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ABSTRACT

This paper details the work of Demos and the Learning and Skills Development Agency to examine how new institutional structures for supporting lifelong learning can develop in ways that best support community-based learning activities in the United Kingdom. Three seminar background papers and notes are provided, each followed by seminar notes. "Communities, Learning, and Contemporary Society" asks how community is defined in practice and compares these working definitions against the principles and criteria used by central government and policymakers and explores the forms of community that might best develop a lifelong learning agenda in ways that can tackle deprivation. "Local Organizations and Community Learning" examines examples of best practice and innovation in engaging local communities and certain case studies. It explores what role various providers play in stimulating and shaping community-based learning activity; how responsiveness to community fits with their core objectives and statutory responsibilities; and whether new technologies offer new possibilities for outreach, provision of learning opportunities, and community-based decision making. "Learning Communities--A Framework for Funding, Planning, and Accountability" addresses the role of local and national frameworks and seeks to identify key strategic priorities for policymakers. It asks what role these structures play in blocking or stimulating community-based learning and seeks to identify connections between education and other key areas of local and national policy. (YLB)

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Learning communities

strengthening lifelong learning through practice

A DEMOS/ LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY SEMINAR SERIES

This paper sets out details of work being carried out by Demos and the Learning and Skills Development Agency to examine how new institutional structures for supporting lifelong learning can develop in ways that best support community-based learning activities. **The paper aims to stimulate interest and contributions in the form of papers and examples of practice to inform the work.**

Introduction

Education is now the UK's highest public policy priority. Its role in achieving economic prosperity and social inclusion is undisputed. Alongside the 'standards' agenda and the modernisation of the school infrastructure, the British government has committed itself to making lifelong learning a defining characteristic of national life. *The learning age* and *Learning to succeed* set out ambitious objectives for raising participation among adult learners, and new institutions and policy instruments, from learndirect to individual learning accounts, are being developed to underpin the new learning culture.

The missing link: community

Stimulating a national culture of lifelong learning, however, also depends on a dimension still largely neglected in national policy-making and implementation. Learning is essentially an activity embedded in a social context. Its contribution to other social goods (thriving families, local economic regeneration, civic renewal) depends on the capacity of organised learning activities to connect in meaningful ways to local community contexts. To be sustained and successful, learning must reinforce and renew the ties of social capital and collaboration that underpin civil society.

Policy context

In this context, UK learning policies are at a crucial point. Public spending on education will rise significantly over the next three years. The institutional infrastructure for expansion and reorganisation of lifelong learning is being put in place, largely through the new learning and skills councils. In other policy areas, from neighbourhood renewal to crime prevention, early years provision to public health, there is an unprecedented level of local experimentation and innovation. Creating thriving local communities is paramount to achieving a wide range of public policy objectives.

However, there is little evidence that central policy and funding frameworks are capable of supporting and responding to community initiative or need. The achievement of national policy objectives, and the design of new institutions and layers of governance, is not yet systematically grounded in any real understanding of how community participation is developed and strengthened in practice.

Those who might benefit most from participation in lifelong learning are often those most distanced from national or regional institutions. Also they are often unlikely to respond simply to economic incentives to participate. Too often, community involvement in local policy initiatives is restricted to formal representation on partnership boards, which continue to be dominated by mainstream public sector institutions. The governance structures, accountability systems, and control bias of central and regional institutions too often militate against the forms of participation and community engagement which we now need.

This presents a huge challenge to every area of education policy, but especially to the work of the new learning and skills councils. They will be responsible for co-ordinating lifelong learning provision, but also for helping to stimulate demand for learning services and activities among key sections of the population.

The seminars

To develop a better understanding of these issues, the Learning and Skills Development Agency and Demos are collaborating to organise a series of seminars. We aim to bring together a combination of leading researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

Each seminar will address a major strand of the debate.

SEMINAR 1

Communities, learning and contemporary society

What are the fundamental dimensions of community that underpin learning activity? Is there a workable definition of 'community capacity'?

This seminar will draw together leading edge thinking and practice on contemporary definitions of community and their relevance to education policy. It will examine different practical definitions of community, and ask why many past efforts to build 'community capacity' have been unsuccessful. It will ask how community is defined in practice, and compare these working definitions against the principles and criteria used by central government and policy-makers. It will also explore in more detail the forms of community that might best develop a lifelong learning agenda in ways that can tackle deprivation.

SEMINAR 2

Local organisations and community learning

What is the role of local organisations in stimulating and developing community-based learning?

This seminar will examine examples of best practice and innovation in engaging local communities. What role do colleges, schools, local government, voluntary, community and private sector providers play in stimulating and shaping community-based learning activity? How does responsiveness to community fit with their core objectives and statutory responsibilities? Do new technologies offer new possibilities for outreach, provision of learning opportunities and community-based decision making?

SEMINAR 3

Learning communities – a framework for funding, planning and accountability

How should Learning and Skills Councils, local authorities and other bodies support community-based learning?

The final seminar will address the role of local and national frameworks for funding, planning and accountability, and seek to identify key strategic priorities for policymakers It will ask what role these structures play in blocking or stimulating community-based learning, and seek to identify connections between education and other key areas of local and national policy. How should evaluation and accountability regimes record and monitor community participation? Are there tensions between national coherence and local effectiveness?

The seminar series will run between January and May 2001 and will bring together leading researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners from all sectors, to identify ways of rooting lifelong learning in thriving communities. They will be chaired by Tom Bentley, Director of Demos and Chris Hughes, Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Development Agency. The aim is to explore institutional and funding structures that will support community-based learning. There will be briefing papers prepared prior to the seminars, which will be followed by a joint publication setting out the key issues and conclusions of the series

In addition to the events themselves, which will have an invited audience, we should like to encourage broader participation in the debate. **We welcome research papers, or short contributions raising key questions or illustrating pertinent developments in the field. We would also welcome details of any readily available case studies or good practice in local communities**. These will inform the seminars as well as the published outcome, which will be widely published. If you would like to be involved in this programme of work, please contact:

Matthew Horne, Demos
Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London SE1 7NQ
Tel 020 7401 5339
E-mail matthew@demos.co.uk

Sue Taylor, Learning and Skills Development Agency
3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF
Tel 020 7840 5354
E-mail staylor@LSagency.org.uk

Project team

Tom Bentley, Director, Demos
tom@demos.co.uk

Matthew Horne, Researcher, Demos
matthew@demos.co.uk

Caroline Mager, Policy Unit Manager
Learning and Skills Development Agency
cmager@LSagency.org.uk

Sue Taylor, Development Adviser
Learning and Skills Development Agency
staylor@LSagency.org.uk

For more information about Demos and the Learning and Skills Development Agency you can visit our websites:

www.demos.co.uk
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Learning Communities: strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Background Paper

Seminar 1: Communities, Learning and Contemporary Society[i]

The concept of 'community learning' is potentially confusing. Not that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding is troublesome, but that the concept of community can mean many different things.

Often when referring to a 'community', the description of a 'neighbourhood' would be more accurate. This geographical concept of community links social groups to localities but fails to capture communities that are distributed. The political concept of community is used by politicians as both a means, and an end to public policy. For those in academia a contemporary social concept of community could be described as contextualised social capital. Whereas community is seen by some, particularly in the US, as the best way of shoring up moral and social order. The key aim of current education policy is to encourage participation of individuals and whole communities in learning. This involves both the development of individual human capital and collective social capital, but what is the best framework for achieving this end?

1. The geographical concept

Communities are often confused with areas of housing. Certainly many traditional communities were based on residency, but this was more often supported by other common experiences including employment and work. Today many communities are still defined by housing geography, but this may mask smaller communities within that neighbourhood which can be characterised by age, ethnicity, or length of residency. The development of mixed tenure estates has in many cases not resulted in one large diverse neighbourhood community but a multiplicity of communities within the neighbourhood defined by the closure of networks rather than geographical boundaries.

The geographical concept of community is used by Government to administer policy because bureaucracies have jurisdictions linked to place. However delivering policy to communities that are not bounded by geographical constraints is very difficult. To add confusion, many communities are no longer contained within historical administrative boundaries, placing demands on government for partnership between neighbouring authorities.

2. The political concept

Communities are increasingly encouraged to deliver government services for them selves. Irrespective of whether it is a Third Way policy in the UK, or Republican policy in the US, communities are encouraged to take on more responsibility for housing and estate management, local crime reduction, local school management and accountability, and the delivery of key social services. They have become the means by which public policy is implemented.

However, communities are not just the means of delivering services that were previously the responsibility of central and local government. They are also increasingly the subject of public policy. Communities are seen as political ends in them selves. Developments in UK policy have seen a raft of central initiatives that seek to strengthen and develop communities. Recently the UK government announced that they were going to put communities in the driving seat, with Neighbourhood Management pilots, Community Empowerment Fund, Local Strategic Partnerships, and Community Chests to fund grassroots residents' projects.[ii] Moreover the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has just published its National Strategy; which is part of a wider set of policies that include the New Deal for Communities; the Single Regeneration Budget; Local Strategic Partnerships and the European Development Fund.

3. The moral concept

The political idea of a community being an end worthy of support has been influenced by a moral argument about the imperative of achieving moral and social order. This discourse has been driven by a deep concern, particularly in the US, that communities are crumbling. Etzioni and other communitarians argue that

communities are the means of achieving moral order, of restoring a common sense of right and wrong. Strong communities are crucial to restoring moral certainties that are no longer strongly upheld by the church and the state and other forms of authority. In particular communities can uphold the values of marriage and the traditional family by treating people as ends and not means. This moral philosophy is based on sentiments expressed in the proverb that it takes 'a village to educate a child' and has been expressed in the recent political rhetoric of 'rights and responsibilities'.

4. The social concept

The social concept of a community is less concerned with the location of the community or the relationship between community and public policy. Instead it is more concerned with what all communities have in common.

Networks

Communities are described as networks because they can be larger than the sphere of social relationships of just one person. The whole community is held together by the fact that groups of relationships are joined together by key individuals. Members of a community do not have to know all the other members in the community but are still connected to everyone indirectly through other people. *Thus a community is an expanded network of relationships.*

Relations

A Community is a set of direct and indirect relationships between individuals that are characterised by immediacy. Usually community relations are more immediate than those of a society, and less immediate than a set of relationships in a household. Communities can be seen as an intermediary set of relationships somewhere on the continuum between society and the individual

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Individual_____Societ

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Of course, different communities are located on different places on the continuum. Some are characterised by very immediate relationships and some by very distant relationships.

Why do communities exist?

The scope of this community is often defined by the set of interests that the members have in common. These may be based on common experiences of employment, unemployment, religion, housing or ethnicity. Such common interests may lead to group organisation and the development of common social and political objectives that demand collective action or representation. This interaction generates and supports a common set of values, which create identity and bonding. Communities often enable individuals to pursue their interests more effectively.

How does a community work?

Membership of a community is voluntary but also based on the consent of the other members. There is a reciprocal social relationship. You can neither be forced to be a member nor can you demand to be a member. If this is true, then there must be a set of rules that govern membership and a set of sanctions which operationalise those rules. In practice there is a high degree of trust that assumes that rules are adhered to. Networks are kept together by trust based on a set of rules and a set of potential sanctions.

This can bring us close to a starting definition of a community as an expanded network of immediate personal relations that exists for the mutual benefit of its members enabling them to meet their common objectives. A community is maintained by a set of rules and sanctions that are held in place by trust.

Social Capital

This definition of community matches closely the current understanding of social capital in academic circles. For example Putnam describes social capital as 'The features of social life- the network, norms, and trust- that enable participants to act together more effectively to achieve shared objectives.' While the World Bank defines social capital as 'the institutions, relations, and norms that shape the quality,

and quantity of a society's social interactions.' Halpern prefers a definition of social capital based on 'networks, norms and sanctions'

Social capital is an extremely useful concept for us to use in the context of understanding community learning.

5. Community learning

Broadly there are two forms of community learning. Firstly learning that is designed to regenerate a community through developing the human capital of the individuals concerned. And secondly learning that strengthens the networks of the community. Developing the social capital of the community is a form of learning whereby the acquisition of relational knowledge, skills and understanding is done collectively. This can be known as 'community capacity building'.

There are currently three common forms of public community education in England, which are currently being reshaped by the introduction of the Learning and skills Act.

- Local Education Authority delivered adult education
- Post 16 provision in Further Education Colleges
- Education opportunities provided by local regeneration projects

The Learning and Skills Act established a new Learning and Skills Council with 47 local arms, to be responsible for the planning, funding and quality assurance of all post 16 learning and skills delivery in England except higher education. The councils are responsible for working with partners at all levels to promote workforce development and economic regeneration activity. They are also required to work with the new Adult Learning Inspectorate that will inspect all adult education, and OFSTED which will inspect the 16-19 learning provision in Colleges and Sixth Forms. They will be responsible for the planning and funding of College and LEA provision and will be required to work in partnership with community regeneration projects. David Blunkett has explicitly directed them to seek to develop both the human and social capital of communities:

'I also expect local Learning and Skills Councils to play an active role in building the capacity of people living in deprived neighbourhoods...to support the development of

stronger communities who are better able to maintain momentum in neighbourhood renewal...I therefore expect local Learning and Skills Councils to take a holistic view of how their contribution fits within the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.'[iii]

The current diverse range of learning provision is more likely to meet the needs of geographically located communities than any others. It is also more likely to meet the demand for employment related learning than any other. A key test of the new Learning and Skills Councils is whether they can meet the demands of non-geographical communities as effectively as those located in a place and whether they can develop learning which strengthens the social relationships and networks of a community as well as the employment related knowledge and skills of individuals. The question remains: How well will the new policy framework develop the human capital and the social capital of our most deprived communities? Hopefully the joint *Demos* and *Learning Skills Development Agency* seminars will address this very question.

This paper has been produced by Demos for the participants of the Learning Communities seminar series. It is designed to provide a background briefing but will not directly form the basis of the discussion in the seminars. If you have any queries or questions about this paper then please contact Matthew Horne on matthew@demos.co.uk

[ii] http://www.press.detr.gov.uk/0101/0011.htm

[iii] The learning and skills council: strategic priorities, letter form David Blunkett, Nov 2000

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Learning Communities: Strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Seminar 1 Notes
Communities, learning and contemporary society
Held 25 January 2001

1. The seminar heard presentations on the concepts of social capital (David Halpern), on government definitions of community and community capacity building (Charles Woodd) and on the reasons for failure in attempts to widen participation (Phil Street). These notes do not reproduce the presentations made by speakers since these will be part of a publication setting out the inputs and findings from the project. The notes draw together issues and points of discussion and indicate areas of consensus emerging from this first seminar. They aim to encourage continuity and progression in discussion between the seminars.

Education as a route to social capital (and vice versa)

2. David Halpern gave a helpful definition of social capital as norms, networks and sanctions. He referred to bonding and bridging elements - disadvantaged communities often have lots of the former but not the latter. Effective communities have a balance of the different kinds of social capital. Trust plays a key role and the level of trust in communities has implications for economic growth.

3. His presentation raised the question of whether education - and perhaps citizenship education in particular - can generate social capital. How can education engineer links between learning and civil and social engagement? The right kind of social capital can help to raise retention, participation and achievement. For example, catholic schools with strong parental and community networks, establish high expectations, and norms of behaviour that support achievement. Where social capital doesn't exist, how do you create it? Should the state intervene (as it is doing, for example, with the introduction of citizenship studies)?

4. Some participants demonstrated that institutions (formal learning) could be used to promote social capital. A 'community school' can help to build social capital. Formal institutions bring together people who wouldn't normally meet – this type of social capital is part of the learning experience. One provider articulated a model of embedding guidance on opportunities to engage in social capital within academic courses – placing learning and active involvement in the community side by side. Education providers could more systematically attempt to connect learners to the community and to opportunities that foster civic engagement. Learning providers can stimulate the development of community networks.

5. We were reminded of the impact of (middle class) flight from poorer areas, which takes away social and human capital. Government policy towards increased specialisation and supporting parental choice could be seen as being at odds with community cohesion.

Trust

6. Trust is a key element of social capital and crucial in community-based learning. Many people don't trust the local council or its organisations - they don't trust organisations that make demands or that require form filling. Why do we trust institutions like schools and hospitals less than the RSPB and football clubs? What is it about these organisations that make them deserve our trust? Discussion suggested that voluntarism, community of interest and sharpness of focus might be key features.

Linking social capital and human capital

7. The argument that investment in individual human capital will lead to a more competitive economy is alive and well in public policy thinking – how do we bring in the collective dimension? A criticism of colleges was that they lack connection with the world of work. Work is key to developing human capital. Equally educational providers can be distant from civic and social life.

8. Employers and government have a clear goal of increasing individual human capital through paying for formal learning. Their aim is to create individual and national economic prosperity. However the social and economic benefits of learning which is not directly vocational are not universally agreed. How should this business case be established? To what extent should employers see themselves having a responsibility to develop social capital as well as human capital?

When does geography matter?

9. We live in geographical communities and to that extent, communities matter to everyone. Learning allows an individual to transcend their context. In many instances this means leaving a neighbourhood community as social mobility often brings geographic mobility. The result can be the creation of new networks of interest-based communities defined not by geography but by shared values and aspirations. Communities of interest (which may be virtual communities), rather than geographical communities can generate creativity and build confidence.

10. However, geographical communities are still a relevant concept, perhaps particularly for those most at risk from social exclusion - those on low incomes, the poorly educated, the very old and very young. These people are less mobile and more dependent upon their local community. Thus we need to create bridging social capital for those unable to break the isolation of geographical immobility. We need to generate bonding capital for those not fixed in place but floating in networks of relationships in danger of fragmentation.

Individuals or communities

11. Discussion highlighted the increasing individualisation of society which is, to some extent, reflected in the new models of learning provision. Many of the new initiatives (Connexions, New Deal etc) have the role of personal advisors at their heart. New technologies – the growth in on-line learning – also reflect this individualisation. Community outreach is seen traditionally as about reaching individuals. Participants asked whether learning can contribute to new social institutions – eg schools as hubs of communities. As ICT changes the character of learning, schools will be needed for social functions. The blueprint for this has been set in the 'Excellence in Cities' programme, which is 'breaking down school walls'. Creative Partnerships (funded by DCMS) are offering another model of helping communities through schools.

12. The theme of individualisation and privatisation of life raised questions about the extent to which individuals or communities should be the focus of interventions. It was suggested that individuals can be involved not communities. The motivational power of individual enhancement and of the prospect of work and of status - individual enhancement rather than community enhancement - is valid. In his summing up Tom Bentley referred to this issue as the need to understand more about the 'structure of aspiration'.

13. What are the implications of this privatisation and individualisation for how we develop community learning policy?

Who can best engage with communities: institutions or community groups?

14. The following distinction was made: Community development is about helping people to do what they want to do; community capacity building is about helping people to do what government wants them to do. Likewise, institutions are characterised as helping people to do what government wants them to do, while community groups are characterised as helping people to do what they want to do themselves. But schools and colleges can provide premises for other agencies and can be centres of learning for many different learners of different ages, where the formal and the informal are complementary. More pertinent is how can formal and informal learning providers learn from each other? Currently, adult and community learning tends to be very disconnected from the formal education system.

Learning and doing – where does the distinction lie?

15. The suggestion was made that the most effective learning is that delivered outside formal education settings, and that the best approach is to embed learning in action. This led to a discussion about how broadly 'learning' should be defined, and where the distinction lies between 'learning' and 'doing', recognising that government budgeting and accountability mechanisms will require that distinctions be made. One suggestion was that reflection is the key distinction between learning and doing. Others felt that informal learning should not be seen as being at odds with systematic or purposeful learning. The consensus seemed to be that informal learning is important and should be recognised, but that formal education should not be de-valued. Perhaps the compromise is to informalise formal learning and formalise informal learning – to meld the best of both worlds.

16. Discussion also noted the unhelpful but common detachment between adult and community learning and formal learning. Ways in which the role of local LSCs might influence this will need to be considered.

A wide range of learning

17. The above discussion also raised issues about what counts as learning and what learning should be funded. The capacity to recognise a wide range of learning will be key to expanding community-based learning, it was felt. It was suggested that definitions of learning need to include new forms of engagement (social capital) not just new skills. Community learning has a variety of definitions: co-operative learning, co-operative action, people power. There was concern that as the LSC tries to rationalise provision and imposes structures of accountability on providers, community providers may be pushed out of the market. Local LSCs will need the discretion to be able to support local community organisations and not be constrained by prescriptions based on national priorities.

Changing the learning product

18. Part of the discussion centred on the new types of provision now available and the contribution of informal and formal learning to the promotion of social capital. Trust was a key characteristic of social capital, and some felt that many disconnected communities had lost trust in institutions, and their capacity to help them learn. These were people who had

been failed by educational institutions in the past. (The point was made that lifelong learning does not begin at 16 – something needs to be done to tackle those institutions that are failing children and sending them out with a negative experience of learning.)

19. Examples of new forms of community provision were cited, which are overcoming the barriers of formal provision – a learning bus that goes out to rural communities (and traveller communities) from a college in Northumberland, the Scarman Trust that is distributing ILAs in Liverpool to be used to buy in customised training for the local community, giving power back to the community.

20. Despite these examples, there was seen to be a problem of institutional inertia. A common approach by learning providers is to do 'outreach for a product' – so to take a predetermined package into the 'community', rather than customising a product to meet the needs of a target group. Phil Street raised the question of whether education research is used sufficiently to shape the learning product to take account of need.

21. A key policy challenge therefore is how to promote real innovation by providers to offer new learning opportunities. Phil Street suggested that we need to build both the capacity of communities and of the professionals involved. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy includes a Skills and Knowledge strand to address the skill needs of those working in the area of neighbourhood renewal. These innovations need to be matched by a culture change to make learning 'normal'.

Success factors for engagement

22. The discussion began to suggest 'success factors' for engaging communities and individuals in learning that could be built upon in future seminars:

- Modify the product
- Engage in much better market research
- Improve/change practitioner skills
- Look for ways of incorporating 'bridges and networks' into community learning
- Get employers involved.

Funding implications

23. A fairer distribution of learning was called for by Phil Street – the need to weave learning through life, not life through learning. The resource needs of working with 'hard to reach' groups were emphasised – there is a need for funders to be aware of the high costs of the intensive intervention they require. Institutions which get involved in community related work sometimes do so at financial risk.

24. We do need to know more about what sort of learning, what sort of provider and what sorts of systems are needed to develop and support community learning, otherwise there is a danger that the major resources will continue in the easier, mainstream provision. There seemed to be a consensus that we need more free-thinking about funding learning. How, for example, can government enable people to learn from each other? How can people be funded to help other people to learn? How can 'small, meaningful pockets of money' be provided? What interventions should government make?

A national community-based learning service?

25. There was some discussion as to whether there was a need for a new national community-based learning service (based on the Connexions model), as expounded by Phil Street. Others felt that what was needed was a national framework rather than a national service, supported by a secretariat that would drive the agenda forward from the centre. Discretion for flexible local action was important. The learning and development strand of the

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was suggested as a model. This issue will need to be discussed further at future seminars. For example, to what extent is the LSC going to provide a national framework, that encompasses community-based learning, with local discretion available to the 47 'arms'?

Neighbourhood renewal and learning communities

26. There is a need for some co-ordination or alignment of the learning element of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy with the community learning element of the Learning and Skills Council remit. There is no clear blueprint of how that will work at a systems level – do we need to think through how the fit can happen on the ground?

Caroline Mager
16 February 2001

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Learning Communities: Strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Seminar 2: Local Organisations and community learning

Back Ground Paper

Learning communities: the secret to their success

By Martin Yarnit, January 2001

Learning Communities: the secret to their success

Introduction

Creating thriving local communities is crucial to achieving a wide range of public policy objectives. Which is why David Blunkett has given a clear remit to the Learning and Skills Council 'to support and sustain neighbourhood renewal and to work with local partners - voluntary and community sectors - to target help where it is needed most'.[1] This is a tall order: the reality is that systematic connections between learning and community activity are still rare, and the very people who could benefit most from lifelong learning are often not engaged with it. Symptomatically, fewer than 50% of the new Learning Partnerships have thought fit to extend membership to a representative of the community or voluntary sector.[2]

This paper

- Provides some examples of best practice in developing learning communities
- Analyses the key factors in their success
- Considers the implications for providers and partnerships
- Considers the lessons for a reformed national lifelong learning system.

But first, it attempts a definition of learning community and how success can be measured.

What is a Learning Community?

Faris and Peterson's definition provides a useful starting point:

Any city, town or village, and surrounding area, that, using lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal, promotes collaboration of the civic, public, economic, educational and voluntary/community sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusion.[3]

In this definition, the emphasis is on learning as a means for achieving the social and economic objectives of a community. For the purposes of this discussion, there are aspects of the definition, which need to be made explicit, and aspects, which require amplification. Faris and Peterson's comparison of the characteristics of Learning and Traditional Communities is helpful here:[4]

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[1] DfEE Press Release, 16 November, on Urban White Paper.

[2] According to a paper presented to the second National Partnerships Forum convened by DfEE.

[3] *Learning-Based Community Development: **Lessons Learned For British Columbia*** - A Report submitted to the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers by Ron Faris and Wayne Peterson, April 2000, page xi.

[4] Op.cit., p. 2.

Table1: Learning and Traditional Communities

Learning Community	Traditional Community
uses both formal and non-formal sector learning resources	the education system has few links to the non-formal sectors, particularly the community
economic and education partners share their training resources	companies and education often compete: there is often limited community access to either
social/intellectual capital is valued, added to, and used for comparative advantage	social/intellectual capital is unrecognized and largely untapped
learning is seen as investment	education is seen as a cost
learning is seen as a social process that results in a comparative community advantage for economic development	learning is viewed as an individual activity for individual benefit
thrives on decentralization	dependent upon centralized policies
innovations are supported by interactive learning among learning organizations within the community	innovations are isolated and viewed as competitive threats by other in the community
◘ **local lifelong learning strategy developed including individual learning plans for economic enterprises and learner smart cards to promote learning for all** ◘ **universal local access to learning technologies for networking within and among communities**	◘ incoherent, sporadic, and unequal learning opportunities are provided with chief benefits to an educated elite ◘ limited access to learning technologies with little networking beyond the community
☒ **the development of a lifelong learning culture is a community goal**	☒ some individuals promote lifelong learning values

What needs to be made explicit in this definition is that

1. It encompasses learning in three senses
    a. Formal
    b. Informal
    c. Reflexive (i.e. reflecting on and learning about individual and social activity like government, wealth creation, and community safety)

2. Since it is about learning as a means to various ends, participation in learning should lead to various outcomes – '*objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusion*'
3. It implies a process of intervention, which can promote the connection between participation and those outcomes, which includes an element of self-management: leadership, management, and partnership.

The definition also needs amplification.

First, the territorial issue: a broader view is needed of community than a simple geographical definition to take account of

- The development of networks
- The decay of traditional community organisation in many areas
- The workplace as a learning community
- The community of interest represented, for example, by black and ethnic minority organizations.

Second, lifelong learning needs to be understood as comprising pre-school, school and post-school. Post-school learning can be broadly categorised in three ways:

- Learning in and for the workplace
- Learning in and through formally organised further, higher and adult education and training
- Community-based learning.

A Learning Community will need to mobilise all these types or sectors and to integrate what I have referred to elsewhere as the old and new learning systems. (see table in Appendix: *Learning Systems: Old and New).* The old or established system, which takes the bulk of mainstream public funding, is characterised by separate provision, usually in schools, colleges and universities, formal learning with curricula and qualifications. The new system has grown up at its margins, reflecting new learning needs, and characterised by short-term project funding (SRB, Europe, Lottery, Standards Fund), integrated facilities and all age, all year round access. The boundaries between the two are often less clearly drawn that this suggests: many colleges, for example, are striving towards all year opening for a mix of courses and learners, closely linked to HE and to schools. Schools are increasingly throwing open their resources to their community, encouraging close links with pre-school and adult learning.

Success Criteria

What, then, are the criteria that would help us to determine whether a learning community is achieving success?

The starting point is to set a baseline and target for increasing participation as the basis for assessing effectiveness. The next step is to consider the impact of participation on outcomes. The third is to examine the processes, which promote lasting benefits for the community. This gives us the formula: Inputs + Processes = Outputs where...

- Inputs correspond to investment in staff, resources, facilities
- Processes are about engagement mechanisms and organisation of delivery
- Outputs may be enrolment rates among other things, but how do we get to the lasting benefits referred to in the Faris and Peterson definition?

A value added chain provides a more sophisticated framework for understanding these complex social processes. The main components are the three already mentioned, plus two more: *outcomes and benefits*

Starting with the investment of resources, the chain traces the effects of a given set of processes in terms of immediate impact. But it goes beyond the simple equation to consider the wider, medium term effects (the outcomes) and the long-term benefits. *Implicit is the hypothesis that self-management and partnership are vital to turning a growth in participation into lasting benefits.* The table in Appendix 2 develops each of the five components of this value added chain.

The value added chain enables approximate judgments to be made about quality, value for money and benefits. In short it enables us to evaluate success.[5] For example,

- Improvements in participation rates can be set against inputs to assess value for money
- A qualitative balance can be struck between impressive outcomes and poor processes e.g. low level of community involvement in management
- A qualitative assessment can be made by comparing improvements in participation with medium or long-term outcomes in terms of individual or social benefits.

Another benefit of this approach is that it provides a constant reminder that we need to be clear about our long-term goals if we are to make useful judgments about value added.

Elements of this approach are built into the FEFC inspection regime and into the system used for assessing SRB-funded learning programmes, but both

[5] See a more detailed account of this approach in *Practice, Progress and Value – Learning Communities: Assessing the Value They Add* (1998) Learning City Network and DfEE, pp.37-39.

are hampered by a definition of outcomes – e.g. qualifications gained - which can only be a crude proxy for the purposes of measuring progress towards a learning community. The key issue for a learning community, it could be argued, is how the learning input feeds through into qualitative changes in the lives of individuals and the community in the long run. Or to quote Faris and Peterson again, 'learning is seen as a social process that results in a comparative community advantage for economic development'.

Although there is plenty of scope for debate about the precise meaning of terms like social capital and social cohesion, isn't this exactly what we are looking for as the outcome here?

So, finally, what can be said at this stage about evaluating success? First, that evidence of direct outputs is necessary but not sufficient. What is also required is evidence of the sort of medium term outcomes set out above, and perhaps also signs of the more profound but long term benefits of learning for cohesion and economic strength. Second, that a value added chain offers a more balanced assessment of the lasting impact of given inputs and processes than a focus on output measures. It enables us to track, for example, the impact of more responsive approaches on the part of mainstream providers, or innovative forms of organisation and delivery, and to test out the value of community engagement and control as ways forward. In short, a learning community organisation or partnership that generates a rise in enrolments is making progress, but it is the longer-term benefits that are of real interest.

Now that the returns to learning have been calculated for individuals, for companies and for economies, the next step is a programme of research and action to operationalise the returns to learning for cohesion. [6]

Best Practice: The Case Studies

But in the meantime, we have to have a means of selecting the case studies used in this paper. I have used a modified form of the value added components referred to above to arrive at a set of criteria that have guided the selection and writing of the case studies.

Table 2: Simplified Value Added Table

Inputs	◦ Budget, staffing, facilities
Process	◦ Community stake ◦ Partnership and collaboration ◦ Innovation in organisation ◦ Inclusiveness
Outputs	◦ Innovation in delivery ◦ Enrolments

[6] See Mike Campbell's *Learning Pays and Learning Works* (1999) for National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets. The ESRC Learning Society programme has commissioned research on the broader aspects of returns to learning.

	◻ Jobs created ◻ Facilities created
Outcomes	◻ Community assets created ◻ Community stake in management and governance ◻ Local people into employment
Benefits	◻ Economic base ◻ Learning culture ◻ Social cohesion

On this basis, I have selected four very different case studies to illustrate the key categories of learning community

- Royds Community Association serving a geographical community on Bradford's southern edge
- SPELL-NE serving a geographical community in Parson Cross, Sheffield
- Community Learning Network serving a community of interest in Liverpool
- BLINK (Black Information Link) a website serving the needs of a black and ethnic minority virtual community of interest

These case studies exemplify the connecting thread that turns participation into lasting benefits although they are at different stages in the life cycle of a learning community. Royds, for example, can trace its start back to 1995, whilst SPELL-NE is still appointing its key workers. Although very different, these four organisations demonstrate

- A rising trend of participation in learning
- The vital role of self-management and partnership
- Lasting benefits
- Effective engagement with their constituency

Case Study 1: The Royds Community Association

'Although they might not think of themselves in this way, the Royds is a learning community. They are teaching themselves the art of self-government.'

The quotation is from an account of the Royds Community Association I wrote last year that provides a broad view of its history and activities.[7] Rather than re-cover old ground, I want to focus here on three issues that are germane to this study:[8]

- Forming equal partnerships
- Learning for self-government
- The basis of their success.

Forming equal partnerships

Community organisations often find themselves trusted by their local population but unable to convert that into a source of legitimacy with officialdom. Royds CA is in many ways the voice of the people. More people vote in the annual elections for their Board of Directors than in the local elections. This gives the Association a certain authority in its dealings with agencies like the local authority, the police and the housing associations. This helps to explain why the police have been persuaded to change the way they police the Royds area, and why the youth service agreed to provide local detached youth workers. There is another factor: the Association has arranged from the beginning to draw on the expertise of professionals such as architects and solicitors, so that it was not at the mercy of one set of opinions.

Local support is built on three factors above all:

- The Association is widely viewed as effective in getting things done – since its formation, it has helped to transform the physical face of the Royds, refurbishing more than 350 homes, getting 70 new homes built and improving the environment beyond recognition in many areas
- There is face to face contact through a variety of means
- A majority of the Board of Directors are local people who understand local concerns.

Learning for Self-Government

Very little of the Royds' activity is about learning *per se*. 80% of the budget goes to the physical and housing programme, much of the remainder is devoted to employment creation. Only a tiny amount supports adult or children's learning in the narrow sense. The main learning activities are

- Capacity building for community management
- Problem solving
- Healthy living.

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[7] See p.66, *Towns, Citiezs and Regions in the Learning Age: A Survey of Learning Communities,* Learning City Network (2000).

[8] Based on interview with Social Action Programme Coordinator, 14 January 2001.

All Directors of the Association take part in management committee training, as do the members of the committees that run the local community centre and healthy living centre. These and the residents who take part in consultation and attend management meetings are also involved in problem solving, learning the most effective approach, for example, to crime prevention, debating the optimum housing mix for the area. A major activity of the healthy living centre is learning about health promotion that touches on all the other activities of the Association including employment creation and environmental improvement.

The Basis of their Success

Four points seem to summarise the basis of the Royds Community Association's success in engaging effectively and consistently with its residents.

1. Keep in constant touch with local people; seek them out, on the doorstep or at the luncheon club to maintain face to face contact
2. Recognise that change is a constant challenge and that getting things right is a long haul
3. Build partnerships with 'official' agencies from a position of strength
4. Develop vision and a responsive outlook in the management committee and the staff

Case Study 2: SPELL-NE[9]

Of the four case studies, SPELL is the closest to the conventional notion of a community-learning project. Funded by SRB and ERDF, SPELL-NE was set up to widen participation in a large area of council housing in North East Sheffield. SPELL, which stands for Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning, arose out of the Learning City initiative in the city and was initially funded on a trial basis by DfEE. Organisationally, it is the learning arm of a community trust that takes in a large part of the Secretary of State for Education's constituency. Its aim is to engage local people in learning by creating a wide range of opportunities in partnership with other providers including Sheffield College and the WEA. These include vocational courses and informal courses in non-traditional settings such as a local workingmen's club. SPELL has also taken on a key role coordinating local provision.

The challenge to SPELL is profound[10]:

- Its area includes the 14th worst ward in England for levels of adult literacy
- Out of an adult population of about 36,000, hardly 5% were enrolled on courses with Sheffield College that has a major centre at one end of the area.

An important characteristic of the SPELL approach is that it employs local people to promote learning opportunities door to door, and to organise and deliver programmes. Employing local people as outreach workers has been very effective. They have credibility, act as ambassadors for SPELL and provide a living incentive for engaging in learning by demonstrating that learning can lead to jobs. Local people have initially been appointed to training posts which provide a bridge to better paid work with SPELL or elsewhere. 80% of them are locally recruited and around 50% still live there, drawing on a variety of local networks including tenants associations and healthy living projects.

A door-to-door survey by the four outreach workers of 2000 households or 10% of the adult population, suggests that the College enrolment level could be more than doubled. Surprisingly, people have been willing to sign up for basic skills courses on the doorstep, although very few overall have identified themselves as having basic skills needs.

Key to Success

SPELL has only been in existence for two years so it is hard to point to a great deal of evidence of impact. At this stage, it can be said, though, that it has the feel of a project which has already won a great deal of local support and is also seen by the main agencies as the key to a coherent plan for local learning. Several factors underlie that positive start:

[9] Interviews with Project Manager on 1 December 2000 and 13 January 2001.
[10] Data from the SPELL SRB5 Business Plan

- The vision, skills, commitment and local standing of the staff
- The commitment to outreach and face to face contact with residents
- Creating a range of learning opportunities, vocational as well as non-accredited, in line with the local people's requests, in accessible and sympathetic settings.

Case Study 3: Community Learning Network[11]

CLN grew out of the decline of traditional community organisation and community work in Liverpool in the mid-1990s. It sprang up as an attempt to reconnect with individuals who wanted to continue to be active in their communities but who were sceptical about the value of the existing organisations. It also reflected the jolt to the community scene caused by the start of the large Objective 1 programme, bringing with it the promise of significant resources for capacity building (although CLN has received very little European funding). The founders of the project, ex-community workers in the main, believed that they were not alone in feeling that there was a need to reconnect local or neighbourhood organisation with the big picture (act locally, think globally). Above all, they were convinced that they had to feel their way towards a meaningful programme of activity through a series of explorations.

The core activities of the Community Learning Network are

- Exploratory events
- Short courses about Europe.

From these have developed some far-reaching types of activity that have demonstrated an ability to reconnect with concerned individuals.

Exploratory Events

Just Imagine was a conference designed to provoke debate about the sort of society participants wanted to help to shape. It brought together members of community councils, (a long established type of community forum in Liverpool which has seen better days and is sometimes reduced to being the property of a family clique) and individuals, including people from a wide range of ethnic groups. Somalis, Yemenis are amongst the city's ethnic communities as well as African-Caribbeans and, more recently, refugees from Africa and the Balkans. The event provided the basis for a new network which have taken part in a variety of programmes, including *You at the Heart,* a Freire-inspired transformatory learning scheme which explores the connections between self, the group and the world outside.

A more recent exploration of a different sort was inspired by the Moser report on basic skills. To draw attention to the report's findings about the scandal of illiteracy, CLN organised in collaboration with Liverpool Dyslexia Association a march from the outskirts of the city during Adult Learners Week to collect signatures for a petition to the City Council calling on them to act. A concrete outcome of the march is a new initiative linked to an education action zone centred on an area of the city where, according to BSA data, one in five adults has a serious literacy problem. This initiative involves the trial of a computer-based programme, *touch...type...read...spell,* in a primary and a secondary school and a community centre. Key figures in this initiative are a local community leader and a leading member of the labour movement, both active

[11] Interview with one of the tutor-organisers, 14 January 2001.

in the community council for the area. Liverpool Hope University is another member of this new partnership for basic skills.

Short Courses about Europe

One of the outcomes of *Just Imagine* is a unique programme of ERDF-funded 10 day study visits to Brussels and Paris to experience at first hand how the rest of Europe lives and to confront the reality of the European Union. The Cicero citizenship programme that CLN also participates in inspired this. The Cicero experience has demonstrated the remarkable impact of the study visit, especially for those who have never been abroad before, and this shorter version extends that opportunity to 100 people every year in Liverpool.

Engagement

CLN lacks the tidiness or clear focus of many community-learning projects. It is trying to engage a less easily identified 'community' – mainly concerned individuals - in grappling with difficult issues such as asylum seekers, fear of writing and the nature of the European project. It is also exploring new ways of creating collective action in the community. Statistics about impact are hard to come by, but it is clear that CLN is barking up the right tree: it is managing to engage hundreds of people in a learning process in a way and about a content that no other organisation does.

CLN is also about developing new forms of organisation that are better suited to the times. It provides a range of way of getting involved, which reflects a widespread aversion to heavy commitment. People can serve on the management committee, or they can just come along to events, or to a new monthly lunchtime discussion.

How does it succeed? There are a number of factors:

1 The content enables people to make sense of their own lives in terms of a broader reality
2 It explores new ways of working and networking at a time of the decline of traditional community organisation
3 It is responsive with activities generated by need and interest
4 It operates informally, face to face on a human scale, relying heavily on the ability of the small staff team to provide a supportive and stimulating learning environment
5 It provides the incentive of trips to Paris and Brussels.

Case Study 4: BLINK

BLINK is an extraordinary success as an information centre with around 1.5 million hits per month. The brainchild of the 1990 Trust, it has played a key role as a conduit of information and opinion between the black community and policy makers. Set up in 1995 with Lottery funding, it shares the 1990 Trust's mission to...

- to promote good race relations;
- to articulate the needs of the Black community from a grassroots Black perspective;
- to ensure that all issues affecting the lives of people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent are addressed;
- to engage in policy research and development which will further the above.

In addition, it has a specific role to ensure that the black community sidesteps the digital divide. The evidence on this score is sparse, as the PAT Report on ICT found, with probably a significant disparity in access reflecting class differences.[12]

Its activities can be summarised as

- Providing information for its users
- Supporting campaigns in line with the Trust's mission
- Enabling community organisations to access the Internet through connections and email.

BLINK provides access to a comprehensive range of information with special pages for women and young people. Key issues include health education (particularly sickle cell anaemia) and campaigns against racism. It has helped to shape government thinking about the new Race Relations Act, especially the provisions about public service, and its has campaigned tirelessly on behalf of the Mal and Linda Hussein, a couple who ran a shop on an estate in Lancashire besieged by racist gangs. BLINK is fundraising £120,000 to enable them to move out.

A key role of BLINK has been in promoting networking amongst community organisations, to strengthen their voice and to improve understanding between sections of a very diverse community. Enabling community groups and organisations to access the Internet has been an important contribution to this end.

So what has helped BLINK to establish itself as perhaps the country's most important black information network? How does a virtual network engage effectively with thousands of people, at a distance? Its establishment was

[12] See chapter 5 in *Closing the Digital Divide – Information and Communication Technology in Deprived Areas,* Policy Action Team Report 15, DTI, 1999.

timely, as campaigning against racism began to make headway in the mid to late 1990s. The Stephen Lawrence Campaign created an enormous demand for information, and BLINK was able to respond to what its users wanted. It was, it needs saying, trusted because it was a clearly recognisable black voice, with a forthright tone which reflected the political approach of its founders, including Lee Jaspers, a black community activist who has recently been appointed the Mayor of London's adviser on race and policing. BLINK is managed by the Trust that is itself managed by black community representatives and national figures.

BLINK was timely in a second sense. It provided access to the Internet at a time of growing interest in things digital, a trend that included the black community. Black Internet users are a significant group in many areas. Over two-thirds of the users of INNIT, a UK-Online pilot centre in Kilburn, West London, for example, are drawn from ethnic minorities, most of them black and many of them refugees.[13]

A network, and especially a virtual network has a more attenuated relationship with its community than a territorially based project, but the growth of BLINK suggests that it has developed a vital relationship with its users. Being there at the right time, being trusted and learning to respond to need seem to be the keys to BLINK's success in community engagement.[14]

[13] Interview with Centre Manager, 15 January 2001.
[14] Interview with Information Manager, 15 January 2001.

Engaging the Community: The Success Factors

The case studies point to six types of success factors. Not all of them exhibit all six, and the combinations are different in each case. However, the first three are present in all four cases.

1. The right people: Attitudes, skills and relationships
2. Responsive and Learner focused
3. Community stake or ownership and Partnership
4. Innovation or re-invention
5. Outreach
6. Incentives to take part

Lessons for Providers and Partnerships

So how can providers and partnerships build on these examples of good practice? There are a number of lessons to derive from this analysis.

1. Partnership

No one organisation has the skills or resources necessary to support the development of successful learning communities. What is required in every case is a combination of the resources and expertise that a number of organisations can bring to bear. The difficulty is that partnerships tend to be top heavy, dominated by large mainstream agencies such as colleges or local authorities, risking the exclusion of voluntary and community sector organisations. Financial and regulatory frameworks compound the imbalance.

The answer may be threefold:

1. Frameworks which facilitate joint working, for example through funding agreements which favour the community
2. Skills and attitude: the right people and skills are critical, and are in short supply, but they can be developed – big agencies are not inevitably incapable of collaboration on other people's terms
3. Brokers: Nottinghamshire's Learning Community Operations Groups are the most developed example of a partnership between communities and learning providers facilitated by the local authority that holds the ring to ensure that learners needs are met.

The Royds Community Association has demonstrated another approach. It has been able to adjust the balance of forces in its favour by delivering practical and sustainable benefits and by tapping the expertise of its own professionals.

2. Responsiveness, Ownership and Learner Focus

It is easy to see why locally based projects can sometimes be more effective than big institutions in engaging people. There is no substitute for face-to-face contact, for getting to know people and adjusting to their changing needs.

Hence the surprisingly positive responses to Bradford's home care managers when they went out to meet community care users in their own homes.[15] But it is also a case of demonstrating a commitment to the community, which is true of all four case studies.

3. Local Investment

Resources are an issue in developing learning communities. SPELL can improve the quality of college provision by subsidising smaller classes. SRB and European funding enables it to run an outreach programme that the College cannot afford. Creating a learning culture is inevitably costly.

4. Innovation and Invention

ICT is fundamental to BLINK but it figures surprisingly little in the other cases. There are undoubtedly lost opportunities here. On the other hand, there is a commitment to innovation and invention of other kinds, including CLN's European study visits or SPELL's outreach and local employment initiative.

Conclusions

1. The State of the Nation

Bromley by Bow (London), Balsall Heath (Birmingham) and the Royds Community Association (Bradford) : these award-winning cases are prominent amongst a rather short list of examples of holistic community development. There is a similarly short list of communities that have begun to assume control of their own learning. The cases of best practice cited earlier do not stand alone but they are unusual.[16] More typical are cases of partial community engagement, usually around a specific project or initiative. The annals of SRB can provide dozens of examples of this kind.

The paucity of examples is not surprising. Community engagement goes against the grain of institutional management of learning resources and social structure. It challenges long-established notions of what works and who has power, clashing with systems of control and finance run by professionals. To compound the problem, the attempt often takes place in the most hard-pressed neighbourhoods, where expectations of the practical benefits of learning are low. To succeed, it requires local leaders with enormous resilience, determination and substantial organisational resources. And even this is not enough. For as Frank Coffield, a sceptic about the all curing powers of lifelong learning, has argued,

Policies, which concentrate on widening access, are likely to have limited impact unless they are integrated with wider, well-resourced strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion.[17]

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[15] Kendra Inman, 'Down your way' in *Guardian Society,* 10 January 2001, p.144.

[16] A rich source of data on community learning is the Adult Learners Week Group Awards which have provided examples every year since the scheme's inception in 1993.

[17] 'Poverty won't be beaten so easily' by Professor Frank Coffield in *Times Educational Supplement,* 8 December 2000, p.34.

A recent study underlines the difficulty of reversing decline in the poorest neighbourhoods. Michael Carley, in his summary document (December 2000) for a forthcoming report "Regeneration in the 21st Century" (which summarises lessons from Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Area Regeneration Programme), suggests five key areas to which attention needs paying: understanding urban disadvantage; developing robust and innovative partnerships at local level; developing neighbourhood governance structures to empower communities; developing not only city-wide but also regional regeneration strategies; and finally a national plan for cities and regions which responds to regional economic differences, acknowledges the vital role of cities and strengthens the role of regions in co-ordinating the economy, transport and planning.[18]

2. Lessons for a Reformed National System of Adult Learning

There are a number of lessons for the national system, many of which have been highlighted elsewhere, for example, by FEDA and by the Policy Action Team on Skills.[19] Its report, Skills *for Neighbourhood Renewal,* concluded that there were three main reasons for the persistent lack of basic skills in many disadvantaged communities:[20]

- The education and training system does not adequately address people's needs
- Local capacity is too weak to support improvements
- People do not believe that acquiring skills or qualifications will make any difference to their employment prospects.

These are not the only problems, as the report noted, but they are fundamental. The lessons that follow are intended to address these three issues.

3. Meeting People's Needs

Much current education and training provision is characterised by a provider-led mentality, reinforced by a curriculum, staffing and funding infrastructure, which slows down the shift to a more responsive, learner-focused system. Further education has been debating roll-on roll-off provision for two decades, yet most enrolments still take place in September. Innovation is held at a safe distance at the margins, largely dependent on short-term funding, while the great engine of the mainstream service rolls on majestically.

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[18] Carley Michael et al (December 2000) *Regeneration in the 21st Century: Policies into practice* JRF/Policy Press

[19] FEDA (2000) *Local Strategic Partnerships and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund;* DfEE (2000) *Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local Solutions,* Policy Action Team on Skills. See also the policy pointers in *Towns, cities and regions in the learning age – a survey of learning communities* (2000) by Martin Yarnit for LCN, LGA and DfEE, pp 82-86.

[20] DfEE (1999), p.10

It is too soon to say whether the new LSC framework will promote a new balance in favour of learners at the expense of providers, which it must if today's needs are to form the basis for planning and funding. Learning Partnerships are expected to shoulder the responsibility for feeding back learners' expectations and experiences to the LSC, yet

- Learners or even voluntary and community organisations, which may be closer to them, are noticeable by their absence from the Partnerships
- Since Learning Partnerships are not mentioned in the Learning and Skills Act, it is unclear to what extent the LSC will take any notice of the feed-back they offer
- The practice of garnering learner feedback is largely confined to consultative fora and satisfaction surveys.

Sturdier accountability tools are required if we are to see a shift in the power balance:

- LSC should ensure that learner fora are properly set up and funded in every area so that they can survey and report authoritatively on a wide range of learner views
- These bodies should be equipped for constructive scrutiny and able to carry out detailed audits of need and provision
- Demonstration projects should be set up to test the feasibility of delegating significant amounts of funding to properly set up bodies representing local interests.

These proposals, which sound radical or worse in the education context, are, of course, par for the course for SRB and New Deal for Communities programmes.

4. Joined Up Government to Address Learner Needs

The value of partnership in promoting learning communities is clear:

FEDA's research and development work – for example, in the area of widening participation and meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups – demonstrates the value of co-ordinated working across sectors. Joint decision-making and sharing of information can strengthen the support available to learners; create pathways between different types of provision and help put new learning opportunities in place. By working with a range of organisations with functions relating to education, social welfare and economic development, learning providers can better identify and respond to the needs of local communities.[21]

The planning framework over which the Learning and Skills Council will preside is designed to promote collaboration and to minimise unhelpful competition between providers. This is a major advance but it is not enough. It is clear that we are at a crossroads. Partnerships are seen by the Government as an essentially voluntary compact, yet, as FEDA observes,

[21] FEDA, op. cit., p.1.

The ability of Learning Partnerships to deliver agreed strategic objectives depends in large measure upon the commitment of individual partners to meeting these objectives through the organisations they represent. The absence of legal duty and accountability may constrain the influence of partnerships and limit their ability to fulfil their responsibilities.

The creation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), of which Learning Partnerships are likely to become 'the learning arm', creates another voluntary relationship to further obscure accountability.

Set against the 'organic' evolutionary process which is favoured by Government, it could be argued that we have reached the point where we need a new form of local governance of learning to correspond with the LSC and other statutory agencies, on the one hand, and with learners and communities, on the other.[22]

Existing arrangements are unable to support the shift required from a voluntary and unsystematic approach to provision to a systematic approach to service planning. Imagine if the school system or antenatal care were run on the same basis as post-16 education and training. At best, schools in a given locality would collaborate to advertise themselves to the parents of rising fours, but which social groups would ensure that they took advantage of this offer? Or, you can imagine the situation if antenatal care was provided by word or mouth or on the basis of leaflets in doctors' surgeries rather than through a systematic process of invitation supported by a community health outreach service. Instead, there is a growing mismatch between the unplanned pumping of resources into the creation of UK Online learning centres and the failure to engage the very people who could most benefit from neighbourhood provision.

The new strategy for basic skills, however, marks a shift towards systematic provision and service planning, a reflection of the heroic efforts by the Basic Skills Agency to promote a targeted approach. The same approach must be extended to all post-16 education and training. But that will mean a shift from voluntary consortia of providers to a statutory planning and finance framework in which clear responsibilities are allocated to providers, backed up by a shared infrastructure for identifying consumers and for tracking their progress. Accountability to the funding bodies will be in the first instance contractual, but what is also required is a greater element of public participation and scrutiny through the democratisation of the Learning Partnership with some form of election.

[22] Organic is the term used by a senior DfEE official at the Learning Partnerships Conference in Coventry in October.

4. Strengthening Local Capacity, Creating a Stake

A fundamental feature of a reformed system is that it builds on, wherever possible, local community organisation, rather than supplanting it with a new burdensome bureaucracy, convinced it alone knows best.

Discussion about ownership rarely extends as far as practical proposals about devolving resources to poor neighbourhoods, yet this is what is required.

There has to be a means by which community management can be exerted. Community trusts show some success in providing a local system of governance and accountability, in the case of the Manor and Castle Trust in Sheffield or the Royds Community Association, Bradford, acting as the lynchpin for a thriving business park with mainstream and community businesses. The urban community trusts common in the Netherlands provide a more ambitious model. A trust serving Feyenood, a low-income neighbourhood in Rotterdam, employs 256 people providing social and educational services including well-equipped community learning centres.[23] In other EU countries, other forms of organisation such as cooperatives fulfil a similar function.[24]

Trusts provide a vehicle for the management of devolved local services, including education, as well as for the ownership of assets and equity. I have proposed elsewhere the creation of Enterprise Learning Centres.[25] The Centres, which would combine learning, training and wealth creation on one site, open to all ages, all year round, would be jointly owned and managed by voluntary and community organisations and education providers. They could be run as non-for profit enterprises in their own right.

5. Resourcing Engagement

The volunteer principle is sound but limited especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In those settings, volunteers need well resourced and organised support systems if their engagement is to be sustained and they

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[23] See the Rotterdam case study in Yarnit, M. (2000) *Towns, Cities and Regions in the Learning Age: A Survey of Learning Communities,* LCN – The Network of Learning Communities for DfEE and LGA, IdeA Publications, London.

[24] The most comprehensive account is by Jordi Estivill et al (1997) *Las Empresas Sociales en Europa* , Barcelona: Editorial Hacer.

[25] Unpublished paper for South Yorkshire Objective 1 Education and Training Priority Group, 2000, available by email from the author – martin.yarnit@virgin.net:
The Enterprise Learning Centre is not to be confused with the image of a bank of computers increasingly conjured up by the term Learning Centre. Of course, it will be a Ufl centre but more than this it is a centre for learning the knowledge and skills which regenerate communities: social and economic enterprise, public, private and third sector. They will tap into the resources of higher education through micro-business incubator units and SME cluster focused research and development units, developing spin offs from main research programmes. They will generate new forms of community enterprise and assets, providing jobs, products and services. They will provide a single gateway to re-connect unemployed and under-qualified workers to training and employment opportunities. They will provide guidance and counselling for all ages.

are to progress to new and perhaps more responsible roles. Above all, there has to be a properly planned and resourced career structure, enabling people to move from volunteering through part-time or short-term employment and on to more responsible and better-paid positions. ILM programmes are effective in moving people out of benefit dependence but careful planning is needed to take them to the point where they can apply for and hold down the growing number of jobs funded by regeneration programmes.

6. The Importance of Informal Learning to Building from the Bottom

"The major conclusion from this survey is that our organized systems of schooling and continuing education and training are like big ships floating in a sea of informal learning. If these education and training ships do not pay increasing attention to the massive amount of outside informal learning, many of them are likely to sink into Titanic irrelevancy."

This is the view of David Livingstone, a Canadian investigator who carried out a survey of 1500 adults in 1998 designed to establish the extent of adult learning, the existence of social barriers to learning and more effective means of linking learning with work.[26] The extent of engagement in informal learning is naturally hard to pin down, but there is evidence of enormous potential on the rare occasions when it is systematically tapped.

According to the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, 70% of skills are learnt outside formal institutions. For example, non-formal learning is the main source of skills acquisition for small business.[27]

7. Learning Pays

Adult Learners Week has taught us a lot about how to promote the value of learning. One of the major spin-offs is the permanent national help line, **learndirect**, which has been very effectively advertised to unemployed people through a message distributed with giros. Other successes associated with the Week include Channel 4's Brookie Basics and BBC's Webwise, which have demonstrated the vast potential audience for well, designed and promoted learning. The lesson is the need to build on this experience to create an articulated approach to promotion: all year round, linking local, regional and national media and initiatives.

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[26] See: Lifelong Learning Profiles: General Summary of Findings from the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning
http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/sur_res.htm
The National Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) at OISE/UT was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

[27] *Re-focusing on learning regions: Education, training and lifelong learning for Australia's wellbeing*
See URL: **http://www.crla.utas.eduau/sumpap99.shtml**

ALW will remain a high point of the calendar, but there will need to be others, perhaps in July-August (coinciding with summer activities in schools), in September (traditional recruiting time for adult and further education), in November (linked to the nation's pre-Christmas shopping spree) and at the beginning of the spring when people are more inclined to venture out again.

Careful planning and coordination will be essential to ensure that the message conveyed by the national media finds a reinforcing echo where people live, play and work. That is a vital job for the LSC supported by RDAs. Webwise proved that it is possible to create a national network of centres able to support a series about ICT. Learning towns and cities and learning partnerships have a crucial role to play to ensure that the national message is reinforced at (sub-) regional and local level. The case studies demonstrate the value of proximity, although BLINK's experience suggests that shared values are just as important.

8. An Integrated Approach to Tackling Social Exclusion

Finally, learning must be seen to be part of a comprehensive plan to improve the conditions of living, especially in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Coffield's argument poses the first conclusion: policies to strengthen learning communities must form part of an integrated attack on social exclusion and poverty. But this makes sense from a second point of view, and this is the second conclusion, that learning should be seen in the main as an instrument of social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal, rather than a good in itself. It is the tool for improving people's powers of critical analysis as well as their capacity for managing health, housing and other services or setting up businesses. Yet, for the most part, learning stands alone from other community activities. From school onwards, the curriculum and the way people learn is abstracted from the real business of life surrounding them. The Royds points to another way of learning.

Locally led learning community organisations can turn the tide, engaging people in learning and bringing about concrete and lasting benefits but they need help:

- Partnership, planning and funding arrangements must be rejigged to favour the development of learning communities
- Local capacity must be invested in so that it can respond to local need and provide leadership in partnerships

These changes are vital to bringing about sustainable and visible benefits and persuading people in the most hard-pressed neighbourhoods that their efforts will be rewarded.

Martin Yarnit, January 2001

Appendix 1: Learning Systems: Old and New

	Old	New
Character	:: Formal	:: Formal :: Informal :: Reflexive
Funding	:: Mainstream budgets	:: Initiative + project driven - funded by SRB, Europe, NOF
Focus	:: Provider-driven	:: Learners/Business/ :: Neighbourhood
Structure	:: Segmented, :: Competition :: Age driven :: Elitist - Oxbridge effect :: Majority leave by 18	:: Embryonic, small scale :: Integrated, :: Collaboration :: Partnership :: Connected communities :: Lifelong learning
Delivery	:: Segmented: separate facilities for schools, colleges, libraries, businesses :: Teachers-Taught :: Classrooms :: Schools closed 75% of the year	:: Integrated facilities :: Autonomous learners :: Learner advocates :: Networked learning centres :: All age, open to all :: RO-RO (finally) :: IAG on tap
Content	:: Segmented, academic-vocational divide	:: Convergent - core skills and competences :: Enterprise, wealth creation
Control	:: Providers	:: Learner leverage + :: accountability
Who Pays	:: School leavers subsidise HE	:: Bigger tax base, :: Charitable status for learning centres, :: Workplace learning incentives

Appendix 2: Value Added Chain

Inputs: **Resources invested**	◻ Budget – capital and revenue ◻ Staff – numbers and skills ◻ Materials ◻ Facilities

⇩

Process: **Participation and Management**	◻ Partnership ◻ Decision making ◻ User/community involvement ◻ Responsiveness to local wishes/conditions – e.g. outreach; marketing ◻ Innovative forms of organisation e.g. using internet to promote democratic decision making

⇩

Outputs: **Levels of participation**	◻ Enrolments ◻ Facilities created ◻ Advice sessions given ◻ Jobs created ◻ Innovative forms of delivery e.g. community ICT networks

⇩

Outcomes: **Medium term impact**	◻ Learning ◻ Skills, qualifications ◻ People employed ◻ Service satisfaction levels ◻ Creation of tangible community assets e.g. companies; art centres; new library and information centres; improved childcare

⇩

Benefits: **Long term impact on cohesive, self-sustaining development**	◻ Employment: improved capacity for creating new companies, services and products ◻ Rooted culture of learning ◻ Household income levels ◻ Health and Community safety ◻ Social cohesion e.g. new networks; gender and race equality; community engagement in service development

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Learning Communities:
Strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Seminar 2 Notes
Local organisations and community learning
Held 6 March 2001

1. The seminar heard presentations on the characteristics of successful learning communities (Martin Yarnit), community regeneration in the Royds Community Association (Marie Copley) and on how those involved in provision in the new learning and skills sector need to behave differently to facilitate effective community learning (Chris Jude). These notes do not reproduce the presentations made by speakers since these will be part of a publication setting out the inputs and findings from the project. The notes draw together issues and points of discussion and indicate areas of consensus emerging from the seminar. They aim to encourage continuity and progression between seminars.

Institutional versus voluntary and community sector provision

2. It was suggested that there was an assumption underlying the opening presentations that smaller organisations should be funded to provide community learning, rather than existing institutions. This stimulated discussion of the capacity of small voluntary and community organisations to deliver adult community learning and the (in)ability of formal institutions to meet this need. There is some evidence that smaller local organisations can be effective in widening participation and creating learning communities where formal institutions have perhaps failed. There was also some questioning of the assumption that provision for community learning should be channelled through new organisations, rather than getting existing organisations to change.

3. Some were concerned that there should not be an over-dependence on local infrastructures in disadvantaged communities, which can often be unstable, transient and lacking in leadership. Others felt that, on the contrary, there is a vast pool of talent in the voluntary and community sector still to be tapped. The suggestion was made that a twin-track approach is needed - engagement with the community without over-reliance on a bottom-up approach through a 'mixed economy' of voluntary and community as well as 'mainstream' provision. Long-term stability and investment are required.

4. There was some pessimism about the capacity of formal institutions to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities. Young people often had

bad experiences of school, which led to disaffection. The view was expressed that higher standards in schools made school life 'uncomfortable' for some young people and led to 'flight' from mainstream provision. Some felt that schools and colleges would only change if compelled to do so in a market of open competition for funding. However, there were others who argued that the strength of schools and colleges lies in their longevity – they can fulfil the long-term commitment that is needed to change communities (provided they become more 'informal'). Only these long-lived education institutions are able to provide learning opportunities with some continuity for successive generations of learners in a community – and have the capacity therefore to bring about inter-generational change (eg. in attitudes to education).

5. However, there was also discussion about the need for short-term intermediary organisations (and provision), which may play a role in brokerage and stimulation of demand. Smaller voluntary and community organisations are best-placed to offer an access route into education for those who will not use formal provision. It is important, however, that they have clear progression routes available – informal learning can lead to formal learning. Some argued here that there is a need to rethink mainstream formal provision itself, and not just to focus on how to bring people into it.

6. The conclusion to this part of the debate was that it is important not to generalise. The ability of formal institutions to engage with communities is a local issue, affected by geography, local history and community receptiveness. There is nothing inherent in formal institutions that makes them unable to deliver effective community learning.

Schools and lifelong learning

7. The point was made that schools (pre-16) should not be separated from the lifelong learning agenda - this was an artificial distinction. Schools equip people with the skills and tools they need to participate in the community. Schools also play a key role in planting the seeds of community capacity building through their contact with parents. Opportunities for learning for parents can be generated through the tripartite relationship between parents, children and teachers. Parents need the capacity to make decisions about their child's education, and there should be a dialogue between schools and parents across a range of issues. The level of parents' interest in their children's education should not be under-estimated.

8. However, the capacity for schools to exercise this role and engage with communities can be limited. Schools are subject to constraints that do not affect community organisations like Royds. They have different output measurements and accountabilities to fulfil, and have the pressures of inspection regimes and league tables to deal with.

'Mainstream' community learning?

9. The discussion considered why community learning is rarely classed as 'mainstream'. The psychology of the territory has often centred on a false dichotomy between formal and informal learning. This results in community learning being viewed as marginal, and leads advocates of community learning to adopt a defensive stance.

10. Some asked whether the impending new LSC system was leading to a shift in the policy debate towards a view about long-term sustainable approaches to learning in communities. The concept of margins and mainstream will need to change in the new sector, where much more provision should become the 'mainstream'. There was a desire to get away from the old 'mainstream'/community learning juxtapositions and to think about restructuring the relationship between the two. Crucially, there seemed some consensus that formal learning needs to change and that, in turn, the voluntary and community sector should be recognised as offering more than a route to formal learning delivered by the 'mainstream'.

11. In terms of what practical steps local organisations could be taking to effect this change, several propositions and examples were offered:

- develop consortia of local professionals - for example, the headteachers working with Royds
- more consultation with communities
- empower local people - for example in decisions about learning; through requirements on contractors to take on local employees; in arrangements for accountability
- use funding as a lever to bring about institutional and professional change
- fund individuals – put greater power in the hands of learners
- find ways to manage risk - particularly necessary when engaging with the voluntary and community sector, who may be trying innovative ways of doing things
- bring 'learning' into a wider range of local agendas – for example when major local planning decisions are made, consider the impact on learning in the community
- decide who should ensure 'fair play' – what might be the respective roles if the LSC and the Learning Partnership?

LSC potential

12. Participants felt that Adult Community Learning (ACL) had, until recently, been marginalised. With the new LSC system there was an opportunity to establish wider definitions of community learning. The LSC is intended to adopt a broader approach to funded learning, and is already beginning to evaluate what should be included in the new wider field of formula funding.

13. This is a welcome shift as it could bring 'informal' provision into the 'mainstream' and could offer greater security for ACL providers. However, the price of 'mainstreaming' could be to constrain the product because of the demands of accountability and the regulatory framework. It was considered important that these administrative burdens do not 'kill' what the new structure is intended to support. Smaller voluntary and community organisations need the capacity to develop their own success indicators. It was felt that, although policy seems to be moving in the 'right' direction, there is a danger that funding accountabilities could work against this.

14. It was also argued that the LSC needs to be flexible and not replicate the rigid structures of the existing system. There was some concern that the LSC should not absorb in bureaucracy, funding that could go directly to learning providers.

Community capacity-building/engagement

15. Participants also considered the role of community capacity-building in creating effective learning communities. It was often the case that it was the desire to act, to do something in a community that triggered the recognition of learning needs. There was reference to the 'virtuous circle of learning and doing'. Some felt that voluntary organisations have a wealth of relationships with their clients that could be built upon and turned into relationships that are about learning (even though they may have different origins). Community self-help was often the first step to forming learning communities, which was why the bottom tier of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding is so important. Learning communities would not necessarily recognise themselves as such. Community success is not measured purely in terms of learning.

16. Community capacity building needs to develop community leaders who are able to evolve their role and move on from their initial responsibilities. It is often the case that the original innovator is not the best person to manage a project once it is underway. Royds Community Association elects new Board members each year to prevent potential problems of dominant leaders. The crucial factor was having a clear process of management succession and continuity in place.

17. Organisations seeking to engage with communities ideally need staff to live and work in the local area. Engaging the difficult to reach is an active process. The view of the Royds Association, for example, is to reject the idea of having an exit strategy in favour of 'being there for the duration', and finding ways of becoming an integral part of the community. This is essential to bringing about inter-generational change. However, some questioned whether engagement mechanisms inevitably become bureaucratised in the long-term.

18. Some participants feared a pervasive belief in national and local government and its agencies that external agencies must come in and 'build' the community. This was rejected – it is vital to build from the bottom up wherever possible – and to empower communities to do this

building themselves. This approach needs to be supported by a guaranteed entitlement – people within the community need to feel that they have the right to make demands on the system. Communities need to have a sense of ownership.

Democratic approaches

19. Building on Chris Jude's contribution, there was some discussion of the learning that professionals need to do if they are to help facilitate 'learning communities'. Professional behaviour needs to change and there needs to be less of a rigid hold on power if residents are to feel more 'in the driving seat'. Participants asked whether planning could become a more democratic and responsive process. How can 'inherently more democratic approaches' be formed that involve communities more actively? These are questions that now need to be addressed by local authorities and service providers if 'learning communities' are to be formed and sustained.

Debbie Dawson
Learning and Skills Development Agency

DEMOS

learning and skills development agency

Learning Communities: Strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Seminar 3: Learning Communities – A framework for funding, planning and accountability

Background Paper

1. This paper draws out pertinent issues and debates from earlier seminars in order to inform the final seminar. The theme of this seminar is to identify how funding, planning and accountability structures need to take account of the particular characteristics of community learning in order to widen participation in learning.

Different Approaches to defining Community Learning

2. 'Community' and 'Community Learning' are difficult concepts and there is no consensus around a single definition of either. The notion of community embraces definitions which go beyond the simple idea of neighbourhood, and includes, for example, the idea of networked communities connected over the internet, or cultural or faith groups which are not based on place. In a similar way community learning goes beyond the category of LEA secured Adult and Community Learning, and includes activities in a range of settings including colleges, schools, LEAs, workplace, families and community organisations.

3. In order to inform the task of bodies such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in promoting community learning it is necessary to acknowledge and disentangle the range of meanings attached to community learning. This should enable more differentiated approaches to identifying and promoting learning activities in the range of contexts.

4. Building on the first two seminars it appears that the term is used in three different ways. They can roughly be characterised as learning **in** the community, learning **for** the community, and learning **through** the community.

5. Learning **in** the community refers to location and expresses the aspiration that learning should be made accessible through being local. Being local is often, though not necessarily, associated with familiar settings - a local library or community centre as against the unfamiliar classroom. Sometimes the notion of proximity also carries the implication that local provision is tailored to distinct local needs as opposed to 'off the peg' standard offerings.

6. Learning **for** the community seeks to define community learning as having distinct outcomes or objectives. It is an activity designed to help develop social capital as well as individual competences. It seeks to strengthen social networks, and social norms[1]. It supports community capacity building - the capability of a community to organize things for themselves.

7. Learning **through** the community sees community learning as a type of learning distinguished by the learner's participation in community activities and organisations. Just as Work Based Learning is distinguished by using the experience of real work as the basis for learning and assessment, community based learning uses contexts provided by local community activities. Often the learning will involve a voluntary or charitable body but it is not defined solely by the status of the provider. A distinctive feature might be that they involve a notion of learners being members, stakeholders or shareholders in the learning provider (for example in Credit Unions, Co-ops, Regeneration consortia, residents associations. etc).

[1] See David Halpern's discussion on social capital as norms networks and sanction.

8. These three approaches to community learning, though frequently interwoven in practice, appear to be logically distinct. Learning **in** the community could be delivered by a local faith group or by a university. Learning **through** the community could promote individual, rather than social outcomes. For example, a community action project, perhaps built around housing issues, might aim to help local people take charge of their lives by working together on a range of issues or simply serve as a context within which to promote the literacy skills of individuals.

9. A practical question for LSC is how these different types of community learning interrelate. Is it true, for example, that learning **in** the community is best delivered **through** the community? Is it true that learning **for** the community is best delivered **in** the community?

Government policy on community

10. Charles Woodd's presentation in the first seminar in the series demonstrated that the Government's policy focus in terms of community is predominantly on regeneration of deprived communities.

11. The recent establishment of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit seems a strong indicator of the historic failure of community regeneration strategies since 1945. Successive governments have invested in the physical regeneration of local areas, but the picture today suggests that this has made little impact on the general well-being of people who live and work in deprived neighbourhoods.

12. In the policy recommendations that emerged from the Government's Policy Action Teams (PATs) – now being taken forward by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit - we can see a shift towards a more coherent and holistic approach to community regeneration. The PAT on Skills holds particular relevance for this discussion. This report drew attention to the impact skills have on every aspect of people's lives and suggested that the *'decline in 'social capital' ... has a significant role in cutting people in some disadvantaged communities off from learning and the labour market'*.[2] Key recommendations focused on the need for accessible local provision, the value of involving local people in the management and delivery of learning at the community level, and the priority the LSC should place on providing informal adult and community education activities which most effectively engage socially disadvantaged people.

13. The approach of recent policy is more people-focused – not just about local housing but also about local jobs in the construction industry, not just about local colleges but also about local people delivering education and training. The emphasis of the learning and skills strand of the neighbourhood renewal strategy is community capacity building – learning <u>for</u> the community. It's about giving people a stake and encouraging community members to share the responsibility for making local services work.

14. This provides opportunities for learning <u>through</u> the community. Government is positive about community groups taking the initiative to provide services

[2] Policy Action Team: Skills – Final Report, paragraph 27

themselves, in the form of local health centres, leisure and sports groups, training opportunities, business start up support, and travel facilities for example. In so doing, local people can develop individual skills, build trust and develop ways of working effectively together.

Mainstreaming community learning

15. Obstacles remain in the system which serve to hinder such community initiatives. The message from earlier seminars is that the voluntary sector and community groups often find themselves unsuccessful in competing with large public sector institutions for mainstream funding and are consequently left with the insecurity of receiving funding from a variety of different sources, through complex bidding processes and with burdensome accountability structures. The Royds Association was a good example of this - a community organisation operating with time limited funding from many different sources, providing services to local people and encouraging local people to provide services for themselves.

16. The PAT on Skills also identified this as an issue. They said that '*the most effective work (they had) seen with disadvantaged people has been delivered by local community and voluntary organisations, who usually have a much better understanding of local people's needs – and more credibility with them – than larger, more inflexible organisations in the public sector*'.[3] There was a need to increase the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to meet learning needs at the community level, and this meant simplifying the complex funding programmes and practices. It is our view that strengthening the voluntary and community sector is a precondition for strengthening social capital and for engaging potential learners, for developing intermediaries between LSC and Learning Partnerships/LEAs as well as for strengthening learner voice mechanisms.

17. There remain real issues about how local Learning and Skills Councils are to fulfil the Secretary of State's expectation that they 'take a holistic view of how their contribution fits within the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal'.[4] Not only will they need to think about how they can complement the learning and skills strand of the Strategy, but they must also consider the fit with Local Authority Community Planning and how they can support community initiatives more broadly by making funding for the learning element of these initiatives more accessible to voluntary and community groups.

18. Some discussion suggested that community learning is now part of the mainstream – it is an established element of LSC provision. But concerns remain about how effectively these forms of learning can be accommodated within mainstream systems of funding, planning and accountability. In addition, a crucial question is how LSCs should work with Local Authorities to maximum effect in co-ordinating community focussed resources and interventions.

[3] ibid, paragraph 52
[4] The Learning and Skills Council: strategic priorities letter from David Blunkett, November 2000.

Brokers and Community Learning Champions

19. Another significant issue is how to ensure that the needs of the community are articulated and met by local LSCs. Learning needs can be assessed at a highly aggregated level (X numbers of A level or Modern Apprenticeship places), which might not be responsive to the very specific needs of each community. While LSCs will take account of Regional Skills Strategies generated by RDAs, it is unclear how they will meet specific learning needs at a local level.

20. There is uncertainty also about how LSCs, which often cover areas larger than local authorities, can identify the needs defined by local communities for themselves. The non-statutory Learning Partnerships could provide local learners with a voice, but their capability is unclear. It is also unclear how they will relate to Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Authority Community Planning in identifying needs.

21. There have been calls by national bodies (such as the National Skills Task Force and the Community Education Development Centre) for a clear statement of entitlement to learning. Learning City Network among others has proposed that to ensure this entitlement, organisations should be identified or created to act as community brokers to help individuals and communities to work together to get the learning opportunities they want. Based in the community, they could negotiate individual entitlement and act as an intermediary between learners and providers to secure provision for individuals or groups of individuals. They could provide the bridge between Local Authority and LSC planning systems. They might for example support community groups in attracting funding from different streams and create networks of different providers sharing complementary skills, knowledge and resources.

The specific demands of community learning

22. The primary objectives of the LSC, set out in the draft corporate plan, are to:

    1. Raise participation and achievement by young people
    2. Increase demand for learning for adults
    3. Raise skills for national competitiveness
    4. Raise the quality of education and training delivery
    5. Equalise opportunities through better access to learning
    6. Improve effectiveness and efficiency.

23. In order to achieve objectives 2 and 5 in particular, LSCs will need to secure the contribution of community learning in the range of manifestations described above. The analysis in this paper suggests five specific issues that will need to be addressed:

    - The identification of learning outcomes needs to address both educational and community learning – ie be set in terms of individual and social capital
    - Indicators of the quality of learning processes need to be appropriate to the educational and community contexts

- Regional and national strategies need to be capable of taking account of very local needs and collective as well as individual needs for learning
- The LSC funding, and Community Regeneration Funding need to be joined up at the community level, as well as at national and regional levels if the LSC is to meet its objectives.
- A new voice is needed for the (potential) learner
- Strategies to promote demand must encompass effective outreach if they are to have a significant impact in reaching adults, particularly those in disadvantaged areas
- Mechanisms must be found to promote the employment and professional development of local people to deliver services.

24. During the current transition phase to an integrated funding system, consideration also needs to be given to how mechanisms might be strengthened to support community learning through the existing funding streams (ie for colleges, for adult and community learning, work-based learning and school sixth forms).

A funding, planning and accountability system for community learning

25. The LSC is well placed to promote the development of community learning on any of the definitions deployed, though what it would need to do would differ with the definition(s) chosen. It has several mechanisms at its disposal, but its arrangements for funding, planning (allocations) and accountability are critical. A consideration of these mechanisms, in the light of the examples raised in the seminars, and the definitions and analysis offered here, yields a rich set of practical issues for consideration.

26. **Funding Issues** concern the rates which the LSC will pay providers for different types of provision. The standard funding approach recognises that programmes vary in length and resource intensity; and also reflects variations in costs which arise from working in areas of disadvantage, areas of high cost (London) or with individuals with special needs. In relation to community learning however it also needs to ask:

    - Should funding reflect location? Should the LSC pay more (or less) for provision offered in 'local' settings?
    - Do learning opportunities, which aim to promote community outcomes (for example to develop social capital), have distinct cost characteristics which need to be reflected?
    - How can funding be made more accessible for community groups and the voluntary sector?
    - Does learning through the community have a distinct cost structure which should be recognised like work-based learning?
    - Should different levels of funding apply to different categories of organisation?

27. **Planning or Allocation Issues** concern the volume of activity which the LSC will seek to secure from individual providers. Unlike the FEFC, the LSC is not constrained in the providers it can fund so it needs a logic for determining the

pattern it supports. Questions prompted by the discussion of community learning include:

- How should the LSCs set targets for 'local' delivery?
- How should the LSCs determine how much 'learning for the community' is needed and which providers should supply it?
- What role might Community Brokers play?
- Should LSCs set targets for learning delivered through the community and how might they be derived?
- Should LSCs seek to set targets for provision by types of provider, or partnerships of providers?
- How might the various approaches to community learning best be reflected in regional and national planning and the local work of Learning Partnerships?
- Should the LSC seek to priority-fund partnerships between colleges, LEAs and the voluntary sector?
- Should the LSC only fund community learning that attracts funding from community regeneration funding streams?

28. **Accountability Issues** concern how to identify when learning is taking place and how to measure it. The relevance here is in helping identify what might be equitable levels of resourcing for like activities. Among the questions raised are:

- How might provision, which is 'local' or 'familiar', be identified?
- How might the LSC monitor improvements in social capital as well as individual learner progress?
- `How could learning **through** the community best be identified?

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Learning Communities: Strengthening lifelong learning through practice

Seminar 3 Notes
Learning communities: a framework for funding, planning and accountability

Held 4 June 2001

1. The seminar sought to explore how funding, planning and accountability structures can be developed to support community learning and widen participation in learning. All three have the potential to bring about changes in learning provision by encouraging and legitimising different types of learning, both formal and informal.

2. Presentations were given by Chris Yapp (Lifelong Learning Fellow, ICL) and Sue Cara (Associate Director, NIACE). These notes do not reproduce the presentations made by speakers but draw together issues and points of discussion and indicate areas of consensus emerging from the seminar.

Planning

3. The seminar considered whether there is an alternative to the current dominant planning approaches. These were characterised as the supplier dominated system and pure free market system. The case was made for a much more learner-centred system, with planning shifted towards the local/community level and learning provision tailored to a much greater extent towards 'learning on demand' and meeting the needs of communities and individuals. Seminar participants noted some of the practical difficulties with implementing community-level planning, however, particularly in an area like London where there is a culture of travelling to learn.

4. In discussing alternatives, participants commented on the influential role that independent intermediaries and brokers can play in articulating demand. There was some discussion as to whether the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Connexions services could take on a brokerage role. It was felt to be vital that the increasingly important role of learning guide or adviser is kept separate from traditional provider roles. Just as Independent Financial Advisers give impartial and relevant advice to

customers about financial products so learning advisers must be seen to be independent from providers.

5. It was suggested that the guidance infrastructure needed to be developed so that people based within local communities undertake this brokerage role. There was some concern that Connexions would become over-professionalised – guidance was needed that was not institutionalised, and that would win the trust of local communities. There were already examples of community champions being trained to take ILAs into disadvantaged communities – could community champions undertake this brokerage role and play a part in articulating community demands for learning?

6. The concept of 'learning on demand' implies that people are already in a position to articulate their demands. Participants suggested that this was not yet the case in some disadvantaged communities, and that efforts would need to be made to help groups to form and to strengthen communities of interest – part of the role of independent intermediaries, perhaps. It was suggested that there is too much emphasis on getting the 'skills-poor' up to standard, without addressing the question of whether the disadvantaged have or can be encouraged to have their own distinctive aspirations and dreams.

Accountability

7. Participants suggested that there is an obsession within the education and training system with qualifications and accreditation and some even argued that this was the biggest barrier to encouraging community learning. Such a focus was incompatible with the 'dip in – dip out' model of lifelong learning. This exposed the tension between the learning and standards agenda and the participation and inclusion agenda.

8. Often those not engaged in learning 'prefer *doing* to *learning*'. Many do not want to follow a course or gain a qualification – instead they want to do things that interest them, that will be of help to them and their community. Examples were given of the *'Furniture Resource Centre'* and *'Bulky Bobs'* projects in Liverpool, which are social enterprises that both employ and train local people, who learn through their role in the organisation.

9. Furthermore the demand for informal learning opportunities from a growing elderly population is a reflection of their interests in practical hobbies and the social benefits of learning rather than learning per se. Hobbies and informal learning activities with an emphasis on 'learning through doing' like pottery, gardening, or jewellery-making help to prevent degeneration in old age and could be an important part of preventative health care. The value of these types of activities could be lost if they are treated as traditional qualification focused courses.

10. It is important, though, to ensure that local people are buying quality provision, and, therefore, that there is some mechanism for assessing the

quality of these more flexible types of learning activities. It was argued that the new Common Inspection Framework (CIF) is broad enough to evaluate the effectiveness of community based and capacity building activities. The Adult Learning Inspectorate is piloting inspection of Adult and Community Learning from October 2001 to test out reporting on this type of provision against the CIF. In order to evaluate learning provision, inspectorates need individual learning objectives to be set. Some participants also talked of the possibility of developing group learning plans. There was a call for better sharing of information about the tools already available to evaluate both individual and group progress, including progress in developing social capital.

11. Different methods of quality assurance were considered. Simple and straightforward approaches are needed. In the private sector some businesses use a model that measures what 'delights the customer' - measuring quality as defined by the experiences of the user rather than the provider. This quality model is used by organisations like Toyota, who have reduced the cost of assuring quality from 20% to 2%. The seminar considered what this would look like in the public sector.

12. Some questioned whether an approach based on 'delighting the customer' could serve disadvantaged people as well as the middle classes, who are better able to use purchasing power. There is also an issue about whether what 'delights the customer' in terms of learning experiences is the learning activity itself or the social and economic gains – would social and economic gains be a valid quality indicator? Another method of quality assurance might be to extend the use of Public Service Agreements, with targets to drive the learning provider's activities.

Funding

13. Participants noted the close link between the debate over quality assurance of community learning and the question of what should be funded. Funding bodies need to be satisfied that they are funding quality provision.

14. It was suggested that 'affective learning' (developing a sense of responsibility, confidence, self esteem and communication skills) - the sort of learning gained in running a community festival, for example - is of real importance to members of disadvantaged communities and needs to be funded. But this form of learning is qualitatively distinct from the qualification based 'cognitive learning' traditionally provided by the formal education system. It is the type of learning that might be funded through neighbourhood renewal initiatives. There is a clear need to coordinate funding further, and to clarify the boundaries between LSC and community regeneration funded learning. In many cases local communities find themselves trying to pool funding from different sources, and a simpler system which avoids duplication would be beneficial.

15. There was also a need to channel funding into promoting and fostering a demand for learning and incentivising participation at the local level. The example was cited of the person (a local link worker, for example) who stands outside the local chip shop or the school and offers information about learning opportunities in a non-threatening way. Larger learning providers may need incentives to engage with small communities and to invest in activities that carry financial risk. All providers need stable infrastructure funding to ensure they can continue to innovate. Learners and communities need financial support, as well as institutions, if the system is to become more 'stakeholder driven'.

16. It was felt that what was needed was a comprehensive analysis of the extra costs involved in attracting and working with disadvantaged communities.[1] The ideal system would enable as many people as possible to learn, including making sure that those who can afford to, do pay for their learning – for example, by allowing providers to exercise flexibility in fixing the level of learners' financial contributions.

17. The general point was made that we should not look at funding, planning and accountability in isolation, but should consider how all three levers can interact to support community learning.

[1] A report is shortly to be published by LSDA on research commissioned in this area from JM Consulting - *Costs of Disadvantage*. For further details contact Mick Fletcher, Research Manager, LSDA.

This paper sets out details of work being carried out by Demos and the Learning and Skills Development Agency to examine how new institutional structures for supporting lifelong learning can develop in ways that best support community-based learning activities. **The paper aims to stimulate interest and contributions in the form of papers and examples of practice to inform the work.**

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