

Skills Development Scotland : First Year of Operation

Skills Development Scotland is a new national skills body created from a merger of Careers Scotland, the skills and learning function of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish University for Industry.

Skills Development Scotland has published its first Operating Plan, setting out its work programme for 2008-09, supported by a budget of over £184 million for delivery. This article provides a brief summary of the Operating Plan and highlights the major points of interest for voluntary sector social service organisations.

The new agency's vision is to....**be a catalyst for real and positive change in Scotland's skills performance. We will help individuals to realise their full potential, we will help employers be more successful through skills development, and we will work in meaningful partnership to enhance Scotland's sustainable economic development.**

The role of Skills Development Scotland is to:

- promote the availability of access to and create demand for, relevant, high quality and innovative learning and skills development for the Scottish population,
- advance education and skills development and the promotion of lifelong learning and skills development amongst individuals and businesses
- provide information, advice and guidance, including guidance relating to career and learning choices to people of all ages
- provide support and funding to individuals for learning and skills development
- advance and provide training programmes to build employability skills and to provide information and support to employers to develop the skills of employees
- promote and facilitate local lifelong learning opportunities and the local development of Skills Development Scotland foster collaborative partnerships in lifelong learning and skills development
- promote and deliver equality of access and opportunity in service delivery and the wider lifelong learning landscape.

In line with the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy, [Skills for Scotland](#), focus on individual development and economic pull, Skills Development Scotland identifies two main customer groups – individuals and employers. In delivering services to both individuals and agencies, Skills Development Scotland says it will work in partnership with other bodies, including key intermediary organisations in the third sector, which we assume will include SCVO, the proposed third sector skills body and VSSSWU.

Skills Development Scotland targeted individuals of particular interest to VSSSWU stakeholders include adults who wish to learn and work, those who have literacy issues and unemployed adults who are ready to take a step towards the labour market. Increasing the proportion of people in work and connecting individuals to job and learning opportunities are seen as important challenges. During 2008, Skills Development Scotland intends to build on research information on attitudes and barriers to learning to look at progression routes individuals may take over the course of their lifetime.

Skills Development Scotland targeted employers are:

- Employers with low incidences of training activity, especially SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises)
- Key industries and businesses where learning will make a difference to productivity and growth
- Employers who wish to know more about the ways in which learning could contribute to their business.

Unsurprisingly, further enquiry by the writer has ascertained that social services are not identified as one of the key industries.

Programmes and services to be delivered in 2008-09 of particular relevance to VSSSWU stakeholders include:

- Public Access Centres (known to most of us as Careers Offices) providing information, advice and guidance on learning and training opportunities and career development. Skills Development Scotland intends to provide, 'the definitive source of information, advice and guidance on lifelong learning to connect individuals and employers across Scotland to learning that works best for them.'
- Individual Learning Accounts Scotland Scheme. (*changes for 2008-09 extend individual eligibility for ILAs to age 16+ and open up funding of up to £500 (means tested) for a wider range of work-related courses.*)
- Modern Apprenticeships and Skillseekers training programmes for those entering the labour market. *The two adult Modern Apprenticeship frameworks of interest to the sector - Health and Social Care and Children's Care, Learning and Development (formerly Early years, Care and Education) will be delivered by the SSSC as Skills for Care and Development.*

- Information, advice and guidance for businesses.
- Support to SMEs
- Capacity building with partner organisations and voluntary organisations.
- Work with sector skills councils to understand skills demand and to develop an integrated approach to the development and utilisation of skills in the workplace.
- Promoting the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Skills Development Scotland sets out its model for future delivery in a new 'de-cluttered' lifelong learning landscape, saying it will transform its services to be customer-centred, enabling and innovative. Better partnership working with key agencies and partners, including Sector Skills Councils, SCVO and Community Planning Partnerships, is identified as vitally important. Numerical targets for delivery against each work programme and service are set out, against which achievements will be published throughout the operational year.

The Operating Plan concludes with Skills Development Scotland's intention to develop a robust and integrated set of performance measures and quality assurance framework through which it will demonstrate its overall contribution to the vision and goals laid out within 'Skills for Scotland, the Government's Economic Strategy and to relevant outcomes within the National performance Framework.