



**Community Learning & Development
in Glasgow**

Research Project

October 2005

**“Engaging in Community Learning
& Development Planning”**

*“.....I can’t comment on that –
I don’t really have enough knowledge.
I don’t really know enough,
but if I did – I could talk forever on it.....”
(A respondent)*

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Executive Summary

This research aims to investigate the attitudes and perceptions, and the experiences and issues of organisations in the voluntary sector with regard to Community Learning and Development Planning. By the use of semi-structured interviews, with a guiding questionnaire format, respondents engaged in free flowing conversations that elicited both quantitative and qualitative data.

As would perhaps be expected, the study reveals the main areas of concern for the sector organisations are in connection with resources of time, finance and staff. However, in addition, much information is generated that identifies further areas for research as well as indicators for the future progression and evolution of the sector and its services. In particular, issues of leadership, equality and information sharing are highlighted as matters that need to be addressed on a sector wide scale.

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1.0 Introduction

This study, which looks at Community Learning and Development Planning, has been conducted using a small sample of organisations in Glasgow's Voluntary Sector, and as such is not presented as representative nor as a means of generalisation. However, the sample was carefully chosen in order to gather responses from a range of organisations and is successful in providing an overview of perception, attitudes and experiences within that domain.

The findings of the research were greatly enhanced by the willingness of the participants to discuss their experiences, and their contribution is appreciated and acknowledged. It is hoped that the results of this initial study can provide indicators for further progression of the work within the sector and better achievement of its objectives.

“...we are part of the learning landscape...”

(A respondent)

2.0 Aims and Objective of the Research

The objective of this research project is to review the support and development services provided by the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and their partners, with the aim of facilitating the engagement of organisations in their work in Community Learning and Development (CLD) within the city.

2.1 Research Aims

- To collect primary data from 17 key organisations working in the voluntary sector
- To collate and analyse the findings of the research
- To present coherent results
- To identify prominent issues that will progress the work of partners involved in the delivery of Community Learning and Development. with particular reference to:
 - helping GCVS to develop the services they provide to the voluntary sector relating to CLD and CLD Planning
 - influencing the development of CLD & other partnerships across the city
 - informing the work of the Glasgow Community Learning Support Partnership

3.0 Research Design and Method

In pursuing the research objective, this study undertakes data collection by the use of semi-structured interviews, with a framework of twenty pre-determined questions to guide the interview discussions (Appendix I). Semi-structured interviews were chosen to encourage the provision of qualitative data, perceptions and attitudes, and contextual information through flexibility in the flow of conversation.

The study did not commence with a preconceived theory, opting for an inductive approach, exploratory in nature, to allow for the emergence of new and relevant information.

3.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of the data was addressed by:

- Recording interviews to enable accurate transcription
- Assuring participants of confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix IV)
- Setting pre-determined parameters for the discussions
- Conducting the interviews under similar conditions and settings
- The use of only one interviewer to ensure consistency of approach and technique
- Adherence to ethical behaviour by the researcher
- Provision of sufficient information for the participant
- Informing the participant of the researcher's aims and intentions
- Ensuring privacy and respect during the interviews
- Ensuring that participation in the study was by choice, without coercion or persuasion

4.0 Data Collection

4.0.1 Sample

The research sample was comprised of individual respondents from 17 organisations within the voluntary sector. The organisations that were chosen for participation were diverse with respect to their community focus and had varying levels of involvement with Community Learning and Development services, but retained a commonality in terms of structure, framework of operation and accountability

4.0.2 Pre- Data Collection

Prior to the study, the selected organisations received a written communication to advise of the intended study – this was followed by personal contact on behalf of GCVS to arrange a suitable interview time with the organisation’s representative who was best suited to respond to the research questions. The interviews were scheduled to suit the respondents so as not to conflict with other obligations (Appendix II). A pilot of the study was carried out to test the feasibility of the questions and to assess the typical duration of the interviews.

4.0.3 Data Collection

The use of semi-structured interviews for data collection provided the opportunity to discover the opinions and perceptions of those closely involved with the research topic, as well as affording flexibility to expand and explore related issues arising from the respondents’ interaction. In this format, the respondents are able to answer questions in terms of what they perceive to be important.

4.1 Data Categorisation

By a process of systematic elicitation, interview responses that had a common theme were identified and assessed within a domain, defined by the focus of the study and the questions in the interview. At this stage, hermeneutic contextual interpretation allowed for categorisation of terms or responses that may at first appear irrelevant. Respondents were asked to discuss or prioritise variables, which led to identifiable domains.

Following this initial analysis, further distillation of the data revealed similarities and relationships in the responses, which provided clear and measurable information.

Finally, having extracted the responses from the 'set' questions, a considerable amount of qualitative data from the interview transcripts remained as yet unclassified, largely relating to issues raised by the participants, or from conversations that developed beyond the initial research questions. This extra data is included, where appropriate, along with the tabulated findings for each research question.

5.0 Tabulated Findings

5.1 Notes on Interpretation of Findings

- Not all participants answered all of the questions – some were not applicable or relevant, therefore screening questions were used to create loops within the questionnaire.
- Some questions allowed for multiple answers from each participant, so in some cases the number of answers will exceed the number of respondents.
- Responses that do not directly answer the question but which, nonetheless, provide a perspective on the topic, are not included in the tabulated findings. These responses are included in the narrative accompanying the relevant table or chart or at the end of the Findings section.
- Question 14 on the interview questionnaire proved to be irrelevant in practice. It required respondents to comment upon a topic that they had already asserted no knowledge of. Those respondents who did have knowledge avoided this question by a loop, as their responses were dealt with in other questions. Subsequently, Question 14 elicited no information, and as a result is removed from the research findings.
- Although the interview questions made a distinction between ‘community learning and development’ and ‘community learning and development planning’, many of the participants treated these as interchangeable in their responses. Similarly, quantifiable questions, such as ‘how long’... or ‘when...’ have been answered with a mixture of personal and organisational responses, with the impression that to the respondent, these are basically the same thing.

- Question 3 tended to elicit interchangeable responses with those of Question 6, the 'how' and 'what' of these being interpreted as meaning broadly the same thing. Few respondents identified a definite 'how' of becoming involved, preferring to choreograph the 'what' of their activities to illustrate their path of involvement. The responses to Question 6 are much more substantial, therefore, as the responses offered for Question 3 were often responding to Question 6.
- Similarly, Questions 5 and 7 provoked many responses that were interchangeable, even though the former was more retrospective than the latter.

5.2 Findings

Q.1 What role do you play in delivering community learning and development services?

The responses to the first question of the interview served to reveal the broad range of interpretations that respondents offered as their understanding of what role they played in delivering CLD services, and indeed of what CLD meant to them. Most respondents outlined the activities of their organisation as a way of defining their role; some were uncertain if those activities were considered to be CLD activities while others were certain that they were not involved in CLD activities. The total range of responses is provided in Chart 5.1 with summarised responses from the transcripts presented below.

Several of the participants were involved in more than one type of service delivery while others defined their role in a more strategic or managerial aspect. There is considerable overlap within the responses – for example, someone who considered they were involved with capacity building may have indicated that they achieve this through providing academic and vocational training courses, while another may claim to do the same thing by developing personal and social skills. The value of these results lies in the diversity and adaptability of the respondents to respond to specific needs while maintaining an overarching objective.

An overview of some of the types of activities can be summarised thus:

Academic & Vocational Training Courses:

- Short specific courses such as Health & Safety at Work and First Aid
- University linked courses, with certification
- Courses on demand, such as local history, creative writing and digital photography
- Childcare/return to work courses
- English as a second language/numeracy & literacy

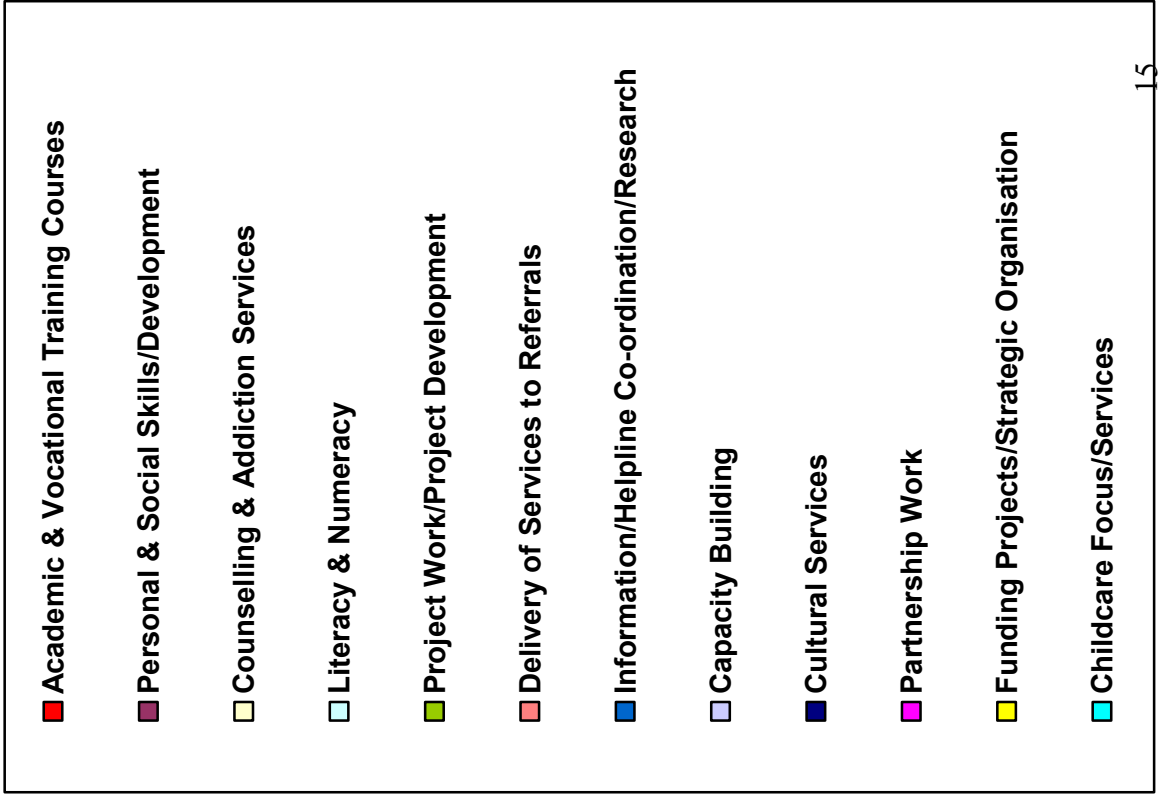
Funding Projects/Strategic Organisation

- Funding projects on the basis that they are generally pilot schemes that might be mainstreamed in the future. Seeking innovative approaches.
- Local Community Learning and Development Steering Group, helping organisations access funding.
- Working with childcare agencies and providers to identify the needs of their staff, management committee and volunteers.

Cultural Services:

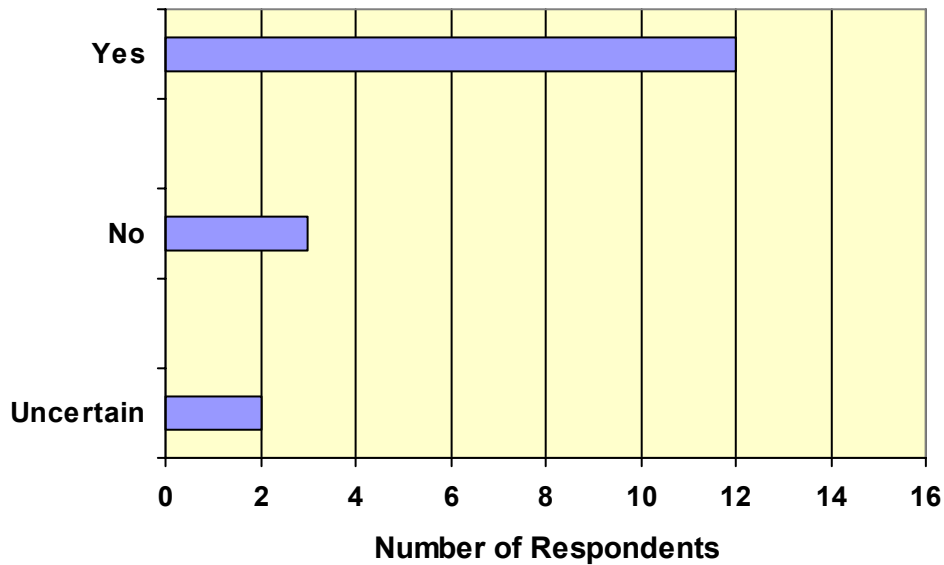
- Cultural planning through creative intervention. Acting as a catalyst for the development of new social enterprises such as theatre groups and local radio stations.
- Informal learning through group work and the arts.

Chart 5.1 Responses to Question 1



Q.2 Have you been involved in community learning and development planning?

Chart 5.2 Responses to Question 2



In response to this question, 75% of the participants considered that they were involved in Community Learning and Development Planning to some extent.

The reasons for non-involvement of 3 respondents is addressed later in Question 13.

The reason for the uncertainty of the remaining respondents is given as:

- ***“I am not personally involved but the organisation/Chief Executive has been involved. I believe his involvement is about personal development services? Originally I was the administrator so I was aware of what was happening through paperwork that comes in – meetings and projects. I don’t know the level of input but I know he attends.”***

- ***“I think there is a community learning plan but I’m not quite sure if it’s a community learning and development plan – there have been various community learning plans...I’m not sure where the community planning partnership is at the minute...It hasn’t really hit the ground yet, has it? The Scottish Executive has taken the lead in all strategic planning at arms length for the area.”***

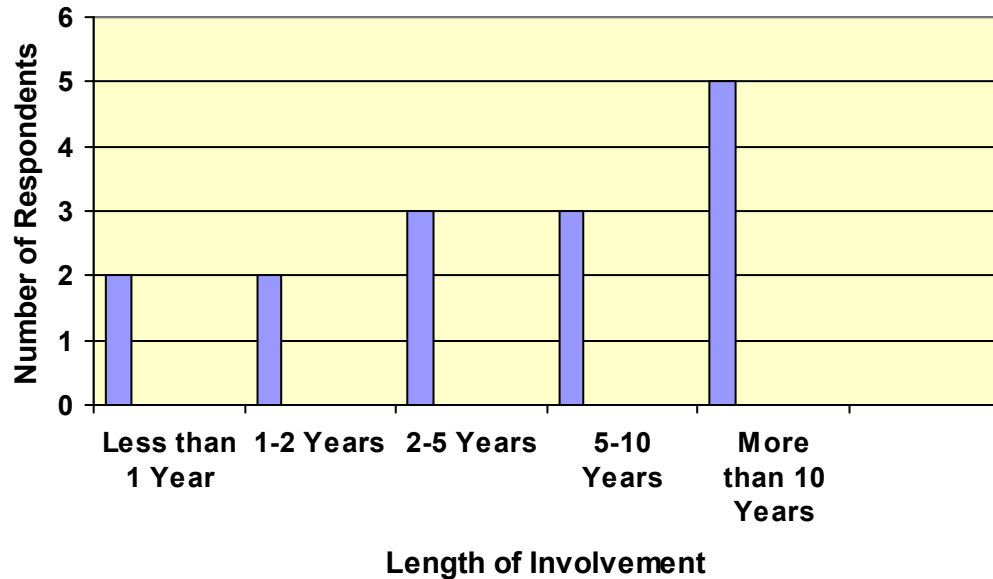
Q.3 How did you first become involved in community learning and development planning?

- *“We became involved because the City Council has taken a pretty inclusive approach to the delivery of community learning and development. They recognize that a lot of that comes through the voluntary sector and that they need to get the voluntary sector involved.”*
- *“The organisation has always been involved in childcare, partnership and a lot of strategy work. That has always been. When I came here six years ago I was told to develop this. Although I have had a lot of job titles, this has always been a core element.”*
- *“I was invited to become involved by invitation from a Policy Officer in community learning. We discussed our role and how we could contribute.”*
- *“I took over temporarily when my predecessor left – that was two years ago. It has expanded since then.”*
- *“We have always been heavily involved in delivering training, capacity building to organisations. We are a member of the citywide implementation group also.”*
- *“It’s just something that we have always done and been involved in.”*
- *“I kind of got involved with the original meetings, then kind of came into the management post, where I mentioned all the different strands of Glasgow’s learning. So we were supporting and planning events and making sure that learning was involved.”*

The predominant feature of these responses is that involvement came about as a general evolution or development of existing roles. Only one respondent was formally approached and engaged in discussions prior to involvement.

Q4. How long have you been involved?

Chart 5.3 Responses to Question 4



The responses to Question 4 offer little beyond quantitative information about length of service. Most respondents related the question to the length of time that the organisation had been involved. It was noted, though, that those who offered a personal involvement time scale in excess of five years, were generally those who were more sceptical about the potential and relevance of Community Learning and Development Planning as a concept.

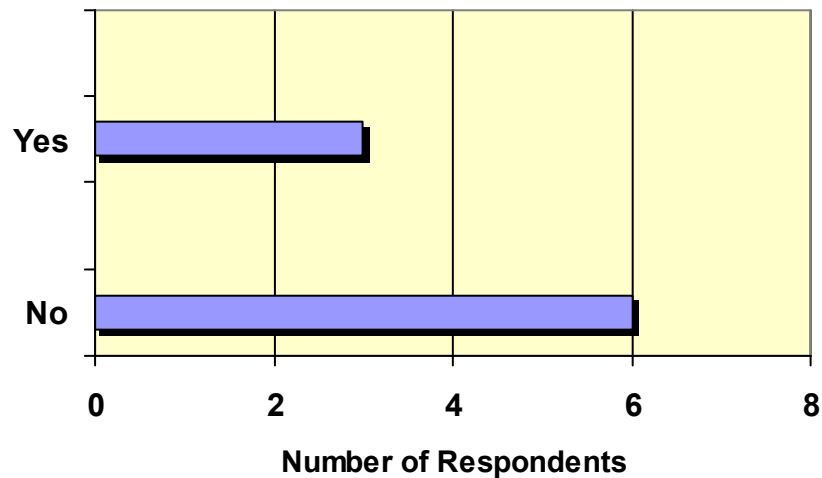
Responses and Comments for Question 4

- Where **Organisational involvement** is 2-5 years and **Interviewee involvement** is less than 1 year:
Involvement is seen as interlinked and evolving
- Where **Interviewee involvement** is 2 years:
Role is seen as constantly changing and evolving.
Circumstances change the focus and emphasis of services
- Where **Interviewee involvement** is 6 years:
Involvement has included developing a learning centre to combat skills shortages
- Where **Interviewee involvement** is 5-10 years:
Experience has been on-going, developing, evolving, gaining importance and recognition
- Where **Interviewee involvement** is more than 10 years:
There is a continuing feeling of isolation and exclusion

The responses to this question appeared to reflect a change in the nature of involvement that was broadly related to the length of service. Where interviewee/organisational involvement was 12 months – 5 years, the role was described as changing, evolving and reflecting current situations. The middle service period, of 5-10 years, was characterised by feelings of active involvement – perhaps a more proactive, creative and innovative approach inspired by confidence in the role. However, those with a service period in the region of 10 years or more tended to be more remote from the changing process; this could be due to a desire to retain or believe in existing procedures, or a simple resistance to any change.

Q5. Did you have any concerns prior to becoming involved?

Chart 5.4 Responses to Question 5



Although only 3 respondents admitted to having concerns prior to becoming involved, many more voiced concerns in the course of the interviews. These concerns centred mainly on uncertainty about their future roles and increased workloads. The responses of all those who cited concerns are as follows:

- ***“Inequity between statutory and voluntary organisations: Like any form of working partnership, there is always a bit of unease that organisations are never really equal partners. There is always a concern that statutory agencies will have their own agenda that may not coincide with that of the voluntary organisation. It is a major concern – about how it will develop. It largely depends on the people involved and their level of commitment.”***

- ***“I was concerned about my ongoing role in what was just one particular CLD area...it’s a big city with eight areas and I wondered how I could contribute.”***
- ***“Concerns that it would be time consuming for the person who is most involved. Takes the ‘leader’ of the organisation away for considerable periods. Belief that the organisations own projects and work can suffer while attention is directed elsewhere.”***
- ***“Increased workload, organizing that is involved, and changes as a result of community planning. Things like the proposed division of areas could introduce conflict between organisations when it comes to funding applications,”***
- ***“Nothing in particular – just thought it was a big task.”***
- ***“I couldn’t see how our resources could meet the extra demands of being involved.”***
- ***“Not about getting involved. But I was concerned that the whole thing isn’t joined up – so many different people doing their own things, or doing the same things, when they could be helping each other. Also, people who know nothing about planning or anything - they come along, come to the courses, get the money and off they go.”***

Q6. What kind of involvement have you had in community learning and development planning?

Chart 5.5 Responses to Question 6



As with service delivery, involvement in planning is diverse with areas of overlap. Most of the planning activities of the respondents fell into a few categories, as illustrated. While some respondents were certain of their role, others appeared less confident in identifying their contribution, as indicated by the following interview extracts.

Responses to Question 6

- *“We have been involved in a sense through the City Council’s mechanisms, a local planning group and a wider one that covers North West areas of Glasgow.”*
- *“I did attend meetings a while ago, but the whole thing is time consuming because each area in Glasgow has their own community-learning plan, which I get invited to. Given the resources I have at present, we are unable to attend as we are working to full capacity to prioritise. I can end up with 4 or 5 invites on my desk for basically the same thing. As a manager here, I’m having to either come in at 7.30am or work late and take work home at the weekends.”*
- *“Identifying skills shortages/gaps, developing training that matches gaps in the employment market, finding out what funds are available, consultation work, linking in with service providers.”*
- *“Consultation meetings with other areas. I have been invited to another this month but I will have to see if I can manage that. I just find it very difficult. I have to prioritise. Really, for this organisation, generally everything within the Glasgow City Council area – it is me who has the responsibility. We do have three other people, but they are specifically on literacy projects. For the wider activities in Glasgow – it is just myself. Sometimes you see documents and brochures stating plans and sometimes you only have time to glance through them and be aware of the general picture but not really enough to play a big role.”*

- *“It’s been patchy involvement because we have been concerned with schematic community learning planning. We have been involved in planning work, reviewing progress that has been made since the start of community planning. We are trying to see what lessons can be learned and how things can be streamlined into the Glasgow wide community-learning plan. This is more of a private study.”*
- *“I have been involved in this type of project for a long time. I found it interesting that this was a new approach that I could be actively involved in. It was refreshing to see the voluntary sector showing innovation.”*
- *“My knowledge of the community learning plan is probably not enough; we participate within the local group which is chaired by the college, but it comes under the social fund and social inclusion partnership steering group and includes economy, education and lifelong learning, health and the arts. We do have input into that, probably more from the perspective of how we can support it and ensure that the plan recognises the needs of families. We look at plans and it informs us about what is happening, what demands there are going to be and what funding may need to be accessed.”*
- *“We are a member of GCVS, which not everyone is. We are mainly involved in the Glasgow youth work network. We aren’t actively involved though – I was at the last meeting because it suited my schedule. We get a lot of visitors coming to find out and learn from our experiences.”*
- *“At the same time as doing our project work, we are trying to bring together cross-sectional partners from the housing, planning and local authorities and educate them all about these cultural planning processes. We are involved in planning as well as delivering services and projects.”*

- ***“We have quite a number of meetings. Very painful actually. I went to a number of them and they were fairly sporadic. It wasn’t a very inspiring process. We were trying to shape the whole process. Some area networking was considered dysfunctional while others worked quite well. It has to do with areas – some have communities that hang together well and others don’t. It isn’t always just a geographical thing or number of people thing. No one really takes the lead, and I have been pushing very heavily to have a strategic approach when looking at community learning and development. I couldn’t really see how it was going to work when I met the people involved and they didn’t inspire any confidence whatsoever, I’m afraid.”***
- ***“One of things I am planning to set up is to start a weekly homework class, for want of a better word, because too many people are doing college courses or doing jobs, but they really haven’t been in the education system. What I would like to do is have at least once a week a get together to do some homework, course work or whatever. It might even be filling in a housing form – anything. Some people are dyslexic, some have very, very little formal education so it would cover all aspects of that.”***
- ***We have been involved in planning and delivering services through partnership work in adult learning, social inclusion and healthy lifestyles and food initiatives.***

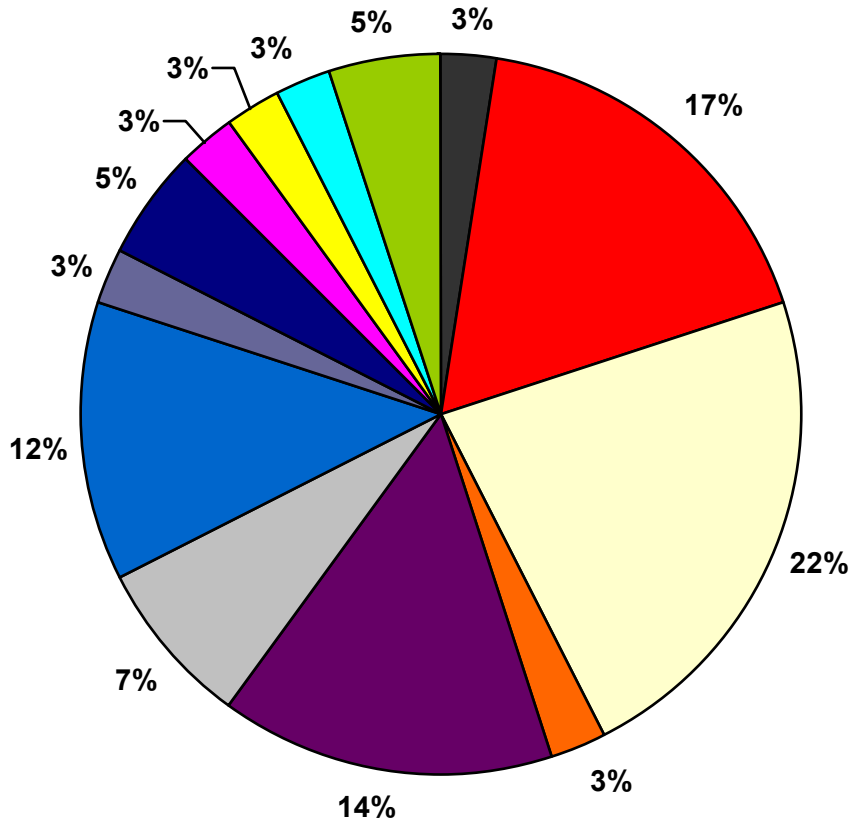
The variety of these responses indicates the diverse activities that constitute involvement in Community Learning and Development Planning. With activities ranging from project work and planning, focus meetings, and training, to strategic work and consultations, it also reflects the level of multi-skilled people within the sector

Q7. Have there been any issues that have affected your involvement in community learning and development planning? (sustainability of involvement, necessary skills)

The three main issues for most respondents were funding, time and training, with 51% of respondents citing one or more of these as a major concern for their organisation. Also of significance was the issue of information and knowledge. As this was raised with consistency during the course of the interviews, it is addressed separately, following the tabulated results of the interview questions.

The main impression from the responses to this question is one of unity across most organisations and an acceptance of circumstances that dictate and restrict resource levels. It could be said that at about mid point of each interview, a thread was emerging that linked lack of resources to levels of involvement, belief in the system and clarity of goals for both individuals and organisations. An interesting point was made by one respondent with regard to the issue of the funding process; it was believed that funding was granted on the basis of the target group – what kind of people and what area. It was felt that this worked against inclusion policies and further segregated certain groups from others, based on their perceived level of need and ability to attract funding.

Chart 5.6 Responses to Question 7
Issues Affecting Involvement



- No Issues
- Pressure of Time
- Money/Funding/Length of Funding Period
- Voluntary Sector Image
- Getting Information/Continuity of Knowledge
- Geographical Boundaries
- Trained/Training Staff
- Government Priorities/Agendas
- Inequity/Mistrust between Voluntary & Statutory Agencies
- Lack of Community Development Approach
- Pointless Meetings/No Progress at Meetings
- Lack of Understanding of the Partnership Concept
- Disjointed structure/Duplication of Activities

These extracts illustrate some of the perceptions behind the responses to Question 7.

- ***“ There are always resource issues – time and money. Planning means a lot of meetings, but with limited staffing resources and a tight remit, you have to prioritise and make sure meetings have a tangible result.”***
- ***“Getting the statutory – and other – agencies to realise that there is professionalism in the voluntary sector. Also, I have heard that other organisations share the view that there has been too much emphasis on local community plans rather than city wide plans.”***
- ***“Quite often you are working blind – you don’t know what other people have on their agendas.”***
- ***“The major thing is that there are eight different geographical areas. I wonder how one person can contribute to all eight areas.”***
- ***“It takes a lot of staff time and meetings to drive the thing forward and progress has been slow. Also people from some organisations don’t turn up at meetings for months, and then appear wanting to know what’s been done. That’s unfair to other partners. Even if organisations do turn up at meetings, it doesn’t necessarily mean they are contributing. I have taken it upon myself to minimise the length of meetings so that more action is being taken. There are also problems with inadequate monitoring and evaluation, and issues between partnerships organisations. For example, a lack of interest in finding out or learning from what other people are doing; personality clashes at management levels which impacts on the staff and their work; mistrust between statutory and voluntary organisations – there has not been a coming together of organisations.”***

- ***“A difficulty I have with the whole process is that we are a relatively small organisation and our funding limits me in terms of what training I can do. The main issue is with the resource of staff time – a typical problem across the network. I would like to train 5 more people up but realistically that’s not going to happen even though our project has been successful.”***
- ***“Time is the major thing – and also staff training. A lot of staff go to training in their own time – which I think is wrong. If you are training for the benefit of the organisation, then you should have the time to do it, but these organisations don’t have the funding or the staff to actually let people away. We have people who sign up to do training then cancel at the last minute because someone has gone off sick and they are short staffed. There must be ways of dealing with that.”***
- ***“Money – it’s the most important factor. We could do with so much more funding. The trouble is we are chasing reducing funding all the time and it’s by far the biggest issue. We are wasting time fundraising when we should be doing our job. I have spoken with government ministers and prospective candidates for the Scottish Parliament about it – they recognise it but they don’t do anything about it.”***
- ***“We have no core funding at all, so all of our core costs to run this company and the core staff have to be budgeted into the project. Also we are only starting to gain credibility with the statutory agencies. We haven’t done all the work yet to achieve that with teachers, health professionals, Communities Scotland officials and local enterprise companies, but it is what we are working towards. There isn’t a grasp yet amongst these agencies about the value of our approach. Our role is very rarely recognised. I think it’s only recently that organisations such as ours are starting to be seen as part of the learning landscape.”***

- ***“Some networks seem to work and some don’t – and a lot of that has to do with personalities. Also I think there is confusion about community learning and community development. I think some of the key people involved struggle to understand, and are almost cynical perhaps.”***
- ***“Stigma is a big issue for us – the stigma of coming from a certain area or the stigma of labels that say who or what you are.”***
- ***“Training is a big issue for most organisations – multi skilling is good to help provide a better service. Also funding – short term funding is absolutely horrendous for projects that have a time-scale of eight or nine years. Few projects are under three years – but they have yearly funding applications to do.”***
- ***“As a company we were going to drop community learning and development, as no one was prepared to fund it on the scale needed to make an impact. There is money available, but quite frankly, not enough. Clearly the main one is the same as any organisation – the concept of funding and the short-term nature of funding. When, like us, you have to deal with a long-term agenda on the basis of short-term funding, staff have concerns about the organisation’s sustainability, and so move elsewhere. Then you need to use more of the organisation’s resources for recruitment, induction and training.”***
- ***“The difficulty we have is from referrals – we do not know what others have already done with the learners, there may be differences in how we do things but we aren’t aware of what these actually are.”***

Q.8 If yes, how have these issues been tackled?

Very few respondents answered that their issues **had** been tackled, but rather with suggestions as to how they **could** be resolved. These could be broadly categorised as:

- Establishing communications
- Making direct requests for information (successful in the past)
- Involvement of organisations in plans to link initiatives
- Request for clarification of terms/meanings
- Networking/informal meetings (considered to be more successful and productive than formal 'agenda' meetings)

While it was felt that sometimes a simple phone call could rectify or help a situation, overall it was considered that there was a need for firm leadership, in the form of a sector representative, who would keep partners informed and equable. It was obviously felt that increased funding would alleviate many issues, such as staffing and training, but clarity of strategy and policy, more stringent monitoring and evaluation, and increased collaboration were all considered important. There was also widespread dislike of unproductive meetings, which, it was felt was encroaching on already constrained time.

Finally, inequality, with regard to the representation of some groups (such as black and minority ethnic groups), lone parents, and drug and alcohol addicts) was a major concern of organisations who are involved with those groups. Those respondents who expressed an opinion on this matter felt that consultation and consideration for these groups is not at an acceptable level, in comparison to other groups. The view was expressed that government addressed and targeted groups according to a pre-determined agenda.

Q.9 What was your initial understanding of what community learning and development planning was trying to achieve when you first became involved?

Few respondents were clear about the aims of Community Learning and Development Planning, beyond the belief that it would mean more work. Those who were long standing sector workers tended to perceive it as a new name but not a new approach. Those who did consider it to be a fresh initiative expressed apprehension at what appeared to be a large undertaking, underpinned by uncertainty, as some of their comments reveal:

- **“Sounds like a really huge project”**
- Uncertainty about role (*personal*)
- Concept not always relevant to work being done
- More mixing/integration of learners and service users (*to remove “target groups”, “labels” and “segregation”*)
- No understanding – **“ but didn’t fancy the sound of it”**
- A coming together of organisations to discuss projects/options – but has actually become organisations in competition for funding and learners

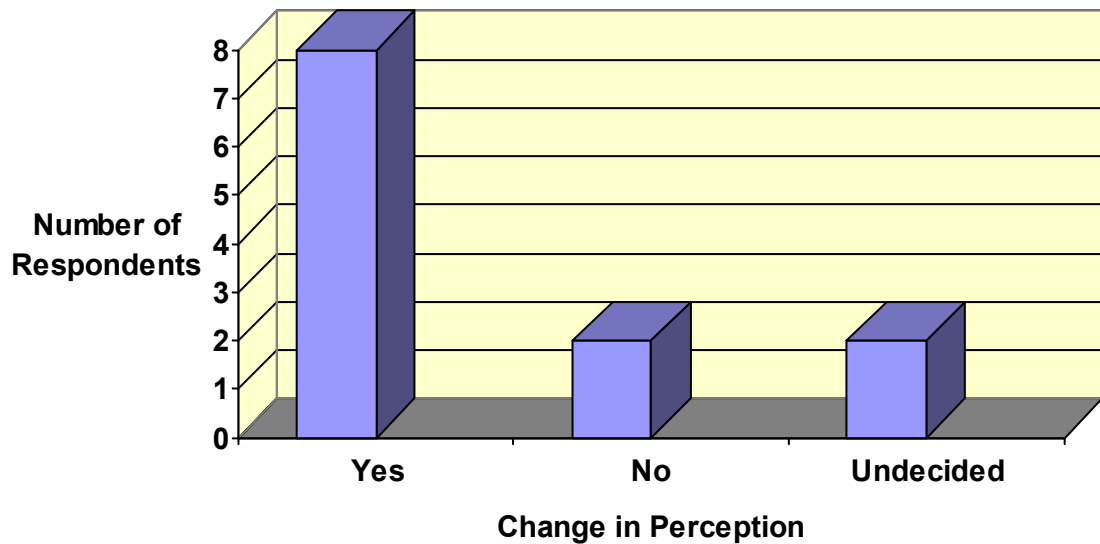
Generally, the respondents who were already proactive in innovation and planning for the future were more optimistic about becoming involved. These organisations tended to see the planning as a means of further integration and coming together of organisations and learners, as well as opening up possibilities for those who felt they were on the periphery of the system in terms of inclusion.

One respondent felt very strongly that they needed to –

“...position ourselves at the core of it...be right there at the centre to inspire and engage with other practitioners in a cultural approach but most of them aren’t at the table..”

Q.10 Has your perception of what it is about changed as a result of your involvement?

Chart 5.7 Responses to Question 10



The responses to this question were, perhaps, the most diverse of all the interview questions. It is clear that the majority of perceptions changed post-involvement, but the range of these is such that condensing them into categories detracts from their content. Therefore, the responses are reproduced below, verbatim. The main concern here, though, is why such a large proportion of respondents found their original perceptions so challenged. This may revert back to the supply and provision of information issue.

Responses to Question 10

- *“To be fair in terms of the activities we have been involved in there has been very good partnership between the statutory sector and the voluntary sector. It is one of the areas that has gone very well. One of our projects involved a college, the council and a number of other agencies working together – it worked well and an awful lot of people got a lot out of it.”*
- *“It is not as joined up as I thought it would be – and I would have liked the funding to be for longer.”*
- *“I have become more cynical over the years. A lot of that is the reality of having to work to get the planning in. The main difficulty is getting the knowledge and getting it at the right time. If you don’t have the time to do the planning, and you don’t have the time to get the background information, how can you be positively and actively involved in the planning? What is often the case is that afterwards, people suddenly realise that they haven’t consulted with a particular type of group.”*
- *“I feel now it is chaos and turmoil. There is a lot of confusion and I’m trying not to let that hamper what I’m trying to do. We are still trying to target people who face barriers and disadvantages in accessing learning – we are still trying to get around the city to do all of that.”*
- *“It does change to some extent. You can give your opinions. It’s not something that’s isolated, that you don’t have access to. Getting to know what’s involved, in my experience, is something you can relate to and you can give input to.”*

- *“I’m pretty clear now about it. Unless we get the community learning side right, we are not going to be able to engage properly with people. A big thing coming from the population is learning for adults, as there are adult literacy and numeracy issues and that is a big thing. I think before we got involved in this we were fairly narrowly thinking about geographical areas. I think we have a much better appreciation of what community learning is all about – it’s supposed to make sure people get the right service and aren’t stuck with the wrong service, it’s about increasing access and equality. I want to emphasise the point about the importance of an equality monitoring framework.”*
- *“My perception hasn’t changed drastically, although it has not always been positive from my point of view. It’s quite cumbersome and the systems aren’t always relevant.”*
- *“I don’t think my perception has changed. Personally, I have found that there is always the demand to have outcomes which don’t necessarily relate to the needs of young people. I mean the nature of the outcome – community learning and development has got to be about getting young people into work, whereas it’s actually about young people’s personal and social development. We are currently being asked to justify our existence in terms of employment.”*
- *“Most of us involved in cultural planning aren’t at the table of involvement. It hasn’t happened.”*
- *“I couldn’t really say if my perception has changed. I know we pushed very hard first of all, but when we didn’t get recognition or involvement – well.... now I don’t know, and I don’t care – that signifies how unimportant it is. You practically have to stand over them to get an end result. You*

would rather not have this process. Some of us were really trying; there were issues coming out but they would be watered down, and I would have to say ‘No – this is what I said’.”

- *“Yes – because we don’t have a lot of resources in terms of staffing. I am the one who has really got to try and meet needs, even in the areas where I don’t have particular expertise.”*
- *“I think a lot of the time people are actually competing with each other for the same learners so I think in terms of planning and development we should be looking at bringing learners together, moving them all together and looking at joint events. On some occasions there are 40 different organisations putting on 40 different events for the same thing – the whole point is to bring people together.”*

Q.11 What changes have there been to your or your organisation's work as a result of your involvement in community learning and development planning?

Just over half of the respondents who said they were involved in Community Learning and Development Planning believed that there had been some degree of change since their involvement. Most of these felt that the changes were generally small in nature but, interestingly, many felt that more radical change was required to realise the potential of the planning process. This would indicate that change was actively desired, in light of the perceived increased workload and commitment that involvement in planning would bring.

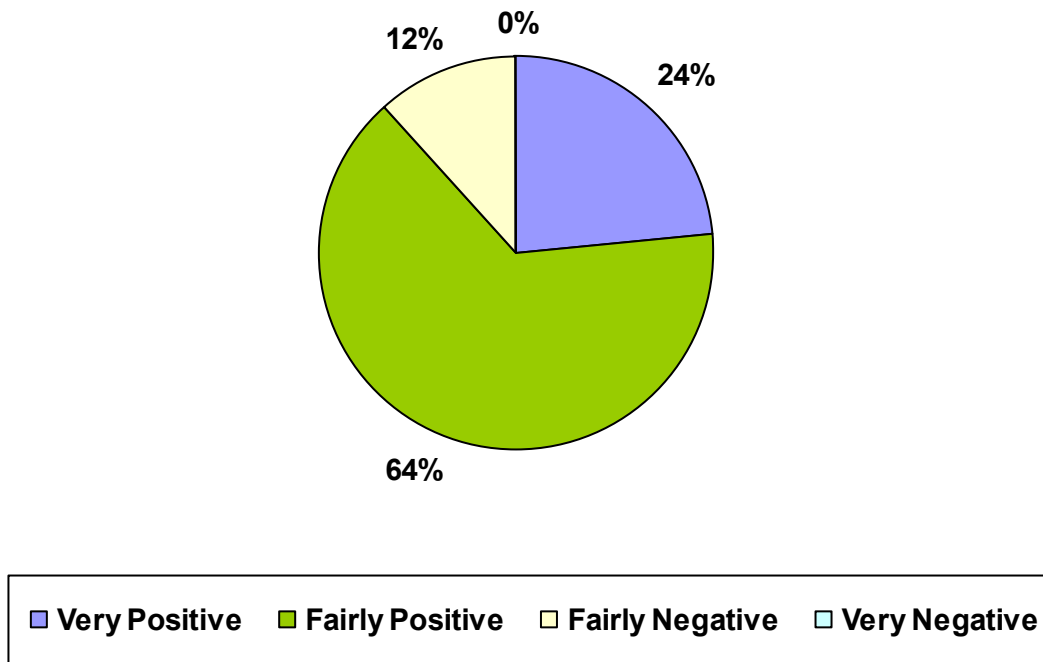
The main reported changes can be classed as being perceived as positive or negative thus:

| Positive Change | Negative Change |
|---|---|
| Greater emphasis on partnerships | Competition for funding |
| More openness | Overwhelming and confusing structure |
| More projects (responding to need) | Increased monitoring and evaluation (also perceived as positive by some) |
| More successful funding applications | Increased workload |
| More collaboration | |
| Involvement of key stakeholders | |

Other reported changes, which have yet to be proved as positive or negative, include a change in organisational focus, in response to community demand/need, and a re-branding of organisational image, to reflect the organisation's approach and strategy.

Q12. Overall, how would you describe your experience of involvement in community learning and development planning?

Chart 5.8 Responses to Question 12



The results from this question generally reflect the respondents' (and their organisations') experiences in delivering services. For example, those who were fairly negative also indicated, from previous responses, that they felt isolated within the sector, cynical about the process and doubtful of the policy and strategy. Respondents who were fairly or very positive were, on the most part, optimistic for the future, albeit with some reservations during the transitional period; they also tended to be the respondents who displayed a history of full involvement, innovation and forward thinking in their activities.

Most respondents accompanied their response with remarks, which help to qualify their answers:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Very Positive | It's going in the right direction. Although there is a level of uncertainty, we encourage people to look at all the facilities and see the bigger picture. |
| Very Positive | Definitely. Optimistic for the future and the direction that is going. |
| Very Positive | No comment |
| Fairly Positive | Optimistic |
| Fairly Positive | No comment |
| Fairly Positive | But in my experience it is difficult |
| Fairly Positive | But it needs more promoting and explaining in the workplace. Some people just don't know what you are talking about. |
| Fairly Positive | In that there is potential. If I wasn't an optimist I wouldn't be getting involved in this kind of work. We as an organisation have tried to do too much in the past as well and it has taken us a while to realise that we have to concentrate our efforts. To a certain extent the whole community planning agenda has helped us realise that. It has focussed our minds a little. |
| Fairly Positive | My reservations are because neither I nor my organisation have been involved that much. |
| Fairly Positive | We have to be optimistic. In terms of what we are doing here – it is not going to change |
| Fairly Positive | I think it's got to be a good thing. |
| Fairly Positive | No comment |
| Fairly Positive | I think I am going to have to say that I am fairly positive, sort of optimistic. |
| Fairly Negative | At the moment I don't feel that we are involved. We are not invited to the table; we're just not there yet. |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Fairly Negative | I don't think that people are dynamic about this at all |
| Fairly Negative | Because the planning comes in from above. The Scottish Executive has been planning something for years and they say they want to implement it, and they give us a three month consultation. It's a ridiculously short time to have things in place and turned around. There seems to be no awareness from government just how inappropriate this type of planning is. They should involve us earlier, to look at the structure and firm up issues. But it comes down and then everyone is getting pressure. |
| Fairly Negative | Everything is about the private sector and what the private sector does is best and what the public sector does is not as good. I just think there is a lack of clarity. It's unclear what the strategy is - if there is one. |

Q13. If you haven't been involved in community learning and development planning, are there any particular reasons why?

Five respondents offered reasons why they were not involved in Community Learning and Development Planning. Two of these stated that they were busy doing the job instead of talking about it. As one respondent put it:

“Whilst all the talking is going on we are doing it. I think we have some reluctance to go and spend more time talking about doing it rather than actually doing it. Personally, I left my previous position so I would spend more time doing the job than talking about it. It seems to take forever, particularly through the City Council structure. They seem to move very slowly. By the time they actually get to coming up with a plan it's quite literally been done.”

Of the other three respondents, one had only taken up the post recently, another had been distracted by a major premises move, and the third felt that it was the responsibility of the City Council.

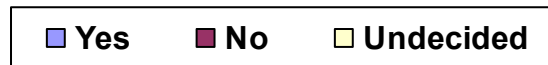
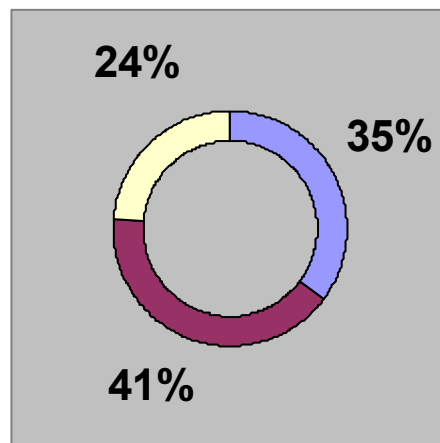
No respondents cited any of their organisational issues – such as lack of resources – as a reason for not being involved.

Q.14 Is there anything that would have been useful for you to have known about before that would have encouraged you to become involved?

In the early stages of the interviews, it became obvious that this question was eliciting no useful information. It did not apply to respondents who were involved in Community Learning and Development Planning, and those who were not involved were not aware of what knowledge or information may have been available to inform them. The question was subsequently deemed redundant and removed from the study.

Q.15 Do you think community learning and development planning has successfully linked in/related to other initiatives, such as Community Planning?

Chart 5.9 Responses to Question 15



The most interesting revelation from the responses to this question lies in the remarks that respondents made along with their answers. Those who answered 'No' were very definite and knowledgeable in their reasons for that answer, while those who answered 'Yes' did so in a more hopeful, tentative and optimistic manner.

The 'Undecided' reflected the air of general uncertainty and confusion that some respondents had about the planning process as a whole, shown by comments such as:

“To be honest I don’t feel I am involved enough to be able to answer. Mostly it’s the council who are controlling that. It may be an issue that the voluntary sector needs to have that explained a bit more – about the relationship between community planning and community learning and development.”

“I don’t know – I’m not too sure. It’s something I’m not too positive on so I can’t say with a definite yes.”

Yet again, this may return to the supply of information issue.

Q.16 If yes – in what ways?

Responses to this question were few and brief, as follows:

- ***“I feel that it has assisted our organisation to grow.”***
- ***“Read the document from the Scottish Executive – this is the way that people will be supported and their knowledge and understanding helped.”***

One can only assume that participants have not yet considered – or realised -what links there are between the initiatives.

Q.17 If no – how could this have been improved?

Once again, the responses from the participants do not lend themselves to categorisation; therefore, the suggestions put forward are outlined below:

- ***“When you have two established initiatives you can talk about where they overlap. Community planning is still very much in development, so it needs the structures in place to pull everything together.”***
- ***“I don’t think it’s a case of how to improve the links; it’s more a case of the workload. It’s so busy that it’s easy for things to slip off the radar, usually because of other priorities.”***
- ***“A lot of the problem is time constraints. You get somewhere then don’t have time to follow up because of the workload.”***

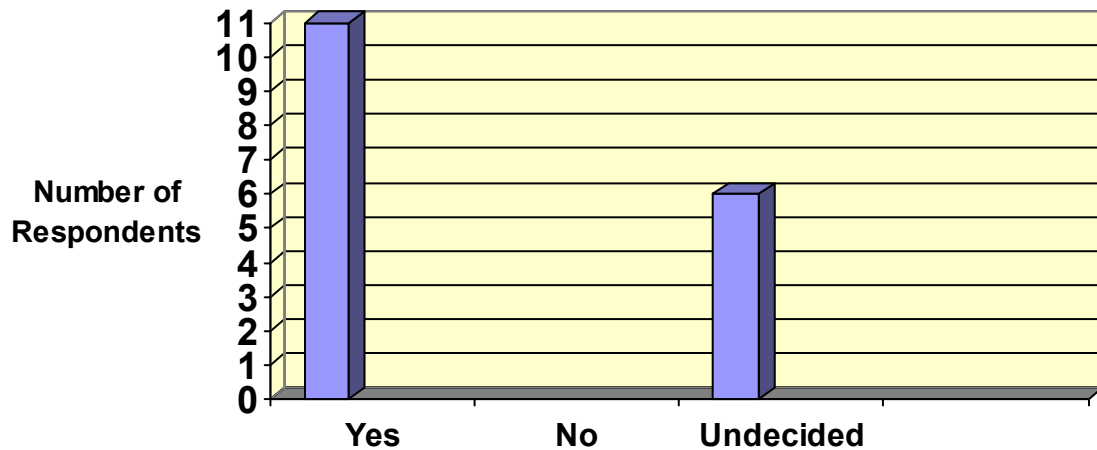
We don't have the resources to delegate someone to do that. They should involve the voluntary sector though at this stage as we have ideas. It has a lot of potential, but we are under pressure.

- ***"They haven't promoted it enough and they didn't start off with a big bang. It's just boring paperwork that comes through. There should be a conference or something for a half day – that would make a difference and people would remember it."***
- ***"The community development aspect worries me. Talking about community engagement – if you don't develop the community you don't have anything to engage with. If you don't have all the elements in place then it is difficult to take forward. There is partly a lack of personal commitment and partly pressure on small organisations who don't have people available."***
- ***"I would like to run a series of seminars and workshops with community planning partnerships to empower them with what cultural planning could offer them."***
- ***"It's difficult because there are so many people involved. I've been looking for leadership, and so far I haven't really seen it. Is that leadership supposed to be coming from the council? I think we need someone to be setting the priorities. And some clarity about strategy."***

What is indicated by these responses is a real desire to be involved and to make a difference. There appears to be an eagerness to contribute, but a lack of knowledge of how to go about it. There is a lot of positive feeling but it seems to be based on a fragile foundation.

Q.18 Do you think the community learning and development approach is supporting the development of capacity building within communities?

Chart 5.10 Responses to Questions 18



Approximately one third of respondents were unsure if the Community Learning and Development approach supported capacity building. Some of these responses were attributed to a lack of knowledge with regard to the definition of capacity building and the fact that it could mean different things to different people. Others were indecisive as they believed the potential existed but were not convinced that it was being achieved in practice. It was also mentioned that, where users came in from other areas, the capacity was not realised in the local community that provided the services.

Also, concern was expressed about capacity building that is created and then lost through the upward and onward movement of people who leave the area community, mainly as a result of their increased abilities or skills.

It was generally accepted that the process of capacity building was a slow one and results may not be seen for several years. However, opening up opportunities for capacity building was perceived as a very positive and encouraging step for both users and providers. It was also felt by two respondents that capacity building needed to have a more cultural tone, in order to foster interest and belief in the resources of the community

Q.19 In what ways, if any, would you promote the benefits of being involved in the community learning and development partnerships to others?

| Should Do | Are Doing/Should Do More |
|---|--|
| Involve Learners in promotion – participation in committees and meetings | Promotion of organisational successes to funders |
| Avoid sector jargon – especially in communication with users/learners | Newsletters/magazines/mailings for the community |
| Improve communication structure between other organisations in area | Word of mouth – simple and most effective |
| Use of marketing and media forms that are easily understood | Personal contact/street work |
| Meaningful partnership working and interaction | Informal community events/open days |
| | Information website for organisations and individuals |
| | Networking – for organisations and individuals, providers and users |

Many of the topics in the above table arose in the course of interview conversations, and demonstrate the range thoughts and ideas of those who are involved in delivering services in the voluntary sector. This rich source of hands on experience is more than willing to be tapped and exploited in the interests of the organisations and their users.

The suggestions range from those that require a basic re-examination of practices – such as the use of sector jargon that is confusing to learners – to major strategy changes, such as the use of modern marketing and media to connect with and inform users. Most of the suggestions would necessitate sector wide cooperation and collaboration in order to succeed, and subsequently returns to the question of effective leadership and information dissemination.

Networking within organisations is seen as being increasingly valuable – sometimes more so than formal meetings which can be unproductive and time consuming. It was felt that informal networking was useful to keep up to date with sector and organisational activities, and provided the opportunity for casual information sharing that is absent at structured meetings. Also, proposals to share and exchange resources aim to make better use of resources as well as providing a more comprehensive service to users.

Websites are considered to be a good way to promote activities to users and other providers. More than one organisation expressed an interest in facilitating the maintenance and input to this, but stressed it should be overseen and managed by a designated steering group. This form of communication – and TV advertising – were perceived as having the most relevance to users in terms of relating information. Traditional methods, such as booklets and leaflets in libraries or community centres were seen to be inadequate, unproductive and too small scale with regard to numbers reached.

It was also emphasised that the use of sector jargon and phrases was misleading and off-putting to potential users – and indeed to some providers – as the meanings were not always clear. Avoiding, or explaining, the use of jargon was considered an important point in

communications with all parties. Finally, some respondents felt that promotion should include relaying success stories to funders, to support their applications and justify projects.

Some of the points raised above are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Q.20 Are there any issues in relation to community learning and development planning that we have not discussed and that you would like to comment on?

In the course of the interviews, many topics were raised – none of which were fully addressed by the questions, and all of which could be the subject of individual research. At this point, an outline of each point is provided.

➤ **Initial Engagement** (of users) –

- *“The biggest hurdle for many is the initial engagement, but one step can mean getting involved in a whole range of things. Genuine involvement of members of the community in planning process. People are too shy to speak up because they don’t have confidence in themselves. Learners need to be more involved and consulted in the decisions about facilities and courses. They should be on committees and boards – and not just a token gesture but actually taking part. Personal contact is considered to be most effective – at schools and shopping centres for instance, or events such as open days and drop-in information centres.”*
- *“Young people are presented as a problem – I say, let’s turn that on its head and start thinking about them as potential resources.”*

➤ **Male/female ratio** (of users) –

“It tends to be more women than men that get involved. Its men who were not taking up learning opportunities so we developed a number of different projects that are specifically targeted at men. The men come in and actually design the courses.”

➤ **Knowledge dissemination/information sharing** – This subject produced wide and varied opinions, covering views on information availability, type, relevance, access, sharing and omission. Many of the questions in the interviews were answered with a reference to and in the context of the information that was available to the respondents. It was felt that issues such as planning and capacity building would be better supported if more – and clearer – information was provided. Of all the topics discussed in the course of the interviews, this one perhaps is most in need of further research as it appears to have a considerable impact on most organisations. The general aspects and comments are outlined here.

- ***“I would say that we don’t get that much.”***
- ***“Informal networking brings in a lot more information.”***
- ***“We get magazines and information from GCVS, but I sometimes feel we are left out of the loop, particularly with things coming through from the statutory sector.”***

- *“Sometimes it’s an oversight when we don’t get information, because they maybe think we wouldn’t be interested.”*
 - *“In a small organisation you can get overloaded with information, but you have to read it – it has to be dealt with. E mail encourages people to send out any kind of information, and there is so much there is a tendency just to not bother with it, but that could be a problem.*
 - *“You have to strive for information sharing, but sometimes it doesn’t work.”*
 - *“One of the big problems is quite often we don’t know what the agenda is or what others are doing, and you hear about it afterwards. We need to develop local area knowledge.”*
 - *“Some partners will provide information quite willingly, but at times we have had to constantly chase for information, phoning every day and sending e-mails. It can be difficult and takes up a lot of staff resources.”*
- *Project funding processes – “They have to recognise that if they want the voluntary sector to participate, they have to fund them to participate.”*

- **Fractionalised working – “The work needs to be more joined up and cross city boundaries. Also, I hate all those little boxes – lesbian, lone parent, disabled etc. The point is community learning for people from all backgrounds, coming together, mixing and moving forward. Instead we are labelling them and keeping them apart.”**

- **The role of GCVS – “GCVS are at the top table in community planning partnerships and as such have responsibilities with regard to equality and representation of black youth groups. GCVS are powerful players and should be asking if it is right that they should leaving it to others to include minority groups, or if they should be making a concerted effort themselves to engage with those groups. When you give – or assume - responsibility, it is more difficult to place the blame on others.”**

Other miscellaneous issues that were mentioned included:

- Overabundance of meetings/unproductive meetings -
- The desire for independence (*of the organisation*) often means isolation/exclusion from partners in day to day activities
- Involvement of voluntary sector at decision making level
- Management systems not robust
- Quality and type of information
- Quality of monitoring/evaluation
- Need for leadership, clear policy and strategy
- Need to look at reasons and motivation for forming partnerships – normally financial/resource/competitive based

Conclusion

Within the remit of this research, and giving due consideration to the short time scale of the project, the small sample and the limited contextual knowledge of the researcher, the following recommendations are suggested.

- The results of this research should be communicated to the participants in the form of the overall findings, with the provision of a full report available on request.
- Further research should be undertaken to ascertain the exact areas of interest for each organisation with regard to information dissemination, in order to avoid both omissions and information overload.
- A robust monitoring and evaluation system should be developed, to encompass activities, projects and progress, to help generate a sense of equality, responsibility and accountability among organisations.
- The issue of meetings should be addressed – perhaps new criteria established for frequency, content, objectives, duration and attendance.
- Forging better understanding and liaison between organisations may help to eliminate the misapprehensions and mistrust which drive competitiveness and segregation.
- Consideration should be given to studying the other issues raised by the participants in response to Question 20 of the study.

***“A lot of people have come a long way –
but don’t realise how far they have come”***

(A Respondent)

Research Overview

This research project was undertaken with an open mind, a blank canvas and an impersonal list of potential respondents. Within the six short weeks of the study, those respondents have helped to create a living documentation of their experiences by freely talking about their hopes and concerns, their aspirations and inspirations, their troubles and triumphs.

The true value of this small study lies in the recognition of the wealth of talent and enthusiasm that exists within the voluntary sector. It was a humbling experience for the researcher to gain temporary access to these organisations, and the responsibility of the task in hand was soon balanced by admiration for those who participated. In the researcher's opinion, these people are the carers and keepers of communities.

The research project itself was of immense interest, stimulating and thought provoking. In retrospect, the survey questions were, at times, merely a stimulus for conversation and in some cases the questions were not directly answered. But in a semi structured interview format of this nature, the impromptu flow and direction of the conversations yielded much more in experiential data than a tick box survey could achieve. In that respect, it is considered that the method was well suited to the objective, and, as such can be deemed as fulfilling the requirements of the research.

This report has been produced by:

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