

The Partnership

Dundee's 'Discover Opportunities' (DO) employability partnership may be better known to some as the 'Dundee Employability Programme' (founded summer 2006). 'Discover Opportunities' is part of the Dundee partnership and reports to the Partnership's Employability Core Group. With the financial backing of the Scottish Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, the partnership was formed in order to:

- To take the strategic lead on the Employability agenda in Dundee.
- To secure and direct resources for Employability Activity.
- To further develop, guide and monitor the implementation of the Employability Plan.
- To maintain an overview of the Employability Programme and associated workgroups and ensure forward planning is undertaken.
- To take responsibility for the Employability input within the Single Outcome Agreement.
- To report directly to the Dundee Partnership on Employability activity in the city.



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The criteria for membership of DO's core group are simply to be able to contribute to the partnership's objectives, but not be a recipient of employability funds. Those organisations which receive funds may be represented on sub-groups, where funding is not discussed.

The core group is well established with the recent addition of the voluntary sector completing the membership.

In addition to the core group there are a number of 'work groups', some of which oversee smaller 'sub-groups', which deliver specific outputs. For example, the 'employer engagement' sub-group trialed a public sector offer to employers by pulling together an overview of all the services that the public sector provides and compiles them in an Employer's Pack.

The Employability Programme is a success because of the commitment of partner organisations and key members of staff within these organisations including Dundee City Council, Job Centre Plus, Skills Development Scotland, Careers Scotland, Dundee Community Health Partnership and NHS Tayside Delivery Partners.

The Challenges

Strategy

Two strategies were developed initially; one to address NEET (not in employment, education or training) and one to address Workforce Plus. More recently the Partnership has determined that an integrated strategy covering ages 16-65 should be developed; this is nearing completion.

The Solutions

Strategy

Now with 2.5 years of experience, DO's strategy is changing. The plan is currently under review to take into consideration the 'European Programme', 'Fairer Scotland' funding, 'Pathways to Work' and the economic climate. Allan Millar, Employability Programme Manager, DO, reports, "the plan hasn't (remained constant over time) and the activities of the partnership definitely haven't because they're developing, they've had to change with each other...as we get involved in new areas of work new opportunities become evident...there's a constant developmental agenda for most of the work of the workgroups."

The Impact

Customers

Using the pipeline approach, DO funds the relevant delivery partners to deliver what provision is needed. This ensures the customer is receiving what support is best for them rather than what is best for the organisation dealing with them.

Customers will also benefit from advice and support from non-employability staff (e.g. social care staff, health staff, housing staff and staff that work with homelessness organisations). Training these workers will begin in 2009, allowing more customers to be reached and referred into the Employability Pipeline.

The 'Discover Opportunities' brand is aimed primarily at customers, attempting to engage them with a non-threatening approach to work. The Discover Opportunities Centre is located in Dundee city centre, a number of services related to employability under one roof. Allan Millar describes the centre as "less scary" than traditional job centres and explains that "national feedback indicates it's quite threatening to some people to go to a Job-centre Plus centre".

Employers

Employers and local business have gained a lot from the existence of the employability partnership. They are seen to have more suitable candidates for their vacancies as a result of job brokers sharing vacancies and fewer organisations offering them the same service (public sector organisations working together).

Support Required

The partnership has found that the aligning of DO's policy thinking with that of the Scottish Government's was a very supportive process. The resource investment from the DWP and the Scottish Government was "fundamental to the employability framework and agenda being developed in Dundee." Also helpful, says Allan Millar, was the opportunity to "bounce off ideas and idiot proof what we were planning to do" with a dedicated Scottish Government contact. Learning Networks are a supportive tool and he speculates that "if there wasn't an NDG or Workforce Plus group in the Scottish Government, or an MCMC, or city strategy learning network that we would find our work here a lot more difficult and a lot less connected to the wider world and the Scottish and UK governments."

Next Steps



The partnership is keen to really understand what the progress of people is once they come into the pipeline. At the moment DO do not have a benchmark to gauge their results against and so the next steps are to develop this. Allan feels DO understands the concept of pipeline, but not fully how it works and what it means for clients. There is an evaluation currently addressing this, which will show what does and does not work. When this work is complete DO will be able to begin to expand the pipeline to cover all employability activity.

In relation to funding, DO aspire to better align their future funds to ensure the partnership is fully informed, allowing them to contribute to the employability programme as a whole. In addition, DO are beginning the process of forward planning and evidencing their usage of their 'discretionary funding for employability' which dates to March 31st 2010.

DO are also moving forward with their management information system, Dundee Employability Management Information System (DEMIS) and have aspirations that the information from DEMIS will enable them to further improve their services.