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**Good practice Identification –  
Advice for transferability  
Clusters  
The Northwest Sector Skills &  
Productivity Alliances (SSPA)**

*February 2008*



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# CHAPTER I: Good practice identification

## 1 General description of the good practice

The development of the Sector Skills & Productivity Alliances (SSPA) is an initiative that is unique to the Northwest region of the UK and has been developed in response to the Skills White Paper “21st Century Skills”, published in July 2004. It is the sector element of the Northwest Alliance for Skills & Productivity (ASP). These SSPAs have been established to bring together (for the first time) the key funding and planning partners, in order to develop a skills and business development strategy for each sector.

### Membership of the SSPAs

There is a core membership for each Alliance, which includes one representative from:

- NWDA Skills Policy Team
- Learning and Skills Council
- Sector Skills Council (SSC) (representing the employer voice)
- Regional intelligence Unit
- NW Cluster Head (representing employers within their networks)
- Business Link
- Regional Business Advisor
- Jobcentre Plus (for their priority sectors)

### Other Key Organisations

As well as the core membership it is essential that each SSPA establishes how it will work with other key organisations including:

- Higher Education
- Further Education
- Schools and Educational Business Links.
- Connexions and IAG (Information Advice & Guidance see <http://iag.lsc.gov.uk/>)
- Unions
- Chamber of Commerce
- Government Office Northwest
- Trade and Professional Bodies

These strategic SSPAs have a crucial role in the region and will carry out a variety of activities including:

- Identifying key issues facing the sector
- Developing an Action Plan to address the needs of employers in the sector
- Ensuring that mainstream public funding is aligned to meet the needs of employers
- Taking a major step forward to avoid duplication of activity and funding
- Strengthening and supporting the work of SSCs in the region

A regular newsletter will be produced to keep partners up to date with progress in this dynamic new initiative.

There are currently 19 SSPAs engaging with 25 Sector Skills Councils, in addition to significant development of a number of National Skills Academies in the Region. Several SSPAs are currently considering the evolution of the sector structure, and discussions are underway to align stakeholder groups where possible.

## 2 Please describe the selected good practice<sup>1</sup> in terms of:

### 2.1 Uniqueness:

<b>Measure Name:</b>		Sector Skills & Productivity Alliances	
<b>General description/rationale:</b>			
Our Vision is to raise regional productivity, skills levels and economic competitiveness through effective partnership Alliances.			
The programme has created a sector-based structure that enables key partners to understand and implement their lead and support role in the region's skills and business development strategy and delivery plan.			
<b>Innovative characteristics as regards:</b>			
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Results</b>
The programme has created a sector-based structure.	These SSPAs have been established to bring together (for the first time) the key funding and planning partners, in order to develop a skills and business development strategy for each sector.	These strategic SSPAs have a crucial role in the region and will carry out a variety of activities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying key issues facing the sector</li> <li>• Developing an Action Plan to address the needs of employers in the sector</li> <li>• Ensuring that mainstream public funding is aligned to meet the needs of employers</li> <li>• Taking a major step forwards to avoid duplication of activity and funding</li> <li>• Strengthening and supporting the work of SSCs in the region</li> </ul>	The Sector Skills & Productivity Alliances (SSPAs) have had success in influencing the Regional Statement of Skills Priorities for 06/07 and 07/10. The structure has enabled the Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) to influence and respond to existing and emerging Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) and National Skill Academies.

### 2.2 Relevance:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution that was provided</b>
Skills development was supply driven rather than demand driven.	Representation includes Sector Skills Council (SSC) (representing the employer voice) and NW Cluster Head (representing employers within their networks)
Lack of coordination between organisations involved in funding and providing skills development.	Representation includes Learning and Skills Council and Sector Skills Council (SSC) plus each SSPA has established how it will work with other key organisations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Education</li> <li>• Further Education</li> <li>• Schools and Educational Business Links.</li> </ul>
Need for better coordination with national and regional policies for skills and economic development.	Representation includes Sector Skills Council (SSC), Learning and Skills Council and NWDA Skills Policy Team

<sup>1</sup>A technique or methodology that has proven to reliably lead to the result that has been aimed for; An activity or procedure that has produced outstanding results in another situation and could be adapted to improve effectiveness, efficiency, ecology, and/or innovativeness in another situation.

### 2.3 Effectiveness:

The main outcome from the SSPA initiative is the amount of leverage that they have on funding for skills development which can be used to meet the needs of businesses in the main sectors in the Northwest region. The SSPA initiative has also helped to raise the profile of the Northwest region in terms of its ability to create more demand led skills development programmes.

More specifically, the SSPAs are now the sector arm of the Regional Skills Partnerships. The SSPAs have been used to identify skills priorities, initially for the period 2006 to 2007 and subsequently for 2007 to 2010.

The establishment of the SSPAs has led to the creation of two pilot projects in the Northwest; one for Level 3 trials and the other a high level skills Pathfinder. The Northwest is the only English region to have both trials and this is specifically because to the presence of the SSPAs.

The SSPAs have also influenced the 2006 regional pot of ESF funding by identifying the sector issues which need to be addressed.

The SSPAs help the national Sector Skills Councils deliver regionally within the Northwest.

These strategic SSPAs have a crucial role in the region and their objectives are to carry out a variety of activities including:

- Identifying key issues facing the sector
- Developing an Action Plan to address the needs of employers in the sector
- Ensuring that mainstream public funding is aligned to meet the needs of employers
- Taking a major step forward to avoid duplication of activity and funding
- Strengthening and supporting the work of SSCs in the region

A regular newsletter will be produced to keep partners up to date with progress in this dynamic new initiative.

### 2.4 User satisfaction:

User group	Primary target group (yes/no)	Feedback provided	Explanation for feedback
Users	Yes	Variable	The feedbacks from the users vary according to the quality of the SSPA. The success depends on the conditions of the sector and the capacity of the regional cluster organisation to represent the users and to influence positively the training providers and direct the skills funding (see feedback from the NW chemical industry below)
Stakeholders	No	Very positive	<p><b>The case of the NorthWest Chemical industry</b> To remain competitive in a high-knowledge sector, businesses need employees with the skills to match market needs. The quality of the workforce is one reason why the chemical industry has such a strong base in the Northwest.</p> <p>Industry has undergone considerable change in recent years; an output of that change is an</p>

			<p>elevation of the age profile of the workforce, creating a number of specific needs aimed at new qualified entrants in the future. The knowledge requirements of such a regulatory-focused industry, which is also faced with considerable competitive global challenges, are also increasing. This requires a higher general level of knowledge, now believed to be around NVQ level 3 as standard, as well as capability in areas of business/operational improvements.</p> <p>As a main delivery mechanism for positive change, Chemicals Northwest chairs the Sector Skills &amp; Productivity Alliance (SSPA), part of the NWDA's Regional Skills Partnership initiative. This powerful body features the main partners in the skills arena, including the Learning &amp; Skills Council (LSC), Cogent Sector Skills Council, Business Link, NWDA Skills unit and many other influential bodies.</p>
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## 2.5 Recognition:

- The establishment of the SSPAs has led to the creation of two pilot projects in the Northwest; one for Level 3 trials and the other a high level skills Pathfinder.
- The Northwest is the only English region to have both trials and this is specifically because to the presence of the SSPAs.
- The SSPAs help the national Sector Skills Councils deliver regionally within the Northwest.

## 2.6 Context dependency:

### Modalities of implementation of the proposed action

SSPA action plans are aligned with emerging knowledge and intelligence on an ongoing basis, areas of priority in the current action plan include:

### Vocational Training - Apprenticeship schemes and placements

- 14-16 A programme to develop a Young Apprenticeship in Science for 14-16 year olds in the south of the region, with a view to expanding the offering region-wide in the future.
- 16-25 Advanced Apprenticeships are well established to high quality standards in the region, Pilot Programme Led Apprenticeship (PLA) scheme in 2006/7 for 24 apprentices. This craft specific offering will develop into a full scheme with wider participation from 2007 onwards, aligned with industry's stated demand levels. Following up to two years classroom based training, apprentices will be employed by participating companies to complete their advanced apprenticeship.
- Chemical companies in the North West also benefit from a dedicated training partnership in ChemiCol, the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for the sector, which coordinates vocational training solutions for the industry. ChemiCol is pioneering the revitalization of apprentice schemes as well as helping to provide courses which can be funded by the LSC's new funding mechanism 'Train to Gain'.

## **Other Sector needs and responses**

- The production of the Sector Skills Agreement for the sector, an interactive industry-led view of the detailed needs of the chemical industry
- The submission of an application for a Process Industries National Skills Academy (PINSA) for the sector under the 2006 DfES call for Academies
- Development of structured Careers Information linked to other key careers organizations.
- Integral to the above, a series of Gold Standard role descriptions are being created which spell out accepted 'best practice' levels of training and competence for recognized roles within the industry.
- The development of a Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) NVQ specifically for the process industries
- The development of a Competence model for organizations, aimed to assist with the ever-increasing level of evidence-based regulatory focus
- Management and Leadership capability has been identified as an area for development in the chemical and polymer sectors

### **Factors for success**

The main factor success of such initiative is to ensure that it is demand led rather than supply led to ensure direct support to sector development programs. Sector skills and training need to match the new needs of businesses/companies and the SSPAs are here to provide facilitate communication between the funding bodies, the support bodies and the users.

One factor success is the legitimacy of the regional cluster organisation to represent the businesses. Therefore, each RCO involved in this process needs to be mature enough to understand and represent the needs of the companies

**Financing:** The SSPAs are not legal entities and do not have a budget, staff or premises. Their purpose is to influence the funding partners in the SSPA to focus resources on meeting the needs of businesses within their sector. Therefore the cost of running the SSPAs is low. The cost to NWDA is that of the time devoted to SSPA activities by members of the NWDA Skills Team and the funding of two Coordinator posts (currently around £80,000 per annum)

### **2.7 Replication:**

The main outcome from the SSPA initiative is the amount of leverage that they have on funding for skills development which can be used to meet the needs of businesses in the main sectors in the Northwest region. The SSPA initiative has also helped to raise the profile of the Northwest region in terms of its ability to create more demand led skills development programmes. More specifically, the SSPAs are now the sector arm of the Regional Skills Partnerships. The SSPAs have been used to identify skills priorities, initially for the period 2006 to 2007 and subsequently for 2007 to 2010.

The establishment of the SSPAs has led to the creation of two pilot projects in the Northwest; one for Level 3 trials and the other a high level skills Pathfinder. The Northwest is the only English region to have both trials and this is specifically because to the presence of the SSPAs. The SSPAs have also influenced the 2006 regional pot of ESF funding by identifying the sector issues which need to be addressed. The SSPAs help the national Sector Skills Councils deliver regionally within the Northwest. All of these have contributed towards a more effective alignment of publicly funded skills programmes to meet the needs of businesses.

### **Update to SSPA Programme**

During the autumn of 2005 a full review and re-shaping of the SSPA structure was carried out to align the SSPAs with the Clusters and the Key sectors identified in the RES. The following autumn, another

review was undertaken and options presented to the RSP with a note that to maintain the existing structure the role of the SSPA co-ordinators would need to continue and be funded by one of the RSP partner organisations. In December 2006 the RSP agreed to maintain and support the current structure and the NWDA agreed to fund the SSPA co-ordinators up until March 2008.

The five stages of the SSAs should be completed for all SSCs by March 2008, at this stage there should be a regional partner action plan for each SSC, which will be signed up to by all partners in the region. It was therefore recommended that the SSPAs continued, fully supported, as above until March 2008, at which stage it would be appropriate to take account of national and regional policy in moving to a more flexible and sustainable sector structure.

Essentially the SSPAs have been successful in the Northwest region but it is now an appropriate time to consider whether they will continue to provide the optimum solution in the future or whether a more effective mechanism can be devised using the experience gained to date.

**Added value for investing in SSPA**

Enable a tripartite discussion between all regional stakeholders, regional cluster organisation, business links, the LSCs (learning and skills council), and the SSCs (sector and skills councils).

## **CHAPTER II: Advice for transferability**

### **3 Introduction to the proposed action**

#### **3.1 What are the main actions to be promoted to meet the objective?**

The objective is to promote trans-national cluster programme cooperation in Europe and the transformation of regional clusters into world-class hubs. Three key actions have been identified and differentiated: Horizontal (Strand 1) and Vertical (Strand 2) Actions; and a Parallel Action (Europe Innova).

- Strand 1: European Cluster Alliance “Plus” (ECA+)
- Strand 2: Trans-national Cluster Cooperation (Thematic InnoNet type projects)
- Europe Innova: Delivery of the European Cluster Observatory

These three initiatives will ensure current investments and networks are developed and value is added where it is most effective and that expansion and growth takes place in priority policy areas (lead markets etc) where it will create value and synergies with other EU activities.

#### **3.2 What is the problem for which the cited measure is trying to provide an answer?**

##### **In general:**

- Low levels of cluster cooperation, due in part to differing cultural backgrounds;
- Cluster policies are being developed in a number of policy and programme areas creating potential confusion, fragmentation and lack of critical mass;
- The importance of cluster policy in national or regional economic planning is not given equal weight by member states;
- Clusters are perceived as fashionable and as a panacea for economic problems;
- Ensuring businesses and the relevant industry associations participate in the cluster process.

##### **SSPA:**

- Skills development was supply driven rather than demand driven.
- Lack of coordination between organisations involved in funding and providing skills development.
- Need for better coordination with national and regional policies for skills and economic development.

#### **3.3 What is the general status of the recognition in the market of the necessity to invest in the proposed policy theme?**

The key messages that have emerged from the European Cluster Memorandum preparation and consultation process have highlighted the urgency for Europe to create world leading clusters supporting European lead markets through improved cooperation and the need to reduce policy fragmentation and duplication of actions, networks etc at a National and Regional level.

#### **3.4 How is the main policy theme communicated in the market/which guidance material is already available?**

There are already existing initiatives such as the four cluster focussed INNONETS. They can play a part in resolving issues affecting the growth and performance of emerging and established clusters.

The INNO-Nets work together through the **European Cluster Alliance, (ECA)** an umbrella initiative that links 59 regional partners from 22 member states, and pursues a coordinated agenda that includes studies of cluster policy, objectives resources and impact. The results of cooperation activities will create benchmarks for policy development, implementation and performance that would provide a platform for regions that have yet to formulate a structured policy for promoting and strengthening cluster performance and transnational contacts.

### **3.5 What is the expected outcome of the proposed actions?**

#### **Strand 1 European Cluster Alliance: ECA+**

The substantial level support proposed for the European Cluster Alliance “ECA+” approach would deliver a clear message to regional cluster organisations and other cluster actors concerning the strategic importance attached to the Pro Inno cluster initiative. Clusters and cluster activity across the EU would be linked by a coherent policy that would focus the collective strategic energy on the marshalling and deployment of the best assets and competencies to deliver the aims and aspirations of the European

Cluster Memorandum. Expected outcome:

- Support for EU Cluster agenda implementation 2008 +.
- Think tank.
- Facilitation of new InnoNets.
- Enhance cluster policy learning and dissemination of cluster policy good practice.
- Concrete InnoNet projects.
- World class clusters: Improving support for cluster frameworks, sustainability and cooperation.
- International linkages.

#### **Strand 2 INNO Nets Cluster Policy Cooperation (e.g.: Environment and Energy focus)**

Cluster policy cooperation to ensure cluster excellence and enhanced competitiveness. For example the alignment of the trans-national cooperation priority areas with the four strategic priorities of the European Action Plan for the environment (which embraces energy) is an advantageous approach to transforming the policy of the programme into action. Expected outcome:

- 40+ trans-national cluster policy cooperation's;
- Internationalisation of clusters.
- Elimination of policy fragmentation.
- Concrete, value added solutions to identified issues.
- Strengthening links with other DG programmes.
- Benchmarking good practice and the enhancement of the knowledge base.

## **4 The innovation policy measure and its context**

### **4.1 National and regional governance: please provide a description of the modalities of implementation of the proposed actions. Examples of elements to be taken into account are the role of the institute, the nature and characteristics of that institute that are important for a successful implementation of the good practice.**

**Strand 1 ECA+:** The existing work in this area will ensure that there is a very short launch phase. The high level of activity in the field of cluster policy will also ensure that the implementation of the platform is both supported and secures a high level of usage by cluster actors. Support via the Cluster Observatory and key political support through the Cluster Memorandum will furthermore enhance the impact and promotion of the ECA+

<b>Strand 2 Cooperation Projects</b>		
<b>Nr</b>	<b>Step Name</b>	<b>Short description</b>
1	Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Network coordinators nominate a project manager, agree work programme, schedule and assign tasks</li> <li>2. Identifying and agreeing on the environment issues to be targeted</li> <li>3. Methodology for narrowing the field of 2110 clusters</li> <li>4. Candidate clusters in each network identified, compared and matched for reciprocal or complementary attributes</li> <li>5. Candidate clusters approached and key stakeholders consulted/introduced</li> <li>6. Programme plan – action plan final draft</li> </ol>
2	Communicating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Workshop for all stakeholders. Programme introduced and elaborated, governance and failsafe explained, collaboration partnerships proposed either firm or in principle pending further negotiations.</li> <li>2. Action plan confirmed</li> <li>3. Facilitation of individual cluster-to-cluster negotiations</li> <li>4. Commissioning of projects</li> </ol>
3	Action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 10+ projects being implemented – say 10 or 12 regions per InnoNet.</li> <li>2. Monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>3. End of programme workshop/conference</li> </ol>

The SSPAs are not legal entities and do not have a budget, staff or premises. Their purpose is to influence the funding partners in the SSPA to focus resources on meeting the needs of businesses within their sector. It enables a tripartite discussion between all regional stakeholders, regional cluster organisation, business links, the LSCs (learning and skills council), and the SSCs (sector and skills councils).

**4.2 National and regional economic structure of the region where the practice has been developed. We are looking for the main factors for success for implementing the suggested measure.**

The UK is one of the most important places in the world in the field of businesses and finance. It is one of the strongest EU economies in terms of inflation, interest rates and unemployment, all of which remain relatively low.

The main success factor of such initiative is to ensure that it is demand led rather than supply led to ensure direct support to sector development programs. Sector skills and training need to match the new needs of businesses/companies and the SSPAs are here to provide facilitate communication between the funding bodies, the support bodies and the users.

One other success factor is the legitimacy of the regional cluster organisation to represent the businesses. Therefore, each RCO involved in this process needs to be mature enough to understand and represent the needs of the companies.

**4.3 The policy measure itself: what was it all about? Who were the actors involved, what actions have been undertaken and which result and impact has been achieved?**

The development of the Sector Skills & Productivity Alliances (SSPA) is an initiative that is unique to the Northwest region of the UK and has been developed in response to the Skills White Paper “21st Century Skills”, published in July 2004. It is the sector element of the Northwest Alliance for Skills & Productivity (ASP). These SSPAs have been established to bring together (for the first time) the key

funding and planning partners, in order to develop a skills and business development strategy for each sector.

These strategic SSPAs have a crucial role in the region and will carry out a variety of activities including:

- Identifying key issues facing the sector;
- Developing an Action Plan to address the needs of employers in the sector;
- Ensuring that mainstream public funding is aligned to meet the needs of employers;
- Taking a major step forward to avoid duplication of activity and funding;
- Strengthening and supporting the work of SSCs in the region;

A regular newsletter will be produced to keep partners up to date with progress in this dynamic new initiative.

There are currently 19 SSPAs engaging with 25 Sector Skills Councils, in addition to significant development of a number of National Skills Academies in the Region. Several SSPAs are currently considering the evolution of the sector structure, and discussions are underway to align stakeholder groups where possible.

The **main outcome** from the SSPA initiative is the amount of leverage that they have on funding for skills development which can be used to meet the needs of businesses in the main sectors in the Northwest region. The SSPA initiative has also helped to raise the profile of the Northwest region in terms of its ability to create more demand led skills development programmes.

More specifically, the SSPAs are now the sector arm of the Regional Skills Partnerships. The SSPAs have been used to identify skills priorities, initially for the period 2006 to 2007 and subsequently for 2007 to 2010.

## **5 The adaptability and transferability of the proposal**

### **5.1 Why is it worthwhile to invest in the proposed action/tool? Did the feasibility study and good practice identification demonstrate substantial added value?**

Because of a cluster programme there will be:

- A coherent strategy to optimise use of best assets and competencies in all EU regions,
- A coherent strategy for value added engagement between companies and RTD institutes,
- A coherent strategy for joint R&D projects, joint ventures, partnerships, etc.
- Ensure focus and development of EU innovation societal issues.

SSPA will raise regional productivity, skills levels and economic competitiveness through effective partnership alliances. SSPA's have been established to bring together the key funding and planning partners, in order to develop a skills and business development strategy for each sector.

A substantial added value of the SSPA's is that it enables a tripartite discussion between all regional stakeholders, regional cluster organisation, business links, the LSCs (learning and skills council), and the SSCs (sector and skills councils).

### **5.2 If there is to be decided to invest in the proposed action/tool, what are the main factors to pay specific attention to?**

It is very important that:

- The project is demand led rather than supply led to ensure direct support to sector development programs.

- Sector skills and training match the new needs of businesses/companies.
- Each RCO involved in this process needs to be mature enough to understand and represent the needs of the companies.

### **Description of the modalities of implementation:**

SSPA action plans are aligned with emerging knowledge and intelligence on an ongoing basis, areas of priority in the current action plan include:

#### **Vocational Training - Apprenticeship schemes and placements**

- 14-16 A programme to develop a Young Apprenticeship in Science for 14-16 year olds in the south of the region, with a view to expanding the offering region-wide in the future.
- 16-25 Advanced Apprenticeships are well established to high quality standards in the region, e.g. the pilot Programme Led Apprenticeship (PLA) scheme in 2006/7 for 24 apprentices. This craft specific offering will develop into a full scheme with wider participation from 2007 onwards, aligned with industry's stated demand levels. Following up to two years classroom based training, apprentices will be employed by participating companies to complete their advanced apprenticeship.
- Chemical companies in the North West also benefit from a dedicated training partnership in ChemiCol, the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for the sector, which coordinates vocational training solutions for the industry. ChemiCol is pioneering the revitalization of apprentice schemes as well as helping to provide courses which can be funded by the LSC's new funding mechanism 'Train to Gain'.

#### **Other Sector needs and responses**

- The production of the Sector Skills Agreement for the sector, an interactive industry-led view of the detailed needs of the chemical industry
- The submission of an application for a Process Industries National Skills Academy (PINSA) for the sector under the 2006 DfES call for Academies
- Development of structured Careers Information linked to other key careers organizations.
- Integral to the above, a series of Gold Standard role descriptions are being created which spell out accepted 'best practice' levels of training and competence for recognized roles within the industry.
- The development of a Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) NVQ specifically for the process industries
- The development of a Competence model for organizations, aimed to assist with the ever-increasing level of evidence-based regulatory focus
- Management and Leadership capability has been identified as an area for development in the chemical and polymer sectors

### **5.3 What is the expected impact of implementing the proposed action/tool?**

The main outcome from the SSPA initiative is the amount of leverage that they have on funding for skills development which can be used to meet the needs of businesses in the main sectors in the region. The initiative also helps to raise the profile of the region in terms of its ability to create more demand led skills development programmes.

**5.4 Based on the insights gained in the feasibility studies and good practice identification, what is the judgement/advice on the support that already has been created by stakeholders?**

**The case of the North West Chemical industry**

To remain competitive in a high-knowledge sector, businesses need employees with the skills to match market needs. The quality of the workforce is one reason why the chemical industry has such a strong base in the Northwest.

Industry has undergone considerable change in recent years; an output of that change is an elevation of the age profile of the workforce, creating a number of specific needs aimed at new qualified entrants in the future. The knowledge requirements of such a regulatory-focused industry, which is also faced with considerable competitive global challenges, are also increasing. This requires a higher general level of knowledge, now believed to be around NVQ level 3 as standard, as well as capability in areas of business/operational improvements.

As a main delivery mechanism for positive change, Chemicals Northwest chairs the Sector Skills & Productivity Alliance (SSPA), part of the NWDA's Regional Skills Partnership initiative. This powerful body features the main partners in the skills arena, including the Learning & Skills Council (LSC), Cogent Sector Skills Council, Business Link, NWDA Skills unit and many other influential bodies.

**5.5 What is the advice on how to disseminate the action/tool?**

SSPA seems to be an interesting initiative. SSPA will raise regional productivity, skills levels and economic competitiveness through effective partnership alliances. The initiative also helps to raise the profile of the region in terms of its ability to create more demand led skills development programmes. When the initiative will be replicated to other regions it is very important to make the project demand led and not supply led. The sector skills and training must match the need of businesses/companies. This can differ in other regions.