

Working with the Learning
and Skills sector

The Churches' Further Education Beacon Award

for Sustainable Community
Development

Introduction and Acknowledgements

Over the past three years, the Methodist Church has been pleased to be a joint sponsor (together with the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church and the Free Churches' Council) of one of these prestigious Beacon Awards in Further Education and Sixth form Colleges. The award has done much to develop good working relationships between the churches and the colleges at national, regional and local levels, based on the recognition of shared interests and commitment to community development.

This booklet seeks to pull together some of that experience to date, in the hope that it will contribute to the development of effective partnerships between local churches and colleges. We hope it will also help to encourage good working relationships between Learning Partnerships and faith communities in the wider context of Local Strategic Partnerships.

We are aiming to meet the needs of rather different audiences. On the one hand, we anticipate that it will be a useful resource for those in the churches working as FE college staff, policy-makers, community workers, chaplains, training and development officers, adult educationalists, youth-workers and, not least, as active members of local churches. On the other, we believe it may also be of interest to a wider audience across the Learning and Skills sector.

Special thanks are due to the staff in all those colleges who, by their commitment and enthusiasm, have made our sponsorship of this award so worthwhile. We hope that this publication will enable their good work to reach a still wider audience. The brief student quotations from Award applications are a tiny selection from the large number of testimonials to the value of this kind of partnership between FE and the local community.

The Association of Colleges' Beacon Awards manager, Alice Thiagaraj, has been consistently encouraging and supportive, as have our assessors, Professor Gordon Lawrence of Warwick University, Pat Twyman, Principal of Bournville FE College, and Gill Healey, lately of Sheffield FE College. Maggie Keane, Director of St. Peter's Saltley Trust, and Kathleen Kimber, Guildford diocesan FE adviser, both helped me in the initial formulation of the award. Revd. David Deeks (Methodist), Revd. Canon John Hall (Church of England), Oona Stannard (Catholic Education Service) and Gillian Wood (Free Churches' Education Unit) have supported the process throughout. Finally, I am most grateful to Audrey Facey, in the Communications team at Methodist Church House, for her help in preparing this booklet for publication.

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Background – The Underlying Issue

The sheer diversity of the Learning and Skills sector (covering, as it does, Further Education colleges, Sixth form colleges, Land-based colleges, specialist colleges, and colleges of Art and Design, along with informal adult and community-based learning) makes it difficult to understand. The blurring of boundaries with school provision (through school links programmes) and with Higher Education in universities (through Access and Foundation degrees) makes this all the more complex.

As a result, the churches, with their long history of commitment to education, have traditionally found it easier to relate to, and support, schools and universities. Many with a vocation to teach have instinctively gravitated to these two sectors, rather than to FE. Similarly, the institutional church has, by and large, neglected to direct its resources to FE, though committed clergy and congregations have unobtrusively done much good work over the years in some of the colleges.

In much the same way, the colleges have frequently misunderstood the church. It has sometimes been seen as rooted in the past and, therefore, irrelevant, detached from contemporary society, dilatory and, by and large, unsympathetic to business, industry and innovation. Colleges often have little understanding of the depth of experience and practical involvement of the churches within local communities. Moreover, even where Christian experience has been recognised, it has typically been slotted into a pastoral role, capable of dealing effectively with crises, but being unlikely to have anything of value to contribute to wider policy-making within the college. Some colleges may still be surprised if pertinent questions are raised about the values being explored and developed within the main life of the whole college and the communities it serves.

As a result, there has often been a failure on both sides to recognise the extent of shared concerns. The Christian gospel, about unbounded love, about valuing diversity, compassion and companionship, about hope, risk and transformation, backing people rather than structures, about respect for life, and about stewardship and costly service, shares some ground with FE colleges.

Most particularly, FE colleges and their local churches are profoundly committed, at their best, to serving the needs of the communities in which they are set. Many colleges and churches have had a long history of working with people “where they are”, with the aim of releasing and building on potential. This has often marked an investment of real commitment by both parties representing, as it does, a key part of their perceived core business.

That this has been done separately rather than in partnership has, sadly, often led to less than satisfactory outcomes for the individuals and communities concerned. Where local people, churches and colleges have put together a mutually agreed learning programme, the results have been genuinely transformative. Each element of the partnership has distinctive

1999–2000 Dunstable FE College, for its NOAH project (New Opportunities and Horizons)

This was managed by the college jointly with the Luton Day Centre for the homeless, run by a Roman Catholic charity. As part of the Council's community regeneration activity, a derelict supermarket was converted into a workshop in High Town, Luton, supported by Social Services and the McIntyre Trust. Some funding was provided by the Church Urban Fund. The centre was supported ecumenically by local churches and other faith communities. Its manager, Sister Eileen O'Mahony, and Dunstable College's Furniture and Joinery tutor, Peter Hampton as programme leader, with faculty head David Early, had developed furniture-making and restoration, woodwork and upholstery courses, ranging from pre-NVQ through to NVQ level 3. A high level of support was offered through Michelle Tynan to students, who came from a variety of backgrounds – long-term unemployed, individuals with learning difficulties, and women returning to work. One of its most attractive features was the way in which a real sense of community and mutual support had developed between this diverse student body. Over its three year life at that stage, 130 students had taken courses, many of them progressing to further study and employment.

insights, gifts and experience to offer.

It was to encourage this model, and to help the FE sector and churches understand each other better, that the churches ecumenically decided to create their FE Beacon Award.

This was all the more timely, given the creation of the new Learning and Skills sector, which brought together post16 education and training, wherever it took place (in FE colleges, on employers' premises, or in informal community settings). Over-arching planning and funding of this work, through the Learning and Skills Council, was designed to create "a seamless robe", whereby learners could access learning wherever it was most appropriate. Not only would it be easier for people of all ages to develop the skills they needed in order to live and work effectively in the twenty-first century, but also everyone, whatever their background or previous experience, would be encouraged to take advantage of the full range of learning opportunities.



Ursula Howard, Director of Research at the Learning and Skills Development Agency, in conversation with Dean Pusey, Ecumenical Liaison Officer for Black Christian Churches (Churches Together)

What are the Further Education Beacon Awards?

The Beacon Awards programme was launched by the Partnership Trust in 1994 and has been administered since 1996 by the Association of Colleges (AoC), the organisation which represents Further Education nationally across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The programme aims to give national recognition to outstanding teaching and learning practice across the FE curriculum, and to highlight the breadth and quality of educational provision in colleges across the United Kingdom. The AoC and Award sponsors are committed to disseminating this good practice, thereby making a significant contribution to continuous quality improvement in the sector. Project profiles of each year's winning colleges are written up and disseminated by AoC to the sector a year after their announcement.

Creation of Beacon Awards promotes the interdependence of FE colleges and the award sponsors, whether they be business, professional or voluntary organisations. The programme represents partnership in action, since it provides significant benefits for both the colleges and the sponsoring organisations. Sponsors include the British Council, MENCAP, RNIB and RNID, the Times Educational Supplement, Marks and Spencer, Construction Industry Training Board, City and Guilds, the Basic Skills Agency, and the Learning and Skills Council. On the one hand, an award acts as a development grant to help realise the full potential of a project based in an FE college. On the other, it also is an effective way of raising the profile of the sponsor within the sector.

2000-2001 Stoke-on-Trent FE College, for its partnership with Stoke-on-Trent LEA - “College in the Community”

Managed by David Moore. It provided a model of genuinely committed and planned community/college/church/LEA partnership, which could potentially be replicated in many parts of Britain. Stoke had become a unitary authority in 1997, and had appointed Nigel Rigby as Director of Education, at much the same time as Graham Moore had become the new Principal of Stoke FE College. Their shared agenda was to develop an easily accessed lifelong learning network in Stoke, whose six towns were suffering from massive manufacturing decline in the potteries, coal and steel industries, had high unemployment, well-below average participation in 16+ education, the highest school exclusion rates in the country, and a high teenage pregnancy rate. Their dream was to change the learning culture, through community-based learning, offering flexible, often free, study programmes in over 60 venues across the city. There were three geographical clusters, in Longton, (Hilary Griffiths), Willfield (Dave Thompson) and Tunstall (Nell Boulton), with strong support from Kaye Goodall, the LEA Family Learning Adviser. Local consultation and leadership was very important in this ambitious and innovative programme. The voluntary sector had significant involvement (e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureau, ARCH, the Prince's Trust, Alcohol Advisory Services). The churches had played some part – for instance, at Longton Baptist Church, St. John's Church of England Welcome Centre, Abbey Hulton, and St. Andrew's in Weston Colney. The Beacon assessors saw young parents and retired men doing ICT on a former NCB run-down housing estate, very effectively supported by the local infants' school under its head, Jan Phillips, and St. Andrew's church; learners at the Wedgwood factory under Terry Hackett, the training manager; and a very impressive dressmaking and English language class for Asian women led by Pat Thorpe at a school in the town centre.

Thus, an annual glossy prospectus, detailing each award, is circulated each April to every FE college in the United Kingdom, and the programme is formally launched in London in May, at the national presentation of the previous year's awards. Colleges are invited to submit, by mid July, written applications for the awards (of no more than 3,000 words), signed by the college Principal/Chief executive.

Each award details the specific criteria that must be met. In addition, however, all applications must have been running for at least one full academic session, must have features which actively promote effective teaching and learning, and must be of benefit to one or more groups of students or trainees as identified and described in the application. The programme must have wider relevance and applicability than simply in its local context.

Sponsors are invited to join the official AoC assessor, selected by virtue of their experience in the particular specialism, and they together shortlist during August/September. Assessors visit short-listed colleges in September/October. At this stage, assessors will meet senior college staff, the programme team, students and others who have been involved in the programme. Attention is paid to outcomes, methods of evaluation, quality assurance, and plans for the future development and dissemination of the initiative. The assessors' judgements and recommendations are reviewed and confirmed by the Beacon Awards Steering Group in October.

The list of award winners is announced at the AoC annual conference in mid November. The sponsor presents the award cheque to its winning college at a local ceremony early the following year. Each college gaining an award undertakes to inform its community about its achievement, and about the support and interest provided by the sponsor. Finally, each winning college is invited to the national awards ceremony in London in May, where they exhibit their work and receive the Beacon Award parchment.

Award-winning colleges are allowed to use the Beacon Awards logo with the year of the programme beneath it, on college-headed paper, and promotional material. Highly commended colleges are also entitled to use the logo.

The Churches' FE Beacon Award for Sustainable Community Development

In 1999, the churches ecumenically decided to create and sponsor their own FE Beacon Award, as part of their continuing support of the Learning and Skills sector, and also of their advocacy of the work of FE colleges within the churches.

Given the churches' long-term involvement with community development in both informal and formal settings, and with work for justice and hope at the margins of society, the focus of the award set out to confirm the vision of an effectively inclusive learning society. Its hope was that, through encouraging innovative local projects, the award would

2001-2002 Loreto R.C. Sixth form College, Hulme, Manchester, for its East Manchester Regeneration Project in Beswick.

The college had made a commitment six years earlier to work with local people on a small-scale, high quality, long-term project, in an area of massive deprivation, very high unemployment and social exclusion. Its partners included New Deal for Communities, local churches ecumenically, the Manchester Settlement, the Probation Service, Social Services, community workers, local schools and Liverpool Hope University. Effective teamwork, and high quality staff, led by the college Principal, Ann Clynch, the senior tutor, Colette Halkon, and the local community development worker, were strong features of this project. Beginning in 1995 with First Aid and parenting for 80 students, the college was now offering NVO 2 and NVO3 Early Years Care and Education, confidence-building, introduction to childcare, managing children's behaviour, and mosaic-building in residential homes. It had a remarkable success record, including progression to Higher Education, NVO3 playgroup leadership, youth and community work, and local employment.

help stimulate a fuller understanding of the importance of learning to live and work together in community.

They knew that their award did not have a succinct name! But they hoped that its title might prompt some thinking around some of the prevalent slogans, such as “lifelong learning”, “community capacity-building”, “sustainable development”, “social inclusion” and “neighbourhood renewal and regeneration”.

The concept of community, so often misused, resonates deeply with the Christian way of life, for Christians believe that it is through living with others that people gain and develop a sense of identity and purpose. The churches were keen to emphasise the need to see learning in a context wider than that simply of individual effort – that is, they wanted to ensure that local individuals and communities were not expected to shoulder all the responsibility for the problems they faced.

Moreover, there was from the beginning an emphasis on the imperative of long-term, sustained, engagement with the community, rather than merely short-term responses to particular Government initiatives. The churches had been frustrated by the constant need to seek funding, since it distracted energy from the real work and, all too often, disempowered the very people whom projects were seeking to help. This kind of work was never seen as a “quick fix”, needing rather to be stable, of high quality, and thoroughly embedded in the community. The creation of the Award aimed to encourage those colleges that were prepared to tackle that difficult agenda.

The sponsoring bodies are the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Free Churches’ Council, the award being managed by the Churches’ National Adviser in Further Education.

The Churches’ FE Beacon Award for Sustainable Community Development set out to be a partnership with gospel integrity. The Award is given each year to the college which has most effectively fostered a broad and sustainable sense of self-worth in a marginalised local group. The commitment from the beginning was to interpret that broadly, recognising the diversity of localities and the rich variety of opportunities to promote community development, social wellbeing and cohesion.

In an attempt to promote what the churches saw as key elements of good practice,



Beacon Award sponsors with Margaret Hodge, M.P., Minister for Lifelong Learning

criteria for the Award were specified in some detail. Thus, the AoC prospectus lists the criteria for the Churches' Award as follows:

- Knowledge and understanding of the community's developmental needs
- Effective college/community collaboration in planning, delivery and evaluation
- Imaginative use of the community's resources
- Imagination and sensitivity in reaching out to, and working with, individuals in these groups
- Support, enabling people both to articulate and achieve their learning goals
- Study programmes, learning outcomes and qualifications which are relevant to the growth of the whole person
- Opportunities for progression
- Appropriate mechanisms for recording achievements which acknowledge all learning and are meaningful to learners
- Flexibility and the willingness to learn from experience and implement the outcomes of evaluation
- A growing sense of self-esteem and an increased use of networks within the community or group

Applications for the Award

From the beginning, the Churches' Award has proved to be one of the most popular, attracting a large number of high quality applications.

Colleges that have applied for the Award:

Barnsley	Exeter
Blackpool and the Fylde	Franklin VI form, Grimsby
Bournemouth and Poole	Halesowen
Bournville, Birmingham	Harrogate
Bromley	Havering
Broxtowe, Nottingham	Hugh Baird, Bootle
Capel Manor, Enfield	Hull
City of Sunderland	John Wheatley College, Glasgow
Cornwall	Limavady, Northern Ireland
Dearne Valley, Wath-upon-Dearne,	Llandrillo
Rotherham	Loreto VI form, Manchester
Dudley	Loughborough
Dunstable	Ludlow

New College, Nottingham	Stoke-on-Trent
Newbury	Telford
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Thomas Danby, Leeds
North Trafford, Stretford	Uxbridge
Plater, Oxford	Wakefield
Portsmouth	Warrington Collegiate Institute
Skelmersdale	West Suffolk, Bury St. Edmunds
South Birmingham	Westminster Kingsway
South East Derbyshire, Ilkeston	Woolwich
South Trafford, Altrincham	Worcester

It was clear that the Award had touched an area of real interest to very many colleges, who were delighted with the opportunity it gave for that work to receive recognition. Applications have come from colleges that were working with “marginalised local groups” in such contexts as:

- Homeless young people
- Residential care
- Housing estates
- Deprived rural areas – e.g. rural transport
- Older, retired people
- Drug and alcohol abusers
- School exclusions
- Adult returners
- People with physical disabilities – e.g. visually impaired, hearing impaired
- Asian women
- Lone parents
- Young men on probation, and ex-offenders
- Unemployed workers in areas suffering industrial decline
- People with low skills in the workforce – e.g. to develop learning representatives
- Women’s refuge
- Big Issue vendors
- Carers
- Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities
- Refugees and asylum-seekers
- People with learning difficulties and/or other disabilities
- Mental health
- Training community advocates

Case Studies: Highly Commended Colleges

In each of these cases, the colleges concerned came very near to winning the Award in that year.

1999-2000 City of Sunderland FE College, for its Cyber-cafe in Sunderland Minster.

This partnership between the college and the church, initiated by Ian Todd, the college Principal, and Canon Brian Hails, had resulted in the creation of an ICT learning centre in the Minster, right in the heart of the local community. The building had been adapted to create two teaching rooms, equipped with high quality computers. The aim was to encourage the elderly people who already used the Minster café to overcome their fear of computing, and develop ICT skills on a structured, and drop-in, basis. The closure of the local brewery meant that the centre was also able to offer help to redundant staff, assisting with ICT and CV production. The centre, managed by Pam Wilkie (the Learning Resources tutor) and Lynda Brown (the Community Operations Manager), buzzed with life. Since its launch by the Bishop of Durham in January 1998, 490 students had enrolled on its courses, with 401 completing satisfactorily.

1999-2000 Woolwich FE College – for its CREST project (Creekside Education Support and Training Centre).

This estate-based guidance centre in Armada Hall set out to tackle unemployment, poverty and inequality in the Hughesfield estate, Deptford. Established in 1996, and managed by Becky Jones, with support from Koko Spiteri, the administrator, its partners were local councils, the John Evelyn Trust and the WEA, with funding from the Single Regeneration Budget and European Social Fund. It offered a wide variety of accredited courses such as ESOL, ICT, literacy and numeracy, childcare and parenting, promoted through local community newsletters. A creche was provided. CREST students who had achieved NVQ Childcare through the programme subsequently ran a summer play-scheme and a health day event. Since its beginning, 563 people had used CREST, the largest group being women who wished to return to study or to work. The project had a strong social dimension, providing a safe drop-in centre, where sympathetic staff could help with a wide spectrum of educational and social needs.

- Bangladeshi community
- Parents in a local minority ethnic community

At the same time, promotion of the Award within the sponsoring churches has significantly helped the various denominations understand Further Education colleges better, and develop more effective partnerships with them for community learning.



Newsletter group discussing impact of local regeneration. CREST Project, Woolwich College

The Promotion of the Award

From the beginning, the churches decided that they would offer publicity to all the colleges they short-listed, rather than simply focusing on the award winner each year. Not only would this recognise the range of excellent college practice, but it would also help church workers identify potential opportunities for local partnerships with FE colleges in similar contexts.

Thus, press releases and articles were sent to the church press, and strong ecumenical representation was encouraged at the local award presentations.

Each summer, the short-listed colleges were invited to talk about their work at the annual churches' FE residential conference. All colleges accepted this invitation, and indicated that they much valued this public recognition of their work. Certainly their involvement made a major impact on conference participants, frequently being described as "inspirational", prompting some excellent follow-up, and further partnership development.



NOAH Project, Dunstable College

WINNERS OF THE AWARD

- 1999 - 2000 Dunstable FE College, for its NOAH project (New Opportunities and Horizons).
 2000 – 2001 Stoke-on-Trent FE College, for its partnership with Stoke-on-Trent LEA – "College in the Community".
 2001 – 2002 Loreto R.C. Sixth Form College, Hulme, Manchester, for its East Manchester Regeneration Project in Beswick

Case Studies: Highly Commended Colleges

In each of these cases, the colleges concerned came very near to winning the Award in that year.

2000-2001 City of Sunderland FE College, for its partnership with the local parish church at Kepier Hall, Houghton-le-Spring.

Working in a deprived area of County Durham, the hall had been converted into a vibrant ICT learning centre, open 64 hours a week. Given strong support from the College faculty head, Steve Durham, and enthusiastically championed by its programme manager, Lynda Brown, it had achieved some notable success stories – such as that of Gaynor Johnson, a single parent who had started computing from scratch at the centre, and was now studying for her Higher National Certificate on the college main site, or of Jean Hewitt, confined to a wheelchair as a result of an accident who, with no previous computing background, was now working successfully on Level 2.

2001-2002 Broxtowe FE College, Nottingham, for its Stepping Stones project (Promoting self-worth through learning).

The college was working with ten hostels for homeless young people, in and around Nottingham. It had already been selected by the Learning and Skills Council to participate in a national LSC project on Foyer hostels. The hostels, run by churches, housing associations and trusts, were working in partnership with the college, local community groups, statutory and voluntary agencies, IKEA, Derby County Football Club and the Derbyshire Building Society. During the year, the project had worked with over a hundred young people, and had enabled them to see a future, in spite of ongoing issues of homelessness, abuse, drugs, dysfunctional family lives and crime. Students were welcomed regardless of ability, and were offered a varied programme of courses throughout the whole year in the hostels, with additional learner support and tutorials. Peer-mentoring and the development of successful role-models played a very significant part in this project. The project represented a strong commitment by college senior management, under its Principal, Nick Lewis to the local community. It was led by an able manager in Gillian Wheatcroft, supported by Terry Shrimpton, Head of school, and John Asher, lecturer in charge of the OCN framework, working with Cath Vesey, the hostels provision manager. The excellent team was determined to work together to help change the students' lives for the better.

HIGHLY COMMENDED COLLEGES

In each of these cases, the colleges concerned came very close to winning the Award in that year.

- 1999 - 2000 City of Sunderland FE College, for its Cyber-café in Sunderland Minster
- 1999 – 2000 Woolwich FE College, for its CREST project (Creekside Education Support and Training Centre)
- 2000 – 2001 City of Sunderland FE College, for its partnership with the local parish church at Kepier Hall, Houghton-le-Spring
- 2001 – 2002 Broxtowe FE College, Nottingham for its Stepping Stones project (Promoting self-worth through learning)



Sunderland Minster Cyber-Café, City of Sunderland College

OTHER SHORT-LISTED COLLEGES

- 1999 – 2000 Hugh Baird FE College, Bootle (for its work with the Parkhaven Trust residential home in Maghull, for people suffering from epilepsy)
- 2000 – 2001 Harrogate FE College (for its work with St. Robert's coffee shop in the town centre)
- 2001 – 2002 Newcastle-under-Lyme FE College (for its work with Audley Wood Lane community association)
- 2001 – 2002 West Suffolk FE College, Bury St. Edmunds (for its Independent Living project, working with adults with autism and severe learning difficulties and disabilities)

Further details of all these projects may be found in the Case Studies

Reflections on the Experience so far

How Things Begin

“Oak trees from small acorns grow” effectively sums up the way in which so many of these successful partnerships were created.

FE colleges, long committed to tackling social exclusion, have been strongly driven by the widening participation agenda, designed to extend learning to new individuals and groups within the community, and have been looking to community groups for support. Colleges have engaged in what sometimes are sophisticated analyses of community needs, to identify particular groups who have been let down by their previous educational experiences. However, such targeting may underplay the existence of pockets of deprivation across the whole country – for instance, in isolated rural areas, or in a particular part of an otherwise prosperous town.

Increasingly, colleges have recognised how difficult it often is to attract marginalised groups of new learners onto the main college site, and have been seeking to work with skilled and committed community outreach centres, including churches, where the elderly, young, homeless, and so on feel safe and accepted. In some instances, colleges have been able to build on long-established relationships of trust in the community; in others, they were looking to establish new partnerships.

Many churches had been involved in Manpower Services Commission programmes in the 1980's, but had become disillusioned because they felt they were managing other people's agendas, rather than meeting the needs of local people. It had often been a painful experience. There seemed little willingness in official circles to recognise that people learn much through their daily lives and experience outside formal education, and that not all learning needed to be institutionally-focused.

Yet, this work has continued quietly within the neighbourhood for years, done on a shoestring, by committed individuals or congregations. They have been able to offer a people-driven agenda, but at the expense sometimes of access to available external funding, or to expertise in terms of progression opportunities for participants in their programmes. So, churches, voluntary organisations and community groups have been looking for ways in which their work might be better understood, more effectively integrated into wider strategic planning, and consequently better resourced. There was a sense that the FE agenda might well offer a real opportunity for genuine partnership.

The arrival of a new manager, at the college, or in the community group, or church, will often provide an opportunity for people to think about refocusing their existing work. By asking people who really know the area what is actually happening locally, and who is involved, they open up new thinking and connections. Conversations over coffee at other

meetings, or social events, often resulted in a mutual recognition of shared interests and involvement.

One of the successful projects' most striking features was that they had strong, committed leadership, by people with vision and enthusiasm. Time and again, one or two individuals, rooted in their own contexts and frequently with an active involvement in both the college and the local community, had taken the initiative. Their approach was one that began with the needs of the local community, and was driven by a strong sense of service. They could see possibilities of providing a much better service to local people, by pulling together scattered pockets of individual work and experience. One does not often describe charismatic leadership and energy as modest and unassuming, but that would be a fair summary of the impact of these project leaders on the Beacon assessors!

Partners

A huge diversity of partners has been found in the scores of applications received so far. The culture of FE has always been highly entrepreneurial and there are strong links with local business, industry and political structures. However, many FE colleges have also had strong links for years with local adult and community learning, with special educational needs work, with local primary and secondary schools, and voluntary groups. The churches have had good relationships with over half the colleges in the sector, evidenced by their chaplaincy provision or community partnerships.

The creation of the Learning and Skills Council, and Learning Partnerships at local level has gone some way to encouraging this broadening of collaborative partnership. Local Strategic Partnerships, with Learning Partnerships acting (as it were) as their learning arms, should encourage more serious commitment to this process. Through their involvement with neighbourhood renewal, education, health and employment action zones, New Deal, single regeneration budget-funded activity, not to mention local community life and politics, the churches are well placed to bring added value to the partnership.

Much information is held by these various potential partners which, if properly shared, can release the potential of effective, and innovative, local projects. Steering groups, with appropriately informed and committed membership, make a real difference to the project. Clear definition of aims and purpose, at a very early stage, is a prerequisite, as is the capacity to cope with the unexpected. Visits at the planning stage to schemes with similar aims have often proved valuable.

On the whole, it would be true that colleges provide advice on access to funding, expertise in bid-writing, specialist community staff (such as an outreach manager), publicity and promotion, curriculum design, delivery, accreditation, and quality assurance, along with staff training and development. Many initial programmes were accredited, for instance,

1999–2000 Hugh Baird FE College, Bootle (for its work with the Parkhaven Trust residential home in Maghull, for people suffering from epilepsy).

As a result of this work, initially on site, managed by Cathy Fairclough, the Outreach co-ordinator, and Pauline Rose, the SLDD co-ordinator, some residents had gained the confidence to travel for the first time by themselves to the college, to continue their learning and make new friends.

2000–2001 Harrogate FE College (for its work with St. Robert's coffee shop in the town centre).

Here the parish hall had recently been redesigned as a community centre, and was now offering catering work experience to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The college programme leader, Pat Lehan, was herself a member of the local congregation and had seen the potential of partnership between the college and her local church. Running the coffee shop allowed the students to develop communication skills, numeracy, organisational skills, and teamwork. At the same time, it helped the congregation and customers to develop a better understanding of the gifts, as well as the needs, of the students, thereby breaking down unhelpful stereotypes.

through the Open College Network (OCN), which builds on community-based learning experience.

The churches and voluntary organisations offer an awareness of local needs, expertise in long-term community-based living and learning, highly committed people to work in initial advice and guidance, teaching and tutoring, access to buildings and facilities, and a determination to ensure that the learners' own needs and potential remain at the heart of the project.

The successful applications for the Beacon Award demonstrated that a mutual, and honest, recognition of each other's strengths and weaknesses was essential to an effective partnership. It is good to recognise that others will do some of the work far more effectively!

The Beacon Award experience has done much to counter a sense of partnership fatigue in some quarters, demonstrating how new approaches can be highly effective, and release new resources.

Funding

One thing which was very clear in these projects was that work was not being driven by the funding. There was a clear sense that partners were using available funding to resource their own vision. Funding very largely came through the Learning and Skills Council (or its precursors, the Further Education Funding Council, and Training and Enterprise Councils), along with Government-funded initiatives and European monies for community regeneration. Side by side with this was often matched funding by partners. Typically, funding came through such initiatives as the Adult and Community Learning Fund, New Deal, the Trades Unions Learning Fund, and the University for Industry. The Church Urban Fund, Methodist Mission Alongside the Poor, and Roman Catholic charities, along with church housing associations and trusts, and other faith communities, contributed to the funding in some cases.

2001–2002 Newcastle-under-Lyme FE College (for its work with Audley Wood Lane community association).

The college, with Barbara Davies, its head of community education department, was working closely with the local community association in a semi-rural former pit community. A local survey had identified interests, needs and priorities. An administrator had been appointed, and a dozen learning mentors had been trained by the college, in a programme focused on community capacity-building. The partnership was underpinned by a service level agreement. Local shopkeepers distributed the excellent community newsletter, which was produced as an inter-generational project, helping to break down suspicion and conflict between different age-groups in the area. The local church was involved in this project.

2001–2002 West Suffolk FE College, Bury St. Edmunds (for its Independent Living project, working with adults with autism and severe learning difficulties and disabilities).

This project had been running since 1995 in partnership with Suffolk Community Education service, Social Services, the National Autistic Society, and private care providers. It had grown from 40 to 167 participants in day and residential care, in 6 sites over a wide rural area. Increasing numbers of students were achieving the flexible ASDAN Towards Independence Award, supported by Geraldine Tunbridge. An interesting newspaper was produced by the students, under Liz Reed.

Taster Programmes

M. came to this country about 8 years ago. She felt lonely and depressed. "I thought about joining English classes, but did not have enough confidence. One day, when my husband was collecting my children from their school, he brought me a note about a meeting on family literacy. He encouraged me and persuaded me to attend. I went, although I was feeling very nervous. When I saw Nilufar, who explained everything in Bengali, I felt comfortable. I decided to give it a try. I enjoyed the course very much, and I also gained a lot of confidence. So when I was asked to become a school governor, I agreed. After that I did a short IT course provided by Kingsway college at the school. I went on to do English, Numeracy and IT at Regent's Park Library with the college, and now hope to do GCSE Maths and English." (Kingsway College)

Learning programmes were jointly developed by the colleges and their partners.

It is not surprising that teams put much effort into offering plenty of encouragement and support, recognising how apprehensive and hesitant many of their students would be.

"At times I found it difficult and overwhelming, yet the vital support was on hand." (Bournemouth and Poole College)

Potential learners were treated with respect and, often for the first time in their educational experience, the gifts, skills and knowledge that they had brought with them were acknowledged. This was far from being a "deficit" model of learning.

The focus was on giving people, and groups, the confidence to move forward. Mutual support was critical, engendering a real sense of belonging to a group, and working for the common good.

"When I first came on this course, I felt like a shell. Now the gaps have been filled in. Still a fair way to go. With the friends I have made on this course, I will get through what life throws at me." (Franklin VI form college)

It is well known that learning in small chunks is much more feasible, and attractive. Sometimes, initial “taster” programmes were offered (say, three hours a week, for six weeks), allowing an initial interview with the programme tutor, some diagnostic assessment, and the identification of additional support needs.

“When I came to Alfreton youth hostel, I was shy and scared. One day I was introduced to the college there. This step changed everything. Not only did it learn me new things. It was keeping my mind off things which had happened in the past. At college I have made a great relationship with all the staff and I feel able to talk to them about anything. Also in college we have a laugh, and also do lots of work as well. While I have been at college I have improved all areas of communication and learnt some great life skills. I love every minute of it.” (Broxtowe College)

Programmes were run at the community centre. College staff visited the outreach centre, and made contact with students. A review took place at the end of the “taster” to identify possible progression routes.

Free sessions were offered, with child-care available.

In some cases, hesitant new learners were accompanied to the main college site by community outreach centre staff, who acted as facilitators with the college staff.

There was a clear recognition of the need for plenty of talking and discussion, to build confidence. Small steps of achievement were recognised, encouraged and affirmed.

As college students, learners had access to the college library, learning centres, counsellor, Access fund for course fees and accreditation costs.

A Flavour of Some Popular Programmes

An understanding of the need to value and develop the whole person was critical to the success of all programmes. A lot of attention had been given to thinking through how people best learn together, and the best programmes had a real commitment to improving people's quality of living.

“I feel that I am keeping my mind active. I also stave off depression and keep a younger outlook and healthier body.” (aged 70, Franklin VI form college)

What was important was to put together the right curriculum for the individuals – something that would be of genuine interest and value to them. It was vital to establish a sound relationship between potential learners in the community and tutors, who were willing to “go with the flow” and who were able to use their experience to build appropriate provision.

Some typical programmes were:

- Personal skills development – Improving own learning and performance, working with others, problem-solving, maintaining work standards (identifying skills, interests and achievements, exploring their use in unpaid and paid work)
- Adult Basic Skills – Literacy, Numeracy
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), Asian music, community languages
- Healthy living – healthy eating, aromatherapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, yoga, understanding and coping with stress, personal welfare, budgeting
- Computing (computing for absolute beginners, word-processing, spreadsheets, databases, telematics, introduction to the internet)
- Parenting – Helping your child at school - reading, storytelling, creative writing, number; managing behaviour, health and safety, handling domestic violence, dealing with emotions
- Classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors (childcare)
- Volunteering in your community (exploring community development, listening, assertiveness, equal opportunities, safeguarding, basic first aid, committee skills, negotiation skills, book-keeping and accounts, catering and food hygiene, introduction to sociology, sign language, counselling, making an application for funding, customer care)
- Jobsearch and CV writing
- Making a video, how to use a digital camera and scanner
- Home maintenance, woodcraft, horticulture, floristry, local history, motor vehicle maintenance, introduction to world religions, dress-making, textiles and soft furnishings, interior design, cake decorating, pottery and ceramics, sound rhythm and music, performing arts, pet care and grooming, current affairs

ACCREDITATION

It is often said that the pressure to gain qualifications in order for a programme to be recognised is an unhelpful barrier to groups engaged with community learning, and that is certainly often the case. Equally, it is true that some people who have achieved personal success at one level may not wish to be pressed into immediately taking further qualifications, and that decision should be respected.

On the other hand, people in the churches and local communities are often unaware of the range of recognised qualifications which are regularly used in an adult learning context. Many of these are very flexible, and are tailored to the specific requirements of the learners, helping people's achievements to be speedily and appropriately recognised.

Students with learning difficulties shared their cooking skills with the congregation by serving refreshments in the pews during a final hymn, which encouraged all to remain in their place enjoying fellowship, eating, drinking and chatting. (Warrington Collegiate Institute)

"I went on to do CLAIT because my children were learning about computers at school, and I wanted to keep up with them. Because if they were to ask me something related to what they were doing at school, I wanted to be able to help them." (South Birmingham College)

The building of a portfolio allows all learning, along with student's reflection on it, to be recognised. Moreover, there is growing recognition in the education world of the need for a unit-based credit framework, allowing the accumulation of credits in these qualifications to lead into progression right up to, and including, Higher Education.

This is where partnership with the curriculum development team at the college can be so helpful. For instance, typical qualification routes in the applications for our Award included:

- Open College Network at NVQ from Entry level through levels 1 and 2, to level 3
- City and Guilds WordPower and NumberPower,
- Computing qualifications such as OCR CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information

Technology), and IBT2, City and Guilds 7261, Learndirect (Ufi)

- Red Cross
- ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) FE Award Level 1
- NCFE (various working with children qualifications)
- CACHE Childcare and Education NVO 2 and 3
- RIPHH First Certificate in Food Safety
- NVQs in Motor Vehicle, Introduction to Counselling, Youth and Community, Early Years and Education
- GCSE
- Assessor/verifier training awards (D32, D33) – making it possible for people from within the community to assess future programmes, and thereby contributing to community capacity-building..
- City and Guilds 9281/02 Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills

In very many cases, a presentation ceremony was arranged by the college, to which family and friends were invited, marking the real achievement of the recipients of the certificates. These were regularly described as joyful celebrations, often motivating them to undertake further study, or to progress to employment.

“I would never have believed in my wildest dreams this could have been possible. At the age of 40, I at last have real hope of doing something worthwhile with my life.” (Bournemouth and Poole College)

“I always thought I was thick.” (Coleg Llandrillo)

One of the key strands to consider is that of “progression” – lifelong learning doesn’t stand still! There is evidence that learning opens up undreamed-of possibilities for many.

“What’s on next?” (Coleg Llandrillo)

Successful projects often had their roots in community social activities, and had developed into a concern to help build a better future for participants, their families and their local area, through learning.

“The unit I think I learned the most from was Unit 3 – Equal Opportunities. I covered issues I have never come across before. I tend to explain more now to my own children about gender, culture, religion and disability, whereas before I'd just either ignore it or dismiss it out of hand.” (Blackpool and the Fylde College)

Perhaps there is a particular lesson here for the church, whose pastoral support hasn't always encompassed a recognition of learning needs. This is not to deny that much learning takes place within the churches – through formal teaching, discussion, talks and visits, exhibitions, specific training programmes, lobbying, clubs, and through developing the skills of volunteers. But, so much more might happen! How many people who use the church drop-in centre might be interested in the development of a community-based learning programme?

It is also important to note the immensely valuable part played by successful students as role models and learning mentors, not to mention their contributions to the continued running of the project.

S. was a shy single parent who attended First Aid training at the Manchester Settlement. Following this initial taste of success, she took on NVQ level 2 in Childcare and Education with Loreto College. She completed the course successfully, and gained immediate work at a local RC primary school. She is now co-ordinator of the “Alphabet Club” (an Education Action Zone-funded project). This enables other parents to know their children are being cared for in a stimulating and educational environment, whilst they have the opportunity to acquire new skills and employment. (Loreto College)

Publicity and Promotion

This was generally funded by the college, with the college and the community using their different networks to advertise and distribute promotional material. Unsurprisingly, there proved to be great value in talking to people about the project, rather than simply deluging them with literature.

The choice of name may be very important – choose a name which gives the right impression! (e.g. NOAH – New Opportunities and Horizons; Stepping Stones; The Door; Open Minds; Lighthouse Centre; Mustard Seed)

Some projects were very effective in capitalising on their contacts with local opinion-formers and policy-makers to raise the profile of their scheme. Newsworthy activities or stories generated media interest, and attracted more support from the community.

Monitoring and Evaluation

People are often intimidated by what they perceive to be bureaucratic quality systems. Yet, critical reflection is central to Christian experience! And there is a strong commitment to high quality.

Everyone involved in the Beacon Award projects had a very clear sense of the difference they were making. People immediately knew and could readily demonstrate what was happening.

Monitoring and evaluation was jointly undertaken, co-ordinated by the college, through its quality assurance procedures, involving team meetings, student and tutor feedback, internal and external verification of student portfolios, and joint staff development.

What emerged from the projects was that people:

- Had a clear sense of what they were trying to achieve
- Were determined to concentrate on what mattered to them, and keep faith with the community
- Set out to include everyone in the quality assurance process
- Knew the strengths and weaknesses of their current work
- Were readily able to demonstrate students' progress (not just through qualifications, but through work done, diaries, photos, videos and so on). Students themselves were learning to learn.
- Could provide student feedback on quality of teaching and tutoring
- Were constantly trying to improve, and acted on decisions
- Were increasingly using statistical evidence – for instance, in terms of student retention, achievement and progression – and were becoming more confident in talking about standards (what constituted acceptable, good or excellent practice).

It is important to keep telling the stories – those “small-scale successes” which continue to have a major significance in the lives of individuals and the wider community. Not least, because they provide the energising basis from which to develop so much else!

Suggestions for Further Work

1. Would it be a good idea to talk about the Beacon Award with others in your congregation, or church structures? Some possible discussion starters:
 - What do you think Jesus meant by “I have come that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness”? (John 10, v.10 in New English Bible)
 - How does the Beacon Award relate to your understanding of “mission” in contemporary society? (e.g. what connection has it to “Our Calling” (Methodist), the Archbishops’ Council’s Themes and priorities (Church of England), and the 5 marks of mission?)
 - Do you know who are “the marginalised and forgotten groups in your local communities”? How would you find out?
 - What opportunities exist within your church to talk about, and engage with, what’s going on in the local community?
 - Where in your church life do people reflect on current issues in education, health, the economy, and so on? (in the youth group? House groups? Church council? Local preachers’ meeting? Sunday worship?)
 - Who currently has little sense of personal worth and value? What skills do people feel they need, which might help them to play a fuller part in developing the local community? What opportunities already exist? What gaps are there? How would you find out? How might you help “foster their self-esteem”?
 - What gifts and experience has the local church to offer to the communities which you seek to serve? Have you asked the community what they think you can offer?
 - Is your church already involved in any learning programmes? Is there any way in which these might make connections with the local FE college?
 - How might involvement in this work change your community, your church, you?
2. Identify potential partners
 - Who might be interested? Who is already doing work like this in your circuit, or district? (e.g. members of your congregation, FE chaplains, lay workers, deacons, church community development workers, youth workers, training and development officers)
 - Make contact with your local FE college. Useful links may be Adult and Community Learning; or the senior manager with responsibility for Widening Participation, or Adult Basic Skills; or the particular element of the curriculum in which the local community is particularly interested. Ask if you can visit some of their outreach work. You might also want to contact some of the colleges mentioned in this booklet.

- What formal/informal networks already exist? What contacts does your congregation have (through family, neighbourhood, local politics, employment, volunteering)?
 - Who already uses your premises? Who might use your premises?
 - What are your ecumenical partners already doing?
 - Who else has valuable experience? Be prepared to “think outside the box”!
 - Why might some of your potential partners be wary of engaging with the church? What might be the different pressures you’d have to balance? What key principles would need to be clarified and agreed? How might joint work help build better relationships?
 - Is there a place for prayer partners?
3. What resources would be needed?
- Think about what is already in place. What else would be needed? Don’t be shy of identifying everything which would help to make your idea really work!
 - Do you know what possibilities exist in terms of external funding? How does what you’re considering fit with government policies, priorities and initiatives? Who might be able to tell you? (Don’t feel you have to start this from scratch yourself!) Why not invite someone from your local FE College – perhaps the Principal, or the head of the Adult and Community Education Department - to talk to you?
 - What steps would need to be taken (by the church, and by other partners) to build in “sustainability”?
 - Would placements, or secondments, help to develop community-based learning? What other training would be helpful?
4. From previous experience, what issues do you need to be aware of?
- Draw up an agenda of pitfalls, and potential solutions, before you meet with funders.
 - Are there some fundamental questions which need to be asked about the purpose of learning? Be clear about your vision for the project.
5. What are the implications of this model for the church’s own training of its clergy and laity?

RESPONSES

It would be particularly helpful to have your comments on this booklet, in terms of the Beacon Award stories it has told, the issues it has begun to explore, and its suggestions for further follow-up. Please tell us how you have used it, and how it might have been improved. Let us know if your church, college or community group is also doing work of

this kind. Seriously consider applying for the Award! Come along to the churches' FE conferences, or link into the NEAFE network (National Ecumenical Agency in Further Education) to learn more about what's happening across the country, and to pick up good ideas.

If you'd like any further information or help, contact: Anthea Turner, Churches' National Adviser in Further Education, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ. Tel: 020 7898 1505. Fax: 020 7898 1520. E-mail: anthea.turner@c-of-e.org.uk

Resources List

Beacon Awards Prospectus, Association of Colleges, 5th floor, Centre Point, 103, New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1RG

Community-led Estate Regeneration Handbook, Churches' National Housing Coalition and the Housing Corporation, 2000

Foster,P, Howard, U, Reisenberger,A, *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*, Further Education Development Agency, 1997

Learning communities (Strengthening lifelong learning through practice), DEMOS and Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2000

Lifelong learning partnerships, free leaflet obtainable from Churches' National FE Adviser, 2000

MacGillivray et al., *Communities Count! A step by step guide*, New Economics Foundation, 1998

McGivney,V., *Informal learning in the community*, NIACE, 1999

McGivney,V., *Working with excluded groups (Guidelines on good practice)*, NIACE, 2002

Making changes (A strategic framework for community development learning in England), Federation of Community Work Training Groups, 2001

Merrill, B, et al., *The FE College and its communities*, Further Education Development Agency, 2000

Neighbourhood Renewal in London: the role of faith communities, Greater London Enterprise, and London Churches Group, 2002

Participation Works! (21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century), New Economics Foundation

Pillars of the Church (Supporting chaplaincy in FE and HE), GS Misc. 667, CHP, 2002

Ed. Randolph-Horn, E., *Faith makes communities work*, Shaftesbury Society, and Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions

Ravenhall,M, Merrifield, J, Gardener,S., *Fit for purpose (Self-assessment for small providers)*

Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2002

Stubbs, I, et al., *Building Learning Congregations*, to be published by CHP, Spring 2003

Ed. Stuart, M., Thomson, A., *Engaging with Difference*, NIACE, 1995

The Essence of Education, A report of the Methodist Conference, 1999, MPH

Thompson, J, *Re-rooting lifelong learning (Resourcing neighbourhood renewal)*, NIACE, 2001

Working out our calling in towns and cities, a discussion leaflet, MPH, 2001

Further materials detailing the work of the churches with Further Education colleges and the Learning and Skills sector may be obtained from Anthea Turner, Churches' National Adviser in Further Education, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ (020-7898-1505) e-mail: anthea.turner@c-of-e.org.uk

