Making a Start

You should read this fact sheet if you want to:

❑ **find an easy way into shared services**
❑ **reduce your expenditure**
❑ **improve the services you offer.**

Curious?

Shared services projects range from the very complex to the straight forward, but arguably too many providers begin with an open-ended or grand-design idea before they've established the foundations needed for success. If you're curious to know what these foundations are, and the many different approaches you could take to create them, then read on.

Making the most of this resource

This isn't just a fact sheet, it's the start of a journey in which you will consider some simple yet transformational ideas and create a vision of how they could be achieved. Throughout the text, you will be given the opportunity to complete a few short tasks to collect your emerging thoughts and ideas and translate them into your context. You can make notes on the *SS Ideas* back page.

Scenarios and issues

- A College wants to explore the idea of sharing services, but doesn't know where to start.
- A group of Colleges get together to look at sharing services, but too much time is wasted considering the many options available, as nothing is ruled out and there is no specific focus.
- The decision to go ahead with a shared service strategy is repeatedly delayed.

Solutions

There are many reasons why a College might not start a shared service journey or go ahead with a project they've been exploring, but arguably the key foundation needed for any successful collaboration is the development of trust and friendship between all partners. So what sort of projects might you choose to achieve this and make a successful start?

There are four components to any shared service initiative:

- The collaborative vehicle (the approach you may want to take)

- The legal structure
- The service/s to be shared, and
- The partner organisations.

The order in which you consider these components will probably be determined by your context; this is not intended to be a prescriptive model.

Collaborative vehicle

A quick look at part one of the AoC's Shared Services Taxonomy (www.aoc.co.uk/shared-services/materials/reports) will show a continuum of collaborative vehicles from Unitary (the centralising of services within a single organisation) to Outsourcing (giving responsibility for services to a third party). Another way of thinking about this continuum is from low risk/more control to more risk/less control. So an ideal starter vehicle with which to establish trust and friendship might be something with lower risk and a good deal of control, such as:

▫ *Consortium: a group of independent organisations join forces to achieve a particular goal.*

Legal structure

Along with a collaborative vehicle, you'll need a legal structure within which to operate; consider part two of the AoC's Shared Services Taxonomy for a comprehensive list. Again, it may be wise to start with a low risk structure, such as:

- *Memorandum of Agreement: a document that sets out how all parties will cooperate on an agreed project. This can be a legally binding document, or just a partnership agreement.*

You can find more details on this in 'Inspiration No. 4: Difficult detail – The legals'.

> **Task 1:** Download and save/print the three sections of the Shared Service Taxonomy and the accompanying Glossary.
>
> Add your chosen collaborative vehicle and legal structure to your *SS Ideas* page.

Services you might consider sharing

So where would you like to start? You'll now have seen that part three of the AoC's Shared Services Taxonomy has a comprehensive list of services that might be shared. Again, these range from low risk to whole organisational change. Here are a few ideas from the low risk end:

- **Curriculum collaboration**
  - Six physics departments in the Solent group moved to use the same exam board. All staff are now contributing their particular expertise to the development of shared resources and a virtual science department. Less work, higher quality. Watch their film here: www.aoc.co.uk/shared-services/materials/videos

- **Blended learning development**
  - The Worcester group partners wanted to reinvent much of their curriculum, so each College contributed five new blended-learning courses to a shared portal. They've now got 30 new courses to choose from. Less work, more choice. Read their case study here: www.aoc.co.uk/shared-services/materials/case-studies

- **Enrichment**
  - With the removal of direct enrichment funding, can you team up with other local organisations

to spice up your learners' experience with a cost-effective collaboration? It might end up being innovative too.

- **Shared staffing for specialist roles**
  - In smaller organisations, managers may work further away from their skill set than is appropriate. Could you share a specialist member of staff with one or two neighbouring Colleges? VLE development, procurement, counselling, event management, careers advice…

- **Occupational health and wellbeing initiatives**
  - This can be an expensive area for Colleges. But what if you share the coordination and what you offer with others?

- **Recruitment advertising: print and/or web**
  - The eight Colleges in the West Cheshire partnership are looking at sharing much of their HR work, but a simple starter idea was to collaborate on job advertisements in the press and share vacancies on each others' websites. Save money, save time and increase your number of applicants.

- **Disaster recovery**
  - The Rotherham led partnership wanted to cut out the middle man and provide back-up and disaster recovery services for each other. This project ended up providing the group with common IT systems and hardware – a perfect starting point for sharing major aspects of provision. Read their case study here: www.aoc.co.uk/shared-services/materials/case-studies

> **Task 2:** Add the service to be shared to your *SS Ideas* page.

Partner organisations

And finally, who would you like to collaborate with? A few searching questions might help…

- With whom do you have a good existing relationship and can this be developed using your shared service ideas, before inviting in other Colleges?

- If this is a starter idea, are you already considering what other shared service collaborations you may want this to lead to, such as the aspects of your provision that need reinvigorating? It's easier to reinvent your provision when two organisations work together to find a 'third way'.

A common concern when considering collaborating with a neighbouring College is the loss of competitive advantage. But one of the key findings of the final evaluation of the 41 Efficiency and Innovation Fund (EIF) Shared Services projects was that the increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative projects meant that the only way to lose competitive advantage was to be outside of the group doing the sharing.

Task 3: Add your potential partners to the *SS Ideas* page.

All of the above resources can be found using the following link: www.aoc.co.uk/shared-services/materials

Task 4: Add a selection of potentially useful resources to your SS Ideas page for later reading/viewing.

Download the Shared Services Evaluation Report and navigate to page 64 for a full list of the 41 EIF projects

Next steps

Attend the AoC Shared Services conference, Tuesday 12 March 2013, to learn from real experiences. Register your attendance at www.aoccreateevents.co.uk/sharedservices2013 or email aoc-create@aoc.co.uk to register your interest.

Valuable reading includes:

- **The Guide to developing Shared Services in FE**
  - Step-by-step instructions to create a detailed Shared Service proposal.

- • **Shared Services Evaluation Report: the many faces of collaboration**
  - An engaging analysis of the 41 EIF projects by Shared Service area: finance, MIS, HR, etc. Also includes sections on collaborative vehicles and legal structures as well as VAT and lessons learned.

- **Online briefings and legal updates**
  - Research into legal requirements, including VAT, TUPE and redundancies. Also see 'Inspiration No. 4: Difficult detail – The legals'.

- **Shared Services written case studies**
  - Get into the detail behind 16 of the AoC's EIF projects – learn from the sector's successes and failures.

- **Shared Services filmed case studies**
  - Essential viewing if you are to understand the human challenges of cross-organisational collaboration.

- **Dissemination events**
  - Hear the Shared Services team and project leads talk about the challenges they've faced and the rewards they're reaping.

Make your contribution

Shared services are an important and growing agenda for the FE sector. To learn more, register to read the AoC Shared Services Briefings to keep abreast of the very latest developments and good practice, join the Shared Services LinkedIn Group www.linkedin.com/groups/AoC-Shared-Services to share experiences or email: sharedservices@aoc.co.uk

SS Ideas Page

Collaborative vehicle *Which will you explore for your starter idea?*	
Legal structure *Which will you explore for your starter idea?*	
Service to be shared *Are there two or three services that initially catch your eye?*	
Potential partner organisation/s	
Next steps *Make a note of the existing projects, written and filmed case studies, and any reports or analysis that might help you explore your ideas.*	
Learn more	Read AoC Shared Services Briefings www.aoc.co.uk/en/briefings/index.cfm, click on the Briefings library to view all the Shared Services Briefings.