



Centre for Local
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briefing

Building Futures East: An approach to tackling worklessness and NEET

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1 INTRODUCTION

Employability and worklessness are main priorities both at national and regional levels. Appropriate training provision is considered paramount to tackle worklessness and stimulate vocational qualifications.

This paper presents the case for Building Futures East (BFE), a social enterprise in Newcastle specialised in training provision. This paper draws on findings from the first phase of the evaluation of BFE carried out by CLES. The aim of this paper is to highlight BFE as an example of good practice, embedded in the local community, well connected and with a strong strategic fit that makes it an important example of how to respond to the identified needs of an area.

2 BUILDING FUTURES EAST

BFE is an independent, not-for-profit organisation focused on providing training to local people and re-investing its surplus in activities to stimulate the engagement, growth and well being of the local community. It is based in and serves the East Neighbourhood Renewal Area of Newcastle, including the wards of Byker and Walker, as well as the smaller neighbourhood areas of Daisy Hill (in Walkergate) and Shieldfield (in Ouseburn). According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004, Walker is the most deprived ward in the City and Byker is third out of 26 wards.

The BFE programme is an example of an imaginative way of approaching training provision. It is important because it was borne from the community and has gained 'buy in' from a variety of influential partners. On the one hand, the model aims to get employers on board to shape and develop the centre and its provision so that it fulfils employment needs, and on the other it aims to

get schools on board as leading agents, enabling them to shape the training to their specific needs. Indeed, BFE was established to provide a route way to employment for residents of the East End of Newcastle, providing the connection through targeted training and associated support between students and employers in order to maximise local employment.

In 2004, the former East End Partnership Education, Employment and Training Working Group defined the vision of the initiative as:

'An environment of opportunity, where people want to belong. Where all the residents have the opportunity to access multi-agency education, training and support that will assist them in engagement with the world of work.'

A number of organisations with a shared interest and commitment to the East End joined a consortium aimed at developing local capacity and supporting negotiations with employers in order to identify their organisational capacity and skills gaps, with the intended outcome of training local people and equipping them with the necessary skills to fill those gaps.

The consortium included a broad range of stakeholder organisations from across the target area (e.g. local secondary schools, voluntary sector service providers and local elected members) and also included organisations with a wider strategic focus (e.g. Jobcentre Plus and Your Homes Newcastle). Key within this, however, was the level of involvement from the private sector (e.g. Shepherd Offshore Services), representing those organisations comprising the marine offshore technology cluster located on Walker Riverside.

The objective of the BFE programme is to provide, through consortium and partnership arrangements, a direct route to employment for communities in the East End of the City that correspond to the agreed skills and capacity needs of employers. The key strategic objectives of BFE are:

- ❑ to support and assist individuals gaining a level of stability and order in their lives that enable them to consider their aspirations and actively make choices to raise those aspirations;
- ❑ to support residents through the development of effective pathways from unemployment into training and onto sustainable employment;
- ❑ promote skills development, lifelong learning, inclusive work practices and retention of those suffering discrimination in the labour market through training and support;
- ❑ empower individuals to participate more fully in the labour market and determine and fulfil their learning and employment objectives;
- ❑ develop and improve basic skills among unemployed and vulnerable workers, as well as providing support post-placement and training;
- ❑ help the unemployed access, retain and progress in employment by testing and developing a transferable model of intermediary support;
- ❑ raise awareness among employers, developers and sub-contractors of the value of developing a more skilled local workforce;
- ❑ strive to improve links between employers, training agencies and other non-governmental organisations to address more effective barriers in the labour market.

3 WHAT BFE DO

The programme aims to support local people into jobs through a three-tier intervention approach:

- ❑ **first tier** – recruitment of beneficiaries through local organisations and community development workers will refer potential trainees identified through their work. Interventions at this level will be focused on building self-esteem and developing personal confidence. This part of the work will be delivered locally through the network of community and voluntary sector partners;
- ❑ **second tier** – accredited and competence-based training provided by BFE, whether through contracting training partners or directly employing training providers, all delivered within the BFE centre. The training is tailored to individual needs and will include adult learning and vocational curriculum opportunities for all local secondary schools. In order to facilitate the engagement of 'disaffected' young people and adult learners, BFE will work co-operatively with its partners, Jobcentre Plus and Newcastle Futures, in order to ease the level of bureaucracy involved in joining a training course whilst claiming benefits;
- ❑ **third tier** – support to individuals following their employment. This will be provided in conjunction with adult learning providers and other local organisations providing community transport, childcare and job brokerage.

Current training opportunities offered by BFE include:

- ❑ Building Craft Occupations (pre-Foundation) Award;
- ❑ Foundation Construction Award – equivalent to NVQ Level 1;
- ❑ Intermediate Craft Award – equivalent to NVQ Level 2;
- ❑ Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS);
- ❑ Key Skills Programme Level 1-3;
- ❑ ICT training;
- ❑ Square1 – 6 month vocational skills and mentoring programme (targeting disaffected young people, those at risk of offending, etc.).

The organisation is also offering evening classes in joinery, plastering, bricklaying, painting and decorating. From 2008, BFE will also deliver construction to NVQ level 2.

BFE is set up as a Development Trust and Company Limited by Guarantee, in order to continue delivering its activities, and is pursuing charitable status with the Charities Commission. BFE works with all East End secondary schools, providing post-16 vocational skills opportunities. Indeed, the organisation is the selected partner of the East End secondary schools in developing the Construction and the Built Environment Vocational Diploma.

Whilst opportunities are offered openly as an organisation, BFE also targets specific vulnerable groups within the area, including disaffected young people classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) and single parents.

4 KEY ISSUES FOR BFE CATCHMENT AREA

BFE is very well connected to the local area and rooted in the understanding of local issues, strengths and challenges. The East Neighbourhood Renewal Area of Newcastle is characterised by:

- ❑ high levels of deprivation, reflected in the high proportion of unemployment in both Walker and Byker;
- ❑ low educational attainment;
- ❑ concentration of vulnerable residents;
- ❑ high crime.

BFE seeks to address these issues by providing local people with a chance to access education, training and employment. Below we present the local area in terms of education and skills, worklessness, crime, and fear of crime.

4.1 Skills

In terms of qualification levels, the 2001 Census shows that Walker has a significantly high proportion of people with no qualifications (56.4%) and Byker (47.5%) has a proportion higher than the City (32.5%) and England (28%). Both wards have significantly low proportions of people with Level 2¹ qualifications (14.1% Byker and 12.2% Walker) compared to Newcastle (15.6%) and England (19.3%).

In 2004/05, the number of permanent exclusions in maintained secondary schools in Newcastle was significantly high (0.33% of the schools population), equating to 57 permanent exclusions compared to the regional average of 34². Community consultation undertaken in 2006 identified the need to provide incentives for the employment of local people, as local people wanted and needed local training and jobs. The respondents felt the local community was lagging behind with regard to skills and opportunities.

Moreover, research undertaken by Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) in 2004 showed that 94% of East End stakeholders thought significant levels of skills shortages were present in the area, particularly with regard to the construction industry, which is currently a significant sector of growth in the City, considering the scale of physical regeneration under way.

4.2 Worklessness

As regards unemployment, in 2006 11% of the working age population in Byker were claiming work-related benefits³ and 13.8% in Walker, compared to 5.1% for Newcastle and 3% for the UK.

The number of young claimants is relatively high in both Byker and Walker. In February 2007, there were 15 people aged between 18-24 years claiming work related benefits for over 6 months in Byker and 25 in Walker⁴. The number in Walker is the same as it was in February 2005, whilst in Byker the number has decreased by 25% (in 2005, 15 people were claiming).

4.3 Crime and fear of crime

The community consultation carried out in 2006 throughout the East End highlighted issues that residents consider important to address. The total number of respondents to the questionnaires was 1,438, the majority of which were residents (95%) and the remainder local workers. Anti social behaviour emerged as the top priority for the East End and was connected to the lack of youth facilities within the area.

5 THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

This section of the policy paper looks at two key areas of national and regional policy relating to the work of Building Futures East:

- 1) policy around employment, particularly focusing on tackling worklessness, including City Strategy policy, the new Welfare Reform proposals *'In work, better off'* and, more locally, Newcastle Futures;
- 2) the Skills Agenda, including the Leitch Review, proposals for the implementation of the Raising Expectations Green Paper and raising the participation age to 18, as well as the NEETs strategy and Skills North East.

¹ 5+ 'O' levels, 5+ CSEs (grade 1), 5+ GCSEs (grade A - C), School Certificate, 1+ 'A' levels/'AS' levels, NVQ level 2, Intermediate GNVQ or equivalents

² DfES data, source: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000662/index.shtml>

³ The rates for ward, city and Tyne & Wear are claimant count rates based on the economically active population from the 2001 Census Source: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core/nsf/a/unempwalker>

⁴ Data from NOMIS claimant count age and duration. We present raw numbers as up-to-date population data were not available

5.1 The 80% employment goal: tackling worklessness

The City Strategy

Nationally, addressing worklessness and economic inactivity are deemed to be central to raising productivity and improving the competitiveness of our towns and cities. One of the key ways the Government has proposed to tackle this is through the City Strategy. The City Strategy policy aims to tackle worklessness in our most disadvantaged communities across the UK, many of which are in major cities and other urban areas. The strategies are based on the idea that local partners can deliver more if they combine and align their efforts behind shared priorities, and are given more freedom to try out new ideas to tailor services in response to local need. The strategies aim to:

- ❑ ensure provision is more attuned to the needs of local employers so individuals gain the skills and attributes they need to access the particular jobs that employers need to fill;
- ❑ play a significant role in increasing local employment rates, ensuring those most disadvantaged in the labour market can receive the help and guidance they need;
- ❑ in doing so, it will contribute to the Government's long-term aims of increasing the number of people in work and tackling child poverty;
- ❑ test how best to combine the work of government agencies, local government and the private and voluntary sectors in a concerted local partnership (consortium), to provide the support jobless people need to find and progress in work;
- ❑ determine whether local stakeholders can deliver more by combining and aligning their efforts behind shared priorities, alongside more freedom to innovate and tailor services in response to local needs.

Fifteen pathfinder areas were chosen to test this approach. The first two pathfinders, announced in April 2006, were East and West London. A further 13 successful cities and towns were granted pathfinder status in July 2006. They were:

- 1) Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country;
- 2) Blackburn with Darwen;
- 3) Dundee;
- 4) Edinburgh;
- 5) Glasgow;
- 6) Heads of the Valley;
- 7) Leicester;
- 8) Liverpool;
- 9) Greater Manchester;
- 10) Nottingham;
- 11) Rhyl;
- 12) South Yorkshire;
- 13) Tyne and Wear⁵.

In December 2006, Pathfinders submitted business plans outlining the challenges facing their area and what they wanted to achieve. They are currently developing the full strategy and these will be signed off in April 2008. Key activities are likely to include:

- ❑ using funding committed by partners to fill gaps in existing provision and provide more help to those who are currently furthest from the support of the welfare state;
- ❑ joining-up local activity more effectively, so there is more clarity and less duplication, with clearer routes for individuals to take up the support they need to get back to work;

⁵ Tyne and Wear City Strategy Business Case. Available at: <http://dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/docs/TyneAndWear.pdf>

- ❑ ensuring the provision on offer is tuned to the needs of the local labour market, so individuals gain the skills and attributes they need to access the particular jobs that employers need to fill.

Welfare Reform – 'In work, better off'

In July 2007, the Government published *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'*. The paper sets out the Government's next steps on the road to full employment. *'In work, better off'* sets out proposals to deliver a step change in the support offered to those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. The goal is full employment in a generation. At the heart of the proposal is a new 'jobs pledge', which will build on the groundbreaking Local Employment Partnerships announced in the 2007 Budget, which hope to see major employers offer a quarter of a million job opportunities to the long-term out-of-work.

Other key proposals include:

- ❑ a new social contract with lone parents which expects an eventual move into the labour market in return for the necessary personalised support;
- ❑ a more personalised, flexible and responsive New Deal, delivering support which is right for the individual;
- ❑ an integrated skills and employment agenda.

Newcastle Futures

At city level, worklessness is one of the three key priorities identified by the Newcastle Strategic Partnership for 2006-08. A new partnership approach was agreed by the board to be delivered by a company limited by guarantee, namely Newcastle Futures. This is linked to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Tyne and Wear sub-region City Strategy. This citywide initiative is based on two main elements:

- 1) providing a high quality customer advice and counselling service for unemployed;
- 2) co-ordinating a range of provision and service providers.

This model, led by Newcastle City Council and Jobcentre Plus, aims to replace the competitive approach where everyone competes for the same outputs, with a collaborative one whereby key players are part of the board of directors and endorse the model. Other partners include Newcastle University, the Health Authority, Newcastle College, the Voluntary and Community Sector and Community Empowerment Network.

5.2 The skills agenda

The Leitch Review

In 2004, The Government commissioned Sandy Leitch to undertake an independent review of the UK's long-term skills needs. The Review published its interim report *'Skills in the UK: the long term challenge'* in December 2005. In its final report, it committed the Review to:

- ❑ identify the UK's optimal skills mix for 2020;
- ❑ maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice;
- ❑ set out the balance of responsibility for achieving a skills profile and consider the policy framework required to support it.

The final report of the *'Leitch Review of skills, prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills'*⁶ was published on 5 December 2006.

⁶ Leitch Review of Skills, Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/6/4/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf

The Review sets out a compelling vision – the UK must urgently raise achievements at all levels of skills and recommends that it commits to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020 – doubling attainment at most levels. The main messages from the review are:

Increase adult skills across all levels

- Progress towards a world-class standard is best measured by the number of people increasing skills attainment.
- The review recommends significantly enhanced funding for education and skills.
- Additional annual investment in skills up to Level 3 will need to rise to £1.5-2 billion by 2020.

Shared responsibility is key

- Responsibility for achieving ambitions must be shared between Government, employers and individuals.
- Employers, individuals and the Government must increase investment and action.
- Employers and individuals should contribute most where they derive the greatest private returns.
- Government investment must focus on building a basic platform of skills for all, tackling market failures and targeting help where it is needed most.
- The Review recommends a new partnership, building on the success of Train to Gain in England.

Increase employer engagement and investment in skills

- Reform, re-license and empower Sector Skills Councils (SSC).
- Deliver more economically valuable skills by only allowing public funding for vocational qualifications where the content has been approved by SSCs.
- Expand skills brokerage services for both small and large employers.

Economically valuable demand led skills

- The Review recommends a focus on economically valuable skills.
- The skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers.
- To achieve a skills system that adds economic value, the Review recommends a simplified demand-led skills system with employers and individuals having a strong and coherent voice.
- Vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned.
- As far as possible, funding should be routed through mechanisms that put effective purchasing power in the hands of customers, providing training providers with a real incentive to deliver the skills that employers and individuals need, flexibly and responsively. This will ensure that providers deliver training that directly reflects demand from local employers and individuals.

Adaptive and responsive policy

- The review sets out the need for skills policy to adapt and respond – no one can accurately predict future demand for particular skill types.
- The framework must adapt and respond to future market needs, building on existing structures.
- Where possible, improving the performance of the current structures through simplification and rationalisation of stronger performance management and clearer remits should be prioritised over new systems and structures – continuity is important.

Apprenticeships

- The number of Apprenticeships in the UK needs to dramatically increase to 500,000 by 2020, with skills brokers engaging with individual employers to demonstrate business benefits.
- The Review recommends that employers should drive the content of apprenticeships through their SSC, ensuring they are relevant to employers and of a high quality.
- The Government should build on the success of the apprenticeship route, expanding it to become a pathway which is open to every suitably qualified 16-19 year old.
- SSCs and skills brokers should work with employers to achieve the necessary increase in the supply of high quality places for young people and adults.
- As a result of this shared action, the Government should consider creating a new entitlement as resources allow so that every young person with the right qualifications can take up an apprenticeship place.

Overall

Finally, the review argues that the employer voice must be strengthened through the creation of a dynamic, employer-led Commission for Employment and Skills to deliver greater leadership and influence within a national framework of individual rights and responsibilities. This will rationalise the existing system by merging and streamlining the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and the National Employment Panel (NEP), both operating across the UK, into a new organisation.

'Raising expectations' and the new NEETs strategy

Early November saw the release by the Government of '*Raising expectations: staying in education and training post-16 – from policy to legislation*'. This follows the Green Paper of the same name '*Raising expectations: staying in education and training post-16*'. Following the consultation that accompanied the Green Paper, the Government developed their proposals to increase the participation age for all young people to 18. They will be able to do so in a number of ways, including:

- ❑ **full-time education** – school, college and home education;
- ❑ **work-based learning** – apprenticeship, including traditional contracts of apprenticeship;
- ❑ **part-time education or training** – employed, self-employed or volunteering more than 20 hours a week.

The Government sets out its belief that raising the participation age is the only way that young people will be able to gain the skills necessary to compete in a changing world economy and increasingly global labour market. From 2013, they plan to raise the age at which young people can leave compulsory education and training and introduce a requirement for all young people to participate until the end of the academic year, in which they are 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

The Government believes that changes in technology and trade, the rapid growth of emerging economies and the rise of high-tech industries bring huge opportunities, but also new challenges, and these require young people to be equipped with the relevant education, skills and training to face these challenges and seize these opportunities. This is at the heart of the policy – to raise the participation age and, subsequently, aspirations and expectations.

Also central to this debate around skills and training is that the UK must also tackle the core of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). As such, at the same time as introducing changes to the participation age and education and training for all, it introduced its new strategy to reduce the number of NEETs, entitled '*Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by 2013*'. This document outlines Government aspirations of a situation where all young people stay on in education or training to the age of 18, developing the skills that will enable them to succeed in life⁷. Prior to this being introduced, the Government plans enable all young people to reap the benefits of staying in learning and training by raising expectations and aspirations of young people and, as such, to reduce the number of NEETs.

⁷ DCSF (2007), Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by 2013, HMSO, London

Participation rates are at their highest ever – 1,547,000 16-18 year olds are now in education or training. 78.1% of 16 year olds are in full-time education – a rise of 6 percentage points in 3 years. 89.7% of 16 year olds and 81.5% of 17 year olds are in some form of education or training. Increased participation is leading to higher achievement. In 2006, 71.4% of 19 year olds achieved level 2 qualifications, the highest figure ever. However, NEETs still remain a significant challenge.

The regional pattern for NEET shows that the highest levels are in areas that have lost traditional industries like coal mining or shipbuilding. This changing economic situation means it is more important than ever for young people to stay in learning and achieve, in order to be able to succeed in the labour market.

The Government's strategy for reducing NEETs is threefold and based on embedding the following three elements:

1) **Careful tracking**

Rigorous and effective local tracking, primarily through the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS), is crucial in reducing NEET. It means local authorities and their Connexions Services:

- know which young people are most at risk of disengaging;
- know their history, characteristics and needs;
- are able to contact and support them individually.

2) **Personalised guidance and support**

This element is about ensuring every young person has a choice of provision:

- at every level;
- for every style of learning;
- everywhere in the country;
- that enables them to progress;
- and to achieve the skills they need for life and work.

The reforms include:

- more space for catch-up at KS3;
- new GCSEs, A-Levels and an extended project;
- the introduction of a Foundation Learning Tier, new Diplomas and more apprenticeship places.

In 2013, we will introduce an entitlement for young people to study any one of the 14 Diploma lines no matter where they live.

All of these reforms will play a part in preventing disengagement and re-engaging young people who are NEET. However, because of the numbers of young people in the NEET group who are low achievers, it is particularly important to have good Level 1 and entry-level provision. Part of this will come through reforms to provision below Level 2 through the development of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT), which by 2010 will encompass Entry to Employment (E2E0, the work-based learning programme for those young people aged 16-18 who are not yet ready or able to enter an apprenticeship, employment or further learning opportunities).

3) **Provision of a full range of courses to meet demand**

To ensure there is both an excellent universal offer of support for all young people and more targeted support to engage those young people with particular barriers to participation, the Government has already introduced a number of initiatives, including the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which provides both an incentive and support through providing an income assessed allowance for young people who participate in post-16 learning; and for young parents, access to Care to Learn (C2L) which provides financial support to cover the cost of childcare (and associated additional transport costs). There are also Activity Agreements, which are a personalised action plan negotiated and agreed with a Personal Adviser. In return for committing to, and completing, agreed activities to aid reintegration into learning, young people will get a weekly allowance for up to 20 weeks.

Bringing this together is the September Guarantee, which ensures that every young person is offered a suitable place in post-16 learning by the end of September after they leave full-time education. This will now be extended to 17 year olds, so that all 17 year olds have the offer of a place to continue or re-engage in learning. This will build on existing arrangements to ensure that young people who complete courses at 17 years old or drop out during their first year of post-compulsory education are given the support and provision to re-engage.

Skills North East

In March 2005, the Regional Skills Partnership⁸, Skills North East, published their Action Plan, which identified seven key objectives (A-G) and actions to address them.

A	Increase employer demand for and investment in skills.
B	Raise individual aspirations and demand for learning and provide individuals with opportunities throughout life to achieve their aspirations and embrace chance.
C	Enable those excluded from the labour market to access learning and sustainable employment.
D	Ensure all individuals have foundations for employability – the attainment of skills for life and a first Level 2 qualification.
E	Increase the achievements of intermediate and higher level skills to support growth.
F	Enable colleges and learning providers to be more responsive to employers and learners needs.
G	Influence national policy and funding to ensure regional skills and employment needs to be addressed.

The new vocational diploma

In 2004, the Committee of Inquiry into 14-19 Reforms, proposed to expand vocational education and have it sit alongside GCSEs and A Levels. This is a specialised diploma that will see a leading role for employers in its preparation, and although it will be delivered in work related settings, it will be education focused, as opposed to training for job readiness.

The Government is planning to launch five pilots in a selection of schools and colleges by 2008. The first diplomas will be in:

- 1) construction and built environment;
- 2) information technology;
- 3) creative and media;
- 4) society, health and development;
- 5) engineering.

Applications to offer the new qualification in September 2008 have been sent out earlier in the year by local consortia made up of secondary schools, specialist schools and training providers.

The Newcastle Education Department was one of the bidding consortia in December 2007. In the bid, BFE and Newcastle College were identified as the two key delivery and partner organisations for the Construction and the Built Environment. A specific Diploma Development Group comprising partners has been established to drive forward curriculum development in preparation for delivery in September 2008.

5.3 Summary to policy context

The review of the context in which BFE has been developed and currently operates, points towards the excellent positioning of BFE to not only meet local demand for skills training and respond to employers needs but also respond to the national agendas set by Government and high profile reviews, such as the Leitch Review.

⁸ The Regional Skills Partnership was established in June 2004 to be responsible for the setting priorities and driving action on skills, which will contribute to the successful development of the regional economy

6 WHAT WORKS WELL: FINDINGS FROM THE INTERIM EVALUATION

The BFE programme is a good example of an imaginative way of approaching training provision. It is rooted in the community it serves and responds to the needs identified by local residents. It offers genuine partnership working, as all the partners involved have the opportunity to shape the agenda for change.

BFE has significant 'buy in' of local businesses, which is also reflected in their representation on the board. The presence of significant employers on the board (Shepherd Offshore Services and Bellway Homes) and their involvement in shaping the programme stimulates other businesses to become engaged in the programme – they grow in confidence that BFE are helping to prepare a valuable and prepared workforce.

It is early days but BFE has already had significant impacts as regards developing relationships with employers, schools and trainees.

6.1 Working with employers

BFE is strategically located at the heart of Newcastle Riverside Regeneration. It is successfully liaising with local employers and already has the 'buy in' of local businesses. BFE provides local employers with a skilled pool of labour as well as an increased confidence in the East End and its potential. The Jobcentre Plus analysis of sectors of growth in Newcastle (2004) identified construction, health and social care, and retail and leisure sectors, as growing employment opportunities within the City. The construction sector is an immediate focus as national and local studies have identified a significant skills shortage in this sector. At a national level, if construction output increases at a rate of 2.1% per annum, the sector will need to attract an additional 76,000 new recruits per annum. In the North East, an additional 17,700 employees are required within the next 4 years to address skills shortages.

6.2 Working with schools

A key part of BFE is working with local schools in the area⁹ and providing alternative vocational opportunities for education. The evaluation found a number of key elements that make this partnership successful:

- ❑ ***schools shape training to meet their needs*** – BFE has regular contact with the schools through the management team and via an 'educational consultant'. In such a way, the particular needs of each school, their availability, their pupils, their funds and their educational requirements, can be met by BFE, as the schools are able to shape the types of services that are provided. As one school commented *'the notion of being there at the development stage of the organisation is beneficial as it allows for all partners to mould and shape the organisation and ensure that all the partners benefit from it'*;
- ❑ ***enables schools to get more involved in the local area*** – through BFE the schools are able to have a greater impact on the local area, which fits in with the shift towards 'extended schools' that are more involved in the community. Through helping to regenerate the East End through BFE, schools have the opportunity *'to play a part in trying to do things for local people'*;
- ❑ ***increases vocational options offered by school*** – BFE enables schools to widen the provision of subjects to pupils at sixth form and offer pupils training in an area they have some interest and in which they can see a future. One school interviewed said *'from BFE we get more variety in the vocational curriculum and experience'*. This is particularly important given the recent transition of schools in providing more vocational qualifications. BFE offer schools courses in practical subjects, providing specific skills that are increasingly in demand locally, with the growing regeneration/construction industry in Newcastle potentially helping pupils to gain employment.

⁹ Benfield Sports College, St Mary's Catholic School, Walker Technology College, Heaton Manor

The course is offered to pupils who stay on at sixth form and those who have not gained the necessary qualifications to do construction at Newcastle College. However, it became clear from the consultation that there is a shift from schools, targeting the course only at young people who are failing at school by trying to find them something practical to do, to actually considering which pupils would like to enter into a career in construction, regardless of their ability. This ensures that the centre is not seen as a '*place where schools send underachievers*' as this will have a knock on effect, particularly with regards to trainees gaining future employment. Moreover, schools have been able to market themselves better using the new range of courses on offer and BFE poses a good opportunity for them to attract a higher number of pupils.

6.3 Working with trainees

The impacts on the trainees were identified through discussion groups with beneficiaries, interviews with programme staff and a survey of over 40 trainees.

88% of trainees rated the course as either 'very good' or 'good' and 93% felt the course was meeting all of their expectations for a wide range of reasons. As summed up by one trainee, the best bits about the course are '*everything – learning a trade, working with others and being treated like an adult*'. The evaluation highlighted the impact the training had on the students as regards to:

- ❑ ***gaining new skills*** – BFE offers the opportunity for trainees to gain specific skills necessary for a career in construction through courses in bricklaying, painting, plastering and joinery, but also through gaining transferable skills, including communication and teamwork. Overall, 91% of all trainees felt they had gained new skills since becoming involved in BFE. Through the discussion groups, it became apparent that trainees understand the value of being able to communicate effectively in an industry that relies on teamwork and client relations, and how BFE has helped this. Anger and frustration can be characteristics in young people, especially those who may be more vulnerable or struggling at school. Patience and self-control are important skills to gain for the workplace and personal development. Though both groups of participants did not know each other well before and attended different schools, it was clear that friendships had developed and trainees worked well together;
- ❑ ***confidence and personal satisfaction*** – trainees felt more confident in their ability to do a job well, and this impacted on how they felt about themselves, both as workers and as people. One trainee commented that '*working at BFE helped me get the confidence to apply for a job*'. There was a good deal of pride from the trainees in what they could achieve and this made them feel good about themselves;
- ❑ ***improved employability*** – the skills that trainees gain during the course should enable them to progress onto further training in construction, thus get an apprenticeship and ultimately gain a good job. Certainly of the cohort involved in the first evaluation, a number of trainees were either expelled from school, unemployed or working in low skilled jobs such as supermarkets;
- ❑ ***increased motivation to work*** – for trainees, the motivation to work and be successful in their 'trade' came across very strongly. From the survey and focus groups, it was evident that almost all wanted to work in construction and understood that this involved working hard and building knowledge and skills. The evaluation highlighted that, through BFE, trainees also benefited from being able to experience having a real job that involved skilled work. This was a motivator for the future, as it highlighted the satisfaction of '*doing a job you enjoy and one that you are good at*'. For the first cohort of trainees, the work was very real, as their training involved helping to redevelop the centre in which the courses take place.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents an example of good practice of what the BFE organisation is doing in Newcastle. It is still early days, but the positive impact of the work resulting from this evaluation indicates the model adopted is working successfully. It responds to the needs of the local area and promotes partnership working between schools and local employers. The training provided is of high standard and provides young people with a chance to access job opportunities and/or further specialisation. BFE's model fits strategically within the national, regional and local agenda to tackle worklessness and reduce NEET, and is linked to other activities and initiatives within the city. The first phase of the evaluation of BFE found the programme a successful example of imaginative partnership working and service delivery. Community driven and developed by committed professionals, BFE is a social enterprise in the making. It is of paramount importance for the programme to establish itself further and not lose the personal, friendly interface that is so beneficial to schools. Watch this space!

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