

Education and training that meets the needs of small business: Support document – Summaries of included studies

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Summaries of included studies

Eleven studies were identified as meeting the criteria for relevance and quality of findings to provide sound evidence to answer our review question (see second chapter, ‘The included studies’, of the main report). An additional nine studies were considered to provide supporting evidence for implementation of intervention strategies.

Core studies

The summaries of the eleven evaluation studies in whose findings we have confidence to answer the review question appear below:

35: GHK Economics & Management, 1997, **TECs and Small firms Training: Lessons from Skills for Small Businesses**, Research Report 27, Department for Education and Employment, United Kingdom, Suffolk.

The study

The aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of an intervention called *Skills For Small Business* (SFSB) which provided free training in one to six NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) units for a ‘key worker’ in each participating small business to enable that key worker to act as a training champion and to prepare a company training plan.

The study had a dual focus: (i) to understand the outcomes/benefits of SFSB for the small businesses themselves; and (ii) to evaluate the effectiveness of the various organisational models which the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) followed in implementing SFSB in its locale.

The research centred on ten Training and Enterprise Council areas, selected (through consultation) to represent various modes of implementing SFSB. There were meetings with Training and Enterprise Council staff, Business Link’s Workforce Development training advisers and the training providers – sometimes the trainers were internal to the Training and Enterprise Council; sometimes external, the different level of involvement of the Training and Enterprise Councils turned out to be a critical factor.

Telephone surveys were conducted with 97 businesses from Year 1 of SFSB. Fifty businesses from Year 2 of SFSB were interviewed: once near the start of their participation (baseline) and again six months later when they were completing it. It isn’t clear whether both the business owner and the ‘key worker’ who participated in the training were interviewed at each of the 97 businesses; there are quotes from both sources. We are not told how the samples of 97 and 50 were selected nor whether they had any trouble getting people to agree to be part of the study.

What they call verification interviews were held with five Training and Enterprise Councils and 10 businesses from Year 1, presumably after the data analysis. Mention was also made of five regional workshops but nothing further was said about them.

The report gives frequency distribution of answers by the small businesses (often distinguishing between the responses of firms with fewer than 25 workers compared with

those which have between 25 and 50 workers) with some quotes and a bit of discourse.

It paints a slightly rosier picture of the impacts on the businesses than may be absolutely justified. My sense is that the evaluators were as much, if not more, interested in the virtues and defects in the different ways the Training and Enterprise Councils handled SFSB – perhaps rightly. Their real focus seemed to be encouraging the Department for Education and Employment to continue to offer this kind of support to small businesses as a way of getting them into Investors in People. The different approaches of the Training and Enterprise Councils did influence the small business's satisfaction with the program.

Intervention strategy

The intervention was for small businesses with fewer than 50 workers. It provided free training for a 'key worker' in each business to act as training champions and prepare a company training plan. The key worker registered for between one and six NVQ units at level 3 or above. At least one unit had to come from a group of standards described as trainer and assessor skills.

In most cases the training provider determined which units would be studied, and some key workers would have liked a greater say in the units studied. There was also a fairly consistent concern that the training providers (especially ones external to the Training and Enterprise Councils) provided training, full stop. The participants, including business owners, expected – and would have liked – some follow-up. But mostly the businesses were satisfied with the program, which was free (although it did require at least the key worker's time).

The program attracted small businesses that had not engaged much with training in the past as well as those that had tried to be more systematic about training but whose efforts had stalled. On the other hand, half the participants had a considered approach to training and saw this as a cost effective (freebie!) way advancing on a course which they had already commenced. Most of the businesses had not much engaged with the local Training and Enterprise Council before the program so the program was seen to be effective in attracting a new client base to the Training and Enterprise Councils.

The Training and Enterprise Councils employed three delivery models:

- ✧ full sub-contracting with no Training and Enterprise Council involvement
- ✧ supported sub-contracting to a training provider with Training and Enterprise Council involvement in marketing, recruitment, vetting and/or follow-up
- ✧ Training and Enterprise Council/Business Link delivery altogether

Where the Training and Enterprise Council had little involvement (dot points 1 and even 2) the SFSB intervention was least successful from the small business point of view. The evaluation concluded that the Training and Enterprise Councils who simply focused on hitting targets – who had a hands off approach to the actual delivery – were chasing new clients at the expense of delivering a decent and on-going service to existing small business client.

The small businesses held high expectations that the program would enhance their skill base. There were differences in perceived outcomes with the larger firms generally benefiting more than the smaller ones.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

Introduced in April 1995, and operating for two years, the *Skills for Small Businesses* initiative in United Kingdom, for small firms defined as having fewer than 50 employees, highlights some key principles and practices in working with small firms with continued currency for Training

and Enterprise Councils, Business Links and their training providers. This scheme precedes that seen in studies 236 & 260.

As a qualitative study it would be hard to fault the range of people they talked to and the means they used – meetings, surveys, interviews, follow-up interviews, regional verification workshops. What we do not learn from the report is the methodological details (for example, sample selection, use of verification, number of perspectives employed in interviews or in data analysis). Those technical details may well have been deemed inappropriate for a report intended to make reasonable recommendations – the users being (more understandably?) concerned with the reasonableness than the underpinning technicalities.

Its picture of the small business participants is useful, particularly what attracts them to engage in a program like this. The drawback is that many (perhaps the majority) of firms in the study are what we would call medium-sized businesses. Australian small businesses tend to be at the small end (with fewer than 20 employees and many only a handful). Taking a key worker out for formal qualification units would be a large hurdle for them unless the training is provided very, very flexibly.

Its insights into organisational implementation are important. The *necessity* for the sponsoring agency (in this case the Training and Enterprise Councils) to maintain close contact with the businesses both during and after the intervention if the program is to achieve its long term aims is critically important and needs to be widely understood.

94: Maton, K 1999, Evaluation of the Small Firms Training Loans Scheme, by United Kingdom Research Partnership Ltd, Research Report 97, Department for Education and Employment, Suffolk.

The study

The Small Firms Training Loans (SFTL) scheme was operated by the United Kingdom Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), with the support of its partner organisations the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), Chambers of Commerce Training and Enterprise (CCTEs), Business Links in England and Wales and the Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland.

The aim of the scheme was to assist small firms with up to fifty employees to develop and finance their training plans. It sought to overcome the resistance of many small businesses to take out loans to fund training, by facilitating bank loans with an interest free period (termed a ‘repayment holiday’) and encouraging the banks to offer preferential interest rates.

For the period October 1994 to May 1998, which was the focus of the study, 346 loans were granted under the scheme to about 300 businesses (or about 0.02% of all businesses in the UK). The total amount loaned over this period was £2,120,000, with the average loan being £6,127, and the median £3,671.

The Department engaged UK Research Partnerships Ltd to conduct an external evaluation of the scheme, and published the evaluation report in January 1999.

The study sought to establish whether there was an increase in training participation as a result of the scheme, and whether participants were satisfied with the impact of the training on business performance and the employability of people undertaking the training. It was also intended to examine the process of delivering the scheme, assess its value for money and recommend improvements.

The evaluation methodology ensured that the views of small businesses, the clients of the scheme, were adequately covered in the evaluation. It consisted of:

- ✧ review of the Department's management information for all 346 loans (covering about 300 businesses)
- ✧ telephone survey of a sample of 92 businesses taking out loans, excluding 40 businesses taking out the 40 largest loans
- ✧ in-depth interviews of representatives of the businesses taking out the 40 largest loans
- ✧ interviews of representatives of partner organisations and banks.

The evaluation concluded that the scheme had been effective in making training available sooner and increasing the amount of training within the businesses taking out the loans.

It also concluded that in the vast majority of cases business aims had been met in full by the training, and that the scheme had worked well, and was a good way of funding training.

It shows that businesses had experienced at least some impact from the training in:

- ✧ Increased productivity through skills development
- ✧ Increased profits or market share
- ✧ Increased competitive advantage

The evaluation also uncovered links between the scheme and jobs growth, with employment increasing in about half the businesses, and increasing by more than 50% in about a quarter.

Intervention strategy

The scheme is intended to provide government support for small firms to develop and finance their training plans by:

- ✧ providing management support in Department for Education and Employment, estimated to cost £55,700 per year
- ✧ supporting the operations of partner organisations (although this form of support is not recognised in the evaluation report it can be inferred that these organisations rely on government support for their existence)
- ✧ funding the interest free period of the loans (the 'repayment holiday'), estimated to have an average cost of about £37,000 per year
- ✧ encouraging the banks to offer preferential interest rates (although the evaluation report questions the prevalence of this practice)

The evaluation report points to the narrowness of both the nature of the training purchased under the scheme and the industry sectors involved. It refers to an independent study which showed that nearly 30% of loans were for training in computer skills (which were the most costly) and an additional 22% in the acquisition of professional qualifications. A quarter of businesses were in accounting, legal, market research and management consultancy and 21% computer and related activities. Only 23% of loans went to the non services sector.

It also concludes that the take up of the loan as a proportion of all businesses is very low (0.03%), showing that the potential for the development of the scheme is very high.

The report attributes this in part to a culture within small business where there is a reluctance to borrow, and an expectation that government assistance for training should be free. It also points to a perception within small business that the cost of training and the time lost to training are not cost effective or manageable. It also questions the effectiveness of the promotion and marketing of the scheme by the partner organisations and the banks.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

This study is an external evaluation of the Small Firms Training Loans scheme operated by the Department for Education and Employment with the support of its partner organisations the Training and Enterprise Councils, Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise, Business Links in England and Wales and the Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland. The scheme aimed to assist small firms with up to 50 employees to develop and finance their training plans by facilitating bank loans with an interest free period (termed a 'repayment holiday'). Operating from 1994–1998, this scheme precedes that seen in studies 236 & 260.

Although the study covers businesses with up to 50 employees, 316 of the 346 loans (91%) went to businesses with up to 20 employees and 62% of loans were taken out by micro businesses with 5 or fewer employees. The study specifically seeks to assess the participation in the scheme by these businesses, and the satisfaction of these businesses with the scheme, especially in terms of whether the scheme met their business needs.

Overall, the research methods used are appropriate and appear to be conducted so that findings are reported reliably. There are some gaps in the reporting for example, it is not stated how many in-depth interviews were conducted with the large loan-holder businesses (40 largest loans).

133: Kearney, P 2000, Size matters: national summative evaluation report of the Small Business Professional Development Best Practice Programme 1996-2000, Office of Vocational Education and Training, Hobart.

The study

The Australian Government Small Business Professional Development Best Practice Programme ran from 1996-1999 and explored innovative approaches, trialling and testing them in all states and territories. This report synthesises what was learnt and provides advice for the future. It is therefore a seminal report for Australia which summarises the approaches and hybrid approaches that meet the needs of small business. It emphasises the need for effective recruitment strategies to ensure participation of businesses that do not have a training culture.

This final national evaluator's report includes the results of the longitudinal evaluation responses from 200 business participants (interviews with 50 participants of 1997, 150 of 1998 & 50 of 1999 SBPD projects), and analyses the State evaluators' reports and 1999 project evaluations and summaries and interviews with Project Sponsor organisations. The 1999 programme focussed on projects that would provide information on:

- sustainable solutions, using projects from previous years
- transferability, particularly through new intermediaries.

Other important areas which had not been investigated in previous years of the program included:

- e-commerce
- indigenous businesses
- sole operators

There were 30 projects in 1999 with 855 participants:

- 1999 Business Services projects - 8 projects- 50, 175, 12, 10, 20, 55, 23, 15 participants (total = 380)
- 1999 Sustainability projects – 12 projects- 17, 28, 30, 20, 35, 8, 13, 28, 18, 27, 70, plus participants (total = 294)
- 1999 Innovation projects: sole operator to employer- 7 participants

- 1999 E-commerce projects – 5 projects – 11, 19, 38, 23, 23 participants (total = 114)
- 1999 Indigenous projects – 4 projects – 17, 7, 16, 20 participants (total = 60)

Managed by Office of Vocational Education in Tasmania, the Australian government-funded Small Business Professional Development Best Practice Programme originated in 1995/96 with the aim ‘to find ways to provide relevant quality professional development to small business to enable them to select appropriate training and to train their own staff’ as recorded in the 1997 formative evaluation report by Cotton. All states and territories established a range of projects in 1996/ 97 but Northern Territory did not participate in 1998 & 1999.

This summative evaluation report was written after the program ended in 1999 by the national evaluator, who also wrote the 1998 report: ID133a: Kearney, P 1999, *Big Pictures from the small end of two: 1998 Small Business Professional Development Programme Evaluation Report*. The 1998 SBPD programme set out to further test models and to find new models with activities focussing on ‘businesses with an explicit lack of training culture’. It also had a focus on making the projects sustainable in the states and territories without national funding.

The programme employed an exhaustive range of evaluation processes, both qualitative and quantitative methods, over the four years. These included:

- Entry and exist surveys of small enterprise participants
- Entry and exit surveys of project managers
- Interviews and surveys with participants several months after exiting the programme
- Interviews with small enterprise participants, project managers and other stakeholders during the life of the programme
- Reports from project managers, SBPD Programme coordinators, field evaluators, project advisors, state and territory training agencies and the SBPD Programme managing agent
- An analysis of project business plans
- An analysis of the project researchers’ documents.

As the author notes, there are two factors that limit the report:

- Securing standardised and comparable data has been limited by the repositioning of the programmes over the years, the changing nature of activities and participation, and the sheer difficulty of obtaining timely data from busy people in small workplaces.
- The SBPD Programme conclusions, as with most research in this complex area, should always be treated with some qualification. The world of small business is so encompassing and diverse that generalisations and inherent limitations cannot be avoided.

Intervention strategy

Approaches and hybrid approaches included mentoring, networks, clusters, action learning, workplace coaching, diagnostic services (for example,needs analysis tools), benchmarking, low-risk buying (such as outcome guarantees), direct training, business service organisations as intermediaries, flexible provision, adviser/facilitator site visits and ongoing support.

Australian government funding provided support which for 1999 Business Service projects included up to \$35000 support to a business service organisation as intermediary and using advisors in a mentoring arrangement to work with a small number of business service organisations.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The Australian Government funded Small Business Professional Development Best Practice Programme (1996-1999) improved understanding of the value of training and increased commitment to training for the majority of participating small enterprises.

This study shows that collaborative self-help models, such as mentoring, workplace coaching, networks and clusters, are widely applicable to meeting the needs of small businesses, especially to improve participants' skills and knowledge, and learn about training options. Typically, the mentoring models included complementary components, such as networking, guest speakers, learning resources, and discussion groups.

Formal networks (based on relationships with common characteristics and orientated to long-term needs) and clusters (based on common tasks and solving immediate short-term need), with links to the formal training system and mechanisms for self-management and mutual support also work to meet the needs of small business. Workplace coaching also meets the training and business needs of small business, since most small employers and managers already coach their staff on the shop floor, giving advice, demonstrating and providing direction. Any direct training needed to be contextualised to the individual small workplace and flexibility (information & training delivery) was paramount to meet the needs of small business.

The success of a comprehensive model depended on effective strategies for recruitment, using training as a business tool, winning commitment, supporting learners, and very importantly, establishing a service with a business outlook and on a sound business footing. It may also include adequate market research, low-risk buying strategies, needs analysis and benchmarking aids. Diagnostic services, analysing skill/business needs, are a useful way to make the connection between training and business needs (especially when end-users are involved in design and validation stages of the business needs analysis tools).

This programme discovered that benchmarking and low-risk buying are potent strategies for enticing small enterprises into more structured approaches to training/learning but the programme did not adequately develop and test these strategies. It was also noted that genuine in-house small workplace training systems/models were not explored but working directly with such workplaces to develop and test micro-systems may produce transferable models, and advance a more sustainable and strategic response to small workplace training.

Collaborative self-help models often successfully used action learning strategies to meet the needs of small business. Action Learning has a definite set of principles, processes and techniques which make it work in the right circumstances. Classical Action Learning involves a group of stakeholders forming a team to solve a real workplace problem they share. They import and question knowledge to form a hypothesis which they then test through action in real situations. They reflect on the processes and outcomes, adjust their solution and try it again. The approach is dependent upon the natural stakeholders having strong desire to 'fix the problem'.

Business service organisations proved to be more than equal to the challenge of small business training, especially where they had established, structured, working networks with small business and an entrepreneurial outlook. Through a central organisation and branch levels they brought *economies of scale* and a *sustained* focus on human resources [ongoing support]. Other success factors included where training helped them achieve their corporate purpose or improve their profile with members, or they had some experience with training and they were dependent on members paying fees.

Other findings

The Australian Government funded Small Business Professional Development Best Practice Programme (1996-1999) improved business performance of the majority of participating small enterprises. This included improved profits, sales/turnover or increased staff or survival chances.

Other outputs from the SBPD Programme

The program produced six publications in *The Small Business: Small Workplaces* series, and four publications from specific projects: *E-business Springboards*; *Our business, Our way*. Indigenous perspectives; *GROW: Learning to be a first-time employer*; and *Coaching in Small Workplaces* (including Facilitator's Guide and Participants Workbooks) as resource materials to provide practical and strategic advice. The SBPD Programme's *Coaching in small workplaces* was accredited and aligned to part of *Train Small Groups* in the national Assessment and Workplace Training qualification.

The Small Business: Small Workplaces series included:

Where Business Meets Training: Key Themes

The Business of Small Business Training: A Planning Guide

Cross Boundaries: Effective Learning Networks

The Right Start: Using Diagnostic Tools

Ways That Work: Recruiting Participants

Business to Business: Learning Through Mentoring

133a: Kearney, P 1999, **Big pictures from the small end of town: 1998 Small Business Professional Development Programme evaluation report**, Office of Vocational Education and Training, Hobart.

The study

Managed by Office of Vocational Education, Tasmania, the Australian government-funded Small Business Professional Development Programme originated in 1995/96 with the aim 'to find ways to provide relevant quality professional development to small business to enable them to select appropriate training and to train their own staff' as recorded in the 1997 formative evaluation report by Cotton (1997). All states and territories established a range of projects in 1996/97 to trial different approaches using three types of models. Two training awareness-raising models were trialled including:

- ❖ **'self-help awareness raising model**, in which training-related information was distributed via paper-based products and electronic communication channels, specifically the Internet; and
- ❖ **advisor-assisted awareness-raising models**, in which intermediaries such as advisers from Industry Training Advisory Boards, NETTForce companies and training provider presented training-related information to small business operators through personal visits and group presentations.

Two direct training development models were also trialled, including:

- ❖ **training practitioner development models** such as developing workplace trainers and/or assessors; and

- ✧ **a co-operative training cluster model** where businesses share training resources and skills with others, sometimes including supplier businesses.

Three general business management development models [strategies] which were targeted towards businesses with a weak structured training culture through addressing business issues but in doing so raising awareness of training, were trialled. These included:

- ✧ **expert-driven general business management development models**, which address general business management issues through instructional approaches
- ✧ **business management consultancy models**, in which business consultants and training providers work with small groups or individual businesses to help them identify and address priority needs
- ✧ **co-operative business management improvement models** through group-based sharing of knowledge and skills and “sneak training in” by helping operator see the value of training and learn about training resources’ (Cotton, 1997).

The 1998 SBPD programme set out to further test models and to find new models with activities focussing on ‘businesses with an explicit lack of training culture’. It also had a focus on making the projects sustainable in the states and territories without national funding. Submissions came from Industry Training Boards, Industry Associations, regional development organisations. Various approaches and hybrid approaches were facilitated to meet the needs of small business with fewer than 20 employees (or 100 employees if manufacturing companies). 1402 small business people participated in 49 SBPD projects throughout 1997 and 1998.

This national evaluator’s report synthesises what was learnt and provides advice for the future. It emphasises the need for multiple methods to ensure recruitment of businesses that do not have a training culture. This report includes the results of the evaluations by State evaluators of the individual 1998 projects in the Small Business Professional Development Programme, Entry and Exit surveys of 1998 small business participants, and longitudinal evaluation activities such as interviews with 50 participants of 1997 SBPD projects and interviews with 1997 Project Sponsor organisations. ‘Disproportionate returns and distortions created by customisation of surveys at local levels, means conclusions are tentative and must be treated with caution.’ Author also admits that changes in personnel and continuing participation in 1998, and possible funding for 1999, ‘made it difficult to attain an accurate picture’ of the impact of 1997 projects on small businesses.

Intervention strategy

In 1998, 18 projects were implemented in all states & territories (except Northern territory) and approaches and hybrid approaches included clusters, networks, mentoring, action learning, needs analysis tools, business organisation intermediaries, flexible provision, facilitator site visits, ongoing support, outcome guarantees, using previous project participants to recruit and support new participants.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

Business Participant Entry and Exit Surveys indicated that small business participants achieved their personal aims of improving skills and learning more about training options. Overall there was an 11% increase in respondents’ rating of their adequacy to run their businesses. In the Exit surveys, only 10% of respondents said that they had not increased their appreciation of the value of training for their businesses, and 62% felt that they would be organising more in-house training as a result of the project. 49% felt that they would be more willing to pay for training in the future. ‘Almost half of the respondents *had already* increased their training efforts as a result of the programme, 37% of the businesses had already committed resources to increasing their training effort, and 38% had set up workplace systems to support the training efforts.’

As co-operative self-help structures, clusters and networks show great promise in meeting the needs of small businesses. Clusters are based on common tasks, and solving immediate short-term needs—activity is driven by achieving a shared task and tends to be concentrated, frequent and regular. Whereas Networks are based on relationships with common characteristics and orientated to long-term needs—activity is driven by affiliation and individual needs & participation tends to be less concentrated and regular. In 1997 projects, clusters and networks often used action learning strategies. Action Learning has a definite set of principles, processes and techniques which make it work in the right circumstances. Classical Action Learning involves a group of stakeholders forming a team to solve a real workplace problem they share. They import and question knowledge to form a hypothesis which they then test through action in real situations. They reflect on the processes and outcomes, adjust their solution and try it again. The approach is dependent upon the natural stakeholders having strong desire to ‘fix the problem’.

A half-dozen projects centred around the design and trialling of tools which would help small businesses to analyse their skill/business needs, and in some cases, make them aware of suitable training options available. Business needs analysis should be prominent and end-users must be involved in design and validation stages.

The 1998 projects largely confirm that mentoring in small business can work in a larger range of contexts (for example, Bilingual Mentoring for Ethnic Small Business). The author notes that the ‘usefulness of mentoring, however, as a ‘beachhead strategy’ to training remains inconclusive’ i.e. the connection between training and meeting business needs has to be made by the project.

Small businesses need ongoing support from training broker, facilitator or provider. The longitudinal evaluation of 1997 participants clearly indicates that where assessors and trainers return to their workplaces without any external support or connection to the training system, their training intentions were quickly dissipated. Formal cluster and networks with links to the formal training system and mechanisms for self-management and mutual support are potentially the solution to the problem.

Flexible provision of education and training is paramount to small business. Facilitators undertaking site visits before, during and after the project proved advantageous, while mixing previous project participants with new ones proved a great strategy in a couple of projects for example, former mentorees became mentors.

Recruiting small businesses to training using a personal or direct approach is better than indirect approaches like letters, fliers & advertising but ‘few single methods seem to be sufficient on their own’. Much depends on thoroughly understanding the nature of the businesses and the industry and combining several techniques: personal approach, advertising, training and business intermediaries for example, ITABs, Trade Associations, Chambers of Commerce, Other intermediaries for example, local councils, regional development organisations, Rotary, shopping centre managers, connecting with local economic and social needs for example, helping young people or using ‘levers’ such as new regulations, using previous participants to recruit new participants or local business identities as frontline recruiters – adequately briefed on training program. In general, business organisations like regional development organisations, Business Enterprise Centres, industry and trade associations are more successful recruiters than training intermediaries.

Other findings

Improved productivity, profit and survival capacity are main business interests and projects which tended to sell economic outcomes rather than ‘training’ or ‘improved skills’ had more success and less difficulty recruiting. The author notes that for small business the risk must be taken out of buying ‘training’ so marketing should relate to business outcomes.

The 1999 Sustainability Projects provide evidence that the training services are more sustainable with more of the following factors:

- ✧ ‘the service provides direct commercial benefit to the service provider
- ✧ the service helps the provider achieve its core purposes (for example, market positioning, organisation profiling and service obligations)
- ✧ the service is cost-efficient [for example, piggy-backing allowed larger organisation to undertake the personal approach to recruiting participants, which otherwise would have been prohibitive]
- ✧ the service is successfully marketed
- ✧ the service can attract a subsidy (for example, public training funds and/or corporate sponsorship)
- ✧ the provider takes a long-term perspective
- ✧ the service is planned on a business footing (Kearney 2000 p.42)

226: Dufty, 2002, **Small Business Smart Business Get Smart- Get into training, Final report & evaluation**, with support of Small Business Development Corporation and Business Enterprise Centres, Western Australia Department of Education and Training, Perth.

The study

This study is a quantitative evaluation of the ‘Small Business Smart Business’ (SBSB) program in 2002, funded by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and compiled by an external researcher to provide information and recommendations on the 2002 SBSB program.

The evaluation focuses on participating small businesses, training providers and Business Enterprise Centre networks in regional and metropolitan Western Australia, and their response to the program. In addition to administrative and management data collected, three separate surveys were sent out to participants of the program, of which, 1064 small businesses (35% response rate), 185 Training Providers (response rate not provided) and 36 Business Enterprise Centres (of the 37 in the network) responded.

Training could be provided by non-registered training organisations, as well as private training providers and TAFE colleges. Small businesses could use the maximum \$200 on more than one type of training. Each of the 27 regional and 10 metropolitan Business Enterprise Centres participating in the program was required to develop a strategy that was applicable to their community to increase the uptake of small business training. In some cases, the Business Enterprise Centres used *Small Business Smart Business* funds to run workshops for particular needs identified in the area.

Intervention Strategy

The *Small Business Smart Business* program in 2002 provided a training voucher up to \$200 per small business to spend on approved training that improves business productivity. It was funded by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and delivered through community based Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) networks.

Relevance to systematic review question

The study has relevance to this systematic review as an evaluation of a major state wide program facilitating training that resulted in a large number of small businesses reporting high levels of satisfaction, with evidence of increased productivity.

Overall, the program was well received by small businesses who participated and the state-wide government was an incentive for small businesses (fewer than 20 employees) to participate in training that improved business productivity.

Small businesses participating in the program indicated that it resulted in a change in training culture and increased delivery of training that otherwise wouldn't have happened. Almost all of the small businesses participating in the program would undertake future training.

The program was promoted in a number of ways but small businesses were more likely to find out about the program through Business Enterprise Centres, training providers and through 'word of mouth'.

Small businesses access training mainly from non-registered training organisations and private providers and the majority of the training undertaken by small businesses was undertaken by the business owner, over half of which, had not had previous training.

Other findings

The study found that the 2002 Small Business Smart Business program did overall achieve its aims, with 88% of the small businesses who responded stating high or very high satisfaction with the program and 46% reporting that the training had improved productivity and profit. Responses identified a range of benefits of the training, for the small businesses as well as the communities and the training providers. Survey results indicated a change in training culture as a result of the program (inclusion of training in business plans and delivery of training that otherwise would not have taken place). 96% of small businesses who responded said they would undertake future training. Training providers believed the program should have been more widely promoted, to themselves and to small business. The Business Enterprise Centres expressed concern with the time needed to administer the program. All major stakeholder groups would like to see the program continue.

236: Hirst, A, Lefauchaux, M & Rinne, S 2003, **Evaluation of the Pilot Small Firm Development Account**, by Cambridge Policy Consultants, Research Report 466, Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom, Nottingham.

The study

The study was undertaken by an external company Cambridge Policy Consultants, on behalf of the United Kingdom Department for Education and Skills (DFeS), to evaluate the pilot Small Firm Development Account (SFDA) program run in the UK from April 2002 to May 2003. The program was funded by the DFeS and the Learning Skills Councils (LSCs). The pilot was designed and delivered by the Centre for Enterprise an independent not-for-profit company based in Leicester, which researches, develops and delivers innovative approaches to workforce and management development. Local Business Link Workforce Development teams recruited firms to the program.

The evaluation aimed to: gain an understanding of why companies did or did not engage with SFDA; understand how SFDA support led to change in company practice; assess the extent of any resulting changes; review the extent to which SFDA achieved its objectives; and identify potential for improvements in the process.

The methodology ensured that views of a range of participants were surveyed including learners, training champions (usually senior employees) managers and those involved in administering and delivering the program.

The fieldwork for the study comprised: analysis of program monitoring data (314 companies); comparison of characteristics of SFDA companies with data on the population of small businesses in the relevant areas; a telephone survey (150 training champions); a postal survey (177 learners); case studies (key stakeholders in 15 companies); face-to-face discussions with a range of stakeholders. A planned follow-up survey was not completed.

The report also includes a survey of 30 non-completing companies; with the chief reason given for non-completion being lack of time.

Intervention strategy

The aim of the SFDA program was to increase the number of small businesses actively engaged in developing their workforce to improve business performance and to develop an internal resource for small businesses able to identify workforce development opportunities and engage with diverse training provision to identify the most effective solution. A main objective was to engage with small companies outside the range of usual business initiatives.

The pilot SFDA program provided small businesses (5-49 employees) with support and training to establish a training champion, develop a training plan and undertake the training in the plan. On completion of the training, funding reimbursed 50% of the training costs (up to £150 per employee). The total investment in SFDA training varied from £90 to almost £19 000 per company with median of just under £2 000. Total value was £899 000 with £587 000 eligible for SFDA contribution.

The pilot was conducted in four counties of England: Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. The pilot target was 320 companies; minor changes in implementation led to 314 companies being involved (although there is a slight variation in numbers of SFDA companies reported throughout the document, ranging from 313 to 356).

Companies came from a range of sectors; there was stronger representation from manufacturing companies, business services and care services, less from retail and construction.

The training covered a broad range, from one day in-house courses to college courses running for a year. Not all training was directly related to the job the learners had to do.

Relevance of this study to the systematic review

Findings from this study are relevant to this systematic review in that it considers a specific initiative for increasing the participation of small business in training activity that will improve their business performance, and it evaluates outcomes of the program including the benefits for the companies involved.

It is important to note that this report is very much concerned with the place of the SFDA pilot in the context of other workforce development initiatives currently operating in the UK system. Companies could not be included in the pilot if they had already achieved the Investors in People (IiP) standard. Some key findings and recommendations in this report deal with to the relationship of the SFDA program to other programs such as Investors in People and Small Firms Initiative (SFI). One finding was that SFDA had a positive impact on the take up and progression of Investors in People committed companies. A key recommendation is that consideration should be given to segmenting the market for SFDA and to fixing its position alongside other workforce development initiatives.

The authors concluded that the SFDA pilots were overall a success and brought benefits to participating companies. They commented that the approach should “be considered as a useful instrument in the policy toolkit.”

Their comparative data analysis suggests that while access to the pilots was open, nevertheless a good range of companies of different sizes and from different sectors was represented. They recommend that, if SFDA is to be continued, thought needs to be given to its place in other workforce development initiatives and to possible segmentation of the participating companies.

While some areas of delivery were identified as needing improvement by some companies (for example, greater attention paid to individual company business needs), overall the level of satisfaction with the support provided by the program was high.

There is some evidence of changed practice in the participating companies as a result of the program: a majority will continue to use the training plan approach in future and will maintain the Training Champion's role. A significant number of companies said that the program had resulted in an increase in training budgets.

Training Champions rated the training plans as good. Almost of all of the training in the training plans developed in the program was delivered (or would have been delivered soon after the report was written). Learners involved in the program showed a high degree of satisfaction with the outcomes; a majority believed that the training was relevant to their job and skill needs and increased their skills, related to their job.

Other findings

The role of financial incentive to participate while important on an a prior basis seem not to be all that relevant in the longer term as companies have indicated that they would have funded the training anyway. This is reported with hindsight but the foresight factor does not support that view and thus it might be important to maintain a significant incentive to attract participation.

260: Hirst, A, Lefauchaux, M & Rinne, S 2005, **Evaluation of the Pilot Small Firm Development Account Year 2**, by Cambridge Policy Consultants, Research Report 619, Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom, Nottingham.

The study

This is an evaluation of an extension of what was originally a one-year program of support in 2002 which was intended to encourage and enable small firms to develop Training Plans. This primarily consisted of support for one person in each firm (identified as the Training Champion) to develop a Training Plan. Firms which participated in the first year were invited to participate in a second year. The second year focused on embedding the Training Plan approach in the firms but also specifically targeted the development of leadership and management skills as well as trying to help firms build relationships with other firms and with available business support services. The program was titled Small Firm's Development Account (SFDA).

The authors point out that from SFDA Year 1 to Year 2 represents *incremental change* and, as such, a challenge to the evaluation of a relatively small initiative. As a consequence their focus was, as they say, "on understanding in detail the companies' motivations to learn and the types of learning undertaken" and most of the data was collected through interviews:

- ❖ telephone surveys talking to the Training Champions of two cohorts: (i) 25 companies that did not register for Year 2 out of 96 companies that did not register for Year 2; and (ii) 90 companies that submitted a Year 2 Training Plan out of 217 who submitted such plans;
- ❖ case studies of 18 companies based on face-to-face interviews with those delivering SFDA and key stakeholder organisations

- ✧ postal survey of SFDA learners – the Training Champion in every company was asked to distribute questionnaires to the staff in their company who had received some training in Year 2; 114 completed the questionnaires from a total of 41 companies – this is 8% of the total posted

The mechanisms for choosing the telephone sample is not given, nor for the case studies. Unfortunately the case study data is reduced to a few very small vignettes.

For the purposes of SFDA, a small business was defined as one with between 4 and 49 employees; this is significantly different from the Australian ABS definition of 1-20 employees. The smaller firms in the Year 1 cohort were less interested in participating in a second year, but the ones which did participate basically had the same experience as the larger small firms.

SFDA Year 2 was successful on a number of fronts. The Training Plans submitted showed a marked improvement over those of the first year. Fewer were rejected and many case study firms themselves pointed out that in the first year their Plans had been aimed at basic training for everyone. There was a real increase in the amount of training in the second year. It was also more targeted, the assessment of training needs more sophisticated and the specification of business objectives clearer. Learners reported that the training infrastructure in their companies had increased.

As might be expected, finding enough time prevented many companies who wanted to participate in the second year, but didn't. Non-participation in the extended program was also attributed to the smaller companies inability to absorb more training. It was also noted that there is a difference between not participating in the second year of the intervention and not participating in further training.

The offer of management and leadership training was well received. Half the companies which participated in Year 2 said that the opportunity influenced them to sign on for the second year. The authors conclude, in fact, that there is a "healthy" demand for this kind of training in the small business sector and it would be wise to keep supporting it. The mentoring program was less well thought through and of limited value even where it got underway.

A disappointment in the study is that it does not provide evidence of the business owner/manager's satisfaction with the program.

Intervention strategy

The overall purpose of the intervention was to stimulate demand for training from small businesses and empower them as purchasers. The purpose of the second pilot year was to further embed the principles of structured training in the companies. It was also to test different methods for encouraging small firms to develop structured approaches to learning.

In the first year of SFDA, potential participants were recruited by Business Link Workforce Development Training Advisers who then support the company's Training Champion through the development of a training plan. In the second year, the intervention provides a 'standard package' of support for the Training Champion to develop a second training plan – the 'standard package' appears to be vetting of the Training Plan by the Centre for Enterprise (the national body overseeing the SFDA program) as well as advice from the local Business Link Workforce Development team.

In the second year there were a suite of optional additional supports :

- ✧ a Training Adviser (at least one visit prior to completing the Year 2 Training Plan was mandatory)
- ✧ subsidies to a maximum of £1,000 for implementing training plan
- ✧ subsidies to a maximum of £1,000 for attending an approved management/leadership course

- ✧ services of a small business mentor for six months (to a value of £500)
- ✧ a Small Firm Training Toolkit (£100)
- ✧ 12 months free membership of a Training network for small firms

The various options were designed to test different approaches to developing a learning culture within small businesses, including understanding the demand for management and leadership training. The management and leadership training was taken up by half the firms that returned to the program in the second year and was cited as a real incentive to continue with SFDA. The monetary value of the funded training was not large and it is not entirely clear what role it played as an incentive to participate. Almost one-third of the Year 2 firms did not actually invoice SFDA for training expenses.

The mentoring program was not a success: it appears that the organisers did not appreciate that effective mentoring does not happen by itself, by simply putting an experienced business person with a less experienced one. It follows that the purpose of mentoring was apparently not understood by mentors or the businesses involved. Networking seemed to be a bit of an after thought and not really supported. It is interesting that the Training Champions said that the aspect of SFDA they were least satisfied with was the opportunity to meet other training Champions (the networking ‘events’), so the interest in specific networking is there.

Overall, however, SFDA was successful especially in improving Training Plans and, for the businesses that stayed the course, in reinforcing the value of training. It appears that one of the unstated goals of SFDA is to steer small firms to commit to the Investors in People (IiP) program. A number of respondents from Business Links and LSCs (Learning Skills Councils) believe SFDA does have a role to play as a gateway to Investors in People for some but also that it represented the most that can be achieved for many others. The authors refer a number of times to some small firms’ limited capacity to *absorb* much training – this is especially true of the smaller small firms. Unfortunately the authors don’t develop the point further.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The intervention itself is relevant because it gives some insight into what motivates small companies to pick up offers like SFDA which offer small cash incentives for training and tailored advice for the individual firm (through supporting the development of Training Plans tied to business objectives)

There is a second ‘relevance’ that may be even more important. The SFDA focus on developing a Training Champion and Training Plans in small businesses appears to fall into a series of UK initiatives designed to the same ends which have turned up in the Systematic Review; for example 035 and 094. It would be instructive in the synthesis phase to look at this set as a whole (and if there are others – they seem to follow the pattern ‘SF..’) to chart changes in interventions as these changes may say something both interesting and subtle about how Department for Education and Skills has read the evaluations. The question would be, with these programs that continue to call themselves ‘pilots’, whether there is a real progression in learning to coax small businesses into strategic training or a bit of treading water, simply offering this limited support at different spots around the UK.

Reading between the lines, it would seem that the management of the overall program has improved and the Business Link advisers are much clearer about the intentions of the intervention and work more effectively with the small firms than in 1997. Mention is also made of having milestones in the 2003 initiative and that that helped to maintain the pace of activity within companies.

Noticeable changes since Study 35 (1997) include:

✧ this time the Training Plan created by the Training Champion had to be approved by the central group responsible for the program (and linked to the company's business plan) – in reviewing the 1997 program we noted that the training plan which was technically at the heart of the intervention slipped off the evaluation radar screen;

✧ the Training Champion attended a workshop rather than undertaking NVQ formal units.

It may also be significant that the definition of a small business now starts at 5 employees (in 1997 the range was from 1 to 49).

604: Devins, D & Johnson, S 2002, '**Engaging SME managers and employees in training: lessons from an evaluation of the ESF Objective 4 programme in Great Britain**' in *Education and Training*, Vol.44, Issue 8/9 pp.370-377, London.

The study

The aim of this article (Study 604) is to explore the extent to which training interventions which have targeted SME managers affects their perception of the value of the training intervention and the implementation of organisational change. It also seeks to explore the extent to which involvement in training funded through the European Social Fund Objective 4 (ESF O4) program in Great Britain in 1998-2000 encouraged a process of lifelong learning and increased competitiveness amongst smaller businesses.

This paper is based on the exploration of a dataset collected to evaluate the ESF O4 program in Great Britain (1998-2000). The authors developed a subset of 116 independent small and medium sized companies from the original dataset of 211 companies and analysed the results for those companies (with fewer than 100 employees). The 2001 report of that survey and evaluation has been consulted as supplementary information for this review.

The evaluation methodology is outlined in detail in the earlier 2001 report of the original survey. It utilised both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The key element was initial and follow-up telephone interviews (in 1999 and 2000) with 200 employers receiving O4 supported training along with 50 face-to-face interviews with managers and employees of organisations engaged in O4 supported training activities.

The data from the telephone survey included 42 initial respondents and 36 follow-up respondents from small businesses having 1-9 employees while the next category was 10-99 employees (122 and 105 respondents respectively). Those organisations which are part of a larger group or employ more than 100 people were excluded from this study of small independent companies employing under 100 employees (n=116).

Intervention strategy

The intervention in this study was the provision of funding and support for a variety of training and skills development interventions for managers and individual employees. It was funded by the UK government from the European Social Fund (ESF) (particularly directed to social inclusion aims such as improving the skills of workers who were likely to become long-term unemployed if made redundant). Objective 4 provision focussed on management and IT training needs identified as a priority by employers. It emphasised the development of skills which would encourage both adaptability and employability. The ESF money is awarded to applicant organisations which have successfully bid for funding. A project must be run by a legally constituted organisation, not sole traders or individuals.

Most ESF money in England is distributed to projects through the Learning and Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus and other organisations (for example, some Regional Development Agencies and local authorities). These organisations are responsible for finding the match

funding. This system is known as ‘co-financing’ and it enables successful applicants to receive 100% funding for their projects.

One of the stated aims of Objective 4, in common with other ESF initiatives, is to influence organisations to undertake further training and development that is not specifically supported by O4, in other words to ‘add value’ to existing interventions.

Relevance of this study to the systematic review

This study, taken in conjunction with the companion earlier report, is relevant to the systematic review. The government-funded support for training interventions that it evaluates did encourage participation in training which met the needs of small businesses. It was necessary to look within the 2001 Research Report No.288 for more information about the nature of the intervention (ESF Objective 4) and the detail of the methodology. This article particularly focuses on a subset of the data from the telephone surveys. While 116 SME respondents is a small sample and it also includes those businesses with under 100 employees, the analysis does give credible results.

The key finding is that training interventions funded under the ESF O4 initiative in Great Britain in 1998-2000 did meet the needs of small and medium sized businesses to some extent for 92% of the SME respondents and for almost half it met their needs ‘to a large extent’.

There was evidence that involvement in the training intervention resulted in the introduction of new qualifications to the businesses, a wider transfer of skills in the workforce and that it encouraged further training.

Overall, the authors suggest that this study should be viewed as the first stage of analysis of a complex issue and that there is a need for further development and refinement of training interventions in the SME context.

Other finding

There was a modest impact on some measures of business performance but little evidence of impact on hard financial measures such as turnover. Business confidence appeared to increase as a result of the intervention. There was no conclusive evidence to support the hypothesis that HR practices were more likely to improve with the involvement of both managers and others in the workforce in the training intervention.

Supplementary document (Devins, D, Johnson, S and Bolam, F 2001) provides further information about the methodology for the original evaluation and survey and information about the ESF O4 intervention. **Study 734:** Devins, D, Johnson, S and Bolam, F 2001, *Adapting to change: an evaluation of the ESF Objective 4 Programme in Britain (1998-2000)*, Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, Series: Research Report no. 288, Department for Education and Skills United Kingdom, Nottingham.

715: Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1999, Business mentors: supporting small business in Tasmania and on the Central Coast of NSW, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, New South Wales, Australia, Ultimo.

The study

Small businesses account for approximately 97% of all private sector business and employ over 3.5 million people so are a vital part of the Australian economy. It is estimated that after two years of operation, 14% of businesses would cease to exist, and after five years 27% would have ceased and after 15 years 51% would have ceased. One response to the alarming

economic and social problems associated with small business failures has been the introduction of Business Mentor programs, the first established in Hobart in 1995—*Mentor Resources of Tasmania*. In May 1997, the *Central Coast Business Mentor Services* was launched in New South Wales and in 1998 they opened their Business Enterprise Centre which provides a full service including training workshops, business advice, access to research facilities and a Crisis Mentor Team for those small business deemed 'in danger of immediate closure'.

This report by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, a not for profit organisation with the broad charter of stimulating innovation in employment and educational practice, provides evidence of the benefits derived from business mentoring. It attempts to document the successes and barriers to success of the two Business Mentor Programs, summarise feedback from clients, mentors and management, and provide case studies of mentoring relationships with the objectives of providing information that will support applications for ongoing funding, sponsorship and development of the Programs. In addition the authors hoped to foster the development of a broader Business Mentor network by encouraging other regions in Australia to follow suit. The authors conducted a survey and interviews of program coordinators, mentors and their clients reporting case studies from the mentor's perspective and from the client's perspective

The objectives of the Business Mentor Programs include to:

- ✧ protect existing jobs and support job creation
- ✧ assist struggling small businesses to survive
- ✧ enhance the development and growth of small businesses
- ✧ provide free business support to local small businesses
- ✧ recruit volunteers with business experience to act as Business Mentors
- ✧ minimise the cost to surrounding communities of business failures

The key objective of both Business Mentoring Programs has been to support small business through the provision of experienced volunteer mentors drawn from the local community's pool of retired, semi-retired and active business people. Business mentors do not attempt to duplicate the work of paid professionals. Having been in business themselves they share an understanding and empathy with their clients and provide a sympathetic and non-judgemental ear. Business mentors attempt to provide a fresh perspective, opening their client's eyes to different ways of operating and helping their client develop a vision for the future. Their role is focussed on opening doors for the clients, identifying possible actions and explaining likely outcomes and in some cases they act as advocates on their client's behalf.

The duration of the mentoring relationships are short-term focuses on the specific goals where mentors report that they spend 2-3 hours a week working with their client over a number of weeks. In some cases mentors have developed longer-term relationships with clients and work with them for a number of months. At the time of this study Tasmania had 90 active volunteer mentors (60% retirees) and the Central Coast had 40 (the majority of whom were actively working or semi-retired).

A survey was sent to a sample group of 82 clients in NSW and 30 clients in Tasmania (total 112); 30 clients responded (27% response rate). Personal interviews were conducted with a selection of mentors, clients and members of the management of both Programs.

Intervention strategy

Facilitated mentoring is a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The Program met the needs of the majority of clients. Of the 30 clients who responded to the survey 18 (60%) rated themselves as 'struggling to survive' and 12 (40%) as looking to expand their business when they contacted the Business Mentor Services. Of the 18 'strugglers' 50% felt that their objectives had been met by the program, 33% were still working on these objectives with their mentors and 17% felt that their objectives had not been met. Of the 12 'expanders' 41% felt that they had achieved the objectives set with their mentors and reported improvements in their business status, 34% felt that it was too early to report results and 25% reported that the Program was unable to meet their needs.

Clients interviewed reported a high level of satisfaction in the results of the Programs. With the assistance of their mentor many have improved their business operations, such as book keeping, financial planning, asset management and marketing, and have increased profitability. Other benefits clients reported from their participation in the Business Mentor Programs include:

- ✧ acquisition of skills and knowledge
- ✧ extended networks of business contacts
- ✧ support and reassurance of an experienced business person
- ✧ different perspective and broader vision of their business and future opportunities
- ✧ access to information and resources
- ✧ increased confidence and self-esteem
- ✧ rekindled enthusiasm and increased motivation.

The sample is small and much of the detailed information from survey and interviews is not provided in this report. The strength of this paper lies in analysing the intervention – we gain an understanding and knowledge of the support provided by business mentoring.

Other findings

Mentors reported that the most common areas of business practice that they assisted small businesses to address include financial planning, time management, asset management, record keeping, budgeting, marketing, human resources and debt management.

The Coordinators of both Programs stated that the most important element of success for a Business Mentor program is the quality of the mentors' skills and experience. Other crucial elements that they identified include confidentiality, free of charge, independent and objective service, immediate and professional response, volunteer mentors with understanding and empathy for clients, coordinator with first hand business experience, good communication skills and the respect of local business community, and supported by community organisations such as Rotary, Lions and Probus.

Lack of consistent funding is an ongoing problem facing both Programs, restricting their growth and the availability of resources. If these Business Mentor Programs are to continue to provide low-cost, high-return service that has proven to be so valuable in supporting and enhancing the growth of small businesses, the coordinated [financial] support of Federal, State and local government is essential.

Other recommendations include to provide training for mentors, to provide team mentoring where appropriate, to provide opportunities for mentors to share skills, experiences, contacts and information. and to ensure Programs collect data and conduct analysis of their results to ensure the ongoing delivery of a quality service to their clients, and more systematic evaluation of impact of Programs to measure the outcomes of the Programs.

725: Hughes, M & Stanton, G 2005, **Talking the right language: can further education offer support for business innovation?: Feasibility study report**, Learning and Skills Development Agency, London.

The study

This study follows an earlier consultation undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) which looked at the development of the concept and criteria for Business Innovation and Support (BIS). The UK Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) requested LSDA conduct a feasibility study to investigate whether there was a role for Further Education colleges and other LSC-funded providers in providing support for company development other than training and generic business support. This feasibility study was undertaken between February and July 2004.

The research considered:

- ✧ the potential benefits of the development of BIS to firms of various kinds and to the local economy
- ✧ the place of the service alongside other forms of business support
- ✧ the extent to which this service was in place and the steps needed to consolidate and develop it
- ✧ the risks and advantages of developing the service in relation to the other activities of the college or learning provider.

It was anticipated that even if the research were to show that there is, or could be a significant role for further education in supporting businesses, a development phase would be required. Therefore, the study also considered the nature of support and development that might be required to secure quality and capacity in its delivery.

Staff from 24 Further Education colleges and training providers in England acted as 'research partners', doing the fieldwork in their local area under the direction of LSDA. Each partner interviewed 5-10 local businesses at senior level (total over 140 local companies - small, medium and large-sized and conducted case studies of two BIS activities their own organisation might undertake (one easily met and one which would pose problems). Interviews were also conducted with their local Business Link, local Learning and Skills Councils (13), Regional Development Agencies (6) and the London Development Agency

LSDA developed a series of four assignments for the research partners to undertake in order to answer the research questions (Appendix 4) and a proforma for recording outcomes of employer interviews/meetings (Appendix 4a). Research partners were briefed about the BIS concept and trained in research methods at an initial residential conference. Subsequent review meetings were held after the completion of each assignment where emerging messages from the assignments were discussed and further briefings on the next assignment provided. A second residential conference took place towards the end of the study to consult research partners on the merging of overall findings, and their potential implications for policy.

Intervention strategy

The proposed intervention strategy to achieve small and medium-sized enterprises, especially small firms, participation in education, learning and training is that some Further Education colleges should provide BIS.

Business innovation and support (BIS) is defined as support for company innovation and development, primarily intended to improve a company's products and performance. It typically involves consideration of a technical problem by means of applied research and

development (R&D), which may draw on knowledge and expertise from a range of sources. In many cases it may be concerned with the application of existing knowledge, which is new to the organisation concerned, rather than with leading edge technology or practice. BIS may be of benefit to both public- and private-sector organisations'

In this study, the intervention strategy is more specifically engaging representatives of local businesses, in personal interviews, in discussion of business needs and feasibility of support (non-training) for business and innovation from FE college staff.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

This study highlights the best practice in engaging small businesses in discussions of education and learning, developing relationships of mutual benefit to FE providers and, subsequently, increasing the demand for training.

It thus has information relevant to the implementation of any intervention strategy for achieving or increasing small business participation in education and training.

It demonstrates the personal approach required to engage with small businesses, building relationships of mutual benefits through listening to their needs and targeting support customised to their needs whether it be problem-solving, technical expertise, networking with other similar business or assisting with staff development or using FE staff or students to carry out development projects for local small businesses.

Other findings

Other findings relate to the benefits to the FE colleges, staff and resource requirements and risk management if BIS was offered to local businesses. For example,

FE involvement in BIS-type activities keeps staff up to date with current industrial and commercial realities, and is intellectually refreshing. This benefits their teaching role, and provides a source of realistic and attractive assignments for current full-time learners.

A BIS initiative would lead the way in developing infrastructure and culture that supports a college or provider mission and see employers, as well as individuals, as customers.

The skills required by staff involved in BIS-related roles include:

- ✧ specialist, technical knowledge and skills in areas of demand
- ✧ the ability to apply these in a business context
- ✧ the ability to develop practical solutions for companies and to communicate these effectively

FE involvement in BIS-type activities should not divert attention of the best staff from teaching duties. BIS does not need to take place at a fixed time and place but securing release of 'experts' requires flexibility on the part of staff and managers. Delivery issues that are crucial to BIS are the appropriate knowledge of the staff and the speed of response.

Note: another research report ID538 by Lisa Doyle and Maria Hughes 'Learning without lessons: Supporting learning in small businesses, LSDA, 2004, 28 p., provides further background to the training needs of small businesses (niche markets need niche training; 'local business angel type person to help in first six months – create a strategy & lots of support at first but slowly give less and less as company progresses').

731: Walker, B & Webster, B 2004, *Small Business Smart Business: Final report*, Small & Medium Enterprise Research Centre of Edith Cowan

University for the Western Australia Department of Education and Training, Perth.

The study

The study, conducted by external researchers, is a quantitative evaluation of the Small Business Smart Business scheme that has been operating in Western Australia over the past 5 years (since 2000). Evaluations of the program have been done for particular years in operation (for example, 2002 program evaluation also included in this systematic review-Study 226), however this evaluation aims to review the effectiveness of SBSB in connecting small business to the VET system as a benefit in planning for SBSB in 2005 and beyond.

This study focused on small business participants of the SBSB over 2000 to 2003. Out of the 16,825 small business operators participating in the program in that period, a stratified (by year of access and region) random sample of 2,500 were sent out self-administered surveys, of which 884 small business operators responded to the survey.

The survey collected data on background information about the business and business owner; participation by the business in training and skills development; attitudes of the business owner towards training and small business; the perceived value of training small business; willingness for small business to participate in training; and aspirations of business growth.

The authors recognise that this study is not longitudinal and are clear in pointing out other limitations of the survey instrument.

Intervention

The Small Business Smart Business program is a Western Australian Department of Education and Training initiative aimed at increasing participation, access, productivity and a training culture for the small business sector. The program and objectives have changed from year to year but is essentially an incentive scheme that allocates training vouchers of up to \$200 to eligible small business in metropolitan and regional Western Australia. The program has been delivered exclusively by the Business Enterprise Centres through a network of 27 regional and 10 metropolitan Centres.

Relevance of this study to the systematic review

The study evaluates a strategy aimed at small business and participation in training and while it is only a point in time survey with no measure of change in behaviour regarding subsequent paid training, the results provide useful information about the attitudes of small business to training, their willingness to participate and the value placed on training.

Small business owners are more likely to recognize the importance and value of training for themselves and their business when they actively participate in training and that without the availability of the voucher some may not have selected to participate in any training.

The aim of the SBSB was to get small businesses involved in training that improved productivity of the business. Responses to the survey indicated that there was an overall indication of positive influence of training on the business and the operators in terms of improved productivity, as well as increased profits, positive effect on staff satisfaction and improved management skills.

The Business Enterprise Centres (BEC) delivered the SBSB program exclusively throughout WA via 27 centres. This strategy was particularly effective in getting small business to participate in training as survey responses show that the BECs are consistently the main source of information for small business about the SBSB program year to year, particularly for enterprises in regional WA.

Larger Businesses or businesses making a larger profit, are more likely to invest more money into their training budgets

In terms of the type of training that small business were undertaking, the majority of businesses used training involving computer programs (33%) and computer skills (20%).

There is another evaluation of this program included in the 'A' list, which focuses on the small business, training providers and BEC participants in the program in 2002 (ID 226). This study provides more information on the processes and fills in details that are lacking in this report (the report assumes a lot of background of the program is known to audience).

Other findings

Small business perceive training as a cost and not an investment, with many believing that funding for training should be a government responsibility. Formal training was considered by the majority of the respondents to be important but decision not to participate due to lack of time, cost and/or resources to accommodate stand alone training or training that involves time away from the business. Many respondents mentioned that they conducted in-house training or continuous on-the-job training which is not generally recognised as formal training and for which they could not access the training vouchers.

Supporting evidence

An additional nine studies provided supporting evidence, especially for successful planning, promotion and implementation of intervention strategies found in the core studies. These studies are summarised below.

167: Figgis, J, Alderson, A, Blackwell, A, Butorac, A, Mitchell, J & Zubrick, A 2001, **What convinces enterprises to value training and learning and what does not?**, NCVET, Adelaide.

The study

This study explored the training or learning cultures in small to medium-large sized enterprises and aimed to better understand the concept of cultures of training and learning and to investigate what makes case studies and other information about exemplar enterprises interesting and convincing enough that other enterprises will follow their lead.

The study proceeded in two stages. Stage one focussed on studying ten enterprises that ‘had cultures (or workplace relationships) where training and learning worked’ (but not necessarily ‘high achievers’). The study required sufficient depth to construct a comprehensive picture of each enterprise: its culture and the strategies it used—including *why* those strategies were used—to further develop the skills and knowledge of individual employees and of the enterprise as a whole. Data from interviews, conversations, observations and analyses of documents were triangulated between two-person interview team. The full case studies were then rewritten into 5-6 pages, called ‘case stories’, which focussed on enterprise’s (and individual’s) most relevant experiences. 10 themes/issues from Stage one case studies were used to facilitate learning and each case story was checked for accuracy by the enterprise (p.21).

Stage two of the study invited 21 enterprises to provide feedback on the booklet through interviews (of which, 35 respondents from 19 enterprises participated including 5 small enterprises) and whether the themes, issues and stories were interesting, helpful or convincing to them. A simple questionnaire was inserted in the booklet to get the enterprises to think about what was interesting, helpful and useful. The draft of chapter on Stage Two was sent to the 35 interviewees to ensure their views were correctly reported and their feedback was fully incorporated in the final report. Stage two responses were also categorised into themes or issues.

Overall, the response to the booklet in terms of content and style was ‘extremely positive’ but not everyone was enthusiastic (either didn’t have time to read through all of it or did not find anything useful to them). The authors found that the enterprises in stage 2 could be roughly categorised into three groups:

- ✧ those that found the information interesting but not inspiring enough to change their approach to training and learning; these were typically enterprises with established patterns of training and learning and thought they had nothing to learn from the booklet. A few were undergoing considerable change and the booklet had little to contribute to the change.
- ✧ those that picked up ‘snippets’ of new ideas to try; the booklet reminded them of skill development and persuaded them that they might be able to do more or different things than the were doing.
- ✧ those which were stimulated enough to reflect deeply about what they currently do and on what they might do in future in terms of training and learning. Outwardly these enterprises had nothing in common in terms of size, region, state, industry and climate of change.

However, in every case, a senior figure in the organisation was involved and took the lead in questioning the culture of the enterprises.

One important theme that emerged from these case studies was the importance attached to informal ways people interacted. There was consistent interest across a wide range of size, industry, location in informal learning but there was a difference in what people actually thought about it. Some enterprises which were interested in the ideas behind informal learning but were not convinced they would (or could) put in place strategies for its implementation. These tended to be companies with a history of traditional VET training. Other participants were keen to bring the ideas about informal training described in the booklet to the attention of their enterprises. Workers and managers in an enterprise will (and should) learn from one another outside of formal training programs so values and attitudes amongst employees at all levels determine the usefulness of the strategy. The authors described this as having an organisational culture which amplifies the value of training and learning.

Intervention strategy

Using real and detailed exemplar case studies of enterprise training and learning experiences to convince other enterprises to follow their lead or engage in conversations about possible training and learning approaches.

Relevance of this study to the systematic review

Stage two of this study is particularly relevant to the systematic review as it is relevant to marketing any strategy to achieve small business participation in training and learning. By including formal and informal approaches from real, detailed case studies, most employers are interested in reflecting on how other enterprises overcame problems and issues, or used approaches, to which they could relate.

The findings include that enterprises appreciate getting real and detailed insight into how other enterprises operate. Stage two enterprises said they were convinced to at least think about their current approaches to training and learning because the information from Stage One cases was frank, generous and authentic.

Enterprises are interested in a flexible approach to skill and knowledge development, especially in the way informal approaches to training and learning could contribute to the development of skills, knowledge and innovation in an effective and cost-effective way. The need to balance the formal and informal approaches to training and learning—not only balance but to integrate them—was an issue acknowledged by enterprises.

Calculating a return on investment made in training and learning is an issue of concern to enterprises and most would like more direction on this. However, this does not mean that they had to see the impact on the bottom line as most mentioned using qualitative measures.

The most effective channel of communication with enterprises is personal interaction—above all because it allows for conversation and the ‘receivers’ of messages about training and learning have the opportunity to think out loud about how the information might apply to their circumstances. Also, the response of enterprises to overtures and information about training and learning depends on the timing.

Other findings

More relevant for larger businesses in particular: There are people throughout most enterprises who have an interest in training and learning. These people should be consulted along with senior management about training and learning. They are often far more critical to making decisions about skill and knowledge development, and certainly encourage employee engagement, than

management. However, where enterprises reflected and questioned the culture of their organisation, a senior figure was involved and took the lead.

261: Confederation of British Industry, 2005, **Employers collaboration to raise skills in supply chains and clusters**, Confederation of British Industry, London.

The study

The Confederation of British Industry in 2004 conducted a study among its 5000 members to investigate the effect of employers' collaboration in raising staff skills. 421 returned their electronic questionnaire (8%). The population participating in the study were made up of three types of firms: 72 small (1-49 employees) firms (17%); 88 medium (50 – 249) sized firms (21%) and 261 large ((250+) companies (62%). Small business is adequately represented within the sample although the total return of 8% is very low and thus the statistical validity of the sample has to be questioned. Furthermore, it has to be noted that members of Confederation of British Industry are already highly motivated organisations and generally one would expect those at the upper 10% of engagement to respond to such a questionnaire. In conclusion, the sample may not be representative of British Industry. However, there are some findings relevant to small business.

The study's aim was to establish what key factors were driving the collaboration process, or what barriers prevented the activity from taking place. The researchers conducted:

- ✧ a theoretical review
- ✧ a quantitative questionnaire using an electronic format
- ✧ selected 30 participating companies for a case study approach, and
- ✧ conducted in-depth interviews some of them telephone based.

The case study approach was employed to obtain samples of good practise employing collaboration, while the in-depth interviews were used to explore the function of the supply chain and cluster approach to collaboration.

The evaluation has shown that overall 95% of participants who reported collaboration in skills training were satisfied with the outcome and reported that the process has had a positive impact on business performance. This was split between those perceiving a small positive impact (58%) and a significant positive impact (37%). Fewer than 1% of respondents believed working together with other employers has a negative effect.

The study has shown that there are two main models of skills collaboration: Model 1 is Hub-and-spoke where leading companies drive skills improvements among smaller firms; Model 2: Small or medium-sized firms work together on skills to gain mutual benefits. The study has also shown that companies collaborate within four broad groupings (i) local area-related sector (the classic cluster); (ii) local area – disparate sector; (iii) national sector; and (iv) the supply chain. Generally small businesses are not involved in type (iii) the national sector [this finding is primarily from the literature review]. Supply chain collaboration is usually driven by larger companies while smaller businesses tend to use the local/sectoral cluster as their preferred vehicle. However, many employers reported working collaboratively in several of these groupings.

Intervention strategy

Collaboration between firms to enhance skills was the intervention strategy that this study reviewed. The study was examining, on an post-hoc basis, firms that were employing

collaborative training for skills enhancements among its staff. Specifically the study examined possible structures (clusters and supply chains) as facilitators.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

There are some findings which are specifically relevant to the systematic review.

The survey respondents were diverse with small business (1-49 employees) providing 72 (17%) of the participants. Information relevant to the small business community includes that:

- ✧ Inter-firm co-operation on skills or skills collaboration can be fostered by dedicated business networks, clusters or supply chains
- ✧ The nature of skills collaboration is driven by business needs and hence encompasses a wide variety of approaches
- ✧ The primary factors fostering success are the involvement of firms
- ✧ facing similar business problems or challenges
- ✧ with commitment of senior management
- ✧ availability of training tailored to the needs of the organisation
- ✧ Businesses that collaborate on skills development report a positive impact on business performance
- ✧ Smaller firms are able to acquire high-quality training at reasonable cost using the training resources of larger companies
- ✧ Skills collaboration in supply chains can provide the capacity to tackle skills shortages or gaps in small firms
- ✧ Small firms are able to mentor and mutually learn from peers;
- ✧ Cross-fertilisation of skills may be possible between public and private sector
- ✧ Economies of scale can be attained though sharing training;
- ✧ Pooling training with firms in different regions can overcome competitive concerns
- ✧ Small firms may find that using a training broker such as local union or industry representative can help foster skills collaborations
- ✧ Skills collaboration participants from small firms are most often owners and managers.
- ✧ Smaller firms co-operate on skills in many informal groups
- ✧ Employer collaborations in local areas may mean skills collaborations on more generic business issues or skills
- ✧ Time and resource constraints are a barrier to skills collaboration, especially for smaller firms
- ✧ Employers who are currently working together on skills collaborations are concerned about sharing information with competitors.
- ✧ Firms which are not involved in skills collaborations by working together with other firms are most likely to have not had the right opportunity or be concerned about business confidentiality.

Other findings

There are a number of issues that arise from this review that are not directly related to the review question but are of some importance:

- ✧ Small or medium sized enterprises working together to mutually benefit from mentoring, sharing skills or learning programs or pooling skills to compete more effectively for contracts
- ✧ Skills training in small to medium sized firms is predominately undertaken by higher level employees. This trend is particularly pronounced in small and medium sized enterprises where owners/directors are more likely to be involved, as collaboration often involves sharing of technical or management expertise.
- ✧ Key drivers of the collaboration process:
 - i. vision of key individual at various levels of organisation
 - ii. approaches by larger firms (supply chain process)
 - iii. initiatives by industry forums
 - iv. external brokers (usually training providers)
- ✧ The most common business benefits from collaboration, among survey respondents, are the improvements in employees competence (55%), working practices (41%), product/service quality (32%) and customer satisfaction (30%). However, many collaborations have specific business objectives, for example, employers working together in a supply chain often concentrate on process improvements.
- ✧ A wide range of direct and indirect business benefits can be obtained as a result of employers working together on skills. These include:
 - i. Collaboration can directly help managers to resolve business problems
 - ii. Companies can win new business by working together
 - iii. Collaborating on skills can increase quality in the supply chain and enhance the prospect of inward investment
 - iv. Working with other companies on training and skills needs can help combat skills shortages and gaps
 - v. Collaboration increases value for money spent on training
 - vi. Increased customer satisfaction often results from collaborative working on skills
 - vii. Some companies use skills collaboration to directly generate revenue
 - viii. Skills collaboration can improve staff retention

384: Hughes, M, Keddie, V, Webb, P & Corney, M 2002, **Working Towards Skills: Perspectives in workforce development: Research report**, Learning and Skills Development Agency, London.

The study

Workforce Development is defined as ‘training and development activities for the existing adult workforce, which relate to improvement of performance within current or future job roles’.

The research project aimed to:

- ✧ assess the extent and effectiveness of workforce development
- ✧ examine how priorities for workforce development are identified
- ✧ identify the types of learning that are taking place - in terms of content and delivery – and assess the effectiveness of this in relation to corporate and individual objectives
- ✧ develop criteria for good practice in supporting learning in the workforce.

The focus of the project was on workforce development strategies to satisfy workers' development needs, not on the effectiveness of workforce development strategies, including the delivery of education and training, to meeting business needs.

The research methodology consisted of:

- ✧ literature review
- ✧ postal survey of employers sent to 2,000 small and medium sized enterprises with 2-50 employees. 85 responded (4%)
- ✧ follow up interviews of managers of 12 small and medium sized involved in the postal survey
- ✧ focus group meetings of employees of small and medium sized – six groups for small- and medium-sized employing 2-250 staff, including two groups 2-10 staff and two groups 11-50 staff.

The research report provides a commentary on how workforce development has emerged as a major government priority and on its potential for use in small and medium sized enterprises.

The research did not provide evidence of the proportion of employees engaged in training, nor the numbers of employees engaged in the various types of training. However, the postal survey provides evidence that two thirds of training is through Further Education Colleges and private training providers, and that this proportion is higher for the smaller firms.

This report draws on the views of employers and employees of small firms on workforce development and on related initiatives and interventions attempting to promote it. Attracting only 85 responses (4.2% response rate) from a postal survey of 2000 small firms with 2-50 employees in the United Kingdom, researchers backed this with follow-up interviews of 12 managers. The postal survey and the follow up interviews provide evidence that training and development leads to better productivity, is necessary for business growth and leads to better motivated staff.

Intervention strategy

The report deals with 'Workforce Development', which consists of 'activities which increase the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in the workforce, thereby improving productivity and employability'. With active learning and in-house learning, this includes education and training.

The research identifies a range of activities which provide opportunities for education and training of employees, including both informal and formal modes of delivery. Specific formal modes of external training surveyed in the research include FE Colleges, private providers, suppliers and apprenticeships.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The results of this study have marginal relevance to the systematic review.

The research is principally concerned with "workers' development needs" and how these are met by "workforce development strategies". Its focus is on "learning at work" and the "capacity to learn informally", not how workforce development (training specifically) is being used to meet business needs.

Some evidence of the participation of small business managers and employees in training can be found throughout the study report. The evidence is strongest when generalised from the literature review. This includes mostly evidence of preparation for training (for

example, planning, and needs assessment – which are not the focus of the systematic review question), rather than engagement in training itself.

The study does contain one piece of research which produces some evidence of employer attitudes to training and whether training has satisfied their needs, although there is a bias in the sample, which is small, and there are doubts concerning the selection process.

The report provides evidence of employer attitudes to training, that is, leads to better productivity, better motivated staff, and is necessary for business growth, but also that formal training leads to increased wages, disruption at work and poaching staff.

The study report is a useful discussion document to engender support for workforce development (including education and training) but it contains only weak evidence with which to answer the review question.

415: European Training Foundation 2000, *Entrepreneurial training for growth of small and medium-sized enterprises: Lessons from Central and Eastern Europe: Report*, European Training Foundation, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

The study

This European Training Foundation project used extensive measures to identify best practice training programs in the transition economy countries and selected local training provider personnel from seven countries were given detailed instructions and a training workshop before preparing their case studies. This project aimed to identify specific training activities provided by agencies and institutions to help the growth and development of small and medium sized enterprises in countries in Central and Eastern Europe experiencing a transition to market based economies. The report sets out to provide:

- ✧ concrete guidance, practical models and solutions to entrepreneurial training providers, agencies and other organisations offering assistance to small and medium sized enterprises in Central and Eastern Europe
- ✧ a useful tool for policy makers at national, regional and local levels as well as those organisations directly and indirectly involved in small and medium sized enterprise development, including the European Commission.

This study illustrates some selected Central and Eastern European practices in the field of entrepreneurial training designed to facilitate the growth of small and medium sized enterprises and reports on the lessons that have been learned in those countries. The enterprises taken into consideration for the case studies:

- ✧ have between 10 and 150 employees
- ✧ have had at least one year of consolidated operations
- ✧ have already demonstrated a capacity to improve turnover and have significantly increased their market share.

The European Union definitions of small and medium sized enterprises used in this report are namely: self employed; micro-business = 0-9 people employed; small business = 10-49 employed; medium sized business = 50-249 employed and large business = more than 250 employed.

Intervention strategy

“Entrepreneurial training” in this context means all kinds of support and assistance activities addressed to entrepreneurs in the context of transfer of knowledge, expertise and attitudes, or facilitation thereof. Informal learning sources are considered where relevant.

The available evidence [from the literature] indicates that effective management development and training approaches are characterised by:

- ✧ an entrepreneurial orientation
- ✧ a focus on the real problems of the business owner
- ✧ one-to-one approaches in the use of external consultants and in-house working with the owner-manager [p.12]

Overall it is evident that training for high growth companies needs to be industry specific, individual and problem focused and differentiated in terms of start-up and growth phases. [p.12]

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

This study highlights best practice in marketing and delivering training to small and medium sized enterprises, particularly those where the owner manager wants company and personal development. Findings included:

- ✧ ‘best practice’ has a strong focus in the process of training upon identifying the problems and opportunities confronting the individual companies [p.118]; programmes focused on identifying areas of potential business improvement, team building and the process of delegation by owner managers [p.115]
- ✧ individuals and companies do not necessarily have a clear notion of the problems they face, but are only aware of symptoms before they come on the programme.. One of the objectives of the programme is to help them focus in this respect.
- ✧ clients may add little to their formal knowledge but add a great deal to what they can do with their existing knowledge base as a result of having time to think and encouragement to structure their experience.
- ✧ Price policy –An attractive marketing feature was the subsidisation of price by external country donors or a large ‘holding’ company but for sustainability the price subsidy must be taken over by a local or central government agency
- ✧ reaching the market- key method of recruitment employed was participation in exhibitions or use of introductory workshops, personal recommendations and promotion of successful clientele feedback in newspaper articles or presentations at ‘open days’. Also marketing through intermediaries such as business clubs, employer organisations, entrepreneur associations and local enterprise development agencies or joint ventures with them.

Other findings

Other findings relate to good practice in program development including location, timing of program, size of class, recruitment of tutors, the development of appropriate materials and the degree to which the program helps participants build their networks. These include:

- ✧ Location and timing - minimise the inconvenience caused in attending the programme and reduce the ‘opportunity cost’ of the owner/key manager being away from their firm for too long, space out substantially ‘formal’ inputs [six weeks between modules]and ‘allow maximum potential for participation exchange’ [maximum 20 usually fewer than 12 in a class] [p.116-7]

- ✧ Trainers and contributors- use was made of visiting speakers, entrepreneurs, officials and bankers but the tutor should also have business experience and demonstrate this.[p.119]
- ✧ Program delivery – strong action focus, participants able to implement their own ideas; peer learning, building networks, consultant follow-up to support implementation of learning [p.120]
- ✧ needs analysis must be pursued in a way that leads clearly into demand (the real learning needs emerge once the program gets underway). Therefore ‘best practice’ has a strong focus in the process of training upon identifying the problems and opportunities confronting the individual companies. It focuses upon these between modules of the course and leaves ample room in the program for discussions with individual participants for learning about needs. Best practice ensures that the participants are of similar background and from similar kinds of companies so that needs are more likely to be shared (but not from same industry to avoid competitors) [p.112]. Several providers engaged participants in pre-course analysis of their business needs [p.113].
- ✧ immediate ‘problem solving’ focus of many owner managers so ‘problem solving and opportunity grasping seemed to be the key trigger for focussing on the ‘needs into demands’ conversions’[p.117];;problem-centred focus leads to a more holistic approach to management.[p115]
- ✧ personal development – developing self-confidence, the pursuit of ‘professionalisation’ of the manager, through presentation skills, role-play, strategic thinking [p.121]
- ✧ There were no outstanding examples of ‘best practice’ in evaluation (i.e. measures at the summative (programme output) levels and formative (programme process) levels). But because of the modular nature of many programmes, attempts were made to provide regular ‘feed-forward’ between modules and consultancy follow-up, both between modules and ultimately at the end of the programmes to encourage learning by implementation.

500: Billett, S, Ehrich. L & Herson-Tinning, B 2003, **How small business learnt about the goods and services tax: lessons for vocational education and training**, NCVET, Adelaide.

The study

This project proposes a model of how learning occurs for small business and highlights how forms of localised support and active engagement by the enterprise are central to learning. Experiences of small businesses complying with new government legislation, the goods and services tax (GST) and business activity statement (BAS), were used to develop an understanding of how small businesses approach (and execute) the requirement to learn new skills and concepts. The data was used to formulate a model for learning that could be applied, implemented and supported by and for small business.

Examples of small businesses learning to implement the goods and services tax and administering the business activity statement were formed in Phase 1 of the project from a sample of 30 enterprises (16 businesses with fewer than 5 employees, 14 small business with fewer than 20 employees) in metropolitan, regional and rural Queensland and from diverse specialisations. Semi-structured interviews were used to identify and delineate schemes for learning in the enterprises and contributions to learning were quantified by ranking different sources of learning (for example,Just getting in and doing it, courses, local networks etc.). The researchers’ write-ups of each business and its experience in learning to handle the goods and services tax and business activity statement were verified by the participating enterprises for accuracy.

Interview data was analysed to categorise the ways small businesses learnt to implement the goods and services tax and used to formulate a model of small business learning in Phase 2 of

the project. A summary table was compiled for analysis and the constant comparative method of analysing qualitative data was used to identify categories, refining these and explore relationships and patterns across particular categories, to formulate a model of small business learning.

Phase 2 of the project interviewed 15 enterprises, four of which participated in Phase 1 (11 businesses with fewer than five employees, four businesses with between five and 19 employees) from varied locations and specialisations in Queensland and New South Wales to investigate the extent to which the proposed learning model was applicable to a recent experience of learning by small business operators. These learning experiences, nominated by the enterprises, ranged from day-to-day operational tasks to central activities of the small business. Verification of the model developed to identify the kinds of learning associated with the goods and services tax and business activity statement was validated for more general learning by asking participants to comment on how this model reflected the learning process in their business both for the goods and services tax and experience and in other of their experience of learning.

The researchers concluded that the model for learning in small business was validated and feedback was used to refine the model, which comprises of the following key elements:

- ✧ the business's motivations for task engagement and learning
- ✧ perception of the task
- ✧ engagement (energy directed towards the task)
- ✧ four-phase process of learning comprising:
 - ✧ goal formation, or defining what had to be learnt
 - ✧ initial attempts at approximation of the task
 - ✧ improvement through practice
 - ✧ achieving a capacity for independent practice or maturing capacities
- ✧ a shift from a reliance on assistance from outside the workplace to an increasing reliance on capacities within the workplace
- ✧ sources of assistance for learning, comprising internal and external localised networks; that is, other small businesses, experts, courses, government support, industry associations.

Intervention Strategy

Small businesses had to learn how to implement a new Government initiative, the goods and services tax and the business activity statement.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

Although not strictly evaluating an intervention that promotes small business participation in education and training, this study demonstrates the different ways in which small businesses rely on external sources and internal motivation/engagement to learn a new task. In this light, a new government legislation that has implications on the small business presents an interesting situation that 'mandates' each business to learn and the some of the findings are relevant to the review question in terms of the types of learning that occurs.

Findings relevant to review question

The study also serves as a reminder that even with a 'learning' as specific and universally mandated as GST/BAS compliance, the variation in the way businesses handled the task was very wide.

The introduction of the goods and services tax and the business activity statement meant that small businesses had to draw on different approaches to guide learning in how to implement this new government initiative.

The far more general and important finding was about the overall importance of networks. The quality of those networks was critical and influenced what external sources were used. The interesting point which the research is at pains to point out is that the applicability of certain learning sources varied with the stage of the learning process.

Small business operators who had access to bookkeepers or family members with financial expertise were able to rely far less on accountants and business consultants than those who lacked access to this kind of expertise.

In most cases, there was a gradual movement for small business operators from initial reliance on external sources and/or throughout the process, to a capacity to handle the demands of the learning task independently. However, this movement was completed at different stages and in some cases still incomplete.

Different stages of learning drew upon different contributions to guide learning and the main contributions identified were three main sources: just getting in and doing it; the use of external advice; and courses.

686: Gordon Consulting 1996, *The Enterprise Training Mentor Program: An effective strategy for a mentoring program for on-the-job trainers in smaller enterprises in the Geelong region and a proposal for expansion*, Rohm and Haas Vocational Education and Training Research Unit, Gordon Institute of TAFE, Geelong

The study

This study was the third in a series of investigations funded by the Victorian government in the Geelong region to develop a “regionally-based approach to ongoing professional development of owner/managers and others with training responsibilities in small business”. The context was (in 1995) the recognition that small business would be a key to implementing the still new Australian Training Reform Agenda throughout the state. One of the earlier studies suggested that a mentor program might be a useful approach. At the request of the Office of Training and Further Education, the Gordon Institute of TAFE undertook to set up the Small Business Mentor Training program. The brief for the study under review was to: (i) create and train a core of committed and recognised mentors; (ii) evaluate and document the process; and (iii) produce a model so the mentor program could be widely replicated.

The training program (the intervention) for 13 mentors from 12 local small businesses took an action learning approach and appears to have been extremely effective in giving the participants (mentors-to-be) real insight into the mentoring process, sound mentoring skills, and a commitment to the mentoring program. The social capital developed amongst the participants (and possibly with the program organisers) was wisely used both as an instrument to further learning and to develop an on-going support structure. [see next section for details].

There is no information in this report about how the participants in the training program were recruited – what enticed these small businesses to participate. They received an honorarium for participating, but the implication is that it was small. Probably more relevant is that they were all already significantly committed to training in their own small businesses.

Various facets of the learning program were evaluated which included such baseline data as the participants’ prior knowledge of mentoring, their expectations of the program, and their current involvement with training. The evaluation was primarily based on conversation as the

participants much preferred verbal to written reflection. It was adequate to the task but not sophisticated.

The study also reports that the mentors' interest in training in their own small businesses was stimulated and advanced by the program but evidence for this finding is not rigorous. Manual and protocols were written as the 'model' the brief required for replicating the mentor program. The materials produced were local and fairly pedestrian. We have no knowledge of whether they were ever used.

Intervention strategy

The intervention was to skill a cohort of people who work in small business themselves to become mentors who can 'be there' for other small businesses in the area interested in workplace (on-the-job) training. In that sense it was not seeking, at this stage, to influence the training in existing small businesses but to provide a resource that might eventually do so.

Having said that, the successful approach taken to skill and enthuse a cohort of committed mentors is both relevant and valuable. We know (for example, from systematic review doc 500) that the kind of guidance and learning mentors can provide is exactly the informal, flexible, non-intimidating, on-the-job form of learning small businesses respond to and trust. So understanding how to reliably build this kind of a resource – the intervention – is important.

The intervention, which involved 13 participants, is correctly described as action learning where the group took considerable responsibility for its own learning. The program ran for about six months. Important details include:

- ✧ there were 5-6 formal information sessions spaced a few weeks apart – yet even these had many elements of informal action learning about them: for example, the group decided on topics they wanted discussed (and two participants actually made presentations on these topics); the sessions always included lively feedback about the progress of the mentor partnerships (an inclusion not foreseen by the evaluator responsible for collecting feedback); and the participants themselves identified the informal conversations and networking before and after the formal sessions as of great value;
- ✧ mentors were paired with one another, in part to try out their developing mentoring skills. They met two or three times outside the group training/meeting sessions and visited each others' businesses. This was a key part of the experience. The one recommendation participants made for changes to future programs, in fact, was to have two pairings rather than one. Their logic was that since being in a pair and visiting one another was such a rich source of learning, the more paired partners to learn from the better;
- ✧ the continuing evaluation was, in reality, part of the intervention because the mentors being regularly asked to provide feedback helped them to reflect and learn. If this factor is not also repeated when the 'intervention' is mainstreamed, a critical component of the training program may well be lost.

What was not clear in the intervention was the nature of the mentoring they actually did for one another. The point of the mentoring is for the mentors to assist small businesses interested in workplace (on-the-job) training. Because they only practiced on one another, it is impossible to know whether changes to training in the 'trial' businesses came about through mentoring or because all the business operators were themselves becoming more knowledgeable through the course about workplace training.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

What is relevant about this study is the very thorough yet flexible and informal way mentors were trained. Every aspect of that training – from mentors partnering with each other and visiting each others' premises to the formal sessions including speakers whose topics were

chosen by the participants (and in two cases were presented by participants) – rings true as an effective and enjoyable learning strategy. The approach might well be recommended for any intervention that includes mentoring. Mentors, by the way, always need to be trained for the specific mentoring role they are being asked to assume – a point not generally understood or acted on.

The finding that small business operators prefer verbal to written reflection (and are excellent verbal thinkers) is a message of importance – both for interventions of any sort intended to enhance training by and in small business and for any evaluations of such interventions.

It is *not* relevant as a study of the participation and advancement of small businesses in training/education. This intervention was a mentor training program where the mentors came from small businesses that were already positive about workplace training. Any advances in training in these businesses would have been a by-product of participating in the program. It was not a study about the effectiveness of mentoring in enhancing workplace training in small businesses.

The tactics they suggest for a wider roll out of small business training mentoring in Geelong are sensible – for example: using existing and effective networks (for example, Geelong Congress of Business Associations); copying protocols from other successful small business programs; setting up a referral centre; etc. . However, we do not know how the systems they suggest did work when implemented (or even if they were implemented) and consequently this aspect of the study is not useful for the systematic review.

693: Holgate, J 1999, **Women in Small Business Mentoring Program**, Professional and Career Development Unit, Western Australian Department of Training, Perth.

The study

This study reports on a six month pilot mentoring program for women in small business run in 1998 by the Professional and Career Development Unit of the Western Australian Department of Training. It was funded jointly by the Commonwealth Small Business Professional Development Program and the Western Australian Department of Training. The aim of the program was to trial the provision of relevant, quality professional development through a mentoring and networking program, for women conducting a small business.

The program was systematically monitored during its life by the coordinator (apart from the fortnightly meetings with participants, details of this are not provided in the report) and a final evaluation was conducted by the coordinator of the program at a follow-up workshop five months after the completion of the program. This study reports on the program and its outcomes. However, the report was prepared by the program coordinator responsible for delivering the program from the Professional and Career Development Unit of the Western Australian Department of Training which was responsible for funding the program. The final evaluation was attended by 25 women (out of total of 43 in the program - as 22 mentors and 21 mentorees). Questionnaire responses (including general comments) were collated and are provided in the report. Views of the women who participated in the final evaluation workshop are well represented comments are provided in detail. Ongoing activities arising from the program are also reported as evidence of successful outcomes.

The coordinator concluded that this project was successfully completed, providing a valuable professional development option for women in small business. She concludes that its success was due to the two-pronged approach: paired mentoring meetings and whole group workshops & networking. Other factors seen by author as contributing to success of this program, offer features of 'best practice' for successful mentoring and creating of networks, for example,

- ✧ There was a pool of experienced and committed mentors
- ✧ Clear information provided to all participants
- ✧ There was a structured briefing day at which the roles of mentors/mentorees were clearly defined
- ✧ The coordinator closely monitored the partnerships and provided support and flexibility when required
- ✧ Fortnightly workshop topics and their format were responsive to specific group needs (needs identified during briefing day and the monitoring process)
- ✧ There was sufficient flexibility to allow for the development of a variety of partnerships; structured and informal mentor/mentoree meetings as well as groups choosing to meet together rather than pairs; access to 'casual' mentors as required.
- ✧ A contingency plan was in place to address any breakdown of partnerships.

The author asserts that, in the final evaluation, many women reported that their business turnover had increased and that they had taken on extra staff. Other significant benefits reported were increased levels of professional and personal confidence. Evidence is provided that many of the women in the program continued to meet after the completion of the formal program.

Intervention strategy

A total of 43 women from a range of industry sectors participated in a six month pilot mentoring program for women in small business run in 1998 by the Professional and Career Development Unit of the Western Australian Department of Training.

All participants registered interest following promotion of the program which required mentorees to have at least one year's experience, and mentors required four years experience, of conducting a small business full-time with minimum turnover \$50 000. There was no cost to mentors but the program cost \$250 for mentorees. Mentor and mentoree were paired from different business sectors and had varied backgrounds including a pharmacist, beautician, locksmith, farmer to name a few, but all had same aim to improve their business.

Twenty one mentoring pairs were established while one participant chose to provide casual mentoring as required, rather than being paired. These pairs were required to meet for a total of 20 hours (most met fortnightly for 2 hours over the five months) to discuss business issues. The mentoree was responsible for setting the agenda for the meetings.

In addition, there were fortnightly workshops which were a mix of presentations, panels, discussions and networking opportunities at alternate breakfast and evening workshops. Workshop topics were identified from participants' needs at original briefing and during monitoring of the program. 11 fortnightly workshops were held on topics including Marketing, Presenting yourself and Your Business, Making a profit, Small Business of the Year 2000, Investing in Your future, Strategic planning & review and Information Management and Process design. Most presentations were by participants but two external speakers presented on *Getting into the Board room* and on the *Small Business Development Corporation*. Networking opportunities were provided throughout the workshops and a strong network was established early in the program. There were 10 hours of Business Roundtable discussions.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

This study is of some value to the review, for the particular population covered i.e. women. It does provide evidence of a program that met the needs of selected small business participants, with some very positive comments, and the evidence is credible though not strongly

supported. The evaluation was conducted by the organisation that provided the program, making it less objective than many other studies under review, although the voices of the participants are well represented, lending weight to the evidence. Over half the participants attended the final evaluation workshop and all of these would recommend mentoring as a valuable training method (presumably as a result of the program although that is not stated). Not all of the outcome measures are relevant to the review as it is not clear that they are in fact needs of small business owners for example, (“do you feel more confident as a person?”).

Other findings

There is some evidence for a positive impact on business performance in terms of growth i.e. of increased turnover and additional staff employed. Of the total of 43 women who participated (as mentors or mentorees), 25 (unknown how many of these were mentorees or mentors) attended the final evaluation workshop. Of these 25, 18 stated that their business turnover had increased and 9 stated that they had taken on more staff since their involvement in the program. Further details of the business turnover increase are not given or how much of this could be attributed to changes made as a result of the mentoring program.

There was interest in transferring the model to other groups as well as in mainstream organisations such as ‘middle managers’ in Western Australian Department of Training.

694: Van den Tillaart, H, van den Berg, S & Warmerdam, J 1998, **Working and learning in micro-enterprises in the printing industry: a comparative research study into the relationship between technological and organisational developments and training activities in micro-enterprises in the printing industry in four European countries: Synthesis report**, CEDEFOP, Thessaloniki.

The study

This study by the independent European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training sought to ascertain the extent of informal learning in small firms in the printing industry in four European countries – Finland, Spain, Ireland and The Netherlands.

The study was based on the premise that there is more emphasis on informal learning in small firms where formal training is less available and where financial and organisational problems are interfering with participation in formal training.

Formal training was defined as initial vocational training and ongoing vocational training. Rather than creating a dichotomy between formal and informal learning, the authors focus on “incidental learning” which they define as “learning by using the ad hoc possibilities within normal daily work”.

The study was based on seventeen case studies from the four countries. Cases were selected on the basis that the firms were likely to employ informal learning. Four firms (one from each country) were selected for commentary because they were active in training and learning activities. A typology (after Schumpeter) was used to select the firms based on their preparedness for development activities.

The owners of the firms in the case studies were the subject of semi structured interviews. In addition, structured survey questionnaires were completed by ninety staff of those firms. A short literature review primarily looking at a related study by the same authors, of small firms in car sales and repairs and in retail in four European countries. It was used as background for the study and provided a basis for some comparisons.

The study concluded that employers in leading (dynamic) firms provide more opportunities for employees to learn than in lagging firms. The skills of employees, their flexibility and their readiness to learn through incidental learning are also factors in bringing firms to the lead.

“Incidental learning” was shown to be important because, with the pace of change requiring continuous skills update and employees’ capacity to learn, formal education and training cannot keep up with the pace of change.

The study found that:

- ✧ A third of employees in the printing sector have no initial vocational education and training.
- ✧ Employees with initial vocational education and training for the printing industry participate more often in continuing vocational training than workers without initial vocational education.
- ✧ Employees with initial vocational education and training for the printing industry make more use of external experts than workers without initial vocational education.
- ✧ Less than a third of employees in the printing sector participated in continuing vocational training during the last three years.
- ✧ The most common methods of incidental learning involve experiential learning by oneself or with experienced colleagues
- ✧ Employees deemed that the most effective methods of incidental learning involved extending their capabilities by taking on new work.
- ✧ Employees deemed that the least effective methods of incidental learning were the directive learning by involvement in management or planning, and from clients or users of products.

The study was not concerned with business outcomes.

Intervention strategy

The interventions of relevance to the review question identified in the study are formal training (initial vocational training and ongoing vocational training) and informal learning (which includes “incidental learning” which goes beyond the traditional boundaries of informal education and training).

“Incidental learning”, which is the focus of this study, is defined as “learning by using the ad hoc possibilities within normal daily work”.

Twenty-four methods of “incidental learning” are analysed in the study.

The five most common were found to be:

- ✧ Learning by solving problems by oneself
- ✧ Learning by solving problems together with colleagues
- ✧ Learning by asking for help/advice from an experienced colleague
- ✧ Learning new things under the responsibility of the boss or an experienced worker
- ✧ Learning by direct employee participation.

The most effective were deemed by employees to be:

- ✧ Learning by using handbooks, manuals, etc.
- ✧ Learning by asking for help/advice from immediate superior
- ✧ Learning by solving problems by oneself

- ✧ Learning by doing work with a growing degree of difficulty
- ✧ Learning new things with the help of an experienced worker

While the following were deemed to be not very effective:

- ✧ Learning by involvement in management, planning, etc.
- ✧ Learning from the experiences of clients/users of products

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The results of this study have some relevance to the review question, insofar as it seeks to understand the kind of “incidental learning” that occurs in leading (dynamic) and lagging small businesses.

It concentrates on one industry with particular development needs, and one which it is pre-assumed relies heavily on informal education and training. The study was intended to add the details of small business ‘dynamism’ in this industry to findings about small businesses in two other industries. They have not, however, produced findings which lend themselves to being generalised across other industry sectors and settings.

The study does not identify individual incidences of participation in training by the case study firms or their employees. Although the views of business owners were obtained in the course of the study the most substantive data was obtained by surveying the employees for their attitudes to the training itself.

Business satisfaction with training was not an aim of the study.

701: Research Australasia and ResolveNorth, 2000, **Our business, our way: indigenous perspectives on small business learning**, Office of Vocational Education, Tasmania, Hobart.

The study

From 1996 to 1999, 80 projects were run under the Commonwealth-funded Small Business Professional Development Programme (SBPD) which aimed to find ways to help small businesses to take more control of their own training needs and solutions. In 1999, the final year of this program, Indigenous projects were a focus and four projects were selected from 100 submissions. They were: 1. Audiographics in Galiwin’ku (Galiwin’ku Project); 2. Doing business better (Cairns Project); 3. Indigenous Small Business Awareness (Stradbroke and Gold Coast Projects); 4. Networking in Action - Indigenous Business Economic Council (IBEC Projects).

This study evaluated the four projects to test whether the learning models worked in an Indigenous small business context. The evaluation aimed to assess the value to Indigenous small business training and learning of the projects and the models developed. The report was funded under the program but there is a disclaimer that the views in the report do not necessarily represent those of the funding government bodies. The evaluation was conducted by Research Australasia and ResolveNorth, Cairns, organisations external to the program and the report produced (after ‘substantive editing by Kathi Eland’) by SBDP manager, the Office of Vocational Education and Training, Department of Education, Tasmania. The evaluation methodology was intended to form part of the learning process, and to involve all the participants in the four projects, obtaining feedback from all stakeholders, employing principles of cross-cultural sensitivity and using a collaborative reporting method. Evaluation criteria were developed in consultation with project managers, key personnel, coordinators and program management. Outcomes of all 4 projects were assessed through questions developed

collaboratively with stakeholders and used to guide informal discussions with all stakeholders, and reporting on the existence of required outcomes such as development of guides and levels of participation in training. The value of each project was assessed in evaluation meetings by informal discussions with stakeholders. The discussion data was collated by evaluators [presumably in English, not stated but presumably facilitator did translation from Community languages where needed) and then 'substantively edited' for the final report. Hence report is really a summary of evidence collected by evaluators but feedback was verified by stakeholders according to methodology stated.

The populations involved were as follows:

Galiwin'ku Project (a remote island community in the Northern Territory): thirteen CDEP managers, four labourers; Cairns Project: seven participants in three indigenous art businesses; Stradbroke Project: 20 participants; IBEC Project: seven women in Sydney, nine organisations and individuals in Forster (Northern NSW)

Intervention strategy

1. *Audio graphics in Galiwin'ku (Galiwin'ku Project)* – using audio graphics technology to provide business skills and concept development to remote community of Galiwin'ku. The project set out to develop a training sessions in business development using audio graphics technology as the teaching medium. This relatively simple technology delivers simultaneous voice and graphic data in real time. Requiring only a computer, modem and phone line at each end of the link, training can be delivered at a pace that is acceptable to the community and participants. Consultations took place with the community to ensure that there was community ownership of the project and this was considered a key aspect of the intervention and its success. Training was delivered in the local Indigenous language by an educator with longstanding community links and respected by the community (clan leader also participated with younger participants and successfully acted as facilitator to overcome cultural constraints).
2. *Doing business better (Cairns Project)* – an existing retail training program was customised and its delivery contextualised to suit participants who were Indigenous retail operators in the Cairns region. The aim was to develop and enhance customer service, merchandising and marketing skills to increase the viability and profitability of Indigenous owned and operated businesses in Cairns. The Retail Skills Centre developed and delivered the training, working with participants to suit their needs. Workshops were not well attended (reasons are documented in the report and include time delays, transportation and communication problems) but there is evidence of some positive outcomes with increase in skill levels and keenness to undertake further training and re-use the model. The authors concluded that this project demonstrated that working together as a group and sharing experiences assists the learning process and builds on the existing skills and knowledge of participants.
3. *Indigenous Small Business Awareness (Stradbroke and Gold Coast Projects)* – awareness-raising workshops were held in south-east Queensland aiming to develop strategies for further learning necessary for operation of small businesses. The aim of the intervention was to assist 2 Indigenous communities (Stradbroke Island and Gold Coast) to identify strategies for small business development; provide community with overview of success factors for small businesses. There were problems at both locations due, according to the report, to procedural/protocol issues. There were no attendees at the Gold Coast workshop. At Stradbroke there were literacy/numeracy difficulties but some evidence of raising awareness of issues for some participants.
4. *Networking in Action - Indigenous Business Economic Council (IBEC Projects)* – cluster/network models used to enhance the business prospects for existing small business operators and existing and potential artists. The project aimed to (1) create a cluster of Indigenous business

women in inner Sydney and (2) develop a regional network of artists in the region surrounding Forster in northern NSW. In Sydney a facilitator was appointed to provide resources, support, assistance and networking. In Forster, Tobwabba Art personnel acted as coordinators for the network. The authors make the point that lack of clarity about the roles of the Tobwabba organisation and its role in the project was a problem with implementation.

Relevance to this study to the systematic review

The evaluation appears to have been conducted appropriately in allowing for cross-cultural considerations and feedback from all stakeholders. The findings are of some relevance to the review question, but apply only in the particular contexts of the study, i.e. for Indigenous communities and individuals. The findings indicate some important aspects of training delivery for Indigenous communities, such as implementing an adult learning approach—interactive, informal and non-threatening (for example, group working together to share their experiences and existing knowledge.), that builds on existing knowledge of Indigenous participants (for example, use of traditional knowledge by educators) and focuses on their needs. Other implications for good practice include ‘ownership’ by the Indigenous community who must be involved in the planning, curriculum, delivery and choice of facilitator. This evidence collected from the stakeholders and participants is summarised; no detail is provided of the feedback verified by them other than a list of the questions that were asked. Since the answers obtained are only provided in summary form, many of the findings, though plausible, are essentially unsupported as it is difficult to know how authentic is the ‘voice of participants’ after ‘Substantive editing by Kathi Eland in Tasmania’. For example, it is not clear if the discussion notes were in the community language when verified by the participants of the Galiwin’ku project.

Other findings

The IBEC Cluster in Sydney has been created and is now functioning under its own momentum (without additional funding). The publication ‘*Developing Small Business Clusters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women: A Guide*’ has been completed, as a major outcome from this project.