Nextstep East of England (Prime Contractor: Suffolk County Council)
Careers Advice and Guidance Advisers
Traineeships Scheme

Final Evaluation Report, commissioned by Suffolk County Council
Author: Lesley Haughton,NICEC Fellow
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"It is fantastic to be allowed to train and work in a different field. If it had not been possible to change, I would have been stuck. It is like a breath of fresh air. I feel challenged, motivated and am learning new things."

1.   Introduction and context

In September 2009 nextstep East of England recruited thirteen trainees as part of an innovative scheme funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The project set-up period took place in the summer of 2009. An interim evaluation report was produced in December 2009. This is the final evaluation report, and has been written in July 2009.

Nextstep East of England is managed by Suffolk County Council (SCC), the lead contractor responsible for delivering careers services to adults across the region. Sarah Sharlott has had overall responsibility for the traineeships scheme, which has been managed by Dot Granville and co-ordinated by Julia Butkus, who has acted as a mentor to both trainees and host organisations. The trainees and their hosts are listed in Appendix 1.

It is important to set the context for the observations and recommendations made in this report. There have been considerable changes in the learning and skills sector since this scheme was planned, which have affected both the implementation of the scheme and the exit strategy for the trainees. The main changes are as follows:

- There has been a general election and a change of government
- The recession continues and recovery is slow, with unemployment figures rising steadily
- Savage cuts in public spending are being made and it is by no means certain what the picture of provision and services will look like in 2010-11 and beyond
- The LSC no longer exists, and has been replaced by the Skills Funding Agency, the future of which is by no means certain
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council for the sector, has produced a national strategy for the training of careers advisers, and has reviewed the National Occupational Standards and qualifications for the field
- The implementation of a new model for adult careers services has now been announced but there has been a delay in making decisions about contracts for Next Step regional subcontractors, and this in turn has affected the availability of posts for advisers
- Co-delivery with Jobcentre Plus has proved difficult with pressure on Jobcentres increasing, and space being at a premium – there will be changes to programmes available through Jobcentres as part of the government's reform of the welfare system
- Government initiatives are confusing for parents, learners, advisers and providers of services – entitlements are not clear and are changing rapidly
- Suffolk County Council, along with other Councils in the region, have an embargo on jobs, and further cuts and possibly redundancies are expected – this has affected the proposed short term extension to the scheme to allow posts to be created and advertised by host agencies

- Although there is a national shortage of advisers qualified to NVQ Level 4, there have been cuts to Connexions services, resulting in large pool of advisers, who are used to working with young people, to re-deploy within publicly-funded services
- There will be a round of ESF-funded projects on IAG delivery but the timing is again problematical, in that bids have been made but no decisions made yet – funding will start in August for the new academic year, after the traineeship scheme has finished
- Colleges are also subject to cuts in funding and restrictions on learner numbers and do not know what their budgets are yet, except that there will inevitably be restructuring and redundancies – they may only be able to expand if they are successful in bidding for Next Step funding.

2.   Methodology

2.1. The interim evaluation aimed to capture insights into the effectiveness of the set-up period of the scheme, the recruitment of the trainees, host organisations and NVQ provider, and to capture a view of the early challenges presented by the scheme. This phase consisted of:

- A meeting with Dot Granville and Julia Butkus to explore the procedures adopted by Suffolk County Council (SCC) in setting up the scheme
- Telephone interviews with the 13 successful trainees
- A detailed questionnaire filled in by the 14 host organisations
- A brief questionnaire emailed to nextstep subcontractors in the region who did not become part of the scheme
- A questionnaire responded to by White Rose Training Ltd, the successful NVQ provider.

2.2. The second phase consisted of:

- Evaluation visits to all of the trainees and their host organisations in April-June 2010, when they were all fully functioning as nextstep advisers and had completed the NVQ4 qualification
- A meeting with Dot Granville and Julia Butkus to discuss the way forward
- A telephone interview with Sarah Sharlott to review the scheme from SCC's point of view

This report builds on the interim report submitted in December 2009.

One trainee had dropped out of the scheme after the interim evaluation, because she secured a post in her original professional field of work. All other trainees have completed the scheme and successfully submitted their NVQ portfolios.

3.   The selection process for host organisations

3.1. Nextstep subcontractors in the region were sent a brief description of the scheme, and an Expression of Interest form, to be returned by the end of August 2009. A document outlining roles and responsibilities in detail followed later. Fourteen host organisations were selected, in different parts of the region. They

included County Councils, FE Colleges, voluntary organisations and Adult and Community Learning Services and represented a good cross-section of the types of subcontractors delivering nextstep services.

3.2. Generally, the host organisations considered the application process to be simple, fair, objective and effective. The tendering process allowed them to set out all the relevant ways in which they could support a trainee. The documentation was easy to complete, and advice was available from SCC at that point. While host agencies would have liked to be more involved in the recruitment process for trainees, the difficulties in the timescale were understood, and at the interim phase of the evaluation most expressed enormous satisfaction with the trainee they had been allocated.

3.3. The main criticism of this part of the process was that there was little communication between the Expression of Interest, the appointment of host organisations and the allocation of trainees. However, most were satisfied with the outcome. The opportunity to meet the other hosts was appreciated, and it was not thought necessary to have further meetings.

3.4. In retrospect, some of the host organisations may not have been entirely suitable to participate in the scheme because they were delivering insufficient nextstep DAPs sessions to provide the trainees with opportunities for observed interviews in order to produce the required evidence for the NVQ. It was suggested that there should have been more careful screening of the commitment and capacity of potential hosts to deliver nextstep so that the opportunities for trainees to deliver nextstep sessions could be maximised, NVQ evidence gathered and the trainees contribution to delivery targets across the region consolidated.

3.5. One organisation was disappointed that they were not initially allocated a trainee, but a placement-sharing arrangement was proposed which SCC acted upon. This has been a great success:

"As it happens it could not have been better. Sharing a trainee worked very well after a lot of negotiation and partnership working. The added value is that we have learnt a lot of lessons through co-hosting and exchanged and shared good practice, and it was useful for the trainee to get both perspectives."

Unfortunately, due to geographical issues, it has not been possible for the trainee to apply for a post with either host.

3.6. Another host commented that from the way the advertisement was framed, applicants may have assumed they would be based in Suffolk, and consequently not enough applied from other parts of the region.

3.7. Improvements to the selection process suggested by the successful hosts were:

- Longer timescales
- More time for applications and wider reach to the rest of the region, the process was too focused on Suffolk and some counties were under-represented

- Some consultation prior to the selection process, and more time for questions
- More information in the Expression of Interest about what was expected of hosts – hosts may not have understood that there was an expectation that employment was to be offered at the end of the scheme
- More communication with hosts about matching trainee to host, and possibly involve hosts in the matching process
- Clearer information about the responsibilities of host and trainee, a job description, working arrangements and clarification of the support to be offered to trainees, in the form of a written pack and a plan with milestones and required activities
- Clearer advance information about host input and support for trainees in working towards their NVQ

4.   Why did other nextstep subcontractors not apply to be host organisations?

4.1. 20 of those who were not involved in the scheme responded to a short questionnaire in November 2009 to establish their reasons for not getting involved. One organisation said they had not been informed (The Richmond Fellowship), one applied after the closing date and did not receive a response, and one did apply but was not allocated a trainee. The others did not apply.

4.2. The reasons for not applying were given as follows:

- Insufficient time to explore the idea fully
- Uncertainty of organisational position and funding
- Facilities and resources inadequate
- Small volume of clients, particularly nextstep customers
- Working to capacity and could not generate further episodes for trainee
- No time to support a trainee
- Already supporting other trainees
- Scheme too prescriptive
- Organisation too small and specialist
- Not happy with SCC as employer (involved in another scheme where host organisations are the employer)

4.3. When asked what SCC could have done to make the scheme attractive to those who did not apply, most said that the idea was attractive but circumstances and the timescale made it impossible to apply this time. 10 said they would apply if the opportunity arose again. Possible incentives listed were:

- Financial incentive
- Earlier and more in-depth consultation with providers
- One to one visit to outline the scheme and answer questions rather than just an email, to allow to think it through in detail
- The option to have a part-time trainee
- Opening the opportunity up to a wider range of unwaged people.

4.4. 14 of the respondents thought that the scheme was a good way of building capacity in the region, although one pointed out that it depends on how many trainees complete the scheme and gain permanent employment in the region.

Those who were not convinced observed cynically that this was a scheme to reduce unemployment numbers, and that a better way to build capacity would have been to recruit new providers where provision is sparse or to help voluntary organisations to draw down funding via a simpler tendering process. There was also a concern that there are experienced advisers who are looking for work. Another concern was that the age profile of trainees might be young, while advisers require life experience to provide a good service; however, this is not the case since the age profile of trainees is varied.

5.   The recruitment process for trainees

5.1.   Some issues arose in setting up the recruitment process for the trainees. Before the actual recruitment process commenced the traineeship posts had to be graded to determine the correct salary and a Job Description had to be approved. This was the responsibility of the SCC Job Evaluation Panel. This is a tripartite panel comprised of representatives from SCC, CSD (Customer Service Direct) and the Trade Union. The approval of the Job Description and grading of the post was problematic because the Panel needed to evaluate the new job against existing SCC jobs but as there were no existing posts similar in any way to the new posts the process was understandably subject to quite lengthy delays while this difficulty was being overcome.

These delays and the consequent shortage of time for the actual recruitment process were monitored closely by the Traineeship Steering Group (comprised of senior nextstep managers and operational staff). At regular Steering Group meetings information was shared, decisions were made and the timetable for the project was written, re-written and amended on an ongoing basis according to developments. Risks were identified and contingency plans were put in place to cover eventualities and anticipated problems.

When the Job Evaluation Panel finally reached their decision the recruitment process commenced with all speed and had to be condensed into a timescale that was much shorter than would normally occur. To speed up the process nextstep staff took on some of the tasks that are usually carried out by CSD and liaised closely with CSD staff to do this.

The posts were advertised on the SCC Jobs Direct website and with main Jobcentres throughout the Eastern Region. The alternative would have been to place advertisements in local newspapers across the whole region but this would have been very costly indeed and would certainly have attracted a huge and unmanageable number of applicants. Initially, there were some slight delays and misunderstandings with SCC Jobs Direct and Jobcentre Plus around placing the advertisements but these were resolved fairly quickly. It must be borne in mind that the posts and the recruitment process did not fit in at all with normal SCC advertising and recruitment proceedings but despite this CSD worked really well with nextstep in a flexible and innovative way once they understood the situation and nextstep's

needs. Soon into the process nextstep staff developed a good working relationship with Tim Hands, the CSD HR Resourcing Adviser responsible for handling the traineeship posts. Tim proved to be very helpful and efficient and gave the nextstep team all possible assistance.

One difficulty with the way the posts were advertised was that although they had good coverage on the SCC Jobs Direct site their promotion in Jobcentres throughout the Eastern region was probably not that good, or at the least it was inconsistent. This can be concluded by the geographical distribution of the applicants and their quantity and quality. There were a high number of good applicants from the Suffolk and Norfolk areas, i.e. these were people who would have found the post on SCC Jobs Direct. There were fewer applicants from Essex and even less from Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, i.e. these were people who would only have known about the posts through their local Jobcentre. Perhaps if there had been more time available then fuller information about the posts could have been passed on to Jobcentre staff with the result that they would have been able to promote the posts more actively and thus attract more applicants.

Following the closing date for the posts, nexstep staff worked speedily as a team to shortlist candidates for interview using a fair and thorough procedure in accordance with SCC guidelines. Candidates were invited to interview with two interviewing panels running concurrently over a period of three days. Candidates were scored and selected. Successful candidates were informed by nextstep staff and unsuccessful ones received letters from CSD. Feedback was given by nextstep staff to any unsuccessful candidates who requested it. All the above stage of the recruitment process was done by good co-working between CSD and nextstep staff using the appropriate SCC procedures.

Following four days of group initial training and induction the trainees took up their placements with their host sub-contractors. It was anticipated that there might be issues for the trainees and their hosts with regard to their employment status as SCC employees working on a day to day basis within another organisation. However, the roles and responsibilities of both SCC as employer and sub-contractor as host were explained fully in the early stage of the placements and there have been no issues or tensions regarding this. All trainees undertook and completed a probationary period with SCC of 26 weeks and were supervised by nexstep mentors who made regular visits to trainee and host and completed the probationary review forms.

5.2. As stated, the vacancies for fifteen Trainee Careers Adviser posts were advertised on the Suffolk County Council Jobs Direct website and in Jobcentres throughout the east of England region. The advertisement was backed up by a detailed job profile. The vacancies attracted a great deal of interest and over 300 applications were received. 40 candidates were shortlisted and invited to interview, and this process took place over 3 days, with two interviewing panels. It was not possible to fill all 15 posts as the decision was made to only recruit high scoring candidates.

5.3. The successful trainees found out about the opportunity in the following ways:

- Jobcentre Plus website (7)

- SCC Jobs Direct website (4)
- Nextstep Skills for Jobs programme
- Met Debbie Suddards (SCC) at a Careers Fair in Colchester
- Through Voluntary Centre Broxbourne

Most did further research using the SCC website before applying and used the help that was offered by SCC to get more detail about the traineeships.

The only reported issue was that the advertisement disappeared from the Jobcentre Plus website while one applicant was making enquiries – it would have been easy to miss it, or to assume it was now too late to apply. However, the enquiry system operated by SCC worked well and the candidate applied.

5.4. Other sources of information about opportunities for work in the region used by trainees were:

- Websites (e.g DWP, other County Councils, Police, New Faces, Total Jobs, Grads East, EDP, Guardian Jobs, East Anglian Jobs 24, NHS, MOD,)
- Agencies (e.g Reeds, UEA Careers Centre)
- Newspapers (local e.g. Comet, East Anglian Daily Times)
- In-house sources at work, including voluntary work.

9 of the 13 successful applicants were unemployed (5 of whom had been made redundant in the previous six months) although 2 were "temping" or on training placements at the time of the advertisement. 2 were fully employed.
Of those who were employed notice periods varied from one week to a month. This did cause some difficulties, due to the short period of time between application and taking up the appointments. Reflecting on this, one trainee felt that SCC were unrealistic about the resignation period required for those at work, but acknowledged that the scheme was intended for unemployed applicants.

It appears that it may have been helpful although difficult, in order to achieve regional coverage, to use other County Council websites, although the main reference point for applicants was Jobcentre Plus. Feedback about their website was positive. However, one trainee observed that Jobcentre Plus were not helpful in assisting her to look for jobs, and now that she is acquainted with the nextstep service she can see that this is what she hoped Jobcentre Plus would be offering.

5.5. The application process seems to have been straightforward for all except for the following issues:

- The page on the SCC website for entering initial personal details did not automatically transfer to the application form as it should, and then it was impossible to make changes. It was only clear when filling in the specific application form where the gaps were and then they had to be added at the bottom
- One trainee found writing a personal statement difficult since she had not had to do this for some years
- One applicant was using the internet in the library and the site went down while completing it. When it returned the application process had been taken

off the site. However, nextstep (SCC) were very helpful and the application form was filled in at their office. The applicant's reaction was *"I want to work with people who are as nice and helpful as that."*

5.6. Looking back on the recruitment process at the end of the scheme, trainees felt that it was quick and efficient, and for those who were unemployed the short timescale between making the application and starting on the scheme was perfect.

5.7. Host organisations commenting on the process to recruit the trainees were not generally aware of what those processes were but acknowledged the difficulty of tight timescales. Most were impressed with the outcomes of the process and delighted with their trainees. There was some concern expressed about the focus on Suffolk for a regional scheme. However, it was made clear in the job advertisement that placements were across the region. One host noted that they were surprised that not all the places were filled.

Hosts suggested these improvements to the recruitment process:

- More time
- More involvement of host organisations, e.g. hosts could have had an electronic copy of the job advert to email it to potential candidates already know to them, candidates on local programmes, and to local umbrella organisations
- A more delegated model where hosts could recruit their own trainees

6.   Appointing the right trainees

6.1. The selected candidates came from a wide range of vocational backgrounds, age groups and locations across the region, bringing the benefits of life and work experience to their role. Three of the trainees were men, who are under-represented in the advice and guidance workforce.

6.2. Only two of the trainees had thought about becoming a careers adviser, or had an ambition to do so. One of these had previously been told that she was too young to work effectively with young people in Connexions. To the others it was a new idea when they saw the advertisement for the traineeships.

6.3. The trainees came from a wide range of educational and working backgrounds (both paid and unpaid) including:

- Insurance brokerage
- Advertising agencies and marketing
- Charities for homeless people
- Youth work
- Administration
- Accounts and bank management
- Management
- Training and CPD
- Probation services
- Working with young parents

- Retail
- Territorial Army Officer working with young people
- Self employment in display industry

6.4. Relevant training and education included:

- Sociology
- Law
- Human Resources

6.5. Relevant transferable skills and qualities gained in these contexts included:

- "People skills", communication, working face to face and one to one with the public, being first contact point
- Listening skills
- Action planning
- Mentoring
- Building rapport
- Being non-judgemental
- Working in a confidential environment
- Keeping records
- Researching
- Sharing information
- Making referrals
- Contracting with customers
- Networking
- Managing time
- Using varied methodology to work with people
- Working with children with additional needs

One comment made by three trainees was that participating in, and working in a voluntary capacity in, career development programmes stimulated their interest in pursuing a career in this area.

6.6. It is a tribute to the selection process carried out by SCC that applicants felt able to describe their past experience in terms of these skills, and to demonstrate an aptitude for careers guidance work in the interview.

6.7. Most of the trainees experienced some doubts about whether to apply, and they fell into these areas:

- Lack of confidence about being right for the job
- No relevant experience
- Drop in salary, level of remuneration
- Short contract, with no security
- Whether intensive training would fit in with family commitments
- One trainee thought she might be considered too young to work with adults
- One wanted to work in an innovative role, and was a bit concerned it wouldn't live up expectations (but it has)

- One hoped it would be as much educational as vocational guidance – the former is a passion

6.8. While they did not all find the interviews easy, the interviews gave all of them an opportunity to present themselves well, a number mentioned the use of open, prompting and probing questions to encourage them to talk and to think, and the friendly, informal atmosphere. The topic of the presentation, and the CV preparation activity were perceived as relevant and not too challenging. One trainee commented that she had only two days notice of the need for a short presentation, whereas others had longer to prepare.

Generally speaking, the appointed trainees had a very positive experience of the recruitment process (as one commented, it was clearly excellent because they got the job!). It was described as professional, friendly, relaxed, helpful, streamlined, and well structured and organised.

For most of the applicants, the speed of the process was a good thing, since they were unemployed and eager to get started. However, one comment was made that a lot of important information was provided post-appointment (for example, the content of the contract).

6.9. There appears to have been a problem for one of the successful candidates in that he received an email at the weekend informing him that he had been unsuccessful. He was expecting to hear by telephone on the Monday, which in fact did happen, to tell him that he had been successful. No explanation was offered about the email. He spent a miserable weekend as a consequence, and had another job application been in the pipeline, might have accepted that after receiving the email.

7. Getting the right match of trainees to hosts

7.1. While some host organisations would have like more involvement in identifying potential applicants, short-listing, interviewing and appointing of trainees, all were initially delighted with the match between themselves and the trainee they were allocated. Hosts did not know what the process had been of matching hosts and trainees:

 "It was very good. We had nominated someone as a potential trainee but they were not appointed. SCC chose the right person who has fitted in brilliantly. I don't know what we will do now if we can't employ her."

7.2. Two commented that while the outcome was excellent, they do not know what the process would have been if the trainee had not wanted to join or stay with them or if they had not wanted to accept the trainee allocated to them. Hosts would have found it helpful to have a meeting with SCC and the trainee before they started work

7.3. Luck or judgement?

"There is an element of luck in how the trainee fits with the team in a host organisation. Ours fits very well but SCC did not know the dynamics of our team and

could not make a judgement on whether the trainee was right for the organisation – you need more than skills and living locally to fit in with your peers. However, we have been very lucky and she is very much part of the team."

"It is difficult to get the right match in a small team who work closely together. In retrospect, our trainee may have functioned better in a larger organisation."
Most hosts looking back on the scheme acknowledged that SCC had achieved an excellent match, and wanted to pay tribute to the efforts made to ensure that this was the case.

7.4. There was some concern that SCC was not familiar with local distances and may have placed trainees in a situation where they had a large amount of travelling to do. It was also suggested that SCC was not sufficiently aware of the way in which nextstep services were delivered by the host organisations. This resulted in placements that were not ideal from the trainees point of view, and three trainees had to take up additional placements in order to gain this experience and to complete their NVQs.

7.5. A further concern at the outset of the scheme was that the SCC team may not have considered some of the complex issues in working in particular contexts, for example, community work which may require significant travelling and some lone working. Were trainees matched in terms of their experience of this kind of work, and of the values underpinning it. One trainee who was placed in this context commented that she had worked previously in a context in which there were rigid and inflexible structures and systems, and found the new flexibility alarming when she first started – *"now I couldn't return to the other model"* and the host's comment was *"she fitted".*

7.6. There were some practical adjustments for hosts to make in accommodating the trainees at short notice but on the whole this has all worked very well.

8.   The training programme: the SCC trainee induction process

8.1. The trainees commenced employment on the 28th September 2009, with four days of initial training and induction held at a hotel in Ipswich. This included sessions on:

- Familiarisation with nextstep; IES; matrix; IAG
- SCC induction including Safeguarding and Health & Safety
- A day's training from the NVQ provider, White Rose Training Ltd
- A workshop offered by an experienced adviser
- IT training and Skills Action Plans
- Sessions on Learning Styles, Transferable Skills and Interview Practice
- Visits from host organisations who talked about their services.

8.2. The induction provided by SCC was valued by all trainees, although two were unable to attend all of the days because of having to work notice at their previous jobs. In the case of the latter, the pack produced by SCC, and support from Julia Butkus, the scheme mentor, to catch up on the missing areas was valued.

The most useful aspects were seen to be:

- Advisers talking about their day (3)
- Input about the NVQ process by White Rose (6)
- The White Rose DVD of an adviser working
- Introduction to nextstep (some had not heard of nextstep until this opportunity arose) and to SCC (3)
- Meeting the host agency (3)
- Getting to know the other trainees, and bond as a team (5)

8.3. Looking back on that process, trainees felt that the following would have been useful at that stage:

- More teaching/ knowledge about the role and skills needed
- Interviewing skills training
- Action planning training
- CV preparation and jobseeking skills training
- Group work skills training
- Would have preferred working in small groups on action planning with an adviser rather than the IT session
- All subcontractors present at induction
- More information on personnel matters, an SCC handbook, rights and responsibilities
- Lone working and more on safeguarding clients and self
- A guide to acronyms in the learning and skills sector

Some felt that the process should have been longer to allow for a more in-depth introduction to working with clients. *"I felt like a rabbit in the headlights – I needed more tools to start with."* However, it was acknowledged this may have been better covered at the host organisation, which is what happened in most cases. Reviewing this at the end of the scheme, mentoring by experienced advisers, shadowing, observing, working alongside other advisers, basically learning by doing was thought to be the most effective method.

8.4. A practical issue that arose during the induction was that trainees were not aware that they would have a lot of equipment (specifically laptops and printers) to carry back with them, so two of them had to buy an additional suitcase while there in order to cope with this on public transport.

9.   The training programme

9.1. The scheme as a whole included a range of components provided by SCC, White Rose Training Ltd, and the by the host organisations and their networks. The basis of the scheme was:

- Induction by SCC and host organisations
- The NVQ programme and assessment provided by White Rose Training Ltd
- A programme of training days held at Pampisford, arranged by SCC and delivered by different facilitators
- On-the-job training, feedback and support provided by host organisations
- Mentoring support for trainees from SCC

Added value was provided and arranged by host organisations and is described in 9.4 and 9.5 below.

9.2. The training programme as a whole was seen by trainees and hosts as successful and comprehensive; all activities fitted together well and all were helpful. It was suggested that the induction period should have included a detailed Training Needs Analysis for each trainee, to identify individual strengths and weaknesses so that hosts could focus on some of these, and this is added as a recommendation in this report for future schemes. Most of the trainees would have liked more training about face-to-face work with clients and key skills needed by clients such as CV writing and job-seeking skills before they started interviewing.

9.3. The speed of the process of NVQ assessment caused some anxiety at first, although White Rose did their best to set out steps clearly and to support candidates. There is still residual feeling among trainees and hosts that the assessment process was too quick to assure competence. In November 2009, some of the trainees had not been able to carry out full nextstep interviews and the early assessment of their competence did not seem very realistic. Trainees were asked in July 2010 whether in their opinion the NVQ is fit for purpose as an indicator of competence for nextstep advisers. Their comments were as follows:

"I do feel competent, and it is probably fit for purpose, but it is not necessarily the only baseline qualification which is needed by advisers. Coaching and lifeskills training may be more important."

"I was apprehensive about the NVQ at first since it was new – it seems an odd way of gaining a qualification before having any experience. I feel competent, but am not sure if I am doing enough – however I met the standards!"

"I think the NVQ is fit for purpose in terms of the client-facing units, but caseloading is not really relevant to nextstep, and the NVQ checklist is weak on networking, which is very important."

"I would have preferred more theory but gained a lot of new concepts and understanding of what goes on in the wider world (e.g. Skills for Life – I now understand the scale of the problem, the effects of long-term unemployment, and the extent of mental health issues for adults)"

"The NVQ doesn't qualify you in itself – it accredits the basic skills, and people want to pay you more! It is good to have external verification that you are competent."

Hosts comments included:

"This was a quick intensive NVQ and quite theory-based. This was acceptable because our trainee likes studying. As a host we had no involvement, but as an employer would expect to the process to take two years and combine training and experience. In addition the host would still need to train an employee in their own context and age group, and this has happened within the whole scheme."

"An employer would want more in-depth training than the NVQ alone provides, the NVQ doesn't teach advising skills and is only an adequate programme for those who are practicing advisers. Fortunately the training programme as a whole has equipped the trainees with a range of skills and experience."

9.4. The scheme has included some unanticipated added value for trainees. Half of the group (mostly those working in an ACL setting) have had the opportunity to attend and complete a PTLLS (Preparing to Teach in the Learning and Skills Sector) course and qualification. Given the emphasis on group work in nextstep universal provision at the start of the scheme, it may have been helpful to build this in since all would have liked to do it, and would have found it useful. However, the expectation of facilitating nextstep services through group work has not happened in all cases as the nextstep model has not developed in that way in practice. Trainees who have undertaken PTLLS have found that they have learnt a lot about planning and preparing a range of interactions, and for some it has been the most structured learning experience they have experienced on the scheme.

9.5. Other opportunities have arisen for trainees during the scheme to participate in additional training and development opportunities, and to gain additional qualifications. The latter includes the ITQ, CLAIT, the A1 assessor award, and C&G 9297 Learner Support. One trainee will do the NVQ3 in Volunteer Management as part of her new job and has done a range of free courses organised within the voluntary sector. Some trainees went to conferences which provided further opportunities for professional development and a chance to see nextstep in a wider context, e.g. the National Careers Show, and NAEGA sessions on reflective practice. Additional training arranged by hosts includes safeguarding, data protection, equal opps, lone working (H&S), how to facilitate workshops, and using Adult Directions.

9.6. Trainees were asked to consider retrospectively what the most valuable aspects of the whole programme had been. The time, pace and range of the whole programme was praised. The most important aspect for all was learning by doing through "hands-on" experience, learning through practice rather than theory, and reflecting on practice.

These were the most valuable training and developmental methods:

- Shadowing experienced advisers, and "buddying" arrangements
- Helping and supporting an experienced adviser with group sessions and individual interviews
- Receiving feedback on own practice from experienced advisers
- Team meetings, and discussions with colleagues
- Attending events and conferences
- NVQ work-based training approach and deadlines
- Co-hosting really helped (had access to different types of service, more through outreach, and working with vulnerable groups)
- The training sessions arranged by SCC – particularly the sessions on interviewing and action planning
- PTLLS
- The "One to one toolkit" book

9.7. The most urgent training needs identified by trainees in December 2010 (it should be noted that trainees were interviewed prior to the SCC day on Interviewing Skills, which will have met some of the needs expressed below) were:

- Interviewing skills and techniques, in preparation for the observed interview by White Rose (7)
- Group work skills (2)
- More experience in the full action planning process and Skills Health Checks (3)
- Some wanted to attend the Skills Diagnostic day, particularly those working in Jobcentres within the IES programme, but were not allocated a place (3)
- CV preparation
- More knowledge about local provision
- Dealing with challenging clients (e.g. those with mental health issues)
- Boundaries, and how to deal with customers' personal issues

These mid-scheme training needs have been addressed by SCC or host organisations as the scheme progressed. The close attention paid by SCC to any gaps or issues and the prompt action taken to meet any needs that arose has been commended by all.

9.8. Trainees were asked at the end of the scheme if anything else should have been included or given more emphasis. The following were mentioned:

- Personal safety, safeguarding, lone working
- Challenging clients, dealing with difficult behaviour
- Understanding the benefits system
- CV writing – a toolkit would have been helpful
- Jobsearch and interview skills (for customers)
- Mental health session useful but very late in programme, and delivered by an inexperienced trainer
- More on disability would have been helpful, and something on dyslexia
- Group facilitation skills, using icebreakers, group dynamics, presentation skills
- Coaching, mentoring, and motivational techniques
- Counselling skills (though some say not – it would be dangerous)
- More good DVDs of advisers in action
- Funding for clients the most difficult aspect – need constant updating
- How to work alongside Jobcentre Plus staff and programmes, and the Careers Advice Service helpline
- Working with offenders and ex-offenders.

10.   Support from SCC

10.1. The role of SCC mentor has been appreciated by all, as has the regular contact and communication for trainees and hosts from both Julia Butkus and Dot Granville, who have been "efficient and approachable".

10.2. The prompt and comprehensive support provided for trainees by Julia Butkus has been a major success factor in the scheme. This included mentoring, setting up peer support through a networking group, acting as a facilitator and go-between for

hosts and trainees, setting up additional training and development opportunities as required, and feeding back issues to SCC as an employer.

"Julia is a goddess – the support has been fantastic."

"Julia's role has been very valuable, constant contact, hand-holding, organic support and confidentiality if needed."

"Julia has been brilliant – she has answered any queries about anything, she has been the middle person. She was a great help with my personal situation, it was so nice to know someone cares."

"Julia has been very good – over and above the demands of the role which has been pivotal in the success of the scheme. She has been very proactive, always thinking of the trainees."

Julia was also responsible for facilitating changes in arrangements with hosts where problems arose for the trainees. The importance of her role, and the way in which she has carried it out, cannot be underestimated.

10.3. SCC was also responsible for providing support for host organisations, and on the whole this was also applauded. SCC has not been "controlling" or rigorous and has allowed hosts considerable autonomy, and allowed them to build capacity through the traineeships scheme in their own way. Generally hosts have not had to ask for much support, *"but we always knew they were there",* and it was easy to make contact by telephone to get an immediate response to any issues. Communication in most cases has been consistent and straightforward. Additional support provided by SCC was appreciated, for example, the feedback given by nextstep staff who observed advisers and trainees as part of quality improvement practice, and the additional NVQ support day provided for trainees was considered an excellent response to needs expressed earlier in the scheme.

Not all hosts were wholly satisfied with the managerial support provided, and one described their experience as feeling isolated and left to get on with it. This is in contrast with the general view that it was better to have been allowed to conduct the scheme in their own way, once the basic ground rules had been agreed.

10.4. The only area in which there has been some criticism of the support provided by SCC is in the exit strategy for trainees. Due to the changing context for the scheme described in the early part of this report and other factors, it has not been possible for all hosts to offer posts for which the trainees could apply. Some hosts were hoping that they would be in a position to take on new advisers in August or September 2010 once the Next Step sub-contracts had been agreed.

SCC responded to this problem by agreeing a temporary extension of the scheme for some trainees whose hosts hoped to be able to offer them the opportunity to apply for a post after the scheme had formally ended at the end of July. However, the freeze on posts within SCC has affected this intention and only limited additional time has been allocated.

Although the scheme was originally intended to lead directly to trainees being offered posts with the host organisations, or others with nextstep contracts, it would have been helpful to have planned some career planning and job hunting support as part of the scheme. Trainees could have been offered a group session about the wider context for advice work, the broader regional network of agencies, the types of jobs they would now be qualified to apply for, and how to transfer their skills. Few of the trainees were aware of the changing national picture of services, and what impact this was having on regional opportunities. In addition each trainee could have been offered an individual career development interview, and some assistance to update their own CVs. It is a recommendation in this report that this support be specified and provided in any future scheme. This is covered in more detail in section 17 of this report.

11.   Support from host organisations

11.1. The degree to which trainees received a formal induction from their host organisation varied. All were made familiar with the main policies, procedures and ethical basis for their work and this was helpful for the early NVQ assignments. For some this meant being given a pack of information to take away and read, or a formal "walkthrough" of the pack. In some cases, hosts were expecting matrix assessments and Ofsted inspections and trainees were involved in preparation for these. Trainees received a full tour of the organisation and its main networks and were introduced to all the staff they would have contact with. Becoming familiar with the day-to-day work of the organisation and what was expected of the trainee was a gradual process.

11.2. Training and support provided by the host organisations took the form of the following activities:

- Open access to supervisor/ mentor
- Mentoring
- Shadowing
- Monitoring of trainee performance
- Case reviews
- Team meetings and discussions
- Observation and feedback from experienced practitioners
- Providing opportunities for trainees to function as advisers
- Training sessions
- Meeting people in network agencies
- Time off for study and to complete NVQ assignments

The support from other practitioners who have completed NVQs or are still working towards them, has been invaluable.

11.3. Early in the scheme, some of the trainees reported issues which were affecting their ability to complete the NVQ (for example the number of "no show" customers, resulting in few opportunities to practice, or a lack of appropriate sessions in which a full interview could take place). SCC and the host organisations resolved these issues as quickly as possible, in some cases by offering alternative placements to trainees.

11.4. Host organisations were asked if they felt that they had been adequately briefed about the traineeships. All but two agreed that they had, and that communication has been good.

"The monitoring process and roles and responsibilities checklist have been clear and useful. Julia's visits have been informative, comprehensive and supportive. I understand that delays in information about processes and procedures at the start was down to the fact that this is a brand new scheme."

11.5. Those who were dissatisfied felt that there had been insufficient information about the responsibilities of the host organisation, including the need for appointments to be set up for the trainee to complete action plans at a very early stage. Suggested improvements to the briefing and preparation for hosts were:

- What extra resources the host was expected to provide (e.g. mobile phones)
- Information about the content of the SCC induction week
- More detailed information about the NVQ process, the training hosts should be providing, and specific areas of work the trainee would need to be involved in
- Early information for the HR department about contracts
- Early initiation of CRB checking – some host organisations have strict rules and the delay made supervision of the trainee very stressful

11.6. Generally, the host organisations feel that they have been adequately supported by SCC throughout the scheme.

12.   Support from White Rose Training Ltd

12.1. White Rose Training Ltd were appointed as NVQ provider in June 2009 following a tendering process based on an Expression of Interest, setting out in detail how the provider would meet the challenge of supporting candidates with a range of experience, across the region, and in a short timescale. Various models were considered, including the use of one or more of the nextstep subcontractors as the NVQ provider or allowing the host organisations to choose a provider. The final choice took into account the benefits to the trainees of being a cohort of a single provider. The process was fair and transparent. All of the trainees, except one who left the scheme to take up another post, have successfully completed the NVQ.

12.2. Only four of the trainees had done an NVQ or competence-based qualification before, and most have undertaken academic study before. For some, the NVQ is insufficiently grounded in theory and there has been no justification offered as to why good practice is regarded as such. However, others saw the way in which White Rose delivered the NVQ as knowledge based and well grounded in theory, and these differing perceptions depended on learning styles and previous experience of working towards a qualification.

12.3. White Rose was perceived by trainees as efficient, professional and well-organised, and inspired trust. Staff were accessible, and support available when needed. Their prompt response to email queries was appreciated. The folder

provided at induction was clear and comprehensive, and the DVD of an advice interview very useful. Feedback on assignments was detailed and useful.

"Set days, deadlines and a clear process – perfect for someone who is unfamiliar with the industry. NVQ by A-Z, achieved in record time!"

"The process was fabulous, clear planning, relevant training, good advice on how to present evidence, and learnt a lot of theory to underpin practical skills."

"It was knowledge based, required research and investigation, and gave a good grounding in the theory and principles underpinning the work. The NVQ as delivered by White Rose is fit for purpose. SCC were clear about which units were relevant for nextstep delivery."

12.4. All trainees acknowledged the implications of the short timescale, and accepted that the process may not be perfect as a result. However, one trainee commented that the key driver seemed to be to meet the terms of the contract rather than the individual needs and circumstances of candidates. Another said that he felt "spoon-fed" which was quite reassuring but not necessarily an indication of learning anything. There was some concern that learning was not a priority, but it was accepted that other parts of the training scheme were focused on learning.

"I had more support from the ACL co-ordinators than from White Rose. I am used to studying – I like theories as an in-depth basis for skills. White Rose were not very flexible but responded to short timescale. Much of it was just box ticking and not a learning process (e.g. no great understanding of legislation or policy). The NVQ was limited in terms of knowledge and understanding and the process alien if you were used to academic study. Reflection on practice and the reasons for doing things in a particular way is important."

"The support from White Rose was inconsistent – more was given to some individuals than others. We spoke to Julia, who gave support to those who felt that they were not getting as much one to one help from the assessors, and arranged for a session with SCC staff to help with portfolio building."

"It would have helped to know early on in the process that only a small amount of writing needed – I was writing reams! When I realised this, I created a list of essential evidence, and shared this with the others."

12.5. It was thought that perhaps more observation was needed in different contexts in order to make decisions about competence. However, SCC regularly observe practice across the region and give feedback, and in most cases the trainees received observation and feedback from their host organisations, both from experienced practitioners and those who have undertaken the NVQ recently themselves. Feedback was also given to trainees through matrix assessments and Ofsted inspections.

12.6. The host organisations were not, on the whole, aware of the process to appoint an NVQ provider, but commented that it appeared fair and straightforward through a

tendering process. 10 did not think that the process could have been improved (although they were not fully aware of what it entailed).

12.7. One commented that some of their staff are being assessed by another provider, and are very impressed with the support the trainee is receiving from White Rose. However, one of the hosts thought that it would have been better to use an existing nextstep subcontractor as the NVQ provider as long as they met the required standards.

"This would have developed capacity and ownership of the scheme within the existing delivery network, helped providers financially and made sure that any lessons about assessment and support could have been made available and led to sharing of good practice among providers via assessor visits."

12.8. There was some concern about the expectation that trainees would be observed and declared competent after so little training and practice, and a more intensive process of observation and feedback prior to assessment would have been preferred. It was also suggested that a more comprehensive training programme prior to assessment would have been more satisfactory. The situation about CRB checks not being completed earlier has resulted in an environment where the trainee may have had to function with both a supervisor and an NVQ assessor in the room which is not satisfactory for the customer or the trainee. One provider would prefer the trainee to be doing the Diploma in Career Guidance and will arrange for this if they are able to employ the trainee at the end of the scheme. Another preferred the National Open College Network (NOCN) qualifications as a grounding for the NVQ, since these involve a structured learning programme.

12.9. The host organisations would have appreciated more information in advance and a meeting and more communication with White Rose in order to support trainees in the best possible way. One host was not satisfied with the communication with White Rose and had a difficult experience where a client was kept waiting for the late arrival of the assessor with no explanation or apology.

12.10. White Rose themselves felt that the process to recruit an NVQ provider was sensible and gave a full opportunity to explain the offer. The organisation is familiar with the region and with nextstep, and their only reservation about the process itself was that the decision to appoint was delayed and the timescale was already very short. An additional challenge for White Rose was the varied exposure of the candidates to advice and guidance practice.

12.11. A decision was made by White Rose to bring the observed interview forward in the programme in order to build confidence in the candidates and enable them to be more productive in their placements. Trainees have responded well to the programme and take-up of email and telephone support was good.

13.   Support for trainees from each other

13.1. In addition to the induction period, there were various pre-set meetings and training sessions at which the trainees could work together.

13.2. The trainees were in regular contact by email and telephone, and shared information with each other. Those who were geographically closer to each other met to attend local training, or to work on portfolios. There was also a Facebook group. This contact has been facilitated by Julia Butkus from the outset of the scheme.

13.3. There are have been no reported difficulties for which support was not available. Where there were any communication issues with the host organisation, or with White Rose, SCC are quick and responsive to any queries.

14.   Challenges and issues for the trainees

14.1. There were initially some concerns on the part of SCC that there might be some difficulties resulting from the employing and host organisations being different. Generally, from the trainee's point of view, there have been no conflicting policies or procedures.

14.2. The slow process of CRB checking made it difficult for trainees to work under little or no supervision at first. Only those who were working in open plan areas were able to function fully at the beginning of the scheme. This has been an issue for both the trainees and their hosts. It has been suggested that this should have been devolved, and may have been completed more quickly.

14.3. Some hosts, particularly other County Councils cannot issue badges, desk space or access to IT systems including email to non-employees. Some trainees found this very difficult and it persisted as a problem. However, for others this has not been a problem. One trainee suggested that the distribution of phones, "dongles" and other items should have been centralised because there was some confusion about who was paying for what.

14.4. For some trainees there was a lot of travelling and managing time and diaries without knowing the geography of the area was an issue

14.5. For some it was difficult to establish relationships and communication within Jobcentres.

"They all have different ideas on paperwork and systems, and there is a divide – nextstep are still seen as outsiders. Jobcentre Plus and nextstep have two different aims - one is simply about getting jobs, the other more about individual aspirations, routes and pathways. There is some conflict there and I am not sure if it is valid to work with people in this way. Jobcentre staff send people they can't do anything with to nextstep which presents serious challenges. I would like to see more new claimants who are not dependent on benefits. I make a lot of referrals back to use the benefits calculator to help people to be realistic. It is also confusing that so many different subcontractors deliver in the Jobcentre – at least six, and I often see people who do not realise they have already seen a nextstep provider. The concept of co-location is simple but the system is fragmented and organisations are not pulling together."

14.6. Some trainees had issues to deal with in that their placements were not ideal, either that the host did not provide sufficient exposure to nextstep or that the placement was not working. SCC responded quickly to these problems and some of the trainees found themselves with a second placement.

"A dual placement can be tough for a trainee, a lot of upheaval and had to work harder at both and take work home. I was anxious about the future and started looking at non-careers jobs. The two hosts were a good complement for each other and I got through NVQ but this was not an ideal solution and very stressful. For example, there was an issue with study time. The hosts felt there was a lack of clear direction from SCC. Some trainees have had a full day a week, but others have had to fight for half a day. I have worked at home in the evening quite a lot –it should have been a clear requirement."

14.7. Some trainees found particular types of client difficult to work with and needed earlier and more focused training and support, for example clients who are not motivated and don't want to be there, are aggressive, have mental health issues or have multiple barriers to moving on.

14.8. Trainees were asked if they could think of anything SCC might have done differently in setting up the scheme. Most said no, under the constraints of the funding. Placements have varied too, some fitting in immediately as part of their host organisation and others took a while to settle.

14.9. Other suggested improvements were:

- A less hurried start, but understand the reasons
- More written information could be included in the advertisements, did not understand what would be doing and where based.
- More information at early stage about the host organisation
- More information in advance about the induction process
- Provide earlier training in interviewing and other skills
- More training on theory
- More training on personal issues, boundaries and referral
- Higher remuneration

14.10. All felt that they were working with very "nice people", and were very happy/ lucky to be given this opportunity. They felt that they were receiving "proper training", and would come out of the process as good advisers, not simply competent. However, even at the start of the scheme there was some anxiety about what would happen at the end of July 2010, and trainees were aware that they have taken a risk. Most were not aware at the start of the scheme that public services are changing, or that there is a national shortage of qualified advisers.

15.   Challenges and issues for the host organisations

15.1. These were the challenges experienced by the host organisations in the first two months:

- 9 of the host organisations also reported no issues, or very minor difficulties with reporting sickness and holiday dates.
- Ensuring that the trainee is occupied and fully supported (2)
- Ensuring adequate supervision and support for a very capable trainee who has progressed more quickly than anticipated – ensuring she develops at a higher level
- *"Finding the time as a busy manager at beginning of academic year to set aside quality time to support and monitor the trainee's progress – mentored by, and shadowing other practitioners. She is a bright, confident, capable trainee who thrives on activity and responsibility. We speak about delivery and progress informally on a daily basis but are planning time out reviews for next term"*
- Ensuring that the trainee is given a good blend of access to customers but also the chance to network and engage with other subcontractors/advisers to see how they deliver the service in their own organisations.
- Exposure to the wider agendas of adult advancement and skills health checks/ IES
- Ensuring that the trainee gains knowledge on learning and career opportunities
- "The speed of the recruitment left us feeling unprepared in the beginning with regard to having activities in place for the trainee"
- One host had a specific problem, which they raised with SCC, *"Our trainee is not yet registered as an adviser for MIS purposes – we need to claim her episodes against her profile and she needs to feel part of the delivery team. She is currently using another adviser's log-in while keeping a record of which episodes are hers. This is not ideal."*
- *"Trying to align our practice with need for the trainee to gain the NVQ. We are all DCG trained and unused to NVQ. I was expecting more actual teaching from White Rose. As we work in FE, most of our nextstep clients are looking to go on to the Access programme. To address this we have been sending our trainee on as many HE visits as possible as well as observing all her interactions, but it would not be fair to the clients to expect her to conduct full interviews at this stage"*
- Waiting for CRB checks – this limits what the trainee can do (2)
- ICT – a more delegated approach would have been better. It has been a real hassle to find a way for the trainee to access our systems – we have had to make do and mend rather than have a comprehensive solution
- Cost and allocation of space and resources e.g. desk, telephone, email, and waiting for a payroll number to set these up (3)

15.2. At the end of the scheme, and looking back on the issues, many of the smaller points had been addressed, and on the whole, hosts felt that the scheme had been well managed by SCC, particularly in not being too "controlling". In addition to the early difficulties, these final points were made that should be taken into account if running the scheme again:

- An advance plan of the whole scheme would have been helpful to plan trainee involvement in delivering the service (e.g. would have been helpful to have dates of training days and NVQ days because these clashed with a weekly job club which the trainee ran as part of her role)

- Detailed guidance to hosts would have been useful about how to mentor the trainee and what level of supervision is appropriate
  "If we did it again we would be less flexible and insist on the trainee following systems correctly. Any issues were dealt with well by SCC when the problems became clear and the trainee gained experience elsewhere. However, early on in the process we got negative feedback from customers and through matrix process, and this could have been avoided had we started off on the right foot – we have all learned from this experience"
- A system to avoid issues about CRB checking and safeguarding would have been helpful – this is a focus for Ofsted and perhaps could have been handled separately

16.   Trainees as advisers, good practice and nextstep

16.1. In November 2009, five of the host organisations said that their trainees were already working as advisers under supervision, and one was working unsupervised. All were working unsupervised by February. To some extent this depended on CRB clearance, but the main issue appears to be building up an appropriate level of knowledge on learning and careers information and LMI. Supervision has taken various forms, including observation with feedback by experienced advisers or line managers; mentoring by level 4 qualified advisers, one-to-one supervision meetings or coaching, regular staff or team meetings and case discussions, shadowing and being shadowed, and monitoring forms and action plans. One of the trainees included unit 17 "Provide support for other practitioners" as part of the NVQ4, and she has undertaken a supervising role, and is putting formal processes in place within the service.

16.2. Most of the trainees have experienced both one-to-one and group work, others only the former. Many of the trainees have had the opportunity to experience other types of information and advice work other than the basic nextstep model, including:

- Running job clubs
- Dealing with enquiries at the college advice desk
- Advising at drop-in sessions
- Providing telephone information and advice
- Advising on internal progression routes in college
- Redundancy counselling on employers premises
- Mentoring ex-offenders
- Working within ESF projects and preparing learning plans
- Providing employability training
- Running CV and interview skills workshops linked to other programmes
- Teaching practice through PTLLS
- Developing volunteering opportunities and managing volunteers
- Visiting prisons
- Manning a stand at job fairs
- Developing databases
- Building up outreach provision
- Contributing to matrix and Ofsted inspections (e.g. arranging focus groups of clients),

- Advising on progression from Train to Gain provision via Vocational Training Centre – mainly on the telephone
- Working on specific projects e.g initial Skills for Life assessments in ACL, adding IAG sessions on to personal development and job-seeking courses
- Producing marketing leaflets and contributing to frontline staff handbook
- Mystery shopping
- Being shadowed by new employees
- Attending meetings to learn about other functions of organisation.

Nextstep sessions combine well with other programmes and can underpin them. However, some hosts felt that exposure to nextstep practice was not a broad enough introduction to advice work for the trainees. Some other models offer more time to engage and to achieve outcomes. ACL services in particular always have a wide range of different provision –hosts wanted the trainee to experience all of their flexible and varied offer. This additional experience has been very useful to the trainees and can be seen as significant added value to the outcomes of the scheme.

16.3. Trainees were asked what they think of the nextstep service. They all felt, two months into the scheme, that they understood how the service functions. Many described the service as excellent and "fantastic", delivered in a range of places and applicable to a wide range of individuals with different backgrounds. One expressed concern that services for people with HE qualifications are inadequate, and later trainees perceived that there is little or no provision for employed people, even those in low-paid jobs. It was noted by all that the service was not well marketed, and that people (including themselves) do not know about it. "When they do, they get excited".

Other comments made at that stage were:

- Action plans don't fit the structure of the interview and feel like an add-on
- Too much paperwork for Universal sessions, all a bit bureaucratic
- Some people need more support than they are entitled to, particularly those who have been unemployed for a long time
- Good for people who don't know where to start, not so good for career advice
- Careful preparation needed for group sessions, and issues about confidentiality
- Booking system for appointments at Jobcentre Plus cumbersome
- Need to see people from the Jobcentre sooner, better referral processes needed

By the end of the scheme, much of this still held true, but trainees were able to give a more detailed appraisal of the way in which nextstep is delivered. Trainees were basically enthusiastic about the service, and all were convinced it should be more widely and thoroughly marketed to allow more people to benefit. One trainee who works mainly in Jobcentres encourages her clients to tell their family and friends about the service.

"I wish I had known about it a year ago! Advisers do a good job, and I would have benefited myself if I had seen them while I was re-thinking my career. CV planning is particularly good. The service suffers from government short-termism and has had to

become a common-sense service. It is admirable what gets done given the limitations."

Some practical difficulties and areas for improvement were identified, mainly to do with the nextstep and IES tools, the action plan and the skills diagnostic:

"At first I found the nextstep action plan difficult to fit into the time scale for an interview. It is easier now we know how to pre-populate the action plan. It is repetitive, and some questions are meaningless to clients. However, it is good to have an action plan and a CV to take away."

"A matrix assessor picked up as a weakness in our service that the action plan was allowed to drive rather than serve the process. It is hard to reconcile with a customer-focused approach, formulaic, numbered questions, tick boxes There is too much paper – the majority of people probably throw it away and don't value it if they see it as another Jobcentre offering."

"The last sections of the action plan are only relevant if the client is doing the skills diagnostic. Clients may lose the will to live by the end of the process. I did the skills diagnostic at home and I hated it – it takes too much time, it keeps dropping you out and tends not to tell clients anything they don't know. I prefer to use the Careers Values tool or Adult Directions".

"It is good that the action plan is word processed, though advisers IT skills need to be good . Using laptops can be a barrier – clients find ICT intimidating. I don't use it until the end of the session."

"Many people need more help than nextstep can give. The funding pays for volume not value and the service can be a sausage machine. In order to see five people, you need nine appointments booked – and if they all turn up, it can be a rush."

16.4. All trainees thought they had observed good practice and different styles of delivering services, and some of the features they described were: providing accurate and up-to-date information; giving relevant information and advice; providing some "quality time" for the customer; not allowing the interview to be driven by paperwork; making the customer feel at ease; combining a friendly style with professional quality; not making assumptions about presenting questions; giving people what they want, not what the adviser wants; not seeing it as a failure not to give information; helping client to be clear about what to do next, not just set actions; client centredness; not telling people what to do, letting people draw own conclusions and have buy in to the action plan; confidentiality, impartiality and data protection; being honest and non-judgemental; listening actively; knowing limitations; admitting when you don't know something and finding out; not overwhelming or putting pressure on the client; helping to select from a wide range of choices; following up; not trying to own the client - finding alternatives in local services so don't have to turn anyone away; managing time; being friendly but not counselling, comfortable but not trying to be their best friend; networking; showing empathy, giving an action plan for people to take away; making the service available to all with strong marketing and open access.

This perception of what constitutes good practice is very impressive and shows a depth of understanding developed by trainees throughout the scheme. One of the hosts commented that the trainees area new breed of advisers, which is needed to deliver services in the 21st century context. Along with the features listed above, successful advisers will accept and work with new skills needed to deliver a service that will continue to attract funding and offer customers a realistic view of the opportunities and the help available to them to manage their lives and careers. One trainee who was observed by SCC during the scheme noted that it was very interesting that the SCC criteria for observing interviews are not so much about guidance skills as the way that the adviser handles ICT, MIS, targets and outcomes. This is also reflected in the hosts view of the strengths of the trainees and what they have brought to the service.

16.5. The trainees were asked at the end of the scheme what they thought their strengths were, and what their particular contribution to the host service had been. Like their customers, they found it quite difficult to talk about their strengths, but the list in this section and in 16.6. is a tribute to them, their hosts and to SCC for selecting and supporting a capable group of people:

- Group work is becoming a strength, and I learnt a lot from PLLSS
- I am offering the full service and becoming more confident
- I have been trained and groomed for the nextstep service, client-centred but focused on outcomes
- I am keen to learn and to find out answers
- I have good people skills and the client response good
- I like working with people who need a lot of help
- My IT skills helped other advisers and I passed on the induction and other training
- I am always happy to ask for clarification and this benefits others in the team
- I use the network well, build good relationships and bring a bit of life to it
- I am confident and honest, I like to know things, and to be organised and thorough
- I want to give a good service
- I am not easily upset and don't take offence
- I am good at building rapport and get on well with clients and colleagues
- I have integrated well with the team, taken an innovative approach, and worked hard
- I am a good listener and researcher, a reliable source of information
- My life and educational experience helps me to show empathy to the clients

16.6. Hosts were asked what they thought their trainee had brought to the service:

- A good adviser, a problem solver, adaptable
- Calm, flexible, confident, willing to ask
- Professional, adaptable, mature, brings other experience to the work, flexible, willing to adapt to change
- Open and willing to learn
- Willing to try things and adapt to own style
- Proactive, takes responsibility for own work

- Tenacious, accepts challenges
- *"He is a bloke in a female-dominated sector"* and brings a different approach and a fresh perspective
- A new set of eyes and ears
- Willing to dive in without hesitation, overcome fears, push self forward, confident to tackle anything
- Bubbly
- Fits in well with the rest of the team
- Can be trusted to research, follow up, pace the process.
- Has taken the role seriously, has gone beyond being a trainee, initiated new practices, lot of transferable experience
- Enthusiasm, energy, warmth, and eagerness

"Our trainee is open, flexible, and wants challenges – advisers are not usually like this. She didn't want to do group work and could have said no, but took it on and is now completing PTLLS. We have thrown her in at the deep end, given her far too much to do, relied on her and she has taken it all on – she has a rare ability to link things up, to get a bigger picture of what's out there for the client. She has brought life to the team, is totally reliable and the feedback is outstanding from everyone. She is an excellent outreach worker and has built solid relationships. She is interested in and quite competitive about targets, which is almost a private sector mentality. She has supported business planning, understands bureaucratic challenges and the evidence base for different funders. It is most unusual to have the aptitude to get this right. She has been very well trained – many other advisers have not had this kind of training, and is totally a part of the delivery team. Although new to nextstep and IAG, she is not a novice to this type of work and has brought valuable experience to it."

17.   The exit strategy – what next?

17.1. As stated at the beginning of this report, the context for setting up the traineeship scheme has changed radically and in some ways unpredictably.

17.2. At the end of the scheme all the trainees, except for the one who left to return to her previous occupation, wish to become careers advisers. At the time of writing this report half of the trainees have secured posts in the field, although some of these are not as nextstep advisers, but in prisons, volunteer bureaux, and colleges doing closely related work. Two are to be taken on directly as advisers by SCC. Most of the others are waiting to hear whether it will be possible for their host organisations to offer posts which they will then have to apply for, competing with more experienced advisers who have recently been made redundant from other publicly funded services. In most cases, hosts are keen to retain their trainees, and one would like the trainee to take full responsibility for the nextstep contract.

17.3. In response to this, SCC provided a brief extension of time for some trainees in order to allow the hosts to receive a decision about their Next Step contracts for 2010-11, and to review their budgets to see if it is possible to create new posts for advisers. This step was appreciated by hosts and trainees, but unfortunately the scheme cannot now be extended further due to a recruitment freeze being imposed at SCC in the last month following government cuts in public spending.

17.4. However, in some ways the planned timing for the trainees to finish the scheme and take up employment could have been more effective and avoided the need for last minute adjustments to the scheme. For many of the trainees, hosts have not been able to create posts that they could apply for because they were waiting for decisions about nextstep subcontracts, which have always been decided finally in July. If the scheme had been planned to extend to August, this problem would not have arisen.

17.5. The exit strategy could perhaps have been more clearly constructed to provide trainees with a structured programme of careers support, guidance and coaching towards the end of the scheme. Some feel the scheme is just "fizzling out", and the exit strategy vague and "fuzzy". Julia Butkus has continued to provide valuable individual support, sending vacancies, advising, coaching and is seen as always available for individual enquiries, but trainees would have found it helpful if SCC had:

- Contacted all hosts and agencies re vacancies and systematically disseminated this information to trainees
- Helped trainees to develop career management skills for themselves, and provided career coaching
- Provided structured help with job applications – the trainees are aware that they might be competing with each other for available jobs, and also with experienced advisers
- Provided each trainee with an individual careers interview
- Offered a group session to provide information about the range of jobs that might become available, including the wider range of agencies offering information and advice, and the changing national and regional structures and networks
- Provided clear information about the transferability of the skills and knowledge gained on the scheme
- Allowed for career development time shadowing other hosts and other agencies (e.g.Connexions)

"The scheme is a good way to train advisers and increase the workforce, but there was perhaps a lack of foresight about what would happen to the trainees – we were never assured of a job, we knew it was a short term contract, but a positive slant was thrown on it. The hosts took us on with recruitment in mind, but did not feel that there was pressure to guarantee a post, and have found it difficult due to the circumstances. I wouldn't have done it if I had known I might be unemployed at the end of the scheme."

18.   Recommendations

18.1. The scheme has been beneficial to trainees, host organisations and to nextstep East of England. In the context of cuts to public services, it is not at the moment possible to identify funding to repeat the scheme. However, this excellent strategy for increasing capacity and producing advisers specifically trained to work effectively in modern services for adults should be repeated as soon as possible to enable the growth of careers advice services in the East of England.

18.2. This report identifies detailed areas for improvement in the scheme based on lessons learnt by SCC, the host organisations and by the trainees themselves. Future schemes should make reference to the lessons learnt from this innovative programme. This particularly applies to the exit strategy.

18.3. A briefing paper should be written about the success of the scheme to enable national dissemination to other Next Step prime contractors, to advisers in different settings across the country, to the Skills Funding Agency, to LLUK, and to BIS in order to share good practice, and encourage others to set up similar schemes.

18.4. A workshop is being offered at the national NAEGA conference in October. The scheme should be promoted in other contexts to allow others to learn from it.

18.5. A short final evaluation exercise should take place later in the year when the full outcome and impact of the scheme will be clear.

19.   Concluding comments

19.1. The disadvantage of this kind of formative and summative evaluation is that it asks questions which encourage people to air problems and suggest improvements. While this is useful, it does not always emphasis sufficiently how positive people are. This section aims to correct this balance and to use the trainees and hosts own words to show how innovative, successful and useful the scheme has been.

19.2. The SCC team feel that the scheme has been more successful than other apprenticeship models and has built capacity in three ways: meeting nextstep targets by providing additional advisers, creating more advisers to work in public services (including 3 men, who are under-represented in the field), expanding the age range of advisers available to the public and getting a group of people into jobs. In addition, it has helped SCC to build strong relationships with subcontractors. The strategic importance of responding to the challenge of a lack of capacity across the region and implementing the scheme in this way cannot be underestimated. At the time, apprenticeships as a model were popular, but this scheme adds value to other models available at the time, and has proved an effective way of bringing new people with a fresh approach to the sector. SCC would like to take this idea forward on a long-term and sustainable basis.

19.3. The hosts made these comments which were included in the interim report and are repeated here:

- *Both trainees selected for my organisation are enthusiastic, committed and will become good advisers*
- *We are extremely pleased with our trainee – in return we can guarantee to offer her a busy, varied and meaningful placement – she is now a valued and integral part of our team*
- *It is an excellent scheme – we are all benefiting*
- *It is a great process and we are really pleased to be part of this model. Wonderful mix of trainees across the scheme from different backgrounds and cultures strengthens our delivery and was just what we needed at this time to*

respond to the very different customers we now see. I think this has worked very well overall and shows SCC as having a vision for the future

- *We are delighted to have a trainee and are benefiting from it*
- *As a small organisation this is an excellent opportunity for us to grow and develop our service – without question we wish to employ our trainee after the SCC contract has ended. The main challenge is to obtain funding.*

At the end of the scheme, the hosts are even more positive:

- *This has made us review our own processes and practice*
- *It has helped to build capacity and to deliver our targets*
- *It has given us more flexibility for a year and enabled us to create a range of projects*
- *The IAG service is so valuable to the volunteer bureau – everything starts with IAG, it is the foundation of the organisation, and the core of the service*
- *This is an innovative scheme and should be presented to senior managers in a range of organisations*
- *She has been a resource we would never have had – don't know what we will do if she has to move on*
- *The scheme is not only innovative but represents value for money - all the trainees have got work-based skills, the sector benchmark and the East of England has got them!*
- *It is so rare for adults to have work experience or a placement – it can be hard for external candidates to get jobs – and we got a free team member for 9 months!*
- *The apprenticeship model is great way of doing it – do it again!*
- *We would love to have another trainee*

19.4. The final word goes to the trainees themselves:

- *It has been fantastic – I enjoyed every single minute, and I think I am speaking for everyone*
- *I wouldn't have been able to do this without the scheme, and the constant support from SCC and the host organisation. I can't fault it –it has been amazing*
- *I have learnt not to be a perfectionist and know all the answers*
- *We are very lucky to have been offered this route in to this career – the only other routes are academic and not on the job. You rarely see trainee posts*
- *Have enjoyed it, re-evaluated myself and would see myself in related work*
- *A really positive experience - it has probably been the best experience of my life. I couldn't have had a better placement. This is a real turning point.*
- *A big thank you – it has been very valuable and will lead to a good career*
- *"It has been fantastic – I came across it by accident, but really wanted to do it from the start. A lovely scheme - a perfect way to a new career. Julia's role was pivotal and the whole SCC and nextstep team was very welcoming. I have met a lot of nice people, including the clients. It is a great job – I love it."*

Lesley Haughton

NICEC Fellow
July 2010

Appendix 1

List of Trainees and Host Organisations

Helen Harwood	Hertford Regional College
Julia Moule	Volunteer Centre, Broxbourne and East Hertfordshire
Miriam Lambert	Bedfordshire Adult and Community Learning
Sameena Khan	Luton Rights
Andrew Smooker	City College Norwich and Norfolk Guidance Services
Kate Sadler	Norfolk Guidance Services
Donna Massey	Community Learning & Skills Development, SCC
Emma Milner-Smith	Suffolk TAP, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Lauren Bayliss-Fuller	Adult Community Learning Essex
Ashley Collinson	SCC Essex Team
Andrea Ojerinola	Thurrock Community College
Nikki Murphy	SEEVIC College and Essex ACL
Andrew Smith	Cambridge Housing Society and Cambridgeshire County Council