

Lancashire County Council Beacon Case Study – WorkStart: A public sector work-trial

Lancashire County Council developed and implemented the first public sector trial known as WorkStart, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus to create a route back to work for long-term welfare recipients. WorkStart supports people who are actively seeking work and have been claiming income support as a lone parent or employment and support allowance. To date 83 placements have been arranged through WorkStart and 60 candidates have secured long term employment.

Background

As one in five jobs in Lancashire is in the public sector the County Council's role in reducing worklessness and improving skills should not be underestimated. In response to this market position a number of innovative programmes have been developed. This includes WorkStart the first public sector trial which aims to create a route back to work for long-term welfare recipients and Future Horizons, a pre-apprentice programme aimed at not in education, employment or training (NEET) and looked after children. We have also significantly extended the county council's apprenticeship programme to address some challenging demographic trends and improve the age profile of our workforce.

These programmes will assist in reducing Worklessness and improving skills which are key economic priorities for Lancashire and were identified as key areas of the Lancashire Local Area Agreement (LAA). In addition to this equality and diversity objectives will be achieved and front-line services cost will also be significantly cut.

Key Learning's

- Engage senior heads and managers - they need to be encouraged to use apprentices and WorkStart placements wherever possible. Get commitment from the top.
- Put simply, we are all colleagues, not functions. By working with Economic Development colleagues, Strategic HR has made the difference and seen all partners' objectives met.
- Streamline and coordinate work with partners.
- Provides a direct link between us and JCP.
- Look for the win/win.
- There is a business case to this work. It is not just about achieving targets.
- Share the approach at local, regional and national level.
- Meets LAA targets.
- Improves partnership-working, so improves our Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- Meets HR priorities.

What we did

Leading the way, the county council, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, has developed WorkStart, the first public sector work trial. WorkStart began in January 2008. 83 placements have been arranged through WorkStart both in Lancashire County Council and our district partners. 60 candidates starting the WorkStart programme have secured long term employment, including Andy who was on incapacity benefit before starting on WorkStart. Andy has now been successful in gaining an apprenticeship in Lancashire County Council.

"Without the WorkStart programme I would still be unemployed and applying for jobs for which I could not prove my skills and for which lots of other people were applying. After a period of being jobless I would challenge anyone to deny that their confidence had not been affected. I was also looking for a change in career direction which was another factor in my lack of confidence. Once again I am confident in my abilities and really enjoying life. My future is looking more positive than it has done for quite a while! "

Managers within the council are also becoming more aware of WorkStart and are keen to use it to recruit.

Senior Librarian:

"As the Jobcentre client has to apply for the placement, the manager knows they are interested in working rather than being told they must attend."

We are currently leading the extension of WorkStart across the public sector in Lancashire, and have already begun work with the police, fire and rescue service, and primary care trusts.

Ian Kent, Partnership Manager, Jobcentre Plus Cumbria and Lancashire:

"Getting employers to support people back into work is paramount and can only be achieved where real job opportunities are made available. Lancashire County Council has led the way in developing and delivering WorkStart, a highly effective low cost way of supporting long-term claimants return to work."

Outcomes

In 2007/08 we spent £7.4 million on agency staff. The new workforce models will contribute toward £1 million in savings for the current financial year and our neutral vendor contract already reflects the decrease in demand for agency staff thanks to take-up of HR programmes by LCC managers.

	Total Agency Costs	Total Workstart Costs
Cost for 30 days	30-day placement = £1,741.94	30-day placement = £180

In addition we have also;

- Arranged 83 placements.
- 60 participants have secured employment. Seven of these have secured a Business Administration Apprenticeship
- Creation of WorkStart talent pool to give participants a head-start when future jobs and placements arise.

Stephen, a WorkStart participant, said:

“The reason I was on incapacity benefit meant it would be difficult for me to look for work, let alone get a job. It's a label, despite the fact we have all sorts of anti-discrimination laws.”

Our main challenge was to convert the strategic vision of mainstreaming these workforce planning solutions across the organisation in a cost-effective way that was fit for purpose and met our LAA commitments and business needs.

Lesson Learnt

Due to LAA time constraints, the team had no option but to develop these initiatives from vision to implementation in an embryonic way, without having the opportunity to always look with a medium to long-term view.

However, due to the success of all these schemes, the sustainability has now been demonstrated and the initiatives are being resourced accordingly.

Due to some candidates requiring more work experience than the thirty days and managers wanting to keep their WorkStart candidate for longer we have also developed WorkStart+. WorkStart+ is a six month training contract, paid at our entry level of £12,145 per annum. This allows the candidate to come off benefits, be in work and be better off financially. All our WorkStart+ candidates on the pilot have now progressed onto an apprenticeship within Lancashire County Council offering a further two year training contract.

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