



**LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CITIES, TOWNS AND
VILLAGES PREPARING FOR A 21ST CENTURY
KNOWLEDGE-BASED
ECONOMY**

A Report submitted to the Resort Municipality of Whistler

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on behalf of

the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology

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HIGHLIGHTS

- For purposes of this investigation the term "learning community" is defined as any city, town or village, and surrounding area, that, using lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal, promotes collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness
- varying models of "learning communities" are developing around the world
- key drivers of learning communities include:
 - global demands for economic competitiveness and social cohesion
 - application of information technologies for interactive communications and associated learning
 - growing awareness of the need for lifelong learning strategies to ensure sustainable economic and community development
- a growing network of learning communities in the UK feature:
 - integration and co-ordination of the local formal education delivery
 - economic "regeneration " strategies involving public/private partnerships
 - appropriate use of information technologies
- almost without exception learning communities make improved use of existing facilities but also make imaginative use of more accessible locations for learners
- additional funds are most often used for economic development and to assist socially excluded individuals and groups
- the policy lens of lifelong learning is beginning to be focused on the array of services or functions which local governments provide or are closely involved in, including:
 - local economic and community development
 - educational provision
 - parks, recreation and leisure services
 - policing and public safety
 - community health services
 - libraries and museums
 - environmental/waste services
 - housing
- increased awareness of the need to evaluate and expand the concept have led to development of a "value-added" assessment model to assess local progress and benchmark good practice.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology and the Resort Municipality of Whistler. The general objective of this investigation was to gain an up-to-date picture of local and national initiatives in the UK related to the development of learning communities.

Many British experts and practitioners gave of their time and expertise to inform the author of local and national learning community initiatives. Representatives from the following bodies provided information and shared their informed views on a wide range of issues related to learning communities:

- * National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education for England and Wales
- * Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership
- * Retford - a learning town
- * the Learning City Network
- * the Lifelong Learning Unit of the Department for Education and Employment
- * the European Lifelong Learning Initiative (ELLI)

Interviews with representatives of the first five of the above organizations were conducted in the British Midlands, while interviews with participants at the ELLI European Conference on Learning Cities took place in Southampton. A full list of these capable informants is provided in Appendix I – Interview Schedule.

The author is responsible for any errors, omissions or misinterpretations of information, and all views in this report are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology.

This edition has been edited for the Web. Those wishing the full edition, including learning partnership statements and other material in the original Appendices, should contact:

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I. Preface

From ancient times to the present the link between learning and the cities and villages in which occurs has been indelible. From the Athens of Socrates to the seven university cities of the early Islamic world; from L'Ordre de bon Temps of Champlain and Lescarbot in the 17th century settlement of Acadia to the Antigonish adult education movement of Nova Scotia - all have celebrated the civic setting as much as the learning which took place in it. Little wonder that such an historic and truly global phenomenon - learning communities- should be reinvented as humanity faces the challenge of massive global economic and technological change in a 21st century knowledge-based economy.

Simply put, learning is as much a social process as an individual activity. Much of the most important learning we do is with and from others. The most important early settings for our learning; our families and the communities in which they live, are crucial to the development of our mental, physical and spiritual health. Throughout this document the term "learning communities" will be used to encompass the notion of learning cities, town or villages. For purposes of this investigation the term "learning community" is defined as any city, town or village, and surrounding area, that, using lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal, promotes collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness.

The generic concept will, as we will see, incorporate a number of functions and features, which help define and clarify the term and its usage. However, all are based on the assumption that "learning, the production and use of knowledge, and the deployment of new information and communication technologies are essential for maintaining competitiveness in our global economy - for an enterprise, a city, or a region..."¹

This report, while noting the international breadth of the learning communities movement, will focus on recent developments in the United Kingdom, and will attempt to draw some conclusions regarding the early stages of a rapidly developing social invention. Like all social experiments, the acceptance and utility of the invention can only be truly assessed after some twenty years. Yet some of the early drivers - social and economic imperatives - are clearly articulated, and the varying, pragmatic solutions of the British civic leaders to deeply-rooted socio-economic problems of their cities was impressive. It is to several of the more important the background factors of the learning communities movement of the UK that we now turn.

1. OECD, **High Level Seminar on Competitive Strength and Social Cohesion Through Learning Cities and Regions: Concepts, Developments, Evaluation**, Paris, 26-27 January, 1998.

II. Background

The learning communities movement in the UK has two main roots, the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and a growing network of civic, private sector and education leaders in Britain who are forging public and private sector partnerships in response to the national government's lifelong learning strategies.

A. OECD Initiatives

The deepest roots of the learning communities movement lies in the work of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a 29 member international organization which includes all of the major western industrial nations and several of the leading Asia-Pacific nations such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. At an OECD learning cities conference in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1992 the OECD placed learning communities on its agenda. The conference report, which gave examples of learning city initiatives around the world, created awareness of a nascent movement that sparked interest among a group of British civic and educational leaders. By 1997 an OECD program to develop a 1998 series of five seminars, co-sponsored by private sector partners, was created to focus on different models of learning cities and regions. The concluding conference of the series will be held in London in 1999.

B. A British Network

The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) began to monitor and discuss developments with like-minded civic officials and by 1995 eight centres - Sheffield, Nottingham, Liverpool, Norwich, Milton Keynes, Derby, Hull and Edinburgh - joined to form the Learning City Network (LCN). The Network, now composed of over 20 centres, meets every two months to exchange best practice among members and act as an information exchange collaborates with both NIACE and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to promote the learning cities movement.

III. Recent UK Initiatives

Recent policy statements and subsequent action by the UK government in the major reform of its education and training systems and its commitment to a lifelong learning strategy provides the context for the learning communities initiatives in the United Kingdom (see "Towards a Learning Nation" (1997) - URL: www.ctt.bc.ca/reports/uk/ for a snapshot of key reforms). The national government has declared education as its highest priority and at the heart of its efforts to create an economically competitive and socially inclusive nation for the 21st century knowledge-based economy.

Thus, it is no surprise that the UK is playing an increasingly important role in the European Union and its concern with learning communities. For example, the European Conference on Learning Cities, convened just following the British Presidency of the Union, featured the UK Minister for Lifelong Learning as well as many other British learning city leaders from the learning city of Southampton in the south to Glasgow in the north and Swansea in the west. The attempt of the conference organizers to develop a generic Charter for Learning Cities, abortive in the author's

opinion, was inspired by the movement's growth on the one hand but thwarted by its pragmatic, unique character on the other.

The response of the local civic and education leaders throughout the UK to this challenge has varied in each community. No one model has gained prominence nor is there any attempt by government to impose one (interview with Wendy Humphreys, DfEE. June 18, 1998). Rather the DfEE is working with a growing number of communities to experiment with different approaches suited to local needs and resources. It is also working with NIACE and the Learning Cities Network to devise the means of assessing local practice, progress, and the value which lifelong learning strategies add to three strands of development which early research indicates are important to the success of any learning community, namely:

- **Partnership - learning to build connections between sectors**
- **Participation - learning to involve the public in the policy process**
- **Performance - learning to evaluate progress.** ²

As can be seen in the following examples, these features express themselves in many different ways as a wide range of learning community models develop across the UK.

A. Partnerships and Participation: Some Examples

Liverpool

Some functions normally undertaken solely by individual institutions in Liverpool are being undertaken by the **Learning City Partners**, a learning city collaborative. For example, joint staff development; looking at common problems and issues such as access for the disadvantaged; and sharing core training activities such as financial management training. Joint marketing promotes "Learning in Liverpool" rather than individual institutions' courses. Information technology is used to link schools and community learners.

Nottingham

This city launched its initiative with a large consultative conference that endorsed the learning city concept and identified objectives. Criticism that the initial steering group was not representative enough of voluntary groups, employers and ethnic minorities led to creation of a small board of directors which included representatives from all sectors - public, private and voluntary. Three working groups were formed to carry out the objectives of literacy, marketing, and information (see Appendix II-A regarding the background and business plan of the **Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership**).

2. Department for Education and Employment, **Learning Communities: A Guide to Assessing Practice and Progress, (draft)**, DfEE & Learning Cities Network, London, 1998.

Retford

This "**learning town**" of some 30,000 commenced its initiative in 1997 and in March, 1998 created a consortium of public, private and voluntary sector partners whose aims are:

"to work together to promote the concept of lifelong learning in the town of Retford, thereby improving the quality of the economic and social life of the town; to encourage the development of learning organizations and in so doing seek to serve all members of the community in the town."

Aims and related objectives for Retford have been revised and expanded.

Norwich

A **Learning City Group** composed of all post-school providers, City Council, employers, media, Careers Service, and voluntary sector supported creation of a Learning Shop in downtown Norwich. This storefront guidance and information centre, which includes the regional library database, could not have been sustained by a single provider. This Shop is one element of a broader civic economic development strategy.

Edinburgh

A **Lifelong Learning Partnership** of civic, private, voluntary and community sector partners was formed and a limited company is proposed in order to, among other matters:

- provide a coherent framework for the development of lifelong learning strategies;
- create a learning culture within the City;
- develop collaborative work between sectors and organizations; and
- improve and increase access to existing learning opportunities in and out of the workplace.

Benefits to both partners and learners are identified in a Partnership Statement.

Swansea

The City and County of Swansea are actively seeking to create a learning culture in which, as the Minister for Lifelong Learning in Wales states, the long term aim is "enabling everyone to access appropriate and quality learning opportunities" and the short term focus is on the following priorities:

- pre-school support
- key skill development
- progression from ages 14 to 19
- the links between education and employment, and
- enhancing citizenship

A broad partnership from the civic sector (including police and health authorities); business, industry and unions; the media; voluntary and community sectors as well as all public education providers is developing an impressive plan of action.

B. Performance: National Education and Training Targets

Milton Keynes

Countec, a partnership led by the Chamber of Commerce and the public/private Training Enterprise Council, has successfully achieved National Education and Training Targets for its region and has also promoted work placements and Modern Apprenticeships (competency-based rather than time-based apprenticeships). The two partners have also created two specialized subsidiaries:

- **Business Link** for business support services and information, and
- **International Milton Keynes** to promote Milton Keynes and region to the world, encouraging inward investment.

Derby

The **Learning City Forum** and its executive group have agreed to focus on National Targets for Education and Training and obtain local data from an extended household survey so that local targets and priorities could be established. For example, targets related to women in specific occupational sectors could be set and progress monitored.

IV. Summary

Prior to leaving for this study two specific questions were posed to the author by a senior official of the resort municipality of Whistler, namely:

1. Do learning cities in the UK chiefly use existing resources or are they developing a largely new physical infrastructure? and;
2. Are there any destination resort centres in the UK similar to Whistler, in that they face a massive influx of people on a short-term or seasonal basis, which view themselves as learning communities? If so, how does this phenomenon affect the concept and practice of the learning community?

The investigator posed these two questions to UK officials from every organization he encountered. The response appeared to follow a clear pattern. The answer to the first question was that, in an overwhelming number of communities, use of existing resources, physical and human, was the only real option but that any new funds were usually directed to the twin objectives of economic development and social inclusiveness. Without exception British leaders expressed concern about any approach which would widen socio-economic gaps and lead to a bi-polar or two-tiered society. Thus objectives of raising the general level of learning and of assuring that public access to information technologies appeared to be shared by learning community initiatives throughout the UK. Any additional funding, normally from the national government or the European Social Fund, appears to be most often devoted to economic development projects that assist socially excluded individuals and groups.

Without exception the British officials admitted that they had never thought of the special challenge found in the second question. The only area that several mentioned with such short-term or seasonal influxes was the rural region of Cornwall/Devon which enjoy a doubling of their summer-time population. Neither of these counties have launched learning community initiatives,

however. A Southampton official thought that the nearby town of Brighton, which is a summer seaside resort with a popular music festival would encounter major influxes of population. However even at its height the Brighton population, with a much larger base, would double at most and not face the four or five-fold short-term influx of Whistler. In summary, the British experience and models inform us at the level of general principles and practice - not in terms of specific applicability to the special challenge of Whistler. Thus, like every UK learning communities initiative, a unique model, relevant to the needs and resources of the municipality would have to be sculpted.

There are however some features of learning communities which are becoming apparent. A report of a recent high-level OECD seminar on "competitive strength and social cohesion through learning cities and regions" (1998) summarized their characteristics as follows:

1. A clear and sustained commitment from public authorities, private enterprises, education and research institutions, voluntary organizations and individuals to set learning at the heart of the city/region's development through partnerships;
2. A development strategy encompassing the whole range of learning, from early childhood education to adult education;
3. Creating globally competitive knowledge-intensive production and service activities; improving human and organizational capacities and creating environments conducive to learning, innovation, creativity and change;
4. A specific purpose and identity implying shared values and networks;
5. Social cohesion and environmental issues are an integrated part of the city's or region's development.

Earlier OECD analysis had emphasized three strengths of the community as a setting for active learning, namely;

- humans relate their learning to their immediate environment;
- cities can provide a framework to give coherence to, and enable collaboration among, fragmented and diverse education and training providers;
- cities can provide a focus for community led learning and action.

Clearly cities, towns and villages - the level of government closest to the people - provide an array of services in which learning, both of the providers and the citizen-recipients, is crucial to continuous quality improvement and sustainable provision. These services often include:

- local economic and community development
- educational provision
- parks, recreation and leisure services
- policing and public safety
- community health services
- libraries and museums
- environmental/waste services
- housing

Based on the presentations of experts at the European Conference on Learning Cities it is apparent that at this early stage of learning community developments less attention has been given to assessing the potential of lifelong learning as an organizing principle for civic policy and practice and more on its use as a socio-economic tool. However some communities are beginning to focus the lens of lifelong learning on an a range of their services. Many are using strategies that are breaking down the barriers between local providers. For example, Swansea has begun to have police officers job-shadow youth workers for several weeks in order to add a new, and better informed perspective to their community policing. Other communities are increasingly involving health care home workers who provide books to mothers of six month infants as part of a highly successful **Books For Babies** family literacy campaign.

The learning community leaders in the UK appear to be well aware that they are exploring in a new and uncharted territory in which they are beginning to discover the unanticipated riches of collaboration and networking. Many are convinced that imaginative, and culturally sensitive, use of learning technologies will help achieve both the economic development and social goals of their learning communities. For example, the following cities are using technologies to expand access to learning opportunities in their cities:

- targets are being set for IT training for the total population of Southampton;
- a network of learning centres is developing in Sheffield;
- technology is used to link schools and community learners in Liverpool;
- IT links school and home in one Nottingham school.

The electronic networking of schools, colleges, and universities in several UK centres is already in operation, and appears to be under increasing consideration throughout the nation as interactive communication technologies are introduced (interview with Dr. Stephen Molyneux, University of Wolverhampton at Douglas College colloquium, June 10, 1998).

All informants appear to be convinced that new means of assessing local progress and benchmarking best practice will be necessary to demonstrate the value-added by a learning community approach. By this fall a guide to assess practice and progress in learning communities - and the value added - will be field-tested in a year-long project involving a range of learning communities. This DfEE/Learning Network/NIACE sponsored initiative demonstrates the depth

of commitment and level of expertise which is being marshalled in the struggle to win the hearts and minds of citizens of what may well be either learning communities or unliveable cities of the future.

Selected Bibliography

Assorted materials related to the learning cities initiative in a number of selected cities are found in the Appendices which follow.

Department for Education and Employment, **Learning Communities: A Guide to Assessing Practice and Progress, (draft)** , DfEE & Learning Cities Network, London, 1998.

Dunbar, Keith and Faris, Ron, **Towards a Learning Nation: A View of Reform of UK Education and Training**, Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, Victoria, 1997. See URL: www.ctt.bc.ca/reports/uk/

OECD, **High Level Seminar on Competitive Strength and Social Cohesion Through Learning Cities and Regions: Concepts, Developments, Evaluation**, Paris, 26- 27 January, 1998.

APPENDIX

I. Interview Schedule

June 12	National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (England & Wales) <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ meeting with Alan Tuckett, Director and Sue Cara, Learning Cities consultant	Leicester
June 15	Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ meeting with Sarah Heesom, Project Manager <p>The Nottingham Trent University, Djanogly Innovation Centre for Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ meeting with Rachelle Maxwell, Director <p>The George Spencer School & Technology College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ meeting with Anne Laskowski, teacher, coordinator	Nottingham
June 16	Retford - a learning town <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ meeting with Paul Willcock, Development Officer	
June 17-18	Department for Education and Employment Lifelong Learning Unit <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Val Hewson, Lifelong Learning Strategy➤ Wendy Humphreys, Learning Cities	Sheffield
June 20-23	The European Conference on Learning Cities	Southampton