

Written evidence submitted by Martin Yarnit

Closing the Learning Gap – Opening Up Opportunities for Adults

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gather the views of key stakeholders, partners and providers on their top priorities for adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 - 10 years.

The deadline for written evidence is 20 May 2016.

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

Please tick the appropriate boxes below

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an individual
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<input type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an organisation
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number?	

Please tick a box from the list of options below that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Business representative organisation/trade body
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Authority/ Combined Authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority provider of adult and community learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist designated institution

	FE College
	FE sector representative organisation/trade body
	FE independent learning provider
	Higher Education Institution
	FE charitable or not-for-profit learning provider
	Other education (please describe)
	Trade union or staff association
	Charity or social enterprise
	Student representative body
	Individual
X	Policy adviser – devolution and local democratic management of education
	Other (please describe)

Introduce yourself

Martin Yarnit Associates led a consortium (unionlearn, the WEA and NIACE) to create a national support programme for community learning champions (CLCs) funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills from 2009-11. This formed part of a strategy for promoting informal adult learning set out in the white paper, The Learning Revolution. Personally, I have led or initiated a number of national education innovations including Adult Learners Week and Education Action Zones. Currently, I lead the education policy work for the campaigning think tank, Compass.

Executive summary

Community Learning Champions (CLCs) are volunteers who become active in their community promoting the value of learning to others.

CLCs are very successful at encouraging people to learn, especially those who feel it is 'not for them'.

CLC schemes provide benefits for disadvantaged learners, CLCs themselves and learning providers.

The national support programme enrolled and trained 2000 CLCs in fifty locations who reached and involved 100,000 people – 70% of them unemployed – in new learning experiences at a cost of £3 per head.

Supporting CLCs is a sensible use of scarce resources and an effective way of developing capacity in communities for self-organised learning. Local authorities, other service providers such as schools and the NHS, and not for profit bodies such as councils for voluntary service should all be encouraged to learn from and build on the 2009-11 support programme.

The final report of the national support programme is available at http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/c/l/clc_final_report_march_2011.pdf

Further information is available from the website <http://www.communitylearningchampions.org.uk/content/welcome-community-learning-champions>

	If your submission is confidential and you do not want it published please tick the box.
X	Please confirm that have read the Terms of Reference and Guidelines on written submissions at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/

Community Learning Champions – a tried and tested approach to engaging the disadvantaged

In 2009, Martin Yarnit Associates led a consortium to set up a national support programme for community learning champions funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. Such was the success of the programme that it was supported – rather than closed down – by the incoming coalition government in May 2010.

Community Learning Champions (CLCs) are volunteers who become active in their community promoting the value of learning to others. Their enthusiasm for learning reflects the difference it has made to their own lives. CLCs can also be called learning ambassadors, mentors or advocates. CLCs, because they have local credibility, are able to promote the value of learning to friends, relatives, neighbours and workmates. In disadvantaged communities, they perform a similar role to union learning representatives in the workplace, complementing the work of professionals in voluntary organisations, local authorities and other agencies.

CLCs are very successful at encouraging people to learn, especially those who feel it is ‘not for them’. CLCs provide an effective, impartial signposting service to local learning opportunities. They help learners to succeed and can help providers improve what they offer through the feedback they collect. Their effectiveness in reaching out to people and communities that professionals have difficulty engaging with depends on their being seen as authentic representatives of their community by the people they seek to engage in learning. So it is vital that CLCs are drawn from the whole spectrum of learners, especially those furthest from education services.

Many CLCs also gain the skills, knowledge and experience that enable them to progress to further or higher education, other volunteering or paid employment. CLCs said that as a

result of being involved in the programme they felt a growing sense of confidence that they were making a useful contribution to their communities. As Anthea Felton (Preston) commented: 'This scheme has made me feel that I can influence change, that I am part of the solution'. In many of the projects, the CLC role included identifying gaps in provision and filling them.

St Mungo's, a London project, serves the needs of the homeless, and its CLCs are homeless people who are taking the first steps to a new life. Leroy Marshall, a Bristol CLC, is a recovering drug addict. 'My life has changed so much over the last five years', he says, 'that it feels like a miracle- and if it can happen for me it can happen for anyone. From a life of crime and drugs he has developed his skills and is now a counsellor in a drug and alcohol project.

Evidence collected for the final report of the support programme suggests an approach that is more effective than the norm in attracting more men, people from black and minority ethnic communities and young people (compared with NIACE annual participation survey). Data from the participating projects shows the unusual make up of the CLC cohort recruited through the programme. In the North West, reported Nicky Crosby, manager of the Sefton project, 'Many of our CLCs are themselves carers, recovering drug users, women taking refuge from domestic violence'.

The programme scaled up previously fragmented local initiatives, given them the backing and prestige of a national framework and set them in a wider policy context. As a result, 2,000 CLCs were trained and registered and engaged 100,000 people in learning in less than 18 months at an overall cost of £3 million – a powerful demonstration of the potential of the approach.

The CLCs delivered 134,538 hours of activity in total, were involved in organising and delivering 6,036 events and activities, and supported 105,804 one-to-one interventions which include:

- 32,503 face-to-face initial contacts;
- 16,815 interviews to identify needs;
- 14,041 instances of practical support to start informal adult learning (IAL);
- 9,289 instances of practical support to help sustain IAL;
- 14,461 signposts to IAL;
- 6,880 signposts to formal adult learning; and
- 11,815 signposts to IAG.

They also provided feedback to learning providers in 1,059 instances.

Behind the framework's success is an ethos that valued creativity and collaboration and the notion that local people often have a better understanding of their community's needs and assets than professional agencies.

It worked because:

1. every type of learning was encouraged, especially informal community learning, to make for an inclusive and powerful appeal;
2. CLCs were encouraged to discover their own enthusiasms and creativity to engage learners and to develop new learning opportunities;
3. CLCs were attached to local hubs and service providers such as community centres, children's centres, schools, clinics, healthy living centres

and libraries where they were able to acquire new skills and knowledge and apply them for the benefit of service users;

4. projects were run by partnerships that can draw on the combined strengths of the voluntary, public and private sectors, reaching out to the broadest range of people in the most disadvantaged communities – including people who rarely figure in traditional adult learning programmes such as the elderly, black and minority ethnic women, homeless people and members of immigrant communities.

The final report on the national support programme suggested that the CLC seemed to work best when the following conditions applied:

- CLCs could count on a clear-sighted and supportive management framework with well-designed opportunities for personal and career development.
- CLCs were attached to local hubs and service providers such as children’s centres, schools, clinics, healthy living centres and libraries.
- CLCs were enabled to be creative in developing new learning activities – sometimes a course, sometimes an activity that helps people to learn together and develop. Many of the projects developed the CLC role beyond engagement, signposting and support to generating new types of provision, responding to community need and interest.
- CLC projects were seen as a vital link in a partnership or network delivering local services, providing outreach, engagement, support for learners and feedback to service providers.
- CLCs’ work was underpinned by a national presence and brand awareness.
- There was national coordination and an information exchange enabling projects to keep abreast of national policy development and to share best practice around the country.

Finally, to summarise the strength of the approach, it

1. helped learners to make better informed choices about the learning services available;
2. ensured that those with the greatest need could access learning;
3. ensured that users can help to shape and improve services to meet their needs.

In addition, it was clear that, through their activities as learning champions, many people gained the skills and knowledge themselves to take a vital step forward to further or higher education, employment or volunteering.

The significance of the CLC approach, from a local government perspective, was summed up by the then chief executive of Cheshire West and Chester Council, Steve Robinson: ‘We’ve realised that public investment can only go part of the way to solving social problems. What’s become clear is that Community Learning Champions are part of the mainstream business. The Big Society is about local people taking responsibility and doing things for themselves. But people can’t do it for themselves unless they are supported with training and education and CLCs are the first step in that process. They talk the same language; they’ve had the same learning experiences. They are a key plank of what this council is about.’