

**Report from the Inspectorate
Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Contributions made by
the FEFC-funded Strategic Partnerships
1999-2000
The Further Education Funding Council**

Contents

Paragraph

Purpose of the Report	1
Introduction	2
Key Lessons Learned from Development Work Focusing on Provision for New Groups of Learners	4
Key Lessons Learned about Agencies Working Effectively in Partnership	5
Examples of Good Practice Developed as a Result of Development Work Undertaken by Strategic Partnerships	
Annex	
A: Strategic partnerships visited by inspectors	
B: Useful publications	
C: Chart	

Purpose of this Report

1 This report identifies some key lessons learned from the work of the widening participation strategic partnerships, and provides illustrations of good practice in widening participation and raising standards.

The report is designed to be useful to:

- governors and managers in helping them to review and develop partnerships with other agencies
- members of various partnerships focusing on post-16 provision
- staff development managers
- other providers of further education
- others with an interest in further education.

Introduction

2 A key recommendation of the Widening Participation Committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, was that the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) fund a series of local strategic partnerships. In response, the FEFC funded 26 partnerships from a first round of applications for the period 1997 to 1999, and 28 from a second round for 1998 to 2000. A total of £4 million was allocated. Most of the partnerships have concentrated on pooling information held by various local agencies about participation in post-16 education. Partnerships are developing effective ways to collect, share and maintain sets of data from a range of sources and to use such data for planning purposes. They are effectively identifying groups that are under-represented in local further education and developing a range of strategies to engage these groups. A few have focused on improving retention and achievement rates among groups least likely to succeed in further education. The Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) is conducting an overall evaluation of the work carried out by the strategic partnerships.

3 Inspectors assessed the effectiveness of action research and development work being undertaken by partnerships, particularly in relation to teaching and learning methods and improving retention and achievement. They also identified some key lessons to be learned about working in partnership. In 1999, inspectors examined documentation from all partnerships and made in-depth visits to eight strategic partnerships (annex A).

Initiatives launched by the partnerships inspected include those designed to:

- identify successful strategies in attracting under-represented learners
- adapt provision to meet new learners' needs
- provide appropriate support to learners
- drive up rates of retention and achievement among groups of students most 'at risk' of failing.

The dissemination of findings from these initiatives between partnership members is enabling the partnership, and individual member organisations, to adopt proven strategies

to widen participation and raise standards. Strategic partnerships are making valuable contributions to widening participation and raising standards.

Key Lessons Learned from Development Work Focusing on Provision for New Groups of Learners

4 These include the need for:

- **investment in development and realistic lead-in times** - it can be difficult and time-consuming to work with agencies that help providers reach new groups of students. Raising awareness about the value of further education and securing co-operation of agencies should focus on the common goal of offering improved life chances to under-represented groups
- **cultural sensitivity** - it is important to use staff who understand and respect the roles of specialist agencies and who are attuned to the characteristics of new learners and their perceived or actual barriers to study
- **targeted approaches** - new groups of learners require forms of contact and support which are appropriate to their specific needs and circumstances
- **consultation** - the views of the target groups and their interests need to be taken into account when developing provision
- **prompt responses** - providers need to be ready to respond rapidly to requests for new provision
- **appropriate provision** - it may be appropriate for students to join existing courses with carefully tailored support but, at least in the initial stages, it is often necessary to create new provision. New programmes should be local, low cost or free to the learner, and flexibility should be shown in determining minimum numbers for viable groups. Teaching methods and content needs to be carefully matched to the needs of the learners
- **support for students** - help with practicalities, such as travel, childcare and provision of refreshments, is required
- **suitable accreditation and progression strategies** - accreditation needs to be used as a confidence booster and as one of several ways to recognise students' achievements. Progression routes and guidance about next steps need to be planned as integral parts of new provision.

Key Lessons Learned about Agencies Working Effectively in Partnership

5 These include the value of:

- **strategic partnerships' networking and collaboration** - it would have been impossible to get work off the ground for many new groups of learners without such collaboration. Staff with the right skills are needed for the successful development of partnerships
- **keeping smaller partner organisations involved** - small organisations, such as the agencies working with homeless people, have specific and valuable contributions. It is important that they are not marginalised because they are

unable to make substantial contributions to the partnership in terms of funding or staff time

- **clear terms of reference and an independent partnership co-ordinator** - members' roles and responsibilities should be made clear. A co-ordinator can provide a neutral 'brokerage' role if needed. Ideally, a co-ordinator would be supported by 'champions' to lead each initiative undertaken by the partnership
- **close liaison between senior managers of member organisations** - effective liaison helps to ensure that decisions can be taken quickly and that planned developments happen 'on the ground'
- **blurring the boundaries between the funded partnership and other local networks** - blurring boundaries helps to kindle commitment from a wider range of bodies, to sustain the partnership's initiatives and to develop well-informed 'joined-up' thinking
- **sustaining a steady flow of new developments** - a steady flow of initiatives keeps partnerships in an active and developmental mode as their work extends to supporting and monitoring established programmes of work
- **creating a 'no blame' and praise culture** - successes of the partnership, and the achievements of new learners need to be formally celebrated as a means of sustaining commitment to the partnership
- **a strong emphasis on evaluation and improvement** - there needs to be effective quality assurance and self-assessment procedures for the work of the partnership, including agreed criteria for success and appropriate performance indicators. Regular reports on the quality and impact of the partnership's work should be disseminated to other relevant bodies
- **the partnership's contributions to forming or strengthening other partnerships** - strategic partnerships have helped the formation of the 'lifelong learning partnerships' and local networks providing infrastructure for the establishment of the University for Industry. Most strategic partnerships intend to sustain collaborative working arrangements with other colleges and agencies after FEFC funding ceases.

Examples of Good Practice Developed as a Result of Development Work Undertaken by Strategic Partnerships

[NB - The numbered examples below surround this diagram in the centre of a double page spread with arrows leading from the diagram. A wheel presentation.]

1 Targeted approaches	2 Networking and collaboration	3 Development work
4 Cultural sensitivity	Widening Participation	5 Consultation
6 Appropriate delivery	7 Practical support	8 Progression strategies

Relates to box 1

6 The foyer of a local supermarket in a deprived area was used effectively by the partnership as a location for attracting non-participants and offering guidance. Publicity materials were adapted to indicate possible employment outcomes from courses of study. Video-recordings depicting the success stories of students from backgrounds under-

represented in further education were played to attract shoppers' attention. The supermarket helped with these promotions.

Relates
to box 1

7 Working closely with a tenants' and residents' association on a local housing estate enabled member organisations within the partnership to find out residents' attitudes to study at the local college. Responses included: 'it doesn't belong to us'; 'it's for posh people'; 'you need qualifications to go there'; 'we don't have any'. Strategies developed by the partnership to attract learners to the college included:

- staff, selected for their skills in relating to this local community, attending tenants' and residents' meetings to describe what college is really like
- leafleting the estate
- inviting residents to a car boot sale and 'taster day' at the college. The college offered lessons in 18 subject areas, repeated four times during the course of the day, which residents could choose to attend free of charge.

Relates
to box 2

8 In a marketing campaign, aimed at reaching under-represented groups and raising awareness of further education, the partnership used a cartoon image of 'Ed the dog' on all its materials. The eye-catching image and associated straplines quickly became talking points in their own right, and have been used effectively in large-scale mailshots to households in deprived local areas and in a learning roadshow organised by the partnership. 'Ed the dog' images are now used by libraries, the adult education service, the careers service and colleges to promote and reinforce messages about guidance services and new learning opportunities. The distinctive cartoon images and slogans have raised the profile of education among diverse communities, many of whom would not usually consider further education.

Relates
to box 2

9 Training events, organised by the project co-ordinator, were designed to update practitioners' knowledge of entry-level programmes and to explore ways of using the programmes effectively for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The events brought together practitioners from many different colleges. Throughout the training, participants shared, usually for the first time, what each was doing, and made practical arrangements to liaise using the network they had created. The partnership's work created a step-change in collaboration locally to develop better provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Relates
to box 2

10 Two colleges were working together on developing a tutorial framework and associated support materials for use with young disaffected students on new pre-vocational courses. Students had individual learning plans and extensive tutorial support. One college produced the tutorial materials and the other organised staff training on ways of using them. The materials contained advice on dealing with challenging behaviour, anger management and interviewing students in ways that help to remotivate them. The work has led to significant developments in one college's overall tutorial programme.

Relates
to box 3

11 One partnership's work with voluntary organisations includes offering free places on training courses for guidance workers or those involved in advisory roles with clients. The training is improving the skills of voluntary organisation staff who are in a position to refer potential students to further education and is leading to more effective and informed guidance work with new learners.

Relates
to box 3

12 Introductory seminars provided by the partnership for local employers have stimulated the growth of several development schemes for employees, designed to generate an interest in learning among workers in low skilled jobs and to motivate them to improve their knowledge and skills. The partnership also provided extensive help in following up these schemes. They produced information packs and individual case studies of employees who had benefited from the schemes, and offered free consultancy and feasibility studies within the workplace. Working in partnership prevented providers competing to offer these kinds of services to companies, thus avoiding the spread of confusing and unhelpful information and guidance to employers.

Relates
to box 4

13 Initial doubts among potential students about the benefits of a project for disaffected Asian pupils aged 14 to 16 were overcome by careful selection of the two project workers, one from the local Asian community and the other a local youth and community worker. The project involved students conducting interviews and filming older men in their community to record their attitudes towards, and experiences of, learning. Informal learning methods in an environment outside school helped to spark interest and to motivate the students. The project was successful in encouraging younger students to study and to appreciate the value of learning.

Relates
to box 5

14 One partnership targeted employees with low skill levels. A 'Positive Futures' course, offered to employees in a large local company who were facing redundancy, was based on an existing 10-week course. The programme was adapted to last for one week with an 08.00 hours start to fit in with the company's own redundancy procedures. It included six hour-long basic information technology (IT) courses held in the Easter holidays so that learners could get used to the college environment when there were few other students there. New upskilling courses in IT, plumbing, welding and mechanical fitting, with suitable accreditation, were developed to meet employees' interests in progression.

Relates
to box 6

15 Analysis by the partnership of the poor progress being made by auxiliary nursing staff registered for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in care, showed that candidates' lack of confidence, low levels of previous academic success and poor study skills were the main contributory factors. In response, the college provided extra literacy and numeracy support at times to accommodate shift working, and funded additional time for health authority assessors to give individual support in study skills and portfolio building.

Relates
to box 6

16 The flexibility of the National Open College Network (NOCN) accreditation framework enabled joint development of a new course for workers in residential homes by the Workers' Educational Association and a local college. The initiative was targeted at employees in private sector residential care homes who had few qualifications and little interest in further learning. The partnership offered a financial incentive for employees to participate in the programme, which comprised skills in learning, methods for conducting reminiscence work, as well as guidance and short 'taster' courses in subject areas such as health and healing and creative arts. The learners gained new confidence in themselves as well as developing new skills that they could apply in working with elderly residents.

Relates
to box 7

17 One partnership supported prisoners in preparing to start studying or to continue their education or training on release. The project team liaised with education providers and prison staff, including prison education staff, to make arrangements which included:

negotiating temporary release from prison to attend interviews; providing sufficient funding for prisoners to visit education providers; making prisoners' own clothes available for them to wear; giving opportunities for practising skills in making purchases; handling money; dealing with disclosure of offences. The project team also put prisoners in touch with other agencies in the area where they were to be released; for example, people and organisations who would help to find them employment or work-based training.

18 One partnership analysed retention rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses and found that many students who had left courses did so because they could not cope with the volume and level of study required. Several had enrolled on a GNVQ course because other programmes at a suitable level were not offered. The partnership colleges agreed to introduce new GNVQ foundation programmes across all curriculum areas in one college. Half-way through the first year of operation, retention levels on the GNVQ intermediate programmes had improved and rates on the new GNVQ foundation level programme were above the college average.

Relates
to box 8

Strategic Partnerships Visited by Inspectors

South London

Surrey

Oxfordshire

Hertfordshire

Norfolk and Waveney

South West Alliance

North Oxfordshire and Warwickshire

Tees Valley

Useful Publications

Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Case studies of colleges, Further Education Funding Council, Coventry, 2000

How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice, Further Education Funding Council, The Stationery Office, London, 1997

Learning Works: Widening participation in further education, Further Education Funding Council, Coventry, 1997

Widening Participation and Raising Standards: National survey report, Further Education Funding Council, Coventry, 2000

Widening Participation Newsletter, First issue, Further Education Development Agency, 1998

Chart

6 The foyer of a local supermarket in a deprived area was used effectively by the partnership as a location for attracting non-participants and offering guidance. Publicity materials were adapted to indicate possible employment outcomes from courses of study. Video-recordings depicting the success stories of students from backgrounds under-represented in further education were played to attract shoppers' attention. The supermarket helped with these promotions.

7 Working closely with a tenants' and residents' association on a local housing estate enabled member organisations within the partnership to find out residents' attitudes to study at the local college. Responses included: 'it doesn't belong to us'; 'it's for posh people'; 'you need qualifications to go there'; 'we don't have any'. Strategies developed by the partnership to attract learners to the college included:

- staff, selected for their skills in relating to this local community, attending tenants' and residents' meetings to describe what college is really like
- leafleting the estate
- inviting residents to a car boot sale and 'taster day' at the college. The college offered lessons in 18 subject areas, repeated four times during the course of the day, which residents could choose to attend free of charge.

8 In a marketing campaign, aimed at reaching under-represented groups and raising awareness of further education, the partnership used a cartoon image of 'Ed the dog' on all its materials. The eye-catching image and associated straplines quickly became talking points in their own right, and have been used effectively in large-scale mailshots to households in deprived local areas and in a learning roadshow organised by the partnership. 'Ed the dog' images are now used by libraries, the adult education service, the careers service and colleges to promote and reinforce messages about guidance services and new learning opportunities. The distinctive cartoon images and slogans have raised the profile of education among diverse communities, many of whom would not usually consider further education.

9 Training events, organised by the project co-ordinator, were designed to update practitioners' knowledge of entry-level programmes and to explore ways of using the programmes effectively for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The events brought together practitioners from many different colleges. Throughout the training, participants shared, usually for the first time, what each was doing, and made practical arrangements to liaise using the network they had created. The partnership's work created a step-change in collaboration locally to develop better provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

10 Two colleges were working together on developing a tutorial framework and associated support materials for use with young disaffected students on new pre-vocational courses. Students had individual learning plans and extensive tutorial support. One college produced the tutorial materials and the other organised staff training on ways of using them. The materials contained advice on dealing with challenging behaviour, anger management and interviewing students in ways that help to remotivate them. The work has led to significant developments in one college's overall tutorial programme.

11 One partnership's work with voluntary organisations includes offering free places on training courses for guidance workers or those involved in advisory roles with clients. The training is improving the skills of voluntary organisation staff who are in a position to refer potential students to further education and is leading to more effective and informed guidance work with new learners.

12 Introductory seminars provided by the partnership for local employers have stimulated the growth of several development schemes for employees, designed to generate an interest in learning among workers in low skilled jobs and to motivate them to improve their knowledge and skills. The partnership also provided extensive help in following up these schemes. They produced information packs and individual case studies of employees who had benefited from the schemes, and offered free consultancy and feasibility studies within the workplace. Working in partnership prevented providers competing to offer these kinds of services to companies, thus avoiding the spread of confusing and unhelpful information and guidance to employers.

13 Initial doubts among potential students about the benefits of a project for disaffected Asian pupils aged 14 to 16 were overcome by careful selection of the two project workers, one from the local Asian community and the other a local youth and community worker. The project involved students conducting interviews and filming older men in their community to record their attitudes towards, and experiences of, learning. Informal learning methods in an environment outside school helped to spark interest and to motivate the students. The project was successful in encouraging younger students to study and to appreciate the value of learning.

14 One partnership targeted employees with low skill levels. A 'Positive Futures' course, offered to employees in a large local company who were facing redundancy, was based on an existing 10-week course. The programme was adapted to last for one week with an 08.00 hours start to fit in with the company's own redundancy procedures. It included six hour-long basic information technology (IT) courses held in the Easter holidays so that learners could get used to the college environment when there were few other students there. New upskilling courses in IT, plumbing, welding and mechanical fitting, with suitable accreditation, were developed to meet employees' interests in progression.

15 Analysis by the partnership of the poor progress being made by auxiliary nursing staff registered for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in care, showed that candidates' lack of confidence, low levels of previous academic success and poor study skills were the main contributory factors. In response, the college provided extra literacy and numeracy support at times to accommodate shift working, and funded additional time for health authority assessors to give individual support in study skills and portfolio building.

18 One partnership analysed retention rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses and found that many students who had left courses did so because they could not cope with the volume and level of study required. Several had enrolled on a GNVQ course because other programmes at a suitable level were not offered. The partnership colleges agreed to introduce new GNVQ foundation programmes across all curriculum areas in one college. Half-way through the first year of operation, retention levels on the GNVQ intermediate programmes had improved and rates on the new GNVQ foundation level programme were above the college average.

17 One partnership supported prisoners in preparing to start studying or to continue their education or training on release. The project team liaised with education providers and prison staff, including prison education staff, to make arrangements which included: negotiating temporary release from prison to attend interviews; providing sufficient funding for prisoners to visit education providers; making prisoners' own clothes available for them to wear; giving opportunities for practising skills in making purchases; handling money; dealing with disclosure of offences. The project team also put prisoners in touch with other agencies in the area where they were to be released; for example, people and organisations who would help to find them employment or work-based training.

16 The flexibility of the National Open College Network (NOCN) accreditation framework enabled joint development of a new course for workers in residential homes by the Workers' Educational Association and a local college. The initiative was targeted at employees in private sector residential care homes who had few qualifications and little interest in further learning. The partnership offered a financial incentive for employees to participate in the programme, which comprised skills in learning, methods for conducting reminiscence work, as well as guidance and short 'taster' courses in subject areas such as health and healing and creative arts. The learners gained new confidence in themselves as well as developing new skills that they could apply in working with elderly residents.

