

VSA Learning Representatives Report June 2007

It does not seem possible that yet another year has flown past since the last VSA Assembly and what a year of change it has been in the world of learning! We have seen the consultation process and the setting up of several consortiums, restructuring and launch of the new streamlined Learning and Skills Council and Herefordshire Learning Partnership.

It seems that we all, locally, regionally and nationally, spend a great deal of time devising new strategies/initiatives, consulting, mapping and restructuring. If you talk to the learners of this rural county the message is very clear and does not change. Fundamentally Adult and Community learner needs and demands remain the same- quality provision delivered locally by quality local providers who are known and trusted. Learners want learning that meets their individual learning needs and interests at venues close to home. As providers we need to respond to learner needs and demands, deliver a quality service that's value for money and work together to ensure there is no duplication and to identify gaps!

The learners are all well able, at whatever level, to tell us exactly what they want and need. As VCS provider's we are often the advocates and voices of our learners who are often the most needy and hard to reach. In the light of all the changes in funding, consortiums and commissioning I have found myself asking this question- We all know that we need to continually develop and improve to provide quality learning opportunities for our learners, there is no argument from me about that but is **all** this change appropriate? Is it 'change' for the learner's sake, or just for the 'sake of change'? Who are all the changes really for? Do the learners really benefit? How much does it all cost?

The Herefordshire Learning Partnership (HLP) has at long last, I am happy to say regrouped and had its first meeting. Sarah Tulk of the LSC has very ably facilitated the group and drafted the terms of reference and aims/actions which were discussed and approved. If you have any comments please let me know.

HLP Aim:

To be an overarching strategic forum that improves collaboration and links with key partners and local groups to enable effective and efficient delivery of post 14 education and training in Herefordshire.

Actions:

- To provide a clear county-wide strategic overview of education and training issues in the County, identifying key drivers.
- To act as a communication conduit on key learning and skills issues with relevant local groups/consortia, informing, guiding and facilitating delivery as appropriate.
- To publish a coherent framework and an annual operational plan based on a progress review of the StAR recommendations associated with the Learning Partnership.
- To report on key issues to Herefordshire Partnership Board.

****I feel that there is one vital action omitted from this list- FUNDING. I have raised this and will continue to lobby. Please let me know what you think.***

Membership:

Higher Education - Worcester University, Director of Lifelong Learning, Geoffrey Elliott (Debbie Lambert)

Local Authority – Adult Services, Herefordshire Council, Director of Adult and Community Services, Geoff Hughes (Natalia Silver)

Local Authority – Schools, Herefordshire Council, Senior Inspector for Secondary Schools, Paul Murray (Polly Garnett)

Post 16 - Learning and Skills Council, Partnership Director, Sarah Tulk (Jason Poole)

RDA - Advantage West Midlands, Partnership Team Leader, John Payne

Voluntary Sector Assembly - HELP, Julie Wilson-Thomas (Peter Ding)

Accountable to:

Herefordshire Strategic Partnership Board

Management Arrangements:

- Chair - Director of Adult and Community Services, Local Authority
- Vice Chair – Partnership Director, Learning and Skills Council
- Herefordshire Partnership Board Representative – Director of Lifelong Learning, Worcester University

Frequency of Meetings:

Every 2 months to undertake initial StAR progress review. Ultimately every 6 months.

Alternative Representatives:

Pre-agreed named substitutes shown above in brackets.

Secretariat Support:

Secretariat support will be provided by the Learning and Skills Council.

All papers to be distributed at least one week in advance of meeting.

Group comment/communication as and when required via email, to negate need for additional meetings as appropriate.

Observers/Co-opted Members:

Philippa Lydford, Partnership Officer – Link to Herefordshire Partnership Team

Additional members co-opted as and when required.

I am confident that the new HLP is a great step forward and that this group will work well together for the benefit of **all** learners in Herefordshire and not just our individual silos. I was impressed by Sarah Tulk's enthusiasm, motivation and good leadership.

The Thematic Groups

There are some admirable constants in this world of change that I am very happy to say still work well, for example- the good practice and partnerships of many cross sector organisations, the dedication, determination and enthusiasm of voluntary sector organisations and their learners and volunteers. A key strength of Herefordshire that needs to be highlighted is the continuation of existing cross sector infrastructures, networks and partnerships that continue to strive for the needs of our learners and County.

Despite the never changing 'playing field' and little/no funding the Adult and Community Learning (ACL), Skills for Life (SfL) and Family Learning groups have continued to function under the good guidance and management of Peter Ding and the Life Long Learning Development Unit (LLDU) at Herefordshire Council (HC). We are all very grateful for their continued support and partnership working.

PDCL, the way to the future

Changes and developments are also taking place within the thematic groups who are all busy reviewing and consulting over their future roles/responsibilities, terms of reference and the best way forward to face the future for our learners. Personal Development and Community Learning (PDCL) is to/has replaced the old ACL/First Steps and Recreational Learning which many of us will be familiar with. Shortly there will be a proforma circulated by LLDU regarding PDCL. It will be calling for information regarding your organisations, activity, learners and geographical spread.

Please please take the time to complete this important feedback form. It's vital that decisions made are well informed and inclusive. I am reminded of something one of our learners said to me 'I can't win the lottery if I don't buy a ticket and I won't get a better job if I don't improve my skills'. The same learner also said that he felt like he was standing on a platform and the high speed train speeds through the station, he didn't stand a chance of getting on. Then one day we stopped the train and he jumped on. He said he may not have made it to the front of the train yet but he's on the train and making his way through the carriages travelling at the same speed as everyone else. This learner travelled from entry level 2 to level 3, he is now the HELP chairman. The same theory applies to us, we have to take part and take action. We have to be proactive, we've got to get on the train!

This is our opportunity to have our learners voices heard and to get a real picture of what provision actually exists throughout the County. We will be able to identify gaps. We are all, I am sure, aware of unmet needs and can identify lots of gaps, let's get all of this vital information recorded. We will then be able to effectively plan for the future and highlight areas where organisations can widen participation if funds permitted. This is not just yet another mapping exercise; it is important and will influence and shape future 16+ Community Learning throughout Herefordshire.

And finally

In previous reports I have covered the learning consortiums and gave contact details. For you information here they are again and the web address for the LSC alerts. The alerts are a good way of keeping up to date on initiatives and updates.

Colleges Consortium Hereford and Worcester (hold Train to Gain Contract),

Led by Worcester College of Technology. Members from all sectors, members include HCT, CSV and Community First.

Contact- Mark Westbury 01905 743503

Hereford and Worcester Training Providers Association. Members from all sectors

Contact- Mike Smith 07813 338890

Herefordshire and Worcester VCS Consortium led by Community First. Membership Voluntary Sector only.

Contact- Mark Herriott markh@comfirst.org.uk

Herefordshire Adult and Community Learning Group (ACL Group) the soon to be new PDCL Group and Skills for Life Group. Members from cross sectors.

Contact- Peter Ding 01432 260637 pding@herefordshire.gov.uk

Family Learning Development Group. Members from all sectors.

Contact- Gillian Scott-Lee 01423 260000 gscottlee@herefordshire.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Council VCS Contacts-

National Office- Voluntary Sector Strategy Team- Cheryl Turner Cheryl.Turner@lsc.gov.uk

Local Learning and Skills Council- Frances Roberts Frances.Roberts@lsc.gov.uk

LSC Web Alerts- cvh-update@lsc.gov.uk [cvh-update@lsc.gov.uk]

Thank you for your support and input over the past year. A great deal of very good practice and quality learning opportunities are taking place in Herefordshire provided by the VCS. The VSA is one of the main ways of ensuring that our learner's voices are heard. We are professional, motivated, determined and care about our learners and their needs. **Let's continue to work together to ensure that even more voices are heard next year and more loudly!!**

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above or raise any new issues and concerns. You can reach me through the VSA or email Julie@helpvcs.co.uk or telephone 07734 297 200. I look forward to hearing from you.