

**REPORT TO: NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
17 April 2000**

REPORT ON: DEVELOPING SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

REPORT NO: 284-2000

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise the Committee of the Scottish Executive's consultation on Training for The Long-term Unemployed, and seek endorsement from the Committee for comments.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee are asked to agree that these responses contained in Section 3 of this report form the basis of Dundee City Council's response to the consultation paper.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Despite a reduction in the number of long-term unemployment in Dundee, this remains a major area of concern, and Training for The Long-term Unemployed has the potential to make a significant impact on the disadvantages experienced by this group, particularly those with basic literacy and numeracy and communication difficulties.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 On 28 February 2000, local authorities were invited to comment on the Scottish Executive consultation paper entitled "Developing Skills and Employability - Training for the Long-term Unemployed". Comments on this consultation paper are requested by 28 April 2000.

6.2 The consultation document seeks views on the future development of Training for Work which is the Government's main training programme for unemployed adults. The document asks fundamental questions about the nature of, and delivery arrangements for training and employability support for unemployed adults. The outcome of the consultation will shape the future of provision.

6.3 The three key areas identified for future development of Training for Work are:-

- complementing the UK Government's Welfare to Work policies, and offering support for skills development for those who wish to return to work;
- focus on basic and employability skills which will help individuals to access lifelong learning and jobs;
- improving linkages with employers and developing effective intermediaries who will help to ensure that training is relevant to individual and employer needs, and leads to sustained employment.

6.4 Appendix 1 sets out the key issues and proposals contained in the consultation document.

7.0 THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

7.1 The Council welcomes this consultation paper and the Government's commitment to support training for the long-term unemployed.

7.2 In particular, the Council applauds the high priority given to basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The specific proposals (Para. 3.22) to examine the level and quality of basic skills provision in Training for Work and to set a target of 50% of Training for Work resources to be allocated to basic skills provision are welcomed.

7.3 While the importance of early identification of basic skill needs and current inconsistency in assessment practice have been identified, the consultation paper stops short of setting out proposals to improve current practice. On the basis of experience gained through the delivery of basic skills in Dundee, the Council suggests that -

- experienced practitioners with specific training in basic skills should be involved in the assessment process;
- there should be a move away from over reliance on test instruments such as the Basic Skills Agency Assessment Pack;
- emphasis on a deficiency model is unlikely to assist those with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

7.4 A more positive and inclusive approach would be to offer universal access to basic skills provision. This would shift the emphasis from agency perceptions of deficiencies and would remove the stigma attached to an assessment process which labels people as deficient in literacy or numeracy.

7.5 A number of specific questions are set out in the consultation document. The Council's proposed responses are as follows:-

7.6 **Question 1 - Objectives of training programmes for long-term unemployed adults**

- Provide transparent access routes into training and enhance the employability of adults who have experienced long-term unemployment.
- Create a motivated and flexible workforce with basic skills in terms of literacy, numeracy, communications, teamwork and IT that can respond to fluctuations in the labour market.
- Promote personal and social development and raise individual's self esteem, confidence and aspirations.

7.7 **Question 2 - Is there sufficient coherence between training for work and other forms of support and learning for unemployed people?**

- Need for structural links at a local level between the key players, ie LEC's, Further and Higher Education establishments, Local Authority Services (Economic Development, Planning, Education, Community Education and Library/Information Services), Employment and Careers Services, the private, voluntary and community sectors.
- Need for greater "joined-upness" between national policies and clearer articulation, integration and coherence between central and local government in terms of policy development/policy implementation. The theme Economy and Enterprise can be linked to others themes such as Social Inclusion, Anti-Poverty, Community Learning and Lifelong Learning through Community Planning frameworks thus providing greater levels of integration and coherence.

7.8 **Question 3 - Which groups of unemployed people will benefit from Training for Work? At which stage of unemployment should Training for Work be available for different groups? And what are the key priorities for early entry to Training for Work? Is there a case for changes in eligibility to focus on groups with serious barriers to entering employment and which reflect changes in the labour market?**

- *Eligibility for the Programme* - the programme should be open to those with a sporadic employment history, eg those with a cumulative total of six months unemployment in the preceding 12 month period, in addition to those who have had no work.
- *Early Entry Groups* - those who are likely to become long term unemployed and can be identified at an early stage, should be eligible for early entry into the programme. The mechanism for identifying at risk groups should be made clear.
- Analysis should be carried out into why participation in the existing programme has not worked for one-third of clients who returned to the programme. This should inform individual's future participation plans.
- An aggregation of findings should be used to inform future developments of the programme.

7.9 **Question 4 - What should be the balance and relative priority between training in basic skills, occupational skills and customised training for employers?**

- National targets should be set for the Training for Work programme in order to achieve desired levels of basic skills amongst the unemployed workforce.
- Basis skills training should be balanced with occupational skills and customised training for employers according to fluctuations in the labour market and local needs.

7.10 **Question 5 - What is the right balance between flexibility in delivery at a local level and ensuring that necessary support, for example childcare is delivered consistently to individuals across Scotland?**

- Flexibility within the programme should be maintained and, perhaps, enhanced so that local labour market conditions can be accommodated, however, this should not conflict with management controls over the quality of the programme. One way to assist and ensure consistent delivery across the programme is to be clear about the criteria which should apply to "discretionary" assistance, eg childcare.
- National standards should be subject to quality assurance reviews.

7.11 **Question 6 - How should basic skills delivery and provision be strengthened in support of the employability of the client?**

- Some doubts have been expressed about whether pre-vocational qualifications are the best response for those with basic skill needs. While they certainly make measurement and evaluation easier for agencies, they are not always suited to the specific individual needs of participants. With reference to Para 4.11 of the consultation document, there is some evidence to suggest that the focus on pre-vocational qualifications such as Wordstart and Number Power can sap confidence unless the trainer responsible for delivery is able to tailor materials and ensure their appropriateness.
- Programmes need to extend basic skills delivery into areas such as confidence building, personal and social development, motivation and teamwork.

7.12 **Question 7 - What are the employability skills and qualifications most valued by employers particularly when recruiting from the long-term unemployed client group?**

- Paradoxically, pre-vocational qualifications have been found, in some instances, to be a disadvantage to clients seeking employment - they can have the unintended effect of suggesting that there are literacy and numeracy issues.
- Delivery of New Deal for 18-25's has highlighted the importance of motivation, and the difficulty of assisting those who have become long-term unemployed, to lift their own aspirations, to address issues of motivation, personal confidence and self-image. The Training for Work programme must recognise and address these issues if it is to succeed.
- Within Dundee, ERDF/ESF and SIPS funded programmes have enabled a considerable body of experience to be developed in assisting long-term unemployed make the progression back into work. The new programme should seek to maintain and utilise these skills which may be lost if temporary funding programmes come to an end.

7.13 **Question 8 - How should "employed status" opportunities on Training for Work be increased particularly for more disadvantaged clients?**

- There is a key role for Scottish University for Industry and Local Partnerships to raise awareness about -
 - (a) opportunities for training/lifelong learning in and out of the workplace, and
 - (b) financial assistance/resources available to employers/employees to support training and lifelong learning programmes.

7.14 **Question 9 - How should the success of Training for Work in achieving sustained employment be measured?**

- Targets and Standards should be negotiated and agreed at national and local levels.
- Success measures need to be aligned with the targets set out in other National Policy Documents (eg The Social Justice Report) and local strategies (eg Economic Development Plans and Community Learning Strategies).
- If core skills and/or motivational and attitudinal changes are to be a central feature of the Training for Work programme, then funding should be based on measured progression in these areas. Progression should be linked to initial assessment and clear milestones. There may be a case for independent verification of progress.

7.15 **Question 10 - What post placement support systems should be available to support Training for Work clients progressing into employment? How should these be delivered and funded?**

- *Adult Guidance Networks* - the availability of high quality independent adult guidance as an integral part of the programme should be considered.
- In Dundee, the provision of employment aftercare services has been pioneered by Dundee Employment Aftercare Project. The experience of this project might be of value to inform the development of the programme, with particular reference to issues of retention and sustaining clients placed in employment.
- Post placement support systems should be funded by central government through LEC's and delivered through local partnerships.

7.16 **Question 11 - What should be the measures or success of intermediary organisations in supporting sustainable job outcomes from Training for Work?**

- Need to find a monitoring system to measure the outcomes of intervention from intermediary organisations against the likely impact of non-intervention.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Executive, the Director of Support Services, Director of Finance, Director of Economic Development, Director of Education, Director of Personnel and Management Services and Director of Corporate Planning have all been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

Director of Neighbourhood Resources and Development

Date.....

APPENDIX 1

**DEVELOPING SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY - TRAINING FOR THE LONG-TERM
UNEMPLOYED**

Key Issues and proposals

- It is proposed that individuals should generally continue to be eligible for Training for Work following a period of at least six months unemployment. However, in addition, where individuals have recurring spells of unemployment, either because they are employed on temporary contract work or are unable to find sustainable jobs they should be eligible for Training for Work where they have had at least six months unemployment during the previous twelve months.
- It is proposed that key early entry groups should be those who have a disability; those who require basic skills training; and those returning to the labour market (including ex-offenders and ex-regulars). Early entry should also be available for major redundancies. It is proposed that those over 50 should be able to enter Training for Work as soon as they become unemployed. This would recognise the difficulty people in this age group often have in returning to work, and the aim of encouraging increased labour market participation by over-50 year olds.
- Training for Work has the potential to spearhead a major drive to combat deficiencies in basic skills in the workforce, and to improve levels of literacy, numeracy and communication skills. It is also proposed that the Scottish Executive will set a target of 50% of Training for Work resources to be allocated to basic skills provision, with the aim of making a substantial contribution to individual employability and lifelong learning in the work force.
- Increasing the emphasis on employed status on Training for Work could play a valuable role both in enhancing the reputation of the programme for clients and improving its effectiveness. A strengthening of linkages between local enterprise companies, training providers and employers could assist in achieving this, with a greater emphasis on after-care and post-placement support for trainees taking up employed status opportunities.
- Where trainees have become more detached from the labour market or have significant basic skills deficiencies it may be more difficult to secure employed status placements, but there will still be substantial benefits from a strong employer involvement in training and this should be a key objective for future development of the programme.
- In considering the future of Training for Work, there is a need to build in a more coherent evaluation system for tracking clients on the programme to determine the *sustainability* of job outcomes. There is a need to consider what the measure of this should be: in employment for 6 months, 9 months, 12 months or longer following participation on the programme.
- LECs may also provide additional, discretionary financial support to clients to address barriers to participating in Training for Work. This can include assistance with travel fares, childcare assistance and the purchasing of specialist equipment. However, where assistance is discretionary this can result in inconsistency of support for clients across Scotland and may have implications for recruiting particular client groups, such as lone parents. There may be a case for offering more specific guidance in this area.
- Intermediaries have a key role in helping clients identify potential job opportunities. In addition to job-matching clients with employers, intermediaries have a valuable role in offering post-placement support to help particularly disadvantaged clients sustain employment, and to progress when in employment. The consultation considers the value of the intermediaries in supporting Training for Work.
- Robust, consistent local planning arrangements between all those involved in the delivery of provision are necessary to ensure adult employment and training opportunities are: readily identifiable by the client; are of a high quality, reflect the aspirations of the unemployed and the needs of local employers; are related to local labour market vacancies and avoid duplication to ensure effective deployment of resources. The consultation considers how local planning arrangements for Training for Work should be strengthened, whilst ensuring coherence and linkage with other related initiatives.

