

Regeneration 2001

CLES Annual Conference

Report by Carl Wiper, Senior Information Officer at CLES

Learning and skills: training for communities

BARONESS BLACKSTONE, MINISTER of State for Education and Employment, gave the keynote address concentrating on two main areas: the role of learning in regeneration and the work of the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). She spoke as the 'ministerial champion' of the Policy Action Team on Skills (Skills PAT), set up to contribute to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal



(NSNR). The Skills PAT had identified lack of skills as a key component of social exclusion. The onus is on the funders and providers of education and training for adults, to devise approaches to attract people in deprived areas back into learning and then connect these to job opportunities. She singled out the work of the East Leeds Family Learning Centre in running short courses to 'whet the appetite' and Hackney

College in acting as a 'head hunter' for London Transport. The ability to use ICT is now the 'third literacy', and the UK Online Initiative had been set up to overcome the 'digital divide', while the University for Industry's (Ufi) Learndirect is providing flexible online learning programmes.

She also traced the influence of the Skills PAT on the arrangements for the LSCs, in that they have a responsibility to work 'with the grain' of local communities, to join up the work of Local Strategic Partnerships and Government Offices and to promote 'what works' by bringing new approaches into the mainstream. She concluded with the rousing call that 'educating the few to think and the many to do is no longer acceptable'.

"Good clear speakers and interesting"

Supporting speakers in the session also sought the 'human face behind the statistics'. Chris Jones, CEDC, described three individuals: Maureen, a lone parent on low income with no qualifications who is unwilling to leave the house because of the fear of burglary; Mahmood, a taxi driver who is active in the community, but works unsocial hours and has a poor command of English; and Joanne, a lone parent with five children who needs childcare to engage in training.

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Highlighted quotes are some feedback from delegates at the conference

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She felt that people like these are missing out because of the wrong stress on individual learning outputs, when what is needed is an appreciation of contextualised community outcomes. She said that FE colleges are effectively disinvesting in community provision, but they should be cooperating more closely with community and voluntary organisations which can provide the all-round support to help people overcome the real problems they face in accessing learning.

Patrick Hayes, chief executive of Skillswork, described what is being done in the Thames Gateway. This area is an important manufacturing and transportation hub, with the City Airport and Transport for London as key employers, but one that also has persistently high unemployment and

Sustainable housing

THE SESSION ON SUSTAINABLE housing traced the re-emergence of housing as a key element of the government's strategy to assist deprived neighbourhoods. Jim Coulter, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, pointed out that the Social Exclusion Unit's first report on neighbourhood renewal, *Bringing Britain Together*, omitted housing from its vision of 'lower long term unemployment and worklessness, less crime, better health and better qualifications', but when the National Strategy Action Plan was published earlier this year, this had changed to 'lower worklessness and

expectancy had increased and crime levels had fallen to the UK average.

Martin Knox, Anthony Collins Solicitors, considered the legal structures that should be put in place to deliver neighbourhood management and described the community association model, of a company limited by guarantee, giving the example of the Community Association on the Royds-Woodside estate in Bradford.

Seminar sessions

THE SEMINAR ON THE FUTURE OF regeneration funding reflected some of the uncertainty surrounding this issue. Keith Barnes from GO-NW, said there was no clear picture, but that the government seems to be re-focusing on bending mainstream funding to support regeneration, rather than new funding streams. Some element of ring fencing will be required to ensure mainstream

"All speakers were interesting and kept up a vigorous pace"

resources go to the most deprived areas. The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have more flexibility now that their resources are being put into a single pot. The aim should be to 'deliver targets with freedom and flexibilities', which implies less control from central government.

Joe Docherty of Barclays Bank suggested that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are looking at tools to develop more micro financing initiatives, though the details are not yet available.

The introduction by Baron Isherwood of the NWDA to the discussion on prospects for regional government and regeneration, was timely, given that the issue of regional devolution is returning to the political agenda. Are RDAs the first step towards the establishment of 'ministries of



Study tour to Leeds Innovation Centre

low skill levels; in other words, local people are not getting local jobs. The solution lies in a combination of supply side and demand side interventions, with a key role for labour market intermediaries. The supply side problem is that people are not ready or able to take work. On the demand side, employers may not specify adequately the skills needed, which leads to unnecessarily high qualification levels being demanded. Labour market intermediaries are needed because both employers and the unemployed feel that existing public agencies are not performing adequately. They can offer a package of short, highly specific courses to improve employability, while giving a screening and matching service to employers. They also need to be able to operate across borough boundaries to tackle hard-to-fill vacancies.

crime, and better health, skills, housing and physical environment'. Now housing is the fifth of the government's seven pillars of a decent society. The government's change agenda for housing combines an increasingly market-based and consumer-led framework with a wider role for neighbourhood based regeneration agencies.

Angus Kennedy, chief executive of Castle Vale Housing Action Trust, said that, while social landlords had a track record of dealing with people as well as local commitment, the so-called 'wicked issues' may be less familiar territory to them. He gave examples of social landlords' involvement in initiatives on education, crime, health and jobs and said that, in places where renewal had been successfully carried through, life

finance' for regional government? Certainly their mission is to strengthen the economic base of their regions and to improve the position of deprived areas, but how well do they satisfy both aims? Some participants felt that the fact they are business led and the Chancellor's

with a higher, preferably socio-economically mixed membership; there are no quick wins, success can take many years to achieve, and capacity building is a key issue.

In the same session, Cllr Frank McKenna, Lancashire County

Centres of Excellence in regeneration were proposed in the Rogers Report and supported by the Urban White Paper. Steve Crocker of Sheffield Hallam University and Carl Wiper of CLES, described work underway in two areas, the North West and Yorkshire, to make them a reality. Steve said the task was to break down professional and academic 'silos' and to promote better skills in economic, physical and social regeneration by joining up training and research, and enabling communities. Carl said that the North West centre aimed to be a champion of integration between disciplines. It would not be a large centre, but would draw out the ideas from practitioners and academics and deliver them in a lively way through a web site as well as through Common Purpose-style programmes. Although the government is in favour of these centres, there is no blue print; how they are to operate is being left up to the initiative of local partners, though the paymasters, principally the RDAs, may eventually enforce standards.



L-R: John Ansbro, Director, Leeds Development Agency; Cllr Brian Walker, Leader, Leeds City Council; Tim Chamberlain, Acting Assistant Director, CLES

statement that they should be involved in 'significant economic intervention', reduces their ability to deal with social regeneration issues. In fact, their budgets and hence their ability to act directly are less than stakeholders may have expected, and so they have to operate by influence and persuasion, as well as through funding programmes. Dialogue between RDAs was seen as vital.

Financial exclusion, the lack of access by low income households to financial services, has been recognised in the NSNR as an important factor in social exclusion and PAT 14 advocated an expansion of credit unions as part of the solution. Sue Davenport offered a sober account of the potential of credit unions in the seminar on social exclusion from her experience of Leeds City Credit Union.

The credit union began in 1987, serving city council employees and retired employees. After some difficult early years it has developed to the point where it is about to become the single credit union for all those who live or work in Leeds. This seems inevitable, given that it is the only one of ten credit unions in the city that is viable. Sue said that many credit unions were not sustainable even with grant funding, and suffered from a lack of skills and the turnover of volunteers. There is a need for fewer credit unions

Council, described the reality of partnership working in Lancashire, where the most deprived areas have been 'regenerated to death', but without any real impact. Prototype Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), involving the public, private and community sectors have been set up and have helped to improve communication between the sectors.

“Much enjoyed the visit to Saltaire as an example of very successful, well resourced regeneration”

Despite the current emphasis on 'bending' mainstream funding, there is still a temptation to seek new funding programmes. Encouraging engagement by residents can take a long time, which may not fit politicians' desires to get 'quick hits'. Frank called for more flexibility from central government, particularly on local taxation.

Neighbourhood renewal

NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL AND the role of public services was the main theme of the last afternoon of the conference. Vanessa Scarborough of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) set the scene, outlining the work of the SEU and the National Strategy Action Plan. The characteristics of the most deprived wards are well known, thanks to the SEU's work; the government's aim is not only to reduce unemployment and crime in these areas and to improve health, skills, housing and their physical environment, but also to narrow the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest, so that within 'ten to twenty years' no-one will be disadvantaged by where they live.

Government policy is based on a number of new funding initiatives, (including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) and targets, better local coordination and community empowerment, with better support at national and regional levels. Delegates queried why the Government Offices are to administer the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund while the RDAs are

responsible for SRB and its successors; Ms Scarborough admitted that it had been a 'hard decision', but that RDAs were expected to have a role in LSPs. There was also concern about the resources available to poor areas that are not in the worst ten per cent, and the response, not for the first time, was that the solution lay in 'bending mainstream funding'.

Discussion moved from general policy to a specific example, the Seacroft Partnership, which had been the subject of a study visit earlier in the day. Central to this is the new Tesco's store, and Martin Venning of Tesco's described Seacroft as 'one of the most important regeneration initiatives by the private and public sectors working together in recent years'. The store is not simply a source of employment, but a 'wealth plan for the community'. The people of the area suffer not only from a lack of jobs, but equally from a lack of skills and training, lack of affordable transport and lack of childcare.

Tesco's 'promise to Seacroft' involves not only a commitment to recruit local people, but also the provision of training to help them to get those jobs, support for lone parents, benefits advice and free buses. The results have been impressive, not only in terms of the sheer numbers of local people who are now employed there or are

"Very useful to see investment in the city centre"

receiving training in job skills, but also in the positive response from the individuals concerned. One said that it was 'the happiest day of her life' when she received a job offer, and now she 'can't wait to get through Seacroft's door'. What can we learn from this success? The will to change and trust between all concerned are essential; we don't necessarily need new institutional bodies if we can manage the existing processes better. From the retailer's point of view the greatest threat to success is the application of 'over zealous planning controls'.

If public bodies are spending resources that affect the well-being of an area,

there needs to be a process of inspection to show whether their work is producing the right result, said Wendy Thomson of the Audit Commission. She said that local authorities score low in terms of whether people feel well informed



Holbeck Urban Village study tour

and satisfied about their services. Best Value inspection addresses this by asking whether a service is any good and whether it is likely to improve. She claimed that it is a 'catalyst to improvement and is supported by the overwhelming majority of ordinary people'.

Now that Best Value is embedded in local government, it is to be extended to LSPs, as a reality check and a form of performance management. LSPs' commissioning functions can be carried out on the basis of a shared duty of Best Value. The discussion highlighted the need to coordinate the Audit Commission's approach with other government criteria, such as DETR's quality of life indicators, and with that of other inspection bodies, such as OFSTED.

Richard Best, director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, gave a considered welcome to the government's regeneration policies. He said the government is travelling in the right direction, but that, so far, inequalities have not narrowed. Stimulating economic growth, which is the main aim of RDAs, does not automatically benefit the poorest people. He felt that LSPs will have to

break down into smaller working groups, and will largely be run by local authorities, which raises the question of whether they can move from a service provider view to a strategic view. The Communities that Care approach used in Seattle shows that community groups can make a difference, but it is not easy to involve local people, and community development workers can have a role in encouraging involvement.

Leeds regeneration challenge

THE FINAL CONFERENCE SESSION showed how the lessons learned from successful projects can be applied to other areas. Leeds City Council had invited suggestions as to how to develop the Hunslet riverside area of Leeds. Two case studies were given to show possible ways of involving the community in area regeneration

Christine Bainton, Community Regeneration York, described how it had been successful in regenerating the five most deprived wards in York, an area which had suffered from job losses following the closure of the ABB carriage works, and yet did not receive SRB funding. They had been successful, not only in creating over a thousand local jobs, but also in establishing a community fund to leverage in £145,000 and in establishing viable community forums.

Drawing on his experience in Merseyside, David Morgan from Leeds University argued that local people should have the opportunity to become stakeholders in regeneration projects. In this way the Tower Hill Development Trust, originally a housing action programme, has gone on to develop the social economy of the area by setting up the North Merseyside Business Centre, which now has 95 per cent occupancy and a Board composed mainly of local community members and business park tenants.

You can read a fuller version of this report on the CLES web site: www.cles.org.uk