

Recommendations

1. A national 'learning framework' should be published as a resource for those wishing to deliver Active Learning for Active Citizenship. Central and local government, other public bodies, key learning institutions and practitioners, and learners themselves should recognise this is a benchmark for effective provision.
2. This approach to citizenship learning should be accepted by agencies of governance, including local authorities and primary care trusts, as a necessary process for strengthening citizen participation and community empowerment, for supporting an expansion in neighbourhood governance, and for promoting safer and stronger communities, and it should be resourced accordingly.
3. Active Learning for Active Citizenship should be recognised as a key component in achieving the government's commitment to empowerment, across all its programmes, as set down in the Together We Can action plan. The 'learning framework' should be recognised as a valuable tool for supporting the Together We Can agenda.
4. The role of Active Learning for Active Citizenship in stimulating a more active, deliberative and critical approach to democratically led social change should be recognised and supported by service providers, funders and policy makers.
5. A national network should be established to continue the promotion of Active Learning for Active Citizenship. The network would maximise the sharing of ideas and experience, and promote and develop the 'learning framework'.
6. The Learning and Skills Council should identify resources to support its commitment to the importance of active citizenship.
7. Formal learning providers, such as universities and colleges, should be encouraged to work with voluntary and community sector organisations to provide learning opportunities for community-based citizenship education for adults.
8. Accreditation systems and progression routes should be reviewed to facilitate opportunities for accreditation and progression via community-based citizenship learning, building on the experience of the ALAC hubs and other providers.

Further information and credits

Visit www.togetherwecan.info for information about the government's Together We Can action plan and the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme.

Email Charles Woodd, charles.woodd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk for information about the learning framework.

Email Ted Hartley, thartley@wea.org.uk for information about the ALAC national network.

Call 020 7035 6058 to request this document in other formats.

Thanks to Professor Marj Mayo, Dr Alison Rooke and members of the ALAC steering group, chaired by Professor John Annette, for their work on the evaluation of Active Learning for Active Citizenship.

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Active Learning for Active Citizenship

The Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme ran from April 2004-March 2006. It was funded by the Home Office Civil Renewal Unit as part of Together We Can, the government's action plan to engage more people in local decisions. Seven 'hubs' tested a variety of approaches to citizenship learning for adults. They worked with a wide range of groups and individuals, helping build their confidence and skills to make their voices heard as citizens.

The programme has been evaluated by Goldsmiths College and this summary presents the main findings and recommendations. The evaluation has looked at the outcomes for the individuals involved, for the groups with which they are connected, and for the wider community. The findings from the programme are contributing to a 'learning framework' to assist people who want to deliver citizenship learning, which will be available from summer 2006.

Main findings

- Active citizenship and community engagement are central to the government's Together We Can action plan which aims to empower citizens and communities to work with public bodies to improve services. The ALAC programme has shown that active learning opportunities can make an effective contribution to achieving this objective.
- Active Learning for Active Citizenship is a process or journey that starts from people's immediate concerns. ALAC offers a variety of pathways from the individual 'I' to the 'we' of collective action in groups and communities, linking the local to the regional, national and

global. ALAC works with individuals, groups and community organisations, building upon existing relationships and networks of trust. As well as affirming the importance of any roles participants play at the local or community level, the ability to see these roles in a broader context has enabled participants to make their work more effective. Wider knowledge of policy, governance and conceptual frameworks has helped them to draw broader strategic links and gain access to new networks.

Main findings *(continued)*

- Social justice, equality and diversity are among the values underpinning ALAC. The programme has demonstrated in practice that active citizenship learning can make important contributions to community cohesion, strengthening social solidarity in the context of diversity and multiculturalism, and promoting democratic approaches to conflict resolution.
- ALAC achieves 'learning together', facilitating partnerships where stakeholders are 'learning to listen' as well as enabling citizens to 'find their voice'. Service providers and policy makers have continued to learn through the programme and participants have shared their learning as agents of change and as researchers with their own organisations and communities.
- ALAC encourages and equips citizens to develop political literacy skills and become involved in governance structures, such as voluntary and community organisations, boards of school governors and local cross-sector partnerships.
- ALAC has shown there is a need for a 'learning framework' to provide a benchmark, a resource and practical guidance for the delivery of effective community-based citizenship learning for adults. It will highlight opportunities for accreditation and progression. It will set out an approach that is based on participatory methods that have been tried and tested, developing tools for promoting citizens' capabilities, building upon learning from experience through processes of critical dialogue. It will emphasise that this approach requires outreach and continuing support for learners.
- ALAC has demonstrated the added value of national networking, to support both learners and providers.
- ALAC learning opportunities should be accessible to all, but there is a particular need to help those who face educational, social and other barriers to their participation.
- To achieve this effectively involves the investment of resources, both to support the learning process and the learners themselves, and also to train skilled learning facilitators.

ALAC's achievements

- The Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme has provided community-based citizenship education for more than a thousand adults over the past two years. These active learning experiences have been facilitated through seven regional hubs, based in the South West, the East and West Midlands, the North West, the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, and London.
- Each hub has been rooted in civil society, in the voluntary and community sectors, working in partnership with formal learning and accreditation providers. These have included Birkbeck College, University of London, Fircroft College, Birmingham, Lincoln University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Northern College, Barnsley and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).
- The partnerships have built upon good practice in adult and community education, developing participative citizenship education programmes through processes of dialogue with the learners, as individuals and as members of community groups and organisations. Starting from the interests and experiences of local people, the learning has been provided flexibly, in a variety of settings, to meet the diverse needs of different communities, including disadvantaged communities, with a particular emphasis on women, black and minority ethnic communities, carers, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers.
- Participants have gone on to become more active in their communities and in public life more generally, for example as school governors, as leading participants in voluntary and community groups, as members of service user forums, as trainers of professionals, and in local networks. In addition, around one quarter of the participants (270) have gained accreditation and gone on to further and higher education. A further 22 are on the way to achieving this and 161 participants have significantly improved their long term employment prospects through the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and knowledge of networks.
- There have been major impacts in terms of increasing community cohesion and solidarity, in the context of diversity and multiculturalism. The hubs brought together people from diverse communities, between whom there is often conflict, and supported them to work together in a positive and constructive manner. Through this work ALAC has been producing multiplier effects more widely, as individuals, groups and organisations have become increasingly effective in pursuing social justice and human rights agendas. In Manchester, for example, participants worked through the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network to develop a Refugee Charter for Manchester.



The ALAC hubs in action

South Yorkshire

Based in Sheffield, this hub is a partnership between the WEA and Northern College. Working with, amongst others, the adult and community learning section of Sheffield City Council, the Northern Refugee Centre, the Metropolitan Housing Trust and local community associations, the hub has provided programmes, study visits, workshops and seminars. These learning events have addressed the link between the local and the global, in the belief that local action has to be informed by events in the wider world. Building on participants' rich experience, the hub has emphasised the importance of 'seeing for ourselves', making direct contact with others from different places and backgrounds. It has facilitated links between community organisations in different UK cities and run study visits to Malmö in Sweden and the Moorish cities of Spain.

West Midlands

Based in Wolverhampton, this community-based hub links Wolverhampton Asian Women and Diabetes Group and Working for Change. It has explored innovative and creative ways to encourage women to get involved in communities and public life. The course, entitled IMPACT!, offers accredited training and

support around power, participation and leadership, together with a network that offers encouragement, skill sharing, information and mutual support. One of the important messages to emerge from this hub is that women have a thirst for increased confidence, skills and knowledge to equip them to make a difference, be involved and be taken seriously. Flexibility of delivery, plus the provision of childcare, has been critical to this hub, given that the women involved generally shoulder the lion's share of domestic life.

Greater Manchester

This hub was initially based on Manchester Metropolitan University's module in community auditing and evaluation. It has worked in partnership with a range of community based organisations, to provide learning that enables community members to research, audit and evaluate issues and take action in their communities for themselves. This has included identifying the requirements for effective volunteering, evaluating a Healthy Living Network, exploring who is involved in different types and levels of decision making and looking at the appropriateness of NHS services for women experiencing domestic violence. Three new university modules have been developed and are being delivered both within the university and community settings as a result of the hub's work.

South West

Based in Exeter, led by Exeter Council of Voluntary Service, this hub has developed particular expertise in providing courses to enable service users, such as carers, people with physical or learning disabilities, and mental health service users to 'Speak Up'. This has led to strengthened user forums and more opportunities for the people who use services to be involved in shaping them. Professionals in statutory bodies have also been engaged in learning to involve users more effectively. This hub includes Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change and the Plymouth Community Partnership, Plymouth Guild, and Students and Refugees Together, who support the integration and social inclusion of asylum seekers, refugees and black and minority ethnic communities.

London

This hub is based in the Civic Forum, the organisation that facilitates London-wide participation, engaging with the Greater London Authority and other structures of governance. With Birkbeck College, University of London, the hub provides courses for representatives and activists from a range of community organisations and groups, including black and minority ethnic groups, people belonging to faith communities, members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and older people, as well as for professionals and volunteers who work with these communities. The courses offer formal accreditation.

Lincolnshire, East Midlands

This hub is based in the Lincolnshire Citizenship Network hosted by the University of Lincoln. It works with a range of voluntary sector project managers, Integration Lincolnshire, the local Crime Reduction and Disorder Partnership, Local Education Authorities, Boston College and the Church of England. In addition to citizenship capacity building through workshops and seminars and supporting learning related to crime prevention by bringing generations together, this hub has developed expertise in working with migrant agricultural workers in this region, an extremely vulnerable group, with particular barriers due to language and shift working.

Tees Valley

This hub has been led by SkillShare, a well established community-based training organisation in Hartlepool, alongside the Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council and the adult learning provision of borough councils in Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland. The hub has focused on the needs of carers, including young carers, developing innovative ways of using information technology.



What distinguishes Active Learning for Active Citizenship?

Values and definitions

ALAC's learning programmes have been based on the values of:

- Social justice
- Participation
- Equality and diversity
- Co-operation and social solidarity

In this context, the hubs explored different approaches to citizenship learning which emphasised flexibility and change. This led to a series of overlapping approaches to learning for active citizenship which was not just about nationality, voting or passing tests, but rather encompassed individuals becoming active as volunteers, becoming engaged as members of groups and organisations, and becoming engaged in structures of governance and in shaping policy.

Principles and approaches

A number of principles underpinned the hubs' approaches. The hubs built on models of good practice in adult community-based learning more generally and worked in partnership, on the basis of existing networks and relationships of trust. They developed learning programmes with the following shared characteristics:

- Learners took an active part, learning in groups of community members and citizens, in dialogue with learning providers, in the initial identification of their learning needs, and in the planning, delivery and evaluation processes.

- The learning was rooted in learners' experiences, linking action and reflection, collectively, and linking the concerns of individuals with those of groups and organisations, locally and globally. ALAC has encouraged participants to review their work, at a community and neighbourhood level. Through that collective process participants have gained knowledge of and become more active in the wider context of local, regional or national governance.
- The learning was delivered flexibly, to meet learners' differing needs. This involved the provision of tailor-made courses and workshops through to more informal learning through visits and opportunities for mentoring. This also meant taking account of the support needs and particular barriers faced by learners, including the less tangible and hidden barriers such as time constraints imposed by shift working, language barriers and cultural barriers. The hubs also emphasised the importance of providing childcare, taking account of the needs of all those with caring responsibilities.
- The learning provided a safe SPACE (Social, Political and Active Citizenship Education) to explore equalities, which were centre stage throughout, to address different needs in the context of multiculturalism.
- Learners included service providers, as well as service users, learning about listening to the voices of newly empowered users. In ALAC's approach, learning for active citizenship involves lifelong learning for all.

ALAC in the wider context

The present government has committed itself to developing strategies to address the democratic deficit, so citizenship has come centre stage as a public policy concern. The aim has been to transform citizens from passive recipients of public services into inter-dependent individuals and members of families, actively engaged in their communities and in public life. They may do this as voters, volunteers and empowered activists, by participating in governance structures, working in partnership with public bodies to shape policies and services, and by thinking about what they want to change and then mobilising to achieve change through democratic means.

Citizenship education has been introduced into the national curriculum in schools to equip young people 'to think for themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life' (Final report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, London, DfEE, 1998). In parallel, citizenship education has also

been developed for 16 to 19 year olds, with the emphasis on 'combining knowledge, understanding and skills with practical action' – a 'political literacy in action' approach (*Citizenship for 16-19 year olds in education and training*, FEFC, 2000), involving young people in their learning and in their communities.

The ALAC programme was launched in 2004, as a two-year time-limited action-research programme, to test a range of approaches to community-based citizenship learning for adults. About £1 million was invested in the programme over the two years. ALAC was specifically designed to build on models of good practice, rooted in relationships and networks of trust between voluntary and community organisations and groups and learning providers in localities. The Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmith College was contracted to evaluate the programme, in order to provide a basis for promoting expanded provision of effective and sustainable learning opportunities.

