

## BIS Consultation: Review of Informal Adult & Community Learning

October 2011

### About This Consultation Response

This briefing is provided on behalf of the Department for Education's overarching strategic partnership for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations that serve children, young people and families. Led by Children England, and working with Community Matters, NCVYS, NAVCA, the Race Equality Foundation and Social Enterprise UK, the programme will include information, learning resources and opportunities, and peer support networks. For more information please [click here](#).

This consultation response has been produced by [NCVYS](#), a diverse and growing network of over 280 national organisations and regional and local networks that work with and for young people. It is a response to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation, *New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme* focusing on the *Review of informal adult and community learning* section.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction and Context

This response supports the responses made by the Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA – whose membership includes NCVYS and NAVCA) and NAVCA, who have separately submitted to the consultation.

As outlined in the TSNLA response, "IACL is broadly defined as informal, usually non-accredited learning based in accessible community venues and addressing wider learning needs. The consultation document emphasises the importance of IACL in personal development and well-being; encouraging people to be more active in their communities; and in supporting progression to further learning. The £210 million spend on informal adult and community learning (IACL) was maintained in the recent spending review and was not cut (although it is not being raised for inflation)."

### Consultation response

In particular we support the following points made by the Third Sector National Learning Alliance and NAVCA:

- IACL plays a central role in communities. The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSES) makes a vital contribution by providing services that are tailored to local needs and priorities. They reach out to people who have become distant from learning and education and

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<sup>1</sup> New Challenges, New Chances, The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (August 2011)  
<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/n/11-1213-new-challenges-new-chances-implementing-further-education-reform.pdf>

can engage with communities that are not always reached by other providers. IACL is often an integral part of much wider community provision and community action. It clearly promotes the Big Society agenda by supporting individual wellbeing and empowerment and also supports further outcomes by changing people's lives and contributing to outcomes improving health and wellbeing and bringing people back into learning and training.

- The delivery and accountability of IACL needs to take place at the local level. Centrally-imposed systems and targets are inappropriate and likely to lead to the exclusion of local decision-making and local providers, which are best placed to offer the breadth of provision necessary to respond to local needs.
- The benefits of IACL can include increased employability, but this should not be the sole consideration when directing IACL resources. There are numerous additional benefits to IACL, including increased contribution to the wider community. IACL often lays the foundation in terms of confidence and attitude and its benefits may not be apparent for some time. Therefore measures should be flexible, qualitative and based on broader assessment of impact on the individual and the wider community.
- We would support using a broader approach than deprivation criteria alone to allocate resources. Many deprived people live in rural and/or more affluent areas and would lose out if allocation was based on deprivation criteria alone. Any change of allocation needs to be phased in to allow time to adapt for those who will lose funding.

We would also like to make the following additional points:

- IACL supports an individual's personal and social development – the process by which we learn from our experiences and develop the skills and competencies to enable us to become more effective in our decisions and relationships.
- In supporting personal and social development IACL helps develop capabilities beyond the learning itself. These may include improved communication skills, self-confidence and increased resilience.
- Increasingly evidence is linking such capabilities with broader social outcomes such as employability, participation and community cohesion.<sup>2</sup> However commissioners should be wary of attempting to measure the value of IACL by these wider social outputs. It is extremely difficult to track the impact of IACL directly through to such outcomes and such systems could place unrealistic and disproportionate demands on providers.
- National and local agencies should retain separate but complementary roles in fulfilling their respective duties in regard to IACL. Both should work together in developing a broad curriculum framework, from which focus can be identified locally according to needs on the ground. For

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see *Measuring Capabilities*, Demos <http://www.demos.co.uk/projects/measuringcapabilities>

example the voluntary, community and social enterprise youth sector workforce benefitted hugely from such a flexible approach through the 2010/11 Progress project, as part of the CWDC Young People's workforce reform programme.<sup>3</sup>

- With regards to the workforce we find the QTLS qualification too restrictive for the delivery of IACL. We would encourage the Government to look more closely at the PTLTS qualification, which is widely held in the voluntary, community and social enterprise youth sector and is sufficient to deliver accredited/QCF training.

### **Case study to demonstrate the value of community led IACL**

In an area of deprivation in Hampshire the local community association formed a stronger relationship with their local community via community forums where local people could raise their concerns about the community they lived in and work together to resolve some of the problems. This relationship of mutual trust, where local people had a voice and were listened to became key to the many changes that happened within that community.

Unemployment and lack of educational achievement were two key issues the community wished to address. Both the local schools were labelled failing schools and put under special measures. Adults generally had a poor experience at school and were still frightened of formal education. Young people had low aspirations, education wasn't seen as important and parents didn't want their children to do better than they had done at school.

The community association worked on a long-term plan, engaging adults in a programme that wasn't really seen as education and therefore totally non-threatening – card making, jewellery making and Indian head massage for example. All these activities were run from the community centre where the community were generally comfortable and used to coming to meet in the café or go to CAB for advice.

The estate was reaching its 25th anniversary and the community worked with the county council adult education programme to do an oral history programme. People realised just how much they had to offer and, using a facilitator so they could recount their stories without the threat of being asked to read or write anything, made a wonderful community project which captured the memories of the first settlers within the community. They were so proud to see the finished booklet and their contribution acknowledged within it.

The level of literacy within the community was estimated to be generally at the level of an average 11 year old. Few people were willing to admit this – but by working with the local college, carrying out literacy classes via a computer at the community centre, the participants were happy to tell their friends

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<sup>3</sup> Young People's Workforce Reform Programme, Evaluation Report Executive Summary, Children's Workforce Development Council (July 2011)

[http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/3155/Evaluation\\_Exec\\_Summary\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/3155/Evaluation_Exec_Summary_Final.pdf)

they were taking a computer class. Community members were encouraged through other programmes to take these classes and develop their literacy skills. One 86 year-old who had never been able to read, began to learn and was then able to read to her great granddaughter for the first time.

Another participant in IACL felt certain that this gentle non threatening approach to education and training has changed her life. She now works full time, is seen as a local community champion and feels that she would never have taken the first steps on this long successful journey unless she had been supported in a non threatening, community led incremental educational and training journey.