Working with local intermediaries:
An evaluation of HSE’s Field Operations
Directorate pilot project

Prepared by
The Foundation for Small and
Medium Enterprise Development
University of Durham
for the Health and Safety Executive

CONTRACT RESEARCH REPORT
389/2001
Working with local intermediaries: An evaluation of HSE’s Field Operations Directorate pilot project

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This report details an evaluation of the activities undertaken during a pilot project on the development of relationships with Business Support Organisations (referred to as ‘intermediaries’) between October 1998 and autumn 2000 on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) by consultants from the Foundation for SME Development at the University of Durham. It also includes an evaluation of the approach adopted by HSE to introduce the lessons learned from the pilot nationally through its Field Operations Directorate (FOD).

The purpose of the project evaluated in this report was to develop and test a new strategy for creating more effective working relationships with local intermediaries (following earlier research conducted by the University of Durham and reported in the Contract Research Report 185/1998). This pilot work involved running a two-year project in two regions (Home Counties and London & the South East) with the aim of increasing the flow of relevant health and safety information to small firms and business start-ups and improving its quality.

This report and the work it describes was funded by HSE. Its contents, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect HSE policy.
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1. Executive Summary

This report details the activities undertaken, the findings and recommendations arising from the two year pilot project on the development of relationships with Business Support Organisations (hereinafter referred to as ‘intermediaries’) undertaken between October 1998 and autumn 2000 on behalf of FOD by consultants from the Foundation for SME Development at the University of Durham.

1.1 Background

The project itself follows on from research undertaken by the same consultancy team in 1997 to test the potential of certain intermediaries as conduits of information from HSE (FOD) to small firms and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMES) and to develop proposals for a new contact strategy with intermediaries to be take forward by FOD.

1.2 Purpose of the 1998 - 2000 project

The purpose of the project was as follows:
“To develop and test a new strategy for creating more effective working relationships with local intermediaries by running a two-year pilot project in two regions (Home Counties and London & the South East) in order to increase the flow of relevant health and safety information to small firms and business start-ups and to improve its quality.”

1.3 Project outcomes

The project outcomes were identified as:

- an increase in the number of small firms that have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries;
- a more clearly defined role for WCO teams in this context, including identification of training/development needs;
- a body of skills and knowledge and systems in HSE for developing relationships with intermediaries and for servicing them;
- an ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring health and safety information to small firms as a result of the project; and
- a clear and objective assessment of the value of such a strategy nationally.
1.4 Project findings

These are drawn from five principal sources:

- the pilot project’s activities and results;
- the survey work undertaken by the Relationships Foundation (RF), a charitable organisation engaged by FOD to explore the inter-organisational relationships between FOD and key intermediaries; a baseline study was conducted by RF at the start of the project and repeated at the end of the project to allow an assessment to be carried out by a party external to the Project team to determine the project’s success;
- Focus Groups conducted with staff from FOD and intermediary organisations in autumn 2000;
- the ‘roll-out’ workshops conducted in June 2000 that were set up to organise and promote the approach developed in the pilot project to the rest of the FOD regions;
- feedback from Project Board and Project Planning Group members.

In this summary the key points arising are presented.

1.4.1 Pilot project activities and results. These were identified as follows:

- the need to expand the project activities beyond the Workplace Contact officer (WCO), who was originally seen as the sole person responsible for developing work with intermediaries, into a broader-based team approach involving inspectorate staff; this development arose because of the limited impact that one member of staff could have on the situation and from the recognition that effective engagement with intermediary staff must come at different levels within that intermediary organisation.
- the development of regional team roles, competences and activities to support intermediary-related work.
- insight into the practical use of planning and reporting tools: notably the development of spider diagrams and contact and activity plans (see Appendix 1) to support WCO work with intermediaries.
- the unsuitability of FOCUS, the FOD database designed and used for recording contact information, as an intermediary contact logging system; the need for FOD to resolve quickly and positively how it will address this issue since, without an effective contact system, effective intermediary relationship development and the required internal learning about it cannot occur; the outline specification of a contact logging system is at Appendix 3.
- the need for each FOD region to develop its own intermediary contact strategy: FOD regions must be able, following the national roll-out of intermediary-related activity, to
identify their key intermediary players and the value of third party fora such as Regional Safety Groups.

- **the changing business support network**: the replacement respectively of TECs and Business Links by the Learning & Skills Councils and the Small Business Service from April 2001 provides both a challenge and an opportunity for FOD regions to build relationships with the intermediary network.

- **resourcing levels and commitment**: the project demonstrated the need for FOD to commit adequate resources to this type of work from the outset (which it did not in the pilot project) and to recognise that effective relationship development with intermediaries will come only from consistent levels of resource applied over multiple planning periods.

- **intermediary team continuity and management support**: experience of the pilot project activities in the London East TEC area serves to underline the need both for continuity in team membership (or at very least well planned and signalled changes to it) and the presence of positive and effective managerial support; neither continuity nor support were apparent in London East.

- **managing ambiguity and responding flexibly**: effective relationships with intermediaries will only be built if FOD staff and the FOD organisation behind them are able to both handle ambiguity that relationships demand and respond appropriately to it.

1.4.2 **The Relationships Foundation (RF) survey work.** A study of the survey work undertaken by RF at the beginning and end of the project revealed the following:

- **development of knowledge of intermediaries; the existence of multipliers**: the project demonstrated through the RF surveys that FOD in the two development areas had enhanced its knowledge of the number and type of intermediaries that exist; in addition, the project supported the argument derived from the 1997 research that intermediaries do interface with substantial numbers of SMEs, thereby providing the crucial ‘multipliers’ that FOD requires to be effective in impacting upon SMEs.

- **development of relationships with intermediaries**: in the Norfolk & Waveney development area, where problems of team continuity and management support were not encountered, although resourcing problems did nevertheless apply, a marked improvement was noted in the strength of relationship between FOD and the intermediaries targeted; the principal areas of improvement were in ‘relationship establishment’, and ‘transactions within relationships’ (i.e. the operation of these relationships day to day); where specific areas of concern were identified through the surveys, they were taken forward to the Focus Groups for discussion and amplification.
1.4.3 Focus Groups with Intermediaries and HSE. The four Focus Groups, two with HSE (FOD) staff and two with intermediaries took place in autumn 2000. These revealed the following:

- confirmation of the multiplier effect: the Focus Groups with intermediary staff confirmed the existence of substantial multipliers.

- the need to manage expectations: the Groups confirmed the RF survey findings that the parties (FOD and the intermediaries) have different expectations of what appropriate response times by FOD should be to intermediary requests for service; this difference needs to be aired at the outset of the relationship, or when it becomes apparent in established relationships, and managed rather than ignored.

- exchange and mutual benefit in relationships: the project sought to help FOD to use relationships with intermediaries as a conduit for transmitting messages about Health & Safety and for learning about the SME environment through reception of intelligence via the intermediaries; to achieve this it must recognise that effective relationships are based upon exchange and mutual benefit; having said which, it is clear that it is FOD that stands to benefit more than the intermediaries from this arrangement and must, therefore, recognise the resourcing implications attached.

- FOD’s listening ability: the Focus Groups serve to confirm the findings of the 1997 research that HSE (FOD) has not developed adequate mechanisms and procedures at local and regional levels to facilitate the reception of, and response to, messages coming via intermediary organisations from and about small companies and the needs of those companies in respect of information and advice on Health & Safety; this is a key requirement.

- training providers, the key intermediary: whilst FOD regions must be able to develop and tailor their own approaches to intermediary relationship development, the training providers remain the key type of intermediary with which to work.

- intermediaries – related activity ‘falling off’ the priority list: this view expressed by FOD staff reflects the conflict and tension identified within FOD between the conventional inspection-based approach and that represented by the intermediary work; it is incumbent upon senior FOD managers to ensure that the intermediary-related work remains a prioritised activity.

- the ‘favourite’ inspector or FOD staff member: the Focus Groups confirmed that intermediaries tend to gravitate towards particular individuals within FOD who are responsive to requests and can engage well with business practitioners; as noted below under ‘theoretical perspectives’, this serves to promote ‘individual capital’ rather than ‘structural capital’ in FOD’s relationships with intermediaries; the implication here is that
FOD should look closely at identifying potential candidates for this work and at training development needs in order to expand the existing cadre of ‘favourite’ individuals.

- **identification of SME groups; targeting of assistance:** the Focus Groups underlined the need for FOD in conjunction with intermediaries to be able in the short to medium term to identify and target clusters of SMEs with similar problems.

- **distance between FOD Headquarters and the ‘field’:** this point, raised by the FOD participants in the Focus Groups and seen again in the roll-out workshops, links to the earlier point made regarding the probability that the intermediary-related work might fall off the priority list; the point here is that in the roll-out of the intermediaries’ work this perception has to be managed by senior staff.

### 1.4.4 Roll-out workshops

From their participation in these workshops the project consultants drew the following additional conclusions. These are:

- **familiarity with the intermediaries’ project on the part of FOD staff:** this was clearly at a low level; ‘ownership’ of it (i.e. commitment to it) even lower; it is in the project consultants’ view significant that a project, that had been in operation almost two years and which had support at senior level within HSE/C, was largely unknown; lack of communication and workloads may explain this in part; its (lack of) perceived relevance to established priorities and targets is in all probability much more critical.
  - **the roll-out - management and learning:** the consultants highlight the difficulties arising from the central management of this work, and the provision for learning by HSE as an organisation about the needs and realities of intermediaries and small firms (SMEs); and how the intelligence from such lessons can be acted upon.

### 1.4.5 The Project Board and Project Planning Group; Project impacts

The following information comes from views and experiences of those involved in the Project Board and Project Planning Group meetings.

- **the Project Board’s role and operation:** the experience of the Focus Groups and of the roll-out workshops indicate to the project consultants that the Project Board did not perform an adequate or effective role in promoting the project and gaining support for it at senior level within FOD, although it did actively lobby for resources – albeit after a pronounced delay; the Board also appeared not to be able to drive the project’s progress and sustain this momentum between Board meetings.
- **Project Board - FOD staff commitment to the project**: the consultants feel obliged to question the commitment of certain senior FOD managers to the project; unhappily this was also reflected in the attitude of certain more junior staff.

- **Implications for the roll-out – communication and co-ordination**: the above comments notwithstanding, the Project Board played a valuable role in pulling together the full picture of the project; this was, however, in the context of a small grouping of three FOD entities (the two development regions and FOD SIU) where substantial effort was put into communication and co-ordination and where views about the importance of the activities undertaken were largely shared; in the roll-out itself the number of groupings rises greatly and the degree of unanimity and goal sharing evident in the Project Board cannot be taken as given.

- **Implications for the roll-out – development of strategies**: the experience of the Project Board’s activities suggests that there is an essential role to be played at the centre to learn about intermediary relationship development strategies.

- **Project Planning Group – strengths and potential for improvement**: the creation of this operationally focused group served to inject endeavour and new ideas into both development areas; one area for improvement identified is the clearer and quicker recruitment of members as FOD staff seconded to the Project Team moved out of the of team to assume new responsibilities.

- **Project impact – main accomplishments**: FOD Project Board and Planning Group members evaluated the two year pilot against the project’s outcomes; overall, the project rated strongly on its ability to meet desired outcomes; in descending order of success, and against a scale where 5 equals full accomplishment and 1 little or none, the following ‘scores’ were obtained:

  - A more clearly defined role for WCO teams in this context, including identification/development needs. (4)
  - A clear and objective assessment of the value of such a strategy nationally. (3.75)
  - A body of skills, knowledge and systems in HSE for developing relationships with intermediaries, for servicing them and for using information gathered. (3.5)
  - An ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring Health & Safety information to small firms as a result. (3.25)
  - An increase in the number of small firms who have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries (2.75).
1.5 Theoretical perspectives

The project consultants invite the reader to consider two perspectives that they believe to be particularly relevant to the project itself. These are Relationship Marketing and Change Management.

1.5.1 Relationship Marketing. Relationship Marketing is defined by this report’s authors in the context of this project as the explicit and planned development of relationships, networks and interactions by an organisation for the mutual benefit of that organisation and that of the parties with, and through, which it works. The relevance of this approach to FOD is that it can provide an intermediate contact strategy for FOD through the adoption of a service mentality towards those intermediaries. If this mentality were to be adopted, it would bring with it the following benefits:

- the removal of ambivalence on the part of FOD staff about the relative positions of HSE and the intermediary organisations and clear direction to regional activity in the roll-out.
- the development of “structural capital” (i.e. organisational ownership and involvement) in respect of relationships with intermediaries and, from this, communication and learning within FOD about these important organisations;
- the approach would stimulate the establishment of systems and procedures that ensured it became integrated into HSE’s corporate consciousness;
- structure to HSE’s (FOD’s) relationships with intermediaries at three key levels:
  - “Policy” – where contacts are at senior level in both FOD and the intermediary organisations;
  - “Relationship development/practice” – comprising contacts between Health & Safety specialists in the intermediaries and inspectorate and WCO staff; and
  - “Internal” – within FOD where information about FOD’s relationships and activities with intermediaries is communicated and developed within HSE.
- the report sets out criteria for measuring the success in relationship development, using a relationship marketing approach.

1.5.2 Change Management. This second perspective is relevant in a broader sense to what is being proposed through the adoption of a relationship marketing approach and the adoption of a service mentality on the part of FOD towards the intermediary organisations. Two areas critical to the process of successful organisational change are:

- the more readily addressed and identifiable ‘hard’ characteristics of an organisation (i.e. systems and procedures); and
- the so-called ‘soft’ characteristics relating to the mindsets of individuals within an organisation based upon years of custom and practice and the nature of the individuals themselves in being attracted to a particular working environment.

Addressing these areas is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of maintaining of organisational movement and of overcoming impediments to organisational change. These issues are addressed more fully in the report. The section proceeds to provide a list of required actions and approaches that have been found to assist and promote the change process in organisations.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations
This section reflects in a broader sense on the project and considers the implications for FOD of the roll-out process, other initiatives with intermediaries and on the pilot project process itself within FOD.

Conclusions

1.6.1 Progress overall to date. This has been encouraging but until or unless intermediaries’ work is brought into the mainstream of FOD work through support at senior level and through appropriate resourcing, that progress can be considered to be ‘fragile’, i.e. easily reversed.

1.6.2 WCO team roles and training and development needs identification. What has been achieved to date is again encouraging. In respect of training and development needs for all FOD staff engaged in the intermediaries’ work, this is only the start of the process.

1.6.3 A clear and objective assessment of the value of (an intermediary-based) contact strategy nationally. The roll-out itself notwithstanding, the value of a strategy of this type could only be definitively judged when compared in a longitudinal study to the impacts of other methods of engagement such as a direct marketing campaign. Having said this, the project has shown clearly how an intermediary-based approach can work within the HSE context.

1.6.4 A body of skills, knowledge and systems in FOD for developing relationships with intermediaries, for servicing them and for using information gathered. A degree of progress has been made in this context – especially with respect to the knowledge element. Substantially more work remains to be done in respect of systems and procedures. Such work will only be effective, however, if FOD adopts a relevant approach (philosophy) to its dealings with intermediaries, as noted in the Theoretical Perspectives section.
1.6.5 An ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring Health & Safety information to small firms as a result. The project has demonstrated that this outcome can be achieved. It is, however, an objective that can be realised in the short term. The progress made to date would, undoubtedly, have been greater if resources had been made available to support FOD activities in the project during the first year of operation.

1.6.6 An increase in the number of small firms who have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries. Progress is evident in the Norfolk & Waveney area.

Recommendations

1.6.7 The role of HSE; organisational change. The tensions evident between HSE’s role as an information provider on Health & Safety and as a legal enforcement agency have been well rehearsed outside the context of this project and this report yet, inevitably, they surface in a number of areas of the report – albeit in other forms. Organisational change is in the project consultants’ view ineluctable for HSE and FOD. The recommendation that comes from this reality is that it is embraced and openly debated within the organisation. The concepts of Relationship Marketing and Change Management discussed here are offered to assist the opening of that debate.

1.6.8 Project activity within FOD. The project consultants’ experience gained over two projects with FOD since 1997 reinforces our view that the very necessary project activity initiated by FOD SIU must be legitimised within FOD itself, made part of FOD’s core work. This suggests that FOD SIU and its activities must be better ‘located’ and more visible within FOD itself. Communication is one part of the solution but it is not in any sense the whole answer. Unless this development occurs, the benefit to FOD derived from future project work of all types is likely to be lost or at best much reduced.

1.6.9 Project management and administration. Three areas for the improvement of the management and administration of projects became apparent during the course of this project. These are:

- the need for an operationally focused Project Planning Group to complement the strategic activities of the Project Board to maintain project momentum.
- the more rigorous identification of short-term outputs and longer-term outcomes in projects through the PIDs.
- **better overall resource allocation and total project cost identification** to ensure that adequate human and financial resources from within HSE are available before conducting operational pilot work of this nature.

1.6.10 Management of the roll-out process. The project consultants invite the reader to use the checklist set out at 5.3.11 in this connection. Drawing from the knowledge gained in the pilot project the project consultants have established a check list to consider in managing this process.

1.6.11 Establishment and use of an information system that can record intermediary-related information. This is absolutely critical to the success of the roll-out programme by facilitating organisational learning about intermediary-related work.

1.6.12 Monitoring of the roll-out programme. This should be undertaken by FOD Headquarters in conjunction with a third (i.e. external) party. The importance of the programme to FOD’s future in our view makes this essential.
2. Introduction and Context

2.1 Background

This report documents FOD’s two year pilot project in working with intermediaries. The body of the report proper is divided into four main sections:

- Introduction and Context
- Findings
- Theoretical perspectives
- Conclusions and Recommendations

These are complemented by a detailed account of the evaluation and research methodology employed (at Appendix 1) which, the authors suggest, merits reference by the reader during the course of the report. The subsequent appendices contain team activity and competence information, a contact management system outline and a graphic illustrating the process of organisational change, as reflected in employee attitudes and actions.

2.1.1 The project was commissioned by HSE following research undertaken jointly with the Small Business Centre of Durham University Business School (now the Foundation for SME Development within the University of Durham Business School) in 1997\(^1\). The 1997 research had three key aims:

- to investigate and assess certain key ‘intermediaries’ that have nationwide coverage, (including Training & Enterprise Councils (TECs), Enterprise Agencies, Business Links, and Chambers of Commerce) as potential conduits of information from HSE to small firms in England and Wales;
- to test proposals developed within the project with SMEs to throw light on the perceptions and views of small business owner managers; and
- to develop proposals to pilot a new progressive contact strategy with intermediaries based on the research undertaken.

2.1.2 The proposals arising from the research were essentially twofold. Firstly, that HSE should consider the development of a new strategy for working with intermediaries that incorporated elements of relationship marketing. This strategy – based particularly on the WCO role - focused on three areas:

\(^1\) The resulting report, “Developing proposals on how to work with intermediaries”: Contract Research Report, 185/1998, was published in 1998
• development of internal relationships within HSE;
• development of relationships with selected intermediaries; and
• support for these relationships by resourcing of initiatives that work through, develop and test the potential of intermediaries.

2.1.3 The second proposal was that rather than risking moving “too far too quickly” a pilot project should be put into operation by FOD to “….develop ideas and practices in a controlled and manageable way, and to learn from experience before larger scale implementation….” as to how HSE might work more effectively with intermediaries with the aim of improving the HSE’s channels of communication for Health & Safety information to small firms and business start-ups.

2.1.4 As will be seen during the course of this report, the terms ‘intermediary’ and ‘intermediary organisation’ define the role of the organisations both detailed in the first paragraph of this section and elsewhere in this report, *from the HSE’s perspective*, as they interface with HSE and the business community, which, of course, includes small firms. In terms of these organisations’ role – as they, themselves, see it – they are Business Support Organisations. Understanding of, and empathy with, these organisations’ roles and objectives in *their* own terms on the part of HSE, remains a key element in building and maintaining effective relationships between HSE and these organisations.

2.1.5 The research identified the importance of developing longer-term relationships with intermediaries and saw this approach as a key component in HSE’s development of more effective channels of communication to business. The context of these relationships was identified as the local level, the interaction being between selected intermediaries and FOD field staff.

2.1.6 The research also identified the potential relevance to HSE of Relationship Marketing, a concept taken from the commercial environment, in developing its relationships with Intermediaries and small firms, thereby improving the flow of information about Health & Safety *to and from* small firms. It was recognised by the consultants that, whilst the concept would require development in this particular context, it had relevance to HSE and its operations. This issue is discussed in greater detail below.

2.1.7 As noted in the PID (1.2 9/98), the project also provided “….the environment for doing the kind of work to which we (HSE) are committed in the HSC/E small firms strategy, and complement other pilot projects on FOD’s “best mix” approach and WCO teams.”
2.2 Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project, again taken from the PID, was as follows:

“To develop and test a new strategy for creating more effective working relationships with local intermediaries by running a two-year pilot project in two regions (Home Counties and London & the South East) in order to increase the flow of relevant health and safety information to small firms and business start-ups and to improve its quality.”

2.3 Expected Outcomes

The PID identified the following:

- an increase in the number of small firms that have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries;
- a more clearly defined role for WCO teams in this context, including identification of training/development needs;
- a body of skills and knowledge and systems in HSE for developing relationships with intermediaries and for servicing them;
- an ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring health and safety information to small firms as a result of the project; and
- a clear and objective assessment of the value of such a strategy nationally.

2.4 Deliverables

The deliverables for the project team, including the engagement of University of Durham Business School in a consultancy capacity, were agreed as:

- A baseline survey conducted at the start of the project to analyse:
  - the relations between FOD and key intermediaries in the two regions: Home Counties and London & South East;
  - the network of intermediaries available and the extent and nature of their dealings with small firms;
  - the total field of small firms which were the target of the project.
- A series of procedures and agreements as to how the project team would facilitate and support the running of the planned activities within the project.
• An assessment of the value and feasibility of developing a style of inspection in the pilot areas to complement the project.

• A map of the individual planned activities that develop effective working relationships with selected intermediaries.

• 6 monthly progress reports to the DFO forum.

• Interim assessments to assure the expected project outcomes.

• A repeat of the baseline survey at the end of the project to determine its success against the criteria measured at the first survey.

• A report to the DFO forum at the end of the project on the activities undertaken, their evaluation against project objectives and recommendations for further action.

2.5 Project development

Following the conduct of the first baseline study (see below) and in discussion at the Project Board’s second and third meetings in October 1998 and January 1999, amendments to the above deliverables were agreed so as to optimise the resources available to the project. These changes were as follows:

• that emphasis must be placed on two, rather than the originally designated four, development areas; those chosen were Norfolk & Waveney and London East, corresponding to the areas covered by the two respective TECs;

• the calculation of a working figure for the total number of small firms operating in the development areas was neither a useful nor feasible objective, on which the success or otherwise of the project could be judged; this conclusion was reached for the following reasons:

  - the impact of the project could not be expected to be seen in terms of directly attributable “payback” – e.g. reduced numbers of accidents or enforcement actions associated with small firms by HSE – within or immediately following the two year time period; the nature of the project was that of establishing the foundation for a new way of working, not of producing unprecedented changes in small firms behaviour;

  - any change in accident statistics during the course of the project, whether positive or negative, would be open to a variety of (potentially contradictory) interpretations;

  - the statistical base in respect of small firms available to HSE (as to other national agencies) was (and is) such that no effective reliance can be placed upon it as the basis for any quantitative analysis or correlation with HSE’s own data (lodged in FOCUS).
• this development in thinking led to the recognition that measures of the project’s success should be evaluated more explicitly in qualitative terms and in the context of the work undertaken with intermediaries;

• the deliverable: “an assessment of the value and feasibility of developing a style of inspection in the pilot areas to complement the project”, was not developed explicitly, although the value of a team-, as opposed to a WCO-based, approach did emerge during the first year of the project’s operation; we develop this idea below and return to the inspection style issue in the final section of the report.

Year One of this pilot project can be characterised by a (typically) high level of activity in terms of idea generation, planning and ‘fixing’ on key objectives. By contrast, implementation on the ground of those ideas was held back largely through the delay in formalising the level of WCO resource and the degree of financial support available.
3. **Findings**

3.1 **Content**

This section documents the findings from the evaluation of the pilot project. These are drawn primarily from the following five sources (see Appendix 1). These sources are:

- Pilot project activities and results
- The Relationships Foundation survey work
- Focus Groups
- Roll-out workshops
- Feedback from Project Board and Project Planning Group members.

No priority is implied by, or should be attached to, the order in which these sources are discussed.

3.2 **Pilot project activities and results**

Our evaluation of the pilot project activities reveals the following:

3.2.1 *The need to expand the locus of the project beyond the WCO*. The original conception of the project saw the WCO as the FOD person (effectively solely) responsible for orchestrating the work with intermediaries. Experience in the first year of the pilot project made it clear in each development area that the work required for a substantive (effective) input into intermediary relationship development exceeded the resources represented in a portion of one WCO’s time. This is not only an issue about the time available to the officer concerned, it also relates to the ability/capacity required for effective engagement at various levels of seniority within the HSE and within the intermediary organisations.

3.2.2 *The need to create a team approach*. The development in thinking noted at 3.2.1 above resulted in the proposal of a team approach to the intermediaries’ work. The recommended regional team comprises Band 1, 2 and 3 inspector grades together with the WCO. This, together with the relevant roles of the individual team members, is set out at Appendix 2. The reader will note that reference is made to a central co-ordination role (probably for Central FOD SIU) in the competences/roles matrix.
3.2.3 Agreement of team competences. The development of a regional team required also that competences for each member of the team be identified. These are detailed in the same matrix as the above at Appendix 2, accompanied by a schedule of activities for the regional team members and Central FOD SIU. The latter document draws from work undertaken by the Project Board in connection with the national roll-out programme.

3.2.4 Development of WCO communication skills. Recognising the critical role of the WCO at the interface between FOD and the intermediary network, the project consultants, having canvassed FOD colleagues for ideas, organised and delivered a one day communication techniques workshop for WCOs in the London and Home Counties region in October 1998. This event sought to connect the policy objectives represented in the pilot project to the identification and development of relevant skills and techniques.

3.2.5 Insight into the practical use of tools for planning and reporting. The spider diagrams (see example at Appendix 1) proved useful for visualising and communicating the extent and development of relationships with intermediaries. A standard format for these spider diagrams should be adopted to the benefit of all parties. Such standardisation allows for an easier exchange of information and experience between regions. Gantt charts are effective as a planning and performance monitoring tool. FOD needs an enhanced contact history database, should it wish to build transaction histories with intermediaries. The consultants’ recommendation is that FOD does indeed log transaction histories with intermediaries.

3.2.6 FOCUS's (The FOD database’s) shortcomings, when used for intermediary relationship development. These are evident, though the project did seek to use FOCUS for a purpose for which it was not designed. This situation was compounded by changes made to FOCUS during 2000 to make it more suitable for the principal tasks required of it (i.e. those not related to intermediary contact). These changes, apparently, made the task of recording intermediary contacts more, rather than less difficult. To help with future systems configuration, an outline specification of what an intermediaries’ contact management system would comprise is at Appendix 3.

3.2.7 The key elements allowing effective work with intermediaries. These include the ability to plan, co-ordinate, and monitor the regional team’s activities. The spider diagrams, Gantt charts and contact logging systems provide useful aids to this. A necessary addition is the scheduling of periodic team meetings. The pilot project settled on formal planning meetings every three months as an appropriate regime. This is a reasonable starting point for other regions to work from.
3.2.8 **The need for each region to craft its own intermediary contact strategy.** The project started from the proposition that the TECs provided the focus for intermediary relationship development. Whilst this proved to be an adequate generalisation as a point of departure, both pilot areas progressed in slightly different directions, indicating the need for FOD to be aware of sometimes subtle differences in the intermediary network between one region and another.

3.2.9 **Activities of third parties.** Fora such as regional safety groupings should not be ignored since they can act to connect FOD with intermediaries in an indirect yet valuable manner.

3.2.10 **The changing business support network.** The situation nationally for future intermediary-related work is complicated slightly by the creation of Learning and Skills Councils and the Small Business Service from April 2001. Equally, these developments represent a real opportunity to initiate, renew or develop relationships with the organisations and personnel involved. Both types of organisation merit attention, but a more rigid expectation of how regions progress intermediaries’ work is neither advised nor considered to be necessary.

3.2.11 **Resource levels.** Work in both the development areas started slowly, primarily because insufficient resources were applied to them. It should be recalled that the original time allocation totalled 20% of one WCO’s time in each area. In both areas the WCOs committed at least their time allocation to the project. Compounding this is the fact that it was only in the second year of the project that money became available to give financial support to some of the initiatives created with intermediaries. The national roll-out of the intermediaries’ programme has considered both the time that a regional HSE team can devote to the project and the criteria relevant to bids made by FOD regions for financial support for related work. We return to these points below.

3.2.12 **Resource commitment.** The payback period on this type of work is shown to extend well beyond one accounting period. This means that HSE needs to be able to commit resources consistently across multiple accounting periods for such work to be effective. The complexity of the project means this is not one that responds positively to the ‘turning on and turning off’ of resources.

3.2.13 **Project team continuity in the London East area.** In terms of relationship development the two years of the pilot work is a small amount of time. Having said this, the continuity of the project team in the London East TEC area was poor. Changes to team membership, that occurred with little apparent advance notice, hampered the development of both team working and understanding of, and empathy with, intermediaries. Given the demands that exist on FOD staff,
an easy solution to future problems of this kind is unlikely. In this case failure at least to minimise such changes was markedly detrimental to the work.

3.2.14 Managerial support for the WCO in the London East area. The above difficulties were compounded by the perception of the WCO concerned that she lacked effective managerial support.

3.2.15 Managing ambiguity; responding flexibly. The key question that those working with intermediaries should be able to ask of those intermediaries has the sentiment ‘what relationship would you like to have?’ This necessitates WCOs and their inspectorate colleagues being able to work with the ambiguity the question suggests and the organisation behind them (FOD) flexible enough to accommodate legitimate wishes of intermediaries in relationship development. Whilst in reality, FOD staff may seed ideas and offer suggestions of what may be done for intermediaries, the key organisational and individual quality is to be able to negotiate a solution in which the other party (intermediary) has a ‘voice’ of at least the same magnitude as the HSE itself.

3.3 The Relationships Foundation (RF) Survey Work

The reader is referred to Appendix 1 for a full discussion of the work undertaken in conjunction with the Relationships Foundation (RF). A study of the RF surveys undertaken respectively at the beginning and at the end of the project revealed the following.

3.3.1 Development of knowledge of intermediaries; multipliers. The pilot project demonstrated that FOD had increased the number and type of intermediaries known to it, during the course of the project. The majority of the intermediaries responding to the second RF survey stated that they interfaced with over 50 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A further significant group stated they interfaced with 21 to 50 SMEs. The ‘over 50’ option was the highest category provided on the questionnaire. Information derived inter alia from the WCO spider diagrams suggests that options of a higher order would have been useful, as the survey results cannot confirm how many intermediaries had links with more than 50 SMEs. The result, nevertheless, upholds the presence of multipliers - a core element of the project’s rationale.

3.3.2 Development of relationships with intermediaries. The strength of the relationship between FOD and intermediaries in the Norfolk and Waveney area appears to have grown. This is another fundamental finding. The questionnaire probed the intermediaries’ perceived quality of their relationship with the HSE around 36 constructs. These break down into four main groups on the
basis of the levels of improvements in the relationships made. The first group comprises 18 constructs where the improvement in relationship strength exceeds 50 percent. These are:

- I have met most of the people I deal with
- At the start of this relationship we took the time to understand each other’s needs and expectations
- I have difficulty knowing who in my counterpart’s organisation has responsibility for the specific areas of work
- The goals for this relationship are known and held in common
- Important issues are discussed face to face
- My counterpart knows the skills and experience I can contribute to work
- I have sufficient contact with my counterpart(s) for the relationship to be successful
- The constraints on what I can do are understood
- It is difficult to know what my counterpart values in our relationship
- I understand how things work in my counterpart’s organisation
- My role within my organisation is well understood by my counterpart
- We both benefit equally from the relationship
- We have a good mutual understanding of the way we each use terminology
- I often hear about decisions that affect my work via the grapevine
- I am confident that this relationship is stable and will continue to develop over time
- It is often hard to know what my counterpart really thinks
- Enough attention is paid to long term issues in this relationship
- My counterpart understands how things work in my organisation.

3.3.3 These are the areas in which the relationship is deemed to have moved most significantly to a more positive relational footing. The constructs of this group can be themed under ‘establishment of relationship’. It is in this area that the greatest progress has been made by FOD with target intermediaries. It provides evidence of a sound platform having been created.

3.3.4 The next group comprises constructs that still show improvement in relationship strength, but by a factor lower than 50%. In addition, the relationship performance against each of these constructs in sufficiently strong that there remain less than 30 percentage points for further improvement on the scale. These are:

- Meetings are poorly managed, rushed or interrupted
- The right medium of communication e.g. face to face, phone fax, is used at the right time
- The relationship takes up more time than it is worth
- Combining our different skills and perspectives makes a positive contribution to the success of our work
- I and my colleagues are always treated with courtesy and respected both for our skills and for who we are
- Differences in the way we approach our work lead to misunderstandings between us
- The same standards of conduct are expected from both sides of this relationship
- We both put the health and safety interests of small and medium sized businesses first.

3.3.5 Again, this shows good FOD achievement, given that little scope exists in this grouping for further improvement. These constructs deal more with the transaction within relationships, rather than their creation.

3.3.6 The third group comprises constructs where there has been improvement in relationship strength, but by less than 50 percentage points (as in the group above). The scope for future performance improvement exists by a factor of over 30 percent. These constructs are:

- I am usually provided with sufficient information on matters affecting our relationship
- We usually make time to talk
- We have little opportunity to get to know each other personally as well as professionally
- I get sufficient recognition for my contribution to the success of our work.
- Any concerns I may have are usually picked up on quickly
- Changes in personnel in this relationship are managed well so that new relationships are quickly established
- It is often difficult to get in touch.

3.3.7 There are two main issues here. The first is whether a ‘personal’ as well as ‘professional’ relationship building dimension is indeed necessary. This point is addressed more fully in the section of the report dealing with Focus Groups. The second relates to transactional aspects to relationships that are perceived by those involved to have improved to a lesser extent than those in the second group. These points are again picked up in the section on Focus Groups.

3.3.8 There were three areas where the relationship was deemed to have deteriorated. The difference in each case was within 12 percentage points, and in two cases out of the three could have been reversed by a difference in any one respondent’s view. These areas of vulnerability are:
- My messages and questions are responded to promptly
- Both sides of the relationship have enough experienced people to provide cover and stability when staff are away
- We both have a joint responsibility for general health and safety matters.

3.3.9 The first two constructs above relate to transactional impediments. Both aspects are explored in the Focus Groups as both parties seem to have failed to improve the relational perspective in these areas over the past two years. The third aspect could relate to the perception voiced elsewhere in this project (see the Focus Group section below) that HSE is expecting intermediaries to do its work. This echoes a similar sentiment that was expressed by the TEC Health & Safety Advisors interviewed in the 1997 research. This is an issue that needs surfacing by FOD in its discussion with intermediaries, if the relationship is to be sincere and open.

3.3.10 Although results from a small sample such as this should be treated with caution, the groupings and inferences above show the areas where the FOD/Intermediaries’ relationship appears strongest, where progress has been made over the past two years and where scope for further development exists.

3.3.11 The RF work also posited the following views. These were also carried forward into the Focus Group element of the study for further investigation.

- Care for individuals appears to be a growing concern for employers.
- There is a difference in expectation of response times (to enquiries etc.) between FOD and intermediaries. Intermediaries expect a quicker response to queries (2-3 days) than does FOD (one week).
- Intermediaries are more concerned about maintaining continuity with particular individuals within a relationship, than FOD staff appear to be.
- Emerging media and information channels (CD-ROM, Infoline, the HSE web site) are used and favoured increasingly.
- Intermediaries are seeing the ‘purpose of the relationship’ to be of growing importance.
3.4 Focus Groups with Intermediaries and the HSE

The four Focus Groups (two with FOD staff, two with representatives of intermediary organisations), undertaken in autumn 2000, enabled the further exploration of views and data. The main points emanating from the Focus Groups are as follows.

3.4.1 The Focus Groups held with intermediary organisation representatives supported the view expressed in section 3.3 above that the actual multipliers that apply to intermediaries’ relationships with small firms are higher than can be confirmed by the RF survey’s assessment. The discussions revealed that most, typically, had relationships with 50 to 100 SMEs, whilst some (particularly, colleges and local authorities) had more than this. A cautionary note should be sounded when considering this data, which is that the strength of relationships suffers as the number of relationships that an individual organisation, department or staff member has to handle increases.

3.4.2 There is a need to manage expectations. The RF survey revealed the difference in expectations of response time between intermediaries and FOD. Intermediaries expect a quicker service than FOD views it should give. FOD is able to explain why it can need more than the desired 2-3 days to give a response. Factors like the FOD officer being away from his/her desk for several days in a row, and particular questions/suggestions needing the input of more than one member of the organisation lengthen response time. There is little that can be done in the short term to reduce the response time. The action required of both parties in the relationship is to define what constitute sensible (reasonable) response times on the part of FOD and the reasons behind them. Where new relationships are developed agreement on this issue at the outset will help to prevent frustration and misunderstanding (on both sides) developing.

3.4.3 The transmission of messages from the HSE and the receipt of messages by HSE take place through different channels. Relationships are based on exchange. This project sought to help FOD use relationships with intermediaries as the conduit not only for transmitting information about health and safety but also for receiving it and, thereby, learning about the SME environment such that it could continue to develop and enhance its approach to this sector. This remains a critical part of the underpinning rationale for the work. Its implementation needs to take into account two key issues.

3.4.4 Firstly, relationships are based on mutual benefit. The main beneficiary of the simultaneous transmission of health and safety information and reception of intelligence on the ‘state of the
market’ is the HSE rather than the intermediary. FOD needs to ensure that intermediaries gain from the relationship in order that it remains sustainable. This comment is made in the context that many intermediaries are concerned that they are expected ‘to do HSE’s job’ by participating in the intermediaries’ project. The relationship needs to be established at the mutually beneficial transactional level before FOD can really hope to gain from the longer term benefits of being able to broadcast a message to the market and learn from the market.

3.4.5 The Focus Group discussion explored the benefits to both parties at a transactional level. This showed the benefits to the HSE as:

- intermediaries gaining access to information/expertise and getting free advice;
- intermediaries gaining the credibility in the information that they report back to businesses;
- intermediaries gaining support in their work around health and safety with SMEs;

and for the Intermediary:

- correct information that helps the client build a sustainable business and enhances the intermediary’s reputation and standing as sources of Health & Safety knowledge and expertise with client SMEs;
- helping intermediaries resolve health and safety problems for businesses;
- comfort/satisfaction on the part of the intermediary that the businesses are safe environments for placements.

3.4.6 There was no mention about HSE being providers of funding to intermediaries for the promotion of the Health & Safety message. However, it is implicit in the above that, as the driver of the relationship, FOD will need to put more effort into the success of the relationships than intermediaries. One point of detail is the potential power of FOD (and HSE) to give formal recognition of some sort to those intermediaries that are involved in this type of work.

3.4.7 The second issue is the realisation of HSE’s ‘listening ability’ at regional and local levels with respect to small firms, though the mechanisms for this channel remain, arguably, undeveloped. HSE has other mechanisms to keep in touch with the dynamics and needs of the small firms market but these operate at a ‘remote’ national level with little effective connection with the position on the ground for the individual regional players, i.e. FOD officers and the intermediaries themselves. HSE will need to work on its infrastructure for this intermediaries’ route to be able to supplement and/or amend its established information conduits that inform its overall small firms strategy.
3.4.8 There is a need to work beyond the ‘TEC umbrella’. The original structure for the intermediaries’ work was to use the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) as the umbrella organisations under which to develop intermediary relationships. The project has revealed that FOD regions need the flexibility to work outside as well as inside the ‘TEC umbrella’ and configure local solutions, as appropriate. Indeed, in some instances the TEC may not be the most valuable intermediary organisation and in other situations the TEC may choose not to support a particular Health & Safety activity. This finding is valid for the position beyond April 2001 when the TEC network will be superseded by the Learning and Skills Councils and the Small Business Service.

3.4.9 Training providers are the key intermediary. Whereas funding for many training providers comes from TECs, (Learning and Skills Councils from April 2001), the pilot study work suggests that direct approaches to training providers and working outside the immediate TEC/LSC arena will be valuable.

3.4.10 The intermediaries’ activity may be in danger of ‘falling off’ the FOD priority list. This sentiment was expressed by FOD staff themselves. It results from a feeling that there is a conflict between this type of work and the more conventional approach built around inspection visits. Both may be built into the work plan, but FOD staff feel there is greater emphasis placed upon the conventional, inspection based, approach as a result of the higher levels of resource applied to it and the fact that this style is part of FOD’s cultural fabric. The implication is that it will demand more vigilance from FOD management to ensure that intermediaries’ work remains a prioritised activity.

3.4.11 There is a further question (again raised by FOD staff) as to whether one organisation (HSE) is able to encompass both the tangential promotion of health and safety via intermediaries and the more direct (conventional) intervention of inspectors.

3.4.12 Civil litigation is raising health and safety issues for SMEs. This is considered to be the reason behind the RF survey revealing that ‘care for individuals’ is a growing concern for employers. The survey may suggest that this concern is a paternalistic gesture. The Focus Groups suggested it to be more self interested in origin than this. The threat of civil litigation seems to be forcing employers to treat Health & Safety issues more seriously. This helps stimulate audience interest for the Health & Safety message via intermediaries.
3.4.13 Intermediaries like the ‘favourite’ inspector or trusted person. This is the reason that intermediaries place greater emphasis on being able to continue dialogue with a particular individual from FOD, than FOD feels is necessary in the same inter-organisational relationship. There are two reasons for this view. The first is the high value they attach to those individuals within the HSE who are knowledgeable on Health & Safety matters, have good presentation skills (can engage with business practitioners) and are responsive to requests for them to be involved with intermediaries and their clients. Once found, intermediaries gravitate towards such individuals. The second is the recognition that not everyone in FOD is as capable in terms of engaging with business practitioners and can respond as positively to requests.

3.4.14 Small firms are not a homogeneous group and a specific, relevant approach needs to be applied. The initial concept for the pilot project was based on the distinction between smaller enterprises and the (fewer) larger organisations that were more under the direct HSE spotlight. The experience of the pilot project asserts the need for HSE to have the scope to be more specific in the tuning of its Health & Safety message than the general ‘SME’ typology currently applied.

3.4.15 The Focus Groups revealed good practice from intermediaries such that Health & Safety issues from a particular subset of SMEs had been addressed by producing materials for, and giving advice to, those SMEs. This ability to identify clusters of SMEs with similar (or identical) problems is a critical facility that HSE must develop in the short to medium term. In the view of the project consultants this is not possible to achieve by HSE alone; equally it is not impossible if HSE works with third parties.

3.4.16 There is a perceived distance between FOD Headquarters and the ‘field’. This view is reinforced in the roll-out workshops, themselves. This is a distance of perspective rather than geography and centres on the ownership of the intermediaries’ work within FOD. The Focus Group participants from the FOD regions suggested that, despite the involvement of staff from the regions in the design of the intermediary activities and their direct involvement with intermediaries in the pilot, the project ‘belonged’ to FOD SIU. This may also ‘fit’ with the earlier comment about the perceived tension between this style of Health & Safety approach and the more conventional inspection-led method. The key here is for HSE to recognise the management challenges that both these factors give to the roll-out of the intermediaries’ work. The management of the process is particularly important in any organisation seeking to work in a way different to some of its powerfully entrenched values. It bears repeating that the Focus Groups comprised HSE staff from ‘the field’ and not FOD SIU. Thus, the view offered carries this bias. The point here is not a debate over which view is correct but rather how any gaps in understanding can be bridged.
3.4.17 A question exists about how Local Authorities fit into the picture. This is an issue for further discussion. It seems that FOD’s interactions with Local Authorities pose in general terms less of an issue, where local ways of working are arrived at to fit the context. Anecdotally, Local Authority representatives appear in some areas to be seen very much as valued colleagues who are working to achieve similar goals to those of FOD. Whilst this view of a third party would – if applied to intermediaries generally – arguably serve to improve FOD’s interactions with the intermediaries themselves, the project consultants are unaware of the existence and application regionally and locally of policy guidelines on the role of Local Authorities vis à vis that of HSE. More effective interaction with Local Authorities would, it is suggested, enhance the depth and quality of HSE’s information base on intermediaries and small firms.

3.4.18 Persistence in approach is the key to success in working with intermediaries. The better, more effective relationships (and those which could demonstrate tangible engagement with SMEs through the intermediary channels) appear to be the result of pro-activity and persistence by FOD staff. The pilot project work called for the WCOs (and, subsequently, their colleagues) to operate in a sea of ambiguity. At the start of the project the ground rules for intermediary engagement and the determination of the scope of FOD support for any element of intermediary work were unclear. The more effective relationships arose from the ability of the WCOs concerned to tolerate this lack of clarity and direction and shape project work with intermediaries as the project progressed. This experience is particularly relevant to the roll-out of this type of work. Regions are strongly encouraged to choose WCOs and project teams who are tenacious and have the ability to handle ambiguity.

3.4.19 The pilot project work has contributed greatly to understanding the dynamics of the statutory body/intermediary relationship. It has helped to develop and test a range of relationship building approaches with intermediaries. However, this does not mean that one of the outcomes of the pilot is a prescriptive guide to how other regions should develop intermediary relationships. An important part of success in relationship development hinges on the ability of the FOD representative in being able to approach the intermediary and craft a recipe from a ‘clean sheet of paper’. This means being able to work with each intermediary and agree the approach that will work for both parties in that context. Whilst the HSE representative might be able to make some suggestions, offer possibilities and seed ideas, it is important that he or she remains flexible in the dialogue with each intermediary. This links with the above point and places the emphasis on FOD regions identifying and supporting WCOs with well developed interpersonal skills and a maturity of outlook, the latter being based upon a strategic understanding of what HSE through FOD is trying to achieve.
3.5 Roll-Out workshops

This element of the pilot project evaluation draws on the consultants’ participation in the three roll-out workshops staged by FOD SIU in early June 2000 for the benefit of the HSE regions going on to become involved in this type of intermediaries work.

3.5.1 Presentation to attendees by FOD SIU of the intermediaries’ project itself and plans for roll-out included a detailed statement of the key drivers supporting this initiative at governmental, HSC/E and FOD levels. To this was added confirmation of the support to the initiative that the DFO Forum in December 1999 had given in terms of its identification of the staffing resources to be committed by participating regions. A modest contact programme for 2000/2001 was outlined, together with a matching budget of just over £40k for which regions could submit bids for activities tied to activities with intermediaries.

3.5.2 Despite the clarity of the information given, the reaction of certain FOD senior managers present indicated a number of key issues and problems requiring thought and resolution.

3.5.3 The distance between FOD Headquarters and their field colleagues noted also in the Focus Groups was very evident and again this relates to a difference in perspective between FOD Headquarters and those within HSE active at an operational level with Health & Safety practice. This distance should not be seen as a function of personalities nor indeed of the relative positions within FOD of FOD SIU and the regional field staff. The phenomenon applies, it is suggested, to a broader divide between “headquarters” and “non-headquarters” personnel.

3.5.4 Looking across the organisation as a whole, it is clear that as the Health & Safety Executive (our italics) the culture of HSE is very much focused on field activity. This is reflected in the organisation’s work plan priorities, its appraisal and reward systems and, indeed, in the paths to promotion and advancement within HSE. This in turn brings with it further implications.

3.5.5 Familiarity with the intermediaries’ project on the part of attendees appeared to be at a low level; ‘ownership’ of it (commitment to it) even lower. It is significant that a project, that had been in operation for almost two years and which had backing at senior levels within HSE/C, was largely unknown. The impression gained by the project consultants was that this project was taken by field staff as the latest in a line of initiatives “from the centre” that added to the workload of the officers concerned, rather than alleviating it, since it did not appear to be in line with the priorities that they were pursuing – and were being assessed against. It is relevant at this point to recall a key finding from the 1997 research that examination of project and other work within FOD over
the previous six years had revealed “islands of activity” which is to say valuable project work and other initiatives, the results of which had not been communicated across FOD.

3.5.6 This lack of awareness on the part of field staff can be argued to stem from a variety of causes. These include a lack of communication per se about the activities involved but perhaps, principally, the high level of workload and pressures that all field staff have to manage and the phasing (timing) of this work. This second factor, arguably, accounts for the degree of ‘insulation’ that exists between different groupings within HSE, whether those groupings are defined organisationally (functionally) or geographically (regionally).

3.5.7 Added to the workload level issue is that of the pressures evident upon senior FOD managers that come from government and, in so doing, force an abrupt change in particular work plans. During the course of the roll-out workshop programme one senior FOD manager intimated that adverse accident statistics in a given sector and the attendant publicity could provoke very direct ministerial pressure for action by FOD with the consequence that one or more new initiatives could be removed immediately from the list of priority actions.

3.5.8 There is a major difference between pilot and roll-out phases for the role of FOD SIU. Within the pilot work, the project was owned by FOD SIU and, although the psychological distance between the ‘centre’ and the ‘field’ was in evidence, FOD SIU committed substantial resource to shaping, managing and evaluating the work and in involving a small cadre of FOD field staff. Post roll-out, the role of FOD SIU is clear in the sense that it will evaluate bids for the money available and that Heads of Operations are required to report to FOD SIU on intermediary-related activities in 2000/1. What is unclear, from the consultants’ viewpoint, is fourfold:

- how effective FOD SIU can be in acting as the central managing co-ordinator during the roll-out phase; (the project consultants see this psychological gap as a characteristic to be managed rather than a barrier to the continued inclusion of a central body in the project governance;)
- the appropriateness of the criteria set for evaluating bids for funding in 2000/1;
- the provision for learning by HSE as an organisation from these activities about the needs and realities of intermediaries (and small firms); HSE (FOD) has not developed adequate mechanisms and procedures at local and regional levels to facilitate the reception of, and response to, messages coming via intermediary organisations from and about small companies and the needs of those companies in respect of information and advice on Health & Safety; this is a key requirement.
- how the intelligence from such lessons can be acted upon.
We return to these issues under “Conclusions and Recommendations” below.

3.5.9 There is a role for a central/planning group. This relates to the point made above. Whilst some of the regions and those within them have good experience of (and evidence of impact through) working with intermediaries, others are approaching this work from a similar position, organisationally and in knowledge terms, to the pilot study areas two and a half years ago. There is a need for a body to help disseminate learning, to communicate good practice and to encourage effort in this line of activity.

3.5.10 There is a clear (and difficult) question about how this project fits in practice with other operational priorities. The roll-out workshops vocalised the perceived tension between this style of work and the more traditional inspection-led approach. As the latter is the more dominant element of the work plan, the former is considered vulnerable.

3.5.11 The need for any ‘model’ of interaction with intermediaries to cope with changing environments. This point was addressed at the changes in the structure of the TEC networks. Earlier in this report it is noted that effective working with intermediaries is less dependent on the ‘TEC umbrella’ than originally thought. The roll-out workshops supported the view that regions should be encouraged to develop local solutions to mirror the intricacies of their own contexts.

3.5.12 There is a question over the sustainability of the project. This relates to questions about the preparedness of FOD to fund this activity for more than a pilot period as well as the internal and external pressures that exist on FOD staff noted above. Those with experience of intermediary-oriented work recognise the relatively long payback times involved. They also understand the negative implications of addressing this work on a stop-start basis.

3.6 Project Board and Project Planning Group; Project’s impact

The final source of information flowing into the evaluation process comprised the views and experiences of those involved in the Project Board and Project Planning Group meetings. The data focused on three areas, the performance of the Project Board, the performance of the project Planning Group, and the Project’s impact.
Issues surrounding the Project Board

3.6.1 The Project Board met periodically and was primarily concerned with the overall governance of the project and its compliance with FOD and HSE protocols for project management. Project Board meetings should have focused more on strategic issues – both internally within HSE and externally rather than the detailed management of the project itself. This is not necessarily the fault of the individuals concerned since the Project Board approach follows accepted project management doctrine. The key here is that the remit of the Project Board fell short of formal recognition of the importance of ‘selling’ the project to FOD more generally. Given that this project (perhaps like others initiated within FOD in the past) marked a potential break from, or change to, the prevailing culture within FOD and HSE (i.e. achieving compliance through inspection and enforcement), the project needed the Board to have engaged in a ‘promotion initiative’ at senior level from the beginning to explain the rationale for the project, disseminate and invite discussion of the work being undertaken and results identified.

3.6.2 The Board was unable to drive project activity and maintain momentum between meetings. The meetings, themselves, tended to be the catalysts for action, rather than the vehicle via which actions and results were reported. Whilst this is often the case, especially where the implementation of new ideas is concerned, it suggests the pilot work may have been too casually configured/managed at a local level.

3.6.3 A question has to be raised over the commitment of certain FOD senior managers to the project. This was evident by the presence (or lack of it) on the part of the individuals themselves, but also that of more junior staff at the meetings and the nature of the senior managers’ contributions when present. In the defence of those involved it has to be noted that this work represented a minority responsibility.

Contribution from the Project Board

3.6.4 The Project Board proved valuable in pulling together the full picture of the project. The preceding points indicate areas for potential improvement in the project’s governance. This view expressed by Project Board members reinforces the value of regular Project Board meetings. Only two FOD regions were involved in the pilot work. FOD SIU was the third party. Substantial effort was committed to structured co-ordination and communication between only three interested parties within FOD on the basis of what was regarded by all parties concerned as valuable activity. The implication for FOD is that the tasks of co-ordination and communication
become both more important and (much) more difficult when more FOD regions are involved post roll-out and where the unanimity and sharing of goals evident within the Project Board members cannot be taken as given.

3.6.5 The Project Board played a valuable role in identifying the main targets and potential (i.e. the multipliers). Although the meetings are seen as having contributed well to keeping the focus of the work, the Project Board is, however, considered by the project consultants to have given insufficient attention to developing strategies for the intermediaries’ work. This may be a consequence of the Group’s project management role; nevertheless the question this poses to FOD is how it aims to reinforce this focus as the roll-out progresses.

3.6.6 The Project Board was able to provide weight behind the work, to support and promote it. This was, however, confined largely to lobbying for resources, a valuable but restricted role.

Issues surrounding the Project Planning Group

3.6.7 In the context of the Project Planning Group itself questions must be posed about the ability of FOD to field an adequate team from the London East TEC area. As with the project more generally (see above), these centre on the extent of the team, its continuity and commitment. The differences in FOD’s effectiveness in the Norfolk and Waveney TEC area and that in the London East TEC area can be largely or wholly attributed to this.

3.6.8 The Project Planning Group (as opposed to the Project Board itself) needed to be clearer on the co-option of new members. This became an issue as the project team as a whole sought to strengthen the regional teams and to replace some team members as those individuals moved on. The learning point here is the need to ensure that sufficient effort is made to minimise the attendant difficulties when the constitution of teams changes in future projects.

Project Planning Group Strengths

3.6.9 The emergence of the Project Planning Group was vital to the work achieved in both development areas. Its existence helped to legitimise a new (and for some Group members a fringe) activity. It provided the forum for the sharing and injection of new ideas and the encouragement of endeavour in both pilot areas. The Group’s main strength was that it was operationally focused, i.e. that it was concerned with the practicalities of how intermediary relationships would be developed.
Project Impact – disappointments

3.6.10 FOD project participants felt there to be general lack of wider interest in the project. Linked to this is the perception of the general difficulty of changing ingrained perceptions about the way in which HSE operates. This again mirrors sentiments offered through other data sources.

Project Impact – accomplishments

3.6.11 FOD Project Board and Planning Group members evaluated the two year pilot against the PID outcomes. Overall, the project rated strongly on its ability to meet desired outcomes. However, the achievement of outcomes was not uniform across the five described in the PID. Below is the order (in declining order of perceived achievement) of the strength of the project’s outcomes – the numerical scores show the assimilation of views on a scale of 1-5 – 1 indicating little or no achievement, 5 representing full achievement.

- A more clearly defined role for WCO teams in this context, including identification/development needs. (4)
- A clear and objective assessment of the value of such a strategy nationally. (3.75)
- A body of skills, knowledge and systems in HSE for developing relationships with intermediaries, for servicing them and for using information gathered. (3.5)
- An ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring Health & Safety information in small firms as a result. (3.25)
- An increase in the number of small firms who have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries (2.75); but please note our comments under 2.5 above).

3.6.12 The FOD project team members also felt that the project showed what it is possible to achieve with engaged WCO staff.

3.6.13 The team also felt that the project helped raise awareness within FOD of the potential impact of this method. This sentiment embraces positive aspects about the close project working between WCOs, inspectors and other staff that can result.

Please see the commentary in Appendix 1 on evaluation.
4. Theoretical perspectives

Central to the achievement of change in organisations’ ways of working and to the change process itself is the presentation and discussion of the key theoretical perspectives that inform thinking behind the implementation of these processes. For this reason the project consultants introduce at this stage of the report, rather than in an appendix, two critical areas that merit attention in the evaluation of this pilot project. The first is Relationship Marketing, the second, Change Management.

4.1 Relationship Marketing

4.1.1 As noted in the introduction, relationship development was seen as a key element in the FOD Intermediaries’ project. The concept of Relationship Marketing was seen to have potential relevance to the process of such development. A brief reprise of some of its key elements is appropriate here. These are:

- “establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges” (Morgan and Hunt*);
- a distinction between “customers” (whether intermediaries or small firms) in terms of the importance and depth of the relationship involved;
- recognition that these customers have a choice and that not all customers want a relationship; in the Health & Safety context, statutory obligations exist for both intermediaries and small (indeed, all firms), which is not to say that they are obliged to develop a relationship as such with HSE;
- “history” and intelligence on customers is a requisite for developing a relationship that meets that customer’s needs;
- internal communication within the organisation wishing to pursue such an approach (i.e. HSE) is critical; this relates to the bullet points immediately above and below;
- “…. Knowing your customers – the way they behave, what their needs are and what motivates them ….” (Kiernan**);
- relationship development requires competencies, skills and resources in the organisation concerned (i.e. HSE);
- relationships of any kind necessitate two way communication;
- such relationships (and their building) are essentially long-term in character and not susceptible to variation; put another way, if you begin such a relationship you must continue it.
4.1.2 In terms of relationship development progress in the first year of the project can be seen particularly through the initiation (stimulation) of activities and events at which FOD and one or more intermediaries could “share a platform” – with the goal of contacting small firms. Whilst clearly beneficial, what was absent was the expression of an overall “contact strategy” with those intermediaries – one of the key objectives of the second year plan.

4.1.3 More simply stated, how should FOD and its staff view their interactions with intermediaries?

4.1.4 The key word here, it was suggested, is “service”. This does not, of itself preclude legal enforcement, where required, as the experience of other public and private bodies (in the latter case, the utilities) demonstrates. The model proposed in year 2 of the project (based upon work by Gummesson***) required FOD and HSE to consider the key intermediaries as customers or clients to whom it can provide a service. That service can comprise a range of actions including:

- information provision;
- expert input at workshops and other events;
- joint sponsorship of events;
- participation in regional health & safety groupings;
- a ‘listening facility’ that takes messages back about intermediaries’ (and small firms’) needs and concerns;
- a corresponding ‘response facility’ to engage intermediaries and, through them, SMEs in an on-going dialogue.

4.1.5 The list is not meant to be definitive. Neither should it hold any surprises. The Relationship Marketing model, which represented one of the departure points for the intermediaries’ project, had always implied a service mentality. What then was different about this approach?

4.1.6 The answer to that question is threefold:

- The adoption of a clear service mentality (philosophy) towards intermediaries gives a clear strategic direction to FOD’s activities in this regard. It could serve to eliminate the ambivalence that exists amongst some HSE staff as to the relative positions of HSE and the intermediary network and the value of any resulting relationship/interaction. From FOD’s point of view the establishment of a strategic direction would serve also to provide a very necessary framework for the regional actions with intermediaries that remain largely at an initial stage of development.
Beyond these considerations, the service mentality would require FOD (and HSE) to engage in a very different way with intermediaries from that currently. The 1997 research, referred to elsewhere in this report, noted that the organisation engaged in a wide variety of valuable activities in respect of intermediaries but did not effectively communicate the lessons learned, nor did it learn as an organisation as a result.

- In a similar way, relationships with intermediaries appear to date to have been a function of person-to-person contacts with little organisational involvement or ownership (“individual capital” in Relationship Marketing terms). The proposal made was that HSE, as a service organisation, should move to develop what is deemed “structural capital”. In this way relationships are established by the organisation as such and are tied inter alia to organisational culture, systems, and the “network” to which it belongs.

4.1.7 The implication for HSE is that, if it is to adopt an effective service approach, the philosophy must be embedded in the organisation’s overall mission statement and be implemented fully through its systems, procedures and internal relationships.

4.1.8 The embracing of a service mentality brings with it the requirement that a service provider defines its relationships with its customers very clearly in terms of the structure of its contacts with customers. This structure, in turn, informs the types of competences needed by the organisation’s personnel to maintain those relationships. We have addressed the issue of staff competences earlier in this report.

4.1.9 Three connected levels of relationship are argued as being needed. These may be defined as:

**Policy**: where contacts are made and maintained between intermediary bodies and the senior managerial staff of individual intermediaries – by equivalent staff in HSE. These would involve senior central and regional HSE staff.

**Relationship development/practice**: this would comprise the contacts between Health & Safety specialists in regional and local intermediaries and the regional co-ordinator, (inspectors) and the WCO.

**Internal**: involving key staff: the national regional senior HSE managers and WCOs. The aim of this type of relationship is to ensure that information about the FOD’s relationships and activities with intermediaries are communicated and developed **within** the HSE organisation.
4.1.10 It allows HSE to develop a policy towards intermediaries in which criteria for success can be identified. As a starting point those criteria should, it is argued, include:

- A measure of “increased (prolonged) customer retention and duration”, thereby lowering marketing (communication) costs; the adage that in commercial terms maintenance of existing customers is much less costly than attracting new ones, can be translated into an HSE context where the maintenance of effective relationships is less costly (by a number of measures) than rebuilding failed, dysfunctional relationships. It should be borne in mind that for the HSE and the Intermediaries the relationship is effectively “for life”.

- A measure or measures of value derived from the relationship. The proposition is of the “win-win” type. Thus, since all parties “co-produce value”, those measures need to be identified and applied regularly. In this connection the work of The Relationships Foundation (RF) provides a starting point but further refinement is needed.

- A measure of initiatives taken by each partner. A service relationship implies that interaction is “on equal and respectful terms”. Equally, long-term service customers can become better “co-producers”.

- A measure of knowledge held by HSE about its intermediary customers. The use of FOCUS to record contact and other details represents some form of starting point, but HSE needs to decide what information about its relationships with intermediaries is important, how quickly that information is to be collected and how best to record and disseminate it internally. FOCUS – as currently configured – is not in the view of the project consultants appropriate. We recognise the resource and organisational implications of this statement.

- A measure of the volume of messages and nature of the information coming from intermediaries into HSE and the responses of HSE to those messages.

- A measure of the effectiveness of the vital internal relationships – as evidenced by information exchange and organisational learning and understanding about the intermediary ‘customer’.
4.2 Change Management

4.2.1 The second of the two conceptual inputs to the project is change management. Despite the commentary below, it is accurate to state that the project consultants only determined change management as a significant issue for this pilot project once the project was well underway. This was the result of a reflection on why the accomplishments of the project began to fall below the aspirations of the project’s champions.

4.2.2 The change management literature is replete with case studies of organisations undergoing change, models for analysing change, and recommendations for the management of the process. Stripped of contextual specificity, the essence of the message is relatively uncomplicated. Two particular change management perspectives aid the evaluation of the pilot project and guidance for its subsequent roll-out.

4.2.3 The first is the consideration of an organisation’s momentum, and the impediment that this creates to change. The momentum may be in the form of working practices, and embedded systems within the organisation. Some systems and procedures, as examples of ‘hard’ characteristics may be altered reasonably readily. Others, the less tangible, (the so-called ‘soft’ aspects) are often harder to change. The latter are more connected with the mindsets of those individuals working in the organisation, such views being conditioned by years of custom and practice, and the nature of those individuals attracted to the particular working environment.

4.2.4 It is often valuable to introduce the ‘transition curve’ view of how people react to non-discretionary change. This diagram is at Appendix 4. The key point for the HSE is that people demonstrate the ability to give ‘lip service’ to change, by appearing to take the full import of the change on board, yet maintaining an affinity for the pre-change era. They disguise this reluctance to shift by an apparent increase in activity following the initial ‘shock’ of the change. People in this state are deemed to be in ‘denial’ mode.

4.2.5 The second is the list of areas HSE is advised to manage in order to help the transition to newer or different working practices. This includes its work with intermediary organisations, but has applicability beyond this.

- clarity about the objective. This means making sure all involved are clear on the purpose of the work. This involves reminding people as the project progresses and taking steps to make sure anyone joining the team becomes aware of the project’s aim.
- **institutionalising the process.** Processes that are integrated within the fabric of organisations are more enduring. New working procedures should quickly be formalised and embraced as part of the organisation’s custom and practice.

- **rewarding of desired behaviour.** This is an essential aspect concerning the motivation of individuals within organisations. It is especially important in situations where there might be conflicting priorities. Managers need to examine the organisation’s reward systems to help ensure that encouragement is in line with the behaviours desired of those working in it. It is important to move beyond the fiscal interpretation of the term ‘reward’. Rewards can be in the form of status, peer group membership, job content, praise.

- **effective and regularly communication.** Ensuring issues relating to new work are communicated to team members, and beyond the team to the people in the immediate environment.

- **promotion of culture champions.** Looking to give greater responsibility and involvement to people who have the qualities to champion the new cause.

- **marginalisation of laggards, the converse of the champions.** In particular, being aware of the restraint that a ‘non-convert’ in the team may impose.

- **provision of training, coaching and support.** Beyond the issue of communication, working to provide support to those involved in pioneering approaches. Being prepared to offer this on a continual basis to help bolster confidence and prevent personal regression.

- **praising and celebrating success.** Finding ways for the project team to recognise ‘wins’, and ‘enabling’ these so that they may be celebrated in an inclusive manner.

- **recruitment of new people in the image of the new culture.** Having identified the template for successful/effective project team members, seek that others joining the team are in this image.

**4.2.6** A reflection on the two years of pilot study work shows the vulnerabilities of the project in change management terms. Such sentiments are expressed fully in the previous section on research findings. There is, however, a positive message to take from which this is that the achievements of the intermediaries’ pilot project were realised without the deliberate intervention of the project team from a change management perspective.
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Context

5.1.1 This section provides the project consultants’ broader conclusions on the project itself against the project deliverables and PID outcomes. It continues by reflecting upon the implications for FOD of the roll-out of this work, other initiatives with intermediaries and, more generally, on the pilot project process within FOD.

5.1.2 The section has two main parts. The first is a comment on the project’s performance against the expected outcomes for the PID (see section 2.3.) and its deliverables (see section 2.4). The second is a summary of recommendations.

5.2 Evaluation of the Project

Deliverables

5.2.1 This comments on the project’s ability to achieve the deliverables set.

5.2.2 The activities and outputs for the project - as amended during the early stages of the project (see sections 2 and 3) have been accomplished. Those that were germane to the consultancy input (i.e. all except internal FOD reporting procedures) have been embraced within this report.

PID Outcomes

5.2.3 The FOD project team evaluated the project performance against the five PID outcomes. Overall, the consultants feel their scores gave a fair reflection of the project’s achievements.

5.2.4 Progress overall can be deemed to be encouraging. It is, clearly, stronger in the more readily influenced areas (as noted in the discussion on performance indicators in Appendix 1). That said, the project consultants are concerned that such progress could be reversed or lost if the way of working with intermediaries proposed is not brought into the mainstream of FOD activity, appropriately resourced and ‘championed’ at senior level.
5.2.5 A more clearly defined role for WCO teams… including identification of training/development needs. The project gives clear guidance on the roles of WCOs and other FOD staff within intermediaries’ teams. The learning gained by the two WCOs during the course of the pilot project was supplemented by structured input on communication techniques. This aspect gained the highest rating of the five PID outcomes. This is an accurate assessment. The project consultants note again here that training and development undertaken represented the start of the process only. FOD itself will need to reflect upon the training and development needs identified through the national roll-out of the intermediaries’ programme for all staff.

5.2.6 A clear and objective assessment of the value of such a strategy nationally. This is the strongest outcome in the overall assessment of the project. It could be argued that the national roll-out programme itself supports the view that this strategy has been demonstrated to be of value. To take this view would, however, be to beg the question. The consultants feel that the project has met this outcome to a reasonable degree. Further research around this objective would involve devoting more than two years to a longitudinal study and perhaps comparing this method with other methods of engagement (for example, direct marketing). The biggest contribution of the project around this outcome is the understanding of how this approach can work within the HSE context.

5.2.7 A body of skills, knowledge and systems in FOD for developing relationships with intermediaries, for servicing them and for using information gathered. This third outcome has been achieved to a reasonable degree. The knowledge gained in the project is the strongest element within this outcome. Some, but not all of the knowledge, has been translated into skills and systems. However, substantially more work remains to be done in the development of systems and procedures (especially in respect of the contact database and overall project information sharing/project governance post roll-out). A systems and procedures view of what needs still to be done is not, however, adequate in itself to ensure the success of the approach proposed and piloted in this project.

5.2.8 The consultants’ reflections on the questions of Relationship Marketing and Change Management in section 4 of this report are designed to prompt thought and action about the mindset (philosophy) needed within FOD to provide the context within which the intermediary approach can work. The ‘correct’ philosophy in isolation from appropriate systems and procedures will be as ineffectual as the implementation of those same systems without any buy-in to the approach that they are designed to support. We return to this issue under 5.3 below.
5.2.9 An ability to demonstrate that a number of intermediaries have become more effective in transferring Health & Safety information to small firms as a result. The project has been able to demonstrate effectiveness in engaging with intermediaries, and as a result information transfer to small firms has begun to be managed via this route. The outcome merits the score assigned, but no higher, due to the short amount of time that this channel of communication has been ‘open’. This is the result of two main factors. The first of these is the length of time that it takes to establish relationships. The second is the impediment to implementation represented by the absence of any ‘enabling budget’ in the first twelve months of the project.

5.2.10 An increase in the number of small firms who have received useful health and safety information through intermediaries. This is the least accomplished of the five. This can be attributed to the factors outlined above. It deserves the lowest score out of the five PID outcomes. However, the score still exceeds a 50% threshold. The momentum to achieve this outcome is in place, especially in the Norfolk and Waveney area.

5.2.11 Overall, the assessment against the PID outcomes reflects the challenge of attempting to achieve far reaching influence (working through one external party to engage with another) from a standing start in a relatively short period of time.

5.2.12 As intimated above, the main legacy of this project is the learning and understanding it facilitates about how the intermediary conduit works in this context. This leads to recommendations to HSE for the roll-out period. These are documented below.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations draw both from the sections outlining the empirical findings from the project and the theoretical (philosophical) perspectives. We address initially two issues that go beyond the project under discussion, i.e. strategic considerations.

5.3.1 The role of HSE/organisational development. The project consultants recognise the very real difficulties faced by FOD in its performance of two linked but at times apparently contradictory roles, i.e. that of information provider and that of legal enforcer in the fields of Health and Safety. This tension is apparent, if not explicitly addressed, in a number of areas of this report. Its impact extends across the organisation’s activities generally and is not confined to this project or, indeed, to any particular initiative.
5.3.2 A model drawn from the field of Relationship Marketing and presented in year 2 of the project suggests that with regard to intermediaries HSE through FOD can - through the development of a service philosophy – reconcile these two roles without compromising its effectiveness in either.

5.3.3 Whether this particular model is taken up in the form presented or not, the project consultants recommend strongly that the issues that it raises be examined and taken forward. The project, equally, has clearly indicated that the issue of organisational change/evolution must be addressed in the short term if HSE is at the very least to retain its effectiveness in the face of adverse pressure on resources available to it. Put more bluntly, the organisation simply cannot continue to operate as it has in the past. The need to impact upon the growing number of small firms in the UK in respect of Health & Safety remains a reality. The HSE’s lack of resource to address it is equally real.

5.3.4 In providing a brief reprise of the key points arising from Change Management, the project consultants are proposing that FOD (and HSE) take on board the implications for the organisation of what is currently happening and that these issues are openly addressed and debated in a strategic fashion.

5.3.5 **Project activity within FOD.** With the knowledge of HSE and FOD gained over the period since 1997 (i.e. from work on the 1997 project and that on which the project consultants are reporting here) has come the recognition of the difficulties facing FOD in introducing into the ‘mainstream’ of FOD activity the knowledge and ideas gained through project activity. In the 1997 report the consultants referred to ‘islands of activity’ within FOD, by which we meant that valuable and effective ideas were being generated, examples of excellent practice were locally available, which could have informed FOD’s approach and activities, but this did not occur because such ideas and examples were not communicated and debated across the organisation and, thereafter, acted upon.

5.3.6 Earlier in this report reference is made to the distance perceived between FOD SIU and their field colleagues. Distance of some degree is inevitable given the very different roles undertaken by these two areas of FOD. FOD SIU must have a degree of freedom to think round questions without being tied to daily operational demands. In respect of project initiation, management and promotion, on which the project consultants can comment, there remains a real concern nevertheless that project activity in its widest sense is not sufficiently legitimised within FOD.
5.3.7 This lack of legitimacy, or perceived value and relevance, works against the development of the organisation’s learning and tends to exclude the ideas generated by project activity from being taken up by field staff. In the case of the project under review here the activities scheduled under the intermediaries’ roll-out programme may effectively drop off the end of the organisation’s priority ‘list’, precisely because they do not accord with the perceived mainstream priorities that the organisation has, and continues to, set itself. Those mainstream priorities are reflected in appraisal and reward systems and criteria, and even in career development paths within the organisation.

5.3.8 The key here is that project activity must be seen to be part of the organisation’s core work, part of its development process. In the case of FOD itself, this argues for clearer ‘location’ of FOD SIU within FOD itself and for its activities to be visible and communicated to field colleagues at all levels. Internal communication and internal promotion are vital, the more so if FOD is to realise the potential represented by the intermediary network to communicate with SMEs.

5.3.9 It is this area that remains a marked weakness within FOD. Substantive participation of field colleagues with project activity should be encouraged and recognised as relevant to FOD’s objectives. One of the recurring themes during this project has been the isolation of the project from the very staff who will be expected to implement its findings. It is not surprising that commitment to the project (‘ownership’ of it) is low when viewed across the board.

Tactical considerations

5.3.10 Again learning from the experience of the two projects, it is evident to the project consultants that FOD would derive greater benefit from its project activity if it addressed three specific areas of project management. These are as follows:

- the provision from the outset of a Project Planning Group in each project whose focus would remain operational to complement the strategic role of the Project Board; by so doing FOD would be able better to ensure the rapid achievement of momentum needed and to identify obstacles to progress and development.

- as noted in Appendix 1, the current expression in the PIDs of ‘outcomes’ represents a mix of short-term outputs and longer term outcomes; it is suggested that adoption of the more rigorous definitions (outputs and outcomes) with relevant timescales attached would serve to sharpen project management.

- resource allocation and total cost identification: in drafting project proposals considerable care and resources are committed to defining the funding need for external consultants; by
contrast, the identification and agreement of the resources needed for work undertaken by FOD itself – either internally or with third parties (intermediaries in this case) – appears to be a much more haphazard affair; the net effect in the most recent of the two projects in which this consultancy team has been involved has been that time and resources were effectively wasted in the project’s first year simply because a comparatively small amount of additional money for work on the part of WCOs could not be authorised.

Issues requiring consideration in the management of the roll-out process.

5.3.11 These are taken from the findings of the pilot project, and emphasised in the roll-out process outlined in the related workshops convened in June 2000:

- the importance of the maintenance of a regional team approach (WCOs, inspectors and senior managers).
- the need for relevant competences within the regional team at all levels – both pre-existing and developed over time.
- the development of practical tools for planning and recording intermediary-related activity.
- to be successful the management process, in rolling out of intermediary-related activity, has, in addition to co-ordinating the activities concerned, to promote and communicate its value and the results achieved; the pilot project’s experience, where only three HSE groups were involved within a cadre of committed individuals, proved this to be difficult; with the national roll-out this difficulty grows exponentially.
- allied to the above point, the need to bridge the perceived gap between FOD SIU and its field colleagues suggests to the project consultants that FOD SIU should co-opt key regional staff – including WCOs, inspectors and senior managers to its central planning group.
- there is a clear need for regions to develop their own strategy in respect of ‘their’ intermediaries; we believe that the often subtle differences that exist between regions are already well understood by particular sections of FOD; the TEC environment (that, arguably, includes Business Links and Chambers of Commerce) was a starting point for the pilot project but should not be seen as the ideal model for such activity; the changes to the above picture brought by the creation of the Learning & Skills Councils and the Small Business Service are a source of complication but also of opportunity to initiate/renew/develop relationships between HSE and the Business Support Network.
- drawing from the pilot project’s understanding of particular sectors, the value of third parties, such as, for example, regional safety groupings in connecting HSE to the Business Support Network should not be lost in the roll-out process.

- continuity in the regional team (and its activities) is vital; this requires development of a clear direction; appropriate resourcing and supportive, involved management; without such involvement (which may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition) the very real danger exists in the consultants’ view that the roll-out exercise will ‘drop off’ the priority list at an early stage.

- the roll-out activity – like the pilot project itself – is critically dependent for its success upon adequate resources being made available swiftly; whilst recognising the constraints under which HSE must work, there are doubts about whether a full national roll-out can be effective with the financial resources allocated thus far for which regions can bid.

- the consultancy team recommends that the following criteria should be used to evaluate whether regions should continue to fund work related to effective relationship development with intermediaries:
  - the effort (time and resources) needed to maintain these;
  - identification of dysfunctional relationships; prioritisation; causes; measures projected to correct these;
  - quality (and number) of initiatives coming from the intermediaries targeted;
  - nature and volume of feedback from intermediaries about small firms’ needs in respect of health and safety;
  - assessment of what HSE, as an organisation, is learning about intermediaries and through them the needs of SMEs.

5.3.12 **Establishment and use of an information system that can record intermediary-related information:** despite the best efforts of FOD staff both within and outside the project group, the FOCUS system simply is not suitable for this purpose. The importance of assimilating knowledge at an organisational level rather than relying on the memories and separate record keeping systems used by individuals, is for the work to avoid dependence on individuals and for FOD to have at its disposal an array of knowledge, readily accessible, that can inform future work. The absence of such a system in FOD is again questioned. The organisation must resolve this issue positively and quickly.

5.3.13 **Monitoring of the roll-out programme.** As matters stand, the project consultants are concerned that effective monitoring of the progress of the roll-out and the necessary reflection on the lessons learned from it may not occur unless it is undertaken by a third party in conjunction with FOD
SIU and their field colleagues. It is, therefore, our final recommendation that FOD engage an external party to address this work. The potential benefit that the roll-out programme represents for FOD (and HSE) as a whole makes this in our view essential.

ACRONYMS LIST

A list of the more common acronyms found in the report may prove useful:

- DFO: Director of Field Operations Forum
- FOD: Field Operations Directorate
- HSE: The Health and Safety Executive
- LSC: Learning and Skills Council
- PID: Project Initiation Document
- RF: Relationships Foundation
- SBS: Small Business Service
- SIU: Strategy and Information Unit
- SME: Small to Medium-sized Enterprise
- TEC: Training and Enterprise Council
- WCO: Workplace Contact Officer

REFERENCE LIST


** “Getting to Know You”. Kiernan, P.; Marketing Week, 11 March 1994

Appendix 1
**Evaluation and Research Methodology**

This appendix explains how the project was evaluated and the research methodology behind the interpretations. It has two main sections:

- sources of data
- evaluation perspectives, interpreting and assimilating data.

### A.1 Sources of data

A.1.1 The evaluation was based around five sources of data. These are:

- pilot project activities and results
- the Relationships Foundation survey work
- Focus Groups
- roll-out workshops
- Project Board and Planning Group feedback.

Each of these is discussed in turn below.

**Pilot Project Activities and Results**

A.1.2 The pilot project embraced activities in two TEC areas, these areas being handled by two separate regions of FOD. Each area was evaluated discretely.

A.1.3 The evaluation took into account the amount of activity with target intermediaries in each area, and the results of that activity. This information was obtained by the following means:

- Quarterly updates on actions and activities by the WCO in each region made to the Project Board and Project Planning Group (the roles of these two groups are discussed below). This reporting was made more structured by the WCO in each region following a pre-agreed format. This is explained more fully below.
Each of the two WCOs recording the development of their network on a ‘spider diagram’, a copy of which forms the penultimate page of this appendix. This showed:
- the presence and nature of relationships between HSE and intermediaries, including how contact had been initiated, i.e. by which organisation (the intermediary or HSE);
- where contact between HSE and the intermediary was inspectorate-led;
- the distinction between intermediaries that had been identified but not approached, those with which contact had been made;
- the existence of connections between intermediaries – either direct or through third party fora such as Regional Safety Groups;
- the ‘multiplier’ that each intermediary was able to provide, this being the number of small firms that the intermediary has contact with, thereby giving an indication of the possible ‘index of magnification’ of impact that is open to the HSE as a result of successfully working with a particular intermediary.

WCOs produced contact and activity plans to facilitate the development of relationships with intermediaries. These plans took the form of detailed ‘diary’ entries of contacts and discussions with intermediary representatives combined with a date chart to permit easy reference by the WCO and colleagues. These plans were updated in accordance with the overall project governance cycle. A page from one of these plans forms the final page of this appendix.

The WCOs logged their contacts with intermediaries onto the HSE contact logging system, FOCUS. As HSE readers will be aware, FOCUS was constructed to store data on the contacts between FOD and firms and ensuing actions, rather than activities with intermediaries.

A.1.4 In addition to the above, the project consultants had regular dialogue with the two WCOs by phone and e-mail. On occasion, the consultants’ involvement included accompanying WCOs to meetings and presentations with intermediaries.
The Relationships Foundation survey work

A.1.5 The HSE commissioned a charitable organisation, The Relationships Foundation (RF), to assess the presence and strength of relationships between FOD and the target intermediaries.

A.1.6 RF had developed a questionnaire-based relationship assessment instrument. This instrument drew upon research into the qualities of sound relationships in an organisational context. The instrument was modified slightly by FOD, RF and the project consultants to accommodate the inter-organisational perspective, rather than the intra-organisational focus around which the instrument was originally constructed.

A.1.7 The questionnaires were used at the start of the project in the summer of 1998 and again at the end of the project work (summer/autumn 2000) in both TEC areas. This enabled a ‘before and after’ comparison to be made. The questionnaires were sent to individuals identified by the WCOs both in the two FOD areas concerned and in the intermediary organisations. In this way, the RF surveys allowed the project to assess the change in intermediary awareness on the part of FOD over the period of the project as well as to determine the strength of relationships involved.

Focus Groups

A.1.8 The second RF survey permitted the mapping of the development in the interim of relational strength. This was supplemented by further research to explore some of the findings from the RF work in more depth. This was accomplished by running four focus group discussions in the repeated baseline assessment in summer/autumn 2000. Two were conducted in each of the pilot group areas, one with HSE staff involved in the project, and one with relevant personnel from the intermediaries. These groups were externally moderated by experienced focus group facilitators with observers present.

Roll-out workshops

A.1.9 The preliminary findings of the study were sufficiently encouraging to suggest that the intermediaries approach merited extending to other FOD regions. FOD SIU staged three ‘roll-out workshops’ in early June 2000, where representatives from other FOD regions could familiarise themselves with the project objectives and the learning from the pilot study.
A.1.10 These workshops provided the project consultants the opportunity to assess the degree of ‘buy in’ to the project that was evident in other HSE regions and the nature of the concerns that were being voiced by the regions. Data was gathered through the consultants’ attendance at, and participation in, the roll-out workshops.

**Project Board and Project Planning Group**

A.1.11 The governance of the project involved the creation of a Project Board based upon the PRINCE project management approach. Early in the course of the project, the Project Board’s activities were supplemented by the creation of a Project Planning Group. This grouping – comprising a subset of the Project Board membership – was concerned with the operational aspects of the project, whereas the Project Board was focused at a more strategic level on the project overall and also tasked with its representation at a senior level within HSE.

A.1.12 Both groups comprised FOD management and staff drawn from FOD SIU and the two regions, together with the project consultants. The Project Board was chaired by the Band 1 project director and encompassed other inspectorate and administrative grades.

A.1.13 The data from the Project Board and Planning Groups came from two sources. The first was the project consultants’ experiences of the meetings (they participated in all meetings during the project period, these being convened quarterly). The second was a questionnaire designed by FOD SIU, in conjunction with the consultants, which all members of both groups were invited to complete. This questionnaire was administered by the consultants using electronic and conventional media.

**A.2 Perspectives of Evaluation, interpreting data and assimilating understanding**

A.2.1 The Intermediaries project was conducted in accordance with a clear statement of its overall purpose, deliverables and expected outcomes. These are articulated in the project’s PID and project deliverables, as subsequently amended about which the project’s evaluation was principally structured.
A.2.2 In addition to the PID, the project’s evaluation sought to capture other perspectives and learning that might be generated. This evaluation comprised the following perspectives:
- inputs
- activities
- outputs
- outcomes
- FOD SIU
- FOD Regions
- Intermediaries.

A.2.3 These terms are explained below.

- **Inputs** are the resources applied to an activity. This primarily involves know-how, time, and money. Inputs can be assessed in absolute terms (i.e. how much) and on a comparative basis (i.e. how the amount actually applied differed from the planned amount to be allocated).

- **Activities** are the actions and initiatives undertaken within the project. It is a recognition of ‘what people do’. Evaluation of activities considers the activities undertaken as compared with those planned.

- **Outputs** constitute the immediate consequence on the beneficiary group as a result of the activities. Like inputs, these can be considered in absolute terms or on a comparative basis.

- **Outcomes** constitute the eventual (thus, longer term) consequence of outputs. They are a higher order result, often more enduring in nature but taking more time to create.

A.2.4 The position of **FOD SIU**, as initiator of the current project, requires that the project be evaluated from the perspective of this part of the HSE organisation as well as that of the individual **FOD Regions**. These, it is suggested, differ from one another in a number of respects.

A.2.5 The evaluation also needed to consider the perspective of the **intermediaries** in the context of those organisations’ own aims and objectives.

A.2.6 The impact of the project upon each of these three groupings may be considered through the four levels of indicator mentioned above.
A.2.7 Projects aspire to higher order results (i.e. outcomes are considered more valuable than outputs). Enthusiasm for higher order indicators alone in project evaluation needs to be tempered by three factors.

Firstly, it can be difficult to identify and define outcomes precisely. Secondly, there is a time lag between applying inputs and realising outputs. On relatively short timescale projects, such as this, it can be inappropriate to expect changes to be evident at outcome level. Thirdly, the higher the order of indicator, the more susceptible it is to extraneous factors and, thus, the more difficult it becomes on the part of the initiating organisation to filter out these factors and, thus, to assess to what degree a project has of itself produced the outcomes identified.

The five statements in the PID are a blend of outputs and outcomes. They are introduced in the PID under the banner of ‘expected outcomes’. This use of the term outcome is different to that suggested above. The project consultants’ view is that any confusion could be reduced by viewing the expected outcomes in the PID as results.

A.2.8 The project, as reflected in the PID, deliberately excluded any assessment on the small firms themselves. The reasons for this relate to the relatively short time scale for this piece of work, and the difficulties and costs associated with generating meaningful data from indicators that might be available. An illustrative example would be the testing of HSE data on accident reporting from small firms prior to, and following conclusion of, the project. The data derived could be rationalised from several (potentially, contradictory) viewpoints.

A.2.9 An increase in the number of accidents reported by small firms in the period could be argued as showing that the project had had no effect or even a negative impact on health and safety in small firms. Conversely, the proposition could be advanced that increased affinity between small firms and the practice of health and safety as a result of this work had led to an increase in the reporting of accidents that were previously going unrecorded. Neither proposition could be upheld without further and substantial research.

**Broader issues to be taken into account in project evaluation**

A.2.10 The overall findings of this project are based on the assimilation of data from various sources, building blocks that contribute to the overall shape. The importance of the emergent pattern recognises no one data source or element of data to be singly important. Each is subject to error and extraneous factors, which, without obtaining corroboration, render it suspect. However, the
effect of this can be mitigated at the data gathering stage by awareness of six factors around the gathering and interpretation of data. The project consultants took these into account in the development of the insight gained from the pilot project. These factors are:

- How appropriate is the research method being employed to the characteristic being observed?
- How is the inherent bias in the research method accounted for in the data gathering and interpretation?
- How thoroughly has the research been executed and what is the degree of rigour attached to that slant of data generation?
- Is there genuine access to the data? Does the method being used provide an effective route to understanding the factor under investigation?
- Does what the data is saying make sense? If not, why is that element of data at odds with other data?

A.2.11 The above questions, together with the sources from which the data is drawn and the perspectives from which the project was considered, culminate in the findings of the project that are documented in section three.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk &amp; Waveney TEC -</td>
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<td>During initial contact (November 1998), it was suggested that we organise a H&amp;S roadshow located in car park. Other suggestions included improving the flow of leaflets, videos, closer liaison with HSE to share information. Meeting with safety team in March 99 &amp; Barry Tarling to discuss initiatives. Action stalled as result of resource cuts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FISHNET (East Anglian Food Industry Safety and Health Network -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings held on 5/5/99, 29/7/99, 26/8/99, 7/10/99, with seminar held on 15/10/99 (inspector involvement only)</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sought funding for webpage via Dave Smith. £500 agreed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norfolk Intermediaries sub-group -</td>
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<tr>
<td>First meeting held on 16/9/99. General introductory meeting. Need to agree terms of reference before proceeding further. Also agreed to invite other agencies. Next meeting scheduled for 23/11/99 now postponed until 13/1/00. Members include FSB, LA rep, Norwich, Waveney, West Norfolk, East Anglia safety group, Printing Federation, Engineering Employers Federation, Fire Brigade, TEC, training supplier. Meeting on 13/1/00 highlighted need for more precise ToR. Agreed to exchange information ie, address list, draw up list of H&amp;S advice to put in libraries, agreed on exchange of dates for safety group meetings. Next meeting scheduled for April.</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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</table>

✓ Indicates month activity has taken place/due to take place
Appendix 2
FOD INTERMEDIARIES’ PROJECT
TEAM ACTIVITIES

Band 1 Head of Operations
- Appointing staff to team
- Chairing meetings
- Devising annual activity plan
- Regional senior level networking

Band 2
- Project management
- Internal networking
- Framing the programme
- Reporting activity to Central FOD SIU
- Organisation of quarterly team meetings

Band 3
- Delivery at specific intermediary events
- Mentoring of WCO
- Generation of periodic feedback from relationship stakeholders
- Attendance at quarterly team meetings

WCO
- Promotion of communication with intermediaries
- Setting up of related meetings
- Ongoing monitoring of actions and events calendar
- Production and update of spider diagram
- Marketing to support (intermediary-related) events
- General (intermediary-related) events administration
- Provision of feedback from (intermediary-related) events

Central FOD SIU
- Connecting individuals for information exchange; communication of best practice
- Monitoring and evaluation; establishment of evaluation criteria
- Establishment of resource needs and measurement of the impact of intermediary work
- National and policy level networking
- Training – needs identification and resourcing
### HSE FOD Intermediaries' Project

#### HSE Staff Competences

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**Commentary:**

1. Team Building: teams have to be constructed, developed and evaluated.

2. Mechanisms/structures have to be built with intermediaries at the differing levels.

3. Commitment: this schema assumes a point of departure HSE staff committed to the concept of intermediary development.

4. A basic level of competence in all activities is assumed for all staff.

5. "No" does not mean a lack of the relevant competence(s); rather that the exercise of this competence is not required in this context.

6. Central co-ordination could be the role of FOD.

**Key:** + indicates a mentoring role
Appendix 3
HSE INTERMEDIARIES PROJECT

Contact Management System – an outline

These are the suggested fields for an intermediaries contact management database:

- Name of organisation
- Name of contact person
- Role of contact person
- Postal address
- ‘Phone
- Fax
- E-mail
- Relationship history:
  - reason for contact
  - who initiated contact
  - agreed actions
  - planned next contact
- Last date contacted
- Contact cycle (i.e. the schedule to be followed by FOD to optimise relationships with the intermediary concerned; this would be based upon a mutually convenient timetable)
- ‘Multipliers’ (essentially, an area of the contact management system that becomes refined over time in recording the number and type of small companies with which the intermediary works and related intelligence about the needs and requirements of these small firms for help and advice on health & safety)
Appendix 4
The Transition Curve - A Cycle of Change

1. SHOCK
Surprise, in extreme cases panic and 'immobilisation'. Mismatch between expectations and reality.

2. DENIAL that change is necessary.
Retreat/withdrawal 'false' competence, 'Blocking'.

3. AWARENESS that change is necessary.
Understanding own incompetence.

4. ACCEPTANCE of reality.
'Letting go' of past comfortable attitudes.

5. EXPERIMENTATION and testing of new approaches and skills. Practice phase, trying to do things differently. Feedback or results, success and failure.

6. SEARCH for meaning.
Understanding reasons for success and failure. New models/personal theories created.

7. INTEGRATION of new skills and behaviour.
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