

Report from the East of England Rural Forum (EERF) Learning and Skills Sub Group

The learning and skills sub group met on 15th September 2009 with 8 members and 2 guest in attendance.

Major agenda items were:

1. Migrant workers and the link to skills provision

- a. Mark Allison from EEDA, who runs the East of England Migrant Worker Steering group, explained the work on migrant issues in the region and noted the fact that migrant issues had been picked up in a number of the rural forum's position papers which he welcomed.
- b. He also reported that the region has submitted a bid to the EU to undertake work to develop an online competence framework using the agricultural and land based sector as a test bed with LANTRA support (sector skills council for the land based sector).
- c. Mark also explained that the Migrant Worker Steering group was re-evaluating its future focus and work programme, but that this was likely to include a number of key themes which aligned with the work of the rural forum including skills, access to housing, health and access to public sector services.
- d. It was noted that evidence suggests many migrants are now settling down and their skill development needs are therefore changing, with many being ambitious and thus keen to develop technical and managerial skills.
- e. The sub group agreed to keep in contact with Mark's work and to share intelligence on the issues affecting rural migrants.

2. Landskills East

- a. Mike Mack presented an overview of Landskills East, a 3 year £4.5m RDPE funded project to improve the skills within the land based sector. Mike explained that the provision was needs led with industry champions chairing 5 sector groups to help determine the needs of their respective parts of the industry.
- b. Mike also explained how the programme was delivering pilots in most of the areas identified in the work commissioned by the Rural Forum in summer 2008 on the barriers to increased rural participation in skills provision. It was agreed that:
 - i. The sub group would work with Landskills East to monitor the success of the pilots and to disseminate the learning from them across the skills sector in the region. This monitoring will also look at the Train to Gain leadership and management courses being delivered by TCHC which are taking a similar business led model to engagement.
 - ii. A subsequent meeting would look at the requirement for all FE tutors to be qualified teachers, because evidence shows that for business courses this is not always needed and indeed can restrict the provision which is available. The sub group will meet with Lifelong Learning

UK (LLUK) and the LSC to review this in the light of experience within Landskills East and other rural training.

3. Rural White Paper

- a. The sub group expressed support for the idea of developing a regional rural white paper and agreed to provide both ideas on key issues as well as identifying data and intelligence to substantiate the issues which need to be addressed within it;
- b. The sub group agreed to use its meetings in November and January to identify issues to feed into the process.

4. Bite size course provision

- a. Improve (the sector skills council for the food processing sector) reported on national work to unitise the qualifications in the sector to develop smaller blocks of study, or 'bitesize' provision, which would allow employees and businesses to better tailor the training they accessed to industry needs.
- b. The sub group welcomed this work and noted that it had been a long standing request amongst rural businesses to be able to access courses on a 'bitesize' basis.
- c. It was, however, noted that final decisions had still not been made on how such courses would be funded and concern was expressed that this may restrict delivery of this important development. It was therefore agreed to debate this issue in full at a future meeting in conjunction with representatives of the LSC, to ensure that the needs of providers and learners for funding to support this type of provision are clearly understood and supported within future funding agreements.

The group is due to meet again on 25th November and 17th February when major agenda items will be:

- Discussion of the issues the group wishes to feed into the regional rural white paper on employment and skills issues;
- A debate with the LSC over the funding of bite size and unitised course provision;
- A debate with LLUK on the qualifications needed by teachers and whether this is restricting course provision;
- A review of Landskills East and TCHC delivery of business training to identify common lessons on engaging smaller and rural businesses, and whether these lessons support the conclusions of the 2008 research on access to rural training provision.