

Case Study: Building London Creating Futures (BLCF)



Building London Creating Futures (BLCF) aims to find long-term employment in the construction industry for local people in London, and to help the industry with its recruitment needs. BCLF developed a collaborative approach between the public and private sectors. Partnership working between construction employers, training providers and community organisations, local authority regeneration agencies and employment agencies, is intrinsic to the BLCF project, which is coordinated overall by a manager based in the London Borough of Southwark. A network of Workplace Co-ordinators (WPCs) works with major contractors on projects situated mainly in inner London.

How was the project started and how is it funded?

The project started around 2001 as an ESF Equal¹ funded project and continued as an Equal project until 2005. During the period 2002-2005, BLCF built on that funding, bringing in Single Regeneration Budget money through the Cross River Partnership. When those funding schemes came to an end, BLCF moved straight into further funding, which is from two primary sources – both through the London

¹ Equal is a European Social Fund (ESF) Community Initiative, providing funds to projects which test and promote new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market.

Development Agency. European Social Fund co-financing funds three posts; the remainder is from the London South Central Single Programme.

When the model of a scheme with Work Place Co-ordinators was first developed it was 100% funded by the public sector, which covered the salaries of the WPCs, the cost of training the beneficiaries and other costs such as buying tools and hard hats. The costs are now split around fifty-fifty between the public and the private sectors. ESF funds half and employers meet the other half of the project costs. The public sector funding is used predominantly for the training element. This effectively resulted in the WPCs being embedded into the employers' companies and thus within the supply chains. This is evidence of a real effort on the part of the industry itself to match some of these costs and hence to make the project more sustainable.

Another source of funding comes through what the BLCF Project Manager, Mr. M, refers to as 'section 106 planning gain.' He explains: "In major developments now - we have started in Southwark and we also operate section 106 in Lambeth - major developers are required to contribute to the cost of all their Work Place Coordinators on their sites and there are attendant targets around what they have to do there.'

Thus the project started as a pilot around pathways to employment. It was set up specifically to look at how to support disadvantaged groups to obtain employment within the construction industry. The target groups include: BME groups, women, under 25s, long-term unemployed, recent returnees to the labour market, refugees, and people over fifty. BLCF has aimed to offer construction skills and lifelong learning skills to beneficiaries from these groups. "The sector itself has shortages of skilled labour, so it is looking at other groups that might be a resource for construction, a resource that could be developed. We (at BLCF) provide them with access to labour" (a BLCF WPC).

Most participants come onto the project at entry level with low or no skills. They must undertake health and safety training which then enables them to obtain a CSCS Card (the CSCS card is the passport to working on site in the construction industry). They can learn and develop basic skills and soft skills – like CV writing and interview techniques – as well as specialist skills. Beneficiaries are encouraged to undertake training that will lead to a qualification, normally at NVQ1 or NVQ2 level.

Seven construction companies in the BLCF partnership have WPCs who recruit the beneficiaries and match them to relevant opportunities. The WPCs also support the beneficiaries during the 13+ weeks when they are trained on site. The WPCs give the participants whatever equipment they may need to work on a particular site – usually they get their own hard hat, boots, tool belt, visibility vest – and they arrange the training.

The Work of a BLCF Workplace Co-ordinator

Mace is a large Construction and Project Management Company, which operates in the building, civil engineering and property sectors and is a partner to BLCF. The company is the principal constructor at Heathrow Terminal 5 and employs a WPC there, Mr TH, who is also Mace's social inclusion manager. Combining the two roles gives the company the opportunity to implement their local employment strategy. "We discuss what the programmes are about and we ask people [the employers and firms in the supply chain] to go along with us. We guarantee that the people we recruit are as good as employers will find through the usual and traditional methods. Our beneficiaries come through a programme that gives long-term benefits to themselves and the companies, because they have more than the minimum requirements as a result of the preparation they have to go through. So the retention level is high. They will stay, employers want people to stay", explains Mr H. As a manager at Mace he is embedded in the supply chain and has access to a large range of opportunities within a small geographical area. "For instance, if a plastering company is on site, then WPCs will work with them and say 'Okay, you are looking for three plasterers at the moment; why don't you take these?'. In that way beneficiaries are brought into the workforce. The WPC for Mace has supported 200 BLCF beneficiaries at Terminal 5.

Mr H. explains that Mace do not target a specific group. "Everybody without a job is a suitable beneficiary, but we concentrate on certain groups: over 50s, women, BME, the long-term unemployed, and other disadvantaged groups who you wouldn't normally see in the construction sector."

The recruitment of beneficiaries happens in two stages and then there is the third stage of helping them develop while they are in the job.

1. Mr. TH. works with local stakeholder organisations like Jobcentre Plus and other training organisations – most of whom are preparing people for employment for all sectors – to find suitable candidates. He works with these training organisations to prepare suitable beneficiaries who want to work in the construction industry by making sure that they are briefed on the sector, on the companies that they are interested in and on jobs they are going for. He also informs them of the qualifications that they are going to need, the right way to approach their interviews and the behaviour they need to adopt whilst at work, and putting together a plan of the sort of training they need in order to get a CSCS card.
2. Once the WPC has found employment for the beneficiaries – by asking members of his supply chain to take people on – he will use the grants given by BLCF to develop the beneficiaries' skills so that if they start as labourers they can then perhaps take an NVQ1 or 2 to move up the ladder. "If you take somebody on at entry level as a support labourer for an electrical company, you don't want to him to be a support labourer for

the rest of his life. You want to make sure that he is going to on developing, into NVQ1, then NVQ2, that he is going to sign into a college, he is going to develop with this company and that he is not going to stay static.”

3. The third stage is about making sure that people are well supported and mentored in their new jobs. The need for support of beneficiaries varies. For example those who have been long term unemployed may need further support to avoid the 'revolving door syndrome', where if they come into a job and are not supported (either by the WPC or the employer), they might develop a level of dissatisfaction because they cannot see how they can fit in with the job. Mentoring involves being there for the beneficiaries, if they need it, to give advice on the general world of work; this could be as simple as reminding people to be punctual, helping them with travel planning, or dealing with their domestic arrangements, such as child care. The relationship between Mace and its beneficiaries is on-going. The beneficiaries always have the option to come back for more advice, guidance and further development. Mace has a system that ensures it does not lose track of people, and the relationship is designed to continue.

Mace, together with its clients, has set up bursary schemes to allow further support to beneficiaries through programmes which allow students from poor and underrepresented groups to go to a University and study construction related degrees. At the moment the bursary scheme caters for six people. Mace is working with more clients to increase that number.

The BLCF project at Mace has been successful overall, with positive sustainable employment outcomes. Beneficiaries may go on to all sorts of apprenticeships. They can start at entry level and get their NVQ1/2 and then become skilled operators within the industry. Some participants were reported to be considering BTECs and degrees. Out of 300 beneficiaries, 200 progressed into employment and 70% of the beneficiaries get higher levels than NVQ1; seven people are on degree level schemes.

The BLCF funding is important to Mace, the WPC explains: “the idea was to have WPCs embedded in the companies....it produces the grants to enable WPCs to do their job when finding people work or training opportunities”.

How successful has Building London Creating Futures been?

The BLCF Co-ordinator explains that, in most cases, BLCF overachieved its targets as shown in the following table:

Groups	Targets set by BLCF	Actual output
Below NVQ1 Qualifications	107	765
NVQ1 Qualifications	194	109
NVQ2 Qualifications	175	60
NVQ3 Qualifications	0	1
Number of People into sustainable jobs	250	388
Young people under 25 assisted	509	534
Women assisted	134	71
Older people assisted	0	54
Disadvantaged people into work	0	163
BME	622	815
People with disabilities	0	8

The high success rate can be attributed to:

1. Working to change the image of the construction sector

The industry is seen as white male dominated profession, not very conducive to people from BME groups, or women. The Co-ordinator explains: 'It's all about selling the industry, and that's something the industry is starting to do for itself. Obviously there are organisations like the Construction Industry Training Board who are very active in this field, and also provide training for agencies. But I think employers themselves are starting to engage much more and do a lot more outreach to BME, women, and others.'

An example of the actions that the industry and BLCF have taken to address image problems associated with the construction sector is with regard to the recruitment of women.

- The industry and BLCF try to convey the message to women that 'not every role is a hard manual labour role. That there is a lot of mechanisation and that there are other opportunities on sites that can be taken into account.'
- Most of Work Place Coordinators (WPCs) are women – this was not done deliberately, but nevertheless proved successful in encouraging more women to join. Because these female WPCs are based within the management structure they have the ability to physically make differences on site. The other effect is that these

women who have the influence to make changes on site, are in turn telling their friends about it and this is cascading to others.

- On most of the sites in which BLCF works, the sexist workplace culture such as pornography has been banned from sites, which used to be a very common feature.

2. BLCF's ability to outreach

BLCF has largely focused on areas of disadvantage in Central London to date. The co-ordinator clarifies, "Our core area is central London, predominantly south of the river, so Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth, Westminster and the City of London. The project is pan-London, so we can help people across the city. But within the core area, there are significant areas of deprivation. Because the links are very good with, for instance, the Jobcentres, with local community based organisations, with the Local Authorities, and with others, it has really enabled the project to engage with clients with the most needs".

3. Tracking of beneficiaries

This is another innovation and one of the key things BLCF embraces to make sure the relationships with beneficiaries continue for a long time. BLCF track beneficiaries for monitoring purposes and keep in touch with them for the lifetime of the project. There are difficulties in that, because the construction industry is of transient nature: people are on one site for two or three months or less before moving on to another site. WPCs develop their own networks to deal with this and remain in touch with beneficiaries even after they leave their current site; this enables WPCs to find beneficiaries' new work if and when their contracts come to an end.

4. Employer Links

The primary way for BLCF to keep in touch with employers is through a series of regular meetings. The meetings are chaired by Cross-River Partnership and are attended by a wide range of other BLCF partners. BLCF also updates its employer partners regularly, through emails and newsletters. The Co-ordinator also has a lot of face-to-face meetings, not only with current employers but also with companies that have expressed an interest in the project. This enables BLCF to achieve its aim of forging strong links with potential employers and gradually to widen the geographical area of its operations.

5. Work Place Coordinators:

Because the WPCs are partially financed by BLCF but are also employer representatives, they are embedded in the supply chain and based with one employer. Therefore they are well-placed to recruit beneficiaries using outreach approaches and these beneficiaries in turn have a good chance of being recruited by employers in the company's supply chain.

The Future of the Building London Creating Futures Project

The number of WPCs has depended on funding. BLCF plans for another six to join by the end of 2006. There are four at present based at:

- Bankside 123, three new office buildings just south of Tate Modern
- St. George Wharf Vauxhall, a large housing development.
- Heathrow Terminal 5
- Kings Cross, where work is being carried out on a rail link and refurbishment of the station

The BLCF Co-ordinator is optimistic of the future and states that there is a lot going to be happening in their area of work over the next few years. There are some very big schemes going on that BLCF is trying to get involved in. The Mace WPC, too, thinks that if the BLCF funding runs out there are other opportunities in the pipeline, for example through the Olympics. A lot of organisations are interested in putting money towards developing greater social inclusion in the construction sector. "Like any sector, it is changing, it is slow, sometimes conservative, but it will take new ideas quite readily, more so than other sectors. The sector is willing to embrace the ideas of social inclusion like we advocate".

Project Beneficiaries:

Mr. MA.

A 58 year-old from Somalia, Mr MA works as an assistant surveyor for the Site Engineering Surveyors at Heathrow Terminal 5. Having successfully passed the three months probation period, he is now working on a permanent, full time basis.

He found out about the BLCF programme in Acton's Jobcentre. At that time, he had been unemployed for over two years and was getting Jobseeker's Allowance. He says, "I was doing training at the Jobcentre. They were helping me with my CV, and I was also using their computers to improve my IT skills. Then, [the WPC from Heathrow] came to the Jobcentre to select qualified people for jobs at Terminal 5". MA had an interview with Mr. TH and it was this, he says, that changed his life. "At the time ..., I was very depressed. You see, I am a qualified Engineer; I have a Masters in Engineering from Italy and have worked as an engineer in Somalia. But that was a long time ago. And when I came to this country, it was hard to find a job in my profession. I was so demoralised for not working in my field. I didn't know which door to knock. I didn't know where to look. Until I met [WPC]. He gave me a new life, a new hope. I can only say thanks to him. He is the angel who saved my life." During the interview with Mr. H, MA stated that he wanted to do anything in the

construction industry. But the WPC, having seen his CV and professional qualifications, informed him that he will look for a job where he could use his skills. The WPC helped MA to tailor his CV to the construction industry by highlighting the specific experiences and skills relevant to that sector; he coached him in interview techniques; informed him about the working environment in construction in the UK and taught him about health and safety, and how to behave with colleagues and managers.

About three weeks after his first interview with the BLCF WPC Mr. MA. was found a job as an assistant surveyor at Heathrow Terminal 5. He started his job at Terminal 5 in July, 2006. Although he wasn't offered financial assistance, such as travel expenses, the employer provided him with safety helmet, boots, gloves, and high-visibility clothing. The Work Place Coordinator also continued to offer Mr. MA further training and guidance. "After I got the job, [the WPC] continued to help me to adapt. This was my first job in this sector in the UK. Although I worked in the construction industry in my country, it was different. Things were done in a different way there. We are in a different world. I am now in Europe and they do things differently in Africa. The equipment we use in Africa is different from here, so I needed the training to be a good surveyor and [the WPC] made sure I got all the training I needed."

The WPC's assistance also included making sure that Mr. MA progressed up the ladder. 'When I got the job of assistant surveyor, [the WPC] kept pushing me to aim higher. He pushed the manager [at Terminal five] to give me more practice and more chances to implement my knowledge, and use more and more instruments. Practice makes perfect. The more you familiarise yourself with the equipments, the more you can progress on the job. [The WPC] and I are planning that after six months, I will be a junior engineer and after that I will be a full qualified engineer. I am going up, up."

Ms E G.

Ms EG. is working as a painter/decorator for GSE Decorating Specialists. She says that before she knew about BLCF, she found it difficult, as a woman, to get into the construction industry. "Even though I heard in the media that more women were coming into the industry, I found it really hard to get into it and I was struggling, so it was a big weight off my shoulders when I found [WPC] and found this job. I was so frustrated and getting depressed because I was having no luck whatsoever."

"When I first started this job, it was the first proper construction site I have been in, so it was a great experience for me, having to wear the helmet, gloves, and boots.... it was good and I have gained a lot of knowledge."

She says that BLCF and the WPC will support her professional development,

but “although I am thinking about progressing and going up the ladder, at the moment, I am enjoying getting my hands dirty and working with the lads.”

She says she loves her job and that she wishes that the industry would take more women.

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There is a 15-minute DVD about Building London Creating Futures. Contact this address to request a copy of the DVD

