

# BRISTOL A LEARNING CITY

## Increasing the wellbeing of all citizens and communities in a city of contrast

---

*New Ideas, New Approaches Workshop - 12 November 2015*

### Overview



In November 2015, **Bristol: A Learning City** hosted a workshop focusing on the challenge of engaging individuals and communities in learning. Bristol chose to focus on highlighting the already innovative and successful activities taking place across the city.

Those who work directly with communities, as well as policy makers and strategic leads from across the City, were invited to listen to successful practice and key challenges, to help them shape future

service provision.

To prepare for the workshop a call for contributions was sent out throughout the public and not-for-profit networks. Organisations were asked to provide a summary of their work, including their client base, engagement successes and challenges.

### Introduction

#### The Challenge for our City

Jane Taylor, Bristol City Council Service Manager for Employment, Skills and Learning, opened the event by setting out the challenge for Bristol. Bristol, whilst a rich and prosperous city is also a city of contrasts. A City that, depending on where you live there is between a 5% and 83% chance of attending university. In parts of the City over 50% of adults are not qualified to the aspirational benchmark of NVQ Level 2. If you live in some of the more disadvantaged areas of the City, you are statistically more likely to die 8.9 years earlier as a man and 6.6 years earlier as a woman.

**Bristol: A Learning City**, a partnership of city leaders has taken on these challenges, by focusing on the positive and empowering impact learning can have on an individual, an organisation and a city. Through learning we are taking action to respond to these challenges and share our successes. This workshop was an opportunity to do just that, giving partners an opportunity to showcase their work and learn from others.

## Keynote Speakers

### University of Bristol - Foundation Year in Arts and Humanities

Richard Pettigrew, Professor of Philosophy gave an overview of the University of Bristol Foundation Year course in the Arts and Humanities; intended as a route into higher education for those who do not have the required qualifications. The programme has no formal entry requirements; rather, admission is based on interview and sometimes written work.

Over the course of the year, students engage with the broad range of subjects taught in the Faculty of Arts. They also develop the sorts of academic skills that are required in an undergraduate degree programmes. At the end of the year, students who complete the programme satisfactorily are guaranteed a place on an undergraduate degree in the Faculty of Arts.

The Foundation Year aims to recruit students from groups that are badly under-represented in higher education. The University works with local community organisations, to run taster courses, to give potential applicants a sense of what university study might be like. Out of the 55 students who have completed the course, 40 have gone onto a full degree course.



*I thought I'd apply, even though I thought I was never going to be good enough. I've been out of education for 34 years." **Deborah Wheeler***

### Bristol City Council – Learning Community Team

The Bristol City Council Learning Community Team gave an overview of three projects designed to engage those with few or no qualifications, in learning.

The first presentation looked at the use of digital storytelling to engage young people with mental health issues in learning. Participants were given the opportunity to tell their story using skills developed on the course. The course had the added benefit of creating a “safe space” for people to share their experiences and to work as part of a team. By completing the course participants increased their confidence and gained the necessary skills to move into employment or internships. Outcomes for the course were high, with 79% of participants progressing into further employment, education or training.



eating and exercise.

The second project, a Bee Friendly course, was set up to engage families in school half-term learning activities. The aim of the course was to encourage parents and children to learn together in a relaxed and fun atmosphere. Learners participated in a number of different activities throughout the day, including smoothie making and honey tasting. Each of these activities helped to increase numeracy and literacy skills, as well as promote healthy

The final focus for the presentation considered the challenge of engaging individuals in learning from areas of deprivation. The Learning Community Team overcame these challenges, taking learning into the

community. By hosting an *Introduction to Working in Schools* course at Bridge Learning Campus in south Bristol and offering incentives; such as lunch vouchers and childcare, the project successfully engaged individuals facing greater barriers to learning. The *Bridging the Gap* project helped participants improve their skills and increase their confidence.

The Learning Community Team runs a number of courses across Bristol, with 43% of participants progressing onto further learning; 9% moving into paid employment; 7% taking up voluntary work and 13% progressing onto a further community learning course.

### **Evidence based employment support for people with a learning disability**



Keith Bates, Head of Employment, Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities presented an overview of the challenges facing people with learning difficulties in Bristol. Employment rates for people with learning disabilities in the UK remain stubbornly low, yet it is known what works: good quality support to people who are interested in finding work and match their skills, interests and aspirations with the needs of local employers and as a result get good job outcomes.

The impact of supported internships is an indicator of what can be achieved when good relationships are developed with employers, with nearly 70% of participants in employment or apprenticeships.

## **Workshop**

As part of the workshop, participants were asked three questions relating to inclusion:

1. What is the biggest **priority**?
2. What is the biggest **barrier/challenge**?
3. What can you or your organisation do to **contribute** to inclusion?



Participants were asked to think about and discuss these questions in three groups, without thinking about the constraints of time and money.

The following themes were raised and discussed:

#### **Priority**

- **Meaningful** – learning needs to be meaningful and led by community wants and needs
- **Communication** – learning opportunities need to be shared with communities using a diverse range of methods
- **Access** – learning opportunities need to take place in local areas, which are accessible to the communities they serve

#### **Barriers/challenge**

- **Transport** – getting participants to learning venues
- **Confidence** – raising the confidence and aspirations of local citizens
- **Isolation** – reaching those who are isolated through language, disability, illness, age

## **Contribution**

- **Mentoring** – business and public sector mentoring of learners
- **Partnerships** – working closely to change the city and avoid duplication
- **Venues** – making sure community venues are made available, with free bus passes provided to enable attendance at venues outside local areas

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Feedback from the attendees was positive, with the opportunity to network and learn from others seen as the overriding success of the event. Many of the negative comments focused on the length of the workshop, with participants feeling it should have been longer with a larger audience invited.

Learning from the workshop, including some of the challenges raised will be considered by the Learning City: Learning for Everyone Challenge Group. This will help to shape future project development, as we aim to meet the challenge of increasing the wellbeing of all citizens and communities in a city of contrast.

**Tommy Jarvis**, Project Manager Bristol: A Learning City, [thomas.jarvis@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:thomas.jarvis@bristol.gov.uk) on behalf of Learning City Partners in Bristol