

## VSA Learning Representatives Report January 2008

Things are still in a state of change in the world of Adult and Community Learning (ACL). I am beginning to think change is the norm! The Learning Partnership Board no longer exists after it's very brief reappearance. I feel it such a shame as there is no overarching body with an overview of all learning in Herefordshire. A beacon of hope amongst all this change that has remained a constant is the ACL provider group facilitated by Herefordshire Council's Lifelong Learning Development Unit and the Family Learning Development Group (FLDG). These groups are now the key way for providers to get together, identify local needs and hopefully bid for funding.

Even the ACL group has seen change with the introduction of Personal Development and Community Learning (PDCL) a national initiative. In Herefordshire we will remain the ACL providers group that will incorporate PDCL. The ACL group has members from all sectors.

ACL is not only informal/recreational learning but also vital more formal learning like Skills for Life and ICT programmes provided by non-college providers such as the VCS. It was felt by the providers of the ACL group that to become solely a PDCL group would exclude valuable input, partners and organisations for example- HELP, my own organisation, who deliver Skills for Life provision, the Probation Service, CSV etc. **(I have covered PCDL previously and consultation/meetings minutes are posted on learning area of VSA website)**

### The LSC

You may recall the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was restructured about 18 months - 2 years ago. Along with the restructuring staffing levels were cut which meant that the relationships and level of support that we had got used to and valued so much changed. There are fewer people on the ground with the same level of responsibility and a more regional approach. The Herefordshire team do a wonderful job in sometimes, difficult circumstances (dealing with me being one). Sarah Tulk leads our local LSC. Our local LSC contacts are-

- Sarah Tulk - Partnership Director Herefordshire  
email-[Sarah.Tulk@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.Tulk@lsc.gov.uk)
- Frances Roberts- email- [Frances.Roberts@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:Frances.Roberts@lsc.gov.uk)

The LSC have published '**Learning and Skills Policy Summaries**' which can be viewed/downloaded from the LSC website- [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk). I would urge you to take a look as the document covers a wide range of LSC funded activity and updates you on current policy changes including SfL/FoundationTier/ Learning Difficulties and Disabilities/ACL/PDCL and First Steps. It is an important read for all of us in learning, whatever our field.

### Consortiums and Possible Way Forward

We have also seen the consultation and development of various Consortia and Bravo Solutions, the LSC online bidding and commissioning portal, the new way to commissioning, bidding and accessing funding. The jury is still out as to whether or not these developments are an improvement or not, from my own perspective it's interesting but I fear not an improvement so far!

Consortiums certainly have their place and strengths. They are a convenient and efficient way for the LSC to communicate and contract with like-minded groups of providers. So far the consortiums seem to bid for funding like Train to Gain, E2E and Apprenticeship contracts, which is great, these are priority Government initiatives and learners. The difficulties seem to arise if that is not your field and you are a specialist provider, particularly from the VCS!

Regardless of the limitations and difficulties at the moment it is still early days and important that you all make informed decisions for your own organisations and learners. The contact details for the main 3 consortiums are-

- Mike Smith- Executive Officer  
Herefordshire Worcestershire & Shropshire Training Providers Association Tel- 07813 338890 email- [mike.hwtpa@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:mike.hwtpa@tiscali.co.uk)
- Mark Herriot- Voluntary Sector Training Providers Consortium  
Tel- 01684 312730 email- [markh@comfirst.org.uk](mailto:markh@comfirst.org.uk)
- Zelma Williams- The Colleges Consortium (I am not sure of the name) email- [zwilliams@staff.wortech.ac.uk](mailto:zwilliams@staff.wortech.ac.uk)

It is getting harder and harder to find sustainable funding or in some cases, any funding to meet learners needs and keep provision running. Huge groups of learners may be/are at risk of losing their provision or never having the opportunity to access any provision in their local community. We cannot miss any opportunity to consult and lobby for our learners and try to influence policy change.

### **A personal view**

It seems to me that we need to return to a more hands on local approach where local needs and priorities are identified and funding is allocated to meet local needs by a locally placed body.

I personally feel that this should be done via our local authority in partnership with local providers and the LLSC. It has always been my experience that Herefordshire's Lifelong Learning Dept are the 'honest brokers' and make their best endeavours to ensure that we are all informed, involved and consulted. There is ample evidence to support this. If you are not already involved in the ACL/FLDG group or on the circulation list **please contact Peter Ding on 01432 260637 or email- [pding@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:pding@herefordshire.gov.uk)**

### **DIUS Consultation**

A great deal of lobbying, not just from us in Herefordshire but nationally has taken place and the Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) have launched a consultation document '**Informal Adult Learning- Shaping the Way Ahead**'. The publication is available from the DIUS website [www.dius.gov.uk](http://www.dius.gov.uk) or by telephoning DIUS Publications on 0845 60 222 60. A copy is also available on the learning area of VSA website. **Please take the time to have a look; this is our chance to influence policy change.** In the forward by John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills tells us-

*'All forms of good adult learning are valuable. Whether vocational, or simply for personal enlightenment and fulfillment, adult learning contributes immeasurably to the well-being and health of our society.'*

We will all agree with this statement I am sure and many VCS have charitable objects or aims that will relate to this statement. Mr Denham goes on to say-

*'Major voluntary organisations are now significant education providers'*

I feel reassured that we are recognised as significant providers but why only 'major', many small VCS providers make a huge contributions. My own organisation, HELP, works with 400 Skills for Life learners throughout Herefordshire each year. We are a quality provider with three good inspections to our credit; our learners have '*higher than national average qualifications, accreditation and progression to higher levels*' (Ofsted May 2008). There are many other VCS organisations doing a wonderful job in the County, reaching the most needy, disadvantaged and hard to reach in society- CSV, Teme Valley Youth, Carr-Gomm, Mind, ECHO, WRVS, Deaf Direct to name but a few.

For the last two years we have all heard much of 'Train to Gain' and vocational qualifications. The Government quite rightly wants all adults to be skilled and qualified but to many of us it seems that

other vital provision, which is just as important, may have been overlooked. Many of us have been working hard to try to influence policy change. John Denham ends his forward with-

*'The emphasis the Government has rightly given to adult vocational educational has led some to suggest that informal adult education is not valued. Nothing could be further from the truth. This consultation document starts a discussion that will lead to a new vision for informal adult learning for the 21st century. To do so, it will be important to understand all the changes that are currently taking place, all the ways that Government and other organisations support adult learners and, most importantly, what learners from all parts of our society actually want.*

*I hope that everyone with an interest in the future of informal adult learning will help us shape that vision and identify the most appropriate support that Government can give'.*

I hope that you will take the time to take part in this important consultation and that together we can get a better deal for the adult learners of Herefordshire. Please do not hesitate to contact me with your views and comments so that I can make sure **your voice is heard**.

**Best Wishes to all of you**

**Regards**

**Julie Wilson Thomas**

**Contact details-** mobile 07734 297 200 or email Julie@helpvcs.co.uk

**Feedback and Comments from Sarah Tulk LSC (from email to JWT 18.02.08)**

Thank you for the opportunity to have sight and comment on the document. I have just a couple of brief observations/comments:

First of all, you are right change does seem to be the only norm, (in fact at the moment it feels like the only constant!). I appreciate your disappointment regarding the dissolution of the Learning Partnership; however I must stress that this was given serious consideration, as you know things have moved on a pace since it was originally set up.

The 14-19 Consortium will now have greater powers and a clear remit to commission activity via the Children's Trust arrangements as part of the Governments 14-19 Reform programme.

The ACL/PCDL partnership as you know has been commissioned with the task of mapping **PCDL** provision at a local level and identifying the gaps of provision and who is in most need of receiving subsidised support from public funding.

Also with the inception of the demand led agenda, particularly for employer funding the Train to Gain Area Management Group now has oversight of employer engagement activity.

The HE for Herefordshire Group will continue to develop and raise the profile of the HE offer in Herefordshire. The ability of a Learning Partnership to influence these activities would be extremely limited and thus the added value of this group would be negligible under the circumstances. The dissolution of this group has been agreed with the LSP Partnership Team.

Please could you make clear in the first paragraph under the section of the LSC that our reshaping was a result of the Governments move to a more demand led agenda?

It's really useful to signpost people to the Policy Summaries document and the consultation exercise.

Thanks again for this.  
Kind regards  
Sarah