

Meeting community needs: notes on curriculum development

Introduction

These are notes from round tables at a NIACE seminar – *Meeting community needs: community learning providers and the voluntary sector: working together to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups*. The event, which was held on 14 January 2014, aimed to encourage dialogue between community learning providers and voluntary sector organisations, in order to understand and address key issues in meeting the needs of very disadvantaged learners, and to share current effective practice. The notes reflect the range of comments made on round tables and do not necessarily represent the views of NIACE or any other agency.

Notes from round tables on curriculum development

How can we ensure a community and learner-led approach that takes into account what individuals and communities need, and what they already have?

- Have to take small scale initiatives. Use of NLDC. Stay learner-led, few pre-prepared courses - re-designed to meet needs of different cohorts.
- Communities can't be "consulted" on what learning needs are.
- Learning Providers to act as a bridge between "gaps" and learners. Work from knowledge of learners. Be responsive. Commission out to voluntary/community sector – proposals written by VCO – e.g. to meet small employer needs.
- Learning in context of a local job but creates a specific curriculum (pick and mix).
- Packaging of offers/local knowledge.
- Learning sector and community sector have a lot in common but we don't always come together in this way. Have to meet and try to get to know each other. See what is mutually on offer. Tailor-making programmes.
- Curriculum review across county each year. Larger providers have to respond to county's policy demands. CL different across board. Time expensive, so mix small scale/larger response.

- Ignorance re. Community Learning in communities and elsewhere – e.g. different council departments.
- VCOs may not seek out.... is it a barrier?
- VCOs don't feel they can approach? Definitions "employability" "job search" may not see it as informal learning and part of what Community Learning might offer.
- Fear of college being around the table, "ripped off" (VCOs) or "make as equal" (LRNRs). Taking over "patch" (of a VCO)
- Community Learning can be what you want it to be (not just the prospectus) – but who dares to speak?
- Curriculum based on learner experience.
- Pilots can be rolled out via other partners etc – shared.
- Working across boundaries. Make new connections, new organisations, different people. Engaging JCP, libraries, health visitors – staff who have genuine contact - having awareness of community need. Engaging with what people's lives are really like, making sure things are practically based.
- Learners. Don't lose social justice/collective action/learner centred, but focus on quality of learning.
- Case to be made too for the people who are just above the most disadvantaged – and make sure they too can gain access.
- Recognising the socio-economic conditions of the learner.
- Entrepreneur courses.
- Opportunities for developing entirely new programmes.
- Pathways – skills funded learning for others – but what about learners who need even more...?
- Pilots/projects must translate into the mainstream – so can be run regularly for many.
- Curriculum development in community – e.g. active city/organising.
- Definitions: "Arts" not usually in community development but a key pathway: "sports", "crafts" – enjoying learning – maths, community development all interlinked.
- Framework on which to hang ideas, transferable skills. Draw out connections. Singing, creative art therapy etc = health professionals – have to turn it into a different language e.g. improve your cardiovascular health etc.
- Reference back – what do you do? What do you have? What do you need? What do you want to be able to do that you can't do now?
- CL – not curriculum – 'learner offer'
- Project ideas – within organisation – response to need, ex-clients as workers/try to model idea/focus groups.

How can we make sure that provider/funder requirements for minimum numbers don't limit the chances for co-production?

- Consistent funding would be better so can spread it out and commission small amounts out.
- Sub contract most of CL service. Working with partners. Pressures/SFA volumes expectations of learners numbers. Learner needs beyond the learning. Housing Associations/MH Trusts/Entrepreneur courses tried together to have life changing impact.
- Development time huge in comparison with delivery time – doesn't help a forward strategy.
- Good will is huge part of success.
- Housing Associations invest in community and employability – don't always link the two.
- Power dynamics/who funds... e.g. housing associations – bid for a contract, very different from SFA, not OFSTED – very liberating.
- Building a partnership – leave it all back at the office – if not looking for funding. If sub-contracting and commissioning then need to get into the jargon.
- Partnerships – key elements – eg. city council and migration partnerships led partly by the VCO.
- Dialogue with funder. Any flexibility?
- Take a risky view and focus on the learners – then you do meet the targets