abreast of new trends and developments and are advise on the possible consequences of change. The same mechanisms could also be used to allow the emergence of local trends to be identified for PAULO.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

1. Introduction

As the NTO for the community-based learning and development sector PAULO is concerned to identify the issues that affect the development of those who work in the sector. This includes all of those who work in a voluntary capacity as well as those in paid, full or part time posts. Information from a Labour Market Information (LMI) survey, carried out last year, and a later Skills Foresight report, has been used to identify the key issues that PAULO and its sector employers will need to address in the coming years in order to develop a highly skilled and credible workforce.

2. PAULO's Sector

- 2.1 PAULO was recognised as the National Training Organisation (NTO) for the community based learning and development sector in January 2000. It brought together, for the first time, several distinct but closely related occupational groups. PAULO includes Youth Work, Community Work, Community Education, Community based Adult Learning and, since 2001, Parenting Education across the UK within its sector. While PAULO was being created, new initiatives created new jobs, which did not directly fit existing occupational groups but nevertheless clearly shared similar principles of philosophy and practice with PAULO workers. Obvious examples are Connexions; Family Learning, Learn Direct and it soon became obvious that many aspects of work in other projects such as Sure Start, Youth Offending Teams, Drugs Action Teams and Homework Clubs required the same skill base as PAULO.
- 2.2 There were already many highly respected agencies representing the interests of one or more occupational area in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. In addition some were concerned particularly with the interests of voluntary or community organisations in the sector. The creation of NTOs by government offered an opportunity for the sector to be recognised as an entity in its own right with a highly trained and skilled workforce. A workforce moreover that is a vital factor in achieving government aims of a more inclusive and better-educated society.
- 2.3 PAULO has, in a very short time, developed credibility for the sector in the wider world of work and education. It is a crucial time in PAULO's development, government is again seeking to simplify its relations with employers in a joint bid to drive up the skills of the workforce and increase the UK's economic competitiveness. A new and smaller network of Sector Skills Councils will come into being in April 2002, replacing and incorporating many existing NTOs. If PAULO is to continue the work of raising the profile and recognition of the importance of the work of the sector it is vital that it can demonstrate sector commitment to raising the standards of competence of its work force.

3. Workforce Development Planning

- 3.1 The government vision for the UK in 2010 is that: -

'The UK will be a society where government, employers and individuals actively engage in skills development to deliver sustainable economic success for all'

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

An unacceptably high proportion of the population in the UK lacks basic and intermediate skills; indeed 20% of adults cannot meet minimum levels of literacy and numeracy. While young people in Britain achieve better exam results each year, they still do not keep pace with levels of attainment of young people in other industrialised countries. It has been well documented that low skilled people can easily become trapped in a vicious circle of poor job prospects, rising debt, poor housing, poor health and eventual social exclusion. This situation is well known to practitioners in PAULO's sector who have long made the argument that economic and social regeneration are two sides of the same coin. Work as a volunteer in community organisations within the sector itself can, for some, be the first step back into the wider workforce, where the skills of team working, negotiation and communication gained through such roles are highly valued. Practitioners in the sector, who work with those most alienated from mainstream learning provision or with young people encouraging them to determine their own futures, need themselves, to be highly skilled and knowledgeable.

3.2 Workforce development is described as: -

'Activities that increase the capacity of individuals to participate actively in the workplace, thereby increasing their productivity and employability'.

Workforce development includes broad issues of education, training and vocational learning, measuring the performance of organisations, access to continuing training and other human resource development opportunities. In an ideal world education and training opportunities would be demand led and responsive to the needs of both employers and workers.

3.3 As an NTO, PAULO is charged with creating a workforce development plan for the sector that will raise the standards of practice in the sector and consequently improve the life chances of those groups and individuals with whom the sector works.

3.4 A work force development plan describes the nature and scale of change needed for greater success for individuals and organisations. It identifies the key issues affecting success in the sector and suggests priorities and strategies to address them. It is important that the plan identifies specific action to be taken by PAULO and other stakeholders and suggests appropriate and measurable indicators of success and time-scales.

The plan is about the sector as a whole and should be seen as a long-term approach to raising the profile and status of work in the sector.

4. Identifying Key Issues for the Sector

4.1 PAULO's workforce operates in a very diverse context, although the occupational groups, which make up the sector share very clear principles and practice, the settings in which they are applied vary tremendously. Organisations can include large national voluntary organisations with both paid and unpaid staff, Local Authority services and very small local community organisations staffed wholly by volunteers as well as short-term government funded and specifically targeted initiatives.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

Moreover staff working in the sector do so with a huge diversity of training, formal qualifications and employment status. The mix of full-time paid staff, part-time or sessional paid staff and volunteers, brings both strength and confusion of role to the sector.

- 4.2 PAULO's LMI survey in 2001 was the first stage in developing a clear picture of the sector and establishing the size and nature of the workforce. Further analysis of responses from more than 600 people helped identify gaps in skills and training as well as some of the issues affecting the success of the sector.
- 4.3 Major issues include defining clear boundaries for the sector, presenting an understandable and attractive image of work and careers in the sector, developing a flexible and accredited framework of training and qualifications and enabling the sector to respond more quickly and positively to changing priorities.
- 4.4 All of these are reflected in reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining high calibre staff, whether paid or volunteers.

The following sections of this report examine some of these issues more closely and look at possible approaches to deal with problems.

5. Identifying Sector Boundaries

- 5.1 As government moves towards new Sector Skills councils, it becomes increasingly important that PAULO is able to define clearly where its occupational boundaries lie. The field of community based learning has never been static, with new roles and job titles constantly being created to meet particular needs. Where once the methods used by community based learning and development practitioners were perhaps seen as somewhat anarchic and outside conventional education policy and practice, it is increasingly the case that other professions such as teachers, health workers and police adopt many of the best practices of PAULO's workforce.

With the advent of new initiatives such as Learn Direct, Neighbourhood Renewal and Connexions the boundaries of the sector have of necessity become more fluid and consequently it is even more difficult to delineate the sector in terms of numbers of employees. This is especially the case with those working in local voluntary and community organisations where there often seems little contact with formal networks of support and training. Employers and Trades Unions will need to work together with PAULO and representatives of the voluntary and community sector to agree common areas of interest and develop networks for co-operation.

Recommendations

- 1 PAULO should agree with major stakeholders where the sector boundaries lie. These should be regularly reviewed in light of changes and new initiatives affecting the sector.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

- 2 A system to collect consistent and accurate labour market intelligence and data on a regular basis is urgently needed. This must be able to identify more easily information about the voluntary and community organisations in the sector.

6. Presenting an attractive Career Option

- 6.1 The LMI survey and Skills Foresight reports both highlighted that many employers in the sector find it difficult to recruit competent paid staff and/or volunteers. In some cases retention of staff is also an issue with good employers who are prepared to train staff, resenting leakage of experienced staff into new roles elsewhere, indeed often outside the sector.

(There are obvious links between this issue and the need for coherent and flexible training, which will be discussed in the next section)

- 6.2 The sector is perhaps unique, in that it tends to attract new recruits who have already developed a career in another area. They move to this type of work because of their belief in the underpinning principles of inclusion, empowerment, accessibility of learning and learning as a means of liberation. Such people are often highly qualified in other fields and bring valuable perspective and breadth of experience to the role.

It is rare to talk to young people, in or out of the formal education system, whose aim in life is to become a Youth Worker or a Family Learning Tutor. Indeed for those who do want this, it is very difficult to enter qualifying training courses without previous work experience in the sector or to find employment in the sector other than as a volunteer. Training in the sector needs to accommodate the needs of learners from a diversity of starting points and to ensure that whatever the starting point or route taken to qualified status there is real parity of esteem, both within and outside the sector.

Recommendations

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- 2 Similar work should be undertaken to relate case studies of people working in the sector, showing the variety of routes into the sector and the diversity of the employees working in the PAULO sector.
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7. Accessible, Coherent and Flexible Training

- 7.1 As a sector, PAULO's members have considerable expertise, knowledge and commitment to learning. Existing training and qualifications for those working in the sector have been developed over a long period, primarily to meet the needs of the

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

various employing organisations in the sector. For some of the large national voluntary organisations in the sector, for example the uniformed youth organisations, there has been formal training of volunteers for the best part of a century.

- 7.2 While there is evidence of a plethora of training it is harder to provide evidence of rigour and quality across the sector. Much of the training taking place is no doubt of high quality, providing a sound understanding of both principles and practice but it is difficult in many cases to provide a clear picture of progressive training which can claim credit within a nationally recognised framework of qualifications. This has obvious disadvantages for both employers and employees seeking to move from one organisation to another.
- 7.3 It is important that all routes and qualifications, including those in the voluntary sector, have external recognition within national credit and qualifications frameworks, (especially by the Higher Education system), to allow people to achieve their maximum potential in the sector or indeed to move into other related professions. Within Youth Work and Community Education there are systems for professional endorsement of training courses leading to qualifications, (mainly in Higher Education), which are used by employers and trades unions as a basis for determining and agreeing terms and conditions of employment.

While this provides some element of quality assurance, there remains a lack of coherence between occupations or between the four countries of the UK, which must be addressed. Community Work NVQs have enjoyed a growing level of interest in recent years, providing access into paid work in the sector for those with few or no formal educational qualifications. This could form a useful model for developing NVQs in other occupational areas and a range of apprenticeship opportunities across the sector.

The situation is much less clear in the rest of the sector with a high proportion of entrants to Community based Adult Learning posts and Parenting Education having previously attained high level qualifications in a wide range of subject areas. While this indicates a certain level of academic ability it provides no assurance of practical ability to work in the particular context of community-based learning and development.

Recommendations

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- 2 Clarification of existing systems for professional endorsement is needed with rapid harmonisation of requirements and cross country/cross occupation recognition.
- 3 PAULO should consider, with key employer and trades union stakeholders, the development of a national professional register, building on work in Youth Work to agree a professional Code of Conduct in England and trials of a voluntary registration scheme in Wales.
- 4 There is some evidence to suggest that Modern Apprenticeships could provide an acceptable, alternative route into the sector. PAULO should consider developing this option with key employers and training providers as soon as possible.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

5. PAULO should explore the potential for graduate apprenticeship training courses for those coming into the sector with high-level qualifications in other areas.

8. Coping with Change

- 8.1 Change is a fact of life; it affects every aspect of work and personal life. In the community-based learning sector practitioners help others to understand and cope with the effects of change in society. To be able to do this competently requires an armoury of up to date knowledge and skills and the ability to apply them in a wide range of circumstances.
- 8.2 However, with few exceptions, there appears to be little commitment to continuing learning and development for those working in critical frontline and service management roles in the sector. While there are abundant examples of short in house courses on one-off topics it is hard to find examples of planned continuing professional development (CPD).
- 8.3 Training providers largely concentrate on meeting needs identified by employers and the time lag inherent in changing the academic focus of a course means that trainees will always be just a little out of date.
- 8.4 The sector lacks a central role in anticipating and driving change itself. Too often change is accepted as something initiated outside the sector and to which it then has to respond. For example many recent government initiatives tackle issues long ago identified in PAULO's sector. It is hard to reconcile the sector's ability to pinpoint social deficiencies and its inability to force change in strategic policy. PAULO needs to lead the way in creating a climate where identification of trends and creative thinking is the normal activity of local learning networks of employers in both statutory and voluntary and community sectors and which mean the sector can legitimately influence policy and drive strategic responses. Partnership between PAULO, key academics and practitioners should be capitalised upon to enable continuous review and analysis of work in the sector and to become the obvious and most respected authority on promoting community learning and social inclusion.

Recommendations

1. PAULO should review its structures and committees to strengthen its ability to gather competent, informed stakeholder views and to make and implement decisions quickly.
2. Networks of local employing organisations should be established and clearly linked to relevant government and funding structures in the English regions and devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. A PAULO 'Think Tank' of practitioners and academics should be set up to include the most highly respected individuals in all parts of the sector. Their role should be to think 'the impossible' and advise both government and the sector on likely future challenges to the sector.

Workforce Development: A Consultation Paper

4. PAULO must use all of the communications mechanisms available to it to ensure that the largest numbers of its members are kept abreast of new trends and developments and are advised on the possible consequences of change. The same mechanisms could also be used to allow the emergence of local trends to be identified for PAULO.

9. What Next?

This paper has tried to encapsulate some of the issues affecting progress and growth in the sector. In the time available PAULO has not been able to identify every concern of those working in community based learning and development but hopes rather that there will be some consensus on the key issues which must be tackled by PAULO in the next stage of its development.

The views of everyone with a stake in the sector are important in shaping future strategy for PAULO and in influencing the direction of many of the key national organisations that support development in this area.

A feedback proforma is attached to this paper. Please let us have your views so that final recommendations for future action can be developed.

Please send your reply to: -

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To reach us by February 20th 2002