

LCIT Programme

UK

Language Policy



Good Practice Executive Summary

The Language & Culture for International Trade (LCIT) Programme was a means of challenging the existing (2006) model of public-funded language support for the language training of SMEs in the East of England. It was also a pilot to try new and innovative solutions to programme delivery and to generate a series of recommendations in terms of 'what works best'.

The programme operated in an environment where companies expected some level of financial support from government, and where government in turn was keen to demonstrate its support for small and medium-sized businesses through the commitment of funds to the rate of 50% of the cost of training.

The existing environment was predominantly based around a 100% government contribution to the cost of language training, mainly through the LCB programme, which had recently ceased to operate in that format and which had moved to an entirely different model.

The programme was built around two components – promotion of language & culture to local business, and delivery of training courses. The specifications for the programme were developed by RLN East in partnership with the East of England Learning & Skills Council (LSC) Train to Gain offer, a co-financing organisation. It was delivered by ACER, the Association of Colleges of the Eastern Region. The target of the second component was to train up to 160 staff from 80 companies.

The project grew from a slow start and significantly over achieved against all the key targets such that:

- 226 learners on courses exceeding the target of 160 by 41%
- 108 companies engaged exceeding the target of 70 by 54%
- 39 courses run which exceeded the target of 36 by 15%

In the process the project established that there is a significant demand for a wide range of foreign language training from businesses in the East of England, and that if this training is offered flexibly to meet the needs of the business and the individuals then employers are willing to contribute towards the cost of this training.

Additionally the project unearthed a wealth of language providers -many of whom are not registered on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKRLP) who are delivering language training to businesses - who, judging by their ability to respond rapidly and flexibly, cost effectively and to the overwhelming satisfaction of the businesses receiving the training, are a resource to be utilised in any future language training.

Funding was made available from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to support Further Education (FE) colleges, Higher Education Institutions and private training providers to plan and deliver workplace language courses up to 24 hours maximum. All potential training providers were instructed to devise individual courses to meet the specific requirements of the company within the time limitations and identify the relevant vocabulary and structures pertinent to the sector in which the company traded.

Employers were able to choose where and when the language training would take place. The timing of all training was arranged to conform to the work patterns of the learners, thus it took place at all times during the day, in the evening and even at weekends.

The subsidy offered (up to 50% of the hourly training rate, up to a maximum subsidy of £30 per hour) was sufficient to encourage companies to engage in language training. The referral process worked well in the main and the RLN East i.hub database proved to be very effective in recording employer referrals and the diagnostic tool was equally effective in determining employers' needs.

Programme oversight was via a steering group chaired by RLN East, with other members representing the East of England Development Agency, the Learning & Skills Council, UK Trade & Investment and ACER.

In total 11 providers were used to deliver 39 courses. The project was not designed to give large tranches of funding to training providers, which they could not access directly, but had the intention of being customer-driven and not provider-led.

Headline figures

- Learner target of 160 exceeded by 41%
- Companies engaged target of 70 exceeded (in terms of I Hub application) by 54%
- Companies engaged at 54% of target of 70 (in terms of course support)
- Number of courses delivered 39- exceeded target of 36 by 15%
- 12 different languages delivered

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The dossier file needs to confirm how the policy addresses lifelong learning relating to contextualised employment needs. Some policies may limit the breadth of the training foresees on one language or sector, and therefore all limitations need to be clearly defined, with justification for their inclusion outlined.

The programme:

- √ promotes a wider knowledge and use of all languages throughout the Union
- √ promotes lifelong learning and learner mobility
- √ seeks to improve the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes
- √ ensures the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

International trade was the key driver behind this, and the steering group member organisations ensured that the project received the appropriate levels of support needed to access the business community. Employer representation came from UK Trade & Investment and the regular communication with brokers groups such as employer clusters and business advisors.

Although the programme was open to all sectors, some sectors were represented by specialist brokers and therefore received more support. Businesses formally identified for support through RLN East and other brokers undertook a diagnostic, using the tool developed as part of the project, to indicate how such intervention could produce benefits to business performance. Training was to be designed to be flexible and reflect company needs and was to be delivered through a wide range of institutions across the region.

2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

The project delivered courses in 12 different languages including Japanese, Polish, Chinese, Hungarian, Czech, Dutch, Portuguese and Russian. This was in addition to the 'traditional languages' French, Spanish, German & Italian, for which there was still ample demand.

The most popular languages were (number of courses) French (10), Spanish (7), German (6), Polish (4) and Chinese (4). In terms of learner numbers, the largest came from French (43), German (43), Polish (37), Spanish (29), Chinese (22) and Japanese (16).

In addition the project had secured the involvement of tutors able to deliver Arabic, Turkish and Romanian for organisations who identified this need, but which failed to translate into courses.

The project looked to be responsive to the identified language needs of the employer. It was demand led and did not, on the whole, go out with a fixed offer (either in terms of language or time/place of course). This required the project to develop a broad range of providers able to support a wide range of languages.

The project in itself did not produce tailor-made materials. Feedback from some groups however indicated that private training providers, including language schools, adapted training to the vocabulary and scenarios required by employers. This was eased particularly by the small size of groups engaged.

The initial contact identified the employers' preferences for delivery i.e. number of hours, where, when, course format (e.g. intensive or weekly sessions). Project staff then either sought to create a viable group of similar needs/requirements or to respond directly to the requirements of a single employer where they had a viable group (e.g. minimum of 2 learners).

The project developed its offer as it progressed to promote the different options available to employers. The breadth of delivery formats included

- Long course provision at providers' premises
- Short course/intensive workshops at providers' premises
- Long course provision at employers' premises
- Short course/intensive provision at employers' premises

The above models were delivered to single and multi employer groups, and as all day, half day, lunchtime and evening sessions in an attempt to be as flexible as possible in meeting the employers' needs. On many occasions course delivery dates and times were continually changed throughout the

course to work with the needs of the individual learners as they had other business priorities/travel abroad etc.

Both long and short (intensive) courses were popular -approx 34% of courses run were 10 hours or less. Shorter courses were used more as introductory or brush up courses for either intermediate or complete beginners. The most obvious determinant of course length however was group size and therefore the maximum number of subsidised training available to each course required a minimum group size of 5 learners. Feedback from one tutor teaching Chinese to a group of 2 beginners was that a 20 hour course would have provided more opportunity for learners to advance.

In some circumstances compromises had to be made on the part of businesses to enable a viable group to be formed e.g. times may not have been ideal for some in the need to arrive at some accommodation of need from different individuals/organisations.

Some of the larger companies who already invested in languages training for their staff reported a squeeze on their languages budget. In these cases they felt that the project subsidy enabled the continuation of training that would otherwise have been under threat.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

The dossier needs to reflect the extent to which the language policy builds on overall regional policy and the level of expected response to current regional priorities. The programme was a perfect fit with the EEDA International Strategy linked to the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), which highlights the importance of intercultural and language skills for international trade & economic growth. It also fits with multiple sections of the East of England Languages Framework.

There was a considerable number of referrals from traditional UKTI/EEI broker groups, but disappointingly less from other 'newer' groups such as TtG brokers. The latter started to trickle through towards the end of the project, as relationships were slowly built, however the shelf life of the project did not permit further development of these relationships.

The Sector Skills Councils would forward leads predominantly related to the employment of migrant workers, however the project was at the outset not focussed on these groups. Thus the relationship was not developed beyond awareness-raising of the project offer. Some initial contact with Business Links was made, however it is difficult to gauge which UKTI/EEI leads were originally Business Link leads, as traditionally many UKTI leads would come through the latter.

Although the project initially developed the lengthier diagnostic form, in reality the most useful information tool resulting from the project was the online i.hub

referral management system which captured core data from the original diagnostic and placed the most useful information onto a shared database.

To develop an appropriate offer certain core details were required, primarily around purpose and location of training, numbers of learners involved, type of training (intensive or weekly) required, and specifics such as language and level. The excel spreadsheet form developed by the project was useful in capturing data in more detail, although employers were not all required to complete this form.

Five was the most common group size making up approx 28% of all groups supported (this is perhaps not surprising as it enable employers to get maximum subsidy in terms of hours and funding).

Significantly approx 37% of all groups supported had less than 5 learners.

* (in one exception an individual who urgently needed a brush up course in advance of a business meeting was given 1:1 support as the group she was eventually to join was still at the forming stage)

The project targets were to engage 70 companies and offer training to a minimum of 160 employees. It was initially envisaged that 36 courses lasting 24 hours be the maximum offer. Early research showed that a guide price for language and intercultural training in the East of England was £60 per hour. A 50% subsidy was therefore set at £30 per hour, requiring a minimum of 5 learners.

Early project experiences showed that the logistical challenges in consolidating learners from different employers, requiring the same language, at the same level, with the same availability able to travel to a suitable location to make a viable group meant that the funding model was appropriate in only a minority of cases (the size and rurality of much of the East of England being a significant factor). It was necessary therefore to devise a more flexible funding framework.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

The project offer was extended to include justice sector employers following formal identification of need through the SSC Skills for Justice Employer Group. Employers trained included the police force, the probation & prison services, and drugs and alcohol teams working within the prisons. This was because there was a significant issue with the increasing number of migrant workers in the region causing issues of public security, in addition to the local police wishing to strengthen their community relationships with these migrant communities, in particular Polish in Essex and Portuguese in Norfolk.

13% of the total number of courses run were allocated to communicating with migrant workers.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

The programme was not designed to facilitate overseas study, rather to better prepare the company staff for communicating whilst overseas during the period of their study. As the vast majority of companies were actively engaged in international trade with the countries of their target language, there was inevitably the opportunity (or opportunities) to practise their language & culture skills as part of their working schedule.

Efforts were made to work with companies and trade advisors to determine when the company staff were due to travel to the target market, and training would, where possible, coincide with this. Furthermore, several of the medium-sized companies employed staff from overseas who participated in the language training (eg: a Japanese scientist wishing to learn German).

The programme made allowances for the training of staff who needed to communicate regularly with migrant workers, especially those from Poland and Portugal. 5 courses were ultimately run to meet this objective.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

The programme only targetted a maximum of 24hrs of learning, as it was a pilot project. Although no qualifications were awarded, during the programme period discussions were held with the awarding body Open College Network (OCN), which was developing 'short' qualifications for national accreditation. This would enable companies to have skills gained from shorter periods of training recognised. The programme recommended the systematic recognition of the need to consider these short qualifications.

7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

The key functions of the project team were that of:

- Promotion and marketing: The intention was for the RLN East team to "sell in" the LCIT offer as part of their visits to employers, as well as to

promote to TtG and other brokers involved in supporting employers to address their businesses skills needs. The former approach was successful in identifying employers who felt they needed language training (although often not as a high priority), the latter approach was fairly unsuccessful judging by the number of broker led referrals (a mere handful out of the 108 referrals made on i.hub).

- Organisational needs analysis (ONA)/referral: The adapted approach of using an ONA and or employers questionnaire to register details on i.hub proved an effective means of capturing key essential data to inform ACER staff and providers about provider need (and eligibility). The questionnaire had the benefit that it could be used as a light touch referral process for providers introducing employers themselves.
- Brokering a training solution: This aspect of project management/coordination was at times fairly labour intensive - particularly in the early stages of the project when endeavouring to develop viable groups from referrals of 1 or 2 at a time. After the introduction of a more flexible funding model and the increasing emergence of single employer groups/courses, the coordination of courses was able to be handed over to providers far earlier once key criteria for proceeding had been established. At this point coordination of the training solution became a far more realistic task within the resource allocated.
- Provision of advice and guidance: This was an important area of project support that was affected by the reduced amount of funding available. Actual support provided included:
 - Range of guidance documentation e.g. lesson plans, course materials (some focussing on specific sectors and languages)
 - Advice from experienced language trainer
 - Face to face and telephone support from experienced language trainer- particularly around challenging courses
 - Lesson observations.
- Administration: ACER has absorbed the project administration workload into its administration team. Evaluation questionnaires completed by providers report that they found the levels of bureaucracy involved in administering the project, the amount of information available from ACER and the responsiveness by ACER to enquiries to be either good or better.

The i.hub system did not specifically capture information relating to the source of referral to the project and this evaluation is unable to analyse the breakdown of referrals by referral type. However referrals largely broke down into 3 distinct groups:

- Specialist brokerage body referrals- via RLN East using the online i.hub to the project manager at ACER. The vast majority of referrals came via this route which is not surprising given that RLN East who have the mandate in the region to support brokers from UKTI, EEI, SSC & other designated groups in terms of language & culture, held the role for employer engagement in relation to this project.
- Provider referrals- this proved to be the second most productive route for referrals. This approach perhaps mirrors the TtG situation whereby the provider “light touch” referral route is generating the majority of learners into TtG. Arguably this route is most effective as the language schools are exclusively in business to sell language training to individuals and companies. At the point that these providers fully understood the detail of the project offer and the processes supporting it, the project experienced a wave of referrals direct from the language schools. The project administration/management role in relation to these referrals then became one of verifying eligibility, authorisation, audit, evaluation and matters relating to provider contracting and payment.
- TtG brokerage referrals- The project offer was promoted to TtG brokerage organisations via direct approaches from RLN East to Brokerage managers, presentation at broker events and via LSC managers responsible for managing the brokerage teams- however the project received only a handful of referrals into the project directly via TtG brokers (certainly less than 10 in total). Although very positive feedback was received from TtG brokers where their referrals were supported by the project.

8. Transferability

8.1. Evidence of transfer

The file should identify whether the policy or training has already been transferred to other places or sectors. It can include the following information:

This was an innovative programme which was designed to test the current model in the UK. However, several elements of this have been transferred during the Harvest (2006-08) project testing to Hungary & Poland. This included the verbal diagnostics, whose questions were delivered face-to-face rather than online.

The key questions arising out of this transfer were the differing cultures of the receiving and transferring countries. We found Polish companies less likely to engage in open dialogue and more likely to take ‘set’ offers of training. The broker model was also used in Poland, although this was restricted to the

agricultural broker groups, whom RLN East met during spring 2008 on 2 occasions and who were able to hear about the programme.

8.2. Innovation

The programme was innovative in that it responded to 2 environments – first, a country where companies received no government support for language training (Poland/Hungary), and secondly a country where 100% support was expected (the UK).

The main barriers to transfer are the availability or use of brokers groups and public funding. There are no barriers in terms of timescales, as the recommendations of the project are ready for all to see. The programme makes recommendations in terms of public support (especially funding) for language training, and this is relevant to all countries of the European Union engaging, for example, with ESF or Lifelong Learning funds.

In some countries the brokerage network is represented by Chambers of Commerce staff, as membership is often compulsory and the offer broad. In the UK, however, membership of Chambers is not compulsory and is often 'replaced' by specialist cluster groups (such as ERBI, Food East, Screen East, East of England Energy Group etc).

8.3. Dependence on political context

The political context of the project is typical of an established European Union member state. Links can be made in particular to ESF 2007-13. The UK is different in terms of the breadth of its brokerage model, which is often confusing to businesses (hence the development of roadmaps or business simplification processes). In other member states we have worked with on Leonardo projects, this has not been as complex.

The beneficiaries of the programme were from a wide variety of organisations, including SMEs, larger multinationals and public sector organisations. This may not be the case with other funding streams such as ESF, where de Minimis rules may apply.

The programme assumes the existence of a broker or 'middle man', however its recommendations can be applied directly by training organisations responsible for the entire delivery of a project, including trainee recruitment.

8.4. Flexibility

The programme has over 10 policy sub-areas, and these can be examined individually. Therefore the degree of flexibility in terms of transfer of components is high.

8.5. Multi-region transfer

Does the policy or programme allow for multi-regional transfer? YES. This has been evidenced in the Harvest project work with Hungary & Poland. Many of its components, however, will not be readily transferred to countries where no government support (especially financial) is the norm and companies are expected to contribute to the entire cost of training. Elements of the programme (brokerage, 50% financial contribution, i-hub and diagnostic) are being transferred to the Misco² project, a joint France-England Interreg IVA project running from 2009-10.