

## Social Integration

### Summary Report of the National Adult Education Stakeholder Policy Roundtable

16<sup>th</sup> March 2019

#### 1. Background

1.1 The event provided an opportunity for adult education policymakers, providers and other stakeholders to bring their collective knowledge and expertise to bear on **the question of how the wider adult education sector can most effectively support social integration**. It was convened by Learning & Work Institute for the Department for Education (DfE).

1.2 **The context for the event was the cross-government *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper***, launched in March 2018. A month prior to the event (February 2019), the Government published the findings from the consultation, together with an Action Plan for England. The Action Plan's stated aim is to foster new partnerships with civil society to "drive forward work across Government to create socially and economically stronger, more confident and integrated communities."

1.3 Integrated communities are vital for social and individual wellbeing. They are places where people with different values, backgrounds and beliefs live together based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. **Integration fosters a sense of belonging and interests in common which reduces exclusion and creates conditions where everyone is more likely to thrive**. The UK has a long history of migration, ethnic and cultural diversity and tolerance of different beliefs. However, Dame Louise Casey's independent review into opportunity and integration (2016) presented a picture of Britain in which many communities are divided along faith, race and socio-economic lines, and has been influential in shaping subsequent policy in this area. As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, and official figures continue to show a disturbing rise in hate crime, there is a clear need to explore how social cohesion can be nurtured for the benefit of individuals, communities and society as a whole.

1.4 **The role of learning is promoting social integration has long been recognised, encapsulated in the notion of "learning to live together"**. While current integration policy includes a commitment to a range of measures designed to better support the development of English language skills for adults, participants at the roundtable started from the position that the contribution of adult learning to this agenda is about much more than ESOL. This note summarises the issues and ideas raised through the plenary sessions and workshops so that they can inform stakeholders' on-going engagement with the evolving social integration agenda.

#### 2. What are the issues?

2.1 **A number of stakeholders expressed concern that the prevailing policy narrative, reflected in the tone and focus of the Action Plan, is problematic. They argued that a fundamental shift is needed in the way that the agenda is articulated, so that it presents a positive and inclusive vision for society**. The Casey Review has been challenged for its perceived focus on UK Muslim communities, and social integration policy risks perpetuating that view. Such an approach serves more to exclude and divide than to

bring people together, because it singles out certain BAME groups and puts the onus on them to do things that are not required of the rest of society. For integration to be meaningful, everyone needs to see it as an agenda that is about them, not just something that refers to other people. Sections of white British society do not want to integrate, but there is little sense that promoting social integration demands change from them too. For example, the Action Plan presents an opportunity to set out an agenda to work with affluent white communities to push against the narrative of economic privilege, but currently this seems to be absent from policy proposals.

**2.2 Stakeholders agreed that, rather than focusing on a particular community, it would be more fruitful to adopt a human rights approach based on an inclusive narrative in which the common humanity of all citizens is the foundation of social integration.** This would both give a voice to excluded communities and make it clear that the social integration agenda is the responsibility of everyone. The policy narrative needs to be inclusive and asset-based, recognising and valuing the diverse benefits and contributions that individuals and communities bring to society. Currently the agenda is framed around a deficit model, which reinforces the notion that certain communities pose a “problem” that needs to be addressed.

**2.3 Support for the better local coordination of ESOL is welcomed as it provides the key to a more consistent, accessible and effective local offer. Lessons can be learned from past and current initiatives.** It is imperative that coordination infrastructure is adequately and appropriately resourced. Driving forward the hub model needs a strong vision (for the next 10 years) and sustainable funding. Without sustainable funding it is not possible to grow provision and address common needs in areas such as workforce development. Activity is widely based on short term funding for which organisations constantly have to re-tender. There is little or no sustainability, widespread duplication and waste, and effective models can easily be lost. Moreover, funding operates in a way that drives competition rather than collaboration between providers, which means that future approaches will need to pro-actively build trust if they are to succeed.

**2.4 The way that public funding for adult learning is organised and managed undermines its potential to promote social integration.** The funding categories of personal development learning, family learning, neighbourhood learning in deprived communities, basic skills etc. are not helpful and do not reflect the way that community learning works best on the ground. They encourage fragmentation and a focus on “target groups” which separates learners from different backgrounds, rather than fostering integration and the communication of positive messages to engage learners from across diverse communities. The widespread delivery of full cost recovery courses within adult learning further exacerbates exclusion and creates divisions between learner groups. It would be better for integration to ensure that there was universal access to community learning opportunities.

**2.5 There is concern that commissioners of adult education and other decision-makers in devolved areas do not really understand adult community learning or other provision which supports learners at entry and lower levels.** Many have little grasp of its potential to contribute across a range of social policy areas, including to social integration, so will not recognise the value of funding certain kinds of provision. For the sector, this creates a constant need to keep capturing, interpreting and presenting evidence to make the case for its work.

### **3. What approaches work?**

**3.1 Community learning can make a powerful contribution to social integration.** A number of key features of community learning are particularly relevant to this agenda.

- **Community learning creates opportunities for people who would never usually meet to come together in pursuit of common goals and interests.** It may be unique in this respect within civil society.
- **Learning for social purpose is at the heart of community learning.** Community learning practice embodies community development approaches which seek to empower individuals and groups to bring about positive social change. These are based on non-hierarchical relationships between communities and providers, and an ethos of “doing with” rather than “doing to” learners. Initiatives such as *Active Learning for Active Citizenship*, *Reaching Communities* and *Testbed Learning Communities* reflected an approach which aims to increase social participation through adult learning. Bringing people together as a ‘learning community’ can establish a culture based on equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of a community which makes a powerful contribution to integration and benefits the community as a whole.
- **Community learning providers work in partnership with community based and grass roots organisations to develop learning opportunities that are relevant and adapted to local needs.** Co-design and co-production of programmes creates positive and productive relationships between providers and communities and ensures that provision reflects the values, interests and concerns of participants. It demonstrates a commitment to valuing the diverse knowledge, experiences and insights within local communities, and builds a sense of enfranchisement among participants. A concern in the current climate is that community partners have been severely impacted by austerity, with the result that much activity is precarious, short term and struggles to achieve sustainability.
- **Local authority adult learning services are well placed to lead on initiatives to bring communities together in a local area.** They are well connected both internally to other departments within local authorities and externally with partners and other stakeholders in the community. They have an established role and long experience in developing learning activities that reflect local needs. Networks and partnerships are central to all community learning.
- **A powerful evidence base already exists to underpin a renewed policy focus on supporting community learning.** Evidence can be found in the outcomes of publicly funded programmes such as *Transformation Fund*, *Adult Community Learning Fund* and *Community Learning Impact Fund* together with research for the *Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* and L&W’s more recent publication *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise: the impact of adult learning across the UK (2017)*, among other sources. It is imperative that the new cohort of policymakers is aware of this body of evidence and incorporates learning from it into the design of future initiatives.

**3.2 Critical thinking skills are essential for enabling people to recognise and challenge “fake news”, and to develop responses to people from different communities and backgrounds which confront and challenge cognitive bias.** Learning which focuses on meta-cognition and building critical thinking capacity helps people to evaluate what is going on around them. Good basic skills, including basic digital and literacy skills, as well as ESOL, are an essential foundation for the development of critical thinking and media literacy. Providers often organise basic skills provision in community venues such as schools and community centres, again highlighting the potential of community

learning as a space that brings people of different backgrounds together, to learn skills which help them live together.

**3.3 Information, advice and guidance is critical for ensuring that ESOL learners who start off disadvantaged do not become “stuck”.** IAG is key for enabling learners to understand and navigate their way around the system, and the funding cuts to local services is a cause for concern. Mapping progression routes from ESOL should aim to provide a clear line of sight for learners to further and higher level learning, skills provision and work. This helps to build motivation and promote awareness of the wider opportunities that exist within the local learning, skills and employment landscape. For learners with ESOL needs up to Level 2, **multilingual approaches to the delivery of IAG** can help build resilience and advocacy. For example, the use of first language in activities such as goal setting enables learners to engage with and set their learning.

**3.4 Approaches to supporting labour market participation for migrants and refugees which emphasise progression in work are key to tackling poverty and enabling social mobility.** Mainstream models are concerned primarily with moving people from benefits into entry level jobs, but the evidence shows that most never progress beyond this level and many employment-focused programmes are thus entrenching poverty and exclusion. Support organisations which challenge this narrative, setting outcome targets linked to pay and progression rather than entry to work, and building relationships with local employers to create opportunities for individuals to undertake work experience of various kinds, have achieved demonstrable success in enabling migrants and refugees to progress into to well-paid, fulfilling roles.

#### **4 What will help to strengthen the contribution of adult learning to social integration?**

**4.1 A shift in perspective among policymakers is needed, so that the expertise of adult learning providers in local authorities, institutes of adult learning and the third sector is valued and recognised.** The experience, networks and socially orientated values and practices of these organisations makes them well placed to take the lead on developing local learning interventions that will promote community integration. Yet, policy tends to privilege provision delivered by colleges, even though the competitive business model that dominates FE is less well suited to creating collaborative, inclusive approaches to developing and delivering learning.

**4.2 The development of an English language strategy for England presents an important opportunity to improve local quality and access and address shortcomings in the current system.** For instance:

- **A funded learner entitlement for ESOL up to Level 2** would give ESOL parity with English and Maths and thereby promote equality and fairness by putting ESOL learners on an equal footing with adults who are native English speakers. It would also recognise that some learners will take longer than others to progress and achieve.
- **Funding models currently exclude smaller, grass roots providers which can play a key role in reaching the most excluded adults.** There is a pressing need to reform funding to promote greater diversity of entry points into ESOL and give greater stability and certainty to a wider range of types of providers.
- **Funding should explicitly support non-accredited courses, as well as qualifications.** Under the current system, the funding can encourage providers to enrol

learners onto accredited courses even though these might not be suitable. Non-regulated ESOL provision has much greater potential than is currently being realised.

- **A plan is needed for the sustainable funding for ESOL hubs** which promotes collaboration and not competition between providers and builds a culture of trust.
- **The strategy should cover key issues for the ESOL sector which require urgent attention**, including workforce development, curriculum, quality improvement, alternative and flexible delivery models and the role of volunteers.
- **Investment in curating and making accessible the wealth of ESOL materials and resources that exist would be helpful.** Development of additional resources would not represent good use of public funds.

**4.3 More should be done to encourage the involvement of employers in supporting English language learning.** With regard to funding, one option would be to replace the apprenticeship levy with a wider training levy, which would release funds from employers to support ESOL. Employers also have an important role to play in creating opportunities for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to gain experience of UK workplaces. This exposure can be vital for enabling people to develop their understanding of workplace cultures and expectations and succeed in the labour market. Established and effective examples of migrant internships and work placements from countries such as Denmark and Germany could provide useful comparative models.

**4.4 The shift to outcomes-based funding for adult learning presents risks for the community learning sector.** Clarity from funders and commissioners about the social integration outcomes that will be valued and the measures that will be used to evaluate these is needed, so that providers can collect and present appropriate evidence to demonstrate the contribution that their work makes. Indicators need to be localised rather than national, or at least capable of being flexed to reflect local circumstances. (e.g. Greater London Authority has developed a framework of social integration measures: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/social-integration-headline-measures> .) In addition, a programme of training should be put in place for commissioners and other staff who are involved in making local funding decisions, as without this there is huge scope for inconsistency and patchy quality.

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