

West London Working Confederation Interim Evaluation

Tony Rich
Rich Regeneration Ltd

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction – the brief

The West London Working Guidance, Skills and Brokerage Confederation has been in operation since April 2009. It aims to support employment and skills providers by providing opportunities for them to meet within and across Borough boundaries and to support the continued professionalisation of the sector through capacity building. Rich Regeneration was commissioned to carry out an evaluation of two of the services provided by the Confederation- the e-bulletins and network events, both delivered by Rocket Science Consultants. It was also asked to seek views on the future sustainability of the Confederation once the current administration contract expires at the end of March 2011. The evaluation was carried out between April and July 2010.

2. Context for the Confederation

The context for the Confederation is the move towards a smaller number of longer and larger contracts for the delivery of pre-employment services. One corollary of this is the need for smaller providers to band together in consortiums or otherwise to form new partnerships and alliances in order to increase their chances of being successful in winning contracts. There is also an increasing need among larger, or 'prime' contractors to form new alliances with smaller, specialist providers and to ensure that these providers have the capacity to operate effectively in the new commissioning environment. The election of a new coalition Government while the evaluation was being carried out has further complicated the working context as existing programmes are to be replaced by a new Work Programme. From an initial analysis these changes have if anything increased the speed of change in commissioning along the same trajectory.

3. Aims of the Confederation

The original West London Working specification to appoint an organisation to develop the Confederation states that "The Confederation is West London Working's response to a need for provider networks across the sub region. It aims to support the provider base across West London by giving them a voice to communicate directly with funders and policy makers. It offers the opportunity for providers to learn, share and develop together."

In addition, the specification states that the network of providers:

- Adds value to existing networks such as the Brent in2 Work Provider Network.
- Builds on London Employment and Skills Taskforce 2012 Pan London Guidance and Brokerage Confederation "Relay London Jobs".
- Gives providers the opportunity to establish clear referral route ways with agreed protocols.
- Informs the West London Working Investment and Target Group of demand & supply on the ground.
- Forms proactive partnerships fit for purpose to access competitive funding.

- Publishes a capacity building workforce development programme building on what is already available for providers in West London.

4. Confederation activities to date

The Confederation programme to date has included:

- Establishment of an interrogative online database of 580 members comprising mainly employment and skills providers from the West London sub-region.
- Six themed events attended by an average of 30-40 providers at each event featuring expert speakers able to provide up to date policy and practice information, with good opportunities for networking.
- Five smaller training events on negotiation, building consortia and developing better relationships and contracting with Prime Contractors. 308 attended both types of events.
- A series of monthly as well as ad hoc e-bulletins promoting events and support provided by local partners, funding and tendering opportunities and relevant national news.

5. Methodology for the evaluation

The following methodology was used for the evaluation:

- An online e-survey of the WLW Confederation database to explore user satisfaction with the Confederation and the e-bulletins and events in particular.
- An assessment against event satisfaction information collected following the events.
- A comparison of outputs versus expenditure to establish value for money.
- A series of telephone interviews with members of the Confederation Project Board, the West London Working Implementation Group and members of the network to review operation of the Confederation.
- A focus group of members of the Confederation who have attended events to gain their perspective on the value and quality of the programme and explore the need to continue providing the service and the kinds of support required.

6. Results of the evaluation

Value for money - in summary, the cost of writing and administering e-bulletins delivered to the membership is seen as acceptable and the cost of Confederation events per delegate is considered to represent good value for money given the level of activity involved. The use of community venues for all events apart from the initial workshop and annual meeting has ensured that a large proportion of the total cost was invested in the local community.

Online survey –despite a disappointingly low response rate there was good knowledge of the Confederation activities among respondents. Of those who attended Confederation events over 75% gave them a score of at least 4 out of a maximum of 5 which indicates a high level of satisfaction. Awareness of the ebulletins was surprisingly low among those responding which indicates that there is further marketing to be carried out to promote these as a tool. However, the mailing list for ebulletins has grown from approximately 100 to 580 showing that it is distributed to a large number of individual stakeholders.

Event user satisfaction forms- The satisfaction level of event attendees overall compares well with other events of this nature. The only negative aspect appeared to be dissatisfaction with some venues

1-2-1 interviews - The interviews confirm that the Confederation is seen to perform a useful role across West London which some feel has given that sub-region an advantage. The sub-regional focus of the e-bulletins is seen as its USP. Its brevity and flexibility are seen as plus points. There remains a need to build the capacity of smaller providers through using the Confederation events. There is a need to keep the events topical and to try not to cover old ground.

Focus group- While the Confederation was seen as adding value, several of the focus group members appeared to take a generally more negative view than was evident from the online survey or interviews. A call for greater employer involvement in events and stronger links with the overall strategy for the sub-region were two main points. The weight given to comments from the Focus Group must be tempered by its small size.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the evaluation:

Confederation as a whole

- The role played by the Confederation in offering a sub-regional perspective on employment and skills provision comes through the evaluation as a strong selling point which is seen as giving the sub-region a definite advantage over other areas.
- The delivery of this perspective through targeted information e-bulletins and network and training events was also seen as a strong and well-received programme.
- The level of involvement in the Confederation by prime contractors was seen, especially by the focus group representatives and some interviewees, as something that could be strengthened.
- Another area where further collaboration is seen as a possibility is between WLW and Association of Learning Provider members. This could take the form of joint events or communications.
- A healthy 50% of questionnaire respondents indicated that the Confederation had led to improvements in their organisations, particularly as a result of sharing good practice and developing links with other organisations.
- The slim, non-bureaucratic management style of the Confederation is seen as a plus, although representation by prime contractors at network events was something that could be strengthened. While this is seen as an aspiration there has been an increase in attendance and participation by prime contractors over the year e.g. through taking part in the 'Dragon's Den' type events.

e-bulletins

- The simple, succinct format of the e-bulletins was received positively by those interviewed as part of the evaluation.
- Responses from interviewees also indicated a high level of forwarding of the bulletins among teams suggesting that their readership was much greater than the initial distribution list.

- Conversely, responses to the questionnaire survey indicated that there are a number of people who attend Confederation events who have never seen the e-bulletins, indicating that further promotion would be advisable.

Confederation events

- Analysis of the evaluation sheets for the Confederation events indicates that overall, the administration, choice of speakers and facilitation are generally very well received by attendees. Levels of satisfaction compare well with other similar events although the level of comfort with some venues was something that could be looked at.
- Responses from interviewees indicates that there is a strong view that the events are primarily aimed at smaller providers, although larger providers also see them as useful in enabling partnerships to be formed with a view to strengthening future bids and two short case study examples of this are quoted in the report.
- Feedback from the focus group indicated that the perspective of employers could usefully feature more prominently at events –perhaps via choice of speakers.

Future of the Confederation

- A strong message coming through from the evaluation is that the Confederation should continue as it is seen as offering a positive support for joint working and improved service delivery in this part of London.
- Given the major changes occurring in the area of contracting and commissioning of employment and skills services and the changing focus of the new Government the Confederation is seen to have particular continued relevance in the area of explaining new policy changes and highlighting new funding opportunities.
- The questionnaire survey highlighted several possible themes for future Confederation events, namely: emerging regional and sub-regional policy and future funding opportunities. Interestingly, there was much less support for further 'dragon's den' type events or 1-2-1 advice sessions although as these were very well enjoyed by the smaller number of people that attended them it is recommended that they continue as part of any future programme.
- In terms of how the Confederation could be run in the future no consensus of views emerged from the evaluation. It is clear that there was a view that all 'key players' should have some say and it should not be dominated by any one sector. There was also a strong view that the governance of the Confederation should remain non-bureaucratic.
- In terms of possible ways that the Confederation could be funded there was also no strong consensus emerging. The view that due to public sector cutbacks local authorities may not have funding to put into this area was a recurring message which may indicate that this burden may need to be shouldered by the larger contractors on the basis that they are best placed to benefit from the support offered to smaller, specialist providers in essential skills and employment services.

1. Introduction

The West London Working Guidance, Skills and Brokerage Confederation aims to support voluntary and community sector and smaller employment and skills providers in the West London sub-region. It is funded by the City Strategy Pathfinder, West London Working. Rocket Science Ltd has been contracted to deliver the support programme for the Confederation through delivering regular networking and capacity building events and through regular e-bulletins.

The Confederation aims to add value to existing networks by providing opportunities for employment and skills providers to meet within and across Borough boundaries where currently no opportunities exist, and to support the continued professionalisation of the sector by disseminating and delivering capacity building. The day to day work of the Confederation is overseen by a small Project Board consisting of West London Working, provider representation from A4E and Rocket Science UK.

Since its launch in April 2009, the Confederation has grown from just over 100 to 580 contacts, representing the full range of services being provided along the employability pathway. This includes organisations wishing to provide services, advice and guidance, charities, housing providers and traditional employment and skills providers.

The current contract with Rocket Science Ltd. to support the Confederation ends in July 2010 and a new contract to continue this activity, until March 2011, is currently being tendered. The purpose of this interim evaluation is to review the e-bulletin and events elements of the project and make recommendations for the future sustainability of the Confederation post March 2011.

2. Context for the Confederation

The Guidance, Skills and Brokerage Confederation is West London Working's response to a need for provider networks across the sub region. It aims to support the provider base across West London by giving them a voice to communicate directly with funders and policy makers. It offers the opportunity for providers to learn, share and develop together and to overcome providers working in silos.

The Confederation has been operating as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as other commissioners such as the London Development Agency (LDA) and the Skills Funding Agency have moved to the commissioning of larger, longer, top tier contracts. As this shift has occurred, WLW has recognised the need to increase the visibility of providers so they are better placed to form strong working partnerships when new opportunities arise. In this way, a key driver for the formation of the Confederation was to support providers to understand changes in the commissioning landscape and position themselves to be ready to engage with large DWP commissioned contracts such as the new Work Programme, as well as respond to the LDA's developing commissioning strategy, European Social Fund (ESF) and other commissioning opportunities.

In addition, a focus of the City Strategy Pathfinder programme is to help delivery partners understand and contribute to national policy. While a number of providers operate across

borough boundaries, nothing operates across the entirety of West London for all of providers of skills and employment guidance, job brokerage and skills training.

The Confederation is one of several work strands developed by West London Working to develop and support the employment and skills infrastructure in West London.

3. Aims of the Confederation

The original West London Working specification to appoint an organisation to develop the Confederation states that "The Confederation is West London Working's response to a need for provider networks across the sub region. It aims to support the provider base across West London by giving them a voice to communicate directly with funders and policy makers. It offers the opportunity for providers to learn, share and develop together."

In addition, the specification states that the network of providers:

- Adds value to existing networks such as the Brent in2 Work Provider Network.
- Builds on London Employment and Skills Taskforce 2012 Pan London Guidance and Brokerage Confederation "Relay London Jobs".
- Gives providers the opportunity to establish clear referral route ways with agreed protocols.
- Informs the West London Working Investment and Target Group of demand & supply on the ground.
- Forms proactive partnerships fit for purpose to access competitive funding.
- Publishes a capacity building workforce development programme building on what is already available for providers in West London.

The aim of the Confederation e-bulletins and events has been to help build a trusted network of providers of employment services in the sub-region and for bigger providers to work better together. This was in recognition that new commissioning arrangements for employment and skills services in the Prime Contractor model could have the effect of driving out provision from small, specialist and third sector providers.

In terms of the Rocket Science UK support contract, the agreed project outputs were:

- 20 providers invited to workshops to design the Confederation
- 6 updates of the capacity building on-line resource
- 5 networking events
- 15 communications to providers advertising events and training opportunities
- 300 providers representatives attending 'speed dating' or themed events
- 5 training sessions delivered where no other capacity building or workforce development funds available

4. Confederation activities to date

The key activities of the Confederation have been to build the capacity of those providers, helping them to create links and contractual relationships with Prime Contractors and through regular communications, keep them up to date with new funding and contracting opportunities. A programme of work was developed and the Confederation began in April 2009, following an annual celebration event for West London Working.

The programme has included:

- Five themed networking events attended by an average of 30-40 providers at each event with subjects ranging from 'Meet the Prime' through to Mental Health and Work and more recently Getting Parents Into Work. These were in addition to the larger annual review event.
- Six smaller training events on negotiation, building consortia and developing better relationships and contracting with Prime Contractors.
- Monthly as well as ad hoc e-bulletins (45 in total) promoting events and support provided by local partners, funding and tendering opportunities and relevant national news.

The e-bulletin

The e-bulletin collates relevant employment and skills news, events and funding announcements with a London and West London focus into one news service. Members of the circulation list are drawn from the provider base in the six boroughs plus relevant borough-based officers and wider West London stakeholders. To date 12 information or policy editions of the monthly e-bulletin have been published and sent to the full number of 580 Confederation members. On average 31% of recipients opened the e-bulletin and of these, an average of 46% 'clicked' to links or download attachments. These figures are comparable with other electronic information services.

The events

The Confederation events held to date have included five sub-regional networking events and six smaller training workshops.

5. Methodology used for the evaluation

The following methodology was used for the evaluation:

- An online e-survey of the WLW Confederation database to explore user satisfaction with the Confederation and specifically on the effectiveness of the e-bulletins, networking and capacity building events and future capacity needs.
- An assessment against event satisfaction information collected following the events.
- A series of telephone interviews with members of the Confederation Project Board and West London Working's Implementation Group to review operation of the Confederation.

- Telephone interviews with selected members of the Confederation who have attended the events.
- One focus group of members of the Confederation who have received ebulletins and/or attended events to gain their perspective on the value and quality of the programme and explore the need to continue providing the service and the kinds of support required.

6. Results of the evaluation

6.1 Cost and value for money

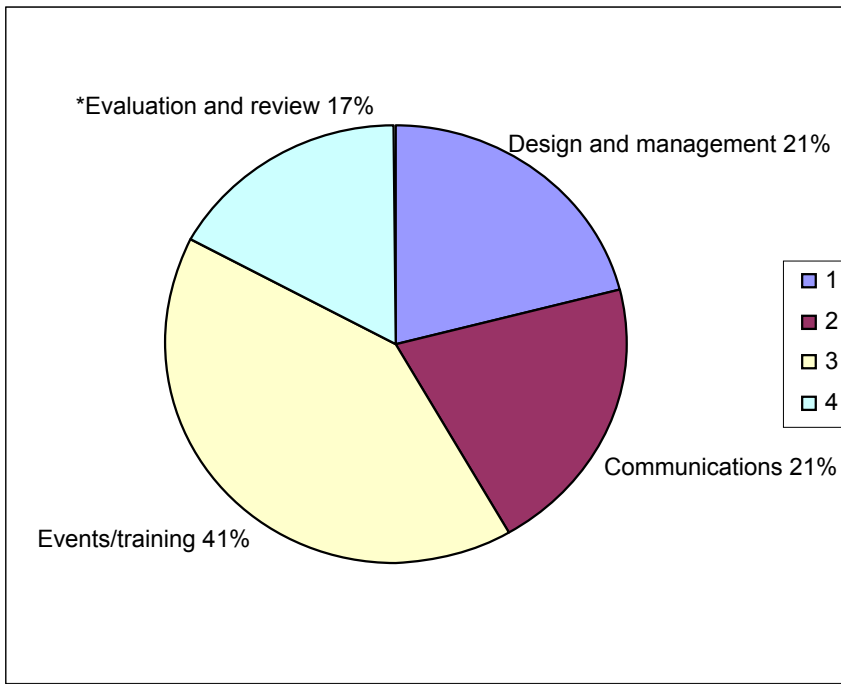
The cost of providing each element of the Confederation services is set out in table 2 below. The largest proportion in terms of cost relates to organising and facilitating the 11 network and training events which were attended by 308 people in total. 45 e-bulletins were issued in all over the period. Of these 33 were invitations to events and 12 information or policy bulletins.

Table 2 –WLW Confederation Costs

Element	Cost	Percentage
Design and management	£14,550	21%
Communications	£14,300	21%
Events/training	£28,450	41%
Evaluation and review*	£11,950	17%
Total	£69,250	100%

*This included all monitoring reports and initial gap analysis

Chart 1: Costs of the West London Working Provider Confederation main elements



* includes all monitoring reports and gap analysis etc.

Table 3 below sets out the main finding in terms of value for money of the elements provided.

Table 3 – Unit cost of the WLW Confederation Services

Element	Cost per unit (£s)	Cost per person (£s)	Total (in £s)
Bulletins	318 (45 bulletins)	N/A	14,300
Events	2586 (11 events)	92	28,450
Total			42,750

In summary, the cost of writing and administering e-bulletins delivered to the membership is seen as acceptable and the cost of Confederation events per delegate is considered to represent good value for money given the level of activity involved. It should be noted that apart from the opening and annual workshops all events were held in community venues thus ensuring that 80-90% of the total cost was invested in the local community.

6.2 Online survey

A short questionnaire survey was circulated to all 580 members of the Confederation via one of the regular e-bulletins in May 2010. The on line questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1. A further reminder was sent via an e-bulletin after two weeks and personalised emails were sent to members of the Confederation to try to improve completion rate. Paper copies of the survey were also handed out at one of the

Confederation events in June. A total of 25 forms were returned although not all questions were completed in some cases. This response rate of less than 5% is low compared with the average for such online surveys of nearer 10-20%. That the questionnaire had a low response despite several reminders is most likely due to the fact that email bulletins and events are not a topic that elicits strong views, either positive or negative. Given that the best response was gained from surveys being handed out at a network event, greater use of hard copy questionnaires handed out in person at events could be considered as an approach should any future surveys be initiated. The overall impression was that while users of the services are generally happy, they do not feel the need to shout loudly about it. This noted, there are clearly some differences of view which are worth drawing out.

Survey results

Qs 1-3 Confederation services

95% of respondents had used Confederation services (i.e. the e-bulletins or events). Only one person had never heard of the Confederation services (e-bulletin) 65% of respondents rated the Confederation services 4 out of a maximum score of 5, with over 85% rated services either 3 or 4.

Qs 4-7 Confederation events

All bar one had attended at least one Confederation event. Out of these 52% gave them a 4 and 24% gave them a top mark of 5. In terms of the things respondents particularly liked or disliked about the events the following are examples of comments made:

Likes:

"It was very useful to have a networking forum to see how other providers were working and what problems they encountered"

"High standards. One of the speakers was very inspirational. Very professional. Good networking opportunities"

Dislikes:

"We weren't given a list of those attending the event"

"Many of the schemes we had presentations on were all very similar"

Q8-11e-bulletins

Only 32% of respondents reported having read the e-bulletins. Of the remaining 68% that had not read them, the majority had not done so because they had never received them. Of the small number of respondents that had read the e-bulletins (6 people) half scored them 3 out of a possible 5 with the other three people giving lower scores. When asked to comment on what they particularly liked or disliked about the e-bulletins, some of the comments received were:

"Very useful to have information in a compact form, and able to link to other documents e.g. Government proclamations"

"...a good source of info over a number of subjects".

"Very informative in terms of what is happening within the borough".

"Good way of keeping in touch"

Q12- Themes of events that the Confederation could usefully run in the future

Of those responding to this question, the largest percentage (28%) favoured more opportunities to work with other providers. The next most popular themes were information sharing events and events that allowed participants to learn about national and regional policy developments (both favoured by 18% of those responding). Further opportunities to work with prime contractors were the next most favoured type of event (15%) with further 'dragon's den' type events and 1-2-1 advice sessions being suggested by the smallest number of people (i.e. by 5% of respondents) The apparent unpopularity of 'Dragon's Den' events has to be balanced by the more positive views put forward by those who have participated in them and can be partly explained by the fact that they are intentionally small events attended by a smaller number of people. Over 10% of respondents also suggested other specific training events with the following themes put forward:

"Programmes to refer clients to: e.g. Marks and Start where employers will "take on" unemployed people and eventually give them jobs".

"Building links with employers who are willing to employ difficult to reach groups".

"Opportunities to network with employers & benefits training"

"More on sustainable jobs/candidates. How to build relationships with companies"

Q13- Has being involved in the West London Working Confederation changed the way your organisation operates?

Of those responding to this question 50% stated that it had changed they way their organisation operated and 50% said it had not. Of those that had changed the way they operated, the comments the responses were fairly evenly split between:

- o Shared good practice- 23%
- o Developed links with other organisations- 20%
- o Increased referrals to other providers -17%
- o Increased knowledge of employment and skills policy/practice – 17%
- o Become involved in joint bids/consortiums- 9%
- o Other – 14%

Comments received included:

"...like to become involved in joint bids but couldn't make the link to those who we could 'buddy' with"

"Better co-operation between organisations"

"It would be very beneficial to have a forum in which local employers are invited to attend to look at building links with providers."

Conclusions of the questionnaire survey

- The survey indicates a high level of knowledge of Confederation services among those participating.
- Of those who attended Confederation events over 75% gave them a score of at least 4 out of a maximum of 5 which indicates a high level of satisfaction.
- The main benefit obtained from the events was the opportunity to network with others. In terms of future events, the opportunity to work with other providers was the most popular suggestion, followed by learning of future policy developments

- Awareness of the ebulletins was surprisingly low among those responding which indicates that there is further marketing to be carried out to promote these as a tool.
- That half of those completing the survey had indicated that the Confederation services had changed the way that their organisation operated is seen as a positive outcome and one that was followed up in the in-depth interviews

6.3 User satisfaction of the Confederation events

A total number of 308 people attended the Confederation events. This includes the annual event held in May 2010. The events were split between sub-regional networking events and smaller training events.

Main findings of the event user satisfaction

The analysis of the completed evaluation forms at the Confederation events is summarised in the charts below and tables with the full results set out in Tables 4 and 5. A copy of a typical event evaluation form is included at appendix 2. In the case of one of the smaller training workshops evaluation was not carried out. There was a high level of satisfaction generally with venues, facilitation and speakers at the events. In two cases (25/3/10 'Keeping ahead of the game' and 'Negotiating Skills' 10/12/09) the venue was less satisfactory. In the case of one event ('Working in Consortia' 10/3/10) facilitation scored somewhat lower. The satisfaction level of event attendees overall compares well with other events of this nature.

Chart 2 Satisfaction with event venues

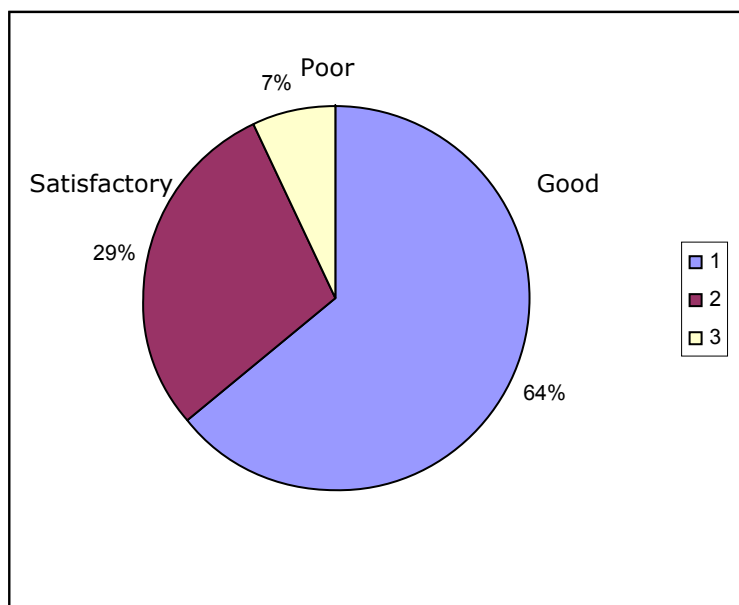


Chart 3- Satisfaction with speakers

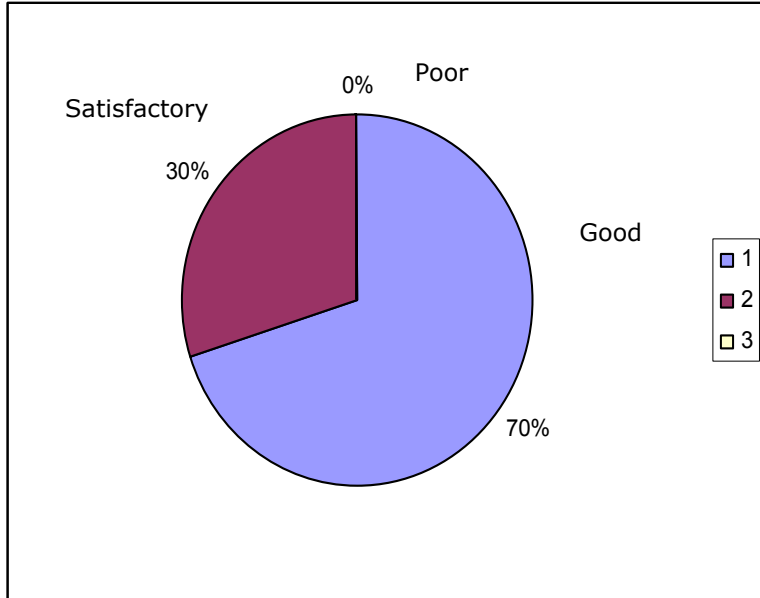
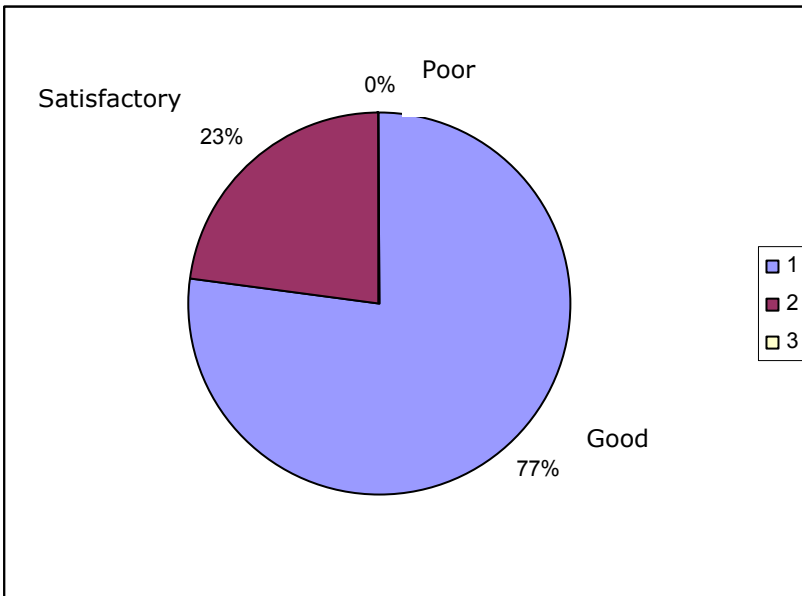


Chart 4- Satisfaction with facilitation



Full results of the attendee satisfaction at the events

Table 4 - Network Events

Event	Delegates	Feedback
Building your bid 14/5/09	39 registered 25 (65%) attended	22 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 14/22 (64%) 'Good' ¹ 6/22 (27%) 'satisfactory', 2/22 (9%) 'poor' Speakers: 17/22 (77%) 'Good', 5/22 (23%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation: 14/22 (64%) 'Good' 6/22 (36%) 'satisfactory'
Provider Workshop 2 24/9/09	31 Registered 24 (77%) Attended	19 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 17/19 (89%) 'Good' 2/19 (11%) 'satisfactory' Speakers: 17/19 (89%) 'Good' 2/19 (11%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation: 16/19 (84%) 'Good' 3/19 (16%) 'satisfactory'
Mental Health & Work 28/01/10	45 Registered 40 (89%) Attended	23 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 20/23 (87%) 'Good', 3/23 (13%) 'satisfactory' Speakers: 16/18 (89%) 'Good', 2/18 (11%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation: 20/23 (87%) 'Good', 3/23 (13%) 'satisfactory'

¹ The categories used for the events were: 'Good', 'Satisfactory' of 'Poor'

Table 4- Network events - continued

Event	Delegates	Feedback
Keeping Ahead of the Game: 25/3/10	27 registered 18 (67%) attended	12 evaluation forms returned: Venue 3/12 (25%) 'Good' 6/12 (50%) 'satisfactory', 3/13 (25%) 'poor' Speakers: 9/12 (75%) 'Good', 3/12 (25%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation 9/12 (75%) 'Good', 3/12 (25%) 'satisfactory'
Getting Parents into Work and keeping them there 10/6/10	60 registered 54 (81%) attended	23 evaluation forms returned: Venue 14/23 (61%) 'Good', 5/23 (26%) 'satisfactory', 4/23 (13%) 'poor' Speakers 17/23 (74%) 'Good', 6/23 (26%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation 19/23 (83%) 'Good', 4/23 (17%), 'satisfactory'

Table 5 -Capacity building training events

Event	Delegates	Feedback
Negotiation skills 26/11/09	14 registered 11 (79%) attended	
Building Consortia 10/12/09	20 registered 11 (55%)attended	6 evaluation forms returned: Venue 6/6 (100%) "good" Speakers 6/6 (100%) "good" Facilitation 6/6 (100%) "good"

Table 5 -Capacity building training events (cont.)

Event	Delegates	Feedback
Negotiation skills (Cutting a Deal) 10/02/10	17 Registered 16 (94%) Attended	14 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 3/14 (21%) "Good" 9/14 (64%) "Satisfactory", 2/14 (15%) 'poor' Speakers: 11/14 (79%) "Good", 3/14 (21%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation: 11/14 (79%) "Good", 3/14 (21%) 'satisfactory'
Dragon's Den 24/02/10	14 Registered 8 (57%) Attended	9 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 7/9 (78%) "Good", 2/9 (22%) 'satisfactory' Speakers: 7/9 (78%) "Good", 2/9 (22%) 'satisfactory'
Working in Consortia 10/3/10	17 Registered 13 (76%) Attended	10 evaluation forms returned: Venue: 5/10 (50%) "Good" 5/10 (50%) "Satisfactory" Speakers: 7/10 (70%) "Good", 3/10 (30%) 'satisfactory' Facilitation: 4/10 (40%) "Good" 6/10 (60%) "Satisfactory"

6.4 1-2-1 interviews

As part of the evaluation eight telephone and face-to-face interviews were carried out with WLW Implementation Group and the Confederation Project Board members as well as one person from the Confederation database in order to gauge their views on Confederation generally and the e-bulletins and events in particular. The list of interviewees is shown in Appendix 3.

General views on the Confederation

There is a strong consensus that the role of the Confederation in an era of ever greater competition is to bring providers together to gain information and network over a sub-region, to build capacity of smaller providers and to allow larger, 'prime' contractors the

opportunity to develop alliances and in some cases joint bids with smaller, specialist providers. As interviewee summarised it: "(the Confederation is)...a place to come together, to share best practice, hear about new programmes, new opportunities and help providers build their capacity". While it is acknowledged that individual boroughs may have their own networks, the unique aspect of the West London Working Confederation was that it represented a larger, functional area that allowed partnerships and alliances to be made over a bigger 'patch'. That the Confederation's 'strategic' sub-regional aspect is seen as a clear strength is something that reoccurs in several interviews. However, conversely the fact that the Confederation operated at a level below London-wide was also seen as a key advantage of the network.

One interviewee argued that the Confederation had met its original aims "...as an opportunity to build relationships". She saw the Confederation "...not as a campaigning force but something more informal." The Confederation was also seen as playing an important role in helping individuals negotiate between organisations "helping to look at how individuals are referred across agencies". However, it was acknowledged that "...the benefits of this aspect of the network are hard to measure in practice." In terms of measuring the affect of the other key aim of the Confederation – reducing duplication and building capacity of smaller providers- the benefits at least of the latter were seen as easier to measure. One interviewee argued that duplication would never be remove entirely as organisations "seek to cover all bases in an increasingly competitive world".

In terms of representation, one interviewee suggested that at the beginning there were too few prime contractors involved although it was acknowledged that this had improved.

Among those on the Project Board there was a clear consensus that it was a good thing to keep this small and focused. In terms of how the Confederation was run, one of the management team referred to its "semi-formal" nature was seen as a positive aspect. Both the management team and Project Board are small and certainly with the latter this was seen as a strength by Project Board members.

One representative of a funder organisation who was interviewed saw the Confederation as playing an important role for smaller providers in helping to make sense of the complex and changing nature of skills and employment contracting in London.

Views on the e-bulletins

The Confederation e-bulletins are well thought of by interviewees and seen as providing a flexible format for information sharing. Several interviewees commented that they regularly passed the bulletins on to colleagues indicating that readership is likely to be much larger than the distribution list. The aspect of the bulletins that is most well-received is the flagging up of new policy initiatives and funding opportunities. The fact that the e-bulletins are focused on the implications for the West London sub-region is seen as particularly helpful in that many information services that local authorities may subscribe to are national and therefore lack this focus.

Views on the Confederation events

The events are seen as a very useful opportunity to network face to face with other providers in the sub-region. The point was made that the events will be of interest to

providers that may be based outside of the sub-region but deliver within it. While turn out for the training events was small these were intended as opportunities for more 'hands on' support. Attendance levels for the network events have remained consistently good. The practical nature of the network event topics appealed to one interviewee who commented that it involved: "moving away from the ivory tower of some forms of service delivery to the 'we're all in it together' approach".

When asked for the reasons why they had not attended many events one interviewee responded that she felt the events were "not sufficiently strategic enough". There is also a view among one or two interviewees that the Confederation events are aimed at smaller providers and therefore were designed with a particular need group in mind.

Practice example - A4E and GOYA

GOYA is a local Organisation based in London Borough of Ealing that was founded in 2003 by a group of young people. GOYA works with mainly disadvantaged people in West London and in particular but not exclusively, young people from Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) and refugee communities. Representatives of prime contractor A4E came into contact with GOYA at a Confederation event and were able to explore areas where they could usefully work together. A4E and GOYA subsequently formed a partnership to deliver welfare to work support with young people and have since submitted a joint contracting bid.

Practice example - Metropolitan Support Trust and Goals UK

Metropolitan Support Trust (MST) is a specialist care and support organisation based in South West London which works across 30 local authorities and delivers supported housing and care to a range of need groups. At one WLW Confederation event staff from MST heard a representative from Goals UK speak. Goals UK is an organisation that provides coaching, confidence building and motivational training for individuals such as unemployed people, ex-offenders in order to build independence, self-esteem, inner strength, personal responsibility, self-motivation and purposefulness. As a result of meeting at a Confederation event the two organisations have agreed to collaborate through the provision of coaching to MST service users.

Future potential themes for events

In terms of possible future themes for events, there is seen to be a need to capacity-build smaller providers and advise them on ways to bid for new funding. There is also seen as a need to help smaller providers cope with what is likely to be a landscape increasingly dominated by larger providers. Other future themes put forward included getting providers to talk about their experiences and perhaps trying to get providers from outside the sub region to talk about their experiences of helping target groups. Practical case studies were considered to be very useful.

Views on whether the Confederation should continue

There is a general view that the Confederation is a 'good thing' and that it should continue especially given the move towards even greater competition among providers.

In one case, a key aim for the Confederation was "...to make the Business Plan for the sub-region come together at the local level". One prime contractor interviewee remarked that the Confederation "...had allowed West London to gain advantage over other sub-regions in London and would advocate something similar for South London". One criticism is what is seen as an under-representation of prime contractors at events which is seen as something that needs to be addressed. It needs to be acknowledged that prime contractors are fewer in number and therefore will be represented in smaller numbers. One representative of a funding organisation interviewed argued that because the Confederation aimed particularly to meet the needs of smaller specialist ('niche') providers which he saw as remaining very relevant in an era of increasing 'personalisation' of services, it was important for it to continue.

One issue raised by an interviewee was what was identified as a potential area for greater alignment between the WLW Confederation which focused on providers working to JCP and ESF contracts and the Association of Learning Providers which focused on providers working to the Skills Funding Agency and ESF contracts.

Views on future sustainability of the Confederation

Views on how the Confederation should be funded varied although there was a common view that local authorities would be likely to struggle to commit funding due to the severe nature of current cutbacks. One view was that West London Boroughs as a group might be able to fund the Confederation, with chairing rotated. Involvement of the prime contractors was also thought to be crucial and it was felt by some that they might be put off if the Confederation was seen to become overly public sector orientated and bureaucratic.

Conclusions

- The interviews confirm that the Confederation is seen to perform a useful role across West London which some feel has given that sub-region an advantage.
- The sub-regional focus of the e-bulletins is seen as its USP. Its brevity and flexibility are seen as plus points.
- While the lack of prime contractor involvement in early events has been criticised there are fewer of such larger providers and this needs to be borne in mind as well as the main focus of the Confederation being to boost capacity of smaller and specialist providers.
- There remains a need to build the capacity of smaller providers through using the Confederation events. There is a need to keep the events topical and to try not to cover old ground.
- Consideration could be given of creating links with other networks e.g. the ALP which represents providers working to Skills Funding Agency and ESF contracts
- Views on the future funding of the Confederation vary with both London Boroughs and prime contractors seen as potentially playing a key role. The need to keep the governance of the Confederation 'light touch' is a key issue.

6.5 West London Focus Group

A focus group was held on 28th April 2010 in Chiswick with 5 members of the Confederation who agreed to put themselves forward following a request in an e-bulletin for participants. The focus group was an opportunity to delve more deeply into some of the issues surrounding the Confederation events and bulletin as well as the future of the network. The weight given to the views expressed by focus group members needs to be tempered by the small size of the group and the fact that not all focus group attendees had attended a Confederation event. While the group was small it comprised a useful mix of Borough provider, national provider, voluntary sector organisation and two London Borough officers.

Views on the Confederation as a whole

The question was posed whether the Confederation duplicates other services currently being provided across West London. One participant made the point that the Confederation "...may duplicate other services in the area but it adds value". That the Confederation had value and was useful was generally agreed by the group.

The Confederation was seen as having a strong public sector emphasis and being light on participation by the private sector which was seen as a weakness. As one participant commented, "WLW is not business focused enough. It has the feel of a public sector network and this would put off the private sector". Another participant similarly commented: "I went to an event which was good. However, there were no employers there. Is there competition with the London Accord? Is there scope to work together with them?"

One participant also felt that there remained some way to go in terms of the Confederation showing the strong leadership that was deemed necessary and also needed to emphasise more its links to the sub-regional strategy for West London.

Usefulness of the e-bulletins

The e-bulletins were generally seen as useful in that they summarised information in a succinct way and were helpful in flagging up events. One participant commented that "(he)... likes the way that the e-bulletins are succinct and broken down, use of headlines, and are generally well laid out".

In terms of possible improvements to the e-bulletins, it was suggested that they could be used to promote best practice and also as a link to the directory". Finally one participant commented that she did not read the e-bulletins as if she needed to know anything she felt that "...West London Working would email her directly".

Usefulness of Confederation events

Those participants that went to Confederation events did so as a way of networking with providers but the comment about the events being light on representation from local employers was again made. One person attended the event on Mental Health and Work

and found it very informative even though it was outside of her current work remit as she felt that this was a possible growth area.

How future events could be improved

It was suggested that in order to make future events popular it was important to use venues that were attractive to people. The example was given of a recent Chamber of Commerce event at Twickenham Rugby Stadium, and the upcoming WLW event at Wembley Stadium.

In terms of potential themes of future events, Disability Discrimination Act and mental health was suggested as was bringing more business representative to events and one on "...the benefits system, Flexible New Deal 2 and new schemes".

How to ensure future sustainability of the Confederation

There was a view voiced by some participants that there remained confusion as to the precise role played by the Confederation and a need to present a more 'business-like' image. As one person stated "...there is a need to clarify what the Confederation is offering". This participant suggested that there was a need to tighten up the way the database operated and give the Confederation a more polished feel ('more slicker'). This statement clearly needs to be qualified by comments which emerged through the questionnaire which showed that members also appreciated the 'informal' and practical, issue oriented nature of events.

In terms of who might fund the Confederation in the future it was suggested that "...there may be a scope to have rolling lead by borough and have business person to front it". As an example of a 'rolling lead' the Hammersmith and Fulham third sector network was mentioned which changes its lead organisation every 3 years.

Conclusions – key messages from the focus group

The following key messages can be drawn from the focus group discussion:

- The Confederation performs a useful function in bringing organisations together across this part of London although there was a view put forward by a small element among the group that it lacked some leadership and direction. This was thought to refer to a perceived lack of connection between the Confederation and the broader strategy for the sub-region which was seen as a weakness.
- The Confederation events are seen as performing a useful role although the view of the group was that the events appear somewhat light on business representation and overly dominated by the public and voluntary sector. However, it must be noted that it is not an aim of the Confederation to represent employers or businesses and by its nature of being a provider network will be dominated in terms of numbers by the public and third sector. A suggestion is made in the recommendations section of perhaps inviting more employers as speakers to give their perspective and hear from the network.
- The e-bulletins are helpful to people in that they are succinct, up to date, and enable complex new information on policy and funding etc. to be quickly assimilated.

- While the point about dominance of the public sector was made more than once by the group, in terms of future sustainability, the prevailing view on future funding and governance favoured a stronger role by the Boroughs in this part of West London.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Confederation as a whole

- The role played by the Confederation in offering a sub-regional perspective on employment and skills provision comes through the evaluation as a strong selling point which is seen as giving the sub-region a definite advantage over other areas.
- The delivery of this perspective through targeted information e-bulletins and network and training events was also seen as a strong and well-received programme.
- The level of involvement in the Confederation by prime contractors was seen, especially by the focus group representatives and some interviewees, as something that could be strengthened.
- Another area where further collaboration which is seen as a possibility is between WLW and Association of Learning Provider members. This could take the form of joint events or communications.
- A healthy 50% of questionnaire respondents indicated that the Confederation had led to improvements in their organisations, particularly as a result of sharing good practice and developing links with other organisations.
- A slim, non-bureaucratic management style was seen as favoured for the Confederation, although representation by prime contractors at network events was something that could be strengthened.

e-bulletins

- The simple, succinct format of the e-bulletins was received positively by those interviewed as part of the evaluation.
- Responses from interviewees also indicated a high level of forwarding of the bulletins among teams suggesting that their readership was much greater than the initial distribution list.
- Conversely, responses to the questionnaire survey indicated that there are a number of people who attend Confederation events who have never seen the e-bulletins, indicating that further promotion would be advisable.

Confederation events

- Analysis of the evaluation sheets for the Confederation events indicates that overall, the administration, choice of speakers and facilitation are generally very well received by attendees. Levels of satisfaction compare well with other similar events.
- Responses from interviewees indicates that there is a strong view that the events are primarily aimed at smaller providers, although larger providers also see them as useful in enabling partnerships to be formed with a view to strengthening future bids and two short case study examples of this are quoted in the report.

- Feedback from the focus group indicated that the perspective of employers could usefully feature more prominently at events –perhaps via choice of speakers.

Future of the Confederation

- A strong message coming through from the evaluation is that the Confederation should continue as it is seen as offering a positive support for joint working and improved service delivery in this part of London.
- Given the major changes occurring in the area of contracting and commissioning of employment and skills services and the changing focus of the new Government the Confederation is seen to have particular continued relevance in the area of explaining new policy changes and highlighting new funding opportunities.
- The questionnaire survey highlighted several possible themes for future Confederation events, namely: emerging regional and sub-regional policy and future funding opportunities. Interestingly, there was much less support for further 'dragon's den' type events or 1-2-1 advice sessions although as these were very well enjoyed by the smaller number of people that attended them it is recommended that they continue as part of any future programme.
- In terms of how the Confederation could be run in the future no consensus of views emerged from the evaluation. It is clear that there was a view that all 'key players' should have some say and it should not be dominated by any one sector. There was also a strong view that the governance of the Confederation should remain non-bureaucratic.
- In terms of possible ways that the Confederation could be funded there was also no strong consensus emerging. The view that due to public sector cutbacks local authorities may not have funding to put into this area was a recurring message which may indicate that this burden may need to be shouldered by the larger contractors on the basis that they are best placed to benefit from the support offered to smaller, specialist providers in essential skills and employment services.

Appendix 1 - Online Survey questions

West London Working Guidance, Skills and Brokerage Confederation Evaluation

Rocket Science, has been commissioned to carry out an evaluation of the West London Working Guidance, Skills and Brokerage Confederation to be completed by the end of May. The purpose of the evaluation is to review the Confederation to date and make recommendations for how it could be taken forward in a sustainable way. As part of the evaluation, this short user satisfaction questionnaire is being sent to all members of the West London Working Confederation database. The questionnaire should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. Your replies and comments will help shape the future of the Confederation.

1. Have you used the West London Working confederation services (i.e. read the e-bulletin, attended any of the events)?

1. Yes
2. No

2. If no, can you expand on reasons why you have not used them? (tick any relevant ones)

1. Not enough time
2. Offer not relevant enough
3. Services didn't look inviting
4. Never heard of them

3. If yes, how would you rate the services received on a 1-5 basis? (1 for poor, 5 for excellent)

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5

4. Have you attended any WLW confederation events?

1. Yes
2. No

5. If no, can you expand on reasons why you have not attended? (tick any relevant ones)

1. Not enough time
2. Topic not relevant enough
3. Speakers not inviting enough
4. Venue not in an accessible location

6. If yes, how would you rate the meeting (s) on a 1-5 basis? (1 for poor. 5 for excellent)

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5

7. Can you expand on this, what particularly did you like/dislike?

8. Have you read the Confederation e-bulletin(s)?

1. Yes
2. No

9. If no, can you expand on reasons why you have not read them? (Tick any relevant ones)

1. Not received them
2. Not enough time
3. Subject matter not relevant enough
4. Formatting did not make it easy to read

10. If yes, how would you rate the e-bulletin(s) on a 1-5 basis? (1 for poor, 5 for excellent)

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5

11. Can you expand on this, what particularly did you like/dislike?

12. What type of subjects/events would you like to see the West London Working confederation deliver in the future? (please tick your top 3 in no particular order)
1. Opportunities to network with other providers
 2. More 'dragon's den' events to get feedback on bids/proposals
 3. More information giving events e.g. on sources of funding, developing consortia etc
 4. Opportunities to hear about national and regional policy on employment and skills
 5. Opportunities to link with prime contractors through specific commissioning and contracting opportunities
 6. 1-2-1 advice sessions with specialist advisors (i.e. law, funding, marketing)
 7. Specific training and support (please specify)
13. Has being involved in the West London Working Confederation changed the way you, or your organisation, has operated?
1. Yes
 2. No
14. If yes, what sort of changes are these (please tick any relevant ones)
1. Increased referrals to other providers
 2. Increase in knowledge of employment and skills policy/practices
 3. Become involved in joint bids/consortiums/commissioning activities
 4. Shared good practice
 5. Developed increased links with other organisations across West London
 6. Any other (please specify)

Appendix 2 - Example of an Event evaluation form

Getting to grips with the policy for parents Thursday 10th June 2010 Evaluation Form

Please take a few minutes to complete this evaluation form. Your comments will contribute both to the assessment of the effectiveness of this event and help to determine our development of future workshops.

Please score/comment on the following:

Key	Poor	Satisfactory	Good
1. Venue			
Comment:			
2. Food / refreshments			
Comment:			
3. Administration of the day			
Comment:			
4. Session 1 – Developing practice for parents			
Comment:			
5. Speaker 2 – Developing the offer for parents			
Comment:			
6. Group discussion			
Comment:			
7. Facilitation of the day			
Comment:			
Any other comments:			

Appendix 3 - List of interviewees

Clare Arnold – Skills Funding Agency

Inder Matharu – Jobcentre Plus

Gursharn Rait –LB Brent

Helena Webster – LB Hillingdon

Victoria Isaacs – LB Harrow

Karen Roberts- Metropolitan Housing Trust

Aisha Izzet –A4E

Sarah Wilkins- West London Working

Sara Clarke - West London Working

Appendix 4 - 28th April 2010 Focus Group attendees

Venue: Playground Room, High Road House, Chiswick

Present:

Laggi Efthymiou – Retrofit Programme Manager, LB Ealing

Melanie Hawman – Business Development Manager, Skills Training UK

Georgina Baretta – Economic Development Manager, LB Hammersmith and Fulham

Andrew Harland – Job Opportunity Broker, LB Hammersmith and Fulham

Christophe Von Luttitz – Chair, Multifaith Book

Helen Barnes – Institute of Employment Studies (evaluator)

Tony Rich – Rich Regeneration (facilitator)