



# **Community Learning Reform Implementation report on survey findings**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of the Community Learning (CL) Reform Implementation Survey was to provide a sector-led, bottom-up analysis of providers' self-assessed capacity in terms of implementing and embedding the Community Learning reform agenda. In summary, this reform agenda, first published in *New Challenges, New Chances* (2011) and in force for all providers since the start of 2013/14, is couched around three headline objectives:

- that work is targeted on people who are disadvantaged and are least likely to participate in education and training;
- that a localised, partnership approach is taken; and
- that value for money is maximised, including leveraging in additional resource from beyond the funding allocation (so-called "pound plus").

The Reform Implementation Survey was undertaken, during Autumn 2014, to take stock of progress in responding to the reform agenda to date, to help identify areas of effective practice, and to point to areas where providers funded for Community Learning delivery might need additional support.

In undertaking the survey, HOLEX worked with other sector membership bodies - LEAFEA, AoC, and TSNLA - to facilitate provider engagement in the exercise and to ensure cross-sector input into project reporting. The survey targeted all providers currently in receipt of a direct Community Learning funding allocation. Data gathered included type of provider, region of operation and size of funding allocation. Information on areas of effective practice self-identified by providers was sought to illustrate principles arising from the reforms.

### **Methodology and response rate**

The survey was sent to 318 providers in receipt of a funding allocation in 2013/14. The survey ran from 19 September to 7 November 2014 and elicited 120 valid responses in total (a 38% response rate). Of the responses received, 75 came from Local Authority maintained services, 32 from colleges (including four from Sixth Form Colleges) and 13 from providers we have classified as "Other", including third sector agencies, specialist designated institutions, higher education institutions and a former Community Learning Trust Pilot.

Responses indicated no significant variation in reported performance by region. As a consequence, minimal analysis based on regional distribution has been included in the report.

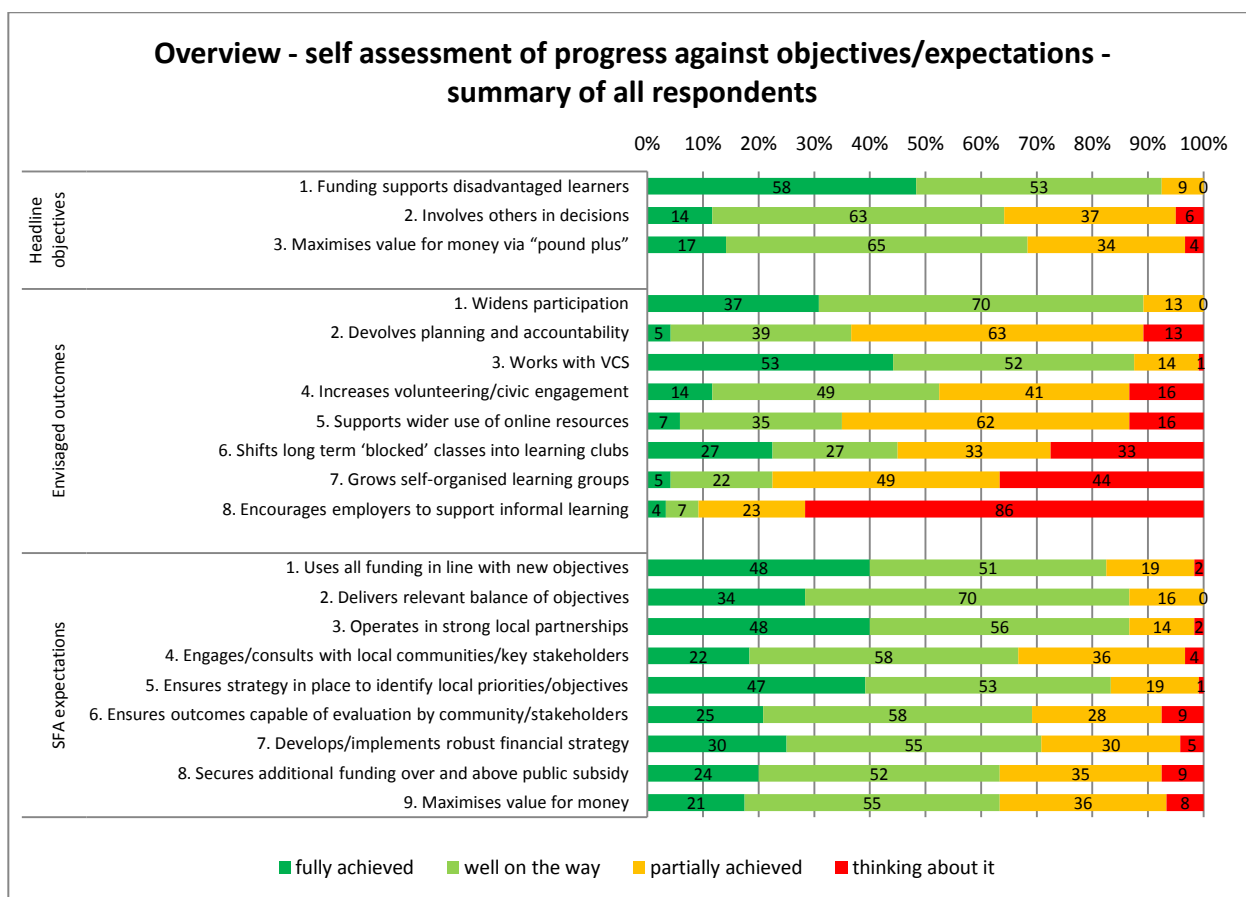
15 providers responding to the survey have a Community Learning funding allocation of less than £100,000 in 2014/15, and have been subject to some sub-analysis. These low-funded providers were most confident of their ways of working to plan and deliver the reform objectives, and fairly confident that their client groups are meeting the expected profile. Nonetheless, around half of this group felt that there was room for improvement in the extent of their collaborative activity, and innovative thinking. The areas where they identified particular weakness was the extent to which their learning offer aligned with what was expected, and financial management of their

allocation. Not all of these low-funded providers are small, which suggests some potential marginalisation of Community Learning activity.

Analysis gives minor indication that providers involved in Community Learning Trust Pilots were more positive about the progress they had made towards meeting reform objectives and funding expectations, but this was not as pronounced as might have been expected. We attribute this to widespread dissemination of evaluation reports on the pilots, and promotion of found practice via the Community Learning Reform website: other providers have been able to learn from the work of the pilots, and are by and large “up to speed” in their implementation of the reform agenda.

### Overview findings

Responses show generally positive progress, though with some areas where more work is required. In general terms, Local Authority services report a somewhat higher level of progress in implementing the reform agenda than other provider types.

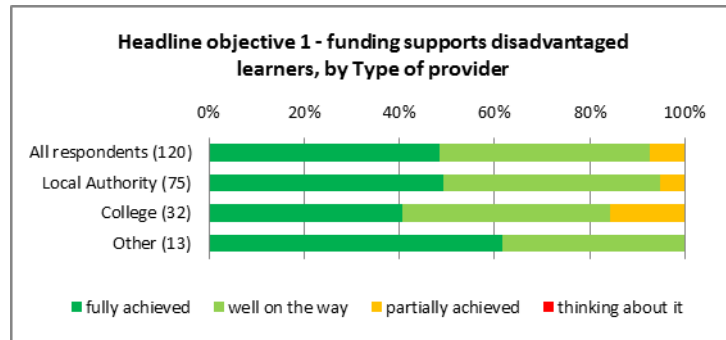


Just over 60% of all respondents report positively on achievement of all headline objectives and against all SFA expectations. Least progress is being made in respect of engaging employers in the provision of informal learning, with only one in ten providers giving a positive response to this prompt. Providers are also in some cases yet to make good progress in shifting “blocked” classes (45% positive response) and, specifically, promoting and facilitating self-organised learning groups (22% positive response). Promoting greater use of on-line resources is also reported as

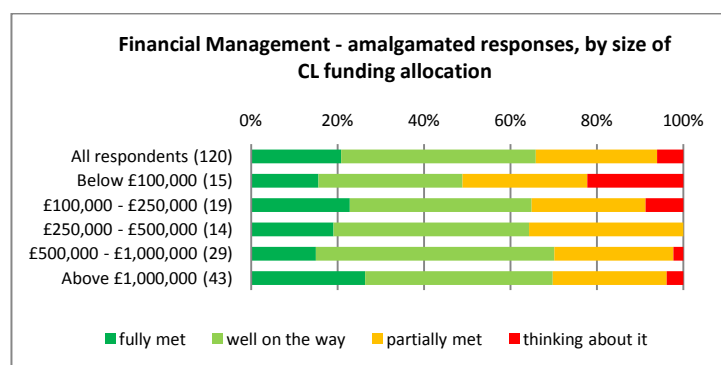
problematic, with just over one in three providers reporting positive progress in this area.

In more detail:

- 93% of respondents consider themselves to be either ‘fully achieving’, or ‘well on the way’ to targeting their activity on disadvantage



- some 54% of all providers report that at least two-thirds of their funding allocation is spent on targeted work (ie provision for specific groups); only 14% of providers were yet to focus more than a third of their available budget on specific provision for prioritised groups
- overall, Community Learning providers consider they are well prepared to widen participation through adopting a partnership approach, including working with the voluntary sector: 9 out of every 10 providers were satisfied that they were meeting these expectations
- nearly two thirds of providers report positively on engaging others in planning Community Learning provision
- 68% of all respondents consider themselves to be either ‘fully achieving’ or ‘well on the way’ to maximising value for money for the taxpayer by increasing income generation and using it to extend provision for people who can’t afford to pay (known as “pound plus”). Just under two in every three providers report securing additional funding to augment the SFA funding allocation from the public purse



- just over 80% of respondents to the survey report using their funding allocation in line with the Community Learning reform objectives to a full or significant extent. Delivering

a balance of the objectives set out in *New Challenges, New Chances*, and meeting local priorities achieved a similarly positive response

- half of all providers report positively on an increase in civic engagement, and 38% confirm work is well underway to devolve decision-making. These findings are taken to imply that the reform agenda is as yet still predominantly being driven by a professional response.

### **Areas of effective practice, and barriers to implementation**

The survey presented prompts (derived from published evaluation of the Community Learning Trust Pilots) on what has been identified as effective practice. Here again, reported progress is by and large positive, with 70% of providers reporting satisfactory progress against all identified effective practice characteristics and one in four assessing themselves as good in all areas. Issues where further development is needed include:

- developing formal protocols through which partnership working is being governed
- effective co-ordination and “joined-up” working
- succession planning, which suggests a potential over-reliance on key individuals
- securing early buy-in from key local stakeholders
- effective promotion, including branding.

Survey respondents were additionally invited to report on the extent to which their implementation of the Community Learning reforms was being hampered by various hypothetical barriers. Responses highlight four key areas:

- the reluctance of local residents to take on responsibility to help to manage local Community Learning activity – a particular concern for larger/better funded providers
- introducing new fee strategies: a third of respondents consider that they face significant difficulty, and have made little or no progress
- diversion of generated income to support non-Community Learning activity: identified as a hard problem by a third of providers, echoing recent work on Pound Plus published by RCU
- problems faced in developing digital approaches to the delivery of Community Learning – both a lack of staff skills and a lack of the technical infrastructure.

### **Support and development needs**

When asked to identify support and development needs, respondents to the survey specifically highlighted the development of staff skills, and a need for relevant materials, to enable greater use of on-line learning; and working with employers to promote informal learning in the Community Learning context.

Providers express a clear preference for training, support and development to be delivered via regionally based, practical workshops; through the sharing of materials from other providers; and via peer support arrangements. There is a clear rejection of residential conferences, national one day events and accredited training programmes.

# 1 SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The reform agenda for Community Learning, first published in *New Challenges, New Chances* (2011) and in force for all providers since the start of 2013/14, is couched around three headline objectives, which can be paraphrased as follows:

- that work is targeted: public funding for Community Learning should be focused on people who are disadvantaged and are least likely to participate in education and training, including those in rural areas and people on low incomes and/or having low skills
- that a localised, and devolved approach is taken: effective local partnerships, bringing together key providers and relevant local agencies and services, should be used to devolve planning and accountability to neighbourhood/parish level, with local people involved in decisions about the learning offer
- that value for money is maximised through what has been termed a “pound plus” approach: fee income is collected from people who can afford to pay and, together with other contributions in cash and in kind, this is used where possible to extend provision to those who cannot.

The purpose of the Community Learning Reform Implementation Survey was to provide a sector-led, bottom-up analysis of providers’ self-assessed capacity in terms of implementing and embedding this reform agenda. The sector membership bodies who have been actively engaged in this exercise believe that information from the analysis of the survey will help identify areas of effective practice and also areas where Community Learning providers might need additional support. It is intended that information from the survey analysis will inform policy development and the NIACE Support Programme, including additional material for posting on the Community Learning Reform web site. We also recognise that the information gathered is likely to be of interest to agencies such as BIS and the Education and Training Foundation, who might use our findings to inform future design/commissioning of sector support initiatives; and that this report might be timely in advance of any review of policy and/or funding for Community Learning which might follow the May 2015 general election.

In undertaking the survey HOLEX worked with LEAFEA, AoC and TSNLA to facilitate provider engagement in the exercise and to ensure cross-sector input into project reporting; we also invited NIACE to comment on findings and on how best we might share the outcome of our analysis. The survey targeted all providers currently in receipt of a direct Community Learning funding allocation from the Skills Funding Agency. Data gathered included type of provider, region of operation and size of funding allocation, to enable sub-analysis where considered relevant. Information on areas of effective practice self-identified by providers was sought to illustrate principles arising from the reforms.

## 1.2 Methodology

The survey instrument was designed by the HOLEX National Office, with input from our partners on the project. It was released for testing by a selected, representative group of providers to ensure that the questions were relevant to all types of provider, and covered all facets of Community Learning reform implementation. Survey prompts primarily asked for closed, tick-box responses based on local self-assessment of progress against reform objectives and funding requirements; opportunity was however given for open-text responses, and selected quotes have been included in this report to illustrate points raised by analysis.

The survey was released to an audience of 318 organisations<sup>1</sup> via HOLEX, LEAFA, AoC and TSNLA networks, with some assistance from BIS to ensure it was available to the small number of other funded providers – primarily higher education institutions – not covered by sector body membership. It was live for a period of seven weeks, between 19<sup>th</sup> September and 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014, during which period a number of reminders were issued.

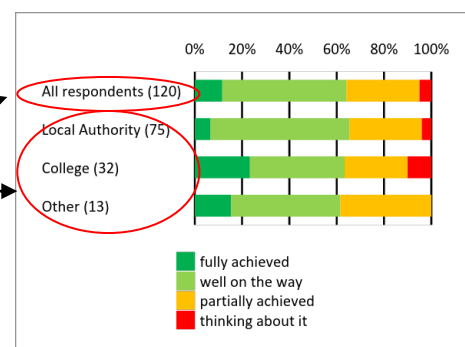
A meeting of the project steering group – lead officers from each partner organisation, and with input from NIACE – was held in December 2014 to review a first cut of responses, to agree a format for the presentation of findings and to identify key areas for detailed sub-analysis. Clarifications were circulated after that meeting, when steering group members were also invited to highlight open-text responses for potential inclusion in the report, and an update was shared later in December. A full draft report was issued to steering group members early in 2015, and the current paper has been finalised following responses. Throughout this period the Community Learning policy team at BIS, and NIACE contacts, have been kept informed of progress and emerging key findings.

## 1.3 Explanatory note in relation to presentation of data

This report makes extensive use of charts to illustrate survey findings. Underlying data is also available on request from the HOLEX National Office.

Where data is presented in detailed comparative bar charts throughout this report:

- the results for “**All respondents**” are shown on the top line
- these results are then broken down by sub-category below.



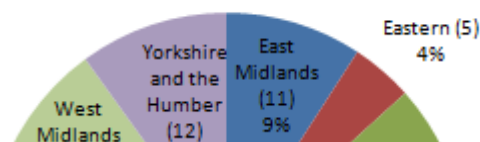
1 The base sample was taken from published SFA Community Learning funding allocations for 2013/14, and covered all directly funded providers; recipients were encouraged to discuss survey questions within local partnerships prior to response



**The number of valid responses for each category is stated in brackets.** In the example illustrated above, this question received 120 valid responses, with 75 being from Local Authorities, 32 from Colleges and 13 from other types of provider.

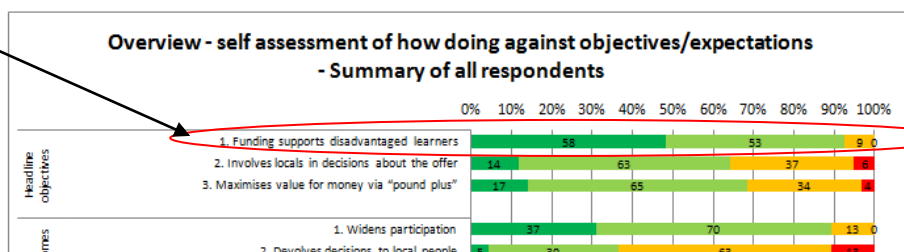
This format has also been applied to other charts, so that **the number of respondents in each category is displayed in brackets.** In the example to the right, 5 respondents (4%) were in the Eastern region.

**Survey respondents, by region**



Where data labels appear on summary bar charts, these figures show the number of respondents providing that particular response. Colour coding reflects the responses invited by the wording of the relevant survey question.

In this example therefore, 58 respondents felt that they were “fully meeting” headline objective 1, 53 felt that they were “well on the way to meeting” the objective, 9 felt that they were “partially meeting” the objective and none were “only thinking about it”.



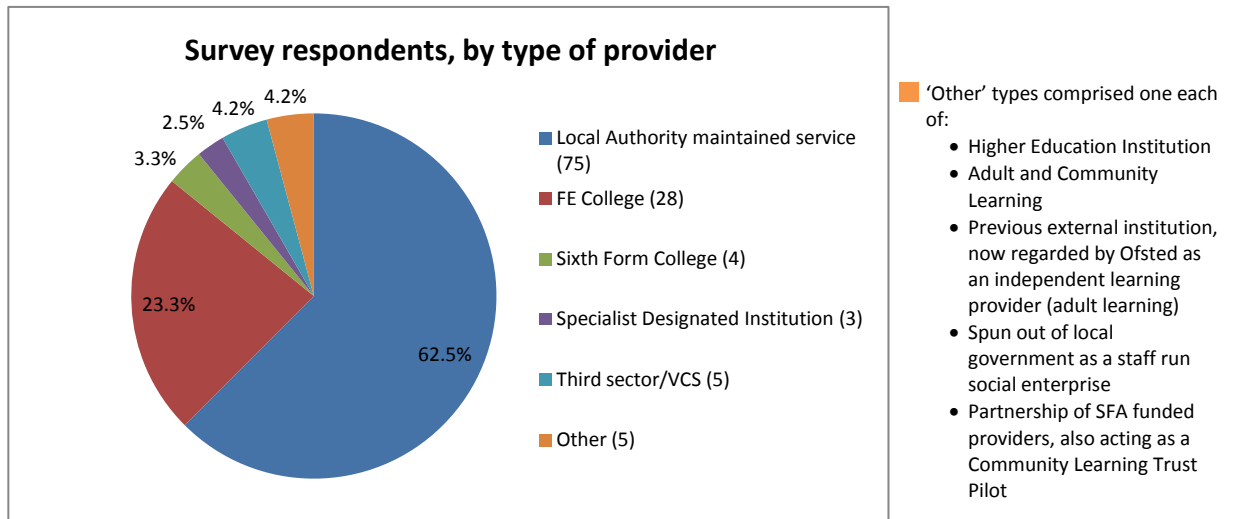
The survey instrument also included, at various points, an opportunity for open text responses to illustrate and/or expand on tick-box responses. This report has similarly made use of respondent comments to illustrate points at various stages: these are displayed as italic text in closed boxes, and have been edited to secure anonymity of those commenting.

### 1.4 Respondents

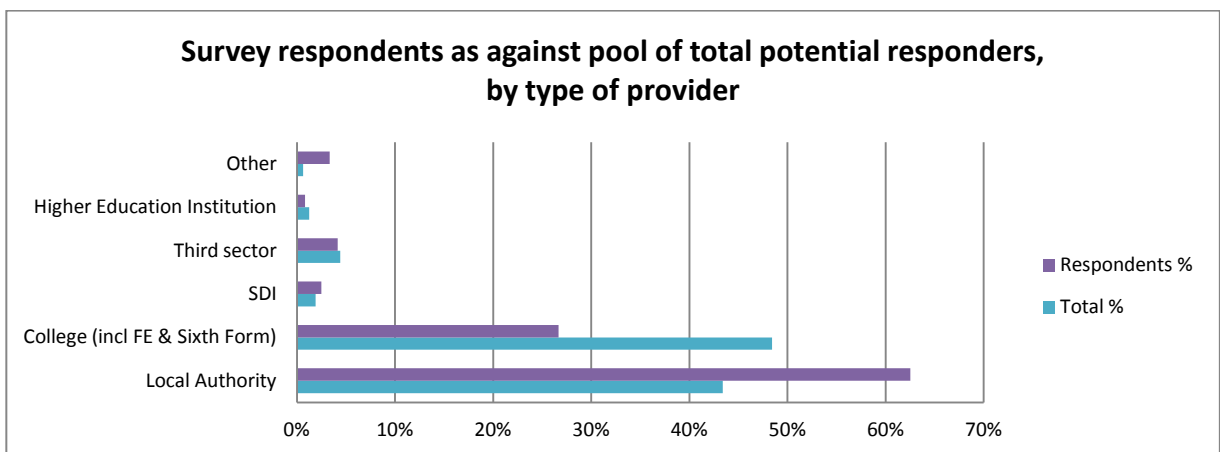
120 useable responses to the survey were forthcoming. This is regarded as a very healthy response rate of 37.7% (based on the pool of 318 potential respondents), rendering it statistically valid to draw conclusions on the basis of responses received. The majority of respondents answered all tick-box questions, but where not all respondents provided answers, percentage analysis has accounted for the reduced response rate.

## 1.5 Type of provider

The 120 useable responses to the survey were split as shown in the following pie chart. The provider “type” as shown in this chart reflects how each respondent classified their own organisation.



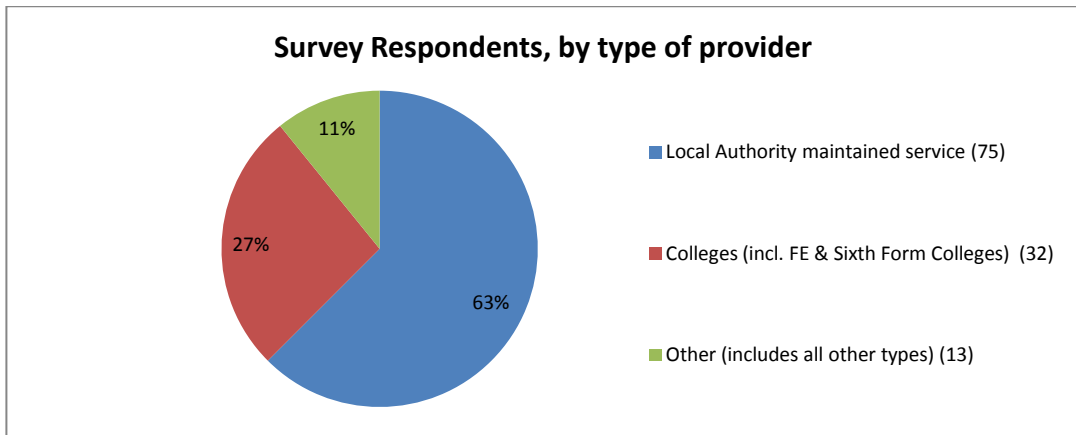
When compared to the overall split of potential responders, the mix was relatively representative of the whole. However, Local Authority services were proportionately much more inclined to respond to the survey, and colleges less inclined. This is shown in the following bar chart:



Close analysis of those respondents identifying themselves as “other” identified some scope for reclassification. Additionally, the number of responses in some of the initial “types” was so small as to render any meaningful sub-analysis statistically unreliable (for example, only four responses were received from Sixth Form Colleges, so any analysis showing 25% of these would in fact only refer to a response from a single provider). Accordingly, and with steering group agreement, we have for the purposes of this report amalgamated the 120 responses received into three main provider groupings:

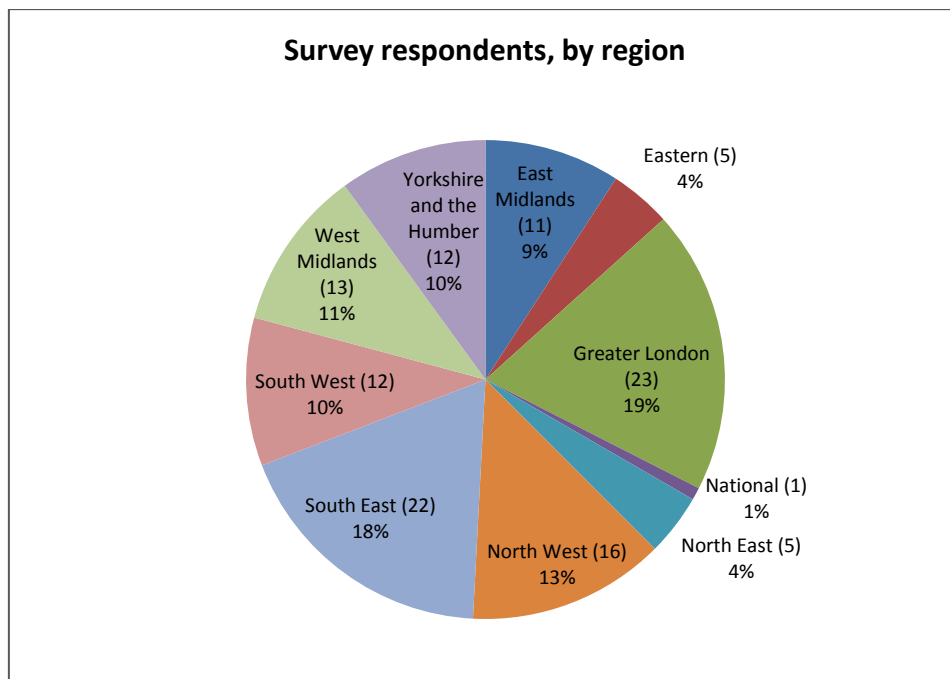
- Local Authority maintained services (75 in total)
- Colleges (including 28 FE Colleges of various size, and four Sixth Form Colleges) and
- Other (13 in total, including third sector agencies, specialist designated institutions, higher education institutions and a former Community Learning Trust Pilot).

These new groupings are split as shown in the following pie chart, and have been used for sub-analysis throughout this report.



## 1.6 Location

The location of respondents is demonstrated in the following pie chart shown.



This distribution is fairly representative of the pool of potential respondents, and further underlines how survey findings may be regarded as a valid reflection of all funded Community Learning providers.

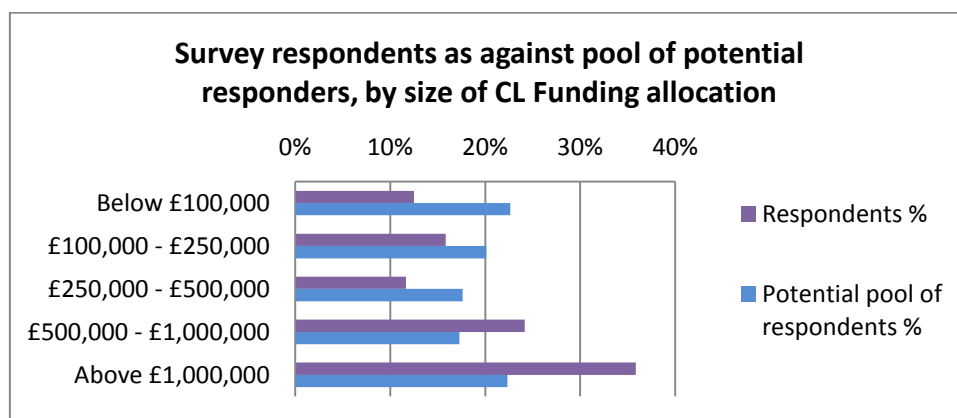
Sub-analysis of responses to sample questions indicates that there is no significant variation in reported performance by region. Steering group members are also aware that, as a result of changes in the way providers are grouped by locality (for example, the growing significance of LEP boundaries) traditional concepts of “region” are no longer considered as meaningful as in the past. It is also statistically unreliable to draw conclusions from small samples, such as the single “national” provider and the five organisations in each of the North East and the Eastern regions. On the basis of these points, no further sub-analysis based on regional distribution has been included in this report.

### 1.7 Community Learning funding allocation

Responses to the survey, when analysed by the level of provider funding allocation, came from across the range:

- 15 responses (13%) came from those with a funding allocation of less than £100,000 for Community Learning
- 19 responses (16%) came from those receiving £100,000 - £250,000 for Community Learning
- 14 responses (12%) came from those receiving £250,000 - £500,000 for Community Learning
- 29 responses (24%) came from those receiving £500,000 - £1,000,000 for Community Learning
- 43 responses (36%) came from those receiving more than £1,000,000 for Community Learning.

There was some variation in the rate of response from providers in each of these bandings: as might be expected, providers with smaller levels of funding were less likely to respond to the survey than were those with larger allocations. This is shown in the following bar chart.



Notwithstanding this slight mis-match, the steering group is of the view that sub-analysis of selected survey responses based on the size of funding allocation is meaningful, and this report highlights such variations in response where these are considered significant. In undertaking such

sub-analysis, we have been mindful that there may be no direct correlation between size of allocation and provider type: it may well be, for example, that a large FE College with a multi-million pound budget receives less than £100,000 for Community Learning provision, while a small, free-standing voluntary sector organisation focuses the majority of its work on Community Learning activity and receives more than £500,000 in public subsidy.

## 1.8 Involvement in Community Learning Trust Pilot

18 respondents (15%) were involved in one of the fifteen Community Learning Trust Pilots that ran during 2012/13. 102 were not involved in a pilot.

Initial analysis of responses suggested that, while there was some indication that providers involved in Community Learning Trust Pilots were more positive about the progress they had made towards meeting reform objectives and funding expectations, this was not as pronounced as might have been expected. Steering Group members have indicated that, as a result of wide dissemination of lessons learned during the piloting,<sup>2</sup> many other providers have been able to adopt practice which had proved effective; and it is also acknowledged that, especially in the local authority and third sectors, provision had already begun to be reoriented as a result of stimulus provided by earlier consultations on Community Learning, notably the *Learning Revolution White Paper*,<sup>3</sup> and associated development opportunities such as those enabled by the Transformation Fund<sup>4</sup> and, more recently, the Community Learning Impact Fund.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, this report does not include routine sub-analysis of responses based on whether or not providers were involved in Community Learning Trust Pilots. Where significant, however, such variations in response are highlighted.

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2 See, for example,

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/249874/bis-13-1218-evaluation-of-community-learning-trust-pilots-summary-of-key-findings-2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249874/bis-13-1218-evaluation-of-community-learning-trust-pilots-summary-of-key-findings-2.pdf)

3 Now archived: see

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4 See <http://www.transformationfund.org.uk/about-transformation-fund>

5 See

[http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/c/l/clif\\_final\\_report\\_executive\\_summary\\_jan\\_2014.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/c/l/clif_final_report_executive_summary_jan_2014.pdf)

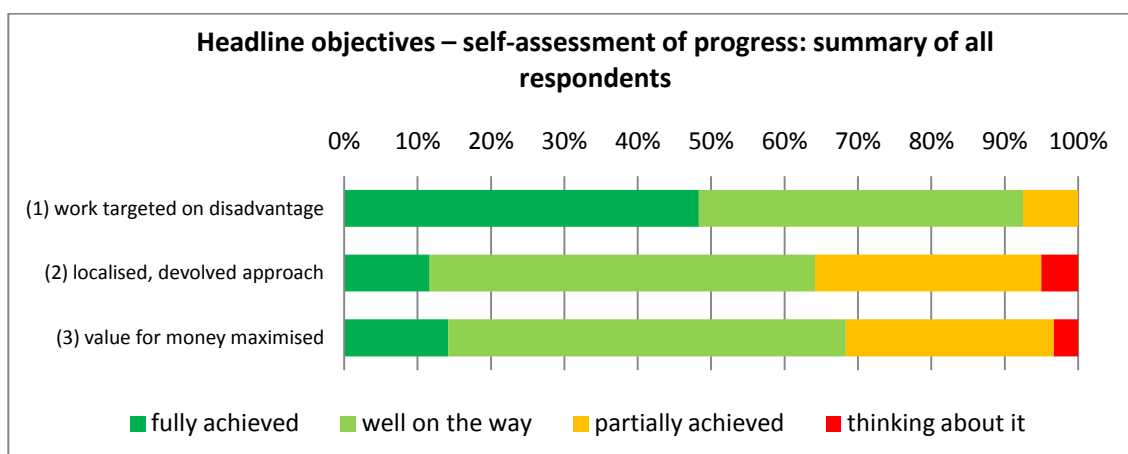
## 2 SECTION TWO: PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE REFORM AGENDA

### 2.1 Self assessment of provider progress against objectives/expectations

The reform agenda for Community Learning, first published in *New Challenges, New Chances* (2011) and in force for all providers since the start of 2013/14, is couched around three headline objectives, which can be paraphrased as follows:

- that work is targeted: public funding for Community Learning should be focused on people who are disadvantaged and are least likely to participate in education and training, including those in rural areas and people on low incomes and/or having low skills
- that a localised, and devolved approach is taken: effective local partnerships, bringing together key providers and relevant local agencies and services, should be used to devolve planning and accountability to neighbourhood/parish level, with local people involved in decisions about the learning offer
- that value for money is maximised through what has been termed a “pound plus” approach: fee income is collected from people who can afford to pay and, together with other contributions in cash and in kind, this is used where possible to extend provision to those who cannot.

The survey asked respondents to self-assess their progress against these headline objectives, which generated the results displayed in the following chart:

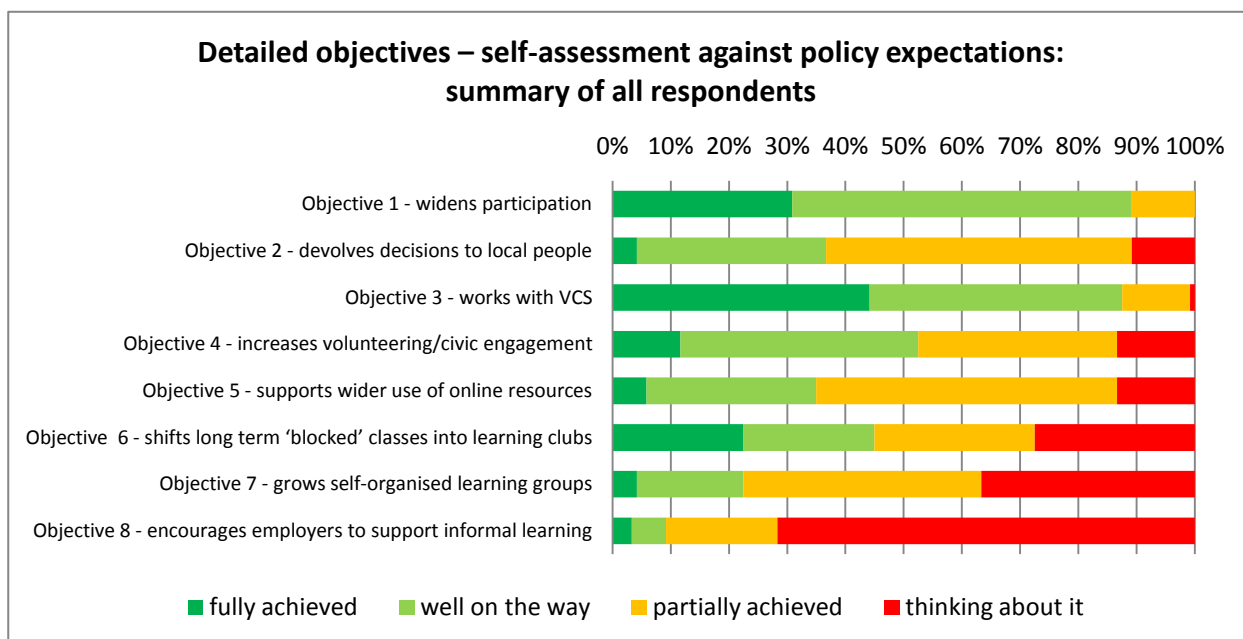


Sitting underneath these headline objectives, BIS guidance identified a range of envisaged outcomes to be derived from reformed use of the £210m made available to support Community Learning from public funds. Providers, working in partnership within a locality, were expected to:

- widen participation
- devolve decision-making to others, including local people
- work with voluntary and community sector agencies
- increase the incidence of volunteering and civic engagement

- support wider use of online resources
- shift long-term “blocked” classes into learning clubs
- grow self-organised learning groups
- encourage employers to support informal learning.

Respondents were asked to self assess the extent to which they felt they were currently achieving these. A summary across all objectives/outcomes, across all respondents is displayed in the following chart:

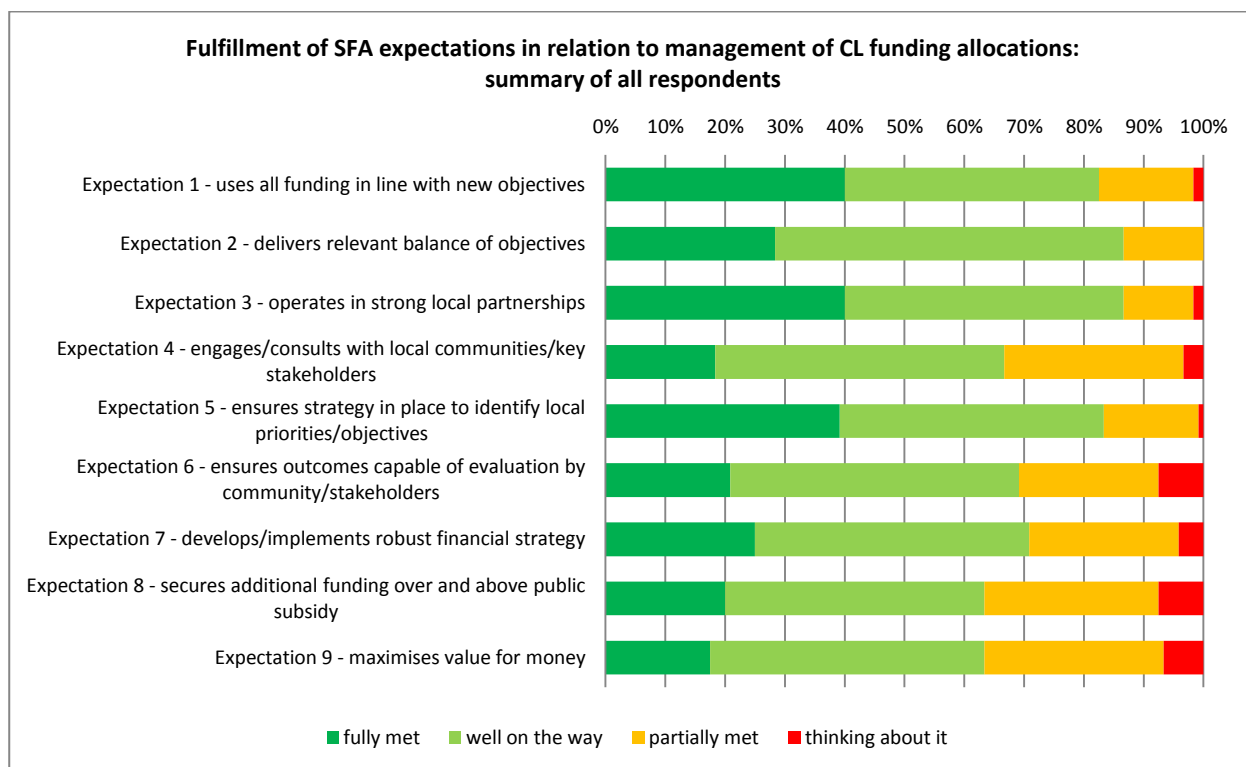


The *Skills Funding Statement for 2013/14*, and associated *SFA Funding Rules*, made it clear that from August 2013 all funded providers should:

- use allocated Community Learning funding in line with the new objectives
- deliver a relevant balance of work against these objectives
- operate in strong local partnerships
- engage and consult with local communities and key stakeholders
- have a strategy in place, focusing on local priorities
- ensure that the outcomes of their Community Learning activity is capable of being evaluated by the community and stakeholders
- develop and implement a robust financial strategy
- secure additional funding (“pound plus”) over and above the public subsidy
- maximise value for money.

While these expectations are overlapping/contain some duplication, our survey asked respondents to report against each element in terms of how well they were performing against each element of

the reform agenda. A summary of the responses is set out in the chart below, with more detail being given in subsequent sections of this report.



## 2.2 Overview of responses - summary of all respondents

Responses show generally positive progress, though with some areas where more work is required.

Over 60% of all respondents report positively on achievement of all headline objectives and against all SFA expectations. Least progress is being made in respect of engaging employers in the provision of informal learning, with only one in ten providers giving a positive response to this prompt. Providers are also in cases yet to make good progress in shifting “blocked” classes (45% positive response) and, specifically, promoting and facilitating self-organised learning groups (22% positive response). Promoting greater use of on-line resources is also reported as problematic, with just over one in three providers reporting positive progress in this area.

In more detail:

- 93% of respondents consider themselves to be either ‘fully achieving’, or ‘well on the way’ to targeting their activity on disadvantage. Only 9 respondents (8%) in total saw this objective as being partially achieved, and no respondents considered themselves to be only ‘thinking about it’. When asked about their use of SFA funding, some 54% of all providers reported that at least two-thirds of their allocation is spent on targeted work; only 14% of providers were yet to focus more than a third of their available budget on specific provision



for prioritised groups

- overall, Community Learning providers consider they are well prepared to widen participation through adopting a partnership approach, including working with the voluntary sector: 9 out of every 10 providers satisfied that they were meeting these expectations.
- the extent to which the broader policy objective of devolving decision-making to local people is being achieved is more problematic to interpret. While nearly two thirds of providers report positively on engaging others in planning Community Learning provision, just half report positively on an increase in civic engagement and only 38% confirm work is well underway to devolve decision-making. This is taken to imply that the reform agenda is as yet still predominantly being driven by a professional response.
- just over 80% of respondents to the survey report using their funding allocation in line with the Community Learning reform objectives to a full or significant extent. Delivering a balance of the objectives set out in *New Challenges, New Chances*, and meeting local priorities achieved a similarly positive response
- 68% of all respondents consider themselves to be either 'fully achieving' or 'well on the way' to maximising value for money for the taxpayer by increasing income generation and using it to extend provision for people who can't afford to pay (known as "pound plus"). Only 4 organisations (3%) were still in the stage of 'thinking about it', while 34 (28%) considered themselves to be partially achieving the objective. Just under two in every three providers report securing additional funding to augment the SFA funding allocation from the public purse.

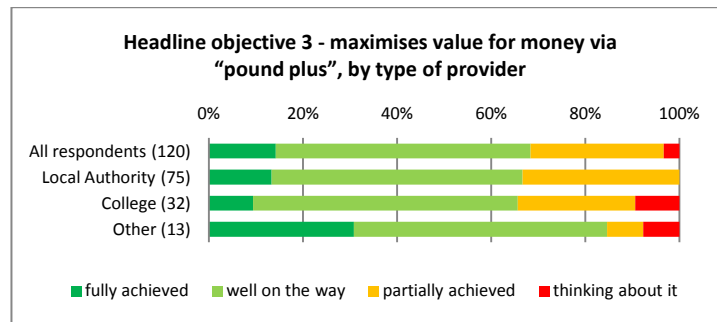
Ensuring that outcomes are capable of being evaluated by the local community is an area where some 10% of respondents report feeling least confident, although some two-thirds of respondents indicate that in general they are achieving or making good progress toward this expectation. Encouraging employers to support informal learning is the area where least satisfactory response was forthcoming: some three-quarters of all respondents report having made little or no progress with this objective.

### **2.3 Progress by different types of provider**

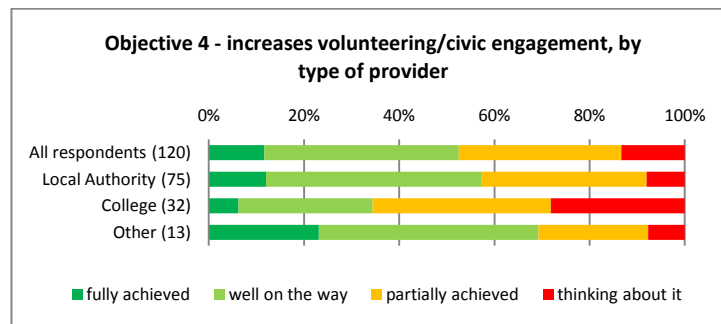
Analysis of responses from different types of provider discloses some variation in the extent of progress made, with colleges on average being least advanced in their implementation of the Community Learning reform agenda. In respect of the three headline objectives:

- 95% of local authority services report positive progress in widening participation and addressing disadvantage, compared with 85% of colleges; 100% of "other" providers (primarily third sector agencies) report positively in this area, which for most is the primary purpose of their organisation

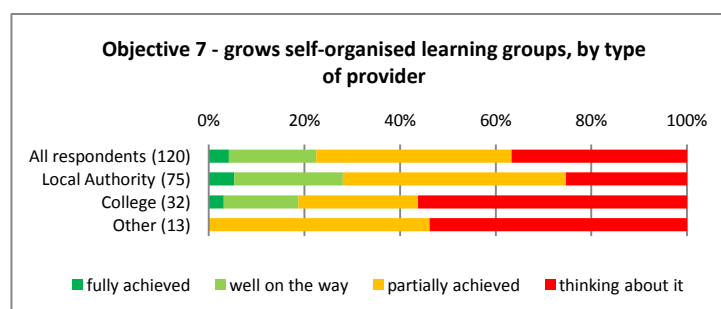
- 65% of local authority services report positive progress in involving others in decision-making, although 5% indicate they are ‘still thinking about it’; 62% of colleges report positive progress, but with 10% indicating they are ‘still thinking about it’; and 60% of other providers report positive progress, with the other 40% having partially achieved this objective
- Responses are most mixed in respect of progress towards headline objective 3 (maximising value for money via “pound plus”), as indicated in the following chart:



Sub-analysis of responses to more detailed questions by type of provider supports this general contention. Particularly noteworthy is the response to the probe concerning providers’ progress in respect of increasing volunteering and civic engagement, where colleges have made least progress and other providers most:



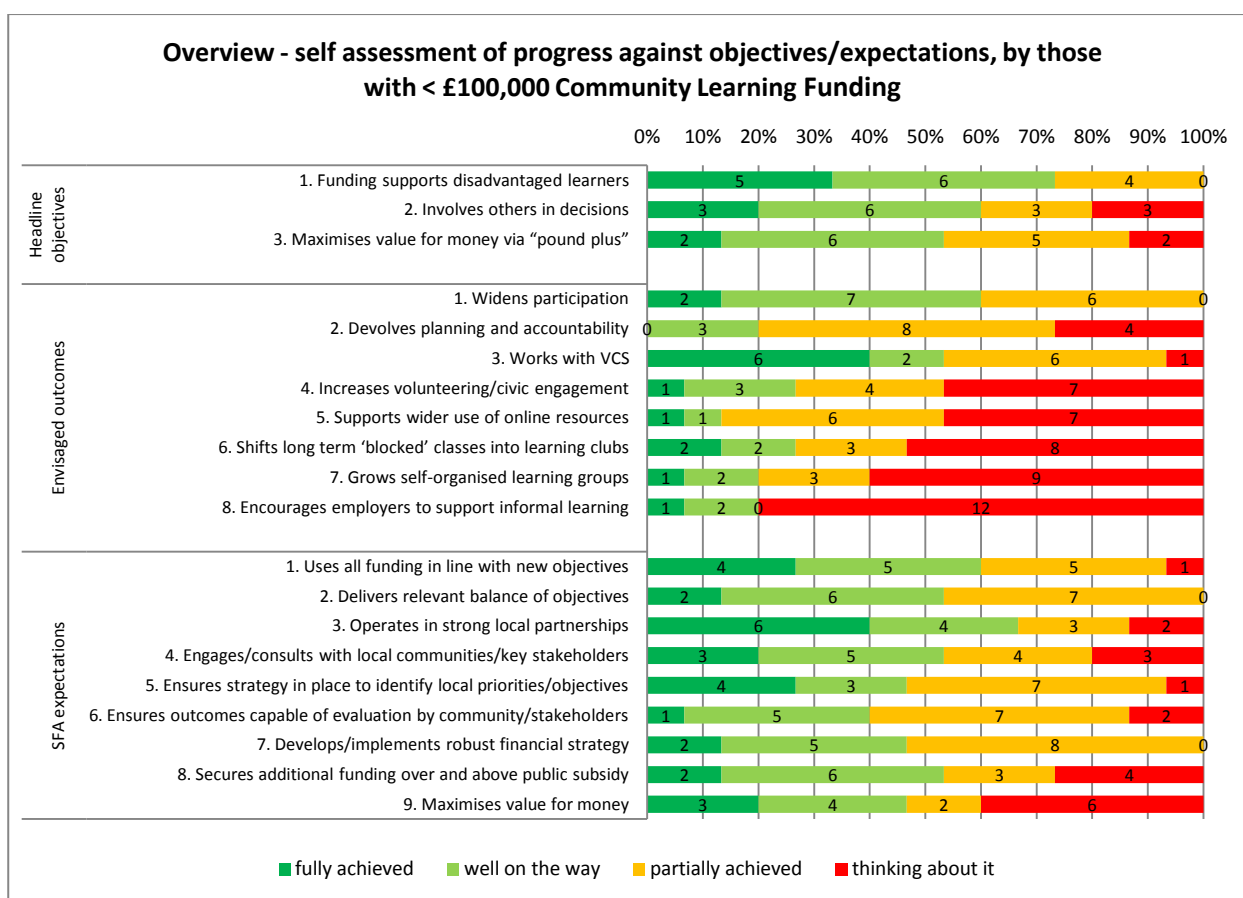
Variable progress is also reported in growing self-organised groups: in this instance, although all types of provider indicate more is to be done, local authorities report most progress, and other providers least:



## 2.4 Lower-funded providers

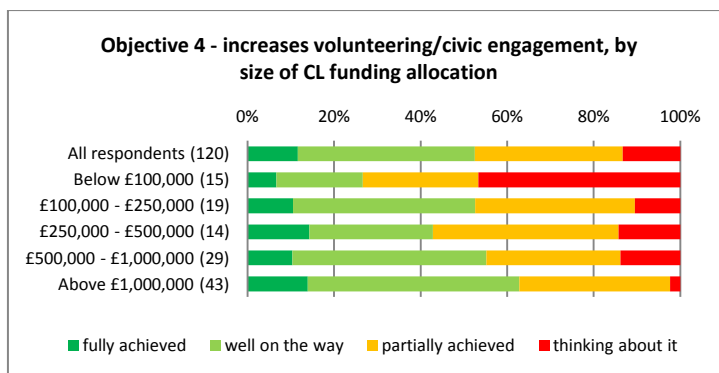
Fifteen providers responding to the survey reported a Community Learning funding allocation of less than £100,000; two-thirds of this group were FE or sixth form colleges, including some very large general FE colleges and a specialist provider of land-based studies. Of the rest, one response came from an HE institution, one from a schools-based consortium, one from a Local Authority service and two from voluntary and community sector social enterprises.

The overall reported progress being made by these lower-funded providers is summarised in the chart below: this shows significantly less progress by this particular sub-set.

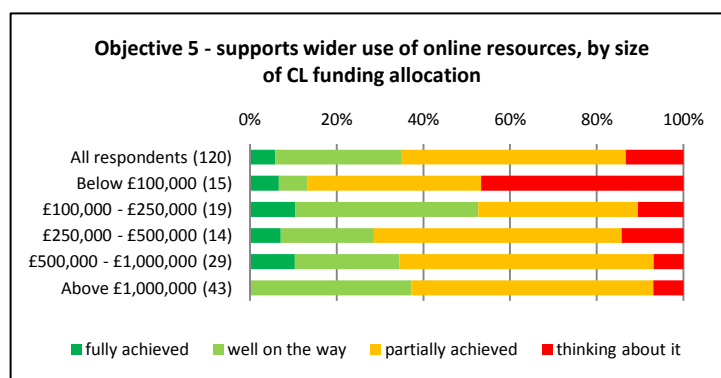


Only three of these 15 low-funded providers consider that they are well on the way to fulfilling all the expectations of the community learning reform agenda; none, indeed, feel that they are fulfilling all expectations. Around half of this provider sub-set felt that there was room for improvement in the extent of their collaborative activity and innovative thinking, while some 35% of the group have only partially met the objective of working in partnership, and this is the only provider group to report no progress in some cases. In such instances, low-funded providers are more likely than others to report progress in aligning their learning offer aligned with what is now expected. However, six providers felt that they were already meeting several of the individual objectives within the overall agenda. These were most confident of their ways of working to plan and deliver the CL reform objectives, and fairly confident that their client groups meets the expected profile.

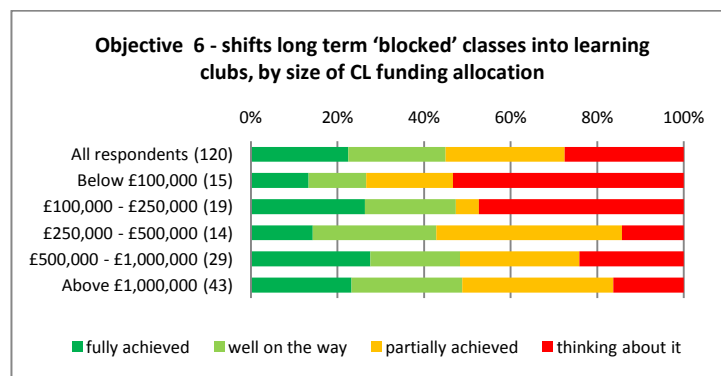
The largest proportion of negative responses from this group of low-funded providers was recorded against the survey section concerning barriers to implementing the reforms, where they assessed themselves as facing many challenges. Providers with the smallest funding allocations are more likely to still be considering how to increase volunteering and to promote civic engagement:



and to have done less to develop ways of supporting the wider usage of online resources:

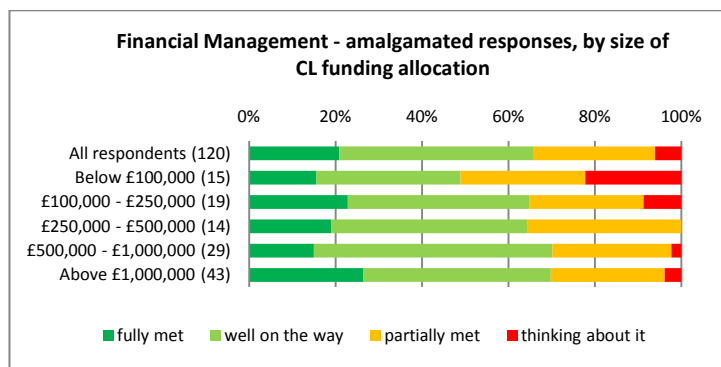


Lower-funded providers are also less likely to have shifted “blocked” classes into self-organised learning groups, although all providers – however well funded – would appear to be challenged in making progress on this reform objective:



As might be expected, progress in the financial management of their Community Learning allocation, including maximising value for money and securing additional funding, is less well developed in low-funded providers than elsewhere. Typically, 46% of this group consider they are

coping well in these areas, compared with 65% of all respondents; the remainder includes some providers that have yet to take any action on financial strategy. This picture is illustrated by the following chart, which brings together responses to three separate survey probes relating to the SFA’s stated expectations regarding provider financial management:



The picture presented by the survey findings is that, while there are instances of effective practice in several areas, those providers with the lowest Community Learning funding allocation are those most struggling to implement the reform agenda. This is probably due more to the relative importance given to Community Learning by the funded organisation rather than a simple correlation with institutional size: these are providers whose main focus lies elsewhere, and for whom Community Learning can be given marginal attention.

## 2.5 Involvement in the Community Learning Trust Pilots

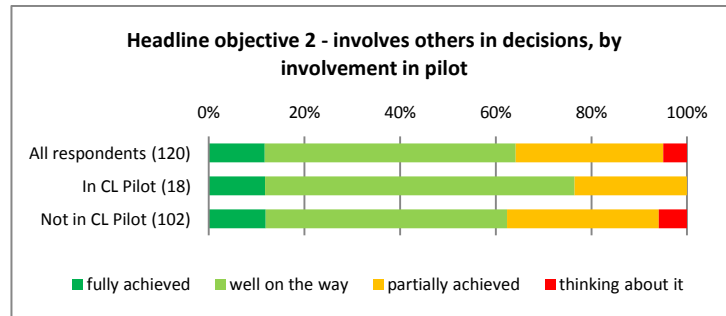
Some 18 providers responding to the survey (15% of total responses) were involved in the Community Learning Trust Pilots that ran during 2012/13. Although not additionally funded, providers in pilot areas were supported in a range of ways during that year, and evaluation of the pilot scheme indicated most had made significant progress in implementing the reform objectives: so much so, in fact, that the Skills Funding Agency referred to them as “more mature and experienced delivery agents of the mainstream approach” and suggested the Pilots would “help other Community Learning organisations ... by sharing their experiences”<sup>6</sup>.

Given this “head start” the survey responses from this group of providers show, somewhat counter-intuitively, relatively little variation from the norm. Discussion on this point at the Steering Group meeting has led us to the view that widespread dissemination of evaluation reports on the pilots, and promotion of found practice via the Community Learning Reform website, has meant that other providers – those not involved in the pilot phase - have been able to

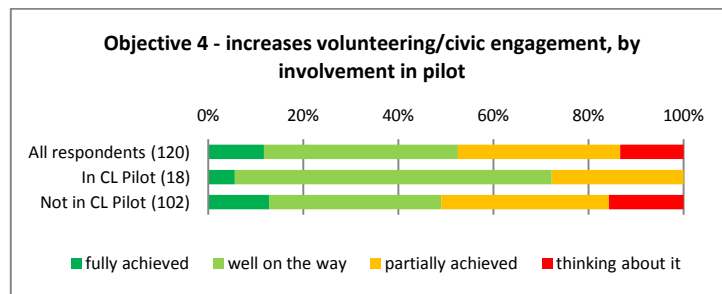
<sup>6</sup> Quoted in v4 of SFA *Community Learning Questions and Answers*, published December 2013: see <http://www.niace.org.uk/community-learning/sites/default/files/resources/Community%20Learning%202013%20FAQs%20v4.pdf>

learn from the work of the pilots, and are as a result by and large “up to speed” in their implementation of the reform agenda.

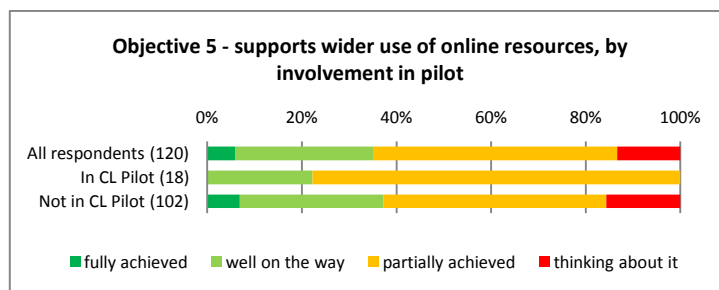
Areas where there is a discernible (positive) difference between those providers involved in the pilot and others are, at the highest level, in relation to the involvement of others in decision-making:



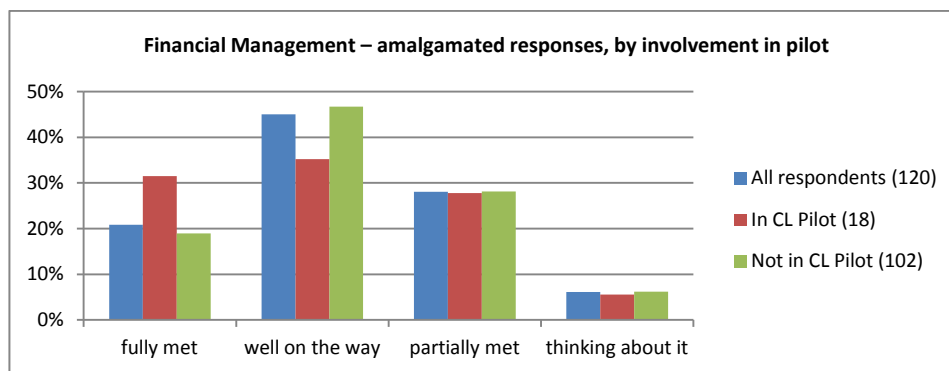
and in relation to increasing the incidence of volunteering and civic engagement:



Findings also suggest those providers involved in the Community Learning Trust Pilot are more likely to be successful – in relative terms – in supporting the wider use of on-line resources. Although none rate themselves as having fully achieved this, all have made some progress, whereas over 10% of providers not in the pilot have yet to make a start:

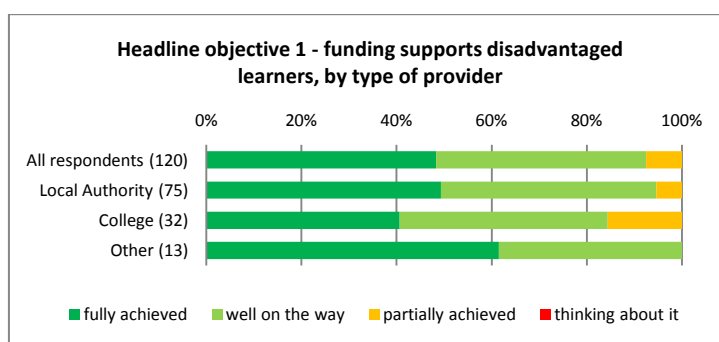


There is also some indication that providers involved in the Community Learning Trust Pilots are more advanced in their financial management, although their relative progress is only marginally better than others:



## 2.6 Supporting disadvantaged learners

Probably because of their *raison d’etre* as third sector agencies, where activity is focused on a community of interest characterised by need, 100% of third sector providers consider they are fully meeting the objective of supporting disadvantaged learners. As the following chart suggests, Sixth Form and FE Colleges have made least progress in this regard:



Throughout the period of reform, it is expected that a ‘universal offer’ open to all learners continues to be available at the same time as greater focus is given to targeted work with prioritised groups. Respondents were asked to give the approximate percentage of their overall Community Learning offer that is focused on targeted work, and to also give the approximate percentage of their Community Learning budget focused on targeted work. The table overleaf sets out a summary of the responses received, by the three different types of provider. From this we can see that at least two-thirds of the Community Learning offer is being targeted at priority groups/needs, with slightly more than 50% of the budget being spent on this activity.

The incidence of targeted work varies considerably between type of provider, with colleges appearing to be less focused on such provision; almost two-thirds of programming by “other” providers (primarily VCSE organisations) is being used in this way.

**% of respondents focusing different proportions of their OFFER/BUDGET on targeted work**

	All respondents		Local Authority		College		Other	
	OFFER	BUDGET	OFFER	BUDGET	OFFER	BUDGET	OFFER	BUDGET
< 33% TARGETED WORK	16%	14%	14%	17%	21%	10%	18%	9%
33 - 66% TARGETED WORK	39%	32%	39%	28%	48%	45%	18%	18%
>66% TARGETED WORK	44%	54%	47%	55%	31%	45%	64%	73%
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

There is a similar pattern in terms of a provider’s expenditure profile: those offering more targeted work spend proportionately more money on it. We would expect this to be the case: by its very nature targeted work is generally more expensive to deliver than a universal offer, and the likelihood of generating fee income will be diminished where a provider has a smaller proportion of provision focused on disadvantaged learners.

- *We have achieved a balance between our universal (open to all) and our targeted (for specific groups) provision and have plans to increase the proportion that is targeted. The fees policy uses concessions to ensure that financially disadvantaged learners can access universal provision.*
- *Provision has shifted to more focussed and targeted activity (type of learner/outcome & location). We have increased fees for some types of adult learning, created learning clubs, set local budgets with associated income targets – all as part of our Pound Plus strategy.*
- *There has been a significant shift in the publicly advertised programme to one which is targeted specifically at priority groups, and with an increase in fees for open courses: some programmes are now full cost recovery. We had already started on these changes prior to the reform agenda , but the national focus gave it more impetus and a rationale. We have achieved change as we always do, by having very clear communications with staff and stakeholders, and by monitoring progress regularly.*
- *Provision distinguishes between universal provision inclusive to all and agreed targeted provision to disadvantaged and under-represented groups, including those adults experiencing mental ill health, discrete LLDD groups, older learners, Family Learning groups in schools in deprived areas and targeted community groups in [the borough’s] most disadvantaged wards*
- *Robust management of learner support funding is secured via a clear policy to ensure funds are allocated fairly, against set criteria and according to need.*



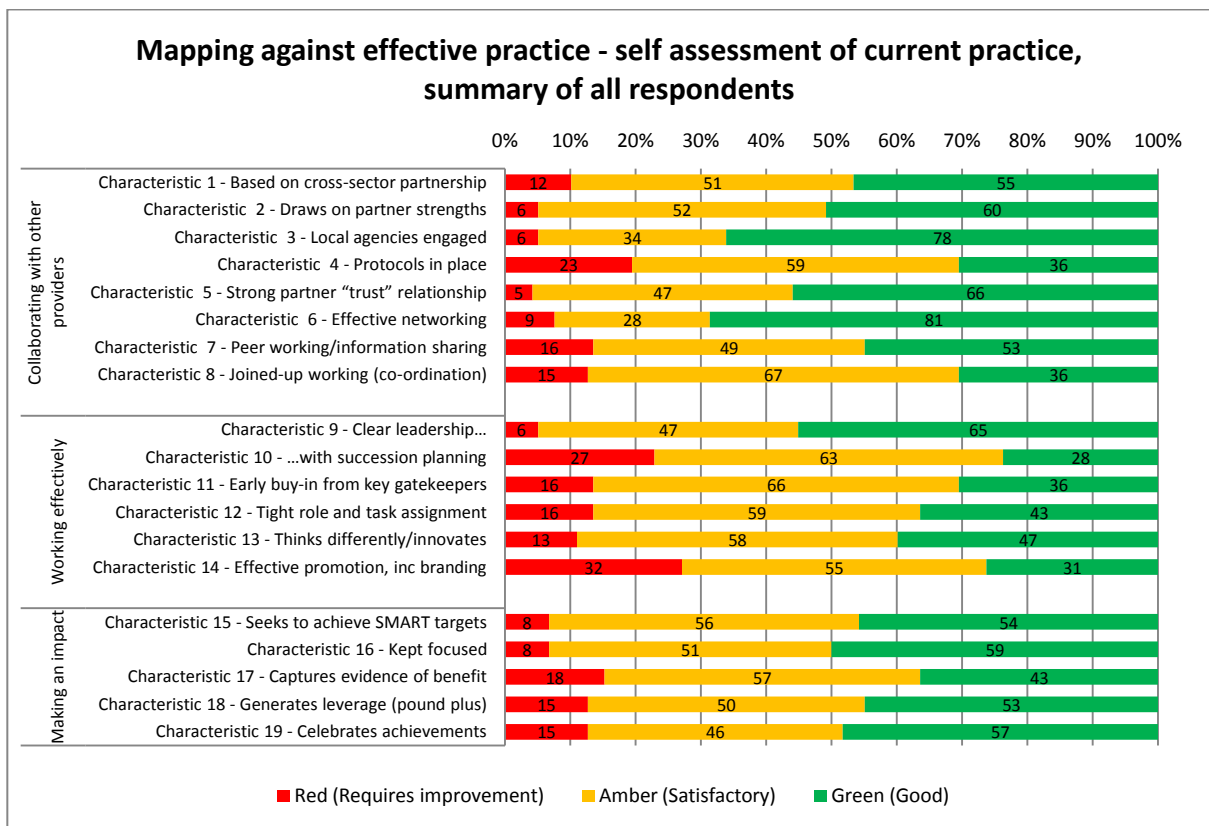
### 3 SECTION THREE: MAPPING AGAINST EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The survey presented prompts (derived from published evaluation of the Community Learning Trust Pilots) on what has been identified as effective practice. This part of the survey elicited 118 responses: 32 colleges; 73 local authorities; and 13 'other', primarily voluntary and community sector agencies, including specialist designated institutions.

Providers were invited to self-assess their own current practice against 19 characteristics of effective practice as identified from published evaluation of the Community Learning Trust Pilots. Assessment was undertaken against a simple red/amber/green rating (RAG rating), where red = requires improvement, amber = satisfactory and green = good.

#### 3.1 Analysis of key characteristics of effective practice

Here again, reported progress is by and large positive, with 70% of providers reporting satisfactory progress against all identified effective practice characteristics and one in four assessing themselves as good in all areas. Overall findings are shown in the following table:



This data, focusing as it does on operational implementation of systems and professional practice designed to deliver against the community learning reform agenda, echoes the generally positive assessment of providers' strategic response to reform objectives and funding body expectations.

The involvement of local agencies, effective networking based on a strong relationship of trust between partners and drawing on their respective strengths are all key features. Activity is kept focused through the adoption of SMART targets, and achievements are celebrated.

- *We have set ourselves participation targets for each area of the city. Provision had drifted towards our central building, but in an effort to change this, and in response to local community request, we have pledged to deliver a minimum offer across the whole city.*
- *Effective strategic planning targets relevant courses in terms of content, structure and charges to specific communities. We systematically use Mosaic profiling and other demographic data together with research about other learning provision, employment opportunities, skills gaps, and leisure activities. Data is further informed by local intelligence, particularly from working with a wide range of partner organisations. This produces a programme maximising fee income from those who can afford to pay while providing a rich learning offer to those in less advantaged circumstances both within the universal programme and on a targeted basis.*

Areas where providers perhaps need to undertake further work relate to formalising their partnership working through the development/adoption of agreed protocols, clarifying leadership succession arrangements, and giving greater consideration to effective promotion, including branding. Survey responses also seem to suggest many providers are yet to find time to think differently and to innovate, but given the speed of implementation of what for many is a new way of working, this is not really surprising.

### **3.2 By provider type**

This section highlights those characteristics where a notable proportion of providers, by type, assessed their practice as 'green' (good), thereby indicating that they consider they have some significant strengths in practice. We include some illustrative comments from open text responses, where available. A further, brief analysis of those providers self-assessing their practice as 'good' identified a handful who assessed themselves as having effective practice across many categories. However, there are also providers who self-assessed themselves positively in one or two categories only. Our analysis suggests this is broadly in line with the external inspection profile of providers, but it would be too much to suggest that the self-assessment underpinning this survey data is an accurate reflection of OFSTED grades in every case.

#### ***Collaborating with other agencies***

##### Characteristic 4 – Protocols in place

36 providers consider that they have good protocols in place to enable them to manage effectively their relationships with partners. Of these 36, 18 are colleges and 18 are local authorities.

## Characteristic 8 – Joined-up working

36 providers consider that they have good relationships in place to indicate joined-up working with partners. Of these 36, 20 are local authorities, 13 are colleges and 3 are 'other'.

- *Existing Community Learning Partnerships are the start of real community engagement and giving the community a voice. (Local Authority)*
- *Staff sit on strategic boards for partners in order to gain intelligence around local need. (Local Authority service)*
- *We had strong partnerships and collaborative working already, but CLT reform has given us a vehicle to better engage with the larger GFE colleges, who often didn't have to report [locally] on their use of funds. (Local Authority service)*
- *We have a high level of managerial commitment to a Strategy Group involving local schools, the Local Authority and the VCO 'umbrella' organisation.... We developed this Strategy Group in light of CLT Pilot evaluation findings, and have secured a more robust 'critical friend' as a result. (FE College)*
- *The College, the County Council and the leading local third sector consortium have formed a Community Learning Partnership with clear strategic objectives. We are moving forward in supporting the availability of adult community learning across the county and are ensuring there is excellent information, advice and signposting, enabling people to make decisions about learning, training and career opportunities. The Community Learning Partnership engages with a broad section of learners, in main part because the partners have separate yet joined-up offers, enabling the broadest provision with simple easy access points: from the client perspective, access to provision is seamless. The Community Learning Partnership has worked together to reduce barriers to access, and are working together to ensure that the learning provision of future programmes better meet the need of communities and individuals. We share data and impact information to enable the co-ordination of both current and future delivery. Improved communication, planning and the sharing of data and impact information is ensuring that Community Learning funding is used to better support access and progression in its widest sense. We are now looking to engage with other learning providers, including the Learning Partnership Trust in [a neighbouring unitary authority]. (FE College)*
- *We have a strong local partnership in place, using local data and intelligence. There is also a bidding panel composed of local stakeholders, and Learner Advisory Panels in place in different parts of the county. Our activity is reported to the Learning and Skills Board, which provides a stakeholder governance model, and ensures good working across other services in the local authority. This all needs building on, but is developing apace. (Local Authority)*
- *We are now sharing delivery plans and in doing so there is little duplication of provision across the city. Improved collaboration between providers is evident. This has been achieved through regular meetings, with a practical focus. Opportunities to jointly market and promote courses are now being taken. (FE College)*

- *The local authority Community Learning Team is now co-located on College premises. We have a strong partnership with the local authority, community based organisations, Parents Centres and JCP which supports a joined-up approach to programme planning and delivery, thereby reducing duplication and maximizing available resources. We are part of [a county-wide] strategic management group facilitated through the voluntary sector umbrella body, and which is separately branded. We engage with individuals through marketing events where we ask them what provision they would like in their area, and through questionnaires distributed through community organisations, parents centres and schools. This has generated pound plus (eg premises have been utilized at no cost, crèche provided by parents centres, leaflets distributed through schools and through community organisations). The development work associated with this activity is considerable. (FE College)*
- *We work with local community groups to ascertain the needs of their user groups, and are investigating other local community provision to ensure our offer is unique. Greater networking has informed and enabled us to create and offer more bespoke courses. We are increasing health and wellbeing provision within community settings and so provide access to a range of courses: these include digital courses including radio; creative writing classes for improving English skills; and programmes targeted at those with low confidence and self-esteem and disengaged from learning, including lone parents. (Third sector provider)*
- *We achieve strong recruitment via multiagency working, eg with local authorities, health commissioners, probation services, and substance misuse support agencies: this helps us to target and support marginalised groups into learning. We also have open-recruitment provision and higher level courses - including Access to HE and teacher education – which are attractive to those interested in social purpose education. Thus overall we have a very diverse student community, working at a variety of levels. Learners are challenged and inspired in this environment. Some are publicly funded, some are self-funded, and some paid for by other agencies. A lot of our provision focuses fundamentally on confidence building, developing skills for civic engagement and participation in civil society as well as economic engagement and learning progression. Much of this is developed on a bespoke basis for specific groups and communities, and may be commissioned and funded by groups. Our recent Ofsted report suggests that our work is transformational not just for individuals but for families and communities. We have established many more active partnerships with community organisations, and have adapted our provision to meet their needs. We have developed a community strategy and hold an annual stakeholder conference to report and consult with our partners and communities. We have also appointed a manager and development staff to undertake more external liaison than was previously the case. (Specialist Designated Institution)*
- *Community Learning reform has provided increased momentum to achieve closer coherence with other public agendas - with health and wellbeing, civic engagement, economic growth etc. Planning is based on systematic analysis of widely varying community circumstances and within the context of broader public agenda. We are working to develop shared insight and measurements of impact, linking service planning and pooling resources to enhance the experience and outcomes for customers and ensure added value for public investment. (Local Authority)*

## **Working effectively**

### Characteristic 11 – Early buy-in from gatekeepers

36 providers consider that they have good relationships in place to enable them to proceed in the knowledge that they have support from local hierarchies. Of these 36, 19 are local authorities, 12 are colleges and 5 are 'other'.

- *The College has an effective strategy which addresses 'New Challenges, New Chances' reform plan priorities, the local Economic Strategy and the Local Authority Vision. We also work closely with JCP and local housing providers to ensure that provision is demand led. The College is the sole sub-contracted provider of learning on behalf of the Local Authority, and both provisions are subject to the same strategic plan. The Strategic Plan contains an impact assessment of the previous year of activity along with KPIs for the next cycle, and some examples of good practice. All activity is coded against these priorities and we evaluate the balance and mix of provision. The majority of our provision is now facing improved economic outcomes, improved Maths and/or English and ESOL. (FE College)*

### Characteristic 12 – Tight role and task assignment

43 providers consider that they have good definitions in place to enable them to manage role assignment and ensure tasks are fulfilled in a timely manner. Of these 43, 24 are local authorities, 12 are colleges and 7 are 'other'.

- *Those living in geographic areas high on the index of multiple deprivation are most likely to meet the Community Learning Reform agenda criteria, and over 70% of learners come from these areas. Sub-contracted providers are required to target 73% of provision in the top 250 Super Output Areas so as to focus learning on those most in need. We also require sub-contracted providers to collect fee income from those who can afford to pay - Pound Plus generation is part of the commissioning criteria. (Local Authority)*
- *LMI data is used to identify, by ward and constituency, the number of residents, unemployment rates, IMD ranking and the proportion of the adult population with no qualifications. Through resident postcodes we focus recruitment on priority wards, and where community learning participation is at its lowest. (FE College)*
- *A proportion of the grant is subcontracted to organisations reaching learners who will not normally work with Adult Learning. An essential part of the bid criteria is working in areas of deprivation or with identified priority learners. (Local Authority)*
- *We have developed and lead on a Community Learning Partnership. The group supported a community consultation seeking the views of the community to plan opportunities across the borough. Key areas identified were then allocated to ensure minimal duplication. (FE College)*

### Characteristic 13 – Provides opportunity to think differently/innovate

47 providers consider that they have good opportunities in place to encourage innovative thinking within their planning, curriculum design and strategies. Of these 47, 30 are local authorities, 9 are colleges and 8 are 'other'.

- *We work much more closely with a range of organisation through the developing Community Learning Trust. We engage with other agencies who are much closer to priority groups and therefore able to provide relevant learning. The service is developing 'Community Hubs' from the job clubs in areas of deprivation, and this is to develop as a one-stop-shop model for the public to engage with other agencies as well as adult learning. We have one instance where the job club also hosts health services and directs clients to CAB (the building is too small to host all three at the same time). The vision is that support for JSA and ESA clients will continue and, according to need, will develop to include a number of agencies such as Credit Union, CAB, Health, resident associations, community development officers etc. We also plan to use this mix to provide digital champions, learning champions, community volunteers and mentors. Volunteers are trained for working in the service, and there is a programme in place for training and developing individuals to work in their own communities. (Local Authority service)*
- *Over the past 18 months we have introduced a commissioning model and a Provider Framework which potential providers can apply to be part of through an ITT process. They can then bid for funding from a prospectus launched 2 or 3 times a year, with proposals to be targeted at priority groups and/or with priority curriculum areas. There are now 28 providers on the Framework, ranging from a large FE College through specialist organisations like MIND and Mencap to small community groups running one programme. This has widened the provider base considerably, and has enabled us to work with providers who can recruit from target priority groups such as mental health service users or the Somali community. We have kept a certain amount of direct delivery and also maintain a QA process and CPD programme for all providers. (Local Authority)*
- *We have been piloting ways to support affordable progression from free, very local engagement learning to more robust, often accredited options. This has included "routes" linked with flexible employment opportunities available locally, which both supports the wider economic goals of the County and encourages civic participation. This has to date focused on Support Work in Schools, Health and Social Care and opportunities for CV development through structured volunteering, and has also included options for craft activities. The initiative has linked Community Budget funds, ASB funds, "recycled" general fee income ("Pound Plus"), fees and contributions in kind from partner organisations. The challenge now is to make this available on a more mainstream basis within our overall strategic direction. (Local Authority service)*

### ***Making an impact***

#### Characteristic 17 – Captures evidence of benefit

43 providers consider that they have good systems in place to ensure that outcomes and outputs

are captured effectively and that their learners are satisfied with the provision on offer. Of these 43, 24 are local authorities, 15 are colleges and 4 are 'other'.

#### Characteristic 18 – Generates leverage (Pound Plus)

53 providers consider that they have good means of generating additional resources at low or no cost to support the delivery of provision. Of these 53, 33 are local authorities, 13 are colleges and 7 are 'other'.

- *Although not an official 'trust', local organisations function as such with a thematic approach being developed to ensure that resources are pooled effectively. Provision is mapped to areas of demand and within priority themes. These have clear rationale based on local data. This exercise ensures that there are no gaps in provision, and that provider offers dove tail effectively. Targeted learning is prioritised within themes as relevant to localities, including English and maths, Family Learning, employability, neighbourhood cohesion and capacity building including organisational development and volunteer training. A multi-rate fee policy is implemented, based on the ability of learners to pay and the level of priority for a specific course. 10% of our contract is sub-contracted to organisations which are better placed to penetrate particular areas of high need. (FE College)*
- *Pound Plus has been a revelation - when we add up all the income we've brought in and the costs that we have saved it is a significant amount (between 33% and 50% of our SFA grant). This has given managers a focus in considering finances in everything they do, so that we are being run more like a business (balancing our books) rather than a bureaucracy. (Local Authority service)*
- *There is a greater understanding amongst the partners of the need to contribute other resources to Community Learning rather than, in the past, relying only on the grant funding. (Local Authority service)*

#### Characteristic 19 – Celebrates achievements

57 providers consider that they have good protocols in place to ensure that learner achievement is acknowledged and celebrated, as successes for the individual, group and provider. Of these 57, 34 are local authorities, 15 are colleges and 8 are 'other'.

- *Introduction of a Festival of Learning culminating in an Awards Ceremony to celebrate benefits of adult learning and encourage wider participation. (FE College)*
- *The quality assurance process has been reviewed and a new system of recording how learners meet their learning goals and achievements has been implemented, based on the RARPA 5-stage milestones. This means we now capture and record learners' soft outcomes, including those focused on personal skills, family and community and work-related impacts. We also ascertain learners' future plans in relation to further study and employment. Our learner evaluation surveys are key to shaping current and future delivery and the systematic recording of outcomes and progression. (FE College)*

Taken in the round, 'other' providers tend to assess themselves more positively than do Local Authority services or colleges. Local Authority respondents in particular express concern about their ability to co-ordinate activity, to promote Community Learning effectively and to capture evidence of benefit; they also express some concern about securing early buy-in from key gatekeepers. Colleges, on the other hand, highlight a lack of opportunity to innovate, and are concerned about their progress in developing formal protocols for partnership working.

- *The learner profile has changed significantly. Over 60% come from a BME community, the vast majority are either unemployed or economically disadvantaged – all this is very different to before the reforms. Our offer is now such that it not only meets individual learner goals but is impacting, positively on supporting the local community. Strong partnerships and sub-contracting arrangements that are building capacity in VCS is enabling them to deliver more provision. There is strong strategic leadership from the Local Authority, with plans that include Community Learning as a key delivery agent. Development of a neighbourhood governance model works to increase participation by the community in the Council's decision-making process. (Local Authority service)*
- *The Community Learning reform agenda has confirmed our approach rather than led to any significant changes. Our provision is closely aligned to the values and expectations of the CL reform agenda. A key strategic objective is the vision of [the provider] as "a key forum for community engagement and adult learning". This recognises the added public value of the learning and capacity-building work that we undertake. It recognises the importance of making a strong contribution to the localism agenda: social renewal through adult learning, through community capacity development and through developing progression routes across the [area that we serve]. (Specialist Designated Institution)*
- *We are one of two providers with a Community Learning contract in the local area, and have seen significant local development since the reform agenda was published. Since 2012/13 a joint commissioning process has been place with defined outputs to be met by local VSC organisations, including pound plus targets. This commissioning process is overseen by a panel of key stakeholders, including the Chief Executive of the local Voluntary Sector Council. Budgets are constrained, so projects are awarded on the basis of merit and their impact on local residents, with a particular focus on enhancing social inclusion and employment skills. The reform agenda has, to an extent, ratified this approach, and has helped local VCS organisations move away from a 'grant recipient' culture to one where SMART targets and outputs are the norm. Some 15 projects are currently supported. Contributions and outputs are measured and reported, but further work is needed to quantify 'softer' outputs. The outcomes from projects are reported to the Community Learning Partnership Group which has representation from all VCS providers involved, the City Council, LEP and JCP as well as the two funded providers. The group meets once a month to assess progress against project targets, and throughout 2013/14 met to discuss and agree a local Community learning Strategy which has now been published as a draft document for wider consultation. Levels of trust and engagement across the organisations involved have grown significantly in the last 12 months. A full-time Community Learning Co-ordinator is in post and their salary is shared between the 2 CL funding organisations. Their remit and job description includes supporting local organisations with accessing other types of funding. (FE College)*



Despite a range of positive practice, survey responses also disclose some volatility, and others identify instances where there is scope for improvement.

One Local Authority reports, for example, that they *“have had to deal with a significant change as our main partner organisation has had its SFA Community Learning contract withdrawn, which has highlighted the risks and challenges involved in setting up and maintaining local partnerships”*.

Elsewhere, a third sector consortium reports that *“for us there hasn't been a huge amount of change: we commissioned with the VCS from the start, and have always targeted disadvantaged communities.... We operate across four local authority areas, and there has been a somewhat patchy response to the CL reform agenda. We believe a sub-regional Community Learning Partnership would offer synergies and greater pound plus opportunities by working strategically at the level of the Local Enterprise Partnership rather than across the four local authorities on the patch.”*

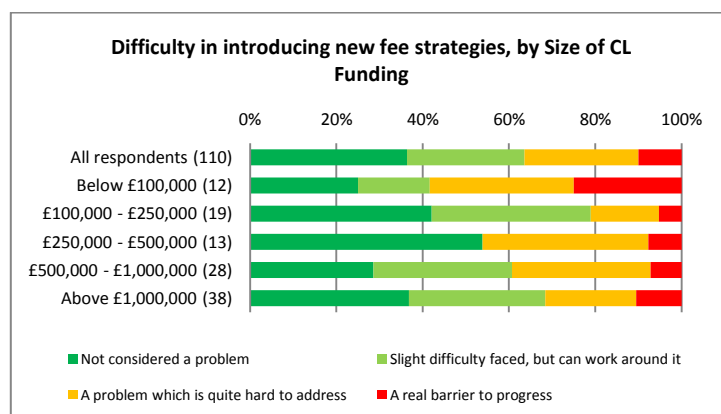
It may well be that prevailing arrangements need to be kept under active review.

### 3.3 By size of funding allocation

By and large there is no significant variation in response from providers of differing size of funding allocation.

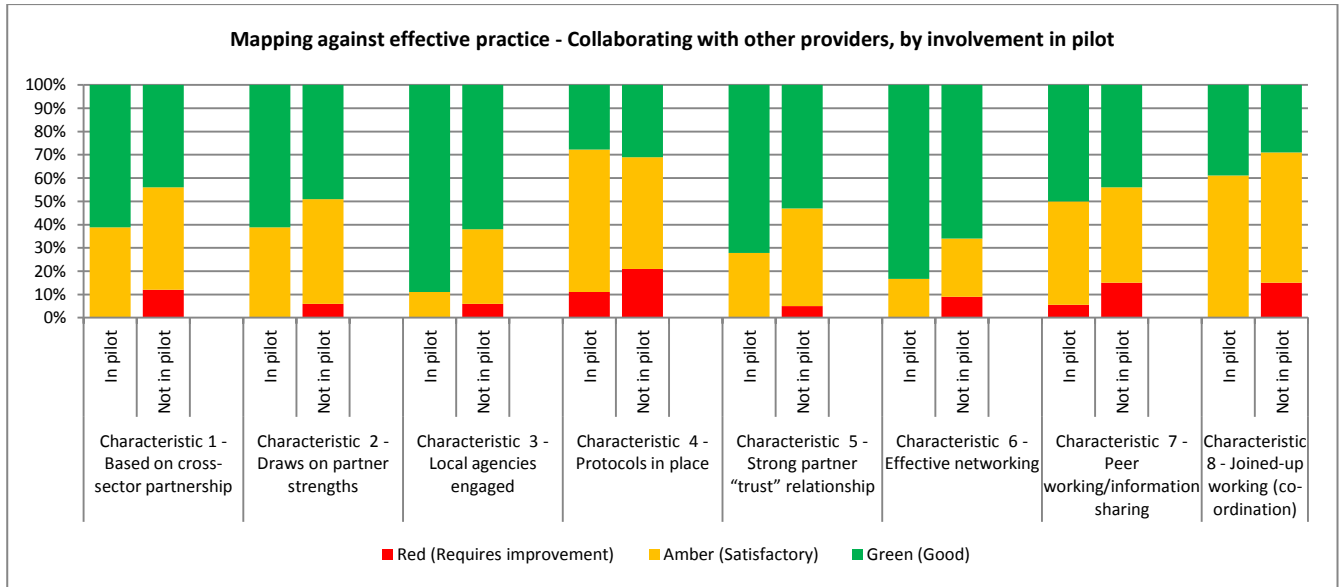
- We have a very small allocation of only £12,000. However we have used this through our sub-contracted partners to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners, while generating pound plus income through in-kind benefit from volunteer support. This delivery can't be supported through mainstream skills funding, but enables essential skills to be learnt to transform low-skilled, unemployed or economically inactive individuals. Our provision enables engagement and provides new opportunities for learners to progress. (Third sector consortium)*

The key exception relates to provider ability to introduce new fee strategies, which is a particular difficulty for those with the smallest funding allocation:

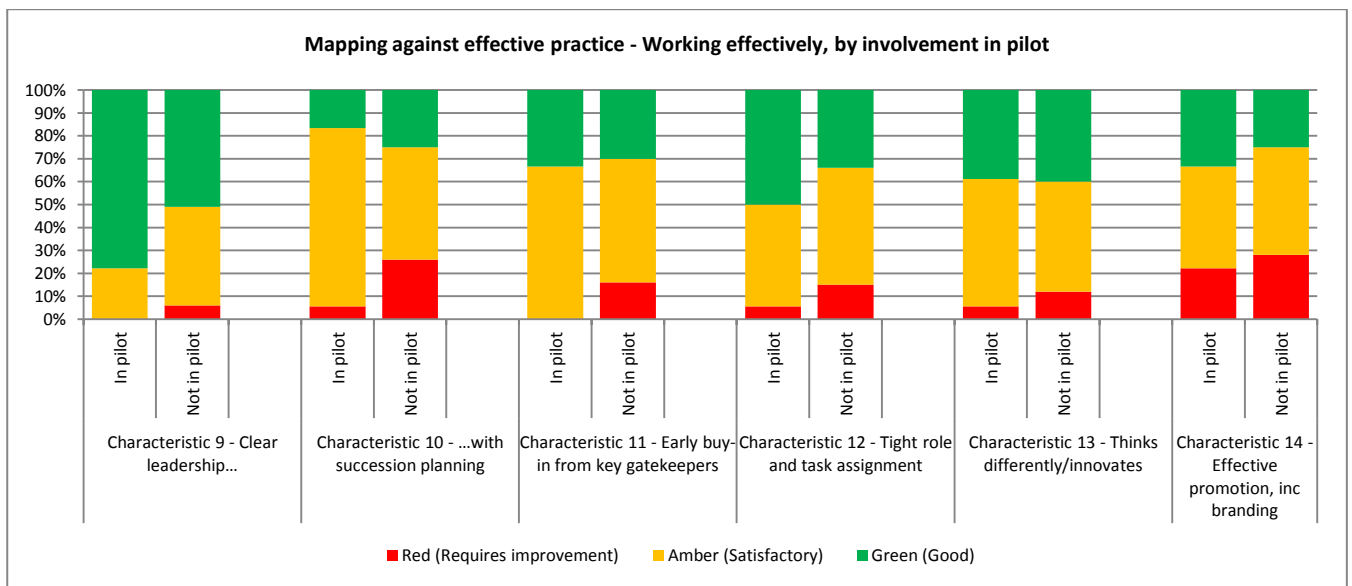


### 3.4 By involvement in CLT Pilot

Although only 15% of survey responses came from providers who had participated in the Community Learning Trust Pilots, data clearly suggests – perhaps unsurprisingly - that these providers take a more positive view on their current practice. Findings are shown in the following series of charts.

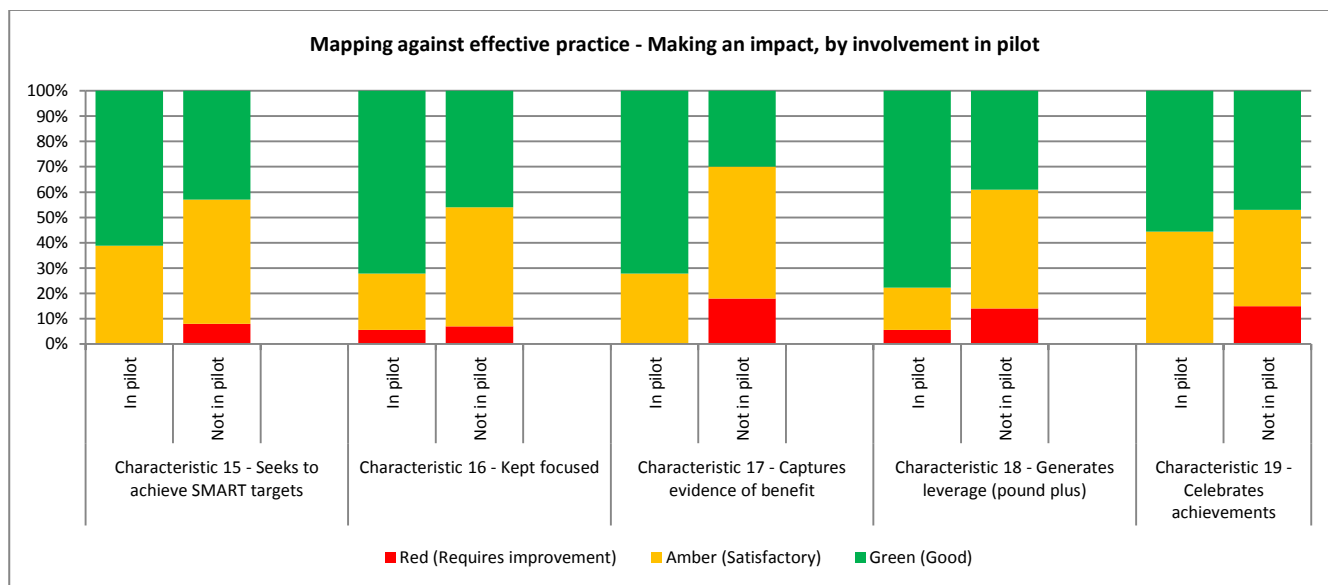


It would seem to be evident from these findings that effective collaboration with other partners takes time to become established. Whereas a proportion of those providers not involved in the Pilots rate themselves red against each characteristic relating to collaboration, only two areas are reported as red by those with Pilot experience: having protocols in place, and peer working. Cross-sectoral engagement, the development of trust and sound networking are all positively reported by those who have been involved in reform activity since 2012.



Clear leadership is evidently well established in those providers who were involved in the Pilots, and they have also all secured necessary buy-in from key gatekeepers. It is however perhaps noteworthy that in

other functional areas, especially promotion, even those with Pilot experience feel there is scope for improvement.



When it comes to the ability to work to SMART targets, to capture evidence of benefit and to celebrate achievement all involved in the Pilots consider they have at least satisfactory practice in place: this may be due to the attention given to these factors during the pilot phase, and the importance national support programmes for the Pilot providers placed on achieving demonstrable successful outcomes. Those involved in the Pilots also report much more positively in terms of securing “pound plus”.

- As a former CLT Pilot we share planning of delivery to develop a collaborative offer. Priorities are shared, as are resources - for example development of a website for easy access to services provided through the partnership and associated groups. There is a clear focus on those who are furthest from the labour market, and least advantaged. The partnership continues to seek ways to maximise value for money through a shared and consultative approach to curriculum design across the city, ensuring a wide range of [targeted] engagement. The partnership has prioritised the needs of learners within the city, and has promoted an open and honest forum for the providers involved.*

### 3.5 Barriers to implementation

In devising the survey we posited a range of hypothetical barriers to implementation of the reform agenda, drawn in part from anecdotal discussion with a range of providers.

The key barriers to speedy and effective implementation of the reform agenda highlighted relate to:

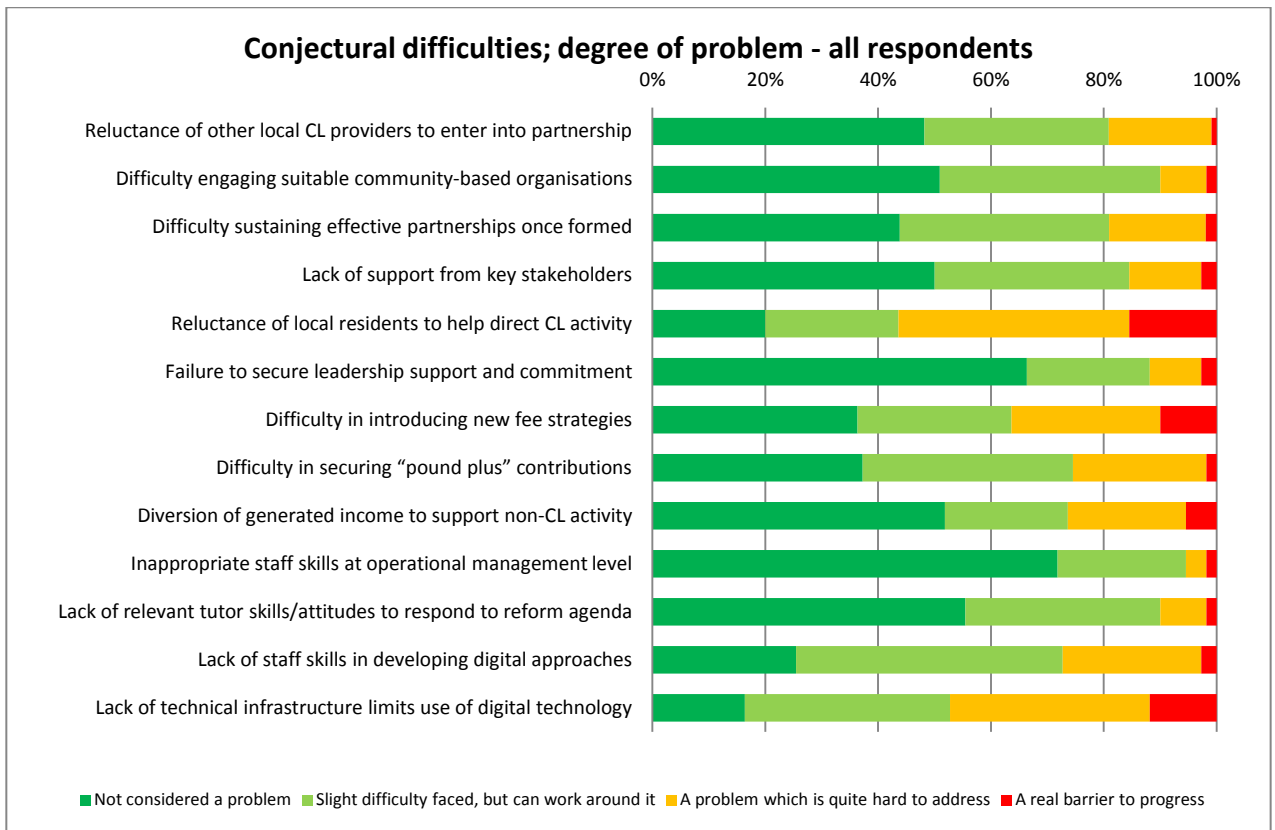
- the reluctance of local residents to take on responsibility to help to manage local CL activity: fewer than half of the respondents to this question were finding this an easy issue

to tackle, with around 15% finding it to be a 'real barrier to progress'

- introducing new fee strategies: a third of respondents to this question consider that they face significant difficulty, and had made little or no progress
- diversion of generated income to support non-Community Learning activity: a third of respondents to this question consider this to be a hard problem, a finding to some extent echoed in recent work on Pound Plus published by RCU.

Concerns were also expressed about problems faced in developing digital approaches to the delivery of Community Learning: a third of respondents consider staff skills need to be further developed to achieve this, and a lack of the technical infrastructure hampers about half of all respondents in this regard.

The following chart summarises responses from all providers, with the incidence of green indicating no or only slight difficulty:

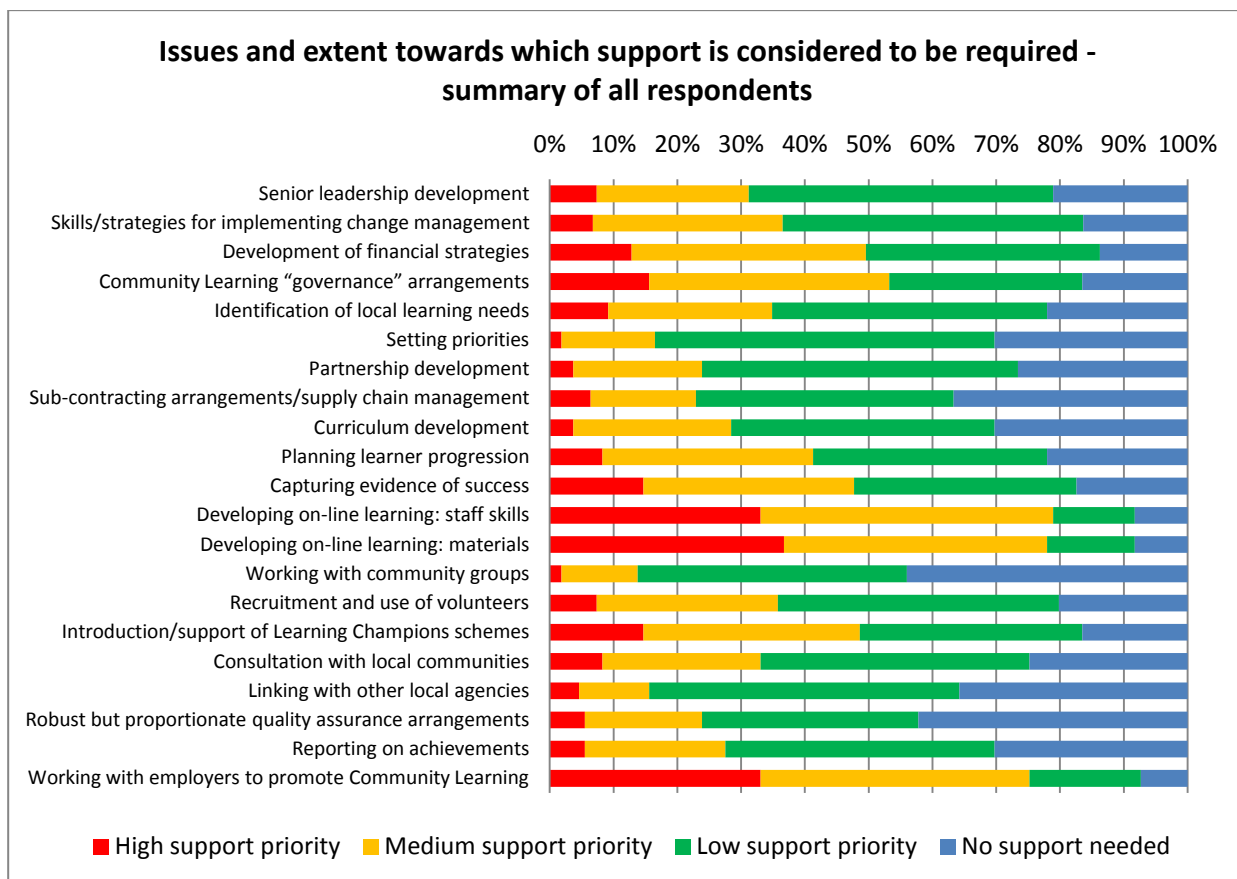


## 4 SECTION FOUR: SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The survey sought Community Learning provider views on what they considered to be their current support and development needs, and additionally sought views on preferences regarding how any such support might be provided. Respondents were able to offer open text commentary to clarify/augment their response to “tick box” prompts, and material from such comments has been used to inform reporting.

### 4.1 Issues and extent to which support is considered to be required

There were 109 valid responses to this question<sup>7</sup>, and the following chart shows a summary of replies received from all respondents:



Areas of highest need clearly lie in three main areas: developing the skills of existing staff in developing on-line learning; the related area of online-learning materials development; and in working with employers to promote informal and non-accredited learning in the Community Learning context. The first two support needs echo findings from a recent ETF-commissioned

<sup>7</sup> Only 104 valid responses were received to one prompt, which was added to the survey after testing: this is reflected in the data presented, which shows percentage responses

project piloting a self-assessment tool for institutional capacity to offer learning via the use of digital technologies, and an associated tool to assess individual digital literacy: that project found that “ACL” providers reported a lower level of confidence and capacity than that found in FE colleges. Work with employers may to some extent be compromised by the prevailing economic context, which is widely reported as limiting employer preparedness to invest in the skills development of their workforce; it is also noteworthy that employee development schemes offering subsidised access to learning for non-work purposes, such as the Ford EDAP scheme, appear to have fallen out of favour since coming to prominence in the late 1980s/early 1990s. There may be some scope for providers to engage more closely with union learning representatives as one way of enhancing work with employers.

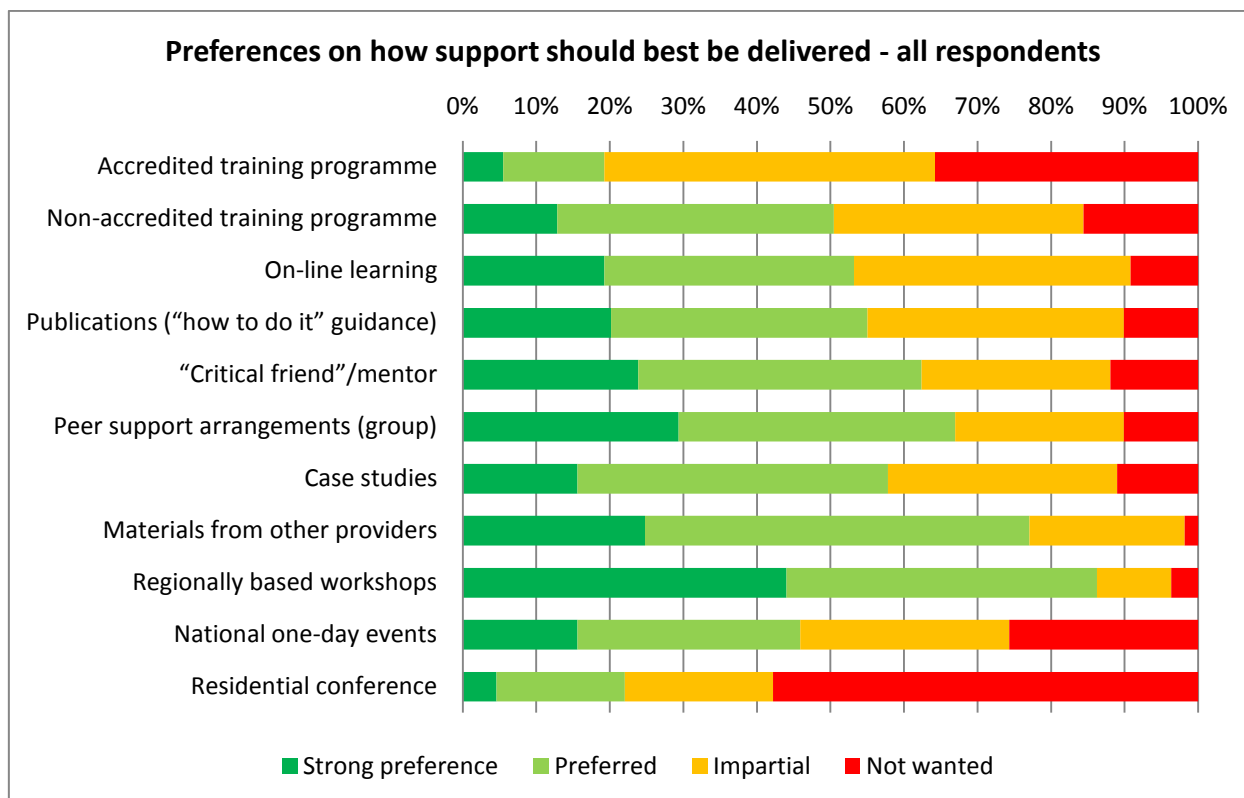
This analysis suggests Community Learning providers are most confident in their current ability to work with community groups and in their general approach to partnership working, including linking with local agencies and setting priorities. There is also positive feedback on the development of quality assurance arrangements, although some 50% of providers prioritise the need for support in capturing evidence of success. Survey responses also suggest more could be done to promote Learning Champions schemes, which may mean there is a need to more widely alert providers to existing support offered via NIACE.

One area not covered by our survey prompts, but highlighted in open text commentary from a number of local authority respondents, relates to a need to better inform and influence elected members and senior Council officers in respect of the Community Learning reform agenda, and what is expected of providers.

- *An important area for us as a local authority service is to be able to understand the political environment and work with members to influence outcomes and raise the profile: only a few of our staff have skills in this area, and it is quite a big support need, particularly for succession planning.*
- *Senior management / decision makers need to better understand the role and benefits of Community and Family Learning.*
- *The crucial issue for [us] has been the lack of strategic buy-in from the local authority.*
- *A lack of understanding by senior managers and decision makers in the Council is a very real challenge which I face as the service manager....*

#### **4.2 Preferences on how support should best be delivered**

There were 109 valid responses to this question, which are summarised in the following chart:



There are some clear messages here: providers express a strong preference for training, support and development to be delivered via regionally based, practical workshops; through the sharing of materials from other providers; and via peer support arrangements. There is a clear rejection of residential conferences, national one day events and accredited training programmes. These findings echo those found in previous enquiries seeking views from Community Learning leaders, managers and practitioners.

- *It would be useful to see some good practice models from other providers (former Pilots?), especially on reporting on achievements, and working with employers to promote Community Learning*

Since the Community Learning reforms are based on adoption of a partnership approach, it is assumed that any support offered should be openly available to all provider types, and without regard to the size of funding allocation or other differential features. Accordingly, we have not sought to offer any sub-analysis in this section: this has also been informed by background analysis comparing responses from different groups of providers, where little significant difference was detected in preference for support delivery method.

## 5 SECTION FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

With a 38% response rate, and a representative sample of providers in terms of type, location and funding allocation, we have confidence that the survey findings presented in this report are statistically robust, and reflective of the position “on the ground” as at Autumn 2014. The Steering Group has also sense-checked the emerging evidence from survey analysis, and supports the following conclusions:

- providers are making good progress across most elements of the new policy aims for Community Learning, and the sector is responding positively to the reform agenda
- providers involved in the Community Learning Trust Pilots run during 2012/13 are more positive about their progress towards meeting reform objectives and funding expectations, but this is not as pronounced as might have been expected: other providers have learned from the Pilot experiences, and are in the main making speedy changes to their ways of working where necessary
- those involved in the Pilots are more developed in their collaborative partnership working, suggesting this takes time to develop
- Local Authority services report a somewhat higher level of progress than colleges or other provider types
- over nine in ten providers of Community Learning are clearly targeting their activity on disadvantage, and the use of funding allocations is being prioritised for this purpose; colleges are experiencing most difficulty in this regard
- there is, however, some indication that Community Learning is being marginalised in those providers with a small funding allocation, especially where this work forms a minority of institutional activity
- providers are finding some reluctance by local residents/communities to take on responsibility to help manage local Community Learning activity; this is a particular concern for larger/better funded providers, and means that the reform agenda is primarily being driven forward by a professional response
- providers of all types are developing solid partnership working, have established strong trust relationships, and are playing to partners’ strengths; voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations, including Specialist Designated Institutions, report most positively on their effective networking
- least progress is being made in respect of engaging employers in the provision of informal learning
- four in every five providers are delivering a balance of the reform objectives, and are working productively together to address locally agreed priorities



- two thirds of providers report making solid progress in their ‘pound plus’ work; introducing new fee strategies is however a challenge for about a third of all types of provider, and more work is needed on shifting “blocked” classes and on promoting and facilitating self-organised learning groups
- about a third of providers, especially Local Authority services and to some extent colleges, are experiencing pressures leading to the diversion of generated income to support non-Community Learning work, and/or transferring resources generated across activity
- there are numerous examples of effective working, across all provider types; this is especially the case in respect of collaboration with other agencies, clear leadership and celebrating Community Learning achievements
- there is a lack of developed capacity in on-line learning
- Community Learning providers are clear about their support and development needs, and express a clear preference for this to be delivered via regionally based, practical workshops, and via peer support arrangements.

Findings from this survey are being shared with BIS, with the Education and Training Foundation and with NIACE, with a view to informing both future policy development and any sector support initiatives which might be put in place. This report will, however, be of most use to those charged with managing the implementation of the Community Learning reform agenda, whether they are directly funded providers of all types or their local partners.

HOLEX National Office  
March 2015