

The role of adult learning in community renewal: Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities programmes

This survey report evaluates aspects of adult and community learning and its impact on community renewal. Between September and December 2007, inspectors visited 21 adult and community learning services and 30 subcontracted voluntary and community based providers who were receiving Learning and Skills Council funding for Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities. The survey explores a range of delivery models, gives examples of good practice and makes recommendations for improvement.

Age group: 19+

Published: September 2008

Reference no: 070228

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Reference no. 070228

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Executive summary

Between September and December 2007, four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector visited 21 adult and community learning services and 30 subcontracted voluntary and community providers to survey Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded learning. Providers in the sample were selected in order to identify methods of good practice in different types of provider, modes of delivery and geographical location.

The Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities fund was launched by the Learning and Skills Councils in 2002. The fund is designed to support the development and delivery of learning opportunities for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and to build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to undertake this work. It forms part of the *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, the Government's strategy to close the widening gap between the richest and poorest areas of the country:

'The strategy's objective is that in the long-term [the most deprived areas] will be transformed into self-standing, productive and thriving communities. They will become places where people want to live, with opportunities for young people, employment for job seekers, support for older or disabled people and security for all members of the community.'¹

The Learning and Skills Council provides in the region of £10 million each year to support Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities capital projects and £20 million annually on Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities learning initiatives. For the funding round 2007–08 the Learning and Skills Council issued new guidance which required a stronger focus on employability as a main outcome.

The survey focused on four main questions.

- How do providers ensure they are reaching the target group?
- What contribution do the learning programmes make to community renewal and cohesion?
- How successful is the work in delivering pre-employment outcomes, information, advice and guidance and sustainable paid and unpaid elements to employment?
- How is self-evaluation used to improve the service at an individual, group and community level?

¹ Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Factsheet No [1] *What is neighbourhood renewal?*, Key Issue 6, 2003. Can be found at www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/displaypagedoc.asp?id=147

The adult and community learning providers in this survey had a very clear view of the target groups within their communities that would benefit from Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding. They worked well with voluntary and community organisations to ensure the funding reached those most in need. Partnership arrangements, including links between adult and community learning providers and a wide range of local voluntary, community and statutory organisations, were strong and effective in meeting the communities' diverse range of needs. However, the monitoring of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding to ensure effective targeting of provision was not always sufficiently systematic across all 21 adult and community learning main contract holders.

The processes developed to access Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funds by the 21 adult and community learning providers visited were clear, fair and generally well understood by most organisations that applied. The processes were often well supported by good information and advice on completing bids and the adult and community learning providers went to considerable lengths to consult local organisations on this work. Additional funds obtained from large voluntary organisations, charitable trusts and other government initiatives were used very effectively to extend and complement Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities initiatives. However, the providers were often unable to sustain community development initiatives because of the short-term nature of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding. Local Learning and Skills Councils were not consistent in their allocation of funding for each learner, which was often based on historical precedent. A tenth of providers were working in a generous financial environment while others were struggling to provide a service.

Overall, the survey found that Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded projects made a good contribution to neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities projects successfully brought communities together. Approximately a third of the provision included in the survey focused on helping learners to develop skills associated with community leadership, democratic involvement and the ability to secure and manage community assets. The success of projects often depended upon individual community activists or champions to drive initiatives. The more successful projects were firmly embedded in well established community organisations that received a range of funding and were linked closely with wider council strategies. Resources were managed effectively to support community learning and to improve and develop the learning resources infrastructure for specific communities.

The revised funding guidelines introduced in 2007 and emphasising employability skills have influenced the nature of provision and the kinds of community groups bidding for funds, although employability skills had always featured as a strand of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities. There is a danger that the focus on employability will narrow the range of provision and distort the distinctive nature of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work. The preparation of individual learners for further training and/or employment was generally successful,

but the impact of such work was unclear. Three quarters of the providers had qualitative targets for increasing the focus on skills for jobs and had incorporated these into their Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities strategies for 2007–08 and beyond. Definitions of skills for jobs differed widely among the providers as did their response to embracing the new funding criteria.

The provision of information, advice and guidance was well embedded in some Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities programmes and was often one aspect of the criteria for funding. However, some information, advice and guidance provision was too dependent upon the personal knowledge and interests of individual tutors or community development workers. The identification and provision of progression routes was satisfactory and improving in the better providers; however, assessing the value and take up of further learning or employment was underdeveloped and data was not gathered systematically by all the providers surveyed. Three quarters of the providers identified the cuts to adult funding for further education colleges as a significant barrier to the planning of progression routes.

In the 21 adult and community learning providers surveyed, quality assurance arrangements were not robust enough and were applied inconsistently. Plans to evaluate the impact of the use of new Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding arrangements for 2007–08 were not developed sufficiently and there had been no systematic evaluation of the impact of the use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding by the Learning and Skills Council, local authorities or providers themselves since the programme started in 2002. Monitoring of the provision did not make qualitative judgements about the impact and effectiveness of the work, but mainly related to targets set for the participation rates of specific learners. Self-evaluation focused mainly on budgeting. The quality of provision was not standardised or evaluated nationally.

Key findings

- Partnership arrangements for the use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding were well established and met a diverse range of needs. Links between the providers of adult and community learning surveyed and a wide range of local voluntary, community and statutory organisations were strong and effective.
- Many communities received well coordinated input from a number of sources and those which worked in close partnership with community police, primary care trusts, churches and faith groups, successfully demonstrated community cohesion.
- Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities projects were clearly linked with wider local authority strategies.
- Bidding processes for the allocation of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding were transparent and fair. The providers in the survey

made good use of additional funding streams to enrich and extend Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded initiatives.

- The providers targeted Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding well. However, the monitoring of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding to ensure effective targeting of provision was not always systematic enough across all 21 of the adult and community learning contract holders.
- Projects that generated collective action such as organising events were successful in bringing communities together. In many of the 21 adult and community learning provider areas learners gained qualifications, progressed to other forms of learning and had higher levels of engagement with their local schools.
- Three quarters of the projects had initial success, but only a tenth became permanently established. The success of projects often depended upon particular individuals from the community who were activists or champions to drive initiatives.
- Three quarters of the providers surveyed ably directed Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funds to employability training in line with recent guidance; however, in a quarter of cases, revised guidance had not been received until too late in the funding cycle and the provision remained predominantly focused on widening participation. A third of providers raised concerns that the revised guidelines would narrow the range of provision and distort the distinctive nature of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work.
- Definitions of skills for jobs differed widely among providers as did their response to embracing these new criteria. Much of the provision was successful in preparing individual learners for further training and/or employment, but there was little sense of the overall impact of such work.
- The provision of information, advice and guidance was well established in some Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities programmes. Some such provision was over-reliant on the motivation and knowledge of individual tutors or development workers.
- A third of providers identified the cuts in funding for adult provision at further education colleges as a significant barrier to the planning of progression routes.
- There has not been enough systematic evaluation of the impact of the use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding. Two thirds of providers did not have sufficiently developed plans to evaluate the impact of the use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding for the new 2007–08 funding arrangements. The quality of provision is not standardised or evaluated nationally.

Recommendations

The survey identified many aspects of good practice in Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded adult and community learning. To improve the quality of provision further, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council should:

- systematically monitor the targeting of provision to ensure that funding is reaching beneficiaries from the most deprived communities in England
- review Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding to include a longer term, structured and integrated view of neighbourhood renewal that supports the development of sustainable community projects
- establish greater clarity and agreement over definitions of skills for jobs and employability and the criteria for measuring successful outcomes
- ensure the systematic evaluation of the impact of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded initiatives at national and regional level
- provide greater clarity on how Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding relates to broader government agenda, policies and national developments

All providers should:

- systematically monitor the targeting of provision across local communities to ensure fair and equitable distribution of funds and that strategies to target communities are fully implemented
- place a stronger emphasis on sustainability and outcomes when planning Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded initiatives to support self-management
- systematically monitor and evaluate achievement and progression outcomes to support improvements in provision
- improve the quality of information, advice and guidance
- ensure the systematic evaluation of the impact of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funded initiatives on local communities.

Community renewal and community cohesion

Links between community renewal initiatives and community cohesion are often strong. Many community projects involving employability skills development activities

include work with marginalised and disaffected groups in deprived communities, where a lack of community cohesion is identified as a concern.

What works in economic development for deprived neighbourhoods?, published in May 2007 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, describes a range of good work by communities to promote economic development in deprived areas and the contribution this makes to community renewal.²

‘The idea of providing sustainable employment as a route out of poverty and social exclusion is central to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In recent years, registered unemployment has declined substantially across the country as a whole, but worklessness continues to be a serious issue in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, for two sets of reasons:

- Despite the overall increase in employment in recent years, spatial disparities locally have continued to grow: once upon a time, there were major regional differences in levels of unemployment; there are now differences within regions, in every region of the country.
- Alongside the reduction in numbers of registered unemployed claiming Jobseekers Allowance, there have been significant increases in numbers of workless people claiming Incapacity Benefit and many disadvantaged neighbourhoods contain disproportionate numbers of incapacity benefit claimants.’

The accepted definition of ‘community cohesion’ agreed by the Improvement and Development Agency, the Local Government Association and the Home Office was first published in the Local Government Association’s 2002 *Guidance on community cohesion* :

‘A cohesive community is one where:

there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities

the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued

those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities

² *What works in economic development for deprived neighbourhoods?*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007.

strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.’³

Significant aspects of community cohesion work are the awareness, understanding, knowledge and skills deployed to help individuals, groups and communities to identify common areas and agree common strategies. This process is close to what is sometimes called the practice of conflict resolution, and is relevant to community development, community health and education, youth work, anti-racist practice and equality work. Many community organisations which are funded to develop employability skills with specific community members will also contribute to community cohesion.

In the funding round for 2007–08 the Learning and Skills Council revised the aims and purpose of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities initiative and issued new guidance to organisations wanting to access this funding stream. The new guidance clearly shows a strong focus on employability as a main outcome from Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding with the Learning and Skills Council aiming to spend 75% of its funds to this end. However, widening the provider base and engaging local community-based, voluntary organisations through capacity building activities are also central to the new funding arrangements.

The role of adult and community learning is evolving in response to changes in policy. This survey examines the distinctive role and impact of adult learning in contributing to the regeneration of local communities, often as part of a wider range of strategies, including community cohesion. Particular attention has been given to the role played by local authorities and work in inner city and rural settings.

The structure and targeting of provision

1. Partnership arrangements for the use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding were well established in two thirds of the providers surveyed. For example in Berkshire, the six unitary authorities worked very effectively through the Berkshire Neighbourhood Learning Centre Partnership which included the six adult and community learning services within the unitary authorities. Areas that were assessed as being more affluent (West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham) have worked hard to gain recognition for the fact that within these authorities pockets of social deprivation exist, and include vulnerable adults whose needs are as significant as those in areas such as Slough and Reading where the needs may be more apparent. The diverse range of needs across the different unitary authorities was clearly recognised in the funding allocations, in what the adult and community learning providers in Berkshire found to be an open and transparent process.

³ *Guidance on community cohesion*, Local Government Association, 2002.

2. Two thirds of the adult and community learning providers in the survey received Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding allocations directly from their local Learning and Skills Council. Overall responsibilities for Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work lay with these main adult and community learning contract holders, but a significant volume of work was carried out with voluntary and community partners and subcontractors. Links between the adult and community learning providers surveyed and a wide range of local voluntary, community and statutory organisations were strong and productive, with formal and informal arrangements in place. Key partners included local schools and colleges, primary care trusts, faith groups, neighbourhood community centres and numerous voluntary sector organisations, from national organisations such as Age Concern and Mencap to much smaller and more local groups.
3. Well established collaborative arrangements contributed to the strength of neighbourhood learning networks and to the better identification and understanding of local needs. Voluntary and community partners played a key role in the planning and delivery of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded provision; they greatly supported targeted work with individual learners, groups and local communities and provided good opportunities for the engagement and development of volunteers; in many instances they also provided learners with improved access to additional resources and community venues. The close relationships that these partner organisations and groups have with their local communities can open doors to marginalised individuals and groups that may otherwise remain closed.
4. All the adult and community learning providers worked hard to ensure that any bidding processes for the allocation of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding were transparent and applied fairly, identifying clear criteria for applications. Such processes were often well supported by good information and advice on completing bids. For example, one of the providers held 'bidding surgery advice sessions' where voluntary, community and faith sector bidders received useful advice in completing documents and producing good quality bids which were relevant to the particular funding stream. Where Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities project proposals were not appropriate to the funding stream, the adult and community learning providers directed bidders to other possible sources of funding. A third of the providers included representatives from the various communities on grant approval panels, to help ensure that the application process was equitable and fair.
5. The 21 adult and community learning contract holders and their subcontracted providers made good use of additional funding streams to enrich and extend Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded initiatives. For example, jointly funded health workers took a key role in planning and organising provision with health related outcomes in Barnsley. The healthy living partnership in Calderdale worked only with residents of the Park Ward who were mainly people at risk of heart disease, or with diabetes or poor

mental health. Many service users were from south Asian communities. Course facilities included childcare so that women with young children could participate. Many projects were provided in areas which also received neighbourhood renewal funding.

6. Providers targeted Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding well. Adult and community learning providers targeted the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities provision in some of the most deprived communities within local neighbourhoods. They specifically targeted individuals, groups and communities from the Super Output Areas of disadvantage, which are some of the most deprived areas in the country. Providers made good use of local labour market information and drew on extensive national, regional and local data to help identify needs; to support decisions about which specific needs they plan to meet; to set timescales and targets; and to consider the range of strategies they might use to support local people in meeting those needs. The adult and community learning providers surveyed were highly effective in helping to engage and work with specific, targeted groups such as people with disabilities, tenants associations, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, young offenders, the homeless and the elderly.

‘I don’t know what I would have done if I hadn’t come to the Spires project. Not only do I get to meet people, particularly my friend, but I get support from the project workers... I get help with my housing needs and I learn new skills. It keeps me sane.’ (Participant, the Spires Project for homeless people, London Borough of Lambeth.)

Case study: Cambridgeshire County Council – an example of targeted work with adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Fenland Area Community Enterprise Trust (FACET), March, Cambridgeshire.

FACET is a social training enterprise group which provides a range of work, leisure and learning opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the Fenland area. It is run on a charitable basis and is well established in a former county council training centre on a local industrial estate. It offers work experience and training in furniture manufacture, information and communications technology and horticulture. In partnership with a local college it also offers skills for work, skills for life and the Mencap essential skills programme. Tutors are supported by learning support assistants and volunteers. In addition, it provides independent living skills training for disabled adults who plan to live independently or who are currently in supported housing. FACET receives Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding to provide a job club for its user group. Learners attend an eight week

course which can include health and safety awareness, curriculum vitae preparation, jobsearch, interview skills, travel training, job tasters and work visits. Learners are gaining confidence in job interview scenarios and are able to identify their skills and knowledge and apply these to potential work opportunities. The job club works effectively in tandem with the training and social enterprise activities run by the Trust.

7. Managers and staff in roles such as community development worker or community researcher made good use of their extensive local knowledge and expertise to help target Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding. This supplemented and enhanced the range of other intelligence available. The better providers made good use of learning champions, who came from the targeted local neighbourhoods and communities themselves and who received training to work with local people to identify what specific learning opportunities and resources would best help them to meet their needs and aspirations.
8. The better providers in the survey placed a strong emphasis on consultation and communication with service users. For example, in 2007 for the second year running the learning communities team of Bristol City Council organised a well attended citizens' conference, where local Bristol people were able to express their views on the kind of learning opportunities they would like to see developed. This year's key theme was about literacy and how to involve more people in literacy learning. A detailed report on the outcomes of the consultation conference was produced to support discussions with local people about planning the development of learning opportunities.
9. The monitoring of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding to ensure effective targeting of provision was not always systematic enough among all main contract holders. Approximately half of the 21 adult and community learning providers carried out regular and detailed audits of provision and systematically analysed monthly returns by all of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities provision within a particular contract. The weaker providers did not have sufficient information about the extent to which they had met their targets.

The contribution that Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities learning programmes make to community renewal and community cohesion

10. Projects that generated collective action such as organising events were very successful in bringing communities together. Such events included fun days at community centres, pensioners' outings, and collective campaigning for the installation of a zebra crossing. In three quarters of the 21 adult and community learning providers, learners gained qualifications and progressed into other forms of learning. In Berkshire, for example, learners who became

learning champions became more involved in their children's schools. In Bristol the work of the learning champions was a good example of the contribution of learning programmes to community renewal and cohesion. Learning champions came from the targeted communities, received good individual support and made good individual progress. They developed communication and presentation skills, gained accreditation and became involved with local community groups to actively support developments in their communities, for example children's summer play activities, tenant association newsletters, community campaigns and helping parents to set up a community playgroup. 'Being defeated is only temporary, it is giving up that makes it permanent.' This statement was made by a participant in an arts project in Kirklees when asked to comment on how he tackled barriers to his personal learning.

11. Many of the learning champions observed in the survey represented their communities on a wide range of community based organisations and activities and many progressed into employment. They played a central role in articulating the learning needs of people within the communities they represented and in communicating these needs to the community development workers and to the learning communities team. This team also actively supported capacity building within the voluntary sector, such as developing a quality resource pack and delivering a wide range of training opportunities for voluntary sector workers and for volunteers.

Case study; Bristol City Council Learning Communities Team – clearly targeted curriculum development to meet Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities employability criteria

A good example of clearly targeted and highly innovative curriculum development supported through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding is the project in Bristol, organised and delivered through Bristol City Council's learning communities team. The key aim of this project is to raise the aspirations of people living in disadvantaged communities in Bristol and to support change for themselves, their families and their communities. This is delivered through a community-based 10-week course. A pilot project in 2007 was very successful, with good feedback from the participants who valued highly their learning experiences. All learners assessed their current lifestyle and identified positive and negative factors affecting their health, finances, skill levels and confidence in their employability, and also the impact on their families and on their local community. Learners were encouraged to articulate their aspirations such as 'What do I want to be?' through a range of very creative activities. For example, they designed their own T-shirts on the theme of what they wanted to be, with a strong emphasis on expressing their ideas creatively; then they printed, discussed and wore the shirts as a tangible reminder of their aspirations. They really enjoyed this activity and found it very helpful in focusing on their plans for the future. The pilot

course ended with a conference, with successful and inspiring motivational speakers from the targeted local communities themselves and learners fired with enthusiasm for the next steps. Plans are now in place to offer this programme across many other disadvantaged areas in Bristol.

12. Those communities receiving input from a number of sources and which worked in partnership with community police, primary care trusts, churches and faith groups successfully demonstrated community cohesion. The better groups were active in planning and delivering provision and in providing a key focus in the identification of local needs through intelligence about the communities they served. The close relationships such groups had with their local communities generated trust and opened doors to marginalised groups and individuals that may have remained closed to outside or professional organisations. For example, in Barnsley the engagement of disaffected young people in learning dry stone walling resulted in significant repairs to vandalised walls and improvements to the general appearance of a local park.
13. It is difficult to establish the degree to which individual Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding initiatives contribute to positive developments linked to community learning activities. It is likely that the coordination of multi-agency work collectively results in improvements, rather than any single intervention. It is easy to see the impact that training has on, for example, learning champions, but harder to measure the impact they then have on local communities. For a quarter of the providers in the survey, taster sessions led the same groups of learners through a series of short activities without any plan to raise aspirations, or to do anything more than keep them occupied. While there are obvious benefits in bringing people together in mutually rewarding circumstances to build greater commitment and understanding, the challenge remains in determining at what point these learners should move to the next stage in mainstream provision. This was not done systematically enough by the providers surveyed and progression routes were not clearly defined.
14. Three quarters of the projects had initial success, but only a tenth became permanently established. There were examples of groups that became self-managing and received their own funding. In Rotherham, for example, about half of the groups that received Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding in 2005–06 were judged to meet the quality requirements for sustainable mainstream funding for learning in 2006–07. However, many arrangements to mainstream projects were underdeveloped. There was often insufficient focus on sustainability at the bidding stage for funding. Only a minority of the projects visited requested information about plans for sustainability. A prerequisite of the Bath and North East Somerset provider was that Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities projects formed part of a properly managed programme.

15. It takes a long time to build networks, develop trust and assure community partners, such as faith organisations, community groups and other established voluntary sector schemes, of the quality of the lead partner's work. The success of many projects depended upon particular individuals from the community who were activists or champions to drive initiatives. When these individuals left, there was frequently no one to continue the work. Career progression, particularly for those who wanted to stay in the role rather than progress to other training or employment, was unclear. Progression within volunteer courses was often underdeveloped and information, advice and guidance were ineffective. In a quarter of the adult and community learning providers no link was made between the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work and learning champion work or other adult and community learning provision within the council, or even the work of other departments involved in neighbourhood renewal.

Case study: London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Adult Education Service – The LAMP Project

The LAMP project is a mentoring project. It was originally managed by a partnership with the Adult Education Service as the lead partner. In January 2007 the project, with local Learning and Skills Council approval, underwent a step-change. The management of the project was allocated solely to the Adult Education Service and a new coordinator was appointed. A more sophisticated model of mentorship was adopted and the programme was redesigned. This is now accredited by the Local Open College Network as leading to a Level 2 part qualification in mentoring. It aims to attract to the programme people who are already active in their communities and who already have some form of qualification at Level 2 or above. While at first sight this seems to be at odds with the purposes of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities, the provider aims to select applicants who will be able to serve as role models for the people whom they mentor and who are committed to reinvesting in the community. The selection process has been changed and strengthened to reflect the changed requirements.

The taught course lasts for 10 weeks, with a one-day session each week. Additionally, participants have supervision sessions with the course coordinator, carry out assignments, complete a portfolio and undertake 10 hours of practical mentoring experience. Information, advice and guidance are integral elements of the programme. All learners have the opportunity to meet one of the service's qualified information, advice and guidance workers in order to draw up a personal action plan related to their progression. Progress against this action plan is reviewed regularly by the tutor and the learner together.

There were 16 graduates from the course in the period January to July 2007. This represents a retention rate of 80% and includes all of those who completed achieved the Level 2 qualification.

This is a small, labour-intensive project. Nevertheless, there is a clear vision for the project; the model that underpins it is a powerful one, and its effects are beginning to be felt. The project has the potential to have a significant impact:

- in terms of learner 'persistence' – enabling learners who are at risk of dropping out of their course or giving up on their community role to carry on and achieve
- as a multiplier – enabling 'graduates' to pass on their skills to others
- as a catalyst – raising people's aspirations about what they can achieve.

It is unfortunate that the short-term nature of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding does not permit the provider more space to 'mature' the product before the pressures to find alternative funding or wind down the project are felt.

16. Three quarters of the subcontracted Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded projects were clearly linked with wider adult and community learning provider and council strategies. These included strategies for neighbourhood renewal, employment and skills, Every Child Matters, safer communities and improving health outcomes. A quarter of the adult and community learning providers helpfully cross-referenced these links in their own strategic planning documents. At Bath and North East Somerset, links to other areas of the council involved in regeneration work, such as economic development and the extended schools programme, were productive. In Gateshead the council supported and developed community activists through an introduction to youth and community learning course.
17. The learning funded through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities was often a part of a voluntary sector subcontractor's wider programme aimed at social inclusion and self-empowerment. At Hangleton and Knoll in Sussex, programmes were particularly successful where initiatives were embedded within a community development project which was managed by a board of trustees, most of whom were local residents. The learning element of a voluntary sector subcontractor's programme often formalised its structure and helped it to clarify its direction, goals and the need for further learning. Portsmouth Access to Video Equipment was a new community organisation formed by Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities learners. At Portsmouth refugees used the digital media suite to develop a film about how to access refugee support services across the city. At Sussex's Whitehawk Inn, encouraging active participation by local people in the running of the centre was important to the success of the project and its integration with the local

community. Participants made friends and felt less isolated and more part of the local community. In Greenwich the community learning champions' project was directly related to empowering people to take an active role in their own communities.

18. The survey identified initiatives that focused effectively on training people from local communities in community leadership skills such as community research, which gave them the skills and knowledge to become learning champions. These initiatives provided training in information, advice and guidance skills, mentoring skills, community development, and training courses for the trainer. In Bristol, Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding was used well for training, supporting and employing learning champions. It was also used to develop a very useful quality pack for the voluntary sector, to support them in developing quality improvement processes for Learning and Skills Council funding requirements and the Common Inspection Framework. For 2007–08, funding in Bristol was also being used to set up employment related training within the voluntary sector. Learning champions were being developed in Cambridgeshire and the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding dovetailed with other community based funding projects such as that funded through Investing in Communities in Ramsey. This project was a self-managed group and they were applying for trust status.

Case study: Engaging communities in democratic processes

Kirklees local authority has supported community organisations in carrying out their own research into learning needs in their community, using Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding. Local people are recruited and trained to interview other local people to find out learning needs and interests, attitudinal and other barriers to learning. The value of this approach is that it is clearly based on consultation with local people and that it provides an accurate picture of identified learning needs. It aims to help build the capacity of community organisations and local residents to understand and identify local needs. Community interviewers are recruited from the local area and bring with them good local knowledge. It has been found that local people respond more fully to people with whom they have a lot in common. Some interviewers are required to speak, read and write a local community language. All must be able to scribe but are not usually educated to a higher level. They receive training and regular support in the activity. Findings are analysed with the help of a local social enterprise. Results are fed back into neighbourhood learning networks and local community organisations. Local people are positive about the outcome, especially as the activity is directed by other local people. The findings complement and sometimes help modify the more generic findings from other forms of market intelligence and data. Some research is targeted at specific groups, such as men, to discover reasons for their non-participation in learning.

19. For two thirds of the providers surveyed their Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work had always featured aspects of related pre-vocational activity, and the revised guidelines have brought this more to the fore. However, in a quarter of cases, revised guidance had not been received until August 2007, and provision remained predominantly focused on widening participation. A quarter of the providers raised concerns that the revised guidelines would narrow the range of provision and distort the distinctive nature of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities. In Lambeth, the focus on skills for jobs influenced the provision this year and the service refocused the criteria for funding issued to local voluntary and community groups in line with new requirements. At the Waaberi Community Development Association in Lambeth there had always been a focus on developing language skills which ran alongside vocational skills training such as information technology courses. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities capital funding provided new personal computers for the organisation. In Cambridgeshire the focus on employment related skills was part of the criteria for this year's bid. So, for example, projects to develop employment skills such as CV writing, job searching and developing interview skills were prioritised. In Bristol, the community development workers were set clear targets to commission and procure employment related activities from the voluntary sector. In addition, a 'learning for work' worker was recruited specifically to support and advise staff on developments for learners related to employability.
20. Resources were managed effectively by all providers surveyed. Much capital funding was used to improve and develop the learning resources infrastructure for specific communities. This included ensuring that buildings had connectivity for information technology classes and that they had flexible room space for different groups and activities. For example, the Berkshire Neighbourhood Learning Centre Partnership had spent the bulk of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding from 2003 to August 2007 on establishing and developing a high quality information and communications technology infrastructure for specific communities in Berkshire. This involved equipping a diverse range of learning centres across Berkshire with new hardware and software, including new computers, printers, electronic whiteboards, internet access and technical support to maintain the equipment through a central contract. Learners at these centres would otherwise have little access to new technologies and related courses, or had been working on outdated and unsuitable equipment.
- 'This training truck with all the laptops and the tutor is a great boon. I can get all the help I need to get onto the internet and learn new IT skills. Within this modern age it's a necessity.' (A member of the deaf and partially hearing group, using the Bromley Training Truck.)
21. In some social housing developments, for example in Tameside, dedicated rooms for community learning were being developed within the housing areas. In Barnsley a community classroom had been developed in a house on a

housing estate in an area of economic deprivation. Three quarters of the community providers in the survey had resources for a range of learning activities and childcare. The resources were vital in supporting a number of events that raised the profile of learning and drew the community closer together. For example, at one Barnsley community venue there was not enough interest to get a celebration off the ground in the Millennium year, but a community gala in 2006, themed 'Elsecar by the Sea', was extremely successful following community learning intervention and community support.

Preparation for employment and the provision of information, advice and guidance

22. Responses from the providers surveyed to the new Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities guidance showed a range of different interpretations of what constitutes employability skills. The Learning and Skills Council defines skills for jobs as 'an umbrella term for a range of different Learning and Skills Council activities that aim to link skills development to sustained employment' and that 'the target group is low-skilled adults aged 19+, not currently in employment, but who want to work...the aim is to have greater impact on individuals' chances of gaining both sustained employment and raising their skills levels'. A quarter of the providers interpreted skills for jobs very widely to include broader personal and employability skills and therefore felt that the new guidance added nothing new to the types of work they had carried out already. Others, such as Bristol City Council and partners in the Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium applied the new initiative in a much more focused way, interpreting it as the development of specific vocational and/or occupational skills.

Case study: Alternatives (Lighthouse Project)

Alternatives (Lighthouse Project) is a voluntary sector training provider in Knowsley that specialises in work with ex-offenders and people recovering from alcohol and substance misuse. It provides learning activities in skills for life, hospitality and catering, furniture making, information technology, hair and beauty and metalwork. One particularly successful aspect of its work is the Alleygates project, which teaches welding and fabrication skills in the production of security gates for alleyways. These gates have significantly reduced the incidence of break-ins through the rear of buildings. In hospitality, participants learn how to cook balanced meals economically using fresh ingredients. In hair and beauty, participants learn about personal presentation skills that help them take a pride in their appearance that will benefit them when they are ready to apply for work. Woodworking activities allow participants to make furniture of a very good standard that they use to furnish their homes as their lives become more settled.

A key aspect of the project is the degree of structure and support provided to reshape the lives of people with previously chaotic lifestyles. The core of this is about commitment to attendance and respect for themselves and others. Participants sit down together, in a social environment, to eat the freshly cooked, well-balanced meals produced in hospitality. Many would not previously always have the money or inclination to eat properly. This structure provides a sound basis of routine and self-discipline for people with life experiences shaped by institutions or self-neglect. One participant had been a heavy drug user for many years. The high level of commitment and concentrated activity required to attend the project and complete qualifications had helped them to give up their habit. The project had promoted a change in lifestyle to one with a positive future and had helped the participant restore good relationships in their family life.

23. Much of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities work promotes pre-vocational and vocational skills well. Taken in its broadest sense, the process of engagement and commitment to a project helps learners to develop the softer skills, such as self-confidence, interpersonal skills and reliability that are essential for successful and sustained employment. For example, learners in Bury who had re-entered informal learning at one centre some time ago had developed sufficient confidence to go on to college to gain qualifications in youth work and childcare. As a result, they made an important contribution to their community as paid workers in a community nursery and in youth provision.
24. A quarter of the providers worked in a more targeted way with employers or through using employment-related data to identify specific skills needs in their local area. In Tameside, work with new employers such as a large furniture retail outlet which moved into the area had led to the development of pre-recruitment courses to help prepare potential employees to apply for jobs and cope successfully with interviews. Many of the course participants had been successful in gaining jobs. At the Horizons project, part of the Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium, many of the courses had been developed to remedy specific employment-related skills shortages in areas such as health and social care, information technology and catering. Their 'Ways into...' courses included 'Ways into customer care and retail' and 'Ways into setting up your own business'. Some longer courses included a work placement, through which learners often received offers of part or full-time employment.
25. The better providers built specific targets for skills for jobs into their Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities strategies for 2007–08 and beyond. At Portsmouth Council for example, the objectives for their art in the community programme this year included targets to increase the number of learners signposted to employment and training through enhanced information, advice and guidance, and to build effective relationships with Jobcentre Plus to open up access to the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities

programme for appropriate individuals. Target numbers were identified for learners achieving accreditation and for progression to further training or employment. A third of the providers were able to identify what proportions of 'learning for work' provision they offered, however they might interpret that phrase. For example, Bristol City Council estimated that it increased this type of work from 15% of its adult and community learning provision in 2005–06 to 23% in 2006–07, with further increases identified for 2007–08. Interviews with a range of providers throughout the north of England indicated that the typical split in their provision was quantified as a 70% focus on employability and a 30% focus on widening participation. Again, this raises the question of definitions and the variations that exist in the ways in which providers attempt to quantify what they do.

26. For the providers surveyed, the provision of suitable progression routes and evidence of actual progression to further training and/or employment external to the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities provider remains a challenge. Much evidence exists of progression, but a lot of it was anecdotal or expressed in the form of individual case histories. Three quarters of the providers were unable to quantify any overall progression rates, although there were exceptions. In Greenwich for example, 71% of the learners who successfully completed their courses up to July 2007 progressed to further learning and 18% gained employment. It remains a concern, however, that the providers surveyed were generally unable to make clear judgements about progression in their project evaluations.
27. Planning for progression was found to be at a more advanced stage of development, but was still too inconsistent. Three quarters of the providers reported that establishing effective progression opportunities was a real challenge for teams involved in Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded work. In Sussex, good use of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding meant that coordinators could be appointed to a number of projects to help learners previously enrolled on community outreach courses to progress to roles within the centres where their learning had taken place. Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities providers such as Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council had carried out detailed area progression mapping exercises with other types of provision and other providers in the locality. In Barnsley this culminated in the production of a DVD which mapped out potential vocational links for every Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities course. In Berkshire, unitary authorities had established good links between Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded provision and more mainstream programmes. A third of the providers identified the cuts to adult funding for further education colleges as a significant barrier to the planning of progression routes, particularly for learners interested in a more gentle second steps type of progression to further learning on non-accredited, vocational courses.

28. Information, advice and guidance varied considerably among the providers in the survey. Some, such as the Horizons project in Sussex and Portsmouth Council, had established this provision successfully at all stages of learners' courses. Those learners had access to well qualified in-house or external information, advice and guidance services and/or had trained community staff or learning champions to provide initial signposting and information. This facility was impartial, flexible and planned according to learners' needs and interests. For learners in weaker providers, however, the provision of information, advice and guidance was still too informal and over-reliant on the knowledge and inclination of individual tutors.

Case study

In Tameside, a group of Asian women gained the necessary employability skills and qualifications to coach and support activities such as swimming, camping and other outdoor pursuits. This opened up new opportunities for other women to engage in these activities. Although they initially carried out this work on a voluntary basis, the trained group developed sufficient organisational and community capacity building skills to receive their own Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding for their work. A young Asian man has similarly completed a range of training and qualifications and now works with other young people in his community.

The use of self-evaluation to improve the service

29. Self-evaluation was underdeveloped. All the providers visited used some form of self-assessment, but most of the documents seen referred to monitoring achievement against numerical targets set by the funding body. They were not evaluative enough to cover the whole of the learning experience and did not measure the impact of activities on communities effectively. In a third of the providers' self-evaluations, no separate consideration had been given to Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded work. There were however examples of providers where evaluation was working well. For example, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council used a well structured self-assessment proforma based on the Common Inspection Framework. Staff from project teams were involved and the resulting evaluation contributed to the overall self-assessment report for the council provision. This was similar to the approach taken by the London Boroughs of Bromley and Lambeth. Leeds City Council arranged an away day for summary reflection by officers and partners and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats analysis was used as a starting point.
30. There was an over-reliance on the benefits to individuals and insufficient focus on the analysis of this information to establish what benefits to neighbourhoods there might be. One provider was able to provide data on reductions in crime rates and anti-social behaviour over the past 12 months, but for most providers this information was anecdotal. In Bristol, the learning communities team

recognised that the full richness of the impact of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding was not always sufficiently captured in a systematic way. In order to gather much more detail on the outcomes and impact of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities-funded provision, they commissioned the University of Bristol to carry out a detailed research project and longitudinal study to measure outcomes and impact in both a quantitative and qualitative way. The project began in January 2008. In 2005, the Berkshire partnership commissioned a very useful external evaluation of the neighbourhood learning centres, which did provide an in-depth study of the extent to which the learning centres were meeting the needs of the local deprived communities.

31. Arrangements to evaluate the impact of the provision were underdeveloped. The better providers requested this type of information from projects, and some produced case studies or success stories, but in general this information was not gathered. The role of learning champions in self-evaluation was often limited. The providers did not ask learners for any feedback on the impact of the learning champions in the classroom and providers were unable to identify the impact of the role of learning champions on total enrolments. They did not receive any feedback about their performance or contribution. Learning champions did not use record keeping effectively to formally demonstrate the impact they had on groups and individual learners. In an attempt to remedy this, tutors from Portsmouth Learning Links and Portsmouth Adult and Community Education had taken part in a Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities best practice sharing event. Prior to the event, each local Learning and Skills Council Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities project held a learner focus group in which the aim was to explore the impact on the learner of taking part in an Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities course. The results were presented in an overall report at the sharing day.
32. In less effective provision many projects relied too much on learner/tutor feedback. Very little use was made of any external evaluation mechanisms. There is scope for the adult and community learning providers to strengthen their self-assessment process by asking subcontractors to evaluate the quality of support they have received from the council. Although the provider often had a reasonable sense of where improvements were needed, its planned improvement targets were not expressed sufficiently for progress to be measurable. The better providers were aware of the shortcomings in the programme and took swift action to bring about improvement; however, a third of the providers struggled to give examples of the impact of learner/tutor evaluations or of improvements made. Examples where changes had been made as a result of self-evaluation included changes in patterns of delivery, new programmes targeting specific groups, the creation of an adult learning forum, handbooks for staff and learners and new publicity materials.

33. In general, targets were set that linked to the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities contracted outcomes for engagement of new individuals and new organisations. Some targets related to the number of new initiatives established. These were monitored through regular, monthly returns produced by each project, and were generally met or exceeded. There were few examples of target-setting outside the contract requirements. Few targets were linked to the longer term benefits to individuals or communities. Three quarters of the providers monitored targets set by the Learning and Skills Council. Some small organisations found these reports onerous and the performance indicators difficult to understand. These were agreed with the local Learning and Skills Council and relate to numbers recruited, numbers progressing into further learning and employment and the number of information, advice and guidance sessions delivered. Two thirds of the providers did not have well established systems for capturing achievement and analysing progression beyond the end of the course.
34. The providers in the survey used pre-existing quality measures, such as observation of teaching and learning processes. These generally worked effectively. Monitoring activities ranged from the systematic use of monthly returns used by all providers to regular quality visits. The frequency of the latter varied between providers. In a third of the providers, visits were a well established aspect of the quality and monitoring system, but in others visits tended to be very informal and it was more difficult to see how they might be used to inform quality improvement. There were good examples of providers with a very business-like approach to running the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities provision: a strong focus on target-setting; close management of contracts; monitoring of delivery; and a lot of analysis through formal reporting structures. All learners and programmes were systematically reviewed as part of the self-assessment report process.
35. The best adult and community learning providers had a comprehensive quality manual, clearly understood by tutors. For example, at Bury Metropolitan Borough Council the programmes were subject to quality processes that had recently been reviewed and refined to make them better aligned to the voluntary and community sector. A very useful quality handbook had been produced in consultation with Re>Build, a subcontractor of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, that provided accessible information about quality requirements, documentation and processes. Good guidance about planning teaching and learning and the recognition and recording of progress and achievement process helped tutors in planning and recording for learning. Greenwich Council employed a lifelong learning officer for quality improvement who carried out regular monitoring visits and conducted lesson observations at subcontractors' sites. The officer talked to staff and learners informally as part of her visits and examined records, including observation of teaching and learning, session evaluations completed by learners and learners' end-of course evaluations. There were project meetings every two to three months and

monthly staff management meetings where the progress of all projects was reviewed.

36. Insufficient quality assurance arrangements existed in some of the voluntary and community sector organisations. Courses directly funded through the adult and community learning services came within existing quality assurance arrangements and were at least satisfactory. However, they did not specifically evaluate the impact of the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding allocation.

Notes

The survey was conducted between September and December 2007. A sample of 21 adult and community learning providers and 30 subcontracted voluntary and community providers was visited. The visits were conducted by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors held meetings with learners, tutors and managers within the local authorities and community organisations. They scrutinised policies, procedures, project proposals and self-assessment reports, and reviewed examples of learners' work. The survey included both desk and fieldwork research, and liaison with national and local Learning and Skills Councils, local authorities, providers and learners. A semi-structured interview form was used by the Ofsted team and sent to all HMI who were leading inspections of adult and community learning in the autumn term 2007. This was supplemented by information from other sources, including national and local evaluation reports from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the former Learning and Skills Development Agency, Learning and Skills Council and the voluntary sector. Particular attention was given to the role played by local authorities and work in inner city and rural settings.

Useful websites

Learning and Skills Council, LSC; www.lsc.gov.uk

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, NIACE; www.niace.org.uk

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit – coordinates cross-sector regeneration programmes and supports local strategic partnerships; www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Renewal.net is the online guide to what works in neighbourhood renewal. It includes how-to guides, case studies and project summaries; www.renewal.net

Department for Communities and Local Government – portal to a range of information on local governance; www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment

Community Cohesion Unit (Home Office);
www.gos.gov.uk/gol/People_sustain_comms/Community_cohesion/

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has offices in Manchester, London, Glasgow and Cardiff; www.equalityhumanrights.com

Adult and community learning providers and main contract holders participating in the survey

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Bradford Cathedral Centre

Bristol City Council

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Cambridgeshire County Council

Cambridge and Peterborough Learning Trust

Berkshire Neighbourhood Learning Centre Partnership

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Leeds City Council

London Borough of Bromley

London Borough of Greenwich

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

London Borough of Lambeth

Portsmouth City Council

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

Subcontracted voluntary and community based Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities projects and partners participating in the survey

Bromley Training Truck – laptop project run by Bromley Adult Education College

Crystal Palace Community Development Trust – social and economic regeneration

Community Zone – media and arts project, Lambeth

Waaberi Community Development Association – Somali organisation, Lambeth

Spires Project – for homeless and disadvantaged people, Lambeth

Fenland Area Community Enterprise Trust – social, training, enterprise group for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Bath and North East Somerset CVS

Bridge Education Centre

Hangleton and Knoll Community Centres, Sussex

Workers Education Association

Learning Links

Solent MIND, Portsmouth

Horizons Community Learning

Matov Centre, Gateshead

Sight Services – learning for visually impaired learners in information and communications technology and art.

Alternatives (Lighthouse Project)

Local Solutions

Forge Community Partnership

Association of Community Partnerships

Re>build

Mosses Centre

Greenwich Local Labour and Business

GROW – voluntary sector provider supporting women into education, work and training

Rotherham Learning Communities

Rotherham Carers Project

Brampton and West Melton Community Learning Forum

Ashton Pioneer Homes – housing and community regeneration

St Peter's Community Partnership – employment and learning

Ashton Allstars / SPY – community sports project/St Peters Youth Partnership

Hattersley Community Media.