

LEARNING ELEMENTS OF THE SINGLE REGENERATION BUDGET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Researched by GFA Consulting on behalf of the DfEE

Introduction

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned *Learning Elements of Single Regeneration Budget* to review the learning elements of the SRB and to identify its contribution to the Government's lifelong learning aims. The study examined 24 projects from 17 schemes, mostly drawn from the third round of the SRB (approved in 1997). Largely based on interviews with key actors and beneficiaries, rather than detailed quantitative analysis, it offers some valuable messages and lessons.

Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for the SRB which became operational in 1995/96, drawing together resources from 20 former programmes from five Government Departments. The SRB is now administered by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in all regions except London where the Government Office will continue to administer it until the Greater London Authority is established in April 2000.

The SRB provides resources to support regeneration initiatives in England carried out by local partnerships. It is for partnerships to decide their local priorities, which projects to fund and how they are implemented.

Findings

The study identified valuable evidence to show the major and important contribution which SRB schemes make to support the Government's lifelong learning aims. However, the regeneration focus of SRB funding encourages firstly an over-riding stress on tackling under-achievement; and secondly learning activities which are more frequently focused on younger age groups. Both are reflected in the report. The SRB also provides a useful source of innovative ideas and practices, which can constructively inform mainstream development and provide evidence of many valuable 'hooks' into learning across all age groups

Main Conclusions

The report's main conclusions include findings that:

- in disadvantaged communities there is a powerful link between low levels of attainment and a lack of motivation towards, and participation in, learning activities;
- in disadvantaged areas work experience becomes vital since young people have limited experience of work even at second hand;
- the education and training system is confusing: fragmentation is a barrier to participation;
- in many areas the lack of locally available provision can be a barrier;
- many children's difficulties with basic skills are associated with their parents' limited literacy and numeracy – reflected in a host of family literacy schemes; and
- the wide range of competitive bidding risks 'initiative overload'.

Key Lifelong Learning Messages

There are close similarities between SRB schemes' priorities and the DfEE's learning objectives. However, the regeneration focus of the SRB means that it is concerned with issues of educational underachievement and its consequences – lack of competitiveness alongside high levels of poverty and social exclusion.

The key themes which support the Government's lifelong learning aims are:

i) Widening Participation in Learning

Low attainment and skill levels in disadvantaged communities are linked with low rates of participation. There are perhaps four key lessons to emerge from these projects:

- motivation to learn is low where poor job prospects reduce the return;
- the learning system is fragmented, and intensive outreach is needed to engage those most removed from learning;
- *locally* available provision is critical, especially for basic skills; and
- educational institutions can be adapted for multiple uses which benefit wider sections of the community.

ii) Basic and Key Skills Development

Improving basic skills is a priority in all the areas covered by the study. Most of the schemes addressed the issue through early years and primary schools work; and, in one case, a strategy to embed key skills at all levels

of learning. Some of the key lessons include the following:

- SRB resources can positively influence the provision in main programmes - for example, by early partnership working which increases project survival chances; and
- tackling skill shortages in disadvantaged areas requires early intervention.

iii) Routes and Attitudes to Work

Supporting transitions to work has long been a feature of regeneration agencies' activity, but remains relevant. The key lessons of these projects include the following:

- where unemployment is the norm, structured work experience is critical;
- involving employers in school-industry links helps overcome the mutual suspicion underpinning 'postcode discrimination'; and
- the prospect of specific vacancies in the customised training model provides a powerful incentive for learning.

iv) Improving Motivation and Tackling Disaffection

The link between motivation, disaffection, participation and achievement is critical. Common strands in diverse projects suggest that good practice includes:

- linking non-educational interventions to the achievement of educational goals;
- the over-riding importance of multi-agency approaches - 'joined up working' is more important than 'joined up thinking'; and
- early diagnosis and intervention can lead to subsequent savings.

v) Introducing Good Practice in Schools

As well as promoting appropriate policy responses, many schemes in the sample also promote improvements in delivery. Key lessons include:

- the importance of incorporating in-service training (INSET) within projects;
- project activity as a catalyst for the introduction of good practice; and
- the need to improve schools' capacity to bid for and manage project based funding.

vi) 'Hooks' into Learning

A number of SRB projects have recognised the need for 'hooks' to bring

people back into learning, whether at school age or beyond. Examples include:

- introducing a range of motivators such as work experience or job interviews; and
- family learning programmes through which parents and other carers can become involved in lifelong learning.

Process Lessons

Whilst ensuring responses are appropriate to the issues they aim to address is important, it is insufficient as a sole strategy. Effective project interventions depend on *process issues*. Critical ingredients include:

- ensuring that projects are firmly rooted in a strategy that includes:
 - robust baseline research to ensure that solutions address the right problem;
 - involving key partners, particularly delivery agencies,
 - setting targets beyond SRB outputs which genuinely measure learning objectives;
- developing projects through collaborative activity in a way that:
 - develops a common sense of ownership;
 - understands individual partners' potential and limitations; and
 - enables partners to understand each others' professional disciplines;
- setting targets to ensure adequate performance measurement – an area in which many schemes encounter difficulty; and
- forward strategies to ensure project survival through a range of tactics including:
 - gradually introducing charges so clients get used to paying for services;
 - seeking sponsorship;
 - early involvement of partners capable of providing long term support; and
 - tapering grant funding.

Securing and Measuring Added Value

The purpose of SRB funding is to bring together the separate tracks across education, housing, transport etc and to encourage coherent development and often imaginative and innovative solutions. The purpose and justification is to kick-start initiatives [which the mainstream finds it difficult to address] would not otherwise be developed. The SRB adds value by addressing issues such as:

- resources - for example, by providing more centres;
- ineffective targeting – for example, by funding links to disadvantaged groups;
- catering for special needs – for example, by meeting the learning needs of children in care;
- challenging uniformity of provision – for example, by delivering individualised support for children at risk of exclusion;
- providing scope for experimentation – for example, by piloting a city-wide core skills strategy ;
- building coherent and effective partnerships – for example, by bringing together teachers, social and care workers, with little previous experience of working together.

Key Recommendations

Widening Participation in Learning

- Regeneration partnerships should be encouraged to invest more in promoting the importance of learning across all age groups.
- DfEE should consider how to reduce the appearance of fragmentation in mainstream post-16 provision. This report has fed into the Review of Post-16 Learning.
- Learning Partnerships should consider how to simplify messages about learning opportunities.
- SRB Partnerships should carry out a rigorous analysis of barriers to learning and ensure that all are tackled.
- DfEE should consider the wider adoption of the customised training approach as a valuable ‘hook’ into learning.

Improving Outcomes from Learning

- DfEE should consider Birmingham’s Core Skills Partnership and identify other models that could be widely replicated.
- Family literacy programmes offer an effective route to engage parents’ learning and should be more widely promoted.

- If regeneration-funded training is to improve employability, it must reflect employers' priorities which emphasise basic skills and attitudes.
- Where unemployment is the norm, regeneration partnerships should ensure there is adequate high quality work experience.

Improving Project and Programme Design

- Regional Development Agencies should ensure that there is a clear strategic justification for SRB-funded learning activities.
- SRB outputs should be extended to place greater emphasis on the SRB's role as a catalyst and influencer of main programmes.
- Providers need to be involved in the design of SRB projects to ensure that they go with the grain of the mainstream and fit within or around existing structures.
- Forward strategies should be built into scheme and project design early on.
- DfEE and DETR should jointly review the SRB's learning-related outputs, perhaps through a practitioners' working group, to identify some modest additions which provide a better guide to learning objectives.
- Partnerships should be encouraged to develop more imaginative approaches to performance measurement as a tool of scheme management.

Conclusion

This report does not provide a comprehensive review of everything the SRB is doing to support learning objectives. However the report, and the case studies on which it is based, provide a good range of interesting examples of what can be done and offer numerous lessons in good practice.

Further Information

The overall outputs of this study include detailed case studies, six thematic good practice notes, and the full report. The report and the executive summary/case studies/thematic good practice are presented in two separate parts, . Part A and B respectively. Copies are available on the DfEE's lifelong learning website at www.lifelonglearning.co.uk and through Regen.Net (a website developed and managed by the Planning Exchange with the help of funding from DETR). Hard copies will be available from DfEE Publications (tel: 0845 602 2260; fax: 0845 603 3360) from October 1999.

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