

The Partnership

The 'Workforce Plus' (WF+) employability partnership in Fife (WF+F) have been operating since July 2007 and consists of the key employability partners in the Fife area. The aims of the partnership are based on the generic Scottish WF+ framework and are as follows:

- To reduce worklessness, including by reaching those from 'hard to reach' groups.
- To use a client centred approach from early engagement through to the 'job ready' stage.
- To streamline and improve the delivery of services.
- To use joint procurement where appropriate.
- To work more closely with employers.
- To ensure all key players are represented within the partnership

WF+F originated as a subgroup of Fife's 'People in Skills' group when the worklessness agenda became a focus of the Scottish Executive. The framework was under development when, in 2006, 'Pathfinders' was launched. Although WF+F did not receive funding from Pathfinders, they became involved in the consultation and so were able to influence the outcome.

The Challenges

Strategy

There are currently 19 members of the core WF+F group. This large number can make it difficult to make decisions. Also, attempts at streamlining work by creating 'implementation' sub groups did not have the desired effect; although much work was done in meetings, this could be continued into the public arena as no group was able to make decisions to permit this.



Partners

The partners collectively agree that two of the biggest challenges of the partnership are eradicating duplication of work, and, ensuring organisations are delivering the services only at which they excel. George Maxwell, Manager of Careers Scotland Fife, also feels that the changes in the economic climate are, and will continue to be, a large challenge to the partnership. Phil Martin, Jobcentre Plus Manager (Forth Valley, Fife and Tayside) adds that further challenges are "putting in place a structure...driving forward the work...achieving the overall WF+ aims".

Membership

WF+F partnership not only has all local employability organisations on board, but also all Fife colleges, members of the voluntary sector and members of the private sector. In addition the partnership has links with the NHS, which they believe assists the challenge of targeting 'hard to reach' groups. However, there is currently no employer representation which may mean that issues and opportunities are being missed.

The Solutions

Strategy

WF+F are currently undergoing the process of dividing their core group into one decision making group and various 'task and finish' sub-groups. One 'task and finish' sub-group presently exists and is working successfully under this model.

Partners

WF+F reports that they will address the current economic downturn by re-examining the continuity plans and exploring alternative methods of delivery. The overall consensus is that this will be challenging but successfully done.

The partnership have also challenged themselves to create a structure which enables priorities to be established, decisions to be made, tasks to be allocated and specific actions to be carried out. This will eradicate the duplication of work and ensure organisations are delivering appropriate services. The work is driven forward without a dedicated co-ordinator and so it has been agreed that all members must find time within their working life to focus and contribute to achieving the overall partnership aims in addition to specific aims.

Membership

WF+F have found it very challenging to recognise which employers would add value to the partnership and so far have invited none. Violeta Ilendo, Development Manager Inclusion and Opportunities Fife Council, explains this decision by saying “we went through a huge exercise to make sure it was an inclusive partnership but there’s always scope for improvement, we don’t knock anyone away”. Rosaleen Brown, External Relationship Manager including partnership and engagement Jobcentre Plus (Forth Valley, Fife and Tayside) adds “I think it’s fair to say... that some of us are employers ourselves through the public sector...it’s important to recognise ourselves as funders and employers.”

The Impact

Customers

Violeta Ilendo reposts that better provision for customers has involved producing programmes in a more robust and person centred manner, which in turn has been more pro-active in moving customers through the employment journey. Mark Cullens, Assistant Principal Andrew Smith College, believes that the customers have benefited from a high level of trust within the partnership as this trust allows joined-up working. Rosaleen Brown adds that the partnership’s “shared vision and intention” also makes a positive difference to the customers, as does the individual partners’ understanding of the “journey of the client”.

Employers

WF+F have taken the approach of informing employers why the partnership exists, including how it can support them, with the hope of gaining commitment. An exercise engaging with approximately 400 employers across Fife showed that there is an interest in running projects, for example with local schools and colleges. However, work experience is not an option at the moment as it is felt this inappropriate given redundancy threats to the current workforce. It has also become clear that many employers have issues with WF+F as there is no ‘one point of contact’ and there is no ‘job ready’ standardisation. WF+F understand these issues and are working towards finding solutions in order to gain credibility.



Support Required

As WF+F were not a Pathfinder pilot area there was no funding for co-ordination support. This lack of financial support resulted in each partner contributing to this role, costing themselves a great deal of time and effort. There is still no dedicated co-ordinator, which WF+F would like to see changed.

Other forms of support that the partnership would like from the Scottish Government are:

- A formalised arrangement which ensures all areas are informed about the projects of other areas, to ensure work is not being duplicated unnecessarily.
- Information regarding all employability partnerships of the progress and outcomes of the National Delivery Group subgroups.
- A website which contains sharepoint sites, including detailing tools and projects from other partnerships.

Next Steps

Evaluation of the partnership and its effect is next on the agenda for WF+F. Many of the individual activities have been reviewed but the partnership as a whole has not. Gail Sibbald, Senior Development Executive Skills Intervention Employability Skills Development Scotland, challenges herself and her partners to “stop the carousel and review where we are at the moment”.

Philip Martin adds that the partnership must “be able to demonstrate that both voluntary sector and employers are actively part of this – we’ve done work with both of them and made a difference, but we need for them to be key players in this now and help to drive it forward”.

Marketing and branding is another aspiration for WF+F. However this is currently waiting for agreement from the Community Planning Partnership. Violeta Ilendo explains “we’re almost there, we need a bit of injection on getting things done and clarity on a couple of things”.

