

Skills Training to Facilitate Access to Cultural Resources

Strategic Change Fund Award: Progress Report

Summary

City of Edinburgh Council Skills Training Project: To Facilitate Access to Cultural Resources

The main task objectives involved in the project as set out in the original brief are to:

'.. research, design and develop training modules for community education workers on how to facilitate access to the full range of cultural resources available through museums, libraries and archives. ...to be piloted in Glasgow and Edinburgh and publicised through a high profile conference to training providers and employers.'

Introduction

This progress report was undertaken by staff at Caledonian University on behalf of City of Edinburgh Council's Museum and Arts department. It focusses on research undertaken between November 2003 and June 2004. This stage of the project is set to inform the development and delivery of training modules for community practitioners and student trainees. The primary aim is to involve more community groups in museum and library activities. The project is led by national policy objectives that are set to encourage more partnership working within public services and provide training opportunities for community workers.

Background

A Community Learning and Development partnership of public sector specialists inspired this innovative training idea. They represent the City of Edinburgh Museums and Arts Department, the Scottish Executive HMI and the Scottish Museums Council (SMC). Although the project supports a range of national and local community education/learning and development strategic priorities, these specialists focussed project objectives on two complementary initiatives, the Scottish Executive's **Empowered to Practice Review of Community Education (2003)** and the SMC's **Strategic Change Award (2001-2004)** which funds the project.

Both initiatives support one another in that they have a mission to modernise, improve services and widen community access to learning opportunities. The **Empowered to Practice Review** and its sister community learning and development guidance document **Working and Learning Together** (which replaces Circular 4/99), address the needs of the Scottish Executive's 5 year vision to modernise community education as recommended in both their **Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland**, and their Community Regeneration Statement **Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the gap** (2002). The project also addresses strategic priorities contained within **Scotland's National Cultural Strategy**. These centre around recording and promoting Scotland's cultural diversity by empowering and engaging excluded groups in a range of cultural learning activities that would improve lifestyles, build confidence and instil a sense of cultural ownership.

The project set out to identify what skills are needed by community education/learning practitioners to involve them and their community groups in the full range of cultural resources held by museums, libraries and archives. The objectives of the project are to develop appropriate training resources for pre-qualifying and post qualifying students and as a continuing professional development (CPD) opportunity for established fieldworkers. Training will target community education/learning and development student trainees and professionals working with youth groups and adult learners including adult numeracy and literacy groups. This is a national project targeting public service providers in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Methodology

The project was treated as an innovative partnership project that covered new ground. For this reason a staged approach was applied which means progressing the project in an exploratory manner taking each stage 'one step at a time'.

This first stage of the project involved a significant degree of research exploration that focussed on identifying:

- ✚ training needs
- ✚ best practice examples when museums and community groups have worked well together
- ✚ FE and HE institutions who would be targeted to deliver modules in the longer term

Therefore this stage not only identified training needs and available cultural resources but provided the groundwork for designing and piloting the modules. It also had an important role in raising awareness about the project, building vital networks and gaining commitment and support from key community education learning and development managers as well as FE and HE lecturers who would be directly involved in programming and delivering the training modules in the future. Methods of gathering information included:

- ✚ an ongoing literature review
- ✚ a desk based evaluation of cultural resources in the four city locations
- ✚ stakeholder interviews
- ✚ a survey targeting community practitioners
- ✚ a survey targeting student trainees
- ✚ a survey targeting museum and library staff.

Findings

Participating Sample

Although most interviewees supported the principles behind these policies, strategic objectives were channelled towards other directions which meant a lack of staff time to commit wholeheartedly to this project. The following chart shows the percentage breakdown of the 350 people who participated in research interviews and surveys.

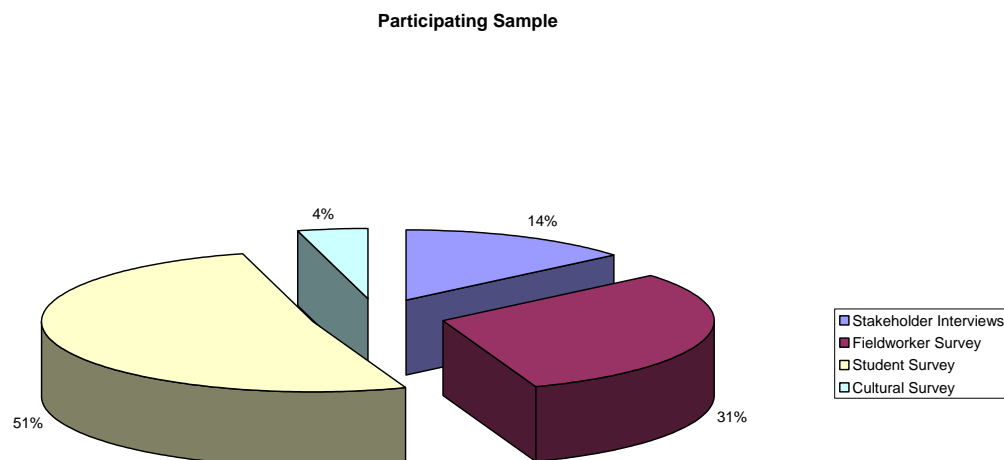


Figure 1: Participating Sample

Stakeholders involved in interviewing included

- ✚ community youth services and adult learning managers
- ✚ Workers Education Association Area Tutor Organisers
- ✚ other voluntary sector managers
- ✚ college and university department heads and lecturers who deliver community education/learning and development courses
- ✚ department heads and managers representing local authority museums, arts and libraries
- ✚ representatives of validation authorities such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority
- ✚ steering group members
- ✚ other stakeholders with an interest in the research

Most of those participating in the student survey reported ethnicity as white (98.4%). The majority of all students (82%) were undertaking community education/learning and development courses in universities with 79% being undergraduates. The remaining 18% were undertaking a Working in Communities NC or HNC course at college.

Community practitioners represented a well qualified group with 80% reporting highest qualification attainment as degree, post-graduate or other professional qualification. Most members of the groups they led were adult learners over the age of 25 years with the remainder being young people aged 25 years and younger.

The cultural resources survey was designed to add value to desk based research with most respondents representing education and outreach staff.

The following chart shows that most participants were located in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

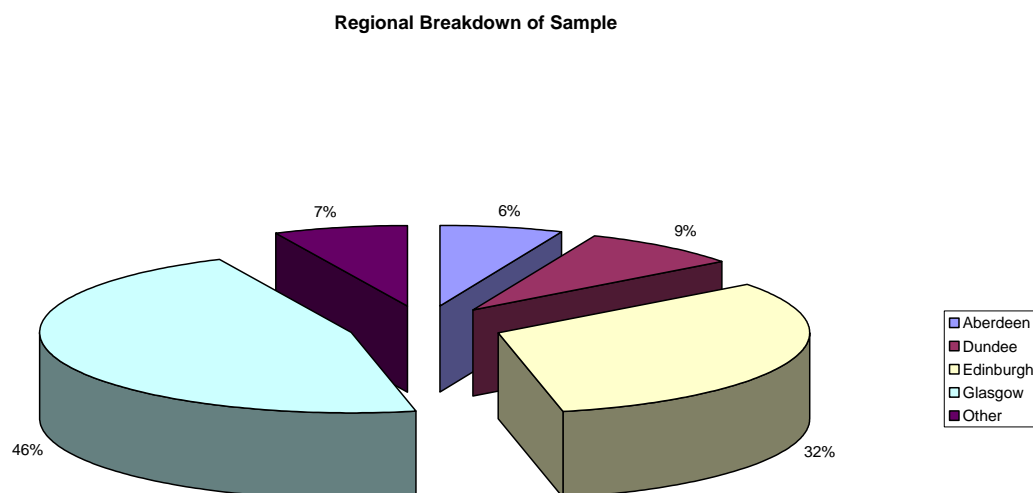


Figure 2: Regional Breakdown of Sample

Cultural Resources

A desk based evaluation of cultural resources held by museums, libraries and archives identified a diverse range spread across the four cities. For museums these ranged from specialist collections like fine art to those that interpret aspects of industrial and community life. Library resources included special interest collections contained within central library organisations and a range of community based library services. Website information was comprehensive even although it showed lack of consistency in the way each museum and library service presented their cultural resources and services.

A range of cultural activities that involved museums and libraries working with community groups were reported. There was no evidence to suggest projects were formally evaluated to record what worked or what did not and there was little evidence to suggest that one project led on to others. There were exceptions when major new projects broke new ground and received various levels of media interest. GOMA's Sanctuary <http://www.thegulbenkianprize.org.uk/2004/shortlist3.htm> and Nu http://web.orange.co.uk/news/story/sm_748118.html projects are good examples of these. However a good case study example was identified as the national project Opening the Doors <http://www.youngpeopleandmuseums.org.uk/site/index.html>. This three year project was developed and evaluated to encourage young people between 14 and 25 years to visit and use museum resources.

Community Education

The extent of diversity and inconsistency that represented the different structures of community education/learning departments across Scotland was a significant finding of this research. Community education/learning and development managers and education tutors mentioned several important policy related issues that helped explain this.

National and local reforms since government re-organisation in 1996 instigated a radical review of community education. Although this has encouraged community education providers to think strategically and work in partnership with wider community learning sectors it has also led to organisational change within local authorities being inconsistent. Community Education services have either retained their community education title and/or connections with education while others have changed their title and/or moved out of education.

Attitudes Towards the Project and Training

It was clear that cultural and community services operate within a different working environment. Staff expertise and work practices varied fairly markedly. Regardless of this the project generated considerable interest among stakeholders. There was enthusiasm among cultural staff. More than 70% of community education/learning and development students and community fieldworkers reported that they would consider using museum resources in the future. A higher percentage at approximately 80% intended future use of library resources in the future. Benefits respondents identified included the opportunity to achieve:

- ✚ strategic priorities as all services covered a lot of common ground
- ✚ benefits for community groups to describe aspects for their lives and learn about the local community

Generally the modules received a positive response supporting the views that...

- ✚ the project promised positive personal development gains for community groups and practitioners
- ✚ positive experiences have been achieved when community groups and museums have worked together in the past
- ✚ the modules would be a welcome addition to existing training.
- ✚ There would be an opportunity for students to undertake placements in museums

Interview findings also provided a foundation for stages 2 and 3. For example some managers and education tutors felt training modules would benefit all staff, even at management/tutor level while others targeted specific fieldworkers and students particularly those who were in full time employment or at a particular level of study.

However, limited staff time and/or cost factors were reported by all sectors. These resource shortages meant restrictions for

- ✚ museums to include issues of interest to community groups
- ✚ educators to include extra modules beyond those within the existing core course
- ✚ community practitioners to plan in extra training and group activities
- ✚ training opportunity among part-time and sessional staff

Options for Modules

There was agreement that national and local policy would influence the decision to support the modules. However, other considerations included the modules role in raising employment opportunity and the extent of current lack of knowledge and experience with cultural resources among tutors, and students.

Practitioners and educators expressed what module options would stimulate the most interest and be most effective. They reported that:

- ✚ stand alone modules would only work if aimed at qualified professionals
- ✚ the modules would fit nicely as an elective at undergraduate level
- ✚ placements for students would provide them with a practical learning experience alongside the opportunity for museums to undertake projects for community groups
- ✚ other learning resource material would be useful such as resource packs and online learning

Knowledge, Skills and Experiences

Understanding the policy implications that support the modules was a key issue for exploration. Coverage of policy development and best practice examples within CPD received a mixed response from practitioners with a minority at 32% reporting thorough coverage. In contrast, even although some students reported being in their first year of a course that extended beyond two years, at least 55% reported thorough coverage of both topics. However, both practitioners and students reported low level coverage of funded programmes with less than 25% reporting thorough coverage.

Existing perceptions and awareness of cultural resources were also pursued. Small and large cultural projects were reported with contemporary art or local/social history activities predominating. They included:

- ✚ Visits and guided tours
- ✚ Reminiscence groups with elderly people
- ✚ Community history projects
- ✚ Youth group projects
- ✚ Oral history projects
- ✚ Projects involving minority groups
- ✚ Creative arts workshops

Although there was recognition of active participation in cultural activities by the elderly, young people and minority groups some groups were harder to reach and remain under-represented. Indeed, more than 60% of community workers had not used museum resources for community learning purposes. They felt that they had a very low level awareness of what cultural resources and support were available. Most practitioners expressed a lack of experience working with museum staff and certainly lacked museum specialist knowledge.

Practitioners and educators felt uncomfortable involving large groups as *'learning can be noisy'*. There was the perception that museums and libraries had the tendency to support *'quiet visits'*. There was also a lack of space where groups could meet and discuss their visit.

There was no doubt that community education/learning and development students from FE and HE have limited awareness of cultural resources. The modules were welcomed provided they focussed on activities

that were appropriate to the needs of groups. However, they would expect the modules to motivate students and encourage them to develop an interest and understanding of culture.

One tutor explained that on previous visits to museums she felt staff avoided communicating with students. Her experience of a guided tour took a 'listen learn approach' which discourage student interaction.

One of the main issues raised during interviews questioned if cultural services had the capacity to supply cultural activities to community groups. Although cultural services have trained staff involved in education, generally numbers were small with low level involvement with community groups who were specifically sourced from community education/learning services.

Conclusion

The first stage of this project has stimulated considerable interest and discussion among people working within the sectors this project targets for collaboration.

The most significant achievement realised by stage one is its role in raising awareness about the project idea and encouraging support among all stakeholders including the practitioners and students who it identifies for training.

There has been agreement across all participating local authority sectors and further and higher education institutions that the principle that lies behind this project is good and there is enthusiasm about the development of the modules. There have been a range of positive experiences identified and recorded when both sectors have worked together on joint projects. This provides a good source for case study material to be further developed and incorporated into the modules. There is also enthusiasm on both sides to widen access further and develop a closer working relationship between providers of both community education/learning and development and cultural services.

It is clearly evident that all the avenues of research explored in stage one confirm that there exists a widespread knowledge and expertise gap among community/education learning and development practitioners and students. Added to this, although cultural staff reported working on innovative projects with community groups, there was little evidence to suggest they received specific training to develop their skills in this field. For this reason there is an identified learning opportunity for museum and library staff as well as for community workers. It is worth emphasising that on both sides of the fence, services operate within a different organisational culture. This will provide the essential context for module design.

Realistically this project alone will not establish a close working relationship at the level required to include community education/ learning and development groups in cultural activities that access the full range of cultural resources. However, most notably this stage has raised awareness about potential collaborative opportunities for students, practitioners and cultural services. This report provides a thorough critique of the problems and barriers that currently exist. Overcoming these will be a critical area to be addressed during the module design process. Although some fairly major hurdles require to be crossed the modules promise to be a good starting point that will encourage these service providers an opportunity to work together more closely.