

Effective Community Development  
A strategic framework



**A working  
document for  
the further  
education and  
skills sector**

## Background

The role of communities is gaining importance. In the coalition government's plans around the Big Society, communities are central. This comes as no surprise as grassroots decision making and devolved power to the citizen has been on the political agenda for some time. However, what has long been regarded as complementary support to public service delivery in some areas now could become the norm. Local community groups soon could be running libraries, kindergartens etc.

Such devolvement to the grassroots level also puts new requirements on to further education and skills providers. More than ever they are emerging as important place shapers and agents of social change. Within the further education and skills sector community involvement and engagement has a long tradition. However, the emerging emphasis on the role of providers in the locality requires a more strategic approach, and LSIS in conversation with the sector is developing this strategic framework to support this approach. Its purpose is not to be prescriptive, but rather to support the development and identification of suitable strategies.

LSIS defines the further education and skills sector as encompassing local authorities, third sector organisations, private training providers, specialist colleges sixth form colleges, as well as general further education colleges.

The strategic framework is considered to be an emerging document which will in the course of the year take into account new developments in the political landscape and more importantly feedback from the further education and skills sector in order to shape the strategic framework. Therefore, LSIS encourages you to help us to refine this framework. You should note that community development is a fluid term and will take different forms in different localities. Fundamentally, it is more about a journey of working with communities so that they inform and shape their services and the environment in which they live, and create a situation where consultative and facilitative working is the norm.

In 2010 and 2011, LSIS offered funding opportunities to enable further education and skills providers to test a variety of approaches to community development. You will find case studies from these projects at the community development area of the Excellence Gateway at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=316017>.

## **1. The aim of the strategic framework**

To support further education providers to identify and implement community development strategies that are sustainable, appropriate and effective.

## **2. The objectives of the strategic framework**

- To support further education providers to identify, plan and take the steps needed to position them as key drivers of and partners in community development
- To support providers to identify and develop key partnerships in order to drive community development
- To support providers to define and manage the relationships between short, medium and long term community development objectives
- To support providers to manage the relationship between neighbourhood, local and regional community development objectives
- To support providers to identify and use appropriate methods of measuring the effectiveness and impact of their community development activities

## **3. Defining Community Development**

- A community can be defined in a variety of ways: by identity/culture, place/ space, boundaries and sites of conflict, citizenship and governance, shared needs/aspirations. Advancement in technology has witnessed the rise of virtual communities defined by a shared interest
- Further education providers can best contribute to the development of such communities by understanding the learning and employment needs of those who make them up and finding appropriate ways of meeting them
- Further education providers should also explore how they might contribute towards capacity building within their communities
- To better meet the needs of learners and potential learners from communities, further education providers will need to understand the fit between their mission and local community strategic priorities
- This will need to be supported by wide ranging regional, local and neighbourhood level consultation and partnerships with employers and other community partners
- Further education providers will need to underpin all of this by accessing understanding and maximising use of all available information from their communities to shape their mix of provision
- All of this should be driven by a commitment to public service, social justice, equality and diversity and supporting those with greatest need in combination with a strategic long-term view of where the interests of the organisation may lie

#### 4. Strategic characteristics of effective community development

The further education and skills sector needs to see beyond their role as training providers and adopt a more holistic approach to support community development in its broadest sense, and has a critical role to play in working with communities to support their safety, cultural enrichment, health and environmental needs. Community development for the further education and skills sector provides a non-threatening way for adults to engage cooperatively, in activities which build social and cultural capital as well as human capital; develop community cohesion in an inclusive manner; and help people achieve greater collective well being as well as enhanced personal growth.

However, it is important for further education and skills providers to recognise that there will be organisations and groups experienced in working with disempowered communities and that unless they take a partnership approach towards community development, they are at risk of being seen as 'colonialists'. An inclusive partnership approach which understands and values what various actors, particularly local people and communities, bring to the table is an essential prerequisite for effective community development work.

A strategic approach to community development would include the following characteristics:

- It is likely to be informed by a comprehensive analysis of community needs, rooted in intelligence from the communities themselves. Further education providers need to understand the population profile of the areas they serve underpinned by knowledge of local, regional and national community and economic strategies. For example, the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010, and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) will be affected by short, medium and long term economic trends. If providers understand these communities, they will be able to assess how best they can work to support and empower them
- It is likely to require consistent, high level, high quality senior engagement with a range of regional and national agencies and partners
- It is likely to be informed by engagement with relevant government policies and priorities
- It is likely to recognise that individuals may belong to a variety of communities with sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory needs and be able to respond appropriately to that complexity
- It is likely to develop and deliver responses and programmes that empower individuals and groups to find solutions and approaches to their own challenges, through skills development and through ways of networking and organising
- It encourages further education providers as employers to recognise the need to draw upon and aim to reflect the profile of the communities they serve
- It promotes procurement processes for further education providers as businesses that utilise skills and services within their communities thereby increasing economic and social wellbeing
- It is likely to be supported and driven by mutually beneficial regional and local sources of intelligence and partners in delivery; eg, Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships
- It is likely to involve constant scanning of the funding environment to identify useable sources of short, medium and long term funding for community development activities
- It is likely to be engaged and delivering appropriately at local and neighbourhood (ward) levels and establishing linkage between these levels
- It is likely to have interlinked short, medium and long term objectives and strategies

- It is likely to be delivering a range of interventions, often in partnership with other agencies, that are aimed at both individuals and groups; eg Skills for Life programmes open to individuals, bespoke programmes of skills development for a range of agencies, or delivering support to a failing school with the National Challenge Trust
- It is likely to empower individuals and their organisations to influence and enrich public policies and services at a variety of levels, eg, through individuals informing service improvements and organisations informing local strategic partnerships
- It is likely to build the strength and independence of community organisations, eg, through community organisations becoming high quality providers in their localities
- It is likely that commitment to community development is embedded in provider and partner mission statements, strategic, financial and business plans and equality schemes

## **5. Operational activities that contribute to effective community development**

- pooling information with other providers and partners to establish a comprehensive map of needs
- mapping existing service provision by all community capacity building providers, both statutory and non-statutory
- providing evidence to funders and agencies of the long term value of community capacity building and advising them on models for more sustained and consistent funding
- considering redeployment or rationalisation of provision to fill gaps identified by communities, and seeking additional resources to fill gaps which cannot be met by rationalisation amongst existing providers
- establishing common or reciprocal objectives with other providers and partners and organising networking and cross-referral to maximise impact
- agreeing ways of capturing outcomes of community development activities, and linking mandatory indicators with other community capacity building objectives, processes and measures, eg, priorities under local area agreements, community cohesion and sustainable community strategies
- agreeing steps to bring all community development practice up to the standard of the best
- applying for funding from a variety of appropriate sources and managing a variety of financial audit systems related to this
- embedding community development activities and priorities in the job descriptions and appropriate skills in the person specifications of appropriate key staff
- providing appropriate community development related staff training for key staff to encourage cross sector working and to breakdown existing silos
- aiming to maximise community input into the development and review of existing and future provision

## **6. Underpinning values and commitments of effective community development**

The key values of community development include:

- Equality and antidiscrimination – work with communities and organisations to challenge the oppression and exclusion of individuals and groups
- Social justice – work with communities and organisations to achieve change and the long-term goal of a more equal, non-sectarian society
- Collective action – work with communities to organise, influence and take action
- Community empowerment – work with communities and organisations to ‘work together’

- Working and learning together – support individuals and communities working and learning together<sup>1</sup>

## 7. Capacity building in communities

As a central theme and outcome of effective community development, providers may wish to consider a range of areas in which they can contribute to capacity building with communities and community organisations. These could include offering support in the following areas:

- literacy and numeracy
- financial management and fundraising
- strategic communications
- strategic planning
- organisational development
- legal compliance
- advocacy
- leadership and management
- equality and diversity
- organisational skills
- IT skills

## 8. Legal and regulatory framework for community development

Ofsted has launched a consultation on proposals to revise the inspection of further education colleges, work-based learning providers, adult and community learning provision and 'Next Step' provision. The consultation aims to *'streamline and simplify'* the framework and align it more closely with the inspection framework and guidance for schools.

The paper states that in proposing revisions, Ofsted has taken into account *'the rising importance of meeting the needs of the local community for many providers in the further education and skills system where they are key players in the delivery of local priorities; this will require inspection outcomes that relate to a provider's contribution to their area's priorities'*. This could facilitate improved integration of community development partnerships and see better outcomes.

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 amended section 10 by bringing schools, colleges and JobCentre Plus under the duty to co-operate. Proposals in the Education Bill, however remove schools (including Academies), colleges and other institutions within the further education and skills sector from the list of relevant partners to which the duty to co-operate applies, and to remove Jobcentre Plus from the list once a suitable legislative vehicle becomes available. Whilst the prescriptive requirement for institutions to pay due regard to the objective of promoting economic and social-well being in the locality no longer remains, it is anticipated that this will allow greater autonomy over how to organise and co-ordinate services more effectively.

The coalition government published an Equality Strategy in December 2010. It includes a commitment to *'train a new generation of community organisers to work with communities to catalyse social action'*. This is embodied in a number of Big Society initiatives<sup>2</sup> including the:

<sup>1</sup> National Occupational Standards for Community Development 2009 LLUK

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-overview>

- [Community Organisers](#) programme which will identify, train and support 5,000 people *'who want to make a difference to their community'*;
- [Community First](#) – a new fund that will encourage social action through new and existing neighbourhood groups. The fund will *'empower people in areas with high levels of deprivation and enable them to take more responsibility for their communities'*; and
- The [National Citizen Service \(NCS\)](#) designed to bring 16 year olds from different backgrounds together over the summer to take part in residential and home-based activities such as outdoor challenges and local community projects.

## 9. Policy framework for community development

The BIS consultation, *New Challenges, New Chances* sets out proposals for the next steps in implementing the further education reform. It was followed by a review of the informal adult and community learning (IACL). The review paper sets out a number of challenges for IACL provision going forward including ensuring that funding investment delivers value for money. This includes:

- being able to demonstrate that public funding is focused on people who would not otherwise have access to learning;
- maximising fee income from those who can afford to pay; and
- providing the conditions to enable wider learning opportunities, not funded by Government, to thrive.

The paper also sets out an explicit desire for IACL to support the development of the Big Society *'in the way it is planned and delivered as well as through the activity it funds'*.

The coalition government has identified the following challenges for BIS-funded IACL.

- to clarify government objectives for spend on IACL and its role in supporting wider Government policy objectives, including the Big Society, localism, wellbeing, social inclusion and digital inclusion.
- to ensure that government funding is sufficiently focused on the most disadvantaged. However *'comfortably-off, educated learners'* pay fees which can cross-subsidise those who cannot afford to pay.
- to provide robust social and economic impact measures evidence for IACL.
- to address funding anomalies and make funding fairer.
- to create the conditions that will enable a much wider range of informal learning to thrive, *'whether this is supported by government, self-organised in local communities, delivered in the private sector or enabled through harnessing the power of the internet'*.
- to ensure that workforce training and quality assurance arrangements support the new vision for BIS-funded IACL.

An LSIS commissioned independent report from the RSA's 2020 Public Service Hub [The Further Education and Skills Sector in 2020: A Social Productivity Approach](#) provides a perspective for the further education and skills sector on possible futures. The report suggests that the amidst the myriad of policy directions, further education providers could pursue a future that is fundamentally more collaborative, networked, and socially productive; where colleges are incubators of social value and hubs for service integration; where further education serves the needs of learners through being a creative partner in local growth and service reform agendas. about citizen engagement and networks of local growth.

The idea of social productivity<sup>3</sup> represents a long-term culture change in public services, to a culture that recognises that social value is co-created between the service and user. It is an approach that puts engagement, co-production and civic responsibility at the heart of public services – creating sustainable systems that build social capacity, foster community resilience, and work with the grain of people’s lives. This learning could contribute to a longer term vision for community development.

## **10. Benefits to the communities from their involvement in effective community development and related activity**

- helping people find common causes on issues that affect them
- helping people work together on such issues under their control
- building the strengths and independence of community groups, organisations and networks
- building equity, inclusiveness, participation and cohesion amongst people and their groups and organisations
- empowering people and their organisations, where appropriate, to influence and help transform public policies and services and other factors affecting the conditions of their lives
- Improved community led service delivery that meets the needs of those they serve
- Increased skill sets within communities leading to increased individual and community economic and social well being
- Move towards a more equal and meritocratic society

## **11. Benefits to providers from their involvement in effective community development and related activity**

Benefits are likely to include:

- new streams of learner progression into and within the organisation
- new sources of paid and volunteer staff, and new sources of members of governing bodies
- direct and enhanced access to forward economic and related intelligence leading to enhanced strategic and operational planning
- access to a wide range of funding streams
- new and strengthened strategic and operational partnerships leading to increased future security and role-relevance
- contributing to the development of a positive local learning culture that stimulates ambition and encourages the demand for learning
- possible financial efficiencies arising from partnership and shared provision
- new sources of feedback on the organisation from local groups that can inform and enhance planning and delivery
- enhanced reputation
- enhanced influence
- improved inspection reports/grades

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of social productivity was developed by the Commission on 2020 Public Services. At root, it is the idea that ‘public services should explicitly be judged by the extent to which they help citizens, families and communities to achieve the social outcomes they desire.

Commission on 2020 Public Services (2010) ‘From Social Security to Social Productivity: a vision for 2020 public services’, London: 2020 Public Services Trust.

## 12. Challenges to providers seeking effective involvement in community development

Challenges can include

- funding that prioritises meeting the needs of younger learners
- managing and auditing the multiple, often relatively modest, sources of funding that can be used to drive community development
- success criteria based on qualifications gained – not getting credit for community development activity
- the difficulty of designing and agreeing widely accepted, rigorous methods of evaluating the success of community development activity when it is not plausible to base it on qualifications gained
- lack of further education provider understanding by the community and voluntary sector and lack of community and voluntary sector understanding by the further education provider
- possibility of uneven commitment to community development within the provider
- possibility of limited skills set related to effective community development within the provider's staff
- establishing an effective balance between engagement with regional and national partners and making an impact at neighbourhood level
- understanding the complexities of community structures; different communities sometimes exist within each other – sometimes in conflict: how to identify who, if anyone, speaks for or represents a community legitimately
- Communities exist around the clock – providers only work limited hours

## 13. A basis for responding to some of the challenges

- critical organisational mass may be helpful if multiple sources of small scale funding are to be levered in to drive community development. This will ensure that sufficient auditing and managerial capacity exists.
- providers may consider Viability (contract size), Flexibility (not just 16-18 or adults – the more demand led the better) and Minimum contract length as possible criteria for determining engagements
- evaluation criteria related to community development activity may include: engagement itself, progression into and within the provider, learner satisfaction levels, learner progress measured through individual portfolio and individually identified goals, demonstrable impact on the effectiveness of strategic and operational planning
- for providers beginning or accelerating the journey into community development, a priority should be given to establishing governor/board level and buy-in from the Senior Management Team
- careful choice of appropriate activity – eg, for some providers engagement with the National Challenge Trust and through it developing a role in supporting the improvement of a failing organisations may be more appropriate than working with a range of small tenants associations and other small voluntary sector organisations.