New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Lifelong Learning

Research Report 13

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Executive Summary

'Lifelong Learning' is an established policy priority and the term is used in reference to a wide variety of initiatives. Across the New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships there are very many projects that address Lifelong Learning: however, most of these remain in the early planning stages at present. This is partly a reflection of the way in which Lifelong Learning is understood by the partnerships. In some contexts it is seen as part of *all* education provision: in contrast, some other partnerships view it as quite distinct and separate. This report includes a description of current developments in Oldham NDC. The project focuses on providing IT training and facilities to the wider community. It is in the relatively early stages of development and findings from the research at this stage should be treated as provisional.

The aim of the scheme was to help overcome barriers experienced by individuals with regard to continuing their education. Issues that were seen as barriers locally include:

- *Poor self–confidence and scepticism about the rewards:* Many local residents have not been successful in the educational system. This may help to explain their lack of faith in the education system and their own lack of confidence.

- *Low levels of motivation and interest:* Simply advertising opportunities will not necessarily improve take-up.

- *Structural factors:* Disadvantage, both at the levels of lack of social capital and material disadvantage, is discouraging. There is also a feeling that the poor state of other community resources, in the past, may be a negative factor.

The research to date has identified a number of key attributes of effective lifelong learning projects:

- *High quality training and flexibility:* Lifelong Learning projects aim to provide facilities for people to continue to up-date their skills throughout their lives. The flexibility of the arrangements suit those who are not used to, or dislike, a formalised, structured course.

- *Delivery:* The person responsible for delivery combines the roles of teacher and administrator; tutoring participants and keeping a log of those using the service. In essence a patient, multi-tasking person is essential.

- *Equipment:* The students also appreciate access to state-of-the-art equipment, as home owned machines (where available) were usually old and of limited capacity:

The research also suggests that the following areas require particular consideration:

- *Internet connection:* The Community Centre is not networked and this conflicts with the aspirations of the project to offer a high quality service.

- *Privileged group users:* There is a question about whether there is a danger that the project is being used by already relatively privileged groups. Some groups are effectively excluded due to the lack of 'complementary' facilities. For example, some mothers who have no place to leave their children whilst they use the computers.

- *Funding:* This is a key issue for areas of high disadvantage where there are huge structural obstacles to overcome.

- *Slow progress:* Funding sources at the national and local levels need to be carefully coordinated as the NDC cannot fund projects that might be funded borough-wide. This necessitates a clear borough policy for educational provision, balancing the interests of different key players, which takes time to develop.

Introduction

Lifelong Learning has become an almost ubiquitous term in current education policy and is interpreted in many different ways. Although national policy has highlighted the importance of Lifelong Learning, it is apparent that NDC partnerships are at different stages in their attempts to realise this goal. A number of Lifelong Learning projects are planned for New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas as a part of the education theme programme but few are actually underway. This is partly a reflection of the way in which Lifelong Learning is understood by the partnerships. In some contexts it is seen as part of *all* education provision: in contrast, some other partnerships view it as quite distinct and separate.

The number and range of Lifelong Learning projects across the NDC initiative has led us to choose this strand as a recurring focus for our work over the next few years. In this first report, therefore, we have decided examine progress in a single partnership (Oldham) that shows early signs of activity and some genuine progress. This may be especially helpful to other partnerships who are struggling to get their Lifelong Learning projects off the ground.

During our work in Oldham we focused on two projects:

- Mobile Learning Centre, *'IT on the Loose';*
- Proposed Lifelong Learning Centre at Hathershaw Technology College.

The first project has been running for eight months. The second has been approved by the NDC board and a Learning Partnership Manager was appointed in January 2003. As they are still in the relatively early stages of development, long-term impact cannot yet be evaluated.

This report covers the following areas:

- The context in which the Lifelong Learning project has been established and the problems it is trying to address;

- The nature of the intervention in terms of objectives and targeted beneficiaries;

- The way in which the Lifelong Learning project has been delivered, in particular focusing on the type of intervention offered and the assumptions behind this intervention;

- Current outcomes and impact of the project (although these are limited given that the projects are in the early stages of development); and

- Key lessons that have been learnt so far from the intervention.

Context and problem

Socio-economic context

According to the baseline information that was gathered to identify local need, Hathershaw and Fitton Hill (the two NDC areas) have high levels of unemployment. Local unemployment is 12.7% as opposed to 8.6% in Oldham and 7.3% nationally. There is also robust evidence from research undertaken between 1996 and 1999 (Kalra, Hepburn and Penhale, OMBC, 1999) that Bangladeshi and Pakistani young people in Oldham suffer from disproportionate levels of unemployment (13% for white males compared to 25% for Pakistani and Bangladeshi males and 18.4% for white females compared to 19.8% for Pakistani and

Bangladeshi females). Low levels of educational qualifications, combined with discrimination in the labour market, were found to be amongst the reasons for this. The area also experiences low levels of household income with 36% receiving income support, compared to 24% in Oldham and 19% nationally. Of the residents of working age, 58% have no qualifications compared to 49% in Oldham and 18% nationally. 23% of pupils attain no GCSEs compared to 10% in Oldham and 6% nationally. In relation to the provision of Lifelong Learning only 47% of young people remain in education post 16 compared to 68% in Oldham and 71% nationally. Only 18% of adults participated in education and training in 2000. Levels of adult literacy and numeracy are substantially lower than in Oldham and nationally.

The figures above indicate significant poverty and social disadvantage. They also help to explain a negative orientation to education and why few local residents over the age of compulsory education take up the education and training facilities on offer. There is also hostility from local residents to Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and considerable disengagement from the local political process, with only 15% of residents (compared to 21% in other NDCs in the region) feeling that they could influence decision-making (Deas, Baker and Rees, 2002).

The NDC area is described in the National Evaluation report (Deas, Baker and Rees, 2002) as continuing to suffer from 'often tense inter-ethnic politics.' Such conflict came to a head in the civil unrest of May 2001 described in the press as the worst 'race'-related violence in Britain for fifteen years (*The Guardian*, November 28th 2001). This was sparked by the activities of far right racist organisations but other contributory factors that have identified include pronounced economic hardship, a distrusted local police force, and generally poor 'race' relations locally. David Ritchie, appointed to investigate the causes of the unrest, claimed that the local authority had failed to address deep-seated issues and had done little in 30 years to challenge racial segregation in education and housing (*The Guardian*, November 21st 2002). At the time of the report only 3% of all council employees were from ethnic minorities. Ritchie considered the lack of ethnic minority staff as a form of institutional racism (Ritchie Report*, Oldham Independent Review*, 2001:12).

The Oldham context is an important backdrop to the work of the NDC in Fitton Hill and Hathershaw. Since the civil unrest there are heightened sensitivities amongst local residents about how resources are allocated and who benefits from them. Around 3.7% of the population of Hathershaw and Fitton Hill self identify as Black or other minority ethnic heritage. Within this 3.7%, 1.2% are Pakistani, 1.4% are Indian and 0.1% are Bangladeshi (NDC Delivery Plan, 2001). There continues to be a debate between the NDC key players about the politics of engaging with minority groups in a meaningful and visible way given the local context. The National Evaluation report (Deas, Baker and Rees, 2002) comments on the lack of BME representation on the NDC board. The NDC is addressing this and is faced with the huge challenge of working in two polarised communities divided by racism. Fitton Hill is perceived as a white working class stronghold and practically uninhabitable for South Asians. Hathershaw, on the other hand is more ethnically mixed. Many local residents and staff in the partnership feel that the idea of divided communities has been amplified by the media. However it remains a barrier to the regeneration of both communities:

> 'It is now a year since the local community was torn apart and still nothing significant has changed. We must quickly provide a tangible route out of the trap of poverty and low-self esteem if this community is to survive intact and then is able to flourish.' (Hathershaw Technology College's Commitment to Lifelong Learning Document 2002)

The Policy Context

The government has committed itself to a vision of Lifelong Learning that infers a holistic educational system, both formal and informal, that supports everyone's learning needs from the cradle to the grave. This involves strengthening and improving the existing formal system so that pupils will develop a positive orientation to learning which, in theory, will continue after the end of compulsory education. It also involves special action in supporting those who have become disaffected, excluded, failed and/or disenfranchised by the present formal system. However, the term *Lifelong Learning* is problematic and the description above leaves a number of key questions unanswered. Key policy texts produced through the 1990s held different ideological positions in the promotion of Lifelong Learning, 'the learning age' and/or 'the learning society' - although the use of such terms might seem to infer a shared set of assumptions.

Lifelong Learning became a concern in the 1990s because of fears about low levels of skills and participation rates in education and training in the UK compared to its European and global competitors. It was felt that one-off education and training was no longer sufficient to equip the population for the rest of their working lives and that constant up-dating of skills was required to ensure economic competitiveness. Reports (Ball, 1990; Dearing 1996, 1997) called upon further and higher education to widen access to a much more varied constituency of learners and to respond to the needs of the economy. Other reports (Fryer 1997, Kennedy 1997) took a more progressive approach that emphasized Lifelong Learning not simply for economic purposes but also in the interests of social justice and developing a more inclusive society. Since 1997 the Labour government has continued this commitment to Lifelong Learning with a very clear emphasis, through key policies, like *Learn Direct* and *Individual Learning Accounts*, on the work place and improving skills as an *individual* responsibility (DFEE, 1998). With the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) a national strategy for the provision of education and training, through 47 local offices, is in place. The government has made it clear that LSC has a key role to play in the development of community–based learning by bringing adult and community learning in disadvantaged neighbourhoods into the mainstream. Part of the remit will be to ensure a very wide availability of 'first step' opportunities to attract into learning those who previously regarded such opportunities as something not for them. This is directly relevant to projects like those described below in the Oldham NDC.

Other policies have tended to focus on strategies that are urgently needed for young people and adults who have passed through the formal educational system but failed to attain the necessary basic skills. These initiatives have included:

- The Basic Skills Agency;
- Individual Learning Accounts (discontinued because of fraudulent activities);
- The University for Industry, now 'Learn Direct';
- Extension of the New Deal beyond the age of 25;
- Regional development agencies;
- Learning and Skills Council.

More recently the government's proposals for changes in the post-14 curriculum signal a desire both to reform the final years of compulsory schooling (when pupils are aged 14 to 16) and also to create a more integrated and coherent system leading from school and into further education. These changes are of particular relevance to NDC partnerships where 'staying on' rates are significantly lower than the national average.

Main barriers to participation: residents' perspectives

According to those interviewed there are several reasons (apart from the issues of racism and inter-ethnic conflict noted above) why local residents over the age of compulsory schooling do not take advantage of the educational opportunities on offer. Poor self–confidence and scepticism about the rewards were often mentioned:

> 'It's just self confidence, to come up and say, yes, and to a point accept that they've got needs which they need to address to get forward. (…) I do meet some people in one of the centres that could do with it, but they haven't got that sort of confidence or I think the confidence in the system as well, that by doing certain things they will actually get somewhere. I think they sort of accept that it's not going to take them any further….', (Tutor, I.T. on the Loose)

As we noted above, baseline statistical information indicates that many of the local residents have not been successful in the educational system and fewer stay on post-16 than in Oldham generally and the country nationally. This may help to explain their lack of faith in the education system as well as their own lack of confidence. It is easy to see why, in such circumstances, some residents are wary of further investment in a system that seems already to have failed them.

Low levels of motivation and interest were also mentioned:

> 'If you go into the middle of Fitton Hill and ask some of those people, "would you like to come and do this course we are doing today? It's free, it's great, it's wonderful." And they'll say "No. I'm going to go and do something else." You know? Because what is in it for them? (…) "Will it affect my benefits? I can't come every Tuesday at that time because I have got to do other things".' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator)

Simply advertising opportunities will, therefore, not necessarily improve take-up. This was recognized by those interviewed: they argued that creative ways of engaging potential students were crucial to the success of Lifelong Learning in areas like Hathershaw and Fitton Hill. At some of the Link centres run by Oldham College they have begun to do this:

> 'So there are people that won't want to come to a college, there are people that don't want to go to a local authority and there are people that don't want to do any learning at all. And we want to try to engage those people without mentioning the word "learning", in effect, or certainly the word "course". So the Link logo is seen as being "come and drop in, come and have a play on the PCs". (Head of Resources, Oldham College)

Structural factors, including deprivation both at the levels of lack of social capital and material disadvantage, were also mentioned:

> 'But it's got to make quite a change, and social deprivation, high level of deprivation, low level of achievement and ambition (…) I think there are lots of issues there, which are not so much about delivery, but about aspiration raising. And (...) confidence building in communities.' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator)

Poverty can raise important barriers for projects relying on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), not least where residents ask themselves the point of learning ICT skills when they are unlikely ever to afford the equipment at home. In addition, there is a feeling that the poor state of other community resources, in the past, may be a negative factor:

> 'One of the things that we're trying to tackle with that is this thing about the quality of the learning environment, which is a very small thing today, and it's about saying to

people their expectations of going to a community centre is that they'll be sat on chairs with three legs. There won't be any paper, there won't be a printer, and there'll be no internet access. There'll probably be no glass in the windows. There'll be barbed wire. They can only go at certain times. And what we said to the community is challenge us. Through the Link project we've said challenge us. Say that you want the walls painted. Say that you want carpet. Say that you want the tables and chairs. Say that you want it new.' (Head of Resources, Oldham College)

There are complex barriers at work in Fitton Hill and Hathershaw. Factors like low aspiration and motivation, poor prior educational attainment and material disadvantage. This is overlaid by lack of social capital, manifested through low community engagement in local politics and two communities divided by racism and mutual suspicion. Such barriers present a considerable challenge to the effective provision and take up of Lifelong Learning.

Nature of the intervention

To date in Oldham NDC one Lifelong Learning project has been set up and another is planned. Their aim is to reach those over sixteen in the NDC area who are neither in work nor education. Primary data for this evaluation was gathered by observing the project at work as well as through interviews with key players and participants.

'IT on the Loose'

A mobile IT centre has been running for eight months, called *'IT on the Loose.'* It provides training in IT skills at various levels, Learn Direct courses and email facilities. It is run by Oldham College and leased by the NDC and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). It operates in the NDC area for two days a week. A driver travels to two community centres in Hathershaw and Fitton Hill with 15 lap-top computers. He is a trained IT tutor. He is of Indian origin and speaks Hindi and Gujarati. He keeps a register of all those using the project and of what skills have been acquired, as well as a sort of 'after-care' system to monitor progression onto other courses elsewhere. The decision to make the project IT based came as a response to the baseline survey, which found that the number of local residents owning computers was lower than the national figure. It was felt that this identified an area where residents might be disadvantaged by lacking access to IT facilities and skills. The idea of a *mobile* unit came from Oldham College where there is expertise in this area. Setting up the laptops in community centres already used by local residents is regarded as a means of attracting students, especially those who would not normally consider going to a formal classroom setting. The project is promoted through the local press, through leaflets, posters and open days at the local secondary school. The cost of providing this service is £36,000 (2002-2003).

Hathershaw Learning Centre

In order to coordinate the work of various agencies, SRB, Connexions, Learn Direct, Oldham Council, Oldham College and one secondary and three primary schools in the NDC area, 'mini education zone,' has been created. The NDC board have approved the development of a Lifelong Learning Centre at Hathershaw College. A skills audit is also being conducted. A Learning Partnership manager, has been appointed and has Lifelong Learning as part of her brief. A network of six or seven learning centres linked to Hathershaw Technology College are planned in the longer term. Hathershaw Technology College is geographically and politically important because it is used by residents of both Fitton Hill and Hathershaw. The College has technology status with enhanced funding and expertise in technology. The

Lifelong Learning Centre will be located in part of what is now the school hall, which will be refurbished and equipped with up-to-date technology. The plan includes computer suites, a cyber café, conference rooms, a reference library and Connexions offices providing careers advice for 16-19 year olds. It is aimed at providing courses during the day for adults without qualifications. The Learning Partnership Manager has already started work with the schools in the 'mini education zone':

> 'We had £165,000 to spend on ICT equipment. Well a lot of that has gone on laptops for teachers and students, interactive white boards. And also we put two technicians between four primary schools (…) we've put learning mentors into the primary schools, six learning mentors between the four primaries. They are working with individual children with behaviour problems, providing pre-school parenting skills and lunchtime activities.' (Learning Partnership Manager)

They have also purchased an integrated learning system called 'success – maker,' which addresses the improvement of reading, spelling and numeracy. It will also be used with adults in the Lifelong Learning Centre.

Another Lifelong Learning Centre in the NDC area is planned at Park Cake Bakeries, one of the largest employers in the town. It will be a partnership between NDC, Oldham College, a trade union and Park Cake management. It will provide access to IT facilities to enable up-skilling employees and the local community.

Aims and objectives

One of the main aims of 'IT on the Loose,' is to act as a pilot project without the kind of capital needed to set up a fixed venue. It was also trying to target those people who come into a community centre, library or school for other reasons than for their own learning:

> 'the project was designed that this van would go around with computer equipment and encourage people to use IT for the first time, and once they are confident, once they're able to do some work on the computers, then it won't be difficult for them to access the other venue-based link centres.' (NDC education co-ordinator)

Such facilities are aimed, as part of the NDC strategic objectives, mainly at those outside the formal educational system who have no educational qualifications. They are also regarded as a very flexible resource, which can be used how, when and where local residents need them:

> 'It would have been difficult to put money into a project which was full of risks in the sense that people wouldn't come and use it enough. In this project, the van is on lease, so it's not something that we are building a permanent base. The laptops can be carried or can be used anywhere, so that's an NDC asset which can be used in the community.' (NDC education co-ordinator)

A particular aim was to reach those who are reluctant to go along to Oldham College, which involves a bus ride out of the area. In addition, some parents are happy to drop their children off at school and, when the van is visiting the school, to then stay and use the computers (sometimes in the guise of supporting their children):

> 'The main aim is to basically address the issue of non-participation in adult education and basic skills in the Oldham area, and also to incorporate IT in that, so I think basically there's a lot of people in Oldham who don't access adult education. There is

quite a lot of people without basic skills and again there's an equal amount of people not accessing the internet and computers.' (Tutor, I.T. on the Loose.)

Beneficiaries

'IT on the loose,' is open to anybody from any ethnic background, and focuses on those who have left formal education. The IT tutor identified the groups that are benefiting at present from the project. The first are retired people (sometimes referred to as 'silver surfers.') Second are those who are out of work or with a disability and third, a group of single mothers who drop their children off at school and stay to use the 'It on the Loose,' computers whilst their children are at school. This project is also lending the equipment to a group of South Asian mothers at their children's infant school.

Those interviewed at Hathershaw Community Centre using the computers explained how they had benefited from the project. The first was a forty nine year old male who had worked in engineering until he became ill. He explained that he would not be able to cope with heavy physical work in the future and, therefore, felt that acquiring new skills was important. He heard about the project from his father who ran weight training at the Community Centre.

> 'Well what I did was, I signed up to *Introduction to Word* [a word processing course], and I come every Monday. And I have finished doing *Word*, and so now I've gone on to *Introduction to Databases*. Just to further educate myself really.' (Male participant)

The second is a grandmother of sixty-five, who came to the Community Centre to do weight watchers:

> 'I saw an advert on the notice board and I'd just acquired a computer, only a second hand one, and I'd no idea what to do with it. So I rang the guy, "yes we are starting lessons on such and such a date. Come along." And that's what I did.' (Female participant)

The IT Tutor describes some of the single mothers who attend:

> 'I've got some single mothers who are a bit more positive than the rest of the group. When they're in the group they actually… whilst they're in my project, they talk very negatively to each other, yet there are one or two who are quite determined to finish the course and that it will lead them to better things (…) one of the positive girls has actually brought three or four other people to join. She is determined to do quite a few courses and to get a job in IT.' (Tutor, I.T. on the Loose.)

This indicates that an informal network is operating which has brought in those groups that can be hard to reach, such as single mothers or those with long-term disabilities. One positive and successful student can raise the aspirations of the others, especially if the training received does lead on to other training courses and improved employment prospects.

Delivery

Reaching the people

As well as the informal networks described above, the idea of locating 'IT on the Loose' in community centres appears to have been successful. It could also be extended to other venues:

> 'We've been approached by a number of community organisations such as churches, mosques, public houses, that it couldn't have a permanent base but that they would like us to visit. So that became this "IT on the Loose" sort of laptops in a van going round delivering materials.' (Head of Resources, Oldham College).

This means that people who would not normally have access to formal education have the option to engage in IT training:

> 'Me child goes to play group which is in like the next room. It was a friend who said "Oh they are doing a computer course", because I suffer from depression and I don't go out of the house unless I have got somebody with me. So there was me and my friend who started it up just to try it… to see how we got on with it. And I just finished my first course and I have just received my second course. I am just still waiting for my certificate coming.' (Mother using the service)

Importantly, attention is not only given to the provision of computer hardware, but also to a range of software, some of which is designed to engage a wide audience. For example: some of the training is made more interesting to the participants through specialised software that emulates games:

> 'So a classic example of one of them we've just introduced with Learn Direct is basically an arcade game. It's numeracy, but you're driving a car in a grand prix game, but to continue you've got to get the maths questions right. (…) If you get it wrong, you car crashes, or you run out of petrol or something.' (Head of Resources, Oldham College).

IT as a skill

Using IT as a hook to get local residents to use the project is important for several reasons. First, for many participants it is a new and exciting way of learning and a distinct break from the methods and curriculum they experienced at school:

> 'it's around those outside the education system, post 19 sector who have probably left school either disillusioned or with low aspirations about education and realise that adult education probably means back in the classroom with the whiteboard or blackboard and a very structured learning.' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator).

Second, it provides state-of-the-art equipment with good learning packages, good tuition and the facilities for producing CVs and doing job applications. For people like the male participant, interviewed above, it was an opportunity to re-skill for new employment. The importance of possessing IT skills for employment is stressed in Hathershaw Technology College's *Commitment to Lifelong Learning* document 2002:

> 'Information and communication technologies are the key to employment success. More than 21 million people – three quarters of the nation's workforce – use computers at work. By 2010 it is predicted that nine out of ten jobs will need IT skills.

Employer demand for a workforce with top-notch skills will continue and we have to make sure that the education and training we offer produces people with relevant, high quality skills and qualifications to meet this demand.'

Third, this project provides an opportunity for social learning, in order to network, share 'hot' knowledge and to build social capital.

Outcomes and impact

According to the education coordinator the project seems to be a great success, especially with the 'silver surfers'. While the project might have been set up with a wider audience in mind, attracting older participants is certainly consistent with the concept of Lifelong Learning. Attendance at the various community centres has been consistent and there is a committed group of participants. For example, the IT tutor comments on how the project has worked for one student:

'I have got one chap here actually, he's done one course already, a Learn Direct course and he is on his second course. (…) Basically Learn Direct is free courses for everyone over the age of 19. There are lots of free courses in the likes of on-line courses, but they do some book and CD based courses, which I am providing at the moment.' (Tutor, I.T. on the Loose.)

The education team also expects that once the Lifelong Learning centre has been established, it will improve prospects for the post-19 long-term unemployed in both the South Asian and white communities.

Unintended benefits:

In addition to the learning benefits offered by the courses, participants also find that they are a part of a growing community of IT users and learners. This in itself is community building:

'It would be quite nice for people to have their own PCs and do what they want at home, and it's there, and they don't have to make the effort to go out. But by having centres there, we are looking at community development…' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator).

This community development is crucial and it is the social nature of learning in the 'IT on the Loose ' project that is so important to counter isolation and lack of self-confidence of local residents.

What works

Lifelong Learning projects aim to provide facilities for people to continue to up-date their skills throughout their lives. Those interviewed indicated that 'IT on the Loose' provided high quality training in a flexible way for different groups:

'It keeps my brain ticking over. Because I'm 65. And I feel as if I'm vegetating if I don't do something. I've done OU [Open University] and I thought – well, I want to be able to help my grandson.' (Female participant)

The person responsible for the delivery is much more than a driver and organiser. He has to be a teacher and keep a log of those using the service. In essence a patient, multi-tasking person is essential:

> 'He [the tutor] is very good. He's very patient. He doesn't mind going back to things. And you can call on him when you want, and he'll come to you. And yes, he's quite a good teacher.' (Female participant)

The flexibility of the arrangement suits those who are not used to, or dislike, a formalised, structured course:

> 'The time span is excellent; you can do it in your own time. It's flexible, which I like, and I think I would find it a bit intimidating if it was rigid." (Female participant)

> 'The flexible hours are there to suit everyone so it is more like a drop-in where you come when you want to.... But I find it easier some times to do it at home 'cos I have a computer. If I don't want to go in I phone and tell them I am working at home today. Then when I need help… like I have had to leave an assignment for a week and then ask him… look …have I done this right.' (Mother using the service)

The students also appreciate access to state-of-the-art equipment, as any home owned machines were usually old and of limited capacity:

> 'I do have a computer at home but I've only got a basic one. It's not as good as these here… it keeps crashing.' (Male participant)

There is an assumption, among some involved in the project, that once local residents gain familiarity with the training through 'IT on the Loose,' they will have the confidence to progress onto using fixed venues with better and more varied training opportunities. However, it would be a mistake to under-estimate the particular benefits that derive from a mobile and flexible resource (as noted above).

Problems encountered/ Barriers to be overcome

There are several problems that are currently being addressed.

The Community Centre at Hathershaw is not networked and this conflicts with the aspirations of the project and some of the statements about the high quality of the service on offer:

> 'That [internet access] is one thing it could do with, because I think a lot of the courses, if you look through them, I think 95% of them are on-line and you are struggling, because when we look at the new courses, I reckon once I've done this *Introduction to Database* it will be a question mark of whether I carry on. Because at the moment my computer's not up to it, to go on-line. So how am I going to do it?' (Male participant)

There is also a question about whether there is a danger that the project is being used by already relatively privileged groups:

> 'I'm not going to be saying we're going to be excluding any people, but are they white middle class people that are attending these venues as opposed to the non-traditional learners that we're hoping to engage in learning and give job prospects, too. So we have an awful lot, don't like the term, an awful lot of "silver surfers".' (Head of Resources, Oldham College).

Some groups are effectively excluded due to the lack of 'complementary' facilities. For example, some mothers who have no place to leave their children whilst they use the computers:

> 'Could do with a crèche … because I think ….two of the girls with kids had to bring their kids into the classroom which was disruptive for everyone else and I think they have stopped coming now because there was no crèche.' (Mother using the facility)

The problem is clearly indicated by the IT tutor who outlines the groups who need to be targeted as they are not currently participating in the project-

> 'It is definitely young males of both ethnic backgrounds that haven't accessed the project as I would have hoped, particularly Asian men.'
> (Tutor, I.T. on the Loose.)

This issue needs to be addressed by the NDC. Despite local tensions and myths about supposedly 'preferential treatment', more could be done to target the provision at particular groups (as above).

Another issue is funding:

> '£53.3 million over ten years. Yes, it sounds a lot of money but it's only 5 million a year. It has to make quite a change in an area with social derivation of a very high level and very low levels of achievement and ambition (...) I'm not convinced we can reach those targets in ten years, even if we had 53 million pounds to spend on education alone.' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator)

This is a key issue for areas of high deprivation where there are huge structural obstacles to overcome. If funding levels are not adequate enough to make up for this former disadvantage then communities like these can be further pathologised by the whole process of regeneration. It can then be claimed that despite the money spent the area is still not reaching its targets and the logic is then to blame the residents for their own disadvantage. This begs the question of how far Lifelong Learning projects can make a difference without substantial structural changes in both the formal system of education and opportunities in the labour market.

A final barrier, indicated by those interviewed, is that progress in developing educational projects is slow. Various reasons are offered for this. One of the most important was felt to be the political nature of the processes, with many vested interests involved in basic skills provision locally. Funding sources at the national and local levels need to be carefully coordinated as the NDC cannot fund projects that might be funded borough-wide. This necessitates a clear borough policy for educational provision, balancing the interests of different key players, which takes time to develop.

Conclusion

> 'I think the team are very good but I think they've got their work cut out for them and they could probably be increased ten-fold. There's just a phenomenal amount of work that needs to be done.' (Learning Partnership Co-ordinator)

As this quotation indicates, the challenge of providing Lifelong Learning in divided communities, with high levels of deprivation, is not an easy one. The NDC team have made a good start on a small scale with the provision of 'IT on the Loose.' To date, it has proven to be popular with local residents by providing much needed access to training in IT. It is delivered in ways that are non-threatening to those who do not have a positive orientation to education and training. It is, however, obvious that some groups are not participating. In particular, there is a need to find new and creative ways of involving young white and South Asian working class men.

There is robust evidence that the partnership between the NDC, Oldham College and Hathershaw Technology College is working well. It is clear that existing expertise and services like Connexions, Learn Direct and, more recently, the Learning and Skills Council are being integrated into what is on offer. The Lifelong Learning Centre at Hathershaw College will strengthen and consolidate the work that has started with 'IT on the Loose' and with the provision of laptops and learning mentors in local schools. Such developments need to provide a clear progression for adults into more formal courses and opportunities leading to employment prospects. Those interviewed and involved in the partnership display commitment, good knowledge of the local area (including its complexities and divisions) as well as expertise in running Lifelong Learning Centres. Information Technology is an excellent focus because it provides skills for both employment and community empowerment.

Key Issues for Partnerships: Lifelong Learning

Barriers to Progress

- *Poor self–confidence and scepticism about the rewards:* Many local residents have not been successful in education. This can lead to a lack of faith in the education system and a lack of confidence.

- *Low levels of motivation and interest:* Simply advertising opportunities will not necessarily improve take-up. More inventive ways of building participation are required.

- *Structural factors:* Disadvantage, both at the levels of lack of social capital and material disadvantage, is highly discouraging. A history of poor local resourcing may also have a discouraging effect until new, more positive, experiences can be built.

Characteristics of Emerging Good Practice

- *High quality training and flexibility:* Lifelong Learning projects aim to provide facilities for people to continue to up-date their skills throughout their lives. The training must be high quality in order to raise expectations. Flexible arrangements are required that suit those who are not used to, or dislike, a formalised, structured course.

- *Delivery:* In the case described here, the person responsible for delivery combines the roles of teacher and administrator. They tutor participants and keep a log of those using the service. In essence a patient, multi-tasking person is essential. In all cases it is essential that delivery is provided by well trained and efficient personnel.

- *Equipment:* In relation to ICT developments the quality of available resources (hardware and software) is vitally important. Students appreciate access to state-of-the-art equipment, as home owned machines (where available) are often old and of limited capacity. Good quality resources are taken as a sign of a positive investment in the community.

Further Pressing Issues

- *Internet connection:* The internet is an increasingly important resource and ICT projects that are not internet-friendly can appear out of step with other developments. This is frustrating and damaging.

- *Privileged group users:* It is important that usage is monitored to ensure that projects cater to all groups fairly. At present some groups are effectively excluded by a lack of complementary facilities (such as child care). On the other hand, relatively privileged groups might take advantage of ICT courses meant for more disadvantaged NDC residents.

- *Funding:* This is a key issue for areas of high disadvantage where there are huge structural obstacles to overcome.

- *Slow progress:* Funding sources at the national and local levels need to be carefully co-ordinated as the NDC cannot fund projects that might be funded borough-wide. This necessitates a clear borough policy for educational provision, balancing the interests of different key players, which takes time to develop.

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