

The logo for EDuce Ltd features the company name in a bold, dark red, sans-serif font. A stylized, curved red arrow graphic is positioned behind the text, pointing from the bottom left towards the top right.

EDuce Ltd

**Luton &
Bedfordshire ESF
Capacity Building
Project: Mapping
Exercise**

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Luton & Bedfordshire ESF Capacity Building Project Mapping Exercise

Findings from an on-line survey of voluntary and community groups

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from an on-line survey of voluntary and community groups and organisations (VCOs), including social enterprises, which work in Luton and Bedfordshire to assist unemployed and out of work groups of people access employment. In our conclusions we also draw on contacts made with organisations in Luton and Bedfordshire who are either funding or delivering capacity building services to VCOs.

In all, 99 individuals (from 97 different organisations) were invited to complete the survey. Between 24th August and 27th September, we received 29 responses: a rate of response which compares favourably with other on-line surveys we have run (and significantly better than a concurrent survey of VCOs we have been undertaking in the South East).

The organisations were identified through databases provided by Luton Dunstable Partnership (LDP), suggestions made by individuals working in other agencies throughout the area (including neighbourhood management teams, the local authorities and Jobcentre Plus local offices) and an extensive search of on-line resources.

2 About the voluntary and community organisations and groups

The 29 responses ranged from the very positive with keen interest expressed in making early contact with the LDP project manager, to one or two organisations who felt the project was not relevant (although supported employment is one of their objectives) or who believe their capacity is more than adequate and that they should already be delivering mainstream contracts.

The organisations and groups who responded range in scope from three serving neighbourhood areas or specific villages to five local offices of national organisations and those serving communities of interest. Seven serve Luton only, two Bedford only,

one all of Bedfordshire excluding Luton, and seven all of Luton and Bedfordshire. Three have a regional area of remit. In terms of the numbers of employed staff, one organisation employs over 25 people, and one has no paid employees. There are 10 with 1–5 employees, seven with 6–10, and nine with between 11 and 25 employees. Four organisations have no volunteer workers, 11 have 1–10, eight have 11–50, and five have between 51 and 250 volunteers.

Fourteen of the 29 organisations specifically serve minority ethnic groups of people and eight target young people aged 16–24. Families and ex-offenders are each mentioned as client groups by seven organisations. Several respondents pointed out that they work with all categories of people who fall within their specific community of interest, eg, people with disabilities, drug and alcohol abusing groups of people (see Appendix 1, Chart 1).

Eighteen groups said that ‘education and skills’ is one of their main areas of work, with one specifically mentioning basic skills. Other important areas of their work are community development, youth work, health, welfare/social care and drugs/substance misuse, which were all mentioned by at least seven respondents. Some of the VCOs we surveyed support people who are not in work by, for example, providing childcare in order to enable them to take training¹, or by matching individuals to local volunteering opportunities (see Appendix 1, Chart 2).

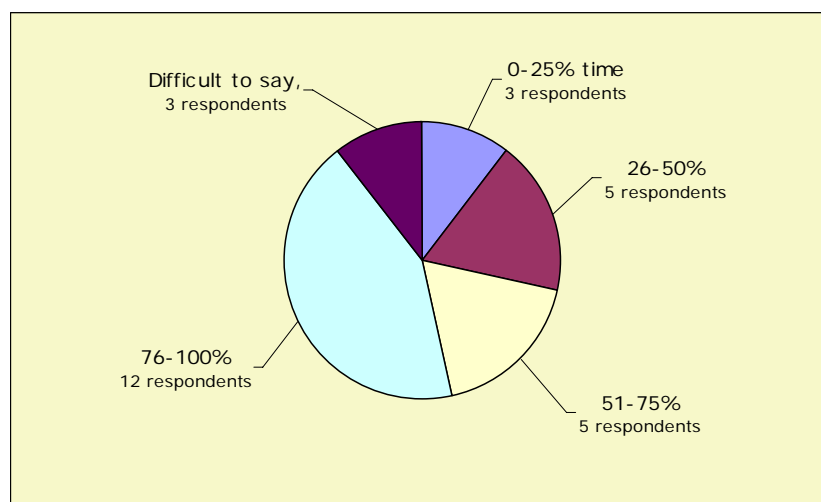
We asked respondents to indicate their current sources of funding. Only one organisation claimed to be “a real business”, although they have received time-limited grants in the past. All the others rely mainly on time-limited funding and/ or donations (see Appendix 1, Chart 3), including 16 which have contracts or Service Level Agreements with local authorities. One interviewee commented that local procurement (by local authorities, health authority, etc) could help improve the sustainability of their organisation.

¹ Such organisations will also support out of work people as they train to become childminders.

3 Activities with people who are not in work

As shown below, nearly half of the survey respondents' activities relate to people who are not in work.

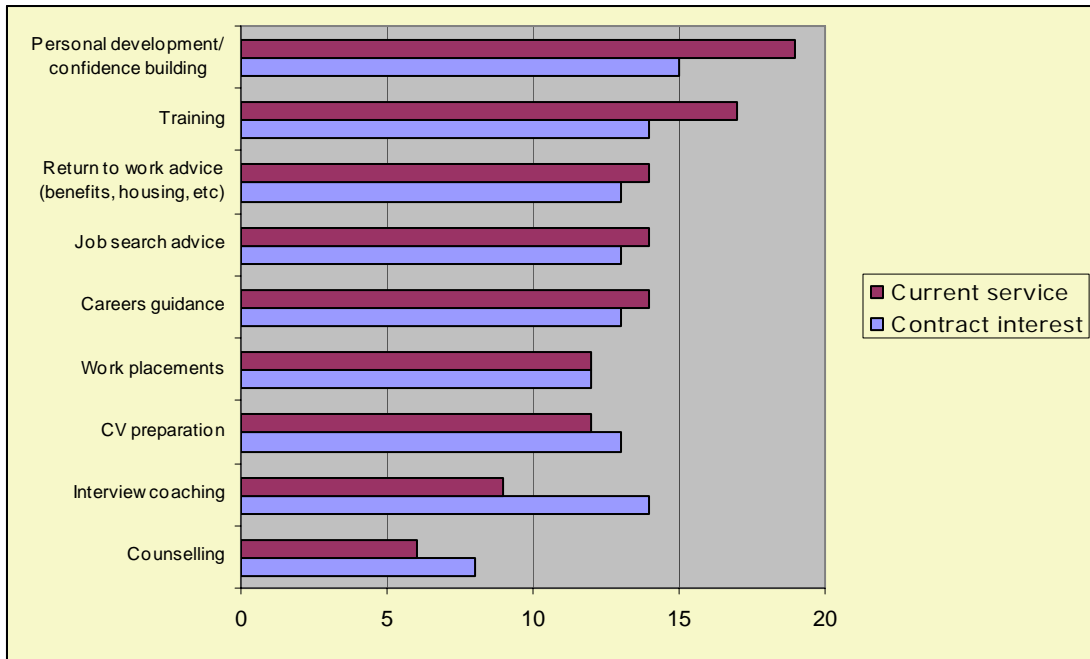
Figure 1: Proportion of activities with people not in work



Over the past year, the organisations have assisted a relatively large number of working age people who are not in work indicating a good reach into Jobcentre Plus target groups of people. Ten respondents had each worked with over 100 such individuals, five had worked with 51–100, and eight had worked with between 11 and 50 individuals.

A wide range of services is offered to out of work people by the VCOs responding to the survey (see Figure 2 which compares current provision with provision VCOs expressed an interest in providing under contract). At least half of them provide personal development/ confidence building, training, return to work advice (benefits, housing, etc), job search advice, and/ or careers guidance.

Figure 2: Services for out of work people: current provision and future interest in contracting to deliver



Totals out of 29 respondents

4 Developing Services

Some 17 respondents have plans to develop services to people who are out of work, and seven are thinking about such developments. Only four of the VCOs have no such plans. One respondent from a VCO which is an employer providing work experience to out of work people, highlighted a particular need for “helping people understand how to behave at work”.

We asked respondents if they were interested in being able to deliver public sector contracts for services to people who are out of work. Only two organisations responded that they have no interest. Ten (including several of VCOs which are local or regional offices of nationwide organisations) could not say. Seventeen VCOs expressed a firm interest in contracting.

The services for which the VCOs considered they will or might be interested in contracting (Figure 2 above) indicates that they are largely interested in providing a similar mix of services to those they current provide, with the notable exception of interview coaching, which they see as an area for development. To a lesser extent, counselling and CV preparation are also seen as areas for expansion. Responses suggest

that VCOs may be expecting that there will be fewer opportunities for personal development/ confidence building and training activities than they currently provide.

5 Barriers faced by VCOs developing their services

We asked survey respondents to indicate the two or three main barriers they face in developing their services (Appendix 1, Chart 4). Nearly all of them cited 'access to funding', 12 'staff or volunteer resources', and seven, 'early awareness of opportunities'. Five specifically mentioned that staff or volunteer skills were a barrier to their development, and five cited difficulties with tendering or bidding, including the lack of hard evidence to back up bids.

When considering their internal organisational learning and training needs (see Appendix 1, Chart 5), training for staff and volunteers was most frequently mentioned by respondents, with improving the quality of services and strategy each mentioned at least seven times. Nine respondents indicated that addressing these needs is *crucial* to their organisation's survival or development and nine agreed that this would, 'help us make progress'. Only four respondents felt that addressing these needs is, 'not vital'.

6 Capacity Building Support

We asked whether organisations had taken advantage of any form of capacity building support in the last 12 months. Half (13) of the VCOs responding to the question said they had; ten said they had not. Seven respondents (not necessarily the same individuals) noted training, funding advice and/ or networking opportunities, and four, advice on business planning. Most respondents thought the support they had received was, 'very valuable' or 'valuable'. Six VCOs received consultancy support funded by Luton Borough Council. Other support was provided by Luton & Bedfordshire Education Business Partnership; Learning and Skills Council Luton & Bedfordshire; one CVS (not stated); head offices of their own national organisations; Bury Park Community Development Trust; Sure Start; and South Bedfordshire DC. There were no mentions for Business Link and some SRB-supported provision which we are aware have been targeting VCOs (including social enterprises) in Bedfordshire and Luton during the same period. It will be important for this ESF Capacity Building Project to ensure that it is well badged in order that participants are fully aware which organisations are responsible for funding and delivery.

We asked the VCOs to tell us what support they would welcome to help them develop their capabilities and services to out of work people (see Appendix 1, Chart 6). Reflecting the importance of time-limited funding to most of them, it is not surprising that 17 of them mentioned ‘information about funding and contract opportunities’. The second most mentioned request was for ‘opportunities to partner with other organisations’. The latter is particularly important in a context where organisations like Jobcentre Plus, while wishing to involve VCOs more in service delivery are at the same time reducing the number of their suppliers. Abilities to form delivery partnerships, make them work (and make them pay) may then constitute critical development needs.

In anticipation of LDP’s ESF-funded project including an e-forum for participants, the survey asked how much respondents use the internet and e-mail in their work. Twenty-three of the 26 respondents to the question use these ‘a great deal’, three use them, ‘occasionally’. Six respondents are ‘not very likely’ to take advantage of an e-forum, 14 ‘likely’, and six ‘very likely’.

7 Conclusions

The ESF Capacity Building Project is being developed at an opportune time, with:

- DWP requiring every Jobcentre Plus district manager to look at “developing imaginative partnerships with the voluntary and community sector”, to provide additional flexible approaches, such as mentoring, support for those entering work, and help with ex-offenders or drug misusers (press release, 26 September)
- decisions to pilot Building on New Deal (BoND), which is to become the overarching programme for Jobcentre Plus support for out of work adults
- proposed changes in Jobcentre Plus performance management which will bolster collaboration in achieving common job outcome targets
- DWP/ Jobcentre Plus considering how best they can be involved with local partners in Local Area Agreements
- the development of Luton and Bedfordshire plans for Investing in Communities - which may have elements relevant to VCS delivery of job-related services

Working in the opposite direction are financial pressures on Jobcentre Plus to *reduce* the number of contractors (most notably currently amongst work-based learning providers). These factors suggest that a high priority for the LDP project is to **promote understanding amongst participating organisations of these DWP developments in policy and contract opportunities, along with associated procurement and quality requirements** (including e-tendering). There is also a **need to ensure that**

local Jobcentre Plus staff are fully familiar with the LDP project and how the participating VCOs can help them deliver their services and performance outcomes.

The LDP project must not be seen in isolation, as there are other capacity building developments aimed at VCOs, most notably through the work of the Luton and Bedfordshire VCS Infrastructure Consortium and its individual members, including the Councils for Voluntary Service, Bedford Racial Equality Council and the Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity. Business Link also provides support for social enterprises (including VCOs wishing to develop income generation activities). LSC Luton and Bedfordshire continues to have an interest in VCS capacity building in relation to education and skills. There are dangers that VCOs could be confused by the potential range of capacity building services available.

Consequently:

- it is essential to **differentiate clearly what the LDP project offers**, especially around (a) organisations *specialising* in job-related services (with both organisational and service-specific development needs), and (b) those other organisations with broader interests but who wish to develop the range and quality of services to their users/ members who wish to secure jobs
- **signposting to other capacity building providers** (CVSs, Business Links, etc) may be a relevant part of the project, where the broader organisational development needs of the latter group can best be met by these other providers
- there may be **scope to involve other capacity building providers in the delivery of the LDP project**, where they have particular skills/ expertise to offer.

Given the interest of some highly experienced larger VCOs, as well as smaller VCOs with particular knowledge of individual communities, there should also be **potential to promote sharing and learning within the group of LDP participants**, and explore partnering arrangements to bid for public service contracts. The **project might successfully engage the private sector**, for example, as trainers or mentors, by helping them address the desire or requirement to demonstrate Corporate Social Responsibility - building on the recent experience in Luton of the Business Broker project. Successful jobs-access projects depend on the abilities of organisations to provide quality services to *both* job seekers and employers.

Appendix 1 Mapping Project: Charts

Chart 1: Number of VCOs serving particular target groups

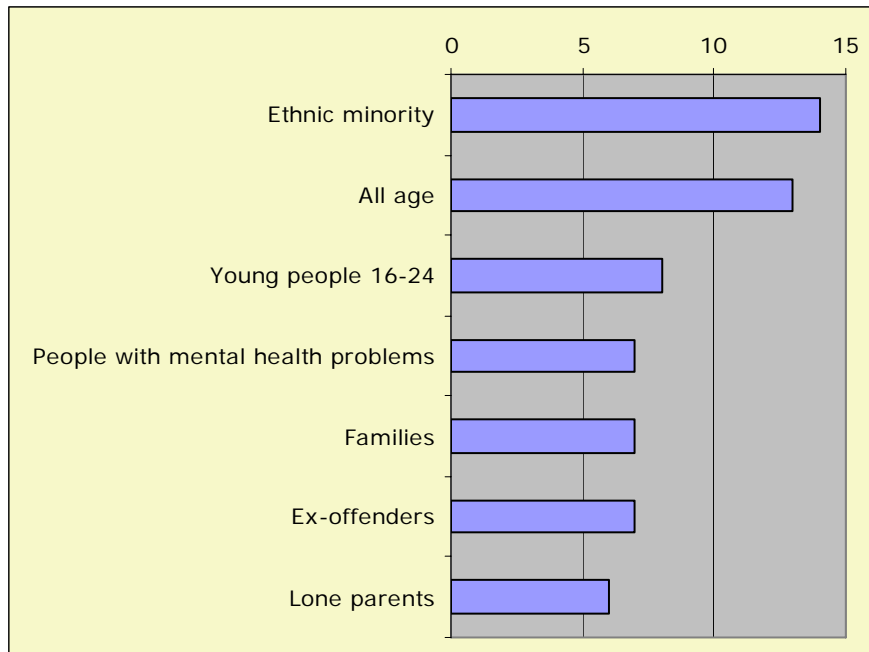


Chart 2: Number of VCOs by main categories of work

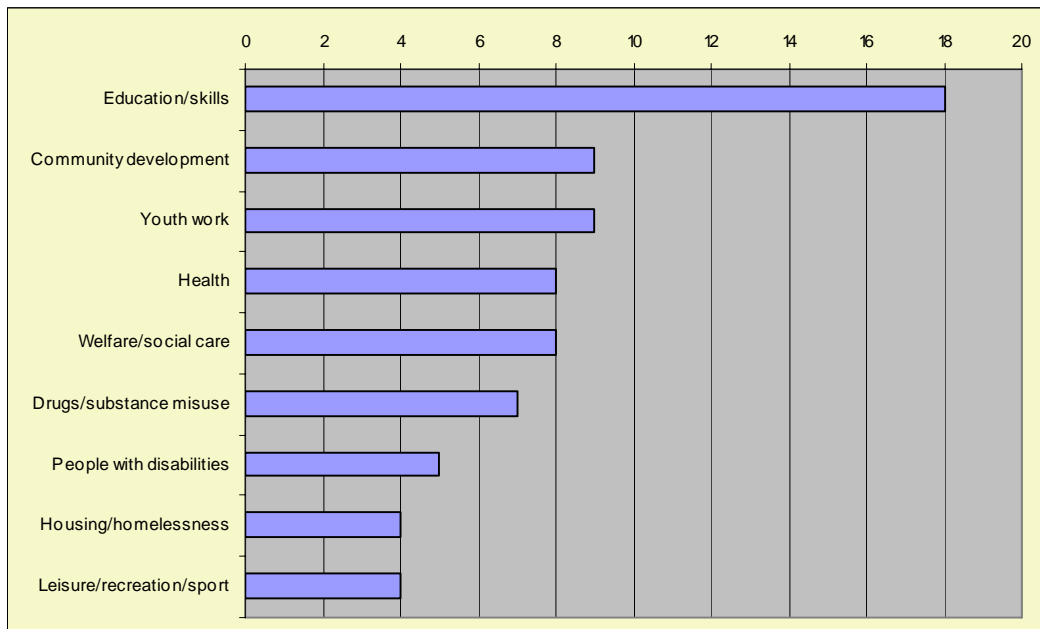


Chart 3: Number of VCOs by sources of funding

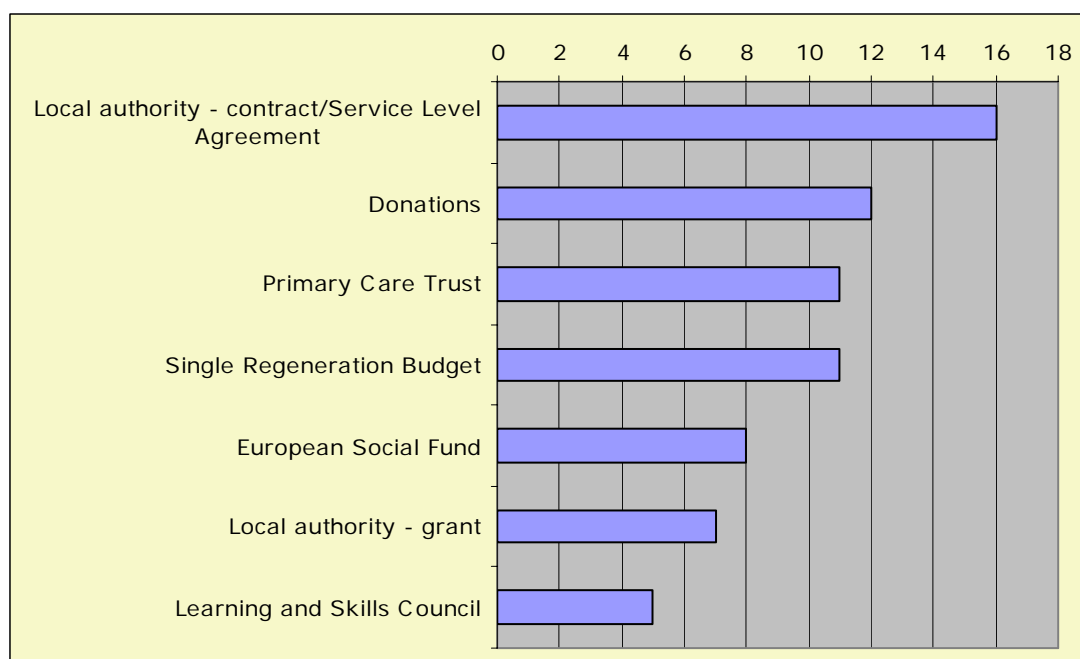


Chart 4: Number of VCOs by main barriers to developing services for clients

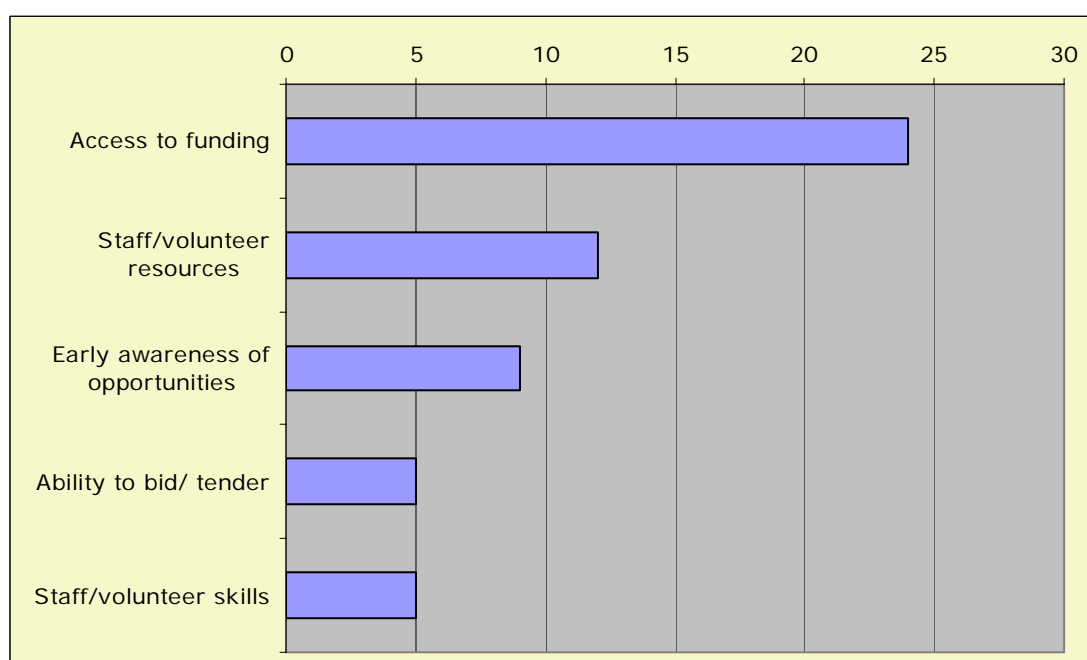


Chart 5: Number of VCOs by main internal learning/ training needs

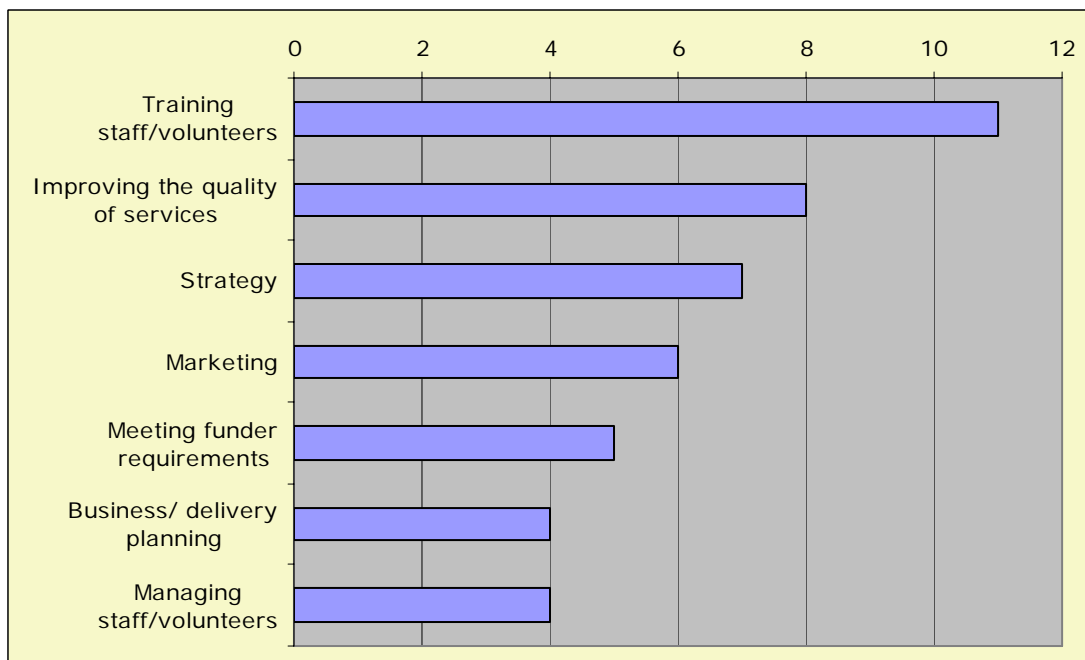


Chart 6: Number of VCOs by forms of support most welcomed

