

Community Learning in Rural Areas

A report by NIACE for the Department for Business,
Innovation and Skills and the Department for
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

NIACE

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Working for more and different adult learners

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Contents

1. Foreword	5
2. Introduction	6
3. Executive summary and recommendations	7
3.1 Recommendations	7
4. Definitions	10
5. Historic use and current context of funding for community learning	13
6. Special features of rural community learning	15
6.1 Learning about the environment and sustainability	15
6.2 Distance learning	17
6.3 Heritage agencies and national parks	19
6.4 Voluntary sector provision	20
6.5 Voluntary Sector infrastructure support	22
6.6 Higher Education	23
6.7 Private and community provision	24
7. The learners in rural areas	28
7.1 The age profile	28
7.2 Unemployment.....	28
7.3 International migrants.....	28
7.4 Older people	29
7.5 Social class and educational attainment	30
7.6 Adults with learning difficulties and disabilities	31
8. Policy drivers and planning	33
8.1 Rural policy, planning and monitoring	33
8.2 Identifying need.....	33
8.3 Premises	34
8.4 Course viability and costs.....	36
8.5 Transport and travel.....	37
8.6 Childcare.....	37
8.7 Progression	37

8.8 Curriculum offer	38
8.9 ICT and connectivity	40
8.10 Promoting self-organised groups	41
8.11 Publicity and guidance	43
9. The learner view	44
10. Partnerships and planning	45
10.1 Building the learning infrastructure.....	45
10.2 The range of possible partners.....	46
10.3 Partners in planning	46
10.4 Rural Community Councils	47
10.5 Parish, Town and District Councils.....	48
10.6 Partners in delivery	48
10.7 The Voluntary Sector	49
10.8 Private sector provision	50
11. Regulation and Inspection.....	52
11.1 Ofsted	52
11.2 Self-assessment	52
11.3 Gathering wider feedback.....	52
12. Conclusions	53
Appendix 1	55
Record of interviews and literature reviewed.....	55
Appendix 2	56
Defra’s proposed 18 principles of local rural proofing	56
Appendix 3	58
Village profile 1 – Great Easton, Leicestershire	58
Appendix 4	60
Village profile 2 – Frizington, Cumbria	60
Appendix 5	63
Village profile 3 – Manea, Cambridgeshire	63

1. Foreword

Last year NIACE was asked jointly by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to examine and report on the provision of community based learning in rural areas, and the participation by adults in that learning. This report looks at the wide range of community learning available in rural communities, including that funded by Government, by third sector organisations, libraries, local councils as well as by the private sector. It also considers self-organised learning and the growth of learning online.

The Government's Rural Statement was published in September 2012, with this report relating directly to its three priorities of economic growth, rural engagement and quality of life. It highlights issues of access and transport, accessibility, cost and timing, and a lack of systematically organised information of learning opportunities. Other areas of concern are connectivity, guidance and progression opportunities. It suggests that much of this could be addressed by a more systematic and collaborative approach to all adult learning in rural communities, and especially through inter-agency working.

The Community Learning Trust pilots, which will report in the summer of 2013, will offer examples of joined up partnership working and will be central to the development of models of planning, funding, delivery and governance. This report reflects the later recommendations in Lord Heseltine's review, 'No stone unturned in the pursuit of growth', which sees empowered and incentivised local communities as the engine for growth, and sees a central role for Local Economic Partnerships and Chambers of Commerce. NIACE suggests that growth in local rural communities must address the availability, quality and accessibility of learning opportunities, and that publicly funded providers be accountable for the delivery of community learning in rural areas.

NIACE hopes that this report will assist BIS and Defra in developing any ongoing strategy to support community learning in rural areas. We also hope that the inter-Departmental initiative of BIS and Defra in commissioning this report might act as a model for other governmental Departments where community learning touches directly or indirectly on their agendas.



Carol Taylor

Director for Development and Research, NIACE

2. Introduction

This report was jointly commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to examine the provision of, and participation in, community learning in rural areas. It considers the difficulties faced by adults in rural areas who wish to participate in learning, and how that participation can be enabled and improved. The report goes beyond the availability of community learning funded by BIS to encompass the availability of other public, private and voluntarily offered provision. Much of the report is directly relevant to the Government's Rural Statement published in September 2012, and in particular the contribution that community learning can make to the Statement's three priorities of economic growth, rural engagement and quality of life.¹

Importantly, the report bears out the Rural Statement's acknowledgement that 'there can be no magic formula to solving all the challenges faced by rural communities across England' but that the Government is 'working to ensure that rural circumstances are understood in national policy-making; enabling local authorities to deliver services more effectively on the ground; and empowering communities to identify and address their own local priorities' (Rural Statement 2012 p.2).

The aims of this report on community learning in rural areas are to:

- assist BIS and Defra in developing a joint outline strategy for supporting community learning and widening participation in learning in rural communities;
- inform and support developing community learning policy;
- support Defra policy on enhancing rural communities and point to good practice in the rural proofing of government policy;
- contribute to the impact of the Government's Rural Statement;
- widen the evidence base around access to adult learning in rural areas;
- identify and record good practice examples that can be disseminated and replicated.

The report has been undertaken by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent charity which promotes adult learning across England and Wales. Through its research, development, publications, events, outreach and advocacy activity, NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives.

NIACE is immensely grateful to Mick Murray, Sue Meyer and all those interviewed for the project who gave of their time unstintingly and also to those who spared staff time to submit case studies or undertake village profiles. There is a list of participating organisations in Appendix 1.

¹ The Rural Statement can be found at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13814-rural-statement.pdf>

3. Executive summary and recommendations

This project was undertaken to support policy development in relation to adult learning in rural communities and to ensure that the needs of current and potential adult learners in rural areas were properly considered. The methodology involved five strands of activity: more than 40 provider and stakeholder interviews; data evaluation; literature review; case study evidence; and profiles of villages.

The report uses Defra and BIS definitions of rurality, rural proofing and of community learning. It examines the work of a number of Skills Funding Agency² funded providers in meeting the learning needs of rural areas. It examines the role of the voluntary sector, heritage agencies, environmental organisations, private individuals and community members in providing rural learning. It also examines the particular factors that distinguish rural learning.

Consideration is given to the way provision is currently planned, how policy addresses specific rural issues and how needs are identified. There is a focus on how delivery is made and the challenges faced by providers in finding the resources to meet the needs of rural learners. Particular attention is given to how partners in rural provision work together and the areas where collaboration is most successful and most challenging.

3.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented to BIS and Defra for consideration. Their principal aim is to improve the quantum and reach of community learning in rural areas.

Recommendations (1) – Providers and partnership

More learning opportunities in rural communities can be achieved by partnership and collaboration. The collaboration of BIS and Defra in commissioning this report is to be commended, as is the intention by Defra to take account of the rural work of the Community Learning Trust pilots and their roll-out.

The role of the Agency will be critical if these recommendations are to be adopted.

- Rural providers and stakeholders should strive to identify one another and to understand their role in any of the models of planning, funding, delivery, review and governance of community learning. Any future models of Community Learning Trusts could play a central role in this.
- The Agency should encourage publicly funded providers of community learning to consider issues of rurality in the planning and delivery of provision.
- The Agency should encourage BIS-funded providers to develop a public strategy for their work in rural areas which is geared to increasing the quantum of community learning, whether delivered by public, voluntary or private providers.

² Referred to subsequently in this report as *the Agency*

- The Agency should encourage large BIS-funded providers covering significant rural areas to adopt a mothership approach to community learning in rural areas, assisting organisations and individuals not publicly funded to be part of the wider landscape of provision, and offering them access, where feasible, to resources, training and publicity.
- Any future Community Learning Trust models covering rural areas should be encouraged by BIS and the Agency to build on previously successful partnerships and to ensure the inclusion of voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties.
- The Agency should encourage local providers to ensure that rural planning for skills is closely allied to planning for learning for community and personal development to maximise the use of common facilities, equipment and staff expertise.
- The Agency should encourage partnerships to assist in the work of development staff in rural areas, with particular consideration to the involvement of Rural Community Councils in the support and use of such staff.
- In rural areas, the new Community Organisers could be encouraged by *Locality* (the agency responsible for the Community Organisers programme³) to be learning champions, and to liaise with their Community Learning Trust to help facilitate partnership and to formulate rural planning and delivery.

Recommendations (2) - Funding and focus

The research revealed the additional costs of rural delivery, the viability of low group numbers, and the need for better ICT and for better mapping of rural provision.

- Any future redistribution of BIS funding for community learning should consider rurality as one of its metrics.
- Agency funded providers should report on the quantum of community learning in rural areas with minimal reporting requirements (so that a penumbra of private provision can be included and mapped to a limited extent without the burden of full data collection).
- BIS should have clear processes for the rural proofing of its public policies.
- Any future Community Learning Trusts, together with their local providers and interested parties, should consider using the Defra/LGA guidance on Local Level Rural Proofing (see Appendix 2).
- BIS should include rurality in its equality impact measures with corresponding data collection and reporting.
- Publicly funded providers should be encouraged by the Agency to address rural issues in their self-assessment.
- Agency funded providers should be encouraged to cast a wide net for feedback on their planning and delivery of community learning with a view to extending partnership models of working.
- Should funding become available, and in conjunction with the Rural Statement's commitment to improving rural connectivity, the Agency could earmark funding for

³ <http://locality.org.uk/projects/community-organisers/>

applications for small grants to improve rural infrastructure, especially IT (specifically permanent bases, computer availability and connectivity).

- Ofsted inspections should report specifically on partnerships, planning, delivery and impact for rural areas.
- The Rural and Farming Networks might be encouraged to consider the efficacy of Agency funded providers in addressing rurality.

Recommendations (3) - Developing and supporting practice

The research showed new models of delivery are needed in addition to the traditional pattern of the weekly group. Providers need to be supported to be more creative, not merely in their project work but in their mainstream delivery, and these recommendations are intended to help achieve these ambitions. BIS, Defra and the Agency might work together as appropriate on the following.

- BIS and Defra could commission development work on blended learning and ICT-based models of teaching and learning to support rural learning.
- BIS and Defra could explore rural models of planning, community development and delivery of community learning (e.g. rural hub and spoke models of provision).
- BIS and the Agency could issue guidance for rural providers on what will be specifically expected of Community Learning Trusts in rural or partly rural areas.
- BIS and Defra should continue their collaboration on rural community learning and consider ways of extending this collaboration.
- BIS and Defra might commission research on a template for action derived from organisations like Kent Adult Learning and Staffordshire Adult and Community Learning Service on how to work creatively with all manner of providers in rural areas.

Recommendations (4) - Redistribution of funding

There was considerable concern among some providers that any redistribution of community learning funding at a time of contraction and financial stringency could lead to a disproportionate knock-back on rural provision.

- Any future redistribution of BIS funding for community learning should consider rurality as one of its metrics.
- Rural sparsity should form part of any equality impact analysis of redistribution.

4. Definitions

The definition of **Community Learning** (formerly Informal Adult and Community Learning) developed by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is from the government paper ‘New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan, Building a World Class Skills System’ (BIS, December 2011⁴).

“We define Informal Adult and Community Learning as a broad range of learning that brings together adults, often of different ages and backgrounds, to pursue an interest, address a need, acquire a new skill, become healthier or learn how to support their children. This kind of learning, usually unaccredited, is an important part of the wider learning continuum. It can be undertaken for its own sake or as a step towards other learning/training. It covers structured adult education courses taught by professionally qualified teachers, independent study online and self-organised study groups. Some learning will be in very short episodes and some takes place over a term, a year, or longer. It may happen in personal or work time and be delivered by providers in the public, voluntary or private sectors, or organised by people for themselves through the many groups, clubs and societies where people get together to learn.

All sorts of individuals and organisations are actively involved in helping to make informal learning happen. Some people are paid but many others are volunteers. Some organisations are funded by the tax payer and many are not. Lots of local voluntary organisations and community networks deliver and support the informal learning found in libraries, museums, community centres, union learning centres, universities, extended schools, children’s centres, colleges and workplaces.”

The paper also lists the drivers of Community Learning as follows. (It is interesting to see how many of these overlap directly with the drivers of the Government’s Rural Statement of September 2012.)

“Purpose of Government-Supported Community Learning

- *Maximise access to community learning for adults, bringing new opportunities and improving lives, whatever people’s circumstances.*
- *Promote social renewal by bringing local communities together to experience the joy of learning and the pride that comes with achievement.*
- *Maximise the impact of community learning on the social and economic well-being of individuals, families and communities.*

Objectives

Focus public funding on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate, including in rural areas and people on low incomes with low skills.

⁴ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/n/11-1213-new-challenges-new-chances-implementing-further-education-reform>

Collect fee income from people who can afford to pay and use where possible to extend provision to those who cannot.

Widen participation and transform people's destinies by supporting progression relevant to personal circumstances, for example:

- *Improved confidence and willingness to engage in learning;*
- *Acquisition of skills preparing people for training, employment or self-employment;*
- *Improved digital, financial literacy and/or communication skills;*
- *Parents/carers better equipped to support and encourage their children's learning;*
- *Improved/maintained health and/or social well-being.*

Develop stronger communities, with more self-sufficient, connected and pro-active citizens, leading to:

- *Increased volunteering, civic engagement and social integration;*
- *Reduced costs on welfare, health and anti-social behaviour;*
- *Increased online learning and self-organised learning;*
- *The lives of our most troubled families being turned around.*

Commission, deliver and support learning in ways that contribute directly to these objectives, including:

- *Bringing together people from all backgrounds, cultures and income groups, including people who can/cannot afford to pay;*
- *Using effective local partnerships to bring together key providers and relevant local agencies and services;*
- *Devolving planning and accountability to neighbourhood/parish level, with local people involved in decisions about the learning offer;*
- *Involving volunteers and Voluntary and Community Sector groups, shifting long term, 'blocked' classes into learning clubs, growing self-organised learning groups, and encouraging employers to support informal learning in the workplace;*
- *Supporting the wide use of online information and learning resources;*
- *Minimising overheads, bureaucracy & administration."*

This report uses Defra's **definition of rural**. Areas forming settlements with populations of over 10,000 are urban, as defined by ONS urban area boundaries based upon land use. The remainder is defined as rural town and fringe, village or hamlet and dispersed using detailed postcode data. These rural settlement types are defined using population density at different scales. Once identified these are used to characterise census units (such as Output Areas and wards). Rural town and fringe areas tend to be relatively densely populated over an extended area, whereas village and hamlet areas generally have lower population densities and smaller settled areas.

Using this definition, in England, 9.5 million people (19.3% of the population) live in rural areas, compared to 39.7 million (80.7%) in urban areas. Around 760,000 (1.5% of the population) live in sparsely populated areas, the majority of which (c. 600,000 people, or 1.2% of the total English population) live in rural areas.

The definition of *rural* was rarely used by providers in planning their provision although many were aware that it existed and that it was used by some parts of the local authority or institution for planning services.

The **definition of rural proofing** is taken from the Government's Rural Statement (September 2012):

*“Rural Proofing requires policy-makers to consider the rural impacts of their policies and programmes and, where necessary, to make adjustments to achieve equally effective and successful outcomes for individuals, communities and businesses in rural areas. Rural Proofing does **not** require exactly the same outcome or the provision of exactly the same level of service in rural as in urban locations. This would not be practical in many cases, as the costs would be prohibitive, and in any case rural communities do not necessarily expect this. They do, however, rightly expect that all Government policies and programmes should be sufficiently flexible to apply fairly in their areas and to deliver quality services that meet their everyday needs.*

*Defra supports Rural Proofing by providing advice, guidance and support to policy officials across Government, including through published **Rural Proofing guidance** materials. This has been revised and will be published in the autumn of 2012, along with the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit. We have recently published a separate report produced with the Local Government Association and others, which identifies the principles underpinning best practice in **Local Level Rural Proofing**.”⁵*

⁵ The Local Level Rural Proofing is available at: <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=18130> and the report is available at http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=9897_RE0246InterimProjectReportMarch2012-PrinciplesNeedsandExemplars.pdf

5. Historic use and current context of funding for community learning

The majority of community learning providers active in rural areas are local authority adult learning services. There are also some colleges of Further Education (including land based colleges), at least one Rural Community Council, and a small number of consortia of rural secondary schools which are in receipt of funding for community learning activity either directly or through an intermediary. Many local authorities also contract out their services to a range of college and voluntary sector providers. The result of all this is a rich and variegated patchwork of provision across the country.

Statistical analysis of community learning

Analysis of the rural/urban split of state-funded community learning shows that from 2008 to 2011 it has been apportioned overall in line with the rural/urban population. Defra's population breakdown of 19.3% rural, 80.7% urban conforms broadly to overall numbers of learners in BIS-funded community learning.

Percentage of learners in BIS-funded provision in rural/urban areas 2008 to 2011

	2008/9		2009/10		2010/11	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Breakdown for all funding streams combined	19.7%	80.3%	18.8%	81.2%	18.1%	81.9%
Personal and Community Development Learning	21.9%	78.1%	20.8%	79.2%	20.1%	79.9%
Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities	10.6%	89.4%	10.5%	89.5%	10.3%	89.7%
Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy	11.2%	88.8%	11.3%	88.7%	10.1%	89.9%
Wider Family Learning	15.7%	84.3%	15.5%	84.5%	15.3%	84.7%

Source: Defra, 2012, derived from Data Service figures

Whilst there is conformity of the overall percentage of learner numbers to the national split of the rural/urban population, learner numbers in the separate strands of community learning show a wider variation. For the last three years, Personal and Community Development Learning has consistently attracted proportionally slightly more rural learners than might be expected from the overall population. However the same is not true for Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities where only around 10% of learners were rural, nor Wider Family Learning (around 15%), nor Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (around 10%).

Number of learners in BIS-funded provision

	2008/9		2009/10		2010/11	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Personal and Community Development Learning	113,550	404,640	106,010	403,070	104,260	413,760
Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities	3,790	31,880	4,040	34,520	4,410	38,480
Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy	7,080	56,010	7,370	58,050	6,250	55,740
Wider Family Learning	11,220	60,140	10,980	59,800	10,840	60,150
Total for all funding streams combined *	135,640	552,670	128,400	555,440	125,760	568,130

** Totals in this table vary from figures given in the various Statistical First Releases because of the absence or inadequacy of some ILR post code data*

Source: Defra, 2012, derived from Data Service figures

The overall number of rural learners declined by 7% in the last three years. There are variations in the changes to learner numbers across the different strands of community learning in rural areas. Rural learner numbers in Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities rose by 16% from 2008 to 2011, but there were declines in other rural learner numbers over the same period: 8% in Personal and Community Development Learning, 12% in Family Learning Literacy, Language and Numeracy and 3% in Wider Family Learning. These contrast with urban figures over the same period of +2% in PCDL, -2.5% in Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy, and unchanged in Wider Family Learning.

Many respondents reported that they were being forced to withdraw provision from rural locations to more central settlements such as market towns. There was less evening provision in rural areas. There was much reported change in the focus of provision made under the Community Learning (formerly Adult Safeguarded Learning) funding stream. Whereas at one time this funding had been used to procure a large quantum of generally available activities, often with a range of concessions to enable access by the elderly and those in receipt of a wide variety of benefits, it was now employed to target disadvantaged learners. Many providers felt they could no longer take risks by trialing curriculum innovations, and were falling back on safer provision likely to recruit minimum numbers.

In rural areas a reluctance to pay course fees and a consequent reduction in provision was reported, especially since the economic downturn. The issue of fees and fee structures is an important one for rural areas since fee income is such a large contributor to covering the costs of community learning. The recruitment of viable numbers is inextricably tied up with the collection of sufficient fee income. Most providers were finding it hard to finance rural groups because of viability.

6. Special features of rural community learning

6.1 Learning about the environment and sustainability

Learners in rurally based environmental provision are part of the tapestry of educational opportunities in the countryside. In some cases, the countryside or coast is used as a resource for learning, bringing people from the towns into courses in rural areas, widening horizons and developing urban/rural links.

Among those providing such learning opportunities are Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB, Forestry Commission, Field Studies Council, National Trust, the National Parks and the Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Activities range from walks and opportunities to see wildlife to art, photography, traditional crafts and include single sessions, courses, weekends and holiday activities lasting a week and more.

Most organisations also offer programmes for volunteers with built in training and support. However, with the exception of the TCV and the national parks, few of these organisations have a focus on specific target groups in designing their activities, although all are interested in making their opportunities as widely available as possible. This is general rather than targeted provision. There is no systematic way of knowing who exactly takes advantage of these opportunities. Daytime volunteering in conservation anecdotally attracts a wide age range. Interviewees reported that courses attract a rather older group but with many participants in their 40s and 50s, and that participants tend to be well educated, mostly white, and equal numbers of men and women.

Although the focus of these events or programmes is largely rural, many participants will travel from urban centres. In spite of the value of the provision to the sustenance of the rural environment and particularly to environmentally sensitive sites, it is rarely specifically targeted at those actually living in the areas where activity takes place.

The outstanding example of environmental learning is the newly-opened Eco Centre in Derbyshire (described in the case study below). Built jointly by the County Council and the Learning and Skills Council, it is dedicated to rural craft, green building, recycling and conservation. It has a countywide brief, and works closely with the Peak National Park and a host of interested organisations. Whilst it offers some accredited learning, the bulk of its offer is informal learning.

Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service

The Derbyshire Eco Centre

The Derbyshire Eco Centre is the only centre in the country built by an adult community education service to promote sustainability skills anywhere. This inspirational new building demonstrates sustainable building ideas and techniques. It is the county hub for courses and activities focusing on education for sustainable development. It supports Derbyshire County Council's work to address climate change issues. It promotes creativity through the arts, and teaches skills to help conserve the natural world and to live healthy lifestyles.

The centre revenue costs are met from the Service's SFA allocation using a combination of the Adult single skills budget for the accredited provision and the ASL budget for the non-accredited learning. The centre has a flexible charging policy in order to enable it to charge higher fees for popular income generating courses and also enable fees to be kept at accessible levels for targeted work.

The Centre's workshop and site are ideally suited for teaching sustainable building skills, including dry stone walling, to support the rural economy and conserve its heritage. Most of the learners at the Centre are adults who come for a variety and combination of reasons - wanting to acquire new skills for employability, looking for something new after retirement, being committed 'greens', and wanting tips for lower consumption.

Its courses develop technical ability, creativity and decision-making skills in a variety of subjects that link community, environment and economy. Courses include art in the environment, ceramics, computing, construction, coppice crafts, countryside management, creative writing, exploring places, family fun, health in the garden, living more sustainably, natural history, textiles, and woodland management. A central theme of the courses is the transmission of manual crafts as a first step to build confidence and resilience around sustainability.

An Eco Centre Exchange has been set up, enabling the Centre to share its expertise and learn from others who are committed to education for sustainability. The Eco Centre Exchange is a place to share ideas and expertise around learning for sustainability. It forms a link between the Derbyshire Eco Centre and all those people who are involved in promoting sustainability learning. It will be a way to join a wider learning community, attract other educators, experts, groups and innovators to the Eco Centre so that it is well used and is lively and inspiring. It will enable everyone to enjoy the benefits of sharing knowledge and skills, and will work in partnership with people from all sectors of the community.

The Centre is committed to an open-door community policy, and is used independently by community groups and self-organised learning groups. It is well supported by a group of

volunteers. It has links with the Peak National Park 'Live Work Rural' scheme that helps businesses start up, and has a strong partnership with creative industries through the regionally renowned Wirksworth Festival and with arts organisations locally. It works in partnerships with conservation and interpretation projects that promote the natural, built and cultural environment across Derbyshire and it inspires other adult community education centres to have confidence in embedding education for sustainability across the curriculum. www.derbyshire.gov.uk/ecocentre

6.2 Distance learning

It is difficult to assess just how much distance learning contributes to opportunities available to rural communities, since such learning is very largely carried out on an individual basis or through membership of informal communities of interest. However, from the interviews carried out, it was clear that although developing technologies might seem to offer the opportunity to develop distance learning provision or at the very least blended learning, these approaches were rarely used by providers and in the few instances where they were offered, take-up was low. In view of the inadequacies of rural broadband, which were widely reported, this may be understandable but as plans are advanced in many areas for enhanced broadband it clearly is an area for development and new approaches, especially in the light of commitments made in the Rural Statement.

The Community Council for Berkshire

Webinar Training

Significant increases in travel and fuel costs have seen a huge surge in interest in using online technology to access and deliver rural learning opportunities. The Community Council for Berkshire (www.ccberks.org.uk) saw strong demand for improving community access to online services through social media, websites, online meetings and training provision. Upskilling rural communities to take on the future challenges of localism will only grow in importance in the future. Online services are vital to achieving the vision of empowering people to 'do it for themselves'.

The Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) introduced webinars to deliver a range of training courses. Webinars are a truly interactive way to hold classroom-style training in the virtual world. Training on how to access funding, write successful bids and project plans were among the webinar topics covered in 2010 and 2011. The courses were presented by experts in their field who had hands-on experience in the topics they delivered. Funding was provided by West Berkshire Council, for whom CCB deliver a Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) programme.

Last year nearly 200 people undertook webinar training with CCB. Katie Reynolds, who led the project, spoke about the real, tangible benefits of webinars. “Webinars have huge benefits which go beyond their cost effectiveness. You can attend the courses from anywhere, simply needing internet access and a headset to join in. I’ve noticed that learners get to grips quickly with the technology, which is an added training bonus. Some delegates also appear to participate more actively online than they might in a traditional classroom, overcoming shyness and getting more involved. Webinars are a truly exciting, interactive training experience!”

Only a very small number of providers said they used technology and distance learning as part of a solution to the provision of rural learning. Imaginative schemes undertaken by the Isles of Scilly and the Community Council for Berkshire illustrate the potential for development. UK Online has a number of rural centres and initiatives such as the Digital Activist Inclusion Network (DAIN) offer rural interventions as part of their programmes but a true rural focus in such initiatives is relatively rare and there is no gathering together of rural lessons or good practice to aid development.

Project work provides interesting models but, so far as the Agency providers interviewed were concerned, there were few future plans for mainstreaming this kind of activity. However one provider working in the rural south east did identify a need for funding to develop provision that blended tutor led learning with distance learning packages that could be studied either individually or by groups meeting without tutors as a way to enable more and different provision to flourish in isolated communities.

Within voluntary sector provision, the University of the Third Age (U3A) has, as part of its central offer, a small amount of online provision, and U3A members responding to surveys have expressed interest in developing and extending the range of this kind of provision.

Harold Wilson Lifelong Learning Centre

eLearning on the Isles of Scilly

Twenty nine miles from Lands End lie the Isles of Scilly, an archipelago of over 200 islands, five of which are inhabited. The Harold Wilson Lifelong Learning Centre on St Mary’s is the provider of recreational and vocational learning, with 350 learners out of the population of 2,100. People coming into St Mary’s from the other islands are subsidised by the Centre. When local tutors are unavailable, mainland tutors are called in, involving travel and accommodation costs which in turn may drastically increase the cost of the course to the learner.

Lifelong Learning in partnership with independent tutors and Plymouth Adult Learning Service have used e-learning to deliver Spanish and French language courses. A group of

learners gather in the main learning room, while the tutor teaches from the mainland using a wide screen television equipped with Skype, and an HD Webcam with an omnidirectional microphone. These give a clear image and good sound to make the learners and tutor comfortable, as if they were in a normal face-to-face class environment.

Learning takes place through a SmartBoard and a software package called 'TeamViewer' which enables the tutor to remotely control the computer connected to the SmartBoard. This enables the tutor to control the activities as if they were in the room. Learners use the touch sensitive board to complete activities and the tutor can see what the learners are inputting even though they could be hundreds of miles away. All learning resources for the e-learning courses are added to the service's Moodle so that learners can access them later to provide ongoing support throughout the course.

The service sees this as the way forward for learning on the islands and hopes to roll it out to some of the less populated islands. Through the partnership with Plymouth Adult Learning Service as well as other providers and using independent tutors, the service will be able to offer a plethora of courses and opportunities to its remote island community.

"The service also has a weekly radio show on Radio Scilly that we hope will aid us as we increase our learning provision, helping us in capturing every islander, across all our islands."

6.3 Heritage agencies and national parks

Along with environmental provision, heritage organisations are involved in the provision of adult learning in their rural estates. Although English Heritage and the National Trust differ widely in their funding arrangements (the latter being entirely independent of Government) they both consider education to be at the heart of their activities. For them, the key learning location is the site itself. Learning ranges from a general visit to in-depth access to archives and materials. English Heritage has a focus on group visits and on family learning. The National Trust uses the visit as the primary focus for learning while being absolutely clear that the role of the Trust is as an enabler not a provider of learning. Both heritage organisations have partnerships and arrangements with statutory and voluntary learning providers and organisations.

Both the major heritage organisations have large volunteer programmes with training and development for volunteers. Significant numbers are involved – the National Trust has 65,000 volunteers. However, as with visitors, there are no figures on rural/urban involvement. As with environmental education, heritage provision is largely blind to rural/urban distinctions. However, the National Trust has a developing policy of establishing mutual and interdependent relationships with the local communities and local areas around their sites which might have increasing value for the communities concerned.

National parks run a wide variety of community learning opportunities. By way of example, the North York Moors National Park runs courses such as a flora and fauna walk, archeological walks, geological walks, '60 Things to See and Do when on a Walk', studying the 12th century planned village and its landscape, the history of the alum and jet miners.

Family learning events include making willow creatures, coastal art, geocaching, stream dipping, bushcraft, a journey to a medieval market. It has partnerships with GP practices for walking on prescription, using the Park as a wonderful natural resource. This impressive array of community learning is typical of all the national parks. Partnership working between the national parks with other main providers could be encouraged by the work of the Community Learning Trusts.

6.4 Voluntary sector provision

This section deals with voluntary sector provision in rural settlements where the organisation is not run by the community itself (although community members may be involved in the organisation) but has an overarching structure – either national or local. It also excludes those organisations involved in heritage and environmental action as these are dealt with elsewhere.

The **National Federation of Women's Institutes** (WI) was set up specifically to provide education and social engagement for rural women. Branches exist in most villages of a reasonable size and offer a number of educational opportunities to their members. Across the UK there are 210,000 women in membership, with the vast majority living in rural areas. Central to the life of the WI is the monthly meeting, which involves a speaker and a formal meeting. Other educational possibilities are offered through involvement in the County Federation's activities and events organised between Institutes, and nationally organised Federations and Branches have a large degree of autonomy, so there are differences in what is provided from community to community. Training for chairmanship, trusteeship, financial management and public speaking is offered both by Federations and through the Moodle set up by the national WI office. There is a cadre of volunteer champions offering high level training to members in rural/domestic skills. The WI also runs its own Denman College, offering a wide range of residential and day classes, mostly craft, cookery and lifestyle. Courses are open to all, but WI members pay a discounted rate. Fees are largely in line with those charged by other adult residential colleges in England and Wales. The college is not BIS funded.

The local **University of the Third Age** (U3A), operate independently under the broad aegis of The Third Age Trust. U3As are local self-help organisations focused on educational activities mainly for retired adults, although they are expanding their reach across communities. They are growing at a considerable rate (around 10% per annum) and have a presence in most market towns, drawing from a rural catchment area as well as the towns themselves. Branches are independent so vary in the way they are organised. Some groups are held in rural areas because premises are available or to suit the needs of members. Their provision has a number of likely characteristics:

- at least 90% of provision is during the daytime;
- the average meeting regularity is probably once a fortnight but is at members' convenience;
- the group is considered to be a collective learning endeavour rather than a class although there may be an expert leader;
- much provision is held in members' own homes;
- the "offer" depends on members' interests and may range from ancient Greek to Scrabble.

U3A members tend to have achieved a good standard of education and many are graduates. The Third Age Trust reported that the median age is probably between 70 and 75, with little difference in the ages of rural and urban members. U3A group leaders are not paid. Much of what is offered reflects what used to be widely available from local authority services. In a few areas there is co-operation between other providers and U3A, but this is quite rare and U3A members and branches guard their independence fiercely.

In addition to organisations with a specific educational focus and remit, a wide variety of voluntary organisations support rural adults and provide informal learning opportunities as part of their work. One example was **MIND**, where people with mental health issues in rural areas are often encouraged to travel to support groups in market towns or larger settlements, and their carers are also encouraged to network and support each other. In this connection, those interviewed described both IT networks and a gardening group with a progression route to the local horticultural college, and with some supported travel for those in rural locations. **AgeUK** offers, through its 150 local AgeUK branches, two main strands of learning. First, there is digital learning with the emphasis on inclusion. AgeUK ran a 'Reach for IT' programme in five care homes. Second is health: 'Fit as a Fiddle' ran for four years with Lottery funding which has now ceased. Neither of these programmes was BIS-funded, and there seems to have been no liaison with other providers.

In terms of the impact of non-accredited provision on rural skills development, the **National Farmers' Union** was aware of the challenges for farmers and their families in coming to terms with the IT and other soft skills issues in an increasingly complex and diversifying industry. Most learning programmes for farmers were accessed via the LANTRA⁶ course signposting service and were delivered by FE colleges and training providers. Some, but not all, of these courses would attract Agency funding but not from its Community Learning budget. Pentalk in rural Cumbria was a network set up after the foot and mouth epidemic; developing IT skills for the farming community was the central function but around it had grown an information exchange about local and rural issues.

Adult and Community Learning Fund Project

Jack Drum Arts, Weardale in County Durham

The project is a joint one between an arts organisation, a college, a school and a museum. The overall aim is to excite the local community about adult learning through arts engagement around heritage, linking themes of participation, creativity and local pride. County Durham is the most deprived rural shire in the country.

Jack Drum Arts has been running after school performing arts and media activities for children and young people across the wider Durham Dales for several years, noting the curiosity and enthusiasm of parents and carers when picking up and dropping off children. Many stay to watch, and as they become familiar with the workers they begin to talk about their own lives and potential interests.

⁶ The Sector Skills Council for people and businesses in the land-based and environmental sector

“We know from our involvement in a two year pilot arts and well-being programme there is a significant unmet need for ‘feel-good’ activities for local residents living in rural isolation, prone to mental health problems. The project involves co-operative creative learning, supporting personal development through increased confidence and skills-building, improving mental health and well-being through learning in a social environment, digital inclusion through a media strand, democratic engagement through collective action, social cohesion and stronger families through shared fun and achievement. The project will impact on all stakeholders through a re-awakening of latent interest in the heritage of the locality. Learners will not only learn about the history and geography of where they live but they will do so through the acquisition and exercise of transferable creative skills (creative writing, art and design, performing arts, music, digital media) which will enhance their employability and improve their mental health and well-being. The community will benefit from an increase in capacity and local knowledge as well as from a collective sense of pride. Education providers will reconnect with each other and with potential learners eager to do more.

“Our Community Play is an innovative way of offering a wide range of people equal access to a variety of informal creative adult learning opportunities. The creation of a special play about a special place offers opportunities for learners to do something new as part of a collective effort to tell the story of their place. The project will provide opportunities for engagement in media and performing arts designed to facilitate the making of a community celebration, with live performances, accompanying exhibition and publication. The project models the learning habits of the self-taught leadminers whose story we will tell.”

6.5 Voluntary Sector infrastructure support

Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is the umbrella organisation for 37 Rural Community Councils/Rural Community Action Networks. These are charitable local development agencies, generally based at county level, which support and enable initiatives in rural communities, mostly around rural capacity building, the support of the rural voluntary sector and the engagement of rural communities in planning and running their futures. As part of this study a number of Community Councils/Rural Community Action Networks (RCANs) were interviewed about the learning that they manage and deliver. These interviews revealed a rich strand of activity.

Community Council for Berkshire

Family Learning: Cookery Training

Six family learning cookery courses were delivered by Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) in 2011 as part of an Informal Adult and Community Learning contract with West Berkshire Council. The training was funded by West Berkshire Council, Greenham Common Trust and the West Berkshire Partnership.

The 'Tastes of the Seasons' courses taught fathers and their children aged between 7 and 11 how to cook simple dishes using local, seasonal produce. Guest chefs from local pubs and restaurants offered their time and energy to inspire the families to increase their skills and to enjoy cooking from scratch. Each course ran over 5 or 6 weeks on consecutive Saturdays at local schools.

In rural areas, access to training and development activities can be limited. This training was delivered on an outreach basis, with suitable venues chosen in rural or urban fringe locations, enabling people from rural communities to access the training without having to travel far. Learners, especially the younger people, were more relaxed learning in familiar surroundings within their own communities. Although the training was open to all, publicity was targeted in an effort to recruit learners for whom the training would have most impact. Learner recruitment was supported by local youth clubs, neighbourhood wardens and extended schools, all of whom were able to encourage those who would benefit most to sign up.

The health benefits and economic benefits of home cooking using high quality, fresh ingredients are widely known. These training courses were able to add in some powerful social benefits too, by providing a safe and structured environment in which parents and children could spend time together learning a new skill that the wider family would also benefit from.

All of the 43 adults who attended the training said that spending time learning with their children was enjoyable and informative. Many commented that they would love to do more activities on a Saturday with their children, including more cookery classes.

Engagement in learning activity varied widely but all RCAN members deliver capacity building for voluntary organisations, including governance training, financial management etc., and are also involved in training for and development of community planning. Most provision is centred on group learning about civic engagement and RCAN members also deliver training for parish councillors and clerks on behalf of the National Association of Local Councils. Funding comes from a patchwork of sources, but only one of the RCAN members interviewed reported receiving Skills Funding Agency funding for some of this work and also for family learning programmes under contract from their local authority.

These bodies have a focus on rural deprivation and a very clear and detailed knowledge of their rural environment. Whilst they are not experts on the full range of adult learning delivery, they provide support and advocacy on rural issues and at least one reported supporting private tutors through continuing professional development. Very few Agency-funded providers mentioned work with their local RCAN and in some areas local authority provision appeared to be doing some similar work. There is clearly crossover here and connections between these two kinds of bodies might well increase the quantum of learning for rural learners and the support available to community based providers of all kinds.

6.6 Higher Education

Information was sought from the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) and all providers interviewed about higher education provision in rural areas. Although there

had been a history of university extra-mural activity in many places, only one provider, in Sussex, was aware of university provision in their catchment area and this was to finish during the current year due to retrenchment. There appeared to be little other evidence of specifically rural opportunities offered by Higher Education providers.

6.7 Private and community provision

The role of private provision and informal learning developed within communities themselves is one of the least understood areas of adult learning. The study sought to understand the relationship between such provision and that funded by the Agency and voluntary sector organisations, and to see whether these activities grew up in rural communities generally or only in more privileged areas, and which of the residents of rural areas they served.

The three village profiles undertaken provided an important insight into local provision and practice that is often hidden from the sight of providers who necessarily operate over a wider area. The profiles are attached to this report as Appendices 3, 4 and 5. It is notable that the village with most services in terms of schools, shops and pubs has the least to offer in the way of learning and that the smallest village offers so much. The most striking feature of all the provision is the age of the participants. Community organised groups clearly offer company, stimulation and education to relatively large numbers of older people at a reasonable cost. However, many of these groups have been in existence for a lengthy period and there is little reported sign of new groups being established by those in middle age living in the villages at present.

The groups were largely organised by better educated members of the community but were inclusive in terms of membership. The role of incomers is important. The groups in Great Easton were organised almost exclusively by incomers, although these were from the first wave of new development in the village. It is important not to generalise from so small a sample but there did seem to be a relationship between villages that had expanded and had relatively high proportions of private housing and increased activity. It was interesting that the decline of the WEA and local authority adult learning activity in Frizington did not appear to have resulted in activity by residents to fill the gaps, whereas, in places where there had never been provision, it did seem that people had developed their own provision. Manea was the village with the most recent significant range of newcomers and also seemed to have the range of activities with the greatest appeal to the young.

Interviews with providers suggested that knowledge about private and even voluntary sector provision was very patchy and fragmented. Those providers who knew most about such provision fell into two categories:

- those with bases in specific localities where staff working in areas or from area bases were said to have some knowledge of such provision;
- and, more rarely, those who had a defined policy of regarding such provision as a contributor to the overall adult learning offer and where opportunities were publicised and to an extent included in planning.

Kent Adult Education

Working in Partnership

Kent Adult Education has worked with many different partner organisations as a fundamental part of its adult learning strategy, in order to maximise opportunities and outcomes for customers wherever they live or work. Working together enables a broad range of courses to be available in terms of location, content, cost and charges providing critical flexibility in a constantly changing environment. This strategy is ideal for meeting the needs of rural communities who may otherwise find themselves distanced from learning centres.

Kent Adult Education manages backroom services, as well as providing some of the courses, for the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities initiative in the part of Kent which includes the only sparsely populated rural area (2008 Defra definition) in the South East. The partnership includes community-based learning providers and other organisations operating within this area, which contribute specific, up-to-the-minute local information and understanding to shape and deliver a highly responsive learning offer which is relevant to local needs. Courses such as first aid, food hygiene, manual handling, and health and social care link up with interests arising from other local initiatives whether directly related to learning and employment or to broader community activity and take advantage of venues – faith buildings, schools, shops fronts - used for a range of other purposes.

Kent Adult Education provides electronic, phone and paper-based marketing, enrolment and management information facilities ensuring that the initiative meets Skills Funding Agency requirements. 200+ learners have already benefited during the academic year 2011-12.

Kent Adult Education also works with specialist delivery partners across a broader programme of adult learning throughout Kent where learners pay the full cost of their courses. A wide range of opportunities offered by experts using dedicated facilities are promoted alongside directly provided courses and KAE manages recruitment, enrolment and payment as an agent. 36 partners are working with KAE at present leading to 763 additional enrolments between September 2011 and January 2012. The range on offer is wide – from Bee-keeping to Upholstery – and is delivered by large and smaller “niche” providers sharing indirect costs with KAE.

In most instances, while local staff or local contractors may have known about community-based provision of this kind, at the level of a county or a large institution, knowledge was general at best. However a number of common threads emerged.

- Much provision run privately by individuals in rural communities is being delivered by ex-adult learning service staff who saw an opportunity to use their skills and expertise to organise local provision that might not have been considered viable as part of a wider corporate offer.

- Privately run provision seems to flourish in particular subject areas such as arts and crafts, health and fitness, yoga and dance.
- Such provision is often seen as hard to map and the information gathered may be short-lived and unpredictable.

Special mention should be made of the use of libraries for adult learning. Where adult learning services and libraries were under a single local authority umbrella there was very significant use of library premises for adult learning – this tended to be in market towns but libraries were also sometimes available in larger villages. Library use was much less often reported where services operated independently of one another.

Some providers were using mobile provision as an answer to the difficulties of delivery in rural areas. However, budgetary pressures were bearing heavily on the use of buses and vans, and much of this method of provision has been discontinued.

Worcestershire Local Authority

Comput@bus

The Comput@bus project started in 2002 with ESF funding; a need had been identified to engage Worcestershire's rural communities who were identified as being digitally excluded due to the lack of Internet access. A mobile learning centre was identified as the best method of engaging with these communities.

The Comput@bus was equipped with 8 desktop computers, printer, scanner and internet access via a satellite connection allowing internet access almost anywhere in the county.

Although internet access has improved since 2002, fast Broadband access is still a major issue. There are currently two tutor drivers who deliver courses on the Comput@bus from beginners to improvers leading to qualifications through OCR or NOCN.

Advertising through the Libraries and Learning prospectus and local media promote the ICT courses. Take up is varied from area to area with most learners being retired and wanting to develop existing skills or learn new ICT skills; internet and email are always very popular. A book bar has been added to enable learners to borrow books and this is done through the normal library system with learners being able to borrow books for up to three weeks although they can be returned to any library within the county.

The Comput@bus is also used to support partner organisations by providing them access to the bus and also access to mobile internet or to promote other services and courses. They regularly work with the NHS, St Richards Hospice, Trading Standards, children's centres, Vale of Evesham Area of Highest Need project, MIRA Project (Migrant Workers) and the WI.

The Comput@bus blog is: <http://www.computabus.blogspot.co.uk/>

A major feature of all interviews was the tendency to withdraw to main centres in the interests of economy. There has also been a gradual shift in the times of day of provision. All providers reported that at least half of their community learning was taking place during the day and in many cases, and especially when targeted work was concerned, this was as high as 90%. When retrenchment to towns took place, provision was seen as fitting with the natural travel patterns of rural dwellers who have to travel to hubs for shopping, health care and access to services. Even though provision was planned to dovetail with travel, it was accepted that there would be a reduction in opportunities for learning for those who were unable or less willing to travel.

7. The learners in rural areas

As indicated earlier, it is an underlying principle of BIS funding of Community Learning that public money should benefit most those who have benefited least from earlier educational opportunities. However deprivation in rural communities is both harder to define and to provide for than in urban communities. Post-code analysis by Output Areas or by Super Output Areas is often inadequate in identifying deprivation in small communities. It follows then that the identification of deprivation is necessarily down to local knowledge coupled with the ability to make this knowledge available to those local agencies responsible for the planning and delivery of provision. All these characteristics highlight the need for active knowledge exchange between the providers of rural services.

7.1 The age profile

Providers interviewed were asked about the age profile of those learning in rural areas. All those interviewed, whether from colleges or local authorities, believed that rural learners tended to be older, though there was some variety in response. In some local authorities it was felt that rural learners were only slightly older but in one authority where figures were readily available: 51% of people in rural community learning were over 60. In the village profiles, older people made up the vast majority of participants, especially where the opportunities were community-organised and community-run.

7.2 Unemployment

A number of providers interviewed were delivering targeted provision related to employability. All providers were aware of the challenges in reaching those without work and those with poor prospects and low skills in rural areas. Where providers had Community Learning funding specifically focused on work with unemployed adults, it tended to take place in larger settlements such as market towns; it was daytime provision and was free of charge. Recruitment was through a combination of local advertising, referrals from agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, children's centres and local voluntary organisations working with target groups. The work relied heavily on the development work carried out by the provider's own staff.

Anecdotally, learners tended to progress within the provider's own offer and that of partners before being ready to take the steps to more formal college based learning. To take account of the rural hinterland served by this provision, start and end times were set around school pick-up times, and in some cases contributions were made to transport costs. Substantial educational progression meant travel to more distant providers in many cases, although there was also progression into voluntary work (often with partner organisations).

7.3 International migrants

Some agricultural sectors are dependent on international migrant labour. It is estimated that in second stage food processing some 90% of the work force supplied by labour

providers is made up by non-UK migrant workers⁷ and there is an increasing presence of migrants in service industries in rural communities. Many migrants are under-employed in terms of their skills and qualifications and have been part of a rising demand for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision (which is not funded through the Community Learning stream). In this study, those interviewed were asked whether adults from migrant communities were taking advantage of community learning provision in the rural areas where they were working. Providers reported that this form of learning did not attract people from these communities and the numbers involved were insignificant. Where rural migrants were involved in education and training it was likely to be in provision funded through the skills funding stream.

7.4 Older people

As discussed in the section on age profile, learners in Agency-funded community learning tended to be older than learners in more urban areas. Village profiles and evidence gathered from the Women's Institute (WI) all suggest that those who actually learn in small communities tend to be either near or past retirement age. It was not possible in this study to establish whether older people learn more often (national evidence suggests engagement in learning declines with age), or whether younger adults tend to travel out of rural villages to do their learning and if so why this is the case.

However, it was clear that this kind of learning formed a valuable social hub for the older people involved, whether the learning took place at an Agency-funded class, a WI run group or a community run group. Learning in rural areas is a service very much used by older people who might not have the opportunity to learn elsewhere. For those in the U3A, who by definition are older, the need and desire to learn is sufficient to produce the considerable effort involved in running self-help groups and many of the people organising community activities are of the same age profile. Older people are fundamental to the life and viability of community based provision organised on a self-help basis.

Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A) is a social enterprise working with 16 care homes in Leicestershire, Sheffield and Leeds, three of which are rural. It recruits, trains and supports volunteers who go into care homes to deliver informal learning – this can range from playing an instrument to holding a conversation about the news. The biggest problem for the rural homes is finding local volunteers. This may be because of the subject area, or because of the costs of transport. If the economy worsens, it is the rural provision which will be first in line for cuts because of the higher costs of provision. L4A felt strongly that more could be done by commissioning authorities to promote and support informal learning activities in care homes in order to strengthen and improve the quality of life, health and wellbeing of elderly people in care.

⁷ Defra The Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 p 3-138
<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/rdpe/progdoc/chapter3.pdf>

Adult and Community Learning Fund project

Oxfordshire Adult Learning Service Dementia Project

There are about 7000 people aged over 65 with dementia in Oxfordshire, a total expected to rise by 20% in the next five years. Many of these people live in isolated rural areas, dependant on unpaid carers with limited access to services. This project aims to enhance the capacity of communities in these areas to support members living with dementia and those who care for them. The project will set up a small network of sustainable community learning groups in rural areas of Oxfordshire to learn about dementia and dementia care. These groups, facilitated by adult education practitioners but led by local people, will access the expertise of statutory, voluntary and private organisations to develop practical ways to support dementia care within the local community, building local capacity and self-reliance. In this way, the project will deliver transferable community learning and development skills to local people and organisations, including learning for all partners in Social Return on Investment methodology.

For individuals, the project aims to create a rich mix of learning opportunities, including volunteering opportunities. For education providers, the project aims to develop a sustainable approach to community learning. For other service providers, it offers a new way to explore local communities' needs and aspirations. This project has a close fit with the Oxfordshire Dementia Plan and the Oxfordshire Carers Strategy. Both prioritise support for carers, linked to concerns over access to services. The project adds an educational component to the Government's Big Society concept by developing an approach to community learning that enables community members to take an active and sustainable role in identifying and meeting their own needs. It increases the capacity of small communities to support members with dementia. It brings together providers of health and social care, adult education and rural services.

7.5 Social class and educational attainment

Gathering information on social class and educational levels is not easy in provision not funded by the Agency. However, a clear aim of the Community Learning reforms is to focus public spending on those most in need, who derived the least from the education system and who are furthest away from learning.

The U3A was very clear that, although there were obviously many exceptions, the bulk of its members were not new to learning and, indeed, were most usually well-educated enthusiasts. Heritage organisations stated that many of their volunteers were retired and from the well-educated middle class although there were many exceptions to this

stereotype. In Agency-funded provision the learner profile was more mixed, with some activities attracting more new learners than others and targeted provision providing many new learners. For some voluntary organisations, provision was heavily targeted to specific client groups who might also be new to learning. Family Learning too was often able to access those unfamiliar with education as adults, and to ensure a mixed offer, appealing to a wide group of participants. In this respect, the most interesting provision was probably that organised by people living within communities themselves, and particularly that provision which was very close to the education/leisure divide where a wider social mix was described by organisers.

7.6 Adults with learning difficulties and disabilities

For many providers, provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities is a priority within the Community Learning funding stream. In some cases the needs of rural learners demanded transport to provision which tended to take place in larger settlements. The difficulties of gathering viable groups of learners in smaller communities meant that this provision tended to actually take place in market towns.

Adult and Community Learning Fund project

Copeland Occupational Services Centre in Cumbria

Copeland Occupational Services Centre (COSC) is an activity centre for people with physical disabilities in rural West Cumbria offering support, advice and information to others wanting to access learning opportunities and activities in the area.

The project has three main aims. i) To increase the learner voice from learners with physical disabilities (a group often excluded and under-represented in mainstream services) by increasing awareness of local opportunities and support to overcome barriers. ii) To build on the success of the Community Learning Champions programme by training volunteers living with physical disabilities to be able to support and encourage others in similar situations, especially those people having to come to terms with a newly acquired disability. And iii) to encourage learners with physical disabilities to develop a progression pathway which will assist them in becoming more actively involved in their local communities and beyond, and to gain independence and realise their own potential. The project will encourage participants to become more self-reliant and have more say in how provision can be made more accessible to people with physical disabilities.

Progression pathways for people with disabilities have been difficult to establish. This project will develop a targeted group of learners to become champions to support others in similar situations, and advocates in the design, planning and delivery of services and learning opportunities accessible to people with physical disabilities living in deprived areas in west Cumbria.

8. Policy drivers and planning

8.1 Rural policy, planning and monitoring

All the providers interviewed for this study had significant rural areas in their catchment area, but only two had any specific policy for rural engagement. This did not, however, mean that rural areas were not considered or that there was no focus on rural delivery. Many providers considered their whole catchment area as rural and all of their planning was based on being organised to work with the grain of rural living. For other providers and services, specific delivery strategies had been devised for rural areas and these were differentiated where settlements were seen as deprived.

Taking part in the study itself highlighted this issue for providers and a number felt that they would need to be more structured in their approach to rural areas in the future and in designing and developing their delivery models. This will become increasingly relevant as funding becomes more targeted. It was, however, significant that there were no formal local policies and thus no specific targets and measures to evaluate the efficacy of rural provision. The lack of such targets or measures meant that much information was anecdotal, clear measurement of trends was hard to obtain and it was hard to measure providers' effectiveness in delivering to rural agendas. In at least one county, there were clear numerical targets for targeted work but as the focus for the funding was on disadvantage and on specific client groups, disaggregating the data on rural participation was very challenging.

A small number of local authority services did have data on rural delivery and participation but these were very much in the minority. Deprivation data, not specified, was generally used to inform targeting and this did not often focus on the most rural parts of providers' catchment areas. However, interviewees reported that development staff were often described as being well aware of rural areas where deprivation, isolation and accessibility were a problem and were committed to focusing on these areas in their work. Clearly this is not necessarily a systematic approach, and can leave gaps in knowledge where staff move on or are withdrawn.

8.2 Identifying need

Providers varied in the ways that they assessed need in their rural areas. For targeted provision the most common ways were through discussion with learners, referral agencies and voluntary sector organisations working with the specific client groups being targeted. Sometimes these organisations were the local authority's own contractors. For fee paying provision, conversations with learners, waiting lists, tutor availability and historical patterns of provision were rather more prominent. Some services made use of surveys of both learners and non-learners and liaised with other council departments on issues where need had been identified. A number had curriculum staff who worked with development and frontline staff to arrive at a curriculum for the rural areas. In a number of cases providers mentioned working around what was already on offer from private providers, WEA etc., but this was by no means universal.

In one county, feedback was obtained from a centralised guidance and information service which informed planning as well as helping rural learners identify where they could find suitable provision.

In discussing the planning and location of provision and the desirability of planning with others, a number of respondents mentioned the useful role that the now mostly defunct PCDL partnerships had played in this process.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Adult Education Service

The East Riding is one of the biggest unitary authorities in England covering a large rural area of 930 square miles. 100,000 of its residents (almost a third) live in parishes of less than 3,000 people. 42.5% of the rural population do not have access to an internet-enabled PC (Defra Survey 2009). Transport costs in rural areas are estimated to be three times higher than in urban areas, and incomes 60% of those in urban areas.

The Council has a strong Single Equality Scheme, one element of which is rural proofing, and the adult education service's priorities include addressing economic disadvantage, rural isolation and digital inclusion. The service works with council departments to support and add value to existing priorities and also in each community, with councillors, local partners and the voluntary sector to help support and develop learning that reflects the needs and desires of each community.

Informal learning is not seen as standalone but as an integral part of the overall learning offer progressing learners from informal to formal learning where appropriate. It has been vital in helping to address digital exclusion issues, primarily with the older population and has offered them opportunities to use the internet as a way of breaking out from isolation.

The service's community learning has always aimed to support, develop and unite communities, engage the rurally isolated, and provide a vehicle to bring a range of people together with the common aim of learning and development.

8.3 Premises

Adult learning activity in villages takes place almost exclusively in premises that are not purpose built for learning. Only one provider owned learning centres in rural locations and even these were buildings that had been designed for other purposes. Most activity took place either in partners' premises (particularly common in work that was contracted out or in targeted work where third sector premises were familiar to the target groups) or in community premises (a wide range of buildings are being used, including village and church halls, churches, pubs, children's centres and schools).

Where private provision is concerned, community venues are often used but so are the premises of tutors and group leaders, including private homes.

Providers were aware of developments in relation to community premises such as the establishment of community shops and pubs but had not developed particular relationships with these premises, although it was clear that, should they provide adequate accommodation for learning, they would be considered as good venues for learning and good places to advertise local learning opportunities.

A number of issues arose in the use of premises, including the need for disabled access, health and safety considerations, the transport of necessary equipment, heating, lighting and inevitably connectivity where ICT was to be used. Providers felt that the standard of community premises was rising due to the requirements of all hirers. One local authority was itself supporting improvements through a small grants programme for premises being used for learning. Staffordshire County Council had a discrete budget for granting sums of up to £1,000 to self-organised rural learning groups to help pay for the cost of premises. Interestingly this same council's adult learning service supported 140 self-organised learning groups (about 2,000 students) and produced a termly newsletter for these groups which was posted on the web.

For the vast majority of those interviewed, delivering in really rural locations involved a degree of pragmatism; there was a stark choice between less than ideal venues or no provision, and most providers were able to find workable compromises that enabled delivery to rural learners where premises were concerned. One provider told of the short shrift given to an Ofsted inspector by a class of adults learning in coats because of the cold when he suggested the venue was inappropriate! However, the cost of rural venues (particularly upgraded village halls) is rising and in a static budget this, together with the cost of tutor transport, was forcing many providers to consider retrenchment. Some providers also mentioned the pressure on village halls that often had many hirers during a week.

Herefordshire Community Learning and Employability Service

Marches Access Project, Kington

Since it came into being in April 2007 the Marches Access Point (MAP) has become an established community learning centre meeting the learning needs of Kington, a small market town on the Welsh borders. Access to adult learning opportunities in this very rural area is problematic due to its remoteness. The County Council's Community Learning and Employability team has been a key supporter of MAP, providing funding for it to meet local needs, especially of the Council's priority target groups. It has made capital funding available to support its ICT and other resources, revenue funding for a range of learning activities, and funding to develop staff and volunteers to meet the work force reform requirements. It has spent significant time helping to develop MAP's capacity as an organisation to deliver quality learning opportunities.

The support that has been put in by the Council has led to the organisation becoming an accredited City & Guilds and OCR centre, developing its quality processes and enabling it to access other funding in order to undertake outreach in disadvantaged communities surrounding the town and deliver learning in community buildings in rural areas; an example of this was helping two farmers learn skills needed to complete VAT forms online and also to submit cattle numbers.

The Council's learning service also puts on community courses delivered to an expressed demand, and where access to one of the market town providers is not within easy reach; this mainly tends to be ICT in local villages where a local 'champion' has identified a cohort of learners of sufficient numbers. This locally identified need is picked up in the process, and the Council's Parish Liaison and Rural Services officer advises MAP of this need.

Additionally in rural areas the learning service contracts another organisation which has county wide coverage to deliver to its primary target group through a foundation learning model within Community Learning. This organisation delivers in community venues, which might include village halls and schools,

In respect of older people, there is close collaboration with Age Concern which has centres in the market towns where they engage, recruit and deliver learning programmes to the older learners.

8.4 Course viability and costs

The major problem in securing viable courses and groups in rural areas was related to population sparsity. All those interviewed made the point that while it was relatively easy to recruit a group of fifteen learners even in difficult urban areas, in rural villages it was practically impossible. Rural groups had to operate with much lower numbers, making them both expensive and also, in some cases, less satisfactory as learning experiences. Some providers gave leeway to rural groups, allowing numbers to be lower and in one case there was both an allowance for lower numbers and a reduced fee for groups seen as operating in isolated and deprived locations with poor access to services. However, the expense of rural groups meant that they were always a likely target for cuts, and when providers were asked how rural provision could be improved, they almost universally asked for a rural uplift to help deal with this issue. Groups providing sufficient fee income for real viability were a rarity.

Travel was difficult for both learners and tutors in winter, meaning cancellations and discontinuity in the learner experience.

The lack of fee income was not the only threat to the viability of rural groups. Tutors were less and less willing to travel long distances to work, even if their travel was paid. If the time taken to travel was not paid, a two hour class could be taking four hours of tutor time. Providers were finding travel costs for tutors to be a heavy additional burden for rural provision. Administrative staff travel and time costs added to the problem, as did the costs of visits by programme managers and quality control staff.

For private providers and those providing in their own communities these issues seemed less of a problem; tutors chose where they would provide and the fees they would charge, and seemed willing to accept low numbers on occasion. Although seen as short lived by Agency-funded providers, many of the private groups we found in profiling had been in operation for a number of years.

8.5 Transport and travel

Transport is well recognised as a problem for people in rural areas. In the interviews with providers, the default position was that public transport was so poor that it was impossible to plan educational opportunities around it. However, providers did report that they timed provision in market towns and larger settlements to fit with available transport by avoiding early morning starts and making sure provision finished to allow children to be collected from school.

Essentially, except where provision is in a village location, use of a car is a prerequisite for taking part in education. However, many providers made the point that this is so much the pattern for rural dwellers in accessing services that they have developed strategies to deal with it, and access was not seen as an insurmountable barrier for most learners. Heritage and environmental agencies stated that all those attending their activity used cars to access it and people travelled from village to village by car to attend private provision.

Some providers were making an active effort to encourage car sharing and in targeted provision sharing lifts was commonplace. Some providers, notably the WEA, were able to offer learner support funding for those learners who found it hard to access provision because of transport costs but where there was support funding for travel, it tended to be for targeted provision only. A number of providers mentioned that the rapid increase in fuel costs had led some learners to drop out; learning was seen as a luxury that could not be justified in difficult times.

8.6 Childcare

Childcare was only likely to be provided for targeted provision and then rarely in rural areas, though where provision was in a hub there might be a crèche shared by all activities. Family learning or learning based in children's centres was the only type of provision where childcare was commonplace.

8.7 Progression

Almost all providers reported some difficulties with enabling learner progression in rural areas. In some targeted and family learning provision, learners were likely to progress within the provider's own programme or that of voluntary sector partners. At the point where progression from these supportive environments was the next step, travel and the lack of flexibility of larger providers were reported as insuperable barriers to some learners. Progression into work was seen as difficult in the current climate, and again travel and less flexible timings made it difficult for rural learners who had to add a long and often complicated journey to the working day.

In other types of Community Learning, progression was also difficult, although the point was made that for many learners linear progression was not necessarily appropriate. Typically a beginners' class in a village would not produce viable numbers for a more advanced course, so those wanting to progress would either have to travel to a hub or a college or remain in

what would become a mixed ability class in the same location. For many learners and providers, neither of these alternatives was ideal but compromise on such issues was integral to rural provision if it was to remain viable at all.

8.8 Curriculum offer

Providers were asked about their rural curriculum offer and whether it differed significantly from their urban offer. For most Agency providers, as previously stated, there was a difference between what was included in targeted provision and what formed part of a universal offer (which often had much large learner numbers and was essentially a fee earning, market driven programme).

Separate streams of targeted work were family learning (Family English, Maths and Language and Wider Family Learning) delivered in rural primary schools and children's centres, and provision funded through Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (although this tended to be focused on more urban areas). Those services which had top-sliced their Community Learning budget, or were applying the whole of it to new and disadvantaged learners, tended to use this money for a range of activities that could be grouped as follows:

- employability skills, including confidence building, return to learning, listening and study skills which may lead to basic skills and other provision funded from the skills funding stream and be integrated with tasters and very short programmes in traditional [PCDL] activity such as floristry, massage and Tai Chi to stimulate interest and aid recruitment;
- programmes to do with civic engagement, such as programmes for volunteers in financial management, or governance for those working in the voluntary sector, and work on community planning.

Very often, all these kinds of programmes were delivered through, or in conjunction with, VCS partners, and did not have open recruitment. There was no perceptible difference between what was provided in rural and urban areas.

Community Learning & Employability (Herefordshire Council)

The difference that learning makes to our rural learners.

Community Learning & Employability (Herefordshire Council) has been working in partnership with Herefordshire Housing to support a group of learners from Penyard Gardens, a deeply rural sheltered housing scheme in the small village of Weston Under Penyard which is located four miles from the small market town of Ross On Wye, Herefordshire (population approx. 10,000).

This group of learners started off as complete beginners last year (2010 – 2011). Since there were no ICT facilities at the sheltered housing scheme, Herefordshire Housing arranged and covered the cost of transport from Weston Under Penyard to the Community Learning Centre at The Hereford Academy School; a journey of some 17 miles.

As the learners were enjoying their experience so much they were encouraged by Herefordshire Housing to bid for a range of ICT equipment that could be used by the residents of the sheltered housing accommodation at Penyard Gardens. This bid was successful and they now have three PCs for community use, an internet connection, a large LCD screen TV, a printer/copier and a Wii.

Community Learning & Employability and Herefordshire Housing have continued to support these learners and have also supported the development of an additional group of beginners from Smallbrook Gardens, a nearby sheltered housing scheme, in order to make full use of the range of facilities. The original group of beginners has developed extremely good IT skills and is now able to surf the web, communicate electronically and take and edit fabulous digital photographs.

As part of the course, and to celebrate the newly developed skills of the learners, a photographic trip was arranged by Herefordshire Housing & Apollo to beautiful Symonds Yat. The learners took a picnic with them which was provided by the resident's social club. Learners from both courses were invited. This was a wonderful opportunity for the group to enjoy a day with their tutor in order to learn more about digital photography, as well as having the chance to visit a beautiful local site whilst exploring a new hobby.

These courses have been hugely beneficial to the residents and helped to encourage them to discover more about computers, digital photography and the internet. It is hoped that the group from Smallbrook Gardens, Ross on Wye will form a committee so that they too could be in a position to bid for ICT equipment to complement their community room once building work has been completed. This will result in more learning being brought to the heart of their rural community.

The most common pattern of provision is one where a proportion of the budget is still applied to a universal offer run as a fee paying programme. Some services were very clear that their main service delivery was a general offer for the whole population, whereas for others this was a reducing area of activity. Where there was a sizeable universal offer, programmes tended to be strong on art and crafts, languages and ICT with a scattering of other subjects such as floristry, philosophy, history and literature. Where services were providing sport and fitness this comprised a significant slice of the programme, but many providers had reduced this provision because of competition from gyms and private providers. Where it was maintained, this was one part of the curriculum likely to be delivered more in rural than in urban areas since the gyms and sports clubs present in towns were not available in small rural settlements.

In general, the curriculum offer was similar to that offered in urban areas. However, heritage and wildlife organisations and land based institutions did have a curriculum with a focus on rural skills and the rural environment, although as explained earlier it was not necessarily targeted at rural dwellers. There were some projects too which used the countryside as a focus for learning as a way of attracting new and different learners.

Adult and Community Learning Fund project

Northamptonshire - Move-In4ward - South Northamptonshire Homes

South Northants district is seen by many as an affluent area, which can result in lack of funding opportunities for community development/social improvement projects. Despite this perception, South Northants has pockets of deprivation and other associated problems faced by rural communities including lack of services/facilities, accessibility and transport restrictions, and people living in isolation and poverty.

“Move-In4ward is not just any life skills course; it's an experience for our housing association tenants where we will work on the basis of personal discovery and empowerment. Participants will develop soft skills such as motivation, confidence, self-awareness, positive thinking, discipline and goal setting, and practical skills including budgeting, computers for every day life, DIY, first aid and how to manage tenancies. Courses will be delivered in a relaxed environment and will spark their interest in learning as a way that improves their prospects and helps them find the tools to be successful in their tenancies and all that they aspire to be.”

The project will have numerous benefits for the learners. Ultimately they will be motivated and equipped with skills they can embed into their everyday lives which will benefit them, their families and the wider community. Training will be delivered in an informal community setting and provide a safe learning environment and remove barriers of more formal settings. Using volunteers as mentors will give them peer support throughout the course and help remove any barriers between tutors and participants. Participants will be encouraged to go on to volunteer to support peers on future courses and progress to accredited courses, employment and/or volunteer opportunities.

8.9 ICT and connectivity

All providers interviewed for this study experienced problems with IT and connectivity in relation to rural provision. Computer suites are not an option in rented premises heavily used by other hirers. There are still places where modern ICT provision is not available to learners in spite of the best efforts of providers. Imaginative solutions were being used by providers to overcome these problems. One large adult learning service takes various actions to assist people in rural areas to access courses, for example by installing internet access to village halls, and provide a mobile crèche and community transport.

Reference has already been made to mobile IT provision, although this is relatively rare. More common is the use of suites of laptops with an internet connection through the mobile phone network where required. It was acknowledged that these were not completely effective and tended to be expensive but they did a reasonable job of allowing internet access for learners. Pick up, transport and security of laptops by tutors and provision of technical support were resource hungry.

On the positive side, many interviewees mentioned local broadband schemes and initiatives to upgrade broadband access in village halls and other community facilities. Some rural areas' big problem is lack of bandwidth but this should be resolved by 2015 when 90% of the UK will be able to access 24 mgbs and the last 10% (most challenging areas) 2 mgbs.

There are interesting community broadband schemes. The largest of these is B4RN (Broadband for the Rural North) which has taken some creative steps, including in one case laying fibres across a farmer's field (with his permission of course!). B4RN is also trying out a new WiBE technology which allows high speed connectivity over 3G phone signals. Another potentially interesting development could be the use of masts linked to schools' fibre lines, thus providing a limited amount of WiFi for the properties surrounding the school. This could add weight to any arguments for adding high speed lines to learning centres if others in the community can benefit.

Community learning in rural areas could be a significant beneficiary of the three strands of the Government's 2010 Broadband Strategy⁸.

- The Government's £530m (plus equivalent match funding from local authorities) Rural Broadband Programme (delivered by local authorities). Part of this programme will help develop effective demand stimulation plans to make sure people and communities benefit from better broadband and will include recruiting digital champions to provide informal support and encouragement.
- The £20m joint Broadband Delivery UK and Defra Rural Community Broadband Fund is supporting communities in the final 10% of areas, which would not otherwise receive superfast broadband under the main county wide roll out plan.
- The Mobile Infrastructure Project – up to £150m to improve mobile coverage in not-spots across the UK.

8.10 Promoting self-organised groups

As a part of the offer focused on personal development, a number of providers have been promoting self-organised groups in a variety of ways. Some providers have been encouraging long standing or strong new groups to become self-organised and other providers are offering publicity to self-organised groups as a means of increasing the quantum offer available to potential learners. The benefits to the groups themselves are that they sit outside Skills Funding Agency quality control systems and paperwork while still benefiting from public advertising enabling recruitment of new members. Benefits for the provider are increased opportunities for learners with a significantly reduced burden on budgets.

Given the large number of private and community run groups within affluent rural communities, publicity about such provision clearly benefits rural learners. While private tutors may be the beneficiaries of increased enrolments, a greater quantum of adult learning is being offered to communities, with a significant added value to provision in rural areas. However, for this strategy to be really successful, investment in development staff close to the ground is essential, and the costs of this should not be ignored.

⁸ Details of these three initiatives can be found on p.5 of the Defra Rural Statement September 2012)

Staffordshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service

Reaching Communities - Community Learning Groups

Staffordshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning Service is unique in its support of Community Learning Groups, defined by the Service as adults who come together in informal groups to share and develop their skills and learning. These may be small, independent groups of adults or groups which belong to larger organisations such as the University of the Third Age, Phoenix groups or Over 50s groups. The County Council provides £70,000 to support 140 Community Learning Groups with 3891 registered learners. 44% of the groups are specifically for older learners, 40% of groups are from rural areas and 25% are from semi-rural areas. As they are currently run, these groups would not meet Skills Funding Agency/Ofsted requirements or comply with the narrowly defined eligibility criteria.

The County Council supports these groups by offering grant funding for 60 hours per year for their venue hire costs. The average grant per group is £500. This then enables groups to use membership fees to support the development of learning or the purchase of equipment, rather than the cost of hiring a meeting place. Groups are funded on the basis of a simple grant application process at the beginning of each financial year and, in return, are expected to produce registers of member attendance and produce a yearly report which includes learner feedback and future plans. A number of the groups are also visited during the year to monitor attendance and activities. Groups are kept in touch with each other and with national and local developments through a termly newsletter, to which groups are invited to contribute work and comments. They are also involved in consultation activities held by the Adult and Community Learning Service and recently contributed to the commissioning priorities policy document.

Group activities range from arts, crafts, languages, music, dance, cookery, archery, health and fitness to reading groups, gardening, sociology, family history, flower arranging, IT, photography, upholstery, belly dancing, bridge and chess. The only stipulation is that there is learning taking place in the group, and it is not a social or competition group. Groups meet in local community centres, church and parish halls, schools and libraries.

The Staffordshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service recognises the immense impact these self-supporting, independent learning groups can make to individuals and the community, intellectually, physically and emotionally.

The aim will be to encourage groups to become self-supporting. The contribution of community learning groups to fostering communities and developing varied interest groups outside of the established confines of Adult Safeguarded Learning is recognised and promoted by Staffordshire County Council.

8.11 Publicity and guidance

Providers reported a wide variety of strategies for ensuring that rural learners got to hear about provision that might be relevant and interesting to them. For targeted provision, most publicity was through referral agencies, partners and organisations with reach to the client groups along with flyers in shops (including rural community shops), surgeries etc. - places where the target audience might go as part of their daily lives. Although targeted provision was advertised in brochures, this was not a major source of recruitment of learners.

For the universal offer, brochures and websites were the most common vehicle for giving information. Some providers ensured a brochure through every door in rural areas, even if this was not provided for urban areas, and all put information in libraries, learning centres and public offices. Some authorities had termly brochures. In a large number of services, development staff were key to getting publicity out to rural areas. Village shops were a particular focus for rural publicity.

Other ways of publicising provision were also built into providers' strategies. Fairs, fetes and shows were used in rural areas, and local radio was used with at least two authorities reporting specific learning slots on their local stations.

Guidance for learners is clearly more difficult to secure in rural areas where there are no large learning centres to approach for help. Providers were aware of this, although it was a difficult problem to solve. Development workers, who were often very vulnerable to cuts in funding, were crucial in offering guidance as well as being close to the ground and able to develop awareness of activity in local communities outside state-funded provision. In targeted provision where the needs were seen as greatest, development workers trained in guidance and guidance staff visited groups to aid progression. In the universal offer, arrangements were more casual; phoning the centre, talking to tutors and centre staff and looking at the guidance on levels etc. in brochures were the most that many could expect. However, collaboration did produce examples of guidance shops and learning shops/centres working with more than one provider, which offered much more to prospective learners.

9. The learner view

The perspectives given in the sections above are very much related to providers and the constraints and opportunities they experience in trying to serve the needs of rural learners. In addition, by looking at case studies and the profiles of villages, the study has also taken account of what learning might be like from the point of view of someone living in a village. This leads to a consideration of what potential rural learners might expect as a minimum in terms of a universal offer of community learning.

Living in a small affluent village might well be different from living in a deprived area, but most people living in villages could expect to find:

- some informal learning activity in their community, with a relatively high likelihood of a fitness class (probably privately run), a WI branch, church group, art/craft group (probably privately organised);
- some sports activity such as cricket or football;
- relatively accessible publicity on publicly-funded provision in nearby larger settlements and towns;
- some targeted and/or skills provision in towns and larger settlements;
- most provision in the daytime;
- most provision used predominantly by older learners;
- most provision organised and run by well-educated community members;
- where there was no Agency-funded provision, one or two activities at best and an absolute necessity to travel to a larger centre for progression;
- costs of community organised activities likely to be low and often paid weekly; some private classes with fees similar to public PCDL offer but no concessions.

In effect, what is available is a very minimal amount of informal provision which may be hard to find out about, and a public offer likely to involve travel. For those at a disadvantage, some provision is usually available where travel might be supported, but taking part almost always means a journey to a larger centre and the programme will be focused around return to learn and employability where needs are greatest. In a few areas there is no longer any significant informal provision, and this means that something as basic as a French or Spanish class is not available even for learners ready and willing to pay.

Those who are retired may be best off, since most groups are run in the daytime and the U3A's self-help groups run at minimal cost and now offer more variety than the standard publicly-funded offer. Higher Education activity almost certainly means travelling to a major population centre, or studying with the OU.

Despite these difficulties, some providers were taking the most from what was available and stitching together the disparate elements to make a better all-round offer to their potential learners. Collaborative planning and delivery are at the heart of these solutions.

10. Partnerships and planning

10.1 Building the learning infrastructure

This report has focused on provision in rural areas funded through the BIS community learning budget. It has been considered separately from the skills provision made by the same providers, some of which is also delivered in rural areas. On the ground this division is often unclear to learners themselves. It also ignores important issues for providers.

One of the aims of the community learning budget is to provide progression routes that enable learners to move from targeted community learning provision into formal accredited training funded through the BIS adult skills budget. In all areas, but particularly in rural areas, this requires providers to work collaboratively to make the most of available funding. Often the budget for either community learning or skills training would not, on its own, support rural outreach and delivery. However, when planned coherently, both kinds of provision can become more viable because publicity, guidance and ICT can be shared, and in some cases learners funded through the two streams could even be learning together in one class. In order to deliver an effective offer to learners, provision in rural areas needs to be planned holistically rather than piecemeal.

Northumberland Adult Learning Service

Haltwhistle Library and Community Resources Centre

Haltwhistle is a small market town with a population of 3,811, located in rural Northumberland. A £1.4 million grant from the Big Lottery enabled the former Mechanics' Institute building to be turned into a 21st Century Library and Community Resources Centre. The Library, Tourist Information Centre, Adult Learning Service, the Town Council, Health and Social Care Information Point and Haltwhistle Archive Project are based in the Centre. The centre is warm, welcoming, and accessible with a strong focus on the local community.

This co-location of services and voluntary groups has encouraged partnership working. The library and adult learning service have a joint focus group of users. The service benefits from close working with the children's centre which has led to the offer of health and care programmes. The adult learning service is a partner in a rural employability partnership working closely with JobCentre Plus and Haltwhistle Partnership to consider employment opportunities and the development of skills to meet local needs.

The adult learning service offers a range of programmes including English, Maths, ICT, Painting and Drawing, Family Learning, Employability and Personal Development, Animation and Supporting Teaching and Learning. Good links with youth groups have led to the provision of Foundation Learning programmes for learners aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training. The adult learning centre is also used as the base to offer outreach in village halls and local schools in West Tynedale.

10.2 The range of possible partners

The most effective way of providing community learning in rural areas lies in local collaboration and partnerships. As one provider put it, “when you think how big the county is and all the different kinds of places there are, no-one could do it all - there is room for everybody”. The interviews with providers and stakeholders revealed a large and diverse range of partners, ranging from small local voluntary groups to national organisations. A very small number of providers were planning with and supporting private sector provision to increase the number of opportunities available.

10.3 Partners in planning

Interviewees were asked whether they worked with other agencies, statutory or voluntary, in the planning and delivery of provision. In terms of planning, those services that contracted out provision were most likely to have formal arrangements to plan provision with their sub-contractors. Some of the agreements specifically involved covering rural parts of the area. One contracting out service remarked on the vulnerability of small, rural, third sector organisations; this meant that contracts with these organisations were sometimes short-lived. A number of authorities mentioned planning in conjunction with other local authority departments, especially where provision was targeted. There was less shared planning in relation to courses where fees were charged. Most providers described themselves as collaborating and working with the voluntary and community sector, but it was not clear whether these collaborations included decision-making about significant issues such as funding allocation.

During the interviews, a significant proportion of the providers (all of whom had rural catchment areas) mentioned their previous experience of planning in a PCDL partnership, a majority of them were very positive about working in this way. Some of the partnerships were being maintained as a way to avoid unnecessary competition and duplication of provision.

Devon Adult and Community Learning Service

Devon Community Learning Partnership (DCLP)

Many may remember the Personal & Community Development Partnerships created, and for a time financially supported, by the Learning and Skills Council. These were intended to provide a vehicle for the development and coherent planning of local PCDL-funded provision to ensure local needs were met, and unnecessary duplication avoided. A great deal of energy and time was invested in developing these partnerships nationwide. However, the dismantling of the LSC and increasing emphasis on formal FE led to the majority of partnerships fading away.

In Devon, statutory, voluntary and community organisations formed a partnership with the intention of embracing a wider remit than PCDL, and looked to attract funding from a variety of sources to support its work. This work has focused in the main on capacity building and bringing a wide range of learning opportunities to a largely rural county. This

has included the development of Learning Hosts, a highly successful Transformation Fund project, delivery of County Council-funded skills programmes, and the establishment of a website to provide a platform for information exchange and discussion. One of the benefits of developing links across a wide range of organisations is that fresh ideas and approaches come from within communities, and they really reflect the interests and needs of learners.

Devon Adult and Community Learning has developed these links and is currently working with around twenty community-based organisations to deliver both accredited formal learning and informal learning. This has enabled it to reach groups and communities which have had difficulty in accessing mainstream provision (and funding) in the past. The service has also benefited from the opportunity to develop new areas of the curriculum and so enhance its wider offer.

10.4 Rural Community Councils

The work of Rural Community Councils (RCCs) or Rural Community Action Networks (RCANs) has been described in the section of this report on voluntary infrastructure organisations. Perhaps because adult learning services are more focused on client groups than rurality, it was not common for RCANs to be partners in planning learning services. One service, focused on a consortium of community schools, mentioned their local RCAN as a key partner. However, in terms of rural knowledge and focus, these organisations would have much to offer in terms of partnership and networking. In the case of two RCANs, funding for the delivery of learning was being secured through their local authority. In general, much of the work being delivered through RCANs was similar to the community development work some services were doing through their targeted provision.

One Rural Community Council described itself as an infrastructure body for voluntary organisations (very similar to a Council for Voluntary Services). It directly delivered a whole range of capacity building for voluntary organisations; learning covered funding, governance, running a committee, communications, being a representative and coordinating volunteers. The local authority had a generic agreement with the RCC to deliver skills improvement to the voluntary sector at a nominal charge to participants. However, this funding is now very vulnerable. This RCC also runs one-off programmes, usually when a bit of funding becomes available, for example a course on food hygiene in village halls. Similarly, there have been bits of work with the Primary Care Trust (PCT). This RCC thought that rural proofing should allow for smaller groups and reduced fees.

Another RCC advocated a model (which they thought would yield better results than the LA delivery model) which would be for community learning funding to go via a body like the RCC. The funds would then “grease the wheels” and enable more voluntary organisations to confidently pick up provision. It would give better value for money because funding would go to infrastructure, not delivery, whilst still getting the “bangs for the bucks”. It would also, they thought, strip out the data gathering that goes with Skills Funding Agency/local authority administration.

Many of the Rural Community Councils were heavily involved in capacity building work with parish councillors and clerks. Agency funded providers in rural areas could be encouraged to investigate stronger partnership with their RCCs.

10.5 Parish, Town and District Councils

Providers were likely to work with district councils in planning their rural provision, particularly where the district council had developed specifically targeted programmes for rural areas; at least one provider used district council areas as the hubs for local planning forums, and another was working with them in relation to learning provision in care homes. Relationships with district councils tended to be ad hoc rather than strategic.

There were mixed experiences of, and views about, parish councils. Not many providers went through them to help plan local provision. There was a view that many parish councils are stretched, especially with their new responsibilities for neighbourhood planning.

10.6 Partners in delivery

The most active partnerships between organisations were those that involved working together on delivery. Again there was significant variation in how such partnerships worked. For some the arrangements were based on a clearly defined sub-contract with expectations in relation to quality and paperwork. In other cases the partner's role mainly related to recruitment. Most of the partnership activity was focused on targeted provision; there was much less partnership activity in relation to fee paying programmes.

North Yorkshire Adult Learning and Skills Service

Overcoming Rural Disadvantage: challenges and approaches

The Hambleton area of North Yorkshire encompasses five market towns and the county capital town of Northallerton. It is over 40 miles in length from north to south; it includes a vast area of agricultural land and rural villages, and is diverse in terms of wealth and social deprivation.

Most of the Adult Learning Service's provision is in Northallerton and Thirsk; due to budgetary restraints, it is not viable to offer the full extent of provision in the smaller towns. Northallerton and Thirsk are easier to access from surrounding towns and villages. However, some of the smaller towns have access to an FE college or to an arts organisation. Public transport is the greatest challenge and ever-increasing fuel costs for lengthy journeys deter learners from enrolling.

When planning provision, Hambleton area considers factors such as public transport wherever possible. We aim to timetable classes within the school day to take account of parents who need to collect children from school. Our leisure course learners are popular with retired learners who tell us they prefer to attend day time provision.

The Adult Learning and Skills Service employs learning and skills advisers based in every area of North Yorkshire. They publicise the Service, give advice to learners, and use a multi-

agency approach. They work with Surestart children's centres and Jobcentre Plus, women's refuges, prisons, probation services and the charitable or voluntary sector, and aim to help remove barriers to learning. They carry out outreach work in rural communities, including the use of the Skills Mobile and libraries where they are regularly based to meet community members to give them information about our courses or advice on CVs, interview skills or career paths and choices, and can use online facilities if required. The Service can signpost people to other sources of support or learning provision where appropriate, or offer follow up appointments on their doorstep to avoid their having to make a journey to a larger town. They do similar work within the children's centres and many of the parents using the centre enrol on courses.

"We receive positive feedback; it is rewarding for our team to know that a large number of the surrounding communities are enjoying the benefit of learning and developing skills to help them enrich their personal and economic circumstances. We hope to continue to be able to help alleviate some of the challenges faced by communities especially those disadvantaged by rurality."

10.7 The Voluntary Sector

The most common partnerships in provision were between main providers and voluntary sector organisations working with particular client groups. It was not easy to distinguish between rural and urban partnerships; sometimes the same organisations were involved, and most partnership work outside direct contracting related to targeted activity. In working with partners in rural areas, interviewees mentioned the need for extra resource because of the travel and costs involved in, for example, training visits and supervised teaching. In many cases, one of the provider's roles was supporting continuous professional development for the contractors' staff. A number of those interviewed mentioned that cuts to voluntary sector budgets were reducing the time available for partners to spend on activities like learning, which might be outside their core purpose.

While sub-contracting to the voluntary sector was very common, many directly delivered services were heavily involved in collaborative arrangements where the voluntary sector partner's role was 'reach' and the provider's 'teach'. Although much of this provision was in hubs such as market towns, it served rural learners. Voluntary sector partners often provided volunteer placements and some progression for learners. In one very rural area, a learning centre was a hub for a range of agencies working with rural learners and community organisations.

The voluntary sector was much less involved with the delivery of learning for personal development where the client groups were less targeted, although some services reported collaboration with heritage agencies and environmental groups.

Staffordshire County Council Adult & Community Learning Services

Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities delivery model

Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities in Staffordshire is administered by a partnership of the adult learning services in Staffordshire and Stoke, Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Consortium of Infrastructure Organisations, Jobcentre Plus and Connexions. The partnership awards grants to third sector organisations of all sizes across the county. New organisations such as community interest companies, social enterprises and small specialised groups can access the fund to help develop their learning opportunities, giving the local community the tools to teach themselves, in line with the principles of the Big Society. The fund is also used to capacity-build groups by subsidising places on courses for training adult tutors.

The fund is targeted at the most deprived areas of the county and the hardest-to-reach adults. The collaboration between Staffordshire and Stoke councils ensures precise targeting and no overlaps. The open collaboration between all of the steering group partners has ensured that the best informed decisions are made to fund the most appropriate local organisations to deliver services. The steering group also openly shares quality assurance and this has allowed issues to be dealt with on a timely basis, ensuring a high level of delivery and a continuous improvement over the years of the project.

Since 2008, 29 voluntary and community groups have received funding to deliver informal learning opportunities to BME learners, people with mental health issues, homeless people, adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, carers, older learners, women's refuges and learners from areas in the Super Output deprived areas in Burton, Tamworth, Cannock and Newcastle. 1,814 individual adults have successfully completed learning opportunities. Between 2008 and 2011, £90,000 per year was available for funding groups; in the 2011-12 academic year this was increased to £130,000.

As a result of accessing the services offered by the funded voluntary groups, 9% of learners progressed to college courses, 0.5% to university courses, 8.5% went on to another learning experience, 22% continued to access the voluntary or community centre services, 5% gained full time employment, 6% gained part time employment places and 13.5 % took up volunteering opportunities.

10.8 Private sector provision

Given the raft of private sector provision that exists in at least the most affluent villages and the rapid development of U3A, which has grown in 30 years to nearly 900 local organisations with approaching 300,000 members in the UK, it was surprising that so many Agency funded providers were relatively ill-informed about private and self-organised sector provision in their areas. Local staff were better informed, but in essence we found very little evidence of partnership working with private or community organisers. However, there

were one or two providers who saw such provision as complementary and recognised the benefits of collaboration. In these instances, attempts had been made to include private organisations in some planning, to help encourage participation by advertising such provision, and to build quality and support through staff training.

This was not specifically a rural phenomenon, but given the large areas to be covered, competitive edge seemed less prevalent in rural than urban areas. Working with the grain of private provision was visible in attitudes to fitness and yoga, where many providers said that they were contemplating backing out of such provision because of a thriving private sector. These approaches need the support of locally based development staff who may be shared with other players in rural development, such as Rural Community Action Networks.

11. Regulation and Inspection

11.1 Ofsted

All Agency funded adult learning is subject to inspection by Ofsted. All non Agency funded provision is outside the Ofsted remit. The learner is likely to be relatively unconcerned by the differences between providers. However, the possibility of complaining to an adult education staff member or claiming a refund is undoubtedly available and occasionally used in publicly-funded provision, and learners themselves may have higher expectations of it. Interviews did not reveal any evidence of Ofsted inspectors making specific inquiries about provision for rural areas.

A number of providers talked about initial problems with Ofsted requirements and the paper trail necessary for Agency funding in their collaboration and partnerships with voluntary sector organisations. However, most indicated that over time this had settled down and working arrangements had been reached or organisations had opted out. In order to meet the rigorous quality standards required, many providers were supporting their own tutors and partner organisations quite substantially and, for rural providers, this meant expense in time and travel that was not proportionate to the level of activity.

11.2 Self-assessment

There was no requirement for Agency funded providers to report specifically on their rural policies and practice. However, if this were a requirement where appropriate, it could fall within any reporting on equality and impact. This would encourage a sharper focus on work in rural areas and a greater line of accountability.

11.3 Gathering wider feedback

There was little evidence of Agency funded providers actively and systematically soliciting feedback from other rural parties. Agency funded providers and the pilot Community Learning Trusts could be encouraged to garner the views of other interested organisations. This might be done through submitting an annual report to stakeholder organisations, requesting their feedback and offering further engagement in planning and delivery.

12. Conclusions

This project aimed to assist future policy on community learning in rural areas. Our research showed how problems in rural provision could be tackled on a small scale, but there was **little evidence of systemic solutions**. The **access issues** in relation to adult learning opportunities in rural areas are similar to those relating to other rural services: transport, information, cost, accessibility and timing all being important. In the case of adult learning, issues related to poor connectivity, appropriate guidance and the difficulties in progression are additional problems. More systematic identification of **rural deprivation** and evidence of it being addressed are required. Where solutions were more system wide, the following elements were present:

- an overall (though rarely written) **policy** about how needs would be met, for example through a hub and spokes model, or through contracting with rural voluntary organisations;
- significant **collaboration** between partners; usually these partnerships were more prevalent in provision for disadvantaged groups, but they also existed in more general provision;
- **funding** that recognised the issues involved, often meaning the funding of development staff or having special arrangements and rules to underpin rural provision.

Our research found two groups who benefit particularly from rural community learning. The first is the **elderly**; older people participate much more widely in rurally based provision, whether publicly funded or privately provided, and it would appear that, aside from the gains from the curriculum offered, it is a major strand in social interaction and the reduction of isolation. The second group is those **disadvantaged adults** recruited to attend targeted provision. Much is being done to reduce their isolation, to provide learning opportunities to fit their life patterns, and to demonstrate that obstacles such as travel can be overcome through their recruitment to market town provision. The training (mainly related to employability) offered at a variety of centres and through mainstream and project based provision is fitting these participants for progression and, in the best examples, is supporting and enabling this to happen.

Among the most interesting and promising avenues explored in relation to impact on communities related to the work being done by **RCANs** is their infrastructure work on both supporting local voluntary organisations and developing participative rural planning. It was possible to envisage real results for the villages and organisations concerned.

The work carried out in this study has shown that the best results are obtained for rural adult learners where **collaborative work** is at the heart of planning and delivery. However, most collaborative activity to date has been in relation to targeted work, with the exception of some providers who contract out provision. The quantum of fee paying activity is slowly (or rapidly in some cases, due to local policy changes) decreasing in rural areas where there are few arts venues, museums, galleries and limited numbers of special interest groups, so those who previously participated are finding it difficult to continue their involvement. As part of future planning, **more and different alliances** need to be made with private and

community based providers so that the private sector can open its offer to more learners, and the public sector can focus on areas where it will be the only provider. The recommendations relate to the partnerships that are essential for the future health of rural adult learning.

Defra's report looking at the **Local Level Rural Proofing Project**⁹ contains 18 underlying principles for local rural proofing which were identified as part of that work as being important in shaping successful rural services (and are listed in full as Appendix 2). The authors of this report on "Community Learning in Rural Areas" believe that many of these principles are covered explicitly and implicitly within the delivery identified as part of this work. The authors therefore consider that the application of these principles to the planning and delivery of community learning could be usefully tested and trialled in further research, with a view to establishing an agreed **Defra/BIS intra-Departmental approach** to best practice.

This study has shown that community learning provision can have a significant **impact** on employability, personal well-being and community life. Providers are best supported in continuing to make provision to meet the needs of rural dwellers where there is **coherence and clarity in national policies**, and where **collaboration** is fostered between providers. The policy objectives of both Defra and BIS will, we believe, be better met if future Community Learning Trusts take account of the findings and recommendations of this report. And in particular, we welcome the **commitment in the Rural Statement** (Defra, 2012) to "gathering and disseminating the lessons learned from Community Learning Trust pilots covering rural areas, so that the needs of rural learners can be reflected in the wider rollout of the initiative".

⁹ http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=9897_RE0246InterimProjectReportMarch2012-PrinciplesNeedsandExemplars.pdf

Appendix 1

Record of interviews and literature reviewed

Record of interviews

Local authority adult learning services in Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Devon, Dorset, East Riding of Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Isles of Scilly, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Worcestershire.

Community School: Adult College for Rural East Sussex (community school provider).

Colleges of Further Education: Easton College Norfolk, West Suffolk College, Boston College, Bridgewater College, Sussex Downs College.

Voluntary organisations: WEA, U3A, Learning for the 4th Age (L4A), AgeUK, local branches of MIND, Women's Institute, Wildlife Trust, National Trust, English Heritage, The Courtyard (Herefordshire's Centre for the Arts), Universities Association for Lifelong Learning.

Rural Community Councils affiliated to ACRE: Kent, Berkshire, Shropshire, Isle of Wight.

Other interested agencies: the National Association of Local Councils, the National Farmers Union.

The report was also reviewed by the Skills Funding Agency.

Literature reviewed

- Country Learning - 1989, Uden NIACE/REPLAN
 - Rural Learning - 2000 Payne, NIACE
 - Lifelong Learning in Rural Areas – A report to the Countryside Agency Summary Report - Clarke et al, 2002 Birkbeck College/NIACE
 - Adult Learning in Rural Areas – 2007 Payne, unpublished NIACE
 - Family and Intergenerational Learning in Rural Contexts 2009 Malin et al, NIACE Dysgu Cymru
 - Lifelong Learning and Rural Communities 2011 O'Grady, unpublished NIACE
-

Appendix 2

Defra's proposed 18 principles of local rural proofing¹⁰

1. An overt and upfront commitment from service designers to provide fair and equitable treatment for users and to achieve proportionate outcomes in rural and urban places.
2. Approaches to service design which seek to address the fundamental challenges of rural delivery (sparsity, distance, etc) by harnessing and enhancing typical strengths within rural communities (social capital, self-reliance, etc).
3. Finding ways to spread or reduce the fixed costs of service delivery, so as to mitigate increased unit costs of delivery arising from distance/time costs and lost economies of scale (the rural premium). This may involve organisations collaborating, services co-locating, the use of ICT, volunteer input or various other approaches.
4. Taking into account a broad range of potential outcomes (economic, social and environmental) when assessing options for rural delivery (beyond unit cost or "value for money").
5. Taking a "user focused" approach to design; involving rural communities in the early stage of needs assessment based service planning and then involving them in shaping appropriate local solutions.
6. Starting this dialogue with rural communities from first principles, asking what their needs are and how they wish to use services rather than simply adjusting current service models.
7. Investing in understanding local circumstances and the impact of geography on service costs and use, in order to inform the design of evidence-based solutions.
8. Considering urban-rural inter-dependencies and the scope to maximise the benefits for rural communities arising from them.
9. Designing sufficient flexibility into delivery models, so they can be adapted to local circumstance or opportunity.
10. Offering a portfolio of delivery solutions to meet the varying needs and circumstances of rural users.
11. Targeting geographical gaps in delivery so that services are readily accessible to more (potential) users, especially those in remoter or more isolated locations.
12. Focusing particular effort (and perhaps financial support) at those groups who find it hardest to access existing services. This may involve tailored solutions for individuals.
13. Service commissioners seeking to avoid spatial gaps in provision by including incentives or penalties within contracts to avoid market failure among providers.

¹⁰ http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=9897_RE0246InterimProjectReportMarch2012-PrinciplesNeedsandExemplars.pdf

14. Factoring in broad outcomes which enhance the future sustainability of rural communities as design objectives or within the criteria for assessing "return on investment".
 15. Recording and monitoring at lower or local levels of geography (commensurate with local delivery) and reviewing the outputs regularly to seek further rural service enhancements.
 16. Designing solutions to increase the use of existing assets within rural areas (e.g. buildings, land and transport) in order to enhance their viability.
 17. Looking to collaborate beyond the boundaries of individual services, so additional outcomes may arise.
 18. Testing innovative approaches in small areas (as pilots) in order to gain sufficient evidence, learning and support for their mainstream use.
-

Appendix 3

Village profile 1 – Great Easton, Leicestershire

Population: 800

School: Bringhurst Primary School – serves 2 villages and adjoining hamlets, takes children up to 12.

Pub: The Sun – small and patronised by only a few of the villagers.

Village Hall/s: One recently refurbished with room allocated to children's centre activities for 4 sessions per week (sessions not currently used)

Shop: Post Office and general groceries recently updated and thriving

Library: Mobile library van calls fortnightly.

Social Mix: Generally affluent. Previously agricultural village with a substantial influx of newcomers in 70s and 80s; a thread of new development since that time. Lots of houses refurbished and extended and some small developments; very little social housing with old council houses mainly in private ownership. Mixed in age but with a preponderance of older people and a mixture of village families and incomers.

How far to the nearest market town or substantial settlement? 5 miles to Uppingham, affluent market town with many learning opportunities; 4 miles to Corby, deprived ex-steel town with small college campus, leisure centre etc. Bus running several times a day to Uppingham and Corby, two per week to Market Harborough.

Is there a parish newsletter or magazine? Yes, shared with other parishes but delivered to every house.

About Adult Learning Opportunities

Publicly Funded Learning e.g. local authority, WEA, college provided: None - nearest at Uppingham and Corby.

Women's Institute: About 30 members, age range 45 - 80

Church Groups: Prayer group. Church usually has 2 services per week, 1 Sunday, 1 midweek; flower arrangers' group

Groups organised by Voluntary Sector organisations: None

Health groups: None, although possibility of children's centre operating some of these in the future, funding permitting.

Privately run groups: Tai Chi meets weekly, 12 – 20 mixed, ages 35 – 75, Village Hall
Opera Minima – opera organisation bringing professional opera players to villages – only some villagers involved in organising events though many attend

Community run groups: Line dancing meets weekly, 12, ages 55 - 75 Village Hall

Ladies choir meets weekly, 22, ages 40 – 80 Village Hall

Art Group self organised untutored meets weekly, 18, ages 50 – 85 Village Hall

Tapestry Group meets fortnightly in winter, 16, ages 50 – 70+ in members' homes, self-organised, untutored

Garden Society meets monthly, speaker and open forum, 20 – 30 members plus additional participants for different sessions, £5 annual membership or £1 per session, age range 40 – 80

Historical Society meets monthly, speaker and open forum, 25 members plus additional participants for different sessions; up to 60 quite common. Age range 45 – 80. £6 annual membership or £2 per session.

Walking Group – monthly £1 per walk to cover insurance. Age range 55 – 75.

Good companions – older people's group, speakers and trips, monthly, about 20 members all over 60 up to 85.

Individual tuition offered: Piano lessons, guitar classes

Other village organisations

Whist Group – 20+ weekly

Mother and Toddler Group – weekly, numbers unknown

Youth Club – fortnightly, numbers unknown

Parish Council

Parochial Church Council

After School Club – commercial venture

Singing Sally – (toddlers singing) - commercial venture

Bell ringing

Cricket Club (meets in adjoining village to gain access to pitch)

Appendix 4

Village profile 2 – Frizington, Cumbria

Population: 2580

School: Frizington Nursery School (numbers vary), Frizington Community Primary School (110,) St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School (54). Both the Community School and St Joseph’s were awarded Outstanding status in their last Ofsted inspections.

Pub/s: The Griffin, The Veterans’ Club, White Star Football Club

Village Hall/s: Schools, Freemasons’ Hall, St Joseph’s Parish Hall

Shops: Post office, butcher, baker, pharmacy, small supermarkets x 2, horse riding equipment shop, fish and chip shop and two takeaway establishments.

Social Mix: Mainly social housing, some of which has been purchased by the tenants, with a scattering of private dwellings, until recently when two small private estates have been built.

Frizington developed rapidly in the mid 19th century from a scatter of farms and hamlets with a population of less than 600 to a population of 6000 in a few decades, due to the expansion of iron-ore mining. The miners came from every part of the United Kingdom and beyond, and rows of terraced houses were erected to accommodate them. The village stretched from north to south forming “one long street” a term used to describe Frizington to this day.

The mines closed in the early 20th century and many families moved on, some to other parts of the U.K. and some to North America and Australia. For those who stayed life was very difficult, but Frizington had many opportunities for further education at that time through the Workers’ Educational Association. Classes in woodwork, childcare, cookery and shoe repair are some of the skills eagerly undertaken by the unemployed.

In the mid 20th century youth clubs, sports clubs and musical societies thrived, and it is a cause of much sadness to “old Frizingtonians” to witness the reluctance shown by the general public towards learning and volunteering possibilities offered in the village today. As will be seen from this profile many of the formal and informal learning opportunities are being taken up by older members of the community.

How far to the nearest market town or substantial settlement? 5 miles

Is there a parish newsletter or magazine? No, but one might help to promote village activities.

About Adult Learning Opportunities

Publicly funded learning - e.g. local authority, WEA, college provided

Frizington Community Primary School is running “Family Fun with Phonics” as part of their family learning programme this term - 8 adults & 8 children.

Frizington School Governors Approximately 8-10 members aged 30 – 80 years. Training in appropriate skills offered.

St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School is holding what is hoped will be the first of a series of Community Lunches to which everyone is invited.

St Joseph’s School Governors - there are 13 members ages ranging from 25 to 80. Governors are offered training in Child Protection and Health and Safety.

Friends of St Joseph's – 8 members aged 30s to 60s. Help with school outings, gardening club and fund raising.

Frizington Nursery: no training taking place at present in the nursery, although it is hoped that discussions with the holders of children's centre money will lead to the setting up of parent groups, which the nursery staff are anxious to get under way.

Library: Lots of information and a great local resource with lots of space. Unfortunately it is only open 12 hours a week at present. It is available for exhibitions and open days. A recent event, arranged jointly with a WI from a neighbouring parish as part of the "Love your Libraries" campaign, involved 150 children and 60+ adults. The children were read to in small groups by WI members (all over 60), the Mayor of Copeland and the MP for Copeland – all of whom proved to be very able story-tellers! An exhibition of paintings by the children illustrating their favourite books was also on display. It was felt that we need more of these events in the village.

Women's Institute: No. The Frizington Branch folded in the 1990s.

Church Groups: Small group meets fortnightly in Methodist Church. Average attendance = 8. 2 x 50+, 2 X 80+ and the rest 60-70

Groups organised by Voluntary Sector organisations: Citizen's Advice Bureau has started a drop-in session once a month in the library this year.

Health groups: Nil. There is a doctor's surgery in the village and the usual clinics are held for mothers and babies, diabetics, asthmatics, heart disease etc. as part of ongoing patient care.

Privately run groups:

Art Class meets weekly in St Joseph's Hall organised and paid for by participants = 4 aged between 60 and 76. Desperately need more members to continue. Started as a WEA course in 2000 in Sheltered Housing Scheme (now demolished).

Local History Group meets weekly in Frizington Primary School Further Education Suite, led by former WEA tutor (age 70) working as a volunteer, who started Local History courses in Frizington in 1995 and family history courses in 2000. Some of the present members attended these courses in the past and have continued to retain interest. The groups have produced books and DVDs about the parish and have had exhibitions about Local History in the library from time to time. 10 participants, 4 aged 60+, 5 aged 70+ and 1 over 85. Self financing.

Computer Class meets weekly in Frizington Primary School FE Suite. Taught by former Adult Education tutor. About 10 – 14 participants, all over 60yrs. Self-financing. Started approximately 8 years ago.

Craft Class meets weekly in Frizington Library. Average attendance 10-15, mainly between 60 and 70yrs. Self-financing. Started 4-5 years ago.

Moki exercise class meets weekly in St Joseph's Hall. Large attendance some from outwith the village. Very mixed ages. Organised by professional instructor. Started last year.

Community run groups:

Spirit of Frizington – fundraising group for Christmas lights. 4 on the committee aged 40+, 60+ and 86. Started 6-7 years ago.

Frizington Community Group – formed late last year (with support from Home Group and Parish Council and Regen NE Copeland) aim to refurbish Newtown play park into facility for 12 plus age group. They organise fund raising events and make applications for funding. 6 members leading the project, all aged between 30 and 40 yrs.

Frizington Senior Citizen's Committee organise an annual outing. Various fund raising activities such as musical evenings and bingo. 3 members on the committee aged 59, 62 and 65. Old established group

Individual tuition offered: Not known

Other village organisations

Neighbourhood Forums - now joint forum meetings, possibly once a year in Frizington. Attendance and ages vary, but opportunities to hear about community policing, information regarding plans for the disposal of nuclear waste, council planning and bids from various organisations and clubs.

Parish Council meets 1st Monday in the month except Jan and Aug (Feb & Jul in Arlecdon). 9 members age range 40 to 60 with one aged 80.

Church Councils

St John's CC meets twice a year to discuss church programme, building repairs, health and safety, finance etc. Average 8 attendees. 2 aged 50+, 3 aged 60+ and 3 aged 80+.

St Paul's PCC meets monthly. Approximately 6-8 members, all over 60.

St Joseph's doesn't have a church council as such, but training is given to church members according to their role in the church.

Youth Club: training is offered to trustees and leaders in health and safety, child protection and finance.

Brownies - training offered to leaders.

Football and Rugby coach training possibly offered by the clubs.

Bowling Club - active in the summer months. 15 members aged 35 – 65. Would welcome new members from age 10yrs.

Bingo - twice weekly in St Joseph's Hall as a fund raiser for the church. Mainly over 60s.

Freemasons' Lodge - no information available at present.

Credit Union - weekly in St Joseph's Hall. Run by volunteer aged 65.

Appendix 5

Village profile 3 – Manea, Cambridgeshire

About the Village

Manea in Cambridgeshire is ranked amongst the most deprived areas in Cambridgeshire for education, skills and training. The village is located in Fenland district, and is an expanding village in the [Cambridgeshire Fens](#). Notable features are [Manea railway station](#) and [RSPB Welches Dam nature reserve on the Ouse Washes](#). The area has been inhabited for centuries and [Stonea Camp](#), an Iron Age hill fort, is located in the vicinity of the village.

Population: 1570

School: Manea Community Primary School – 153 children

Pub: 1 Pub - Rose and Crown, no restaurants or hotels

Village Hall: One hall

Shop: One part shop part cafe and a hairdresser.

Social Mix Manea was once a mainly agricultural area, but with the expansion and new housing many new residents now work in neighbouring towns or commute to London from Huntingdon or Ely. Of total households, 30% have no-one in employment. 79% of houses are owner-occupied. Population is 99% White British. Average houses prices January 2012 – 1 bed £86K to 4 bed £260K rapid price rise. Peterborough and Cambridge are equidistant (30 miles). The main local town in the area is March which is 6 miles away.

There is a railway station. Mondays to Saturdays there are two daily trains in each direction operated by Cross Country. There are two eastbound services to Cambridge and Stansted Airport, with two westbound services to Peterborough, Leicester and Birmingham New Street. There is no Sunday service.

There is a bus service which runs from Manea to March and has connections to Wisbech. The buses run every approx every 2 hours but the service finishes around 5 pm. This would not be conducive to people searching for work who do not own a car.

Other village organisations

Parish Council Parish Council newsletter < <http://www.manea-pc.gov.uk/index.htm#latest>>.

The Parish Council celebrated its 100 years anniversary in 1995 with an Exhibition in the Village Hall. The Council meets monthly, on Mondays at 7.00pm, usually in the Village Hall. The Parish Council has an open forum of 15 minutes duration at the beginning of each meeting. The annual Parish Assembly is usually held in the month of April each year and members of the public are invited to attend to engage with the Parish Council.

Community web site – Manea Connect < <http://www.maneaconnect.co.uk/home--1>> is a village website run by a group of volunteers whose aim it is to inform villagers about Manea events, groups and clubs and contact details for other services that are available in and around Manea, such as transport links/timetables, the doctor's surgery hours, contact details for the local schools and emergency services. Click on Manea connect hyperlink above for timetable of private and voluntary sector activities scheduled for February and March. The timetable contains:

Women's Institute - Held in Church rooms once a month. With classes – e.g. jewellery making

Church Groups - Bible Study Group, Messy church (Mum & Toddler Group).

Groups organised by Voluntary Sector – Brownies/Rainbows/Guides,

Health groups – Manea dinners, Mother and toddler group, Over 60s,

Privately run groups - Manea Art Group, Yoga, Line Dancing, Karate, Mobile gym, evening entertainment (artistes)

Community run groups - Angling Club, Allotment Assoc., Football Club, Badminton club, Gardening Club, Youth Club, Pensioners' Afternoon Club, Brownies, Mum & Toddler Group, free pool night, Flower club, Bingo, Manea street pride, County Club, Walk and Talk, Manea Silver Band, St Nicholas Sausage supper, Women's Section, Bee Keeping, History group.

Manea Connect also has editorial on Manea villages' history written by villagers, gardening and wildlife stories.

About Adult Learning Opportunities

No publicly subsidised adult learning classes held in Manea. Currently nearest classes 6 miles away at March. Adult Learning classes are provided at March, Chatteris, Wisbech and Whittlesey. At present 8 learners from Manea attend classes at these venues – classes include counselling, lip-reading, yoga, Pilates, flower arranging and family learning.

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