Partnerships for skills

investing in training for the 21st century

Maria Hughes and Sharon Cottam

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Summary and key issues

During 1998–99, FEDA (now known as the Learning and Skills Development Agency) and British Aerospace (BAe – now known as BAE SYSTEMS) researched the development of best practice partnerships between education and training providers and employers. The research entailed an extensive literature review of partnership theories from the business sector, interviews with people engaged in partnership activity, and the production of case studies to demonstrate partnership development.

Key issues from the research

- There is an urgent need to develop the skills, knowledge and competencies to support economic success and employability. Securing this development requires sustained collaborative efforts from a range of partners.

- Strategic alliances between employers and education and training providers can add more value to the learning opportunities provided than is likely to result from a more traditional purchaser/supplier arrangement.

- The changing nature of work and organisations in the knowledge-driven economy has had a major impact on relationships between companies. As a result, companies are less likely to be able to operate in isolation. Judgements must be made about the value of long- and short-term relationships in the exchange of goods and services and in the exchange of knowledge and skills. All organisations should consider the benefits and costs of co-operation.

- It is equally as valid to assess the costs and benefits of partnerships concerned with the development of knowledge and skills, as it is to evaluate those concerned with the exchange of any other service. Models drawn from business theory could provide a useful starting point when determining the business case for partnerships between education and industry.

- While the partnership principles of competence, openness, reliability and equity were present in the partnerships surveyed, many of the relationships were still fixed in the provider/supplier mode. Examples of providers taking strategic partnership or stakeholder roles were found, and some of the partnerships were long term and addressed strategic concerns. Moving beyond the existing contractual relationship to a deeper partnership based on mutual development would take little further effort.

- The benefits of partnerships may need further clarification to show the added value that they bring to learning. The link between learning and performance is irrefutable – the link between training and performance is less certain.

- There is frequently a lack of clarity in defining training needs and consequently an inexact match with learning opportunities that increase employees' effectiveness. Better mutual understanding could be enormously beneficial in bridging this gap and improving the relationship between training and the bottom line.

- Strategic alliance between providers and employers can assist with predicting long-term skill and knowledge requirements, thereby shifting the emphasis from remedying deficits to predicting and planning for the future.

- Education and training for employment and learning at work are relatively well established. Learning through work – as a concept and reality – is less well formed. New models are required where learning through the job role or working environment brings about increased capacity. This would not necessarily reduce the need for vocational training or specific updating, but it would require an active learning culture and innovative ways of securing learning.

- Partnerships involving microbusinesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) may need a different approach (Pengelly, 2000a, 2000b). SME supply-chain relationships tend to focus on addressing immediate skills shortages to secure contracts in the short term. Little emphasis is placed on long-term or management development. Responsibility for developing the SME supply chain could be shared, particularly where suppliers have a close relationship with a single large company.

- It may be inappropriate for small firms with diverse markets and a range of outlets to mirror the corporate approach to management as greater flexibility in job roles will be required. Colleges could champion the development of these broader skills, but this is a high risk/high responsibility undertaking. Infrastructures are required to draw together SMEs associated with larger firms for generic development.

- The benefits to individual employees from partnerships should be emphasised. If people are aware of the benefits, they may be more willing to take part in training and learning activities, rather than doing it 'because they have to'. In the knowledge-driven economy individuals must be active players in partnerships between the worlds of work and education. Initiatives such as the Union Learning Fund and Individual Learning Accounts could be influential in promoting the desire for learning and development among the population at large.

- The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) should consider carefully the role of colleges in relation to the support they provide for business. The new world of post-16 education and training, as proposed in the White Paper, *Learning to succeed* (DfEE, 1999), places increased emphasis on skills development and the leading role of employers in developing a skilled and educated workforce to secure UK competitiveness. Sustained partnerships, which build upon the intellectual capital of FE providers, could enrich skills development and limit the gap between the identification of skills needs and development of skills that has bedevilled the UK economy throughout the last century.

- To be effective, such relationships will require development and their success will depend on the FE sector's ability to deliver. Maintaining a strong and capable FE sector will require investment in terms of updating the technical and pedagogic skills of the staff, and in the facilities and infrastructure which support learning. It will also require a more timely and accurate assessment of training and development needs if an increase in the skills equilibrium is to be achieved.

Introduction

The national imperative for lifelong learning springs, in part, from the need to develop the skills, knowledge and competencies to support economic success and sustainable employability. Securing this development is an onerous task that is unlikely to be achieved solely through the efforts of individuals, single employers, education providers or by government directives. The challenges of the knowledge-driven economy are too great and our starting point is too far behind our economic competitors for disjointed or piecemeal development to work. Sustained collaborative efforts from a range of partners are more likely to achieve results.

Partnerships and strategic alliances between employers and education and training providers can add more value to training than is likely to result from a more traditional purchaser/supplier arrangement. This added value may be evident both in the effectiveness of employee learning, and in the identification of skills needs and their development, resulting in a better match with and of future requirements for employability. Through employer/provider partnerships, a bridge of capability, knowledge and understanding could be created to engender an inclusive approach to lifelong learning.

Previous research by FEDA has provided useful categories to describe the key roles that colleges can play in economic regeneration:

- Colleges develop skills for the future through 16–19 education and training, and meet current demands by upskilling the workforce.
- Colleges can also play an important stakeholder role – as employers in their own right and as a base from which employment may grow.
- FE colleges can link with other sectors as strategic partners for local economic growth and development (James and Clark, 1997).

During 1998–99, FEDA and BAE SYSTEMS investigated the role of partnerships between employers and FE providers in skills development. The project attempted to analyse a range of joint working arrangements between employers and providers to ascertain their added value in terms of skills development, based on theoretical perspectives of business partnerships.

This report provides:

- a rationale for partnerships between employers and education and training providers, based on relevant theoretical perspectives
- outcomes of the joint research project undertaken by FEDA and BAE SYSTEMS
- case studies of some of the partnerships identified by the research project.

Employers are constantly exhorted to ensure that their staff have opportunities to learn and develop, particularly in the workplace. However, the extent to which they have the capacity to secure these opportunities is limited in the majority of firms, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). There is a strong case for employers remaining focused on their core business activities. Learning may be an integral component of business success, but it is unlikely that employers themselves can undertake the provision of formal vocational education and training, particularly at the initial or foundation stage.

The project

Throughout the autumn and winter of 1998, FEDA and BAE SYSTEMS researched the development of best practice partnerships. The research began with an extensive literature review of partnership theories from the business sector, with a view to assessing their relevance to partnerships between education and industry. A partnership analysis tool previously used by BAE SYSTEMS managers was adapted to provide a research instrument to evaluate the partnerships investigated by the project.

Interviews were conducted with education providers engaged in a range of partnership activity. These partnerships demonstrated:

- the range of providers involved in different types of partnerships with industry
- diverse learning solutions and a broad spread of provision from basic skills to managerial and professional development
- different geographical locations and industry sectors.

A review seminar, attended by many of the people interviewed, was held to consider and expand upon the findings from the interviews. Case studies were commissioned, based on some of the partnerships evaluated. These, and the research findings, were disseminated at an event in June 1999, jointly organised by BAE SYSTEMS and FEDA, and held at BAE SYSTEMS's corporate headquarters in Farnborough.

The study was designed to be qualitative. While the small number of people interviewed means that the findings are not representative in any strict statistical sense, some consistent messages and issues from the research can be applied more widely. Four of the original case studies, by education providers, are included in this report, see chapter 5, page 15.

A business rationale for partnerships

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The changing nature of work and the organisation of businesses in a knowledge-driven economy has had a major impact on the relationships companies have with each other. As competition increases, it is less likely that any company can operate in isolation. This is the case in supply-chain relationships, and in the exchange of goods and services between all companies. The degree of interdependence between organisations is increasing, as is the need for judgements to be made about the value of long- and short-term relationships in the exchange of goods and services and, most crucially, knowledge and skills. It is important for all organisations to consider the benefits and costs of such co-operation.

It is therefore equally as valid to assess the costs and benefits of partnerships concerned with the development of knowledge and skills, as it is to evaluate those concerned with the exchange of any other service. Because of this, models drawn from business theory could provide a useful starting point when determining the business case for partnerships between education and industry.

Establishing the business case for collaboration

Collaboration and partnerships between otherwise extremely competitive businesses are well established and take many forms. In some instances, contracting out a function or process to another company or provider can be of great benefit to complex organisations and allow organisations to concentrate on their core business.

However, a great deal of time and effort is required to develop and maintain the partnership process. Organisations need to ensure that these arrangements provide mutually useful outcomes at an acceptable cost – including the considerable time and effort involved. This is equally the case if the partnership concerns the training and development function. The need for skills and knowledge updating is increasingly important, and sustained and productive relationships between employers and providers may be viewed as important enough to warrant the effort involved in creating and developing partnerships.

Reasons for partnership

Dunning (1979) proposed that organisations will collaborate if they are able to gain clear advantages, such as improved markets and access to resources, improved technology and enhanced strategic growth. Similarly, Ajami and Khambata (1991) noted that organisations participate in partnerships to gain benefits such as lower economic costs, reduction of financial risk, access to partners' skills and greater strategic direction.

Firms may engage in partnerships not just because of a desire to reduce costs, but also to capitalise on their subcontractor's technology base, and gain access to its skilled workforce. The benefits to the subcontractor could include greater access to funds from an organisation at the forefront of technology, along with other advantages such as equipment and software support.

Root (1984) argued that developments in partnering or contracting out require long-term contractual arrangements between organisations. He noted that firms would transfer non-strategic production processes or operations to other organisations on a co-operative rather than a control basis.

The term 'virtual co-operation' has been used to describe temporary networks of independent organisations linked by information technology to share skills and costs, and to access each other's specialised market.

Inter-firm co-operation

Much of the research on industrial policy and economic competitiveness suggests that co-operation is a better means of encouraging growth in the economy than competition. This being the case, it could have a major impact on the way organisations structure their internal and external relationships.

Spekman (1988) states that:

> *The traditional adversarial way of interacting with suppliers attempts to minimise the price of purchased goods and services by playing a large number of suppliers off against one another through arms' length, short-term contractual arrangements. While this approach may gain price concessions in the short term, it cannot establish the trust, commitment and information sharing necessary to achieve mutual success.*

There are many similarities between Spekman's views and the Japanese Keiretsu: a large industrial complex with a number of companies linked together through a network of formal and informal business relationships.

Blinder (1991) examined the advantages of the Keiretsu:

> *The astounding success of Japanese auto and electronic companies suggests that the long-term relationships that define a production might be a better co-ordinating mechanism than either vertical integration or open markets.*

High-performing partnerships

Moss Kanter (1997) observed that for any partnership to perform at its best, certain things need to be aligned and implemented by all partners:

- reasons for partnering have to be clear and shared
- rules and regulations regarding how the partners will work together have to be set and agreed
- structures and procedures for daily operations have to be set up
- skills, attitudes and behaviours that allow a partnership to succeed must be developed.

The partners may invest in each other to demonstrate their respective stakes in the relationship through, for example:

- equity swaps, cross-ownership, or mutual board service in a corporate environment
- jointly owned equipment in a team environment
- joint bank accounts in a personal partnership.

Investments in time and effort are equally important.

Working relationships

Moss Kanter (1997) suggested that working relationships generally fall into one of three groups:

- Power relationships – which rely on punishment and reward. These have been the business norm for many years. They generally get things done but are costly in time and resources, breed divisions and resentment, and stifle excellence.

- Hope relationships – characterised by the notion of removing controls and empowering partners. They encourage people to act responsibly, but the absence of controls could lead to major and costly mistakes.

- Trust relationships – attempt to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of effective partnerships. Partners in a trust relationship work together because they want to.

Trust has played a major role in the success of numerous corporations including Hewlett-Packard, Dunlop and Marks & Spencer. From a study of the UK construction industry, Benett (1995) concluded that partnerships based on trust cost on average 1% of total project costs to initiate, and are responsible for overall cost savings of between 10 and 30%.

Moss Kanter (1997) also noted that a successful trust partnership is underpinned by four core principles:

- Competence – the ability to do the job well
- Openness – honesty and openness towards partners
- Reliability – doing what you said you would do
- Equity – fairness in working relationships.

Partnership cultures

The culture of an organisation can have an impact on the success of the partnership. Handy (1995) observed a range of culture types seen in organisations:

- The power-based culture – recognised by the efforts of its key influences to exercise power over subordinates, colleagues, and contacts of all kinds. While the alignment of power does not necessarily conform to the formal organisation chart, individuals, not groups, usually take decisions.

- The people-based culture – consensus is essential and group decisions are encouraged. People are involved in decision-making and know what is going on in the organisation.

- The role-based culture – bureaucratic, and operating largely on the basis of rules and norms that are written down and seen as being collectively owned.

- The task-based culture – puts task before process and concentrates on current work goals. Task cultures typically put much human effort into organising and managing group or team activity to complete the common task.

Additional drivers

Additional drivers for partnerships may include: political forces, attempts to pre-empt competitors, and the commercialisation of the product or service. The promotion of partnerships is high on the current government's agenda, and this political will is clearly encouraged through initiatives such as local learning partnerships and the proposed local learning and skills councils.

From theory to practice

The outcomes of the literature review informed the areas of further investigation explored during the interviews with people involved in college/company partnerships. Interviews were held with 33 people, representing key players involved in partnership activity. A list of those interviewed and their organisations is attached as Appendix 1.

Although the size of the sample is small, the examples that are drawn from it illustrate some of the principles of partnership in action.

Processes for implementing partnerships

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Partnerships between a range of businesses and education providers were investigated to assess the extent to which Moss Kanter's core principles – competence, openness, reliability and equity – were present. All of these principles were seen by key players as important characteristics for an effective partnership, although interviewees mentioned many more. Points that emerged from the investigation were generally related to:

- **Strategy, purpose and objectives** A clear strategy must state how the partnership will be developed and maintained. The strategy must specify the key activities to be undertaken, be jointly owned and equally important to all partners. Better outcomes are more likely if the education provider is aware of the organisational strategy of the company and the relationship between the business need and skill and knowledge requirements.

- **Infrastructure** The partnership should ensure equivalence of commitment in both time and resource allocation. Partners' respective contributions may vary in size, because the organisations themselves may not be of equal dimensions. However, the parties concerned should view the proportion of each other's contribution as sufficient.

- **Common processes and procedures** Shared processes and procedures are helpful in developing successful partnerships. Such practice enables effective monitoring of the activities and outcomes of the relationship on a basis that is understood by all parties. However, it may be difficult to achieve precise compatibility of systems, especially if they are used for other purposes. As a compromise, the needs of all parties should be accommodated, with essential differences clarified.

- **People and organisation** One of the main ingredients of effective partnerships is the deployment of staff with appropriate skills in clearly defined roles. People should also be supported through an appropriate organisation structure, agreeable to both parties. As part of the contract, one company contributes towards the cost of training the college staff to ensure they are equipped with the skills needed to assess the business. The company also makes available some of its management development, personal skills programmes and learning resource centre packages to college staff working on the contract. With both of these partnerships, college staff will appear on the company's organisation charts, to show that they are a fully integrated into the organisation.

- **Communication** Each partner needs to be informed of the other partner's business and culture. Regular meetings or other communications channels need to be established. Joint forums, steering groups and information sharing are essential. In some of the examples investigated, providers were regularly invited to company social or business gatherings. For example, in the implementation of the 'Developing us' programme, staff from BAE SYSTEMS and college tutors jointly organised best-practice events and award ceremonies. In order to keep education providers up to date on industry business, BAE SYSTEMS regularly distributes business plans, company newspapers and journals to its education providers.
- **Teamworking** The review of partnership theories revealed that working in partnership requires a co-operative and consultative approach to problem solving and information sharing. Teamworking throughout the partnership is vital if the partnership is to be successful. The BAE SYSTEMS and Blackburn College partnership organised teambuilding events to improve teamworking.

Partnership enablers

The representatives from partnerships surveyed were asked what factors, in their opinion, were essential to the development of good partnerships. There was a considerable degree of consistency in their views. Common themes included: loyalty, shared and integrated goals, regular reviews, joint problem-solving, trust, openness, flexibility, joint commitment, teamworking and the allocation of adequate resources. Equally as interesting are the issues identified that were not common to each group. People from education mentioned listening skills, up-to-date knowledge, mutual respect, attention to detail, achievable aims, joint accountability and identity, a no-blame culture, ethics and integrity. People from industry valued long-term vision and equal ownership. Some of these differences may be due to the variances in language and terminology – equal ownership could mean the same as joint accountability. However, the list of characteristics identified by the education providers is much longer than that proposed by people from industry. This may indicate that education providers place greater importance on partnerships.

Based upon these examples of best practice and the work of Moss Kanter (1997), a 'partnership enablers model' is proposed (see Figure 1). The model describes the enablers that need to be considered and subsequently adopted in order for a partnership to be successful, and complements the suggested processes for implementing partnerships. Ten partnership behaviours essential to effective partnerships are identified. These are based on the behaviours identified by the project partnerships:

- honesty
- trust
- openness
- sharing
- respect
- ethical behaviour
- feedback
- no-blame culture
- listening
- flexibility.

Developing effective partnerships

In addition to these enablers, practical steps need to be taken to ensure that partnerships are effective. These were identified and commented upon by participants in the project.

Figure 1 | The partnership enablers model

British Aerospace and FEDA Working Together in Partnership

Partnership Enablers

Partnership Enablers

Strategy/Purpose and Objectives	• Clear strategy and vision • Equal ownership • Equal importance • Agreed goals & objectives
Infrastructure	• Investment • Integrated information technology
Process	• Regular review and evaluation • Jointly agreed processes • Full integration • Attention to detail
People/Organisation	• Dedicated resource • Correct organisation structure • Appropriate knowledge/skills
Communication	• Informed of the business • Regular and effective communication methods
Team working	• Equal ownership • Collaboration • Sharing

Business Results

Honesty   Openness   Respect   Feedback   Listening   Flexibility

Trust   Sharing   Ethical   No-blame

Partnership Behaviours

Source: BAE SYSTEMS

Steering or working groups

There is clearly great benefit to be gained from setting up formal steering or working groups to monitor the success of partnerships. Such groups can share and develop education and business strategies. Steering group representatives can also act as central points of contact, information sharers or communicators in their own organisations.

Warwick University emphasised the importance of ownership and commitment of employers on steering groups:

Steering groups must be chaired by the Programme Sponsor on behalf of the Industry Project Manager responsible for ensuring that the partnership is maintained and implemented successfully.

To obtain equal ownership and commitment, is essential; those involved in the partnership need to be informed about the strategy and plans of the partnering organisations. The establishment of joint steering groups or forums may help to bring this about.

Effective implementation process

The partnership implementation process is likely to be most effective if a sequence of steps is adopted. Clear, agreed milestones and action plans are important in the effective implementation of partnership activities.

Initiating the activity

A significant amount of work with companies now goes through a formal tendering process, with education providers engaged in competitive tendering. As one employer noted:

> *We now prefer our education providers to bid for work as it enables us to ensure that we choose the most suitable and skilled providers. Once we have received their proposals for the work, we bring them in to give them the opportunity to present their proposal. We can then form a view on the culture of the college, their standards of operating and their cost mechanisms, and whether it would integrate well with our own.*

While this approach may be useful in the initial stages of a relationship, it may sit uneasily in established partnerships. Colleges noted the positive and negative aspects of tendering. They recognised that the process offers them an opportunity to present their ideas on a level playing field with other providers. However, they also noted that time could be wasted if bids were unsuccessful.

Service level agreements

Not all of the examples investigated had formal contracts and service level agreements in place, although all interviewees believed it would be beneficial to detail both parties' roles and responsibilities. In partnerships centred on service delivery, required standards of performance, the cost or pricing mechanisms and details around termination of the contract should also be articulated.

Review and evaluation

A further critical step is the review and evaluation process. All partnerships analysed had some form of review mechanisms in place. The Kimberly Clark and Furness College partnership held regular monthly progress reviews to discuss current activities and future developments (see Case study B). The college provided their industry contacts with regular written reports to summarise key points of the meetings. Other partnerships conduct joint appraisals on their shared or domestic resources so that future development can be jointly agreed.

Similarly, colleges usually provide employers with written reports on trainees' progress and written proof of exam results and pass rates. All the partnerships investigated followed some aspects of the 'plan, do, review' process to maintain their relationship. Some providers produced regular status reports that would typically include: key activities undertaken during the last six months, pass rates, difficulties or problems encountered and future developments.

Warwick University and BAE SYSTEMS have developed a robust pre- and post-programme evaluation process whereby each individual embarking upon the purchasing programme is asked to conduct an analysis of their current and subsequent performance levels against the defined purchasing core skills (see Case study D).

Education providers conform to a rigorous inspection process and may operate other quality assurance processes, such as Investors in People. All key players recognised the importance in providing a quality framework to document their processes.

Benefits of effective partnerships

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A fair degree of consistency in portrayal of the benefits of partnerships was apparent in the views expressed by both providers and employers. If all partners are committed and willing to put in the investment – not just in terms of resources, but in infrastructure and shared processes and procedures – the benefits realised can be enormous.

Benefits of partnerships to employers were identified as being:

- sharing of best practice and networking, particularly for large companies or in provision shared with other companies
- consistency and relevance to the job role, especially in customised training for a single company
- access to dedicated resources
- more efficient and effective programme management, especially where a dedicated project manager is provided
- increased employee motivation and morale
- better trained staff with increased educational competence
- identification of high performers
- influence on the development of the curriculum
- access to formal accreditation.

Because of the dialogue between partners, benefits to learners could include:

- more relevant training with clearer links to job role
- sharing of best practice and networking with other learners
- enhanced employability – especially if accreditation is offered
- enhanced capability.

Repeat business

Securing repeat business from working in partnership with industry is clearly important for providers. Since the Automotive Sector Strategic Alliance (ASSA) was established, the City of Sunderland College has been awarded a contract to develop a high-volume manufacturing facility to be based at Washington in the north-east of England. ASSA is to be responsible for the provision of the premises, establishing the credibility of the facility with employers and the recruitment of students. The college will be responsible for the provision of training and equipment.

As a direct result of the establishment of ASSA, Training Direct Resource Ltd (TDR) was formed. TDR Ltd is a partnership between industry and training in further and higher education, aiming to:

- increase capacity of employers to respond to specific needs
- improve the image of engineering
- provide high-quality training to new recruits and the current workforce
- identify and direct funding streams to produce joint funding bids.

The partnership is led by industry and has developed close collaborative links with local colleges to support technical education and training requirements of engineering companies across the northern region.

A further benefit to business success resulting from partnership activity is evident at Kimberly Clark. Following the successful secondment of a full-time member of staff from Furness College to Kimberly Clark, the company has asked Furness College to lead the discussions regarding the establishment of a learning resource centre within the company. Three years ago, Kimberly Clark would not have considered working with the college as it believed it had nothing to offer the industry.

Limitations and difficulties

Working in partnership is invariably challenging. Failure to consider the characteristics of effective partnerships may contribute to the inability of training providers and employers to develop and deliver effective training programmes. There are many potential difficulties and limitations to working in partnership for all parties concerned. Particular issues raised in interviews with key players included:

- managing differences in culture, customer expectations, understanding of roles and boundaries
- contractual difficulties due to industry pressures and changing business needs
- competing pressures on providers to supply mainstream and business-specific training
- isolation of staff working off-site
- coping with the range of abilities of work-based learners
- pressure on employees to succeed
- difficulties in fully integrating partners' systems
- employers' negative perceptions of colleges' capacity to cope with rapid pace of change and the imperative for providers to be more innovative and flexible
- no direct linkage to career development or reward for many work-based learners and the impact of this on their motivation
- lack of networking and sharing of best practice with other organisations on company-specific provision
- problems for firms in forming multiple partnerships to source training.

In addition:

- Some of the difficulties for industry result from the ways in which education providers operate and are funded. Firms' training budgets are limited – particularly in SMEs – and support from public funds may be inflexible and insufficient.

- Education providers see the competitive training market having a major impact on how they perceive partnerships. Tight budgets and competing with local colleges for work and staff may contribute to the perception that the work is too difficult and time consuming – especially with SMEs, where there are few economies of scale.

- Major industries in some areas can dominate rather than collaborate with other firms or colleges.

- Companies may not give providers enough information on their business activity or keep the training providers informed of general business goals and priorities.

- While it is in everyone's interest to ensure that providers maintain and increase the skills of their staff to keep abreast of changes in their sector and in pedagogical practice, industrial players may feel that the onus is on them to keep education providers up to date.
- Internal conflicts between line managers and training managers, for example, where managers may not fully support staff in their development on the job, may limit the effectiveness of training.

Conclusions

While the partnerships investigated had some of characteristics of 'true' partnerships, many of the relationships were still fixed in the provider/supplier mode. Some involved the colleges in strategic partnerships or stakeholder roles, but there were few examples of equal partners sharing a common destiny. However, some of the partnerships involved long-term relationships, addressing strategic concerns of the companies. Moving these beyond the existing contractual relationship to a deeper partnership based on mutual development would take little further effort.

Partnerships can imply a loss of power and control for the individuals within them. The development of equal relationships between colleges and companies depends on mutual trust and accountability, and may hinge on the confidence of individuals to surrender some of their power and control. Partnerships that demonstrate these characteristics are unlikely to be purely business relationships and may require a deeper commitment to learning and development.

The benefits of partnerships may require further clarification to emphasise the added value that they bring to learning. The link between learning and performance is irrefutable – the link between training and performance is less certain. There is frequently a lack of clarity in defining training needs and subsequently an inexact match with learning opportunities that increase employees' effectiveness. This may result in outcomes that do not substantially increase employees' effectiveness. As a consequence, many employers remain unconvinced that training results in bottom line benefits. Better mutual understanding could be enormously beneficial in bridging this gap.

Ways forward

The key issue in the future may be how and where people learn. Education and training for employment and learning at work are relatively well established. Learning through work – as a concept and reality – is less well formed. New learning models are required where learning through the job role or working environment brings about increased capacity. This would not necessarily reduce the need for vocational training or specific updating, but it would require an active learning culture and innovative ways of securing learning. Every firm, or even every worker, could have an academic mentor, for example. Clear performance indicators would be needed to establish the added value of such approaches, as would flexible systems for recording and recognising the achievement of individuals.

Strategic alliance between providers and employers can assist with predicting long-term skill and knowledge requirements, thereby shifting the emphasis from remedying deficits to predicting and planning for the future. The intellectual capital of education needs to be seen as a resource for industry, and partnerships could provide forums for discussing skills for the future.

The partnership implementation process described in this report is probably more appropriate for larger firms. Partnerships involving SMEs may need a different approach. SME supply-chain relationships tend to focus on addressing immediate skills shortages to secure contracts in the short term. Little emphasis is placed on long-term or management development. There appears to be little shared concept of the need for capacity building between large companies and their suppliers.

Suppliers in a close relationship with a single large company have a mutual destiny, therefore responsibility to develop capacity to secure quality and effectiveness is more likely to be assumed by the larger company. In such circumstances, responsibility for developing the supply-chain SMEs could perhaps be shared. Joint staff training and management development programmes may be appropriate.

Mirroring the corporate approach to management may be inappropriate for firms with more diverse markets and a range of outlets that may require less specificity and greater flexibility in job roles. Colleges could champion the development of these broader skills, but this is a high risk/high responsibility undertaking. Infrastructures for drawing together SMEs for generic development need to be put in place. Examples exist of self-help groups being formed for this purpose, such as the Local Employer Networks. These approaches work best when the threat of non-collaboration exceeds that of competition.

Networks between providers across the country would be useful for securing quality and consistency with major companies or sectors. For example, the Association of Colleges of Aerospace Technology (ACAT) takes a lead on training for new processes in aircraft maintenance. National Training Organisations (NTOs) could perhaps take on this role, where no large companies exist.

The partnerships surveyed appear to pay little attention to the role of employees. Benefits from partnerships to individuals also need to be emphasised. If people are aware of the benefits, they may be more willing to take part in training and learning activities, rather than taking part 'because they have to'. In the knowledge-driven economy of the new millennium, individuals must be active players in partnerships between the worlds of work and education. Initiatives such as the Union Learning Fund and Individual Learning Accounts could be influential in promoting the desire for learning and development among the population at large.

The Learning and Skills Council should consider carefully the role of colleges in relation to the support they provide for business. The new world of post-16 education and training, as proposed in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* (1999), places increased emphasis on skills development and the leading role that employers should take in developing a skilled and educated workforce to secure UK competitiveness.

Sustained partnerships, which build upon the intellectual capital of FE providers, could greatly enrich skills development and limit the gap between the identification and development of skills that has bedevilled the UK economy throughout the last century. To be effective, such relationships will require development and will succeed or fail depending on the FE sector's ability to deliver. Maintaining a strong and capable FE sector will require investment in updating the technical and pedagogic skills of the staff, and in the facilities and infrastructure which support learning.

Case studies

The case studies that follow demonstrate a range of partnerships in action, in different contexts. They are representative of the many partnership activities in which colleges are engaged.

CASE STUDY A

A systematic approach to developing capacity describes a collaborative effort to overcome a predicted skills gap in the engineering sector in the Tyne and Wear area. It shows how competitive instincts of the colleges involved were put aside because of a threat from industry to develop private sector provision, and that FE colleges can take a strong leadership role in strategic development of the curriculum and training opportunities. Significant mutual benefits have resulted from this approach.

CASE STUDY B

Maximising employee potential to secure competitiveness illustrates a proactive approach by a college to support change in a local firm, by dedicating a member of staff to provide a needs-analysis service. Out of all the partnerships analysed in the project, this partnership is perhaps the nearest to a mutual benefit relationship.

CASE STUDY C

Developing HRD infrastructure for corporate clients, and

CASE STUDY D

Developing a corporate purchasing programme, are powerful examples of responsive service providers engaged in strategic developments to meet the changing needs of a major company. They also demonstrate how providers can jointly develop training programmes, and the extent of flexibility required to meet employers' needs.

A systematic approach to developing capacity

DAVID CHEETHAM, PRINCIPAL, GATESHEAD COLLEGE

The national debate over skill strategies and economic development has raged for over a century. Thomas Huxley (1887) referred to skills shortages and the need to compete more effectively. Most commentators on economic performance and industrial competitiveness support the need to create a lifelong learning culture with the supply side of the skills equation more closely harmonised with the needs of business. As Llew Aviss, President of the North East Chamber of Commerce, observed:

> *We need to be a nation committed to a lifetime of learning, making sure our educational institutions respond to demands for an ever-increasing variety of courses and requirements for knowledge. We must have lightening quick reactions to a technological world that often appears to be changing at the speed of light. In a world where the only constant is change, we must adapt to survive.*
> Aviss, 1998

David Brown, Chair of Motorola and board member of the government's University for Industry (Ufi) initiative, echoed these sentiments:

> *The connection between learning and industrial success is of the utmost importance to all of us. As we stand on the threshold of the next century, we must understand the nature of that linkage and engineer tomorrow's college to exploit that understanding. The result will be world-class performance both industrially and educationally.*
> Brown, 1998

Providers on the supply side of the skills and training equation do not yet match these enormous forces of change, driven by incredible developments in information and communication technology, with appropriate responses.

Private or public sector ?

In the summer of 1997, employers in the manufacturing and engineering sector on Tyneside voiced concerns about the effectiveness of initial apprentice training and workforce development. An ageing workforce and continued expected growth within the engineering sector also meant the problem would worsen. Companies were not convinced that the FE sector could 'engineer tomorrow's college' and develop tomorrow's engineers.

The employers accepted responsibility for the skills shortage and the need to develop and own strategies to secure the future stock of skilled engineers. Through Tyneside TEC, the firms demanded that the training infrastructure across the region should be modified to secure high-quality, cost-effective training. An influential group of employers commissioned an extensive investigation, funded by the TEC, into the scale of this critical regional skill shortage and the means to resolve it. This research confirmed the enormity and immediacy of the engineering skills shortage problem. Put simply, the engineering workforce on Tyneside was ageing and the number of apprentices being recruited and trained each year was insufficient to replenish the 7,000 workers expected to retire over the next 10 years. The research also indicated that recruitment difficulties were only part of the problem. In addition to a local scarcity of people with job-specific engineering skills, the need to present engineering as an attractive and relevant career was identified as a priority.

The research highlighted a lack of co-ordinated provision across the region, resulting in duplication of basic engineering training and a lack of specialist hi-tech provision. Although the surveys revealed a greater number of young trainees being trained than anticipated, much of this was to nationally accredited standards. A good deal of the training provision available was either under utilised or lacking in investment.

When these findings were reported to the TEC and employers their initial response was to create a new Centre for Engineering Excellence, developed and managed by the private sector. This was to operate in competition with private training organisations and the FE colleges. This implied criticism of the FE sector, and the threat of a competing Centre for Engineering Excellence, prompted a rapid response from the colleges. Over a short period of time, considerable effort went into a raising the profile of the colleges' engineering provision and to suggest that these considerable public sector resources should be developed as the core of a virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence. Key employers leading the engineering initiative subsequently met with senior college staff, and a comprehensive inspection of both the colleges' and private training organisations' engineering training resources was organised.

The campaign convinced employers that an industry-led partnership could provide a cost-effective and responsive solution to the engineering skills shortages without creating yet another training supplier. As a result, an effective employer/TEC/HE/FE/private training partnership has emerged across Tyne and Wear. The partnership has been instrumental in:

- the formation of Training Development Resource Ltd
- securing £850,000 from the FE Collaboration Fund to invest in engineering resources
- the implementation of an FEFC Rationalisation Project
- the formation of the Tyne and Wear Further Education Consortium.

Training Development Resources Ltd

Training Development Resource Ltd (TDR) is a limited company formed in September 1997. A partnership between industry, private training providers, further and higher education, Tyneside TEC and the Careers Service, it was established to consider ways of developing a skilled workforce to secure the current and future success of local engineering companies. The partnership is led by industry, and employers in the engineering sector have played a key role in communicating their training needs to training providers in the FE, HE and the private sectors.

The FE Collaboration Fund, together with Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and private sector contributions, provided the financial means to both invest in and rationalise engineering training facilities in the region. As a result of two successful applications, each college has now identified the engineering specialism on which it will concentrate future investment, to create a network of specialist centres. Collectively, the colleges offer high-quality, well-resourced training in mechanical, production, fabrication, welding, electrical, electronic, marine, communications and computer-aided engineering. In addition to these specialist areas, each college also provides a range of generic engineering training courses.

A board of directors leads TDR Ltd The majority of board members are from the industrial sector and the chief executive was recruited from a major local industrial training provider. TDR Ltd has established working groups, to provide the board with specialist inputs on the strategic development of services and the support required by industry.

The TDR Ltd partnership has developed close collaborative links between all members and created a structure to support the technical education and training requirements of engineering companies across the region. Training and development products and services are brokered through the TDR Ltd co-ordination centre and delivered through an emerging virtual regional Centre for Engineering Excellence. The co-ordination centre also provides an effective interface with industry, schools and private training providers. TDR Ltd's main purpose is to:

- market careers in engineering
- market engineering training
- source training and provide a booking/brokering service
- agree quality standards with training providers and 'kitemark' approved provision
- source available funding for training and future investment
  in the training capacity of the region
- co-ordinate the exchange of best practice and sharing of specialist resources
- promote the development of a virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence
- liaise with schools and Tyneside Careers to promote opportunities in engineering.

The initial priority for TDR Ltd is to support the initial training of new recruits and apprentices. However, once this immediate problem is resolved, TDR Ltd is well placed to support industry's growing need for up-skilling and workforce development. By bringing together industrial and educational partners, TDR Ltd hopes to ensure optimal utilisation, non-duplication of resources and continual reinvestment in the latest technologies within the region.

Although it is still a relatively new organisation, TDR Ltd has had a significant impact on the region and, in particular, has influenced the behaviour and collaboration of FE colleges. Within the next three years, TDR Ltd is expected to:

- increase the capacity of employers to respond to their skills needs
- improve the image of engineering and promote the sector as
  one that offers career opportunities for young people
- provide high-quality training to new recruits and the existing workforce
- develop new recruits and the existing workforce via Centres for Excellence,
  which incorporate industrial and education partners
- ensure optimal utilisation and non-duplication of training resources and
  continual reinvestment in the latest technologies for skills development
- identify and direct related funding streams
  and provide a conduit for joint funding bids
- become self-financing through added value services
- lead and oversee the implementation of the regional engineering skills strategy
- increase the number of apprentices and skilled workers engaged
  in training and development, particularly among SMEs
- assure best quality and cost effectiveness of training provision
- share best practice within and between industry and education
- improve the coherence between engineering curricula in schools,
  further and higher education.

FE Collaboration Fund

The FE Collaboration Fund had two distinctive strands targeted at improving services to industry. The Wider Collaboration strand provided capital funding for investment in equipment and accommodation; and the Rationalisation strand provided funds to develop cost-effective curriculum design and delivery solutions. Colleges working in partnership were eligible to apply for funding. While the wider collaboration project concentrated on the implementation of the capital investment programme, it also created the partnership and foundations for the rationalisation project.

The formation of TDR Ltd and the invitation to apply for FE Collaboration Funds could not have been better timed. By submitting partnership bids to both the Wider Collaboration and Rationalisation elements of the fund, the seven participating colleges in TDR Ltd (City of Sunderland College, Gateshead College, Newcastle College, New College Durham, North Tyneside College, South Tyneside College and Tynemouth College) had a unique opportunity to secure significant capital investment and revenue to create a virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence.

The Wider Collaboration project provided £850,000 of funding, and the Rationalisation project provided £85,000 of revenue funding to undertake a feasibility study on rationalising provision across the seven partnership colleges, to eliminate duplication and unnecessary competition.

The Wider Collaboration project

The Wider Collaboration project's main objectives were to:

- convert and refurbish buildings, install equipment and train staff in its use
- adapt and update learning and training materials
- introduce new technologies into education and training
- increase the take-up of training by employers and individuals
- evaluate and report on the project and develop co-ordinated plans for further investment to expand and update accommodation and resources.

Figure 2 (overleaf) shows the outputs and additional funds created by the Wider Collaboration project.

Figure 2 | **Outputs and additional funds created by the Wider Collaboration project**

College and specialism	A	B	C	D	E
New College Durham: manufacturing and auto assembly	£118,140	£95,000	717	120	12
Gateshead College: computer-aided manufacture	£150,180	£64,000†	210	340	60
Newcastle College: rapid prototyping	£122,640	£34,000	700	750	150
North Tyneside: clean room technology	£215,750	—	360	120	32
City of Sunderland College: automated assembly	£230,370	£110,000	110	400	100
Tynemouth College: computer-aided design	£15,020	£390,000	45	70	25

Key: **A** FE Collaboration Fund allocation
B Leverage other grants secured
C Students receiving additional training
D Number of employees trained
E Number of companies assisted

† Does not include £400,000 ERDF grant to remodel and refurbish the college's engineering accommodation

Further benefits

- All engineering provision on Tyneside is now more cost effective because of collaboration on management, planning, delivery and staffing.
- Long-term economic viability of engineering education and training in the area has been secured.
- The skills and resources that have been developed are immediately transferable into the manufacturing sector – ASSA operates in the Tyne and Wear area.
- New training centres are geographically placed to service partner companies and local communities.
- Investment in high-quality facilities has raised the credibility of further education with employers and has stimulated demand for training.
- Dissemination events are expected to raise the profile of engineering as a career.
- Cost-effective staff training has been made available to partner colleges to facilitate collaborative delivery of courses.
- Further collaboration will act as a platform for future ventures.
- Colleges now share information and the materials produced through curriculum development.
- The initial project steering group of college principals has been formally constituted as the Tyne and Wear Further Education Consortium.

The rationalisation project

The seven Tyneside colleges undertook a feasibility study to consider rationalising provision for engineering, including electrical installation. By rationalising costly engineering provision, a more effective and co-ordinated contribution to the development of the virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence was possible. The feasibility study aimed to:

- assess the future education and training requirements of the engineering sector
- produce a model to rationalise the engineering curriculum
- map this curriculum across existing provision to identify and confirm the future involvement of all colleges in engineering education and training
- identify and agree the investment requirements to develop a range of hi-tech engineering specialisms
- inform future bids to secure the necessary funds to invest in the range of technology required to create a regional virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence firmly based on the region's FE colleges. In particular, to prepare the necessary supporting information from which to generate a bid under round 2 of the FE Collaboration Fund (wider collaboration strand)
- build upon the engineering partnership of Tyne and Wear colleges to rationalise and strengthen engineering provision across the region.

Better use of physical and human resources will be achieved by rationalising the colleges' most expensive curriculum area. A more stable range of student choices will be maintained and each college will understand its contribution to creating the virtual Centre for Engineering Excellence. Provision will be more aligned to the needs of regional engineering and manufacturing companies; and investment will be more concentrated and targeted at creating specialist centres of engineering excellence.

A further expected outcome of the exercise will be an agreement to divert colleges' physical and human resources around the virtual network as the environment and training requirements of employers change. This is potentially a difficult area and will require the development of robust and transparent procedures to enable the redistribution of staff. However, employers and students will benefit from:

- planned and coherent progression routes through schools, colleges and higher education that facilitate transition into employment at appropriate points
- improved levels of hi-tech training resources
- a co-ordinated approach to securing future capital investment income i.e. ERDF, SRB, etc.
- clear and coherent course and curriculum information on the full range of engineering opportunities
- full co-ordination of engineering in construction across public and private sector training organisations.

Because the rationalisation project has the potential to alter engineering provision dramatically across Tyne and Wear, it is being led directly by college principals. The Regional Technology Centre (North) (RTC) has been appointed as project manager and operates impartially from the colleges. The RTC has been able to elicit unbiased feedback from TDR, ASSA, other employers, TECs and the wider regional stakeholders regarding the contribution and role the colleges play in meeting the region's skills needs.

The RTC has worked closely with management in colleges and has developed a useful template to rationalise engineering training across the seven colleges. The RTC's final project report and recommendations on if and how to rationalise provision, will be presented to college principals. The template overleaf may be useful to colleagues preparing to undertake similar rationalisation exercises.

A template for rationalisation

1 | **Create a permanent focal point for the partnership:**
- production of joint business plan
- analysis of resources required
- division of budget and responsibilities
- assignment of staff and office facilities.

2 | **Facilitate inter-college networking:**
- formalisation of management structures
- circulation of college highlights data
- development of electronic communications
- wider consultation and information events.

3 | **Undertake comprehensive mapping and product definition:**
- regional mapping of products and services
- acceptance of common operational standards
- definition of transferable resources/modules
- identification of pilot collaborative ventures.

4 | **Identify and recognise all consortium marketing functions:**
- re-branding of consortium engineering products
- actions to improve marketing efficiency/targeting
- image building/charm offensive towards industry
- strategic promotion aimed at policy and funding bodies.

5 | **Develop mechanisms to handle new business opportunities:**
- establishment of central enquiry response team
- reinforcement of preferential referral policy
- production of joint skills and capacity matrix
- focused search for new funding proposals.

6 | **Build in a flexible response to industrial needs:**
- consortium recruitment of manufacturing and engineering advisers
- representational activities with business groups
- alignment with supply chain training initiatives
- benchmarking of industrial output measures.

7 | **Collaborate extensively on course development:**
- identification of highest inefficiencies (low cost-benefit ratio)
- adoption of modular framework for collaborative delivery
- setting of targets for staff, materials and resource exchange
- shared delivery of fixed number of hi-tech/advanced courses.

8 | **Co-ordinate the development of learning materials:**
- establishment of inter-college development team
- assessment/import of best practice – techniques and materials
- external funding for regionally orientated materials
- shared cost investments in resources centre development.

9 | **Identify and invest in flagship projects:**
- endorsement of three or four strategic goals with political importance and funding potential e.g. young entrepreneurs, women in engineering, IT task force, industrial design, environmental product development
- feasibility study to determine market demand against consortium capability
- establish management structures, facilitate and access to capital resources
- fixed-term delivery with external funding assistance and high-profile marketing.

10 | **Integrate into regional educational provision:**
- establishment of Foresight NE training panel
- research into current and future market needs
- discussions regarding alternative funding models
- closer working with schools and careers advisers
- shared activity with HE institutions
- collaboration through TDR Ltd with independent sector
- extension of collaboration across the other subject areas.

Building effective partnerships – language and definition

The developments described above demonstrate the power, influence and potential of partnerships in supporting the needs of local industry. Although they are at an early stage, there is much to learn from each of them.

During the initial discussions with employers, it quickly became apparent that there is a lack of clarity in the language used to discuss skills issues. It is important, therefore, to adopt a clear and common framework for thinking about and discussing this immensely complex topic. There must be a shared vocabulary for talking about skills issues to ensure that deliberations are clearly understood, and to engage constructively with others in contributing to the National Skills Agenda.

Surveys undertaken by organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC) and any NTOs, research by academic institutions and even government publications all use different terms to describe skill shortages and training requirements. As a result, data often appear contradictory, and so comparisons and analysis based on that data become highly questionable.

While the consequences of skills shortages, skills gaps and other recruitment difficulties can be broadly similar, they have significant economic consequences for affected employers. In aggregate, the potential exists for serious knock-on effects for the whole economy. Because the cause of each of these skill problems is different, the solutions to the problems must be different too. In responding to the variety of skill problems that can be faced by employers, it is important to understand more deeply the underlying causes of each problem before diagnosing and testing possible solutions.

Building effective partnerships – lessons learned

These three projects have yet to realise their full potential and impact on the region's training and development capability. However, the partnership that is supporting these initiatives is extremely robust and committed to improving the employer/college interface and the overall effectiveness of the shared training infrastructure. Underpinning the operation of the partnership is trust, a common purpose, a shared understanding and individuals who co-operate with each other. These principles are summarised overleaf.

Understanding the situation
It is important to understand the environment and the context of partnership activity.
This may include:

- a sound understanding of the economic environment
- the ability to understand and define the skills needs and issues appropriately
- understanding the needs and expectations of key partners and stakeholders.

Clear vision and long-term strategy
All partnerships should demonstrate a clear vision and common aims.
These articulate the common agenda, bind the partners together and
demonstrate how the partnership will achieve its aims.

Leadership and commitment through involvement
Partnerships need an effective mix of public and private sector representatives.
Employer leadership is important, and early effective involvement of key players
(employers/community/agency/others) is crucial. Clear roles and shared responsibilities
need to be established. Influencing and gaining commitment at senior level is also
crucial to the process.

Partnership needs nurturing and a little patience
Patience is needed in bringing partners together. It will take time to manage expectations,
develop relationships, focus programmes/projects, build ownership and deal with
the many uncertainties that are likely to arise.

Building good relationships
Building and sustaining good relationships are essential for successful partnership.
This will involve managing attention, understanding and respecting the perspectives
of others, and maintaining a positive attitude. Building good relationships is also about
effective teamworking, sharing problems, trust, openness, honesty and collaborating
on solutions. One approach may be to:

- agree in public and argue in private
- take forward points which partners can agree on
- ensure no partner delivers everything
- manage the process and harness the skills.

The need for good project management and control is important and the use of an
independent broker who is able to facilitate should be considered. The importance of
harnessing the right skills must be recognised both in terms of the expertise and knowl-
edge that partners bring to the partnership, and in gaining access to specialist help.

Maximising employee potential to secure competitiveness: a partnership between Kimberly Clark Ltd and Furness College

TZENA COGLAN, TRAINING NEEDS ANALYST, FURNESS COLLEGE

Background

Like many other FE colleges, Furness College had a long tradition of providing training for local industries. Situated in Barrow, the college concentrated on providing training to support the local shipbuilding industry. The decline in this industry and the downsizing of VSEL, the largest local employer, has resulted in a restructuring of the Barrow economy. Furness College has, in turn, restructured to meet local needs.

The college principal saw the need to change and develop provision across the whole of the college to keep pace with changing demands from both individuals and employers. The college needed to gain a better understanding of company training needs, prevailing culture and barriers to learning. Furness College needed to become more flexible and able to adapt provision to meet a much wider range of needs. In particular, the college needed to be more in touch with local industries in order to understand their needs and inspire trust and confidence in the college.

Partnership arrangements were seen as an ideal opportunity to gain valuable insights and to carry out market research. The college mission statement refers to the college as being 'an activist in the local/regional economic community, by contributing to partnerships for economic development and regeneration'.

Achieving this mission clearly required a proactive approach on the part of the college. The college principal was frequently in touch with local businesses and ensured that the college took an active role in the local community. One such initiative involved discussions with the senior management at a Barrow papermill, owned by a company called Kimberly Clark following its merger with Scott Ltd in 1996.

The merger between Kimberly Clark and Scott Ltd required Kimberly Clark to realign the organisation – new ways of working and thinking were needed if the company was to remain a major player in the competitive papermaking industry. As a result, some restructuring took place, giving rise to new roles and subsequent development needs. During a previous period of downsizing, much of the skills base and experience had been lost. This needed to be regained and strengthened to increase the flexibility of the workforce. In addition, with increased flexibility and multiskilling in mind, the organisation needed to be de-layered and restructured with an emphasis on teamwork and improved communications. These factors, combined with Kimberly Clark's planned investment in new technology, meant that training and development of people was of paramount importance.

In order to address the perceived training and development issues, Kimberly Clark looked for external help. However, its needs were so specific that generic papermaking and supervisory qualifications would not deliver the outputs required. It was at this point that the mill manager, approached Furness College for help.

Setting up the partnership

The two organisations came together and, at a strategic level, planned how an effective partnership of mutual benefit could be established. As a result of these discussions, a six-month secondment to Kimberly Clark for member of college staff was arranged. A selection process was put in place to ensure that the most suitable person was chosen. The college shortlisted suitable candidates using its established recruitment procedures and Kimberly Clark then made the final decision after interviewing each of the candidates.

The secondee worked alongside project managers at the mill to assist in devising an employee development programme. She was also given the task of writing a training manual for the Andrex Business, in order to give a development focus to the project.

The mill manager and Production manager from Kimberly Clark and the enterprise manager and the principal from Furness College, who oversaw the project, met quarterly. In addition, the production manager, who was also the secondee's mentor/manager at Kimberly Clark, and the enterprise manager, met monthly.

Developing the partnership

The project gathered momentum over the initial six-month period and was subsequently extended for 12 months on a 0.5 basis. The project has continued on 12-monthly contracts. A job description has since been written and includes the following:

- To resource Furness College in the development of appropriate and effective solutions designed to satisfy Kimberly Clark's training and development needs so that a mutually beneficial relationship exists between the two organisations

- In conjunction with site leadership, assist in the design and implementation of effective training and development plans for Barrow Mill that meet current and future needs

- Effectively network training and development needs across the Barrow Mill site in order to optimise the use of common solutions, thereby ensuring that the mill benefits from economies of scale by the efficient use of resources

- Support the development and implementation of effective training and development programmes for employees at Barrow Mill to maximise their contribution to the business

- Contribute to the audit and evaluation process of all training and development activities at Barrow Mill to ensure identified needs are met or activities improved on, if necessary.

Mutual benefits

Benefits from the partnership were anticipated as being:

To Kimberly Clark:
- production of a training document, which is still used for foundation training and induction of new employees
- introduction of training needs analysis (TNA) to employees in a non-threatening way
- feedback to management of perceptions around training and training needs
- TNA via questionnaires, formal and informal discussions
- access to Furness College's expertise for advice or guidance on training matters and the development of provision
- gaining knowledge of the entire manufacturing process and a general feel for the culture and environment in which the business operates
- assistance with the overall employee development programme.

To Furness College:
- the establishment of a college presence at the mill, including a notice board providing information on college provision and an enrolment point
- feedback on the manufacturing process, training needs, perceptions of the college, culture, barriers to and attitudes towards training
- the trust developed between the two organisations
- development of provision to meet current and emerging training needs.

The partnership has subsequently brought about the following additional benefits:

- increased awareness of college facilities, capability, expertise and provision
- both Kimberly Clark and Furness College are working closely on the Local Employers' Network University for Industry project
- work placement and industrial visits have been arranged for several college students
- the mill manager is a governor of Furness College
- the mill manager has been a major speaker at several events organised by Furness College
- the image and profile of the college within Kimberly Clark and other companies within the Local Employers' Network has been raised significantly.

Future developments

- Joint development of curriculum and education standards to meet industry needs
- More flexible approaches to training solutions – needs-driven not menu-driven
- Increased sharing of best practice
- Predicting and planning for effective learning
- Developing the skills, knowledge and personal competencies of the workforce to support the rapid advances in technological development necessary to become a world-class manufacturing business.

Developing HRD infrastructure for corporate clients

DAVID FELL, DIRECTOR, DEARNE VALLEY BUSINESS SCHOOL

Our opportunity space is so outrageous there is no excuse for us not to grow.
Charles Schwab, 1996

Doncaster College's Dearne Valley Business School was founded in May 1992. Situated in an area where unemployment has been twice the national average and education retention rates have been among the lowest in the UK, this may appear to be an unlikely location for a provider of management training. The original vision for the school was to assist with the regeneration of the local and regional economies by providing relevant business and management education for local and regional employers. More than 50% of its work is now customised for employers. Its client list includes: BAE SYSTEMS, Vickers Defence Systems, National Power, Bridon, Avesta Sheffield, Royal Mail, Du Pont, Nokia, Adtranz, RJ Budge Mining, Barnsley MBC, Rotherham MBC, ICI, and many SMEs. In 1998/99, the Business School recruited 3,000 students on to programmes, ranging from NVQ level 3 and professional qualifications to undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral degrees. It is currently achieving 30% annual growth in terms of enrolments and income generated.

Creating competitive advantage

The difference between organisations that thrive and their competitors is that they know they have to change. Their competitors are looking to improve whilst they are looking to re-invent themselves.
Hamel, 1998

The Business School operates within a fiercely competitive market. Breaking into this market required the creation of competitive advantage. The starting point for this was to recognise that the markets in which education providers operate are increasingly customer controlled. As electronic systems create speedier transmission of information and access to deeper pools of knowledge, customers are better informed and more demanding. This means that the programmes and services we provide must meet the requirements of the customer and the added value of training and development must be both demonstrable and measurable.

Providers of Human Resource Development, therefore, need to develop an infrastructure that is responsive, flexible and able to react at speed to market needs. It must have the capacity to deliver programmes and services through a variety of modes, ensure the quality and integrity of service and deliver cost advantage through efficiency and effectiveness.

Our customers have become our best advocates. We have worked hard to develop long-term partnerships with our clients. This provides a knowledge base that ensures the continued relevance of our services to our customers, even in rapidly changing environments. Partnerships have also been developed with other service providers to enhance responsiveness and flexibility, and add further value to the services provided.

The culture

If education and training organisations are to succeed in providing added value and leading-edge services they must develop a culture that encourages innovation and new perspectives. Avoiding a blame culture is of the greatest importance. This has important messages for leadership and highlights the need to be able to live with others' mistakes when things go wrong.

The staff

People come to work to shine, it's our job to enable them to shine.
Archie Norman, 1998

Organisations should revel in the innovative talents of their staff. We have found within the Business School that the creation of internal markets for ideas, talent and resources has helped to create this desired climate of innovation. The teamworking approach and the school's internal communication mechanisms secure dissemination of best practice and the development of ideas throughout the school. Selected ideas have been identified as growth platforms and have been resourced for development purposes. Similarly, the talent within the school has followed new ideas rather than being held in positions of past success. These internal flows of ideas, resources and talent have succeeded in encouraging flexibility and the development of a culture that embraces change and re-invention, and challenges current norms.

The development strategy

Running a company without a shared agenda is like taking a ship out in the high seas without a compass.
CK Prahalad, 1999

This innovative culture constantly looks to improve operations and services for the benefit of both the school and its clients. The old adage of 'if it isn't broke, don't fix it' no longer applies in today's dynamic and ever-changing climate. Continuous improvement and change, through benchmarking and regular review of performance and market requirements, is important for optimum impact and successful growth. Equally important is the development of a positive spirit within organisations. We have achieved this through the enjoyment and celebration of our successes and encouragement on the occasions when things have not gone to plan. We have worked hard to avoid the crushing of the positive spirit through the peculiarly British trait of wanting to knock the successful.

The investment

The development of a positive, innovative, flexible and responsive culture is difficult without a well-equipped and attractive working and learning environment. The surpluses generated by the school have therefore been used to ensure that the learning resources and ICT facilities available are regularly updated and are compatible with the needs of clients. Similarly, investment in the acquisition and creation of relevant distance learning and online learning materials is of great importance, as is investment in the continuous professional development of staff. The school currently invests in excess of 2.5% of its turnover on continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

The service

To meet the requirements of corporate clients it is necessary to create an infrastructure that is relevant, flexible, and responsive and one that demonstrably adds value for clients. Much of the school's work, therefore, has been customer-specific, with teams analysing the needs of clients, designing appropriate interventions and then seeking to accredit the programmes and services delivered. This accreditation has become increasingly important as clients seek to market their training and development activities in an ever more qualification-sensitive culture.

The school has an action learning philosophy and many of its programmes are competence based. The range of programmes on offer – from NVQ level 3 to doctorates – enables the learning and development needs of staff at all levels in organisations to be met. Clients find attractive the wide range of programmes that provide networking to facilitate the dissemination of best practice.

The school also provides specialist support where required. This can be in the form of consultancy, mentoring or the provision of learning support skills, for example. The emphasis on customer care is reflected in the appointment of customer-specific project managers, and the evaluation of the service delivered through measured outputs has been important in ensuring that the client's objectives are met. Secondees from client organisations being attached to the Business School, and provided with personal development programmes that have included both teaching and research activities, have also generated added value for clients.

A partnership approach in action

BAE SYSTEMS currently consists of 12 major business units, employing approximately 43,000+ people on a global basis. Several years ago it embarked upon a cultural change programme with the aim of achieving world-class status as benchmark company for the global defence and aerospace industry. BAE SYSTEMS sees the human resources function as the catalyst to realise this vision. It therefore designed a development strategy for HR staff called 'Developing you' to help ensure that its personnel practitioners:

- understand the changing environment in which they operate and the role of personnel within it
- are equipped with the personal and technical skills and confidence to manage and implement change effectively
- can find solutions with clients rather than be expected to give answers
- can introduce and implement strategic change with clients by challenging long-standing assumptions and practices within the organisation.

BAE SYSTEMS invited tenders for this work and the Business School was delighted when it succeeded in securing a five-year contract to provide the 'Developing you' strategy for all 500 of BAE SYSTEMS's personnel practitioners.

Securing the partnership

The Business School has always encouraged staff to become involved with corporate clients. Since the early 1990s, several members of staff have delivered personnel programmes for what was the Military Aircraft Division of BAE SYSTEMS and have thus developed good relationships with BAE SYSTEMS. The Business School acquired an understanding of BAE SYSTEMS's business and what it wanted. For its part, BAE SYSTEMS began to appreciate our flexibility in meeting its needs and felt confident in the Business School's ability to deliver what it required.

This confidence stems not only from the development of relationships but also from being customer-focused and flexible in programme design and delivery. The Business School's strategy of developing progression routes enables it to design courses that could, for example, accommodate a delegate with no previous qualifications entering a programme of study which, with progression, could ultimately lead to that individual achieving a PhD.

The refurbishment of the Business School's High Melton site and conference facility enables most modules to be delivered on a residential basis. Workshops vary in both number and length depending on the programme being attended. From BAE SYSTEMS's point of view, this enables delegates from different business units to share information and best practice, and is a more manageable way of releasing people from the company.

Maintaining the partnership

A partnership arrangement on such a scale calls for dedicated co-ordination and project management. This provided a developmental opportunity for a member of staff from the school to become the project manager for the BAE SYSTEMS initiative – BAE SYSTEMS provides a secondee to the Business School on a yearly-rolling basis. As well as providing a dedicated resource to manage and develop the partnership, the two roles are mutually developmental. The project manager becomes familiar with the world of BAE SYSTEMS and the secondee becomes involved, not only with the delivery of the BAE SYSTEMS programmes, but also with the Business School's operations and delivery to other corporate clients, so enhancing general business awareness.

Learning transfer and the sharing of best practice are important. They not only add value to BAE SYSTEMS but also ensure that the programmes are continually updated according to business need. These aspects are facilitated by several mechanisms. One such mechanism is the project manager's report to a steering group of representatives from each of the business units, which meets periodically to review progress and developments. An initiative developed from the partnership has resulted in an annual event called 'Developing us', which enables the HR functions from each business unit to identify best personnel practices and to share these at learning events. The nature of the partnership arrangement encourages and welcomes the involvement of the project manager in various BAE SYSTEMS initiatives, including regular liaison with BAE SYSTEMS Virtual University staff. This enables, at appropriate times, the dissemination of BAE SYSTEMS best practice and initiatives into the developmental programmes. Finally, commitment to the partnership, the sharing of best practice and learning transfer is demonstrated by the regular contribution to the programmes of senior BAE SYSTEMS personnel directors.

A partnership could not be maintained without a dedicated team of HR tutors with the requisite skills and flexibility to meet customer requirements. The Business School's HRD strategy has assembled such a team. Members of the HR team have also had opportunities to become familiar with the operation of one of the UK's largest employers through networking with BAE SYSTEMS delegates and visits to BAE SYSTEMS business units. These opportunities enable the teaching team to talk in a language that is familiar to the customer, which aids credibility of delivery.

Tutors also need to be adaptable, responsive and flexible since the partnership regularly calls upon the Business School to deliver specialist HRD initiatives within the business. This means that tutors may be required to deliver a programme at Airbus in Bristol one week and a programme at Regional Aircraft in Manchester the next week. Complementing this internal team, the Business School has nurtured relationships with specialists from outside the organisation. Such relationships enable the Business School to call upon these specialists when appropriate.

Developing the partnership

It is essential that the client continually monitors consistency, quality and outputs and contributes to the development of the programmes. Evaluation of learning transfer in BAE SYSTEMS has been developed in different ways by the relative business units. For example, the Business School's action learning philosophy has enabled some in-company evaluation exercises to take a developmental route; delegates present their programme projects to management teams to highlight their learning and their contribution to added value.

It is important to be responsive to the views of learners and their employees throughout the programme. Each workshop is evaluated and actions taken, where necessary. This has resulted in the progressive development of core modules, for example, and a change to the mode of attendance for the Managing Change module. Although the core modules have an HR context, they are essentially generic to all management roles and a future development could be to open them up to all managers in the company, or indeed to management within the supply chain, or other BAE SYSTEMS partners.

One of the reasons why BAE SYSTEMS decided to offer training and development on a residential basis was to encourage networking and the sharing of ideas between delegates from different business units. The 'Developing us' initiative, mentioned earlier, reflects this philosophy. It is encouraging to see the seeds of this endeavour beginning to bear fruit as delegates realise that there is no need to re-invent the wheel – business units can share knowledge rather than duplicate it. Such realisation and the sharing of such knowledge immediately adds value to the client's organisation. It is hoped that this sharing of best practice will be increasingly reflected across BAE SYSTEMS.

Learn for the future

Customer-controlled markets require partners to be receptive to advancements in learning and development strategies. These increasingly call for delivery in different geographical locations supported by distance learning materials and information technology. In the global economy, mergers, joint ventures and acquisitions are frequent and BAE SYSTEMS is now a global player. Mindful of such developments, the Business School is embarking upon the upgrading and development of a state-of-the-art research and information technology suite. Close liaison with BAE SYSTEMS Virtual University staff will enable the Business School to incorporate and develop information technology which will meet the needs of BAE SYSTEMS's emerging professional development framework and enable the partnership to progress.

Benefits of the partnership

Such partnerships obviously generate income, which not only enables the Business School to further develop its HRD infrastructure, but also makes a contribution to its parent organisation (Doncaster College) and assists with the development of the college's overall provision. In addition, the progress made by the school has led to the dissemination of best practice and other developments across the college.

The current residential nature of programmes and the regular attendance of delegates from all corners of the UK has brought some income into the local community and has helped to promote the Dearne Valley.

In addition, developmental opportunities for staff have been created and the innovative approaches to programme design and delivery, together with securing a partnership arrangement with a leading-edge organisation, have attracted other corporate clients. Success has been seen to breed further success.

Conclusions

Do the right things for the customer. This trumps any short-term economic criteria.
Charles Schwab, 1996

The BAE SYSTEMS project is just one example of how the school's HRD infrastructure has led to the development of mutually beneficial partnerships with corporate clients. The formula described has produced consistent growth for the Business School, particularly within this corporate client area. It can be seen, therefore, as a model for the sector and provides direction for those wishing to develop similar services.

Overall, the conclusions we have reached are, firstly, that taking considered risks with programme and staff development is the only way to reward and, secondly, that responsiveness, innovation, continuous improvement and change are the only ways to success. Developing an appropriate physical infrastructure is of paramount importance but only when this is coupled with staff who are well qualified, possess the relevant skills and experience, and work within a culture that responds at speed to market and client needs, will an operation's impact be optimised.

Developing a corporate purchasing programme

TIM BRIDGEMAN, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES, WMG

BAE SYSTEMS spends over £3.8 billion per year with its supply base – over £500,000 every hour, every day. This represents over 70% of the final product cost. Ensuring the professionalism within the procurement arena is essential to BAE SYSTEMS's international competitiveness. This paper describes the formation of a partnership between BAE SYSTEMS and Warwick Manufacturing Group to secure a learning framework that supports the effectiveness of the procurement professionals.

In 1994, the Chief Executive of BAE SYSTEMS, Sir Richard Evans, highlighted purchasing skills as a key corporate resource and identified the need to develop and invest in these skills. Five key skill areas were identified as being critical to the 500+ professionals within the purchasing process across the company. These were:

- finance and cost management
- project and risk management
- principles of contracting
- negotiation
- supply-chain management.

Although many other skills were required across the complete procurement process, these five skill areas formed the core of the underpinning knowledge required. It was agreed that a large-scale development programme was required to develop these skills across the company.

For a programme of this scale to succeed, commitment from company's managers was essential – not only in the development of the framework, but also in elements of its delivery. An external qualification was seen to provide visible evidence, to both the company and its customers, of improvement in the overall standard of the purchasing skill and capability. It was felt that accreditation would also encourage staff to take part.

A structure to embed learning

The BAE SYSTEMS programme heads were determined that the programme should be more than a set of learning events – what was taught had to make a difference to the company. Therefore, a key requirement of the framework was a structured process for embedding the learning back in the workplace, with the objective of making the programme a benchmark of its kind.

These requirements for the learning and development framework were structured into a request for quotation (RFQ). The RFQ outlined the key elements of the framework and invited several academic bodies in the UK to tender a proposal.

Losing and winning the contract

Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) aims to meet the research, technology integration and education and development needs of engineering and manufacturing companies. It has over 18 years' experience of jointly designing, developing and delivering programmes suitable for experienced industrial audiences, typically delivered in a variety of part-time, modular formats.

Since the early 1990s, WMG had been developing a series of tools to improve both the design of programmes and the post-programme transfer of learning to the workplace. The receipt of BAE SYSTEMS's RFQ appeared the ideal opportunity to implement a number of these piloted tools on a large-scale programme.

A response to the RFQ was duly drafted and submitted. WMG did not win the contract. It subsequently transpired that, while WMG could demonstrate its ability across a range of similar activity, it was not compliant with the terms of the RFQ. At that stage WMG felt unable to provide a detailed outline of the contents of the proposed BAE SYSTEMS Corporate Procurement Learning and Developing Programme (CPL&DP). This situation arose due to a fundamental difference in philosophy between WMG and BAE SYSTEMS. BAE SYSTEMS believed it was purchasing educational services; WMG was proposing to enter into an educational and development partnership. The heart of the WMG proposal was that it was capable and had the processes to meet the requirements of the RFQ. However, to meet BAE SYSTEMS's overriding requirement that the programme must result in a measurable difference back in the workplace, WMG believed that a fundamentally different approach to the design, development and delivery of the programme needed to be taken, based on partnership driven by functionality. This was not a programme WMG would 'do' to BAE SYSTEMS but one that it would deliver in partnership.

Having investigated proposals from a number of alternative sources, BAE SYSTEMS returned to WMG to discuss the proposal in more depth. After dialogue about WMG's approach, the contract was awarded to them, initially for a pilot to be followed by a rolling programme.

Establishing the ground rules

Partnership is simple in concept, difficult in practice. Both BAE SYSTEMS and WMG had to learn how to work together. The fact that a BAE SYSTEMS key programme head had previously worked with WMG on another programme helped, but it took a series of meetings to build trust and a shared understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.

WMG's role

WMG brought experience in the overall programme development process, experience of acting as a prime contractor in educational services, experience of post-experience education, experience of the aerospace industry and an administrative capacity and capability. However, WMG lacked expertise in the area of procurement.

BAE SYSTEMS's role

BAE SYSTEMS had to accept that there were no 'off-the-shelf' solutions that would deliver its objectives, but that developing the programme would itself be a joint learning process. Like many organisations, BAE SYSTEMS has islands of best practice in most business processes. Its challenge is to share and extend this across all its divisions, business units and 43,000+ employees. BAE SYSTEMS had to: own the programme, communicate and sell the concept across the divisions and line managers, identify and engage cross-divisional expertise, identify and access the islands of best practice, and provide internal administration and organisation.

Developing the programme

The programme aimed to: deliver the purchasing skills and competencies required within British Aerospace, to ensure that all individuals involved in the supply chain are capable of meeting both the current and future needs of the businesses.

BAE SYSTEMS and WMG jointly developed this overall aim together with five key objectives:

- To initiate a behaviour change throughout the BAE SYSTEMS supply chain so that individuals promote and strive to implement the BAE SYSTEMS supplier partnering philosophy, where appropriate
- To provide a learning model which ensures a consistent approach to the development of purchasing skills across the company
- To provide individuals within the BAE SYSTEMS supply chain with the skills and competencies necessary for them to contribute to a measurable improvement in overall business performance
- To ensure that purchasing excellence is maintained/enhanced while maximising the impact of the introduction of multi-functional teams
- To provide individuals on the learning and development programme with the opportunity to attain recognised external qualifications through BAE SYSTEMS's partnership with Warwick University.

Framework

To meet these requirements, a development framework was created. The framework explicitly recognised that, while five key knowledge areas existed, as a participant progressed through the framework, development would increasingly be driven by an alignment of the development needs of individuals and the business. It was recognised that:

- a considerable amount of experience and expertise already existed within the company
- different levels of expertise were appropriate depending upon an individual's role.

Three levels of expertise were identified:

Core skills practitioner:
- To provide a pan-consistent BAE SYSTEMS platform of underpinning knowledge and company qualification
- To deliver an agreed and measurable improvement in individual performance against the procurement functions
- To instil a culture that links together learning, the application of learning and on-the-job performance.

Seasoned practitioner:
- To deliver a cadre of procurement professionals, capable of performing all the core procurement functions with minimum supervision
- To instil the concept and acceptance of self-directed learning, recognising that learning and development opportunities are not limited to educational programmes
- To develop the habit of identifying, recording, reflecting and applying best practice
- To deliver an external (WMG) and professional Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) qualification.

Acknowledged expert:
- To create a corporate resource for procurement excellence that is capable of delivering all the procurement functions, combining expertise and experience
- To provide external recognition of achievement via alignment with a Masters' level qualification.

Programme development process

'Remember it's not rocket science' is a good adage when considering education and development. In most instances it is about insisting on a consistent, robust and coherent process rather than any content or delivery innovations.

The competitive capability cycle starts with the company vision. Education and training should cascade from the vision and business strategy to deliver real business benefit. The strategy will determine the goals or targets a business unit must achieve.

It is essential that the appropriate type of development be identified. Within BAE SYSTEMS this was addressed by ensuring that any educational inputs were part of a larger learning environment. As an employee progresses through the framework, the appropriate mix of the acquisition and application of knowledge, experience and personal performance drives development. However, organisational issues that may limit an individual's learning opportunity to turn capability into performance are not explicitly addressed by the framework.

The procurement development framework

The BAE SYSTEMS CPL&DP has been emergent, rather than definitive in BAE SYSTEMS's structure. BAE SYSTEMS and the programme heads have a vision of what they are trying to achieve and, together with WMG, are discovering ways of achieving this vision.

At the time of writing (May 1999), over 300 participants have commenced the core skills programme in 19 cohorts and over 100 participants have successfully completed this first stage of development. The pilot of the seasoned practitioner stage has been launched and the next cohort is planned for October 1999. The acknowledged expert phase is still in development. This trust and partnership between BAE SYSTEMS and WMG are key to the continuing success and development of the framework.

Making it work

Implementing a programme of this size and complexity, covering all the BAE SYSTEMS divisions, is a complex task. Experience has shown that there needs to be a comprehensive management and administrative structure for the successful development, delivery, management and administration of the programme, and that both BAE SYSTEMS and WMG need to maintain significant programme infrastructures.

Programme management and administration

WMG has worked with BAE SYSTEMS on the development and delivery of eight dedicated programmes in the last ten years. The following good practice for successful programme management and administration has evolved from the partnership:

- Steering committee: a joint BAE SYSTEMS/WMG committee chaired by BAE SYSTEMS to oversee the development and subsequent operation of the programme. This committee meets monthly for the first six months of the programme, once every six weeks for the following six months, and then quarterly.

- Working parties: joint BAE SYSTEMS/WMG meetings to design/configure modules to meet the functionality matrix requirements. Typically four one-day meetings are required to produce the overall design and agree session development and delivery responsibilities. Additional meetings after the first and second running of a module are used to address continuous improvement issues. Meetings are then held as required, but at least annually.

- Business unit co-ordination and administration group: a joint BAE SYSTEMS/WMG meeting to agree and document programme-operating procedures. Four meetings are usually held in the first six months, followed by quarterly meetings.

- Assessment group: a WMG-led meeting used to agree assessment processes and ensure they are consistent with academic and professional requirements.

- Development group: a joint BAE SYSTEMS/WMG meeting to consider future developments to the programme framework.

- Policy group: a joint BAE SYSTEMS/WMG meeting to determine the overall use of the programme framework and its future development.

Programme support infrastructures

Programme infrastructures are required in both BAE SYSTEMS and WMG. The BAE SYSTEMS requirement is:

- Project sponsor: a senior manager within BAE SYSTEMS who champions the programme. Main responsibilities are: aligning the programme heads (senior management); ensuring appropriate budget commitment; securing line managers' commitment to the development; representing BAE SYSTEMS commitment at induction events; and chairing the steering committee.

- Project manager: an experienced and well-respected procurement professional. This role is critical to the overall success of the programme as the project manager will generate momentum within the organisation. The main responsibilities are: BAE SYSTEMS management of the development and delivery of the programme; communication; ensuring line managers sell both the need and benefits of the programme; interface to WMG.

- Project co-ordinator: this role provides a central administrative and organisational support to the project manager. The main responsibilities are co-ordinating meetings and supporting documentation.

- Business unit representatives (BURs): essential in ensuring the day-to-day management of the programme. They brief line managers and potential participants; co-ordinate nominations; organise development and assessment meetings; co-ordinate in-house academic assessment (where required), and act as the main point of contact for WMG within a business unit. Due to their detailed knowledge of the programme, they often take on additional roles e.g. module co-owner.

- Module co-owners: ensure that module design and delivery meet requirements. They are usually experts in their own area and experienced within the business unit. Importantly, they need to be able to open doors for WMG tutors to gain access to material and processes. They also need to be able to identify capable BAE SYSTEMS speakers for guest speaker sessions.

- Working party members: to ensure pan-BAE SYSTEMS suitability, each module is designed with advice from divisional personnel. They need to be knowledgeable about the module subject matter and able to identify with the target audience. They align the module content and delivery processes with potential participant needs.

- Session speakers: WMG typically provides the underpinning theoretical rigour to a module and consultants to provide a range of context-based examples. BAE SYSTEMS experts provide specific BAE SYSTEMS examples or process/procedure detail. For each session speaker there must be at least one substitute speaker because of inevitable conflicting business commitments.

- Line management commitment: without this commitment BAE SYSTEMS would waste its money on an individual participant as it is unlikely that they would be able to deliver the demonstrable improvement in business performance all parties are looking for. This commitment includes: undertaking professional development plans (PDPs); functionality assessments; learning and development meetings; pre- and post-module briefings/debriefing; enabling practice of learning; mentoring participants; and post-programme assessment.

- Participant time release: participant commitment is often taken for granted. However, this programme requires significant investment from the participant; and all participants will still be required to 'do their day job'. Some of the time required for research, analysis, reporting and presentation will need to be done outside office hours. The participant needs to be prepared to take on this extra work.

In parallel to the internal BAE SYSTEMS infrastructure there is a significant WMG infrastructure to support the programme design, development, delivery, assessment and management. This includes:

- Programme director: responsible for the overall control and delivery of the programme. Controls programme resources and is responsible for all contract and pricing issues.

- Programme manager: operational delivery and day-to-day programme management.

- Programme design: programme design processes and overall programme design.

- Programme administration: day-to-day administration, issuing of joining instructions, timetables, pre-reading, post-module work and academic data recording.

- Programme integration: bespoke to multi-company module integration and academic programme management.

- Programme quality assurance: programme quality control, academic alignment and assessment.

- Transfer of learning: a team of learning process consultants responsible for conducting the in-company functionality assessments.

- Module owners: WMG subject area experts responsible for the final design, development and delivery of a particular module. Responsible for ensuring that each module has the underpinning academic rigour as well as the practicality for application.

- Session owners: WMG internal and external specialist subject experts (consultants) used to provide breadth as well as depth to the module.

- Academic assessment: The university academic process for setting, supervising, marking and controlling any piece of participant work that will be used as credit towards a formal qualification.

Benefits

Over 100 participants have successfully completed the core skills programme and over 150 are still on programme to date. Each successful participant has provided demonstrable improvement in personal performance against key functions. As the development targets were set against the needs of the company, the line manager and the individual, each of these is delivering direct business benefit.

As important as the documentary evidence is the perception on the ground. Many line managers are now reporting the ability to delegate tasks they would have previously undertaken themselves. Several of the participants who have completed the programme have won promotion. The BAE SYSTEMS Procurement Core Skills Certificate is being specified as a preferred qualification in many internal recruitment campaigns.

The future

The future of the procurement programme will be driven by business need. As people are developed and move on so a new generation of procurement professionals will arrive requiring core skills development. These core skills are unlikely to remain static and, in addition to the continuous review and improvement of the current core skills modules, BAE SYSTEMS and WMG are planning the review of the whole core skills platform to ensure that it still is relevant to the organisation's business needs.

The seasoned practitioner has taken the procurement population into new areas of learning. Not only is it establishing a cadre of highly professional staff with demonstrable capability, but it is also creating a culture of self-development and self-directed learning, which is essential for both personal lifelong and organisational learning.

Self-directed 'needs matched' development will provide the groundwork for the acknowledged expert. As important will be the development and implementation of the experience map (together with its wider HR implications) and the cross-functional corporate development modules, combined with personal behaviour development, consistent with the BAE SYSTEMS competencies.

The real challenge for both BAE SYSTEMS and WMG is to ensure that the experience and good practice developed within this programme are shared across BAE SYSTEMS's development activities. To date, we have a good track record of applying the concepts to other WMG enabled programmes: the BAE SYSTEMS Corporate Commercial Learning and Development Programme and the BAE SYSTEMS Manufacturing 'Developing you' programme. It is too early to tell if the simple concept that 'training is more than just a set of modules' has yet become embedded within BAE SYSTEMS company psyche.

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Maggie Chadwick Principal, Furness College

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Phil Clifton Head of the Axis Centre, Preston College

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Partnerships and strategic alliances between employers and providers can secure a better match between the skills needed for competitiveness and their development than a purchaser/supplier relationship. *Partnerships for skills* considers the rationale for such partnerships, based on theories of partnerships developed in a business context. The report also provides case studies demonstrating a systematic approach to developing capacity; maximising employee potential; developing HRD infrastructure for corporate clients and developing a corporate purchasing programme.