

North Norfolk Pilot Business Survey 2007:
Final Report
Executive Summary

Executive Summary including recommendations

- The purpose of the report was to allow the North Norfolk Skills Partnership (NNSP) and the North Norfolk Business Forum (NNBF) to understand both the skills needs and the support needs of local businesses in the district.

Section 1: Respondents

- The survey was made available through an online page and was directly sent via email, post and personal contacts to over 1500 businesses. A total of 116 surveys were received through the post and via the online survey page hosted at the NNSP website.
- The respondents employ over 3000 persons between them, meaning that a high proportion of the larger employers in the area have responded (approximately one quarter).
- Only four postcode areas had no responses (NR29 4, NR20 5, NR11 6 and NR10 5). These areas represent 2% (80) businesses. Significant over representation only occurs in NR27 9 (Cromer – this is probably due to the active distribution of the survey by the LAP), NR12 0 and NR21 7.
- In terms of sector representation, there was significant over representation of tourism and finance and significant under representation of Transport and storage.

Section 2: Issues

Future Prospects

- Of those businesses surveyed, a majority had had no change in staff over the last year and more businesses had recruited staff than shed them. Only 5% of businesses are forecasting a reduction in staff compared to 44% who forecast an expansion.
- Overall, 77% said that there were some barriers or threats which were affecting the growth of their business. These included - town centre car parking, 'general economic climate' and competition from larger national chains.
- Other barriers/threats that were raised were rental values, land values, shortage of employment land and lack of serviced premises.

Training Learning and Skills

- Training Learning and Skills is one of the most important areas of work both at a national and local level. It is also of interest to businesses,

with far more respondents requesting further information about this than any other option. Specifically:

“The most commonly identified benefits were improved productivity (mentioned by 89 per cent), improved employee commitment and involvement in the organisation (88 per cent), and improved employee morale (88 per cent).”¹

- There is more emphasis on in-house training (37% train a lot) than on external training (7%).
- Respondents list basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and IT as well as communications and customer services when asked about the skills that were important to the future of their business.

Employment and Recruitment

- The hardest group to employ were ‘Young People’ aged 16-24 years.
- Many respondents stated that they had no disabled staff or applicants. This highlights a potential lack of awareness in that the legal definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is:

‘Someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day – to – day activities’².

The difficulties which many respondents seem to think would be a problem seem to be an issue of perception, given that they are probably (unknowingly) employing persons who can be classified as disabled.

Business Support

- Few respondents have accessed business support but the type of support that would be useful was highlighted by respondents as:
 - The need for advice (this was mentioned very frequently)
 - Grants and loans for expansion
 - Issues around IT – both training and equipment
- The large number of respondents who highlighted a need for advice seems to show that existing services in this area are not reaching businesses in North Norfolk.

Section 3: Conclusions

- North Norfolk seems to have a fairly contained economy in which most businesses are not active in international markets. Moreover, the vast majority of businesses intend to stay in the area in the future but few appear to have used forward planning.

¹ P4 ‘Recruitment and training among large national employers’, LSC, January 2008

² http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001069

Supporting local businesses

- Peer support networks for businesses in North Norfolk, such as the Business Forum³ and projects such as the Bizzfizz⁴.
- On an individual level, day training such as the very popular Business and Social Enterprise (BASE) courses in Cromer supported by Action for Market Towns offer a short introduction to important business planning skills and let the participants gauge the value of pursuing further training.
- The issue of training in sole-trader or owner operated businesses is also an important factor in North Norfolk where a higher than national average proportion are self-employed (11.1 % to 9.3 % respectively).⁵

Population Changes

- The trend of ageing in rural coastal areas, as well as rural areas in general is well documented – this is driven by older persons retiring to the coast and younger skilled persons emigrating.⁶ This is a matter of Youth Engagement which goes beyond just educational opportunities and includes recreation, social life and aspirations.⁷
- There also seems to be a self-reinforcing trend amongst young people in which those who do are seen as ‘academically successful’ leave the area and that those who do not are looked upon negatively by employers.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) & Skills Issues around migrants

- Migrants in general tend to possess a good level of skills, which are often under utilized due to language barriers. Research by the OECD highlighted that 25% of migrants possessed a University level of education compared to an OECD average of 20%.⁸

‘There is a failure within the labour market for skills and qualifications to be effectively recognised. This is a generic problem but it affects the newly arrived more directly as they do not have access points and local knowledge to overcome this challenge’.

- Work by the Improvement Agency and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA)⁹ identified that migrants prioritised obtaining information regarding: getting a job, English language learning, where to get advice and information, national insurance and tax, rights at work, welfare benefits and social security, rights to live and work in the UK, doctors, adult education and training and housing in the UK.

3 <http://www.northnorfolk.org/nbf/>

4 <http://www.bizfizz.org.uk/>

5 Statistics from NOMIS - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/imp/la/2038431850/report.aspx>

6 Research at the University of Newcastle projected that 75% of the population of North Norfolk would be over 50 by 2028.

7 This could be an area of future research in cooperation with other rural districts in Norfolk

8 ‘Migration strains rich and poor’, Steve Schifferes, BBC, 20 February 2008.

9 ‘Integrating new migrants communicating important information’, IDeA, January 2008, p.34.

- Besides the fact that there are problems with physical access to facilities for learning, which means that most courses are run in Fakenham and North Walsham.
E.g. there were eleven ESOL courses listed to take place in North Norfolk from January to April 2008. Although these were available in Cromer, Fakenham and North Walsham, the Workers' Registration Scheme also shows higher concentrations of migrants around Stalham, which has very low provision in general.
- Using the top two skills highlighted in the responses, IT and customer service, we can also see some of the problems. IT, whilst well-supported in some areas (Fakenham, North Walsham, Cromer, Sheringham and Holt) is not available in others (Stalham, Wells and villages) due to the investment in equipment and premises associated with IT learning.
- Issues of 'provision-led' problems and of accessibility are significant when considering future Vocational Diplomas in the area. A consortium of schools in the Northern Area of North Norfolk is already preparing to offer a diploma in Construction and the Built Environment from September 2008 and more are in development across the County. However the ability for students to get to classes between these schools as well as being able to attend suitable work placements are likely to be major problems in North Norfolk when compared to well-connected urban areas.
- There is a risk that the successful diploma holders, like other qualified young persons, will be forced to seek employment outside of the district.

Recommendations

- The problem of Younger skilled persons emigrating could be counteracted through 'substitution' policies, i.e. to identify what young people leave for that can be provided here e.g. access to Higher Education and thereafter high skilled jobs.
- Courses to improve the level and quality of internal training, e.g. train the trainer, would also seem to be of use given the high level of internal training.
- The provision of affordable housing and year round wellpaid employment must have importance here and must therefore be part of continued regeneration.
- With the planned future growth of housing in North Norfolk, there is also a larger market for trades which are populated by sole traders such as electricians and plumbers.¹⁰ Cooperation in this way on a local level, perhaps through the NNBF, can keep money in the local economy rather than losing it to large nationally based companies.

¹⁰ The North Norfolk 2006 Housing Needs Study estimated that over 900 dwellings were needed per year to satisfy demand for housing.