

Mutual Advantage:

Working with Voluntary and
Community Organisations
on Learning and Skills



Report Summary

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

The mission of the Learning and Skills Council is "to build a new learning culture... We want the LSC to make a real difference to people's lives - to help support families, build stronger neighbourhoods, support the regeneration and the capacity building of communities and support competitive businesses."

DfEE (2000), The Learning and Skills Council Prospectus

The Learning and Skills Council, and its local arms, the Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs), cannot achieve its goals without effective partnerships with the voluntary sector. Voluntary and community organisations have many and varied contributions to make, through promoting the benefits of learning, widening access to opportunities for all sections of the community, and integrating learning and skills into economic and social regeneration activities. Employing over 500,000, they constitute a significant sector in their own right - bigger, for example, than agriculture or publishing and printing - and have their own workforce development needs to address.

There are challenges to LLSCs and the sector itself, however, in realising the potential that the new learning and skills policy agenda offers for benefiting the people who are served by - and who work in - the sector.

These challenges include:

for voluntary and community organisations

- understanding what is different about the Learning and Skills Council and organising to take full advantage of policy and funding developments
- securing and managing the resources needed to play a fuller and effective role in partnerships, projects and provision of learning opportunities

for LLSCs

- understanding the sector and what makes voluntary and community organisations tick
- appreciating the full range of the sector's involvement in learning and regeneration
- working in ways that best support the development of the sector and help it maximise its contribution

"Mutual Advantage" report

One key to moving forward is the pursuit of **mutual advantage**: LLSCs, voluntary and community organisations and other partners working together to help each other achieve their goals - to the benefit of the people and communities they serve.

The report, "Mutual Advantage: Working with Voluntary and Community Organisations on Learning and Skills" has been produced to capture some of the lessons and good practice that already exists in partnerships involving TECs and the voluntary sector which

will be relevant to the work of Local Learning and Skills Councils. It draws on development work in three TEC areas (Hampshire, Sandwell and Wigan) and case studies and illustrations from other parts of the country. [Details of how to get copies can be found on the back cover.]

Materials have also been produced to help voluntary organisations and LLSCs:

- follow up relevant networks and contacts
- review roles and potential contributions

- identify resources for building organisational capacity in the voluntary sector
- work better together

The “Mutual Advantage” report highlights 10 key messages - four for the voluntary and community sector, four for LLSCs and two for

joint working - in response to the question, “what do we need to do to make more of a difference on learning and skills?”. All the messages were drawn out by participants themselves - they were not instances of one sector telling the other what they should be doing . . .

10 Key Messages

Key Messages for the Voluntary and Community Sector

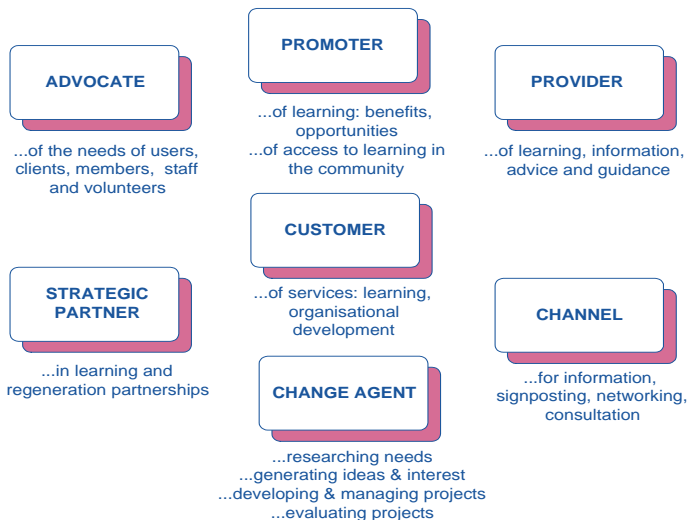
1. Appreciate the opportunities in the new learning and skills agenda

From April 2001, the Learning and Skills Council is the channel for all Government funding of post-16 education and training, other than for higher education. Each local Learning and Skills Council has substantial Local Initiatives Funds from which to address local needs and support a wide range of learning and skills projects. The bulk of the European

Social Fund will also be administered through LLSCs from autumn 2001.

There are many opportunities for voluntary and community organisations, relevant depending on their purpose and the needs of their users, members, clients, staff and volunteers. These relate to the roles they may play:

Voluntary and Community Sector Roles in Learning, Skills and Regeneration



For some, providing education and training opportunities is the major part of their activities. Others may have no involvement but could develop their contribution in one or more of a number of these roles.

Potential Benefits for the Voluntary and Community Sector from the New Learning and Skills Agenda

for communities served

- new and improved learning opportunities
- more of a 'learner voice' in decisions about provision
- resources for new provision tailored to local needs

for voluntary and community organisations

- access to services and resources to improve organisational/group effectiveness
- stronger LLSC links with wider regeneration and community development activities
- greater influence over LLSC plans

2. Promote what the sector has to offer

There are many clear signals from the Government that the voluntary and community sector has an important part to play. Not least is a role in relation to providing 'first rung' learning opportunities which give individuals confidence to progress to further learning and the benefits - to their job prospects and to their lives generally - which this can bring.

But there is a need to promote what individual organisations and the sector as a whole has to offer, especially how they already:

- reach many potential individuals whom others cannot, or find difficult to attract into learning
- promote learning within the voluntary sector workforce - which involves significant numbers working, eg, in health and social welfare, arts, leisure and the environment
- inform and guide personal development and learning choices made by service users

3. Improve networking, organisation and capacity for partnership

Voluntary and community organisations have less of a say than they could have, because they are often not organised around learning and skills matters. Even where there are representatives from the sector on partnership bodies, these individuals are not necessarily well linked to the wider sector and often lack the backup, knowledge and confidence to deal on equal terms with others around the table. Partners may not realise the costs and time involved for voluntary organisations in taking part in partnerships and in the networking,

communications and consultation needed to raise awareness and promote involvement.

If the situation is to change, it is important that the sector itself addresses these issues, articulating the learning needs of the sector's clients and workforce (staff and volunteers), and seeking to influence LLSC plans and the activities of local Learning Partnerships¹.

There is also a need to strengthen collaborative skills and knowledge, to be able to play a fuller role in strategic partnerships and develop and manage joint projects.

¹ Local Learning Partnerships have a key role in reconciling the demand and supply of learning, seeking better information about what people want and promoting better range and quality of learning opportunities through collaboration amongst providers.

4. Invest more in training and quality

Voluntary sector participants in the project strongly advocated more investment by the sector in training staff, volunteers and trustees as a route to more successful performance. In addition to partnership skills development needs include fundraising, IT and management skills. There are barriers which need to be tackled - typically, course costs, time pressures and limited staff resources. Participants were keen to work with LLSCs to find cost-effective solutions, including collaborative models (such as learning networks, 'piggy-backing' on training run by larger organisations, brokerage to help organisations define their needs and team up with others, etc).

The value of investing in quality was also stressed: both in relation to service quality and organisational development, and to the provision of learning opportunities, advice and guidance (in those cases where voluntary organisations are, or could become providers). Pursuit of general standards (such as Investors in People, PQASSO and Quality First) can assist voluntary organisations develop their approach to quality, in ways which enable them to make a more effective contribution to social inclusion, employability, etc. Work towards the standards also provides a stimulus to identifying and meeting skill needs and encouraging organisational learning.

Key Messages for Local Learning and Skills Councils

5. Appreciate the nature and importance of the voluntary and community sector

In the past, relatively few TECs treated the voluntary and community sector as a priority, in developing stakeholder relationships and in targeting services. The picture has varied across the country in terms of the extent to which voluntary organisations have been involved with FE colleges and with local authority adult education services, especially in widening access to learning opportunities. The project drew attention to the broad range of involvement of sector in learning, skills and regeneration, and

highlighted its economic and social significance, in ways relevant to the mission of the LSC. Consider:

- around 500,000 people are employed in the sector - more, for example, than in agriculture, energy, food products or publishing and printing
- the sector is growing in employment and in income faster than national averages
- there are over 3 million unpaid workers, with many more individuals involved in volunteering activity from time to time

Potential Benefits for LLSCs in Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

improved outcomes

- *reaching individuals who may otherwise be difficult to attract to learning*
- *provision better tailored to learner needs, and offering progression to further learning*
- *increased investment by voluntary sector employers in developing their employees and volunteers*

organisational benefits

- *a stronger local mandate, building wider support for LLSC objectives*
- *allies in promoting the development of a learning culture*
- *stronger links to grass roots/ disadvantaged communities - and a better understanding of needs*

The voluntary sector merits targeting for LLSC activities, as customers and as partners in developing a learning culture. It is important

that LLSCs understand what makes the sector tick and how best to engage and work with individual organisations and groups.

6. Encourage sector involvement

LLSCs can promote the involvement of voluntary and community organisations across all aspects of their business, and can seek to ensure that other partners (eg, members of Learning Partnerships) effectively engage the sector. LLSCs can assist involvement more generally through

7. Help the sector build its capacity

LLSCs have important decisions to take in allocating their Local Initiative Funding. There will typically be many competing claims, and LLSCs have to judge which will offer the best returns in pursuit of national and local objectives, including 'community capacity building'. LLSCs are expected to work with learning providers to improve standards, and to support new providers - potentially from the voluntary sector - which serve particular groups.

LLSCs share a common interest with a range of other partners (eg, local authorities, health

support of voluntary sector forums, providing appropriate briefings - as free as possible from jargon - and allowing good time for consultations. There is also a need to recognise the costs for voluntary sector representatives of participating in partnerships.

authorities, registered social landlords) who are also interested in building capacity in voluntary and community organisations and who need to engage with the sector more effectively. It will be essential (for example, in the context of the new Local Strategic Partnerships) to look with the sector at the resources available and how to make best use of them. The report provides many examples of ways in which TECs have been supporting organisational capacity building in the voluntary sector, including actions in support of providers of training or information and guidance.

8. Develop internal capacity for working with the sector

According higher priority to working with the voluntary and community sector has implications for the approach LLSCs may adopt. Three aspects were highlighted by the project:

- understanding what's needed in promoting bottom-up community development
- practising the behaviours and approaches

which make for effective partnership working

- implementing performance management and staff appraisal policies which recognise and support successful outcomes in working with the sector

LLSCs may need to promote a single point of contact in their dealings with the sector.

Key Messages for Collaboration

9. Implement Compact principles

Project participants consistently expressed a need for everyone to 'get smarter' at partnership working: in strategic partnerships, to create and maintain the conditions for effective partnership; and at a project level, to improve the management of collaborative projects.

Much of what needs to change at a strategic level is recognised by work at a national level in establishing the Compact: an agreement between the voluntary and community sector and government to improve their relationships for mutual advantage. Local Compacts aim to

develop this between the sector, local authorities and other local public bodies, including health authorities and local Learning and Skills Councils. The underlying concern is to strengthen the sector, and enable more to be achieved together than would otherwise be possible.

Compact principles include:

- partners should carry equal weight in decision-making, with agendas set by all involved
- mutual respect for the different contributions partners are able to make

10. Pursue joint capacity building

Greater effectiveness in partnership working requires joint capacity building: all partners need to develop and update their capabilities for ensuring successful outcomes through

- contracting regimes should enable the sector to bid on equal terms

More successful outcomes depend on changes on the part of both voluntary bodies and public agencies. One priority for the latter is to develop a more common and coherent approach, eg, to requirements for reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and to the terms of funding of voluntary organisations. The Compact initiative also addresses the particular needs of the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and community groups.

collaboration. Partnership needs to be worked at continually, and can be progressed effectively through joint projects and joint training.

What You Will Find in the “Mutual Advantage” Report and Materials

Part 1 treats these key messages in more depth, with many examples and illustrations of emerging and good practice.

Part 2 features profiles of work in the three TEC areas (Hampshire, Sandwell and Wigan), the case studies, and resources for use by LLSCs, voluntary sector and other partners.

The six case studies are:

- Birmingham Voluntary Sector Quality Development Programme
- Calderdale & Kirklees TEC working with the voluntary sector
- CITINET learning centre network (Sheffield)

- North London TEC working with the voluntary sector
- Pan-London Community Regeneration Consortium
- VOLCAAN (Voluntary and Community Alliance Across Norfolk)

The resources cover:

1. Developing Voluntary and Community Sector Involvement in LLSC Activities
2. Voluntary and Community Sector Roles in Learning and Skills
3. Resources and Funding for Organisational Capacity Building
4. Partnerships and Trust
5. Networks and Contacts
6. Glossary

See the back cover for details on how to obtain these.

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For copies of the 'Mutual Advantage' report (Part 1) and for Part 2 containing the case studies and resources, visit the DfEE website at www.dfee.gov.uk/led

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