

Changing the County Graph

Hampshire County Council

Introduction

This Case Study focuses on how, since 2010, Hampshire County Council (HCC) has planned major growth in community learning provision and enabled greater participation and impacts across the county. It will also highlight the strategic imperatives that underlined the approach towards this growth. It is an example of best practice that could be utilised by other providers and partners.

The activity

Over the past three years, Hampshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning Service has substantially increased the volumes and success of local learning through a planned programme of targeted and supportive learner engagement. Learner numbers in relation to community learning activities that occur within each of the 11 Hampshire districts, inputted onto the ILR, increased from 16,000 in 2010 to over 20,000 by the conclusion of the 2012/13 academic year.

The county's 'Strategic Commissioning Plan for Adult and Community Learning', was formulated in 2010/11 and together with the policy to 'Change the County Graph', established challenging priorities and targets that were designed to grow the learning offer (particularly in areas of greatest need). The policy of 'Changing the County Graph' appreciated, and sought to address, the imbalance and gap between access to learning in affluent areas compared with lower access within some disadvantaged areas. HCC were committed to drive up learning activities where needs were more profound.

We also sought to respond to evidenced-based learning requirements such as employability and qualification whilst ensuring continuing quality in delivery. Principle sources of evidence were the Hampshire Child Poverty Needs Assessment, the Hampshire Area Economic Assessment alongside information pooled from district Community Learning Partnerships.

The HCC Adult and Community Learning Service objectives were to increase and sustain an improved learning offer across the county and, within three years, this resulted in an over 20% increase in learner participation. This growth also corresponded with greater customisation of learner programmes to suit individual demand (such as IT courses, provision for the disabled or designated activities for the unemployed), consequent flexibility for Centre's in the delivery of courses and ongoing quality of provision. By the end of 2013 over 3,000 courses were being delivered within approximately 300 venues and co- locations.

The Service was therefore committed to 'harder targeting', better of usage of resources including NLDC and increasing learning in areas of need, and improvements in performance management. This was achieved whilst enhancing 'universal' programmes via funding strands such as PCDL, particularly for those who can afford to contribute towards their learning. The successful targeting of provision within areas of need was achieved through the enhanced engagement of partners within the local voluntary and community sector and the positive promotion of community learning within selected areas.

The differences this approach has made

Learners

The planned increase in learner volumes has made a notable difference in Hampshire and enabled improved availability and accessibility of learning to residents, especially those from the more deprived areas. Increased community learning activities in venues such as community centres, schools and libraries has also enabled a greater focus for learners on skills, employability, qualifications, personal development and improved progression pathways.

Testimonies to learner and individual success are reflected in the stories of two Hampshire CC community learning-supported participants. In May 2012 Michelle Bratt from Basingstoke and Adele Woodford from Eastleigh, both engaged in family learning programmes, were NIACE Adult Learning South East Regional Award winners. Michelle was given the Regional Adult Learner Award and Adele received the Regional Progress/Succeed Award.

Managers, staff and volunteers

Managers and staff gained an appreciation that through planning and effective dialogue, the service can improve and extend the local learning offer. They recognised that the service could build a community learning programme that was broad-based and involved activities to meet the needs of different groups such as families, disabled, unemployed, and digitally excluded people. Equally, there was an understanding that the service could respond to local need and demand yet retain flexible and strategic approaches.

The organisation

The growth in adult learning activities highlighted to staff, partners and particularly to learners, how joint-working can achieve positive results. Through the presentation and implementation of the Strategic Commissioning Plan for ACL, the Service successfully demonstrated to Chief Officers and to Elected Members the value and impact of adult and community learning across Hampshire.

The 'Changing the county graph' approach resulted in a strategic shift of resources and enhanced activities within districts, particularly towards communities of evidenced social and economic need. It also led to better partnership working and community engagement approaches.

HCC believes that their performance in relation to enhanced learner volumes over the three year period would be on a par with or exceed that of other providers when compared nationally.

Challenges and solutions

Alongside collaboration and a dialogue with local partners to ascertain and respond to learning needs, the challenge was also to utilise effective data sets (including the Hampshire Child Poverty Needs Assessment) to enable 'harder targeting' of resources. We utilised data sets, including those for Super Output Areas (SOA's), to pinpoint communities of disadvantage, exhibiting factors such as low qualification, long-term unemployment and receipt of free school meals.

The next challenge was to deploy funding into other areas, increase learner volumes and ensure quality in delivery without undermining our ability to provide support to local organisations. We responded to this challenge by liaising with district Community Learning Partnerships, local Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) organisations and through a number of Community Learning Roadshows.

Critical factors for success

The key factors that provided the basis for success were:

3. planning at the Chief Officer level and with local district representatives;
4. local consultation and improved understanding of need and demand;
5. ensuring more effective use of programme funding such as NLDC and WFL;
6. emphasising progression pathways particularly in relation to employability,
7. qualification and skills enhancement;
8. increasing the levels of NLDC and PCDL activities; and
9. quality improvement and good performance management .

The "golden moment"

In 2010, out of the 11 districts in Hampshire and in terms of comparative district-based learner numbers, Havant and Gosport (which are the most disadvantaged districts in Hampshire) were 5th and 7th respectively. By the end of the 2012/13 academic year, Havant and Gosport were first and second respectively and learner volumes had exceeded the HCC target of 20,000 learners.

Contact for further information

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