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Skills for Social Inclusion and Knowledge Economy: Towards a Shared Vision



Report of LCN conferences on behalf of the DfES spring 2001

Contents

Page 3	Malcolm Wicks letter
Page 4	Introduction, summary of the events & main points emerging
Page 6	The rationale for community-based learning
Page 8	The Policy context
Page 10	The Regional view
Page 11	New ways of working
Page 12	Fitness for purpose; ensuring (E)quality - Feedback from workshops
Page 14	Learner feedback - Feedback from workshops
Page 16	Learning centre networks - Feedback from workshops
Page 18	Basic Skills Strategy - Skills for Life
Page 19	Basic Skills - Feedback from workshops
Page 20	Action points
Page 21	Contact information & publications
Page 22	Acknowledgements
Page 23	LSC timetable

SKILLS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY REPORT



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MALCOLM WICKS MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

1 February 2001

SKILLS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

I am writing to encourage you to take part in the forthcoming series of regional events organised by the Learning City Network (LCN) for the Department for Education and Employment. The theme is very dear to this Government. We believe that the way to create strong communities and to tackle social exclusion is to equip people to take advantage of the widest range of learning and employment opportunities. Above all, we are committed to ensuring that all communities, and especially the poorest, gain access to the skills required for the rapidly expanding knowledge economy.

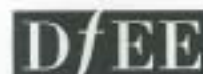
This series of events is for all those involved in supporting and providing the learning opportunities that will make this happen. They will provide a forum for LSC, Learning Partnerships, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations to agree who is best placed to do what needs doing. Government Office and RDA staff should also be involved in view of their important role in setting new regional frameworks and creating the wider context for work on social inclusion and economic development. Drawing on best practice in Adult and Community Learning, workshops will stimulate participants to consider what their contribution should be, and to discuss with local partners how they can work together to ensure the greatest coherence and impact. There will also be an early opportunity to hear about the Government's Adult Basic Skills Strategy and explore its implications for your organisation.

These events represent a partnership in their own right, involving the LSC, Government Offices, RDAs, Learning Partnerships, NIACE, LSDA as well as the LCN and DfEE. This is the shape of things to come; all of us are going to have to learn to pool our resources and expertise, and work more effectively together, locally, regionally and nationally. I hope that you will be able to take part.

MALCOLM WICKS



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Introduction & Summary of the Events

This report covers a series of regional roadshows which took place around the country during March and early April 2001, on the theme of *'Skills for Inclusion and the Knowledge Economy: Towards a Shared Vision'*.

The events were organised on behalf of the Department for Education & Skills, formally DfEE by the Learning City Network (LCN) and venues included Birmingham, Cheltenham, Epsom, Wakefield, London, St. Helens, Castle Donington (East Midlands), Duxford (Cambridgeshire) and Durham.

There were presentations and workshop papers from the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU), the National Association for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), as well as the DfES and the LCN.

The knowledge and experience that participants brought to the conferences was very varied.

The aim was to enable local and national Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Learning Partnerships (LP) personnel to:

- meet each other, and colleagues from Regional Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies, Further Education, Adult and Community Education, Local Education Authorities, the Voluntary Sector and the private sector
- discuss issues that would be raised in the context of the new post-16 framework, in the field of adult learning
- start the work of defining what needs to be done, who should do it and how
- create new networks between key organisations.



To clarify the background, there were presentations on the Government's policy on adult and community learning, and on the perspectives of the nine Regions. Workshops were then held on four topics: the Adult Basic Skills Strategy, Fitness for Purpose (Quality and Equality), Learning Centre Networks and Learner Feedback, chosen to enable delegates to explore the characteristics of ACL at its best - inclusiveness, diversity, flexibility, local delivery, innovation, high standards, meaningful outcomes, responsiveness and accountability.

Over 900 people signed up for the events from a wide variety of organisations.

MAIN POINTS EMERGING

1. Learning which promotes social inclusion and community capacity building, and learning which promotes enterprise and improves workforce skills are two sides of the same coin.
2. Dialogue between LSC and organisations involved in Adult and Community Learning is vital. Learning Partnerships also have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that LSC-funded provision meets local needs.
3. Voluntary and community organisations have a vital role to play in widening participation in learning and building up community capacity, and they need the right kind of funding and support to help them to do their job well.
4. Although the Local Initiatives Fund should support innovation and informal learning, it is vital that adult and community learning is properly funded from mainstream resources.
5. Quality, assessment and inspection systems must take account of the nature of informal and community-based learning if it is to flourish. Voluntary and community organisations can meet the requirements of the new inspection framework, but they will need help.
6. Networking and partnership arrangements are essential to make the best use of resources and skills, and to ensure the spread of effective practice.



THE RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Regeneration and inclusion are at the heart of the Government's agenda, and at the heart of regeneration is investment in human capital. Without a focus on the engagement and development of residents of deprived neighbourhoods, or indeed of people disadvantaged and excluded by other circumstances, there is little hope of achieving ambitions for a robust, knowledge-driven economy, for vibrant, self-sustaining communities and for a universal culture of lifelong learning.

Bringing Britain Together, (Social Exclusion Unit, 1997) outlined the problems of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their excluded residents in stark terms, and sparked off a widespread programme of further investigation into the inter-linked causes of deprivation.

A New Commitment to Regeneration: National Strategy Action Plan. Published in January 2001, the Action Plan summarises the conclusions of this scrutiny and the programme of change designed to reverse the decline. Emphasised throughout the strategy is the central importance of harnessing the talents and experience of local people, as clients *and as organisers* of services.



Overcoming Alienation

Contributing to the national strategy was the work of the Policy Action Team (PAT) on skills in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; its report, *Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local Solutions*, forms the background text for this series of conferences. Through its fieldwork, the PAT confirmed that people often felt entirely alienated from mainstream, formal education and in fact many were not convinced that learning had anything at all to offer them. Conversely, it was clear that where individuals had overcome such wariness, they had tapped great reserves of potential which could transform their lives and make a difference to families and the community around them.

Where there had been success in engaging, developing and empowering disadvantaged people, the approach was small-scale, demand-led and firmly embedded in the everyday life of local communities. The PAT also concluded that changes were needed to the planning and funding of education and training to save such approaches from struggling against the grain and instead allow them to flourish.

New Arrangements

The influence of this thinking is clear in the new arrangements for post-16 education and training, most explicitly in the Secretary of State's Remit Letter to the Learning and Skills Council. For example:



"I also expect local Learning and Skills Councils to play an active role in building the capacity of people living in deprived neighbourhoods, and to promote equality and social inclusion. Local Learning and Skills Councils should look to use the Local Initiatives Fund to support the development of stronger communities who are better able to maintain momentum in neighbourhood renewal, and to facilitate the development of a wider range of learning opportunities, including skills development for individuals. A broader range of support can enable individuals and groups to become more actively involved in self-help activity, neighbourhood management, asset building and community enterprise. There is also value in training courses for community leaders." (paragraph 24)

"Successfully increasing the demand for learning will also depend on a continuing drive to improve the flexibility and attractiveness of learning opportunities, including ensuring a very wide availability of 'first step' opportunities to attract into learning those who previously saw it as something not for them. This will demand innovation in approach and delivery...[The Council] will also need to look at how it can use its responsibilities in adult and community learning, and in Further Education, to ensure that there is accessible provision available in local communities, which support and help build their confidence and capacity." (paragraph 49)

Opportunity For Coherence

The transfer to LSC of responsibility and funding for LEA-secured ACL provides an opportunity to achieve greater coherence with the wide range of other opportunities open to adults, building on the work of local Learning Partnerships. It also signals a move towards greater equality, in terms of funding and of esteem, between ACL and vocational, qualification-bearing provision.

The guarantee of consistent funding levels during a transition period is further proof of the Government's commitment to ACL: the budget for 2002-03 has been increased and, beginning in that year, there will also be a capital budget for ACL, for the first time. The intention in time is for much of ACL to be covered by the mainstream funding, planning, quality assurance and inspection arrangements: this stability will be invaluable in ensuring the consistent service that disadvantaged people and reluctant learners can grow to accept and rely on.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

Malcolm Wicks, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning at the time of the conferences, Derek Grover, DfES, Tim Down, DfES, Marcus Bell, DfES, Jane Mardell, DfES.

‘The establishment of the LSC provides an opportunity to bring together all the main actors in post-16 learning - colleges, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations.’

Malcolm Wicks, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning.

The policy background to the events embraced the complementary roles and vital importance of two factors:

- the need to help people to develop the skills required by the economy; and
- the need to build community capacity and combat social exclusion.

Both of these are within the remit of the LSC.



The approach to both these challenges lies in helping individuals to get involved in learning, and then to progress. Three key problems have been identified:

- the needs of disadvantaged communities have not been met by the present education and training system.
- although local projects work best, local capacity to imagine, develop and sustain them is weak.
- many people do not see how they could benefit from learning or improving their skills.

‘We want to create a Learning Society where everyone has the opportunity to update their skills and to learn throughout life. This means helping people develop the skills to be successful in employment, and also means supporting learning of all kinds - including informal learning, community based learning and learning for pleasure - which can help people to overcome social disadvantage and to play a full role in society.’

‘These two key objectives, the economic and the social are two sides of the same coin. They must be dealt with in an integrated way.’

Malcolm Wicks, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning.

The solutions to these problems are far from straightforward, but must involve:

- a more flexible approach to fundable learning - much first rung learning in local communities does not look vocational but has a critical role in helping to 'hook' residents of disadvantaged communities into learning
- more first rung provision available in disadvantaged communities through the development of neighbourhood learning centres, UKonline, City Learning Centres (Excellence in Cities) and Non-Schedule 2 pilots
- effective support for community capacity-building and genuine community involvement - a start has been made through Community Champions and Community Leadership Pilots
- streamlined and user-friendly funding arrangements for small voluntary and community organisations
- better data and sharing of good practice and information about what is, and is not, effective.

The LSC holds the key to these. The Council is responsible for the funding and planning of all post-16 learning, apart from Higher Education, and its establishment marks the most significant change to arrangements for adult learning for many years, providing opportunities to tackle many long-standing problems that have inhibited the development of genuinely learner-centred provision. The role of education in combating social exclusion is highlighted in its remit, and the Council has a key contribution to make to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

'We need to base policy decisions on clear evidence about what the needs are and about what works.'

Malcolm Wicks, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning.

However, it would be unfair and unwise to expect the LSC to solve all difficulties and provide answers to all problems very quickly. Inevitably the process of transition will be slow. We are in the process of setting the agenda for a number of years.

In developing the effectiveness of the LSC in this area, there are four key questions:

- How will the LSC decide what to fund in disadvantaged areas? - A wide range of learning opportunities will be eligible for LSC funding but the LSC will need to choose from this the learning it thinks will be most effective in delivering its remit. There are a number of Government priorities, but everyone involved will need to think about exactly how those priorities can be translated into action on the ground.
- How can real community involvement be secured? Learning Partnerships have an important role in gathering and analysing the needs of local individuals and communities and communicating that information to the LSC, but Learning Partnerships are variable and the voice of the learner is not always available or listened to.
- How can the new LSC systems accommodate community and voluntary organisations? Flexible and innovative thinking will be required to create the right conditions for these organisations to deliver their important services to their communities.
- How should adult learning be embedded in wider neighbourhood renewal strategies? There is still much to be done to raise the profile of adult learning.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

Presented by a Government Office representative from each Region.

Each event included a presentation on the regional view of skill needs, regeneration and priorities for learning. Although the characteristics of the different regions varied widely - rural issues were important in the South West and North Yorkshire, for example - many of the underlying problems were the same and the approaches to tackling them also had much in common.

Examples from the regions clearly illustrated the link between social inclusion and economic development. Regeneration can only be partially successful if some sections of the population are left behind: conversely, it is possible to create a virtuous circle. Strong, self-sufficient communities make fewer demands on public resources. As individuals find opportunities to develop their skills, find jobs and bring salaries into their home area, untapped new markets open up, expanding employment opportunities and enhancing prosperity.



These sessions expanded the canvas to cover additional initiatives and funding sources administered on a regional basis, including:

- the Skills Development Fund
- European Union Objectives 2 and 3 funding - the former aimed at targeted areas, the latter spread across a region, plus EU Objective 1 funding in Cornwall and South Yorkshire
- CMF UKonline Learning Centres - there are now over 1250 of these nationally
- the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal - incorporating New Deal for Communities and the National Strategy Action Plan which provides several strands of implementation funding, with the overall intention of improving mainstream services in the most deprived areas
- the new Adult Basic Skills Strategy - in which regions will play a full part, supported by significant extra funding, and assisted by newly appointed Regional Co-ordinators.

Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are the key players, in turn dealing with Local Authorities and, through them, the Local Strategic Partnerships which are being established first in the most deprived neighbourhoods and subsequently in other areas.

The key question posed was how regional and sub-regional structures can best be made to complement each other. What do local LSCs, GOs, RDAs and others need to do to ensure the activity they support dovetails in a coherent, even seamless way that maximises the impact of resources and, most importantly, makes sense from the point of view of the learner and potential learner?

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Alan Noble, LCN, Jan Eldred, NIACE.

The event programme then focused in on what “Adult and Community Learning” might mean, looking at recent developments in delivery of learning that present opportunities for better tailoring and targeting.

If non-learners are to be brought into learning, new attitudes and new practices will have to be developed by the providers of learning opportunities.

Providers must recognise that reaching new learners is unlikely to succeed if they are required to attend colleges (of which they are deeply nervous) within certain defined times and to learn in certain defined ways.

In a recent survey, learners listed their preferred learning locations in the following order:

1. at home
2. at work
3. in libraries
4. in community settings
5. in colleges
6. in church.

Providers of learning must develop a new flexibility which recognises these preferences. They do not need to start from scratch. There are already a number of learning initiatives already in existence which can provide the stimulus - and in some cases the means - to reach the heard to reach. Think of the opportunities that follow from:

- UKonline
- learndirect
- the Moser Report leading to the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit
- ILAs
- Discounted fees for disadvantaged learners
- European funding supporting diverse initiatives aimed at building skills and capacity
- Family Learning
- Older and Bolder Learners
- Mobile Learning - releasing people from being committed to time and place
- Lifestyle Learning - going where the people are.

We know from often repeated experience how effective, and how moving, it can be to use such initiatives to help people to overcome barriers and *learn* their way to a better life.

We could also spare some sympathy for providers, who suffer barriers of their own:

- the variety of different funding arrangements for different people and different schemes
- the proliferation of regulations
- the abundance of new initiatives. They all mean that energy which should be spent on the prime task of creating relevant and accessible learning opportunities, is dissipated on bureaucratic complexities.

We need to achieve new ways of working by thinking in new ways, seizing new opportunities, enjoying the challenges and, at all times, having as our watchword, ‘think of the learners’.

FITNESS FOR PURPOSE; ENSURING (E)QUALITY

Workshop by Learning and Skills Development Agency

Two definitions:

- Quality must include an equal opportunity to succeed - hence the use of '(e)quality' in the title of this workshop
- Fitness for purpose means fitting provision to potential learners rather than learners fitting themselves to what is on offer.

Why it matters

Too many people are missing out because provision does not meet their needs. If we are to close the equality gap we must give people the support they need (with childcare, money, language, for example).

Raising skill standards benefits individuals and whole communities. We need to identify more clearly the gaps that exist and the benefits to be gained.

At the same time as drawing in new learners, new inspection and LSC quality standards must be met. Every provider must have an annual self assessment report; everyone has to show how to improve quality year on year. Publicly-funded agencies must now demonstrate how their services contribute to equality of opportunity for people from all sections of the community. This means looking at how services are marketed and delivered.

Improving good practice without re-inventing the wheel needs a partnership approach. Up to now this has been hindered by too many short term projects, with too much information and good practice not shared, and too much competition rather than co-operation.

How we can make it happen

To make the necessary improvements we must have:

- training and mentor support for voluntary groups - if we want to get people onto a learning ladder, the first rung (which is often provided by voluntary groups) must be very good
- consortia of small providers to improve quality and to access LSC funding
- a quality framework for partnership activity
- an approach of fitting provision to learners not learners to provision.

Challenges

Putting improvements into practice will involve

- consulting effectively with local communities - if this is to be a priority, how do you know exactly what is the community? What about local voluntary groups with different agendas?
- making a step change in reaching new learners - having one body, the LSC, with such a wide remit for all aspects of learning will help, for example, in the shift from short term to mainstream funding
- recording and valuing informal learning - a tough nut to crack
- signing up providers to be collaborators rather than competitors.

FITNESS FOR PURPOSE; ENSURING (E)QUALITY

Feedback from workshop participants; direct quotes are in quotation marks and italics.

Funding

Much of the participants' response concerned funding and its lack of flexibility. Furthermore, they thought that if larger formal organisations received the funding at the expense of smaller organisations, which might be more focused on community needs and informal learning, then the smaller organisations could be driven out of business entirely.

It was felt that the *'LSC must ensure flexible provision. Adult and Community Learning (ACL) should take its place in the mainstream, not as a peripheral activity and that the relatively high costs of providing learning in the community should be recognised.'*

There was a need for *'clarity, openness, flexibility and coherence,'* in the way funding is allocated and for funding arrangements to be long term.

Small, voluntary and community organisations

It was felt that a particular effort should be made to *'help, encourage and persuade voluntary organisations to improve quality and share good practice'*. There were worries that the quality requirements might be too much for some smaller providers and drive them out of the market, and also that smaller providers might be driven out of the market by the quality standards simply because they thought (possibly wrongly) they could not cope with them. For some the solution might be to team up with colleges who could take responsibility for the administration and quality assurance.

There was thought to be a risk of stifling the energy and innovatory approaches of smaller organisations because of bureaucracy. It was suggested that the LSC should ring fence part of the Local Initiative Fund to encourage people to take risks. *'Allow innovation - target the audience and be prepared to change and meet needs. These innovations must then be evaluated and learnt from.'*

Communication

Some people identified communication as the key theme running through all efforts to improve quality and equality. *'We must not reinvent the wheel. Most things are being done somewhere. We need to communicate this idea widely, and get people to tell others what they are doing.'*

However, it was felt that *'We lack the mechanisms to share good practice across agencies. Information gained in a health context does not always transfer across to a learning provider,'* and that we should *'pick up on successful high quality work projects already in place and call those pilots.'*



LEARNER FEEDBACK

Workshop by NIACE

Listening to learners is not straightforward, not least because learners themselves are a very diverse group with an almost infinite range of backgrounds and intentions. To find out what they think is a creative, active process. Don't wait for them to come to you.

It is necessary to devise opportunities in which the views of learners and potential learners can be expressed and, if the process is to have any credibility with those involved, it must lead to action.

The importance of the learner voice

Planning is one of the key LSC responsibilities. It is to be led by demand, by the requirements of learners and potential learners rather than providers. Learning Partnerships have a crucially important role in identifying learner views and feeding them into planning processes.

The LSC and Learning Partnerships both have a key contribution to make to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. To be successful, the Strategy must include the voice of the community, learners and potential learners, and identify triggers which can draw marginalised people into learning and keep them there.



Monitoring and discussion

All agencies with learning agendas - including the LSC, Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies and the Basic Skills Strategy Unit - need the engagement of communities, learners and potential learners to monitor the appropriateness of delivery methods, quality, outcomes and overall relevance.

How we can make it happen

The following two examples of good practice illustrate what can be achieved and how. In each case they are based on close listening to learner needs and aspirations.

- Through the WEA (Workers Educational Association), parents of children with learning difficulties and disabilities came together to provide informal play activity for their children, wanted to learn more, contacted the WEA, moved to a structured course and then OCN accreditation and further progression.
- Through an Adult and Community Learning Fund project, Fircroft College in partnership with NHS trusts and voluntary organisations used drama and discussion to deliver relevant learning on health issues.

Implications

Working with marginalised people to create relevant and effective learning experiences takes much longer than more standardised approaches. The process usually needs to be helped by people who know what is possible, and know the way to deal with institutions and 'the system'.

Feedback from workshop participants; direct quotes are in quotation marks and italics.

Who should listen to learners?

Participants seemed to feel that everybody should play a part in listening to the learner, not only Learning Partnerships, learning providers of all kinds, LSC, Local Authorities and Trade Unions, but also community and voluntary organisations, faith groups and activity groups and employers.

In terms of communicating to local LSCs the essence of learner opinion, it was felt that Learning Partnerships had the primary part to play. *'LPs must be inclusive, act as broker, pool intelligence, find out what access member organisations have to potential learners in order to push out the boundaries of learner participation.'*

Learning Partnerships, it was considered, were in a position to co-ordinate with Local Authorities Community Strategies and tap into local, countywide, regional and national networks to find out about learners and potential learners. They could also cross boundaries into other agencies, for example Social Services, to access their information.

However, there was a feeling that some Learning Partnerships were likely to be much better than others in this task, and that many Partnerships were set up with a narrower intention than would be appropriate for a major communicator of area-wide learner opinion. Basically, in one view, *'Learning Partnerships are there for their members, not for the LSC.'*

It was thought that local LSCs themselves had a responsibility to ensure that organisations do have effective procedures in place for listening to learners.

How to listen

There were a variety of suggestions about how to find out the opinions of learners and potential learners: the general view was that no single method would do the job.

One approach would be through structured survey methodology, which could be straightforward for current learners, but awkward with those out of learning. People might be reached through their ordinary life activities, through groups they might join for non-learning reasons, for example, through churches, or mother and baby clinics, or housing associations. Engaging with such interests and concerns could open the way to effective and relevant learning experiences.

Sometimes people's views can be discovered through a simple form of communication - a note taken home by primary school children asking their parents what they want.

However views are obtained, it is important that people are told what is done as a result, and, if something cannot be done, why not.



LEARNING CENTRE NETWORKS

Workshop by the Learning City Network

A learning centre for every neighbourhood

‘First rung’ provision ... should be delivered where people live through neighbourhood learning centres, in the management and operation of which local people should wherever possible have a significant stake.’ *Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local Solutions.*

What is a learning centre?

The Skills PAT’s recommendation quoted above was a recognition of an approach to learning provision which had been successful because it worked with the grain of local communities.

Learning centres come in all shapes and sizes, but in general they should

- be local and accessible - if possible within pram-pushing distance of the target group
- enable ‘lifestyle learning’ - to fit in with people’s needs and preferences
- be welcoming and inclusive - in premises where people feel at home
- usually have ICT facilities - to enable online learning
- actively seek to widen and deepen engagement and participation - to help people to use learning to improve their lives
- offer learner advice and support - an essential, not an add-on.

Examples of locations for learning centres

The key to learning centres is what they are intended to do, not what they look like. Wherever people naturally congregate is the right place for a learning centre, so they can be almost anywhere, for example, in

- supermarkets
- libraries
- working men’s clubs
- community centres
- internet cafes
- museums
- schools, colleges, Connexions and Sure Start centres.

Helping centres to develop

While helping communities and individuals to develop, centres themselves need to develop. To make the most of resources and to build local capacity, they can link into “peer networks” of similar centres, now much easier through electronic communication. Good networks can provide wider opportunities for learner progression, giving access to many more local learning and employment opportunities, through linked learning pathways and through shared promotional initiatives and joint local branding.

Networking learning centres

To build a network in an area, it is important to take account of:

- individual centre autonomy
- the need to plug gaps in provision
- existing initiatives including learndirect, People’s Network, UKonline, CALL, Broadband, Excellence in Cities, National Grid for Learning.

Key questions:

- Who are the key players?
- Which is the co-ordinating body?
- How will learner-centricity be assured?
- How will an even pattern of provision be achieved?

Feedback from workshop participants; direct quotes are in quotation marks and italics.

Participants discussed the nature of learning centres and how they should be grown. Two ideas were that a learning centre:

- needed a key person if it was to be successful
- should be community based, bolted on to existing community facilities and resource centres.

Participants were clear about how they saw the nature of learning centres and the way they worked. *'Centres and their networks must be learner centred'* and they must, as well as being appropriately proactive, *'be responsive to local need, which is identified through knowledge of the local community.'*

To be embedded in a local community was seen essential, but it was recognised that this was not necessarily easy. One participant comments on the *'Need to build up trust as a starting point.'*

Learners

However, the strongest views were those that focused on the learner. A learning centre should be in a community so that individual learners in that community could access the learning they needed, presented to them in ways they could cope with. *'We must develop learning opportunities to suit the needs of the individual.'* *'The centre must recognise and enable diversity of learning styles.'* *'A centre should promote the acquisition of new skills through informal learning.'* *'Centres must allow for diversity and not stereotype potential learners.'* *'We need to interpret learner need beyond initial presenting need, through individual learning plans.'*

And, very importantly, *'learners should be involved in planning.'*

Support

Participants recognised the value of peer support, for example, in learning centres in residential homes, and also the value of learning champions, who are particularly successful in promoting IT in communities. It was considered that Learning Partnerships could co-ordinate the development of community-based learning champions, attached to learning centres.

There were concerns that quality systems might be set up which would not give a true picture of a centre's achievements. *'Don't set up community groups to fail by using inappropriate measures of success. Negotiate appropriate outputs and recognise the problems of small organisations, without huge administrative resources. Quality standards should be devised by the community, rather than be imposed from outside.'* One important question was *'who has the responsibility for quality?'*



BASIC SKILLS STRATEGY - SKILLS FOR LIFE

Workshop by Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit

Any strategy aimed at improving skill levels in disadvantaged areas of the UK must have the improvement in basic skills at the top of the agenda. The creation of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU), with a leading role across all Government Departments, establishes a more determined focus on solving this problem.

Funding and Planning

The short term target is to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 people by 2004; the long term aim is to match the best of other countries and ultimately, to eradicate the problem altogether. To provide the means of achieving these aims, funding has now been increased significantly, from £241million per year to over £400 million per year by 2003/04. Including resources from other Government Departments and the Employment Service, over £1.5 billion is available over three years (2001/02-2003/04) to address basic skills needs.

This is a challenging task: over 2 million learning places need to be created over the next three years, and there will have to be a major publicity campaign to boost demand.

Partners

The partners in this endeavour include:

- Government Departments
- Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit
- Learning and Skills Council
- Local Authorities, Employment Service, learndirect, voluntary and private trainers
- Partnerships including Learning Partnerships, RDAs, employers, unions
- Basic Skills Agency, NIACE, ALI, LSDA.

The RDAs' tasks include:

- ensuring literacy and numeracy are a priority in the region's skills action plans and regional funding decisions.

Learning Partnerships' tasks include:

- helping to identify basic skills needs in their communities
- helping with local plans
- helping the LSC to set appropriate targets
- promoting the importance of basic skills in the community
- ensuring there is adequate information advice and guidance.

Roles and Responsibilities

Different agencies have different but very important roles to play in the campaign. The LSC's tasks include:

- working in partnership - with Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit regional co-ordinators, with the Employment Service and other training providers
- planning and target setting
- funding
- ensuring flexible learning
- quality assurance/raising standards - monitoring the effectiveness of provision.

The Trade Unions' tasks include:

- promoting literacy and numeracy skills to their members
- offering advice, providing training programmes
- negotiating training time for employees.

BASIC SKILLS

Feedback from workshop participants; direct quotes are in quotation marks and italics.

Participants' views reflected concerns with exactly how things were to be done. They thought that an important tactic in winning the support of the public and Government alike was to go for quick wins to show early success.

Small, voluntary and community organisations

Much good work in basic skills is done by small and voluntary organisations working in communities. There were concerns that these organisations might not receive fair and adequate funding. *'How can we ensure that small organisations who have knowledge and access to potential learners get funding?'*

Another concern was that arrangements for including small and voluntary groups might be over-bureaucratic and too demanding administratively. One way of tackling this problem was for the ABSSU and its regional co-ordinators to work through consortia or umbrella groups such as Councils for Voluntary Service or Community Relations Councils.

Funding and planning

Funding for such small groups required understanding, participants felt. *'Funding needs to be comprehensive, e.g. include travel costs.'*

It was also thought that planning and funding arrangements should take a deeper view of flexibility and risk. *'Flexible learning means flexible funding.'* *'Planning should include the idea that a risk culture is acceptable.'* It was emphasised that funding must be secure - *'Stop insecurity and constantly changing funds.'* - and transparent.

Staffing

There was a general recognition of the problems of staffing. *'We're going to try yet again to hire some basic skills teachers,'* was one desperate comment. Part of the problem can be addressed through building up community capacity and infrastructure, but there can be no substitute for recruiting and training teachers. *'We need to develop high quality basic skills training to deliver this strategy.'*

Motivating the clients

Many participants raised the question of reaching and motivating the hard to reach. *'How do we motivate and raise aspirations of potential learners to see the benefits of involvement?'*

Small local organisations were seen as likely to have a way to reach potential learners' peer groups and families. Learning must be tuned to the needs of individuals, for many of whom the prime need is to be sustainably employed. *'We must offer relevant and meaningful learning to enable people to be employable.'*



ACTION POINTS

Participants identified a number of actions they themselves could initiate immediately, as a result of the conferences. Here are some of them:

Learners

- Try to contribute to LP & local LSCs on behalf of learners
- Consider new ways to attract people into our learning centre
- *'I'll remember, re. learners, one size does not fit all'*
- Identify what Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services can do to ensure that the learner voice is heard - and acted on
- Adjust and refine arrangements for learner/potential learner feedback

Communication

- Feed Adult and Community information into college strategic planning
- Communicate the information about resources available, to the voluntary sector and youth services
- Follow up contacts made at the conference
- Follow up contacts in organisations such as health and social services
- Raise profile of community and voluntary groups with local LSC
- Improve links with self-employed, as individuals and as a sector

Dissemination and sharing

- Get the voluntary sector interested in working with LPs and the LSC
- Read up on LSCs and disseminate information to colleagues and other groups
- Discuss ways of contacting community learning groups
- Reinforce library support and outreach
- Work on a country-wide approach

- Review and write up current situation re. networks with local voluntary and community organisations and identify training needs

Development

- Foster leadership developments in neighbourhood renewal
- Encourage real capacity building
- Be innovative in creating learning opportunities for Standards Fund
- Identify basic skills funding streams
- Initiate advocacy project
- Look at rural indicators strategically
- Get involved in basic skills strategic development
- Research potential of local LSC
- Put monitoring and evaluation procedures in all courses
- Use the information learned at conference in setting up ICT centres

Partners

- Reinforce existing networks
- Get more involved in LP
- Investigate TUC/Trade Unions as partners
- Support collaborative and partnership working
- Invite local LSC members to visit our organisation
- Extend existing partnerships
- Consider and review culture of LP

General

- Challenge the status quo
- Demand creative/innovative/lateral thinking from self and colleagues
- Concentrate on action rather than brooding on problems

CONTACT INFORMATION AND PUBLICATIONS

The Learning and Skills Council Remit Letter from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Education and Employment's vision for the Learning and Skills Council, its statutory framework and the priorities for its first Corporate Plan.

Copies from: Mike Morley
DfES
W3A
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ

Or by e-mail to Post-16.feedback@dfes.gov.uk, or by visiting the DfES's website at www.dfes.gov.uk/post16

Learning and Skills Council Corporate Plan

Document on www.lsc.gov.uk. Copies from:

PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham, NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 6022260
Fax: 0845 6033360
E-mail: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local Solutions

Report of the Policy Action Team (PAT) on Skills. Copies (quote reference PAT2) from:

DfES Publications
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 6022260

Also on www.lifelonglearning.dfes.gov.uk

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan (Social Exclusion Unit, Jan 2001)

Copies at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu, or by contacting the Social Exclusion Unit - tel: 020 7944 8383, e-mail: neighbourhoodrenewal@dtlr.gsi.gov.uk

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Policy Action Team Audit

(Social Exclusion Unit, Jan 2001). Tracking progress.

Copies from the Social Exclusion Unit as above.

Skills for Life: The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Document on www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/news Copies from:

DfES Publications
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 6022260

Mutual Advantage Report: Working with Voluntary and Community Organisations on Learning and Skills

A limited number of copies of the part 1 report and part 2 case studies and resources are available from:

EDuce Ltd
St John's Innovation Centre
Cowley Road
Cambridge
CB4 0WS

Tel: 01223 421 685

Fax: 01223 420 844

Copies can also be viewed and downloaded on www.dfes.gov.uk/led

Funding Community Groups

A consultation document. Document on www.homeoffice.gov.uk under Volunteering. Further copies by calling 020 72178400, or by e-mailing: public_enquiry.acu@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Empowering the Learning Community

(Education & Libraries Task Group March 2000) Ways in which co-operation between the education and public library sectors can be stimulated and improved to support lifelong learning. Copies from:

Library & Information Commission

19-29 Woburn Place
London, WC1H 0LU

Tel: 0207 273 8700

Fax: 0207 273 8701

E-mail: lib@lic.gov.uk

Web: www.lic.gov.uk

Towns, Cities and Regions in the Learning Age: A Survey of Learning Communities (2000) LCN with DfEE and Local Government Association

Current state of learning communities in the UK.

Copies from IdeA Publication Sales,

Layden House,
76-78 Turnmill St,
London EC1M 5LG.

Tel: 020 7296 6600

LGA Code: ED045 ISBN 184049 1981

Moving on: the Learning and Skills Council and the voluntary and community sector. Final report and recommendations

Main issues and recommendations from nine regional seminars for the voluntary and community sector on the Learning and Skills Council.

Copies from WEA or NIACE. Also on the NIACE website:

www.niace.org.uk

Lifelong Learning News

Free quarterly publication covering developments across the whole field of lifelong learning, aimed at practitioners in the field. Copies from Dan Walton, DfES, Room E8, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ.

Telephone : 0114 259 5553; e-mail: daniel1.walton@dfes.gsi.gov.uk.

Also on www.lifelonglearning.dfes.gov.uk.

Useful web addresses

Department for Education & Skills (DfES) - formerly Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)

DfES home page - www.dfes.gov.uk

Lifelong Learning home page - www.lifelonglearning.dfes.gov.uk

Learning Partnerships home page -
www.lifelonglearning.dfes.gov.uk/lp

Neighbourhood Learning in Disadvantaged Communities -
www.skills.org.uk

Learning City Network

www.LC-Network.com (from December 2001)

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

www.niace.org.uk

Basic Skills Agency

www.basic-skills.co.uk

Learning and Skills Council

www.lsc.gov.uk

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/national_strategy.htm

Home Office Active Communities Unit (ACU)

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/acu.htm

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk

Local Strategic Partnerships

www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/partnerships

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

www.lsagency.org.uk

Government Offices

<http://www.go-nw.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-ne.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-london.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-wm.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-em.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-east.gov.uk/>

<http://www.goyh.gov.uk/>

<http://www.gosw.gov.uk/>

<http://www.go-se.gov.uk/>

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Karen Shepperson, Learning City Network

Susan Smith, Government Office Yorkshire and the Humber

Sara Turton, Yorkshire Forward

Martin Yarnit, Learning City Network

Jonathan Webster, Adult & Community Learning Team, DfES

Learning City Network LCN - the Network for Learning Communities

LCN - founded in 1995 - is the largest national organisation of its kind in the world with more than 50 affiliates throughout the UK ranging in size from Birmingham to Great Yarmouth. Membership is open to learning partnerships representing towns, cities, counties and regions. LCN - a company limited by guarantee and a charity - is run by its members through a Board of Directors which each year elects a Chair and Deputy Chair.



ITS MISSION

- Learning communities - whatever their size - use learning to understand and adapt to change and to enable their citizens to shape the future.
- Learning communities work together to strengthen their capacity to deal with change and to share best practice.
- LCN exists to promote learning communities and to support them to collaborate effectively to achieve their objectives.

For further information about Learning City Network, please contact Karen Shepperson, Learning City Network Secretariat, 111 Grantham Road, Bingham, Nottingham NG13 8DF Tel. 01949 878118; Fax. 01949 831 171; e-mail: lc-network@ntlworld.com

LSC Timetable

Date	Strategic Planning (to 2004 & 2005)	Business plans (to 2003)
Nov 2000	Remit Letter issued	Annual guidance/budget 01-02
Mar 2001	Corporate plan 01-04 to external consultation	
April 2001	Learning & Skills Council launched	
May-Aug 2001	National Council reviews responses, consults Government, approves final plan and notifies ranges for local targets.	Annual guidance 01-02
	Local Councils begin preparing local skills, participation and learning strategies, & notify the timetable to local partners.	Local Councils prepare draft plans 02-03
From Sep 2001	Local Councils consult local & regional partners on outline strategic plans	
Nov 2001		Annual guidance/budget 02-03
Dec 2001	Local Councils issue draft local strategic plans for consultation	
Jan-Mar 2002	National Councils takes overview of emerging local plans; reviews progress against targets; & finalises Corporate Plan 02-05	Annual guidance/budget 02-03
	Local Councils finalise local strategic plans 02-05	Local Councils finalise business plans 02-03

Source: LSC Strategic Framework to 2004 Corporate Plan