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**Evaluation of the VCTrain  
Project**

**Final Report**

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A report prepared by

**PACEC**

on behalf of

LSC Yorkshire and the Humber

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## Contents

Executive Summary .....	2
X2 Conclusions .....	2
X3 Recommendations .....	4
1 Introduction, Aims and Methodology .....	5
1.1 Introduction.....	5
1.2 Evaluation Aims.....	5
1.3 Evaluation Framework.....	5
1.4 Methodology.....	6
2 The Background, Aims, and Scale of VCTrain.....	7
2.1 Background .....	7
2.2 ESF Objective 1 in South Yorkshire.....	7
2.3 The VC Train Consortia .....	9
2.4 VC Train's Responsibilities .....	11
3 Desk Study: Management Information .....	16
3.1 VC Training activities.....	16
3.2 Lessons learned from the TLM Evaluation .....	18
3.3 VC Train overall performance .....	18
3.4 VC Train Financial Management 2005 - 2006 .....	19
3.5 VC Train – future priorities .....	22
4 Views of VCTrain Core Staff.....	24
4.1 VC Train interviews main points.....	24
4.2 Roles of Staff at VC Train .....	24
4.3 Operation of VC Train .....	24
4.4 Measuring the benefits of VC Train.....	25
4.5 Additionality of VC Train.....	25
5 Views of VCTrain Consortium Members .....	27
5.1 Introduction.....	27
5.2 Background Characteristics of Consortium Members.....	27
5.3 Involvement with VCTrain .....	28
5.4 Nature of Training Support Provided by Consortium Members .....	29
5.5 Impact on Beneficiaries of Participation in the VCTrain Consortium .....	30
5.6 Impacts on Own Organisation of Participation in the Consortium .....	32
5.7 Collaborating with Other VCTrain Consortium Members.....	32
5.8 Management of VCTrain .....	33
5.9 Monitoring and Evaluation.....	33
5.10 Feedback From Former Members of the VC Train Consortium .....	34
5.11 Summary of Main Points.....	35
6 Conclusions and Recommendations .....	37
6.2 Recommendations .....	38
Appendix A Bibliography.....	40
A1 List of Documents Consulted .....	40
Appendix B Evaluation of VC Train Project: Draft Questions for Consortium Members/Training Providers .....	41

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## Executive Summary

- X1.1 In July 2007, the Learning and Skills Council, Yorkshire and the Humber (LSCY&H) commissioned PACEC to undertake an evaluation of VCTrain. This document is the Final Report on the evaluation.
- X1.2 The aim of this project was to evaluate the VCTrain project and consortium and to assess its impact and added value in assisting voluntary and community organisations develop capacity and skills. Efficiency and effectiveness outputs were to inform recommendations to the LSCY&H.
- X1.3 To deliver the project, an integrated research programme was developed to gather evidence to inform the recommendations. The main elements of the methodology included an Inception meeting, a desk study of VCTrain information, interviews with core VCTrain staff and a survey of Voluntary / Community Organisations participating in the VCTrain consortium.
- X1.4 VC Train was set up in September 2001 in recognition of the important role the voluntary and community sector play in developing and delivering learning opportunities, in particular to disadvantaged individuals and communities.
- X1.5 The activities of VC Train are based around 3 Measures that all fall into Priority 3 of the ESF Objective 1 Programme that aims to build a world leading region that promotes equity, employment and social inclusion. Approximately £223m has been made available for this Priority overall. Specific measures for VC Train are
- Measure 11 - to create a responsive training and education system
  - Measure 13 – to develop an adaptable and entrepreneurial workforce
  - Measure 17 – tackling disadvantage
- X1.6 Overall in 2006, total income for VC Train was £525,883 and expenditure was £526,932.

## X2 Conclusions

- X2.1 The main conclusions from the evaluation are presented below in relation to the main aims of the evaluation.
- Its engagement and how that compared with other engagement initiatives with the voluntary and community sector;*
- X2.2 VCTrain has a core number of contracted members of 52 and an additional 60 non-contracted associate members.
- X2.3 The membership of VCTrain is quite static and solid relationships have been developed with and between members. This ensures that maximum value may be derived from the relationship and organisations have an opportunity to develop considerably during their years of collaboration with VCTrain.

X2.4 In terms of numbers of collaborating organisations, the extent of this engagement compares favourably. For example with the Social Enterprise East Midlands consortium group, approximately 40 organisations have been engaged. In more recently established consortia such as Birmingham Chamber of Commerce REALiSE cluster consortium, approximately 38 organisations are engaged.

*Added value to the voluntary sector and South Yorkshire training;*

The survey of members indicates clear evidence of additionality in relation to their own organisations and to the impacts on their beneficiary groups. This was particularly the case in relation to the impact on trainees (beneficiaries) where two thirds of members indicated that they could not have made this impact without VCTrain's support.

*The impact on beneficiaries;*

X2.5 Benefits to end users are measured via the Monthly Monitoring Return (MMR). The Support Unit also evaluates hours spent, letters, calls over half an hour, observation of teaching and learning (OTL) visits, workshops and cluster meetings. The Support Unit produces over 12,000 database reports showing these contact hours between them and members. Each member organisation receives a benchmark report so they can measure their performance against other Consortium members.

X2.6 VCTrain has been involved in the delivery of 12,117 episodes of learning between October 2004 and August 2007.

X2.7 Overall, M13 support tackling disadvantage has had the highest number of learners since 2004 (4,910) followed by M11 support (3,161) and then British Minority Ethnic groups in Sheffield (BMES) (1,992), In My Back Yard (a support group for disabled people – IMBY) and Lone Parents (LOP) both supported over 1,400 learners each. BMEC (Black and Minority Ethnic groups for the Coalfields) was the smallest project and helped 582 beneficiaries.

X2.8 Interviews with core VCTrain staff indicated that VC Train had a positive impact on end users, as 'they got access to good quality learning in the community' in a suitable setting and they are not forced into the FE sector. Employers too benefited from the training provided.

X2.9 Interviews with member organisations indicate that there has been a clear impact on beneficiaries. This was most often through increased self-esteem, increased confidence and improved job preparedness.

*The contribution to the basic skills and life-long learning agenda;*

X2.10 Almost all members (40 out of 44) interviewed believed that the VCTrain consortium has contributed towards the lifelong learning agenda in South Yorkshire. Additional

comments provided by members on VCTrain were generally very complimentary about the help and support that they had received from them.

*Ability to enhance employability and the skills base, including alignment with the sector skills councils' lead on appropriate qualifications.*

- X2.11 VCTrain is achieving what it aimed to achieve in this regard. The VC Train Development Plan 2007-8 provides details on the targets set for improving learner achievement by ESF measure and illustrates the extent to which these have been met. With six months to run, VC Train has already met the LSC's learner targets for the total contract and has met the majority of targets per Measure. There are only 7 different targets among the three measures that are yet to be fulfilled, one in Measure 11, three in Measure 13 and 3 in Measure 17. VC Train will be concentrating on meeting these shortfalls for the remainder of the contract.
- X2.12 Data collected in the survey of members indicates that employability and skills base have been significantly impacted through the activities of the member organisations with the assistance of VCTrain.

### X3 Recommendations

- X3.1 Based on the conclusions above, drawing on all parts of the research undertaken, recommendations are:
- **Funding of VCTrain:** The current funding of VCTrain is producing a solid return in terms of impact on beneficiaries and positive effects on the organisations in the consortium. *We recommend that funding of the consortium continues.*
  - **Expansion of the reach of VCTrain:** The consortium is currently made up of a relatively static group and there is relatively little activity to seek new members. It is likely that VCTrain could benefit more organisations. *We recommend that a wider reach for VCTrain be considered.*
  - **The cluster activity** within the consortium is working well and members benefit from one another's expertise directly through these. A large number of members (37 out of 44) are also in collaboration with other (non-VCTrain) organisations. *We recommend considering whether some of these other networks could contribute to the VCTrain clusters either directly or indirectly.*
  - **The Board of Trustees** requires a balanced outside perspective. *We recommend that plans to appoint an outside Chair be developed and actively pursued.*

# 1 Introduction, Aims and Methodology

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In July 2007, the Learning and Skills Council, Yorkshire and the Humber (LSCY&H) commissioned PACEC to undertake an evaluation of VCTrain. The aim of this project was to evaluate the VCTrain project and consortium and to assess its impact and added value in assisting voluntary and community organisations develop capacity and skills. Efficiency and effectiveness outputs were to inform recommendations to the LSCY&H. This document is a Final Report on the evaluation.

## 1.2 Evaluation Aims

1.2.1 The aim of the evaluation was to provide clear evidence of the impact and effectiveness of the role of the consortia and the support unit (SU) in terms of the benefits to the voluntary and community sector. Clear recommendations were to be made on the future direction of the project. In summary, the evaluation aimed to address:

- Its engagement and how that compared with other engagement initiatives with the voluntary and community sector;
- Added value to the voluntary sector and South Yorkshire training;
- The impact on beneficiaries;
- The contribution to the basic skills and life-long learning agenda;
- Ability to enhance employability and the skills base, including alignment with the sector skills councils' lead on appropriate qualifications.

## 1.3 Evaluation Framework

1.3.1 An evaluation framework was established at the outset of the project which set the context of all the information required in order to undertake the evaluation successfully. This reflects best practice re evaluation:

- Policy aims and objectives
- Expenditure, leverage and inputs
- Infrastructure, capacity, partnership development
- Take-up by voluntary / community groups
- Impact on organisations
- Impact on employees / volunteers
- Policy issues and conclusions

1.3.2 The effectiveness / efficiency and net additionality or the added value of VCTrain were also examined.

## 1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 To deliver the project, an integrated research programme was developed to gather evidence to inform the recommendations. This was refined in discussion with the Steering Group at the Inception Meeting. The main elements of the methodology are:

- An Inception meeting
- Desk Study of VCTrain information
- Interviews with core VCTrain staff
- A Survey of Voluntary / Community Organisations participating in the VCTrain consortium
- Analysis and Reporting

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## 2 The Background, Aims, and Scale of VCTrain

### 2.1 Background

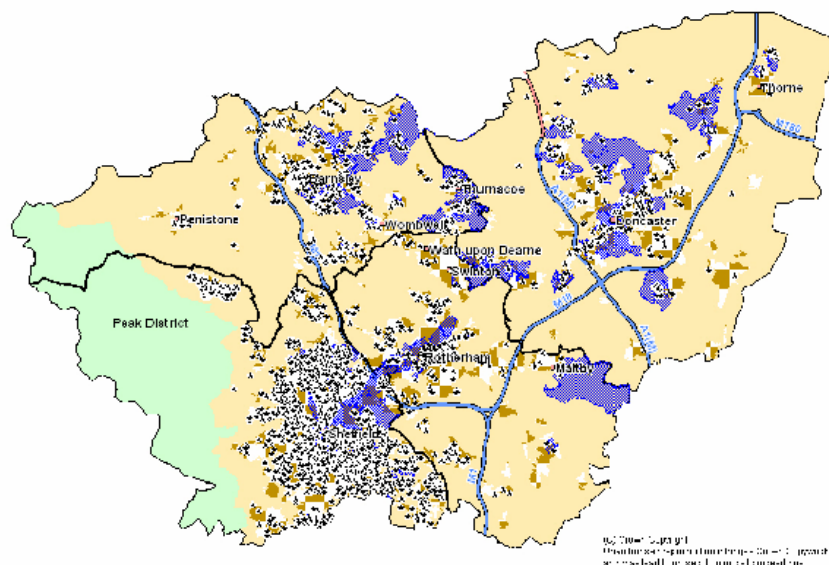
#### *The South Yorkshire Context*

- 2.1.1 The strategic rationale for policy interventions to tackle unemployment across South Yorkshire remains strong. South Yorkshire continues to suffer high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. The South Yorkshire TLM Evaluation recently found that South Yorkshire has a lower economic activity rate and a higher proportion of working age population claiming JSA compared to the national average, particularly amongst young people. Compared to national trends, Doncaster has a high proportion of long term unemployed [claiming JSA over 12 months]
- 2.1.2 These trends persist amongst certain groups and in certain areas throughout the sub-region despite a reasonably buoyant labour market. Workless people are those who are either unemployed claimants or economically inactive who are not working, or in full-time education, training or actively seeking work. Amongst the economically inactive group are people who want a job and would work if they had the right opportunity, incentive or path back into employment. National labour market policies such as New Deal and Pathways to Work have been broadly successful in overall terms in reducing unemployment levels; have been less successful to date in helping the most disadvantaged groups and in reducing worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods.
- 2.1.3 Recent years have seen an increasing focus on the high levels of worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods in areas peripheral to major urban centres like Barnsley, Doncaster, Sheffield and Rotherham. It should be noted, however, that the majority of people claiming benefits for worklessness do not live in the most deprived wards but are spread across wider geographical areas.

### 2.2 ESF Objective 1 in South Yorkshire

- 2.2.1 The Objective 1 Programme in South Yorkshire is a £2.4bn investment programme that includes over £770m from the European Union's Structural Fund Budget as well as public and private sector resources. The Programme was launched in July 2000 and all projects will come to a close by the end of 2008. South Yorkshire is one of Europe's poorer areas with fewer businesses and fewer and less well-paid jobs than other regions. Figure 1 shows the dark areas of particular deprivation in the sub region and the take up of VC Train support illustrated as dots that cluster around these urban centres.

**Figure 2.1 Take up of VC Train Support across South Yorkshire**



2.2.2 The activities of VC Train are based around 3 Measures that all fall into Priority 3 of the ESF Objective 1 Programme that aims to build a world leading region that promotes equity, employment and social inclusion. Approximately £223m has been made available for this Priority overall. Specific measures for VC Train are

- Measure 11 - to create a responsive training and education system
- Measure 13 – to develop an adaptable and entrepreneurial workforce
- Measure 17 – tackling disadvantage

2.2.3 VC Train’s role is to increase skills and capacity in three main target groups that national labour market interventions have been less effective in helping. These groups are black and ethnic minorities, lone parents and the disabled. The main objective of VC Train is to secure a positive outcome as a result of the ESF supported activity.

2.2.4 **Measure 11 seeks to create a responsive training and education system. Positive outcomes will be achieved if**

- Community plans are developed
- Community partnership organisations are formed or sustained

2.2.5 **Measure 13 seeks to develop and adaptable and entrepreneurial workforce. Positive outcomes will be achieved if:**

- Learners are working towards a qualification
- Workers gain a qualification
- New businesses are started up
- Individuals are moving towards self employment
- New Jobs are created

**2.2.6 Measure 17 seeks to tackle disadvantage, a positive outcome will be achieved if, beneficiaries achieve one of the following within six months of the ESF intervention ceasing:**

- Secures paid employment
- Takes up voluntary work which they were not doing previously
- Enters further education or training
- Begins a course of action designed to overcome the specific barriers preventing them from securing employment.

2.2.7 There are also **cross cutting themes** (CCTs) that VC Train contributes to in the Objective 1 Programme in South Yorkshire. These are assisting social inclusion and diversity, by helping beneficiaries from the most deprived communities; helping black and ethnic minorities and those with a disability or long term limiting illness.

## 2.3 The VC Train Consortia

### *History of VC Train*

2.3.1 VC Train was set up in September 2001 in recognition of the important role the voluntary and community sector play in developing and delivering learning opportunities, in particular to disadvantaged individuals and communities. It was also believed that a co-ordinated approach would provide the most self-sustaining and effective mechanism for developing quality, funding routes and coherence. The organisation grew rapidly, following success in winning two substantial ESF co-financed contracts (ACL and M17) enabling the consortium to fund learning delivery by member organisations.

### *Aims and objectives of VC train*

2.3.2 VC Train's vision is to seek to build a sustainable community of responsive learning providers committed to tackling disadvantage. The mission is to provide a mutually beneficial Consortium structure for voluntary and community sector learning providers in Yorkshire and Humberside. It enables member organisations to access funding, develop their capacity to meet the needs of learners, tackle disadvantage and advance equity and social inclusion.

2.3.3 Following on from the vision and mission, the aims and objectives of VC Train are to provide a direct bidding and fund management mechanism through a partnership structure for voluntary and community sector learning providers. This aim is focused upon the access and maintenance of mainstream funding from key government bodies, especially the LSC with co-financing through the ESF, or its equivalent in the future. Its main activities are capacity building, contract management and quality assurance. The Consortium supports 112 voluntary and community organisations across South Yorkshire, aimed at tackling disadvantage, especially for black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people lone parents and ex offenders. Strategic bodies outside the sector comprise LSC South Yorkshire,

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Yorkshire Forward, South Yorkshire Open Forum, Rotherham Adult Learning Partnership and Change Up.

- 2.3.4 In order to meet these goals the consortia aims to:
- create a support infrastructure that will enable members to fulfil the requirements of the Adult Learning Inspectorate to optimum effect
  - create a structure where member organisations own and control the Consortium
  - generate economies of scale and make efficiency savings in the management of bureaucracy, through the creation of a centralised point for information management - A Support Unit (SU).
  - provide greater opportunity for a strategic overview of training and education in the voluntary and community sector.
  - explore opportunities for co-ordination between Consortium members and creating an internal market for the exchange of skills resources and outputs.
  - allow new voluntary and community learning providers in Yorkshire and Humber (that meet requirements) to join the consortia
  - ensure high standards and quality in relation to the Consortium overall and within individual learning providers
  - build the capacity of member organisations to help them meet quality assurance, monitoring and audit requirements
  - promote, lobby and disseminate the work of the consortia to local, regional and national bodies
  - develop cross sector partnerships across agencies that can build the capacity of the Consortium and contribute to tackling disadvantage, and promoting the equity and social inclusion.

- 2.3.5 VC Train is driven by the needs of disadvantaged learners through the empowerment of its member voluntary and community learning providers. Through the work of the providers, learners benefit from a process that gives them the skills they need to overcome disadvantage. The VC Train Consortium is keen to protect the autonomy of its member organisations and the Support Unit (SU) nurtures the differences between them. All contracted members have equal status in the Consortium and the SU seeks to build the capacity of individual providers, including helping them bid for funding, manage their own funds, and give them know-how in quality improvement strategies. The Consortium also actively encourages member organisations to establish partnerships and networks outside the Consortium so that they can develop their potential. Their organisational aims are specifically to
- Improve learner achievement in all areas
  - Maintain financial stability and reduce management fees ensuring more funds to into the delivery of learning
  - Develop human resources and teaching skills to deliver outstanding learning opportunities
  - Align curriculum to respond to the needs of employers

## 2.4 VC Train's Responsibilities

- 2.4.1 VC Train holds the overall contract with the LSC, and are responsible for total contract compliance, including delivery of outputs and outcomes, financial monitoring, internal audit, data returns/claims and quality assurance. As contract managers of the project, VC Train is responsible for the following areas:

### *Contract Management*

- Negotiating and issuing sub-contracts for training delivery
- Inputting of all ESF short records ensuring they are suitably completed and accurately transferred to the ILR Database
- Compiling the monthly Contract Management Report's (CMR).
- Maintaining a comprehensive management information system (MIS)
- Maintaining records of key monitoring/audit data.
- Providing technical advice and guidance relating to output/outcome performance, financial performance and quality development

- 2.4.2 VC Train is responsible for coordinating communications between member organisations and other stakeholders in relation to the Adult and Community Learning (ACL) project. The ACL Project steering group provides a specific steer to this project. This group meets every 3 months, and currently has representatives from the Support Unit Team, Trustees and the LSC Contract Manager.

### *Quality Assurance (QA)*

- 2.4.3 VC Train provides a QA service dedicated to improving quality standards among the contracted provider network in line with the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). The aim of the QA team is to ensure that each learner receives the best possible service, that the service received fits the needs of the learner and that the standard of service improves from year to year. The objectives of the QA service are:

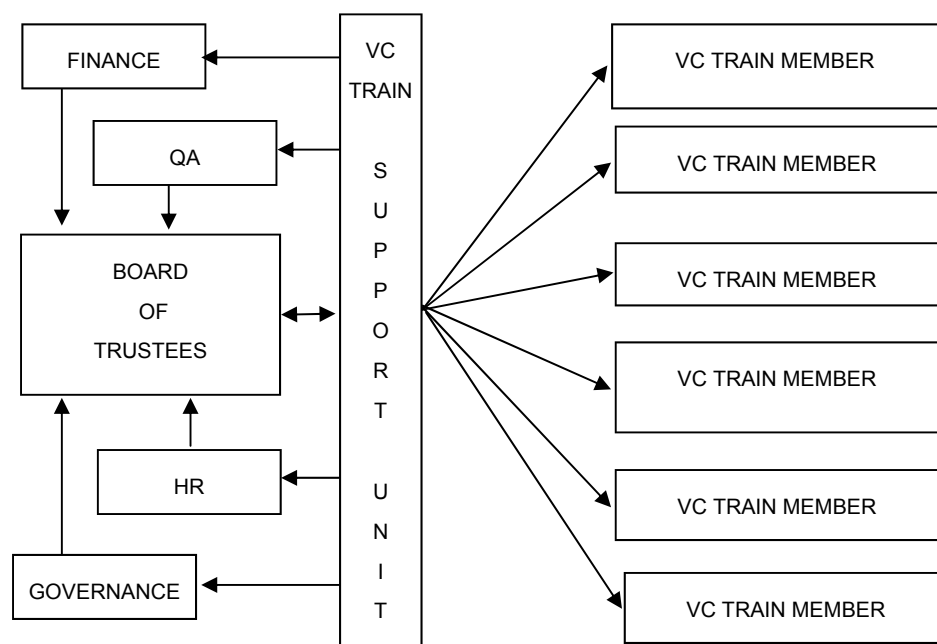
- To implement and maintain Self Assessment Reports across all contracting organisations
- To implement and maintain observation of teaching and learning (OTL).
- To grade training providers and to produce a consortium level Self Assessment Report.
- To maintain, implement and review a Development Plan.
- To maintain an overall quality framework.
- To define audit and MIS functions within the quality framework.
- To attain an overall grade in external ALI inspection of 3 or better for the consortium as a whole

- 2.4.4 Both of these processes are managed through the sub-contracting arrangements in place. All organisations delivering activity under the ACL project were issued a sub-contract at the beginning of each contract period. Organisations targets were profiled in the contract delivery plan. Project targets included the target number of learners and qualifications to be delivered and milestones to be achieved.
- 2.4.5 The milestones were written into the sub-contracts and aimed to improve quality assurance and monitoring systems. Each year the organisation's milestones has made up 20% of the overall contract value and progress against milestones has been reviewed on a monthly basis. The milestones include:
- Completion of a Self Assessment Report
  - A report of Observation, Teaching and Learning
  - Tutor Professional Development Plan
  - Submission of Monthly Monitoring Returns
  - Outstanding Paperwork Submitted
  - Visit from Quality Assurance Coordinator

### *Delivery Structure of VC Train*

- 2.4.6 VC Train is essentially a consortium of South Yorkshire's voluntary and community sector learning providers, known as the Membership. The consortium, that is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, is governed by a Board of Trustees with sub-committees who oversee specific areas of strategic responsibility. VC Train's Executive Director leads the Support Unit, the consortium's employees who manage the work of the consortium.

### *Structure of VC Train*



### **Membership**

2.4.7 VC Train comprises 112 organisations (including 52 contracted members) from across the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire and the process to become a full member is extremely rigorous. A significant number of the member organisations deliver learning activities funded by VC Train, through a sub-contracting arrangement. As well as these 'full' members, VC Train also have 'Associate members' who have an interest in adult / community learning, but do not deliver support directly.

2.4.8 A significant number of member organisations work in clusters that often work within complex arenas, across marginalised communities and with organisations that are often operating with stretched resources. **There are four clusters, which were predominantly set up to deliver the ESF ACL and Measure 17 contracts respectively around upskilling those in and out of work and 'Tackling Disadvantage'. They are:**

- **1) Disability**
- **2) BME (Coalfields)**
- **3) BME (Sheffield)**
- **4) Lone Parents**

### **Support Unit**

2.4.9 The Support Unit structure is based in Rotherham. It was awarded Investors in People (IIP) status in January 2006. It focuses on four key areas of the work of the consortium:

- **Management of the consortium** with the support and overall governance of the Board of Trustees, the Support Unit manage the strategic development and day to day work of the consortium through the leadership and management of VC Train's Executive Director.
- **Project delivery.** All aspects of delivering funded projects falls within the Director of Operations' responsibility. Essentially this comprises Quality Assurance (QA), Contract Management and Monitoring Information (MI). The majority of communication with members around learning delivery takes place within these areas with the QA team providing the most regular direct contact with member organisations.
- **Finance and administration** - This area of work, led by the Director of Finance covers the finance, administration, audit and accountability of VC Train. The focus for this area is to ensure the robustness of VC Train's internal systems and to ensure an effective and efficient general communication and administration process.
- **Development** - This area of work focuses on developing VC Train's capacity, funding opportunities, reputation, voice and partnerships in order to ensure the organisation's sustainability. The role is crucial in taking the organisation into appropriate new areas of learning delivery and in ensuring VC Train responds to its impending completion of its current ESF delivery and the changing external landscape.

2.4.10 VC Train currently manage the following projects:

- **Adult and Community Learning (ACL)** funded by ESF via LSC, to deliver accredited learning activities within the VC sector across South Yorkshire, through 38 member organisations (Oct 2004 – Dec 2007)
- **Tackling Disadvantage** funded by ESF via LSC to deliver a programme of vocationally focussed activities for young people in Sheffield, through 10 member organisations (Aug 2006 – July 2007)
- **Skills for Life Whole Organisational Approach** funded by KPMG to embed skills for life within whole organisations, via 3 member organisations.
- **Voluntary sector Data Mine**, funded by LSC West Yorks

### ***Monitoring/QA/Inspection framework of VC Train***

- 2.4.11 According to the VC Train Self Assessment Report 2005 2006, one of the key challenges of the consortium is presenting information from across partners in a clear and standardised way. VC Train are an overall body that manages the delivery of learning of its member organisations and inevitably, this means that each organisation has its own individual structure, activities, strengths and weaknesses. Traditional progression 'fields' do not allow for systematic capturing of evidence to support what are in essence professional development activities and this can lead to a falsely low suggestion of progression where providers have put a tick in the box if their learner began as 'employed' and remained employed. Feedback on positive outcomes which do not correspond to an LSC target (for most disadvantaged groups) is sometimes under reported.
- 2.4.12 A very useful MMR (Monthly Monitoring Return) process captures added value achievement information, by the requirement of providers to submit a monthly narrative on their activities. The MMR headings include 'success stories', 'strengths', 'weaknesses' and 'changes to provision'. The project management team read the MMRs and collate the texts into a summary analysis of current activity which is then submitted to the LSC. The team also act on any identified changes, weaknesses etc. by notifying the appropriate team member and following up the issue. The 'success stories' provide additional and insightful evidence of individual and organisational achievements, and although the evidence is not quantified, the narratives support numerical data with instances of individual success and achievement.

### ***Funding issues***

- 2.4.13 According to the VC Train SAR, the most important change currently facing VC Train is the impending completion of the Consortium's significant ESF contracts. The current round of VC Train's ESF funding ends in December 2007. The focus of VC Train's strategic development is to take the consortium forward beyond this ESF, with a drive to ensure potential funding such as LSC mainstream funds are accessed where appropriate opportunities arise. The e2e contract (an annual contract beginning in August 06) has begun this shift into mainstream funding and the submission of VC Train's Strategic Development Plan to the LSC indicates the consortium's capacity and drive to deliver fundable learning provision.

- 2.4.14 VC Train's Curriculum Development Strategy also emphasises the impact that funding has on the whole planning cycle of the Consortium. The report argues that it would be appropriate for VC Train to look further afield than the LSC in funding a more diverse range of learning delivered by its membership; to organisations such as MBCs, the Probation Service, PCTs and social services. The ACL Evaluation (2007) suggested that VC Train will be in a good position to tender for future LSC opportunities in the 14-19 Level 2 qualifications provision

### **3 Desk Study: Management Information**

#### **3.1 VC Training activities**

##### *How support is organised and delivered*

- 3.1.1 Produced for this evaluation in August 2007, VC Train reported on 6 main beneficiary clusters or project groups. These are BMEC (Black and Minority Ethnic groups for the Coalfields), BMES (British Minority Ethnic groups in Sheffield) IMBY – a project aimed at supporting those with disabilities and LOP (Lone Parents). Interventions that support ESF Objective 1 Measures 11 and 13 are also reported on. VC Train has no specific cluster for ex-offenders and these beneficiaries are spread across the project clusters.

##### *Numbers of learners*

- 3.1.2 From October 2004 to August 2007, VC Train has provided some 12,117 episodes of learning support across the four target groups. It is noted by VC Train that some double counting has taken place for those beneficiaries who have received support from more than one of the project clusters. Overall, M13 support tackling disadvantage has had the highest number of learners since 2004 (4,910) followed by M11 support (3,161) and then BMES (1,992), IMBY and LOP both supported over 1,400 learners each. BMEC was the smallest project and helped 582 beneficiaries.
- 3.1.3 Females accounted for 70% of the VC Train beneficiary group and they accounted for the majority of learners across project clusters. They accounted for 97% of the LOP beneficiary group. Male learners had the greatest presence on the BMES project (46%), compared to a 29% participation rate overall.

##### *Ethnic groups of learners*

- 3.1.4 From the total number of 12,117 beneficiaries, it is clear that the majority of learners were white (72%). Around 12% were from Asian or Asian British groups, 5% were Black or Black British groups and 5% were Chinese or from another ethnic group. Ethnic background was not known for 2% of learners and 1% classified as mixed ethnic groups. Whilst the BMEC (74%) and BMES (88%) clusters were very successful in attracting learners from minority ethnic groups, there was much less penetration by IMBY, LOP, M11 and M13 to non white beneficiaries. Additionally, it is interesting to note that 19% of learners on the BMEC project were classified as white.

##### *Learners with disabilities*

- 3.1.5 In total, 2,380 of the total 12,117 beneficiary learners were known to have a disability. There were 1,264 disabled learners on the IMBY project, which was

particularly designed for this group. This figure accounted for 88% of the total, which is an encouraging result. Looking at the participation of disabled people on the BMEC, BMES and LOP projects, the results suggest that VC Train may have had difficulties in attracting beneficiaries with multiple disabilities, as these less than 10% of these learners reported any disabilities.

### *Age of learners*

- 3.1.6 VC Train also collected data by age group of learners and there was a fairly even spread of learners across the different age brackets. Out of the total, over half (54%) were between the ages of 25 and 44. Around 29% were over 45, with 9% being aged between 55 and 64 and 15% were under 25. In total, around 4% of beneficiaries were over the age of 65.

### *Location of Learners*

- 3.1.7 Data on the towns of beneficiaries point to a high take up among Sheffield groups, accounting for 6,290 cases of support. Doncaster accounted for 2,000 VC Train learners and Barnsley had 1,904, with Rotherham supporting 1,833 learners. These results indicate that learners were more likely to receive learning support in Sheffield area.

### *Coverage of support*

- 3.1.8 The coverage of support offered by VC Train was fairly wide ranging, but there were particular aspects of support that were well used overall. **Information and communications** was the most popular area of support, with 1,139 learners. **Preparation for life and work** was also popular, used by 3,788 learners and 2,187 took part in support related to **health, public services and care**. Around 1,988 obtained **IAG** and 1,448 received support in **business administration and law**. Additionally, 572 learners were supported in **arts, media and publishing**.
- **BMEC's** aspects of learning concentrated on IAG (255) preparation for life and work (227), and information and communications support (100), with some languages and arts, media and publishing also provided.
  - **BMES** provided a similar suite of support, in larger proportions. In total, 520 learners accessed IAG and 429 received support in preparing for life and work. Additionally, 278 received support in information and communications.
  - **IMBY** also provided help in preparing for life and work (881), ICT (237) and IAG (128). However, this project also improved learning in the area of arts, media and publishing.
  - The nature of support for **Lone Parents** largely mirrored the content of other VC Train clusters. There was large take up for IAG, (1,097 learners) and preparation for life and work (668). However, LOP provided minimal learning on ICT, helping 32 learners. However, 92 received help in the area of health, public services and care.
  - **M11** project support was fairly wide ranging and focussed on ICT (1,136) and preparing learners for work (775), health issues (844), with some support made available in agricultural education, humanities, business, the arts, leisure and tourism.

- Support for **M13** learners was also wider than for other project clusters. 1,153 learners covered ICT, 1,248 learned about business administration and 1,211 covered issues relating to health, public services and care. Around 923 were supported in preparation for life and work. Other areas of support included agriculture, retail, arts and media, leisure, travel and tourism.

## 3.2 Lessons learned from the TLM Evaluation

3.2.1 The TLM evaluation pointed to at least five main lessons from experience at this level to date and these are important for the LSC to consider in the development of the VC Train evaluation.

- There is a need for client based and customised approaches to working with the most disadvantaged groups
- A 'holistic' approach involving a range of options and opportunities which address multiple barriers to work [not just employability] is required.
- Inter-agency collaboration, including working across administrative [e.g. local authority] boundaries and engaging with the voluntary and community sectors within deprived neighbourhoods and those representing particular groups.
- Effective outreach and targeting of individuals and employers is essential for engagement and programme development and innovation
- There is a need to work with employers at the local level to seek to influence recruitment, training and workforce development practices so as to provide opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged people who wish to take up employment. But agencies should not become preoccupied with trying to locate new jobs in the most deprived areas e.g. via new business start-ups or job subsidy.

## 3.3 VC Train overall performance

3.3.1 The VC Train Development Plan 2007-8 provides details on the targets set for improving learner achievement by ESF measure and illustrates the extent to which these have been met. With six months to run, VC Train has already met the LSC's learner targets for the total contract and has met the majority of targets per Measure, as the three tables below demonstrate. There are 7 different targets among the three measures that are yet to be fulfilled, one in Measure 11, three in Measure 13 and 3 in Measure 17. VC Train will be concentrating on meeting these shortfalls for the remainder of the contract. Looking at the tables more closely, we can see that

- **Measure 11** is down by 65 learners in RES 1b
- **Measure 13** is down in total by 87 learners across OP1a, RES 1a and RES 1b
- **Measure 17** is down by a total of 216 learners, across OP 1DF, RES 2 and RES 3

**Table 3.1 Targets and achievements for Measure 11**

	Target to end 2007	Achieved to June 2007	Achieved already
OP 1a	700	1236	Yes
OP 1b	2000	2660	Yes
RES 1a		495	Yes
<i>RES 1b</i>	<i>1295</i>	<i>1230</i>	<i>65 down</i>

**Table 3.2 Targets and achievements for Measure 13**

	Target to end 2007	Achieved to June 2007	Achieved already
OP 1a	1560	1552	8 down
OP 1b	4440	4724	Yes
OP 3a	1092	1273	Yes
OP 3b	3108	3535	Yes
RES 1a	680	626	54 down
<i>RES 1b</i>	<i>1937</i>	<i>1912</i>	<i>25 down</i>

**Table 3.3 Targets and achievements for Measure 17**

	Target to end 2007	Achieved to June 2007	Achieved already
OP 1DM	500	585	Yes
OP 1DF	750	729	21 down
OP 1BMS	354	531	Yes
OP 1BFS	531	608	Yes
OP 1 BMC	200	200	Yes
OP 1 BFC	300	344	Yes
OP 1 LM	25	30	Yes
OP 1LF	1225	1316	Yes
OP 2	2690	3251	Yes
OP 3	583	1335	Yes
RES 1	219	459	Yes
RES 2	2331	2180	151 down
<i>RES 3</i>	<i>388</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>44 down</i>

### 3.4 VC Train Financial Management 2005 - 2006

3.4.1 Overall in 2006, total income for VC Train was £525,883 and expenditure was £526,932.

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### *Income*

- 3.4.2 Total income for VC Train for the period ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 was £525,883, an increase of £52,160 from the previous year. The majority of this funding (£488,194) was voluntary income 'restricted funding' made up of ERDF money (£199,856), LSC ACL (£151,825) and LSC Basic Skills funding (£65,392). VC Train also attracted a Big Lottery Grant of £71,124 and in addition, the Consortium received £37,689 from other unrestricted sources and from investment income not specified and this helped offset the net deficit in restricted funds (£38,738) for the end of March 2006.
- 3.4.3 The restricted grants for 2006 were larger than for 2005 (£488,194, compared to £445,236) and sources of other income and investment income were boosted by £9,202 between 2005 and 2006 (£37,689 compared to £28,487).
- 3.4.4 Total income in 2004 was £567,638 and this dipped to £473,723 in 2005 and increased again to £488,194 in 2006, largely to do with the amount of restricted funds granted.

### *Expenditure*

- 3.4.5 In total, expenditure between April 2005 and March 2006 was £526,932 and was an increase of just £510.00 from 2005 (£526,444). This compares very well with an overspend of £77,700 in 2004.
- 3.4.6 In total net resources expended for the period were (-£1,049.00) and this compares well with a 2005 deficit of £52,669 and £77,700 in 2004. Expenditure in 2006 was made up of charitable activities (£170,620) costs associated with generating voluntary income (£279,362), other expenses (£76,068) and governance (£882.00). This figure is an increase from 2005 (£139,918) but is lower than the 2004 spend of £222,872 (where this expenditure area is called 'activities for furthering charitable objects'). This result is largely due to the high 2004 spend on Consortium development.

### *Charitable Activities*

- 3.4.7 The largest expense in this category was the salaries and staff costs of trainers and those working directly with learners (£127,904), compared with £96,477 in 2005 and £122,376 in 2004. Other staff costs such as employers' national insurance, and pensions accounted for £15,751. Non staff costs in this category made up the remainder of charitable activity spend, such as marketing and promotions (£7,979), conferences (£7,135), training (£6,204) and consultancy fees (£6,204).
- 3.4.8 In 2006, there was no expenditure on Consortium development, contrasting with a spend of £6,580 on this in 2005 and a sizeable £58,487 in 2004. Network development was another no spend area in 2006, compared to a spend of £13,209 in 2005 and £5,661 in 2004.

### *Costs of generating voluntary income*

- 3.4.9 In 2006, this area of expenditure ran to £279,362, which was smaller than the figure for the previous year (£313,741) but greater than the 2004 spend of £224,363 (where this area of expenditure was called 'support costs'. The largest part of this expenditure was devoted to staff salaries and costs at the Support Unit (\$202,842). It is interesting to note that salary costs were £171,885 in 2005 and £137,948 in 2006 but costs of hiring temporary staff were £14,198 in 2005 compared with £10,067 in 2006 and £3,269 in 2004. It is apparent that 2005 required more temporary HR resources than in 2006, where recruitment costs were greater (£21,048 compared to £14,211).
- 3.4.10 Depreciation costs have fallen from £27,997 in 2005 to £10,985 in 2006 and rent and rates remained relatively stable (£18,845 in 2005, to £17,293 in 2006). However, printing postage and stationery has increased (£9,772 - £12,445) as has computer and office consumables. Other resources expended in 2006 came to £76,068 a small increase on the previous years' figure of £51,512, made up of staff costs, insurance and functions and refreshments, smaller than the 2005 figure of £72,763. The 2004, accounts called this area of expenditure 'management and administration' of the charity and amounted to £59,063 in that year.
- 3.4.11 VC Train were able to bring forward unspent monies of £114,206 from 2005 to more than offset their slight overspend of £1,049, resulting in a fund of £113,157 carried over at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, a slight increase on the previous year £114,206, but not as large at the £166,905 of 2004. This was made up of mainly unrestricted funds of £90,475 accumulated over the past 2 years.

### *Balance Sheet*

- 3.4.12 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, VC Train's total assets less liabilities were £113,157. Current assets were £256,052, made up of funding claims £212,184, debtors £194,658, prepayments £17,527 and cash in bank and in hand (£43,868). The figures for assets and liabilities were much lower for 2005, perhaps reflecting the smaller pot of restricted funding for that year. Debtor assets amounted to £77,869 and the cash level was £29,274, totalling £106,963.
- 3.4.13 Current liabilities were calculated as £168,594, made up of £143,596, sundry creditors and £24,998 accruals. Liabilities were £23,633 in 2005, made up of sundry creditors £13,998 and accruals £9,635.
- 3.4.14 In 2006, therefore, current assets were £87,458 and this added to tangible fixed assets £25,699 created the total of £113,157 of net assets. Taken together, the total restricted and unrestricted funds carried forward at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 also came to £113,157. The 2005 balance sheet yielded similar overall total results – as total assets less current liabilities was £114,206, a small decrease on 2004's figure of £116,905.

## 3.5 VC Train – future priorities

3.5.1 The future priorities of VC Train as laid down by the 2007/08 Development Plan are as follows:

### 3.5.2 Financial Stability

- Meet targets for current ESF Co-financed contracts Measures 3.11, 3.13 and 3.17.
- Win new ESF Co-financed contracts and meet all targets.
- Meet targets for current and proposed E2E Sheffield contracts.
- Meet targets for West Yorkshire Datamine contract.
- Meet recruitment and achievement targets for new regional contracts of Train2Gain, Apprenticeships 25+ and Basic & Employability Skills for JCP customers.
- Develop strategies to improve responsiveness to employer needs.
- Set and meet targets for non LSC funding.
- Win NEET contracts in all 4 boroughs.
- Win increased E2E contract in Sheffield and new E2E contracts in other 3 boroughs.
- Win Apprenticeships 16-24 for Regional Consortium.

### 3.5.3 Human Resource Development

- Make any necessary changes to the management and deployment of staff in the light of LSC priorities.
- Continue to support training within the consortium in order that all tutors reach qualified teacher status for 2010.
- Devise and implement a management and personal development programme for the Support Unit
- Gain re-accreditation of Investors in People.

### 3.5.4 Responding to the Needs of Employers

- Raise our profile with South Yorkshire employers.
- React quickly to employers' enquiries and requests.
- Increase and achieve the Train to Gain contract.
- Increase the level of income from non-concessionary and commercial activity.
- Gain 'Customer First' re-accreditation.
- Implement the Apprenticeships 25+ contract and exceed targets.
- Implement the Basic and Employability Skills for JobCentre Plus contract and exceed all targets.

### 3.5.5 Responding to the Needs of Learners

- Develop curriculum.
- Gain Matrix accreditation.

- Gain ASDAN accreditation.
- Improve learner feedback facilities.
- Continue to support curriculum development to embed literacy and numeracy.
- Extend the range of teaching and learning strategies.

## 4 Views of VC Train Core Staff

### 4.1 VC Train interviews main points

4.1.1 As an early task of the evaluation, we interviewed six staff members at the VC Train Support Unit, based at The Ladder in Rotherham and these interviews took place in August 2007 at the above location, over two days. The following bullet points summarise the feedback we received.

### 4.2 Roles of Staff at VC Train

- Five out of six members of staff interviewed had worked for VC Train for some time and one had joined in the last two months. All had been involved in the not for profit training sector prior to joining VC Train.
- All four strongly indicated that their original roles had developed over time, with deeper and wider responsibilities. This was largely as a result of the developmental and continuous improvement work of the Consortium, which had increased the scope of their job roles.

### 4.3 Operation of VC Train

- Perceptions over the role of VC Train were not uniform. When asked about their descriptions of the role of VC Train, three stressed the 'bridging' role the Consortium played in acting as an intermediary between the LSC and member organisations, accessing funding and implementing QA and MIS processes. Three emphasised that the main role of VC Train was to bring members nearer to the mainstream and make them savvier in procuring for LSC contracts.
- Descriptions over the specific activities of VC train were full and clear and reflected the different roles and responsibilities of interviewees. All agreed that they carried out all the paper work on behalf of VC Train members that the LSC required. All touched upon the role of the Support Unit in maintaining standards and continually driving up performance, both in teaching delivery and in administrative issues. One interviewee also talked about the task of the Support unit to manage existing contracts and take on new work at the same time.
- All were clear on the target groups of the VC Train Consortium. Unemployed people, disadvantaged groups, BMEs, lone parents and those with disabilities were all cited. One said that VC Train had a learner centred approach and another commented that they were interested in hard to reach groups and could link in with other services to access new learners.
- Staff described with clarity how the Support Unit interacted with its members. They described the process carried out for new members, starting with the membership pack followed by 'quality health check' and a period of intensive support from a named member of staff at the Support Unit. Two pointed out that support was more wide ranging for a contracting member than for a non contracting member. They also described the links within the VC Train cluster networks and with Voluntary Action groups throughout South Yorkshire.
- Interviewees gave detailed descriptions on the types of support offered by the VC Train Support Unit. Assistance on tendering, capacity building and best practice were all cited and they said that support was very much provider led. As mentioned above, intensive support is available to improve the

performance of members and to ensure delivery of proposed learning is financially viable. ILPs, evaluations, MIS support and SAR support are also part of the assistance VC Train offer. VC Train are also shortly to be an ASDAN Accredited Centre, which will help member organisations in improving their curriculum quality.

- Delivery of support is via individual support, and one to one mentoring, SAR/MIS evaluations, sharing of best practice via one to one sessions and workshops. Some prepared support is available in the form of 'Ezy Guides' on specific topics. One emphasised that support was flexible to needs.

#### 4.4 Measuring the benefits of VC Train

- Staff members were all very confident that VC Train made a real difference to the performance of member organisations. Four talked about how the SAR process had made tangible differences to outputs and capabilities of members over the last 3 years and had encouraged members to take responsibility for their own improvements. Two explained that because the Support Unit looked after the fundraising, the members could concentrate on providing a better and more flexible service to learners.
- Feedback to the Support Unit from members was invited on a continuous basis and was mainly positive, although some members found the SAR process 'painful'. Feedback from end users was also collected via the OTL process and monitoring and evaluation systems in place.
- It was felt that VC Train had a positive impact on end users, as 'they got access to good quality learning in the community' in a suitable setting and they are not forced into the FE sector. Employers too benefited from the training provided, it was said.
- Benefits to end users are measured via the MMR. The Support Unit also evaluates hours spent, letters, calls over half an hour, OTL visits, workshops and cluster meetings. The Support Unit produces over 12,000 database reports showing these contact hours between them and members. Each member organisation receives a benchmark report so they can measure their performance against other Consortium members.
- Suggested improvements to VC Train were; a procedure to make action planning more formal, so it ties in with the support they are offering. One said their was no formal training policy at the Support Unit that tied in with the strategic objectives of the organisation.

#### 4.5 Additionality of VC Train

- Feedback suggested that the additionality for VC Train was high for a large proportion of members but also suggested that it would be low for others. Without a contracting body, some would find it difficult to carry on. The BME cluster would find it particularly tough. Others would get by, but almost certainly with less impressive results. One suggested that due to the work carried out, around half of members could equal or surpass the quality of private providers in the mainstream sector. Another talked about the Consortium being bigger than the sum of its parts and felt that this was a key strength which could not be replicated without the current structure.
- Some organisations were mentioned, such as Carter & Carter, but they lacked the VC knowledge. The South Yorkshire Open Forum was cited by two staff, but they don't have a relationship with the LSC. One said that without VC Train, there would be a big difference in quality.
- If VC Train did not exist, staff members feared the quality would drop and members may not receive the funding that they currently enjoy. Some

member organisations, they said, would find it difficult to develop a relationship with the LSC and visa versa.

## 5 Views of VCTrain Consortium Members

### 5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Interviews were undertaken with contracted members of the VCTrain consortium during September 2007. In total, contact details were provided (by VCTrain) for 52 contracted members. Interviews have been completed with 44 of these contracted members. This chapter presents an analysis of these data.

5.1.2 The purpose of these interviews was to explore a range of areas of impact. The main topics for discussion with members were:

- *Background characteristics of members/training organisations*
- *Involvement with VCTrain*
- *Nature of support provided by Consortium Members*
- *Impact on beneficiaries of participation in the VCTrain consortium*
- *Impact on own organisation of participation in the VCTrain consortium*
- *Additionality*
- *Collaborating with other VCTrain consortium members*
- *Management of VCTrain*
- *Monitoring and evaluation*

5.1.3 The full set of questions asked of members is shown in Appendix B.

### 5.2 Background Characteristics of Consortium Members

5.2.1 Of the 44 contracted members interviewed, most of the organisations had less than 24 employees or volunteers. The most common size of organisations was in the 11-24 staff/volunteers brackets (16 organisations were in this category) as shown below in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1 How many people work in your organisation, including paid and unpaid staff (Please tick one)**

	Number of respondents (by number of people who work in the organisation)
1-4	5
5-10	12
11-24	16
25-49	8
50-99	3
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<b>44</b>

A number is shown in bold where, taking into account the margin of error due to sampling, we are 95% certain that it is different from the number in the left hand total column (using a Chi-Squared statistical test)  
Source: PACEC Survey (Q8)

5.2.2 Most members describe themselves as a combination of a voluntary organisation, a charity or a community organisation. These are well established organisations with all of them having been in operation for more than 5 years.

5.2.3 In terms of geographical distribution of their beneficiaries, there is a relatively even spread across Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster. Most organisations cover more than one area. The distribution is illustrated in the table below.

**Table 5.2 Which areas of South Yorkshire do beneficiaries of your organisation come from?**

	Total
Rotherham Area	24
Barnsley Area	22
Sheffield area	21
Doncaster area	16
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>44</i>

Source: PACEC Survey (Q11A)

5.2.4 The most common type of beneficiary group that the member organisations interact with are Black and Ethnic Minorities. A large majority believed (37 out of 44) that progress reaching their target beneficiary group/s had been as they had anticipated and was on track. For the remaining 7 organisations for whom progress was not as anticipated, reasons that were given to explain this included that the nature of the contracts offered were not compatible with their organisation, that they had insufficient funding to progress and insufficient staff.

5.2.5 A sizeable minority (19 out of 44) indicated that there had been a fundamental change to the design and implementation of how they operated since becoming a member of the VCTrain consortium. When asked to provide details about these changes, a number of areas were mentioned including that the overall quality of their organisation and their delivery had improved, that the nature of their service was evolving and that their client base had been built up and developed.

## 5.3 Involvement with VCTrain

5.3.1 The length of involvement of organisations with VCTrain was considerable – 42 out of 44 had been involved with them for 3 years. The most frequent way they became involved with VCTrain was by word of mouth or by being introduced by a VCTrain core partner.

5.3.2 There was general agreement among the members regarding the objectives of VCTrain – most thought that the organisation aimed to assist member organisations to meet the needs of learners, to access funding more effectively, to achieve high standards in their delivery, to advance equity and social inclusion and to help them to develop their capacity.

5.3.3 Of the 44 members interviewed, 14 were members of the VCTrain Board of Trustees. Of these 14 Board members 9 considered that the board was operating highly effectively or quite effectively with the remainder indicating that it was not effective or that they didn't know.

5.3.4 Further follow-on interviews were undertaken with a subset of these members of the Board of Trustees. In these discussions, respondents were overall very positive about the work of the Board. However, one theme that emerged from the discussions was the need for the Board to have more independent voice. It was thought by a number of people that an independent Chair – totally outside VCTrain – would facilitate the management of the Board meetings and ensure that the agenda and priorities were not dominated by contracted members only. A plan to appoint such a Chair is in place. It was generally felt that procedures and processes were in place in the Board to deal with any matters arising. Administration of the Board was considered to be a little disorganised and it was noted that papers were sometimes not circulated in advance and agendas were not issued.

## 5.4 Nature of Training Support Provided by Consortium Members

5.4.1 Members were asked which of the relevant ESF measures (11,13 or 17) they had supported in the VCTrain project. Most were involved in supporting more than one measure and a majority (36 out of 44) supported measure 17 (tackling disadvantage). BME groups and people with disabilities were the most frequently targeted by the members. The full list of target groups of members is shown below in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3 What is the main target group that your organisation aims to support?**

	Total
People with disabilities	11
Black and ethnic minorities	12
Lone parents	1
Other ( <i>below</i> )	20
<i>All groups are welcome</i>	6
<i>Employed and unemployed people</i>	5
<i>All parents</i>	3
<i>Over 19s</i>	2
<i>Families</i>	2
<i>People with mental problems</i>	1
<i>Voluntary organisations</i>	1
<i>Drug users, victims and professionals</i>	1
<i>Travellers</i>	1
<i>Alcoholics</i>	1
<i>Counselling training</i>	1
<i>Healthcare sector</i>	1
<i>Women</i>	1
<i>Organisations that provide Advocacy support to the public</i>	1
<i>All disadvantaged people</i>	1
<i>White employees in VC sector</i>	1
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: PACEC Survey (Q23B)

5.4.2 Across all target groups, the nature of the support provided was most often confidence-building, self-esteem building and job-preparedness. This support was most frequently delivered through group sessions (38 out of 44), one-to-one sessions (30 out of 44), outreach activities (28 out of 44), and the development and distribution of literature (26). Members reported low drop out rates across all beneficiary groups.

5.4.3 When asked if they faced any barriers in the provision of support to beneficiaries while being a member of the consortium, a majority (37 out of 44) said that they had. This was most often related to funding – 14 said that their shortage of funds did not allow for long-term planning and 12 said that they had difficulty providing training due to lack of funds.

## 5.5 Impact on Beneficiaries of Participation in the VCTrain Consortium

5.5.1 When asked what the main impacts of the support they provided had been on beneficiaries, while being a part of the VCTrain consortium a range of answers were given. The most frequent responses were increased self esteem, increased confidence, improved job preparedness, entering further education or training and

securing paid employment. The full set of responses to this is shown below in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4** What have been the main impacts on beneficiaries of the support you have provided while being part of the VC Train consortium?

	Number of respondents
Increased self esteem	43
Increased confidence	43
Improved job preparedness	39
Entering further education or training	37
Securing paid employment	37
Improved attitude to labour market participation	35
Working towards overcoming barriers to employment (e.g. housing)	30
Taking up voluntary work not doing previously	29
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<b>44</b>

A number is shown in bold where, taking into account the margin of error due to sampling, we are 95% certain that it is different from the number in the left hand total column (using a Chi-Squared statistical test)  
Source: PACEC Survey (Q29A)

### *Additionality*

- 5.5.2 Members were asked if they would have been able to achieve the same impacts on beneficiaries without the support of VCTrain. Most (34 out of 44) thought that they could not have done it without VCTrain while 10 thought they could have. Those that thought they could have achieved it in any case indicated that they would have used a different approach to achieve the same end or would have sought funding from elsewhere.
- 5.5.3 A majority of members (35 out of 44) indicated that they were on course to meet the target outputs of their organisation.
- 5.5.4 When asked if there had been any wider community or social benefits arising from their participation in the consortium, a majority (32 out of 44) said there had been. Specifically, these impacts included having a wider reach into the community, raising their profile, and improved performance of the groups who employ their trainees.
- 5.5.5 In relation to other outputs produced during their involvement in VCTrain, 29 out of 44 indicated that these had indeed resulted from their work with VCTrain. These included written materials, DVDs and CDs, workbooks, health and safety information, quality standards information and improved infrastructure.

## 5.6 Impacts on Own Organisation of Participation in the Consortium

5.6.1 When asked to what extent their own organisation had benefited from being part of the consortium, 31 out of 44 indicated that it had benefited to a significant extent while the remainder said they had benefited to some extent. The ways in which they had benefited included accessing relevant support, that they had been able to consolidate some of their activities, that they had received help with part of the work they do and that their profile had been raised. The evidence of this positive affect on their organisations was shown through improved network of contacts, improved access to funding and organisational improvements noted in the self assessment report.

### *Additionality*

5.6.2 When asked if they believed that the impacts on their organisation would have occurred without the VCTrain consortium, half (22 out of 44) thought it might have happened to a limited extent. They believed that this might have happened through utilising different sources of funding, with many saying it would have taken longer with reduced activity levels. Another 14 thought it would definitely not have occurred.

## 5.7 Collaborating with Other VCTrain Consortium Members

5.7.1 A majority (32 out of 44) of the members have collaborated with each other via cluster groups within the consortium. The distribution of members across cluster groups shows that 18 organisations were involved with the BME cluster, 15 were involved in the Disabilities cluster, 9 were involved with the Lone Parents cluster and a further 11 were involved in these and other clusters. This distribution is shown below in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5 Which cluster group have you been involved with?**

	Number of respondents
Black and ethnic minorities	18
People with disabilities	15
Lone Parents	9
Other	11
<i>Number of respondents</i>	32

Source: PACEC Survey (Q40A)

5.7.2 Of the 32 members involved in clusters, 19 thought they worked very well and 11 thought they were average.

5.7.3 Most of these collaborations (21 out of 32) within the clusters involved general collaboration with other members of the consortium group who work in a similar area. A further 17 only collaborated with other members who targeted the same group and 16 collaborated with only one organisation directly. In terms of frequency of interaction with the other members in clusters, 13 organisations said they had very

frequent collaboration and 13 said that they had quite frequent interaction. Most were happy with the level of involvement that they currently had and 31 said they would like about the same amount of involvement in the future.

- 5.7.4 A large number of members (37 out of 44) collaborated with other organisations outside of the VCTrain consortium. Some of these included the Borough Council, Voluntary Action Barnsley, the PCT, the LEA and Rotherham Learning Network.

## 5.8 Management of VCTrain

- 5.8.1 Of the 44 members interviewed, almost all (42) had had some interaction with the VCtrain Consortium Support Unit. A majority were involved with them quite frequently (20) while 14 said they interacted with them very frequently. A further 9 said they dealt with them only occasionally. Most were happy with this and 36 out of 44 wanted the same level of involvement in the future.

- 5.8.2 Members were generally happy with the administration of the consortium by the Support Unit. Half (22) of members considered that the administration was highly effective and 17 thought it was quite effective. Only 5 thought the success of the administration was limited with the main reasons provided being the extent of red tape required.

- 5.8.3 In terms of the effectiveness of the consortium itself, half of the members (22) thought it was highly effective and 18 thought it was quite effective. When asked what (if anything) was particularly good about VCTrain, members pointed to the good level of support, the network and the helpful advice and guidance that they received.

- 5.8.4 Suggestions for improvement from members included increasing the interaction with other members, reducing red tape and bureaucratic requirements and facilitation of continuation of funding.

## 5.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 5.9.1 Almost all members (42 out of 44) monitor outcomes of the support they provide since becoming a member of VCTrain consortium. They do this by gathering feedback from beneficiaries just after support has been given, by collecting feedback during the provision of the support, by reverting back to the beneficiaries some time after the support has been provided and by getting feedback from employment and training organisations that the beneficiaries work at.

- 5.9.2 Almost all members (40 out of 44) thought that the VCTrain consortium has contributed towards the lifelong learning agenda in South Yorkshire. Additional comments provided by members on VCTrain were generally very complimentary about the help and support that they had received from them.

## 5.10 Feedback From Former Members of the VC Train Consortium

5.10.1 As part of the evaluation, we carried out brief interviews with three former members of the VC Train Consortium. All were registered charities and employed between 11-24 staff, including those who were paid and those who were unpaid. One of the ex members provided a service to enable families to provide a safe environment for children, ran a workshop to produce wooden fencing from waste timber and also refurbished children's equipment such as prams and cots. This workshop provided work experience for those with learning difficulties or physical disabilities. The other provided a community arts service via theatre activities to local adults with learning disabilities. The third provided disabled people in Sheffield with mobility resources and provided training to unemployed people. All three organisations were mature – one was almost 20 years old and the other had been in operation for 23 years. All organisations were active in Sheffield and two also served beneficiaries in Barnsley and the other had involved learners from the Rotherham area.

### *Involvement with VC Train*

5.10.2 Two organisations had become involved with VC Train as, at that time, they ran training courses that were accredited via the Open College Network (OCN). One had a franchise for and education accredited learning in the performing arts and the other provided accredited training in woodwork with OCN until 2004. The third organisation tapped in to VC Train for funding to train unemployed people to deliver shopmobility services to local disabled people.

### *Leaving the VC Train Consortium*

5.10.3 It is notable that all three organisations thought that VC Train was useful and valuable and did not leave because of negative experiences with the Consortium. Rather, it was felt that the emphasis on accredited learning ultimately did not suit the aims of these organisations. One explained that the workshop training was not a core objective and was actually a drain on costs, whilst work experience they provided to local people with learning or physical disabilities who simply wanted to do something useful or use the experience as a means of rehabilitation was not accredited and thus did not attract any public sector funding. Another ran out of funding for the training and for the supervisory post that co-ordinated the work of the organisation. The third explained that because they wanted to keep costs down, they gained a franchise with Rotherham College as well as working with VC Train, but this became too costly and too complex and they felt that working with the College was more suitable for their needs than VC Train. Therefore, they all either stopped doing the training or changed the way it was delivered and so being a member of the VC Train Consortium was no longer relevant to their needs

### *Progress after leaving VC Train*

5.10.4 Two organisations are still providing services to their particular client groups. One explained that their activities no longer included training and they were focusing on

helping families and children. This organisation felt that the workshop production had been growing before membership with VC Train and had continued to grow during and after membership with the Consortium and that they had been given useful equipment for this work stream by other charities. They felt that objectives were still being met and mentioned that some of their staff had benefited from Level 2 training and that they had helped over 2,500 families in the last twelve months. Another respondent said that they no longer have a franchise with an external organisation as their training is no longer accredited and that they were still looking for a partner to carry on this work. The third said that internal training was no longer carried out for their staff or volunteers.

5.10.5 However, two felt that funding was still a threat to their ability to sustain their services in the future and raised concern that unaccredited learning for vulnerable groups was in the shadow of mainstream accredited training that the LSC was now more likely to support.

5.10.6 This being said, these two organisations had continued to use tools and practices they had used as a VC Train Consortium member. One said that the organisation had developed as a result of their membership of VCTrain and that some of the systems had been adapted for their internal use. The other reported that they now handled the development of volunteers in a more structured way now they were using the VC Train based Self Assessment tool, to identify objectives and set goals. The third organisation said they did not use any specific tools.

## 5.11 Summary of Main Points

- In total, contact details were provided (by VCTrain) for 52 contracted members and interviews have been completed with 44 of these.
- Most of the organisations had less than 24 employees or volunteers and most members describe themselves as a combination of a voluntary organisation, a charity or a community organisation.
- The most common type of beneficiary group that the member organisations interact with are Black and Ethnic Minorities. A large majority believed (37 out of 44) that progress reaching their target beneficiary group/s had been as they had anticipated and was on track.
- A sizeable minority (19 out of 44) indicated that there had been a fundamental change to the design and implementation of how they operated since becoming a member of the VCTrain consortium.
- The length of involvement of organisations with VCTrain was considerable – 42 out of 44 had been involved with them for 3 years.
- There was general agreement among the members regarding the objectives of VCTrain
- Of the 44 members interviewed, 14 were members of the VCTrain Board of Trustees. Of these 14 Board members 9 considered that the board was operating highly effectively or quite effectively.
- Most members were involved in supporting more than one ESF measure and a majority (36 out of 44) supported measure 17 (tackling disadvantage).

- When asked if they faced any barriers in the provision of support to beneficiaries while being a member of the consortium, a majority (37 out of 44) said that they had. This was most often related to funding.
- The main impacts of the support members provided to beneficiaries, resulted in increased self esteem, increased confidence and improved job preparedness.
- Most members (34 out of 44) thought that they would not have been able to achieve the same impacts on beneficiaries without the support of VCTrain.
- A majority of members (32 out of 44) said there had been wider community or social benefits arising from their participation in the consortium. Specifically, these impacts included having a wider reach into the community, raising their profile, and improved performance of the groups who employ their trainees.
- 31 out of 44 members indicated that their own organisation had benefited from being part of the consortium to a significant extent.
- When asked if they believed that the impacts on their organisation would have occurred without the VCTrain consortium, approximately half (22 out of 44) thought it might have happened to a limited extent and another 14 thought it would definitely not have occurred.
- A majority (32 out of 44) of the members have collaborated with each other via cluster groups within the consortium. In addition, a large number of members (37 out of 44) collaborated with other organisations outside of the VCTrain consortium.
- Of the 44 members interviewed, almost all had had some interaction with the VCTrain Consortium Support Unit. Members were generally happy with the administration of the consortium by the Support Unit.
- In terms of the effectiveness of the consortium itself, half of the members (22) thought it was highly effective and 18 thought it was quite effective.
- When asked what (if anything) was particularly good about VCTrain, members pointed to the good level of support, the network and the helpful advice and guidance that they received.
- Suggestions for improvement from members included increasing the interaction with other members, reducing red tape and bureaucratic requirements and facilitation of continuation of funding.
- Almost all members (42 out of 44) monitor outcomes of the support they provide since becoming a member of VCTrain consortium.
- A small sample of former members of VCTrain indicated positive learning experiences while they were members.

## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1.1 Conclusions and recommendations are presented below.
- 6.1.2 Conclusions are drawn from all the elements of the research detailed above. These conclusions are presented below in relation to the main aims of the evaluation.

### *Its engagement and how that compared with other engagement initiatives with the voluntary and community sector;*

- 6.1.3 VCTrain has a core number of contracted members of 52 and an additional 60 non-contracted associate members.
- 6.1.4 The membership of VCTrain is quite static and solid relationships have been developed with and between members. This ensures that maximum value may be derived from the relationship and organisations have an opportunity to develop considerably during their years of collaboration with VCTrain.
- 6.1.5 In terms of numbers of collaborating organisations, the extent of this engagement compares favourably. For example with the Social Enterprise East Midlands consortium group, approximately 40 organisations have been engaged. In more recently established consortia such as Birmingham Chamber of Commerce REALiSE cluster consortium, approximately 38 organisations are engaged.

### *Added value to the voluntary sector and South Yorkshire training;*

The survey of members indicates clear evidence of additionality in relation to their own organisations and to the impacts on their beneficiary groups. This was particularly the case in relation to the impact on trainees (beneficiaries) where two thirds of members indicated that they couldn't have made this impact without VCTrain's support.

### *The impact on beneficiaries;*

- 6.1.6 Benefits to end users are measured via the Monthly Monitoring Return (MMR). The Support Unit also evaluates hours spent, letters, calls over half an hour, observation of teaching and learning (OTL) visits, workshops and cluster meetings. The Support Unit produces over 12,000 database reports showing these contact hours between them and members. Each member organisation receives a benchmark report so they can measure their performance against other Consortium members.
- 6.1.7 VCTrain has been involved in the delivery of 12,117 episodes of learning between October 2004 and August 2007.
- 6.1.8 Overall, M13 support tackling disadvantage has had the highest number of learners since 2004 (4,910) followed by M11 support (3,161) and then British Minority Ethnic groups in Sheffield (BMES) (1,992). In My Back Yard (a support group for disabled people – IMBY) and Lone Parents (LOP) both supported over 1,400 learners each.

BMEC (Black and Minority Ethnic groups for the Coalfields) was the smallest project and helped 582 beneficiaries.

6.1.9 Interviews with core VCTrain staff indicated that VC Train had a positive impact on end users, as 'they got access to good quality learning in the community' in a suitable setting and they are not forced into the FE sector. Employers too benefited from the training provided, it was said.

6.1.10 Interviews with member organisations indicate that there has been a clear impact on beneficiaries. This was most often through increased self-esteem, increased confidence and improved job preparedness.

*The contribution to the basic skills and life-long learning agenda;*

6.1.11 Almost all members (40 out of 44) interviewed believed that the VCTrain consortium has contributed towards the lifelong learning agenda in South Yorkshire. Additional comments provided by members on VCTrain were generally very complimentary about the help and support that they had received from them.

*Ability to enhance employability and the skills base, including alignment with the sector skills councils' lead on appropriate qualifications.*

6.1.12 VCTrain is achieving what it aimed to achieve in this regard. The VC Train Development Plan 2007-8 provides details on the targets set for improving learner achievement by ESF measure and illustrates the extent to which these have been met. With six months to run, VC Train has already met the LSC's learner targets for the total contract and has met the majority of targets per Measure. There are only 7 different targets among the three measures that are yet to be fulfilled, one in Measure 11, three in Measure 13 and 3 in Measure 17. VC Train will be concentrating on meeting these shortfalls for the remainder of the contract.

6.1.13 Data collected in the survey of members indicates that employability and skills base have been significantly impacted through the activities of the member organisations with the assistance of VCTrain.

## 6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Based on the conclusions above, drawing on all parts of the research undertaken, recommendations are presented below:

- **Funding of VCTrain:** The current funding of VCTrain is producing a solid return in terms of impact on beneficiaries and positive effects on the organisations in the consortium. *We recommend that funding of the consortium continues.*
- **Expansion of the reach of VCTrain:** The consortium is currently made up of a relatively static group and there is relatively little activity to seek new members. It is likely that VCTrain could benefit more organisations. *We recommend that a wider reach for VCTrain be considered.*
- **The cluster activity** within the consortium is working well and members benefit from one another's expertise directly through these. A large number of members (37 out of

44) are also in collaboration with other (non-VCTrain) organisations. *We recommend considering whether some of these other networks could contribute to the VCTrain clusters either directly or indirectly.*

- **The Board of Trustees** requires a balanced outside perspective. *We recommend that plans to appoint an outside Chair are developed and actively pursued.*

## Appendix A Bibliography

### A1 List of Documents Consulted

- Adult and Community Learning Project Internal Evaluation: VC Train May 2007
- Curriculum Development Survey for VC Train April 2007
- Self Assessment Report VC Train 2005/2006
- VC Train ALI Statistics for Measures 11,13 and 17 2004-2007
- Evaluation of the South Yorkshire Transitional Labour Market Programme (TLM) Yorkshire Forward June 2007
- VC Train Quality Improvement Plan 2006
- VCS Learning Links website
- Yorkshire and Humber Government Office ESF 1 web pages
- South Yorkshire Key Skills Website
- SPD targets for Measure 17
- DWP 'ESF A Profile Of Inactive Beneficiaries' Research Summary
- DWP 'Research Into Multiple Disadvantage Groups In ESF Objective 3 in England' Research Summary

## Appendix B Evaluation of VC Train Project: Draft Questions for Consortium Members/Training Providers

**PACEC is contacting you on behalf of LSC Yorkshire and Humber to find out about the VC Train Consortium Project which helps to support disadvantaged groups into employment. Therefore, we would like to ask you a few questions about your experience as a member of the VC Consortium.**

**All the information you provide us with will be considered confidential and you will not be quoted directly. The results of the survey will be presented to the LSC in aggregate form.**

### 1. Background Characteristics of Consortium Members/Training Providers

Q1 Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Q2 Name of organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Q3 Are you a member of the VCTrain project consortium (*Please tick one*)  
 Yes  <sup>1</sup> No  <sup>2</sup>

**If No, Thank and Close**

Q4 Address \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 Name of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Q7 Position in organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Q8 How many people work in your organisation, including paid and unpaid staff

Q9 Which of the following best describes your organisation (*Tick all that apply*)

Social enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary organisation <input type="checkbox"/> Community organisation <input type="checkbox"/> Charity <input type="checkbox"/> Sole person organisation <input type="checkbox"/> Local authority <input type="checkbox"/>	FE College <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary/community forum <input type="checkbox"/> Private sector organisation <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ) <input type="checkbox"/> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>
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Q10 How many years has your organisation been in operation?

Q11 Which areas of South Yorkshire do beneficiaries of your organisation come from?

Q12 How many beneficiaries/trainees have been involved since you became a member of the VCTrain consortium?

Q13 Has progress reaching beneficiaries been as anticipated?

Q14 If progress is less than anticipated, why is this?

- Q15 Have there been any changes in your organisations' aims and objectives, or design and implementation since becoming a member of the VCTrain consortium?

## 2. Involvement with VC Train

- Q16 How long have you been involved with VCTrain?  
Q17 How did you become involved in VC Train  
Q18 What would you say are the objectives of VC Train?  
Q19 Are you a member of the VCTrain Board of Trustees?  
If Yes, what is your view of the effectiveness of the Board?

## 3. Nature of Training Support Provided by Consortium Members

- Q20 Which of the ESF measures have you supported in the VC Train Project?  
Q21 What are the main target groups that your organisation aims to support?  
Q22 What has been the nature of the support that you have provided to each of the target groups in the VC Train project?  
Q23 What are the main ways that support is delivered to your target groups?  
Q24 Please estimate the drop out rate after provision of support for each of the beneficiary groups that you have given support to while a member of the VC Train consortium.  
Q25 As a provider of support to target groups within the VC Train consortium, have you experienced any barriers in providing this support?  
Q26 If yes, what barriers have you experienced in providing support to beneficiaries while you have been a member of VC Train consortium?

## 4. Impact on Beneficiaries of Participation in the VCTrain Consortium

- Q27 What have been the main impacts on beneficiaries of the support you have provided while being part of the VC Train consortium?  
Q28 Would your organisation have been able to achieve the same impacts on beneficiaries without the support of the VC Train consortium?  
Q29 If yes, please explain how this would have been done?  
Q30 Do you think you are on course to meet the target outputs for your organisation?  
Q31 Have there been any other wider community / social benefits not mentioned above?  
Q32 Has your involvement in the consortium resulted in your organisation producing any other additional outputs, eg tool kits, materials, methodologies, policies?)

## 5. Impact on Own Organisation of Participation in the VCTrain Consortium

- Q33 To what extent has your own organisation benefited from being part of the VC Train Consortium?  
Q34 If significant or some extent, how is this evident?  
Q35 To what extent do you think the impact on your organisation would have occurred without the VCTrain consortium?

Q36 How would this impact have occurred?

## 6. Collaborating with other VC Train Consortium Members/Training Providers

- Q37 In supporting the target groups of your organisation and the VCTrain project, have you collaborated via cluster groups with other partners/providers in the VC Train Consortium?
- Q38 If Yes, which cluster group have you been involved with ?
- Q39 If Yes, how well do the cluster groups work?
- Q40 If Yes, please describe the nature of the collaboration
- Q41 Do you collaborate with other providers outside the VC Train Consortium?  
If yes, please tell us which providers outside the VCTrain consortium you have collaborated with.
- Q42 How would you describe the frequency of collaboration with other partners/providers within the VC Train Consortium?
- Q43 What level of collaboration would you like with partners/providers in the VC Train Consortium?  
Please can you explain your answer?

## 7. Management of VCTrain

- Q44 As a member of the VCTrain Consortium, have you interacted with the VC Train Consortium Support Unit (the core group who administers the consortium)?
- Q45 How would you describe the frequency of involvement with the VC Train Consortium Support Unit?
- Q46 What level of involvement would you like with the VC Train Consortium Support Unit?  
Please can you explain your answer?
- Q47 How effective do you think the VC Train Consortium Support Unit has been in administering the consortium?
- Q48 How effective do you think the VC Train Consortium itself has been?
- Q49 Is there anything that is particularly good in VCTrain?)  
Please can you explain your answer
- Q50 Can you suggest any improvements?

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Q51 Do you monitor outcomes of the support you have provided since you became a member of the VCTrain consortium?)
- Q52 In which ways do you monitor outcomes of accredited learning?
- Q53 Overall, to what extent do you think the VC Train Consortium has contributed towards the lifelong learning agenda in South Yorkshire?)
- Q54 Any other comments