

Learning Towns and Cities

Good Practice Guides

Developing and Sustaining Partnerships

The purpose of this document is to draw out key lessons, illustrated with examples, from the ten projects which linked developing partnerships to learning and regeneration.

Partnership Projects	
<u>Birmingham</u>	Developing a Corporate Lifelong Learning Strategy and a Learning Partnership
<u>Blackburn with Darwen</u>	Identify appropriate partnerships and targets between new unitary authorities in the North West.
<u>Bristol</u>	Analyse and develop Bristol Learning Partnerships
<u>Durham</u>	Establish a partnership to achieve social and economic regeneration
<u>Greenwich</u>	Motivate Greenwich people to participate in lifelong learning through working in partnerships
<u>Kirklees</u>	Build on existing Community Education Partnership to improve coherence of lifelong learning locally and widen participation from under-represented groups
<u>Middlesbrough</u>	Develop the Learning Partnership for the Education Action Zone
<u>St Austell & Newquay</u>	Secure a partnership between learning, economic regeneration and community development to bring tangible benefits to the area
<u>St Helens</u>	Work in partnership with Oldham and Bolton focusing on towns emerging from industrial decline in order to develop performance indicators Towns: St Helens, Oldham, Bolton, Bury
<u>York</u>	Work collaboratively with Higher Education providers and schools to develop appropriate outreach activities for York school pupils

LESSONS

1 Lessons from evaluating partnerships

1.1 Complexity of partnerships

Few communities develop what might be called 'greenfield' partnerships. It is important therefore that, in the early stages, partners have the chance to explore points of difference and to identify areas of work. And where partnerships already exist, it is necessary to discuss 'joined-up' work.

Partnership problems often arise when people understand too little about each other's organisation's culture and priorities. Setting time aside to discuss this is time well spent.

The experience of the projects is that the 'partnership field' is complex; requires a high degree of personal and communication skills on behalf of key personnel, and clear lines of communication to ensure that targets are achieved.

Changing Government approaches to local partnership structures have had a dramatic impact on the energy and focus of all LCN Pathfinder projects. This is because partnership working is an essential ingredient in local learning and is highly susceptible to changes in the policy context.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Kirklees had a multitude of partnerships, many with the same organisations and overlapping/duplicating roles. There was little coherence in developing and sustaining cross sector partnerships to encourage participation and progression in learning for the whole community.

While some partnerships were well established, it became clear through using the Practice, Progress and Value Guide that all were still at the early stages of getting organised.

1.2 Different types of partnerships

There are many different types of partnerships: strategic, operational and community and others.

While there are principles common to all types of partnership - i.e. building trust, clear understanding of agendas and contributions, etc - actions and protocols may vary, particularly across the different levels of partnerships. Communities are encouraged to map the work of all partnerships and to tap into local knowledge, innovation and ownership. An accurate understanding of the types of partnership will in itself add value.

Birmingham

Birmingham Strategic Learning Partnership

This partnership is still in its early stages of development, although it has agreed its mission, values and protocol. Growth of the partnership has been impeded by national developments such as Learning Partnerships and Learning and Skills Councils. This has been exacerbated by a multitude of partners and existing partnerships (with overlapping remits), plus a history of competition in the area.

Operational - Corporate Lifelong Learning Strategy Group

This group has operated within the authority for a few years, providing a focus for lifelong learning across the authority. It has produced a strategy framework and, more recently, the local authority 'Lifelong Learning Development Plan'. In 1999, an officer was appointed to develop the work of this group. Issues include the problem of fully engaging individuals from across a range of departments and how to effectively measure (at a corporate level) the impact of a wide range of learning activities.

Community - Area-based local learning partnerships

A number of these partnerships have developed in disadvantaged areas of the city, often (but not always) around funding such as SRB. They bring together organisations that share an interest in post -16 education and training and have a strong regeneration agenda. The partnerships appear to be most effective where a development worker has been appointed.

1.3 Partnership champions

Successful learning partnerships frequently develop through the efforts of a single individual - a 'champion' - who builds commitment to, and support of, the need for a common vision. This individual is usually already well known and respected within the community and already acts as a community ambassador.

As things develop, it becomes necessary to broaden the membership of the partnership. Strategic partners are needed who can give authority to the partnership and represent the community. The need to ensure wide ownership is especially important, lest a 'leadership gap' develops if and when the 'champion' moves on.

St Austell and Newquay

Previously, concerted action has proved difficult in this predominantly rural area with little industry apart from tourism and clay. But if a plan for a network of local learning communities has provided the spark, then an individual has been the catalyst.

The principal of a local FE College has played a key role in bringing together local agencies and interests to form the Restormel Action Group (RAG), which includes the chief executive and economic development officer of Restormel Borough Council. The Group, which includes business representatives and representatives of local town forums in Newquay and St Austell, is developing a 'learning for regeneration' strategy closely linked to the ESF Objective 1 programme.

1.4 Communication is critical to successful partnerships

Partnerships - of all types and at all levels - rely on effective and diverse methods of communications to sustain and develop their activity. Effective partnerships use a wide range of communication tools to give, receive and reflect on information and messages relating to their activity.

A key component is a neutral body to take on a communications role. Sometimes an outsider can more easily spot the cause of tensions and may be better placed to tackle disagreements between partners.

Effective communication is critical to all players involved in partnership activity: e.g. paid staff, volunteers, Steering Groups, informal/formal networks, public bodies, the media and the broader community.

York

Green Apples Early Outreach project links higher education and secondary schools. The project's target group is young people with the capability of moving into higher education but no family or personal aspirations or experience that would lead them to do so.

This project, co-ordinated by Learning City York, has a high ownership by its twelve partners due to their early involvement in detailed discussions, development and review of the project model. At regular meetings, partners contributed to the plans, enabling a flexible model to develop according to individual organisations resources and way of working.

2 Lessons about participation

2.1 Participation is a challenge to most partnerships

The *Practice, Progress and Value Guide* encourages partnerships to evaluate the ways in which they actively engage and receive feedback from the broad range of players. Experience from LCN demonstrates that very few began this from a Learning City concept. Some individual organisations have begun it where it has become part of their core business e.g. local government bodies.

Durham Learning City

Durham announced itself as a Learning City in 1994, with a launch to which high profile people from local organisations with an involvement in learning were invited.

However, it was unable to sustain the trust and investment of time/resources from its partners. It was not viewed by the community as having any relationship to 'me'. The relaunch of Durham Learning City reflected this learning, with a consultation conference focused on a broad range of professionals, to share preliminary aims and thus help shape future activity.

The drive for democracy and participation within local communities is beginning to be seen in the form of local area forums within local government structures, and residents becoming decision makers within major regeneration projects such as New Deal for Communities.

While there is a need for further research, information and communication technologies (ICT) do seem to be a tool which could greatly increase the opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions directly.

New Technologies West Berkshire Learning Partnership

Having made ICT a major priority for engaging the community in lifelong learning, West Berkshire spent 1999 reviewing the options and ways in which ICT could support existing partnerships and have developed a website as the first stage in their work.

2.2 Share examples of participation practice

All projects welcomed the opportunity to hear about, and learn from, existing practice. The opportunity to hear what did and did not work is a valuable learning process. This provides ample chance for partners to reflect on replication issues within their own locality.

In Bristol local provider networks involving small community groups, as well as more conventional education sector bodies, meet regularly. They identify local needs and agree appropriate responses and who is best placed to deliver. Networks also share information and good practice. An umbrella statement of aims and objectives forms a protocol for these groups.

2.3 Build on existing good relationships within partnerships

Human capacity, trust and understanding take a substantial time to build within partnerships and are key to their success.

It is important to acknowledge the success of existing partners or sectors, and openly to consider ways in which this expertise and trust in partnership activity can be harnessed.

New partnerships may not always be required. Perhaps an existing partnership may consider broadening its scope and/or altering its structure to take on changing local context or external challenges.

Middlesbrough

The Council's goal is to widen participation and to raise achievement levels at all ages.

The means is community use of schools - to improve links with parents and employers, and to demonstrate the value of learning to the whole community. But the first step is to build a corporate partnership, to turn the links between council departments into a unified force to support schools. And at the same time ensure that a multitude of initiatives get joined up within the Council: Surestart, Education Action Zones and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB).

3 Lessons on performance

3.1 When does evaluation commence?

Many projects do not feel they are in a position to begin to evaluate their work - even at board level. They acknowledge the importance of it and admit they need to be able to list 'value added'. However, it is not a high priority.

Evaluation tends to happen only by external forces i.e. funding regimes, government or legal requirements. The 'voluntary' introduction of Learning Partnerships is a good example of the impact of external pressures to undertake evaluation upon local partnerships.

Greenwich London's criss-crossing boundaries are an obstacle to coherent local government of education. But the White Paper Learning to Succeed is a force for change. Greenwich Learning Partnership is reviewing its role, membership and priorities. The key evaluation issue is the Partnership's role in raising achievement levels amongst the 30,000+ poor households in the Borough.

3.2 Use of a range of evaluation methods

Almost all activity undertaken within a learning community will have its own performance measures and outputs, determined by a combination of the funding body and the partners. There should be flexibility for projects to create their own indicators, as well as using nationally or sectoral approved data.

Blackburn with Darwen The key feature of the project was to identify baselines for both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

This project built upon long-standing local partnerships and the availability of a common information dataset.

The partners were also able to share perceptions of how to measure quality in a way that would enable benchmarking with statistical neighbours elsewhere in the country.

Each partner shared resources and methods to establish baseline information: participation rates, curriculum mapping, community focused research groups, postal and telephone research with employers, local government indices, census population data, and desk research on past secondary data.

Partners - FE, LEA, Borough Council, Careers Service, TEC, Training Provider and WEA.

3.3 How to assess performance

Three of the ten projects used the evaluation framework to set internal targets and external benchmarking. This tended to be conducted as overlapping cycles of work, rather than in stand-alone phases.

St Helens

Learning Towns out of Industrial Transitions aimed to identify measurable standards of performance that contribute to medium-term strategic goals for a Learning Town. The Project assessed the performance and contributions of partners in the context of: employment base, environment changes, qualification levels, learning opportunities and National Learning Targets.

St Helens was invited and joined with Blackburn with Darwen - in a Benchmarking Club.

4 Practical Tips In Developing And Sustaining Partnerships

Emerging issues:

- Gaining or retaining private sector commitment to developing partnerships is a shared concern.
- Employers are keen to support specific projects. However most have little interest or time to be involved in the politics and processes in developing community/city wide partnerships.
- All partnerships share the need to ensure that funding is maintained.
- Guidance on funding approaches should be addressed in the very early stages of partnership development, focusing on key areas: secretariat/staffing, resources, publicity, delivery projects/services and research and evaluation.
- Funding structures and systems still encourage individual institutions to put their priorities first.
- Examples of existing practice are essential.
- All projects expressed a concern over 'partnership fatigue' and the issue of partnership sustainability.
- All projects stated that due to the rate of change, partnerships focus on outcomes first, and then begin to focus upon developing a strategic framework.

Potential causes of conflict:

- Inconsistent/poor attendance or lack of continuity of people at meetings.
- Meetings which do not have action outcomes.
- Decision-makers not delegating responsibility.
- Poorly-chaired meetings.
- Limited support/feedback of paid staff who are responsible for the day to day success of partnerships.
- Changing or different agendas not being acknowledged.
- Poor management systems for monitoring performance.
- Willingness of partners to be honest and to contemplate actions which may not always benefit their individual organisation.

Comments relevant to all forms of partnerships:

- Reviewing, as well as forming partnerships, is key.
- All partnership guidance needs to take account of the existence of current partnerships, build on their experiences and be aware of their effect on new ones.

- External consultancy can provide real help in brokering partnerships and should be considered by all at various stages of their development.
- Attention needs to be given to the specific needs of different kinds of partnerships at different levels: - strategic, operational and community based.
- All partnerships operate within an informal networking arrangement - it is important to ensure the connections are made appropriately.
- An absence of readily available and homogenous data makes comparative studies difficult.
- Resist the temptation to over-simplify existing partnerships within the community.

5 Research About Partnerships

Listed below is a summary of the growing literature on partnerships and regeneration as a guide for those involved in partnership activity.

Definitions

There is overlap with the related fields of networks and clusters, and indeed, the three terms are often used interchangeably. However, there is a distinction.

Partnership tends to refer to bodies comprising representatives of a number of different types of agencies or organisations which come together to oversee or manage a joint activity. Partnerships are required for bids to European structural funds and to SRB. More recently, DfEE has proposed the creation of Learning Partnerships.

Networks tends to refer to organisations of the same type which are loosely linked to share ideas and experience. Learning City Network is a good example of this type, bringing together learning city and town partnerships from around the country.

Clusters tends to refer to organisations with similar purposes linking together in a defined locality to share ideas and experience. The term often refers to businesses, especially SMEs, which link up to improve their competitive position.

Texts

Competitiveness Through Partnership

1997, DfEE

First in series, TECs and Local Economic Development, summarises 19 national research and development projects funded by DfEE, including a number of the case studies from International Ideas and Innovation: Promoting Best Practice in Local Economic Development (see below).

A Fruitful Partnership: Effective Partnership Working

1998, Audit Commission

International Ideas and Innovation: Promoting Best Practice in Local Economic Development

1997, Meridien Projects Limited, for DfEE

Deals with the role of TECs in local economic development through a series of case studies in the UK, US, France, Ireland and Italy. Includes useful analysis of seven different types of local economic development partnership, with defining characteristics and private sector role in each case.

Learning to Succeed

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Learning Towns, Learning Cities

1988, DfEE

Obtainable from DfEE Publications, PO Box 5050, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 6ZQ

Phone: 0845 6022260

Fax: 0845 6033360

Provides summaries of the activities of 19 learning towns and cities.

Local Partnership: A Successful Strategy for Social Cohesion?

1998, Michael Geddes, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin

Making Partnerships Work: a practical guide for the public, private, voluntary and community sectors

1997, A Wilson and K Charlton, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York

New Deal: Lessons from Local Partnerships in the UK

1998, Prof. Mike Campbell with Simon Foy and Jo Hutchinson, Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, paper presented to international conference on the Local Dimension of Welfare to Work, 18-19 November 1998, Sheffield, organised by OECD and DfEE.

Although the focus is on New Deal, especially at a local level, much of what is said can be applied generally to partnerships. The paper provides a set of messages which could be used as critical success factors or as a set of evaluation criteria.

"Practice, Progress and Value" Learning communities: assessing the value they add

1998, DfEE in collaboration with the Learning City Network, with a foreword by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, MP.

The Richness of Cities: Urban Policy in a New Landscape

1998, Sue Cara, Charles Landry and Stewart Ranson, Comedia in association with Demos.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Birmingham

Objectives

To develop a Learning City approach across the City Council and, in parallel, across a range of partners for the benefit of the local community.

Work towards this was to involve building an effective partnership between all the stakeholders in lifelong learning in the city, developing a Strategic Plan for lifelong learning and co-ordinating activities around the provision and marketing of opportunities.

The project was led by the City Council who were to use Practice, Progress and Value to shape a corporate framework and support the formative stages of the new Learning partnership. The project focused on two strands of the Guide.

The first part of the project was focused on the City Council itself and the need to co-ordinate and monitor lifelong learning in a systematic way. The second part developed from the need to develop a new learning partnership in Birmingham in response to Government policy and to build on foundations laid by an earlier learning forum in the City. The Guide was used as a framework for the first exercise and it was hoped that it would be useful in shaping the second.

Outcomes

The toolkit was used to construct a corporate strategic framework for lifelong learning and to make the case for a Learning City approach within the City Council. It provided the basis for a grid used initially by departments to submit their corporate lifelong learning priorities.

The concept of the Learning City was introduced to the steering group of the Birmingham Learning partnership by the consultant to the project and the ambition to become a Learning City is embedded in the mission statement of the partnership.

In developing the City Council part of the project, problems arose in the interpretation of the grid documents by departments. By changing to a supported process focused on activities a more straightforward method was arrived at for confirming priorities.

There were also problems in making the strategy for lifelong learning an agenda for action. Activities in this area of development were interrupted by the need to produce a Lifelong Learning Development Plan for the City to comply with the requirements of the Standards Fund for Adult Education and reorganisation of both City Committee Structures and Departmental structures have also hindered forward movement on this project.

Considerable effort was invested in the development of the Learning partnership but, as with many other such groupings, the changes in structures proposed for post 16 Learning, advent of Local Learning and Skills Councils and changes in role for local partnerships all led to inactivity. It was not possible to make much progress beyond the production of the Local Learning Plan required by the DfEE.

The lessons that emerged for the Birmingham projects leader were that it was unwise to take on a project which was over ambitious. A small, more contained project would have been easier to assess and possibly easier to achieve.

It was also felt that it was easy to assume that the concept of the Learning City was easily understood. This did not prove to be the case. Ample time should be allowed to work through the concept. A further recommendation from this project was that the talk and discussion involved in the development of the concept need to be accompanied by concrete action and achievement.

So far as using the Guide was concerned, it was found useful in bringing the idea of a structure to lifelong learning in the authority and to engaging new and different departments in the development of lifelong learning. A clear definition of the Learning City has helped in promoting lifelong learning beyond the City Council as well. However, external agendas and particularly the demands of the DfEE have meant that the context and agendas have been changed over the life of the project. The development of new and different partnerships may mean that the building of the kinds of partnerships envisaged at the start of the project may take rather longer than hoped.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Blackburn with Darwen

Objectives

Initially to develop commonalities between unitary authorities in the North West of England. However, as the project developed it concentrated on the piloting of the Guide through a partnership group in Blackburn and Darwen alone. This group was closely related in its membership to the Blackburn with Darwen Lifelong Learning Forum and is a sub-group of the East Lancashire Learning partnership.

Most of the partners involved with the project had worked together in the commissioning of an extensive baseline research report mapping participation in education post 16. This meant that the group had already worked together on a very substantial project and had shared and detailed information about participation and opportunities in their area.

Because of their long-standing history of working together the group concentrated their work on the Performance Strand of the Guide. The project was carried out through four meetings and attendance at a joint evaluation and planning day at St. Helens. Action took place in relation to internal assessment, external comparison and evaluation of added value and included the setting in train of a benchmarking exercise that will provide the basis for an extended role for the working group beyond the life of the Pathfinder project.

The role of the Consultant in this project was to guide partners through the use of the Guide, to plan work sessions and to facilitate and record outcomes including the final report. A first, and accurate, conclusion of this group having been that the Guide was not a structured work pack, but rather a stimulus to thought and action.

Outcomes

The first meeting of the project dealt with issues of group structure and confirmed that Strand 3 was the most appropriate area for the project to focus on. This was achieved through discussion of key issues derived from the Guide. The group then spent time assessing the themes contained within it and drawing up a schedule to guide progress. The second meeting focused on an assessment of the base line position of the partnership and also began the process of preparing for external benchmarking. It was felt that the pack was convincing on the need to benchmark but sketchy on how this should be done.

The benchmarking procedure carried out by Blackburn and Darwen was one that they would recommend to other partnerships. It involved using original census data to come up with the 5% postcode areas with most resemblance to the Blackburn with Darwen area. Three possible benchmarking areas were then selected because they matched and because partners had suitable contacts to begin an exercise.

The benchmarking exchange was to involve some quantitative data but the exchange of good and innovative practice was seen to be the primary aim. The development of tools and arrangements for the benchmarking, the issue of added value and overall evaluation of the Guide, formed the agenda for the fourth meeting. Benchmarking was to be carried out through use of benchmarking sheets, examples of which are included in the project's final report. These show what has been carried out in Blackburn and Darwen and invite identification of similar initiatives, their progress and other useful developments from the

benchmarking partner. The group used relevant sections of the pack to carry out a test case study demonstrating value added using the development of Community Access Points in the Authority, an initiative in which all participants had been involved. The case study revealed a lack of hard evidence of the success of a project, which had been seen, as very effective and the way that the approach used in the Guide might be used to fill the evidence vacuum.

Evaluation of the Guide took place in the fourth session of the project and jointly with St. Helens. Many of the conclusions were shared with that project. A toolkit was seen as a useful help for this kind of initiative but it was felt that the current Guide needed too much interpretation to be used in this way. More guidance would be needed to use the materials in the Guide effectively and there was a need for checklists accompanied by examples of action.

It was felt that the Guide did not resolve the difficult question of value added and the concept of a Learning Town still needs development. Case studies, flow charts, the following of prompts and questions with suggestions for action were all mentioned. In essence the project, while seeking to acknowledge local diversity as a strength, was seeking a much more structured "how to do it" document than the Guide currently provides.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Bristol

Objectives

To analyse and develop Bristol lifelong learning partnerships including the Learning Works group and provider networks to widen participation and contribute to community regeneration.

The Guide was to be used as part of a process to "self assess" the current learning partnerships. It was hoped that new targets would be formulated to progress partnership working towards widening participation and that good practice would be discovered through working with other Pathfinder projects. This project was focused on Strand One of the Guide.

Outcomes

The consultant met with the project leaders and attended partnership meetings evaluating the efficacy of the partnership with the Guide as a tool. A survey of partners unable to attend meetings was carried out. The model used in Bristol, of local learning networks assessing needs and co-operatively meeting them has given both small community groups and conventional providers a clear idea of neighbourhood priorities.

It was clear that there are layers of partnership requiring different strategies in terms of support and engagement. In Bristol the multiplicity of partnerships has been a particular issue and one where the Guide was lacking in advice and guidance.

The Bristol project has a number of key messages to add to those in the Guide. Their experience is leading them to look at the possibility of reducing the number of partnerships to deal with the time commitment involved in sustaining them. It is felt that different sizes of groups of partners are appropriate for different functions.

A process of mapping partnerships is being undertaken to reveal the relationship between partners with the understanding that such relationships may look different to different players. The problems of communication in partnership have been revealed by the survey carried out with some recommendations about newsletters replacing formal minutes as well as rotation of meeting times to allow better participation.

The projects in Bristol believe that it is important that the "mission" of partnerships should be clearly understood and that the partners should align their own mission statements to that of the partnership. Agreement should also be sought on Performance Indicators and evaluation strategy at an early stage. In the particular partnerships in Bristol there has been a need to maintain a focus on adult learning within a general lifelong learning agenda.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Durham

Objectives

To establish a partnership to support social and economic regeneration through learning for the people of Durham.

Objectives included: the establishment of the partnership, identification and prioritising of learning needs in the city and the development of an action plan for improving skills and widening participation in learning.

The focus of the project has been the partnership strand of the Guide, although some attention has been given to the participation strand. The Guide has been used extensively by the two key officers included in the Pathfinder Project.

Work with the project consultant has concerned the holding of a consultative conference and summarising key messages from it. It has also involved a great deal of work with the partnership including individual consultation with Steering Group members, drafting and clarifying objectives, helping to develop useful baseline data and work to support development of Learning Shops.

Outcomes

The actions taken involved meetings and discussions, the consultative conference and individual meetings mentioned above and exchange of information on aims and objectives.

The project has encountered some problems. One is the development, during the life of the project of the Government's initiative for Learning partnerships. The project has also had difficulties in sustaining the interest of committed individuals in the past and a previous initiative had been disbanded for this reason.

The project is faced with significant challenges in relation to resources and employer engagement - although there is support for specific projects. However, marketing is a key area of interest and it is hoped that the setting up of a Learning Shop will be built on this. The project managers at Durham draw from their experience some essential components, which they believe must be in place if a Learning City initiative is to be successful in getting off the ground. These are:

- a local "worker" for the partnership with credibility across the local community;
- co-ordination by a neutral organisation;
- monitoring of project work; and
- a balance between talking and developing shared understandings and tangible activity and outcomes.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Greenwich

Objectives

To enable the Greenwich Learning partnership to develop a coherent framework for linking a whole series of initiatives with a focus on lifelong learning.

These included among others SRB Projects, Education Action Zone activity and Excellence in Cities. The changes to be made to the infrastructure to support learning post 16 and the change of emphasis on the role of Learning partnerships, together with the complexities involved in the setting up of such partnerships and the new Learning and Skills Councils in London have presented a challenge to the project.

The project leader believes that many of these new partnership initiatives and their interest in evaluating the activity for which they are responsible show much of the same philosophy as underpins the development of Learning City ideas and concepts.

Outcomes

The project is operating at a number of different levels in different strands, the Greenwich Learning partnership is in a state of transition and is likely to remain so until the main planks of the new structure for learning post 16 are in place. One issue that has clearly emerged is that there is no agreement among providers as to who should be responsible for strategy in relation to training in the Borough. This was a concern shared by the consultant working with Greenwich. It is a matter currently under discussion by both the partnership and the Borough Council.

The lack of resources to provide even secretarial support for the Learning partnership has meant that keeping momentum going has been difficult. This factor, alongside the complexities of the development of structures in London, has limited the progress possible in this initiative.

There is no information in either the final report of the project or the consultant's report on the use of the Guide.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Kirklees

Objectives

To build on the existing post 16 partnerships in Huddersfield, thereby encouraging working together to improve coherence in lifelong learning provision and widening participation. The project focused on the Partnership strand of the Guide.

A particular objective was to broaden the existing partnership to include schools and increase participation from the voluntary sector, trade unions, employers and the media.

The consultation, the use of the toolkit and the setting up of the Learning partnership revealed that the partnership in Kirklees was not as robust as had been believed. Considerable work had to be done in building the partnership and much time was spent in the activities in level one of the partnership strand which relate to beginning processes of partnership. The beginning of shared understanding is now emerging.

Outcomes

Among the problems encountered were confusion over the scope and powers of overlapping partnerships and their effect of the formation of Learning City initiatives. This was one of the issues in the Bristol project as well as this one. Other problems were caused by the competitive nature of many funding streams and in the case of this project a focus on 16-19 agendas and difficulty of getting adequate consideration of adult issues.

During the life of the project, a protocol for the Learning partnership has been agreed and it has been recognised by the Government Office. Early goals in student support have been agreed, Local Learning Plans drafted and individual plans approved and a seconded post put in place. A system for leading individual initiatives has been put in place.

Kirklees feel that any partnership getting established needs a well-known charismatic figure to chair the partnership and ensure publicity, and adequate funding to support activity. Perhaps most of all, it requires from partners a lessening of devotion to sectoral interest and a willingness to contemplate actions not of direct benefit to their institution. Having an outside consultant who is neutral was of particular use to this project.

So far as using the Guide was concerned, this project found it a useful tool to analyse progress and decide priorities. They found the strategies in strand 1 practical, pragmatic and a useful way through periods when the partnership was bogged down and overloaded by initiatives.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

Middlesborough

Objectives

To bring together three strands of local authority activity: raising achievement in schools, increasing prosperity for citizens through higher employment levels and increasing social exclusion.

The proposal formed part of Education Action Zone development and was to use the toolkit in developing the Learning partnership that was envisaged to take work further.

Outcomes

At the stage of the interim report the project had barely begun its activities but it was becoming clear that the focus had shifted to the establishment of a corporate partnership to support and promote community use of schools. This was seen as a key strategy in raising achievement by engaging with parents and employers and strengthening links between lifelong learning and regeneration activities.

The consultant's report clearly outlines the purpose of the initiative indicating that this should provide a range of benefits for parents in equipping them to help with their children's learning and developing their own learning potential. The initiative would also help schools to engage business in developing teacher/business exchanges, providing placements and work experience and help to encourage an improved work related curriculum.

The project would set in train a process whereby better use of school premises would result from projects that would promote leisure, learning and regeneration. The consultant then sent the project a schedule of the stages that needed to be undertaken in setting up the project and in evaluating it. The report does not mention the use of the Guide in the project work nor has any report further to that of the consultant been received from the project. It is not possible to be sure from the information received the extent of the project's final progress, the benefits gained, how the Guide was used or its usefulness.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

St. Austell and Newquay

Objectives

To create a strategic partnership that will develop a number of learning towns in the borough of Restormel.

The project manager is the Principal of St Austell College and he has played a key role in bringing together local agencies and interests to form the Restormel Action Group. The group includes the Chief Executive of Restormel Borough Council, business representatives and representatives of local town forums in Newquay and St. Austell. The strategy being developed is closely linked to the Objective 1 programme being developed in Cornwall in readiness for Objective 1 status.

Outcomes

The consultant to this project reports that the Learning Town concept has propelled the development of an integrated approach to learning and regeneration. The partnership has demonstrated a pattern for attention to negotiating and sharing values and also demonstrated the key roles individuals need to take in such a process.

Involvement in the pathfinder project has been useful in providing links with similar initiatives elsewhere. These have included the Objective 1 area in South Yorkshire and other pathfinder projects in Bristol and Kirklees.

A central feature of the work in Cornwall is a focus on the learning needs of small and medium enterprises and the consultant believes that the needs of such enterprises should form a focus for follow up Learning City activity.

So far as the use of the toolkit is concerned this initiative found it a useful basis for partnership development although local experience might suggest some revisions. The interim report suggested that the project manager had found it over sophisticated. The performance strand of the toolkit has been used as the basis for a checklist for use with partners' progress in developing local partnership.

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

St. Helens and Associated Boroughs

Objectives

To work across four Boroughs in the North West in identifying measurable standards of performance that might contribute to medium term strategic goals for a learning town. The part of the Guide on which the project was based was the Performance Strand, particularly those parts that deal with benchmarking and target setting.

The project had four elements:

- unstructured interviews with lifelong learning managers
- structured questionnaires to named individuals
- searching of the internet for relevant data
- the joint dissemination of findings and workshop discussion.

It involved examination of the current raft of measures being used to establish baselines and to set local targets. The hope was that there would be indications as to how performance indicators, and qualitative measures might be developed that would complement the national targets and looked towards benchmarking the quality of education and training provision.

The survey covered two main areas:

- satisfaction with the current National Targets; and
- the identification of other measures and benchmarks, which might provide data likely to be of use in the particular towns.

Outcomes

The survey showed general satisfaction with the national target but targets for adults were felt to be much less useful and appropriate than targets for young people. There were particular problems with the participation target which was felt to be about right by only a third of respondents although there was a fairly equal division between those who felt it to be too high and those who felt it was too low.

What the survey showed was a belief that measures outside the National Targets were needed and that those responsible for the development of lifelong learning needed to be able to measure their activities and their successes against those of other communities. Specific areas were suggested in respect of young people but the recommendations for adults were much less settled. Basic and key skills were mentioned but other specifics were not clearly identified in the project report. There was a view that local targets might better be expressed in numbers than percentages.

The Internet search reflected the difficulties that the authors of the Guide had experienced in searching for targets and baselines for learning. Examples of some interest were found from the USA and Australia but there is a paucity of data relating to England.

The final part of this project involved a day seminar, which included representation from Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council who were the partner authority in this grouping.

Findings from both the consultants used were presented and there were workshops on the usefulness of the toolkit and on how learning community approaches can give national and local learning targets a higher profile.

These two projects found the Guide limited in its usefulness and felt that in its current form it did not provide sufficient guidance for a community to construct its own set of valid measuring mechanisms. There were a series of recommendations about how the Learning City Network might create a more useful document but in summary the project states in its final report: -

"There need to be examples of the types of data that provide a foundation for identifying and selecting targets. There is a need for guidance on data-gathering and re-measuring performance against the indicators. The application of benchmarking is not to be taken on without a clear set of objectives and the kit needs to provide practical assistance with identifying and selecting appropriate benchmarks."

Learning Towns and Cities

Pathfinder Project Report

York

Objectives

To focus on links between higher education and secondary schools. The project's target group was young people with the capability of moving into higher education but no family or personal aspirations or experience that would lead them to do so.

The strands of the Guide most applicable to the project are the partnership and performance strands although the attempt to boost parental involvement might move into the territory covered by the participation strand. The project moved through all the levels in strand one of the Guide.

Outcomes

A series of activities have taken place in this project, moving from the establishment of partnership and agreeing of scope, targets and criteria for the project to the development of a project plan, evaluation plan and agreement on useful baseline data.

A full round of visits to higher education institutions and obtaining of feedback from visits took place and new partners are involved for year two. A further outcome was a successful application for Higher Education Funding Council funding for an extended phase of the project.

The project encountered problems in engaging parents in the initiative; an event to raise parents' awareness was poorly attended. However, help has been sought from the parents showing interest in the project in the task of engaging more parents and these lessons built into the second phase of the project.

The consultant to the project believes that a key to its success has been the very strong sense of ownership felt by partners and the time and detailed discussion spent in the development of the project delivery model. Clearly focused, task based meetings produced coherent proposals. A further essential ingredient was the flexibility built into the project, which allowed partners autonomy in delivering the elements for which they were responsible.

The Guide has been used by the learning city manager, and the evaluator and the project manager found the Guide a useful reference tool in the planning of the project. The Guide has also provided a clear framework within which to set evaluation activities. However, the Guide does not offer practical examples of how to undertake the kind of evaluation exercises necessary such as setting baseline data, providing a framework for participant feedback or the development of a model to assess impact.