



“Your strengths are adaptability, clear thinking, working to tight timescales, being responsive to changing situations, excellent reporting”

Department for Education and Skills

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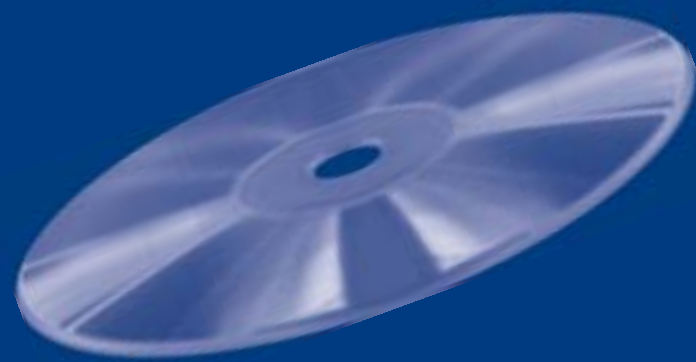
Beyond consultancy



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A fresh perspective can help set the right course

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What we do

“60% of our work comes from repeat business”

Specialist management consultancy **Rocket Science** has really taken off since its launch in 2001. Now a team of 20, we have offices in London and Edinburgh and work across the UK on national policy development and frontline service delivery. We can bring fresh perspectives and effective solutions to your organisation based on wide experience and an understanding of both the direction of policy making and the realities of the front line.

The main themes that underpin our work are **improving performance, facilitating and delivering change, and helping people and organisations learn from each other.**

When Rocket Science was founded, we were determined to create a company that offered clients more than just outstanding consultancy support. We wanted to offer practical tools and effective events to help clients improve their performance and, where necessary, support change. We wanted to help them make things happen. Our clients tell us that we do.

Our strengths lie in our knowledge and experience, our range of contacts, our professional judgement and our disciplined approach. We make sure that we really understand our clients' needs, and develop bespoke solutions just for them. Our clients appreciate our creativity and practicality, telling us that our benchmarking and performance improvement products set us apart from other consultancies.

Our clients include:

- **National** organisations such as the National Employment Panel, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive
- **Regional** organisations such as the London Development Agency, One North East, local Learning and Skills Councils and the Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland
- **Local** organisations such as local authorities, Glasgow's Local Development Companies and Councils for Voluntary Service
- Frontline **projects and initiatives** including ChangeUp, Futurebuilders, Centres of Excellence, labour market intermediaries and other community based projects.
- **Partnerships** including the Newcastle Partnership, other local strategic partnerships in England and community planning partnerships in Scotland.

Areas of expertise

We don't try to be good at everything: we focus on specific areas of expertise and we're straightforward about where we can help. First and foremost, we are consultants. We have developed our tools in response to real needs we have identified in working with clients – and our clients tell us that these have great value as part of our wider consultancy support.

We focus on seven specific areas of knowledge and practice:

- welfare to work and workforce development
- learning and skills
- economic development and regeneration
- youth issues
- the social economy
- funding models and structures
- supporting partnerships and managing networks

Examples of our experience:

Welfare to work and workforce development

We have:

- evaluated a wide range of labour market intermediaries and produced strategies for enhanced networking and collaboration
- chaired the Interventions Workstream of the Employability Framework for Scotland
- worked with local partners to produce the Access to Employment Strategy for Tower Hamlets
- worked with ONE North East and its partners in developing an employability framework for North East England

Learning and skills

We have:

- made a major contribution to the production of the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) for London and the work of the Regional Skills Partnership
- developed a Skills and Employment Action Plan for the London Gateway Agency to focus its investment alongside partners in the Thames Gateway
- carried out a comprehensive review of in-work skills and learning for the Forth Valley Local Economic Forum
- reviewed the role of regional skills development managers for ONE North East and their partners

Economic development and regeneration

We have:

- provided consultancy support to the delivery of the Lewisham Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- worked with the London Development Agency (LDA) to design, facilitate and report on an Olympic peer review workshop, and we also liaised with the other eight regional development agencies to prepare a report on the "Live, Work and Visit" benefits of London's hosting the Games.
- supported Regen WM with the design, field work and reporting on a study to identify how to attract young people to careers in regeneration
- reviewed the SRB6 Partnership for Change in Newcastle

Youth issues

We have:

- evaluated the Carnegie UK Trust's Young People's Initiative
- designed and implemented a programme to support a youth editorial board in producing a young peoples' edition of the Scottish Executive's mental health magazine 'Well?'
- produced a youth justice strategy for East Dunbartonshire Council and helped them implement it
- designed and facilitated planning sessions for staff working on a children, young people and families agenda at Government Office North East

The social economy

We have:

- researched and drafted the first ever Social Enterprise Support Strategy for London for Business Link for London
- carried out a client and stakeholder survey for Forward Scotland, Scotland's leading third sector organisation for sustainability
- carried out the annual review of CEiS (the UK's largest social economy development organisation) for the last two years
- reviewed the role, structure and performance of the executive committee of Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector

Funding models and structures

We have:

- worked with the London Development Agency to design and implement the LDA Opportunities Fund framework from funding prospectus through project selection and moderation to project management
- designed and implemented a process for allocating grant funding for the centres of excellence in the North East, East Midlands and East of England to deliver efficiency gains in local government
- worked with the Big Lottery Fund funders' forum for Scotland to help them forge a stronger strategic alignment between key funders
- helped the East of England Development Agency to create a strategic framework for Community Development Finance Institutions in the East of England

Supporting partnerships and managing networks

We have:

- carried out the interim evaluation of all the UK's Employment Zone partnerships
- reviewed Partnership by Design for Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire and subsequently developed a suite of other tools around it to help SED become more demanding and rigorous in its partnership roles
- reviewed the measurement of partnership benefit for Scottish Enterprise and developed partnership guidance for Communities Scotland and the Improvement Service
- worked closely with the Newcastle Partnership Board to help them focus on the strategic areas where they can make the most difference

We can:

- design and facilitate workshops, events and conferences
- help measure and improve organisational performance, including effective procurement
- design, manage, review and evaluate projects and programmes
- formulate and review strategies
- design and support effective community engagement
- carry out stakeholder surveys
- advise on effective integration of service around the needs of clients
- advise on the co-design of services with your clients
- analyse policy and direction of travel
- develop future scenarios

Why work with Rocket Science?



We work closely with you to make sure that you get the right result. We start by making sure we really understand the job you need to do. We spend a lot of time at the beginning of an assignment listening to you, making sure that what we intend to do, and the way that we are going to do it, will help you achieve your objectives.

We offer:

- a complete service that goes beyond consultancy, supporting clients through implementation
- a process that reaches hearts and minds and doesn't just generate reports
- a focus on performance improvement by providing objective, practical and realistic recommendations
- thorough research and evaluation involving a mixture of techniques that capture not only quantitative information, but also perceptions, aspirations, ideas and insights
- a strong focus on learning and sharing and helping people and organisations to learn from each other
- a kit of tools which help clients measure, benchmark, and improve their performance and that of their providers

We think the process is as important as the results. We maintain a 'running commentary' for the client so they know exactly where we are. We engage a wide range of stakeholders in our work at the key stages, so when our work is finished we leave behind not just a report but a commitment to

change. Clients often ask for our support to help them through the implementation process.

Our methods vary, but 'adding value' and the way we design every assignment specifically to meet your needs make us distinct. Our success has been built on our experience, judgement, insight and knowledge. We recruit and develop outstanding staff with the right mix of skills and the most cost effective level of experience. Our work as consultants is backed up by a wide range of innovative tools and techniques that can be tailored to your exact needs, bringing cost efficiency and robustness to what we do.

Our values

The way we work and develop as a company is guided by a series of core values, which we have developed with our staff:

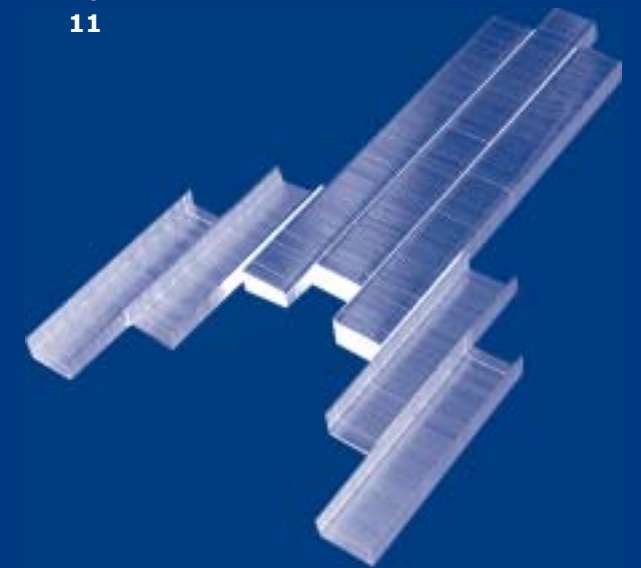
- integrity
- making a difference
- commitment to social justice
- learning and sharing
- working with clients rather than for clients
- sustainability - helping to create robust organisations and approaches
- investing in our people
- enjoying what we do!

"Went to great lengths to understand our needs. Very realistic in discussions, professional presentation, discussed intelligently with the management team how to present the results to staff. Challenged us, but in a very charming and diplomatic way"

Scottish Executive

Tools that support our consultancy work

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We have developed a range of innovative online, interactive and paper-based tools that help clients gain new insights into current performance and the scope for improvement. These are not 'off the shelf' products: we customise our tools to suit the specific requirements of each client. We use them as part of our wider consultancy service, providing our clients with additional value and support.

The following pages explain what the tools are and what they're useful for.

"Rocket Science's main strength is they have a good deal of background knowledge on policy development drivers across the UK. Their products set them apart from other consultancies."

Careers Scotland



Event design, facilitation and management

Our events work has covered:

- supporting leadership and management teams of government departments and agencies
- seminars and workshops for partnerships
- conferences for 50-500 participants, including government ministers and senior managers
- summer schools for staff in newly-formed organisations, or teams undertaking strategic or organisational reviews
- international events that bring together specialists from different countries
- study tours in the UK, elsewhere in the European Union, and North America

Events we have designed, managed or facilitated include:

- a partnership-wide learning and development programme for Liverpool City Council
- London 2012 – two one-day workshops involving the key partners
- the *Approaches: Young people and Health* national conference for NHS Health Scotland aimed at practitioners and *Your Choice: Your Life* for young people
- the annual conference of Apex Scotland staff (2004 and 2005)
- an annual management conference for 500 senior Child Support Agency staff
- a series of workshops for the Newcastle Partnership Board
- communications and events to promote the Department for Education and Skills' renewed commitment to teachers' professional development

The Rocket Science team has over 20 years' experience in designing, facilitating, reviewing and reporting on a wide range of workshops, events and conferences throughout the UK and internationally.

Transforming events

We work closely with our clients in the design and delivery of their event, as we understand the need for a good relationship between all the parties. Our outstanding facilitators provide a friendly and approachable, but highly professional, service.

We see every event as part of a longer-term process of review, analysis, learning, action and networking. On-line, pre-event, questionnaires provide new insights to stimulate discussion. After your event we are quick to provide succinct reports which set out the key issues and action points that have emerged. We can then also help with their implementation.

We are skilled in exploiting the potential of IT to create appealing and engaging events. By working with carefully selected technology partners we make sure that our clients benefit from the latest advances in interactive technology. These can range from participants' instant feedback and ratings via keypad and laptop technology, to instant surveys with client groups using mobile phones.

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"The pre-event questionnaire allowed us to make dramatic improvements in our engagement with all delegates at the conference and the use of technology really impressed a lot of delegates"

North East Centre of Excellence

Measuring and improving performance



We have developed a range of scorecard-based tools that help clients measure the qualitative aspects of their performance. We have developed this further with our innovative web-based e-Scorecard system to help organisations, partnerships and networks to benchmark their current position, develop action plans with specific targets and assess progress over time. This is a sophisticated tool that allows you to offer clients, partners or providers with a way of improving their performance whilst providing you with a clear perception of where you might most effectively intervene with support.

All Scorecards are designed in close association with the client, identifying features of their service and exploring what each of these would be like if it were to achieve a standard which could be described as 'outstanding'. We then develop a series of statements building up to this description of excellence.

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Case study

The 80 learning centres across the Highlands and Islands shared concerns about their financial sustainability. In 2003 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) commissioned an e-Scorecard as part of a project to address this issue.

The e-Scorecard was made available to all learning centres, helping them to assess their position against the key features of a sustainable learning centre. Feedback indicates that the tool helped them pinpoint their own development needs and prioritise action. This provided a framework for discussions with partners aimed at strengthening their operating position and capacity.

The aggregated results from all the centres have helped HIE to see overall trends and identify priorities for support, whilst preserving the confidentiality of results from each individual centre.

Why use it?

- e-Scorecards allow users to:
- pinpoint their development needs
 - identify the actions they need to take to move towards outstanding practice
 - compare their own performance against that of similar organisations
 - revisit their profile over time to see if they are making the shifts that they have prioritised
- ...and the aggregated scores pinpoint overall areas of weakness where support might be focused.

Who might use it?

- Organisations wanting to:
- provide clients, partners, outlets and providers with a way of measuring and improving their performance
 - pinpoint where they should be directing their support – and understand the difference this has made

Who has used it?

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise, as a self-assessment tool for learning centres and training providers.
- The National Employment Panel (NEP), to measure the performance of their 10 employer coalitions across the UK. Each coalition uses the e-Scorecard as an annual stakeholder survey tool, whilst the NEP can pinpoint areas for additional support
- East Ayrshire Council, to assess the awareness and perceived performance of the community planning partnership across staff in each of the five partners.



Assessing bids and proposals

Why use it?

- helps clients to clarify their objectives and criteria
- ensures a fair and transparent application process
- reduces subjectivity
- helps scorers to make more robust judgments about the strategic fit of an application or proposal
- gives scorers the confidence to sift out weak bids at an earlier stage
- speeds up the overall assessment process with associated cost savings
- provides a clear audit trail
- easy to use

Who might use it?

- Anyone involved in grant aid or investment funding or who has to assess any other types of application (e.g. job applications, tenders, proposals).

Who has used it?

- Communities Scotland – for Futurebuilders Scotland
- The London Development Agency, Learning and Skills Council London North and London Central – for European Social Fund Co-financing
- The London Development Agency – for the Opportunities Fund and the Creative London Supporting Talent to Enterprise Programme
- Centres of Excellence in the East Midlands, East of England and North East – for efficiency grants

Our Bid Assessment Tool (BAT) allows an organisation to assess how closely an application or proposal meets agreed criteria. It can be used in a wide range of settings, from allocating grants or investment funding to awarding contracts.

The BAT is an easy-to-use, time- and cost-effective interactive scorecard. It minimises the subjectivity that can creep into any appraisal process and creates a clear audit trail for decisions. It can be used to provide constructive feedback to any applicant or contractor.

How does the design process work?

Every bid assessment tool is different because it is designed and built to meet the specific needs of each client. Typically, we begin by holding a workshop to elicit a range of views about what should be assessed. These are converted into a draft scorecard, which is refined and agreed with the client.

Rocket Science offers a 'pick and mix' service, which might include some or all of the following: design of a prospectus, application form, guidance, tailored Bid Assessment Tool, scorer training and/or scoring of applications by Rocket Science.

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Evaluating partnerships

Our Partnership Evaluation Tool (PET) is an easy to use self-assessment scorecard that can help partnerships benchmark their strengths and weaknesses and address these in a structured and strategic way.

Partnership teams work through a series of investigative questions on issues such as partnership purpose, management, communication and outcomes. The PET translates the scores to guide a partnership towards a strategic plan or towards support options for specific areas that require development.

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Why use it?

- helps partnerships gain new perspectives on their current strengths and weaknesses
- offers practical guidance to help partners review and strengthen their performance
- supports effective partnership rationalisation
- identifies the different perspectives that may exist
- fun and interesting to use, encouraging regular review and greater accountability

Who might use it?

- organisations that manage a series of partnerships and wish to support and/or rationalise the partnerships
- organisations with an interest in creating a partnership assessment framework within a particular sector, area, or organisation
- teams within an organisation, franchise, or regional branches

Who has used it?

- Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire, who commissioned us to develop the Partnership Evaluation Tool.



Assessing skills

Why use it?

- converts qualitative perceptions into quantitative scores, which can be used to compare different aspects of performance
- helps organisations identify learning needs and align training to respond to these needs
- informs individual and organisational action plans
- helps people to identify their own strengths and weaknesses
- can be re-used to measure improvement in performance

Who might use it?

- organisations with an interest in investigating a skills set within a sector, field, region or organisation
- organisations with an interest in creating a baseline of skills and subsequently measuring improvement against this

Who has used it?

- The SSAT was developed with the network of information and guidance advisors working in London's voluntary and community sector organisations who have been using it over the last two years.

Our Skills Self-Assessment Tool (SSAT) is an effective way of finding out about the skills needs, gaps and competencies in a geographical area, sector or organisation. It is an interactive, easy-to-use scorecard, that individuals work through to benchmark themselves against a number of criteria. The criteria are chosen to relate to the specific skills and capabilities that their job or area of work requires.

The SSAT can be used at two levels:

individual - participants can use the SSAT to track their progress over a period of time against the skills required for their role. We help them to plan any action needed to address any identified areas of weakness

organisational - a strategic or service delivery organisation can aggregate the scores from a number of individuals to map the skills abilities and gaps across an area, sector or organisation, over a period of time

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Assessing organisational capacity and sustainability



Our Readiness Assessment Tool (RAT) is an intuitive, fun-to-use self-assessment process that helps projects or organisations to think about their long-term sustainability.

As a project manager, for example, the RAT helps you to score your project against a number of sustainability criteria. By turning qualitative assessments into quantifiable and comparative benchmarks, it provides you with a realistic overview of your current capacity and future sustainability and helps you create a plan of action.

We can offer a range of services to help you to use the RAT effectively, including:

- bespoke guidance and support for different regions or project types
- training for project staff and/or contract managers
- developing the scorecard to help with specific funding applications, business planning or other uses

The RAT can be used free of charge, online at www.rocketsciencelab.co.uk (home page)

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Why use it?

- helps organisations to manage projects successfully over the long term
- intuitive and fun to use
- highly practical – includes benchmarking, action planning and reports for project staff
- encourages people to really think about the way they run a project and to take practical action
- provides a 'one stop shop' which includes a wealth of information, guidance and support and signposts users to other toolkits for project management, succession and closure

Who might use it?

- project managers
- agencies with an interest in capacity building
- voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, those contracting with them or the VCS in general

Who has used it?

- The RAT was designed in partnership with the London Development Agency and the Government Office for London European Unit for grant-funded projects to use in project management
- The Local Community Sector Taskforce is intending to roll out the RAT through regional roadshows, to minimise the impact of the end of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and EU funding on community sector organisations.
- The Waterloo Project Board SRB Partnership, for its constituent projects' succession planning and its own self-assessment.

Contact us

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“Supreme ability at facilitating and moving things forward, listening, getting the best out of the people there. Very responsive.”

Learning and Skills Council, West of England