

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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Neighbourhood Learning for Regeneration – Lessons and case studies from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund (NLDCF)

Abstract

In 2002 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) launched the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund (NLDCF). The fund was designed to support the development and delivery of learning opportunities for residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and to build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) to undertake this work. It formed 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.

NIACE was commissioned by the LSC to identify effective work funded through the 2003/04 allocation of the NLDCF. This followed a full evaluation of the Fund by NIACE in 2002/03 and an early, primarily quantitative analysis of 2003/04.

This research identified a wide range of pointers to effective practice for developing and delivering high quality, responsive adult learning in neighbourhood renewal settings, based on messages drawn from the selected NLDCF projects.

Research methodology:

- ❖ A questionnaire (developed by NIACE) was sent to all local LSC NLDCF contacts, requesting nominations for projects that offered transferable practice. Twenty-eight responses were received, several of which involved local LSC evaluation reports, and 48 projects were nominated.
- ❖ NIACE arranged and ran a focus group with learners, their supporters and frontline workers from NLDCF projects in the Eastern region.
- ❖ This was supplemented by information from other sources including evaluation reports from Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Kent and Medway, Lancashire, London East, Merseyside, Staffordshire and Tyne and Wear.
- ❖ A range of illustrative case studies was also developed.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ Key messages from learners were that learning should be: purposeful; varied; feel 'adult'; develop thinking skills and the confidence to learn as well as give specific knowledge; be flexible enough to fit and grow around the learner, not the other way round; encourage learners to help, support and learn from each other, as well as from their tutor; build confidence; be well supported; and be valued properly.
- ❖ Following the pattern of the previous year, NLDCF projects funded during 2003/04 were very varied. However, some key themes emerged: employability; empowerment of learners/local people; language, literacy and numeracy skills; VCO capacity-building; improved learning opportunities; increasing social capital; widening participation in learning; neighbourhood renewal; increasing lifelong learning opportunities and community development.
- ❖ Projects worked with an equally varied range of individuals and groups, many in combination, including: activists and frontline community workers; learning advocates and champions; black and minority ethnic communities; individuals with language, literacy and numeracy skills needs; residents in poor areas; adults with learning difficulties and disabilities; refugees and asylum seekers; older people; parents; travellers; VCOs; and Neighbourhood Learning Centres.
- ❖ NLDCF was received well by LSC and project staff and learners and demonstrates the importance of flexible 'lighter touch' funding sources for outreach and community-based learning and of funding to support informal and experimental work.
- ❖ Key difficulties included: ensuring that distribution processes reached smaller VCOs; achieving consistent dispersal and reporting processes across the LSC; and the short-term nature of NLDCF which caused some difficulties for both LSC and project staff.

Recommendations

- ❖ It is important to recognise the potential and value of flexible 'lighter touch' funding sources.
- ❖ Linking short-term funding streams, such as the NLDCF, with other complementary sources, for example, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, can add significantly to their impact, particularly in relation to sustainability and finding resources for essential aspects of learning activities that are not direct delivery, such as learner support.

Output

- ❖ Turner, C. (2005) *Briefing Sheet for LSC staff*. NIACE: Leicester.
- ❖ Turner, C. (2005) *Neighbourhood Learning for Regeneration: lessons and case studies from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund*. NIACE: Leicester.

Supported by a wide-range of case studies, this publication covers various aspects of project development from essential groundwork and understanding what is needed, through partnership building, planning, tackling barriers to learning, creating imaginative and relevant curricula, to monitoring and evaluation.

Funder: Learning & Skills Council (National Office)

Duration: December 2004-July 2005

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Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

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