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**Ducks in a row** *idiom*: meaning to ensure all of the small details or elements are accounted for and in their proper positions before embarking on a new project or collaboration.

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# Ducks in a row

The final report of the  
Forward Communities Project



*Examining partnerships and pathways  
between further education colleges and  
the voluntary and community sector*

## Acknowledgments

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# Executive summary

Funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Flexibility and Innovation Fund, this is the final report of **Forward Communities** project, carried out by New College Stamford and One East Midlands, between July 2010 and December 2011.

The primary objective of this joint project was to develop an understanding of the current relationships between voluntary and community sector (VCS) learning providers and further education (FE) colleges and make recommendations on how this could be improved to develop joint working opportunities, which enhanced delivery in both sectors, including activity to explore the development of progression pathways.

To build a picture of the relationships and what key issues were prominent within the learning and skills sector in the East Midlands, the project methodology combined desk research with face-to-face interviews, questionnaires and cross sector events, involving a total of 193 individuals, including contributors from 16 of the 18 regional FE colleges, 103 VCS organisations, six East Midlands local authorities and one district council.

## Findings

The research uncovered a number of environmental factors, which appeared to affect joint working in a local area. These environmental factors often set the climate in which joint working operated.

There were five key issues that respondents felt undermined attempts at joint working between FE colleges and VCS organisations:

1. Do we know who to talk to?
2. Do we listen to one another?
3. Do we value one another's skills?
4. Do we know what we can learn from one another?
5. Can we trust one another?

## Headline Recommendations

### Partnerships and collaboration

- introduction of an 'honest broker' role to mediate between sectors; facilitating relationship arrangements if required;
- joint forums for FE colleges and the VCS to discuss:
  - barriers and obstacles to effective cross sector partnership working;
  - specific local challenges to improving cross sector partnership working and local action to address those challenges;
- cross sector work shadowing opportunities;
- collaborative bid writing;
- cross sector networks focusing on developing progression pathways and transition arrangements.

### Communication, trust and understanding

- single front door approach for colleges to engage with VCS providers;
- clearer identification by FE colleges of who has responsibility for community learning and VCS engagement;
- joint policy briefings for the sharing of information;
- improved marketing of the VCS offer.

### Progression pathways and transition

- a framework, which facilitates joint planning of community provision;
- joint advertisement of courses, which identifies possible progression routes;
- clear procedures for more intelligent data collection and sharing of information;
- improved data collection on community learning progression by both FE colleges and the VCS;
- the OCN transition units produced in response to this project, to be robustly tested through a pilot project.

# 1.

# Introduction

There is a strong emphasis on employer engagement in the FE sector and great progress is being made in this area. However, an area that still needs to be developed is the relationship between FE (colleges) and (the) voluntary and community sector. Both have similar aims in terms of supporting and developing people so they can take an active part in the social and economic life in the region. However, there are often different drivers and strategic aims which can inhibit communication and cross sector working.

*Extract from Forward Communities funding proposal*

Funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Flexibility and Innovation fund, this is the final report of the New College Stamford and One East Midlands **Forward Communities** project [referred to within this document as ***The partnership***]

This innovative partnership project was designed to support activity to build better relationships, identify joint working opportunities and investigate the potential for progression pathways through effective partnership working between the regions' further education (FE) colleges and the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

**Key to the project was the 'dual perspective' approach, with work carried out in both sectors. By the end of the project it was envisaged that the following would have been achieved:**

- analysis of VCS community learning provision;
- understanding of current relationships between VCS learning providers and FE colleges;
- [*with a particular emphasis on*] supported transition pathways from informal adult learning into mainstream further education;
- [*and*] opportunities for improved joint working between community learning and skills providers and FE colleges;
- investigation of appropriate FE [*college*] provision development to meet the needs of both the VCS workforce and its service users.

### **The Partners**

**New College Stamford** is a general further education college that serves a mainly rural area and is situated in the market town of Stamford at the southern most point of Lincolnshire. However it is anything but a small rural college offering a huge range of course and high standards, taking learners from 14-16 and post-16 study through to a degree. With exciting partnerships and excellent collaborative working relationships with the local community, the college has a network of community outreach centres supporting highly successful employment and education programmes.

**One East Midlands** is the regional voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation for the East Midlands. It works to ensure that the voluntary and community sector is actively engaged with partners and stakeholders, from across the public, statutory, business and social enterprise sectors. One East Midlands brings together organisations that support voluntary and community groups across the region to influence and shape policy, improve services and provide a point of contact at a regional level.

***The partnership*** team:

- Glenn Powell - Project And Data Manager, New College Stamford
- Rachel Quinn – Chief Executive, One East Midlands
- Jayne Quantrill – Forward Communities Development Officer

***The partnership*** also secured the services of Lisa Vernon, the Chief Executive of the Derbyshire Learning & Development Consortium (DLDC) and representative from the East Midlands Learning & Skills Partnership, as an advisor and critical friend to the project. Lisa is also on the board of the Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA).

Derbyshire Learning & Development Consortium was established in 2000 to support Voluntary and Community Sector organisations across Derbyshire to develop and deliver high quality learning and development opportunities for their staff, volunteers, clients and learners.

DLDC provides information, training and support to members and the wider VCS in Derby and Derbyshire on learning & development policy, practice and quality assurance to enable them to engage fully with the learning & skills agenda.

# 2.

# Background

Dictionary definitions provide a fascinating insight into the possibilities and tension inherent in our understanding of the word collaboration.

*[Gulati, A. and English, H. (2003) Collaboration: Learning Partnerships and Stakeholders A guide].*

**Term:** Collaboration

**Encarta Dictionary (English UK):**

1. working together: the act of working together with one or more people in order to achieve something
2. working with an enemy: the betrayal of others by working with an enemy, especially an occupying force

Established learning environments currently exist in both the VCS and FE colleges, with both having similar aims in terms of supporting and developing people. What the two sectors offer in terms of learning and skills is becoming increasingly more comparable. For example, many FE colleges have a firm focus on supporting harder to reach learners, whilst some VCS learning providers focus on moving people into employment and have a firm grasp of labour market and industry needs.

However partnerships and projects that start with initial enthusiasm and good intention can flounder. In some cases this is due to the difficulties of establishing common ground, or because of a lack of effective communication channels. This can also be compounded by fundamental differences in working practices or differences in knowledge bases in the two sectors, or simply as a result of funding pressures with no apparent way around the impasse. More recently the impact of funding cuts on the re-allocation of resources and movement of those staff who were 'key contacts' have added another dimension to setting up and maintaining relationships.

Despite a shared agenda and the willingness and desire to work together, there often persists the spectre that primarily the different drivers and strategic aims inhibit communication and cross sector working. While unacknowledged misconceptions and perceptions remain on both sides, the differences, in reality, are often not as great as imagined and in some instances the two are more alike than they realise.

## 2.1 The national learning and skills landscape

The landscape in which learning and skills providers operated underwent rapid and considerable changes following the general election in June 2010, which heralded a change of government. The subsequent decisions made as part of the new coalition government's comprehensive spending review announced in October 2010 saw reforms across all departments, with major changes to funding for education, learning and skills, including:

### **Reduction in FE colleges 19+ funding**

- 4.3% national rate reduction for all adult provision;
- reduction in programme weightings for basic skills (except for entry level numeracy).

While the full impact of changes may not yet be fully evident, there are potential implications for all learning providers with the pressures on budgets manifesting themselves in many different ways; one obvious knock on effect being a reduction in staff which in turn reduces existing staff availability for community liaison, networking and partnership building.

### **Changes to FE colleges and fee remission policies:**

- reduction in fee remission categories, only job-ready income-related benefits will be eligible (JSA and ESA) from 1/4/11.

*This not only reduced potential income but also added an element of confusion regarding information, advice and guidance (IAG) on eligibility criteria.*

### **Restriction of entitlement to fully-funded access to a first level 2 for learners aged 19 up to 24:**

- those aged 24+ will only be fully funded for basic skills qualifications (with exceptions for those on employment-related benefits). Year of implementation 2011/12;
- the introduction of FE loans to cover learner contributions for Level 3/4 for those aged over 24 by 2012/13.

*This is likely to have a significant impact on those furthest from the labour market and may well affect all learning providers in the long term.*



### **Minimum contract levels of £500,000 for adult skills funding**

While it is envisaged that voluntary organisations will continue to be eligible to receive public funding directly and indirectly through sub-contracting and consortia arrangements, the process and legal costs of making the arrangements, have already excluded some smaller learning providers, and limited the time available for other partnership building activities.

### **No government, regional or national sources of funding for workforce development from March 2011**

This is the first time in 20 years there is no recognisable fund for the VC sector to deliver it's core programme of workforce development to the sector (*Source Skills-Third Sector: A National skills framework for the voluntary sector*).

In addition the reduction in funding means that the surplus that some consortia were able to redirect towards training has been significantly reduced.

In November 2010 - Secretary of State for Business Vince Cable and Skills Minister John Hayes launched the Government's strategy for skills: **Skills for Sustainable Growth**, and its parallel publication: **Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth**. The strategy set out the Government's vision for reform of the FE and skills system.

The publication in November 2011 of the report by the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities "A dynamic nucleus: Colleges at the heart of local communities" set out a shared agenda between colleges, local partnerships, commissioning bodies, central government agencies and sectoral support bodies which includes:

Colleges to:

- define a clear offer from colleges to the communities they serve as specified within the community compact (*by September 2013*);
- establish within colleges a clearly defined community curriculum that responds to local needs and associated outreach work (*by March 2013*).

Local partnerships and commissioning bodies to:

- share existing public sector intelligence and data systems to increase common understanding of community needs (*by March 2012*).

Central Government agencies to:

- establish an 'innovative code' to allow flexibility to fund responsive provision which meets locally assessed priority needs. This should total up to 25 percent of the college's adult skills budget per annum (*by September 2012*) rising to 50 per cent (*by September 2013*);
- review the qualifications framework to enable the development of flexible and responsive community qualifications (*by September 2013*).

Sector support bodies to:

- develop a community curriculum template with tools to help institutions develop an overall curriculum strategy;
- establish a professional programme to develop a new responsive community curriculum via the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Institute for Learning (*by September 2012*);
- develop, through sector collaboration, good practice guidance and performance measures for community engagement (*by July 2012*).

“The key is for colleges to work in partnership, whether with local business, charities, local authorities or public sector organisations. While colleges may be the catalyst for change - hence our term ‘the dynamic nucleus’ - we see the way forward as essentially ‘a shared agenda’.”

[Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Chair of the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities]

In December 2012 The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) published their response to the FE reform consultation; **'New Challenges - New Chances'** *Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System*.

The publication sets out the Government's overall plans from now to 2015 and builds on the strategy published in 2010. Although set in the context of severe economic and fiscal restraint the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) confirmed that it would 'continue to support a universal community learning offer, with a wide range of learning opportunities available to all adults in England'.

The report outlined a number of objectives related to the purpose of government supported community learning and outlined how it intended to commission, deliver and support learning in ways that contribute to those objectives including:

- using effective local partnerships to bring together key providers and relevant local agencies and services;
- involving volunteers and VCS groups, shifting long term, 'blocked' classes into learning clubs, growing self-organised learning groups.

**“** *My vision is of a revitalised, reborn FE sector which is more responsive to the changing needs of a dynamic economy. It will involve greater choice and a market opened up to a range of high quality and more diverse set of providers. It will encompass a wide ranging and evolving set of colleges and training organisations who can respond quickly to meet specific, specialist and/or localised demand as needs alter* **”**

*John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills & Lifelong Learning, June 15 2011*

# 3.

## Learning and skills providers: Regional context

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between informal and formal learning as there is often some crossover between the two. The setting is not necessarily a defining element: some informal learning takes place in formal educational environments while some formal learning takes place in informal local settings.

*[McGivney, V. (1999) Informal learning in the community: A trigger for change and development]*

### 3.1 Voluntary and community sector

*'A distinctive aspect of delivery of learning and skills by third sector organisations is that the majority have a wider remit and purpose than just the delivery of learning and skills. Programme delivery typically uses a number of approaches:*

- *prime contractor and direct provider of learning and skills programmes;*
- *prime contractor and lead agency for a consortium of other voluntary and community sector organisations delivering learning and skills programmes;*
- *sub-contractor of other learning and skills providers, such as FE colleges or local authorities delivering part of a learning and skills contract;*
- *sub-contractor as part of a voluntary and community sector consortium delivering part of a learning and skills contract'.*

*[Yarroll, I. (2009), Exploring the Leadership and Governance Implications of Self-Regulation for Local Authority and Third Sector Providers of Adult Learning and Skills, LSIS]*

The East Midlands also has a sub-regional mix of learning consortia through which learning and skills to a broad spectrum of beneficiaries, not just VCS employees or volunteers, is provided. In order to do this the consortia often operates a dual role:

- as a consortium for the delivery of learning and skills by VCS organisations that have limited capacity to contract independently;
- as a capacity building facility for the VCS to develop the skills of staff and volunteers in order to improve services, better meet the needs of their communities and develop learning and skills delivery.

VCS learning providers deliver a wide and diverse range of specialist provision and adult learning and skills activities across the region including:

- information, advice and guidance
- foundation learning curriculum
- skills for life
- employment support
- priority qualifications
- workforce\* and community development (see above)
- informal adult learning
- learning and skills programmes

The individual sub-regional (county) consortia have been affected to a varying degree by the funding cuts and policy changes. Only two consortia have retained a direct contracting relationship with the Skills Funding Agency, Enable; the learning and skills consortium for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Learning & Development Consortium. Consortia links with the wider VCS in the East Midlands was strengthened by a number of contacts held by Enable and delivered through the East Midlands Learning & Skills partnership, enabling its members to provide strategic coordination for both workforce development (WFD) and community skills priorities.

### 3.2 Further education colleges

The East Midlands spans a wide and varied geographical area, covering five counties and is home to 18 regional general FE colleges

- **Derbyshire:** Chesterfield College; Derby College, including South East Derbyshire College and Buxton College of Further Education (part of Derby University)
- **Leicestershire:** Brooksby Melton College; Leicester College; Loughborough College; Stephenson College and South Leicestershire College
- **Lincolnshire:** Boston College; Grantham College; Lincoln College (which also operates Newark College in Nottinghamshire) and New College Stamford
- **Nottinghamshire:** New College Nottingham; North Nottinghamshire College; Vision West Notts (formerly West Nottinghamshire College) and South Nottingham College [recently merged with Castle College]
- **Northamptonshire:** The Tresham Institute (also cover Rutland) and Northampton College

The region's colleges vary dramatically in size and demographics, from large city colleges, to smaller rural colleges, to colleges in more than one county; all of which has a direct impact on the make up of their infrastructure, internal relationships and communication systems. This also means that there is no universal model of where responsibility for working with the community and VCS providers sits within a structure and often no easily identifiable single point of contact to help navigate requests to the most appropriate person or department in the college.

Most colleges provide learning and skills programmes to young people and adults on both a full and part time basis. Provision is very diverse and takes place not only in college centres, but also at venues in the community. While in most cases the majority of funding comes from the Young Peoples Learning Agency and Skills Funding Agency they are often adept at sourcing funding to provide a range of additional learning and skills programmes. Because of their autonomous nature, no two colleges orchestrate the delivery of their programmes in the same way.

While most FE colleges offer informal non-accredited learning alongside vocational and academic study, a number have cut back on their community provision in response to funding constraints. Previous relationships with community providers and those VCS organisations seeking training for service users has, in some instances, been a casualty as colleges re-structure or re-focus on new government priorities.

There are also seven specialist colleges located in the region, funded by the Young Peoples Learning Agency. While this was outside the scope of the research there may be a great deal that could be learned from how these colleges and specialist VCS organisations work in partnership to support those learners with particular needs.

### 3.3 Local authority adult and community learning provision

*The decision was taken early in the project to include local authorities from both city and county councils, in particular those engaged in adult and community learning; as they often hold a pivotal role in the way learning and skills provision is funded and/or co-ordinated within a given area. This tripartite approach also offered another perspective on the relationships between different sectors.*

The East Midlands has nine upper tier local authorities: Derby and Derbyshire; Lincolnshire; Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; Northamptonshire; Leicester and Leicestershire and Rutland. Within the local authorities there is no single common model of delivery for adult learning and skills. Responsibility for delivering provision may reside with a local authority adult learning service or be divided between different departments within the authority. Not all of the councils are directly involved in providing adult and community learning provision.

*'Where adult learning services are delivered within one local authority directorate, usually one of the following models is used for service delivery:*

- *direct delivery: all aspects of planning, delivery and quality assurance are managed by the local authority;*
- *subcontracted: planning and overall quality assurance are managed by the local authority, but delivery of programmes is subcontracted to FE colleges, the voluntary and community sector and other organisations;*
- *a mixed model: planning and overall quality assurance are managed by the local authority with a combination of both direct delivery and subcontracted provision'.*

*[Yarroll, I. (2009), Exploring the Leadership and Governance Implications of Self-Regulation for Local Authority and Third Sector Providers of Adult Learning and Skills, LSIS]*

While the picture of how local authorities administer and deliver adult and community learning differs from county to county, so does the extent of involvement in which they co-ordinate partnerships and advertise learning and skills.

For example: Nottinghamshire Adult and Community Learning uses a large number of providers, from both FE colleges and the VCS to deliver its courses across the county and provides a link to larger provider websites to give information about the range of courses on offer. They ensure that they co-ordinate learning provision between both the VCS and FE colleges to try and avoid duplication of provision in any one area.

While in Lincolnshire the county council website has a directory of learning partners, offering a wide range of learning opportunities across the county. They also produce an extensive brochure, which details personal development and lifelong learning courses available from all providers delivering in Lincolnshire. The majority would fall into the leisure category but there are a number of work skills and continuing professional development (CPD) courses available.

# 4.

## Our Approach

Distilling evidence about the learning and skills sector is a notoriously tricky business. There is no single definition of what constitutes ‘the sector’; and the richness and diversity of the organisations that are sometimes included brooks both overview and comparison. Attempts to generalise simply reinforce that ‘the devil is in the detail’.

*[Learning and Skills Improvement Service: New Freedoms New Focus 2011 pg 9]*

**The partnership** put together a research programme to develop an understanding of current collaborative working across the sectors; identify any local factors that affect partnership working and discover what key ingredients were necessary for effective collaborative partnerships. We also hoped to reveal any practical approaches used for transitioning learners or examples of regional organisations using formal progression routes for adults (19+) moving from non-accredited into accredited learning and from level 1 up to level 2.

The research approach adopted, combined desk research on collaboration and progression, along with interviews, questionnaires and cross sector events; involving a total of 193 individuals, including contributors from 16 of the 18 regional FE colleges, 103 VCS organisations, six East Midland local authorities and one district council.

The methodology used included:

**4.1 Face-to-face interviews with FE colleges (focusing on community provision) and local authority adult and community learning services.**

Interviews with FE colleges and local authorities included looking at an overview of community delivery; the organisations past and current relationships with the VCS; the community networks the organisations attend; training delivered to specific cohort groups of learners; any activity on progressing learners; future planned activity or development ideas/opportunities with the VCS; and any best practice or activity for dissemination.

**4.2 Questionnaires to FE colleges, VCS organisations and VCS infrastructure support organisations.**

**4.2.1 The questionnaire sent to the VCS organisations** [Annex 1a] focused on partnership working and VCS relationships with FE colleges. It aimed to establish the breadth and reach of the organisations' involvement in providing or delivering training and the offer they could make to the colleges, while inviting suggestions of the sort of opportunities they felt would contribute to the aim of improving joint working between community learning providers and FE colleges.

**4.2.2. The questionnaire for VCS infrastructure support organisations** [Annex 1b] examined the role of infrastructure support organisations in the learning landscape and looked at their role around networking and the facilitation of the flow of information about learning opportunities available to service users, from both third sector community providers and colleges.

**4.2.3. The questionnaire to FE colleges**, [Annex 1c] rather than mirroring the VCS questionnaire, examined the whole college's current working practice and attitudes towards partnership working with the VCS. This also allowed us to examine local responses to some of the wider strategic debates associated with the Colleges in their Communities Inquiry and the review of informal adult and community learning provision, which were in progress at the time.

**4.3. Cultivating Joint Working: an interactive partnership event.**

This cross sector event for the VCS, FE colleges and local authorities, in May 2011, was an open invitation to discuss key issues coming out of the questionnaire sent to the VCS; learn from interactive workshops; share good practice and the opportunity for networking. Attendees were invited to make a pledge to 'take action' on developing partnership working. This was re-sent to them six months later, asking them for an update on how far they had progressed with their pledge.



#### **4.4 Community Development: Strategic network focus group. [Annex 2]**

The aim of the meeting in November 2011 was to examine how the two sectors can work together at a more strategic level and to address some of the key issues highlighted in the questionnaires. This event was aimed at those within the FE colleges with a strategic responsibility for engaging and working with the VCS and those involved in business and partnership development; along with chief executives and business development managers within VCS learning and skills provider organisations in the East Midlands. This was also opened up to key personnel within local authorities, involved in learning and skills provision. The agenda for the day included a presentation by Lisa Vernon on 'Working with the Third Sector' and table top discussions focusing on three key questions:

1. What difference will it make if we have effective connections?
2. What are the conditions that lead to thriving relationships?
3. Involving communities more effectively in joint planning and delivery - How do we get there?

The information gathered via the different research methods gave an insight into the characteristics of organisations and told us about their funding situations, external relationships, and the key issues that they felt were prominent within the learning and skills sector in the East Midlands. It also helped us examine:

- what mapping of the local learning landscape had been undertaken in the past and what that had revealed; who holds that information and whether it is shared amongst all learning providers for the wider benefit of the learners;
- whether there were any existing systems in place for encouraging learner progression and what the barriers were that could hinder progression;

- whether there was an effective local strategy for encouraging cross sector working or collaboration and if this could be easily replicated elsewhere;
- what the critical factors in partnership working and/or collaboration between the two sectors were, what can go wrong and provided a pointer to what needed to be done to address that.



# 5.

# Findings

Sometimes people and organisations take part in partnerships for purely pragmatic reasons; it might be to secure funding...it might be to ensure your organisation's voice is heard...In these circumstances, organisations are less likely to trust each other and less likely to be willing to work together to build up trust.

*[Tett, L. (2003) Working in partnership – NIACE: Lifelines in adult learning #9]*

*While investigating the relationships between VCS learning and skills providers and FE colleges, it became evident that the issues being raised around partnership working would need to be addressed in addition to any initiatives aimed at developing opportunities for joint working. Nevertheless, **The partnership** was encouraged by both the aspiration and appetite of organisations, to finding solutions to more equitable partnership working.*

The research uncovered a number of environmental factors, which appeared to affect joint working in a local area. These were often dependent on organisational culture and experience of partnership working; as a result of regional circumstances or due to funding requirements and restrictions. These environmental factors often set the climate in which joint working operated.

The diversity of relationships between providers across the learning and skills sector was highlighted, with respondents reporting they had a mixture of good and bad relationships with different individuals, organisations and departments within organisations.

Cross sector relationships can often be fragile and external factors such as funding and commissioning regimes, can seriously impact on partnerships and wider relationships, setting them off on the wrong foot, which sometimes do not fully recover.

The research highlighted five key issues that respondents felt undermined attempts at joint-working between FE colleges and VCS organisations;

1. Do we know who to talk to?
2. Do we listen to one another?
3. Do we value one another's skills?
4. Do we know what we can we learn from one another?
5. Can we trust one another?

Relationships with cross sector networks were seen as important and generally positive, with the key roles of information exchange and face-to-face dialogue being highlighted; though there were instances where they were viewed as time consuming and just 'talking shops'.

Although the research identified examples of 'bread and butter' partnership working between the VCS and FE colleges, examples of more innovative collaborations were limited, with the opportunity to utilise joint working often not mainstreamed into each organisation's everyday practice. Where learning partnerships and good working practices have been established to promote shared learning experiences and progression, it was not easy to identify forums for sharing good practice with other learning providers.

There appears to be a significant amount of resources used on mapping provision. This seems to take place at regular intervals, with the information becoming out dated very quickly. With no apparent mechanism in place for updating and sharing of the data gathered, a more permanent solution to the on-going problem of repeated mapping is needed.

## 5.1 Voluntary and community sector

**5.1.1** The research undertaken showed the breadth of training provided by VCS learning providers ranged from informal and non-accredited learning up to a small number delivering accredited training at Level 4 and 5. This reinforces previous mapping of the sector, which demonstrated that the VCS offers a wide and diverse range of learning provision – often only limited by the funding available to deliver it. However, there persisted a sense of feeling under valued in partnerships, of being viewed as not providing the same quality and level of provision as other providers and there being a lack of knowledge about what they could offer.

*“We don’t feel valued in partnerships... colleges tend to do things to the VCS rather than with the VCS”*

**5.1.2** While colleges publish easily accessible copies of their prospectus both in print and on-line, when it comes to finding exactly what accredited and non-accredited learning and skills provision (as opposed to workforce development) is on offer from VCS providers, there appeared to be no easily obtained county-by-county listing available. While some local authorities advertise community provision and an effective consortium can tell the enquirer at any one time what is being delivered by members in their region, there does not seem to be a full picture of provision readily to hand across the entire region. VCS infrastructure support organisations, which often signpost service users to learning and skills provision, indicated that they do not hold directories of what was available from VCS organisations in their area; while they do have easy access to what provision was available from other providers.

**5.1.3** VCS organisations, including some of those who declared that they had a current relationship with a FE college, were often uncertain of exactly what the college was able to fund in relation to community provision. There was a sense of frustration all round when a college was initially willing to open discussions, only to then discover that appropriate funding was not available. It was felt that colleges could do more to make clearer their funding policy for community provision.

**5.1.4** There remained a concern that college enrolment still did not fit in with the roll on/roll off programmes being delivered by most VCS providers. It was felt that this could be a significant barrier if they wanted to move learners onto a mainstream accredited course; with learners having to wait too long for the next enrolment, increasing the risk of them dropping out of learning altogether.

**5.1.5** There was a keen interest from VCS learning and skills providers in working more collaboratively with colleges at a strategic level to explore a more integrated approach to the planning of community provision and in the development and delivery of projects to meet identified needs. Organisations were also interested in exploring ways to work more effectively with FE colleges to identify joint bid writing opportunities.

*“FE colleges often hold the perception that the VCS are wary of their approach to offer training to service users because they think the college wants to ‘poach’ their learners. In some cases this has led to the misconception that VCS organisations don’t want their learners to progress. The situation is however more complex. The way that some funding bodies measure success is through outcomes; and while the VCS are often integral to the outcomes being achieved, whoever holds the contract claims the outcomes. Without being able to prove their success rates the VCS providers often find it more difficult to access future funding or to demonstrate their highly important role in the system.”*

*[Lisa Vernon – Chief Executive Derbyshire Learning and Development Consortium]*

## 5.2 Further education colleges

Recent research by NFER [National Foundation for Educational Research: collaborative good practice between local authorities and the further education sector 2009] which examined partnership work between colleges and local authorities highlighted a number of key lessons if collaboration was to be effective. These included: establishing relationships in which trust and openness were evident; having confidence that partners will deliver; sharing a vision and understanding of the project; regular and robust communication systems and the involvement of senior leadership.

*[A dynamic nucleus: Colleges at the heart of local communities: the final report of the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities. Baroness Sharp of Guildford. November 2011]*

**5.2.1** Prior to 2005 a number of colleges had dedicated community teams to facilitate community learning and engagement, however in some of the regions colleges staff numbers have been steadily in decline. This appears to have been further affected following the comprehensive spending review in 2010 with some colleges no longer having a dedicated community team or community outreach provision. Providers should endeavour to communicate the potential impact these changes are having on community provision and joint working.

“*We already have these strong partnerships and links with our communities and it saddened me that other colleges lack this, simply because of funding restrictions and recent redundancies of community development teams*”

**5.2.2** Colleges reported a variety of ways in which they worked with the VCS. These ranged from the familiar delivery of short non-accredited courses in the community to more complex partnerships with shared delivery of projects with a variety of partners. While most indicated that they had positive and often long standing relationships with VCS organisations, it was noted that others made less easy bedfellows and relationships with individuals within organisations could often determine the effectiveness of a partnership. There was a genuine sense of the benefits of working in partnership; however, miss-matched aims and drivers for initiating collaboration could often be an important factor in how an organisation perceived the outcome of the project or partnership.

**5.2.3** Meetings with the colleges identified a range of approaches to supporting learners in making the transition from learning in a community setting to moving into mainstream college. A number of those relied on community outreach through the colleges own community provision, rather than working with other providers to ensure that learners who had not received training via the college had sufficient support. The research also highlighted that some colleges do not have established progression pathways for learners moving into mainstream FE college provision within their own structures; there was also evidence of varying degrees of cohesion between outward facing community engagement and the mainstream college curriculum teams.

**5.2.4** While the governing bodies of colleges comprised of people from a wide range of backgrounds, including staff and learners; far fewer had representation from the voluntary and community sector on their Board of Governors, compared to those with an industry or private sector business background.

# 6.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Effective collaborative working rarely happens by chance. It is often asserted that collaborative working is in place based on the absence of conflict, the fact that everybody seems to 'get along well' or that delivery is good...In many cases these assumptions mask underlying issues with regard to trust, intent, behaviours, money, performance and competence. At times these issues bubble to the surface and at other times they explode in various forms of conflict or adversarial behaviour.

*[C2E Consulting 2009]*

*The partnership acknowledges that while the information gathered is not representative of all of the organisations involved in learning and skills across the region, the breadth of responses from across the counties and the different types of organisations allowed us to draw some informed conclusions.*

### 6.1 Partnerships and collaboration

What became obvious over the 18 months of the project was that there was a real willingness amongst those involved in learning and skills, to work together more collaboratively, despite the barriers identified. What seems to be missing is a framework by which to help the two sides to understand how to work together. This came out really strongly in the Community Development Network meeting, with all sectors acknowledging that they need help in navigating the sometimes difficult conditions that can prevail when embarking on a successful collaboration.

“...a very complex picture! Being able to hold in my head all the different levels of planning and operating... regional working is a challenge.”

There were clear indicators of specific areas of support organisations would like, including: identifying opportunities for joint funding; an environment that allows for collaborative bid writing; brokerage for partnerships; cross sector networking; more effective communication channels and sharing of information. There was also a recognition of the need for joint training on collaborative working and developing effective collaborative cross sector partnerships, as it is often taken for granted that it can just happen.

“...delegates think it is a good idea to work together but are not clear how it will become a reality...how do we make partnerships active and real?”

In order to develop an environment in which more effective collaborative working across the sectors can germinate and before successful transition pathways can be established, **The partnership** identified a number of key recommendations in response to the findings.

Recommendations:

- 6.1.1 Introduction of an ‘honest broker’ role, to mediate between sectors and facilitate cross sector relationship arrangements if required.
- 6.1.2 Joint forums for FE colleges and the VCS, held in sub-regional venues and coordinated by an independent facilitator that can be used to discuss:
  - barriers and obstacles to effective cross sector partnership working;
  - specific local challenges to improving cross sector partnership working and local action to address those challenges.
- 6.1.3 Cross sector work shadowing opportunities to help build stronger partnerships.
- 6.1.4 Development of an online portal to highlight joint bidding opportunities.
- 6.1.5 Use of a system which enables collaborative bid writing.
- 6.1.6 Cross sector networks focusing on developing progression pathways and transition arrangements.

### 6.2 Communication, trust and understanding

*It is important to see collaboration not just as one conversation, but a network of conversations. This series of conversations must help us find our path through the inevitable maze of personality issues and conflicting views and perspectives, until we build a basis for shared understanding that results in a (creative) solution.*

*[Hargrove, R. (1998) Mastering the art of creative collaboration]*

There is often a challenge in finding the ‘right person’ to contact. For the colleges, the vast array of VCS organisations can present a problem in identifying the most suitable partner; while for the VCS organisations, getting to talk to the appropriate person within the college can be frustrating.

There is a general need for improved communication and information flow between organisations and for a more strategic approach to communicating with sector counterparts. In the current environment, working relationships and partnerships should be taken

into account during periods of organisational change and restructuring. Any effect these changes may have on current or future partnerships and collaborative working should be communicated effectively.

Cross sector representatives or sector advisors to the boards of organisations or corporations, may be helpful where due consideration is needed on the impact business decisions may have on relationships with partners, service users and/or community learners, for example:

- when deciding on an alteration to service, spend or allocation of local funds;
- when embarking on a new project or introducing a new activity in an area;
- when deciding what policies and activities to support.

It remains important that FE colleges publically acknowledge the valuable contribution that VCS organisations make to successful collaborative delivery, both to funders and wider audiences. Likewise, a VCS organisation should endeavour to show recognition of the added value that working with a college has made to a project or delivery. Despite hearing anecdotal evidence of successful partnerships, the appeal for case studies revealed very few written examples were available.

There is room for improvement in the ways in which VCS organisations present themselves to colleges. The VCS also need to demonstrate and evidence outcome and impact as providers; being more pro-active about promoting themselves to a wider audience including funders.

Recommendations:

- 6.2.1** Single front door approach for colleges to engage with VCS providers, which allows impartial access to VCS organisations.
- 6.2.2** Clearer identification by FE colleges as to who has responsibility for community learning and VCS engagement within the college and a nominated 'go to' person who can disseminate requests from the VCS to designated departments and curriculum areas.
- 6.2.3** Investigation of different models for supporting the development and sustainability of cross sector representatives or advisors to the boards of FE colleges and the VCS learning providers.

**6.2.4** The use of joint policy briefings for the sharing of information on policies and organisational changes, for example those which impact on funding, contract arrangements, delivery and partnership agreements.

**6.2.5** Colleges to make commendations to funders where the work of a VCS partner organisation has been an important factor in the success of delivery and/or added value.

**6.2.6** VCS organisations mobilised to identify what they can offer in terms of expertise and skills; with improved marketing of the VCS offer so colleges have a better understanding of what is available.

**6.2.7** Organisations to create case studies, which highlight effective cross-sector collaborations to publicise the effectiveness of partnerships and demonstrate the value of collaborative working.

## **6.3 Progression pathways and transition**

An obvious prerequisite for the creation of coherent progression routes across different providers in a region is the establishment of cooperative cross-sectoral and inter-institutional progression arrangements. To achieve this, however, requires funding mechanisms that encourage collaboration rather than duplication or competition.

*McGivney, V. (2003) Adult Learning Pathways: through routes or cul-de-sacs?*

The research undertaken to investigate previous progression initiatives revealed that a small number of specialist programmes had previously taken place in the East Midlands. These included:

The schemes delivered by Fast Forward, funded by Nottinghamshire County Council from a variety of sources including the Single Regeneration Budget, The Rural Development Commission and Europe. Fast Forward operated throughout the county and worked with a range of partners to develop locally based learning opportunities and progression routes into further training or employment. [McGivney, V. (1999) *Informal learning in the Community* pgs 27-28, 33-34, 77]



And the Stepping Stones to Learning projects, funded through the European Social Fund, which involved the Leicester and Leicestershire City Learning Partnership (LLCLP), the city and county colleges and the local authority adult learning services. See also Case Study 12 on Leicester College in *'Breaking down the barriers: success in widening participation a toolkit approach'* [Champney J, Davey M, Lawrence S (2005) Pg 44-45].

While the project was made aware of a small number of excellent initiatives previously used to assist learner progression, these were often funded through additional funding streams. For example the Leicester/shire 'Transition Project' funded through the European Social Fund to encourage city and county colleges to work more closely with partners in adult and community learning.

There was limited evidence presented, of any current activity, that demonstrated an all-inclusive joined up approach to planning and provision for the transition of learners from community based learning and skills into mainstream [college] provision. There was also a lack of information available on the tracking of learners moving between learning environments and little evidence of coherent progression routes across different providers in a region. Developing a framework by which the FE colleges and VCS providers can come together to identify their particular strengths and develop effective mechanisms for joint planning, is essential in the route to greater collaboration on developing both progression routes and transition pathways.

However, revealing information on programme planning at an early stage would need organisations to be more open and also require a large element of trust. Nevertheless, opening up communications and getting the relationships right should encourage greater confidence and open up opportunities for more collaboration on provision. There is one caveat however; while funding mechanisms encourage competition over collaboration this will continue to be a challenge.

To look at addressing some of the potential issues associated with supporting staff and learners from different learning environments with progression, **The partnership** established a working party, with OCN East Midlands Region leading on the development of a joint OCN Level 3 Award. This qualification is being designed to provide a transitional platform,

with the aim of developing a better understanding for workers and learners in the two sectors and promoting smoother transitions and working practices between them.

The development of the joint OCN Level 3 Award should provide a more structured approach towards transition support for community learning providers and providers in the FE/HE Sector and significantly aid the process of learner progression. However this alone is not a magic bullet. It would also be beneficial if introductory courses were structurally linked to accredited courses, with providers collaborating on developing programmes for learners, which have built in progression options and identified transition arrangements.

Recommendations:

- 6.3.1** Development of a framework, which facilitates joint planning for community learning provision between VCS providers, FE colleges and local authorities where appropriate.
- 6.3.2** Commitment by all sectors to share intelligence and data on local learning needs and priorities.
- 6.3.3** An online portal, allowing individual organisations to input information. If kept up-to-date, this could help with the planning of progression routes and avoid the need for regular re-mapping of the learning and skills landscape.
- 6.3.4** Joint advertisement of courses with larger providers; consortia, FE colleges and local authority adult and community learning teams, providing progression routes from informal to formal learning across the range of providers in their prospectus.
- 6.3.5** Targeted collection of learner progression data by the VCS to identify which type of FE service users/learners are choosing i.e. other community-based learning or mainstream college.
- 6.3.6** Improved data collection by colleges relating to the progression of non-accredited community learners into accredited provision.
- 6.3.7** The OCN transition units produced in response to this project, to be robustly tested through a pilot project.



Colleges and other providers within the FE service have been involved in collaborative working for many years. It is recognised that collaborative working can be challenging and may have associated risks. However, those involved in collaborative arrangements report that working with others has proved successful in delivering improved outcomes and greater opportunities for learners and employers.

*[Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills: Further Education Colleges - Models for success July 2008]*



## Additional Information and web links

The Forward Communities project has its own web presence accessible through the One East Midlands website at [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunities](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunities), which hosts links to articles and websites relevant to the work of the project.

You can read more about the Cultivating Joint Working event including links to presentations and workshops here: [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesevent1](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesevent1)

You can read more about the Community Development Network event here: [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesevent2](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesevent2)

The outline of the Leicester/shire 'Transition Projects' can be seen here [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/leicesterandshiretransition](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/leicesterandshiretransition)

**The partnership** has also published a magazine, which highlights the work undertaken by the project with examples of collaborative working and information and articles on issues which are relevant to the learning and skills sector. You can find the magazine on the One East Midlands website here: [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/publications/insight07](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/publications/insight07)

Additional copies of this report will also be available to download via the One East Midlands Website here: [www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/publications/ducksinarow](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/publications/ducksinarow)

### 7.1 Regional Website Links

**Community Development network:** a network for the East Midlands funded by LSIS as part of their community development initiatives with a focus on:

- Developing an area network with partner providers;
- Hosting three network meetings per academic year;
- Acting as a communication point for providers and LSIS for the network.

For more information on the Community Development network visit [www.emcommunity.org.uk](http://www.emcommunity.org.uk)

**East Midlands Further Education Council (EMFEC).** EMFEC is a membership body with charitable status; which provides umbrella services for colleges and providers in the Further Education sector. For more information on EMFEC visit [www.emfec.co.uk](http://www.emfec.co.uk)

**LeicesterShire Learning Networks (LLN).** LLN provides a range of services in support of collaborative work in post 19 learning and skills; working with Leicestershire post 19 learning and skills providers (local authorities; FE colleges; academies, sixth form and community colleges; universities; voluntary and community organisations) and public and private organisations that have a stake in learning. For more information on LLN visit [www.lsln.org.uk](http://www.lsln.org.uk)

**The East Midlands Learning & Skills Partnership** website is currently under review. For more information on the work of the regional VCS consortia or partners contact Colette Byrne the Regional Partnership Manager at Enable at [Colette@enable.uk.net](mailto:Colette@enable.uk.net)

**The East Midlands Learning Support Network** links VCS specialists with specialist colleges to try and improve provision for those with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health support needs. For further information on the network visit [www.emlearningsupportnetwork.org.uk](http://www.emlearningsupportnetwork.org.uk)

### National Website Links

**Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)** [www.lsis.org.uk](http://www.lsis.org.uk)

**NIACE** (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

**Skills - Third Sector.** [www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk](http://www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk)

**Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA)** [www.tsnla.org.uk](http://www.tsnla.org.uk)

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- BIS [Department for Business Innovation and Skills] (2011) **'New Challenges - New Chances'** Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System.  
[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/f/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/f/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan)
- Champney, J., Davey, M., Lawrence, S. (2005) **Breaking down the barriers: success in widening participation a toolkit approach**. Published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency. ISBN 1-84572-214-7
- Gulati, A. and English, H. (2003) **Collaboration: Learning Partnerships and Stakeholders a guide**  
[www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/llp/collaboration.pdf](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/llp/collaboration.pdf)
- Hargrove, R. (1998) **Mastering the art of creative collaboration** McGraw-Hill ISBN 0-07026-409-0
- Learning and Skills Council (2003) **Successful Participation for All: Widening Adult Participation Learning and Skills Council**  
<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/pre2005/ourbusiness/strategy/successfulparticipation-for-all-widening-adult-participation-strategy.pdf>
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) **New Freedoms New Focus**: towards a strategic framework for improvement and development in the learning and skills sector  
[www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Publications/Documents/LSIS-Strategy-Framework.pdf](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Publications/Documents/LSIS-Strategy-Framework.pdf)
- MacGregor, J. (2007) **Local Government/Third Sector Partnership: Making change happen**. An NLGN e-Pamphlet Published by NLGN <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/local-government-third-sectorpartnerships.pdf>
- McGivney, V. (1999 re-printed 2001, 2002, 2004, 2011) **Informal learning in the community: A trigger for change and development** ISBN 1-86201-073-0
- McGivney, V. (2003) **Adult Learning Pathways: through routes or cul-de-sacs?**  
NIACE & department for education and skills ISBN 1-86201-180-X
- Tett, L. (2003) **Lifelines in Adult Learning 9. Working in partnership** NIACE ISBN 1-86201-162-1
- Wilkes, J. (2010) **A National Skills Framework for the Voluntary Sector**:  
Delivering the skills priorities 2011 to 2014. A National Skills Network Model  
[www.skillsthirdsector.org.uk/documents/A\\_National\\_Skills\\_Framework\\_for\\_the\\_Voluntary\\_Sector.pdf](http://www.skillsthirdsector.org.uk/documents/A_National_Skills_Framework_for_the_Voluntary_Sector.pdf)
- Yarroll, I. (2009) **Exploring the Leadership and Governance Implications of Self-Regulation for Local Authority and Third Sector Providers of Adult Learning and Skills**, LSIS, at [www.lsis.org.uk/Publications.aspx](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Publications.aspx)

### Additional Reading

- Learning and Skills Council (2009) **Understanding the contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills**  
[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding\\_the\\_Contribution\\_of\\_the\\_Third\\_Sector\\_in\\_LSC.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding_the_Contribution_of_the_Third_Sector_in_LSC.pdf)
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2011) **FE and its contribution to social and economic life**:  
a vision for the Big Society [seminar series – summary report]  
[www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Policy/Policy-Seminars/Pages/FE-contribution-socialeconomic-life.aspx](http://www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Policy/Policy-Seminars/Pages/FE-contribution-socialeconomic-life.aspx)
- McGivney, V. (2002) **A question of value**: Achievement and progression in adult learning, a discussion paper. NIACE ISBN 1-86201-169-9

## Annex 1: Questionnaires

### **Annex 1.a: Abridged version of the questionnaire sent to the regions voluntary and community sector.**

**The full questionnaire can be seen at**

**[www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesvcsquestionnaire](http://www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/forwardcommunitiesvcsquestionnaire)**

- What area is served by your organisation?
- What best describes the role of your organisation?
- Does your organisation attend any network meetings where requests for specific training or courses are discussed?
- Does your organisation have a current relationship or has your organisation had in the past any relationship with an FE college? (if yes) Which FE colleges have you had a relationship with?
- Which type of relationship do you have with them?
- In your organisation's own experience, what are the biggest barriers to engagement with the FE colleges?
- Does your organisation have experience of delivering training or working in partnership to facilitate the delivery of training? (if yes) What type and/or level of training?
- Do you have any experience of administering funding for projects or training?
- Which system do you use to track service users progression into training?
- Which system do you use to track service users progression into employment?
- Which type of information, advice and guidance (IAG) do you offer around training and progression?
- One of the aims of this project is to identify potential joint working opportunities between the VCS and FE colleges. Would you be interested in investigating ways in which you could work more closely with the FE college sector?

### **Annex 1.b: Abridged version of the Survey Monkey questionnaire sent to the VCS infrastructure support organisations.**

**The full questionnaire can be seen at**

**[www.surveymonkey.com/s/T5V7QZ2](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/T5V7QZ2)**

- Please state which local support organisation you are responding on behalf of, which geographical area your organisation covers and what are its main areas of interest?
- Does your organisation offer any of the following advisory and support services to voluntary, charitable and community organisations?
- Does your organisation hold a directory of what learning opportunities are available from the voluntary and community organisations in your area?
- Does your organisation have access to what learning opportunities are available from other learning providers in your area?

- Does your organisation provide training specifically around workforce development to voluntary, charitable and community organisations?
- Does your organisation signpost voluntary, charitable and community organisations to other organisations for their workforce development needs?
- Does your organisation provide training to service users and/or signpost service users to other organisations?
- Does your organisation work with careers and employment services to promote opportunities available in the sector?
- In addition to one-to-one support for organisations, does your organisation facilitate any voluntary sector networks, which allow voluntary organisations to come together and get involved in the co-ordinated planning and delivery of learning in your area?
- Does your organisation take part in any strategic partnerships with other VCS organisations, local government and/or other statutory agencies, which help shape the delivery of learning and skills services?

### **Annex 1.c: Abridged version of the Survey Monkey Questionnaire sent to the regions' colleges. The full questionnaire can be seen at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/FEVCS](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FEVCS)**

- Where in the college would responsibility for the following most commonly sit?
- Who in the college has the remit to drive partnership development with the voluntary and community sector?
- Does your college strategy proactively link into working with the voluntary and community sector?
- What type of voluntary and community sector organisation(s) has the college worked with in the past two years?
- Does the college track learner progression from community based learning provision? If so, what tracking system do you use?
- How does the college map the learning and skills needs of the community?
- Does the college engage with the voluntary and community sector when planning to submit bids/tenders for community based projects?
- Does the college have representation from a voluntary and community sector organisation on its corporation?
- Does the college have a system for regularly inviting comments from the voluntary and community sector on their working relationship with the college?
- Does the college encourage the voluntary and community sector to come forward with ideas for better ways of working?

- Has the college considered how the voluntary and community sector could be involved in joint service planning?
- Has the college considered using a specialist voluntary and community sector organisation to deliver resources for you? For example, good practice materials or specialist staff training?
- Has the college considered offering staff from voluntary and community sector organisations a place on relevant Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training events offered within the college?

**Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements**

- Different drivers and strategic aims make it prohibitively difficult to collaborate with other voluntary and community sector learning providers
- A lack of funding for informal adult community learning and/or restrictions on how the funding can be used is often at odds with what the community requires
- The college has an effective communications strategy to ensure that the voluntary and community sector knows the most appropriate department/person to speak to when making initial contact
- Demands on time/budgets means that partnership development with the voluntary and community sector takes a low priority
- Having a specified organisation to act as the college's first point of contact with local voluntary and community sector organisations would be useful when looking to engage with the sector or find partners
- The college has an effective working relationship with its local voluntary and community sector Learning and Development Consortia

## Annex 2: Table top discussions

What Difference will it make if we have effective connections?

Annex 2A

<p><b>Yellow Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners progress better</li> <li>• Learners will trust organisations better</li> <li>• No man left behind/no wrong door</li> <li>• We look more professional as a learning and skills sector</li> <li>• Providing a quality joined up learner-centred service in itself begins the journey of growing self esteem</li> <li>• Impartiality – learner focused</li> </ul>	<p><b>Green table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding each organisations vision</li> <li>• Identifying shared vision</li> <li>• Co-ordinated approach to addressing community need</li> <li>• Understanding what is in existence &amp; what each can offer</li> <li>• Organisational culture rather than personal relationships</li> </ul>
<p><b>Red Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better uses for and of funding and resource</li> <li>• Work for learners – same goal?</li> <li>• Key contacts</li> <li>• Better partnerships</li> <li>• Need to look at addressing need, not funding</li> <li>• Being straight about money prior to partnership working</li> </ul>	<p><b>Blue Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better services/learner experience</li> <li>• Efficiency Savings – scope for sharing services</li> <li>• Increase learner retention</li> <li>• Minimise disengagement by better signposting &amp; progression routes</li> <li>• Strengthening referrals – helping the learner the whole way through to reach their goals</li> <li>• Opportunity to share services – rooms, learning resources</li> <li>• Ability to articulate demand more accurately</li> <li>• Ability to respond ‘smartly’ to opportunities/funding etc</li> <li>• Reduce number of people being left out &amp; lost</li> <li>• Making core funding go further</li> <li>• Reaching new learners</li> <li>• Providing courses informally – advertising these courses through new connections</li> <li>• Build greater Knowledge across providers for benefit of learners</li> <li>• Knowing where/who to contact more easily to address learner needs/develop targeted partnerships</li> </ul>

What are the conditions that lead to thriving relationships?

Annex 2B

<p><b>Yellow Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has to be more advantage for potential partners in collaboration than competition</li> <li>• Mutual trust (to look after fragile learners)</li> <li>• Outcome payments ‘into employment’ are divisive and bad for learners</li> <li>• Agreed roles/niches/boundaries</li> <li>• Recognising and celebrating each others contribution</li> <li>• Evidence base for routes provided by good tracking data</li> <li>• Partnership training</li> <li>• ‘Success’ needs to measure more than just a qualification</li> </ul>	<p><b>Green table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to need</li> <li>• Openness about each organisations agenda</li> <li>• Understanding the constraints and operations that organisations have</li> <li>• Knowing the right people to talk to</li> <li>• Using existing consortia effectively e.g learning communities</li> <li>• Listening to what people want &amp; responding</li> </ul>
<p><b>Red Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local partnership meetings (including residents) who believe in what they are doing</li> <li>• Strategic partnership meetings inc: Police/Churches/ Council/Housing Assoc/Care Homes</li> <li>• Employ local people. (time - quality)</li> <li>• Grass roots: Community Education Team that sits in the local college</li> <li>• Point out what we share for effective relationships</li> <li>• Respect “area” for the provision</li> <li>• Having a “Champion” (Championing doing the right thing)</li> <li>• Listening &amp; being honest</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Forums: What we want to solve/find - Finding funding (including trust clause)</li> <li>• Keeping it local</li> </ul>	<p><b>Blue Table Group #1:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust/Rapport/openness</li> <li>• Changing culture/attitudes to community development activities internally as well as externally</li> <li>• Regular Dialogue – knowledge events ‘meet the supplier’</li> <li>• Sharing Resources – knowing what is available</li> <li>• Face-to-face dialogue has greater impact</li> <li>• Open dialogue and honesty about what you can deliver within capacity restraints</li> <li>• Identifying common aims/objectives</li> <li>• Developing shared strategies</li> <li>• Effective contingency planning re changes of lead staff so no loss of interface where changes occur</li> <li>• Central point of contact identified; make linkages within and across organisations</li> <li>• Respecting other organisations expertise!</li> <li>• Realistic service level agreements</li> </ul>

### Involving communities more effectively in joint planning and delivery - How do we get there?

Annex 2C

#### Yellow Table Group #2:-

- Developing consortia to open doors and collect and collate needs (or building on existing consortia)
- Sharing resources and mechanisms to communicate (one stop shop/search engines/use of Face book?)
- Making better use of existing relationships to influence communities development
- Key contacts?

#### Green table Group #2:-

- Relationship Building
- Representative Partnerships
- Local needs survey
- “what can we do for you?” local event
- Link/communicate with all community groups
- Local “ward walks”
- Neighbourhood groups
- Learning Champions
- Reach community leaning groups
- Use Skills Third Sector
- Home Grown learners/teachers
- Collect CVS data
- Use technology to implement something along the lines of “Fix my street”

#### Red Table Group #2:-

- ‘A sub regional and local public sector infrastructure is required to achieve long-term social and economic impact and to engage the private sector’(colleges in their communities report)
- Identify who/what the community is
- Identify what is currently being delivered
- Identify what gaps – ‘learner voice’
- What does/does not work
- Individual/shared skills
- Capacity building
- Sustainability
- Involving the right partners
- Inter-generational approach - inclusive

#### Blue Table Group #2:-

- Vision!
- Secondments
- Peer review
- Long Term involvement
- Planning & practical frameworks
- Work out a plan together – then work out how to fund the plan!
- Learning from the past – not reinventing the wheel
- Invest in peoples time
- Internal structure – both ground up and management down to all buy in to this
- “Champions”
- Coordination + on the ground community organisers involvement to feed back what the community wants
- Communication – who to contact/one point of contact
- Informal honest relationships
- Hold organisations to mandate – commitment to provide what is promised
- Contact seminar – How do we make a list of contacts?
- Big Event??
- Building on this to go forward

