



Evaluation of the Learning Community Accounts Pilots



Research

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Audience	The voluntary and community learning sector, providers of training and DCELLS programme delivery, funding and planning departments.
Overview	The evaluation of the Community Learning Account pilot has involved individual evaluations of each pilot and a collective evaluation of the overall approach. This report presents the collective findings, distinguishing between the two pilots that ran in established organisations and the three pilots that were set up as new projects.
Action required	None
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Additional copies	This report is available online at http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/124540/?lang=en
Related documents	<p>Case Study Report 1: TDG Case Study Report 2: CwmNi Case Study Report 3: Fairyland (Neath) Case Study Report 4: Caia Park Partnership Limited Case Study Report 5: Cardigan and South Ceredigion</p>

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1. Summary

Overview of research aims and objectives

In 2007 BMG Research was commissioned by The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), Welsh Assembly Government, to evaluate the five Learning Community Accounts (LCA) pilot projects. The LCA pilots were set up to support disadvantaged communities to develop and engage in learning activities with the intention of engaging and upskilling excluded individuals to facilitate progression to mainstream education and employment. The pilots ran until March 2008.

The overall aim of the evaluation is:

To assess the effectiveness, appropriateness, implementation and impact of the Learning Community Account pilot programme against its stated aims and objectives

The intention of the evaluation has been to examine each of the pilot projects individually and collectively to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the approach. This report presents the collective findings, distinguishing between the two pilots that ran in established organisations and the three pilots that were set up as new projects. Individual 'case study' reports on each of the five pilots are available at

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/124540/?lang=en> .

Evaluation Approach

The research aims and objectives suggested that a mixed-method 'triangulation' approach was most appropriate. The evaluation therefore comprised a combination of qualitative and quantitative work, as well as incorporating available monitoring and administrative data.

Key Findings

Getting Started

- The pilot projects initially had a slow start, with delays in the commissioning and contracting stage.
- Furthermore, three of the five pilots experienced considerable difficulties in 'getting off the ground' due to staffing and resourcing problems. In particular, projects found it difficult to become established without dedicated funded staff for the pilot.
- Projects that were part of a wider established organisation and who were already providing some form of learning activities to their clients were more successful than those who were trying to set up the project 'from scratch' within a wider Communities First or regeneration framework.
- The first pilot network meeting was not held until October 2007 – in the last 6 months of the pilot. Pilots would have benefited from learning from each other from the outset and throughout the pilot period.

Engaging with Learners

- The commitment, enthusiasm and skills of the staff working on the LCA pilot has enabled engagement with individuals and communities who had hitherto had limited success in education or learning activities.
- The pilots utilised considerable creativity to meet the needs of individual learners whilst ensuring that as far as possible they work to achievable outcomes that benefit them as individuals as well as wider benefits to the community.
- However, at the time of the evaluation (which commenced in the summer of 2007) only one pilot project had achieved its target of learner engagement, although others were on track to do so by the end of the pilot in March 2008.

Learning Activities

- Learners faced significant barriers to engaging with learning, including negative educational experiences, poor social skills, low confidence/self-esteem and ambition, drug/alcohol issues, family difficulties, learning difficulties, long periods of unemployment/inactivity and complex and chaotic lifestyles

- Creating a positive learning environment was therefore a priority in the pilots, with most activities based in an informal setting, but underpinned by progressive learning outcomes
- One pilot formally recognised the value of a ‘transitioning’ period prior to engagement in learning, another provided mentors to support learners on a one to one basis
- Rewarding and accrediting learning was undertaken, mostly in the two most developed pilots – this was found to be hugely motivating for learners as well as ensuring that progress was being made
- Quality standards were only fully developed in one pilot, but some others were developing processes and procedures.

Outcomes

- Pilots that were based in more established projects were more successful in engaging learners in the pilot than those starting afresh
- All learners involved in the evaluation stated that they would not have engaged in learning without the LCA pilot
- Whilst it was too early for most pilots to identify significant quantifiable outcomes, there was evidence of improved soft skills and considerable distance travelled – for many clients such progress would in all likelihood not have been achieved had it not been for the LCA pilot project.
- Soft skill improvement included self-confidence and social and communication skills
- There were challenges in developing approaches to measuring and capturing soft skills and distance travelled. The more established and experienced pilots were able to develop some tools to use with their learners, although systematic recording of soft outcomes achieved by learners was sometimes patchy
- The main ‘hard’ outcomes achieved by the LCA pilots has been in accredited learning and progression into further learning or employment – although some difficulties were encountered in establishing learners’ progression once they had left the pilot. The established projects were better able to manage the tracking process. Those projects dealing with larger numbers of learners for short courses were not able to collect this type of data.

Funding Issues

- Requirements were that the funding could not be used to fund existing activity or staff costs, but could be used to pay for Learning Champions' time. Some pilots had not appreciated this until later on in the process, which had caused considerable difficulties.
- Welsh Assembly Government funding per learner (as outlined in pilots' original tender submissions) ranged from around £144 to £946 per learner, depending on the nature of the client group and the type of support to be provided. However, one pilot (TDG) had at the outset agreed to pay half of the learner costs. Therefore the funding quoted does not represent the actual costs. During the course of the pilot they attempted to actually calculate the cost of supporting their LCA learners, and found that it cost approximately double the funding from WAG.
- A longer time period is required to assess the value for money of such costs, to establish the full benefits and outcomes (increased fiscal revenue, reduced benefit payments, better health, better family cohesion, better health etc)
- The 'costs' of *not* participating in an LCA pilot were considered. Most learners said that they would not have taken part in learning were it not for the pilot.

Conclusions/recommendations

Overall, the evaluation evidence suggests that as a model for community learning the Learning Community Account pilots worked best when used to support organisations who already had significant experience of working with the target group and had already begun to address their identified learning needs. The model was less successful for pilots that were attempting to establish new projects. This was largely because of the significant (and often underestimated) time it took to establish projects, to develop learning approaches, and to engage with target groups to encourage and facilitate learning activities. This was compounded in some cases by the lack of dedicated project staff and the reliance on unfunded or voluntary Learning Champions – when funding for staff costs was utilised, progress was swifter. Furthermore, where the community members themselves were

tasked with implementing solutions to the identified learning needs they needed considerable support which again took time and resources.

Based on the experience of the LCA pilots, there are a number of recommendations in taking forward this approach to community learning. These include:

- Having dedicated project management and co-ordination
- Having paid Learning Champion(s)
- Building on existing community engagement approaches to introduce learning, rather than attempting to engage 'from scratch'
- Recognising (in terms of resources and funding) the length of time needed to engage with (potential) learners
- Ensuring that projects are part of a wider network of community learning projects, to ensure that best practice and lessons learnt are shared, and built on
- The need for clear links with current government policy and policy developments, via network meetings, regular information and communication from key policy officials
- Having an in-depth understanding of the client group(s), including access to specialist knowledge, provision and support when required (for example, housing issues, mental health, parenting, domestic violence etc)
- A central focus on accredited learning, and establishing consistent quality standards
- An identified local community delivery base
- A clear understanding and agreement of monitoring and evaluation processes from the outset, building on existing systems and utilising existing tools where possible.

2. Evaluation of the Learning Community Accounts Pilots: Final Evaluation Report

Introduction

In 2007 BMG Research was commissioned by The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), Welsh Assembly Government, to evaluate the Learning Community Accounts (LCA) pilot projects. The LCA pilots ran from 2005 to March 2008.

Community learning can make an important contribution to a wide range of Welsh Assembly Government priorities. This includes strengthening communities, raising community capacity and providing opportunities for disadvantaged, marginalised or 'hard to reach' groups to re-engage with learning and work related activities.

The Learning Community Account was set up to support 'communities' to develop and engage in learning activities, with 'communities' defined as a group of people who are linked in some way, either through living in the same area or neighbourhood (geographical community) or who share one or more common characteristics (community of interest).

The aims of Learning Community Accounts are to:

- transfer skill, knowledge and resources to communities to enable them to participate and design solutions to community learning needs by upskilling key individuals
- embed learning and skill development within community regeneration, by supporting communities, families and individuals to develop and engage in learning activity which is learner focused, flexible and accessible to all, and
- provide a mechanism that integrates communities in to the local planning process, and also supports and empowers them.

The LCA therefore aimed to empower communities to identify needs and develop strategies to facilitate learning activities. The desired outcomes of the LCAs were:

- increased learning activity that contributes to community regeneration, widening participation, skills and employment;
- opportunities to engage and up skill socially excluded individuals and allow progression to employment;
- a cohort of qualified development workers focused on learning and a general increase in the capacity of individuals involved in community development; and
- the availability of a collaborative and quality provision that meets the needs of communities and contributes to community regeneration.

The pilots

There were five pilot projects in total:

- Caia Park Partnership Ltd, Wrexham
- Cardigan and South Ceredigion Regeneration Forum
- CwmNi – Communities First, Treherbert, Rhondda Valley
- Fairlyland Communities First, Cwmafon, Neath
- Cymorth Cymru –Housing Associations (pan Wales), known as Tai Dysgu a Gwaith (TDG)

The first four of these were identified as primarily geographical communities, whilst Cymorth Cymru is a ‘community of interest’ focusing on homelessness.

A brief description of each pilot is provided below. Further details are available in individual pilot case study reports

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/124540/?lang=en>

Caia Park Partnership Ltd, Wrexham

Caia Park is the largest council estate in North Wales, with around 13,500 residents. The estate contains two of the most deprived wards in North Wales. The Enable Project originated in 2001 from European Social Fund funding – now ended. The model, however,

was transferred to the LCA pilot. The Caia Park LCA Enable pilot provides a mentoring scheme for learners with mental health needs and/or drug or alcohol dependency issues. The aim was to support learners by planning an individual intensive mentoring programme to support them through the learning process. Each learner had an individual learning plan (termed a Personal Development Plan - PDP) and they were given mentoring support that extended beyond the remit of learning. Learners could receive advice from their mentor, or from others in the Caia Park Partnership or be signposted on to other organisations (for example, debt counselling, welfare benefits, drug and alcohol issues). Progress was tracked through regular review of the learner's PDP. The aim of the project was to provide long term flexible support that responds to the specific and changing needs of the learner.

The pilot was overseen by a Chief Officer, with day to day management responsibility being provided by a Senior Manager in Caia Park. There were six members of staff who acted as Learning Champions and two part-time mentors.

Caia Park had a total target of supporting 40 learners in year 1, 60 in year 2 and 70 in year 3), at a cost of £725 per learner. The actual numbers of learners supported was 58 in year 1, 67 in year 2 and 52 in year 3. This gives an average of 59 learners at £730 per learner.

Cardigan and South Ceredigion Regeneration Forum

The Cardigan and South Ceredigion Regeneration Forum is a rural project linked to the Cardigan and South Ceredigion Regeneration Programme. The LCA pilot covered a large remote geographical area of six wards, with a total population of just under 11,000.

The Learning Champions (11) were identified via discussions with key individuals involved in learning and regeneration in the Cardigan area, which resulted in representatives from organisations such as Workers' Education Association, The Welsh Wildlife Trust, Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO), Area 43 Youth Drop In, Cardigan Castle and Skillstart Training Provider. Learning Champions were then trained by an external organisation to help them to be able to consult with their

community to identify learning needs. Each Learning Champion was responsible for the design, development and delivery of learning activities within their organisation. A lead Learning Champion oversaw the management of the LCA pilot and the co-ordination and development of the other Learning Champions.

There were some difficulties in progressing this project due to no organisation being in a position to take the pilot forward, despite there being an identified group of Learning Champions. In the last year of the pilot, Ceredigion's Community Education Department have agreed to host the project, with DCELLS agreeing to funding a lead Learning Champion (from CAVO) to take the project forward and to co-ordinate and develop the Learning Plan. Ten Learning Champions were recontacted to enable learning activities to get underway, although this occurred much later than anticipated.

The original target was 500 learners, agreed in July 2007 with a cost per learner of £144. The final figure was 470 learners participating in learning activities at a cost of £153 per learner.

CwmNi, Treherbert, Rhondda Cynon Taff

This project covered five villages in the Rhondda Valley, with a total population of just over 6,000. The villages sit within some of the most remote communities within Rhondda Cynon Taff and are among some of the most deprived in Wales. Local amenities in the area are limited and access is restricted by public transport availability. CwmNi itself is a Communities First partnership, working towards the regeneration of the Treherbert ward area.

The CwmNi LCA pilot had five community priorities or themes, namely education, youth and lifelong learning, business and economy, environment and housing, community safety and health and well-being. Learning Budgets are devolved to each of the five groups and village forums to enable a better focus on key areas. The project encouraged learners to volunteer their skills and time for the community as part of the process of giving something back to the community, thus ensuring that new skills learned were of benefit to the community as well as the individual – in some senses this pilot's intention was probably closest to the original community learning model proposed.

The project experienced some difficulties in progressing this project, including delays in submitting costings for the community learning plan (which subsequently led to delays in contracting). This led to the loss of one years funding. This was primarily associated with the lack of dedicated time for project co-ordination, which was being undertaken by the Communities First Co-ordinator who already had full-time commitments and responsibilities. Funding was later approved by the Assembly to pay for a 'lead' Learning Champion, but the role had not been established successfully due to long term sickness.

The target number of learners was 200 (with a cost per learner of £279) and 15 Learning Champions. The latest figures indicated that there were 12 Learning Champions and 143 learners (defined as those who signed up to a learning agreement).

Cymorth Cymru/Tai, Dysgu a Gwaith Cymru (TDG)

This project brought together four supported housing organisations (Tai Hafan, Clywd Alyn, Llamau Ltd and Trothwy Cyf). Together, they operated the pilot in around 20 of their individual projects throughout Wales. The pilot was the only one of the five that focused on a community of interest (homeless) rather than a geographical community – although the coverage of each of the projects extends to both urban and rural areas from Cardiff and areas of the south west to parts of north east and north west Wales. The pilot provided support to learners who were homeless or had housing needs, and aimed to provide holistic individualised support covering a range of life skills, numeracy, literacy and key skills. The organisations in the pilot adopted a ten stage process to engaging and developing learners, underpinned by a shared quality framework and 'toolkit' for identifying learning needs and capturing soft skill development and distance travelled.

The project was managed at a strategic level by the Strategy Group, with an Operational Sub-group of Learning Managers which met monthly. The pilot also had a Project Co-ordinator and Project Manager (from Cymorth Cymru). There were a total of 22 Learning Champions – all paid members of staff.

The overall target for the pilot was 555 (at a cost of £946 to the pilot, match funded by the TDG organisations), and the latest figures indicate that the actual number of learners inducted into the programme was 823 (with others being referred to the programme but not yet signing up until the 'transitioning' phase has been completed).

Fairyland, Neath

Fairyland estate in the Port Talbot area has a total population of 334, with a high percentage of young parents. Fairyland is in a Communities First area, and is part of a wider local partnership that includes the New Learning Network, the Youth Service, the local Council for Voluntary Services, Jobcentre Plus and other local statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

The aim of the pilot was to take forward the learning needs of the young community. The pilot identified learning needs via a residential consultation workshop, planned by three Learning Champions (two local residents and the Communities First Co-ordinator) who had been identified and trained by the project. The project subsequently aimed to support young people to achieve learning goals in the areas of physical and emotional well-being, work and learning.

The Fairyland pilot experienced difficulties in progressing, including delays in submitting the costings for the Community Learning Plan (which led to the loss of one years funding). This was primarily associated with the lack of dedicated time for project co-ordination, which was being undertaken by the Communities First Co-ordinator who already had full-time commitments and responsibilities. Funding was later approved by the Assembly to pay for a 'super' Learning Champion, and as a result more progress was made.

The original target was for 50 learners and 10 Learning Champions, at a cost of £932 per learner. The final figures were 52 learners participating and 11 Learning Champions trained, at a cost of £895 per learner.

Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the evaluation was:

To assess the effectiveness, appropriateness, implementation and impact of the Learning Community Account pilot programme against its stated aims and objectives

The intention of the evaluation has been to examine each of the pilot projects individually to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the approach.

Specific research objectives include exploration and assessment of:

- the effectiveness of the approach
- the administrative processes involved in establishing and managing the projects
- the effectiveness of the individual learning plans
- the increase in skills as a result of the pilot
- the ability of the projects to meet the needs of learners, and the appropriateness of such provision
- the quality and value for money of the learning provision
- the take-up of activities by the target groups
- the funding issues
- the outcomes, including destinations of those who have participated in the project, and
- key strengths and areas for development in the projects.

The projects have been running for three years from 2005, and finished at the end of March 2008. BMG Research was commissioned to conduct the evaluation in the summer of 2007. The evaluation was completed in the late spring of 2008.

Research Approach

As each LCA pilot project was different, both in terms of its set-up and organisation as well as its delivery stage, the evaluation adopted a case study approach. Each LCA project has been written up individually in a 'case study' report, to present a comprehensive description of the projects being evaluated

including the specific context and an exploration of the experiences of the people involved in it. Each case study report provides a detailed understanding of how each LCA pilot works and what the experiences are of those who have been involved. There are five case study reports in total, one for each of the five LCA pilots.

This evaluation report brings together and synthesises the information from each of the case studies to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the LCA pilots to date in meeting their objectives as well as identifying areas of good practice and 'lessons learnt' with regard to this approach to community based learning. Although the evaluation report does not compare individual pilot projects (because of the significant differences between them in terms of size, coverage, client group and stage of delivery), some comparisons are made with the two projects that were run within more established organisation (TDG and Caia Park) and the three that were set up as new projects (referred to collectively as 'developed' and 'new' pilot projects).

The report focuses on 'what works' (and why) and what has been less effective (and why) under each heading, rather than revisiting the descriptive data presented in the individual case study reports. The report is designed to inform the future development of Learning Community Accounts, and community learning as a whole.

An evaluation framework was developed which was applied across all case studies (detailing, for example, the key research issues, proposed method and key stakeholder groups) with the acceptance that some projects would be able to provide greater access to an evidence base than others. It was recognised that the two pilots that are most advanced in their development (Caia Park and TDG) would provide the fullest evaluation evidence whilst the approach adopted for remaining three would need to concentrate more on start up and process evaluation rather than assessment of impact.

The research aims and objectives suggest that a mixed-method 'triangulation' approach was most appropriate. The evaluation therefore comprised a combination of qualitative and quantitative

work, as well as incorporating available monitoring and administrative data. Pilot projects also had the opportunity to comment on draft reports, and to provide feedback at a dissemination event held in March 2008.

The research approach was therefore as follows:

- Telephone discussions with some key WAG staff involved in the inception and development of the pilots
- Early familiarisation site visits to each pilot, including initial discussions with the manager. The visits were also used to identify possible learner respondents (where available) and other stakeholder respondents and appropriate methodology to be employed.
- A review of key documentation including delivery plans, annual reports, monitoring data (including evidence gathered during familiarisation visits)
- In-depth discussions with operational and delivery staff (face-to-face where possible, supplemented with telephone interviews);
- In-depth discussions with learners (face-to-face), including the identification of potential individual case studies.
- Presentation and discussion with pilot representatives at DCELLS offices in March 2008.

Analysis

All discussions were recorded, with the consent of the participants. Data from the transcripts of interviews were then analysed, using a matrix mapping approach, alongside other information provided by the pilots including administrative and monitoring data, testimonials from learners, learners' individual learning plans and other tools used by the project to capture learners' progress and development.

Report Structure

Chapter 2 examines the process of establishing a community learning project through the Learning Community Account pilot.

Chapter 3 focuses on how pilots promoted awareness of the project and engaged with learners to establish their learning needs and objectives.

Chapter 4 reviews the learning activities that were run through the LCA pilot, including different approaches to learning, accrediting learning and developing and maintaining quality standards.

In Chapter 5, the outcomes and impacts of the LCA pilot are considered, including 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes as well as engagement with learning and distance travelled. Funding issues are explored in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of how the projects have run and whether they have met the original aims of the Learning Community Account pilots. Chapter 8 concludes by providing recommendations for any future development of this model of community learning and suggesting an ideal 'model' of organisation and delivery.

Annex A provides a short overview of a preliminary review of good practice in community learning, conducted as part of the inception phase of the evaluation.

3. Setting up a Community Learning Project – the pilot experience

This section reviews how the LCA pilots were set up, including identifying local needs, project inception, organisation and structure local links and partnerships and support from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

Identifying needs and developing learning plans

One of the requirements at the initial tendering stage was that proposed pilots had identified the community that they would be working with, and had evidence to show the need for learning activity in the community by establishing their learning needs. This was demonstrated in a range of ways including assessments of existing clients to review their experiences of education and what areas of learning and development they felt they wanted as well as evidence from community surveys.

On award of the pilot funding pilot projects were required to submit draft learning plans (based on the learning needs assessment) to WAG and to have identified and appointed Learning Champions. The two more 'developed' pilots submitted their costed learning plans as required, and used funding for staff who were already employed in the role of Learning Champions to progress the pilot, as well as building on existing structures and expertise.

However, the three newer pilots had particular difficulties in moving from the initial planning stage to the implementation stage and there were significant delays in submitting their costed learning plans. In some cases, the co-ordination role was tasked to the Communities First co-ordinator who often did not have sufficient time to dedicate to the LCA pilot. One pilot also encountered significant difficulties in agreeing a 'host' organisation, which shifted between the local council's economic development department and learning department, again causing considerable difficulties in getting the project established.

These three 'new' pilots did not have staff in place to be Learning Champions and had initially interpreted the funding criteria

differently (which meant that they assumed that Learning Champions time was not fundable by the pilot). Fully costed learning plans from these three 'new' pilots was not progressed until the spring of 2007 (ie, towards the end of the second year of the three year pilot period). Furthermore, the contracting process took longer than anticipated, which meant that contracts were not signed until the middle of 2007. This led to significant delays in starting the project, with around a year being lost for three of the pilots, leaving only around eight months for them to implement and deliver their learning plans (as will be discussed later on in this report). There was also a view from the pilots that the changes that were occurring within the Welsh Assembly Government at the time the pilots were getting established made it difficult to get consistent support and advice from officials. Clearly, the two more established projects with existing staff and structures to draw on, fared much better than those who did not have such infrastructures.

Project inception and set-up

There were some considerable delays (of over six months) between the initial submission of tenders from organisations bidding to be an LCA pilot and the organisations being advised by the Welsh Assembly Government (via ELWa, as it was at that time) that they had been successful, with contracts being awarded. This meant that in some cases the individual within the community who had been responsible for putting the tender together had moved on because funding had ended. This had also contributed to the difficulties that some projects experienced in getting the project started once the contract had been awarded (see Section 2.1)

In two cases the pilot projects were already established in providing learning activities to their community, and continued to make plans to develop this area for their clients whilst awaiting the outcome of the tendering process. Caia Park and TDG were already established organisations with in-depth knowledge of their client group (clients with mental health problems and homeless people respectively) and were already working with them to improve their access to education and learning. This meant that these projects were able to be up and running fairly quickly on being awarded LCA pilot status as they had staff and systems in place – and in

fact had already begun to plan for development in learning activities for their clients whilst they waited for the outcome of the LCA tendering process.

The four organisations that made up the TDG pilot worked in partnership with each other to ensure that they were able to share good practice and lessons learnt at a very early stage in the pilot. This meant that the organisations within the TDG that had more experience of delivering structured learning activities were able to support and advise those who had less experience, and were able to share information regarding, for example, monitoring tools. Caia Park also already had a model of engagement with its client group through a European Social Fund project – Enable – which the LCA funding was then able to develop. Both pilots were therefore able to draw on their specific areas of expertise to develop the projects.

In other cases, where the pilot projects were new, or emerging from the Communities First partnership, they experienced some difficulties in getting the project off the ground – indeed by the time the evaluation began in late 2007 two had only recently identified Learning Champions and three had only just begun working with learners. This was primarily because of their original interpretation of how LCA funding could be used (see above) – which they had initially assumed could not be to fund Learning Champions' time. As noted earlier, the Communities First staff did not have the time to dedicate to the LCA pilot, and volunteers who had expressed a willingness to become Learning Champions did not have access to appropriate support. Once Welsh Assembly Government had confirmed (in 2007) that the LCA funding *could* be used to pay for Learning Champions to facilitate the process, progress was swifter.

However, as there was no mechanism in place for Learning Champions or co-ordinators to contact or communicate with other LCA pilots, they were unable to learn from the progress already made by the two more developed pilots - for example, with developing tools for monitoring and reporting, or for engaging and working with learners. This, it appears, exacerbated their slow development.

Organisational structure and set-up, project management and staffing

As noted earlier, some of the pilots were fully embedded in an existing organisation at a very early stage. Staff members were

often already working within the wider organisation, and management structures and systems were already in place. For these 'developed' pilots, this meant that the process of establishing the LCA project was relatively straightforward. However, for those attempting to establish the project from scratch it was more difficult, requiring protracted periods of establishing who would take the lead for the project as well as identifying staff to take the project forward. At the same time, the Welsh Assembly Government itself was undergoing significant restructuring and changes in staffing – ELWa (who had original responsibility for the pilots) was merged with the Welsh Assembly Government in April 2006, with responsibility for the pilots transferring first to the Department for Education and Lifelong Learning, and then to the newly formed Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. These changes in departmental responsibility for the LCA pilots also inevitably led to changes in staffing within the Assembly. The view from pilot projects was that these changes led to feelings of uncertainty about the development of the pilots and the levels of support received, with apparent lack of visibility at certain times of someone who could provide advice or answer queries, or visit the pilots and attend pilot project meetings.

In some pilots, difficulties were also experienced in recruiting staff with the appropriate mix of skills (which included post-16 learning, understanding and experience of disadvantaged communities etc). For pilots who were hoping to develop Learning Champions directly from the community, difficulties in finding suitable volunteers also led to some delays.

In terms of establishing a physical environment for the LCA pilots, there was a general understanding by the pilots that creating an informal learning environment was important in securing the confidence and engagement of learners. It was recognised that many of the potential learners had negative views and experiences of prior learning (typically whilst at school or college), as well as a general reluctance to travel out of their own locality. Efforts were made by project staff to ensure that learning environments were friendly, relaxed and informal rather than modelled on classroom type approaches. Much use was made of local established community facilities, including community centres, libraries and leisure centre facilities.

Developing local partnerships

A requirement of the LCA pilots was to develop local contacts and partnerships to ensure that the pilots made the best use of, and complemented, existing provision. All of the projects had invested considerable time and resources to find out what provision there already was in the area, and how their clients could access it. Links had been made with, for example, local voluntary groups, the library, the local church and faith groups, other post-16 learning providers in the voluntary, statutory and private sectors as well as other statutory support services.

Links with other LCA pilots

Until the first network meeting was held in October 2007, there had been no contact between the different LCA pilots. The reasons for this are unclear, although there was a perception among some pilot staff that there was a deliberate strategy for the different pilots *not* to communicate. For projects that had found it difficult to become established and to identify Learning Champions and learners, it was evident that they would have benefited considerably from being able to share experiences and lessons learnt with others at an earlier stage – and the more established Caia Park and TDG reported that they would also have found it useful to be in a wider support network. However, at the first network meeting held in October 2007 there was a commitment demonstrated to sharing insights and experiences – including in one case a ‘good practice guide’ developed by the TDG to help those setting up learning and work projects.

Support from the Welsh Assembly Government

As noted earlier, pilot staff reported perceived difficulties in the provision of consistent and sustained support from Welsh Assembly Government officials to the pilots, with changes in staffing and responsibilities which meant that there was a perception of gaps in support during the three year pilot period between where staff left and new staff were brought up to speed with the pilots (although the Assembly perspective did not necessarily support this view). Those organisations that had more experience of establishing and delivering projects of this nature were less affected than those who were still in the process of

setting up the project. Particular difficulties were encountered in the collecting and provision of monitoring data to DCELLS, not least because of the seemingly frequently changing and increasingly onerous requirements for monitoring – which some projects felt that they had not had sufficient support, training or resources to deliver.

Where support had been available, it had been in the main valued, particularly where the officials had been able to visit the projects in person to observe ‘first hand’ the activities underway and to meet staff in person. It was noted by the pilots that particular progress in this area had been made in the last six months of the pilot – although in some cases it was felt that this was too late.

3. Engaging with learners

This section looks at how the projects engaged with learners to encourage them to participate in learning activities. It considers any promotional or marketing activities undertaken by the pilots, the process of actually engaging learners in the LCA pilot, and establishing learning needs and objectives.

Promotional activities and referrals

The purpose of the LCA pilots was to engage with groups and individuals that 'hard-to-reach' – by virtue of their circumstances and characteristics as well in some cases their geographical location. It was therefore recognised by the pilots that a variety of approaches would be needed. All projects faced challenges in engaging with their target group, and in particular in engaging them in learning activities. Responsibility for engaging learners was often shared among a range of staff in all the organisations, and numerous approaches were used. These included:

- Promotion through links with other local organisation
- Advertising in the local press
- Distributing leaflets, for example, at local schools, doctors, information points, drop-in advice centres
- One-to-one approaches (for example, via support workers, staff in other parts of the organisations and by Learning Champions)
- Word of mouth, from other learners.

Initial awareness was raised through printed material and through developing links with other local practitioners. However, it was clear that as projects gained momentum, word of mouth became the most important method of raising awareness. In particular, learners already engaged with the projects appeared to become an important link to potential learners, promoting the project to peers and encouraging others to join in. Where present, staff in other parts of the wider organisation were also able to present the LCA pilot as an opportunity to engage people in community based

activities. The effectiveness of other approaches was less clear, although some pilots had plans to monitor the different awareness routes into the programme.

All projects had established a wide range of local contacts from across the statutory and voluntary sector – this was seen by all as an integral part of the project to raise initial awareness of the pilot. However, it also ensured that existing resources were maximised and that clients were able to benefit from what was on offer locally as well as what the projects themselves were able to provide. Referrals came from organisations such as Careers Wales, community mental health teams, welfare rights advice agencies, youth offending teams and other voluntary or community sector organisations. In some cases, referrals were two-way, with LCA pilots referring clients on to specific support agencies (for example, counselling, dealing with domestic violence or help with drug and alcohol misuse).

For pilots that were hosted by a larger organisation (including the TDG and Caia Park), referrals typically came from within the organisation from other staff or projects working with the client group. This 'internal' referral process was found to work well as it was thought that clients were more likely to participate in something that was seen as part of the wider organisation than being run by another body. Being part of a wider, and well-known, local organisation which already had made significant in-roads with the client group therefore had clear benefits.

Engagement of learners in the programme

One of the greatest challenges for some of the pilots was getting learners engaged in the project. It was originally anticipated that this would be a primary function of the Learning Champions. However, as noted earlier, three of the projects had only recently been able to identify (and pay) Learning Champions. This, coupled with the significant delays some projects had experienced in getting the pilot up and running, meant that towards the end of 2007 only one of the LCA pilots had achieved its targets in terms of numbers of learners engaged in the programme – the TDG pilot - although the others were on profile to achieving their original targets by the end of the pilot.

Establishing learning needs and objectives

Two of the pilots – Ceredigion and CwmNi - had enlisted external support to conduct a full community learning needs assessment at the commencement of the pilot – in both cases this had been conducted via a survey, with local people enlisted to carry out the interviews. This had resulted in a clear indication of learning needs which then informed the development of community learning programmes. In another pilot – Fairyland - there had been a two night residential event with 12 local residents to identify key learning issues, with the local Communities First Co-ordinator then compiling a community learning plan.

The two pilots that dealt primarily with a ‘community of interest’ (homelessness and mental health) had considerable experience in working with that client group so already had a good understanding of their communities’ learning issues and needs (along with the recognition that individual needs varied considerably).

In terms of identifying *individual* learning needs, staff worked with individuals at an early stage to draw up an Individual Learning Plan or a Personal Development Plan. The use of these individualised plans, drawn up with learners at the start of their engagement, provided a tool to identify key goals for the learner as well as support needs and how these might be met. This process enabled an individually tailored approach to addressing barriers and engaging with appropriate learning activities. The intention of the process was that it provided a clear indication to learners as to what they could expect, and what expectations there were of them. In this way, the plan ensured that learners had a clear understanding of the process they were beginning, how they would be supported and respective roles and responsibilities between the learner and the project staff. In some of the pilots, learners had a good understanding of their Individual Learning Plan, their goals and their routes to achieving their goals. In other pilots, learners appeared to be less clear, with those interviewed often not making direct reference to their own plans for development. However, it was noted among staff that many learners and potential learners had already undergone numerous assessments prior to joining the

pilot (particularly the case for some young people) and to ask them to undertake further detailed assessments could be a disincentive for engagement in the pilot. It should be noted here that staff highlighted the numerous basic skills assessments that some learners had already had prior to coming to the LCA pilot.

4. Learning Activities

This section examines the range and types of learning activities that the LCA projects implemented. It also looks at how these activities have been developed to meet target groups' skills needs.

Approaches to learning

The provision of learning activities that were delivered through supportive, non-threatening activities has been a common feature of LCA projects. This feature is significant because most of the learners coming through the LCA pilots had a number of identified barriers to learning (typically picked up via the initial one to one discussion between a learner and the Learning Champion), including:

- Previous negative experiences of school and education (low achievement, peer group difficulties, bullying, high absenteeism etc)
- Lack of confidence, low self esteem and low self belief
- A fear of failure
- Negative views of formal classroom environments
- Having learning difficulties such as low basic skills, dyslexia, behavioural problems,
- Intergenerational barriers (no family history of learning, negative family views of education)
- Being out of education for a long period of time, and
- Complex, chaotic and unpredictable personal lives.

Creating a positive learning environment was therefore a fundamental element for LCA projects, with most activities being based in informal and workshop style settings as opposed to formal classroom based. Activities that were grounded in 'learning through doing' were implemented extensively by projects.

Projects also put in place learning activities which were highly practical and linked to explicitly to areas of interest such as family learning, craft activities and local regeneration activities (repairing

local community facilities). Additionally, most projects had developed a varied programme of learning activities at different levels to ensure learners could participate on a programme that was suited to their needs and interests.

Ensuring that learners' personal needs as well as skills needs were being addressed at their point of entry has been a focused area of activity for some of the projects. This was especially true of the TDG project which had established a 'transitioning period' as part of a series of ten stages to help learners to engage with and progress through the programme. Assessment and review of learners' needs and progress were key features of the transitioning period which could last up to six months. Following this transitioning phase, learners then progressed onto accredited programmes of learning suited to their interests and abilities. This 'transitioning' phase was an important development in the early part of the pilot once it had been recognised that many potential learners benefited from a 'pre-learning' phase prior to embarking on learning activities when they are ready. Providing mentoring support (as has been the case with Caia Park, for example) was also been an effective way of supporting individuals through their learning activities.

Supporting learners to develop their basic skills was also a key area of activity for most of the projects. Project managers and delivery staff were very mindful that LCA activities were a good opportunity to assess and support learners who need to improve their numeracy and literacy. Caia Park's Enable Project assessed learners' basic skills at their point of entry and, and their progress was then tracked through quarterly reviews. Providing training to Learning Champions to enable them to assess learners' basic skills needs and signpost them to appropriate provision was also been a feature of some of the other LCA pilots.

The delivery of learning activities that were directly linked to a community based activity was an approach used by some of the projects. The CwmNi and Cardigan and South Ceredigion projects in particular sought to implement learning activities based around local regeneration activities. For example, First Aid and communication skills training was provided to volunteers who worked at Cardigan Castle. CwmNi also delivered a marketing

course for volunteers working on the community radio station to help them to develop ways to generate income for the station. The Enable project also implemented community based learning activities whereby learners contributed to the maintenance of local grounds through its gardening project. In the TDG project, work has been undertaken by learners at a local care home for older people, with the creation of a mural. In such cases, the activity has been underpinned by a structured learning programme facilitated by the Learning Champion.

Group work and one-to-one

The LCA pilots implemented learning activities that spanned a range delivery approaches to ensure that learners were engaged and supported effectively. The barriers described earlier have led to most activities being delivered through informal settings, either group work or through one-to-one activities.

Intensive one-to-one learning activities have mainly been delivered to learners who were at the early stages of entering the projects. This was especially true of projects working with hard to reach and vulnerable groups, where a significant amount of time was often spent assessing learners' personal and learning needs. Much of this work was undertaken by skilled Learning Champions who focussed on developing learners' confidence, whilst also nurturing a sense of trust. In many cases, an identified goal was for the learner to participate in more group activities, to encourage them to develop their social and communication skills.

Enabling learners to take ownership and responsibility for their learning has been an intrinsic aspect of some of the LCA projects through the implementation of learning plans in some form. For example, the TDG project has developed a Learning Portfolio containing a learning plan which learners reviewed regularly with their Learning Champion to ensure that they were making appropriate progress, and more importantly to allow for agreed adjustments so that desired outcomes and needs were identified.

The Caia Park pilot had a Personal Development Plan process in place which identified key goals for learners to achieve. The Fairyland Project sought to use Individual Learning Plans, but found that its client group had difficulties in identifying learning

goals. However, the project staff had recently been reviewing the Learning Portfolio materials that the TDG project developed (through its Learning and Work guide, mentioned earlier) to assess whether these could be more successful in working with individual learners to identify learning goals.

Group work based activities were most successful where there was a common goal that needed to be achieved, for example, building and maintaining dry stonewalls, the creation of a collective mural or artwork or the production of a learner newsletter. Whilst the learners may not always have perceived these kinds of activities as specific learning activities, the Learning Champions attempted to ensure that learning outcomes were identified (for example, team working, creative thinking, time management etc) and recorded.

Structured formal classroom based learning activities have been very limited in the provision of LCA activities. This was mainly because this style of learning is not appropriate for the types of learners that the projects were seeking to engage with. Some workshop based programmes of activity have been implemented, such as a 12 week welding and metal work programme for learners which enabled them to use the learning to refurbish a local school's gates in Cardigan. Additionally, some projects have also run accredited First Aid and Food Hygiene courses which were delivered through more structured approaches.

Informal learning

Embedding learning throughout a range of ongoing 'real life' activities has resulted in the development of some innovative approaches by projects. For example, the TDG project has used an Open College Network unit around maintaining a tenancy to link with developing learners' numeracy and literacy skills. Similarly, Fairyland implemented classes about personal finance that have focused on raising issues of numeracy and also provided a starting point to explore the sorts of skills that are expected in the work place.

Community development activities have also provided a gateway to introducing individuals' to learning activities, such as Cardigan and Ceredigion's family based learning sessions at a wildlife centre.

These introduced participants to learning about the local environment, as well as practical skills for making bird boxes.

Accrediting and awarding learning and achievements

Some of the more 'developed' pilots offered a range of awards and accreditation to their learners. This included internal awards and certificates as well as externally recognised and validated awards (for example, City and Guilds Profile of Achievement and Open College Network credits). The ability to offer accredited learning to learners was felt, by those who offered it, to be a central part of the offer to learners – and for many learners it was the first time that they had achieved any form of recognition for their work. Being able to award learners for their achievements, no matter how small, had a profound effect on some learners, instilling in them a sense of pride and self-worth. Staff who worked in organisations offering accredited learning were also of the view that accreditation ensured that learners were gaining externally recognised and validated awards at an externally recognised standard which would help them to build up their employability skills for the future.

Nevertheless, learners often began their learning journey not wanting to pursue any form of accreditation, or not in a position to undertake this type of learning. It was apparent, therefore, that it was important for learners to be able to undertake less structured and non-accredited activities (which often still had a learning element) such as arts and crafts, cooking and woodwork. Often these activities led on to learning that could be accredited, and it is in these situations that the skills of the Learning Champions in encouraging progress and identifying learning outcomes with the learner became crucial.

Developing and maintaining quality standards

With one exception, there was limited development of quality standards for project activities for the LCA projects. The time it has taken for projects to get established, to identify and support Learning Champions and to engage with learners has meant that a specific focus on quality standards has – at this stage in the pilots – had to take a back seat. Additionally, the fact that some projects were using a range of learning providers and individuals to deliver LCA programmes has also resulted in projects finding it difficult to

identify and develop a unified quality standard. Furthermore, the lack of accredited learning in some pilots has meant that there has been less of a 'push' to develop and maintain quality standards (which would be a prerequisite for any externally validated learning).

The exception to this was the TDG pilot. The four housing providers who form the TDG pilot have adopted a rigorous common quality standard framework, developed through regular meetings and sharing of good practice between organisations. Pilot partners were also able to draw on the existing standards in place in their wider organisations, where quality standards were already fully embedded in working practices (for example through the required standards for Supporting People). Furthermore, as the pilot organisations offered accredited learning opportunities, they were subject to regular assessment and verification from awarding bodies which required the maintenance of consistent quality standards across all learning. There was also an established system of internal verification and peer assessment.

Despite other projects' lack of progress in this area, there was some evidence to show that some processes and procedures have been put in place to ensure quality standards. This was mainly through ensuring that staff and Learning Champions were trained and supported to a standard level within individual projects, for example, by providing Basic Skills Assessment training to Learning Champions in the Caia Park and Cardigan and South Ceredigion projects.

5. Outcomes

This section reviews the LCA pilot's achievements in engaging with learners and assesses how learners have progressed through the support of LCA provision.

Engagement with learning

Projects have had varying levels of success in engaging targeted groups with LCA supported learning activities. Projects that have been most successful are those that have been running for the longest period of time (that is, prior to the LCA pilot) which has enabled them to build their profiles with key target groups and partner organisations. This has been especially true of the TDG project which had internal referral mechanisms in place, since many learners are already known to the delivery organisations through their role as a supported housing provider (for example, learners may be tenants in the foyers). Caia Park, also an established organisation, already had the Enable project established via the European Social Fund, so had already engaged with the target groups. This is also somewhat true of Fairyland, where many of the learners are already known to project staff through other community development activities which have been undertaken on the estate – although to date their engagement with potential learners has been on a relatively small scale.

Assessing engagement with learning for the CwmNi and Cardigan and South Ceredigion projects has been more problematic since all project activities are open to individuals aged over 16 in these communities. Therefore gaining a sense of how successful these projects have been in engaging with learners is difficult, especially since both of these projects had delayed starts which have impacted on the promotion of the project to potential learners and partner organisations.

What is evident, therefore, is that the process of engagement with learners, or potential learners, has been far more successful in established projects. Where projects were being set up from

scratch, engagement with the target groups has been more difficult and has taken much longer.

‘Distance travelled’

‘Distance travelled’ refers to the progress an individual may have made from the start of their engagement in an intervention to an end point – typically through the development of ‘soft’ skills (see Section 5.3 below). Examining ‘distance travelled’ is one way of putting some kind of definition on the ‘added value’ of an initiative or intervention. However, each individual learner will have a different starting point and eventual outcomes – no one individual will be the same as another because of their own circumstances and complexity of barriers that they face in (re)engaging with learning activities. Furthermore, much of the progress made by learners concerns the development of ‘soft skills’ – those that by default are difficult to both identify and measure. The evaluation provided numerous examples of areas of progression, over and above any tangible outcomes. These examples came from both staff and learners themselves, and included:

- Being able to have eye contact with members of staff and other peers
- Improving personal hygiene and general appearance
- Reducing aggressive, confrontational or ‘angry’ behaviour that had made it difficult to engage positively in a group setting
- Being able to converse with others in a group setting
- Listening to, and valuing, others’ points of view or perspectives.

Capturing the ‘distance travelled’ or progress made for learners who have engaged with the LCA pilot therefore remained a challenge. Whilst some projects made significant efforts to measure progression – with varying degrees of success – others had yet to develop such systems. Thus, varying levels of evidence are available to show how the LCA projects have supported learners in progressing with their learning and development. TDG’s Learners’ Profiles have provided clear records of individual learners’ journeys from their point of entry to their exit.

Furthermore, they have developed a number of soft skill monitoring tools (such as the Wheel of Progress) which staff can use at regular intervals with learners to identify areas of soft skill development and how these have changed over time. Nevertheless, not all projects have made full use of these tools with learners.

Caia Park's Enable project attempts to track distance travelled through assessing soft outcomes achieved by learners, with monitoring data showing that 43 learners attending the project had been identified as having an improved sense of self-confidence.

The less established projects which started later than originally planned have not been able to track and evidence distance travelled due to the concentrated delivery of project activities in a short period of time.

'Soft' outcomes

Soft outcomes can be defined as outcomes from an intervention that are not tangible and are thus difficult to measure¹. They can include achievements such as,

- interpersonal skills, for example: social skills and communication
- organisational skills
- analytical skills, such as: the ability to exercise judgement,
- managing time, prioritising and problem solving, and
- personal skills such as motivation, confidence and looking after oneself.

Measuring soft outcomes can therefore give some indication of the 'distance' a beneficiary has travelled from where they started from – acquiring or developing soft skills gives an indication that progress is being made. Consideration of both soft outcomes and distance travelled are therefore both important when looking at beneficiaries' achievements.

¹ Institute for Employment Studies (2000). *Guide to measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled*. DfEE

Systematic recording of soft outcomes achieved by learners has been patchy, despite most projects stating that these outcomes are often very significant for learners. This is felt to be especially salient when projects have been successful in engaging with learners with multiple barriers to participate in project activities. Nevertheless, some successful approaches have been implemented to recording soft outcomes including a flexible system for recording learner outcomes related to a number of statements that refer to the presence of soft skills. This system involves learners identifying whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements related to soft outcomes, such as feeling confident and being able to work well with others. The compilation of responses to these statements enables the identification of trends in learners' achievement of these outcomes.

Other projects have identified soft outcomes for learners, but these have not been compiled in such a systematic way to show how learners have achieved. In some instances, projects have reported that they tried to limit levels of paperwork and recording of outcomes of learning for participants as this can be a barrier to engagement in itself.

In terms of soft outcomes achieved, all LCA projects reported that the engagement of individuals in learning activities has been the main area of achievement. Projects reported that learners have made very good progress in developing their key skills, mainly communication and team working since many activities have focused on learners applying these skills to a range of tasks. Other significant areas of soft outcome development have been improved personal skills, including improved appreciation of time keeping and attendance. Improved attitudinal outcomes have also been a key area of achievement in terms of learners experiencing improved confidence and self esteem and an increased self-belief. The following quotations from learners and staff describe the kinds of achievements and progress learners have made:

Since I started coming to [LCA pilot] I feel that I'm more confident talking in a group, I am also more assertive, I can say no to people! I have learnt things that I wouldn't have dreamed of learning (female, 24)

Its given me confidence, its given me a reason to live and shown me that I can actually go out there, you know.... Its amazing what they've done and how they've helped me (female, 19, overcoming depression, mental health and self-harm problems)

They have helped me calm down ... the most help I have ever had in my life (female, 50s, preparing for GCSEs and encouraging her own children in education)

I thought I'd never get there, never get my own house. People kept saying to me you can't do this, you can't do that, because you've got a disability... but I believe what I can do now... I'm really grateful (female, 20, now left supported accommodation and in mainstream college and living independently)

Helps youngsters like me stay out of trouble (male, 16, undertaking maths and English OCNs)

When they say you can get a certificate, it shows you then that you can do it (female, 24, recovering from drug/alcohol abuse, now studying OCNs and undertaking work experience)

Positive impacts on local communities through learning LCA activities have also been reported which were evidenced through improved environment. Contribution to community activities has also been evidenced by the CwmNi project whereby learners who have undertaken LCA supported activities agree to contribute to community activities, for example some of those who have completed first aid courses have provided support for riverbank cleaning activities.

Evidencing 'hard' outcomes

The achievement of accredited qualifications and progression into further learning or employment have been the main 'hard' outcomes to emerge from the projects, although the level of these achievements varies greatly between projects. Most projects were able to provide evidence of learners achieving certificated training through gaining recognised awards in, for example, first aid and food hygiene. Evidence of achievement of qualifications in numeracy and literacy was also evident in some projects.

Learner progression into employment or further training and learning have also been evidenced in some projects, although systematic collection of this data was still in its early stages for some projects who had only recently got learners engaged. One of the challenges that projects have experienced is tracking learners once they have left the project. This makes it difficult to identify subsequent transitions, and whether these have been successful.

Moving on – project exits

Project exits have been a key area of activity for pilots working with specific target groups rather than those working with broader communities. Tracking learners and collecting destination data has been identified as a very resource intensive activity especially if learners move out of an area; nevertheless, most projects have strived to gather evidence of learner progression. This is particularly true of the TDG project which has a dedicated stage of its project focusing on collecting these data. However, it was particularly challenging for staff to follow up learners once they have left the project. This in turn made it difficult to provide evidence of progression into mainstream education or employment, other than anecdotally.

Nevertheless, planned exit reviews with learners were an area of development that some projects were undertaking during this evaluation. The CwmNi project has been investigating linking with an external provider to undertake intensive advice and guidance sessions with identified learners who needed support to progress to appropriate employment or further learning following their participation in the programme. TDG has developed an exit review programme in the latter stages of the project where learners discussed their progress and completed a questionnaire as they prepared to leave the project. A review of a small sample of these questionnaires identified that learners were all able to identify some positive outcomes as a result of their participation.

6. Funding issues

Funding to the LCA pilots was provided to pay for learning activities that will regenerate the 'community'. This included formal, non-formal, accredited and non-accredited learning. Funding could also be used for childcare and transport costs if they are not met through other provision. It was also intended that the funding would not be used for learning that was eligible for funding from other sources, nor for funding existing activity or staff costs. However, as noted earlier, the LCA funding could be used to pay for Learning Champions, although in the early parts of the pilot only two projects – TDG and Caia Park – interpreted the guidelines in this way (see below).

Use of LCA funding

As noted earlier, in some of the projects LCA funding was used in the final year of the pilot to fund the salary of a co-ordinator or Learning Champion in some of the projects. In such cases, prior to that there had been considerable difficulties in getting the LCA project established. This was mainly because the responsibility had fallen to the Communities First co-ordinator or Partnership Co-ordinator who simply could not divest the required time to the LCA because of competing priorities and responsibilities required in their existing role. Any voluntary support that had been secured via volunteer Learning Champions had limited capacity to make progress because of lack of dedicated co-ordination. When the funding was used to pay for Learning Champions' time, progress was much swifter.

Funding was also used to facilitate learning activities (including one off events such as day trips), to cover costs associated with accrediting learning (for example, registration costs), to pay for training for staff (for example, to be able to assess Basic Skills) and to run consultation events. In two cases, funding was also being used to pay for an external evaluation of the LCA project.

One of the projects – Cwmni – had allocated the money to local community theme groups. However, some difficulties were encountered with community theme group members needing a lot of guidance about what they could spend the money on, and how to decide. This again reflects the need to have dedicated funded co-ordinators to help community members to drive the project forward.

For one of the pilots, the TDG, who had perhaps the largest volume of learners registered to the LCA pilot through its Learning and Work programme, the LCA funding contributed around 50% of the total cost of delivery of services for learners. The remainder was met by each of the four individual organisations that made up the TDG pilot.

Some organisations had successfully secured additional funding for their LCA pilot projects, albeit at a relatively small level. For example, one pilot had obtained a small grant to enable them to purchase equipment and training to run desk top publishing workshops for their learners, and the purchase of film making equipment and training to enable learners to make short films about their life.

Cost per learner

The costs per learner originally presented by the LCA pilots at the bidding stage ranged from £144 to £946. This variation depended on the client group targeted and the nature of support and learning to be provided.

Only one organisation had attempted to quantify the cost of providing support to their learners via the LCA pilot – others had not been in a position to do so, mainly because learners had only recently come on stream. For the one pilot that was able to provide some form of cost per learner information (TDG), based on providing an average of just under two hours of direct support to an individual learner each week this equated to just under £36 per learner per week, based on an average hourly cost of around £20. However, this in all likelihood underestimates the real cost because of the often ad hoc nature and intangible nature of support. Furthermore, each individual's needs varied greatly in terms of the

nature, intensity and duration of support. It follows then that some learners will require many more hours than others, over a longer (and often undefined) period of time. In addition, this cost does not include any preparatory work – for example, establishing local links, finding out if there is suitable provision for the learner outside of the LCA pilot, speaking to other agencies about learners' needs etc. Furthermore, it does not necessarily include any time pre-registration. Such time – referred to by TDG as 'transitioning' - is a critical part of the process of re-engagement but is generally ad-hoc, hard to define and hard to measure (and generally unfunded by programme costs). It can include informal discussions, one-to-one support and general encouragement and information sharing, and can be conducted both face-to-face and by telephone. Therefore, the challenge of calculating a 'cost per learner' should not be underestimated, and it can only be done on a somewhat arbitrary basis.

However, if one makes a number of assumptions it is possible to provide *indicative* costs. These assumptions are:

- That a learner engages with the LCA pilot over one whole year (assuming 48 weeks to allow for holiday periods), and that no pre-registration dialogues or support are needed prior to engagement
- That, *on average*, engagement is in the form of individualised learning, at a local community centre (ie with limited overhead costs and any childcare or transport costs are already met)
- That a learner, *on average*, attends a learning activity for around two hours a week.

On this basis, it can be calculated that the cost for this learner in this scenario is £1,728 per annum. If one assumes that a learner only engages over a 10 week period, for 2 hours a week, this cost is calculated at £360. Often, courses were scheduled to run in around six week 'blocks' (with flexibility according to the individual's own needs) – this could cost around £216.

To enable an accurate reflection on the cost per learner, it is also useful to look at progression and sustainability over the longer term

to gain some measure of longer term benefit. One way of defining this would be to look at the cost per learner to get them to a point where they are able to enter mainstream activity – be it education or employment – and to be self-sufficient (ie, without reliance on supportive organisations). However, relatively little is known at this stage of the pilot about learners' ultimate destinations. In some cases this is because a pilot has only recently engaged with learners so they are still relatively early on in their 'journey' and in other cases there are difficulties in tracking those who have exited the programme to known destinations. The following section examines some of the wider impacts of participation in the pilot.

At this point, there may be some merit in considering costs from other 're-engagement' or activation programmes in the UK. Evaluation of Employment Zones, for example, have estimated the cost of providing support to an individual into work to be between £1,800 and £4,000, depending on the client group and source of information (see for example, HoC, 8th January 2007, Column 207W; Freud, 2007). Calculations of costs per individual helped under the New Deal suite of programmes have fluctuated widely over the years since the first New Deal in 1997, but the most recent figures estimate around £1000 for each job found via New Deal (Public Accounts Committee, 2008) – although this does not necessarily take into account deadweight (those who would have found a job anyway), which is thought to be fairly high in some groups (such as lone parents) and there are likely to be large variations between different New Deals (for example, cost per sustained job in New Deal for 25+ is estimated at £5,130). The cost of such provision is also rising, as activation programmes are increasingly left with the so-called 'hardest to help'. Although these figures provide limited comparability to the LCA pilot because of different approaches and context, it does suggest that the pilots can offer relatively good value for money on a 'cost per individual' basis – although a longer time period would be needed to establish the full costs, benefits and outcomes. Furthermore, for the hard to reach groups that the pilot is targeted towards, deadweight costs of interventions are likely to be low as in the main the evaluation evidence from both staff and clients suggests that they would not be undertaking learning activities had it not been for the LCA pilot.

A review of the latest statistics on costs per learner in Wales also provides some useful context. According to figures from the Welsh Assembly Government's Statistics for Wales, total budgeted per pupil expenditure on local authority education for 06/07 is £4,610 – rising to £18,704 for learners with special needs.

One may also consider the cost to the economy, and to wider society, of successful participation in a programme such as the LCA. For example, the loss to the economy of an unemployed person concerns their loss of output, and lack of payment of income tax and national insurance, as well as the benefits cost to the economy. This is considered further in Section 7.3.

7. Overview

This section presents an overview of the key findings from the evaluation by considering the six key evaluation questions:

- How well have the projects run?
- Have the projects contributed to the wider social inclusion agenda?
- Are the pilots a cost effective way of engaging with these kinds of learners? Do they provide value for money?
- What has the pilot contributed over and above existing provision?
- How are these types of projects best supported?
- How effective is the model used?

How well have the projects run?

The time, skills and knowledge required to establish a community based and community driven project such as the Learning Community Accounts was, it appears, underestimated, with considerable difficulties in getting three of the five projects up and running. This has been for a variety of reasons, including:

- Considerable delays in the initial commissioning, which meant that some staff 'earmarked' to work on the project had had to move on due to lack of funding
- Underestimating the support some projects might need from WAG in getting the pilots set up, and getting costed learning plans submitted
- Organisational and structural changes in WAG, and staffing changes, which led to a perceived gaps in support for the pilots
- Finding it takes longer than anticipated to get learner engagement when starting from scratch
- Staffing issues, with no dedicated staff to take the project forward, and no funding to pay for dedicated co-ordinator.

- Reliance on Learning Champions working in a voluntary or unpaid capacity, with insufficient training or support
- Difficulties in identifying and agreeing a co-ordinating body to oversee the pilot.

Progress was swifter once funding had been agreed to pay for dedicated staff time for the project. Furthermore, learning from other pilots via the network meeting and subsequent sharing of information and ideas (towards the end of 2007) also accelerated progress for the newer pilot projects.

The two projects that had less difficulty in getting the LCA pilot off the ground were already established organisations and already had an in-depth knowledge of their client group's circumstances and needs.

How have the pilots contributed to the wider Welsh Assembly Government agenda?

The Welsh Assembly Government has an overall commitment to the principles of sustainability, inclusivity and social justice, across all of its different agendas and strategies, with a particular focus on those who are marginalised from society. The pilots have the capacity to contribute to these principles, by bringing learning to those who have – for a variety of legitimate reasons and circumstances – been unable to progress in mainstream education and employment that many others may take for granted. Furthermore, the recommendations contained in the Beecham review of local service delivery in Wales², encourages local service providers to work together. The LCA pilot projects have developed strong partnerships with others working in the area, linking in with existing provision and accessing specific support for their clients where needed, thus minimising duplication of effort. However, a stronger wider geographical network of support is needed to ensure that pilots are able to learn from one another, rather than operate in relative isolation (which appears to have been the case for the LCA pilot projects).

² Beecham (2006). *Beyond Boundaries: Citizen-centred local services for Wales*

Wales has a number of targets to improve skills (see Leitch, 2006³), including:

- By 2010, over three quarters of pupils finish compulsory education attaining at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*–C or equivalent.
- By 2010, reduce the proportion of adults of working age without qualifications from 1 in 4 in 1996 to 1 in 10, and
- By 2010, increase the proportion of adults of working age with a Level 4 qualification from 1 in 5 in 1996 to over 3 in 10.
- Basic Skills Pledge, with a target of 50 per cent of employees being covered by 2010 (the pledge already covers over 10 per cent of employees in Wales).

The more developed pilots, including the TDG and the Caia Park, have made some considerable progress towards facilitating steps towards raising qualifications and achievements for its clients. Many clients are progressing to accredited units and qualifications, and some have successfully moved on to mainstream FE and HE provision or into employment.

The Welsh Assembly Government's National Planning and Funding System (NPFS) aims to strengthen the link between learning needs and learning delivery, by ensuring that schools, colleges and training providers are funded on an equitable basis through a single approach to the funding and planning of post-16 education. Underpinning this is a focus on collaboration and partnership between different FE and training providers to give more choice for learners, better value for money, a greater focus on quality and an increase in the number of people learning in Wales. The LCA pilots appear to fit well into this agenda, providing an effective model of partnership working by making the best use of existing local learning and education provision and by bringing new learners into learning activities that they would not otherwise have undertaken.

³ Leitch (2006). *Prosperity for all in the global economy: world class skills*. HM Treasury.

The Webb review⁴ has identified significant challenges that Wales faces in delivering high quality further education, including doing more to help the large numbers of young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training. In particular, the review recommends that adult and community learning funding should focus on meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged people, and funding should not be solely focused on qualifications as outcomes. The LCA pilots were established to focus specifically on the most disadvantaged, and it was recognised at the outset that for many outcomes would – in the short term at least – be centred around ‘softer’ benefits and ‘distance travelled’.

From the evaluation, it is clear that the pilots have engaged with a wide range of individuals from a broad range of social groups. Many of these individuals had hitherto limited involvement in learning activities, and in some cases this extended to limited social interaction of any nature. The evaluation evidence indicates that the projects have made considerable efforts in engaging with groups that have not historically engaged in learning or community activities. For the more established projects, the pilot has enabled them to work more closely with their clients to support them on their journey into mainstream activities (including housing, education and employment) – although in many cases they were already working with their clients, albeit on a less ‘learning focused’ basis. However, for the less established processes one of the most profound outcomes has been their ability (supported by the design of the pilot) to work in a creative manner to engage with often the most reluctant and recalcitrant individuals. Because of the challenges this has presented, coupled with the extraneous delays already mentioned, the pilots have made a significant contribution to the social inclusion of these individuals, a contribution which cuts across a number of areas including social and civic participation, family and child well-being, health and community development.

However, now that the funding for the LCA pilots has ended, there is a risk that much of the momentum gained and the expertise developed, will be lost. For the kinds of clients supported through this type of provision, this means that the ‘bridge’ that the pilots

⁴ Webb (2007). *Promise and Prosperity: a report of the independent review of the mission and purpose of further education in Wales*

could potentially provide to mainstream work and education is now missing.

Are the pilots a (cost) effective way of engaging with the hard to reach? Do they provide value for money?

Earlier discussions in this report have identified the difficulty in providing any measure of cost effectiveness of the LCA pilot, due to the limited progress made in some of the pilots, plus the difficulty of quantifying costs per learner because of the nature, depth and breadth of support provided. However, one way of considering the cost effectiveness of engaging with the hardest to reach groups in this manner is to consider the implications of *not* engaging with them through this pilot. In the main, it is evident that most learners who have become engaged with the LCA pilot, and thus in learning activities, would not otherwise have done so. Many have already 'failed' at participating in more mainstream education and learning activities (notably school and in some cases college or other training) – others had previously expressed little desire or inclination to return to learning, perceiving that it was not 'for them'. Learners participating in the pilots were often also overcoming other difficulties including mental health problems, drug abuse, homelessness and alcoholism – and involvement in the LCA pilot was, according to them, contributing to their recovery. Nevertheless, as with any initiative that attempts to work with the most disadvantaged groups, it is resource intensive as it invariably requires working over a prolonged period of time and on a one-to-one basis if it is to have any measure of success where other interventions may have failed.

Programme 'value for money' may be measured in a number of ways including:

- Looking at the cost of providing support and the number of transitions into more mainstream activity (such as employment)
- Looking at the 'cost effectiveness' of the programme in terms of entry into mainstream activity and associated longer term government savings (for example in reduced benefit payments) and benefits (for example, increased income tax payments).

However, such calculations have a number of limitations – particularly for people who are the furthest from mainstream education and the labour market. First, they mask the significant long term and sometimes enduring labour market barriers that many people (including those participating in the LCA pilots) face by looking solely at short term employment outcomes. Other pre-employment positive outcomes (such as increased confidence, increased literacy or work experience/voluntary work and greater resilience) are often not recognised in generic ‘value for money’ programme calculations. They also require a number of assumptions to be made, for example, about deadweight costs, about the average duration of any subsequent job and associated wages. Furthermore, they do not take into account the wider far reaching benefits to the individual, their family and community and society as a whole. These can include improved health, reduced childhood poverty, greater family stability and community cohesion, reduced crime or anti-social behaviour, improved intergenerational attitude to learning and work and general improved social well-being.

There have been some attempts to quantify the costs of, for example, unemployment, drug use, offending and homelessness – which many of the LCA participants had experienced. Whilst all such attempts carry significant caveats about the assumptions made to carry out such calculations, they can provide an indication of some of the economic and societal costs of *not* participating in activities such as those offered by the LCA pilots which aim to facilitate self-sufficiency and progression to mainstream activities. For example, a brief review of available data and figures found that:

- the cost to the Exchequer of youth unemployment in Wales (based on £45.50 a week for 18-24 year olds) per week is £979,023⁵
- Taking into account the potential tax revenue lost, analysis has shown that the cost of unemployment in the UK as a whole is £61 billion a year, which equates to £2,810 for each household in Britain⁶

⁵ Prince's Trust (2007). *The Cost of Exclusion: counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK.*

⁶ *ibid*

- The average cost to society of problem drug use (including crime, psychiatric treatment and addiction services, but excluding social security payments) is around £11,000 a year for an individual⁷
- Incapacity Benefit costs an average of £4,379 per claimant per year⁸
- Estimates for the cost of an unemployed person staying in a hostel is around £15,500 a year⁹
- The average cost of a prison place per year is around £40,000 (depending on how the cost is calculated) and around £30,000 to keep a young offender in custody for a year – again costs vary widely depending on the method used for calculations.

The complexity of determining the costs and benefits of different programmes designed to help the so called ‘hardest to help’ has been highlighted in the recent Freud review of Welfare to Work programmes¹⁰, with support for a model that demonstrates the *full* costs and benefits of helping such groups towards more mainstream activities. Nevertheless, the Freud review does calculate fiscal benefits of a year long move into employment for different client groups – again demonstrating the importance of taking a long term perspective when reviewing the overall benefits and ‘value for money’ of initiatives such as the LCA. For example:

- The gross savings to the Department for Work and Pensions of moving an average Incapacity Benefit recipient into work is £5,900, rising to £9,000 taking into account direct and indirect taxes paid and additional tax credits
- For Jobseeker’s Allowance the equivalent figures are £4,100 and £8,100 respectively, and for lone parents the figure is £4,400 (with childcare elements of the tax credit system balancing other revenues).

⁷ See, for example, research undertaken as part of the National Outcome Research Study at Maudsley Hospital, as well as other research conducted on behalf of the Home Office.

⁸ House of Commons Library, 2007

⁹ Crisis (2007). www.homelessness.org.uk/policyandinfo/facts/costs

¹⁰ Freud, D (2007). *Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work*. Department for Work and Pensions.

Added value – what has the pilot contributed over and above existing provision?

A requirement of the LCA pilots was that the learning activities did not duplicate existing provision, but where appropriate accessed existing provision in order to maximise community resources.

Whilst it may be that there are other local providers offering similar programmes of study or learning, it is the *style of delivery and personalised support* that is different in the LCA pilots and it is for this reason that most of the mainstream courses on offer (for example at the local further education college) were unsuitable – borne out by evidence from both staff and learners. Colleges often do not have the resources to provide on-going one-to-one support and coaching, or may lack the detailed understanding of issues relating to, for example, self-harm, being in care, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health problems and issues relating to prolonged low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Furthermore, learning provision is generally structured, with little flexibility in hours of attendance or days of the week on which a learner needs to be studying. On the other hand, the LCA pilots are staffed by people who understand their learners' issues, are able to build up sustained one-to-one relationships and are able to provide the often intensive support that is needed to smooth the path towards, ultimately, mainstream education provision, employment and participation in normal every day life. In addition, the LCA pilots are able to offer flexibility to learners, to enable them to work at their own pace, in an environment where they do not feel threatened or marginalised and where they can make incremental progress without the concern of failure because they have not been able to keep up with rigid attendance or achievement requirements.

Developing community based learning for marginalised or disadvantaged groups needs to link up with other local or geographically based developments to strengthen learning opportunities that are 'responsive, accessible, coherent, effective and efficient'. The Welsh Assembly has already demonstrated its commitment to developing learning 'networks' (for example, through geographical pathfinder reviews that have looked at the

organisation and delivery of post-16 learning in specific local areas). The experience gained by those involved in developing and delivering the LCA pilots should not be lost; there is significant expertise to draw on for the post-16 and adult community learning sector, particularly in meeting learners' needs, in developing inclusive approaches and widening access to learners and in facilitating transitions to mainstream provision.

How are these types of projects best supported?

The Demos review of community learning¹¹ identified a three stage process which has been indicated elsewhere as the mechanism to progressively engage learners:

1. do something
2. do something purposeful
3. work towards a qualification.

All of the LCA pilots have successfully found ways to engage their target clients in some form of activity, and (according to both the learners and the staff) in something that they would not have otherwise engaged in. The challenge has been to progress this to the second stage of the process outlined by Demos - into something purposeful and ultimately into something that enables work towards a qualification or learning outcome. One of the pilots (TDG) has been able to do this with considerable success, one has made significant progress (perhaps only hindered by the nature of the client group itself – Caia Park's clients have significant mental health issues) but the remaining three had not yet reached that stage by the end of the evaluation. To do so requires more support and guidance at the start of the project, dedicated paid co-ordination and support workers as well as support from a wider network of others engaged in similar activities. This support network, as utilised in the TDG network with the four supported housing providers, ensures that good practice is shared, lessons are learnt and progress is made.

Projects of this nature are therefore probably best supported in a several ways:

¹¹ DEMOS (2003). *Towards Community Learning Accounts in Wales*. ELWa

- through regular pilot network meetings (at least annually, possibly six monthly), supported and co-ordinated by WAG to enable pilots to come together from the outset to share good practice and lessons learnt (through workshops and presentations) and to hear how the pilots fit into the government's agenda
- through e-support, via access to a secure pilot portal which could host bulletin board discussions, question and answer sections, sharing of key documents, key monitoring requirements, timelines, latest government policy developments etc
- with the development of separate strategic and delivery groups *across* the pilots to enable staff with similar responsibilities to work together on, for example, strengthening the evidence base of what works, developing monitoring tools for soft outcomes etc.

How effective is the community learning model?

The community learning model used in this pilot was one that aimed to empower communities to identify their own needs and to develop strategies to fulfil those needs, and to enable the transfer and embedding of knowledge and resources into communities to enable them to up-skill and build capacity thus contributing to community regeneration. The model is thus in principle laudable, but in practice it has been more difficult to achieve – notably for the three 'new' pilots. The evaluation has highlighted some significant areas of the model in practice that have hindered its success. Primarily, this relates to the initial absence of dedicated project co-ordination/management time. The nature of the pilot and the community learning approach means that this type of project cannot be successfully established by staff who already have significant and considerable other responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a need for Learning Champions to be skilled and experienced staff, with a community presence, understanding of the target group and appropriate training and support, and to be paid members of staff rather than volunteers.

The time it takes to get a community driven approach to learning established may also have been underestimated. Only those projects that already had a clear understanding of their client group

and had established systems and structures, procedures and processes in place were able to make substantial progress during the three year pilot period – and even then the extent to which they have been successful in transferring and embedding knowledge to the wider community is less clear. Others took much longer than anticipated to get established and only in the final months of the three year pilot did they begin to make significant progress in learner engagement and development. A much longer time period is required for a project of this nature to get established and to evidence impact and longer term outcomes, particularly when working with such disadvantaged and disengaged groups and communities.

The pilots have, however, demonstrated effective ways of engaging with communities and individuals who have often not engaged with any form of learning activity prior to the LCA pilot – and thus have provided an important link or ‘bridge’ between non-learning and mainstream learning. This is a result of innovative approaches, as well as the hard work and commitment of all of the staff across all five LCA pilots. As a model of engagement with hard to reach communities, the approach has demonstrated considerable success. Nevertheless, successful engagement is greater for those who already have some contact with the target client group (ie, in a non-learning capacity) – in such cases they can be seen to some extent as ‘captive’ audiences.

Based on the evidence above, a successful model can be envisaged as follows:

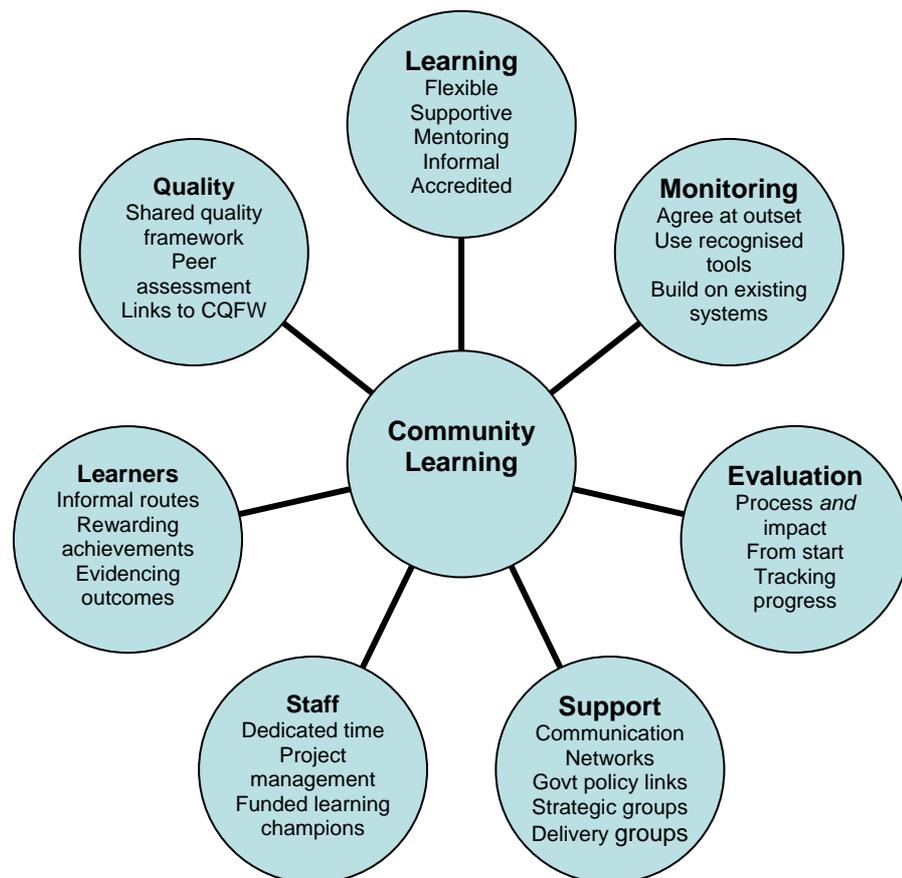
- Dedicated project management and co-ordination
- Paid Learning Champion(s)
- Built on existing engagement approaches to introduce learning, rather than attempting to engage ‘from scratch’
- Recognition (in terms of resources and funding) of the time to engage with (potential) learners
- Part of a wider network of community learning projects, to ensure that best practice and lessons learnt are shared, and built on
- Clear links with current government policy and policy developments, via network meetings, regular information and communication from key policy officials
- An understanding of the client group(s), including access to specialist knowledge, provision and support when

required (for example, housing issues, mental health, parenting, domestic violence etc)

- An identified local community delivery base
- A clear understanding and agreement of monitoring and evaluation processes from the outset, building on existing systems and utilising existing tools where possible
- Ensuring evaluation findings contribute to the development of the pilots from the outset.

The diagram below illustrates these key factors.

Figure 1 A model of community learning for disadvantaged groups



8. Recommendations

The Welsh Assembly Government has demonstrated its commitment to being a 'Learning Country', with a key priority the promotion of lifelong learning which:

....liberates talent, extends opportunities, empowers communities, provides the better jobs and skills that people need to prosper in the new economy and creates a sustainable future for Wales¹²

There is little doubt that the more established LCA pilots have made a significant contribution to facilitating learning among groups that were hitherto excluded or marginalised from education. The newer projects have had a difficult start, but progress in the last six months of the pilot has been encouraging. Nevertheless, based on the evidence from this evaluation, there are a number of recommendations for any future similar approach to community learning. These relate to:

- Project management and co-ordination
- The use of Learning Champions
- Support networks
- Measurement of progress and outcomes
- Tracking learner journeys
- Recognition of informal learning
- Quality control, self-regulation and peer review
- Accreditation
- Calculating the 'cost' per learner supported
- Establishing community learning projects.

Project Management and Co-ordination

In order to ensure that the project is given the necessary resources and attention, there is a need for a dedicated co-ordinator who is

¹² <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills> - dd 16/4/08

funded by the project. This will ensure that the project can get up and running within an acceptable timeframe, that there are appropriate monitoring and administrative systems in place, learning plans have been sufficiently developed and learning champions have been identified and/or appointed, as well as significant inroads to the mapping of current provision and development of local partnerships. This function cannot be done as an 'add-on' to another job, and given the considerable set-up time should not be supported by funding from other parts of the organisation. Nevertheless, it should be recognised it can take time to find someone with the appropriate skills, local knowledge and community presence to take on the role – this needs to be recognised in planning the project start and subsequent timelines. Organisations that were able to provide a significant proportion of time to the pilot at the beginning made far more progress than those that were not. For the latter group, where they were eventually able to secure funding for a 'Super' Learning Champion', considerable progress was subsequently made.

The use of Learning Champions

There were generally two different models of Learning Champions in the pilot – those that were drawn from elsewhere in the wider organisations, and those that were recruited from within the communities (sometimes in an unpaid capacity).

Utilising community members to take on the role of (unpaid) Learning Champions appears to have been less effective. Where organisations were able to identify Learning Champions from within their organisation (that is, paid members of staff) this was more successful. Nevertheless, in recognition of the contribution and in order to ensure that resources are not drained from elsewhere in the organisation, such time needs to be met from the project budget.

Support Networks

Continued support from the sponsoring organisation needs to be in place. This ensures that projects have access to support when they need it, as well as encouraging project momentum. It also enables projects to have a clear link into policy and an

understanding of how their project contributes to wider social and economic agendas.

There is also a need for more opportunities to 'network' with other projects to share good practice and advice (for example, on evidence gathering, mapping soft outcomes, developing administrative systems etc). This may be in the form of regional and local networks as well as e-networks. Peer support has been found to be a particularly effective way of engendering good practice and high quality standards in post-16 learning and education and can also be utilised in community learning.

Measurement of Progress and Outcomes

All projects grappled with the challenge of measuring progress and outcomes, particularly in relation to identifying soft skills progress and distance travelled. However, much work has already been undertaken in the field to develop validated tools for measuring soft outcomes (see for example, the RARPA approach). Opportunities for shared learning such as that evidenced through the TDG's Guide to Community Learning Projects should be maximised.

Measuring this kind of soft skill progress can make an important contribution to the key goal of enhancing social skills – as recommended in the recent Webb review.

Tracking learner journeys

A more systematic approach is needed to tracking learner progress and learner journeys. Currently, this is mostly done via paper records (including the learner's individual learning records), and can be an onerous administrative task – particularly when it comes to analysing such data. However, there may be scope for the transfer of paper based records to electronic based records, thus rendering the process of demonstrating progress and outcomes less onerous. Providing data in this format can present a strong evidence base when seeking to demonstrate project effectiveness and value for money. Nevertheless, the difficulty of tracking exits from the projects remains a challenge.

Recognising informal learning

Informal learning approaches can encourage the most disadvantaged groups or communities into learning, but the value of informal learning needs to be recognised. The new Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales is developing a credit based approach for *all* learning, including informal learning, voluntary community learning, OCNs, in-house training and others that do not fall into the National Qualifications Framework. This development ensures that learning outcomes from community approaches such as the LCA will become part of a wider recognised national standard. Credits received by individuals through the framework demonstrate achievements to learners, employers and others. As has been shown in this LCA evaluation, gaining recognised awards for learning has proved to be highly beneficial to learners.

Quality control, self-regulation and peer review

Developing and maintaining consistent standards in the quality of provision ensures that learning is of an acceptable standard. Adopting a local reciprocal system of peer reviewing may help to ensure this, and will ultimately be of benefit in pursuing accreditation. Only one pilot – the TDG – was able to develop consistent and recognised quality standards.

Accreditation

Where possible, learning activities need to be focused on achieving accreditation. Whilst not all learners may (initially) be suited to following a structured learning programme, many accredited options have a large degree of flexibility enabling the learner to develop at their own pace and to undertake learning that is structured around their own personal development and life skill needs. Often, learners in these environments have limited qualifications and a low self-belief that they can achieve any formal qualification. Adopting learning through, for example the Open College Network credits, ensures that learners are being rewarded for their development and that they are up-skilling which in turn will enhance the opportunities to return to more mainstream learning,

education or work. Providing accreditation to learners may also serve to add value to the programme, as viewed by external agencies.

Calculating the ‘cost’ per learner supported

There is a considerable emphasis, in policy terms, of demonstrating ‘value for money’ for interventions that seek to engage people in learning and work. However, the nature of projects such as the Learning Community Accounts pilots means that they are often working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, with the most severe needs. Quantifying the ongoing support that they need remains a challenge – particularly as it is often over an indeterminate time period and of an intangible nature (see Section 7). Furthermore, the transitional ‘pre-engagement’ phase (discussed earlier) is often particularly resource intensive but does not often feature in funding priorities or resource allocation. Other research has also highlighted the importance (and challenge) of recognising the true costs of engaging with hard to reach learners (NAO, 2007¹³; NIACE, 2007¹⁴).

Establishing community projects

Other research has suggested that it can take at least three years to establish structures, systems and recruit participants (DEMOS, 2003), and it can take much longer to embed cultural change in a community. For the LCA pilots, it is evident that the time it took to establish the projects was, in the main, far longer than anticipated. The process of embedding learning into communities that have not historically viewed themselves as a learning community is likely to take even longer – but the benefits will be reaped over generations.

¹³ National Audit Office (2007). *Helping People from Workless Households into Work*.

¹⁴ NIACE Dysgu Cymru (2007). *Welsh Assembly Government review of Adult and Community Learning*.

Annex A: Learning Community Accounts – evidence of best practice

This short summary is designed to explore best-practice strategies for establishing and maintaining learning communities.

The material for this report was gathered from secondary research sources, chiefly using Internet search engines. Whilst there appear to be relatively few examples of learning community account type projects outside of Wales, there are some transferable lessons from other initiatives that have sought to take a community approach to learning. The key findings below are drawn from these examples. Illustrative descriptions for projects are provided in the boxes. Further examples are also provided in the DEMOS report (2003) referenced elsewhere in this report.

Face to face interaction

A key factor in achieving participation in community learning projects is the use of face-to-face contact and consultation with local people.

The starting point in the learning process is the individual recognising their need to learn. Communications through various forms of media creates awareness of projects, but do not necessarily identify learning needs. The promoters when speaking to the public face-to-face are able to suggest to the residents that they may need some kind of education by asking about their current skills sets and aspirations. Following on from this, promoters are able to recommend courses that match the requirements of residents.

The Fieldway Local Action Group (FLAG) project in Croydon used this to great effect. The FLAG project targeted New Addington; at the time the third largest council estate in Europe. The idea was to take people who had been educated through the project and train them to promote learning in their community themselves.

These local residents acted as “Learning Promoters”, giving encouragement and information to individuals on a face-to-face basis. The promoters went out in pairs and introduced themselves door-to-door and encouraged people to think about learning. The promoters were offered incentives for their work, including expenses and small contributions to spend on their own learning. This approach has been incredibly successful, many of the courses are now full and 70% of new students have joined because of the efforts of the promoters.

The promoters themselves live in the area and understand the culture of the community. Residents are able to identify with the promoters, and aspire to their learning achievements. The promoters adopt a “if I can do it, so can you” approach to selling the cause.

Furthermore, door-to-door canvassing is a very useful in terms of identifying barriers to participation¹⁵. Residents are able to explain to the promoters what exactly is preventing them from participating in learning activities. These findings can be fed back to the organisation for the purpose of developing strategies to counter-act them.

Finally, this approach generates a considerable amount of word of mouth messages, resulting in highly credible information being disseminated through the community. The promoters and the residents are able to create a “buzz” in the area and a sense of commitment to the community; this is essentially free advertising. Moreover, mobilising existing learners as ‘ambassadors’ for the learning approach can be more effective than others such as practitioners or others from outside of the community.

Basildon Adult Community College, (BACC) started its Community Learning Ambassadors (CLA) project in 2003 and targeted at residents of Northlands Park in Basildon. Its aim was to increase their participation in post-16 learning by employing local Community Learning Ambassadors as champions.

The project sought to increase the number of residents taking part in training and education in order to improve their skills, to increase the take-up of new learners, whilst also seeking to provide progression opportunities for existing learners.

By using local residents who have already engaged in adult learning, the project sought to provide role models in the community. Having addressed their own skills issues, Community Learning Ambassadors were well placed to promote learning opportunities amongst residents.

Meeting people’s needs

There is a recent view that much of today’s current education and training provision is led to a great extent by providers – a so-called ‘provider-led mentality’¹⁶, with little or no emphasis on the learner’s individual requirements. Community learning projects need to be

¹⁵ Department for Education and Skills, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres, Case Study – Hatchford CARE (Solihull) - www.skills.org.uk/case05.pdf

¹⁶ Learning Communities: Strengthening lifelong learning through practice; local organisations and community learning – DEMOS report 2001

designed with the local community's needs in mind. Focus groups, door-to-door visits and even postal questionnaires can help ascertain individual learning requirements and gaps in education. The Scottish Executive highlights the importance of helping learners develop a personal vision, so that they are clearer about what they want out of their education and become more self-directed as learners. Finding ways to help learners make the transition from 'passive' learners - where the system tells them what they should learn - to 'self directing' learners - where they are more conscious of their personal goals and seek the learning they need to achieve their goals - should become embedded as a key role of the learning sector¹⁷.

The College in the Community project in Norwich was run as a pilot from September 2000 to July 2001. The main aim of the project was to enable local residents to improve their skills and qualifications through providing courses located in the area.

Consultation with the public was carefully conducted, including informal breakfast meetings in the Community Centre. In the end, it was the community members who decided what sort of learning opportunities was to be provided. The importance of providing facilities and support for community members with young children was also identified during the consultation process, and because of this, high-quality on-site crèche facilities were made available to the learners.

Local people were deployed as 'community champions'. The learners were able to trust and relate to the community champions as they were from similar backgrounds and social settings. The similarities in culture created a more comfortable atmosphere for the learners.

Moreover, the project management team provided courses with catchy names that signified in a non-threatening way the problems that needed to be addressed. Courses included: 'Beat those nasty numbers!', 'Jazz up your junk' and 'Maths for the terrified!'

SOURCE:

New Deal for Communities: The National Evaluation – Research report 29

Raising Awareness

One of the key objectives of the community learning planning process should be to create a high level of awareness among the local people. Word of mouth, as mentioned above, is extremely effective here, but posters and flyers are also useful. Other ideas include producing regular newsletters and inserting them in local newspapers, providing regular briefings to media and conducting surveys to ask the public about their views on learning opportunities.

¹⁷ The Scottish Executive – Learning to Improve: Quality Approaches for Lifelong Learning - 2005

Open days and special events such as family days and Christmas parties are also an effective way of promotion, plus this also creates further opportunities to communicate face-to-face and network with the community.

Effective use of local websites and ensuring any positive news is passed onto local radio or newspapers can also help to keep the project in the public sphere. One of the success factors of the East Leeds Family Learning Centre has been the ability to cultivate relationships with sympathetic local journalists.¹⁸

The Southwark Works! Programme in Aylesbury, specifically aimed at targeting hard to reach groups, has used marketing communications to good effect.

The project is publicised heavily on the main estate with leaflet drops and door-to-door visits being conducted regularly. Newsletters produced by the New Deal for Communities group also carry details of the service.

Furthermore, a huge percentage of clients come to the project having heard of it through both current and previous users.

Feedback is also encouraged and user satisfaction questionnaires are sent out on a regular basis to all clients giving them the opportunity to make suggestions for improvements.

SOURCE: www.renewal.net - Careers Outreach and Counselling Service on the Aylesbury Estate, Southwark

Monitoring, evaluation and accreditation

It is extremely important to monitor and evaluate the impact of the project. Strategies here include keeping records of participants and actively seeking feedback from all those involved in the project (including participants, staff and other stakeholders). Seeking feedback should be an on-going process concerning the things that went well or not so well. If feedback is carried out infrequently or in retrospect it may be too late to take corrective action.

In terms of accreditation, the work of Foley (1999) suggests that there is a need to make *explicit* the learning that has occurred simply to make learners aware of the skills gained, to name them, so that they can 'market' themselves more effectively and so maximise the learning outcomes.

On the other hand, accreditation may have confidence-boosting effects and allows learners to achieve a 'tangible' qualification. A

¹⁸ Department for Education and Skills – Case Study, East Leeds Family Learning Centre

recognised qualification is particularly important for those intending to seek employment or enrolling for further educational studies¹⁹. Regardless of whether accreditation is used or not, it is important to track and recognise progression.

The role of intermediaries

Intermediaries can play an important role in engaging communities in learning activities. Such intermediaries comprise a diverse range of human resources and organisations including community development workers, youth workers, Job Centre staff, career guidance specialists and religious leaders to name but a few. Low salaries and difficulties in funding these intermediaries leads to short termism and identified intermediaries disappear after only a short time.²⁰ Appropriate funding, training, integration and coordination of these entities may help facilitate learning engagement by creating cohesion and providing a strong support infrastructure within the community.

Conclusion

Research carried out as a part of the New Deal for Communities project in 2005 concluded that it was important to focus on three main areas when developing strategies to drive community engagement. These three points neatly summarise the contents of this short report.

Processes involved in successful community engagement²¹:

- Project delivery: the timely completion of visible and well branded projects that meet local needs
- Consultation and involvement: a wide ranging approach to consultation and involvement and a clear willingness to be seen to respond to that consultation
- Communications: tailored, frequent, regular, attractive and innovation instruments through which to communicate with different constituencies about plans, progress, partnership working and funding opportunities.

¹⁹ World Wide Learn - <http://www.worldwidelearn.com/accreditation/accreditation-process-benefits.htm>

²⁰ Engaging communities in learning – Learning and Skills Development Agency for Wales, 2002

²¹ New Deal for Communities 2001-2005, An Interim Evaluation – Sheffield Hallam University