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# North East Third Sector Skills Survey 2007/2008

## Executive Summary



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and produced by:**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The **North East Third Sector Skills Survey 2007-2008** was carried out by the PNE Group as part of the voluntaryskills.com project, which helps promote skills development and career progression in the Third Sector by offering free information on training opportunities in the North East & Cumbria.

voluntaryskills.com is funded by the Northern Rock Foundation and European Regional Development Fund, and the website features a searchable Training Database, News & Events, Job Profiles, Case Studies, Vacancies, Resources, and a training e-bulletin which is sent to over 2300 subscribers each month.

A total of 282 surveys were completed between 19<sup>th</sup> November and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2007, and the aim of the research was to help understand the current training needs of people working and volunteering in the sector, highlight any gaps in training provision and identify the barriers to learning across the region.

## 2. Analysis of survey results

The full research report contains an analysis of the survey results, a summary of the data held on the voluntaryskills.com Training Database over a period of 12 months between January and December 2007, key findings, and recommendations for Training Providers, Third Sector organisations and funders to take forward.

For this Executive Summary, the main survey results are listed below:

- Over three quarters of our survey respondents (75.27%) were female.
- The age of respondents was fairly evenly spread between 31-50yrs, although the highest age group was between 41-50 (29.08%).
- The overwhelming majority of respondents to our survey described themselves as White British (92.55%).
- Over half of our respondents live in the Tyne and Wear (55.07%) area, with the highest number in Newcastle (19.20%), followed by Sunderland (8.70%), North Tyneside (8.33%) and then Gateshead (7.61%) respectively.
- Areas with the lowest number of respondents living there were Berwick, Morpeth and Alnwick in Northumberland, Teesdale and Hartlepool in Tees Valley, and Easington in Durham.
- Over half of our respondents said that their organisation was based in the Tyne and Wear area (58.87%). Just over a quarter said that they were based in Newcastle (25.81%), followed by Sunderland (10.48%) and then Gateshead (6.45%), which are all in Tyne and Wear.
- Areas with the lowest number of organisations responding to our study were Derwentside in Durham, Teesdale in Tees Valley, and then Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth Valley and Wansbeck in Northumberland.

- Most people who took part in the survey were 'Employed (Full Time)' (63.69%), and only 16.62% said they were 'Employed (Part Time)'.
- A wide range of job titles were given although the most common roles were 'Manager', followed by various different types of 'Officer', 'Coordinator' and then 'Worker' (as in Youth or Project Worker).
- People taking part in our survey are well-educated, with most having a qualification at LEVEL 3 or above. Nearly three quarters (73.47%) have a qualification at LEVEL 5 or above, and 98.55% are educated to LEVEL 2.
- Our survey also suggests that people in the North East Third Sector are better educated than in other parts of the UK, with almost three quarters of our respondents saying they had a degree or higher qualification, compared to only a third with a degree quoted by the *UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2007*.
- In comparison, when asked what was the highest level of Third Sector training they had done, most respondents said they had 'NONE', followed by 'ENTRY LEVEL', or answered 'DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE'.
- Almost three quarters of respondents (73.31%) said they had taken part in some training that was paid for by their organisation in the past 6 months, but only 53.41% had any further training lined up over the next 6 months.
- The subjects that people are most interested in are 'Education & Personal Development', 'Management & Supervision', 'Business Skills', 'Fundraising & Finance', 'Leadership & Governance', 'Coaching & Mentoring', 'Marketing & Promotion', 'Training & Assessment', 'Equality & Diversity' and 'Legal Issues'.
- However, there is a shortage of training in all of these subjects apart from 'Education & Personal Development' and 'Management & Supervision'.
- The most popular sources of information on training opportunities in the sector are 'Training Provider flyers / emails / prospectus', followed by 'voluntaryskills.com' and then 'Local CVS or VDA e-bulletins or newsletters'.
- 'Cost', 'Level of training' and 'Reputation of Training Provider' are the three most important factors influencing people's choice of training.
- The preferred method of learning in the sector is 'Classroom-based' training, followed by 'In-house (i.e. delivered at your workplace)', 'Distance learning/Correspondence', 'e-learning' and then 'Self-taught' respectively.
- The biggest barriers to training faced by people in the sector are a 'Lack of funding', 'Courses too expensive' or a 'Lack of time'.
- 35.36% said they were 'willing to attend training that takes place anywhere in the North East', 11.43% would 'travel anywhere in the North of England', and 33.21% were 'willing to travel to training anywhere in the UK'.
- The majority of respondents (78.85%) said they had 'Access to a car they could use to get to training during the day'. However, almost the same number of people who 'did not have access to a car' said that poor public transport links to a venue had stopped them attending a course in the past.

- An analysis of the data held on our voluntaryskills.com Training Database in 2007 showed that the majority of courses were 'Non-Accredited / Entry Level' (85%-90%), followed by Level 2' (4%-7%), and then 'Level 1' (2%-5%).
- In addition, most training courses in 2007 were just 'One Day' (40%-41%), followed by 'Flexible' (23%-24%), and then 'Half Day' (11%-13%).
- Third Sector courses also tended to be offered free of charge or at a low cost. For example, between October and December 2007, 35%-39% of courses were 'Free of charge', whilst 31%-36% costed 'Less Than/Up to £75'.
- In 2007, the majority of courses took place in Newcastle, followed by Durham, Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Gateshead, Blyth Valley, Darlington, Hartlepool and then North Tyneside respectively.
- There was a good spread of courses in the three sub-regions of Tyne & Wear, Durham and Tees Valley, but an apparent shortage in Northumberland.
- Although nearly half of respondents say there are "lots of opportunities for skills development in the sector", slightly more people believe there is "not enough guidance on what training is right for them or their organisation".

### **3. Key findings**

#### **People in the Third Sector are well educated...**

Our research shows that people in the North East Third Sector are not only well-educated, but also appear to be more highly skilled than in other parts of the UK.

Although it is unclear why this may be, one possible explanation could be that research by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) suggests that many people in the Third Sector tend to enter it later on in their careers after previously working in the public or private sectors, and so may be bringing with them a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, once working in the Third Sector, our voluntaryskills.com website shows there is a vast array of training courses available throughout the North East which enables people to continue to develop their skills, although most of these do tend to be non-accredited or lead to low level qualifications.

Whilst it is good that highly qualified people are attracted to the sector, more could be done to attract younger people by highlighting the possible career options that are available in addition to volunteering, introducing better long-term training and development programmes (including graduate trainee schemes), and more higher level qualifications to ensure continuous professional development for everyone.

#### **The biggest barriers to training are still a lack of funding and time...**

People working or volunteering in the Third Sector of the North East complain of a 'lack of funding', 'courses being too expensive' and a 'lack of time' as being the biggest barriers preventing them from accessing training and influencing choice.

Unfortunately, 'Lack of funding' and 'Lack of time' were identified as the two biggest barriers to learning and development in the 2005 reports *Ambitions and Aspirations*

*of Workers and Volunteers from the Voluntary and Community Sector in the North East, and the North East Sector Skills Action Plan 2005-2008* which suggests that little has changed in the past three years.

However, our analysis of the voluntaryskills.com Training Database shows that there were hundreds of free courses available in 2007, and roughly the same number again were available at a very low cost (less than £75). The region has also benefited from regional capacity building programmes funded by the Northern Rock Foundation and Capacitybuilders / ChangeUp making more free training and support available.

A lack of time is a much harder problem to tackle, as many voluntary groups only have a small number of staff or volunteers, who may find it difficult to take time out from their daily duties to attend training. Despite some schemes to provide cover for people who wish to do training, such as the Backfill Project<sup>3</sup> in Northumberland, a lack of time and resources is likely to remain a significant problem for the sector.

Therefore, perhaps the only way to overcome these barriers is to continue to raise awareness of the training opportunities available in the region, and encourage all Third Sector organisations to recognise that despite a lack of time, resources and funding, it is vitally important for them to plan the future skills development of their staff and volunteers so they can continue to provide a good service to their clients.

### **Training provision does not match training needs...**

Unfortunately, the majority of Third Sector courses available in the North East do not match the type of training people say that they want or need.

In particular, there is a real shortage of training in the following 8 out of 10 subjects that respondents told us they were most interested in:

- Business Skills
- Fundraising & Finance
- Leadership & Governance
- Coaching & Mentoring
- Marketing & Promotion
- Training & Assessment
- Equality & Diversity
- Legal Issues

To correct this, funders, infrastructure organisations and key decision-makers in the sector should work with Training Providers to develop new training programmes that encompass each of the subjects above, and are delivered in easily accessible locations throughout the North East.

Furthermore, all Training Providers should conduct their own market research and regularly review their training programmes to ensure they are demand-led rather than funding-led, or simply courses they have always provided in the past.

It may also be useful to carry out an annual voluntaryskills.com Third Sector Skills Survey to monitor any changes over time, although this would be subject to securing further funding and resources for the project.

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<sup>3</sup> Backfill Project ([www.wansbeckcvs.org.uk](http://www.wansbeckcvs.org.uk))

### **Better signposting and information on career progression is needed...**

There is a need for better signposting, advice and guidance on which training people should do, and what progression routes are available in the sector. Indeed, nearly half of our survey respondents (49.29%) said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "There is lots of information on training opportunities, but not enough guidance on what is right for me and my organisation".

Although the voluntaryskills.com website is the most comprehensive single source of information on Third Sector training in the region, it aims to be completely unbiased and does not provide course recommendations, or offer advice on which training is most suitable for an individual or organisation.

Such a new service would require additional funding and staffing for the project, or may be better delivered by infrastructure organisations such as local CVS or VDAs who already do much to help identify suitable training for their members.

Also, although the Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain service has been introduced to "provide impartial, independent advice on training to businesses across England", there is some confusion over whether the service is open to voluntary organisations or not (it is), and a feeling that the Skills Brokers do not understand the often unique needs of the Third Sector.

Furthermore, the service is primarily designed to help employees achieve their first full Level 2 qualification or Skills for Life first numeracy and literacy qualification, but we have already identified that because most of the people who responded to our survey have higher level qualifications they would not be eligible for any support.

Therefore, we suggest that Train to Gain could do more to understand and engage with Third Sector organisations, existing Skills Brokers need better training to help them understand the needs of the sector, new Skills Brokers could be recruited from within, or a new voluntary sector-friendly version of the service should be created.

Training Providers themselves should also provide clearer information on the training they offer and the progression routes that are available to participants. For example, "if you have taken part in training X, you may also be interested in training Y", or "completing modules A and B, will count towards the following qualification".

### **Rural areas may be disadvantaged by a lack of training opportunities...**

There appears to be a shortage of Third Sector training opportunities in more rural parts of the North East, with most courses taking place in and around the major towns and cities. In particular, there was a real shortage of training available in Northumberland in 2007 in comparison with the other three sub-regions.

This may be due to good transport links making training delivered in the major towns and cities easier for participants to access. However, analysis of the Training Providers listed on voluntaryskills.com in 2007 shows that most of them are also concentrated in and around the major urban areas of Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, Durham, Middlesbrough and Stockton and so it is likely that they are either using their own training facilities or venues in their immediate vicinity.

As a result, people in rural parts of the region may be disadvantaged by a lack of training opportunities in their local area, and so greater efforts need to be made by

funders, local authorities and Training Providers to ensure courses are provided in more convenient locations for everyone.

Furthermore, although 'classroom-based training' was the most popular form of training delivery in our survey, there could be significant benefit in developing new online / e-learning courses to help overcome any geographical barriers in the region.

### **Third Sector training suffers from poor marketing and promotion...**

Although there are lots of high quality courses available in the region, some Training Providers are letting themselves down with poor marketing and promotion.

People tell us they regularly do not get to hear about training opportunities until it is too late for them to get approval from their line manager or board to attend, many courses are promoted with too short notice before the booking deadline, and marketing materials are often produced by Training Providers with little more than a course title, date and location, and no description on what the course is about, how it can help or who it is suitable for.

Whilst managing the voluntaryskills.com website we have also seen that many Training Providers fail to keep their own websites up-to-date with full and detailed information about their training programmes, or send out regular updates or reminders on their courses in flyers, leaflets, newsletters or emails.

voluntaryskills.com was originally created to make it easier for people to find training opportunities by compiling Third Sector courses taking place in the North East into a single online searchable database, and in 2007 the service was developed further by introducing a monthly e-bulletin containing information on all training courses listed on the website over the following two months. Although our research shows that voluntaryskills.com has grown to become the second most popular source of training information in the region (closely behind direct mailouts from Training Providers), unfortunately some Training Providers still do not make full use of the service to promote their courses, and could play a more active role in ensuring their details are kept up-to-date on the site, rather than rely on PNE to source this information.

Therefore, Training Providers must improve their marketing and promotion or risk a shortage in course participants and the increased likelihood of having to cancel their training sessions because of low take-up which is a common problem in the sector.

### **There is a lack of forward planning with regards to training...**

The Third Sector in the North East seems to embrace skills development, with most people attending some form of training in the past 6 months, receiving appraisals once or twice a year, and regularly discussing training in their organisation.

However, almost half of respondents said they did not have any further training lined up over the next 6 months, which suggests that they do not plan their training very far in advance, and may simply be waiting for the right training to come up and to make a last minute decision before booking a place.

Unfortunately, this apparent lack of forward planning in Third Sector organisations with regards to training can have a serious impact on budgets. For example, if organisations are not thinking very far ahead about what skills are needed by staff or volunteers to deliver a project, then once it has begun they may not have sufficient

funding to pay for any training when they need it. Therefore, there is a need for greater forward planning, including skills audits of the workforce, to ensure that any training needs are identified early so that costs can be included in budgets.

### **Most Third Sector training is non-accredited and low level...**

The majority of Third Sector courses in the region are non-accredited or offered at a low level, and one of the major strengths of the sector is its willingness to share knowledge and expertise, and to learn from others through informal training sessions, workshops, discussions and events.

Indeed, many of the courses on offer are delivered at an introductory or beginners level, but what happens if people are more experienced and need higher level training and support in order to progress and develop their skills? At present there does not appear to be a sufficient number of high level training courses specifically aimed at people working in the sector, although they may simply be expected to do generic courses at college or university.

Feedback from Training Providers suggests that although much of the training on offer in the sector is non-accredited, it can sometimes be pitched at a very high level (particularly Leadership & Governance training), which is not always made clear in their marketing and promotional materials. Therefore, as a direct result of this feedback we will be adding three new non-accredited levels to our Training Database (e.g. Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced) to make it easier for people to find the right training, and would like to suggest that all Training Providers make this type of information much clearer on their course descriptions too. However, there is still a need for funders and infrastructure organisations to work with Training Providers (including Colleges and Universities) to develop higher level training programmes.

### **Skills and experience are more valued than qualifications (for now)...**

Although just over half of our respondents (51.61%) disagreed with the statement "I believe there is too much pressure on people in the Third Sector to increase their skills and become more professional", most people (58.06%) said they agree or strongly agree that "There is too much emphasis on qualifications and not enough recognition of the non-accredited training and skills people have in the Third Sector".

However, there appears to be a growing need for more qualifications specifically aimed at people working in the sector, with 65.84% of respondents telling us it was 'important' or 'very important' for their next course to be accredited.