Informal Learning
and Widening Participation

Prepared for the
Department for Education and Employment

by

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Preface

“Things is different now, though, to what they was. I’m on education & during that period of time each day, I get to meet a person. Not an inmate. Not a screw. A real person. I’m still trying to get use to it & it ain’t bloody easy. I’m pretty much set in me ways now ‘cos of the life I’ve lead for so long, on the out as well as the in, so it’s difficult at times I’ve got a bit of a temper, so that don’t help much either. But ‘cos of these ‘real people’, I’ve learnt to control myself a hell of a lot better than I use to. I still flare up now and again, but no one’s perfect, eh! But I’m trying. Not ‘cos I have to, but ‘cos I feel I owe it to these ‘real people’. They’ve got respect for people & that’s something I ain’t seen for along time. Well, I have, but from what you show them & what they see in you as an individual. If they have ‘a go’ at you it’s for your own benefit & not just for the sake of doing, like the kangas do. You’ve gotta respect that in itself, cos they’re helping you, eh? ........ “If”, when I get out, I go straight & never commit another crime, it won’t be through fear of coming back inside for 10-15 years. It’ll be through fear of letting ‘them’ down after all they done to help me. I’d be kicking them in the teeth. I may be a vicious bastard, but I could never do that to them. Not now. Not ever. Not for anyone or anything.”

Inmate, Young Offenders Institution
SUMMARY

Introduction: Informal Learning and Widening Participation

Informal Learning is widening participation. However, it is not always recognised or accepted that the relationship between informal learning and participation extends beyond the narrow focus of transition pathways. There has been a continuing preoccupation in policy and research circles with establishing a causal relationship between informal learning, involvement in formal education and training and enhanced employability. This reflects a commonly-held view that the benefits of informal learning, at the bottom line, have to be measured against the ‘hard’ benchmarks of real rates of return; improvements in adult vocational training rates and, ultimately, the contribution of informal learning to the creation of a more flexible labour market, one that is equipped to meet the challenges of the new ‘knowledge economy’, global competition and the need for a flexible work force.

But, participation shouldn’t simply be construed as entry into formal education and training. Equally, the benefits of informal learning extend way beyond its capacity to act as a bridge to qualifications or a better job, important though these outcomes are. As the opening quotation to this report indicates, participation in the context of informal learning can mean coming in to society from the cold isolation of a corrective institution. It can mean contributing to the regeneration of an economically moribund steel-making community by collaborating in the collective empowerment of two generations of the long-term unemployed.

Widening participation (and by extension informal learning), then, is defined in this report as the active engagement by citizens (including those, such as convicted offenders, who have to some extent been stripped of their citizenship) in the construction, interpretation and, often, re-shaping of their own social identity and social reality.

Scope and Content of the Study and Report

The report describes the results of a study commissioned by Department for Education and Employment on informal learning. The study specifically excluded ‘work-based’ or ‘on-the-job’ learning. The main objectives of the study were to:

- add to existing knowledge on the nature, processes and outcomes of informal learning
- identify and learn from examples of innovations in informal learning (particularly those aimed at engaging excluded groups in the learning process)
provide inputs towards the development of:
- mapping tools to define informal learning arrangements and the settings in which it takes place
- a methodology to evaluate the outcomes of informal learning
- policy recommendations to promote informal learning

In the study, we were particularly interested in:

- finding out more about the nature of informal learning
- why people get involved
- what factors contribute to the origins of informal learning
- how does informal learning develop, and in what ways does it generate ‘multiplier effects’ (such as increased participation in more formal learning)
- what are the main barriers and constraints
- what are the main benefits associated with informal learning

The aims, objectives and research questions of the study were addressed through a multi-methodological approach that combines desk research and field work within a case study framework. The study encompassed:

- An initial critical review of theory and practice in the domain. This was intended to clarify the main concepts used in informal learning; provide some theoretical ‘anchor points’ for the research, and identify previous relevant research.

- An ‘audit’ of informal learning initiatives, arrangements and practices. The audit was intended to define the boundaries of the domain; provide some indication of the scale, range, characteristics, and social and spatial distribution of informal learning; clarify the ways in which informal learning occurs; and identify key examples for more detailed research.

- Case studies of eleven ‘exemplars’ of informal learning arrangements. Each case reflects different configurations of scale, geographical coverage, objectives and actors, as well as particular ‘themes’ of informal learning – for example the use of new technologies in learning.

- An additional ‘dynamic’ case study of informal learning within a particular geographical area – the city of Sheffield. This was intended to firstly, explore the inter-relationships between informal learning, conventional education and training and regeneration programmes within Sheffield. Secondly, it aimed to examine how
informal learning arrangements evolve within a particular spatial setting.

- A series of ‘Synthesis Workshops’ involving experts and practitioners in the field, whose task was to review the findings and outputs of the study as it developed.

Around one hundred examples of informal learning ‘phenomena’ were reviewed by the study. Twelve examples were analysed intensively as case studies. During the case study analysis, we carried out direct observation of the informal learning as it occurred; interviewed around seventy key actors (entrepreneurs; public officials; funders; managers; mentors and learners) involved; surveyed around fifty learners on their experiences, and, reviewed a large amount of learning materials, evaluation reports and other content.

What is Informal Learning?

A key conclusion of the study is that there is not much to be gained in trying to squeeze informal learning into a definitional ‘box’. This is especially true if the starting point for such an enterprise is to go for a mechanistic definition based on ‘difference’ between it and formal learning, for example along the lines of the ‘Schedule 2’ protocols used by government and other agencies to, amongst other things, legitimate what kinds of education and training are to be paid for through ‘welfare to work’ schemes . The same type of problem occurs if definitions are linked to accreditation (for example, certificated and non-certificated learning) or setting (for example, anything that takes place outside of a college or educational establishment) because there is considerable overlap in these cases between what is commonly assumed to be formal and what is assumed to be informal learning. Some informal learning is accredited; some does take place in schools and colleges.

The key defining characteristics of informal learning (and the distinctions between it and formal learning) as identified by the study are related to factors like developing a greater capacity for self-determination and self-evolution, or emphasising the social embeddedness of learning rather than its individual focus. Essentially, a defining feature of informal learning is that it is not as bounded as ‘mainstream’ education and training by ‘learning patrimonies’ – the historical and cultural factors that shape established pedagogic concepts and practices, and which find their expression in, for example, national curricula.

Informal learning is an ill-defined and messy concept that lacks theoretical foundation. It is eclectic and pragmatic in focus, and literature on the topic is very patchy. Scant as it is, the literature is mainly located within frameworks that draw on adult and community theories, concepts and practices. Adult education and learning is itself informed mainly by psychology, with little sociological or cultural analysis. A danger exists however, in focusing narrowly on micro processes rather than on some of the broad macro processes, as it is the macro processes that shape to some degree the opportunities for informal learning.
A number of key conclusions are suggested by the literature. A dominant theme is that the ‘arrangements’ through which informal learning takes place are extremely complex and variable in scale and scope. These arrangements typically involve learning that takes place in different settings, ranging, for example from a single, physical location like a Community College, to a geographically diffuse national network that is not bounded by location.

Another feature of the domain of informal learning is that its theories and concepts reflect tensions and contradictions. Some take a narrow definition of learning, shaped by a particular ‘learning patrimony’, one that is focused on the nature of educational practice. Other models adopt a much broader perspective, in which almost all forms of social interaction are seen as involving learning. A key contradiction is that between the traditional ‘individualistic’ (and instrumental) orientation, and newer learning theories, with an emphasis on the social dimension. This implies a shift away from seeing learning as a primarily individual, mental activity towards a focus on other outcomes and benefits associated with informal learning than individual skills, attributes and knowledge. These ‘wider benefits’ include things like social capital, capacity-building and citizenship.

At the same time, the literature also highlights a further tension between the ‘outcomes’ and ‘processes’ of informal learning. There is a marked tendency to focus either on learning processes and activities or on outcomes, but not much in the way of bringing these two together. By looking at both the trajectories of settings and the different pathways of learners, we can begin to map what constellation of factors is associated with different end goals for informal learning and how people are enabled to reach them.

Analysis of the ‘audit’ of informal learning arrangements, supported by the detailed case studies, reinforces one of the key findings of the literature review: that informal learning encompasses a diversity of arrangements, actors and practices:

- it takes place in community colleges, penal institutions, in pubs, at home, and on the beach
- it is delivered through a range of mechanisms: television ‘soap operas’, a mobile ‘Computer Gym’, theatres, community workshops, videoconferencing and ‘faith meetings’
- the ‘learning process’ encompasses outreach work (for example on depressed housing estates); self-managed learning; computer-based learning; conventional lecturing; mentoring; and broad grassroots ‘social movements’
- the learners are frequently self-selecting, rather than ‘target groups’; they can be highly differentiated and united by a common need rather than class, age or ethnicity – but can be highly homogenised, for example people living with HIV
Compared with ‘formal’ education and training – which generally tends to be highly structured and highly bounded in terms of content and delivery – informal learning happens in all sorts of places; involves different kinds of participants, and uses a variety of platforms and methods. It doesn’t to the same extent as formal learning reflect the ‘narrowness’ of ‘learning patrimonies’ (the socio-legal and political frameworks of education). Indeed, a characteristic of informal learning, particularly when it takes place in an unstructured setting – such as the ‘Surfers Against Sewage’ example described below – is that its participants do not perceive themselves to be ‘learning’. It encompasses a diversity of arrangements, actors and practices. It reflects subscribed, emergent and highly contextualised needs, rather than the ‘operational’ needs of formal education and training policy and practice. Where there is a demonstrable need – for example the need to mobilise the untapped and latent skills of young people on a housing estate and harness these to regeneration initiatives -then informal learning can emerge to fill that need

Why and How Does Informal Learning Happen?

It is important to distinguish between the initiating circumstances of informal learning as an emergent phenomenon, occupying social and organisational space, and the reasons why individuals get involved in that process.

The initiating circumstances of informal learning can be of three main types: an effort by key ‘movers and shakers’; the consequences of a broader ‘social movement’; or a programme or project based on a defined policy agenda.

Many informal learning initiatives originate as a result of the activities of a key entrepreneurial individual or group of individuals. In some instances, informal learning is a ‘by-product’ of another key issue. In two of the cases studied – ‘Faith in the Community’ and ‘Surfers against Sewage’, for example, the origins of the informal learning initiatives were rooted in initial concerns over environmental problems. Other cases – for example the initiatives in place in Peabody Housing Trust Estates – arise because of a collective desire by the people concerned to change the conditions under which they live. In further cases, a gap in existing learning provision is identified and exploited by what might be termed a ‘learning entrepreneur’.

Whether initiated by an individual ‘learning entrepreneur’; involving a broader social movement like SAS, or set up as part of a strategic development initiative, the results of the study clearly show that informal learning actions develop through a combination of the right people in the right place at the right time. The ‘right place’ and ‘right time’ invariably mean tapping into available funding.

How Does Informal Learning Develop?

Because informal learning ‘phenomena’ often originate ‘organically’, in response to unmet needs such as poor housing conditions, they initially at least, tend to have broad agendas, minimal infrastructure and flexible (if any)
organisation. This provides a high degree of potentiality for development and change. Informal learning can be seen therefore as an evolutionary process, in which the learning that happens in response to this initial need triggers other needs. These can be ‘latent’ – where participation in learning unearths additional needs that have hitherto remained hidden - or ‘transformed’ – for example where participants develop a need for additional learning as a result of participating, such as the need to acquire IT skills.

Significant changes that typically occur in the evolution of informal learning include: expansion of geographical coverage; diversification of client/participant base; professional management and organisational structure; formalisation of learning, through linkage to formal training providers and accreditation.

It is important to emphasise, however, that the formalisation and bureaucratisation of informal learning does not always reflect a process of ‘natural progression’ towards accreditation. Becoming more integrated within a more mainstream education and training service provision framework can add value to informal learning initiatives, but is sometimes perceived as threatening, inappropriate, or restrictive.

By the same token, informal learning initiatives may not be (and may not need to be) sustainable or transferable. Whether (and in what ways) an initiative should grow, and whether (and how) it can be transplanted and adapted to other locations and settings depends on the balance between ‘context’ and ‘commonality’. On the one hand, the study shows that most examples of informal learning are highly ‘contextualised’. They have emerged and evolved in response to unmet needs in a particular space and time, as a result of the right configuration of key actors in the right place at the right time. However, the examples also incorporate common features that can apply in other contexts and other times.

The sustainability and transferability of informal learning is dependent on the following factors:

- it must meet a continuing need
- to be sustainable, the learning must be incorporated into institutional practices and agencies
- there must be funding available to enable the initiative to continue, or to be replicated elsewhere

It should be remembered, however, that some initiatives have a natural ‘shelf-life'; not all aspects of informal learning are, or should be, transferable, and, to be transplanted successfully elsewhere, informal learning needs to be relevant, appropriate and flexible for different learners in different environments.
Why do People Participate in Informal Learning?

In general, people from all walks of life get involved in informal learning. In terms of age, they range from teenagers to people who are retired. It attracts both men and women in broadly equal measure. It encompasses people with very low-income levels to the relatively affluent. It includes people from black and ethnic minority group communities. A wide range of educational attainment is represented - from people with a very low literacy level to university graduates.

Although, *en masse*, participants in informal learning constitute a relatively heterogeneous population, the evidence also suggests that different types of informal learning will attract particular groups of people with a common need, a similar set of values, and shared expectations. Sometimes this common identity is self-selecting, some times it is strategically targeted as part of a policy initiative. A number of examples investigated by the study, involve this type of ‘targeted’ learner. These include Brookie Basics (basic literacy skills for adults); Heart n’ Soul (the learning disabled); Back to Work (people living with HIV/AIDS); DJ Masterclass and Downham Youth (disaffected young people); Northern Animateur and Peabody Trust (residents on housing estates with high unemployment rates).

These different types of people get involved in informal learning essentially because it creates an ‘opportunity space’ around some unmet need. The key ‘triggers’ that motivate the creation of informal learning opportunities are:

- **Social dysfunctionality.** For example, residents on an estate feel that organising around an informal learning opportunity is the only way of improving conditions on the estate.

- **Life change/ improvement.** People anticipate that real changes, such as a better job, can occur as a result of being involved.

- **Issues-driven.** Opportunities for learning are built up around a social movement, for example aimed at realising environmental improvements.

Once this opportunity space has been created, a number of ‘hooks’ can be identified that draw people into active engagement in informal learning. These include:

- **Innovation-driven.** For example, the availability of new technologies provides an opportunity for people to experience something new.

- **Advertising-led.** Through large-scale promotional campaigns, such as ‘Brookie Basics’.

- **Peer reinforcement.** Where people see their friends not only participating in informal learning, but actively benefiting.
What are the Main Barriers and Constraints?

Obstacles to learning occur both at the ‘institutional’ level – militating against the creation and evolution of an ‘opportunity space’ for learning, and the individual level – constraining people’s engagement in the process of learning. In turn, barriers to learning are in part shaped by structural processes within society itself, and by the local environment in which learners lead their lives.

The study also found that some of the ‘triggers’ that motivate people to get involved can, conversely, be the very things that create resistance to learning. Social dysfunction, for example, can reinforce resistance to learning, because of structural factors – such as the lack of learning opportunities and learning facilities on environments like depressed housing estates – and because of normative factors, by reinforcing feelings of isolation and alienation. Similarly, peer pressure can be a two-edged thing. On the one hand, it can encourage people to get involved in informal learning because they see people like themselves benefiting from the experience. On the other, learning can sometimes be seen as an ‘anti-social’ or ‘abnormal’ activity by the reference group with which a particular individual is identified. In this type of context, learning can sometimes be seen as ‘dangerous’, and one of the group defence mechanisms against this danger is to devalue it.

The main barriers and constraints to involvement in informal learning identified by the study are:

- **Negative previous experiences of education and training.** Particularly for adults who have left school early, without qualifications, returning to learning is fraught with problems like fear of not being able achieve something, or being perceived to be stupid.

- **Financial constraints.** For many people, particularly the long term unemployed or lone parents, informal learning may incur real costs – for example course fees; learning materials; travel – and opportunity costs - for example spending time learning when you could be earning money.

- **Access problems.** People can be either geographically isolated from learning resources and opportunities (like in rural areas) or socially isolated (for example in poor inner urban areas).

- **Inertia.** On the individual level, resistance to starting something new is often a key barrier to getting involved. At the institutional level, bureaucracies are sometimes slow to respond to emergent learning opportunities, particularly with regard to funding. In other instances, informal learning – particularly when it takes the form of perhaps a radical social movement – can generate hostility by institutional agencies who feel threatened by it.
What are the Outcomes of Informal Learning?

Essentially, informal learning has an important ‘catalytic’ function. It can be seen, perhaps, as a sort of ‘binding agent’ in a process of societal reconstruction, and in the development of social capital and the construction of an ‘asset base’. This asset base can operate at very different levels. At the individual level, informal learning can provide the impetus and the tools to enable people to ‘re-package’ themselves, by improving their meta-cognitive skills (learning to learn); increasing their self-confidence; improving their social skills. At the institutional level, informal learning can promote social cohesion on a residential estate, by reinforcing social integration and cohesiveness, through the development of new forms of partnership and collaborative working.

At the level of the community, informal learning allows for capacity-building. In the Sheffield case study, the evidence suggests that informal earning provides to a large extent the ‘glue’ that holds together a complex package of integrated regeneration strategies. Working through agencies like MaTrec and MCDT – two ‘on the ground’ partnerships that provide much of the co-ordination for SRB and European funding, residents, professionals and funding agencies are attempting to provide two generations of workers whose jobs have disappeared as a result of economic restructuring, and who distrust the ‘usual suspects’ providing formal training, with the means to re-energise their community through informal learning. Utilising new technologies, informal learning provides not only new technical skills – for example in house-building – but transferable skills, such as marketing, to enable residents to exploit existing and create new opportunities. In turn the applied skills are used to build new housing for the community; develop environmental improvements and contribute to ‘healthy living’ actions.

This represents to some extent a microcosm of the ways in which, at the societal level informal learning can contribute to re-shaping notions of and commitment to citizenship, social identity and social capital. The study suggests that informal learning can help make people better-informed – even, through participating in the local ‘pub quiz’ – improve their access to information sources, and their capacity for information management, and so help develop the tools for democratic decision-making. By the same token, there is some evidence that these processes are making a contribution to the demand for a more knowledge-based labour market. Informal learning can address some of the problems of social exclusion and social isolation, and thereby contribute to a more cohesive society. Finally, there was some evidence provided by the study that innovative practices originating through informal learning initiatives are being transferred and diffused on a national basis, although, as suggested above, there are some problems associated with transferability.

Given the complexity of these relationships between informal learning and these types of ‘wider benefit’ the study suggests that there is a danger of an over-preoccupation, in theory, policy and practice, with the linkages between informal learning, widening participation in formal learning, and increasing
employability. Whilst the study did demonstrate a ‘knock-on effect’ for formal learning, and employability, the contribution of informal learning to securing more educational qualifications and better jobs is relatively limited.

The limited evidence identified by the case study analysis of a direct relationship between participation in informal learning and increased employability is primarily because of four reasons:

Firstly, qualifications and accreditation are more important as reinforcers for raising self-esteem and increasing confidence than as technical qualifications linked to employment. Secondly, the outcomes and benefits associated with informal learning tend to focus on ‘generic’ rather than ‘technical’ attributes, and are more difficult to market directly. Thirdly, informal learning is highly contextualised. Thus opportunities have to exist within the immediate vicinity of the learning setting to directly convert skills acquired through informal learning into real employment gains. Informal learning, at heart has to be directly relevant to the real life-world and opportunity structures of learners.

In general, therefore, the key contribution made by informal learning to employability lies in enabling people to reconstruct themselves: to get out of the cycle of unemployability by enhancing their meta-cognitive skills; their presentational skills (at job interviews, for example) and their ability to market themselves. This contribution is underpinned by the real improvements informal learning can make to self-esteem and confidence-building.

However, a fourth reason why the study found only a weak link between participation in informal learning and employability is that, in several of the cases studied, the participants are already highly marginalised, for example people learning in prisons; people living with HIV; the long-term unemployed on ‘housing sink’ estates. In these contexts, the pre-existing ‘labelling’ by prospective employers of marginalised groups can over-ride the gains realised for participants in informal learning. Despite raising their competence levels or presentational skills informal learning may not prevent prospective employers subsequently viewing young offenders as untrustworthy, unreliable, and so on. As argued above, in relation to employability, informal learning has to be directly relevant to the real life-world and opportunity structures of learners. This means that employers as well as participants themselves need to be engaged collaboratively in the process of informal learning.

**Lessons from the Study: Good Practice; Policy Implications and Outcome Measurement**

The study has identified a wide range of examples of innovation and good practice in informal learning. These shed light on how to increase participation, particularly for those who are ‘resistant’ to learning, and those who are excluded from learning opportunities. They also highlight some of the ways in which the experience and outcomes of informal learning can be enhanced for those involved. In turn, the examples of innovations and good
practices identified by the study highlight the need for a range of policy actions that can both encourage and sustain participation in informal learning.

The examples of innovation and good practice, and the policy recommendations set out in the Report, are informed by the main constraints to involvement and continuing engagement in informal learning identified by the study. Essentially, the Report argues for flexibility in the funding, management and evaluation of informal learning. Informal learning encompasses a diversity of arrangements, actors and practices. It reflects subscribed, emergent and highly contextualised needs, rather than the ‘operational’ needs of formal education and training policy and practice. As a result, in the context of national policy-making, investment decisions and programme initiatives should allow scope for flexibility, and not privilege initiatives that aim to support transitions between informal learning and formal learning or as pathways to employment. Equally, it should be recognised that ‘having fun’ is a key, motivating factor driving participation in informal learning. As argued above, the very fact that learning is sometimes a ‘hidden’ agenda subsumed within another activity – like going to a beach party held by ‘Surfers Against Sewage’ – can often be a key factor in overcoming the resistance to learning of people who are otherwise hostile to, afraid of or sceptical about learning. Policies aimed at encouraging wider participation at the national level should therefore be flexible enough to support initiatives that may reflect radical alternatives to ‘mainstream’ education and training. Equally, local practitioners with responsibility for setting up and managing informal learning opportunities could benefit from a more flexible pedagogic approach that draws on the examples of innovation provided by the study.

The study also emphasises the need for integration. If informal learning is seen as a ‘binding agent’ in a process of societal reconstruction, and in the development of social capital, then this implies a degree of integration between informal learning and broader policy agendas, such as health and social exclusion. National policies aimed at encouraging involvement in informal learning should build on recent trends towards ‘joined up government’. At the local policy-making level – particularly in relation to linking informal learning initiatives to the broader agendas of community re-generation - integration also implies sustaining existing, and developing new forms of partnership to facilitate and support the creation and sustainability of learning opportunities.

The Report also argues the case for dissemination networks in order to maximise the transferability of innovations between practitioners, and between learners themselves, in order to address inequalities in the distribution and accessibility of learning opportunities. A contributory factor to the uneven distribution of informal learning provision is the uneven and unpredictable nature of the dissemination and transfer process of innovations and good practices in the domain. This is partly because informal learning is to one degree or another contextualised, and some elements of it do not travel well. It is also due in part, however to the lack of a dissemination infrastructure. To facilitate the dissemination of good practice and the transferability of informal learning innovations, a co-ordinated monitoring and
dissemination infrastructure for innovations and good practices in informal learning should be set up. At the national level, this could be linked, for example, to Learning Direct to enable people to be better informed about learning opportunities. At the local level, it implies developing horizontal networks to enable practitioners to share the benefits of new innovations.

Finally, it highlights the need for more research, principally in innovative ways of facilitating informal learning. This should focus on: adapting informal learning to learner profiles; investigating the effectiveness of learning technologies and supporting skills development in this area; developing pedagogies for supporting self-paced learning; identifying and enhancing the effectiveness of mentoring systems. This recommendation will particularly benefit practitioners – those who develop and manage learning opportunities. The study also highlights a need at all levels – in terms of national policy; at the local level, and for practitioners on the ground - for more research in how to evaluate informal learning and assess its outcomes.

The report concludes with a review of outcome assessment approaches, and sketches out an evaluation framework for informal learning, together with some examples of possible assessment tools. It argues that, because of the complexity and diversity of informal learning, evaluation should be shaped by the following guiding principles: multi-dimensionality; contextualisation; the adoption of a ‘criteria-based’ approach; the use of normative assessment measures, and the inclusion of process and developmental evaluation. Informal learning continues to be seen as an ‘investment’ necessarily justified by ‘rates of return’. However, the study strongly suggests that measuring the outcomes of informal learning on the basis of economic rates of return will inevitably realise poor results. This is mainly because the key benefits of informal learning are associated less with widening participation (in the narrow sense of facilitating transition pathways to formal training and increased employability) and more with improving the individual, community and societal asset base (in the broad sense of increasing self-confidence; creating community capacity and building social capital). We also show that informal learning constitutes phenomena that typically evolve in response to some ‘unmet need’. Such needs frequently imply social value rather than financial returns on investment. By the same token, informal learning is often highly innovative. It involves different stakeholders with different ‘world views’ of what are its benefits, and it may develop along a trajectory that is difficult to predict. Because the domain is inherently unpredictable, highly contested and exploratory, it is neither possible nor useful to find an agreed consensus on outcomes, let alone how to measure them. It is therefore essential in outcome measurement to incorporate some notion of social construction of value as well as some mechanism for reconciling these different constructions. It is hoped that this report provides a step in the right direction towards establishing a basis for measuring the outcomes of informal learning.
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

1.1 Introduction: The Study Brief

In January 1999 the Tavistock Institute was commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment to carry out a study on ‘Informal Learning and Widening Participation’. The main aims of this study were to:

- identify how individuals, particularly those who appear resistant or unmotivated towards informal learning, and the socially excluded, can most profitably become engaged in informal learning
- investigate and identify the key factors promoting effective learning, with particular reference to the relationship between such learning and employability

The key research questions addressed are:

- What are the distinguishing characteristics of informal learning?
- In what context does it operate effectively?
- What are the processes through which people become engaged in such learning?
- What are its benefits?

The main research activities adopted to address these research questions are comprised of two phases.

**Phase 1** includes:

- a literature review of state of the art research and practice in informal learning
- an ‘audit’ of informal learning contexts and settings
- a synthesis workshop involving experts and study stakeholders to critically review the study findings

**Phase 2** focuses on:

- a set of ten indicative case studies of exemplary informal learning arrangements
• a ‘dynamic case study’ implemented within a defined spatial area, in which the dynamics of informal learning are explored on the ground. This is intended to provide a research space in which the linkages between different learning configurations can be explored.

• a second synthesis workshop.

• providing inputs towards developing a methodology to evaluate the outcomes of informal learning; towards the dissemination of good practice; towards recommendations for policy to promote informal learning.

An Interim Report, covering Phase 1 of the study, was produced in April 1999. The Interim Report was supported by two key accompanying documents, a detailed review of the literature on informal learning and widening participation, and an ‘audit’ of examples of informal learning drawn from the UK experience. This Final Report incorporates the key findings of the Interim Report and the accompanying documents. It further outlines the results of the second phase of the Study and draws together the results of both phases to provide conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Methodological Approach

The aims objectives and research questions of the study were addressed through a multi-methodological approach that combines desk research and field work within a case study framework. This approach focuses on the identification, documentation and assessment of exemplars of different informal learning configurations. A starting point for the study was the development, on the basis of an initial appraisal of theory and practice in the field, of a provisional ‘typology of informal learning contexts and settings’. This provided a classification structure for a review of the literature in the field. The literature review was based on a critical interpretative analysis of the main concepts, approaches, theoretical positions and practices currently adopted. It also enabled the study to identify innovative examples of informal learning that were further investigated in the Audit. The review was intended to (i) clarify the nature and conceptualisation of informal learning; (ii) provide some theoretical ‘anchor points’ for the case study research (phase 2); and (iii) identify previous research relevant to the questions posed by the DfEE.

The audit was to (i) define the boundaries of the domain; (ii) provide some indication of the scale, range, characteristics, and social and spatial distribution of informal learning; (iii) clarify the ways in which informal learning occurs (iv) provide a population frame from which a sample of exemplary cases could be drawn v) identify the research criteria to be used to structure the approach and research instruments in phase 2 of the study.

Following an appraisal and synthesis of the results of the literature review and audit, a Synthesis Workshop was held, involving experts and study stakeholders to critically review the outputs of the literature review and audit of informal learning contexts. This was implemented in the form of a ‘focus group’
and focused on a critical review by the participants of the results. A significant outcome of the first workshop was the identification of a preliminary list of examples of informal learning to provide the basis of the later case study analysis.

Two types of case study analyses were carried out. In the first type, a set of ten ‘exemplary’ instances of informal learning arrangements were analysed. Each case reflects different configurations of scale, geographical coverage, objectives and actors, as well as particular ‘themes’ of informal learning.

The second type constitutes a ‘dynamic’ case study. The ‘dynamic’ case study had two main objectives: firstly, to assess to what extent and in what ways informal learning within a particular spatial boundary relates to other forms of learning provision, and to other initiatives (such as economic strategies); secondly, to explore how informal learning arrangements evolve within a particular spatial setting.

For both types, in keeping with the study approach generally, a multi-methodological approach to data collection and analysis was used. The data were drawn from both primary sources (e.g. interviews with key stakeholders) and secondary sources (e.g. reports). In order to standardize data collection procedures, and to facilitate cross-case comparison, a common ‘template’ was developed. This specified the common activities to be carried out; the key sources of data to be used and the way the data should be analysed and presented. The case study research activities for each case typically involved a combination of face to face interviews with key actors (e.g. learning managers; activists; providers); focus groups with participants (typically learners themselves); observation of informal learning activities; content analysis of relevant materials (for example course texts; minutes of meetings); surveys of learners, using a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ).

Following the approach used in Phase 1 of the Study, the results of the two types of case study analysis were summarised and presented in a second Synthesis Workshop, which critically reviewed the outcomes and provided inputs towards developing conclusions and recommendations.

1.3 Structure of this Report

The Report is set out as follows:

- Following this Introduction, Section 2 provides a summary of phase 1 of the Study (the literature review and audit of informal learning contexts and settings, together with the results of the First Synthesis Workshop).

- In section 3, we present the main findings of the analysis of case study examples of informal learning.

- Section 4 provides a detailed description of the results of the ‘dynamic case study’
Section 5 provides the main conclusions and recommendations of the study, in the form of: examples of innovation and good practice in informal learning; inputs towards policy recommendations to facilitate participation in informal learning; inputs towards a methodology to assess its outcomes.
SECTION 2: RESUME OF PHASE 1 OF THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

Phase 1 of this study commenced in January 1999 and concluded in April 1999. This section provides a synopsis of the resulting Interim report, which detailed the activities and findings of phase 1.

The main research activities of phase 1 were:

- A literature review of state of the art research and practice in informal learning. The review was intended to (i) clarify the nature and conceptualisation of informal learning; (ii) provide some theoretical ‘anchor points’ for the case study research (phase 2); and (iii) identify previous research relevant to the questions posed by the DfEE.

- An ‘audit’ of informal learning initiatives, arrangements and practices. The audit was to (i) define the boundaries of the domain; (ii) provide some indication of the scale, range, characteristics, and social and spatial distribution of informal learning; (iii) clarify the ways in which informal learning occurs; and (iv) provide a population frame from which a sample of exemplary cases could be drawn.

- A synthesis workshop involving experts and study stakeholders to critically review the outputs of the literature review and audit of informal learning contexts.

Initially, we held a number of underlying assumptions about the nature of the informal learning domain: that, it was to some extent bounded (for example in relation to the scale and volume of activities); that there was a consensus about how informal learning is defined; that this definition was underpinned by well-developed conceptual understandings; that, to a large extent the ‘units of analysis’ of informal learning were mainly in the form of discrete initiatives and projects that themselves displayed bounded and definable characteristics. However, results of the literature review and audit do not support these preliminary assumptions. In particular, a key conclusion of the literature review and audit was that the domain is essentially open-ended.

The remainder of this section is structured as follows:

Section 2.2: A summary of the most salient findings from the literature review.

Section 2.3: Main results of the audit of learning contexts and settings.

Section 2.4: Outcomes of the Phase 1 Synthesis Workshop in brief.

Section 2.5: Phase 1 Concluding Comments
2.2 The Literature Review

Informal learning is an ill-defined and messy concept that lacks theoretical foundation. To move beyond its eclectic and pragmatic focus, it is necessary to establish linkages with relevant domains of theory and to connect it to strands of emergent thinking which will give it some depth and explanatory power. Given that there is no well-defined field of informal learning, literature on the topic is very patchy. However, three areas of theorising identified as offering valuable insights on informal learning were: Learning theory, Life course theory and other frameworks relating to transitions and pathways (towards different goals, implying different development tracks), and Civil society and notions about active citizenship.

Literature on informal learning, scant as it is, is mainly located within frameworks that draw on adult and community theories, concepts and practices. Adult education and learning is itself informed mainly by psychology, with little sociological or cultural analysis. A danger exists however, in focusing narrowly on micro processes rather than on some of the broad macro processes, as it is the macro processes that shape to some degree the opportunities for informal learning.

The task here is not just one of reviewing the literature, but a more intellectually demanding one of building new theory, making links across disparate fields of the literature and bringing quite new perspectives to bear on informal learning. In this sense, the literature review is necessarily part of an iterative process involving conceptualisation, action research, revisiting the literature, and ongoing refinement of models.

The literature review provided the following broad understandings:

- The ‘arrangements’ through which informal learning takes place are extremely complex and variable in scale and scope. Although there are examples of well-bounded initiatives, usually taking place within the context of a structured setting, such as a community college, for example, many of the more interesting examples identified, involved loose networks, sometimes on a national scale.

- The importance of locating an analysis of informal learning within different settings. By implication, what we are likely to arrive at is an understanding of how informal learning is configured in these different settings - a kind of contingency framework - rather than being in a position to make broad generalisations that hold across all kinds of informal learning in all kinds of settings.

- Conceptual models of informal learning reflect tensions and contradictions. Some take a narrow definition of learning, shaped by a particular ‘learning patrimony’, one that is focused on the nature of educational practice. Other models adopt a much broader perspective, in which almost all forms of social interaction are seen as involving learning.
• There is a potential tension between the individualistic (and instrumental) orientation that is implicit in many of the DfEE questions and what some people hold to be the defining feature of informal learning, namely its social, interactive character. Newer learning theories, with emphasis on the social dimension, are based on a different (and unfamiliar) epistemology which represents a shift away from seeing learning as a primarily individual, mental activity. Thus, we may need to be looking for different outcomes and benefits from informal learning than individual skills, attributes, knowledge etc.

• A great deal of the literature is so steeped in its own disciplinary paradigm that one cannot be sure whether the findings reported are empirically based or reflect an unquestioned set of assumptions.

• Whilst we identified a few key empirical studies of informal learning, they nonetheless leave some substantial gaps in our understanding. There is a marked tendency to focus either on learning processes and activities or on outcomes, but not much in the way of bringing these two together. Some of the best recent work has been undertaken in the field of workplace learning, but this is a very particular kind of bounded context and in any case research here has not had a dynamic or developmental focus.

• It is evident from the literature that getting at informal learning through research requires considerable effort and perseverance. By its very nature it is elusive, and not readily available for scrutiny or measurement. This combined with the circumstances of many of the people likely to be of interest to this study suggests that we are talking about intensive and negotiated research methodologies. One very rich source of case study material, which we were able to draw on for the voluntary sector, for example, was gathered over a six-year period. Other studies, ethnographic in nature, have been narrow and intensive in scope.

• Questions about the effectiveness of informal learning will necessarily have to relate to ‘effectiveness for what’? This is an area where the dynamic approach we propose may make a valued contribution. By looking at both the trajectories of settings and the different pathways of learners, we can begin to map what constellation of factors is associated with different end goals for informal learning and how people are enabled to reach them.

2.3 Audit of Informal Learning Contexts and Settings

The audit is comprised of a database of eighty exemplars of informal learning ‘arrangements’. The examples of informal learning included in the audit represent a broad set of learning scenarios, settings, networks, funding arrangements and pedagogic characteristics.
Our initial analysis suggests that there are four key defining dimensions of informal learning: Domain, Context, Arrangements, and Process.

(i) **Domain:** The overall environment in which informal learning takes place.

Our preliminary analysis of the Audit examples suggests a number of broad configurations of learner groups; environments and agendas that constitute the main environments in which informal learning takes place. These are:

- **Ethnic and faith communities:** two main types of informal learning can be identified. Type 1 constitute targeted initiatives that are typically part of broader policy interventions, usually ‘top-down’ schemes that are government funded. Type 2 are community-based examples of informal learning that develop within a ‘self-help’ or ‘community empowerment’ context.

- **Disability:** a strand of informal learning associated with marginalised social groups with a common interest in disability can be identified. As with examples drawn from the ethnic communities, learning is typically precipitated either through formal programmes, or through more radical ‘protest’ and rights-related activities.

- **Older People:** informal learning for older people tends to be focused in social settings, such as clubs and leisure activities.

- **Protest and environment:** although protest and rights-related issues are a common strand across domains, a key informal learning domain is focused on environmental issues.

- **Gender and parenting:** an important determinant of non-participation in formal learning is stage in the family life cycle. A significant informal learning domain is thus associated with women with pre-school children and women returners.

- **Community regeneration:** this domain is explicitly related to addressing marginalisation and social exclusion through promoting basic skills, as well as issues around homelessness.

- **Criminal justice:** this domain focuses primarily on people in prison, and particularly activities around young offenders.

- **Health:** a range of informal learning initiatives and activities focus on health. They tend to be classified into three main groups: health promotion and disease prevention; health education; and self-help.

- **Leisure:** leisure and lifestyle is possibly the broadest and most extensive informal learning domain. As an example, informal learning in a ‘pub’ setting has become a key source of informal learning, ranging from pub quizzes to specific courses offered in a pub setting.
• **Youth**: ‘young people’ tends to be a cross-cutting domain label that links a number of strands of informal learning, including criminal justice, citizenship issues and homelessness.

(ii) **Context**: this refers to the ‘boundaries’ in which informal learning takes place, i.e. the socio-cultural and organisational environment.

The audit suggested four broad generic contexts of informal learning:

• Self-directed: where learning is primarily carried out as part of a personal ‘life-plan’.

• Local voluntary organisation: where learning is a collectivised activity, facilitated and supported by an existing network, such as a voluntary organisation.

• Social movement/community action: where learning is embedded as part of a socially contextualised set of actions, for example as part of an attempt by residents to empower their community.

• Education outreach: typically shaped by a ‘top-down’ initiative involving funding through some government agency.

Within these broad generic contexts a key constituent element shaping informal learning identified by the audit is ‘setting’, which includes:

- Single site (e.g., a community college, either providing activities on the premises, or outreach activities for the community)
- Formal networks (e.g., a national network of libraries)
- Informal networks (e.g., national protest and rights-based activities).

(iii) **Arrangements**: this defines how learning takes place – the pedagogic characteristics; content and agendas shaping learning.

The main elements identified by the Audit are:

• **Delivery arrangements**: typically self-referred; didactic (delivered by teachers or other experts); mentoring (provided through self-help)

• **Pedagogic approach**: usually transmissive (involving specific formal content, such as course material) or situated (for example part of a community agenda based on empowerment)

• **Content**: covering the objectives of informal learning. These may be explicit (for example courses providing basic skills or languages) or tacit (for example advocacy skills acquired through involvement in a protest movement).
(iv) **Process**: the initiating circumstances of learning and the evolution of learning. Informal learning is not always a ‘static’ or ‘discrete’ phenomenon; nor does it necessarily involve intentionality or strategic planning.

The audit suggested that the process of informal learning is a key defining element of what it is and what it does. Two main process factors can be identified:

- **Initiating circumstances**: the circumstances through which informal learning originates are typically either strategic or ancillary. In the first case, informal learning is defined by some sort of formalised frame that usually is associated with particular objectives. Typical examples are government-funded programmes. In the second case, learning tends to be a by-product of some other process, a typical example being protest or rights-related events.

- **Trajectories**: In some cases, the origins of informal learning will evolve into a different path or trajectory. This may sometimes involve consolidating learning outcomes through, for example entering into formalised accredited training.

### 2.4 The Phase 1 Synthesis Workshop

A synthesis workshop was held on 23 March 1999, to review phase 1 findings and plan subsequent stages of work. The workshop brought together fifteen participants, including academics, practitioners, people with a policy brief from DfEE and the Tavistock Institute research team.

Feedback was given by the Tavistock research team in the form of (i) an introduction to the policy context which set the project within the Government’s Lifelong Learning Policy and general concerns about access and participation; (ii) a literature review progress report. This drew together quite disparate understandings of social innovation and contemporary ideas of citizenship and social inclusion as well as more traditional discussions of learning theories and education; and (iii) presentation of a range of case examples from the audit to aid the process of clarifying the choice of research case studies for phase 2.

Key outcomes of the Workshop were:

- A discussion concerning the different definitions of who were to be recognised as learners. Positions adopted by Workshop participants ranged from learning being innate human behaviour, meaning that everyone was a learner, through to a more restrictive intentional definition that focused on outreach from formal education.

- A discussion about the relationship between learning and economic activity and work. It was agreed that whilst informal learning often had vocational implications, this was not always so.
• It was recognised that different case examples suggested different trajectories for the development of initiatives and different pathways for individual development. Suggestions were then made regarding selection of research cases, for example, to include community-led initiatives, youth-oriented projects and at least one technology or web-based example.

In summary, the phase 1 workshop helped to define the boundaries of what constitutes informal learning and identify the case studies that would need to be undertaken.

2.5 Concluding Comments

Phase 1 does not provide clear conclusions about the nature of informal learning, nor does it set the boundaries of what informal learning is. Rather, the findings of phase 1 as outlined above represent one iteration of an evolving ‘object of study’.

The main outcomes of Phase 1 were:

• A literature review which has highlighted the problematic and paradigmatic nature of informal learning, but has nevertheless identified a number of perspectives and positions that make a contribution towards furthering understandings about the nature of informal learning.

• An Audit of informal learning examples, which can be seen as a first stab at mapping the domain.

• On the basis of the literature review and audit, a preliminary model of informal learning that provides a classification and analytical framework for further research.
SECTION 3: RESULTS OF THE EXEMPLARY CASE STUDIES

3.1 Introduction

Following the first phase of the study a ‘shortlist’ of examples identified by the literature review and the ‘audit’ was drawn up. In the second phase of the study, these examples were the focus of intensive case study analysis. The cases short-listed represent ‘exemplary’ informal learning arrangements. Each case reflects different configurations of scale, geographical coverage, objectives and actors, as well as particular ‘themes’ of informal learning – for example the use of new technologies in learning. The cases were chosen, on the basis of the results of the literature review and audit, as typical representations of the types of informal learning commonly found in practice. Following a review of the shortlist, at the first Workshop meeting, and in a subsequent meeting with DfEE, a final list of ten cases (with one additional ‘back up’ case) were chosen for the case study analysis. These cases are described in detail below in Section 3.2.

These cases can be seen as ‘benchmarks’ of the broad spectrum of informal learning at large. The main objectives of the case study analysis (in keeping with the overall objectives of the study as a whole) were to:

- further deepen understandings of the nature, processes and outcomes of informal learning
- identify and learn from examples of innovative approaches to informal learning, with particular reference to increasing participation of excluded groups in the learning process
- provide inputs towards the development of mapping tools to define informal learning arrangements and the settings in which it takes place
- provide inputs towards developing a methodology to evaluate the outcomes of informal learning
- learn from the case studies in order to inform policy recommendations to promote informal learning.

In the case study analysis, we were particularly interested in:

- finding out more about the nature of informal learning
- why people get involved
- what factors contribute to the origins of informal learning
how does informal learning develop, and in what ways does it
generate ‘multiplier effects’ (such as increased participation in more
formal learning)

• what are the main barriers and constraints

• what are the main benefits associated with informal learning

These questions are explored in detail below.

A multi-methodological approach to data collection and analysis was used for
the case studies. The data were drawn from both primary sources (e.g.
interviews with key stakeholders) and secondary sources (e.g. reports). In
order to standardise data collection procedures, and to facilitate cross-case
comparison, a common ‘template’ was developed. This specified the common
activities to be carried out; the key sources of data to be used and the way the
data should be analysed and presented. As Table 3.1 shows, the research
activities for each case typically involved a combination of:

• face to face interviews with key actors (e.g. learning managers,
activists, providers)

• focus groups with participants (typically learners themselves)

• observation of informal learning activities

• content analysis of relevant materials (e.g. course texts, minutes of
meetings)

• surveys of learners, using a self-administered questionnaire (saq)
Table 3.1: Case Study Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>N. Interview</th>
<th>N. Observations</th>
<th>N. Focus Groups</th>
<th>N. SAQs</th>
<th>Content Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Peabody Trust</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Portland YOI</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Surfers against Sewage</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Heart 'n Soul</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brookie Basics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faith in the Community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>D J Masterclass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Northern Animateur</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Downham Young</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>UK Coalition</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pub Project</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Characteristics of the Cases

Table 3.2 gives a brief summary description of the eleven case studies.

Table 3.2: List of case studies

1. Peabody Trust

Peabody run a range of learning projects that are embedded within other initiatives designed to improve the environmental and social conditions on Peabody housing estates, with particular reference to ‘empowerment’ of the residents themselves. This particular example reflects the use of new technologies in developing informal learning.

2. Young Offenders Institute Portland

HMYOI Portland is a training establishment for male young offenders. They are often underachievers and suffer from a lack of motivation, confidence, self esteem and expectations. A key feature of this case is the mix of traditional learning formats with a more informal approach that addresses the context and circumstances where the learning activities take place.

3. Surfers Against Sewage

Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is a pressure group campaigning for cleaner bathing waters. It runs a range of campaigns/learning opportunities through the national and local media, lobbying, poster campaigns protests and
demonstrations as well as using surfing contests and festival to encourage participation and membership. A key feature of this example has been the evolution of the movement from a marginalised group interrupting water company shareholder meetings to a mainstream consultation forum.

4. Heart n’ Soul

Heart ‘n’ Soul is the only professional music-theatre company for people with learning disabilities. The members write their own music and lyrics and have devised and toured ten full-scale musical productions across the UK and Europe. The company aims to broaden the skills and employability of learning disabled people by training them to work in various arts activities.

5. Brookie Basics

Brookie Basics is a national initiative designed to increase participation in learning and facilitate conventional learning. It provides basic literacy training mainly through community colleges. The content is linked to events that happen in the Channel 4 ‘soap opera’ Brookside. Three sites offering Brookie Basics have been selected: a study centre in Liverpool Community College; a womens’ prison near London, and a CVS centre in Newcastle.

6. Faith in the Community

Faith in the Community aims to facilitate dialogue about the quality of life, sustainability and Local Agenda 21 across different spiritual groups around Nottingham. A key lesson learned from this case is how important a key ‘knowledge entrepreneur’ or core group is in initiating and sustaining informal learning processes.

7. DJ Masterclass

The DJ workshop provides hands-on technical skills for DJ’s via FE colleges, youth clubs, local authorities. It’s philosophy is about an alternative approach to education, which mainly addresses young people who left mainstream education and in general disaffected youth. The long term aim is to encourage some of the young people who left school to go back to some form of education. For this reason, the workshop unit goes towards a BTEC in the National Diploma for the Performing Arts.

8. Northern Animateur

This case study focuses on two main issues: the role of trades unions as partners in informal learning, and the ways in which community regeneration can be developed by training members of the community as ‘animateurs’ or catalysts in community empowerment. The example is located in the North East of England.
9. Downham Young

Downham Young (located on an inner urban London housing estate with many of the typical indicators of multiple deprivation) is led by young people themselves. All activities are aimed at increasing the level of young people’s participation in their own community. The ethos of the group focuses on empowerment. On the one hand, the group organises activities with local Youth Clubs such as a Graffiti project and residential week ends away with young people living on the estate. On the other hand they are active collaborators in the regeneration of Downham estate.

10. UK Coalition – Back to Work Project

The pilot project was set up by the UK Coalition of people living with HIV and AIDS. A wide set of training options is offered to clients through the HIV/AIDS agencies involved in the project. In addition to some skill-based training according to their own interests, clients are also given the opportunity to have a job placement with a number of employers involved in the project.

11. Pubs (thematic case study- backup)

This case study looks at how pubs constitute a focus for informal learning. The study includes an assessment of the role of ‘pub quizzes’ in informal learning, and then compares this with initiatives that provide more structured courses. This includes The Miners Arms scheme, which provides course delivery in a shopping precinct, a teleworking centre and a cybercafe in Matlock.

As Table 3.2 illustrates, the eleven cases reflect a wide range of participants, domains, organisational structures, learning approaches, content and intended outcomes. They include relatively ‘top-down’ learning arrangements, that are to some extent linked to more formal training and qualification pathways, as well as ‘bottom-up’ examples of broader social movements. Table 3.3 summarises the main characteristics of the cases in terms of these key elements:

- the ‘learning model’ (reflecting the nature of the pedagogic objectives and practices adopted)
- the ‘learning setting’ (reflecting the context and environment in which learning takes place)
- the ‘target group’ (the type of participant involved – although it should be emphasised that the very nature of ‘informal learning’ frequently entails participation by amorphous rather than deliberately targeted groups)
- the ‘organisational model’ (describing the institutional context in which informal learning takes place)
• the intended outcomes (the intended and actual outcomes associated with informal learning)

• features (reflecting the unique or ‘trade-mark’ features of a particular case)

As the Table shows, and in keeping with the findings of the ‘audit’ carried out in phase 1 of the project, the case studies represent a diverse set of informal learning arrangements.

i) Learning Settings

The settings in which informal learning takes place cover a broad spectrum from widely dispersed national networks to single institutions housed in one building. They include:

• National networks.
  Example: Surfers Against Sewage services over 10,000 members nationally, with a head office in St Agnes, Cornwall, and regional offices connected by an IT infrastructure. Within this institutional structure SAS is essentially social and community based as part of a single-issue environmental movement.

• Housing estates.
  Example: The Digital Learning Ring provides distance learning for residents on the Clapham Peabody housing estate in South London.

• Institutions.
  Example: The Portland Young Offenders Institute provides a flexible mix of conventional (qualifications-focused) and informal learning to young men serving custodial sentences.

• Educational Institutes.
  Example: Brookie Basics is an adult literacy learning package which includes video materials, workbooks and tutoring delivered through Liverpool Community College.
### Table 3.3: Characteristics of the Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE</th>
<th>Learning Model</th>
<th>Learning Setting</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Organisational Model</th>
<th>Outcomes Intended</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Peabody Trust (PBT)</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Housing estates</td>
<td>Long term unemployed</td>
<td>Collaborative partnership</td>
<td>Social inclusion Empowerment ‘Learn to learn’</td>
<td>‘Computer Gym’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Surfers against Sewage (SAS)</td>
<td>Outreach/self-help</td>
<td>National outreach</td>
<td>10,000 members of public</td>
<td>Community-based social movement run by NGO</td>
<td>Awareness raising about pollution</td>
<td>Fun activities; media campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Heart ‘n Soul (HNS)</td>
<td>Self-help</td>
<td>Distributed - theatres</td>
<td>People with learning disabilities</td>
<td>Theatre company</td>
<td>Empowerment and professional skills</td>
<td>Touring theatre group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brookie Basics (BBC)</td>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>Distributed National/College/Home</td>
<td>Adults with poor literacy</td>
<td>Linked DIEE/FE network</td>
<td>Improve basic reading/writing</td>
<td>Uses national TV ‘soap opera’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Faith in the Community (FIC)</td>
<td>Social dialogue</td>
<td>Local network</td>
<td>People with religious commitment</td>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>Improve knowledge; spread awareness</td>
<td>Religious/social issue base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. DJ Masterclass (DJM)</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Multi-site</td>
<td>Mainly young, difficult to teach</td>
<td>Partnership - education authorities</td>
<td>Music skills qualification</td>
<td>Trains kids in DJ skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Northern Animateur (NAT)</td>
<td>Adult community-led education</td>
<td>Community-based/Residential college</td>
<td>Working people (long term unemployed)</td>
<td>College – but community-led agendas</td>
<td>Learning to learn; IT; qualifications</td>
<td>Pub-based; video conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Downham Young (DMY)</td>
<td>Outreach/self-help</td>
<td>Single housing estate</td>
<td>Young people on the estate disaffected</td>
<td>Participative youth club dialogue</td>
<td>Empowerment participation in local regeneration</td>
<td>Dialogue with local actors. Local development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Pub Project (PUB)</td>
<td>Outreach/self-help</td>
<td>Virtual classroom</td>
<td>Learners who are isolated</td>
<td>Partnership - pub/college</td>
<td>Community integration</td>
<td>Self-paced computer learning; video conferencing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **Lifestyle-oriented** – through work settings, the home, pubs and theatres.
  Example: The Miners Arms provides a range of courses in the local pub, supported by tutors in a local college and with self-organised learning delivered at home through CD-ROM and teleconferencing.

ii) **Delivery Scenarios**

These settings incorporate four main types of *distribution/delivery scenarios*:

• **National distributed networks.**
  Example: Brookie Basics is delivered nationally through a major television ‘soap’, which reinforces the learning provided by more conventional learning materials in community colleges, prisons and other settings nation-wide.

• **Local distribution Network.**
  Example: DJ Masterclass provides a ‘touring’ class for learners in community colleges and other venues in Tower Hamlets and Lewisham, in London.

• **Single site.**
  Example: Downham Youth is a community-based ‘empowerment’ initiative intended to actively involve young people on the Downham Estate in London in its regeneration.

• **Virtual network.**
  Example: The Peabody ‘Computer Gym’ provides a mobile technology-based learning system for residents in six London housing estates. These are supported by the Digital Learning Ring, which provides on-line courses (through video conferencing) from two local colleges.

iii) **Pedagogic/service model**

Typically, the type of service provided is not pre-structured on any given pedagogic mode, but tends to evolve as the learning itself evolves. With this proviso in mind, four main types of service (or learning) model can be identified:

• **Outreach** – Where participants in the learning process become engaged in collaborative learning with learning ‘providers’.
  Example: The Peabody Trust Digital Learning Ring was developed by Peabody Trust Community Workers who started by going on to the estates to canvas residents about their learning needs.

• **Self-help** – Where learning needs are originated, defined and addressed by learners themselves.
  Example: Downham Young represents a learning process where the young people of the estate implemented their own community consultation about learning and regeneration needs in their area and
then proceeded to actively secure the skills and the resources necessary to realise those needs.

- **Social discourse/dialogic** – Where learning is part of a broader social movement, a key aim of which is capacity-building. Example: Surfers Against Sewage, which started off with a few surfers who were fed up with getting their wet suits covered in excrement and ended up as a big national environmental lobby.

- **Conventional didactic** – Where learning is essentially ‘top down’ and promoted through a classic ‘teacher-student’ interaction. Example: Portland Young Offenders.

However, a characteristic of the informal learning examples studied is that the methods that promote learning within these different pedagogic spaces tend to be non-didactic. For example, one of the dominant themes in the case studies has been the emergence in informal learning processes and practices of the kind of ‘dialogic discourse’ referred to by Giddens (discussed in detail in the literature review of this study) in his analysis of how community identity is currently being re-shaped in the face of globalisation processes and the ‘information society’. In this context, learning is promoted primarily through mentoring and ‘peer imitation’. This has become an essential part of the strategy through which economic regeneration of depressed areas is currently being undertaken (see Example 3.1).

**Example 3.1: The Animateur Project**

The Animateur project started in November 1997. X drew on the ideas of animateurs drawn from developments in Spain and Scotland. The emphasis is on development of resources of/within a community:

“The idea was that in rural areas – it was a rural construct - you could not have community development workers in all communities. You could employ, use local leadership – they had this notion of local natural community leaders - and support them through professional training. When I came down here and was working with some experienced community development officers – training needs analysis focused on ex coal mining. The way we did it was through recruiting local people training them to do these analyses. We developed it further. Any community audit is the first skin of the onion – because local people involved in it are able to peel other layers of onion off “

Similarly, an important medium for delivering informal learning is through self-organised learning. As an example, the Peabody Trust Digital Learning Ring and Computer Gym enables mainly ‘socially excluded’ groups to package their own educational programmes, and to go on to learn at their own pace within their own (familiar) environment. This, and the Vale Project, situated at the Miners Arms in Matlock, are examples of the increasing use of new
technologies for informal learning that are aimed at addressing problems of access. In the case of Peabody, access problems that prevent participation in learning are mediated through social disadvantage. In the case of the Vale Project, it is geographical remoteness that creates access problems.

Finally, a significant characteristic of the ‘pedagogic’ dimension of informal learning is that it typically aims to be ‘enjoyable’. In some respects a definition of informal learning is that it is (or should be) inherently fun. As discussed below in section 3.4, the degree of ‘enjoyability’ of informal learning is often a good predictor of its effectiveness. Many of the cases studied – DJ Masterclass; Heart n Soul; Surfers Against Sewage – for example reflect this ‘fun-based’ pedagogy (Example 3.2).

Example 3.2: Surfers Against Sewage Event

The scene is a Surfing Contest at Porthowan Beach, Cornwall, with sponsorship by Rip Curl and SAS. The main objectives are to have fun for everyone, spread the word about SAS and educate people about environmental pollution. The event is boosted by a special appearance by Nat Young one of the pioneers of Surfing and a double world Champion in the 1960s and to many of the parents a surfing Legend. He is here with a Film Crew and SAS get him to wear one of their T-shirts. He donates five books to the prize winners and sells his book at a discounted rate with a contribution to SAS. He holds court by the SAS table and talks about Sewage issues going down in Australia thus cementing relations with organisations out there. SAS are very much milking the cash cow there and also get the film crew to ensure that their banners are included in pictures (along with those of Rip Curl the sponsors)

iv) Target groups

Because informal learning often reflects these emergent, grass-roots phenomena with loosely defined agendas and pedagogic methods, the participants are not always ‘target groups’, can frequently be self-selecting and are sometimes highly differentiated. Surfers Against Sewage, for instance, embraces a wide spectrum of members, from teenagers, who tend to be mainly (but not entirely) hooked by the ‘surf ethos’, to the retired, who tend to focus on SAS’s environmental campaigning. Downham Young represents a much more homogenous constituency of young people with a common agenda that is centred around improving life in their neighbourhood.

The other cases studies tend to reflect more ‘interventionist’ examples of informal learning that are specifically targeted, usually towards a ‘socially marginalised’ group. Heart ‘n Soul, for example, targets the learning disabled; Brookie Basics targets adults with a low literacy level; UK Coalition ‘Back to Work’ project targets people affected by HIV/AIDS.
Commentary:

Detailed analysis of the eleven cases of informal learning studied reinforces one of the key findings of the literature review and audit carried out in phase 1 of the study: that informal learning encompasses a diversity of arrangements, actors and practices. Compared with ‘formal’ education and training – which generally tends to be highly structured and highly bounded in terms of content and delivery – informal learning happens in all sorts of places; involves different kinds of participants, and uses a variety of platforms and methods. It doesn’t to the same extent as formal learning reflect the ‘narrowness’ of ‘learning patrimonies’ (the socio-legal and political frameworks of education) as embedded in traditional formal curriculae and instructional methods. It reflects subscribed, emergent and highly contextualised needs, rather than the prescribed needs that are operationalised in formal education and training policy and practice. Where there is a demonstrable need – for example the need to mobilise the untapped and latent skills of young people on a housing estate and harness these to regeneration initiatives - then informal learning can emerge to fill that need. This has two important policy implications:

- Firstly, the diversity of informal learning implies corresponding gaps in formal service provision. This echoes to some extent a recurrent theme identified in the literature review: that ‘learning’ has lost its central place in human discourse and practice, becoming instead a much more narrow, technical frame of reference for a particular set of theories and practices associated with formal education and training. As we observed in the literature review: “Such has been the power of the social institution we call ‘education’ that what is widely perceived as worthwhile learning has to a very considerable extent become synonymous with what occurs in schools (and the education system more generally).”

This ‘responsive’ attribute of informal learning – it’s capacity to plug the gaps left by mainstream educational provision – is widely seen as a positive reflection of social cohesion and of an emergent ‘dialogic discourse’ within society. However, it can also be seen as part of a ‘displacement effect’ in which inequalities and inadequacies in public investment in relevant education and training are to some extent masked by informal learning. We return to this theme again in Section 5 of this Report.

- Secondly, the diversity of informal learning suggests that policies intended to facilitate and promote it must be contextualised to the socio-cultural, organisational and environmental space in which it happens. Although informal learning shares some common features, it is often driven by radically different needs. This in turn has important implications for how investment decisions on informal learning are made, and how its outcomes are evaluated. Again, we return to this key issue in section 5 of this Report.

We consider in more detail the needs addressed by informal learning – why people get involved and how it happens – in the following Section.
3.3 Why and How does Informal Learning Happen?

3.3.1 The initiating circumstances of informal learning

Informal learning involves an interaction between a number of stakeholders, typically:

- those who are doing the learning
- those who are providing the context and content for learning
- those playing facilitating and supporting roles (e.g. funders of informal learning initiatives)

In some of the cases studied, the same people fill all three of these key roles, for example, as discussed in the preceding section, when informal learning evolves as a response to unmet needs, for instance when housing estate residents take charge of their own regeneration strategy. In other instances, informal learning constitutes part of an ‘official’ (top-down) intervention, where learning opportunities are delivered in order to fulfil a pre-determined policy need. In this section, we firstly consider this broader, institutional and socio-cultural context of why informal learning happens, before moving on to look at the reasons why individuals get involved in the process as learners.

The initiating circumstances of informal learning can be of three main types:

- an effort by key ‘movers and shakers’
- the consequences of a broader ‘social movement’
- an institutionally-driven action based on a defined policy agenda

Many informal learning initiatives originate as a result of the activities of a key entrepreneurial individual or group of individuals (example 3.3).

**Example 3.3: Origins of ‘Faith in the Community’**

“The original event that sparked the whole thing off was a visioning exercise in July, 1996 – before I started here. It was initiated largely on the efforts of one person, who was in effect my predecessor on the project. At the time he was employed by Nottinghamshire County Council, doing a similar job to me, a kind of environmental officer working with communities around the county to involve them in various kinds of environmental initiatives. It was his own personal interest, really, in faith and spirituality, which led him to think how he could work that kind of audience and marry the two things together, a professional interest in the environment with wanting to work with faith groups.”
In some instances, as exemplified by Example 3.3 above, the ‘learning’ element is initially a secondary aspect of a prior determining ‘cause for action’. In the case of ‘Faith in the Community’, the initiating circumstances focused on environmental issues, and it was the existence of ‘faith groups’ as a context and catalyst for learning that subsequently provided the driving force and ‘setting’ in which learning could be developed.

In other cases, as Example 3.4 illustrates, a specific ‘gap’ in learning provision is identified by a ‘learning entrepreneur’.

**Example 3.4: Origins of DJ Masterclass**

“I used to be a teacher in London and one of the main problems all teachers face here is that kids just aren’t interested in school. I became a DJ, quite well-known with a residency at Blue Note and Girls FM. DJ Masterclass started off as an after school workshop, and became a regular event at the British Record Industry Trust School. It grew organically, mainly because of the conscientious work done, and interest spread, also because of good press coverage in the Observer. One of the main objectives is to get kids who don’t want to learn – who’ve dropped out or been excluded from school – to see that learning is worthwhile, and at the same time develop real and marketable musical skills. As it got more successful, interest grew and there have been workshops in the Isle of Wight, Blackpool, Cambridge as well as London. Colleges now run it as a BTEC unit in the National Diploma for Performing Arts”

In other cases, an existing core group of individuals with a ‘learning mission’ grows into a wider social movement, as is the case with Surfers Against Sewage (Example 3.5).

**Example 3.5: Origins of Surfers Against Sewage**

SAS started out as a bunch of concerned people (mainly men) who kept getting ill after they went surfing on the beaches at Porthowan, St. Agnes who got together to try and lobby the water companies to do something about this. They tried to get help and research done on the some of the problems especially ear, nose and throat infections and they began to get organised so as to run some demos. So it started off more as a direct action organisation and has evolved over the course of time to become more strategic in terms of a lobbying, educating organisation rather than a pressure group. At the beginning a number of them put £20 each on the table and over ten years that has risen to a membership of 10,000 and a total membership over that time of 36,000. When they started they did a few small poster campaigns to advertise a local meeting in a local church to get things off the ground, plus they did one interview on local radio. The meeting was packed out, there were people standing in the aisle, standing outside, it seemed to touch a nerve with a great deal of the local people. Given that this was also at the height of the
environmental movement during the late 80s early 90s it was very much a case of the right place at the right time for SAS.

A third type of informal learning entails a more ‘top-down’ intervention that is frequently packaged in some form of Programme funding, usually involving Single Regeneration Budget, DfEE, Lottery or European Social Fund finance. A typical example is the Peabody Trust Digital Learning Ring, which was the subject of a successful Single Regeneration Budget proposal. The Partners included Peabody Trust, a number of London Boroughs, IBM, two local Training and Enterprise Councils and the Peabody Tenants Association.

Whether initiated by an individual ‘learning entrepreneur’; involving a broader social movement like SAS, or set up as part of a strategic development initiative, the results of the case studies clearly show that informal learning actions develop through a combination of the right people in the right place at the right time. The ‘right place’ and ‘right time’ invariably mean tapping into available funding. Funding is usually provided through four main sources:

- institutional (for example European Social Fund; Single Regeneration Budget)
- charitable donations (for example Peabody Trust)
- sponsorship (for example Channel 4 Television)
- self-generated through merchandising and fees payable for learning materials and services (for example DJ Masterclass)

3.3.2 The evolution of informal learning

As suggested in the preceding section, informal learning initiatives often originate as embryonic phenomena with minimal strategic objectives or organisational structures. Such learning arises in response to some unfulfilled need. As a result, informal learning typically originates within a space that provides ample scope for developing along a number of possible trajectories. It can be seen therefore as an evolutionary process, in which the learning that happens in response to this initial need triggers other needs. These can be ‘latent’ – where participation in learning unearths additional needs that have hitherto remained hidden - or ‘transformed’ – for example where participants develop a need for additional learning as a result of participating, such as the need to acquire IT skills.

The typical evolutionary process of informal learning in its organisational sense (i.e. at the collective rather than the individual level) will run something like this:

- Stage 1: Opportunistic phase - an initial need gives rise to an ‘informal learning opportunity’
Stage 2: Initial development - usually involves securing some initial funding; planning how the learning will happen; developing the infrastructure (finding premises; personnel and so on)

Stage 3: Expansion - latent and transformed needs begin to emerge, leading to the acquisition of additional functions, e.g. support staff

Stage 4: Consolidation - the process begins to stabilise

Stage 5: Sustainability/future growth - key stakeholders begin to look towards future development possibilities.

Significant changes that typically occur in the evolution of informal learning are:

- **Expansion of geographical coverage.**
  Example: DJ Masterclass started off as an after-school workshop in London and is now delivered as far afield as Lancashire, East Anglia, Isle of Wight

- **Diversification of client/participant base.**
  Example: Surfers Against Sewage began with a small ‘bunch of surfers’ and has expanded to become a national environmental campaign organisation with members from an age range of six to sixty

- **Acquisition of management and organisational structure.**
  Example: Downham Youth now taken on the role of developing and putting forward bids for Single Regeneration Budget funding.

- **Formalisation of learning, through linkage to formal training providers and accreditation.**
  Example: DJ Masterclass now provides a Unit for the BTEC Diploma in Performing Arts

It is important to emphasise, however, that the formalisation and bureaucratisation of informal learning does not always reflect a process of ‘natural progression’ towards accreditation. Becoming more integrated within a more mainstream education and training service provision framework can add value to informal learning initiatives, but is sometimes seen as threatening, inappropriate, or restrictive, as Example 3.6 illustrates.
Example 3.6: Resisting accreditation: Heart n’ Soul

“We’ve resisted the formal accreditation route basically because we’ve found it too limiting. In 1992 we did look at making use of arts and technical NVQ’s but they started at level 2 which was just totally inappropriate for our lot as they are more like at sub-level 1 &. Rather than enhancing participants learning and enjoyment experience the approach would have been limiting and demotivating. Again it comes down to the fact that it would be fitting disabled people into a non-disabled route and the two are incompatible and that’s not our vision anyway. We want the learning disabled to have their own identity, be themselves in their own right without recourse or comparison to non-disabled. We would be far more comfortable piloting an accreditation scheme for the learning disabled culture, but it’s not really a priority as really in this setting the value of accreditation has no value. We measure outputs by the product of our labour which is the performances and the quality of the lives of those participating.”

It is also important to recognise that informal learning initiatives may not be (and may not need to be) sustainable. Of the eleven cases studied, only one – Faith in the Community – demonstrably ‘failed’, in the sense that it did not develop into a more stable, bigger, broader institution. In this case, the reason attributed to its non-sustainability was because the key ‘learning entrepreneur’ – the individual who originated and initially developed the initiative – moved elsewhere. On the one hand this reinforces the observation discussed above that informal learning needs effort by key ‘movers and shakers’ in order to develop:

“If this sort of exercise is going to be successful really you need to have a person appointed in a sense to be facilitator who’s given the time and has got the energy to work with the people. To make something like that work there needs to be a lot of handholding and there just wasn’t anyone around with the time and energy to do that and consequently it failed din the main”

Key actor in ‘Faith in the Community’

However, it could also be argued that, although the initiative ‘fizzled out’ it had already had a number of significant impacts that did not require the continuing existence of the initiative. These included the production of a document that provided inputs to the global Agenda 21 initiative (which began with the Rio summit in 1992), and, at the local level, establishing inter-denominational contacts and networks between different faith communities in Nottingham which might prove to be springboards for other collaborative actions in the future.

The issue of sustainability is linked to the issue of transferability. As discussed above, ten out of the eleven cases studied (the exception being Faith in the Community) can be described as ‘successful’ in terms of their continuity (although it should be borne in mind that most of them are relatively recent). A
key policy implication in relation to their success (which we explore in more
detail in Section 5 of this Report) is in what ways can the 'successful' elements
of the examples be supported by relevant policy instruments, and what can be
transferred elsewhere to help facilitate informal learning generally.

The transferability and innovation diffusion potential of the cases studied
highlights an inherent tension in informal learning between the generic and the
particular. As we have argued above, most of the examples presented are
highly ‘contextualised’. They have emerged and evolved in response to unmet
needs in a particular space and time, as a result of the right configuration of key
actors in the right place at the right time. However, the examples also
incorporate common features that apply in other contexts. In addition, the
diffusion of informal learning innovations out of their initiating context can have
unintended and unforeseen effects. In the case of DJ Masterclass, for
example, ‘copycat’ replication of the DJ workshops by private companies has
led to a lowering of technical and pedagogic standards in the delivery of the
learning, and a consequent devaluing of the accreditation of the workshop.

The lesson to emerge from the case studies is that there can be no
sustainability or transferability without contextualisation. In this sense:

• sustainable informal learning must meet a continuing need
• to be sustainable, the learning must be incorporated into institutional
practices and agencies
• there must be funding available to enable the initiative to continue
• some initiatives have a natural 'shelf-life'
• not all aspects of informal learning are, or should be, transferable
• to be successfully transferable, informal learning needs to be
relevant, appropriate and culturally-consonant, i.e. flexible for
different learners in different environments

As an illustration, this is what one of the managers of Surfers Against Sewage
said about expanding the organisation globally:

“... in Cornwall, it is very rare that you see black people, and a
couple of my friends came down and they got the most amazing
attention from people, but you don’t tend to see them down on the
beaches. ... As far as members, I really don’t know. I don’t know
whether this is something that would appeal to them, the beach
culture. ... Once we start moving into South Africa, obviously
that’s going to be a much bigger concern, which is much more of
a human rights issues, there are many people who do not have
basic sanitation. So, for them us coming in saying, well there is
shit running into the sea, they would say, so what, there is shit
running down our street”
3.4 Why People Participate in Informal Learning

We turn in this Section to the origins and initiating circumstances of informal learning at the individual level. How do people get involved and why?

Table 3.4: Socio-demographic characteristics of informal learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Social Exclusion</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Peabody Trust (PBT)</td>
<td>Young;</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>New deal; Lone parents; 80% on welfare</td>
<td>Most have few qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>retired</td>
<td></td>
<td>levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Portland YOI (PRT)</td>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Young offenders</td>
<td>Typically ‘drop outs’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Surfers against Sewage (SAS)</td>
<td>All ranges, but mostly 18-30</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mainly affluent</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Heart ‘n Soul (HNS)</td>
<td>14-40</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Learning disabilities</td>
<td>Special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Brookie Basics (BBC)</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Poor literacy</td>
<td>Minimum statutory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>D J Masterclass (DJM)</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Mainly</td>
<td>Typically</td>
<td>Mainly BEMG</td>
<td>Typically excluded from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Northern Animateur (NAT)</td>
<td>All ranges</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Unemployed Asian women</td>
<td>Few qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Downham Young (DMY)</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Mainly</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>50% BEMG; high level of welfare</td>
<td>Some underachieve rs and excluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>UK Coalition (UKC)</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Mainly</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.1 Characteristics of learners

Table 3.4 provides a summary profile of the people participating in informal learning for each of the eleven cases studied. The Table shows:

- In general, people from all walks of life participate in informal learning. In terms of age range, the cases studied reflect a wide spectrum of participation, from teenagers to people who are retired. The gender base of informal learning is broadly equally balanced. It encompasses people with very low income levels to the relatively affluent. It includes people from black and ethnic minority group communities. A wide range of educational attainment is represented in the informal learning constituency – from people with a very low literacy level to university graduates.

Table 3.5, which shows the results of a survey of people participating in a pub quiz, underlines the ‘universality’ of informal learning.

Table 3.5. Pub Quiz: Participant characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Under 21</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 45</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it is likely that the socio-demographic profile of pub quiz contestants will vary according to location – this particular example is an inner London location on the border between Hackney (a generally socially deprived and economically poor area) and Islington (a generally affluent area) – the data do suggest that the pub quiz, as an example of informal learning, draws participants from a range of social, economic and educational backgrounds.
Although, *en masse*, participants in informal learning constitute a relatively heterogeneous population, the evidence also suggests that different types of informal learning will attract particular groups of people with a common need, a similar set of values, and usually shared expectations. Sometimes this common identity is self-selecting, some times it is strategically targeted as part of a policy initiative.

Most of the cases studied, for example, involve learners with particular needs. These include Brookie Basics (basic literacy skills for adults); Heart n’ Soul (the learning disabled); Back to Work (people living with HIV/AIDS); DJ Masterclass and Downham Youth (disaffected young people); Northern Animateur and Peabody Trust (residents on housing estates with high unemployment rates). Although to some extent the case studies were deliberately selected to illustrate typical examples of socially excluded groups, they are nonetheless representative of the range of informal learning ‘types’ identified by the extensive literature review and ‘audit’ carried out in the first phase of this study.

This common interest of need, situation and circumstance is a key determinant shaping the reasons why people get involved in informal learning.

### 3.4.2 Why informal learning happens

In Section 3.3 above, we argued that, for informal learning to happen, an ‘opportunity space’ has to be created around a learning need. Why do individuals move into that space? The case studies suggest that there are a number of key ‘triggers’ that motivate individuals into informal learning. These triggers can reflect combinations of the normative and the functional; the pragmatic and the political, but typically include:

- **Social dysfunctionality.**
  Example: Northern Animateur (Example 3.7) Residents on an estate feel that organising around an informal learning opportunity is the only way of improving conditions on the estate.

- **Issues-driven.**
  Example: Surfers Against Sewage. A broad-spectrum single issue movement aimed at realising environmental improvements.

- **Peer reinforcement.**
  Example: Peabody Trust Digital Learning Ring. Residents see their friends not only successfully using technologies, but actively benefiting from using them.

- **Innovation-driven.**
  Example: The Vale Project. The availability of new technologies provides an opportunity for people to experience something new.

- **Advertising-led.**
  Example: Brookie Basics. A large-scale promotional campaign, reinforced by promoting the adult literacy ‘message’ in the Brookside
soap, alerted a large number of people to the possibility of improving their literacy, and, by extension, their life-chances (example 3.8)

- *Life change / improvement.*
  Example: Back to Work project. The UK Coalition initiative firstly raised awareness among people living with HIV/AIDS about the possibility of getting back into employment and also provided the partnership arrangements and means to help make it happen.

**Example 3.7 Northern Animateur**

“There is a lot of apathy in the community. If crime is a problem, it’s the police’s job. If it’s housing problems, go to the council. We group on Oakhill say ‘no - it is our community’ - if there are not jobs we should create them. For such a long time people in the community were told what to do, what they need, what they are going to get. We’d like to see that change, pretty much in line with what new Labour is saying.”

**Example 3.8: Brookie Basics**

“Couldn’t find anything else. I was that anxious to get back to learning. left (school) at 14. For the last few years I’ve been thinking about it, but I’ve been off that long I didn’t want to go. My daughter’s grown up and I don’t want to be a cleaner forever. But I don’t know what I want to do. Over the last few years, there’s more talk that people should go back; that you’re never too old. Everyone’s saying it now. Years ago you didn’t really hear a lot about people going back. Now it seems to be happening a lot. People realise they need an education for a job. When I fill in an application form for a job, I’ve got no exams.”

However, some of these ‘triggers’ are also instrumental in providing obstacles to people’s engagement in informal learning. Social dysfunction, for example, can reinforce resistance to learning, because of structural factors – such as the lack of learning opportunities and learning facilities on environments like depressed housing estates – and because of normative factors, by reinforcing feelings of isolation and alienation.

Similarly, peer pressure can be a two-edged thing. On the one hand, it can encourage people to get involved in informal learning because they see people like themselves benefiting from the experience. On the other, learning can sometimes be seen as an ‘anti-social’ or ‘abnormal’ activity by the reference group with which a particular individual is identified. For example, the case studies provided some evidence that acquiring new knowledge through informal learning can be disruptive within the family environment, because the ‘selfhood’ of the learner is somehow changed. They are seen in a new light, almost as a different person.
In this type of context, learning can sometimes be seen as ‘dangerous’, and one of the group defence mechanisms against this danger is to devalue it, as the case of the ‘sad bastard’ syndrome in pub quizzes illustrates:

“Doing the pub quiz doesn’t make you feel more self-confident. It’s the other way round. You are a poor sad bastard if you go.”

Pub Quiz Participant, Hackney, London

Often, getting involved in informal learning means overcoming some form of resistance of this type. The main obstacles to participation identified by the case studies were:

- negative previous experiences of education and training
- financial constraints
- access problems
- inertia

i) Negative previous experiences of education and training

Particularly for adults who have left school early, without qualifications, returning to learning is fraught with problems. Many such people have had bad experiences of formal education – for example of being unable to keep up with coursework, and consequently being labelled as stupid. These experiences tend to be transferred to the learning domain generally, and are a significant factor that militates against participating in informal learning. These negative experiences tend to be translated into fears about not doing well in informal learning (Example 3.9).

Example 3.9: Brookie Basics

“The atmosphere in school used to be a threat – just standing over you. You were just left to try and catch up. A lot of people get left behind through the method of teaching, because they thought everybody was illiterate in that they don’t learn. I have a wife who is part-disabled – diabetic. I needed a new direction. I said am I too old to learn and they said no you’re never too old to learn. When I got on the train - I was that keyed up I wanted the train to go the other way, but it couldn’t of course”.

ii) Financial constraints

A second major obstacle to participation in informal learning is the real or perceived financial cost. For many marginalised groups, such as the long term unemployed or lone parents, informal learning may incur real costs – for example course fees; learning materials; travel - that are difficult to afford. Participation can also mean some element of opportunity cost, for example
spending time learning when you could be earning money; or spending job-seeking time in informal learning. Opportunity cost issues are particularly significant in situations where informal learning incorporates some element of training or accreditation (Example 3.10). At the opposite end of the earnings spectrum, opportunity cost is measured in terms of time processes. One of the reasons ‘Faith in the Community’ did not continue was because of time pressures for the key, busy and relatively affluent, actors in the initiative.

Example 3.10: Northern Animateur

“Coming on can make a real difference in monetary terms – you don’t just lose benefit but things like dental charges, spectacles. It can make an enormous difference. The reason I did it was because I saw so much value in training and job enhancement opportunities. I was willing to make the sacrifice - but I didn’t have financial dependants. For individual trainees their situations are so varied – checking out their situation is up to individuals – but we try to put them in touch with people who can help them work it out”.

iii) Access problems

Access barriers to informal learning focus on geographical remoteness and social isolation. In isolated rural areas, the infrastructure (in terms of delivery mechanisms and human resources) for learning opportunities is less well-developed than in more densely-populated locations. In areas such as depressed inner urban housing estates, access is about multiple deprivation. As with rural areas, know-how is a scarce resource. People with teaching skills, technical expertise and managerial competencies are thin on the ground. In addition, the mechanisms necessary to support learning – for example creches are poorly-developed.

In order to address this endemic cycle of deprivation, an increasingly important approach to informal learning has been to equip members of such communities with the skills necessary to promote learning by their peers. The Northern Animateur project, for example, trains facilitators who then become both ‘product champions’ of learning and also act as learning mentors within the community. In this sense, communities can be seen as a kind of ‘learning organisation’:

“If we are serious about empowerment. If we are serious about ownership of the community; serious about sustainability; the way forward is to take and assist existing local activists and support them to do what they want to do or are doing already and also accredit them. It’s about transferring ownership of community development from professionals to local community”.

Another emergent informal learning strategy to address access problems in both rural and inner urban areas has been the utilisation of information and communication technologies to promote empowerment and self-help. In the
Vale project, centred on a local pub in the Derbyshire Peak district, the adoption of video-conferencing, remote tutoring and computer-assisted learning packages has extended learning opportunities to a much wider audience than was previously possible:

“\textit{The exercise has proved to be very useful in widening participation in learning. It has been extremely successful in encouraging the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, but more significant has been the boost in self-confidence. It has given people the sense that they are not behind the times and they are still capable of learning different things.}”

Similarly, the Peabody Computer Gym Project is a mobile computer ‘drop off’ facility for Peabody residents that takes learning technology to where people need it. At the same time, as part of the associated Digital Learning Ring project, residents can access dedicated videoconferencing facilities and learner support systems (including facilitators) from access centres based on the estates. These also provide support services such as a crèche:

“It’s good here, the staff are really helpful and I can bring my child. It caters for single parents, which is really important to me, especially in the holidays - and she can learn too.”

\textit{iv) Inertia}

As discussed above, resistance to informal learning can be mediated through negative experiences of formal education and training. This can be seen as a specific manifestation of a more generalised resistance to trying something different. Learning is not easy. It necessitates breaking out of the habitual status quo. In some situations, this ‘inertia’ factor is reinforced by structural conditions and processes, especially those processes that contribute to the marginalisation of particular social groups. For example, sustained exclusion from learning, or from situations where individuals are exposed to new knowledge (like at work) can inhibit the development and usage of meta-cognitive skills (i.e. ‘learning to learn’):

“I didn’t know anyone. When you see college; college was like me looking up at Goliath. A bit unobtainable, like Mount Everest.”

Participant in ‘Brookie Basics’.

Other forms of alienation, for example the experiences associated with being HIV positive, also reinforce resistance to learning:

“You know I did get myself into a real rut and a depression and I was just sitting around the house moping and it’s very difficult. I just wanted to fill up my time and decide what I wanted to do.”

Participant on UK Coalition ‘Back to Work’ Project

Resistance can also take the form of institutional or bureaucratic inertia. In the case of Surfers Against Sewage, for example, the politicised, and adversarial
profile of the organisation in its formative days was seen as a ‘threat’ by the
water companies, who expended energy in ‘blocking’ techniques (such as
promoting adverse publicity about SAS), in an attempt to preserve the status
quo. As SAS grew, and began to achieve real gains, like contributing to the
passing of legislation on environmental improvements, the water companies
began to see value in a more collaborative relationship with them.

In other cases, for example the Downham Youth case, ‘officialdom’ can be slow
to respond to new ideas. The local council took time to recognise Downham
Youth as a legitimate voice of local residents; the strategies developed by the
organisation – for instance detailed plans for a leisure centre – were not
operationalised, and the ‘world views’ of local youth and local authority offices
do not always coincide:

“… they never came back to tell us what was happening, and we
brought it up with the councillors in February about why we had
not heard anything about the leisure centre and they were really
surprised that young people were so abrupt … we all sat there,
there must have been 20-27 of us, and we were all asking
questions, and there was councillors on one side and all the
young people on the other side, and we asked why have you not
come back to us? We built a model, we’ve done all the research,
we have gone out and surveyed people and why haven’t you got
back to us, and they could not say anything.”

Downham Youth member

However, it should be recognised that informal learning can itself act as a
powerful agent in breaking down resistance to learning generally. This
happens particularly when the informal learning is not seen as learning as such
- but as a ‘fun activity’, as in Surfers Against Sewage.

3.5 The Outcomes of Informal Learning

Informal learning is multi-layered. As described above, informal learning is
highly differentiated in scale – from the national to the local – in scope – from
broad-based social movements to relatively structured initiatives – in profile –
its participants can be highly heterogeneous or they can constitute a close-knit,
homogenous group. Informal learning can also be very different in terms of its
delivery – it can aim to achieve quite ‘amorphous’ aims, such as raising
awareness about an issue – or very specific objectives, for example providing a
qualification in French. This means that:

- the benefits (and costs) of informal learning are both generic and
  context-specific

- informal learning outcomes are realised (and have to be assessed) at
different levels: the individual level; group level; community level and
societal level
informal learning can produce a range of outcomes: both ‘tangible’ – such as increased employability and financial gains; and ‘intangible’ – such as greater social identity. It can deliver expected outcomes – for example improving adult literacy skills – as well as unintended (or unanticipated) effects.

Looking at the outcomes of informal learning is in some ways analogous to looking at skills. On the one hand, it is possible to identify ‘transferable’ or ‘generic’ skills – such as problem-solving; team-working – that are common to any job. On the other, there are ‘technical’ skills – such as knowing how to lay bricks in a straight line – that are inherently context-dependent.

Table 3.6 illustrates the range of ‘generic’ and ‘specific’ outcomes associated with the informal learning cases studied.

**Table 3.6: Examples of generic and specific outcomes derived from informal learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Generic outcomes</th>
<th>Specific outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Peabody Trust (PBT)</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Portland YOI (PRT)</td>
<td>Social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Surfers against Sewage (SAS)</td>
<td>Capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Heart 'n' Soul (HNS)</td>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Brookie Basics (BBC)</td>
<td>Learning to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Faith in the Community (FIC)</td>
<td>Capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>DJ Masterclass (DJM)</td>
<td>Learning to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Northern Animateur (NAT)</td>
<td>Community empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Downham Young (DMY)</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>UK Coalition (UKC)</td>
<td>Social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Pub Project (PUB)</td>
<td>Community identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3.6 shows, each of the examples can be associated with a set of identifiable outcomes that are specific to the context in which informal learning takes place. In DJ Masterclass, for example, participants were able to build up expertise in a narrow domain – that of DJ mixing – that is unique to the particular world of the DJ. Similarly, with Heart n’ Soul, a key benefit of getting involved was the opportunity to learn and put into practice theatre management, set design and acting skills.
In tandem, however, Heart n’ Soul also provided ‘wider benefits’ that are associated with things like raising self-esteem and confidence; ‘learning to learn’; empowerment and social identity (Example 3.11).

Example 3.11: Heart n’ Soul

I’ve made lots of friends here. I do go out, but my parents don’t let me go by myself. Heart ‘n’ Soul is different, but at home it’s different, because if I’m crossing the road if I was with my mum and dad and I say I want to go down the shop to buy something to eat or a drink, they won’t let me go, ‘cause well they’re protective of me. I can’t go by myself, all the roads crossing and coming back is a bit too much and I might cause an accident. But Heart ‘n’ Soul is well travelled a lot and we’ll be in a group we’re a team, so more independence.”

Similarly, the tangible outcome produced by the Faith in the Community initiative was a strategy document providing inputs to Agenda 21. However, key actors within the initiative realised that the wider benefits of Faith in the Community went beyond the narrow confines of an ecumenical treatise:

“Documents are very middle class things, for people who are articulate and all the rest of it, and I’m not sure that’s reaching 90% of the population. It’s back to something about what was really important, it was not the document we produced, but the process that was the key thing.”

In this sense, informal learning has an important ‘catalytic’ function. It can be seen, perhaps, as a sort of ‘binding agent’ in a process of reconstruction. As Table 3.7 shows, this catalytic function of informal learning operates at different levels.

Table 3.7: Examples of Informal Learning Outcomes at different levels of scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Increased self-esteem and confidence</td>
<td>Brookie Basics: improve adult literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Peabody Trust: increase skills capacity of estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Community identity</td>
<td>Animateur: empower community to work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>Political reforms</td>
<td>SAS: changes in legislation on pollution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the **individual level**, the case study analysis suggests that participation in informal learning can provide the impetus and the tools to enable people to ‘re-package’ themselves: to build a personal ‘asset base’ through, for example: improving their meta-cognitive skills (learning to learn); increasing self-confidence; improving social skills and team-working; improving information-handling and knowledge processing, and learning how to use IT.

At the **group level**, informal learning can, for example add to the collective asset base of the family, the residential estate, by reinforcing social integration and cohesiveness.

At the level of the **community**, informal learning allows for capacity-building. As the Animateur project demonstrates, for example, the social exclusion of the long-term unemployed can be addressed by enabling key actors in the community to tap into and redirect the strengths of that community towards its regeneration.

At the **societal level** informal learning can contribute to re-shaping notions of and commitment to citizenship, social identity and social capital.

We return to this key issue of the ‘catalytic’ nature of informal learning, and its integration within wider socio-economic and socio-cultural processes, such as the regeneration of depressed local economies, in Chapter 4 of this Report.

To summarise, our main conclusions from the case studies on the outcomes of informal learning are as follows:

**i) Informal learning and participation**

Virtually all the case examples studied demonstrate a ‘knock on effect’ for learning, in that there was evidence of participants moving on to take up places on courses offered by educational and training institutions like Community Colleges. For example, SAS informants reported several cases of members going on to take degrees in environmental management and oceanography.

In general, however, the contribution of informal learning to increased participation in education (i.e. as a transition pathway to formal learning) was less important than its contribution to increasing meta-cognitive capacity, i.e. learning to learn. On balance, in the cases studied, the majority of those involved in informal learning were involved for reasons other than as a means to more formal education, or better qualifications.

However, it should be recognised that accreditation, and tangible evidence of involvement, are important priorities for participants. For example, Brookie Basics provides a certificate for those who have completed the adult literacy course. The style and presentation of the certificate might be described as ‘populist’. It shows the entire cast of Brookside assembled in ‘the Close’ and is printed in garish Technicolor on poor quality paper. Instead of making a
contribution to the sense of achievement of Brookie Basics participants, as intended, it had the opposite effect. Virtually all the learners interviewed said they felt it ‘devalued’ the course and their achievement.

This illustration underlines an inherent paradox in the relationship between informal learning and educational participation. Accreditation conventionally tends to be seen with regard to informal learning in a narrow ‘technical’ sense – for example as an official ratification of competence in relation to some skill benchmark. However, for many informal learners themselves accreditation has a more normative connotation. It represents a ‘seal of achievement’ – that an individual has gone through a process (sometimes quite difficult) of change. This type of accreditation is more important as a reinforcer for raising self-esteem and increasing confidence than it is as a technical qualification.

In broad terms, the relationship between informal learning and increasing participation is mediated by the following factors:

- the context in which learning takes place (for example the extent to which the ‘initiating circumstances’ of informal learning are aimed at encouraging increased participation)
- the purposes of learning (the degree to which a participating individual has an explicit agenda focused on accreditation and qualifications)
- the degree of linkage between informal learning networks and formal learning delivery infrastructure (whether, for example, informal learning is directly linked to community colleges)
- the extent to which the informal learning arrangements are ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom up’ (many informal learners on ‘run-down’ residential estates mistrust formal educational institutions and typically engage in learning as part of a process of ‘self-empowerment’)

**ii) Increasing employability**

There was limited evidence identified by the case study analysis of a direct relationship between participation in informal learning and increased employability, in the sense that participation realised directly marketable outcomes. This is primarily for two reasons:

- Firstly, as discussed above, the outcomes and benefits associated with informal learning tend to focus on ‘generic’ rather than ‘technical’ attributes.

For example, D J Masterclass provides an accredited unit within the BTEC Diploma in Performing Arts. However, very few of its graduates have gone on to employment in the music industry. The main contribution DJ Masterclass provides is clearly associated with improving the confidence and learning capabilities of young people who are excluded from education.
In general, the key contribution made by informal learning to employability lies in enabling people to reconstruct themselves: to get out of the cycle of unemployability by enhancing their meta-cognitive skills; their presentational skills (at job interviews, for example) and their ability to market themselves.

- Secondly, we have emphasised in this report the ‘contextualised’ aspect of informal learning. This suggests that the relationship between participation in informal learning and employability is mediated by the opportunity structures associated with its specific context.

For example, the direct impact on the Digital Learning Ring and the Computer Gym for Peabody estate residents will be dictated by, *inter alia*: the extent to which the skills delivered for the residents are compatible with local labour market conditions; the extent to which job-compatible opportunities are available locally, and the effectiveness of communication about job opportunities.

To take another illustration, the evidence suggests that, in the case of the UK Coalition ‘Back to Work’ Project, aimed at re-integrating people living with HIV/AIDS into employment, the real ‘learning need’ is for employers themselves to understand more about the nature of HIV and their own contribution to the problematics around HIV and employment.

### iii) Psychosocial benefits

As argued above, a key outcome for individuals engaging in informal learning is the contribution made to self-esteem and confidence-building. This is one of the key outcomes of a range of ‘wider benefits’ of learning identified by the case studies. Table 3.8, which shows self-reported benefits attributed to informal learning by a sample of pub quiz contestants, sets this type of outcome within the context of the debate on the relationship between informal learning, participation and employability.
As the Table shows, the benefits of informal learning are associated with increased self-confidence; improved sociability and social interaction and community identity and involvement, rather than with participation in more formal learning or with employability. Although pub quiz contestants cited ‘improved general knowledge’ and ‘subject knowledge’ as significant benefits of informal learning, these were viewed as instrumental things. Acquiring more knowledge was seen as a way of contributing to improved confidence in social situations and to increased sociability – for example by allowing people to appear more informed in conversation.

This ‘confidence-building’ aspect of informal learning is particularly important in relation to social inclusion. As Brookie Basics demonstrates, for many participants getting involved meant breaking a long-standing cycle of personal low self-esteem and isolation from ‘life chances’ – including employment opportunities. The improvement in literacy level engineered by involvement in the learning process in turn had a ‘knock-on’ effect in that Brookie ‘graduates’ were more self-assured; more informed about the ‘big world’ because they could absorb more information; could communicate better and, ultimately, felt their chances for self-improvement (for example in relation to better job prospects) were significantly enhanced.

“When I got here it was so relaxed. I am enjoying every minute. Yesterday I done a study. I don’t get down to doing the essay looking after my wife. I have to take it home. I have a little room where I can work. I wanted to do a lot of writing but I couldn’t. Stories - I can tell stories. I was held back. Now, I am so filled with it.”

Brookie Basics student
At the level of the collective, informal learning, as we have observed above, acts as a catalyst to promote community identity; raise skill levels through peer-reinforcement and peer-group learning; raise expectations; build social capital and contribute to breaking the self-perpetuating cycle of long-term unemployment and social isolation:

“The original notion of animateur is based on notions of leadership. But people on these estates are continually led to believe they are not good enough to lead. We want to take not natural leaders but potential leaders.”

Northern Animateur

iv) Citizenship and social capital

It is plausible to extrapolate the ‘capacity-building’ capability of informal learning as a means of re-building damaged communities, to the macro-level of societal enrichment. Although the scope of the case study approach restricted the extent to which we could consider the outcomes of informal learning at the national level, we did identify some examples where such initiatives could be said to be making a contribution to social capital in its widest sense. Brookie Basics, for instance, as a nationally-networked delivery mechanism for learning, is likely to make an improvement to adult literacy levels generally, and hence, it could be argued, will contribute to a more flexible, knowledge-oriented workforce, as well as improving the reflexivity and communication-processing skills of a formerly excluded segment of the population.

This has obvious implications for issues around citizenship, such as participation in democratic decision-making. As Surfers against Sewage illustrates, informal learning can marshal and channel public awareness into a drive – successful in this case – for real political change. We also found evidence that informal learning can contribute to increased involvement by citizens in shaping their future – the Downham Youth; Animateur and Peabody Trust cases, for example, suggest that informal learning generates new forms of social and political participation (new forms of consultation and decision-making partnerships, for example) and greater political involvement by citizens in the administration of their communities. Part of this process is attributable to the capacity for informal learning to open up access to information sources, and the means to manage information. In some of the housing estates researched by the Study, residents literally sometimes cannot afford a newspaper – a situation which clearly restricts the tools available for citizens to feel part of, and make decisions about, a rapidly-changing and highly externalised world that lies outside their immediate horizon. Innovations like the Digital Learning Ring and Computer Gym, for example, provide ways of ameliorating these real obstacles to participation in its broadest sense.

However, it was argued by some of the respondents interviewed in the study that informal learning can have unintended and untoward multiplier effects. For example, as well as contributing to the social cohesion of family and community life by enhancing social identity, informal learning can have a ‘fragmentation effect’. Individuals expectations and horizons can outgrow their roots. People
can leave for imagined better prospects elsewhere, leading to disintegration of family and community life. We found little evidence of this in practice, but we return to these issues in Chapter 4 of this Report.

Finally, another important area where the outcomes of informal learning can have demonstrable impacts at the societal level is in relation to innovation diffusion. Many of the cases studied reflect examples of innovation that have generic transferability and some are already beginning to be replicated outside their initiating context. An example is DJ Masterclass, referred to above. However, transferability is a complex process and as the DJ example illustrates, poses a number of problems. The study was not tasked to investigate the issue of transferability in detail, and further research on the issue is clearly desirable.
SECTION 4: SHEFFIELD: A DYNAMIC CASE STUDY OF INFORMAL LEARNING

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The spatial dimension of informal learning

In this chapter we outline the findings of the dynamic case study. In contrast to the ‘bounded’ exemplary cases discussed in Chapter 3, we were interested in this part of the study in exploring the linkages and inter-connections between policy, learning and needs within a defined spatial area. The city of Sheffield was selected for this dynamic case study of informal learning. It was chosen because it provides a convenient spatial boundary for the study, one that has both dense policy networks and a number of active and successful examples of bottom-up informal learning initiatives and centres. In particular, these networks are linked to regeneration strategies. In investigating informal learning and its spatial dimension we set out to explore the needs of learners from the bottom up, whilst also identifying the nature of policies for learning in the city from the top down. This has facilitated identification of areas of consonance and dissonance between the policy arena and the needs of learners in Sheffield.

Within the analysis of the policy arena we focus in particular on ‘organisational evolution’, starting within a ‘learning city’ frame of reference. The notion of the ‘Learning City’ encapsulates many themes central to informal learning (co-ordinated Lifelong Learning; building social capital; partnerships etc). Learning Cities also (notionally) incorporate strategic plans with timeframes that reflect notions of ‘development’ and evolution.

We have also analysed informal learning as it is embedded in grass roots initiatives within different communities and constituencies in Sheffield. We have looked at a number of quite different organisational frameworks in Sheffield – the Manor Training and Resource Centre (MaTReC), the Manor Castle Development Trust (MCDT), and the Sheffield Business Club, as well as other initiatives that operate within these frameworks, and the ‘Learning City’ umbrella, for example ‘Parents as Partners’, SPELL and CitiNet. Indeed, a key objective of this part of the study was to explore the overlaps and inter-relationships between these different informal learning ‘frames of reference’.

The case study activity comprised:

- an initial mapping exercise primarily designed to provide an overview of the situation in Sheffield, and to identify key informants and examples

- an assessment of the evolution of informal learning within Sheffield, including comparison of top-down and bottom-up perspectives
These two sets of activities were implemented through a multi-methodological approach combining desk research, secondary data analysis and field work – primarily in the form of face to face, semi-structured and telephone interviews.

The case study is exploratory and highlights the need for the development of more sophisticated methodologies for researching the complexities of informal learning in relation to its spatial embeddedness in communities and the problematic of fitting national and local policy to local needs. We return to this theme throughout the chapter and in Section 5 we explore some of the ways in which policy instruments and outcome measures could reflect this aspect of informal learning. This exploration entails looking at the contribution informal learning makes to the socio-economic and socio-cultural fabric of an area; the significance of place and the linkages and learning spin-offs which characterise the informal learning system.

4.1.2 Sheffield – the city

This section describes the context of the case study – the location of the ‘mini-case studies’ we undertook in Sheffield and the general socio-economic profile for the city.

Figure 4.1 below shows the city of Sheffield and the locations of the six mini case studies of learning activities in Sheffield. The three Learning City initiatives we examined (SPELL, CITINET and Parents as Partners) operate across the whole of the city with Spell also having a particular focus in the North East. Both the Manor and Castle Development Trust (MCDT) and the Manor Training and Resource Centre (MaTReC) and located in the shaded area of the map. The Sheffield Business Club now extends its operation beyond the confines of the city to include south Yorkshire as a whole.
In common with other northern industrial cities, Sheffield has experienced radical economic re-structuring, a process which has had a particularly debilitating effect on the traditional ‘core’ industries of steel-making and cutlery production. As a result, the local labour market has been characterised by high levels of unemployment, in some areas spanning two generations. Like other cities, there is a concentration of areas of greatest disadvantage around the central area of the city. Figure 4.2, below, shows the Index of Local Deprivation for Sheffield in 1998. The Index, elaborated by Sheffield First Partnership for the City is based upon a range of six indicators of disadvantage for the different wards in Sheffield. The geographical pattern of deprivation is reflected across the different wards in unemployment rates, the distribution of households receiving income support, low birth weight as a percentage of births, and low electoral turnout. It is in these central areas that the highest rates of ‘non-participation’ in learning are recorded, and here where the main informal learning initiatives, aimed at promoting the empowerment and the learning capacity of the long-term unemployed, have been concentrated.
4.1.3 Key themes – informal learning as a system, the importance of place

A number of key themes have emerged from the study which illuminate the distinctive and spatially differentiated nature of informal learning in Sheffield. We will discuss these in more detail in Section 4.4, and we return to these themes throughout the Chapter.

- Informal learning in Sheffield may be understood across a number of different dimensions:
  - it spans different settings and delivery mechanisms
  - it varies according to content, the degree to which learning is implicit or explicit, whether accreditation is an outcome, and the duration and scale

- Within Sheffield there are a number of different conceptualisations of ‘learning’. These include regeneration, community development, employability, health
• At the level of policy there are important issues of perceived and actual needs, the degree of political ‘fit’ to local needs, and different conceptualisations of space and learning needs

• Informal learning initiatives invariably encounter issues of sustainability and transfer which also reflect the ‘capacity-building’ capability of the initiative

• There is some preliminary evidence to indicate that informal learning activities help to enhance social capital and greater social cohesion within geographical areas and communities

• Spatial dynamics and linkages are an important dimension of informal learning. Future methodological approaches need to recognise this important dimension as a way of situating/ embedding informal learning in its context.

• Informal learning is a system which embodies structures and processes in a locality.

This case study therefore represents a particular slant on informal learning and widening participation. It is one that recognises the fundamental importance of place as a key dimension within which linkages, spin-offs and interconnectivities of the learning system emerge and develop. In Chapter 3 of this study, we emphasised the importance of ‘process’ in addressing (and assessing the benefits) of informal learning. As many of the case study examples demonstrated, informal learning has an inherent ‘transformation’ capability. In this part of the study, we take this notion of process a stage further to conceptualise informal learning as a system that takes place within a particular socio-cultural and spatial environment. This has important implications for policy as it entails the need to understand the wider implications of policies for the learning system and not just for individual initiatives within an area.

In the sections that follow, we first consider existing policy initiatives in Sheffield before considering some examples of initiatives which have developed in Sheffield from the bottom up. In Section 4.2 we focus on the policy system, examining the Learning City initiative as an example of the city’s learning polity. This example proved a useful device for capturing the fluid and evolving nature of learning policy in the city. In Section 4.3 we consider three informal learning initiatives which are rooted in grass-roots projects. This enabled us to develop a needs-based perspective on informal learning in Sheffield. In Section 4.4 we draw together key findings and conceptual insights arising from the case study, giving particular emphasis to the notion of informal learning as a system and the implications this entails of policy strategy.
4.2 The Policy System

In this section we consider the policy system as it has responded to the learning needs of different clientele and communities in a city. As we indicated in Section 4.1.1, the ‘Learning City’ was selected as an initial organisational frame of reference for the case study.

The concept of the Learning City was advocated by the OECD/CERI study of 1992. This prompted the development of the Learning City network that now has approximately 20 cities. The Learning City is intended to ‘address the needs of its locality through partnership’ (DfEE 1998a, p.iv). It has two principal purposes: to support lifelong learning and to promote social and economic regeneration. The Learning City encapsulates three principle stands: partnership, participation and performance. The notion of the ‘Learning City’ also entail themes that are central to informal learning (co-ordinated Lifelong Learning; building social capital; partnerships).

In the following sub-sections we outline the nature of the Learning City in Sheffield; the history of the learning strategies and institutional structures in Sheffield, and the impact of the changing policy agenda.

4.2.1 The Learning City in Sheffield

At the outset of our investigation of the Learning City initiative we undertook an extensive scouting exercise aimed at illuminating the nature and current direction of the Learning City in Sheffield. This involved preliminary fact finding interviews with a number of key actors from different institutions and Learning City initiatives in Sheffield. These included City Council, TEC, Education, Careers and Community informants.

Before being reconfigured as part of the Lifelong Learning Partnership for Sheffield, the Learning City in Sheffield consisted of two parallel developments. This was different to Learning Cities in other parts of the UK that were primarily partnerships of education and training providers which aim at widening participation. Most partnerships are led either by local authorities or TEC’s. In Sheffield, however, there were two bodies which only recently merged. The Strategic Education Forum (SEF) was set up by a partnership of the TEC, Universities and Local Authority to promote and monitor the National Education and Training Targets (1993-94). The Learning City began to develop at the same time (1992-93). With the SEF came funding and recognition by the government. The result, probably uniquely, is that Sheffield had two parallel structures while other cities have developed one integrated body.

The Strategic Education Forum (1993-94) was intended to be a mechanism for the achievement of targets and it was also given the task of leading the education and training elements of the city's regeneration strategy. The Learning City initiative came into being in 1992-93 and brought together people from similar organisations to the Strategic Education Forum but at a more operational level (below that of chief executives). The intention was to involve
adult learning enthusiasts who wanted to adopt the widening participation agenda.

This led to difficulties in securing stable funding for the Learning City making it necessary to depend on specific grants from local agencies while the Strategic Education Forum has been able to count on a properly funded secretariat. In practice, there has been a great deal of overlap between the two bodies through common membership which has stimulated the search for a more unified approach. Recently, partly because the personnel in both began to be interchangeable, the two bodies merged.

Throughout its lifetime the Learning City in Sheffield comprised a number of key initiatives. These included:

- Parents as Partners - a means to access adult learners through their involvement in their children’s early years’ learning
- The Multilingual City - promotion of language learning in schools and beyond
- European Years of Lifelong -creation of local co-ordination groups for the European year of lifelong learning
- Cicero - trains unemployed young people as European Community animateurs
- SRB bid - the Learning City promoted the focus on learning centres ands a basis for capacity building for community economic development
- Citinet - city wide network of information and learning centres
- Value Added project (VAP) pilot - piloted in Sheffield for the learning City network as a practical framework for evaluation
- Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL) – brings organisations together as part of a campaign for learning.

The Learning City concept in Sheffield has declined in favour of more recent moves towards the establishment of a Lifelong Learning Partnership and Plan for the city. Our informants told us that the Learning City had ‘fizzled out’ in Sheffield:

- “The Learning City executive agreed to wind themselves up.”
- “As I understood it, the Learning City had disbanded in Sheffield and changed it’s name to something else, and I thought it was SPELL”
“In Sheffield we have now integrated the Learning City initiative into the Lifelong Learning partnership and we have integrated one key project into the partnership in particular, it is called SPELL – Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning.”

“It’s been revamped – there was a good deal of confusion”

The Learning City in Sheffield has now been integrated into the Lifelong Learning Partnership and so the main thrust of the Learning City project has been subsumed into the more contemporary policy perspective of Lifelong Learning. Key actors involved with ‘learning’ in Sheffield identify a number of important traces which the Learning City framework left in the city:

- The Learning City is seen as having ‘won the case for linking learning and regeneration’ which is now taken for granted in Sheffield

- It provided some support for arguments at the policy level in favour of new locations and new forms of provision – all ages, all year round provision

- The two approaches above became embedded into:
  - the Single Regeneration Budget for Sheffield Rounds 4 & 5
  - the Structural Funds bid currently under preparation
  - and into other European funding bids

- Initiatives that have evolved out of the Learning City framework remain but have evolved along their own particular trajectories

We examined three of the Learning City generated projects: SPELL, Citinet, and Parents as Partners as initiatives with particular relevance to informal learning activities in Sheffield. In Examples 1 to 3 below, we briefly outline the principle characteristics of these initiatives.
Example 1: Outlining the principle characteristics of SPELL, Parents as Partners and CITINET

SPELL - Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning - the Sheffield Learning City flagship project. Its primary function is campaigning to widen participation in learning activities throughout Sheffield. It does not deliver any learning but aims to get people motivated to learn and recruited to learning. It is essentially a partnership, bringing together people involved in lifelong learning across the city into a central structure of collaborating organisations. Since the city-wide functions of SPELL were incorporated into the Lifelong Learning Partnership in Sheffield, SPELL has concentrated on delivering its outreach work in the North East of Sheffield.

“SPELL is committed to the creation of a Learning City, which will provide learning opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to all. The partnership recognises that lifelong learning is a continuous process and that widening participation will make a significant contribution to the quality of life and the future prosperity of Sheffield and its citizens.”

(Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning, 1999)

Example 2: Parents as Partners - has its roots in a Learning City seminar which led to a joint project – REAL - between the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Education Department. REAL was established with the aim of supporting parental involvement in Children’s early learning years. This led to a collaboration between the Education Department, Sheffield College and Sheffield Hallam University on a new venture called ‘Parents as Partners’ to promote parental involvement in their children’s education and to encourage parents as student’s themselves.

Example 3: CITINET - created a city-wide computer-based network of information and learning centres, supported by a wide range of local organisations. The initiative is led by the City Council, the College and the TEC, and is backed by the government through SHI’s Challenge funding. Citinet is a vehicle for collaboration and partnership for all organisations involved in a learning activity. Information technology is used to allow users access to information about courses, organisations and learning initiatives as well as providing opportunities for the acquisition of a minimum level of IT skills to enable individuals to use the network effectively.

In the following paragraphs we compare initiating circumstances and key themes which emerge across the three initiatives and which illuminate the nature of the learning city as a city-wide policy which seeks to widen participation and in some instances increase informal learning in Sheffield.
Initiating Circumstances and Intrinsic Dynamism of the Initiatives

The three Learning City initiatives investigated have all taken on their own momentum and dynamism enabling the initiatives to grow and develop beyond the remit of the Learning City framework. In essence, the Learning City policy may be seen as operating more as an impetus and initiating circumstance rather than an on-going policy framework. The Learning City initiatives we examined have therefore taken on their own momentum and the Learning City now has only some residual relevance to these projects. The Learning City framework may be understood as playing a key role in the development of delivery capacity within the City. In the case of the CITINET initiative we were told, for example, that

“The Learning City brought Citinet about, but Citinet is now a network which functions with its own dynamic.”

While the Learning City concept was an important catalyst for the start up of these initiatives, access to funding streams was also critical. The Parents as Partners initiative attributes its existence to LEA funding.

“Legitimately you could say the Parents as Partners is a Learning City initiative I suppose, because all of those different partners have a contact with the LEA. But, primarily, if the LEA had never funded the development of Parents as Partners in the first place it would never have taken off.”

Funding was also instrumental in the development and emergence of SPELL. The initiative’s success in securing funding from the DfEE for its campaign for city-wide learning enabled it to expand beyond its original sphere of operation in the NE of Sheffield, for example. However, the success of SPELL was largely attributable to the actions of a single actor who gave drive and momentum to the early stages of the initiative’s evolution under the aegis of the Learning City and the subsequent evolving policy environment. The importance of a key actor was also significant in the Parents as Partners initiative.

The Learning City policy may therefore be seen as having played an important role as the generator of a number of self-sustaining learning initiatives. This is especially interesting in the light of the fact that the Learning City was not a sustainable policy itself.

Key Themes – informal learning and its spatial context

The three Learning City initiatives we examined echo a number of the findings set out in Chapter 3 which emerged from the exemplary case studies. These include the importance of:

- key actors for sustainability and transference of informal learning initiatives
• networking, partnership and co-operative working arrangements
• adequate time for transferance of initiatives and models into new areas and domains
• flexible bureaucratic procedures which can adapt to the particular needs of informal learning and community based initiatives
• peer support and learning through peer imitation
• particular skills and outcomes which are acquired through informal learning: group communication, self esteem, raised expectations
• individual pathways and learning spin –off
• adequate funding

The Sheffield case study points up a number of additional features about the importance of linkages between informal learning initiatives and the way in which policy interacts with learning needs which are embedded within a spatial context. This particular dynamic has shaped the particular form and character of the Learning City initiatives we have looked at in the following ways:

• initiatives tend to comprise an amalgam between top-down strategies and empowerment
• successful strategies appear to involve the identification of a gap between existing bottom up and top down initiatives
• a community development and multi-agency approach was adopted in most cases
• successful strategies recognise that access to information about learning opportunities and access to learning itself is a key factor in enabling participation in learning
• tailoring informal learning packages and locating them within broader regeneration funding proposals, such as from SRB and European Structural Funds has been a highly successful way of developing the ‘asset base’ of depressed communities.

We also found that:

• meeting the actual needs of local communities is more difficult at policy level than at the level of pro-active grassroots organisations
• the shifting demands of the changing policy context can lead to the re-labelling and slight modification of policies to fit new policy-level requirements
The Learning City initiative in Sheffield was one stage in the development of a broader system of education, training and learning strategies for the city which are evolving closer links and coherence. The Learning City also played an important role as a builder of delivery capacity within the city.

4.2.2 History of the learning strategies, rationalised arrangements versus messy reality and the impact of the changing policy agenda

Here we focus on the city context for the policy interventions in the field of learning in Sheffield. We begin by reflecting on the history of the different learning strategies in Sheffield and its regional context (south Yorkshire), and examine the impact which the emergence of residual structures and countervailing cultures has had on the direction and shape of learning policies as well as on the complex mosaic of structures and bodies which are involved in today's polity. We then examine the impact of the shifting national policy agenda on existing initiatives in Sheffield. We have found that a common local response to shifting policy requirements is often the repackaging and rebadging of initiatives to ‘fit’ with new policy priorities and requirements.

History of the Learning Strategies - Rationalised Arrangements versus Messy Reality

It is difficult to understand what is going on in a territory without a grasp of longer-term history. In Sheffield the heritage of South Yorkshire region; the radical restructuring of the local economy; and the way that cut-backs in non-vocational adult education were handled in the 1980s, all set a context for informal learning policy and practice. The picture in Sheffield is therefore one which is conditioned by a number of residual structures which co-exist (and overlap) with current structures operating at different stages and segments of the policy agenda. The Learning City policy in Sheffield is a good example of this. We have seen how the executive of the Learning City initiative was disbanded and the core activities of the Learning City for Sheffield were assimilated into the city’s Lifelong Learning Partnership. The Learning City has left behind a number of residual structures and initiatives which now overlap with new policies and agendas in the changing and evolving policy context for Sheffield. Figure 4.3 below shows the rationalised co-ordination arrangements between the different bodies and committees operating in this policy arena.
The reality in Sheffield is inevitably more confused and messy than this. The inter-institutional relations have been described in Sheffield as:

“An emerging network rather than some kind of hierarchy, with some informal accountability arrangements.”

Until very recently co-ordinative arrangements in Sheffield have been overlapping, untidy and partial – the carry over from uncoordinated past initiatives and a competitive culture between institutions – such as LEAs, TECs, Colleges etc. Thus the ‘old’ Education Board was set up by the TECs essentially to monitor National Education and Training Targets; while the Learning City Network was City Council-based. Both had overlapping memberships. Nonetheless current plans build on building blocks that were laid down over the last six or seven years, and so learning strategies in Sheffield have been conditioned by the competing and countervailing cultures of these residual approaches.

Currently two separate Lifelong Learning Plans are being developed in Sheffield. This reflects the continued existence of residual structures and approaches which characterise the polity of learning and education in Sheffield.
The first Lifelong Learning Plan is under the aegis of the Lifelong Learning Partnership, while the second is being produced by the Adult Education Wing of the City Council.

Sheffield’s Lifelong Learning Partnership was created to respond to current national policy agendas by the Strategic Education Forum situated in the Sheffield First Partnership. This is the most strategic body in Sheffield – housed in the City Council buildings, it is a partnership which brings together key organisations in Sheffield to promote the city. The Lifelong Learning partnership has five sub-groups on the education side including one which is specifically focused on community based learning. A Lifelong Learning Plan is currently being developed by the Co-ordinating Manager of the Strategic Education forum and Lifelong Learning Partnership in Sheffield.

The Adult Education wing of the City Council is also currently engaged in the production of a Lifelong Learning Development Plan. The Adult Education approach to learning and training is older and more traditional than current moves towards Lifelong Learning espoused by the current government. The two Lifelong Learning Plans being developed in Sheffield reflect different traditions and approaches to learning which are shaped by current and residual structures in the city. These approaches also overlap and exert a degree of mutual influence on each other.

The policy framework in Sheffield may therefore be seen as an evolving system characterised by informal linkages, and a more recent tendency towards formalisation into a more coherent system. The emergence of a more unified policy framework in Sheffield is pre-dated by the emergence of a shared philosophy towards learning across agencies and between the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ of the system. It can be summarised in the statement: ‘Everyone wants to learn and is interested in learning’. The problem is delivery: the barriers that prevent access.”

**The Impact of the Changing Policy Agenda**

Officials in Sheffield have noted that the shifting policy requirements which come from central government result in existing initiatives and activities being modified to ‘fit in’ with and adapt to new policy directions. There is a sense among officials that the city’s policies have to be re-moulded in order to fit into a moving policy agenda. This is an inevitable outcome in an area where on the ground realities of learners and their needs are difficult to capture in any detailed policy design.

The level of activity in the informal learning arena is sometimes difficult to gauge. One of the results of new policy initiatives and new co-ordination arrangements is therefore re-badging or re-branding of what exists (e.g. existing Centres become ‘part’ of CITINET; a local headmaster’s initiative becomes part of Parents as Partners, etc.). The ‘multiplication’ and ‘transfer’ of good practice occurs in many ways: growth, replication, expansion etc.
This finding echoes a key finding of our Phase 1 literature review of informal learning. We found that the field of learning is blurred and nebulous, and that of informal learning more so. It is extremely difficult to construct meaningful definitions of the concept of informal learning because it is multi-dimensional and any example of informal learning may differ in the number of criteria which make it classifiable as an example of informal learning. Accordingly, the very nature of informal learning makes it difficult to achieve optimum ‘fit between policy objectives, design, and on the ground realities of learners. As policy agendas change and evolve it is inevitable that there will be some moulding and reshaping of initiatives to comply with new policy requirements. We should stress however that policy requirements do also influence and shape the evolution of initiatives in an area. Our study of the Learning City Initiatives (see sub-section 4.2.1 above) has demonstrated the enduring nature of some aspects of that policy beyond the lifespan of the Learning City itself.

Learning is also embedded in many domains. Policies which focus on Lifelong Learning now recognise this reality. The City Council’s policies in the fields of, for example, health or employment, inevitably have linkages with learning and informal learning activities for individuals and groups. Policies which are explicitly focused on learning and education therefore often overlap in a somewhat obscure manner with those in which learning is an implicit rather than explicit factor.

The coalescence of learning into regeneration – and vice versa – is a characteristic of Sheffield’s current policy stance. The focus of the Sheffield Learning City in particular was on urban renewal. The Learning City, is according to more than one assessment attributed with ‘winning the case for linking learning and regeneration’. Although regeneration is the main axis along which these different policies are brought together it is not the only one. Learning is also part of health promotion, citizenship initiatives, community development and unemployment policies – as well as adult education and lifelong learning.

The evolving and semi-formalised nature of the learning polity in Sheffield allows room for flexibility and innovation to occur. This is an advantage of the Sheffield system. The confusion and overlap also creates room for inertia and replication which is less advantageous. These findings imply that cities like Sheffield would benefit from some continuity in policy framework, but one which allows for flexibility and recognises the on the ground realities on delivery of learning strategies and the particular nature of learning in the informal sector.

4.3 The Bottom-Up Perspective

In this section we outline informal learning initiatives in Sheffield which address the needs of learners from the bottom up. Accordingly, in this section we analyse informal learning as it is embedded in local initiatives within three ‘institutional frameworks’ – the MaTReC, MCDT, and the Sheffield Business Club (see Figure 4.1). We have therefore selected examples which have sought to maximise the range of communities and domains of operation to
capture different scales and types of informal learning which are on-going within Sheffield.

We first outline the particular characteristics of the examples selected and highlight emergent areas of commonality with the findings outlined in Chapter 3. We then examine the relationship and links between the bottom up initiatives presented in this section and the broader policy environment. A picture is emerging in Sheffield of a progressive blurring of boundaries between the formal and informal systems in Sheffield. We conclude this section by identifying areas of consonance and dissonance between the policy arena and the needs of learners in Sheffield.

4.3.1 Sheffield Business Club, the Manor Training and Resource Centre (MaTReC), and the Manor and Castle Development Trust (MCDT)

We begin this section by outlining the chief characteristics of the examples of the Sheffield Business Club and two Manor and Castle community initiatives before drawing out the key findings which emerged from a comparison of these two cases.

The Sheffield Business Club consists of members representing a cross-section of business interests, including professional activities, manufacturing, distribution, and business services. Its primary purpose is networking, members join the club in order to make contacts with other business people, keep up to date with general business developments in Sheffield, and be in an environment where different types of occupational expertise are at a premium and can be used as a resource ('free' advice) or to generate increased business. Membership is by annual subscription. Breakfast, lunch and evening were the main times of meetings. Participants have experienced informal learning implicitly through knowledge acquisition, networking (learning how to network and how to access expert knowledge), enhancement of social skills, and through increased awareness of business activities and trends in Sheffield. Short talks and master-classes are also held at the different networking events. An email forum also allows the circulation and discussion of topics of interest to keep members up to date on business news, and to stimulate debate and fact-finding. The club’s philosophy is to encourage the growth of business in and around Sheffield.

As indicated earlier, we also visited two different but related organisations for the Manor and Castle communities. The first of these was the Manor Training and Resource Centre (MaTReC) which has been running for 11 years providing training and basic skills to local people. The second example was the Manor and Castle Development Trust (MCDT) which evolved out of MaTReC. Its mission is to empower regeneration by empowering local people through provision of basic skills, business generation, housing renewal and environmental improvements and so on.

MaTReC evolved from a group of activists in the 1980s its main focus was to address the difficulty of unemployment faced by the residents of the Manor estate. It evolved as a network which provides training in job skills for the
unemployed and socially marginalised, and internships with local companies to provide work tasters for young people excluded from school. The initiative has been very successful in attracting funding from the SRB, EU and FEFC and is approached by similar bodies outside Sheffield wanting to learn from MaTReC’s experience. The project believes in empowerment and the participants are encouraged to feel ownership in MaTReC and make clear their particular learning needs. Participants have voting rights and a say in decision making, and the organisation is community owned.

MaTReC is an example of an informal initiative in Sheffield which was described as ‘the adult education system in exile’. A specific aspect of the contracting/provider culture in Sheffield follows from the incorporation of colleges and other changes in national adult education policy in the late 80s and early 90s. The following quotes elaborate:

‘MaTREC is the survival of the adult education that was squashed in this city following incorporation;’

‘… all the things that have been closed down in the city in recent years are now being re-opened.’

As with MaTReC, the MCDT has also been successful in attracting funding from the SRB and more recently has submitted bids to the Structural Funds and follows the regional RDA strategy. Interestingly key projects of MCDT include the Parents as Partners Learning City initiative as well as a number of other projects aimed at regeneration and environmental improvement. The MCDT notes that it ‘has tentacles everywhere’ and it promotes citizenship and the development of the social capital by encouraging the residents to become involved by sitting on committees. A key feature of the MCDT’s *modus operandi* is its holistic approach to regeneration. Thus, for example, urban renewal is linked to health promotion, which is in turn underpinned by a ‘Lifelong Learning Strategy’ that is aimed at developing the social capital of the area.

The examples of Sheffield Business Club and the two Manor and Castle community initiatives echo a number of the findings set out in Chapter 3 that emerged from the exemplary case studies. These include the importance of:

- the spontaneous emergence of initiatives in response to need.
- key individuals as motors for sustainability, and transferance of informal learning initiatives
- a friendly, non-threatening and fun environment for learning
- access to basic resources and ability to attract adequate funding
- peer support and learning through peer imitation
- flexibility, enabling the initiative to adapt to learners’ needs
• the employment/employability focus
• networking, partnership and co-operative working arrangements
• individual pathways and learning spin–off

Particular skills and outcomes which are acquired through informal learning in these cases included: group communication, self-esteem, raised expectations, networking, basic skills and employability related skills.

The community focus of the initiatives we looked at has shaped the particular form and character of informal learning in the following ways:

• the size and scale of the initiatives reflects the size of demand but in all cases a friendly and intimate atmosphere was an important component of the initiatives’ success
• importance was attributed to the notion of community ownership of the initiatives with structures for participative decision making and empowerment
• word of mouth was the primary mechanism for recruiting new participants
• networking is the mechanism for expansion of the project ideas and practices beyond the confines of the individual initiative
• individual participants often engage more pro-actively with the community and civil society as the result of their involvement in informal learning through these initiatives
• the initiatives link into regeneration

4.3.2 Blurring the formality/informality boundaries

While we have distinguished between policy level initiatives and bottom up initiatives in our analysis, at the same time we have observed a blurring of the boundary between the informal and formal systems. The move towards an empowerment-based focus which was evident in the Learning City Initiatives is a good example of this. In the case of the Manor and Castle projects there have been moves towards partnerships with more formal providers such as the Sheffield college and the WEA.

An accommodation also appears to have been reached with regard to qualifications. Recognising achievement and giving certificates is seen, even by bottom-up initiative takers (with the exception of invisible, accidental or hobby learners), as positive feedback. This can be regarded as an example of the shifting boundaries between formal and informal learning. There remain problems however – a high proportion of courses do not meet widely agreed
criteria for qualifications. It is also the case that the more formalised courses are not always suitable for the learners' needs. MaTReC observed that there was a problem in offering NVQ courses as students found that they took too long to accomplish because of other time commitments which they faced (child care, work, etc.).

We have already noted that informal learning tends to be nebulous and difficult to define with any clear-cut criteria. The boundary between the formal and the informal must therefore be regarded as fluid. In the case of MaTreC the approach to provision of training is more informal than that of most providers in the area because of the emphasis on the informal atmosphere which is characterised by a friendly, relaxed and non-threatening environment. The blurring of the distinction between the formal and the informal may be regarded at the level of policy as a positive thing. It enables the links between the two systems to be solidified and pathways and trajectories to be opened for learners. Thus, we can regard the vagueness of the boundary between what is formal and informal as a positive feature which can be harnessed for widening participation.

In Section 4.1.1 we indicated that we believe there is a need for the identification of more sophisticated methodologies which can better illuminate the nature of informal learning in its geographical context. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5. The need for better understanding of geographical linkages and the nature of pathways and trajectories within the informal learning system is highlighted by the difficulties in demonstrating and capturing the nature of links between, for example, employability and participation in informal learning. It is difficult to systematically demonstrate that informal learning subsequently leads to more formal training and qualifications. It's an 'act of faith', key actors observed, and 'we're very bad at tracking systems'. Yet data exists, e.g. postcodes of learners, biographies of learners within the formal system, drop-out rates, and so on. There is a lack of analysis and investment in analysis. The twin problems are: how to make visible what is going on, and, how to demonstrate linkages between the formal and informal. Anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of informal learning is plentiful, however.

4.3.3 Prospective – dissonance and consonance with bottom up needs

One of the key findings from the dynamic case study, comparing the policy level examples and from the grass roots examples we have looked at, is that there appears to be a degree of mis-match between policy frameworks and instruments and actual learning needs in informal learning. In one sense, gaps in provision are characteristic of any policy system which is still evolving and taking shape. We have also observed that difficulties with the policy ‘fit’ and the needs of learners are also an endemic feature of the informal learning arena itself, which is sometimes difficult to define. There are inherent problems and difficulties for policy design in this area. This implies a need for policy to remain flexible and open, reflecting the elastic nature of informal learning and the needs, goals and objectives of learners in this field.
In the case of MaTReC, for example, difficulties emerged as the result of current Government Employment Policy Development Schemes tending to focus on the 16-24 age range. MaTReC found that on the Manor Estate there was a great need for training in the 30-40+ age group:

“People in this group, if they’ve been made redundant, feel as though they’re on the scrap heap and we’re talking about a number of professional people here too, not just the semi-skilled and long-term unemployed. Many have work experience but not the qualifications so they really need to be able to feel positive about themselves and get some qualifications and that’s where we come in. It’s a friendly, fun, atmosphere, people are here because they want to be here.”

The advantage of initiatives and projects which are close to the grass roots is that they can identify areas of need in learning much more easily that more distant local authorities and national policy makers.

“We now have so many links and partnerships in place that we’re really an integral part of the community and other projects have stemmed from us.”

**Linkages between Agencies and Initiatives**

A circumstance in Sheffield that has favoured current informal learning initiatives is the existence of a network of people who know each other and have been involved in adult and community development and education for many years. This ensures an underlying flexibility and responsiveness in the relationships between agencies in which this network of people are located.

Grass roots initiatives can also employ a flexible strategy towards policy directives in order to ensure the maintenance of the grass roots character and commitment to the community. This casts local initiatives into the role of bargaining and mediating the wishes of policymakers with the needs and objectives of the communities they represent.

Partnerships between more local grassroots initiatives also exist but not universally. While the Manor and Castle initiatives have successfully built links with city-level agencies, the Sheffield Business Club has no such linkages. This is partly a reflection of need, as the Sheffield Business Club is financially self-sustaining. It nevertheless remains an important source of informal learning for its participants. It also provides a bridge into employment. Some of the participants we spoke to indicated that the club had prompted them to set up their own successful businesses in Sheffield.

There is, however, a less positive scenario immanent within the revival of inter-agency co-operation especially at the top level, for example, bringing together TECs, LEAs, other City departments, colleges, Careers, and so on. There is a fine balance between the bottom-up and top-down in informal learning. Some important aspects of local autonomy could be threatened by the re-invigoration
of a strengthened local education system. In the early phase of our study we observed the threat of formalisation for some informal learning examples. It remains the case that some informal learning initiatives are successful precisely because they are outside the mainstream system. Policies in this arena therefore need flexibility and openness but they also require criteria for identifying when and where intervention should not be attempted.

4.4 Conclusions – Informal Learning as a System: Policy Implications

In this chapter we have examined the:

• extent to which Sheffield as a ‘Learning City’ constitutes a coherent development strategy for learning

• nature of the development trajectories planned for Sheffield. The extent to which this is developing to plan and the nature of changes which have taken/will take place

• extent to which the policy framework meets the needs of learners in Sheffield

We have found that initiatives in, and examples of, informal learning take very different forms. They include ‘informality’ in terms of content, delivery and accreditation. Some are top-down (e.g. outreach) others bottom-up (e.g. local community development). Some have learning at the centre and for some learning is peripheral or indeed unrecognised. Successful informal learning initiatives appear to share many characteristics:

- locally animated and led
- working intensively with small groups
- building up slowly over a long time
- able to translate national programmes and funding into local opportunities
- linked to key people within major agencies

Conditions that appear to support informal learning initiatives include:

• a broad view of the rationales for informal learning
• a contracting/provider culture
• multiple sources of funding – including SRB, ERDF and ESF
• national policy demands such as National Education and Training Targets or the requirement to produce a lifelong learning strategy
Informal learning itself has the potential to increase: employability, social capital, peer support, the growth of other initiatives and the development of particular skills (networking, partnerships, communication and specific employment related skills). In this dynamic case study we have also found, as with the cases presented in Chapter 3, that informal learning initiatives also benefit from the:

- mechanism of key actors or agents of change who drive the initiative forward
- basic infrastructure (access to buildings, computers etc)
- peer involvement and peer tutoring
- space to do informal learning without too much policy interference (Sheffield Business Club is a good example of this)
- development of specific facilitated links which enable individual transitions to new learning opportunities and new jobs

Informal Learning as a System: Policy Implications

The aim of this case study has been to illuminate informal learning as a ‘system’ which reflects inter-related, and over-lapping, organisational and institutional frameworks, within a particular spatial environment. A number of key findings have emerged:

- informal learning is difficult to define with any rigid set of criteria. there are therefore blurred boundaries between the formal and the informal
- the criteria for the operation of informal learning initiatives are essentially different to those which pertain to the formal learning system. Methodologies for better understanding informal learning need to reflect the distinctive character of informal learning
- informal learning operates across a number of different dimensions (settings, delivery mechanisms, content, duration and scale, accreditation and degree of explicitness/implicitness of learning)
- informal learning is part of the wider learning system of (in this case) the city which includes policy initiatives as well as grass roots community based projects and hybrid combinations of the two
- informal learning is itself a system embedded in the locality in which it takes place. The systemic nature of informal learning is characterised by locality-defined linkages, connections and networks which create conduits and pathways for learning spin-offs
• conduits and pathways for learning spin-offs occur at the level of initiatives and projects and at the level of the individual

• this phenomenon is also observable across different domains thus informal learning has implications for the shape and character of regeneration in the city, for the thickness and richness of social capital formation, and for access to employment

The systemic nature of informal learning has particular implications for policy and for future research. It is clear from our analysis of the Learning City initiative that this policy was influenced by a number of different elements of the learning system for example. We have also seen how the Learning City framework has been the catalyst for the emergence of individual initiatives that have evolved and developed their own dynamics outside the particular constraints of the Learning City policy itself. The individual initiatives within the Learning City framework have also impacted on and been shaped by the communities within which they were implemented. The Learning City initiative in Sheffield was also affected by new directions in national and city-level learning strategies which altered the direction and sustainability of the Learning City framework itself in Sheffield.

Because informal learning is inherently systemic it follows that policy changes which impact on city-wide learning strategies will have implications for different informal learning activities throughout the system. This would imply the need for the costs and benefits of new policies to be understood for individual initiatives within the system.

It is inevitable that there will be some dissonance between existing policies and the on-the-ground realities of the learning needs within the informal system. New policies can reduce this dissonance by echoing the flexibility that characterises the nature of informal learning itself. This entails recognising the need for space to allow the emergence of innovation and dynamism. Policies therefore need to avoid excessive formalism, over-regulation and bureaucratic constraints. Flexible policy strategies would be better able to support a wide range of informal learning initiatives and achieve a greater proximity of fit between learning needs and the policy framework. Future methodologies for understanding informal learning in its geographical context should draw out good practice lessons for increasing participation and transfer of successful informal learning strategies.

These policy, and measurement, implications are explored in more detail in the next section of this report.

References cited:

Sheffield First Partnership. 1998. “Sheffield Trends: an Annual Compilation of Indicators for Sheffield”. Sheffield First: Sheffield
SECTION 5: GOOD PRACTICE, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT FOR INFORMAL LEARNING

5.1 Introduction and Scope of this Section

This chapter concentrates on the practical outputs set by the study brief. Drawing on the results and conclusions of the preceding sections of this Report, we synthesise the main findings of the study to provide:

- examples of innovation and good practice in informal learning
- inputs towards policy recommendations to promote informal learning
- inputs towards the development of a methodology to assess the outcomes of informal learning

Our approach to developing these three outputs is shaped, firstly, by the key research objectives posed by the study brief, and secondly, by our understanding of the nature and process of informal learning, as described in the preceding chapters of this Report.

The key objectives of the study (as described in Chapter 1) are:

- to identify how individuals, particularly those who appear resistant or unmotivated towards informal learning, and the socially excluded, can most profitably become engaged in informal learning
- to investigate and identify the key factors promoting effective learning, with particular reference to the relationship between such learning and employability

Firstly therefore, we need to relate innovation, good practice and outcome assessment to overcoming barriers and constraints to the creation of ‘opportunity spaces’ in which those who are disengaged from learning can become engaged. We then need to turn our attention to identifying ways that can facilitate and enhance the experience and the benefits of learning for participants, once they have become involved in informal learning.

Given the importance of linking practice, policy and measurement to the characteristics of informal learning, as set out above, good practice, policy recommendations and measurement methodologies therefore must also necessarily reflect:

- the complexity and diversification of informal learning
- its evolutionary nature
- its context, particularly at the individual, institutional, community and societal levels
• the importance of the ‘wider benefits’ of informal learning, vis a vis a more narrow focus on transition pathways to formal learning and employability

• the ‘catalytic’ function of informal learning – as a key constituent, for example, of broader capacity-building and regeneration strategies

• the range of different stakeholders who need to collaborate to make it work

• the main obstacles and constraints to involvement in informal learning, as identified by the study

On this basis, the model used in this Chapter – and its resultant structure – is as follows:

In section 5.2, we consider the issue of how to promote the involvement in informal learning of people who are resistant and excluded.

Since the key to promoting involvement in informal learning is overcoming resistance, we firstly identify the main obstacles and barriers as identified by the study. We relate these obstacles to:

• the four key ‘contexts’ (levels) of learning identified by the study: individual, institutional, community and societal

and

• key actors involved (such as learners, practitioners, public agencies).

We then provide, firstly, policy recommendations aimed at reducing the effects of these obstacles, and, secondly, transferable examples of innovation and good practice from the study that show how these obstacles can be overcome.

In section 5.3, we consider the issue of how to facilitate and enhance the experience and the benefits of informal learning for those who are actively engaged. As with section 5.2, we identify the main obstacles, and then provide by policy recommendations followed by examples of innovation and good practice, to address these constraints. Once again, we link these to the different levels and actors involved.

Finally, in Section 5.4, we sketch out a methodological approach to measuring the outcomes associated with informal learning and provide examples of some measurement tools. This approach and examples once again reflect the characteristics of informal learning as described above.
5.2 How to Promote the Involvement in Informal Learning of People Who are Resistant and Excluded

5.2.1 The societal level

The main barriers to participation at the societal level are:

- the inflexibility of policy frameworks, policy instruments and institutional arrangements to promote informal learning
- the lack of integration between informal learning, formal learning and broader societal agendas and programmes
- accessibility problems
- the uneven dissemination and transferability of innovations
- inadequate funding provision
- limited evaluation policies, approaches and practices

i) Inflexibility

Informal learning encompasses a diversity of arrangements, actors and practices. It reflects subscribed, emergent and highly contextualised needs, rather than the ‘operational’ needs of formal education and training policy and practice. As a result:

- investment decisions and programme initiatives should allow scope for flexibility, and not privilege initiatives that aim to support transitions between informal learning and formal learning or as pathways to employment.
- equally, it should be recognised that ‘having fun’ is a key motivating factor driving participation in informal learning. Policies aimed at encouraging wider participation should be flexible enough to support initiatives that may reflect radical alternatives to ‘mainstream’ education and training.

Example of innovation and good practice:

Surfers Against Sewage is an example of a broad grass roots social movement in which involvement was focused around ‘fun events’. For many participants, ‘learning’ was an unintended outcome of participation. However, being involved had led to real gains in educational and employment opportunities for members, has contributed to capacity building on environmental issues on a national basis, and, has achieved real political reforms.
ii) Integration

If informal learning is seen as a ‘binding agent’ in a process of societal reconstruction, and in the development of social capital, then this implies a degree of integration between informal learning and broader policy agendas.

- Policies aimed at encouraging involvement in informal learning should build on recent trends towards ‘joined up government’, for example, Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE), and other DfEE/Department of Health initiatives like Healthy Schools and Tackling Drugs Together.

iii) Accessibility

The distribution of informal learning opportunities is both spatially and socially uneven. People can be either geographically isolated from learning resources and opportunities (like in rural areas) or socially isolated (for example, in poor inner urban areas).

- There is a need to encourage a more even distribution of informal learning opportunities and resources. One way of promoting this is through a more intensive utilisation of information and communication technologies to help widen access, for example by exploring the feasibility of an informal learning equivalent of the National Learning Grid.

Example of innovation and good practice:

The Peabody Trust Digital Learning Ring and Computer Gym enables mainly ‘socially excluded’ groups, for example lone parents and the long-term unemployed, to gain access to learning programmes, tutors and support.

iv) Dissemination and transferability

A contributory factor to the uneven distribution of informal learning provision is the similarly uneven and unpredictable nature of the dissemination and transfer process of innovations and good practices in the domain. This is partly because informal learning is to one degree or another contextualised, and some elements of it do not travel well. It is also due in part, however to the lack of a dissemination infrastructure.

- To facilitate the dissemination of good practice and the transferability of informal learning innovations, a co-ordinated monitoring and dissemination infrastructure for innovations and good practices in informal learning should be set up. This could be linked, for example, to Learning Direct to enable people to be better informed about learning opportunities.
Example of innovation and good practice:

DJ Masterclass started off as an after school workshop in London and is now delivered as far afield as Lancashire, East Anglia, Isle of Wight. However, ‘copycat’ replication of the DJ workshops by private companies has sometimes led to a lowering of technical and pedagogic standards in the delivery of the learning, and a consequent devaluing of the accreditation of the workshop. This highlights the need for careful and co-ordinated ‘shepherding’ of innovation.

v) Funding

Informal learning initiatives only work when there is adequate funding available to sustain their development. The availability of funding is in turn constrained by a prevailing view that the benefits of informal learning, at the bottom line, have to be measured against the ‘hard’ benchmarks of real rates of return. In addition, there is also a prevailing view that initiatives necessarily have to demonstrate their sustainability in order to merit funding. Neither of these propositions is borne out by the results of the study.

- Investment decisions on informal learning initiatives should not be based primarily on a real rate of return, but on the wider benefits of learning
- Funding criteria should not insist on the sustainability of initiatives but should acknowledge the evolutionary nature of informal learning

Example of innovation and good practice:

Faith in the Community initially aimed to facilitate organisational learning across different religious denominations. On the surface, it failed because it did not develop further. The tangible outcome produced by the Faith in the Community initiative was a strategy document providing inputs to Agenda 21. However, key actors within the initiative realised that the wider benefits of Faith in the Community went beyond the narrow confines of an ecumenical treatise. The real legacy of Faith in the Community was in laying down precedents for dialogue between social groups with a long history of mutual ignorance and suspicion.

vi) Evaluation

Evaluation of informal learning needs to be attuned to the particular characteristics of the domain - its complexity, messiness and variability - and its unpredictable ‘life cycle’. Ex-ante evaluation (for example the evaluation of funding proposals) needs to be flexible enough to accommodate this variability; on-going evaluation needs to incorporate some form of monitoring or developmental orientation that is attuned to the typical capacity of informal learning to ‘re-invent itself’ according to changing needs, and ex-post evaluation needs to incorporate outcome measures that consider its wider benefits.
There is a need to invest more in evaluation methods that will allow successful practice to be documented and innovative practice to be disseminated.

Evaluation and assessment approaches should not focus primarily on economic and impact-based measures, should facilitate developmental and formative learning and should be responsive to the systemic and evolutionary nature of informal learning.

**Example of innovation and good practice:**

Because of their perception that conventional consultation methods had failed to realise improvements in their environment, members of the Downham Youth initiative developed their own methodologies for needs assessment; translated the results into an Action Plan for their housing estate and subsequently developed methods for monitoring and progress assessment of the strategies developed through this method of participative evaluation.

### 5.2.2 The institutional level

The main barriers at an **institutional level**, focus on things that militate against the creation of an ‘opportunity space’ for informal learning and its development. The key barriers are:

- absence of key ‘learning entrepreneurs’
- the availability of adequate funding to kick-start initiatives

#### i) Learning entrepreneurs

Many informal learning initiatives originate as a result of the activities of a key entrepreneurial individual or group of individuals.

- There is a need to promote an environment that can encourage and foster the emergence of ‘product champions’ of informal learning in areas where there is most need.

- It is unlikely that this environment could be developed through formal methods, such as providing training courses on ‘leadership’, for example. Policies should therefore promote entrepreneurship indirectly, for example by providing funding and infrastructure for capacity-building and social capital development in communities.

**Example of innovation and good practice:**

The Northern Animateur project trains facilitators who then become both ‘product champions’ of learning and also act as learning mentors within the community. In this sense, communities can be seen as a kind of ‘learning organisation’ in which investment in the community asset base is primarily achieved through ‘learning by example’.
ii) Funding

As argued in Section 5.2.1 above, informal learning initiatives only work when there is adequate funding available to sustain their development. The availability of funding is in turn constrained by a prevailing view that the benefits of informal learning, at the bottom line, have to be measured against the 'hard' benchmarks of real rates of return. The emphasis here, therefore, lies in providing flexible funding criteria to enable informal learning initiatives to get off the ground.

5.2.3 The community level

The main barriers at the community level are:

- limitations of funding mechanisms and their lack of integration
- mistrust of traditional and conventional learning providers
- imposition of ‘top-down’ learning agendas
- lack of integration of informal learning with other key structural initiatives and programmes, such as regeneration strategies
- partnerships that work

i) Integration of funding mechanisms

Community-based and led informal learning sometimes acts as a catalyst for broader strategies that focus on the strategic regeneration of an area. This implies that:

- There is a need for co-ordinated integration of ‘high level’ community funding – including SRB and EU structural funds targeted at regeneration programmes – with more narrowly-defined education and training initiatives, for example the Adult and Community Learning Fund; New Start and the Neighbourhood Support Fund. This would imply greater flexibility for funding bodies to allow combinations of different funding packages, and enable local actors to package their own funding arrangements.

Example of innovation and good practice:

In Sheffield, Manor and Castle Development Trust (MCDT) acts as a conduit for flexible and innovative funding packaging that bundles together subsidies from European Structural Funds, Single Regeneration Budget and a range of local sources. This allows for the integration of community-based informal learning that is tied to broader objectives, such as Health Action Zones and environmental improvements.
ii) **Mistrust of conventional learning providers**

The study suggests that, particularly for residents in communities that suffer from multiple deprivation, there is a strong consensus that ‘official’ learning providers – even those such as community colleges with a tradition of informal learning – have failed them.

- There is a need to support the development of community-led informal learning that is designed and delivered by communities themselves, and informed by their own analysis of needs.

*Example of innovation and good practice:*

As discussed above, the Northern Animateur and Downham Youth case studies clearly show how effective informal learning can be when it is managed by communities themselves.

iii) **Imposition of top-down learning agendas and institutional frameworks**

A recent trend identified by the study is the re-emergence and re-badging of institutional frameworks and agendas for education and training that preceded the purchaser-provider era.

- There is a need to avoid re-constructing top-down agendas which could undermine the openness and informality of some of the newer groupings that have been created in the last ten to fifteen years.

- There is a need to construct contracts that it is possible for smaller bottom-up and local groupings to work with.

iv) **Lack of integration of informal learning with other key structural initiatives and programmes, such as regeneration strategies**

The study shows that informal learning often acts as a base for other actions designed to promote change within and for a community.

- There is a need for local education authorities to recognise the transformation in educational purpose that is occurring, given the new emphasis on learning and the integration of learning into broader agendas such as regeneration, improving health and reducing social exclusion.

v) **Partnerships**

The integration of learning into broader purposes such as regeneration and social exclusion in turn highlights the need for innovative forms of partnership.
There is a need to expand and consolidate Business and Community links, such as the Business Partnership Networks; Age Concern; involve agencies like the University for Industry in a strategy and co-ordination role. However, these should not interfere with or over-ride the organic partnerships that have emerged at grass roots level to provide informal learning opportunities.

Example of innovation and good practice:

MaTREC, the Sheffield-based community training organisation, brings together representatives of local industry, the city council, local residents and non-governmental organisations to develop and implement a strategic blueprint for informal learning that is designed to empower communities with a high level of long-term unemployed and act as an input to broader regeneration agendas.

5.2.4 The individual level

The main barriers at the individual level are:

- negative previous experience of learning
- the real and opportunity costs of learning
- inertia
- peer pressure
- accreditation and application of learning outcomes

i) Negative previous experience of learning

Particularly for adults who have left school early, without qualifications, returning to learning is fraught with problems. Many such people have had bad experiences of formal education – for example of being unable to keep up with coursework, and consequently being labelled as stupid. This problem is linked to poorly-developed meta-cognitive skills. Some individuals never acquire the skills to be able to ‘learn to learn’, or these skills have become out-dated through, for example, experience of long term unemployment.

There is a need to invest in awareness-raising campaigns that target people’s resistance to participation. These campaigns need to be carefully contextualised to reflect the different types of learner profile and learner environment addressed. They should adopt a ‘learning by example’ approach which allows the target audience to see ‘people like themselves' benefiting from informal learning.

Example of innovation and good practice:

Brookie Basics used a story-line in the Channel 4 ‘soap’ which featured a character who could not read and write. This helped to encourage a significant number of learners into improving their basic literacy skills.
ii) Real and opportunity costs

For many marginalised groups, such as the long term unemployed or lone parents, informal learning may incur real costs – for example course fees; learning materials; travel - that are difficult to afford. Participation can also mean some element of opportunity cost, for example spending time learning when you could be earning money; or spending job-seeking time in informal learning.

➢ There is a need to explore ways of providing incentives to participate in informal learning. For example, by reviewing ‘Schedule 2’ procedures, in order to minimise any loss of benefits incurred through opportunity costs.

iii) Inertia

As discussed above, resistance to informal learning can be mediated through negative experiences of formal education and training. This can be seen as one aspect of resistance to learning. In some situations, this ‘inertia’ factor is reinforced by structural conditions and processes, for example, sustained exclusion from learning, or from situations where individuals are exposed to new knowledge (for example at work) can inhibit the development and usage of meta-cognitive skills. Inertia can also be sustained through exclusion from participating in decision-making.

➢ There is a need to invest in awareness-raising about the benefits of informal learning. Reinforce awareness-raising by developing and supporting ways of increasing citizens’ participation in consultation, decision-making and the democratic process.

Example of innovation and good practice:

Downham Youth provides a forum to enable young residents to actively engage in dialogue and decision-making with local councillors. This in turn has led to an increased involvement by young people on the estate in the Downham initiative, as it became clear that it actually worked.

iv) Peer pressure

Peer pressure can be a two-edged thing. On the one hand, it can encourage people to get involved in informal learning because they see people like themselves benefiting from the experience. On the other, learning can sometimes be seen as an ‘anti-social’ or ‘abnormal’ activity by the reference group with which a particular individual is identified.

➢ There is a need to invest in awareness-raising campaigns which aim to counteract the perception that informal learning is itself a form of ‘marginal behaviour’. An effective way of doing this is to present learning as ‘fun’. Alternatively, learning can be packaged as a ‘hidden’ benefit of associated activities.
Example of innovation and good practice:

In Sheffield, the ‘Parents As Partners’ initiative successfully involved adults in informal learning by encouraging them to go into schools and work with their own children.

v) Accreditation and application of learning outcomes

In order to get them involved in learning, learners need some clarity and expectation about the return on their effort. The most obvious symbol of this return is through accreditation and certification. Accreditation, as the study shows, is a complex issue. On the one hand, some people feel intimidated by the prospect of earning certificates. On the other hand, some types of learner have expectations of a real ‘return’ for their effort, in terms of improved career prospects, for example, which should be properly accredited.

- A more flexible approach to the accreditation of informal learning is required. Certification should not focus only on ‘technical’ attainments (such as basic literacy skills) but also on broader personal achievements.

5.3 How to Facilitate and Enhance the Experience and the Benefits of Informal Learning for Those Who are Actively Engaged

5.3.1 The societal level

The main barriers to continuing participation at the societal level are similar to those identified in Section 5.2.1. above, that is:

- continuing funding
- monitoring and evaluation

As discussed above, informal learning initiatives only work when there is adequate funding available to sustain their development. This means that investment decisions on continuing funding need to be flexible enough to accommodate the diversity and complexity of the domain. Similarly, monitoring and evaluation practices must avoid a narrow focus on demonstrating an economic rate of return for justifying supporting continuing development.

An additional constraint to these two factors is:

- bureaucratic inertia and resistance to change

Institutional agencies, such as government departments, conventional education and training providers, and other organisations, such as large companies, sometimes perceive the unconventionality of informal learning as, at best, of limited value, and, at the extreme, as a threat. Another problem is that large organisations are sometimes slow to respond to innovations as they emerge, and as they develop – for example by over-bureaucratising funding
procedures, or imposing conditions that are inappropriate for a particular innovation.

- There is a need for more collaborative dialogue between mainstream organisations, and the kind of ‘bottom-up’ organisations, like social movements, that form the grass roots of informal learning. Such dialogue should explore ways of making bureaucratic procedures, such as funding applications, more flexible.

**Example of innovation and good practice**

‘SPELL’ - the Sheffield Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning does not in itself provide or deliver learning opportunities, but is a partnership that brings together key actors into a central structure of collaborating organisations.

### 5.3.2 The institutional level

The main barriers to continuing participation at the institutional level are:

- transferability of informal learning innovations
- space and flexibility to accommodate development trajectories

**i) Transferability of informal learning innovations**

Once established, the impact of new innovations in informal learning will to some extent be shaped by the extent to which they can build a critical mass.

- There is a need to develop both ‘vertical’ networks that provide for the dissemination of innovation and good practice at a national level and also horizontal networks among local actors in order to ensure that innovation spreads between practitioners.

*Example of innovation and good practice:*

Brookie Basics has been adapted to a wide range of locations – including community colleges; ‘at-home’ learning and prisons and is beginning to have a significant impact on adult literacy levels nationally.

**ii) Space and flexibility to accommodate development trajectories**

As the study has demonstrated, many informal learning initiatives start as a response to some unmet need, and may subsequently develop in ways that were unforeseen or unexpected, but which still address emergent or transformed needs.

- Initiatives should not be bound by inflexible ‘missions’ and evaluation criteria that prevent development and change
5.3.3 The community level

The main barriers to continuing learning at the community level are:

- lack of integration of informal learning outputs with ‘external’ environment
- displacement and ‘unforeseen’ effects

i) Integration of informal learning outputs with ‘external’ environment

Informal learning initiatives can fail when they are disconnected from community life. This can be because they raise expectations – such as the prospect of jobs – that cannot be fulfilled; they are inappropriate for the community culture, or they do not provide back-up and support to sustain the involvement of learners.

- Informal learning has to be embedded in the local life-world. This means, for example, spending money on support infrastructure (e.g. crèches) and making sure skills learned are compatible with the realistic life chances of the community, by providing linkages with local employment agencies, educational and training institutes and the voluntary sector.

- Informal learning policies should avoid a narrow focus on the individual. Although support for individual ‘learning plans’ and self-paced learning is important, in many cases a better return can be produced by supporting local community bases (i.e. building social capital).

- Informal learning initiatives need to build bridges both with local employers and employment opportunities outside the community.

Example of innovation and good practice

In the case of the UK Coalition ‘Back to Work’ Project, aimed at re-integrating people living with HIV/AIDS into employment, the real ‘learning outcome’ was heavily affected by whether employers themselves understood the nature of HIV and were able to adapt to provide support.

ii) Displacement and ‘unforeseen’ effects

The study suggests that the continuing success of informal learning initiatives for the community depend to some extent on its capacity to promote and support broader change, such as regeneration. In some instances, successful informal learning networks can have a ‘displacement’ effect, where they inhibit the development of co-ordinated education and training strategies; they can reflect duplication and over-lapping of resources. They can, perversely, contribute to the destabilisation of communities, for example, by contributing to
gentrification; skills migration; and the loss of key learning entrepreneurs and ‘animateurs’.

- There is a need for careful monitoring of the multiplier effects of informal learning initiatives where they occupy a central role in regeneration policies.

- As far as possible, informal learning initiatives should be directed towards the retention of skills within the community and the creation of locally-based employment opportunities.

**Example of innovation and good practice:**

In the case of MCDT and MaTREC in Sheffield, informal learning initiatives are linked to re-generation objectives that are designed to: empower local residents to ‘learn to learn’, improve their self-presentation and marketing skills, and compete on a more equal footing with ‘outsiders’. In addition, skills asset-building through informal learning is linked directly to employment generation strategies that are locally-based, for example new housebuilding schemes within the community.

5.3.4 The individual level

The main barriers to continuing participation at the individual level are:

- pathways to formal education and employment
- real and opportunity costs of continuing learning
- peer and family pressures

**i) Pathways to formal education and employment**

Although the study emphasises that the outcomes of informal learning are associated more with ‘wider benefits’ such as increased self-esteem than with facilitating transition pathways to formal education and employment, nevertheless, for some learners, informal earning is seen in just such terms. However, the study also suggests that these pathways can be ‘blocked’. For example, the mutual value added of links between informal learning and ‘welfare to work’ strategies like New Deal is undermined by a number of factors, like the restriction of legitimated education and training to Schedule 2 activities, and similar funding restrictions imposed on providers. This prevents the tailoring of customised learning strategies for individuals involved in New Deal.

- There is a need, therefore, to make the arrangements of schemes like New Deal more flexible, in order to maximise the contribution informal learning can make.
**ii) Real and opportunity costs of continuing learning**

As discussed above in section 5.2, staying the course of informal learning can mean real financial penalties are incurred, although it should be emphasised that, particularly in ‘unstructured’ forms of informal learning - such as membership of a ‘grass roots’ social movement - the costs are considerably cheaper than conventional learning.

- There is a need to provide incentives to support continued participation in informal learning. Minimise any loss of benefits incurred through opportunity costs.

**iii) Peer and family pressures**

People can be discouraged from continuing learning by the negative attitudes of their peers. In addition, the outcomes of informal learning, as well as contributing to the social cohesion of family and community life by enhancing social identity, can also reflect a ‘fragmentation effect’. Individuals expectations and horizons can outgrow their roots. People can leave for imagined better prospects elsewhere, leading to the disintegration of family and community life.

- There is a need to explore ways in which informal learning can be better integrated within the everyday lives of different types of learners. This research should focus on aspects such as child care, opportunity costs, and the social and inter-personal consequences of learning.

**Example of innovation and good practice:**

Heart ‘n’ Soul addresses the potential problems of creating stresses and strains within the family, as a result of precipitating change through learning, by working with both the ‘learner’ and the family. In this way, it uses the new independence created for participants as a device for ameliorating these stresses.

**iv) Learning problems**

The study found that individuals may drop out of informal learning because of practical difficulties experienced in the learning process itself. These include: not being able to keep pace with the learning process, or with peers; lack of skills in using new technologies; poor or inappropriate learning materials.

- Further research is necessary on innovative ways of maximising learning outcomes in informal learning. This should focus on: adapting informal learning to learner profiles; investigating the effectiveness of learning technologies and supporting skills development in this area; developing pedagogies for supporting self-paced learning; identifying and enhancing the effectiveness of mentoring systems. However, such research should be responsive
to the wide diversity of the different forms of informal learning identified by this study.

**Example of innovation and good practice:**

The Vale project is located in a pub in rural village in Derbyshire. Its innovative pedagogic approach combines self-managed and self-paced learning (using multimedia learning packages) with tutorial support (via videoconferencing to local community colleges) as well as collective mentoring from neighbours also involved in the initiative.

**5.4 Inputs Towards a Methodology to Assess the Outcomes of Informal Learning**

**5.4.1 Scope of this section**

In this section we explore some of the ways in which the outcomes of informal learning could be assessed. It should be emphasised that the discussion below is not intended to provide a definitive model or instruments to implement a cost benefit analysis of informal learning. Our brief was to provide suggestions and inputs towards the development of such tools.

With this proviso in mind, this section is set out as follows:

- firstly, we identify and elaborate a number of key ‘guiding principles’ that should be followed in relation to the development of outcome assessment tools.

- secondly, we explore some of the ways in which the parameters of assessment could be defined. This is an essential precursor to outcome measurement, since, in order to build evaluative criteria for measuring outcomes, it is necessary firstly to define the ‘mapping parameters’ of informal learning – what is it that is being measured

- thirdly, we provide examples of the kinds of outcome assessment tools that could be developed.

**5.4.2 Principles of outcome assessment**

Five key ‘principles’ need to be incorporated into the design and implementation of outcome assessment tools. These are:

- multi-dimensionality

- contextualisation

- a criteria-based approach

- a normative-based approach

- a process and developmental-driven orientation
i) **Multi-dimensionality**

As this Study demonstrates, for over thirty years conceptions of the benefits of learning have been documented in the UK and world-wide by human capital theory. Although, both ‘individual’ and ‘social’ benefits of education are acknowledged by its adherents, human capital theory has tended to emphasise individual rates of return - if only because of the acknowledged difficulties measuring social rates of return. This theoretical framework has also asserted the primacy of an economic rationale for educational investment, often from within a narrowly vocational (individual) perspective. A refocusing on learning rather than on education (or training) has occurred in recent years as evidenced by the ‘learning society’, ‘the learning age’ and the concept of ‘life-long learning’. But, this refocusing has mainly taken place within the confines of the human capital discourse. Learning continues to be seen as an ‘investment’ necessarily justified by ‘rates of return’.

Measuring the outcomes of informal learning on the basis of economic rates of return will inevitably realise poor results mainly because of the following:

- As this study has demonstrated, the key benefits of informal learning are associated less with widening participation (in the narrow sense of facilitating transition pathways to formal training and increased employability) and more with improving the individual, community and societal asset base (in the broad sense of increasing self-confidence; creating community capacity and building social capital)

- We have shown that informal learning constitutes phenomena that typically evolve in response to some ‘unmet need’. Such needs frequently imply social value rather than financial returns on investment.

- By the same token, informal learning is often highly innovative. It involves different stakeholders with different ‘world views’ of what are its benefits, and it may develop along a trajectory that is difficult to predict. Because the domain is inherently unpredictable, highly contested and exploratory, it is neither possible nor useful to find an agreed consensus on outcomes, let alone how to measure them. It is therefore essential in outcome measurement to incorporate some notion of social construction of value as well as some mechanism for reconciling these different constructions.

ii) **Contextualisation**

Outcome measures need to be geared to specific and different purposes. Four types of ‘purposes’ can be identified:

- the context in which informal learning develops – why it happens and what needs it addresses

- the balance between the general and specific learning addressed
As reported above, the initiating circumstances of informal learning may encompass widely differing circumstances and needs. This means that the ‘object of evaluation’ can itself vary enormously. For example, as the ‘dynamic case study’ of Sheffield illustrates, informal learning may be considered as a kind of ‘binding agent’ in a package of regeneration strategies. As part of a process of breaking a cycle of disengagement from learning, in response to the effects of economic re-structuring, informal learning initiatives can be linked to other intended outcomes, such as better housing, environmental improvements and health gains. It follows that different parameters, cost mechanisms and outcome measures will apply for these different purposes. In the case of this kind of regeneration context, it may be more useful to consider outcomes and impacts in relation to measures like contribution to partnership development and sustainability than to financial rates of return.

Similarly, sustainability itself is a contextualised criterion. As we have seen (in Section 3 of this report) it is not always a sign of ‘failure’ that informal learning initiatives do not develop. In the case of Faith in the Community, for example, there was common consensus that the initiative had a limited shelf-life; had achieved its objectives within that life cycle and had ‘sown the seeds’ for future development in other forms. So, sustainability is not a prior requirement of informal learning (and it may not be necessary to assess an example of informal learning on its sustainability) because particular phenomena may have an in-built ‘shelf-life’.

Secondly, as discussed in section 3 of this Report, informal learning has generic as well as specific outcomes. Although it is possible to identify a set of common outcomes against which the benefits of informal learning can be assessed, the assessment would need to incorporate measures of ‘technical’ outcomes.

Thirdly, outcome assessment should not confine itself to the evaluation of the specific delivery and practices of informal learning, but also the context in which it happens. This could imply, for instance, in the assessment of the costs and benefits of ITC-based learning, the extent to which learning is socially supported (like the provision of creches for single parents); whether it is relevant (like the extent to which the skills learned are consistent with the availability of jobs within the local labour market).

Finally, the purposes of evaluation themselves need to be considered. For example, decisions on whether to fund informal learning project proposals imply a different set of evaluation criteria than decisions on whether to continue supporting initiatives as they evolve. Typically, project sponsors and agencies are looking towards predictable outcome measures to assess the ‘success’ of interventions, whereas the unpredictable nature of innovations is more conducive towards experimentation and learning rather than outcome. This in
turn brings into play the issue of stakeholder interests and the extent to which assessment approaches and tools reflect the different agendas and objectives of key actors involved

iii) Criteria-based assessment

This study has shown that informal learning takes place in different settings; with different types of people; for different reasons and on different institutional and geographical levels. Outcome assessment therefore has to be sensitive to these different criteria of analysis. At a minimum, this implies different criteria for:

- individual outcomes (e.g. improved self-confidence; better ‘learning to learn’ skills)
- institutional outcomes (e.g. impact of informal learning on family cohesion; the impact of an informal learning initiative within a Programme)
- community outcomes (e.g. contribution of informal learning to increasing participation in decision-making in an inner urban housing estate)
- societal (e.g. contribution to the development of social capital)

Assessment measures should also be tailored to and reflect the different types of delivery scenario for informal learning. For example, informal learning that is based on an ‘outreach approach’ could usefully focus on measures of ‘target audience penetration’ as a basis for assessment. In the case of self-organised and self-managed learning (for example the computer-based learning packs delivered through the ‘Miners Arms’ initiative reported above in Section 3 of this Report) assessment measures would need to be geared to the pre-set goals determined by the individual learner.

iv) Normative – based assessment

This study has demonstrated that learning – and its value – are socially constructed. In the case of the Downham Young example (discussed in Section 3 of this Report), it was clear that the young people involved in the initiative had very different ideas about the focus of learning; how to develop learning opportunities, and what were the desired outcomes, than those of the local Councillors who were providing some of the funding for the initiative. Assessment approaches and measures need to incorporate an understanding and reflection of these different social constructions of the content and value of learning. But, whose construction and whose values?

As discussed above, this also brings into play the issue of stakeholder interests and their consonance or dissonance. The rationale behind a stakeholder approach to evaluation is therefore partly one of giving an evaluation ‘legitimacy’ but more practically it is to ensure that the evaluation is useful, its
results are utilised, and that the initiative itself benefits. An initial task for the evaluation of informal learning is to undertake a ‘stakeholder analysis’ which maps things like their organisational interests and ‘vision’. Such an analysis will reveal the extent of ‘alignment’ within the initiative, broadly the extent to which stakeholders’ interests overlap or are coherent, or alternatively where there are incompatibilities. Stakeholder ‘alignment’ is particularly relevant in the context of trying to assess the potential ‘diffusion’ capability of informal learning initiatives (the extent to which they are likely to successfully ‘deliver’ learning to their target audiences; the degree to which their innovative features can be transferred elsewhere). According to prevailing innovation diffusion theory, the most important factor in successfully implementing new innovations, whether they be new technologies, new partnerships or new ideas, is how well the dynamics of pluralities of interest groups are managed (Molina, 1994; Latour, 1987).

v) Process and developmental aspects

We have argued in this Report that informal learning is not a static, rigidly bounded, event but typically an evolving process. Particularly when it originates as a ‘bottom up’ response to some unmet need, informal learning as an organisational phenomenon will adapt and change. This process of change may in turn initiate ‘latent’ needs that emerge during the development process and ‘affective’ needs that arise as a result of people’s involvement in the process. Outcome measures need to be responsive to this ‘evolutionary’ aspect of informal learning. This implies that summative measures of informal learning (i.e. ex-post outcome and impact evaluation) are inadequate unless supported by formative evaluation that can capture evolutionary change. To take the argument further, one can argue that in some instances a developmental approach to the evaluation of informal learning is necessary. In the case of the Animateur project (as reported in Section 3 of this Report), for example, informal learning is used as a catalyst for social change. In this case, there are few pre-determined objectives against which resultant outcomes can be assessed. Rather, informal learning provides an open-ended space within which a number of scenarios can possibly develop. In this space, it is possible to argue the case for evaluation as a collaborative, developmental strategy that is integrated within the management of the initiative and helps guide its development.

5.4.3 Examples of Mapping and Measurement tools

In this section we provide some examples of models and tools to evaluate informal learning. As argued above, an essential precursor to assessing the benefits of informal learning is to establish the criteria against which those benefits can be assessed. For each of the examples shown, we therefore, firstly, provide an illustration of how the parameters and dimensions of informal learning can be ‘mapped’ to provide assessment criteria, and secondly, an illustration of how these criteria might be operationalised. The examples have been developed to incorporate the ‘guiding principles’ elaborated above, in terms of:
• the multidimensionality of informal learning (‘wider’ as well as economic benefits)

• the different ‘levels’ of informal learning (individual; institutional; community; societal)

• the socially constructed nature of informal learning

• the process and developmental orientation of informal learning

Example 1: Assessment of impacts for individual learners participating in Peabody Trust initiative

**Background and features of this example**

This example provides a hypothetical illustration of an evaluation of the Peabody Trust initiative described in Section 3 of this Report. In this example, the main objectives of the evaluation are to assess the effects, for individual participants, of involvement in an informal learning initiative implemented on a residential housing estate that provides:

• access to a ‘computer gym’ (a mobile ‘drop-off’ facility that delivers computer and software systems to individual residents) and which in turn provides access to:

  • the digital learning ring (providing a customised learning package tailored to an individual learners’ needs and allowing them to learn at their own pace) and incorporating:

    • access to interactive videoconferencing with learning mentors from a local community college, plus

    • additional social support in the form of creche and drop-in resource and library centre.

**Approach**

**Step 1:** Establish the criteria that define the parameters of informal learning within the setting (i.e. the housing estate) in which it occurs. This should be done in the form of a collaborative needs assessment exercise involving Community Workers and residents. It should reflect the ‘contextualisation’ of the initiative and its effects in relation to the ‘life-world’ of the residents, for example by relating the delivery and outcomes of informal learning to the everyday life of learners, and relating its potential benefits to local economic conditions.
Tables 5.1 to 5.3 illustrates the range of criteria that could be used.

Three types of criteria are identified:

- To assess the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the learning scenario provided (Table 5.1)

This set of criteria focuses on identifying ways in which learners can evaluate the learning arrangements (setting; content; delivery mechanism; support systems) on the basis of their own expectations and needs. In this sense the evaluation criteria are ‘self-anchoring’ in relation to the individual ‘life-world’ of the learner.

**Table 5.1: Criteria to assess learning scenario**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Ease of access to learning services and support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Effectiveness of support systems (mentors; creche etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness</td>
<td>The extent to which the learning materials provided address information needs of learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>The degree to which learning is provided within timescales that suit learner’s everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-friendliness</td>
<td>Extent to which ICT tools are easy to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural relevance</td>
<td>Degree to which learning delivery and content is consistent with socio-cultural profile of learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of information</td>
<td>Degree of linkage to labour market conditions; skills needs of learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- To assess the outcomes of participation in terms of skills provided (Table 5.2)

The second type of mapping criteria refer to the kinds of learning outcomes that might be expected as a result of participating in the initiative. These are based on the acquisition of three kinds of skill and competence: foundation (generic and transferable skills applicable in all contexts); technical (relating to the particular content of the learning provided); generic workplace (relating to the transferability of the informal learning outcomes to employment transition pathways)
Table 5.2: Criteria to assess skills acquired

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Skills</td>
<td>Basic (reading, writing, maths)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking (creative; decision-making; problem-solving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal (self-esteem; self-management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Attributes</td>
<td>Content skills (as for basic skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process skills (critical thinking; learning strategy; monitoring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-functional social (negotiation, co-ordination)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex problem-solving (information gathering; evaluation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical skills (operations analysis; operations implementation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic Workplace</td>
<td>Ability to allocate resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competences</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using, selecting, troubleshooting technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquisition, evaluation and management of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

➢ To assess the effects in terms of broader social contextualisation (Table 5.3)

The third type of mapping criteria focuses on the relevance of the informal learning to the socio-cultural environment in which the learner operates. It refers to the potential applicability of the outcomes in broader life experience, for example the degree to which skills acquired can be translated into further learning opportunities; better job prospects; improvements in social relationships; relationship to citizenship and community identity issues.

Table 5.3: Criteria to assess social contextualisation of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning enhancement</th>
<th>Enhancement of involvement in learning (attend formal courses; acquire qualifications) etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>Career enhancement (work entry; promotion; improved job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Changes in social relationships (new friends; participation in social institutions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Attendance at residents meetings; participation in other decision-making bodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 2: Entails the operationalisation of these criteria into an evaluation plan. Typically, the evaluation would incorporate a ‘cohort’ study, where a group of learners involved in the initiative would be followed through a process of learning, from initial involvement and beyond their disengagement from the initiative. Data collection could incorporate both ‘hard data’ (for example in the form of standard skills assessment instruments for the three types of skills described above in Table 5.2; frequency of attendance – in videoconferencing lessons; college courses; job interviews etc) as well as qualitative data (e.g. self-reported rating of the ICT services used in informal learning; self-reported rating of outcomes by learners – Table 5.4 below). The methodological approach would typically involve running a pre-test survey of learners prior to their involvement; a post-test repeat of the survey after quitting the project and a follow-up to record any subsequent changes in participation and employment.

A useful analytical tool would be a matched-pair analysis of before and after scores, as illustrated below in table 5.5

Table 5.4: Self-reported rating of informal learning services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Rating good or very good</th>
<th>Computer Gym</th>
<th>Digital Learning Ring</th>
<th>Video-lessons</th>
<th>Internet Information Services</th>
<th>On-line Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive ness</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-friendliness</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural relevance</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of information</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 illustrates the results of analysis of data collected through a survey of residents, on their rating of the outcomes associated with the five main elements of informal learning provided on the estate. It shows the percentage of residents rating each element - for example, the Computer Gym as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ - on a set of seven rating dimensions - accessibility, and so on.
### Table 5.5: Wilcoxon matched pair analysis of learning outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Wilcoxon Z Probability</th>
<th>% below norm at pre-test</th>
<th>% improve</th>
<th>% no contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>-8.576 0.000</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>-9.402 0.000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>-9.876 0.000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content skills</td>
<td>-1.085 0.277</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process skills</td>
<td>-6.161 0.000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-functional social)</td>
<td>-10.969 0.000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex problem-solving</td>
<td>-12.082 0.000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>-0.721 0.470</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5 shows the results of a ‘before and after’ analysis of learning outcomes, as measured by a survey of residents. Prior to their involvement in informal learning, each resident was asked to rate themselves in terms of eight skills - basic, thinking, etc. - Following their involvement in informal learning the survey was repeated. The table shows the percentage of residents reporting an improvement in their self-rating for each skill. The Wilcoxon score indicates the ‘strength’ of the improvement (the higher the score, the greater the improvement).
Example 2: Community empowerment through raising awareness of drugs misuse

**Background and features of this example**

This example envisages a ‘bottom-up’ community development initiative within the broad policy arena of the Government ‘Tackling Drugs Together’ White Paper. Working along the lines of the ‘Animateur’ project (discussed above in section 3 of this Report), the main focus of the informal learning initiative is to use a Community Development manager to train people from within an inner London borough in outreach work. These ‘animateurs’ will be the ‘product champions’ in an initiative to firstly raise awareness within the local community on drugs issues; to begin to develop programmes targeting people who are currently users, and those ‘at risk’ in harm minimisation and rehabilitation, and to link drugs issues to broader strategic programmes focusing on a ‘health action zone’. The initiative has an inherent ‘developmental’ orientation.

**Approach**

The first task is to carry out a stakeholder analysis of the relevant actors involved. This example is a good illustration of the ‘social construction’ aspect of informal learning, as discussed above. The drugs field is notoriously susceptible to extremes of conflicting perspectives and ‘world views’; notions of what should be learned and what should be the outcomes of learning are highly contested (for example between the ‘just say no’ school of thought and those who advocate harm minimisation rather than restriction of supply). An essential first mapping exercise is to sketch out the ‘terrain’ of learning by identifying key stakeholders and their agendas. A simple ‘grid’ tool like the one below can be used for these purposes

**Stakeholder mapping grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mapping Criteria</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Funders</th>
<th>Community Development Managers</th>
<th>DATs; DRGs*</th>
<th>Police; LA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs and agendas: what are the main outcomes required?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Questions and Criteria: On what basis will the initiative be evaluated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological preferences (what kind of ‘evidence’ is required?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of engagement in initiative and its evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DRG: Drugs Reference group. DAT: Drugs Action Team
The stakeholder analysis sets the parameters for both the ‘developmental trajectory’ (how it will develop) and the evaluation outcome criteria of the initiative. On the basis of the analysis, an evaluation design will need to be developed which:

I. Provides an institutional framework for developing the initiative and its monitoring and evaluation (facilitates contact and consultation with agencies and individuals including schools, police, local and health authorities, the Drug Action Team, businesses, parents, young people etc. To gain both the involvement, of these groups and information from them on their needs and wishes concerning the local drugs strategy and the particular problems in their area)

II. To set up a representative steering committee, draw up an agreed local blueprint for action, and implement this plan

III. To begin a local publicity and fundraising campaign to involve a range of local people in drug prevention initiatives

IV. Within the context of the evaluation, to develop measurable outcomes, based on:
   - Survey of local need/Development Audit
   - Survey of current working practices.

IV. An Action Plan is developed in consultation with relevant agencies, is agreed by the Advisory Group within the first 6 months, and is successfully implemented.

V. Monitor the effectiveness of the Action Plan, on the basis of:
   - The effectiveness of publicity and external communication will
   - The number of inquiries about the initiative
   - Membership and contacts of the initiative
   - Extent and quality of networks generated between key stakeholders
   - Qualitative evaluation of attitudinal change (e.g. by measuring knowledge and attitudes’ regarding drugs prior and post each development activity)
Example 3: Normative assessment of Informal Learning Case Study examples

Background and features of this example

This example is intended to illustrate the use of normative-based mapping criteria to design an assessment model and measurement tools for informal learning at the ‘institutional level’. In this case we take as the unit of analysis the examples of informal learning arrangements derived from the case studies analysed in this Report (as described in Section 3). The aim of this example is to illustrate how the variability and context-dependency of informal learning can be classified in order to reflect the ‘wider benefits’ associated with informal learning. This type of approach could be adopted, for example, to enable funding proposals to be rated on the basis of an ‘interpretative’ or case study analysis of widely variable informal learning arrangements.

Approach

On the basis of the study literature review and audit of informal learning examples, a set of ten bi-polar descriptors have been identified to define how examples of informal learning can be situated with regard to key concepts identified in theory and practice. These scales are shown below.

Criterion 1: World view impact

The extent to which involvement exposes people to different frames of reference allowing them to open up to a range of different possibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criterion 2: Sense-making

The extent to which the example is embedded in the local community and involvement enables people to broaden their understand of a shared life-world and community identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly embedded</td>
<td>Unembedded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criterion 3: Learning approach

The extent to which the example is highly situated – a communal activity – or highly self-organised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situated</td>
<td>Self-organised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 4: Competence-based</td>
<td>The extent to which learning is focused on skills acquisition or promoting generic knowledge or information enhancement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills-based</td>
<td>Generic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 5: Boundedness</th>
<th>The extent to which the example is highly bounded (e.g. with a strong institutional base) or ‘unbounded (e.g. with no formal centres or settings)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounded</td>
<td>Unbounded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 6: Temporality</th>
<th>The extent to which the example represent a highly transient, short-lived phenomenon or is sustainable and evolutionary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient</td>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 7: Social contextualisation</th>
<th>The extent to which the example has been driven by a spontaneously-created Social movement, or has been developed through an external initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social movement</td>
<td>External</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 8: Management style</th>
<th>The extent to which the example is a ‘bottom up’ activity or is highly centralised and ‘top-down’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom up</td>
<td>Top down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 9: Transition-oriented</th>
<th>The extent to which the example is well-linked to formal transition pathways (e.g. formal training and employment) or de-coupled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-coupled</td>
<td>Highly linked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 10: Overall success measure</th>
<th>Your rating of the overall ‘success’ of the example in terms of providing innovative informal learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly successful</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the descriptors shown above, the case studies analysed in the report are mapped against each other according to their position on the scales.
6. TEMPORALITY

Social

Evolutionary

Transient

Eternal

BBC

SAS

DMY

UKC

Transient

PRT

FIC

PBT

DJM

HN

NAT

PUB

3. LEARNING APPROACH

Bounded

Self-Organised

Situated

Unbounded

PRT

HNS

BBC

NA

DJM

PBT

SAS

FIC

PUB

DMY

UKC

81
Sample 4: Community regeneration in Sheffield

This is the most complex area for outcome assessment. In this case, the overarching objective of the assessment exercise is to evaluate the contribution of informal learning within the broad policy perspective of local economic regeneration. This objective would need to incorporate a number of complex multi-variate dimensions, including:

- the relative cost-effectiveness of informal learning *vis a vis* ‘conventional’ education and training delivery
- the contribution of informal learning to ‘wider benefits’ associated with regeneration, including, *inter alia*, environmental, health, employment and capacity-building improvements
- the nature of ‘displacement’ and ‘multiplier effects’ associated with informal learning (for example the degree of ‘overlap’ of different actors involved in informal learning; the gaps between formal and informal service provision)

**Approach**

This assessment focuses on a ‘needs-value’ approach to measuring the impact of informal learning. The first step of the assessment exercise is to map the distribution and specificity of informal learning within the spatial area selected (in this case the city of Sheffield). This would entail selecting an appropriate unit of analysis (ward level, SRB area, and so on). Within the defined boundary, a number of key dimensions need to be mapped:

- the distribution of informal learning *vis a vis* ‘conventional’ educational and training delivery
- the relative distribution of related regeneration initiatives
- the distribution costs of the above
- the level of interactivity between formal and conventional learning provision, and with regeneration initiatives
- the ‘learning needs’ of targeted groups
- learning outcomes of targeted groups

**Learning distribution**

Data on the relative distribution of ‘learning supply’ can be derived from a combination of secondary and primary data. Data exists, for example, for the catchment population and student profiles of Community Colleges in the Sheffield area, and their course content, as well as similar data for secondary and HE establishments. This can be supported by interviews with local
authority representatives; Learning City partners; SRB partners; TEC members in order to develop a mapping of informal/formal learning provision.

**Regeneration initiatives**

A similar data collection exercise could be undertaken to identify the distribution and characteristics of relevant regeneration initiatives. This would entail: content analysis of policy documentation; SRB proposals; SRB evaluation reports: interviews with key actors.

**Distribution costs**

The costs of provision of informal learning *vis a vis* conventional education and training provision can be calculated on the basis of, *inter alia*:

- capital and maintenance costs (building, equipment etc)
- personnel costs (tutors, managers, ancillary and support staff)
- materials costs (books, learning packs, electronic media etc)
- ancillary costs (planning, design, administration etc)
- transport costs (travel for learners; travel for providers)
- taxes, fees, levies, public subsidies etc
- opportunity costs (e.g. of time taken by learners to participate)

Informal learning provision costs can be compared against benchmark cost comparitors derived from national and European surveys. An example is shown in Table 5.6, which compares estimated costs for the on-line ‘Learning Ring’ services provided within MATREC with average work-based training costs on the basis of EUROSTAT statistics. The potential cost-savings incurred are primarily due to economies in travel and labour costs attributable to informal learning.

**Table 5.6: Cost comparisons formal/informal learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training costs (Euro)</th>
<th>Conventional Training</th>
<th>MATREC ‘Learning Ring’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs per training day</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. cost of training course per trainee</td>
<td>1496</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. cost of on-job training per trainee</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interactivity**

In this context, two dimensions are mapped:

- the relative distribution and interconnectivity between informal learning initiatives and formal learning provision
- the relative distribution and interconnectivity between informal learning and regeneration initiatives (for example health action zones; SRB schemes)

A useful mapping tool for this exercise is a kind of variation on the ‘socio-metric matrix’ approach traditionally used to identify interpersonal relationships. In the case of Sheffield, for example, we have on the basis of triangulating interviews with key actors, and content analysis of relevant documents, identified a number of significant informal learning ‘phenomena’ (including ‘top-down’ projects typically funded by SRB or other programme finance, as well as ‘grass-roots’ cases). Using primarily interviews with primary stakeholders involved, it is possible to calibrate the degree of interactivity between the different informal learning phenomena, significant regeneration initiatives and conventional learning provision. Interactivity would reflect: shared and competing funding and funding sources; common and competing objectives and agendas; common key participants. Mapping would capture data on variables such as: catchment/target population overlap; amount of funding; location and type of key settings (for example, colleges; other key physical spaces).

**Table 5.7: Socio-metric matrix for Sheffield Manor & Castle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Agendas</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Catchment</th>
<th>Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LLP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citinet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table shows how the interconnectivity of a selected (and illustrative) range of informal learning initiatives in Sheffield: Lifelong Learning Partnership (LLP); Rover mobile ICT lending project (Rover); Citinet (Sheffield-wide on-line learning system); Regional Interchange Networking Group (RING) and Parents as Partners (informal learning initiative in parenting skills) – can be mapped in relation to a number of key descriptors.
Learning needs

We approach the definition and mapping of learning needs in its broadest sense – in relation to the ‘wider benefits’ of learning - as discussed throughout this Report, and specifically within the context of community regeneration. In this sense, learning needs are embedded within a broad spectrum of indicators, encompassing economic needs; educational and training needs; socio-cultural needs; capacity and participation needs. Table 5.8 summarises these needs with regard to these broad headings.

Table 5.8: Indicators of ‘learning need’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>E&amp;T</th>
<th>Socio-cultural</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business formation and business survival rates</td>
<td>Attainment and qualification indices</td>
<td>Population change</td>
<td>Electoral turn-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/unemployment rates</td>
<td>Workforce qualifications and skills</td>
<td>Age distribution</td>
<td>Membership of representation and decision-making bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing benefits and income support</td>
<td>Learning provision (e.g. libraries; learning centres etc)</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Community capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings rates</td>
<td>Learning participation (e.g. no of library cards per pop)</td>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crime statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental amenity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty index</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mortality and index of chronic and acute diseases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mapping of spatial sub-areas (wards, SRB areas etc) on the basis of these need indicators can be undertaken through: statistical analysis of secondary data supported by surveys of residents.

It follows that mapping of learning outcomes can be undertaken as an ongoing long-term exercise using the same set of indicators.
Analysis

The above mapping exercises are intended to provide the relevant data and indicators to enable outcome assessment to be carried out in relation to the three key dimensions outlined above, i.e.:

- the relative cost-effectiveness of informal learning vis a vis 'conventional' education and training delivery
- the contribution of informal learning to 'wider benefits' associated with regeneration, including, inter alia, environmental, health, employment and capacity-building improvements
- the nature of 'displacement' and 'multiplier effects' associated with informal learning (for example the degree of 'overlap' of different actors involved in informal learning; the gaps between formal and informal service provision)

Cost-benefit analysis

As indicated above, straight cost comparisons can be determined, using benchmark data derived from European and UK databases, on the basis of the data derived from spatial area analysis.

Over time, the ongoing monitoring and collection of data on a small area basis can be used to progressively refine a cost-benefit model for informal learning using regression analysis. Such a model could identify the relative contribution of informal learning to overall regeneration strategies within targeted areas. Regression modelling would need to incorporate a 'clustering' of the indicators shown above in Table 5.8. A suggested model could include:

- Economic Index
- Formal Learning Index
- Informal Learning Index
- Social Capital Index
- Environmental Utility Index
- Healthy Lifestyle Index
- Citizenship Index

Displacement and multiplier effects

Policy analysts would find it useful to identify the extent to which there are gaps in service provision of formal education and training - gaps which informal learning may or may not fill to a greater or lesser degree of success - the extent
to which there is "overlap" of informal learning projects and provision; the extent to which the needs of excluded groups are being met or unmet. Using the mapping data described above, a number of analysis tools could be developed, two of which are illustrated below.

**Location quotient**

Figure 5.1 below shows an illustrative example of a location co-efficient comparing the distribution of informal and formal learning provision for a selected number of wards in Sheffield, on the basis of the data collection and analysis exercises described above. The location co-efficient is a standardised indicator of the extent to which a particular sub-area (ward, SRB and so on) matches the ‘norm’ in terms of provision. The norm (baseline) can be a national benchmark or, in this case, a city-wide average.

**Figure 5.1: Location Quotient**

The location co-efficient tool is a convenient illustrative tool to identify gaps in service provision on a community–wide basis.

**Congruence co-efficient**

In contrast, Figure 5.2 below shows an illustrative profile of a particular ward – Manor and Castle – in terms of a ‘congruence coefficient’. The congruence coefficient is the degree to which the learning needs of a particular sub-area are matched by learning provision.
As the Figure shows, data can be collected over time on two broad sets of comparative indicators: learning needs, as measured by economic, informal learning, formal learning, health, environmental utility and citizenship indices (as measured by self-reported and secondary data), and learning outcomes on these variables. A coefficient of 1 indicates a broad match between needs and provision.