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**Ambitions and Aspirations
of Workers and Volunteers from the
Voluntary and Community Sector
in the North East**



Project North East would like to thank the members of the [voluntaryskills.com](https://www.voluntaryskills.com) reference group for their continued support and encouragement throughout the development of the project.

Project North East would also like to thank all those who took part in the research.

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Executive Summary

This report is intended to disseminate the findings of research undertaken by Project North East as part of the voluntaryskills.com project. It aims to facilitate an understanding of the wants and needs of the voluntary and community sector in relation to individual ambitions and aspirations, and to understand these requirements in relation to the available opportunities uncovered by previous PNE work in the area.

The main findings of the research have provided substantial information regarding the wants and needs of individuals from the sector, and have enabled a fuller picture of development requirements. The research has identified;

- the majority of people (82%) are keen to participate in training in the future
- a large proportion (93%) of organisations encourage learning and skills development, and an increasing number appear to have a training plan (59%) and/or a training budget (62%)
- the perceived benefits of training are that it improves skills and knowledge, as well as increasing confidence
- the most popular generic subject areas for further training and development continue to be personal development, business & management and social & community development
- the most frequently cited plans for individual development include improving the skills required for current positions and progressing into higher level management
- courses at level 3 and above are continually the most requested levels of training
- lack of funding and lack of time are again cited as the biggest barriers to accessing learning
- over half (55%) of respondents are keen to be able to do units of training which would count towards a qualification

With regard to PNE's earlier mapping exercise of current North East availability, it has become apparent that there are a number of areas of mismatch with regard to wants and needs in the sector. The current research identified 'social & community development' as an area of high interest for future training and development however this contrasts greatly with the availability of courses identified by the mapping exercise. It highlights an apparent gap in the provision of highly sought after training and indicates that a higher volume of training and development opportunities needs to be made more available in this area.

In contrast, the areas of 'personal development' and 'business & management' were revealed to be popular choices for future training and areas where there were a large number of courses available. However, these findings must be treated with some caution due to the generic nature of the subject area categories. It is possible that despite there being a host of courses available under these subject headings, they may not include the specific courses required by the sector.

This perhaps suggests the need for further clarification of the required courses and more specific development opportunities in these areas.

There appears to be a further gap in the provision of training and development opportunities with regard to courses at particular levels. The research highlighted that the sector requires higher level training and that there is a great deal of interest in courses at level 3 and above. However, the earlier mapping exercise undertaken by PNE demonstrated low availability of training and development opportunities at these levels. The findings have uncovered a gap in availability and suggest an increase in the number of higher level training opportunities is required for individuals within the sector to be able to develop.

In order to understand these research findings within a wider context it was necessary to review previous research and current developments around the topic. This allowed a more educated insight into the skills gaps and training needs already discovered throughout the UK and gave a better understanding of current issues. The current research findings appear to correspond with a number of outcomes of earlier work, particularly in relation to required course levels and subjects of interest, and indicate particular areas of concern affecting the development of people within the sector.

It now remains important to use the research findings to help contribute to North East learning and skills initiatives, and to identify the most appropriate way to provide for the gaps in order to help encourage a more supportive development environment for the sector in the region.

Contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Background Information	7 - 9
3. The Survey	10 - 11
4. Survey Analysis	12 - 23
4.1 Sample Breakdown	12
4.2 Previous Training	12 - 14
4.3 Future Skills	14 - 19
4.4 Barriers to Development	20 - 21
4.5 Career Ambitions	21 - 23
5. The Findings	24 - 27
6. Forward Strategy	28 - 29
7. Bibliography	30 - 32
Appendix	33 - 37

1. Introduction

This report details the findings of a piece of research undertaken by Project North East (PNE) as part of the voluntaryskills.com project. It presents information on the career ambitions and aspirations of workers and volunteers from the voluntary and community sector throughout the North East of England.

The aim of the report is to provide knowledge around the actual training and development wants and needs of the sector and to demonstrate the importance of investing in learning and skills. The report offers a comprehensive view of the career plans of individuals from the sector, and presents a clearer insight into the role learning and development plays within the voluntary and community sector in the region.

The research findings display a number of common features and areas of specific interest for the sector, and have been explored in conjunction with previous PNE work in the area. Apparent gaps in the availability of training and development opportunities for the sector have been highlighted and areas requiring additional support and encouragement demonstrated.

This report disseminates the information gathered from the research and intends to discuss the findings in real terms. It conveys the findings in relation to previous research in the area, and considers future plans that will help contribute to a more structured approach to learning and development within the voluntary and community sector in the North East.

2. Background Information

The voluntaryskills.com project was initially conceived in early 2001 following discussions around how people in the voluntary and community sector develop a career. These discussions highlighted a number of difficulties surrounding the area of career development plans and choices for the sector, and led to the development of a pilot Tyne & Wear project entitled 'Career Progression in the Voluntary Sector'. The project set out to contribute towards the establishment of professional career progression pathways for people working and volunteering in the voluntary and community sector, and has been continually refined and progressed since its inception. A number of activities have been undertaken in order to accomplish the aims and objectives of the project, with various pieces of research being included in the project development plan.

The first stage of the project involved research into the provision of existing training and development opportunities, as well as exploration into the opportunities being pursued by the sector in Tyne & Wear. The findings helped define which courses and subject areas were of interest to the sector and revealed that although there was provision available more knowledge of what was accessible was needed. There was no one source of comprehensive information on training and development opportunities for people from the sector to access, with people generally relying on receiving specific mail shots or actively spending time searching for information.

In order to try and combat the problems associated with these findings, and to encourage people from the sector to get involved with training and development opportunities, PNE proposed the introduction of a website to provide information on available training provision in one easily accessible place. The website was intended to encourage participation in training and development opportunities by identifying current availability and informing the sector of its existence. A searchable database of training provision throughout the area, alongside current news of relevance to the sector, information on events, training reviews and aspirational case studies of people from within the sector were considered vitally important for the purpose of the website. The provision of an attractive, up to date and informative resource that was simple to use and navigate for everyone was considered essential for people within the sector to engage with the idea.

After much careful planning, PNE launched the www.voluntaryskills.com website for Tyne & Wear in May 2002.

A mapping exercise of website data sources was carried out in early 2003 to profile the existing training and development provision available to the sector in Tyne & Wear. The information gathered demonstrated that training in the areas of 'business and management' and 'information technology' dominated provision in the locality, and that the majority of courses available were from an introductory level up to level three. The mapping exercise provided some indication of areas where training and development opportunities were lacking and presented useful information around the possibility of progression routes.

Further research into the actual ambitions and aspirations of workers and volunteers from the sector within Tyne & Wear was presented in a PNE report published in January 2004. The main findings of this research provided substantial information regarding the wants and needs of people in the sector and enabled a fuller picture of development requirements to be established. A positive view of learning and skills development was discovered with a definite recognition of the benefits of training. The areas of 'social and community development', 'personal development', 'business and management' and 'information technology' were the most popular subjects for further training, and courses at level three and above were revealed to be the most favourable levels of training.

The results of this research were explored alongside the results of the earlier mapping exercise in order to establish whether appropriate training and development opportunities were currently accessible to the sector in Tyne & Wear. Upon investigation there appeared to be an evident lack of availability for the most requested courses. The most popular areas of interest for further training identified by the research were 'social and community development' and 'personal development', areas where the mapping exercise revealed low provision. In addition, there appeared to be conflict between requests for higher level training and the availability of courses above level three, highlighting a gap in the provision of training at the required levels. The research and mapping exercise undertaken by PNE allowed apparent gaps in provision to be highlighted and provided a more informed view of factors affecting the take up of development opportunities. It also allowed recommendations to be suggested in an attempt to help contribute further to developing the availability of progression opportunities for the sector in Tyne & Wear.

Early in 2004 funding was secured to expand the geographical coverage of the website to make it into a North East resource. The expansion involved researching and collating a vast amount of information on available training and development opportunities throughout the region. In order to incorporate local knowledge and ensure the plan was executed successfully and thoroughly, PNE established positive working partnerships with community groups within each of the sub-regions to assist in the collection and upload of data. In addition, the vast increase of information to be held within the expanded website required some site enhancements and resulted in a site re-development and re-design. A more attractive and user friendly site was developed, with the positive features of the original site maintained and built upon.

The www.voluntaryskills.com website became a North East resource on 1st July 2004.

Following the extensive website expansion it was considered appropriate to conduct further exploratory work into the availability of training and development opportunities for the sector within a North East context. In March 2005 a report detailing the availability of opportunities for the sector throughout the region was launched. It was revealed that the subject areas most commonly available in the North East are 'information technology', 'business and management' and 'personal development', with 'social and community development' having the lowest availability. The most frequently available course levels were shown to be

at levels two and three with the least available levels being four and five. Additionally, it was discovered that the most significant providers of training and development opportunities for the sector in the North East are higher/further education establishments. The mapping exercise provided much information regarding the current availability of training and development opportunities for the sector in the region, as well as an additional sub-regional breakdown of availability. The findings were envisaged to be useful for a number of voluntary and community organisations, intermediaries and the public sector, and presented an opportunity to further explore the match between need and availability.

More recent research into the career ambitions and aspirations of workers and volunteers from within the voluntary and community sector in the North East provides the focus for this report. The findings can be used in conjunction with previous PNE work to help clarify where further provision would be beneficial and to encourage more complete provision for the sector in the region.

3. The Survey

Previous PNE research into career ambitions and aspirations within Tyne & Wear set the precedence for this specific piece of research. The original survey design used for this earlier work has been utilised in this North East study in order to maintain the thoroughness of the research methodology and to allow for the comparability of findings.

A survey design was chosen in an attempt to include a larger sample of people from the voluntary and community sector throughout the North East region, and involved the use of telephone and postal questionnaires. This approach was considered to be the most appropriate due to the geographical spread of the area, and to ensure time and cost remained modest. The telephone survey was conducted to generate higher response rates and make data collection much quicker, with the postal questionnaire included to cover a wider area and allow people the convenience of responding in their own time.

The questionnaire used for both the postal and telephone survey methods was the same, and needed to be easily understood by everyone who was to participate. There were a number of considerations to be made regarding the initial design of the questionnaire and a pilot study was conducted to test its suitability and to fine tune its contents. A standardised design was used for the questionnaires and a great deal of thought was given to the inclusion of appropriate questions to collect the relevant information. It was also important to consider how best to ask questions so that they weren't too intrusive, and to ensure that the meaning of questions was not misconstrued. Questions followed a natural progression with simple questions being asked at the beginning of the survey so that participants were more likely to carry on, and a mixture of multiple choice, text open-ended and rating scale questions were included. The incorporation of a variety of question types provided a range of different answers, and hopefully led to a more fair and honest representation of information. The length of the survey was a major consideration as if it was too long it may have deterred participation, and if it was too short there may not have been sufficient information collected. This led to the survey being designed to take no longer than 15 minutes as this was considered to be a reasonable time to gather enough information and a brief enough time not to deter participation. See Appendix 1.

In order to be inclusive the sample aimed to include a mixture of participants from each of the North East sub-regions (Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley). Sample information was compiled using a combination of methods, which were dependent upon the availability of voluntary and community sector contact details within the districts. The majority of information was gathered from Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) directories, with the remainder being gained from internet searches. Participants were randomly chosen from the original sample frame of sector contacts, before being randomly allocated to one of the survey approaches. All of the people contacted, either by post or telephone, were presented with brief descriptions of the reason for the research and offered further information on the findings upon completion of the work. Confidentiality was

assured and everyone was made aware that participation was purely voluntary, yet greatly appreciated.

The postal survey was forwarded to 1,267 people within the voluntary and community sector in the region, and the telephone survey was used to contact a further 139. Of these, a total of 400 individuals participated, 353 by post and 47 by phone. The research was conducted throughout the North East during July and August 2005, and all of the information was believed to be correct at that time.

4. Survey Analysis

A total of 400 participants took part in the research, 353 by post and 47 by telephone. All of the responses gained from the research were considered extremely valuable and the findings have been compiled using all of the information available, despite some questionnaires being returned partially completed.

In order to alleviate concerns regarding the joint analysis of different survey methods, the research findings were initially analysed separately for both the postal and phone survey methods. However, it became apparent that similar result patterns were occurring for both survey methods, indicating that the differing methods had not created any difference in responses. As the mode of data collection was the same for both methods, the analysis of all data was combined to provide an overall account of the findings.

4.1 Sample Breakdown

The breakdown of the research sample suggests that the sector is largely made up of females, with only 31% of participants being male. The sample also indicates that the sector is largely made up of people over the age of 35, and shows that a high proportion of workers were employed on a paid basis. See tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 – Age of Respondents

16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
13 (3%)	44 (11%)	99 (26%)	127 (33%)	104 (27%)

Table 2 – Position of Respondents

Paid Employment	Volunteer	Trustee
279 (70%)	108 (27%)	10 (3%)

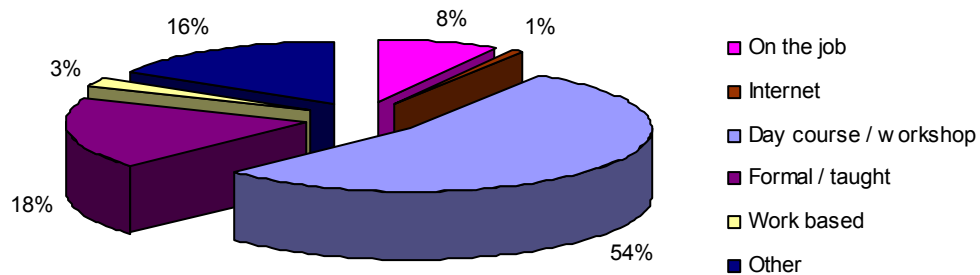
4.2 Previous Training

A large proportion of the sample (87%) had previously undertaken some form of training during their time with their current organisation, the most common being through a day course or workshop (54%). The second most popular category cited was 'formal/taught' (18%), followed by 'other' (16%), with only 1% of the sample having previously carried out training over the internet. See figure 1.

Upon closer examination of the 'other' category choice it became clear that much of the training received had involved a mixture of training types. The most notable combinations of training involved 'on the job', 'day course/workshop', and 'formal/taught'. This indicates a higher proportion of 'on the job' training than initially discovered, however it does also suggest that this form of training is of

more benefit in conjunction with another method of learning. The continued reference to 'day course/workshop' and 'formal/taught' serves to highlight the frequency of the sectors involvement with these kinds of training.

Figure 1 - Kind of Training Undertaken



Most of the previous training which had been undertaken was considered to be beneficial and relevant to the respondents work, with very few expressing that the training was not important for their skills development. See table 3.

Table 3 – Importance of Previous Training

Very Important	Important	Not Important
197 (57%)	132 (38%)	17 (5%)

In addition to the importance placed on their previous training, respondents presented information on a number of training benefits that they had personally experienced. The general consensus was that training improves skills and knowledge, as well as increasing confidence. Statements received from the sample included;

'the training I have undertaken has allowed me to develop my skills as a worker and helped me grow in confidence'

'I gained new knowledge, skills and confidence'

In addition training helps develop new abilities and ideas which can be directly linked to personal work situations, and also highlights the skills individuals already possess;

'it confirmed that I possess the relevant skills to carry out my job and I now have the qualification to prove it'

'it helped to develop me as an individual and at work'

'it gave me new ideas – updated skills, shared experiences, informed me I was on the right track'

'good training improves performance and effectiveness'

Learning opportunities were also cited as being important for networking and discovering what other people do. The training environment allows skills to be shared and developed and provides the opportunity to learn from other experiences. It offers the chance to compare practice, and often results in increased confidence and efficiency when individuals learn that others do things in a similar way to them;

'a good chance to network and pick up new skills and ideas'

'helped me to be confident to do the job and also helps me work with other organisations'

'met people in related organisations, learnt more in areas where I had felt less confident'

'encouraged reflective practice'

Another major benefit exposed by the survey was that training can ensure organisations and individuals are up to date with current legislation and codes of practice with responses including;

'gained updates on policies and procedures'

'information on legislation changes, networking and profiling'

'keeping up to date with current legislation and government guidelines'

'greater understanding and up to date information'

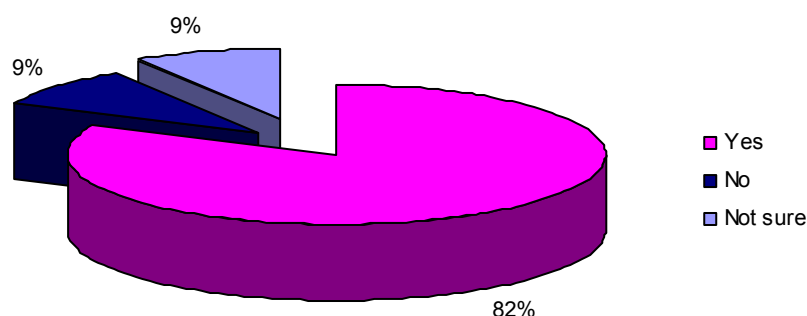
Finally, respondents indicated that involvement in training placed them in a better place for future development and helped their career prospects;

'opened up new avenues and gave me new qualifications and skills'

'helping with career development'

4.3 Future Skills

All research participants were asked if they would like to do training in the future and the most dominant answer received was 'yes'. Upon further exploration of the data for those who did not want to do training in the future, it was discovered that they were predominantly people who said they were retired or winding down toward it. See figure 2.

Figure 2 - Respondents Interested in Future Training

In addition to this, the survey presented the statement 'I have no need to learn new skills' and asked participants to rate their level of agreement with this. Over three quarters of respondents (76%) either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' with this statement, further demonstrating the importance individuals place on skills development and involvement in further training.

The survey also aimed to discover whether organisations had training and development plans or budgets in place for their staff and volunteers to engage in. A fair proportion of organisations had training and development plans and budgets in place, with a staggering amount of organisations encouraging learning and skills development. This further highlights the importance placed on future training and development, and demonstrates a positive approach to skills and learning by organisations within the sector in the North East. However, it is important to note that although the overwhelming majority of organisations encourage skills development, there are still many without a training plan or budget. See table 4.

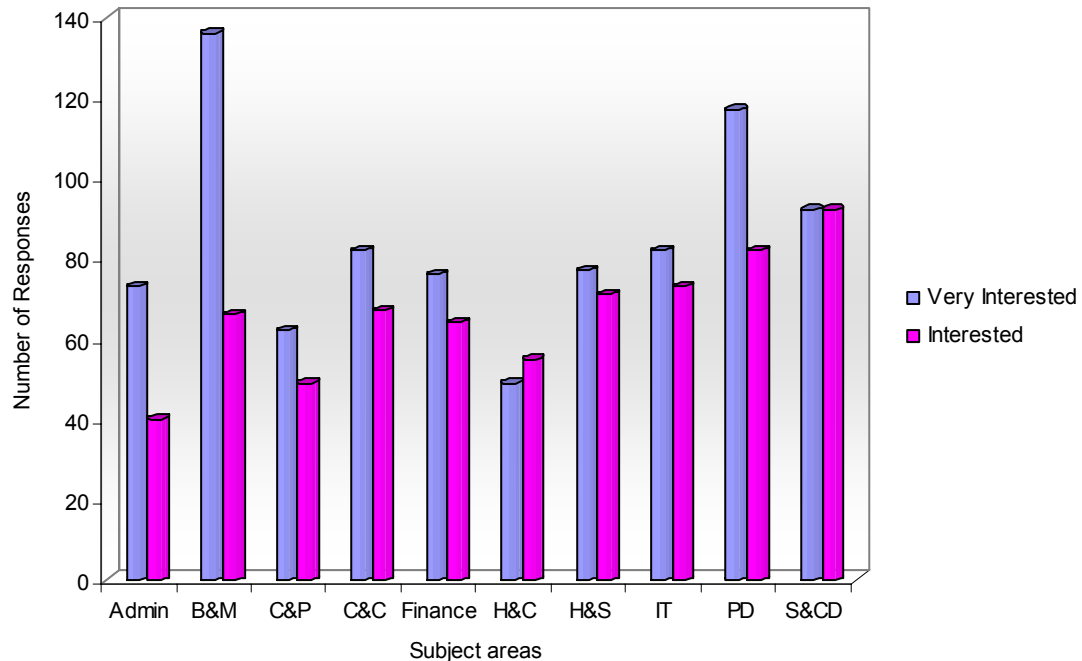
Table 4 – Organisational Training and Development Plans and Budgets

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Training Plan	234 (59%)	149 (38%)	13 (3%)
Training Budget	248 (62%)	135 (34%)	15 (4%)
Encourage Skills	368 (93%)	23 (6%)	6 (1%)

The research asked respondents to rate which subject areas of learning they would be interested in from a list of ten generic categories (administration, business & management, childcare & protection, counselling & communication, finance, health & care, health & safety, information technology, personal development and social & community development). The most popular area of interest was shown to be learning in 'personal development', with 61% of respondents being 'interested' or 'very interested' in the subject area. 'Business & management' was another area where a lot of interest in future learning was shown, 59% of respondents were 'interested' or 'very interested' in this particular

subject area. The subject of 'social & community development' was also shown to be an area where interest in future learning was demonstrated by 54% of respondents, with the areas of 'health & care' (34%), 'administration' (35%), and 'childcare & protection' (36%) showing the least amount of interest. See figure 3.

Figure 3 - Interest Shown in Subject Areas



As the subject areas presented in the survey were relatively broad respondents were invited to list any specific training courses that they would particularly like to do. There was only a small selection of specific courses mentioned however there were a number of answers linked to specific learning themes. The most frequently cited answers revealed a general interest in management skills and monetary responsibilities. This served to highlight a selection of particular areas of interest;

'volunteer management, recruitment and retaining of volunteers'

'performance management'

'project management'

'leadership and change management'

'monitoring and evaluation'

'VCS development and management'

'business planning'

'strategic level training'

'fundraising and marketing'

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'financial management'

'higher level fundraising'

'accountancy for the sector'

'budgets/accounts/book-keeping'

'how to write better funding bids'

There was also some reference made to the relevance of marketing skills and the ability to raise the profile of the work carried out by organisations, as well as how to encourage involvement in the different projects in operation. Training mentioned included;

'media/communication skills '

'promotion and marketing'

'how to persuade and influence'

Particular interest in varying aspects of community development was mentioned and demonstrated a number of requirements in this area;

'community development qualification'

'anything specific to community development'

'social and community development – higher level'

'youth work/sport leader/outdoor activity courses'

'outdoor activity training important for the sector'

There was also specific interest shown in the area of counselling and support, as well as the skills needed to be able to communicate effectively with a range of different people and being aware of their needs;

'counselling – level 4'

'drug/alcohol awareness and counselling'

'communication'

'welfare support and benefits'

'disability awareness and diversity training'

'blind disability awareness'

'sign language, lip reading'

'mental health awareness'

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A number of requests for future training relating to the legalities of work were also made;

'employment law'

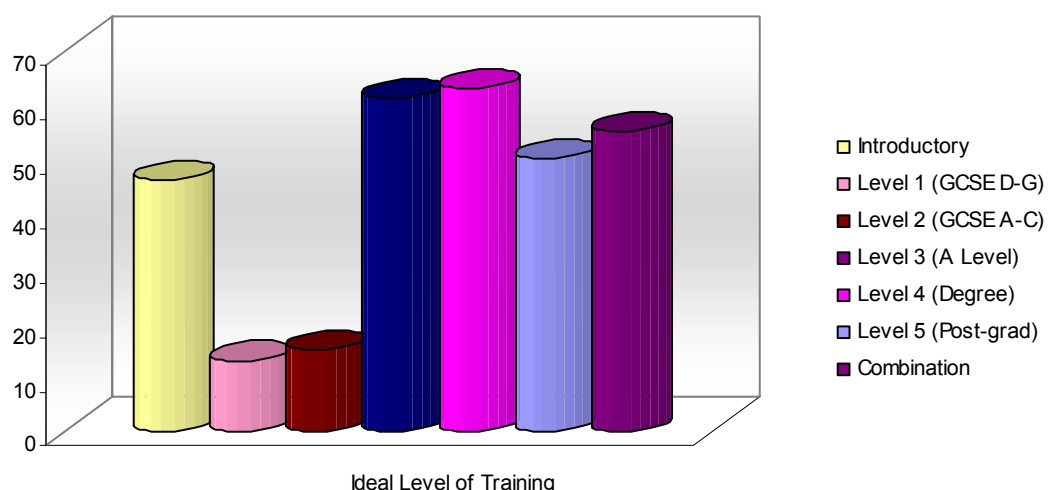
'legal aspects of work, legislative responsibilities, higher level paralegal'

'data protection'

Additionally, there was interest shown in future learning around all aspects of IT ranging from basic to advanced levels in training like email, website management, digital media, desktop publisher and database design. Finally, interest in health and safety training, including risk assessment and first aid, also appeared relatively frequently.

The level of training required by the voluntary and community sector is of particular interest to this research and will be of great significance when considering gaps in current provision. Course level classifications included introductory, level 1 (equivalent to GCSE D-G), level 2 (equivalent to GCSE A-C), level 3 (equivalent to A level), level 4 (equivalent to a degree) and level 5 (equivalent to post graduate study). The research showed most interest for courses at level 3 (20%) and level 4 (21%), with little interest shown in courses at level 1 (4%) and level 2 (5%). A 'combination' category also emerged which included responses that reported more than one level of learning people wished to access. Upon further exploration of this data it became clear that the responses fell into two specific categories which included any course up to level 2 (3% overall) and any course above level 3 (14% overall). This indicates a definite requirement for higher level courses ranging from level 3 and above. See figure 4.

Figure 4 - Level of Training Requested



In order to establish whether there is a need for certain types of training the research asked if there was any preference to the kind of training respondents would participate in. Almost half of responses (47%) indicated that participants 'don't mind' what kind of training they receive. The most preferred type of training was demonstrated to be 'taught' (25%), with the least favoured being 'mentoring'

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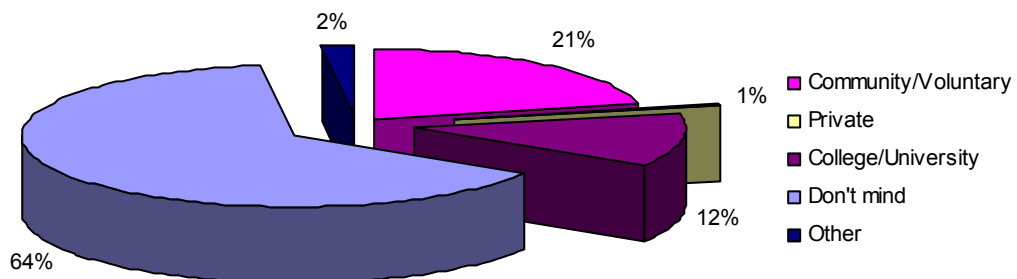
(1%). In addition, the answers provided within the 'other' response category suggested that a combination of training types would be favoured. See table 5.

Table 5 – Type of Training Preferred

In-house	Work Based	On-line	Taught	Mentoring	Don't Mind	Other
30 (8%)	32 (9%)	10 (3%)	90 (25%)	4 (1%)	170 (47%)	26 (7%)

The type of training organisation preferred by respondents was also explored. Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents reported that they 'don't mind' what kind of training organisation they attend. Just over a fifth (21%) would prefer to go to a 'voluntary or community organisation', with the least favoured being 'private companies' (1%). Further investigation into the 'other' category responses provided additional information indicating that the type of organisation visited for training is largely dependent upon the course quality and choice. See figure 5.

Figure 5 - Type of Training Organisation Preferred

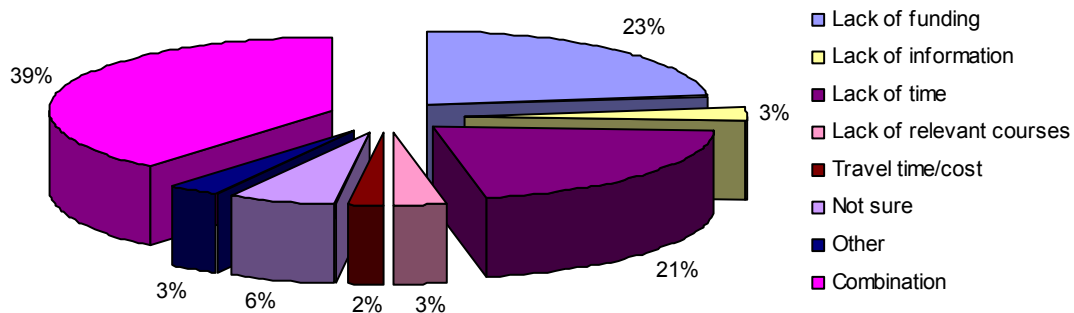


Information on available training is most commonly found through a combination of factors (36%) including the media, internet, prospectuses, family/friends and work/colleagues. The single most common source for finding information is through 'work/colleagues' (26%), with the least used method being 'family/friends' (0.5%). Upon further exploration of the 'other' category (12%) it was discovered that a lot of information on training and development is received from voluntary sector council mailings and newsletters. It seems apparent that people in the sector receive their information from a variety of sources, but most notably from resources filtered through their work.

4.4 Barriers to Development

The biggest single reasons for people in the sector not accessing training were cited as 'lack of funding' (23%) and 'lack of time' (21%). However, the largest proportion of responses demonstrated a 'combination' (39%) of factors was the main reason for not accessing training. Further exploration of this data uncovered that the majority of 'combination' factors (17% overall) cited both 'lack of funding' and 'lack of time' as barriers to learning, with 4% of responses considering a combination of all of the given categories to be barriers. In addition to this the 'other' category presented findings which indicated that a lack of interest or motivation could also be a contributing factor to the barriers of learning. See figure 6.

Figure 6 - Main Barriers to Learning



It is possible that if units of training which count towards a qualification were easily available, people from the sector may be more able to include training within their schedule. Participants were provided with the statement 'I would like to be able to do units of training that count towards a qualification' and asked to rate their level of agreement. Over half (55%) of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with this statement indicating that being able to do units of training would be beneficial to the sector and alleviate some of the problems associated with the time barriers highlighted by the research.

It is suggested that another barrier to learning may be linked to a lack of knowledge around career guidance and progression routes available to the sector. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of one to five with a number of statements relating to their personal development, and although there was relatively high responses demonstrating no significant feeling either way a number of assumptions were able to be made. The statement 'I think there is sufficient career advice and guidance available for people in the sector' was presented and almost half (45%) of respondents 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'

with this, also 46% of participants 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement 'I think it is sometimes difficult to gain information on development opportunities'. Additionally, the statement 'I would like to know more about the courses that will help me progress' was presented and over half (57%) of participants said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this. This suggests some possible barriers to engaging in learning for development, however there are some conflicting results which suggest that many people are aware of how to develop. Over half of respondents (51%) 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement 'I am unsure about which qualifications will help me progress to a higher level'. It also seems apparent that people are able to access training related to their needs as almost half (48%) 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement 'I would like to learn new skills but cannot find any training related to my specific needs'. These findings indicate that although some people are aware of opportunities they aren't always known and easily accessible to everyone. This has led to the assumption that finding information on training and development opportunities can be easy if you know how, but if not it can be confusing and difficult to know where to start.

The survey provided participants with the opportunity to make any additional comments which they felt had not been covered by the questionnaire. Among these responses there were a number of further barriers to learning highlighted. These include;

'voluntary sector doesn't cater for personal development'

'most relevant courses in London, or Manchester at best'

'usually just one day courses that don't provide enough depth'

'VCS providers don't always provide higher level learning, often just basic'

'specific courses for the sector needed'

'institutions should stop changing criteria for courses/qualifications'

'course standards and levels need to be more organised'

4.5 Career Ambitions

Participants in the research were asked to provide information on their personal career ambitions or plans for development. Over two thirds (68%) of respondents took the opportunity to present their comments, of these 15% were about to retire and had no plans for further career advancement however, some did mention they would continue learning to keep their brain active.

'I am a retired volunteer and don't feel I want to develop my career further – I would like to be able to encourage others to take over from me'

'I am now retired so long-term development plans are not particularly relevant. I enjoy keeping up to date with new techniques and furthering my skills'

'I am retired but I do like to keep on learning new information and skills'

The remaining responses also indicate that people from within the voluntary and community sector in the North East are indeed interested in further learning, development and progression. Training was seen as a way to develop and improve skills in order to learn more about the area in which people work, and there was an indication that some people were simply interested in developing their skills and not necessarily in advancing their career.

'happy with career at present, wish to develop skills to better service current employer'

'keep on learning curve'

'I have no desire to seek promotion, I am however always keen to develop skills'

'I don't have a career but am interested in keeping my brain active'

The most frequently cited plans for development included improving the organisation and services involved in their current role, specialising in their particular field, and most notably progressing into higher level management. Additionally, there was a great deal of interest shown in advancing to higher level, degree or post-graduate study.

'improve our service and develop the organisation'

'plans for development are with the project to expand the range and extent of provision while maintaining quality of service'

'to be able to further develop the organisation'

'to stay in my current post, but to constantly evaluate my performance and learn new skills'

'become a better manager in my profession'

'higher management role'

'I wish to stay in the voluntary sector and become a senior manager'

'develop project management skills'

'to develop my management and business skills'

'higher strategic management within voluntary sector'

'level 4/5 diploma in management'

'work towards a degree whilst still learning things relevant to work'

'want to do an appropriate post-grad qualification'

'would be keen to start a PHD'

However, there were also a few comments where people were unsure of how they would like their career to progress or in what direction they wanted to develop. Interest in a change of direction or a completely new career was highlighted and suggests a lack of definite career plans within the sector in the region.

'unsure of what direction I would like to take at present'

'uncertain'

'I would like to have a change of career'

'new career, want a complete change in direction'

Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, there were a number of comments which expressed dissatisfaction with the progression prospects within the voluntary and community sector, suggesting that some people may leave the sector due to a lack of development opportunities.

'I am unsure what sector I want to work in'

'no promotion prospects'

'need more courses that offer progression'

'I plan to leave the voluntary sector – in part due to lack of training and personal development in the voluntary sector'

'thinking of giving up volunteering'

5. The Findings

The research has provided some invaluable information regarding the career development hopes and prospects of people from within the voluntary and community sector in the North East. It has demonstrated a positive outlook toward skills development and offered a clearer picture of the career ambitions and skills needs of the sector.

A number of similarities with previous research have been uncovered and appear to reinforce that the sector is concerned about the development of skills. The findings of this research present the idea that individuals within the sector tend to place a great deal of importance on the training they have already completed, and on the idea of undertaking more development opportunities in the future. There is a general acceptance of the benefits of training, most notably that it improves skills, knowledge and confidence, and a definite desire to engage in these benefits is highlighted. This signifies some parallels with the previous research of VSNTO (2003) and City College Norwich (2001) who acknowledged the importance of training for the sector and demonstrated the interest of the sector in engaging with some form of learning. Perhaps the encouragement of a learning culture and greater investment in skills within the sector, as proposed by London Third Sector (1999), is now being taken more seriously and beginning to take effect.

The more recent development of the 'North East Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Action Plan' has reinforced the importance of encouraging skills and development in the sector. The findings of the current research compliment this advancement and reinforce the need for positive development opportunities to be made more widely available to the voluntary and community sector. The importance placed on the current and future development of individuals within the voluntary and community sector is also of relevance to various governmental skills initiatives across the board. These initiatives are predominantly concerned with a considerable investment in the development of skills and intend to increase the numbers of people engaging in learning. The encouraging outlook of the sectors engagement with learning and development opportunities demonstrated in this research suggests a positive impact on government skills strategies, and implies that the targets set to increase the activity of the sector may indeed be moving forward. However, it is important to recognise the limitations of the research findings. There is no way of knowing whether the importance placed on learning and development by individuals involved in the research are in any way linked to any skills strategies or the encouragement of a learning culture. It is also important to note that the research was only concerned with the voluntary and community sector within the North East region, and that the importance of training expressed in this area may not be supported by other regions. With regard to these limitations it is perhaps best to accept that individuals within the sector in the North East appear to place much importance on their learning and development, but that further research into the direct impact of skills strategies and initiatives needs to be undertaken.

The future skills needs of the sector in the North East were of particular interest to this research and the findings have shown some consistencies with earlier

research in other areas of the UK. Many previous studies into sector skills development and workforce progression have presented a number of similar results identifying the most commonly cited areas of skills gaps. These predominantly include basic and advanced use of IT, leadership, strategic and business planning, forward thinking and organisation, project management, financial management, managing people, partnership working, fundraising, specific technical skills and communication (DSC 2002, London Third Sector 1999, LSC 2003, PAULO 2001, PNE 2004, VSNT0 2000, 2001, 2003). The findings of this research have also presented a number of these specific skills needs for the sector and indicate a definite need for training and development in the area of 'business & management'. This subject was cited as the second most popular generic area for future training and frequent mention of development in this area was made in the individual development plans of participants. There was also mention of the importance of marketing skills and the ability to raise the profile of the work carried out by the organisation, which appears to be a relatively new addition to the future skills needs of the sector. This perhaps suggests an increasing recognition that the sector needs to develop a more professional and business like approach to their work. A lot of interest was shown in the areas of 'personal development' and 'social & community development', with specific reference made to the need for community development learning, as well as the ability to communicate effectively with a range of different people. It seems apparent that there are a number of specific areas of interest within the voluntary and community sector in the North East however it is also important to recognise the generic nature of the subject areas and the course variations within each area.

The research also discovered that the most requested levels of training in the North East are introductory, and level three and above, and that most career plans of the survey sample included advancement to degree and post graduate study. Upon further investigation of previous research it is evident that requests for higher level training are a common feature throughout the voluntary and community sector in the UK. It is acknowledged that there is a principal demand for training at level three and above (LSC 2003, PNE 2004), and that there is a distinct interest in higher level learning which needs to be addressed in order for people in the sector to develop (City College Norwich 2001, LSC 2003, VSNT0 2000). This suggests that the availability of higher level development opportunities is fundamental for individuals within the sector to develop and achieve their full potential. Therefore when considering the suggestion of promoting the sector as a career option with real prospects and progression routes (VSNT0, 2003), it is important to acknowledge this need and look into the most appropriate way to ensure the necessary training is available to the sector.

This research exposed the main 'barriers' to learning as 'lack of time' and 'lack of funding', notions which have been largely accepted within previous research (City College Norwich 2001, London Third Sector 1999, LSC 2003, VSNT0 2003, PNE 2004). Given that the structure of the voluntary and community sector often results in difficulties releasing staff and dealing with numerous funding implications these barriers are unsurprising, and generally accepted. However, it has also been demonstrated that although voluntary and community organisations within the North East have been reported as encouraging staff development, they often don't offer a development plan or budget. This can result in individual progression plans

being less straightforward and can often deter people from taking up opportunities. It is acknowledged by the current research that there are still a number of organisations without development plans or budgets however, it is important to note that there has been a definite increase in their numbers since previous PNE research published in early 2004.

There appears to be a number of additional underlying factors affecting the engagement of learning and skills development by some people within the sector in the North East. A lack of interest or motivation, lack of knowledge around career guidance and the perception that the sector doesn't cater for personal development have all been mentioned and need to be taken into account. These findings have also been offered support by previous research which has highlighted additional problems associated with a lack of understanding of progression routes and a confusing qualification structure (City College Norwich 2001, VSNT0 2001). This area needs to be explored further so that a more comprehensive understanding of the constraints of engaging in learning and development opportunities can be revealed and possible solutions uncovered and developed.

Problems associated with lack of time and the difficulties experienced releasing staff could be lessened if there was a modular structure to development opportunities. This would allow training units to be undertaken at periods of time convenient to organisation workloads and allow a more flexible approach to learning. Also, attaching qualifications to a modular structure and allowing individual choices of units for completion would greatly benefit individuals and organisations in an ever changing environment. This notion gained support from this research and has also been maintained by previous research in the area (DSC 2002, PAULO 2001, VSNT0 2000). It is evident that modules of training would be most beneficial for the sector and may indeed encourage more workers and volunteers to participate. The introduction of such an approach would also fit within the government Skills Strategy agenda which plans to develop a credit framework scheme to allow individuals to gain credits as recognition for their skills. Perhaps more thorough and explorative research into the practicalities and most useful aspects of such a framework would be beneficial. This would hopefully create further understanding of how best to implement a modular or credit framework, and help further the development of an extremely valuable framework for the entire voluntary and community sector.

A mapping exercise conducted by PNE in early 2005 has provided some additional information regarding the opportunities available to people from the voluntary and community sector in the North East. The information presents knowledge on the current availability of training and development opportunities in the area, and can be used alongside the research findings to determine whether the required opportunities are accessible to the sector. Research identified the most popular areas of interest for future training to be 'personal development', and 'business & management', areas where course provision was revealed to be high by the mapping exercise. These positive findings suggest that the training needs in these areas are indeed being met however it is important to realise that all of the subject areas are generic, and that there is the distinct possibility that the specific courses required may not be as easily available as first thought. Further

exploration and clarity in this area would perhaps be beneficial and help to highlight the actual courses required within the subject areas and hopefully make them more freely available. The area of 'social & community development' was found to be one of the most popular areas for future training in this research, although the earlier mapping exercise demonstrated this area had the lowest provision within the North East. This contrast between the demand for training and the evident lack of availability uncovers an apparent gap in accessibility for some of the most requested courses, signifying a need for the introduction of further training within this area. Finally, the mapping exercise undertaken by PNE established a clear lack of higher level courses across the board. This notion was supported by some of the comments received in this research and by previous research which identified that the most common training in the sector was of low to intermediate levels, with the accessibility of advanced courses largely neglected (DSC 2002, NCVO 1998). A discrepancy between the required level of training and the actual level of training available is clearly evident and leads to the assumption that an increase of higher level development opportunities is vital for individuals within the sector to develop.

This research has presented a fairly straightforward picture of the ambitions and needs of individuals from the voluntary and community sector in the North East. It has demonstrated a definite interest in involvement with training and development opportunities, a need for specific training in 'personal development', 'business & management' and 'social & community development' and highlighted the requirement for higher level training in the area. Interest in the development of a modular framework has been discovered and a number of specific 'barriers' to learning demonstrated. The research has shown a number of similarities with various other research projects and suggested that the voluntary and community sector within the North East is not too much different from the rest of the UK. It has highlighted a number of areas where more in-depth research would be useful and presented areas where real improvements can be made. A positive starting block has been established by the research and a number of apparent gaps in the provision of training and development opportunities have been highlighted. It is now necessary to take note of the research findings and explore further initiatives to increase the real career development opportunities for individuals within the sector.

6. Forward Strategy

The current research has highlighted the importance of training and development within the voluntary and community sector in the North East and demonstrated an increasingly positive attitude towards learning. There appears to be a definite interest in developing skills and a desire for many people in the sector to advance their career. However, it is also evident that there are a number of issues affecting the take up of development opportunities and the availability of career progression pathways.

In order to help contribute further to the establishment of career progression pathways for the sector, it is now important to fully recognise the findings of this research and to appreciate what is available in relation to what is actually wanted and needed by the sector. The gaps in training provision need to be fully acknowledged and the development of more relevant opportunities encouraged so that more career progression options are available.

The voluntaryskills.com project has been involved with the development of the voluntary and community sector and the availability of career progression opportunities since its inception in early 2001. The introduction of the www.voluntaryskills.com website has served to provide one source of easily accessible information on training and development opportunities for the sector, and supported some aspects of government skills strategies. Targets to make information on development opportunities more easily available (HM Government, LSC) and the vision to make the North East a region which invests in the development of skills (Skills North East) are key features of the voluntaryskills.com project.

Additionally, the project has allowed a number of enlightening mapping and research initiatives to be undertaken, offering the opportunity to continue assisting in the development activity of the sector. The findings of the work have uncovered similarities with earlier work in the area and have been widely distributed throughout the sector to further develop the scope of the voluntaryskills.com project.

Project North East have built upon the foundations of this work and developed a range of activities to support the voluntary and community sector in the North East region. Fundamental to this work is the Northern Rock Foundation and Project North East Capacity Building programme which is made up of a number of different development themes. This was established in 2004 to build on existing training provision for the sector by identifying areas of strategic and operational development need, and working collaboratively with key intermediary organisations to develop and deliver solutions to the sector. The key aspiration for the programme is a better, stronger sector.

Government priorities to focus on developing management and leadership skills and capability, and increasing the achievement of higher level skills (HM Government, Skills North East) are reflected in the current research findings. These priorities are incorporated into the Capacity Building programme to support

the need for developments in these areas. A number of themes including better financial management, greater understanding of legal requirements, people management and development of quality standards form part of this programme. Additionally, PNE's long running Building Capacity in Voluntary Organisations (BCVO) plays a part in the programme and offers training for key members of the voluntary and community sector. It provides the opportunity to achieve level 3, 4 and 5 NVQ qualifications in management, providing further support to higher level skill priorities.

The research undertaken as part of voluntaryskills.com has continually highlighted the need for training and development in the area of 'social and community development'. Therefore, as part of the Capacity Building programme work is currently being carried out to try to increase the amount of community development opportunities for the sector throughout the North East. This strand of the programme, alongside all of the other themes, recognises the importance of providing the sector with what it needs to progress, and attempts to increase delivery of necessary training and development.

Plans for the future involve further development of the Northern Rock Foundation and Project North East Capacity Building programme in order to continue supporting the development of the sector in the region. More specifically the voluntaryskills.com project plans are linked to further developing the availability of opportunities for the sector and include;

- continued update of the www.voluntaryskills.com website
- website enhancements to ensure the site develops to meet the needs of the sector
- investigation into the most appropriate methods to increase the necessary provision
- further collaboration with regional skills development plans and government initiatives

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to discover the aspirations and ambitions of workers and volunteers in the voluntary and community sectors within the North East. It forms part of a research project which aims to encourage career progression pathways within the third sector.

All of the information provided is strictly confidential and will only be used for analysis purposes. Participation is purely voluntary and any information is greatly appreciated.

The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and it is requested that all questions are answered.

If you would like to receive further information on the research undertaken please tick the box below and leave your contact details in the space provided.

For all answers, apart from where a space is left for personal responses, please circle appropriate answer for each question.

Current Position

1. In what capacity do you work?

Paid employment Volunteer Trustee

2. What hours do you work?

Full time Part time Sessional

3. What are the main activities of your organisation?

4. Does your organisation have a training and development plan?

Yes No Don't know

5. Does your organisation have a training and development budget?

Yes No Don't know

6. Does your organisation encourage learning and skills development?

Yes No Don't know

7. During your time with the organisation have you done any kind of training?
 Yes No

If you answered No to question 7 please go to question 15.

8. If you answered Yes to question 7, what kind of training was this? (If you have done training on more than one occasion please answer using the most recent experience)

On the job Day course/workshops Internet
 Formal/taught Work based assessment
 Other – Please state-----

9. If the training was costed did the organisation pay for it?

Yes No Not Costed

10. If No, was the training funded? Yes No

11. Who decided you should do the training?

Myself Colleagues Manager
 Other – please state-----

12. Was the training relevant to your job? Yes No

13. How important was the training for your work skills development?

Very important Important Not important

(Please answer only one part of this question)

14a If you feel you benefited from this learning experience please say how below

14b If you feel the training was not beneficial how could it have been improved?

More specific Broader overview Lower level
 Higher level Other – please state-----

15. What do you consider to be the main reason for people in the sector not accessing training?

Lack of funding Lack of information Lack of time
 Lack of relevant courses Travel time/costs Not Sure
 Other – please state-----

Personal Goals

16. Would you like to do training in the future?

Yes

No

Not sure

17. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is Very Interested and 5 is Not Interested at all, what areas of learning are you interested in?

Administration	1	2	3	4	5
Business & management	1	2	3	4	5
Childcare & Protection	1	2	3	4	5
Counselling & Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Finance	1	2	3	4	5
Health & Care	1	2	3	4	5
Health & Safety	1	2	3	4	5
Information Technology	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Development	1	2	3	4	5
Social/Community Development	1	2	3	4	5

18. Please list any training courses you would particularly like to do

19. What level of training would you ideally like to access?

Introductory

Level 1(GCSE D-G)

Level 2(GCSE A-C)

Level 3(A level)

Level 4(degree)

Level 5(post-grad)

20. What kind of training would you prefer?

In-house

Work based assessment

On-line

Taught courses

Mentoring

Don't mind

Other - please state-----

21. What kind of training organisation would you prefer to go to for training?

Community/voluntary

Private

College/university

Don't mind

Other – please state-----

22. How would you usually find out information about what training is available?

Family/friends

Work/colleagues

Media

Internet

College prospectus

Not sure

Other – please state-----

For questions 23 - 30 please state if you agree or disagree with the statements, where 1 is Strongly Agree and 5 is Strongly Disagree.

23. I am very keen to progress my career but am unsure how to move forward
1 2 3 4 5

24. I have no need to learn new skills
1 2 3 4 5

25. I would like to learn some new skills but cannot find any training related to my specific needs
1 2 3 4 5

26. I am unsure about which qualifications will help me progress to a higher level
1 2 3 4 5

27. I would like to be able to do units of training that count towards a qualification
1 2 3 4 5

28. I think there is sufficient career advice and guidance available for people in the sector
1 2 3 4 5

29. I would like to know more about the courses that will help me progress
1 2 3 4 5

30. I think it is sometimes difficult to gain information on development opportunities
1 2 3 4 5

31. Please can you tell me about your personal career ambitions or any plans for development?

32. Are there any areas of skills development or training needs that you would like to comment on that have not been mentioned?

Equal Opportunities

Age 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55+

Sex M F

Ethnic Origin

White British Black Caribbean Indian Chinese

White Irish Black African Pakistani Mixed

White Other Black Other Bangladeshi Other

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person? Yes No

I thank you for your time and greatly appreciate the information provided.