

A revised approach to M&L development to reflect current realities

The world has changed radically since we devised the current M&L development programme. We've taken the opportunity of evaluating the programme's successes, weaknesses and relevance to the new realities. Here we put forward a new proposal that, in effect, re-shapes the lead SSC role, and the service that goes with it.

In the current economic climate it's difficult to sell M&L development 'pure and simple' to employers facing existential challenges. More promising approaches will include the following:

1. **Make M&L an intrinsic part of a wider business focused approach.** We need to address the business issues of the moment such as:

- Customer focus: identifying new realities in the market and responding quickly to them
- Cash conservation: securing working capital, reducing costs and timely debt collection
- Sales development: ensuring offers match customer's current needs and wants
- Production: ensuring quality products and services delivered on time
- Investing for the upturn: intelligent investment in the development of staff and products/services

Fortunately two of the current M&L solutions, Action Learning and Inspirational Leadership, are 'agnostic' processes. You can introduce most business problems at one end and get a solution out the other.

But, in order to make these offers appealing to harassed business leaders, we need to ensure that they have one of the above relevant business 'wrappers' around them. SkillsActive plan to pilot this approach with Action Learning this summer – more details at the Forum meeting.

2. **Working through the English regions.** All regions will shortly have an Alliance Manager and a process for SSCs to engage with regional LSC, broker and RDA staff. We have an opportunity to capitalise on this pool of employer-facing resources that have access to Train to Gain and regional funds. With a consistent approach we can work with brokers and L&M advisors to magnify the impact of the SSCs' own employer facing staff. The challenge is to ensure that brokers and SSC staff are working to a common plan and have the appropriate training.

3. **Working with SSC clusters such as the Manufacturing Alliance.** We can capitalise on the momentum these alliances provide to develop another route to engaging effectively with employers. It provides a double benefit: offers can be seen to be relevant because they are both 'business-issue-focused' and 'sector-specific'. We need to find out more about the other clusters.

4. **Up to date employer intelligence.** Both the SSAs and Compacts are likely to be out of date with current realities. It would be good to get an 'M&L Snapshot' from every SSC. A test snapshot survey on M&L is being piloted by Proskills.

Apart from these specific ideas we propose the programme for the next 12 months would include the following.

5. **Inspirational Insight Tool.** The M&L programme supports the continued hosting of this popular tool but the presentation and branding need to be modernised to reflect our refreshed focus.

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The tool will be customised to reflect the Alliance as the main sponsor and we will start mining the information it holds to supplement the development of improved M&L case studies.

6. **SSC support.** Every SSC has a different level of understanding, focus and capability in promoting M&L development. The all-sector programme is a centre of expertise for M&L that provides reactive support to the most capable SSCs and proactive support for those who need help. There will be a continued focus on intra-SSC communication, spreading best practice and providing base level solutions and advice and guidance.
7. **English Regions.** Similarly, every region has a different level of understanding, focus and capability in promoting M&L development. Moreover, RDA and LSC regional staff find it difficult to communicate with all 25 SSCs; nor do we expect regional SSC staff to have a detailed understanding of M&L issues and solutions. The all-sector programme provides an M&L centre of expertise that can and does add value to regional M&L programmes. (Examples of recent contributions include the South West, South East, North West, East Midlands and London.)
8. **Compacts.** Compacts are providing a new focus on M&L by incentivising SSCs to meet specified employer engagement targets. In many regions M&L SSC 'special interest' groups are beginning to share information about working with brokers and developing best practice. The programme will actively support this work by providing M&L detailed expertise to supplement that of the local regional staff.
9. **NI, Scotland, Wales.** All three countries are 'resetting' their M&L programmes. We will continue to engage with the new teams in NI and Wales. For Scotland we have a proposal to recast the M&L offers in terms of 'Skills Utilisation' which is the key productivity limiting issue as seen by the Scottish government. Overall and wherever possible we will seek to capitalise on all work to make our 'learnings' available across all areas of the UK while being sensitive to local culture and needs.
10. **Stakeholders and Partners.** We will continue contribute to national and regional meetings with stakeholders and partners to demonstrate that the Alliance has a credible and coherent M&L programme and to ensure that issues and initiatives are identified early and fed back to the SSCs.
11. **Communications.** We will continue to host M&L Strategic Forum meetings about once per quarter to share information with SSC representatives and take input. This will be backed up by the continually refreshed web site and regular email updates.
12. **Sector Qualification Reform Programme.** Encourage SSCs to capitalise on the Sector Qualification Reform Programme as it relates to M&L. This would include facilitating SSC engagement in the work of the Management Standards Centre (MSC) and the projects the MSC is engaged with. The goal is to ensure that the outcomes of this work meets the Alliance of SSCs' needs – NOS, Sector Qualification Strategy and associated Action Plans
13. **Other initiatives.** This would include much of what is discussed in the first section above. Examples of past initiatives include the 3 phases of SSA analysis and the proposal for an M&L based NSA.

We have summarised the work to be done and the approach taken in the following diagram. Level 1 focuses on national leadership for the programme which would operate at CEO level and engage with UKCES and key partners and stakeholders.

The other three levels are more operational. Level 2 is about working effectively at the operational level with partners and stakeholders and ensuring we have a joined up approach. Levels 3 and 4 are about coordinating activities across SSCs to deliver tangible benefits to employers.

L&M Programme Overview

