



Skills for Learning Professionals

Northern Ireland Online Continuing Professional Development Project

FINAL REPORT

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Contents

1. Executive summary	3
2. Background	5
3. Aims and objectives of the project	6
4. Project Approach	7
5. Development of tool	9
6. Internal review results	11
7. Overview of participant organisations	12
8. Pilot set up and training review	13
9. Summary of pilot process	15
10. Evaluation Results	16
11. Conclusions	21
12. Recommendations	23

Appendices

1. Project Board members
2. Options Paper
3. Evaluation Survey and Results

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Lifelong Learning UK has been commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to pilot the utilisation of an online personal planning and professional development framework to drive and record staff training and quality improvement, driven by National Occupational Standards. This project formed the first phase of a two phased approach with the second phase of the project being planned on delivering at least two areas of professional development including Leadership and Management and Coaching and Mentoring.

1.2 The project was undertaken in the light of the Lifelong Learning UK Stage 5 Agreed Collaborative Plan (completed in May 2008) which recognised that that '*continuing professional development across the constituencies represented by Lifelong Learning UK is vital*'..

1.3 The research also recognised that there are examples of good practice within the sector however recommends the need for '*a more consistent and collaborative approach*'.

1.4 Using desk and web based research a number of online continuing professional development tools in use in the lifelong learning sector were identified. Following analysis of these options the CPD Engage tool was chosen to be developed for trialling with employer representatives from three employer organisations representing work based learning, community learning and development providers and representation from libraries, archives and information services. Due to the work already carried out in further education with this tool by South Eastern Regional College a partnership working relationship was developed rather than direct involving them in the pilot so they could provide the project with the benefits of their experiences and progress in developing this tool.

1.5 The CPD Engage tool was developed to include relevant standards for the participants to provide a competency based framework for continuing professional development. To test this approach a pilot was run between February and March 2009 and feedback gathered through face-to face meetings and the use of an online evaluation survey.

1.6 Evidence suggests the use of an online system for continuing professional development was perceived positively as a method which was practical, easy to use and un line with modern day-to-day working practices.

1.7 The use of a competency based framework has been an innovative approach within the sector however there are limitations associated to this as the standards are not yet all encompassing for the many varied job roles within the sector and are not yet accepted as the 'norm' for all parts of the sector. However it was clear from the evidence gathered that standards are becoming more recognised as central within the sector. This suggests a continuing professional development approach based on them has a lot of potential for supporting the sector in the future if developed in the right way.

1.8 In terms of feasibility across all groups there was no evidence to suggest this type of framework could not work for all areas of work within the sector. No issues were experienced during the pilot; however evidence does suggest that there will be more work to do to adapt a solution fit for purpose for all, as it was noted that while the basic solution worked for each organisation each organisation would have their own individual requirements to develop this for use with all their staff.

1.9 The evaluation suggests however that there is still some work to do in terms of selling the long terms benefits and potential for use of this type of continuing professional development framework against the resource and time it will initially take to embed it.

1.10 There is further potential for Lifelong Learning UK in conjunction with the sector to develop the benefits for this type of tool and link in with existing and future qualifications frameworks to complete the development cycle. This would meet Lifelong Learning UK's wider strategy within Northern Ireland to develop their action plan and meet the priority skills needs of the sector workforce, both now and in the future.

1.11 It is therefore recommended that a second phase of this project should go ahead. This needs to incorporate another pilot to test this approach for a longer period of time to enable key training themes to emerge and investigate how Lifelong Learning UK can then support the delivery of this training. This phase should also look at the long term sustainability of a tool such as the CPD Engage tool and the issues for wider day-to-day use which could emerge. Other options for providing this type of approach to continuing professional development should also be considered at this stage. It is also recommended that the process for mapping standards to job roles and the competencies used is developed both working with key individuals and at a sector wide level to ensure the competency statements underpinning the tool are both relevant and useful in planning further training and development.

1.12 There has been significant interest noted in the project and area of work from the sector. The project board have also been very enthusiastic and supportive of the project. It is clear from the positive feedback from the sector that there is a wider appeal to the project which a second phase will help to meet, and continue to build upon Lifelong Learning UK's aims and objectives throughout the sector in Northern Ireland.

1.13 A sustainability strand will need to be developed as part of the second phase of work for this project to manage the expectations of both the Department for Employment and Learning, as the funder, and the organisations involved from within the sector. This will also need to look at the long term options for Lifelong Learning UK to build on what has been achieved both in delivery and sector engagement from both phases of the project.

2. Background

2.1 Lifelong Learning UK has been commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland to pilot the utilisation of an online personal planning and professional development framework, to drive and record staff training and quality improvement, underpinned by national occupational standards. The objective of this project was to carry out a number of tests and trials with employers to determine the feasibility of this type of tool in assisting with effective continuing professional development.

2.2 Lifelong Learning UK is the independent employer-led Sector Skills Council for the Lifelong Learning Sector. It is responsible for the professional development of over one million people working in further education, community learning and development, higher education, libraries, archives and information services, careers guidance and work based learning across the United Kingdom, and is the voice of employers in the further education sector on workforce skills issues.

2.3 Lifelong Learning is licensed by the United Kingdom government to set standards for occupational competence for those employers whose primary purpose is the delivery and support of learning. Hence its role is pivotal to enabling the skills supply system to increase in quality and capacity to meet skills challenges across the United Kingdom.

2.4 This project meets the needs and priorities of Lifelong Learning UK Northern Ireland as evidenced in the Lifelong Learning UK Stage 5 Agreed Collaborative Action Plan. Lifelong Learning UK identifies an aspiration that the lifelong learning workforce in all four nations and across all constituencies has access to an integrated continuing professional development framework.

2.5 The Lifelong Learning UK Stage 5 Agreed Collaborative Plan (completed in May 2008) recommends that continuing professional development across the constituencies represented by Lifelong Learning UK is vital. One of the collaborative solutions in the Action Plan is to “develop an integrated continuing professional development framework and model for the lifelong learning sector where appropriate”. This recognises that there are examples of good practice within the sector, however recommends the need for a more consistent and collaborative approach which is a key driver for this project to explore. The Department for Employment’s Learning Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: Success Through Skills (2004) stressed the necessity to increase skills levels and improve participation in training and education across all sectors. This also lines up with the recommendations from the Department of Employment and Learning strategy report “Leading ...to Success: Management and Leadership Development Strategy and Implementation Plan”, June 2007 which includes a theme specifically centred on improving skills levels of managers across the voluntary and community sector, the public sector (including further education) and the civil service.

3. Aims and objectives of the project

3.1 The aim of the project was to test the feasibility of an online continuing professional development tool with a range of employers from across the lifelong learning sector in Northern Ireland. The ultimate aim is to enhance opportunities for continuing professional development identification and the tracking of programmes undertaken. This will in turn lead to individual, team and institutional improvement within the areas of work targeted and through dissemination. Originally the project targeted participant organisations from three areas of work; further education colleges, work based learning providers and community learning and development providers. Following interest from the libraries, archive and information services sector the scope of the project was also extended to include a participant from this area of work.

3.2 The key objectives of the project were:

- To develop and/or adapt appropriate portfolio building software to identify and record individual continuing professional development needs.
- To recruit staff from community learning and development, further education and work based learning providers.
- Complete test and trials to determine the feasibility of an online personal planning and professional development framework in order to assist with effective continuing professional development.
- To utilise Lifelong Learning UK standards at all stages and with all participants.
- To ensure dissemination of the project outcomes to all relevant stakeholders.

3.3 A Project Board was formed to help support and inform the project and comprised of representatives from the following:

- Department for Learning and Employment
- Education Training Inspectorate
- Foundation Degree Forward
- South Eastern Regional College
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland
- Springvale Learning
- Lifelong Learning UK

A full list of the names of Project Board members are provided in Appendix A.

3.4 The project board provided invaluable support and advice throughout the project. Members of the board also helped to provide participants for testing and trialling the tool (central to achieving the aim of this project) and ensured that it was promoted through their own networks to maximise the awareness of the project within the lifelong learning sector.

4. Project Approach

To meet the objectives of the project a decision was made to research existing online continuing professional development tools already in use within the lifelong learning sector which could be modified and developed for use rather than choosing to build a completely new solution from scratch. This option provides the benefits that it will enable the project to meet time/cost constraints and demonstrate a value for money solution. It can provide a quick solution made ready for piloting which has already had its usability and reliability evidenced. Research also suggests that tools which need meet the specification for this project are not readily available to 'buy off shelf' and implement easily. The option to build a completely new continuing professional development tool to meet the specifications of the project would not have been viable due to the time/cost demands of the project.

The research for this project predominantly consisted of desk based and internet research to identify and evaluate continuing professional development tools currently in use. However the experience and knowledge of colleagues within Lifelong Learning UK was also utilised in directing the research towards tools that were perceived as existing examples of good practice. Through the research a number of potential tools were identified and an options appraisal was carried out to identify and compare the key benefits and risks for choosing each tool. The main tools identified and reviewed were:

- Institute for Learning's Reflect tool
- CPD Engage
- Pebblepad
- Skills Passport
- Enterprise Essentials
- Lifelong Learning Systems
- Profilerskills
- PremierIT

The full appraisal of the various options for this project is included in Appendix B to this report.

The research found that while there were a wide number of tools and portfolios in use these differed in approach and range of use depending on the constituency and there was a recognisable lack of any one consistent approach within the sector. The ability to develop the tool to provide a framework for continuing professional development based on Lifelong Learning UK standards was also one of the key factors in choosing the tool. The research found that this was not an approach that has been adopted generally within the sector which did limit the options available for the purposes of the project.

Following the research and options' appraisal it was identified that the most viable option, for the purpose of this project, was the use and development of the CPD Engage tool. CPD Engage is designed to help individuals identify record and track their own staff development requirements. CPD Engage provides members with a centralised record of past, current and future training and development, in order to support their current role and facilitate their career progression. This tool is currently owned by Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland, with the licence and code for the tool held by Aurian Software. The rationale for this was decision was due to a number of factors including;

- It offered the 'buy off the shelf' option with the flexibility to develop this for the objectives of this project.
- It was cost effective which was vital due to the limited budget the project had for this phase.

- It is owned by an organisation well recognised in the lifelong learning sector within Northern Ireland. This means the final product for the test and trial phase will already have some recognition and credibility, which is necessary to get engagement with the different provider organisations this project requires.
- The tool itself in its current form meets the basic specification we have identified for the project requirements as well as extra features and functionality which made it appealing compared to other available tools, such as its 'Reflect' function, which encourages individuals to self reflect on training undertaken .
- One of the most important features is that it was a tool which is already driven by national occupational standards (related to further education) and is the only tool found within the sector which is doing this currently. The advantage for the project in procuring this tool therefore is that it would take less development and consequently less cost and time than other tools which do not have this base functionality. The main development required here really is in investigating whether the tool can be used by work based learning and community learning and development participants and the standards which need to be added to enable this.
- Another of the deciding factors in the decision to choose CPD Engage was that the further education college network in Northern Ireland are already using or being encouraged to use CPD Engage in its current form by the Department for Employment and Learning. This shows that there is significant backing for the tool being invested by the Department which will strengthen its proposition in the sector. Also due to this it would difficult to get engagement and buy in for the test and trial phase from the further education colleges if another tool had been chosen in place of the CPD Engage tool they are already using.
- While it is noted as a risk that the tool itself is only being used on a small scale and is still in development this could also be beneficial for it offers the flexibility for the adaptations the project requires at this initial stage. Also as there are four constituencies involved in the project the flexibility CPD Engage offers will be essential to help to engineer a solution fit for purpose for all.

Following the decision to use CPD Engage, Lifelong Learning UK engaged with its owners; Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland through formal procurement processes. The contract was agreed in early January 2009 for the rights to use the CPD Engage software and undertake the necessary development work required identified for the pilot. This also included provision of set up and training for the employers participating in the pilot phase provided by Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland.

One key concern for the project at this time was that although the CPD Engage tool is owned by Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland the software rights and licence for use of the system is owned by Aurian. For use of their licence Aurian had set a charge of £1,000 per organisation. As the tool was originally developed for use with further education colleges in Northern Ireland this charge is covered for the colleges by the Department for Employment and Learning. However there was a concern, for if this fee was charged for other organisations included in the pilot this could have caused barriers when engaging with organisations, or caused the project to go significantly over budget. It was later confirmed that the contract negotiated with Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland included a one off payment for the Aurian licence which covered the pilot as a whole, rather than charging a fee for each individual organisation involved in the pilot. This however is a consideration which needs to be taken into account if the CPD Engage tool was adopted for wider use particularly in cases of smaller organisations where cost could become a factor in the decision to use the tool for their organisation.

5. Development of CPD Engage System

Following a review of the CPD Engage system against the project requirements the following areas for development were identified;

5.1 Suites of National Occupational Standards and job roles

To ensure the tool was suitable for participant organisations taking part in the pilot, additional national occupational standards relevant to the participant job roles/areas of work of the individual participants taking part in the pilot had to be identified and added into the system. The competencies from the standards then had to be summarised and mapped to job roles of the participant. Previously this had only been set up for further education workers within the tool however once the participant job roles to be included were confirmed, the tool was found to be adaptable to include these and ensure the tool was usable by participants from all areas of work included in the pilot. However if this was a tool and approach to be used much wider within the sector the mapping of job roles to relevant standards (there might be a number of standards which impact on individuals roles) is an area where more specialist expertise would be required.

The standards and job role mapping was internally carried out by the project team and Northern Ireland team lead on the project. This was then reviewed and the relevant national occupational standards suites were obtained and provided to Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland. These had to be provided in Microsoft Word format to enable them to be inputted into the system ready for the pilot launch. The standards which were included in the CPD Engage tool for the purposes of the pilot for this project were

- Community Learning and Development NOS
- Family Learning NOS
- Learning and Development NOS
- Libraries, Archives and Information Services NOS
- Working with Parents NOS
- Youth Work NOS
- Learning Support Practitioner NOS
- Coaching and Mentoring NOS
- Management and Leadership NOS
- Northern Ireland Professional Standards (draft)

One issue which did arise from this process was the time taken to input the standards into the tool and map these to relevant job roles which did impact on the project as this did cause some delay in making the tool ready to be signed off and the pilot launched. The actual input of the standards into the CPD Engage tool was also found to be a very manual and time consuming process, even though the pilot was relatively small in terms of the number of organisations and participants included. The skill level and timescales required for this process do need to be a consideration if this pilot was to be extended for wider use where there would be a much wider range of job roles / standards to be included within the tool. This could also be a barrier to organisations which may not have the resource/time to up-skill and manage this process internally, as was indicated in some of the feedback from the participants (which is covered in more detail later in this report).

5.2 Branding/Look and Feel

The CPD Engage tool was branded by Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland to reflect their ownership, however it was felt important to be clear that the tool used for the pilot was a product of Lifelong Learning UK. Therefore the Lifelong Learning UK logo was added onto the Internet pages, so it clear to everyone logging in to the pilot version of the tool this was being run by Lifelong Learning UK.

The front page of the tool, seen by all users on entry to the personal development pages and the welcome messages were also revised. These were amended to reflect that this was a Lifelong Learning UK run pilot. As these pages can be accessed and updated online the project team were able to take ownership of this and ensure the right information was provided to users. Frequently asked questions were also available within the tool to support users, however due the fact CPD Engage had been developed solely for use within further education colleges these were limited and were only applicable to staff working in the colleges.

One definite benefit of the tool in this preparation work was the flexibility and functionality it provided as an online tool to manage key messages and provide supporting information for users. This ownership could be really useful for the individual organisation in communicating and support users in their continuing professional development.

6. Internal Review of tool

Following completion of the development of the tool (to prepare this for the pilot), it was internally reviewed and tested to ensure it was fit for purpose for the pilot and ready to be released as a branded Lifelong Learning UK product. The functionality, branding, look and feel of the tool were all reviewed and feedback provided internally from sector, marketing, internet and project specialists. The feedback from the review was largely positive particularly in relation to its general look and easy navigation. A few minor alterations/fixes were identified, although these were minimal and no major issues with using the tool were identified. Following resolution of these issues, the tool was signed off ready for launch with no major challenges or issues to be resolved.

Minor changes suggested from the internal review ranged from technical/look and feel elements to understanding the content of the tool and included:

- Investigating if there was a potential caching problem as the Lifelong Learning logo didn't appear on versions where the computers operating system was Firefox or Google chrome.
- There's no link back to Lifelong Learning UK or anything to show it's "ours" apart from the logo. Possibly look at adding something in the FAQ's and a link?
- Improvement to the login page which had a fault, which meant you were often required to log in twice as the log in details would not be recognised on the first attempt.
- In the training section if the date of the training could also be carried forward and included on the actual page which describes the training course this would be useful (instead of going back to the main page again).
- Relies on the individual member's honesty- would it be more useful to gain external approval before adding training undertaken to the portfolio.

All these changes were investigated with the consultants developing the tool and resolved prior to the training of the participants commencing.

Feedback from the internal review noted that

- "...on the whole it's a good system that seems pretty much ready to go out of the box."
- The breakdown of competencies section seems to be the most useful method of identifying gaps in training...it is simple and easy to use and outlines clearly where there is training required.
- The resource section is very beneficial, when navigating around and using the tool.
- The tool looks really good. I especially like the review section whereby scores are allocated against areas upon which you require training.
- From a communications perspective, all the logos seem to be OK and the language used in the scripts is clear and seem to make sense, it's clean and easy to navigate.

7. Overview of participant organisations

It was decided that for the purposes of the pilot one organisation from each of the areas of work being targeted, further education colleges, work based learning and community learning and development would be identified to provide participants as the scope of the project was limited to a relatively small pilot group of 16. It was also decided following interest from the Libraries, Archives and information Services area of work to widen the scope to include participation from them which would also help to understand feasibility for this tool over wider part of the Lifelong Learning sector overall.

The identification and subsequent engagement of organisations to take part in the pilot was initially progressed through the relationships built by Lifelong Learning UK's Northern Ireland team and recommendations provided from the project board. Interest from the sector was positive and there was the possibility if the project scope had allowed, the size of the pilot group could have been wider given the range of interest received by the Northern Ireland team. However following engagement it was agreed that the following organisations would take part to represent each of the areas of work involved in the pilot;

- South Eastern Regional College – Further Education Colleges
- Springvale Learning – Work Based Learning
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland– Community Learning and Development
- Ballyclare Library (North Eastern Education and Library Board - Libraries, Archive and Information Services)

Five participants from both Springvale Learning and Youth Services were selected and one participant from the libraries board. As South Eastern Regional College were already trialling the CPD Engage tool prior to this project commencing it was decided that it would be more beneficial to work with the college rather than ask them to repeat the testing they have already performed internally on the tool. It was felt this would help in understanding and communicating the potential CPD Engage could have and review their feedback on some of the issues they have encountered to understand how the tool could potentially taken forward by the other further education colleges in Northern Ireland.

8. Set up and training for the pilot

The set up of the tool with participating organisations and subsequent training of the individual participants was provided by Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland. These training sessions also provided an opportunity to collect feedback from the participants on their initial thoughts on the tool, its potential, how easy it was to use and whether there were any differences which could be identified between the different constituency representatives at this stage.

The training and set up sessions for each organisation lasted approximately two hours which ensured that there was minimal impact in terms of the organisation taking time out from their day-to-day responsibilities to learn how to use the tool. The training and set up was positively received by all the participants and none of the sessions raised any serious issues or identified any requirements for further training support at this stage. This indicates that the tool can be used by different types of organisations from a variety of work areas without the need for individual requirements to be specifically developed at this stage.

A more detailed review of this stage is included in the evaluation survey results discussed later in this report however included below are some of the comments received from the training sessions;

“The training went really well. Our staff got a good feel for the package and are looking forward to using it”

“I thought the session was excellent, it seems to be an excellent tool, both for an employee and employer point of view...I am very enthusiastic about it and feel that...it will prove very useful.”

“Everyone was very impressed with it, particularly the fact that you could assess yourself against the NOS.”

Although in general all the comments received from these sessions were very positive, one comment which was feedback from the Youth Work training raised the following concern:

“LLUK had already decided to use the tool.... It left a couple of us thinking that the pilot was a tokenistic exercise”.

To prevent any issues arising from this, the Northern Ireland internal lead for the project, Shauna Dunlop, liaised with the youth work participants to ensure they were clear about what the objectives were for the project and how this fitted into the wider strategic aim of Lifelong Learning UK. Following this discussion there were no further concerns raised during the pilot by the youth council for Northern Ireland representatives. An options paper was also produced for the project board to evidence the process Lifelong Learning UK went through to research and choose the tool used for the purposes of the pilot.

9. Summary of pilot process

Training for the participants undertaking the pilot took place during the week commencing 23rd February 2009. This was slightly later in terms of when the pilot was planned to launch to ensure maximum amount of time possible within the scope of the project for participants to trial the tool. This was due to a number of factors which will be carried forward as key learning points for this project and for any further work with the sector including;

- Lengthier than anticipated procurement to agree the contract with Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland to use and develop the CPD Engage tool.
- Extreme adverse weather conditions during development time which caused unplanned delays in preparing the tool and having the resource to do this.
- Uploading of the Lifelong Learning UK standards and matching of their competencies to participant's job roles within the CPD Engage tool.

Following the training participants were asked to test using the tool until the 31st March 2009.

10. Evaluation Results

10.1 Interim feedback – Participant visits

To understand how the pilot was progressing and the initial thoughts of the pilot group on the CPD Engage tool chosen and approach being trialled by Lifelong Learning UK, face-to-face meetings were arranged in Belfast with representatives from the Springvale Learning, Youth Council for Northern Ireland and the Libraries participant groups on 16th and 23rd March 2009.

Overall the feedback from these meetings was positive and the individuals participating appreciated the opportunity for face-to-face conversations to be able to discuss their view so far and thoughts for utilisation of the tool if it was to be taken forward. These points will be very useful if this project progresses to further stages and in understanding individual requirements within the sector going forward.

In general there was a definite positive response toward the approach Lifelong Learning UK had taken with this trial in terms of an online approach and the use of a competency based model for continuing professional development. All the participants we talked to felt that the tool was easy to use and navigate, however there was a concern raised from all the three groups participating in the pilot in terms of making the tool work specifically for their organisation/area of work and the time and resource this would take to do so properly. This is also something which South Eastern Regional College have identified during their development and piloting of the tool within the college, identifying it as a full time job to continually manage, update and cleanse the system for it to work effectively and provide the reporting information required to use effectively.

The question was also raised of how to engage senior management/corporate teams to persuade them to adopt this approach and that the tool can be applied beyond a small pilot group to work at an organisational level. This is where further work with South Eastern Regional College will be beneficial as they have the evidence to show how the tool can be utilised and potential it has.

One point for Lifelong Learning UK, is ensuring the message being communicated is clear they are giving is clear, and that the project is not perceived as trying to tell the sector this is the only way forward to manage their continuing professional development but that it is in fact providing them with a new way forward through linking into national occupational standards and reflecting the increasing focus these are building within the sector.

An emerging theme from both the one-to-one feedback meetings and the evaluation survey results was the project ability to “sell” the benefits of this approach to the wider sector and in particular senior management teams. This will be particularly important if it is compared to other continuing professional development tools such as the Skills Passport as feedback has identified that this CPD tool is of growing interest in the youth and community learning and development areas of work.

Summarised below are some of the key points raised during these meetings;

Ballyclare Library

- The tool is “fun” and easy to use.
- Fits in well with current work being undertaken.

- Enjoying using the tool...just wish had more time to do use it currently

Springvale Learning

- The competency statements/way standards mapped needs to be made more specific to apply to individual job roles.
- Hoping to see common themes emerging from the staff using the tool to help focus/set training for staff going forward.
- Concern identified in maintaining the tool and commitment this will require. There is the feeling this will need to be stressed to other organisations who may be interested in using the tool.
- Can see long terms benefits in terms of the appraisal process and the self assessment the tool offers through its Reflect function.
- Recognise where tool could link up the newly developing qualifications framework and transferability i.e. Learning and Development – to support building up to PGCE etc
- If the tool was to progress to linking into delivering training i.e. management and leadership –needs to be right kind– ‘tailored’ to meet staff needs.
- Found the online accessibility of the tool is appealing.

Youth Council for Northern Ireland

- Right structure – needs to be appropriate – work within wider framework before raises expectations
- Could look at the way this could link into mandatory training within organisations.
- Corporate link – needs to work alongside – corporate elements /standards
- Needs to work with/for a wider range of different roles/individuals which a wider pilot or trial within the organisation could provide.
- Can see potential in what this is offering.
- Buy in will be dependent on changes within youth work – they will have to be clear strategy and defined structure before can slot on something link this and be able to see clear benefits
- The challenge may be in making the solution both a good management tool as well as an effective self assessment/development tool.
- Ensuring individuals closely monitored and supported would be crucial to making this work in the wider organisation.
- Current look and feel etc feels quite/dry and technical – need to make more inviting and attractive for users
- Flexibility – Job roles and mapping crucial – especially as many on may be on short terms contracts/where job roles can be quote diverse – possibility of drawing in standards from other areas/Sector Skills Councils? Make more applicable to actual job role (mix and match)
- Comparison to skills passport which outdoor education current use - need to champion benefits to youth sector of CPD Engage tool to get buy in
- System needs to be able to link into key docs – i.e. JMC website re job descriptions
- Internal requirements to be considered i.e. matching up to business plans etc and using to assess appraisals and training against
- Links re training reviews/referring back to line management group
- Checking and support mechanisms in place

South Eastern Regional College update

Following the development of the CPD Engage tool which the college has been involved in over the last two years, South Eastern Regional College is now coming to the end of the pilot phase. The progression they have made in terms of the development of the tool and

embedding this within the college is proof of the potential this tool or similar could have for other further education college and wider in the sector. As they are approaching the end of their pilot phase they have identified some key areas for consideration for their further progression including:

- Resourcing and alignment of training.
- Inductions of new staff
 - Business side
 - Diversity of roles
 - Where to start re explaining national occupational standards
- Issue re up-skilling existing training staff – deliver and also develop training with CPD Engage
- Full time job- working with CPD Engage to develop and keep up to date re training – Inputting /mapping/cleansing
- Explore potential for working with other colleges
- More you put in more you get in
- CPD Engage development requirements
 - Identifying course – outlook needs tan update to let know
 - Following review – flag to let managers aware of this
 - Integrate will college’s personnel management system (QLP)
 - Informing and educating staff
- Skills audit – targeting resources
- Reporting particular need – stage at, what need to progress, bigger picture
- Aim to be centre of excellence for staff development (National Occupational Standards, continuing professional development)
 - Recruitment
 - Training
 - Qualifying reviewing
- Benefits from work done – use expertise on Lifelong Learning UK’s national occupational standards team/work with the Northern Ireland team.
- The expertise in mapping competencies roles and skills to do so will be key.

10.2 Participant Survey Results

An online evaluation survey as used to collate and evaluate the feedback from the participants. It was felt that using an online survey tool would fit with the online approach taken with the continuing professional development tool during the pilot. The questionnaire was sent to all of the 11 individuals participating in the pilot following the end on the pilot on 31st March 2009. Due to the impact of the Easter holidays falling at this time, the length of time to complete the questionnaire was extended beyond originally planned and participants were asked to complete the questionnaire online before 24th April 2009. In total seven of the participants completed and submitted their responses to the questionnaire including four respondents from Springvale Learning, two from the Youth Council in Northern Ireland and one from Ballyclare Library.

The questionnaire asked for opinions on the continuing professional development tool and approach being tested by Lifelong Learning UK through this project, their thoughts on the potential of using the tool within their organisation and constituency area in the future and what development/changes would be required. It also gathered feedback from the participants on the areas of personal development and training they had identified through their use of the CPD Engage tool during the pilot. A full breakdown of the evaluation questionnaire and the participant responses is included in Appendix C.

10.3 Summary of outcomes from the evaluation survey

All respondents indicated that they use the Internet on a daily basis which suggests that an online approach would fit into this way of working. When asked to rate their computer skills respondents rated their skills between 'average' and 'very good' which does suggest that the tool is not reliant on a user's computer skills and would limit the opportunity of those that don't see themselves as particularly skilled with IT, however this would need to be further tested with a wider range of user abilities.

Following the initial training, six out of the seven respondents felt ready and confident to use the tool and all seven felt the training gave them enough information on how to use the tool. Comments included:

"The preliminary brief and training were excellent, it set me at ease for using the tool and I felt confident that I could contact Shauna or Nicole at any time if I had a problem"

Areas suggested to improving the training sessions in future included;

- "It [would be]more helpful to identify areas for development, if the units were identified to be linked to a whole qualification"
- "A lot of the units for the business area did not relate to the job role I am doing within the company"
- "It is important that everyone who is participating gets the opportunity to get a general feel for the package and an opportunity to look at units and how they would relate to their job role"
- "More in depth training would be needed for staff who aren't confident on computers"
- "The timing of this session proved to be detrimental to attaining its full potential as most of the group could not stay for the intended full session i.e. a Friday afternoon. I would recommend that such an event should allow for participants to debate and discuss its application to the field as well as receiving training in the mechanics of its operation. I would have benefitted from learning from others about their needs/issues to"

Generally the feeling from the feedback in relation to the training appears to be largely positive. As identified within other areas of the feedback getting competencies aligned with job roles does seem to be a key point and is something which does need to be developed more closely with staff. The provision of longer sessions for discussion or a feedback forum for users could help resolve concerns regarding time to debate and share needs/issues etc. The skill level of users also needs to be taken into account from the outset to ensure these users wouldn't feel alienated if this tool or a similar online tool was to be used by their organisation going forward.

Respondents were questioned on the current process their organisations have for monitoring and tracking continuing professional development, to understand whether there was a need/fit for using a tool such as the CPD Engage tool. Responses to this were open and ranged from none, to updated on a yearly basis by word of mouth, word processed documents, team leaders record training undertaken and a database centrally held, drawing on information from training officers, training organisations and line managers. From these responses the evidence suggests that there is a lack of a coherent and consistent approach to continuing professional development with most methods appearing to be quite ad hoc and inconsistent and in some cases quite outdated.

The majority of the respondents indicated that the training session enabled them to understand why the pilot was being run and what its objectives were. Two respondents were either not sure, or did not fully understand this and received more clarification through the one to one meetings/feedback sessions. This could be due to the lack of an internal representative at the training sessions and is a lesson learned to ensure clear

outlining of goals preferably through the use of a Lifelong Learning UK representative at all meetings sessions of this nature for future projects managed by Lifelong Learning UK.

The experience of the participants in using CPD Engage was also measured and responses for this section were largely in agreement that the content and tool were easy to use and relevant. There was a concern raised that the job roles/duties list wasn't wholly relevant to their job role due to it being quite a diverse role and this therefore meant the content in terms of competencies was not always relevant to them. This seems to be a common concern coming out of the evaluation feedback and is one that will have to be addressed if this is to be made viable on a larger scale. There is potentially a need for a piece of work on a wider scale to understand the nuances of individual job roles which are more diverse and recognise the standards these relate to, to ensure the competency statements make them more relevant. Further exploration on a wider sector level basis or individually, when setting up with an organisation, which will be greatly beneficial to ensure relevancy, and in turn, buy in for this type of approach. The feedback also was clear to stress that it is the approach of a continuing professional development online tool which was feasible, rather than focusing solely on CPD Engage as the tool to provide this in the future.

When asked to identify the best features of the tool, the link to the standards was a key feature to be raised. Also highlighted was that it gave graphic representations which were clear and concise and that it highlighted how much training had been done, similar to a mini audit. This was identified as useful for helping to recognise areas of training that would be beneficial to the individual and organisation. These will all be key areas for future development if a CPD tool was adopted whether this is the CPD Engage tool or an alternative tool.

In terms of the actual approach to continuing professional development being tested by this pilot i.e. online/standards driven tool all respondents were very positive in seeing this as a beneficial approach for moving forward, however it was felt that the organisation/area of work would need to have a clear continuing professional development strategy developed before a tool such of this could be utilised and provide the necessary benefits in the future. Similarly, respondents were also asked their views specifically on the competency based framework this approach, on the whole was met with positive response as being a positive way forward, particularly if more work was carried out to expand the approach to continuing professional development and ensure the right 'fit' at the individual organisation level. Comments included:

- "I think it works extremely well, it highlights the common ground and goals of each profession and individual"
- "I feel it is important that continuing professional development is based on national standards to ensure uniformity within the industry"
- "An excellent way forward and should be used throughout all training providers"

There was the feeling that more work needs to be done in ensuring more flexibility in exploring job roles and their links to different competencies and in matching any system introduced to existing continuing professional development frameworks and areas of relevance i.e. the Youth Service for Northern Ireland curriculum. A concern emerged whether a solely competence based system would have a number of limitations in terms of assessment and monitoring and compliance which organisations in the sector may not have the resource required to deal with on a day-to-day basis. This again questions the possible need to address the day-to-day impact of embedding and then managing this type of system.

What became clear from the evaluation results in terms of improving the system and making it more applicable to individual organisations, was the feeling from some

participants that it was not so much a question of improvement at this stage, but looking at how it could work within organisations both small and large and fit within an organisation and its current training strategies/processes. This, in turn, needs to ensure that the tool should aim to benefit, rather than hinder current practice. There was also recognition for greater staff and management input, which beyond the limitations of this pilot could, easily be addressed by working closely with the organisation at the initial set up phase. Some improvements suggested by participants are areas which this tool already addresses; suggesting that further time spent with the participants piloting this would have enabled them to understand better the wider potential it can have. This is something which the work carried out already by South Eastern Regional College exemplifies i.e. linking into non standards training courses such as health and safety and risk assessment courses.

10.4 Identifying training needs

Though the main focus of the pilot was to assess if a tool such as the CPD Engage tool would be a feasible approach for use across the constituencies within Northern Ireland the pilot also provided the opportunity to assess if there were any key training needs which could be identified from the participant's use of the tool. Although not all participants had used the tool enough to clear identify their requirements the main themes starting to emerge related to learning and development, working with people and communication skills. However a more extended pilot over a longer period would enable a clearer picture of training requirements to be produced and any emerging themes in terms of training and development from across all the areas of work identified which Lifelong Learning UK could then use to identify areas of further support.

11. Conclusions

Following a review of both the initial feedback and evaluations survey the follow key conclusions can be drawn.

11.1 There is evidence to suggest from the findings of this project that there does appear to be a lack of a clear and integrated continuing professional development framework working throughout the sector. This supports the earlier findings from the Lifelong Learning UK Stage 5 Agreed Collaborative Action Plan 2008, which found there was the need for a more consistent and collaborative approach which was a key driver for this project.

11.2 Evidence does suggest an online approach to continuing professional development would both be feasible in line with current working practices within all the organisations; however attention would need to be paid to individuals with weaker internet skills to ensure these would not be alienated when using this approach.

11.3 The use of a standards driven approach for a continuing professional development tool/framework is something which the evidence suggests would be both accepted and beneficial to the sector and is an approach which appears to be feasible for all sectors. However further work is required to ensure that this can practically work with wide ranging job roles, where more than one set of standards would be applicable particularly where this might also require the use of standards from other sector skills councils. A coherent mapping exercise undertaken within the sector by Lifelong Learning UK to look at existing job roles within all the areas of work and which standards are applicable would also be greatly beneficial in supporting this project and the ongoing work within the sector by the Northern Ireland team.

11.4 Appreciation of the wider organisation/area of work and their strategy/approach to continuing professional development and training does needs to be taken into account if a tool such as the CPD Engage tool was to be embedded within the organisations.

11.5 It appears clear that encouraging/enabling input from both management and staff will be crucial to the development and engagement for this type of approach especially if this is encouraged from an early stage to ensure the tool is developed to best fit individual organisations. Building this individuality however could have greater impact on the cost of the solution and support from the suppliers i.e. Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland which would have to taken into account.

11.6 The time and resource required in setting up, maintaining and longer term development of the tool could be a key barrier for the future and further work will be needed to address how organisations can be supported if they want to move forward in this way as well as selling the long term benefits for the approach. A sustainability strand will need to be developed as part of the second phase of work for this project to manage the expectations of both the Department for Employment and Learning, as the funder and the organisations involved from within the sector. This will also need to look at the long term options for Lifelong Learning UK to build on what will have been achieved both in terms of delivery and sector engagement throughout the two phases of the project.

11.7 In terms of the look and feel of the tool being used, the feedback indicates that the current format was found to be accessible and easy to use. However it was identified more work is needed In terms of how it is presented to be more attractive and engaging to all types of potential users in the sector.

11.8 While some work has been done in comparing other continuing professional development tools within the sector further work would be essential in terms of ensuring

their buy in. Although the standards based framework does give this a unique selling point further work with the sector representatives i.e. the Youth Council for Northern Ireland to enable them to see the long term benefits particularly in relation to other tools i.e., the Skills Passport tool.

11.9 While not brought out directly in the feedback from the participant the concern over the costs which could be impact by the Aurian licensing fee for organisations adopting this approach beyond a pilot phase would have to be considered. The £1,000 fee currently charged could act as a barrier for some organisations particularly smaller ones within the sector which identifies a need for Lifelong Learning UK if they were to progress this further in terms of negotiation of fees or alternative options, now this approach appears to be a feasible option.

11.10 Evidence from the project suggests an increasing awareness and use of national occupational/professional standards by the organisations involved in the pilot. The feedback indicated that the embedding of standards is becoming increasingly important and recognised within the sector and therefore it appears that a Lifelong Learning UK standards based approach to continuing professional development would be welcomed by the sector to align with this.

12. Recommendations

12.1 It is recommended that a second phase of this project should go ahead. This needs to incorporate another pilot to test this approach for a longer period of time to enable key training themes to emerge and investigate how Lifelong Learning UK can then support the delivery of this training.

12.2 This phase should also look at the long term sustainability of a tool such as the CPD Engage tool and the issues for wider day-to-day use which could emerge. Other options for providing this type of approach to continuing professional development should also be considered at this stage.

12.3 It is also recommended that the process for mapping standards to job roles and the competencies used is developed both working with key individuals and at a sector wide level to ensure the competency statements underpinning the tool are both relevant and useful in planning further training and development.

12.4 This recommendation is based on the feedback from the participants in the pilot where there was clearly a positive reaction to both the tool and the approach which could be enhanced with further time for participants to spend using the tool and realising more of its potential both at staff and management levels.

12.5 There has also been significant interest noted in the project and this area of work from the sector during the running of this project. The project board have also been very enthusiastic and supportive and it is clear that there is a wider appeal to the project which a second phase will help to meet and continue to build upon.

12.6 There is also a recommendation to use the second phase of this project to explore where a tool such as CPD Engage could link in with relevant qualifications attainment to support this and provide a full circle of development for users. This could be particularly relevant to the work currently being carried out to introduce a qualifications framework within the sector.

12.7 A sustainability strand will need to be developed as part of the second phase of work for this project to manage the expectations of both the Department for Employment and Learning, as the funder and the organisations involved from within the sector. This will also need to look at the long term options for Lifelong Learning UK to build on what has been achieved both in delivery and sector engagement through the two phases of the project.