

## **Curriculum for Leadership and Community Development**

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### **Aim**

To identify the training needs of workers in Leeds who have community development as part of their job and hold a leadership role. The particular focus is on exploring progression routes into Higher Education.

### **Policy context and community development**

A high number of government led strategies and policies have featured a renewed interest in community involvement, community engagement and participation and delivery of services to the public through the use of the voluntary and community sector organisations as well as the private and statutory sectors. A wide range of policies relying on community engagement and participation across many government departments need to be underpinned by community development work in order to genuinely succeed. The list includes the Community Empowerment White Paper, 'Communities in Control (2008) and the plethora of new ideas coming out of the Communities and Local Government Office that require the active engagement of marginalised groups; policies aimed at improving health, addressing inequalities and developing culturally sensitive and effective mental health services; policies on community cohesion and integration (and the Prevention of Violent Extremism); policies on sustainable development; policies focusing on children (such as Every Child Matters and the Aim Higher strategies) and policies around education and social inclusion.

However, caution is needed regarding the use of community development language and tools when these are not based on an understanding and application of the values and principles of community development work. The past few years have seen substantial changes in the employment patterns of community development practitioners and shifting policies around community involvement, engagement and empowerment. Consequently many more workers are required to have the skills, knowledge and understanding to undertake effective community development. National Occupational Standards and a range of training and qualifications for

community development already exist – validated by the England Standards Board for community development. However, Leeds does not yet offer regular and sustained training at any level and this research aims to show the extent and variety of needs and offer a range of solutions.

### **Identified Needs**

- *Community sector workers* need to ensure that their organisations can procure funds and meet the delivery, administrative and financial needs of their funding bodies, whilst also meeting the needs of communities and community organisations.

*Statutory sector workers* need to find the best ways to deal with the increasing expectation on people in communities to become engaged with government policies and initiatives – and how to gain good results in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA - the new inspection framework for local public services) by reaching various national indicator targets such as N4 – Community Engagement and N17 A thriving third sector.

### **Approach and methodology**

The Needs Analysis includes:

- Consultation with management and staff from a wide variety of organisations and sectors
- Consultation with 4 focus groups that cover the different deprived areas of Leeds – in addition a questionnaire was created for those who could not attend an event.
- Recommendations on possible curriculum and appropriate levels of provision

The objective was to consult with 60 workers from across different sectors to gain their views and experiences about learning and training. This was not intended to be presented as a quantitative statistical survey, but as a tool to gain a more in-depth idea of the type of training needed. A database of over 90 contacts was created using the consultant's wide knowledge of Leeds, and this database was used to cascade information through formal and informal networks to identify workers who might be interested in participating. The research also looked into what other community development-related training, both accredited and non-accredited, was available in Leeds. Additionally, contact was made with similar Foundation Degree courses across the country to learn about their content, length, style and cost.

Organisational interviews: 35 face to face or telephone interviews were carried out with mostly managers in a range of organisations including; —

- 9 Networks and Umbrella Organisations,
- 8 Local Authority, Housing and Regeneration organisations,
- 8 Community based organisations,
- 6 Health based organisations,
- 1 Educational organisation,
- 3 National organisations.

Brief interviews were also held with the Community Development (CD) Health Workers' Network and the CD Strategy Group to inform them of the research and to get their input into the training needs of their members.

Focus group: Two hour focus groups were held in four areas of the city attended by 36 people in total with diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender. The split was even between statutory and voluntary sector workers and 2 identified as having a disability. . In addition, questionnaires were sent out to anyone who could not attend a focus group.

## **Overall Results**

The interviews and focus groups mostly noted *'a great need for good quality Community Development training in Leeds'* that is hands-on, worthwhile, good quality and nationally recognised and accredited. There was a marked preference for training that is practical, relevant and deeply rooted in people's experience and includes 'concrete, expert academic input, and creative, engaging, inspiring and experienced tutors'. 'Participative and interactive' featured highly, as did *'space for everyone to contribute'*. It was important for the course to be accredited; *'will my effort and time be recognised?'* and for progression routes to be clearly signposted.

The focus groups reflected on previous experiences of training. There were several comments about the nature of the providers and the skill of the tutors. Many people cited negative experiences where the course had been irrelevant and badly taught and managed: *'It's annoying when training is unrealistic – doesn't reflect the problems we deal with in practice - office based ideas'*. The use of convoluted language or unexplained shorthand made learning difficult, as did bad classroom management, disorganisation and individuals being allowed to dominate. Some past training had been too basic, relied too heavily on participants' feedback and failed to provide

extra knowledge or skills. Lack of understanding of the subject by course providers; *'who have their own focus and agenda'*, poor content and subject knowledge, as well as being given too much information were mentioned; *'overwhelmed by information and felt it was just the tip of the iceberg'*

Adequate information about the course beforehand, including an indication of the time and workload involved was seen as essential.

Staff deemed the following to be good practice in terms of course delivery:

- A mixture of training methods and the chance to share experiences and learn from each other; *'sharing success stories'*;
- Approachable, supportive tutors, one to one support and encouragement;
- *'On the job'* type training, using a variety of techniques including seminars, action learning sets, workshops, lectures, visits and exchanges between: organisations/ parts of city/ different cities/ countries as well as case studies, not only of things that worked but also considering problems and the strategies used to overcome them. *'Not too much classroom work'*;
- Using websites and virtual media to share notes and ideas e.g. Virtual Learning Environment (VLE);
- Pick and mix modules - some compulsory and some optional;
- Academic taught input, with theoretical input and ways of translating theories into work practice, with a good reading list;
- *'Bite size, manageable and down to earth'*;
- A mix of assessment methods, such as assignments and work sheets given as you go along, and a variety of evidence used to complete portfolios. People were keen not to repeat what they already knew, and wanted some way for activists and experienced yet unqualified workers to get recognised for their previous activities.
- Part time was preferable to full time
- Alleviate various practical barriers such as cost, accessible venue, times, length of programme etc.

Workers also highlighted the following benefits which they hoped the provision would provide:

- To gain confidence, develop arguments, learn new ways of working, and achieve better outcomes for the organisation and community;
- Programmes to accommodate different learning styles, and different levels of knowledge and experience;
- The chance for reflective learning and the chance to practice the skills they learn as the course progresses;
- An opportunity 'to step away from daily practice and see a way to do things differently';
- Support from colleagues;

In terms of programme content, the staff indicated a need for a wide ranging programme that covered the spectrum of community development and leadership. The following areas were particularly highlighted as areas for training:

- The involvement of the voluntary/community sector in service delivery and the challenges that this has for the original aims and values of their organisations and improving outcomes for communities;
- Statutory bodies' agenda around community consultation/engagement and capacity building and how this can more effectively influence resource provision;
- Values and principles of Community development and their practical application and challenges;
- Social justice and challenging oppressive practice at community and organisational levels;
- Developing strategic relationships with communities, organisations and partnerships and dealing with conflicts whilst maintaining integrity;
- Developing all aspects of community organisations with relation to the current climate;
- Engaging in policy initiatives and their practical applications in communities; Additionally, workers showed an interest in some more specialist areas including; community action research, environmental community work, drugs and crime, international perspectives and neighbourhood regeneration and working with specific groups such as faith groups. They also highlighted specific skills such as writing reports, reflecting on own practice and role, devising and using frameworks for evaluation and dealing with a variety of power structures.

## **Issues to explore further**

- Voluntary sector organisations releasing workers to attend training;
- Funding is clearly an issue for small organisations;
- Making training relevant to ever-changing circumstances;
- The need for level 2 – 3 courses and adequate progression routes;

Overall, it was felt that greater work needs to be done on the recognition of the professionalism of the role, and that the university could have a role to play here, not only in the development of a degree level course, but also by acting as an advocate and champion for community development in both internal and external meetings and partnerships.

## **Next Steps**

We are currently developing provision with a group of voluntary organisations in Leeds.

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