

## Voluntary Sector Basic Skills Strategy and Action Plan

This Voluntary Sector Strategy is set within the context of the **Birmingham Adult Basic Skills Plan** and supports the aspiration for *the eventual virtual elimination of functional illiteracy and innumeracy in Birmingham.*

The Adult Basic Skills Plan for Birmingham sets out the following key objectives:

- to reduce the number of adults with basic skills by 50% by 2010
- to reduce the number of adults with poor basic skills by 25% by 2005
- to provide a range of diverse learning opportunities accessible in Birmingham, by 2004
- to ensure that all direct basic skills provision meets minimum quality standards by 2003; and that all such direct provision is assessed as being of good quality by 2005

The Plan identifies the crucial role of the voluntary sector in supporting the implementation of these objectives. It recognises that a strong community/voluntary sector, in touch at a grass roots level with the most disadvantaged and excluded groups, is essential if the basic skills strategy is to become a reality.

The Voluntary and Community Sector is recognised as having a number of differing roles in relation to learning, skills and regeneration. These include acting as:

- Advocate: unlocking and promoting the needs of users, clients, members, staff and voluntary organisations. Brokering links between target communities and mainstream providers and programmes
- Sign poster: promoting the benefits of learning and acting as a channel for information about learning opportunities; referring and supporting individuals and groups
- Provider: of learning, advice, and guidance
- Customer: recognising and meeting its own learning needs for organisational development
- Strategic partner: shaping and informing broader plans; researching need and ensuring coherence across activities

This role for the voluntary sector recognises the diversity of this sector and the potential for a substantially increased role for a wider range of organisations.

In order to maximise opportunities to support basic skills it is recognised that different organisations will need different approaches; promoting a single approach will not be appropriate. There are 3 overall key objectives. These are:

1. Developing the organisational capacity of voluntary sector organisations as employers, as organisations and as networks, by:
  - Ensuring that basic skills is part of a wider process of building the skills of managers, employees and key volunteers based upon robust needs analyses
  - Ensuring that opportunities to raise participants' own levels of relevant basic skills are aligned with specific skills training re voluntary sector processes
  
2. Developing key voluntary and community sector organisations as deliverers of basic skills, by:
  - Offering awareness/assessment training
  - Supporting organisations to match established quality levels
  - Training of tutors/trainers re effective teaching and learning
  - Supporting the development of whole-organisation basic skills plans
  - Ensuring effective links to broader developments re basic skills
  - Establishing effective relationships with funded providers of basic skills learning
  
3. Developing the basic skills of members of the community to enable them to contribute more effectively, by:
  - Increasing the volume of direct basic skills provision that is linked to citizenship; community involvement in regeneration; advocacy etc.
  - Developing innovative work to undertake to unlock basic skills activity within communities

**Menu of support available:**

To support this approach voluntary sector organisations will be able to draw upon a menu which offers the opportunity to ensure that:

- There is overall support at an organisational level through the development of an organisational Basic Skills Action Plan
- Key staff are trained in basic skills awareness
- Key intermediaries in organisation are able to offer appropriate in-house support for basic skills, as part of a wider 'championing learning' role
- Organisations have access to appropriate basic skills resources
- Users are provided with access to appropriate ICT to support basic skills
- Organisations achieve recognised quality standards

- Basic Skills is increasingly built into generic programmes and learning centres
- Any basic skills training, linked to the national framework, is effectively delivered
- Organisations are able to draw on paraprofessional support
- Organisational mentoring is available through links with quality providers
- Organisations have access to adequate and appropriate basic skills information and resources
- Partnerships exist with mainstream providers to support bridging activities; access to further training, and enhancement of basic skills of key staff in organisation
- Voluntary organisations are able to draw upon a Training Needs Analysis and structured support to improve the basic skills of key staff
- Organisations are kept involved in, or in touch with, key developments re adult basic skills

### **The approach**

This strategy builds on the framework of activities that have already been developed in this sector. In particular the strategy will support voluntary sector activity delivered through:

- Learning and Skills Council funded programmes
- Birmingham Voluntary Service Council developments
- Learndirect and ICT Learning Centres
- Partnerships with mainstream providers
- Paraprofessional development
- Health and housing organisations
- Information, advice and guidance network activity

The strategy recognises that the voluntary sector is not a homogenous group. In order to reach specific organisations a segmented approach will be developed which attempts to classify and target organisations according to their main purpose, in particular;

- Housing organisations – working in partnership with Birmingham Social Housing Partnership and other networks
- Health organisations – working in partnership with the Health Authority, Primary Care Trusts and Community Health Trusts
- Training suppliers – working in partnership with Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus
- Family related organisation – working in partnership with the Education Department and health organisations
- Organisations targeting members of ethnic communities

- Learndirect – working in partnership with the voluntary sector hub via Peoples Learning Partnership
- Regeneration programmes, working in partnership with the Regeneration Zones, New Deals for Communities, and SRB-funded programmes