

Networks Transnational Group

Developing Sustainable Networks

1] Information Advice Service Network

Partners:

Learning & Skills Council, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

Cause and Purpose:

To develop a flexible information, Advice and Guidance infrastructure that will meet the needs of the service users. To ensure that all information on learning opportunities and funding support is accurate and quality assured.

Characteristics of Network:

The network meets in a formal setting, we aim to ensure all adults aged 20 and over should be able to have free access to up to date information on learning and work opportunities. Attendance is by senior staff from the partner organisations.

Steering and control:

The objectives of the network are:

- To continually raise the quality and effectiveness of the IAG services for adults through effective communication.
- To help individuals to interpret information to help them decide on their way forward through effective communication.
- To achieve an integrated IAG service to ensure there is “joined up” provision from a users perspective through customer feedback.

Duration:

5 years

Character of the Network:

There are regular strategic meetings of the whole group, at the strategic level it links in to the National Policy Framework and action plan. At the operational level this then links into support groups such as the Adult and Community Policy Forum, which has 26 members who represent the various delivery organisations.

Conditions:

The network has a direct link to the funding organisations. The LSC provide secretariat support for the network.

Output specific activities:

The network has responsibility for implementing, monitoring and updating the adult and community learning review. It oversees the Engage 2 project. It has also commissioned research to improve engagement, induction and progression.

Positive outcomes:

Ensures that all eligible adults have access to free Basic Skills provision up to level 2. It maintains the planning framework for adult and community learning whilst extending services to encourage more people to enter learning through better communications and marketing of services available.

Negative experiences:

Because of the size of the conurbation and complicated tendering processes we cannot always guarantee that all interested parties have access to the relevant information at the appropriate time. The network has tried new innovative communication mediums to try to overcome this i.e. texts on mobile phones, adverts on buses, Internet and community radio.

Sustainability:

This is guaranteed due to support from strategic funding bodies.

2] Birmingham Lifelong Learning Partnership

Partners and Stakeholders:

This is a large network, covering a population of 1 million people operating strategically not in touch with adult learning provision. It operates as a political vehicle for Birmingham City Council who also convene, provide secretariat and lead the network.

Cause and purpose:

No clear strategy or expectations of the network. No terms of reference. Those attending the network are unclear of the goals, aims and objectives. The members are unclear of the impact of the network, its effect on decision making and effect on member organisations and work roles.

Characteristics of networks:

No clear network model with an overlap and/or other strategic groups. The group began by being too formal and then became too informal. The network did not settle at an appropriate level.

Steering and controlling:

The network has changes of direction without clear aims and changes of chair. Too many representatives from the lead organisation. Key members did not actively participate. Further Education college [key member] rarely attended and did not actively participate.

Duration and intensity:

Three years

Character of the Network/Relationship within the network:

The network is led by the City Council but they do not do the work but commission it. There is no ownership of the activity and actions. The members do not attend regularly, there is ineffective secretariat that often operates in isolation. Poor information flow.

Conditions:

The network failed to use resources available. It has no scope of influence lifelong learning delivery in Birmingham.

Actual Output/Specific activities:

Minimal activities have been achieved.

Positive experiences/barriers and obstacles:

A tram building planning day was positive for all who attended however the work was not continued.

Negative experiences/Barriers and obstacles:

Many network members felt frustration in attendance and it did not achieve impact on lifelong learning delivery or planning. Members searched for reasons to support the network and continue to attend the meetings.

Sustainability:

The network is expensive to run and there are other activities to fund. There has been a withdrawal of funding by the strategic funding body and this network has now been replaced by local representative groups who clearly understand the role and function of the more locally based network.

3] Solihull Lifelong Learning Partnership**Partners/stakeholders:**

This network has a clearly defined target audience that brings together all of the key adult learning providers and support organisations.

Cause and purpose:

The cause, terms and objectives of this network are clear – the partnership will facilitate and support regular networking events which will promote the work of the partnership, encourage provider collaboration and exchange of information.

Characteristics of networks:

This is a formal network, with a requirement to attend meetings regularly. Members find the network useful to their work and organisation and therefore are keen to attend.

Steering and controlling:

This network is a partnership supported by a co-ordinator who plans the meetings, provides a secretariat and maintains the network database. The network is self motivating with those attending valuing the activity.

Duration and intensity:

2 years

Character of the Network/relationship within the network:

Trust, collaborative working, listening, shared experience, value, good flow of information, good communication, clear expectations of the members.

Conditions:

The network has financial support to provide co-ordination, marketing, promotion, meetings and effective communication.

Actual output/specific activities:

Research and mapping, calendar of events, calendar of members events and activities, maintenance of network database, communication briefings

Positive experiences/success factors:

There is an agreed set of actions that all members have agreed to support.

Negative experiences/barriers and obstacles:

Sustainability:

The network will continue to be sustained while it has external funding

Key elements of good networks – initial analysis

1. Terms of reference - purpose widely understood
2. The network is of mutual benefit and this is what makes a network successful
3. Quality of input is a vital ingredient
4. Relevance to job role or activity
5. The network provides successful networking
6. The network is well organised and the commitment is clear
7. The network provides the opportunity for exchange [of learning or information in this instance]
8. The network provides the opportunity to listen, reciprocate, share and establish rapport
9. The network provides opportunity for long term collaboration i.e. see yourself as a partner not a predator
10. Trust
11. Listening
12. An understanding of what you do with the information afterwards
13. People that attend are at an appropriate level
14. Consistent attendance [sometimes need an induction process]
15. Flexibility to develop

Questions:

Are there different kinds of networks?

Do we have the option of swapping or changing networks? Choice?

Some organisations find they have not got the resource to send people to networks

Do you have to attend in person or can we make use of telekits?