EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PEER REVIEW INITIATIVE

Contents

[EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PEER REVIEW INITIATIVE 2](#_Toc295809738)

[Introduction 3](#_Toc295809739)

[Support from LSIS 3](#_Toc295809740)

[Background to the Community Development Peer Review 3](#_Toc295809741)

[Policy Context 4](#_Toc295809742)

[Peer Review 4](#_Toc295809743)

[The Projects 5](#_Toc295809744)

[Context 5](#_Toc295809745)

[Purpose 6](#_Toc295809746)

[Community Development 6](#_Toc295809747)

[Peer Review 7](#_Toc295809748)

[Strategies 7](#_Toc295809749)

[Reviewing Community Development Strategies 7](#_Toc295809750)

[Measuring and Evidencing Impact 7](#_Toc295809751)

[Positioning Community Development 7](#_Toc295809752)

[Methodologies and Interventions 8](#_Toc295809753)

[Defining Community Development 8](#_Toc295809754)

[Consistency and diversity 8](#_Toc295809755)

[Interventions and activities 8](#_Toc295809756)

[Relationship with Common Inspection Framework 9](#_Toc295809757)

[Learning about Community Development 9](#_Toc295809758)

[Learning about Peer Review 17](#_Toc295809759)

[Community Development as a focus for peer review 17](#_Toc295809760)

[Peer Review of Development 17](#_Toc295809761)

[The benefits of peer review 18](#_Toc295809762)

[Summary of Key Findings 18](#_Toc295809763)

[Implications for the LSIS Community Development Strategic Framework 19](#_Toc295809764)

# EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PEER REVIEW INITIATIVE

### Introduction

1. This report presents the key findings from work undertaken by twenty Peer Review and Development (PRD) Groups between October 2010 and March 2011. It sets out to:

* Provide a policy context to the work
* Present the main lessons learnt about community development and about the peer review process
* Identify key issues and good practice for consideration in the development of LSIS’ strategic framework for Effective Community Development

The report is supplemented by 6 case studies, providing further details of approaches taken and lessons learnt by the PRD groups.

### Support from LSIS

1. As part of the programme of activity, LSIS Regional Peer Review and Development Advisers supported each PRD in defining the scope of their peer review, maintaining progress and evaluating outcomes. Each group was able to access training in the use of Professional Dialogue and its associated planning and evaluation framework – PSOR (Purpose, Strategy, Outcomes, Review) to support them in their peer review discussions.
2. The 20 PRD groups came together at the initiation of the project to debate and refine their goals and at the conclusion of the projects to share practice and disseminate findings. Representatives of the groups will participate in forthcoming Community Development Roadshows to further disseminate their experiences and outcomes.
3. The Professional Dialogue training equipped partners with the skills to engage in a dialogue focused on enquiry within the framework provided by PSOR. Together the aim was to support PRDs in developing proposals and plans for action which would successfully generate outcomes. The PSOR process encourages participants to consider and agree the purpose for their enquiry, identifying issues or questions that it hopes to address. Strategies or plans of action can then be aligned with clear outcomes, outputs and outcome measures completing a cohesive process. The principle of evaluation is embedded within the PSOR process, prompting colleagues to look carefully at measures of success, to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their actions as well as to review and evaluate the findings or lessons learnt from the work and to consider next steps for further improvement.

### Background to the Community Development Peer Review

1. PRD groups were invited to engage in a peer review activity focused on the theme of community development and to present proposals which would:

* demonstrate evidence of changes in the leadership of community development,
* demonstrate cost-effective PRD practice which sustains collaborative activity and positive outcomes for learners and communities
* facilitate transferring and scaling up of effective practice

1. PRD groups were invited to investigate a set of core questions within their peer review activity. These included:

* What contribution do your member organisations make to local strategic priorities, and how is this communicated?
* What are the particular community cohesion and equality and diversity issues which face your member organisations and how have you been successful in resolving them?
* How is your organisation fulfilling its duty to promote economic and social wellbeing?
* How does your organisation map the diverse needs of the learners and community/ies you serve and how do you plan to meet these needs?
* What indicators of success will you use to evaluate how you are meeting the needs of your community and what will the evidence look like?
* What skills do your staff need in working beyond your organisation to lead community projects or influence local strategic partnerships?

### Policy Context

1. Some of the principles on which the notion of Big Society is built – fairness, freedom, local accountability – are values embedded within the learning and skills sector, and the government’s focus on these principles presents an opportunity for the learning and skills sector to develop a narrative about its contributions to community development. In asking how the sector contributes to the development of communities and exploring ways in which this contribution can be measured and evidenced, the Community Development PRD initiative makes an important contribution to this narrative. Many projects considered key questions around the impact of their activities on the development of their communities, exploring a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods for capturing the contribution of the sector to learning and to community development.
2. In the context of the current economic climate and the government’s strategy for growth, the learning and skills sector have responsibilities not only to developing the skills of the workforce, but also a renewed focus on the wider benefits of learning to the individual and communities and a central role in supporting equity, fairness and social mobility in an economic period where the vulnerability of the least advantaged individuals, families and groups could be further exacerbated. The Community Development PRD activities reported here explore the ways in which the sector works strategically and operationally with individuals and communities to ensure that its provision meets their needs.
3. Many of the Community Development PRD projects considered ways in which providers work in partnership for a variety of outcomes, including identifying and meeting local need, sharing best practice, delivering sustainable provision, engaging with strategic partnerships.

### Peer Review

1. The model of Peer Review and Development Groups is an established methodology used to promote and facilitate peer-to-peer learning in the sector. The principle is that a group of learning and skills organisations with some shared interests – type of organisation, geography, population, specialist providers etc – agree to work together to review their practice and to support continuous improvement by acting as an external reviewer, promoting self-evaluation, sharing examples of effective practice etc. These activities increase the capability of partner organisations to improve their services, build social capital between organisations and promote system leadership. PRD Groups have used peer review to undertake whole organisational reviews or to consider selected themes.
2. All of the groups participating in this activity were well-established Peer Review and Development Groups, with experience of undertaking organisational peer reviews. The Community Development Peer Review was distinctive in inviting groups to focus on a new theme, and to use the peer review process as a methodology for reviewing that specific aspect of the work of the organisations.
3. Groups were encouraged to consider ways in which peer review can not only support organisational development and continuous improvement by sharing practice and facilitating learning between organisations, but also to explore ways in which the peer review methodology might be effective in reviewing the impact of the development activity itself. This represented a shift from ‘peer review *and* development’ to ‘peer review *of* development’.
4. As discussed above, it is increasingly important that learning and skills organisations are able to demonstrate their role in community development and to present evidence which evaluates their impact on the communities they serve. In tackling the Community Development theme, PRDs were encouraged and supported (including by the use of the PSOR model), to pay particular attention to the evidence presented by partners of their impact on community development and to engage in discussion about the extent to which that evidence is relevant, rigorous and robust. In this way it is hoped that these peer review and development initiatives will contribute to the sector’s ability to evaluate the role in community development.

### The Projects

1. Twenty PRD Groups each received a grant of £10,000 to support the activity. A wide range of organisations were represented across the groups, including FE Colleges, Training Centres, Adult Education Centres, 6th Form Colleges, voluntary and community sector organisations, work-based learning providers, prisons, specialist colleges and a number of Local Authority Adult and Community Learning services.
2. The scope given to the reviews fell into 2 main categories, those who focused on a specific area of community need and the effectiveness of their work to address the need, and those who used the peer review activity to look broadly at their organisation’s community development strategies and practice. The latter approach was more commonly adopted by PRD groups comprising Local Authority ACL services.
3. A number of groups took an action research approach, working collaboratively across the PRD group to initiate events, activities or consultations with community representatives to determine their needs and sharing the learning from these. In some cases the outcomes of this research were used to inform peer review and improvement planning.

### Context

1. A number of the groups reflected on the changing context in which their organisations are operating and used the review process to assist them in planning for change or in reviewing the impact of change on the community. The drivers for change identified by the groups included reductions in funding, organisational re-structuring, the development of new area-based strategic planning structures, the emphasis in policy development on locality-based planning and community engagement.
2. In some cases, the PRD group set out to consider ways in which they could improve joint planning, both to more closely meet the needs of the community and to ensure cost effective, viable provision. In some cases, on-going change affected the peer review process itself, with managers and professionals leaving post or being subject to organisational re-structuring during the course of the Peer Review.
3. Geographically the projects included partnerships in urban and rural areas. A significant proportion of the projects brought together providers from a diverse range of localities, often where the needs of their communities were very varied. These included groups of work-based learning providers, Local Authority Adult and Community Learning services, City Councils, FE Colleges. Despite the diversity of community needs and priorities, all such projects reported significant value in sharing practice and learning from each other and in many cases identified common themes across their diverse populations. This ability to extract shared learning or to address common questions even when organisations work within diverse contexts is evidence of maturity in the use of the peer review model.
4. A number of the PRD groups were working in communities with significant social deprivation and their projects sought to address the needs of disadvantaged individuals and groups within the communities. In some cases the work reviewed provision for specific groups, for example offenders, for young people, for example young black males who were under-represented in Apprenticeship participation, or for adults, for example ESOL.

# Purpose

### Community Development

1. The most frequently cited aim of the PRD initiatives was to ensure that the member organisations were meeting the needs of their communities and to share examples of effective practice between organisations. Areas of focus across the PRD Groups included:

* Securing Sustainability of provision
* Planning to support future of organisations and partnerships
* Measuring and evidencing and celebrating impact
* Benchmarking and improving the quality of provision
* Increasing engagement of the community in provision (as learners and as stakeholders)
* Increasing enthusiasm for individuals within the community to engage in community development
* Capturing and embed good practice
* Improving coherence of provision across an area
* Engaging hard-to-reach communities and individuals
* Improving practice within individual organisations
* Enhancing co-operative working between organisations
* Improving the capacity of the sector to work effectively with key stakeholders
* Service planning
* Identifying potential for innovation
* Considering alignment between the organisational identity and business model and the needs of the community

### Peer Review

1. PRD Groups also considered their purpose in relation to the peer review and development process itself. Groups were interested in exploring ways in which the process could:

* generate evidence to support institutional self-assessment
* be sustained and time efficient
* impact on improvements
* shift towards a peer review *of* development

Identify appropriate success indicators to evaluate developments and provision

# Strategies

1. The strategies adopted by PRD Groups to achieve these purposes can be grouped under the following primary headings.

### Reviewing Community Development Strategies

1. A significant proportion of the PRD Groups undertook a review of the member organisations’ Community Development Strategies. These reviews were driven by the changes described above and aimed to improve the sustainability of provision, improve practice through benchmarking, identify areas for joint planning and improve the coherence of the partnership, undertake gap analysis. Groups with this focus include ACL providers and training organisations. In some cases the review aimed to inform a planned re-structuring of the service. A number of groups included a mapping of provision across an area or in relation to particular needs.

### Measuring and Evidencing Impact

1. A number of projects set out to examine their approaches to measuring and evidencing the impact of adult and community learning on the development of the community. There was a high level of awareness of the importance to the sector of being able to demonstrate that it meets the needs of communities and has a positive impact on cohesion. This is driven both by changes to funding which highlight the importance of impact and quality or outcomes, and by policy directions which emphasise local accountability and prioritise working in partnership with local agencies.

### Positioning Community Development

1. For Local Authority (LA) Adult and Community Learning (ACL) services, there was some concern that changes in funding and in the role of Local Authorities placed ACL Community Development strategies at risk. A number of projects highlighted the need to ensure that their work was located confidently within the wider organisation internally as well as developing strong external relationships with local strategic partnerships. Some also made reference to their role in supporting the capacity of voluntary sector organisations and to the importance of developing their relationships with FE Colleges.
2. A number of work-based learning providers set out to consider the level of alignment between their business priorities and the needs of the community. Organisations with specialist identities sought to evaluate the extent to which their community provision was aligned with the ethos of their organisation.

# Methodologies and Interventions

### Defining Community Development

1. In a number of cases, project groups reflected on the many different definitions of community development and found that prior to agreeing the scope of the review and developing their methodologies they needed to develop their understandings of ‘community’ and ‘community development’.

One group of 4 ACL services agreed the following as a working definition to guide the review: “To consult with the community to identify learning and skills needs. To provide services through learning and skills activity via partnership working which develop skills, confidence and capacity, leading to stronger, resilient communities able to do things for themselves”.

### Consistency and diversity

In general terms, most groups arrived at a common set of questions or a common topic as the focus for the reviews which were to take place at each of their member organisations. Within this shared theme, members of the group whose practice was to be reviewed guided the review, preparing a commentary, defining the focus and providing key questions emerging from their own self-evaluation and defining an evidence base to against which to make judgements and recommendations.

### Interventions and activities

1. There was a high degree of consistency in the components or stages of the review process across the groups. The majority included:

* Meetings with partners to scope the review, agree reporting format, agree evidence and data to be provided and impact measures to be evaluated;
* A form of self-evaluation, captured through a commentary, storyboard, review or questionnaire
* A review of data, usually in advance of the a visit, including reviews of policy and strategy documents, action plans, learner data (recruitment, achievement, retention, progression, attainment);
* Interviews and focus groups with learners, staff (teachers and managers), stakeholders, community representatives
* The preparation of a report providing an evaluation and recommendations for future action, including future peer support

### Relationship with Common Inspection Framework

1. A number of groups developed a framework for their reviews which used the Common inspection Framework (CIF) as its basis, with some examples of toolkits or pro-formas which defined the aspects of provision under review mapped against outcomes from the CIF. The groups felt that this approach enabled evidence collected through the peer view process to be more easily included in the organisation’s Self Assessment Report (SAR) and actions recommended by the review incorporated within the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

The main CIF objectives seen by PRD groups as relevant to the Community Development peer reviews were:

A2: How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?

A5: How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?

B3: How effectively does the provider use partnerships to develop its provision to meet learners’ needs?

### Learning about Community Development

1. The projects achieved a wide range of outcomes relating to the ways in which they as organisations and learning providers work with their communities. In many cases the groups reported that the full extent of the outcomes will only emerge over time. In working with PRD groups, LSIS posed a number of key questions for consideration. The key outcomes of the projects are presented below linked to these research questions. A number of short examples serve to highlight and exemplify common issues and outcomes.

#### What contribution do your member organisations make to local strategic priorities, and how is this communicated?

1. The importance of achieving strong links between the work of learning and skills sector organisations and local strategic partnerships was widely acknowledged by the PRD groups and particularly by those groups involving ACL providers. There was evidently a strong awareness among ACL services that they had the potential to contribute to range of Local Authority priorities, such as health and well-being, place-shaping, services for the elderly etc. The challenges of communicating their contribution both within Local Authorities and beyond, to local strategic partners were also highlighted. Sharing the outcomes of the peer review process with managers internally and with partners was identified as one way of improving awareness of the contribution of ACL services.

|  |
| --- |
| **NESPT Adult Community Learning Services – Norfolk, Essex, Suffolk, Peterborough and Thurrock**  This review concluded that the two LAs who were evaluated had clear and coherent strategies for ACL which were directly linked to the strategic priorities of their organisations and that these were underpinned by policies and protocols for partnership-working. The organisations were represented on local influencing bodies and partnerships, had a voice within the Local Authority and participated in national consultations. Despite this leadership, the ACL services felt that their ability to influence local policy was ‘patchy’ and that the potential of ACL organisations was not always clearly understood by partners. The review also highlighted some of the pressures of sustaining partnership-working, which, to be successful needs to be forged over time rather than responsive to short-term initiatives and funding. They noted that partnerships can often be highly reliant on the relationships between individuals within partner organisations; at a time of change and re-structuring organisational partnerships are at risk when key people change roles or move on.  The group concluded that in order to address these issues ACL services need to work to better position themselves within a wider range of LA strategies, in order to demonstrate the contribution of ACL to a range of priorities beyond those of learning and skills, to include, for example, Making the Most of Old Age, Keeping Healthy, Culture and Sport, Developing the Capacity of the 3rd sector. |

1. Organisations were better able to assess their contribution to local strategic priorities when they had a good understanding of the area’s needs. Examples included mapping a provider’s contributions to the strategic vision for the county.
2. In the groups comprising learning and training organisations, the agenda for peer reviews included examining the alignment between the organisation’s core objectives and the needs of the community. These included work-based learning providers reviewing the relationship between their role in supporting community development with their identity as a commercial organisation responsive to employer needs. Specialist learning providers reviewed the coherence between the ethos of their organisation and their community learning provision.

|  |
| --- |
| **Learner Voice**  A group of 5 work-based learning providers in the North-West set out to recognise how their organisations, driven primarily by the sector skills priorities and employer needs, impacted on their local communities. The review highlighted many ways in which the organisations supported the communities beyond the core business of developing a skilled workforce to contribute to the economy. Good partnerships were highlighted with community groups, schools and Local Authorities where joint work was engaging young people and adults in training in literacy, numeracy, vocational skills etc.  As a result of the review the organisations aim to improve the evidence of their community activity, to raise awareness among staff of their roles in the community and to develop stronger partnership with ACL services to better understand the needs of the community. |

#### What are the particular community cohesion and equality and diversity issues which face your member organisations and how have you been successful in resolving them?

1. The PRD groups acknowledged a wide range of community cohesion and equality and diversity issues within their communities, including economic deprivation, crime, poverty, homelessness, unemployment. They also identified inequalities in levels of engagement in the provision delivered by organisations or in outcomes achieved by learners from particular communities.
2. In response to these community issues, projects set out to review the effectiveness of their contributions by reviewing areas of work such as increasing the engagement by young people in community development activity, improving levels of literacy and numeracy skills, developing language skills in diverse populations, inequality of participation in Apprenticeships by young black males, inequality of outcomes among learners from deprived wards compared to their peers. The conclusions from these projects were diverse, but many carried out close analysis of data combined with focus group discussions to understand the root causes of low participation or inequalities in outcomes and developed their services in response to their findings. Often these changes were relatively small but could make a significant impact, for example, when considering local take up of Apprenticeship by young black makes it was recognised that many applied for Apprenticeships but dropped out from the application process part-way through; this understanding led to the introduction of pre-application workshops to build confidence and understanding of the process.
3. Within these contexts organisations recognised a range of issues for themselves as providers of learning and skills to adults and young people. These included the need to:

* increase engagement with learning,
* improve progression from informal to accredited learning,
* improve information and marketing,
* ensure that provision was accurately meeting the needs of the community,
* engage community representatives more fully in the planning and evaluation of provision.

1. Many reviews also looked at the wider impact of their learning and skills provision on community cohesion.

|  |
| --- |
| **HMPs Wolds, Parc, Rye Hill and Altcourse**  This project sought to further develop relationships between the four prisons and the work undertaken with families of offenders. By improving the partnership-working between Offender Management services within the prisons, and support for children and families in the community, the partners aimed to improve the transition of offenders into the community at the end of their sentence. The project identified potential for this work to have a significant impact on a wide range of community cohesion issues by addressing the isolation in which prisons can tend to operate.  “On a long-term basis, offenders and their families will be the main beneficiaries, as the interventions put in place will give them more opportunities to address family issues and greater support both within and without the prison. The prison will be able to offer a greater variety of courses to the offender preparing for release; society will benefit from a reduction in re-offending rates. Happier families will have a positive impact on their local communities; supported families are more likely to go on to support families in similar crisis themselves. Families with less need are more likely to access opportunities for jobs and training and may themselves provide positive role models for peers and children within their own communities. If family needs are met, offenders are more likely to become involved in other aspects of Learning and Skills, Offender Management and Resettlement. An improved take-up of provision may result in an increase in sustainable provision.” |

1. The strategies employed or identified as successful in resolving the issues naturally varied according to the issues, but there is a degree of commonality in that many groups identified the need to work more closely with community representatives to develop effective strategies, and highlighted the risks that organisations make too many assumptions both about the community’s needs and the solution.

|  |
| --- |
| **Nottinghamshire Training Network (NTN)**  This review focused on two Community Centres working in neighbouring communities with many similar characteristics, including high crime rates, anti-social behaviour, debt, poor health, low achievement and aspirations. Beyond these apparent similarities, the review process highlighted significant differences both in the communities, their perceptions of themselves, and in the services offered by the Community Centres. In addition to improving the practice of both Centres by sharing expertise in marketing, partnership-working and self-evaluation, the Centres gained accurate feedback from community representatives about the curriculum offer. Users of the Centres were positive about the learning offer but wanted to see more Skills For Life provision that is targeted on skills development towards employment, in addition to ‘courses in jewellery making’.  As a result of the review both Centres will initiate a user survey to gain a fuller understanding of the types of facilities and services the community wants. To expand the curriculum offer also highlights the need for the Centres to develop their relationships with the local FE College. |

#### How is your organisation fulfilling its duty to promote economic and social wellbeing?

1. Organisations were guided in their thinking by awareness of the statutory duties placed upon them to promote social and economic well-being in the area, as well as by the relevant criteria within the Common Inspection Framework that consider the extent to which the organisation meets the needs of its learners.
2. The majority of groups described their primary contributions to the economic and social well-being of their communities in relation to their core business of providing learning. Some work-based learning providers for example spoke about their core role being to ‘serve sector skills priorities and employer needs’, and their desire to explore how this role might also impact on the wider community. Some colleges referred to their ‘core activity, i.e. supporting learners to achieve the qualifications they set out to achieve’, being the way in which they can make the most significant contribution to community cohesion.’
3. Many spoke about the impact of learning on social well-being as well as on improving the life and economic prospects of learners. By delivering learning programmes which improve numeracy, literacy, language, vocational skills etc, organisations are having an impact on individuals, who in turn develop the economic and social wellbeing of the community.
4. Many organisations provide examples of developing their provision in response to particular social and economic needs of their communities, for example courses in financial management, programmes to help those experiencing redundancy back into work.
5. Many also respond to the social needs of communities by offering first steps learning programmes in easily accessible community settings, for example sewing classes for young women from traveller communities, learning classes co-located with mental health services to improve access.
6. A number of reviews also highlighted ways in which organisations invest in building the capacity of communities to promote economic and social well-being among their peers, for example through training community representatives in mentoring and to act as learning and health champions.
7. In some cases the organisations themselves are significant local employers and users of local services, contributing to the economic prosperity of the community in this way. In the case of organisations working with young people and adults with learning difficulties or disabilities, a number of examples of activity to support independent living and work were evident, including for example employment in cafés and restaurants in the community or on the college campus.

#### How does your organisation map the diverse needs of the learners and community/ies you serve and how do you plan to meet these needs?

1. As discussed above, a number of projects highlighted the need to work closely with the community and with individual learners to identify their needs. There was a view that not only would this ensure that provision closely meets needs, but that strategically it is important for learning and skills organisations to be able to demonstrate that their services are community-led. Closer working with the community also serves to challenge assumptions about their needs and about the root causes of issues in the community.

|  |
| --- |
| **Essential Associates**  This peer review group examined a specific issue, namely the under-representation of young black males and Looked After Children (LAC) in Apprenticeships in Luton. The review process included looking closely at data which revealed that the percentage of applications for Apprenticeships from young black males was in fact consistent with the population, but that a high proportion dropped out during the staged application, assessment and interview process resulting in small percentage achieving success. It also showed that no data was collected about LAC status through applications for Apprenticeships. A focus group with young people identified a need for more information about Apprenticeships, a need to improve confidence and understanding about the recruitment process, and a concern that council services needed by young people were not ‘joined-up’.  The detailed understanding of the root causes of low take-up of Apprenticeships among these specific groups of young people has led to a number of highly targeted recommendations for action to improve equality of access. These include the formation of a local operational Apprenticeship Network involving representatives of community groups, a programme of pre-application support, improved and targeted marketing and information, and changes to data collection procedures. |

1. A number of projects enabled members to pool information in order to map community needs more accurately across an area. This mapping, often done alongside a benchmarking review of the quality and impact of provision, results in improved quality, more targeted provision and better use of resources, which in turn supports the sustainability of provision.
2. Among ACL services, there was a consideration of potential changes to the role of the Local Authority in planning, delivering and quality assuring ACL provision, including the shift from a role as provider towards that of commissioner. This raises a set of issues relevant to the question of how a Local Authority’s process of commissioning results in the needs of a community being identified and met.

|  |
| --- |
| **WHISKCL (Wandsworth, Harrow, Haringey, Islington, Southwark, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth)**  The group undertook reviews of the work of 2 of their members, one of which wanted to explore the extent to which the ACL service was effective in identifying community needs and involving the community in developing the curriculum offer. The pattern in the LA is that the majority of provision is commissioned by the LA and delivered by a wide range of providers operating locally and the ACL service wanted to consider the ways in which it provided strategic leadership and set priorities to inform the process of commissioning provision. The review was able to demonstrate that the commissioning process did result in the majority of provision being located in priorities areas, with high uptake from minority groups, excellent rates of retention, achievement and success and good feedback from learners. It did, however, also identify that the strategic priorities for the service were not fully embedded throughout the process of commissioning and did not therefore drive the process or form a basis for planning the mix and balance of provision. The review also recommended that the service consider ways to consult with priority groups about their learning needs and use this information to inform planning. |

#### What indicators of success will you use to evaluate how you are meeting the needs of your community and what will the evidence look like?

1. This question was the primary focus LSIS had asked the groups to addressed and one which was highly challenging. There was a strong consensus across the groups involved in this peer review initiative that it is essential for organisations to be able to demonstrate and communicate the impact that they have on the development of communities, within their organisation, to stakeholders, policy-makers, funding bodies and to the communities themselves. In reviewing their Community Development strategies, many organisations concluded that this was an area for development and that greater emphasis needed to be given to presenting evidence of impact, rather than of volume of activity.
2. Across the groups, this issue raised more questions than it presented solutions. Issues related to who and how we determine notions of quality, how we fuse qualitative and quantitative information, data, evidence and story-telling, how we demonstrate the broader contributions of the sector to well-being, how the contribution of an individual organisation and a partnership are articulated. Such questions are high on the agenda for the sector in the context of the development of the framework for public information.
3. Groups recognised that different partners may wish to see evidence of success in different ways and that the sector needs to present evidence in different ways according to the audience. There was also an appreciation of the fact that the evidence of impact may often be unexpected. Working closely with the community in the development and delivery of provision ensures that organisations are well-placed to notice the unpredicted impact and also to capture a much richer mix of quantitative and qualitative information and evidence. This collection of qualitative data is more viable at localised levels.

|  |
| --- |
| **City of Sunderland PRD**  This PRD group comprising 4 providers aimed to evaluate the awareness of, and contribution to, community development among 16-19 year olds engaged in Foundation Learning programmes and to explore how this might be enhanced by embedding community development activity within the accredited programme delivery. The initial review found that learners were able to identify issues in their communities which needed addressing but were overwhelmingly negative about their community’s capacity to improve. The young people were not aware of the principles of community development, did not take part in any community activity or see how community action could make a difference. Young people reported feeling negative about their communities and felt that the problems were inflicted or imposed and that they were powerless to affect change.  The group developed an Asset Based Community Development toolkit which provided a focus for learning sessions which have now been included within the Personal Social Development strand of the Foundation Learning programme, and learners took part in training and every learner participated in voluntary community work as part of the programme.  Following these activities the learner voice was repeated and against the baseline, young people showed an increased appreciation of the positive elements of their communities (from a 9:1 negative / positive ratio to 5:4). One month later, 29 young people were participating in community or voluntary work, an increase from 4% to 22%. |

1. It was evident that groups found it easier to identify indicators for successful community engagement (participation, involvement) and for community responsiveness (meeting a specified need) and harder to define indicators or measures for the impact of their work on the community.
2. In many cases, strategies to record and measure the impact of provision and services on individuals were more advanced that those which provided evidence of impact on the community as a whole. Similarly, developing indicators and evidence of success in meeting learning needs was easier than for success in contributing to wider community issues and needs.
3. Without exception, groups concluded that evidence of impact required both qualitative and quantitative information and a number celebrated the value of personal stories or case studies to exemplify the impact of learning or an individual or to a community. Methods for collecting learner feedback included surveys and questionnaires and focus groups; in one case discussions with stakeholders were filmed and made widely available electronically.[[1]](#footnote-1)
4. Quantitative evidence of impact typically focused on collecting data on learner recruitment, retention, achievement, success and progression. Within this, there were a number of examples where gaps in the data collected were identified by the peer review process and where action is planned to ensure a more comprehensive data set. Providing evidence of progression was identified as a challenge, particularly in tracking an individual’s progress from informal learning to accredited provision and into employment.
5. In the case of ACL services, particularly where Local Authorities are commissioning through a large number of providers, there are challenges in collecting standardised data against which to monitor impact and outcomes. The partner organisation involved in the WHISK peer review detailed above, concluded that it would be helpful to establish performance targets for providers which are linked closely to quality improvement priorities for the service.

#### What skills do your staff need in working beyond your organisation to lead community projects or influence local strategic partnerships?

1. The insights presented across the peer review groups are well-summarised by the example below.

|  |
| --- |
| **West Midlands PRD**  This group of five ACL services considered the skills required by staff to lead community projects and influence local strategic partnerships. Across the diverse range of authorities, with varied community cohesion issues, there was a high degree of consensus regarding the skills needed by staff. These included:  A good understanding of the local communities  Community engagement and development skills  An ability to empower others  Cultural and political awareness  Effective listening, communication and influencing skills  Negotiation and mediation skills  Knowledge of provision and the ability to offer impartial information, advice and guidance  A solution-focused approach  Project management  Advocacy  Networking and relationship-building skills |

### Learning about Peer Review

1. All groups had prior experience of working together on peer review and development activity, but in some cases it had not been undertaken for some time and this activity reinvigorated the PRD group. The pre-existing nature of these groups means that they have already established the trust and mutual respect and working practices necessary to undertake successful peer review. Many gave significant attention to planning the peer review process and in particular to sharing their understanding of ‘community’ and ‘community development’.

### Community Development as a focus for peer review

1. The focus on this aspect of the work of organisations was beneficial and many groups committed to including community development within their review processes on an on-going basis. For a number of groups the focus resulted in new members of staff being involved in the review process. For example, staff with specialist responsibility for the area of the review (e.g. ESOL), Centre Managers and staff working in the community. The focus of the reviews and the involvement of specialist service leads also helped to ensure that managers were able to recognise necessary change and act quickly to change practice.
2. In some larger organisations it was felt that Community Development staff can occupy quite different roles and can be isolated within their own organisations; the opportunity for managers and leaders of these services to meet, form relationships and learn from each other was repeatedly celebrated. In many cases it gave managers confidence to introduce change and to try a new approach based on successes seen in other organisations.
3. In some cases groups reported that reviewing their community development strategies and activities had a wider impact on the whole organisation. In others, the focus enabled the profile of community development to be raised across the organisation.

### Peer Review of Development

1. In many cases groups reported that the full impact of the peer review, and therefore their ability to work as peers to review the developments and changes initiated as a result, would take time. In many cases groups have either undertaken follow-up reviews or have planned these events. The form of these events includes meetings, written reviews and presentations from each service lead to their peer group identifying the actions take and the impact of these changes.

|  |
| --- |
| **East London Partnership**  This group took as its primary focus a review of how their established peer review process might be reinvigorated. In particular the 6 Local Authorities sought to ensure the sustainability of the process and to confirm that organisations would see a valuable return on their time in the form of increased standards through the transfer of knowledge. They explored ways in which the peer review and development process could be extended to a peer review of development, ensuring that action was taken and improvement was embedded.  The group developed a number of resources to guide reviewers and increase consistency in the process and in the evidence reviewed and trained new staff to act as reviewers. They streamlined the process to maintain rigour but reduce time and used paired observations to achieve more engagement with learners and staff. A 3-month review provided an opportunity to review the development that organisations had taken following the review itself |

### The benefits of peer review

1. The value of peer review as a process was universally celebrated, with benefits to learners and communities through improved practice, but also to staff in raising confidence and sharing new practice and to stakeholders in articulating the work of community development.
2. Working together to share practice, not only improves practice through sharing examples and ideas, but helps to prepare for and manage change. For example, by reviewing and evaluating strategies and procedures at a time of significant change organisations are better able to position themselves in a shifting environment. By developing trust and building relationships, organisations are able to work together more extensively, leading to more effective targeting of services and sharing of resources which will support the sustainability of provision at a time of funding cuts.
3. In a number of cases the PRD groups demonstrated that as the groups mature and evolve they build the capacity to use peer review as an efficient and effective approach to problem-solving, enabling peers to share their practice and to build their evidence and understanding of successful strategies to address shared problems or questions.
4. In many cases, the process of peer review increases staff skills in carrying out self-evaluation and a number of groups identified areas for improvement in their organisation’s self-assessments and reviewing and updating their Quality Improvement Plans. The skills needed by reviewers to carry out peer review activity were recognised and a number of groups introduced training or coaching and mentoring to involve new staff in the process of PRD.

# Summary of Key Findings

1. Organisations with learning and skills as their core business identify their main contributions to the development of communities in relation to the delivery of learning and skills which bring about economic, social, and health benefits to participants. There is potential for organisations to consider learning and skills provision which directly addresses the capacity of the community for development, e.g. training 3rd sector employees in business management and finance or training community representatives to act as ‘community organisers’.
2. A common definition of ‘community development’ is elusive, although in the majority of cases, organisations referred to it as their contribution to building capacity in the community through the provision of learning and skills. The terminology of ‘engagement’ and ‘involvement’ sat alongside ‘development’ and further work is required to articulate the distinctive features of activity which explicitly sets out to develop the community, rather than simply engage it in the work of the learning and skills organisation.[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. The principle that learning and skills have a positive impact on the economic and social well-being of individuals and communities is accepted and celebrated by all. Organisations recognise their duty to promote economic and social and well-being in the area, as well as to attend to the well-being of their staff and learners. However, many groups highlighted the need for their organisations to develop more coherent strategies for community development, to highlight current activity and to take a more analytical approach to defining their role and contribution to the community.
4. Presenting and sharing information which demonstrates the impact of learning and skills organisations on the economic and social well-being of communities is increasingly important to the sustainability of the organisations and to their place within local strategic partnerships. However, groups demonstrate that it is easier to record and analyse data relating to the participation and achievement of individuals in ‘episodes of learning’ than it is to present evidence of the longer-term impact on their social and economic well-being or on their wider communities. Case studies and other qualitative data can tell powerful stories to assert the impact of learning on individuals and communities and can complement quantitative data. Many groups indicated that further work was required both to develop effective strategies for capturing feedback and in ensuring that the intended outcomes and impact of initiatives are clearly defined so as to guide the development of the provision.
5. Close co-operation with communities and with partners is essential in order to enable learning and skills organisations to understand the needs of the community accurately and to target services to meet local needs. Many of the PRD groups demonstrated that consultation with the community identified needs which the organisation had not been aware of and opened the potential for innovation.
6. Working in partnership between learning and skills organisations is an important and effective way to share knowledge and understanding. Organisations are able, through partnership, **to** align services so that they are better targeted and to achieve efficiencies in delivery. All of these outcomes are important for the sustainability of organisations and the services they provide.

# Implications for the LSIS Community Development Strategic Framework

1. Learning and skills organisations may find it helpful to differentiate between their role in delivering learning and skills to individuals and groups within the community (i.e. ensuring that their core business of delivering learning is responsive to community need), and their role in promoting the values and practices of community development to empower the community to develop itself and its resources. Both of these two dimensions fall within an organisation’s strategy for community development but it may be helpful to be clear about the differences. This differentiation may serve to give clarity to the terminology of ‘community development’ as distinct from ‘community engagement’.
2. Clearly the up-skilling of members of a community has the potential to contribute to the development of that community by increasing employability and improving the self-esteem and well-being of residents. A focus on ‘community development’ may however also include activities by the learning and skills organisation which are explicitly designed to empower community representatives to take responsibility to address community issues. Some of these may be providing education and training, for example by offering training to community representatives to act as ‘community organisers’ or training community representatives in bid-writing skills or financial management, but there may be additional strategies which are adopted by organisations. The Community Development Strategic Framework has potential to offer guidance to organisations in analysing and evaluating their contributions to both of these dimensions.
3. Learning and skills organisations may benefit from a framework which supports them in articulating their organisational strategies for ‘community development’ in relation to a matrix which maps their main ‘communities’ (internal and external) against key strands of activity and supports organisations in articulating their strategies and actions and in defining success measures. For example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Equality and Diversity | Economic Well-Being | Health and ‘social’ Well-Being | Self-Evaluation and Responsiveness | Promoting Community Development |
| Staff |  |  |  |  |  |
| Learners | *e.g.*  *Map learner outcomes to ensure any inequalities within gender, ethnicity or postcode are identified and addressed* | *e.g.*  *Delivering employability skills programmes for all learners* | *e.g.*  *Providing health services and a range of social activities* | *e.g.*  *Learner Voice activity reviews the learner experience* | *e.g.*  *All learners are offered an opportunity to participate in volunteering* |
| Local Communities |  |  |  |  |  |
| Employers |  |  |  |  |  |
| Area Partnerships |  |  |  |  |  |

1. The specific community contexts in which learning and skills organisations operate mean that it is not appropriate to define the specific actions or outcomes that an organisation should achieve. Nevertheless it may be possible to develop a self-evaluative framework by posing a set of questions which an organisation can use to review its community development strategies. If such questions were linked clearly to the Common Inspection Framework and were supplemented by access to examples and case studies drawn from the sector, this could provide a valuable resource for organisations. Such questions would also support organisations in using peer review as a process for evaluation, providing a starting point and promoting an evidence-based approach to peer review.
2. It may be helpful to articulate the skills needed by learning and skills staff to succeed in engaging with communities or with local strategic partnerships alongside the National Occupational Standards for Community Development. The areas of commonality and those of distinctiveness may offer insights into the development needs of the learning and skills workforce in relation to community development.
3. The peer reviews highlight the importance of robust evidence of success in community development and the difficulties of defining and collecting this evidence. The Strategic Framework identifies strategic characteristics of effective community development and provides examples of operational activities that contribute to effective community development. It may be useful to work further with the sector to develop a methodology for supporting organisations in setting targets, defining success measures, collecting evidence or evaluating impact. In doing so there may be international research into the measurement of economic and social impact that can be drawn upon.
4. The work of the peer reviews has focused in many cases on finding out what the communities need, from which organisations can set out to deliver different provision in ways that meets these specified needs. In effect this establishes a baseline from which to measure progress in meeting the need, through indicators such as participation, retention, success combined with repeated consultation with community representatives. Organisations may need to develop the capacity to review longitudinal data in order to fully evaluate impact.

1. In response to the emerging agenda in the sector relating to public information and accountability, LSIS and the UK Commission worked with a small group of providers during the Autumn 2010 to explore the notion of a ‘community scorecard’ as a means of learning and skills organisations providing public information and demonstrating responsiveness and accountability to their communities. Action research by providers explored issues about the different audiences for information (customers or strategic partners), the range of types of information and options for its presentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A good example of ‘development’ can be seen in the work of Accrington and Rossendale College who developed a partnership with local housing trusts to develop and deliver a training programme to support prospective tenants in applying for housing. To sustain this initiative the College has trained members of staff from the housing trusts in the Award inPreparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector **(**PTTLs), giving them the capacity to deliver and assess the training in the future. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)