

Executive Summary

Quality Enhancement and Development (QED) Project

The first phase of the QED Project took place between October 2006 and March 2007. It was led by Claire Johnston, Learning Partnership Manager and supported by Helen McNamara, Head of Learning Development, Learning Development Officers and other learndirect scotland staff.

Consultants who provided support to learndirect scotland were Bob Bissell and Joan Black, Open Campus Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University.

learndirect scotland is committed to continuous quality improvement. As part of this it has been recognised that there is a need to further develop a Quality Enhancement Strategy for the Network of Branded Learning Centres. The Quality Enhancement and Development (QED) Project is the first phase in this process and has established a useful platform for future activities which support approaches and activities designed to protect and enhance the learndirect scotland brand.

Six years on it was an appropriate time to take stock of existing arrangements related to branding, readiness of centres to apply for branding, and the application and renewal process. There were approximately 63 branded Learning Centres who were going through the renewal process from October 2006 to March 2007. At this time it was also appropriate and extremely important to review current approaches and processes related to quality assurance and the existing mix of audit, monitoring and development arrangements for Centres wishing to engage with learndirect scotland.

The project has involved Branded Learning Centres reviewing and developing for the future, appropriate and relevant approaches, materials, activities and processes, which support quality enhancement and development, for the various stages related to branding, application and renewal.

A major outcome of the project has been the contribution it will make to developing an implementation strategy for Pledge renewal for existing centres and for the application process for new centres who wish to use the Pledge and the brand.

Quality Enhancement and Development (QED) Project

The Pledge to Learners

- The Pledge is the foundation for learndirect scotland's Branded Learning Centre (BLC) status
- Supporting the needs of the learner, and ensuring that a quality learning experience is provided in Branded Learning Centres, is at the heart of QED
- There are 10 key statements in the Pledge to Learners which centres need to ensure are provided for learners.

The QED Project in its first phase has been about ensuring that organisations who aspire to the brand and those who have the brand meet the Pledge to Learners.

The Evidence Base and Consultation Process

learndirect scotland is a 'listening organisation' and at this stage of the project – lds has undertaken extensive consultation with staff from BLCs (both face to face and telephone interviews), lds Learning Development Officers, and key partners. From these perspectives, a number of key messages, conclusions and recommendations have been drawn.

This extensive consultation and active involvement has informed these new approaches and procedures for Quality Enhancement and Development.

This has involved the following:

- Consultation with 85 Branded Learning Centres engaged in renewal process between October 2006 and March 2007
- Consultation sessions and feedback from learndirect scotland Learning Development Officers and Senior Staff in learndirect scotland
- Background research
- Review of other Quality Standards and systems
- Review of Compliance Systems.

Key Messages of the First Phase

Some key messages from the extensive consultation include the following:

- Impressive achievement in Branded Learning Centre development, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms
- Support of learndirect scotland and branded status are highly valued
- There are many positive views on the materials and resources which are used to support Branded Learning Centres
- Learning Development Officers provide quality support for Branded Learning Centres
- Opportunities to review the way in which support is provided for different centres according to need – blended support provision
- Need to adopt differentiated support where needs are greatest
- Recognition of the way in which aspects of future support can be provided through enhanced information, guidance and materials on quality development together with the use of Operations Groups and sharing of good practice
- Opportunity to explore strategic approaches to BLCs where gaps exist – types of organisation and geographic areas.

Protecting and Enhancing the Brand

The first phase of the QED Project highlighted the following:

- It is clear that respondents value the learndirect scotland brand. For the most part, participants in the consultation sessions highlighted that it provided evidence of quality delivery. There was agreement that it was important to strengthen the brand. This involves both protecting and enhancing the brand. The QED Project has been set up to ensure that these two key aspects are addressed.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations have emerged from consultation and during the first phase. They are as follows:

- Increased use of self evaluation process
- Emphasis on continuous quality improvement rather than 3 year renewal
- Use of diagnostic self evaluation for those who wish to be a Branded Learning Centre, similar to approaches used by other quality standards e.g. Chartermark and EFQM
- The importance of taking account of other Quality Standards that some Branded Learning Centres have, their experience of self assessment and Quality Assurance processes.
- Capacity Building – Operations Groups – potential to have a Quality Enhancement and Development function as well as good practice exchange
- Continuation of Partnership Working for Quality Enhancement and Development – with Branded Partners and Branded Learning Centres
- The importance of blended support for Branded Learning Centres - continued and enhanced support from across learndirect scotland
- Improved information on website for potential Branded Learning Centres and actual Branded Learning Centres on Quality Enhancement and Development
- The Application Process will involve self evaluation but will be substantially unchanged
- The Renewal Process will no longer be referred to as ‘renewal’ and will involve a different set of arrangements and processes, which reflect the need for ongoing self evaluation, supported by visits from learndirect scotland as appropriate. New arrangements will be made available on the lds website, together with information on the QED Project.

Suggested Requirements for Branded Learning Centres (BLCs)

Out of the consultation process there are a number of suggested requirements for Branded Learning Centres which are highlighted here. This reflects the important and key role that staff in Centres have in supporting learners, and includes suggestions which will assist with their networking with others, induction, and professional development in operating Branded Learning Centres.

Suggested requirements under the new arrangements are as follows:

- representation and attendance at events, e.g Networking for Success Events, Learning Centre Operations Groups, Annual Conference
- responsibility for induction of new centre staff related to learndirect scotland and Branded Learning Centre status
- staff should undertake the Professional Development Award (PDA) in Learning Centre Operations or equivalent.

Support for QED and BLCs

learndirect scotland is committed fully to providing support for Branded Learning Centres in Quality Enhancement and Development through a mix of Learning Development Officer support, as well as through other information and materials. An appropriate mix of blended support will be provided to meet different needs. Additional support and advice will also be offered and provided when required. Where necessary, in order to protect the Brand, steps will be taken to remove the Branded Learning Status from a Centre.

- The learndirect scotland website will provide information and guidance to centres and staff about the application and the renewal process as well as other areas of the QED Project.
- Processes and procedures will be put in place to gather ongoing feedback on the enhanced information and guidance from staff and centres (both existing centres and those aspiring to become Branded Learning Centres).
- learndirect scotland signposts learners to local learning centres. In certain circumstances learndirect scotland will remove branded learning centres from this listing.

Blended Support for the Brand

Blended support is a mix of LDO support and other QED Information and Materials.

- For centres who do not adhere to key aspects of the Pledge to Learners, i.e. **the Essential Requirements of Branded Learning Centres**, additional support and advice for remedial action to be taken will be provided.

If this is not acted on, then after two offers of support, the learndirect scotland brand will be removed from that centre.

Essential Requirements of Branded Learning Centres

In order to achieve Branded Learning Centre status or to retain Branded Learning Centre status, Centres need to provide evidence that they adhere to the the following **Essential Requirements of Branded Learning Centres**, which are required by learndirect scotland:

- BLC Profile must be completed and submitted within 3 months – compulsory that this is submitted annually
- complete and return the Self Assessment Checklist annually to maintain the brand or partnership status
- The Self Assessment Checklist must be supported by an Evidence File (which should be available for spot check audits by lds at any time)
- list courses that are offered on the National Learning Opportunities Database (NLOD)
- provide statistics in relation to identified categories e.g. (NEET) , as learndirect scotland has to supply this information to the Scottish Executive
- learndirect scotland plaque has to be displayed
- BLCs must liaise with Learning Development Officers from learndirect scotland.

Meeting the Pledge to Learners

Centres need to ensure that they can meet the Pledge to Learners. QED does not just stand for Quality Enhancement and Development. It also means Quod erat demonstrandum '**that which must be demonstrated**'.

Essentially this is about:

- Commitment to the Brand
- Quality of provision of the BLC
- Quality of support to learners by staff
- Quality and value of the learner experience and achievement
- Evidence of Meeting the Pledge to Learners

Second Phase of QED

The work that has been undertaken from October 2006 to March 2007 represents the first phase of the QED Project, which will be followed by 2 other phases over the next couple of years.

This reflects learndirect scotland's commitment to doing the right things and doing things right in support of quality development, a recognised Total Quality Management approach. Quality is not seen as a 'quick fix' and learndirect scotland recognises the importance of being actively involved, with partners, in a continuous quality improvement approach.

- Phase 2 will involve the trialling and testing of QED approaches from April 2007 – March 2008
- In addition during the second phase, there will be an emphasis on gathering information and capturing the experience of the learner in Branded Learning Centres. Two key methods in which information on the learner experience will be gathered will be through Learner Surveys and Mystery Shopper activities. Results of Learner Surveys and Mystery Shoppers will be put on the website, as well as individual feedback to Branded Learning Centres.
- Operations Groups will have a Quality Enhancement and Development function in the second phase.
- The second phase will also involve random sampling of Branded Learning Centres for spot checks every year on how they are Meeting the Pledge to Learners
- The trialling of a range of QED approaches, materials and support will be important in ensuring that these are manageable, effective and appropriate to take quality forward in meeting increased expectations and different needs of learners.

A Successful First Phase

The first phase of the Quality Enhancement and Development project has been successful in its stated objectives and will assist learndirect scotland in further taking forward the quality agenda for its Branded Learning Centres and for organisations who aspire to achieve Branded Learning Centre status. The project has been extremely well led by Claire Johnston and also well supported by Helen McNamara and other Learning Development Officer staff.

The first phase of the QED Project has set out some key areas for current and future approaches to QED in line with more robust and appropriate measures to ensure that the lds brand is both protected and enhanced, currently, and in the future.

These are in line with ways in which quality systems and standards have developed during the past six years. The new approaches will assist learndirect scotland to focus on enhancing quality over a longer period, rather than just engaging in quality control, or spending large amounts of time and resources through the application and renewal process. The emphasis on increased devolved responsibility, with more self-evaluation approaches, will assist in this, is in line with continuous quality improvement approaches and reflects the fact that many organisations now have considerable experience related to quality standards as well as experience in self-evaluation processes and activities.

Differentiated Approaches and Support

There may be a need for a differentiated approach to using LDOs in the future. It may be more appropriate for LDOs to focus on Branded Learning Centres where they feel there may be some difficulties or they have concerns related to the completed Self Assessment Checklist, rather than a visit to every single centre.

Operations Groups would provide opportunities for LDOs to meet with staff from centres, and use a clinic approach to any specific quality problems that a particular centre might have. It is possible that these Operations Groups which would have a quality enhancement and development function might mean that there is less need for individual visits from LDOs to centres. This could also assist in addressing any LDO workload issues, as well as assist LDOs and lds to target more effectively in providing support to centres which might need it the most.

The enhanced information and guidance on QED provided through the website should also provide additional support for both BLCs and potential BLCs which should mean that there is less need for face to face support from LDOs. It will be important to encourage all centres to use the enhanced website rather than rely on information provided by LDOs.

There is a need to consolidate and enhance quality provision in the existing 515 centres in the next phase, whilst adopting a more strategic approach in terms of encouragement of potential new Branded Learning Centres in identified sectors or areas.

Calendar of Activities

A Calendar of Activities which will help both centres and LDOs with their future planning related to Lds activities and support will be an important part of the next phase of QED. Operations Group meetings would also be part of that. Centre visit planning from LDOs could also be included as part of a Calendar of Activities.

Reviewing, Trialling and Testing in Phase 2 of QED

It will be important to review the working of QED processes and procedures during this trialling and testing period. This will inform decisions made about the type and nature of future support related to QED, where future activities and priorities should be targeted, as well as other aspects of ensuring that the quality experience of learners is both rewarding and enriching.

Feedback from Learner Surveys and Mystery Shopper activities will help in other information gathering and dissemination of results of the Learner Experience. This will assist existing and potential Branded Learning Centres in further understanding the importance of Meeting the Pledge to Learners, as well as other aspects of Quality Enhancement and Development for the benefit of learners and staff who support them.