



National Foundation for Educational Research

# DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN MERTHYR TYDFIL

## **Draft Final Report**

**R Powell  
R Smith**

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**WME**

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

The National Assembly for Wales (NAfW), in its education and lifelong learning strategy *'The Learning Country'* (2001), offers a vision for a closer relationship between schools and the communities that they serve. The strategy states that:

*We want schools to act as a community resource – not just in school hours but out of hours and in vacations as well. We see them as being integral to community capacity building – providing a better base for delivery, not just in education and training, but also a range of other services like family support, health and enterprise promotion.*

Although there is no accepted definition of community education, OFSTED (2002) suggests that it has two main aspects:

- ◆ engagement of the community to strengthen the work of the school
- ◆ engagement of the school to strengthen the community.

Those schools which describe themselves as community schools often have a strong commitment to community education (OFSTED 2002). Ball (1998) suggests that although there is no agreed figure on the number of community schools in the UK, a number between 800 and 1000 is sometimes cited and OFSTED (2002) propose that, traditionally, approximately 20 per cent of secondary schools in England are schools of this type.

The distinguishing characteristic of community schools is a commitment to education as a lifelong process in which every member of the community has a part to play. The concept involves schools being open to both children and adults as a *'mutually-enriching'* experience (Summers, 2002), with a flexible atmosphere in terms of opening times and delivery. Ball (1998) explains that the idea of the community school:

*...sees the school as a learning facility both for adults and children; inclusive, rather than specialist, flexible and responsive to the needs of the community, rather than rigid and authoritarian.*

## 1.2 History

According to Ball (1998) the thinking behind community schools is not a new concept. In 1924 Henry Morris, the Chief Education Officer for Cambridgeshire, in his memorandum on the 'village college' depicted a place

that would be *'the centre of learning, culture and social life'* (Ball, 1998). Cambridgeshire developed a vision of the school being at the heart of learning for the community and although this philosophy was often dismissed as only being relevant for rural settings, urban areas in the 1960's such as Coventry and Leicester did adopt a more community approach to education.

### 1.3 Policy Agendas

Summers, (2002) suggests that there are two main policy agendas advocating the concept of community schools. The first is the development of competent learners, *'...breaking down the boundaries between schooling and the rest of life'* and changing the perception of schools *'as learning organisations and as a learning resource for others'*. However, the more prominent agenda appears to be focused on widening participation in learning and the associated strategies for social and economic inclusion and community well-being.

However, a number of competing agendas within schools may hinder the development of community schools, such as the national curriculum, literacy and numeracy strategies and pupil attainment targets (Summers 2002). Ball (1998) also suggests a number of other more practical barriers including timetable pressures and space, as a community school can expect as much as a 75 per cent increase in the number of people using its facilities.

In England, the apparent permanence of selective education in many areas and a new emphasis on specialist schools may militate against the development of the community school. In Wales, however, the position of the Welsh Assembly Government (see above) has been reflected by the establishment of designated community schools in several LEAs.

The concept of community schools received considerable attention during the 1970s. Ideas of promoting learning by engaging with communities, including groups which had not traditionally accessed post-compulsory education or training were articulated (Fletcher, *et al.*, 1980). These included a focus on developing community schools as vehicles for delivering negotiated learning opportunities and new curricular experiences so that:

*the meaningless rigmaroles that so many of the present generation endured in the name of education must be replaced by an exploration of the society in which we live* (Mitson, in Fletcher *et al.*, 1980).

Yet throughout that period commentators regularly complained that the development of this type of school was being hampered by lack of resources and the feeling that community education was peripheral to the mainstream education and training system. Moreover, White *et al.*, (1997) claim that the notion of community schools changed from an agenda related to empowerment through its contribution to community development and urban renewal to a view more orientated towards the National Curriculum and its delivery.

Although community dimensions were emphasised in some schools, supported by some LEAs, the concept of a community school was often limited and encompassed little more than joint usage of facilities and using buildings as venues for adult education classes out of school hours.

More recently, broader notions of community schools have been advanced which examine both the use and function of the physical assets and the relationship between schools and the communities in which they are located. These have included suggestions for maximising the use of school sites, not only as venues for adult learning and recreation but also more widely. For example, locating medical centres, benefits offices and job centres on school premises has been advocated as a means of promoting the image of the school as something which is relevant to, and used by, the whole community.

At the same time, commentators have referred to the need to develop greater mutual understanding between schools and their communities. According to White *et al.*, (1997):

*central to the concept of community education is the agreement on, and the establishment of, a set of common values, owned, shared and understood within the school and the community.*

It is also proposed that engaging in the community's learning agenda is not a 'bolt-on' but something that has a '*central and underlying part*' in '*enriching and motivating pupils' learning, improving standards and making schools more effective*' (White, *et al.*, 1997).

For this to happen schools will need to become more outward-looking and focus on building confidence and trust between themselves and the community.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (CBC) is keen to develop this approach, and in 2003 it commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research into the development of community schools, initially in the catchment area of Pen-y-dre High School.

This report presents the research findings. The structure of the report is as follows:

Chapter 3 examines the priorities for public policy and how they apply to Merthyr Tydfil and the Pen-y-dre catchment area. Chapter 4 focuses on the schools in the Pen-y-dre catchment area and the way they interact with the communities they serve. Chapter 5 examines the extent of young people's participation in out-of-school activities. Chapter 6 highlights the role of youth services. Chapter 7 considers the sports facilities in the Pen-y-dre catchment area. Chapter 8 draws on recent research on lifelong learning. Chapter 9 examines the development of lifelong learning in the Pen-y-dre catchment area. Chapter 10 focuses on visions for community schools. The two case studies of community schools are then presented.

## 2. Aims and Methodology

### 2.1 Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of the project was to devise a strategic plan for the development of community schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

This aim was to be attained through pursuing three specific objectives:

- ♦ to review the literature and recent initiatives in the area of community education
- ♦ to conduct an evaluatory audit of current educational, cultural and recreational provision for children, young people and adults in the Pen-y-dre High School catchment area
- ♦ to undertake a consultation with school pupils and staff, adults and a range of statutory and voluntary organisations in order to identify the educational and cultural needs of local people and to obtain their views on the development of community schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

### 2.2 Methodology

The project used a combination of research methods, including a desk-based documentation review and face-to-face interviews.

The research comprised four strands which are outlined below.

#### **First strand**

The first strand involved the collection of background information on issues surrounding community schools. This information was drawn from two sources. Case studies of two recognised community schools were undertaken, one each in South Wales and the East Midlands. Interviews were conducted with the headteachers, other senior staff, and LEA officers with responsibility for community schools/education. A review of literature on issues surrounding community schools was also undertaken.

#### **Second strand**

The second strand was an examination of the existing educational and cultural provision in the Pen-y-dre catchment area of Merthyr. This was carried out through face-to-face interviews with key personnel in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and LEA, the local CCET, and with staff of voluntary organisations which are active in the Pen-y-dre catchment area. In addition to establishing a baseline of present provision, these interviews elicited officers' views on possible future developments.

### **Third strand**

The third strand of the research was the design of semi-structured interview schedules and the conduct of the consultation through face-to-face interviews with the following groups:

- ◆ key personnel and groups of pupils in Pen-y-dre High School
- ◆ headteachers and groups of pupils in a sample of the primary schools feeding Pen-y-dre
- ◆ staff of statutory and voluntary organisations active in the Pen-y-dre catchment area
- ◆ adults in a range of age groups living in the area, accessed through the organisers or managers of community activities and classes.

The interview schedules elicited respondents' views on issues such as:

- ◆ the present community provision for educational, cultural and recreational activities in Merthyr Tydfil
- ◆ the existing links between Pen-y-dre High School and its feeder primary schools and the local community
- ◆ the present educational and cultural needs of all sections of the community
- ◆ possibilities and opportunities for developments in community schools in the locality, including initiatives which have proved successful in other towns and cities.

The interviews with staff and pupils in the schools were held during July and September 2003. The interviews with adults and organisations extended through July, August and September.

### **Fourth strand**

The fourth strand involved the collation and analysis of all data collected from the literature review and the fieldwork and the production of the draft project report.

This includes:

- ◆ a description of the research methodology
- ◆ an appendix of all institutions and organisations consulted during the research
- ◆ an analysis of present educational and cultural provision in the Pen-y-dre catchment area
- ◆ the presentations of the findings of the consultation in terms of the needs and aspirations of all groups in the community.



## 3. The Policy Context

### 3.1 Public Policy Priorities

In many ways, the NAFW has adopted a distinctive approach to education and training in Wales, and has developed specific strategies which include:

- ◆ less emphasis on the formal assessment of pupils
- ◆ a move away from league tables of schools
- ◆ a greater emphasis on partnership between schools and less on competition
- ◆ less emphasis on specialist and faith schools than elsewhere in the UK
- ◆ greater emphasis on co-operation between clusters of schools
- ◆ a determination to build on the notion of community schools.

Increasing adult participation in learning has also been identified as a major goal for public policy in Wales (NAFW, *The Learning Country*). It is recognised that this will require a concerted effort to overcome a range of physical, attitudinal and other barriers which prevent people from taking part in learning. For this to be achieved, it is recognised that a great deal of innovative work involving cooperation between partner organisations will be required, based on an approach which reaches out and engages with individuals who do not and have not had a history of participation in structured learning.

### 3.2 Priorities in Merthyr Tydfil

These considerations have also been recognised by key stakeholders who are involved in the planning and delivery of learning opportunities in Merthyr Tydfil.

Merthyr Tydfil CBC has outlined its strategy for schools in *Education for Life*, its Education Strategic Plan for 2002-2005. In it the council describes its mission as being to provide an education service which:

- ◆ is of the highest possible quality
- ◆ is relevant to the needs of the individual learner
- ◆ is lifelong
- ◆ involves a range of partners
- ◆ contributes to the development of the community.

In its *A Strategy for Community Outreach* (2002), ELWa South East Wales sought to identify *'the factors that need to be addressed properly if world class learning is to be achieved by the residents of our most disadvantaged communities'*. It outlined key criteria to measure the success of such a strategy and recommended making judgements on the basis of targets such as the extent to which:

- ◆ relevant staff understand the community regeneration agenda
- ◆ staff understand the links between lifelong learning, the labour market agenda and community regeneration
- ◆ better links between key stakeholders are formed
- ◆ barriers to participation in lifelong learning have been overcome
- ◆ community-led regeneration initiatives have been developed
- ◆ accessibility and progression within lifelong learning has been facilitated
- ◆ more learner-centred activities have been developed.

The strategy also made a clear connection between the agenda for school improvement and that of lifelong learning. It noted that there was a need to *'ensure that every opportunity is taken to link adult learning with other strategies to raise aspirations and attainment levels in schools'* and identified five prerequisites for success:

- ◆ promoting parity of esteem between academic and vocational achievement
- ◆ building a world class community-based learning and training infrastructure
- ◆ ensuring a sustainable, world class community learning infrastructure
- ◆ ensuring coordination between ELWa and other lead community learning design agencies
- ◆ developing and piloting innovative world class programmes.

Organisations within Merthyr Tydfil which provide services for children and young people are developing closer cooperation through the Children's Partnership and Young People's Partnership established through the Children and Young People's Framework. The partnership provides a vehicle for practitioner-led dialogue and consideration of priorities. The work focuses on areas such as:

- ◆ health, including health promotion and addressing social issues related to health
- ◆ measures to enable children to develop
- ◆ parenting skills
- ◆ social skills

- ◆ day care
- ◆ youth affairs.

The focus on youth affairs includes:

- ◆ information and advice
- ◆ managing the transition to adulthood
- ◆ participation/empowerment
- ◆ training and accreditation progression
- ◆ access to sport and leisure activities
- ◆ healthy living/health, including housing
- ◆ widening opportunities
- ◆ status of young people in the community
- ◆ profile and value of youth support services
- ◆ engaging at all levels of need
- ◆ recognising varied methodologies.

The Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Group has set ambitious targets both in terms of delivering high quality services and in addressing the underlying issues affecting health and wellbeing within the County Borough. This includes addressing issues relating to the social inclusion agenda and working with a range of partner organisations. Its approach includes developing strategies to work with people with learning disabilities, with children and young people and to assist with the work of the Communities First initiative.

### **3.3 Public Policy as Applied to the Pen-y-dre Catchment Area**

Pen-y-dre High School serves a population of approximately 12,000, mainly in the Gurnos, Dowlais and Penydarren wards. The 2001 census indicates the need to address a number of challenges confronting these areas.

**Table 1****Percentage of people who described their health as not good**

Ward	%
Dowlais	18.4
Gurnos	21.6
Penydarren	19.4
Merthyr Tydfil	18.1
England and Wales	9.2

*Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001*

In each of the three wards the percentage of people who described their health as 'not good' was more than twice the average for England and Wales and higher than the average for Merthyr Tydfil.

**Table 2****Percentage of people with a limiting long-term illness**

Ward	%
Dowlais	29.3
Gurnos	33.4
Penydarren	31.0
Merthyr Tydfil	30.0
England and Wales	18.2

*Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001*

A third of the population of the Gurnos ward (33.4 per cent) stated that they had a limiting long-term illness and in each ward the figure was higher than the average for England and Wales.

**Table 3****Percentage of people who described themselves as permanently sick or disabled**

Ward	%
Dowlais	16.3
Gurnos	19.3
Penydarren	17.9
Merthyr Tydfil	15.9
England and Wales	5.5

*Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001*

In all three wards the percentage of the population who described themselves as 'permanently sick or disabled' was more than three times the average for England and Wales.

**Table 4****Percentage of people who described themselves as employed**

Ward	%
Dowlais	49.0
Gurnos	36.2
Penydarren	45.8
Merthyr Tydfil	48.6
England and Wales	60.6

*Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001*

The percentage in the ward which said that they were employed was lower than the average for England and Wales in all three wards and in two wards it was lower than the figure for the County Borough as a whole.

**Table 5****Percentage of people who had no qualifications**

Ward	%
Dowlais	45.0
Gurnos	57.1
Penydarren	48.6
Merthyr Tydfil	43.9
England and Wales	29.1

*Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001*

The census also demonstrated that the area poses challenges to those responsible for the delivery of education and training. More than half (57.1 per cent) of the population of the Gurnos ward said that they had no qualifications, and the figures for Dowlais and Penydarren wards were higher than the average for Merthyr Tydfil and significantly higher than the average for England and Wales.

In response to these challenges a wide range of initiatives have been launched to address the problems confronting the communities served by Pen-y-dre High School. These have included voluntary and charitable efforts, including a number which have sought to enable people to acquire new skills. Organisations such as Homesafe and Safer Merthyr have worked with local people to address issues relating to crime, while other bodies have sought to engage community groups and encourage partnership working between various stakeholders. In 1996 projects to regenerate the area were awarded ERDF funding and part of the area was included in the 'People in Communities' initiative. The local authorities have played a key part in this process. For example in 1985, the former Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council sought 'priority estate' status for much of the area and the local authority has been an active partner and has taken a leading role in several of these initiatives.

The 3Gs Development Trust was incorporated in August 1999 as a company limited by guarantee. Its aims are to contribute to the economic and social regeneration of the Gurnos and Penydarren wards through a range of initiatives designed to respond to priorities set by the people who live in those areas. A community-centred approach is an integral part of the methodology used by the trust. In its submission to the NAFW's Communities First programme the trust committed itself to a strategy that would ensure that:

- ◆ the residents of Gurnos, Galon Uchaf and Penydarren are equipped properly to take control of their own lives
- ◆ providers of programmes and services play their full part in enabling them to do so.

A Neighbourhood Learning Centre has been developed at the Gurnos Community Workshops with assistance from the European Social Fund. Its role is specifically designated as being to serve the area served by Pen-y-dre High School. Its aims are:

- ◆ to establish a neighbourhood learning centre at the Gurnos Community Workshop with outreach facilities at strategic sites within the communities served by Pen-y-dre
- ◆ to encourage and engage residents in relevant and appropriate learning opportunities to enhance their employment chances
- ◆ to develop strong links to the Communities First Development Teams to identify learning needs/opportunities in the community.

The centre is committed to working with partner bodies including Pen-y-dre High School and Pen-y-dre Plus and the 3Gs Development Trust.

### **3.4 Previous Research**

In December 2000 a team of researchers at the University of Wales Swansea and Cardiff University School of Social Sciences published a study of the Gurnos and Galon Uchaf areas (Kynch, *et al.*, 2000) which examined residents' perceptions of the Gurnos and Galon Uchaf Regeneration Strategy.

Kynch *et al.*, found that issues relating to youth (including but not exclusively concerning youth annoyance) were regularly cited by residents and that many of these concerns were attributed to an absence of youth facilities. Even so, it was also found that organisations had difficulty in engaging young people with initiatives which the research partly attributed to:

- ◆ dissatisfaction with the kind of activities on offer
- ◆ charges for accessing provision.

Concerns about public safety issues were also highlighted as a matter of concern for all residents. The research found that ‘teenagers emphasised their own safety – on the street, with respect to speeding cars or to drugs ... and were as likely as others to mention a need to change anti-social attitudes and behaviour’. This the report found was reflected in the four main issues of concern identified by focus groups with young people, youth and elderly people which were:

- ◆ safety, being safe and safe places
- ◆ the state of the environment and civic pride
- ◆ the power to change and influence change
- ◆ divisions and boundaries among residents.

One of the findings of the survey was that many people felt that ‘*spending on major projects ... was associated with help to children, but not youth*’. It also found that residents felt that there were particular problems in engaging teenagers which were ‘*dogging provision for young people*’.

A number of findings highlighted the need for better education and/or training. For example, the report noted that: ‘*adult illiteracy was suggested to be more widespread a problem than is admitted*’. This was closely related to the regeneration agenda given the acknowledged need to ensure that residents had the skills to engage with the regeneration process if it was to be responsive to the community’s genuine aspirations and if ‘top-down’ solutions were to be avoided.

## 4. Schools and their Communities

### 4.1 Pen-y-dre High School

Pen-y-dre High School describes itself as a:

*11-18 mixed-sex comprehensive school situated in the town of Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales in the UK. The school serves a catchment area consisting mainly of a large council housing estate and a number of traditional Welsh valley communities on the edge of the Brecon Beacons. It is an area characterised by high adult and youth unemployment; it is also an area characterised by a respect for education and the opportunities it offers. Parents want their children to do well. The school is committed to raising the achievement of all its pupils. It has set targets and adopted strategies to achieve this end. The vast majority of the pupils come from a Christian religious background.*

Pen-y-dre High School recognises its duty to the local community and has led or contributed to a wide range of initiatives designed to support pupils' learning and personal and social development and to provide improve their life chances through classroom and extra-curricular activities. Examples of these are outlined below.

At the same time the school is keenly aware of its responsibility to the wider community from which it draws its pupils and recognises that it has a major contribution to make to the broad agenda of community regeneration. This has resulted in the school contributing to a number of regeneration initiatives and, in some cases, taking the lead responsibility, in a way which has reinforced community capacity building.

### 4.2 Pen-y-dre Plus

The school has established Pen-y-dre Plus, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee which was incorporated in January, 2003. It is seen as a vehicle 'to deliver the community-facing programme of Pen-y-dre High School'. Its board of directors comprises five governors of the school, three directors representing community groups and one representing a primary school.

The aims of the company are described as being to promote:

- ◆ sports development
- ◆ e-learning
- ◆ extra-curricular activities and clubs



- ♦ vocational education provision
- ♦ creative and performing arts
- ♦ measures to address motivational/underachievement/disengagement issues
- ♦ health education.

The machinery of Pen-y-dre Plus is currently being used to deliver activities which benefit pupils and the wider community. These have included securing NOF money for a breakfast club and to support after-school and holiday activities. One of the roles of these clubs is to offer pupils opportunities to pursue additional GCSE courses which they were unable to study during the school day due to timetabling issues.

### **4.3 Pen-y-dre Projects**

At present the school is engaged in four other projects which are relevant to this study. They are the development of sports facilities at the school, closer working with primary schools, the e-learning project and the Freshstart programme.

#### **Development of Sports Facilities**

Developing the sports facilities at Pen-y-dre for use by both the school and the community is a priority for the school. This has resulted in a successful bid being made to the Sports Council for Wales under the umbrella of Pen-y-dre Plus, for a grant of £750,000 to upgrade sports facilities at the school. It is a requirement of the funding that the facilities are available to the community outside of school hours and the school is in any case committed to promoting community use. The money from the Sports Council for Wales is to be enhanced by a separate grant from the NOF to upgrade the swimming pool at the school. It is intended that the sports complex will be managed by Pen-y-dre Plus and that it would be available for community use from 5pm until 9pm during weekdays and all day on weekends.

#### **Partnership with Primary Schools**

A considerable emphasis has been placed on strengthening and developing the links between Pen-y-dre High School and its partner primary schools.

One focus has been to develop arrangements to transfer pupils from key stage 2 to key stage 3. This has included building on the liaison between partner primary schools and the secondary school's transition manager and its head of learning support, and an enhanced programme of visits by year 6 pupils to Pen-y-dre.

The schools cooperate in the production of an inter-active newspaper, *Y Gorau*, which is aimed at pupils in key stages 2 and 3. It provides a forum in which '*pupils raise and comment on issues of relevance to them*'. A website

has also been developed to enable year 6 pupils to e-mail questions to year 7 pupils.

Curriculum links have also been strengthened in recent years. This has involved close working between staff at Pen-y-dre and the partner schools in curriculum areas identified by the primary schools. These have included a science project and a project with a focus on language teaching skills. Some of the activities are delivered to primary school pupils at Pen-y-dre.

### **The e-learning project**

An e-learning project has been launched as a means of improving pupil motivation in key stage 2 and 3. Its funding includes grants from the LEA, the NAFW and GTCW. Pupils have been provided with laptop computers which have been used extensively as a means of delivering the curriculum to junior school pupils alongside more traditional teaching methods.

### **The Freshstart Programme**

A Freshstart programme has been launched which delivers off-site provision for pupils identified '*because of behavioural problems or poor attendance*'. The Freshstart programme is seen as '*something that complements other provisions, such as the youth offending teams and the youth inclusion programmes*' and consequently there is considerable cooperation between staff at Freshstart and the youth offenders' team and youth access.

Freshstart is delivered at the Pavilion, approximately half a mile from Pen-y-dre school. The building, which is leased from a local sports club, has been refurbished. Freshstart also uses a computer suite recently installed at the Pen-y-dre Youth Centre. The staffing complement is made up of:

- ◆ a dedicated teacher
- ◆ professional development and learning coaches
- ◆ vocational education specialists
- ◆ qualified youth workers.

Places on college courses are also purchased.

The use of the youth service methodology is evident in the Freshstart programme, both through the employment of youth workers to work with the young people and through the involvement of staff of the Merthyr Youth Access programme. The summer activities are a particular focus.

The pupils study for five GCSEs and also pursue vocational courses. In addition, considerable emphasis is placed on developing social skills.

However, the school acknowledges that '*it needs a substantial new investment to take it forward and meet the admittedly ambitious aims of the project*'. For example, the provision of work-based courses is currently limited. According

to one member of staff ‘we want to give them an experience of the world of work, but it’s so expensive and the school hasn’t got a budget to develop it’.

#### **4.4 Out-of-school Opportunities Delivered by Pen-y-dre High School**

Staff at Pen-y-dre High School stated that they worked with a wide range of organisations to provide pupils with experiences outside the school. The types of activities included:

- ◆ charitable fund-raising activities, organised in conjunction with the School Council and as core modules in the PSE programme
- ◆ an awareness of citizenship developed in cooperation with the CBC which included visits to and use of the council’s debating chamber
- ◆ participation in United Nations Association debating conferences
- ◆ participation in environmental conferences
- ◆ work with Atlantic College
- ◆ work with the Busy Bees organisation.

It was also stated that the school was working with the CBC on a project to obtain young people’s views and to ensure their input into council policies.

Part of the work to do with citizenship was being undertaken as part of the Welsh Bac being delivered to sixth form pupils. This course also addresses issues such as health and sustainable development. The sixth formers work closely with junior schools on a mural project, sports activities and contribute to nursery work. Sixth form pupils also have the chance to coach junior school sides. The rapport which had been developed between the sixth formers and the younger pupils was said to be ‘*excellent*’.

The school has also worked with the 3Gs Development Trust for the past four years. One of the ways in which they cooperate is the involvement of pupils in the design and manufacture of street furniture.

In addition, pupils are given access to facilities outside the school as a means of enriching their educational experiences, for example, by using the language laboratories at the University of Glamorgan.

#### **4.5 The Primary Schools**

The five primary schools visited all serve part of the area from which Pen-y-dre High School draws its pupils. Staff at all five schools said that they worked in a challenging environment where a great deal of emphasis was placed on promoting an awareness of the value of learning among pupils and parents.

This required engaging and maintaining a regular dialogue with parents and enabling pupils to develop social skills, including the ability to relate to adults.

### **Community roles of the primary schools**

Three of the primary schools referred to the way that their premises were used as venues for social activities such as meetings and concerts. According to one headteacher '*the school is the centre of the community*' and was '*rented out to organisations practically every week night*'. A very broad range of activities were held in the schools including:

- ♦ youth clubs
- ♦ use by local choirs
- ♦ computer clubs.

One of the primary schools visited had received funding from the NAFW for a new ICT suite for both pupils and for community use and expected that it would be able to expand its provision. The school also intended to develop its facilities to act as a venue for a mother and toddler group and to develop its PE facilities for the school and the community.

### **Out-of-school activities delivered by primary schools**

The primary schools which were visited referred to a range of out-of-school activities which they organised. These included sports activities such as:

- ♦ rugby
- ♦ football
- ♦ netball
- ♦ cross-country running
- ♦ gymnastics
- ♦ dragon sports.

Other activities included:

- ♦ maths clubs
- ♦ reading clubs
- ♦ folk-dancing clubs
- ♦ handicraft clubs
- ♦ recorder clubs
- ♦ choir
- ♦ drama clubs
- ♦ music clubs

- ♦ homework clubs
- ♦ computer clubs
- ♦ art clubs
- ♦ sculpture clubs
- ♦ knitting clubs
- ♦ science clubs.

Some schools also offered modern languages such as Italian, Spanish, and French. One of the primary schools said that they also organised an after-school youth club for pupils in years five and six which attracted around 40 per cent of the target group.

Several headteachers also referred to the way that they took pupils on organised courses to short-term residential centres. The visits were recommended as a means of enriching the curriculum and forging relationships between teachers and pupils. One school referred to the links which it had developed with other bodies and institutions in the locality such as the local church, an old people's home, the police, and community wardens.

#### **4.6 Schools' Role in Community Education**

A representative of Pen-y-dre school stated that their facilities were used during the evenings and at other times for community education and that '*we have always had very close links with community education*'. These included using the school as a venue to deliver classes for adults such as in motor vehicle repair, woodwork and art.

Four of the primary schools said that their facilities were used for adult learning out of school hours. This included providing a venue for family courses including courses focusing on speech and language skills. Part of the premises of one school was used as a base by the People in Communities project. In another school the headteacher referred to the way the school was used by Merthyr College as a venue for computer classes. Another school was currently used as a venue for basic skills provision. Several schools were used as the venue for a computer club for adults one afternoon each week. Another school intended to use its computer suite to deliver ICT classes or adults which would be delivered by another body.

Staff at all of the primary schools visited referred to ways in which they currently or had worked with parents both in order to improve pupils' learning and also to engage the parents in learning.

One school said that they organised numeracy classes for parents and another had provided a maths class, voluntarily, which had attracted twelve learners. According to the headteacher the class had provided them with a good starting

point and had given the learners the confidence to pursue other courses at Merthyr College. She said that one of the main reasons why many of the learners had attended was that they wanted to help their children with their maths.

In another school it had been found that engaging parents in school activities, for example in putting up displays on classroom walls, had been a way of fostering positive attitudes towards learning. This had overcome the notion among some parents that the school only needed help from parents with '*academic skills*'.

## 5. Pupil Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities

During the focus group interviews conducted with pupils at Pen-y-dre High School and at its five partner primary schools, pupils were asked to name the activities in which they were involved during their spare time. Similar questions were asked to the young people interviewed in community settings during the summer period.

### 5.1 Pupils at Pen-y-dre High School

Pupils at Pen-y-dre High School said that they were involved in:

- ♦ charitable activities organised by the school
- ♦ a drugs counselling service
- ♦ participation in debating clubs
- ♦ modern language classes
- ♦ photography classes.

In addition a broad range of sports were mentioned including:

- ♦ soccer
- ♦ rugby
- ♦ netball
- ♦ basketball
- ♦ badminton
- ♦ swimming
- ♦ athletics
- ♦ cricket
- ♦ baseball
- ♦ cycling.

Several of those interviewed said that they played for local teams or for junior sides of local clubs.

## 5.2 Primary School Pupils

The primary school pupils said that they were involved in a variety of activities and that their schools encouraged them to try different experiences. The pupils interviewed took part in:

- ♦ homework clubs
- ♦ cinema clubs
- ♦ a writing club
- ♦ drama
- ♦ music.

In addition the following sports were mentioned:

- ♦ dragon sports
- ♦ netball teams
- ♦ football teams
- ♦ athletics
- ♦ tennis
- ♦ cricket.

As in the case of the older pupils, some key stage 2 pupils played for local clubs. Some of these activities were delivered outside Merthyr Tydfil. These included the specialist activities like motorbike racing. A number of them said that they went swimming in pools outside the County Borough.

A few of the pupils said that they had enjoyed reading and writing clubs which had been delivered in a local library during the summer holiday.

## 5.3 Young People Interviewed in Community Settings

A minority of the young people interviewed in community settings were involved in after-school activities organised by their school. These included:

- ♦ an IT club
- ♦ netball
- ♦ hockey
- ♦ basketball
- ♦ rugby.



The young people interviewed at the town centre drop-in facility said that they did not participate in any out-of-hours activities organised by their schools.

#### **5.4 Charging Policies for Youth Activities**

The young people were asked whether they were charged for taking part in the activities in which they were involved. The town centre youth drop-in centre did not make a charge on the young people. The Merthyr Tydfil Youth Service made a small charge which did not however meet the costs of the activities.

## 6. Youth Services

The research examined the current role of the youth service in the Pen-y-dre catchment area and the links which exist between its staff and the schools. It also sought views on how respondents believed that the youth service could contribute to the development of community schools and the broader learning agenda.

### 6.1 Merthyr Tydfil Youth Service

Merthyr Tydfil CBC provides an active community education and youth service. This includes youth clubs, the work of the youth access team and the summer skills programme. Their programmes address key priorities in the LEA's Education Strategic Plan, including the need to develop young people's self-confidence, assistance with personal and social development, and citizenship issues. Underpinning the programme is the aim of reaching children and young people who are outside mainstream educational provision or alienated from it including through detached and outreach youth work. The youth service works closely with a number of partner organisations and has developed several innovative approaches which seek to engage with young people and empower them to take a full role as citizens.

The aims of Merthyr Tydfil youth service are described as:

- ♦ to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and empower young people to reach their full potential
- ♦ to raise awareness, promote understanding and instil tolerance for the needs of others
- ♦ to enable young people to develop an understanding of the spiritual, social, political and cultural environment in which they live
- ♦ to assist young people to develop the knowledge, skills and positive attitudes they need in order to live fulfilling lives
- ♦ to enable young people to work together as a team
- ♦ to encourage young people to participate in activities which promote health, fitness and self-discipline
- ♦ to enable young people to make informed decisions on issues that affect their lives
- ♦ to develop a wide range of partnerships with the voluntary, public and private sector for the benefit of young people
- ♦ to raise the profile of youth and community work and recognise the value of social education as an integral part of the lifelong learning process.

The youth service delivers activities in areas such as:

- ◆ personal development
- ◆ health
- ◆ arts
- ◆ sport
- ◆ ICT.

At the same time special events are organised to give young people experiences such as community work, charity work, cultural events, debates and quizzes. The youth service also provides special projects in areas like enterprise, youth exchange, and environmental work. It also enables young people to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

The youth service has also developed training opportunities for young people. It delivers an induction programme for junior youth workers aimed at attracting young people aged 16-18. Its aim is to *'enable young people to develop youth leadership skills'* by enabling the young people:

- ◆ to learn to work as a team
- ◆ to understand the role of the youth worker
- ◆ to know how to create a safe environment
- ◆ to know how to organise an effective youth club programme
- ◆ to improve existing abilities and develop new practical skills
- ◆ to develop a portfolio
- ◆ to develop communication and committee skills.

## **6.2 Role of Pen-y-dre Youth and Community Centre**

A youth and community centre is located within the grounds of Pen-y-dre High School. The building is physically separate from the school and is clearly identifiable. It has recently been refurbished to a high standard. The facilities include:

- ◆ a recreation room
- ◆ two meeting rooms
- ◆ a lounge
- ◆ a computer suite
- ◆ a kitchen
- ◆ offices.

The building is currently used for a variety of functions including:

- ♦ a youth club
- ♦ use by the Freshstart programme
- ♦ public meetings
- ♦ adult education activities
- ♦ staff training
- ♦ a breakfast club.

Around 15-25 young people attend those activities on different evenings. The types of activities which are currently held include:

- ♦ a visiting artist who draws caricatures
- ♦ a snake act
- ♦ lantern processions.

A member of staff at Pen-y-dre Youth Centre felt that the staff had succeeded in developing a relationship with both the school and the young people which meant that they could respond to the needs of the young people. For example, it was noted that there was a strong feeling of mutual trust between the users of the centre and the staff who worked there. This was because the centre's staff were committed to an approach which *'looks at the young person as a whole and what their strengths are'*.

She was extremely positive about the use which could be made of the facility. She referred to plans to develop the use of the facility through the introduction of Sky Television and planned initiatives such as curry and football evenings which would be held on the premises. The centre has already started to use the Karaoke machine as a focal point for some activities.

One of the youth workers who was interviewed felt that the centre could become the hub of young people's activities in the area and that it could cater for the needs of young people and adults as well. It was also envisaged that activities could be organised there which could be used by people from a wider area, if transport was provided.

The central issue according to the youth workers was the need to continue to engage with young people. They recognised the need for more outreach work in the area which would draw attention to the activities and stimulate young people to suggest their own ideas. They hoped to continue to do this by building on the youth and community education service's culture of consultation. They believed that the outreach work should target all age-groups, but particularly those aged 13-18.

Several other interviewees also referred to the potential of the centre. The representative of the 3Gs Development Trust said that more use should be made of the facilities. He agreed that there was a need for outreach work and the development of a virtuous circle which would gather its own momentum as the centre became a place that was *'buzzing with activity'*.

It was felt that the centre would benefit from having additional staff who could focus on developing a rapport with some of the young people who were most at risk of disaffection and of engaging them in activities at the centre.

At the same time it was felt that all organisations in the catchment area who worked with young people should cooperate and promote each other's activities. It was noted that contact had been developed with the youth workers employed by the Development Trust and that this was bearing fruit and that this should develop more opportunities for young people, increase the capacity of all those who provided youth services in the area and maximise the potential of the Youth Centre.

Other agencies also use the centre's facilities. For example, a member of the staff of the North Glamorgan NHS Trust was on site to provide advice on health issues on a one-to-one basis out of school hours. It was stated that *'what happens at the youth centre [in terms of health advice] compliments what is done in the school –what would be ideal would be to deliver in the school and have an additional drop-in here'*. It was felt that it was more appropriate to deliver the service at the youth centre than at the school, not least because some young people were more confident about discussing issues with health professionals outside the school building. The representative of the NHS Trust felt that there was a potential to extend the amount of work which they undertook in the youth centre.

The youth workers pointed to the way that the centre was currently used by some local support groups and for public meetings. They drew attention to the way that the facilities lent themselves for use by public agencies. They felt that this should attract adults into the building and make them familiar with the facilities and the provision. However, they emphasised the need to ensure that the centre had enough resources to meet day-to-day costs.

### **6.3 Cooperation Between the Youth Service and Schools**

The youth service has outlined its contribution to the development of community schools. The priorities which it has outlined include working with schools to:

- ◆ consult with young people
- ◆ develop democratic structures within schools to represent young people
- ◆ contribute to the citizenship agenda
- ◆ provide study support/homework clubs

- ◆ contribute to environmental projects
- ◆ contribute to arts projects
- ◆ enhance the delivery of the alternative curriculum
- ◆ develop after-school sports activities
- ◆ develop information services for young people as part of an improved system of information services
- ◆ develop of the youth exchange
- ◆ develop a media project
- ◆ develop an Easter and summer holiday programme
- ◆ help with KS2-KS3 transition
- ◆ deliver the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme
- ◆ establish and develop youth provision for pupils with SEN
- ◆ establish a youth conference
- ◆ develop a volunteering programme
- ◆ deliver health education
- ◆ develop youth leadership
- ◆ develop childcare skills
- ◆ develop peer mentoring
- ◆ develop referral procedures to support young people's educational, health and social development
- ◆ develop a prefect team.

Both the youth workers and staff at Pen-y-dre High School felt that they could work more closely in future. One senior member of staff was particularly keen for the links to be strengthened and noted examples where the contribution of the youth service had had a positive impact on the attitudes of young people. It had been found that substituting the youth service methodology for the teacher/pupil relationship had enabled young people to interact more positively with adults, including teachers at the school. Having positive adult role models had also been beneficial to many young people.

The training opportunities provided by the youth service to enable young people to become youth leaders were also referred to by school-based staff as a valuable contribution. They felt that this had nurtured positive attitudes on the part of the young people who became leaders and that it also provided role models for younger pupils.

However, several of the teaching staff at Pen-y-dre felt that their contact with the Youth Centre was too limited and that they would like to work more closely with the youth service in general. According to one teacher this was one of her targets although it was not her main priority for this academic year.

Most primary schools had little contact with the youth service because they felt that the service catered more for older children, although they, too, were keen to work with the service. However, according to one of those headteachers the initiative would have to come from the youth service because *'we've got so much on we can't be proactive – someone has to approach us'*.

However the headteachers at two of the primary schools referred to the youth clubs which were held on their premises. In one school the community education services used the premises three or four nights each week. In another a youth club was held two nights a week by Merthyr Youth Service. The headteacher said that *'there is a great need for it'*.

According to the headteacher one of the benefits of holding the youth club in the school was that it helped reinforce the notion that *'the school is relevant'* to the older children who had now left that school but who attended the youth club. In another school it was said that the school was a safe environment which took the young people away from street corners.

The activities which were held on the school premises by the youth service included:

- ♦ table tennis
- ♦ volleyball
- ♦ pool
- ♦ computer groups
- ♦ playstation
- ♦ homework club.

In addition, a strong focus was placed on taking children on visits and inviting speakers to the activities.

## **6.4 Youth Services Delivered by Other Providers**

In addition to the contribution of the youth service, the voluntary sector is a major provider of services to young people in Merthyr Tydfil. The research team visited a project based in the town centre which has been in existence for approximately eight years. Its aims are to:

- ♦ relieve sickness, hardship and distress amongst young people aged 11-25 regardless of race, colour or creed, particularly by the provision of a counselling and advice service in Merthyr Tydfil
- ♦ to provide recreational facilities in the interest of social welfare for young people from, in and around Merthyr Tydfil.

The organisation has two venues in Merthyr Tydfil – one in the town centre and the other at Dowlais. It provides a range of activities including a drop-in facility with pool tables and other recreational facilities, advice and information and projects to do with issues such as environmental awareness, health promotion, the arts, and sport.

The young people who were interviewed at the centre were extremely complimentary about the centre and the approach which was used there. They referred to the positive relationship which they had with the staff and indicated that they were engaged with the activities which were delivered by the centre.

The representative of the 3Gs Development Trust said that the trust's own youth workers had developed an approach which was particularly suitable for the most disaffected youngsters and which should be continued. He felt that cooperation with the CBC's youth service should take place where that was appropriate and that ideas and practice should be shared.

## 6.5 Young People and the Provision

The research team met with groups of young people at the Pen-y-dre Youth Centre, in the secondary and junior schools and in activities organised by the voluntary sector.

### **PEN-Y-DRE YOUTH CENTRE**

The young people interviewed in the Youth Centre included pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. A number of those interviewed said that they attended the centre every night that it was open. Some of the young people said that they also took part in activities organised by the school in particular:

- ♦ football
- ♦ netball
- ♦ hockey
- ♦ an IT club
- ♦ rugby

The youth centre was also an important facility for them. According to one of the young people it was an opportunity to meet other people '*otherwise we would have nothing to do but hang around the streets*'. Another said that it was good to mix with young people who he did not mix with in school and make new friends through the centre. A number of them said that they used the facility to obtain advice on issues to do with health. Some said that the main attraction was the varied activities which were delivered at the centre. Others used the centre to play:

- ♦ pool



- ♦ table tennis
- ♦ dancing.

Most of the young people thought that the rules were fair. They defined them as being:

- ♦ no fighting
- ♦ no smoking
- ♦ no gambling
- ♦ no alcohol
- ♦ treat each other with respect
- ♦ treat staff with respect.

They felt that the practice of giving people three warnings before asking them to leave was fair. A number of them complimented the cleanliness of the youth centre and thought that this was important.

The young people were asked what additional facilities they would like to see installed at the youth centre. The responses were:

- ♦ Playstation II
- ♦ a chocolate vending machine
- ♦ computer games
- ♦ access to the internet
- ♦ more organised visits to places of interest
- ♦ opportunities to play varied sports
- ♦ board games
- ♦ a cinema club
- ♦ dance mats.

### **PUPILS INTERVIEWED IN SCHOOL**

Most of the pupils interviewed at Pen-y-dre High School had been to the Youth Centre, but significantly none had been there since the recent refurbishment.

Very few of the primary school pupils had been to the Youth Centre. This was because they had been told that the activities at the centre were for older children and young people. Those who had visited the centre had attended specially-organised activities delivered there.

About half of the young people who were interviewed at the town drop-in centre said that they had used the Pen-y-dre Youth Centre at some point. They

had played pool and table tennis there. Two admitted that they had been banned from the facility but did not elaborate on the reasons. Similarly, few of the young people who were attending the summer skills programme said that they attended Pen-y-dre Youth Centre. Two of them also said that they had been banned from using the facility.

A sample of pupils at Pen-y-dre High School and the five primary/junior schools were asked if they would attend activities delivered at Pen-y-dre Youth Centre. The majority said that they would, if the kind of activities which were organised were of interest to them and if the time was convenient. This was especially true if more activities were put on during the school dinner hour.

### **YOUNG PEOPLE INTERVIEWED IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS**

Only a minority (three) of the young people interviewed in community settings said that they would use the Pen-y-dre Youth Centre and only then if activities of interest to them were organised. The remainder said that they preferred a town-centre venue, in particular the drop-in centre which they currently used. The reasons cited for going there included that more people their own age attended the drop-in centre, that they shared the same interests, that there were more things to do, and that they found the staff supportive. One said that she would not go to Pen-y-dre because it was too close to the school.

## **6.6 Developing the Provision**

A representative of a local training organisation said that although they worked with the Youth Access programme, contact with the youth service was something which needed to be developed. The CBC's Sports Development Department also said that they were keen to work much more closely with the youth service to develop provision for young people.

According to an officer of one body working with young people, there was considerable cooperation between them and the youth and community education service at present and this could be developed in future. However, she maintained that the process should be driven by the young people themselves who needed to be in control of the provision and have a sense of ownership, if it was to be successful.

The research asked young people at Pen-y-dre, in the primary schools and in community settings to identify the kind of facilities and activities which they would like to see provided in the area. The kinds of activities which were mentioned by primary school pupils were:

- ◆ a history club
- ◆ a drama club
- ◆ a singing club

- ♦ an art club
- ♦ storytelling/reading club
- ♦ poetry
- ♦ more summer skills courses.

The kinds of activities which the young people at the drop-in centre suggested included:

- ♦ skateboarding
- ♦ a camping field and shelter.

The facilities mentioned by the primary school pupils were:

- ♦ tennis
- ♦ bowls
- ♦ hockey
- ♦ swimming facilities
- ♦ a music studio
- ♦ pool
- ♦ basketball
- ♦ a running track
- ♦ cross-country running
- ♦ soft-ball
- ♦ bike trails
- ♦ walking trails.

The young people attending the summer skills programme were asked for suggestions for activities and facilities. Despite prompting, none suggested activities but a number cited facilities which they would like to have provided. These included:

- ♦ exercise bikes
- ♦ rowing machine
- ♦ sun bed
- ♦ sauna and jacuzzi
- ♦ weights
- ♦ skipping ropes
- ♦ stretching ropes
- ♦ football posts with nets

- ◆ hockey pitches
- ◆ netball
- ◆ punch-bags.

Some admitted that similar types of facilities were already provided.

## **7. Sports Facilities**

The research team examined the existing sports and recreational facilities in the Pen-y-dre catchment areas and met with representatives of the CBC's recreation and sports development department and staff at Pen-y-dre High School with responsibility for physical education.

### **7.1 Community Sports Facilities**

A representative of the recreation and sports development section stated that the gym at the Community Centre was used on a casual basis but that there was ample opportunity to increase the take-up of sports in the area. He also demonstrated the local swimming pool which was used by community and drew attention to the limited nature of the facilities there.

He felt that there was a need to 'educate people to use the facilities' and to overcome 'the culture of sitting around in gangs'.

The officer noted that the development of sports facilities at Pen-y-dre High School would go some way to meet the need for sports facilities in the County Borough. However, he said that it should not be taken that the facilities addressed all of those needs and added that the type of facilities to be developed at Pen-y-dre should be used as a prototype of a model of satellite facilities which should feed into an upgraded central hub.

### **7.2 Pen-y-dre Sports Facilities**

As noted above, Pen-y-dre High School has bid successfully for money to improve its existing sports facilities. The project includes providing better drainage for the school's playing fields, improvements to the sports hall and swimming pool and a new entrance to the sports facilities which will provide disabled access and enable people to access the facilities without going through the school.

Staff at Pen-y-dre indicated that the sports development at the site would enable them to offer new facilities for pupils, including new opportunities to play tennis and more cricket.

### **7.3 Community Sports Facilities**

The officer of the recreation and sports development section said that he hoped to work closely with staff at Pen-y-dre in relation to their new facilities. He welcomed the investment which he felt should and could be of great benefit to the whole community.

For this to happen, he felt that a love of sport should be nurtured in the schools, not least through promoting more team games. This should be accompanied by a determined effort to encourage people to continue to be physically active after leaving school as a means of developing a culture of lifelong participation in sport.

The recreation and sports development officer also felt that the sports facilities at Pen-y-dre should be genuinely open to the community rather than simply to organised groups, and that the opening times of the facilities should not be dominated by the arrangements of organised groups.

The officer of the 3Gs Development Trust said that there were clear opportunities to use the sports and leisure facilities at Pen-y-dre as a means of attracting people into learning.

One of the primary school headteachers said that they could see very positive advantages from the development of sports facilities at Pen-y-dre as it was something which the children wanted.

### **7.4 Primary School Sports Facilities**

In three primary schools the headteachers said that they wanted to develop sports activities by enhancing facilities at their schools. In all cases bids had been submitted to Sportslot or the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). In two cases the bids included plans to improve the drainage of football fields.

Extensive community use of these new facilities was envisaged, including sharing with local sporting organisations, to maximise the use of these facilities.

### **7.5 Likely use of Sports Facilities**

The pupils at Pen-y-dre who were keen on sports activities said that they would use the new sports facilities there.

Pupils from two primary schools said that they had used the swimming pool at Pen-y-dre. They and the pupils at the other schools said that they would use the facilities, especially if they were improved.

Eight of the young people interviewed at the town centre drop-in centre said that they would use sports facilities at Pen-y-dre High School if those facilities were improved and available free of charge. They maintained that the current facilities were substandard and gave graphic descriptions in support of their claims. These views were echoed by the young people attending the summer skills programme who said that they would be willing to use Pen-y-dre if the swimming pool and changing facilities were improved. One however, said that she would not use the facilities under any circumstances.

## **7.6 Health Promotion**

Staff at the Local Health Group felt that a great deal could be achieved by linking the development of sports facilities to the wider health-promotion agenda. This view was shared by other interviewees who said that encouraging exercise and healthier lifestyles was a priority in the area and who felt that accessible, quality facilities would be more likely to be used.

## 8. Research Into Learning Communities

Developing a learning community has been highlighted by a large number of the respondents interviewed as part of this research. Each has referred to contributions which their own institution or organisation could make to this process. At the same time the connection between learning and community regeneration has been emphasised.

This chapter examines some of the issues which influence the development of lifelong learning communities through a consideration of the evidence presented in published literature and other research into this subject. A particular focus has been placed on research which has been conducted into the following issues:

- ♦ participation in lifelong learning
- ♦ engagement in learning
- ♦ methods of delivery
- ♦ assessment and progression.

### 8.1 Participation in Lifelong Learning

Research into adult participation in learning suggests that it remains a minority activity (Tremlett *et al.*, 1995). A recent survey undertaken by Gorard (Gorard in Aldridge and Sargant, 2003) found that only 38.4 per cent of the adult population involved in the study had continued with any form of formal or continuous learning after reaching compulsory school leaving age, and only 45.5 per cent reported participating in any formal learning other than immediately after they had reached compulsory school leaving age.

Although there is evidence that participation levels have been rising, the figures vary greatly, in part because of the different definitions of adult learning which are used. More significantly, it is clear that participation varies depending on an individual's sex, age, ethnic background, educational background, employment and other factors such as the area in which they live and whether they are disabled. It has been found that younger middle class people are the most likely to participate in adult learning. Men are most likely to participate in work-based learning while more women take part in local adult education provision (McGivney 1999).

#### **Ethnicity**

The evidence about participation by people from a minority ethnic background is unclear. Gorard (2003) found that participation by those from a minority ethnic background was higher than average. However, Smith and Spurling



(1999) point to the variations between different ethnic groups while the National Adult Learning Survey suggested that there was a strong connection between socio-economic class and participation by people from a minority ethnic background.

### **Social class**

The evidence suggests that socio-economic background is a key influence on participation in adult education (Aldridge and Horrocks, 2002). Those who are from a middle class or professional background are far more likely to take part in learning than other groups. In part this has been attributed to the nature of many of the opportunities which are available (Tuckett, 1996).

### **Previous educational experience**

People's experience of formal education has also been found to influence their participation in adult education with those who left school earliest least likely to participate.

## **8.2 Engagement in Learning**

Providers have developed a variety of different means in order to encourage participation among groups which have not traditionally accessed post-compulsory learning. These include the use of direct one-to-one methods of recruiting learners, through outreach work undertaken by providers and community workers (LSDA, 2001; Michael and Hogard, 1996; Aldridge and Tuckett, 2002; Jameson, 2001). The kind of strategies which have proved successful include the following examples:

- ♦ a basic skills organisation arranged an open day for the whole community. Games were made available for the children and it provided an opportunity for community groups to publicise their activities (McMeeking *et al.*, 2002)
- ♦ in an urban area of South Wales a project was undertaken that aimed at increasing public awareness and involved a staff member of the Adult Education Department and three entertainers including magicians and storytellers marketing learning activities on public transport. One entertainer would attract the public's attention by, for example, telling a story, and another member of staff would provide the passengers with information about the provision available
- ♦ cooperation with local medical and social services who would recommend people to pursue a learning activity
- ♦ out-door work involving community education personnel meeting with individuals in a variety of settings where they would normally go.

### 8.3 Methods of Delivery

Providers have also developed different delivery methods in order to engage learners.

#### **Community partnerships for delivery**

Partnership working to deliver learning alongside other provision has proved effective in a number of contexts and has been recommended by the European Basic Skills Network (2002). Two examples of such partnerships are:

- ◆ a project in North Wales, which sought to assist individuals who suffered from health problems to engage in learning activities in order to increase their confidence, develop skills, and promote general well-being, was developed through a partnership between learning providers and health professionals such as local doctors, nurses and social workers. The health professionals gave formal recommendations to patients to participate in learning activities
- ◆ health and beauty projects were developed in conjunction with retail companies as a first step course encouraging unemployed women into learning. The first part of the course concentrated on job-searching, CV writing and interview techniques. In the second part of the course the retailers provided the participants with £100 and a personal stylist to help them buy appropriate clothes for interviews.

#### **Accessibility**

The settings in which adult learning is provided have an important role to play in creating an accessible environment for potential learners. According to Tomlinson (1992) the use of appropriate learning venues for each group of learners is a key factor in increasing participation. Among the examples in the UK are:

- ◆ an LEA in South Wales arranged 'Introduction to IT' courses which were delivered in schools. The principal aim was to engage parents with children at the school. Community participation was also possible.
- ◆ an LEA developed a programme of learning activities delivered in public houses, as a means of attracting young men who were not accessing learning in any form and participation was facilitated by the use of laptop computers.
- ◆ a network of learning shops was organised at a commercial centre which offered drop-in provision which provided training and a learning setting for those who found existing college provision inconvenient.

**Flexibility of provision**

Accessibility has become central to the provision of learning opportunities. Flexible timetables, the use of technology and more appropriate courses or situated learning are methods that have been used by a number of providers.

**Use of technology**

Technology has been highlighted as a means through which some of the traditional barriers causing the exclusion of particular sub-groups of the population from learning can be overcome (Gorard and Selwyn, 2003).

**Situated learning**

Situated learning, whereby learning is embedded into other activities which an individual undertakes have also been used effectively as a means of delivering learning in a way which is relevant and meaningful to participants.

**8.4 Assessment and Progression**

The issue of assessing and measuring learners' progression is an integral part of debates about the development of learning communities.

**Accredited Learning**

Several commentators have noted that the use of accredited courses which provide a way for learners to progress to a recognised qualification has increased in recent years (Tuckett, 1996; Aldridge and Horrocks, 2002). Under this model learners can accumulate and transfer attainment credits through different learning activities. The use of Open College Network (OCN) Accreditation has been advocated as a means of providing a flexible model of accreditation which can be negotiated with learners. Accredited learning offers a pathway for individuals who want to work towards a qualification to do so in a flexible way and the method can be used in a broad range of learning activities.

**Learning for its own sake**

However the research also indicates the danger of focusing exclusively on learning activities which are accredited with measurable outcomes for learners. This view reflects two broad judgments concerning lifelong learning. First, there is the philosophical position that learning and learning activities are and should be undertaken for their own sake (Gorard, 1998; Aldridge and Tuckett, 2000) and that one of the key aims of a culture of lifelong learning should be to provide individuals with opportunities to learn without committing themselves to undertake any form of assessment or to pursue a qualification. Thus all learning is seen to have a purpose whether or not it leads to a quantifiable outcome. This tradition in adult education is one which has deep roots in the South Wales valleys and was a key feature of the voluntary adult education movement and some local authority provision.

### **Informal learning**

In many ways the notion of informal learning challenges the perception that individuals are 'non-learners' in any meaningful way. It emphasises that all individuals learn through the variety of life experiences and challenges which confront them as they go about their daily lives (Tight, 1996). Thus, factors such as dealing with those in authority, debating a point, relating to others and acquiring and assimilating information are experiences through which the vast majority of people learn and develop new skills.

### **Non-accredited learning as a gateway**

The use of non-accredited courses as a means of encouraging learners has been highlighted (Thompson, 1995). This approach emphasises the importance of confidence-building learning activities designed to assist learners to overcome barriers to participation in accredited learning, such as personal disposition, lack of confidence or other reasons.

### **Measurement**

The measurement of learning activities by which learners are expected to achieve a particular level of attainment is an issue which has received considerable attention by both researchers and practitioners. Clearly, for many learners achieving a recognised qualification, however small, can be a crucial first step which overcomes lack of confidence or other factors which have prevented that person from engaging in learning activities.

A number of approaches have been developed which seek to overcome learners' apprehension or even objection to assessment. These include the use of 'covert' rather than 'overt' assessment to establish a baseline and the learning gains at the end of a period of learning. In some cases interviews have been held with individual learners as a means of identifying what skills have been developed and ways in which learners can develop further.

However, even the use of innovative assessment techniques by which learners may not be aware that they are being assessed, require clear milestones upon which the measurement is undertaken and a defined period over which the learning will have taken place. It is much more difficult to measure more subjective features such as inter-action with others, attitudes, confidence, engagement and attitudinal factors. These are often the most fundamental issues in the development of learning communities in areas where there is no tradition of engagement in learning.

One technique which has been used has been to measure recruitment and retention to courses. The use of this approach has been advocated as a means of measuring progression in some informal learning contexts, on the basis that the fact that a learner has participated is the learning outcome. Allied to this is the examination of reasons why learners have dropped out of a particular activity.

## **Progression**

The development of structures to enable individuals to accumulate credits for learning through participation in a range of activities, for instance through the OCN framework, has opened an immense range of opportunities for some learners. The structure has proved effective in providing a flexible means of progression which can be tailored to the needs of individual learners. At the same time, the use of the APEL technique has been deployed as a means of establishing a baseline and measuring the starting point from which learners should be judged to have proceeded.

## **Flexible progression**

Previous research undertaken by the NFER (McMeeking *et al.*, 2002) has highlighted the need to ensure that progression routes are flexible enough to take account of factors such as the pressures confronting individuals which may prevent them from engaging in a prolonged period of learning. Thus the system of measuring progression needs to be able to accommodate individuals who may wish to return to a learning activity after a break. Although this complicates the process of planning the delivery of courses, it has been cited as a key feature of programmes which seek to engage people who have negative attitudes towards learning. At the same time, the notion of linear progression (whereby learners progress from one level of learning to a higher level) has to be balanced with the needs of learners who wish to pursue a learning activity at the same level as their previous one.

## **Measurement of flexible progression**

Recording and measuring the progress of learners who do not engage in a period of continuous learning has been advocated as a means of providing learners with a route upon which to progress and of ensuring that all learning is taken into account, including that which has been gained by studying for part or parts of a course. All learning activities (for example a session) are regarded as learning entities in themselves as well as part of a broader learning entity. Thus a learner who has attended a class for one or two mornings gains some recognition for doing so while those who have attended each session of a ten-week course have a different level of recognition. Individual tracking systems, such as the use of individual learning portfolios, have also been developed as a means of measuring the progression of learners who do not engage in a learning activity for a sustained period.

## 9. Promoting a Learning Community

### 9.1 Lifelong Learning in Public Policy

As noted earlier, the need to encourage learning in areas where a high percentage of the population have no qualifications has been highlighted as a key goal of public policy in Wales. Its importance is emphasised for economic reasons, for personal development and as a means of developing communities' capacity to improve themselves and to both lead and contribute to their regeneration.

### 9.2 Community Education Service and Lifelong Learning

The CBC's Community Education Service has an established provision of courses for adults delivered through its Community Education Service. Its mission statement outlines its role as being: *'to provide a quality community-based learning programme that will develop individuals' self-esteem and skills to enable them to become empowered members of their communities'*.

The Community Education Service describes the provision it makes as follows:

- ♦ *adult education classes give you the opportunity to learn on your doorstep*
- ♦ *classes are informal and located in many local venues*
- ♦ *a wide variety of courses on offer*
- ♦ *taught by friendly, approachable and qualified staff, who are very often local*

It offers opportunities for people to:

- ♦ *learn a new skill or brush up an old one*
- ♦ *meet new people and make new friends*
- ♦ *gain qualifications or just to learn how to do something you have always been interested in.*

A broad range of courses are delivered including:

- ♦ computing (courses include basic computers, spread sheets/databases)
- ♦ introduction to desk top publishing, intermediate desk top publishing, computer literacy and information technology, internet technology)

- ♦ arts and crafts (courses including art, watercolours, flower arranging, sewing/soft furnishings, wood craft, ceramics, creative arts/crafts, motor maintenance)
- ♦ languages (sign language, introduction to Spanish)
- ♦ health and fitness (adult swimming, yoga, tai chi, aromatherapy, reflexology)
- ♦ general courses (Merthyr memories, Welsh culture).

The courses are delivered in a number of locations such as:

- ♦ Abercanaid School
- ♦ Aberfan Community Centre
- ♦ Bedlinog School.
- ♦ Bodalaw House, Dowlais
- ♦ Cefn Community Centre
- ♦ Cyfarthfa High School
- ♦ Cyfarthfa Primary School
- ♦ Dowlais Library
- ♦ Gellideg Foundation
- ♦ Gellideg School
- ♦ Green Fields School
- ♦ Gurnos Community Workshops
- ♦ Gurnos Nursery School
- ♦ Hafal Dowlais
- ♦ Heddwch Close Dowlais
- ♦ Heolgerrig Primary School
- ♦ High Street Chapel
- ♦ Old Age Building Galon Uchaf
- ♦ Pantyscallog Primary School
- ♦ Pen-y-dre High School
- ♦ Pen-y-dre Youth Centre
- ♦ Sandbrook Day Centre
- ♦ St Mathias Church Treharris
- ♦ Talbot Square
- ♦ Trefechan OAP Hall
- ♦ Treharris Library
- ♦ Trelewis Community Centre

- ◆ Trelewis Primary School
- ◆ Troedyrhiw Boys' and Girls' Club
- ◆ Twyn Carmel
- ◆ Tŷ Pontyrhun
- ◆ Vaynor and Penderyn High School
- ◆ Ynysowen Nursery
- ◆ Zion Methodist, Aberfan

Differential fees are charged for these courses. These are set at £1.05 per hour for adults with discounts for pensioners (£4.10 per course). Those in receipt of certain benefits can pursue the courses free of charge.

The courses are advertised extensively through brochures and the local press. A senior representative of the Community Education service said that they were often asked for guidance by people who would like to study a certain area but were unsure as to what course would provide the type of activity they wanted to do.

The representative of the Community Education Service said that there was a danger that provision was becoming too focused towards outcomes and formal qualifications and that there was a need to ensure that opportunities were available for people to engage with the notion of learning for pleasure and to broaden horizons. This was regarded as something which contributed to social inclusion and engagement.

### **9.3 Community Development and Lifelong Learning**

One of the officers with strategic responsibility for post-16 education in Merthyr Tydfil was keen that the regeneration trust programme should contribute to developing lifelong learning in the County Borough. In particular, it was felt that the expertise in community consultation and of '*working with communities to identify underlying needs*' based on a '*genuine community dialogue*' which reached out to people had been developed by the regeneration trust. This would be invaluable in identifying learner needs and the kind of provision which should be delivered. He also felt that this would contribute to the emergence of an educational culture which was demand-led rather than determined by providers.

Lifelong learning has been acknowledged as a priority for the 3Gs Development Trust in its submission to the NAFW's Communities First programme. The aims identified by the 3Gs Development Trust include a number which are related to lifelong learning:

- ◆ building the capacity of residents through ensuring that they develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and behaviours to enable them



to set and attain appropriate personal goals for themselves and for their community

- ◆ developing supported progression routes to enable residents to progress from capacity building for community benefit to acquire the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and behaviours that will enable them to benefit from the wider opportunities that will become available through employability and economic activity
- ◆ ensuring that appropriate accreditation is available for all learning undertaken
- ◆ ensuring that those who have power over residents recognise and understand the need to introduce effective strategies to creating informed and assertive customers and thus ensure that they are able to ascertain and meet the real needs of residents
- ◆ ensuring that service providers, including the staff of the 3Gs Development Trust, are equipped properly with the new skills required to design and deliver the sort of groundbreaking solutions that are needed to address the underlying needs of residents
- ◆ ensuring that all capacity building programmes are soundly based/properly researched and are monitored and evaluated effectively.

The 3Gs strategy emphasises the need to ensure that residents are able to overcome the main barriers to engagement in learning. This includes an emphasis on providing a range of informal learning opportunities with appropriate assessment, the provision of Basic Skills and soft skills packages, and effective and appropriate progression routes, with advice and support for learners.

To realise these objectives the Trust recognises the need for clarity about issues such as:

- ◆ the personal development and learning needs of residents and how those needs could be met
- ◆ how to develop an effective learning and support infrastructure to engage and prepare people to take part in learning and personal development activities
- ◆ the provision of inspirational programmes designed to raise aspirations, instil self-belief, develop capacity to learn and encourage and support progression to achieve new goals.

This strategy was outlined further in an interview with a representative of the 3Gs Development Trust who argued that the lifelong learning in the area should be driven by the emphasis on community regeneration.

However, he warned that during consultations undertaken by the trust, only a small minority of residents had described lifelong learning as a priority for them and noted that other issues such as community safety and youth

annoyance were more immediate concerns for residents. He felt that this highlighted the size of the challenge of developing a learning community in the area.

The 3Gs has established an education committee consisting of representatives of Pen-y-dre High School, local primary schools, the residents' trust, the community education service, the police and the local hospital. Its main focus has been on issues such as:

- ◆ school attendance
- ◆ reading programmes
- ◆ school security
- ◆ disaffection
- ◆ enhancing the use of ICT.

However, its activities have been limited, partly because of financial constraints and some of the issues which it wanted to address, including the Freshstart programme and the development of sports facilities at Pen-y-dre High School, have been taken forward by Pen-y-dre Plus.

At present, the 3Gs Development Trust fund a programme aimed at children up to eleven years old to enhance attainment and address behaviour. The cost of this programme is estimated at £1.4m over three years. One of the aims is to develop a multi-agency approach to '*help families help families*' which will tackle issues such as health and communication/speech skills.

#### **9.4 Pen-y-dre High School and Lifelong Learning**

Interviews with staff at Pen-y-dre school and supporting documentation indicate that the school is committed to the lifelong learning agenda and sees it as an essential component in the regeneration of the area it serves. In particular, the school referred to the possibility of developing opportunities for parents to learn alongside their children through home/school reading and language programmes.

Likewise, the e-learning project designed to promote motivation is intended for 'adult and other non-traditional learners' outside 'normal school hours and outside the normal school environment'.

The school's commitment to lifelong learning is reflected in the aims of Pen-y-dre Plus. It wishes to encourage post-16 learning through activities such as:

- ◆ providing opportunities for individuals to develop key skills
- ◆ developing a training company for school and community use
- ◆ an arts centre

- ♦ an integrated health strategy
- ♦ the provision of community mentors.

The representative of the 3Gs Development Trust and a senior member of staff at Pen-y-dre referred to proposals to appoint a lifelong learning coordinator who would be provided with support for administration and revenue generation and who would be responsible for *‘developing the concept of establishing lifelong learning as the engine to drive the regeneration of the electoral wards of Dowlais, Gurnos and Penydarren’*. The postholder’s specific responsibilities are envisaged as including:

- ♦ supporting any school in the area in its ambitions to become a community school
- ♦ ensuring that all community-based learning is designed and delivered in a way that supports the aims of the respective Community Capacity Building Plans of each partnership board
- ♦ ensuring effective strategies are in place to overcome a) the barriers to adult participation in learning, b) build and support capacity to learn and c) enable progression through informal learning/volunteering/capacity building/accredited learning to employability, economic activity, independence and active citizenship
- ♦ ensuring that existing and future providers of community-based learning/training understand the respective Community Capacity Building Plans of both partnership boards and that their training activity is harnessed to support those plans effectively
- ♦ ensuring that other social inclusion initiatives such as the Sportslot bid are delivered effectively to exploit their potential as vehicles to eradicate social exclusion through ‘hooking’ non-learners into informal learning
- ♦ ensuring that ‘learning for health’ is taken forward across all schools and the community.

The lifelong learning coordinator would be responsible for ensuring that Pen-y-dre school and all of its partner primary schools *‘are equipped properly with the necessary resources, expertise and cultural values to enable them to function as effective community schools to support fully the social, cultural and economic regeneration of the communities concerned’* as well as ensuring a *‘joined-up approach to non-statutory provision, ensuring that residents’ lifelong learning and personal development needs are addressed, providing guidance on the design and delivery of learning, training and support programmes alongside monitoring, evaluation and other functions’*.

The postholders would be employed by Pen-y-dre Plus partly in order to ‘alleviate the concerns of the partnership boards that the post should not become ‘internalised’ within the school’.

Although the representative of the Community Education Service was in favour of using community schools as the venue for adult learning it was emphasised that this should not become the sole venue for such provision. For example, there was a need to ensure that community-based learning opportunities remained available.

It was also emphasised that there was a need to ensure that all staff who delivered courses aimed at adult learners received proper training. In particular it was felt that tutors needed to be trained in the most appropriate styles of delivering learning to adults which were very different from those which would be used in a school classroom.

Several respondents felt that there could be advantages from encouraging adults to learn alongside pupils. For example, perceptions of adults and pupils could be influenced in a more positive direction. However it was stated that this approach could pose practical difficulties and that the style of teaching and learning activities might not be suitable for adults.

The issue of CRB checks was also seen as being a potential difficulty given the cost and time issues involved in processing applications. This it was felt could be overcome by delivering adult learning in a designated section of a school, separate from the main building.

## 9.5 Primary School Contribution

The primary schools also indicated that they would be keen to play a greater role in developing a lifelong learning culture. One primary school referred to the way they would like to develop a '*drop-in centre for parents with low literacy levels*' which would provide counselling alongside basic skills provision. Another school highlighted the need for classes on topics such as:

- ◆ letter-writing
- ◆ form filling
- ◆ practical and applied skills.

In three schools the staff referred to the need to focus on developing communication skills. According to one headteacher parents' poor communication skills were being replicated in the children.

A representative of the Community Education Service said that developing provision for adults in primary schools could prove successful especially as a first step towards learning. The primary schools were felt to be closer to many people.

## 9.6 Developing Learning Communities

The officer of the 3Gs Development Trust felt that a much broader agenda was required to engage with people who were '*chronic non-learners*'. He felt that this should be a priority for all professionals working in the area who needed to be trained how to encourage people into learning, particularly those who lacked the necessary positive attitudes.

Similar issues were raised by a senior representative of the CBC's Community Education Service who said that there was a need to increase the range of courses which were available, to develop more opportunities for informal learning and to emphasise the role and contribution of courses which did not lead to a formal qualification. However, it was felt that this could not be addressed by practitioners in the area and that there was a need to address this issue at a much broader level in terms of national policy for adult learning.

In terms of practical steps the representative of the Development Trust advocated using successful learners in the community in the role of learning champions who would encourage people to take up the available opportunities and to identify what learning should be provided. He felt these should be people who were in touch with the local community and trusted by it. Learning through health should also be promoted and used as a '*hook*' to attract people. At the same time, he felt that developing systems to encourage learning progression was essential.

At the same time several respondents referred to the need to build on outreach events that brought different partners together to raise awareness of provision and to develop events that would attract non-traditional learners. For example, staff referred to a 'Have a Go Day' organised by the Community Education Service, the 3Gs, Merthyr Tydfil College, the Neighbourhood Learning Centre and the WEA which had given people a taste of what was available.

A number of the officers of the statutory and voluntary organisations also indicated that they also wanted to use their own services as a means of contributing to the development of learning communities.

The officer of the Recreation and Sports Development section said that the current use of the Gurnos Community Centre could be expanded. He was not aware of that any learning activities were taking place there.

An officer of an environmental organisation was keen to involve a broader section of the community in green projects, particularly establishing gardens. This would empower people by giving them the skills which could ensure that projects gathered their own momentum.

According to a representative of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre it had a key role to play alongside other partners. They hoped to work alongside other bodies, such as the 3Gs Development Trust and the Dowlais Community

Development Forum to promote the facility in the community and encourage people to use it. They also wanted to examine ways in which OCN accreditation could be used in conjunction with a broader range of activities, such as environmental projects. They felt that there was a need to coordinate and plan marketing and recruitment strategies in order for this to happen.

The centre's representative felt that people should have opportunities to develop job search skills. Activities such as painting and decorating, pottery and out-door pursuits could be used as a means of encouraging learners to progress to other classes. The Neighbourhood Learning Centre felt that their facilities were ideal for these purposes.

Another representative of the centre noted that although the facilities were welcome *'Its not all about resources. You need to have the right kind of people to encourage them [learners] in'*. She also concurred with the view that people in touch with the local community and trusted by it had a key role to play.

The representative of an organisation working with young people reiterated the view that the most important factor was the need for the community itself to have a say in what kind of learning was provided. At the same time she felt that learning activities should be delivered at accessible locations. It should be recognised that those who needed to be recruited were unlikely to attend a centre away from their own locality, at least until they had progressed through other types of learning.

## 10. Developing Community Schools

The research team asked respondents to outline what they considered were the key attributes of a community school and to elaborate on how the concept could be applied in the Pen-y-dre catchment area to the benefit of both school-aged pupils and the wider community.

### 10.1 Notions of Community Schools

There was considerable agreement that a community school should be an institution which was an integral part of the life of the area it served, open to the community as far as possible and one of which people living in an area felt a sense of ownership.

A representative of an organisation with a strategic overview of post-16 education and training felt that a community school should be one which had a *'sense of openness and which engaged with the learning activities and needs of the whole community'*.

A senior manager at Pen-y-dre High School said that a community school should contribute to the regeneration of the area it served. A teacher at the school believed that a community school was one which offered learning pathways *'from the cradle to the grave'* and which offered a range of adult courses which made use of the talents of the staff and the school's facilities. Another said that one of the aims of a community school should be to work with partner organisations within the locality to develop capacity for learning. For example, community learning mentors should be encouraged as a means of promoting learning both in the community and among young people and it was felt that many of the young people themselves could take on this role.

It was argued that the curriculum of a community school should also take account of the needs of the community. This should include developing the soft skills of staff and pupils by building on the work being developed with sixth form pupils through the Welsh Bac and cascading it into the other phases in the school.

One of the primary school headteachers described a community school as one which was aware of the community it served and involved in its life. This meant acknowledging a wider role than *'simply to teach children'*. The school should also take account of the social side of pupils' lives by developing a *'community network'* and facilities which could provide support for them throughout their lives. Another headteacher said that the school *'should be at the heart of the community and be the heart of lifelong learning'*.

According to a representative of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, community schools should emphasise positive achievements as it was important that it did not '*set people up to fail*'. Another representative of the centre believed that the school should contribute to the process of enabling local people to drive the regeneration of the area. He felt that cooperation between a range of partners should be encouraged as a means of maximising the potential of all bodies and agencies in the locality.

A representative of the National Council – ELWa felt that a community school should be one that was open throughout the year for all those who wished to engage in learning activities and that there was a great potential in using outreach methods to attract learners and linking with local employers to develop opportunities for their employees.

She also felt that the school should build on its existing links with the community to expand provision for pupils at the school, for example, in delivering workplace and other provision under the 14-19 Pathways programme. She also felt that community schools had a key role to play in promoting the health agenda.

## 10.2 Visions for Community Schools

Respondents were asked to identify what factors had to be in place to develop effective community schools in the Pen-y-dre catchment area.

### **Role of different partners**

There was considerable agreement among those interviewed that a range of statutory and voluntary bodies had key roles to play in the development of community schools. It was noted that bodies had different approaches and expertise which could be used to complement the work of others. This called for open dialogue between different bodies and a willingness to learn from one another. It was felt that the partners should not only be those with an expertise in education and training or working with young people but should include a broader range of bodies, such as those concerned with health.

### **A new approach**

A representative of the regeneration trust noted that the provision of facilities alone is not sufficient to develop community schools and that strategies to engage non-learners in the lifelong learning process should be examined. He maintained that to do so required an approach which:

- ♦ tackles the issue of dispositional barriers
- ♦ breaks the cycle of non-learners through ensuring that all experience of learning is a positive one.



Otherwise, he believed ‘all we can look forward to is attracting residents who are either already engaged in learning at some distance from home and/or the ‘moderately’ switched-off learners who have the capacity but not the inclination to learn due to situational and/or institutional barriers’.

He maintained that ‘*wasteful competition*’ between providers should be avoided and that Pen-y-dre school should become a ‘*genuine community school*’. For this to happen, he argued for the school to ‘*demonstrate its relevance to what the Community is seeking to achieve through Communities First*’. He added that there was a ‘*need for Pen-y-dre High School to establish its relevance to the Community and for the community to establish its relevance to Pen-y-dre High School*’.

A member of the Pen-y-dre High School SMT said that it was critical that the school and the community worked together. For this to occur schools ‘*needed to reposition themselves as community-facing schools*’ and to learn new ways of doing things and to guard against ‘*becoming isolationist*’.

Another member of staff felt that much closer links should be forged between the school’s governing structure and the local community through bodies such as the residents’ boards. In particular, the need to engage with parents was recognised. These views were echoed by a primary school headteacher who felt that schools needed to be able to engage with parents when the children were at a very young age. Another said that there was a need to develop parents’ confidence in coming into the school by ‘*making them comfortable in the school*’ and delivering activities through a ‘*non-threatening style*’.

A representative of an organisation working with young people felt that it was important that community schools adopted an inter-agency approach in order to use the different approaches developed by an array of organisations and bodies as a means of engaging the community. There was also a need for ‘*the issues of the community to be known and understood*’.

## **Management**

The need for an appropriate management structure that enabled all partners to contribute to the development of the notion of community schools in a way which maximised the potential of each organisation was mentioned by several of those who was interviewed. It was also noted that there was a need to ensure that the schools in particular had personnel, at senior level, who could contribute to this work without having to balance the responsibility against the demands of other tasks.

## **Freedom of action**

A senior member of staff at one school believed that community schools should enjoy sufficient freedom of action to enable them to respond flexibly to the needs of the areas which they served. It was argued that a model developed in one context would not be appropriate in others and that ‘*micro-management*

*from the centre*’ would not work and that decisions should be taken instead at a neighbourhood level

### **Curriculum issues**

Several interviewees felt that there was a need to address a broad range of issues relating to the curriculum and management of the school which, it was felt, should enable the community to develop a sense of ownership of the school. A representative of an environmental group felt community schools should adopt a *‘less structured, less formal approach’* adding that *‘there’s obviously something not right with the school system if so many people are slipping through ... with no basic skills’*. The representative felt that the curriculum should be broadened to include more outdoor practical experiences for pupils, including opportunities to engage with the community and take up issues identified by local people, and added that there was considerable scope to develop curriculum enhancement courses in conjunction with schools.

### **Appropriate Professional Development**

Several respondents noted that the development of community schools had implications for staff professional development and that the needs and the distinctive approaches of community schools should be recognised both within initial teacher training and through continuous professional development. These should address issues like understanding and promoting:

- ◆ family literacy
- ◆ soft skills
- ◆ parenting.

### **Resources**

Staff at Pen-y-dre High School said that sustained funding should be available to enable them to develop their role as a community school over a period of time. Several primary/junior school headteachers said that they were fully committed to the notion of community schools but warned that it should be done in a way which did not increase the workload of headteachers and other staff which was already onerous. Many felt that asking them to undertake additional responsibilities would undermine the effectiveness of the process. The issue of capacity was particularly evident in one school which was currently experiencing severe problems caused by a variety of factors. The representative of that school said that this was having an effect on the school’s ability to engage with community issues.

One primary/junior school headteacher advocated the appointment of a dedicated teacher with responsibility for developing the community side of the school. This would enable the primary school to *‘develop the school as a major source of community life’*.

## **Buildings**

Another headteacher felt that issues like the physical design of buildings should be considered. This included making them more secure and vandal-proof and spending money to develop facilities for parents, such as a learning resource centre. The quality of the environment should also be enhanced to make the school and its grounds a more pleasant environment, for example by improving the quality of lighting inside buildings and re-decorating.

Another headteacher also referred to the problem of vandalism and warned that security issues must be tackled. According to the headteacher, adult education classes in her school had been abandoned due to damage to cars during the evenings and activities organised by the PTA had to be held elsewhere because of those problems.

## **A Culture of Consultation**

A representative of the 3Gs Development Trust warned that whatever provision was made should be appropriate and meet the community's needs. This should include listening to young people and obtaining their views as a means of engaging them in the learning process. The staff at Pen-y-dre referred to the need to use existing structures within the school (such as the School Council, Year Councils and Class Councils) as a means of obtaining views on issues such as learning and to use pupil feedback to improve teaching and learning.

## **10.3 Cooperation Between Community Schools**

One of the officers with a strategic role for post-16 education referred to the notion of developing a Lifelong Learning Campus in the County Borough on a hub and spoke basis. The representative felt that this would be possible given the size of the County Borough and the communications which exist within it. The vision for a Lifelong Learning campus emphasised the need for it to *'provide for the diverse learning and training needs of Merthyr Tydfil'* and included developing a range of community-based adult learning provision, which would seek to engage learners, particularly those which had not traditionally accessed post-compulsory education or training. It was felt that community schools had an important contribution to make to this agenda.

# Case Study 1

## Background

The school is situated in a major urban area in Wales, and serves an area containing wards which are included in the Communities First programme. The school was established in 2001 as a result of the merger of two secondary schools, both of which had experienced significant reductions in the number of pupils on roll during the previous decade.

The school has developed a range of initiatives designed to enrich pupils' experiences through extra-curricular and out-of-hours activities. These provide opportunities to engage in a broad range of sports, cultural and recreational pursuits.

### Out-of-School Activities

NOF funding had been received for out-of-school activities which included:

- ♦ a camera club
- ♦ a homework club
- ♦ trampolining
- ♦ choir
- ♦ go-carting.

The activities were coordinated by the youth worker in conjunction with the school's Deputy Headteacher. They were held in the youth wing in a part of the school where no classes took place.

Alternative curriculum provision has also been developed at the school in recent years. One of the programmes focuses on working with a group of 15 year 11 girls who are required to attend school for two days each week but who are taken out of mainstream classes for the other days. The pupils pursue OCN accredited qualifications in areas such as:

- ♦ internet surfing
- ♦ interview techniques
- ♦ health and beauty.

Clear benefits were reported for the participating pupils. It was found that their motivation had improved and that they were likely to gain qualifications at the

end of year 11 which would probably not have occurred had they continued in mainstream classes. According to one member of staff, they would have '*opted out and left with nothing*'. The programme was supported by a dedicated LSA who was responsible for ensuring that the pupils concerned attended school.

However, several members of staff had expressed concern about the programme. Some felt that the school was surrendering to poor behaviour and that this would have repercussions for discipline in the school. These views were said to have mellowed somewhat as the benefits to the pupils and the school in general became apparent.

According to the headteacher the disaffection of the pupils on the alternative curriculum programme was affecting the attitudes of some other pupils. He advocated a thorough examination of the National Curriculum in order to ensure that it was relevant to pupils and provided them with opportunities to succeed. He felt that this should include practical skills such as gardening, painting and decorating and similar activities.

### **Engagement with the Community**

The headteacher referred to the problems confronting parts of the catchment area which included:

- ◆ the effects of long-term unemployment
- ◆ high crime rates in parts of the area
- ◆ issues relating to poor housing
- ◆ ill-health
- ◆ alcohol and drugs misuse.

At the same time he felt that the community needed to be helped to tackle these issues since the long-term nature of the problems had resulted in a climate of acceptance and low aspiration.

### **Current Engagement as a Community School**

The school was designated as a community school relatively recently. According to the headteacher this was an aspect which needed to be developed further. In his opinion '*joint usage*' with the community was a better term for the current model than a 'community school' and he felt that the school, and others which aspired to become community schools needed to go much further if they were to fulfil the role.

### **Use of Premises**

The school's premises were used for a variety of purposes, including community learning. The headteacher said that he was keen to encourage this aspect as he felt that the buildings were not used fully at present and that a valuable community asset was being under-used.

The school's premises had included a purpose-built youth wing. However, the building has not been used for that purpose for several years, partly because it had become a target for vandals. Other uses had been found for the youth wing, including its current purpose as a technology block. There were plans to use a building on the site as a Youth Information Centre.

### **Staffing and Management**

The community provision at the school was managed by a dedicated member of staff who employed by the local authority's Lifelong Learning department. The postholder has extensive experience of youth and community education. It was felt that this arrangement had overcome some of the problems which could have arisen if the role had been undertaken by one of the school's own staff and combined with another responsibility. Four other members of staff were employed, funded through a variety of partnership arrangements, together with additional administrative support staff.

It was reported that the staff responsible for youth and community work cooperated closely with the school, especially in relation to day-to-day issues and out-of-school activities.

### **Role of the Youth Workers**

Two part-time youth workers, both working for 15 hours each week, have been appointed and worked with pupils at the school. They were employed by the LEA rather than the school and this was felt to be an important distinction. The youth workers had made an important contribution to developing relations with the young people because of the way that the youth service methodology was deployed and had enabled a different relationship to be forged between youth workers and young people. The latter were said to have responded well to their approach and the school had supported the use of these methods.

One of the key features was that senior managers at the school acknowledged and appreciated the contributions which the youth service were making. According to the headteacher the youth workers '*extend what we are trying to do*'. In particular, it was noted that they were adept at developing a relationship with pupils who felt that they were having negative experiences in school.

Although it was intended that the youth workers should develop their work in close conjunction with the school, the youth service ensured that the school did not use the youth worker to undertake duties which should be done by teaching staff.

## Adult Education Provision

Courses for adults were being developed at the school. The range of classes being offered at the site varied from adult basic skills to part-time degree courses. The school worked with a range of partner organisations including the LEA, FE and HE institutions to develop provision off-site. This included the use of a converted house on an estate approximately one mile from the school equipped with computers which were used for taster courses. It was planned to develop this type of provision in other areas.

The type of provision offered in the area included:

- ◆ yoga
- ◆ family history
- ◆ upholstery
- ◆ woodwork
- ◆ cookery
- ◆ languages
- ◆ ICT
- ◆ basic skills.

There was an emphasis on delivering what learners themselves had identified. It was estimated that in excess of 500 adults were taking part, the majority of whom were women, aged 50 and over. Among the reasons cited for taking part were:

- ◆ a feeling of a need to upskill
- ◆ a desire to keep in touch with others
- ◆ ambition to become qualified for a particular post.

## Security Issues

Adult learners did not study alongside pupils. The school said that this issue would need to be discussed if the provision was expanded.

## Definition of Community School

The respondents were asked to define their vision of a community school. One definition which was suggested was ‘a school which is a nucleus of a community and is the first point of contact for adult education and youth work, and a source of broader advice and support’. According to a senior member of staff a community school should be one which encompassed ‘people of all ages learning together and a view of a school as something which is integral not separate from the community’. It was felt that a community school’s facilities should be available from early morning to late at night and should become the ‘hub of a community’. In order to realise this there was a need to

examine developing functions such as locating post offices, doctors' surgeries, health centres, police stations, a crèche, breakfast facilities for the whole community, and other facilities on the school's site. This would attract people into the school where they would see learning and be reminded of its benefits. The school should also have a drop-in centre with the specific aim of promoting social cohesion.



## Case Study 2

### Background

#### Characteristics of the school

The school was a 14-19 co-educational, Comprehensive Community and Technology College in the East Midlands. The LEA in which it was situated had a long history of commitment to community education, and the college has been a community college since it was established in the late 1960s. The college was in the suburbs of a major city, located in the middle of a large, mainly private, residential area, although it also included council housing with some pockets of deprivation. One third of the students attending the college were of Indian or Pakistani origin.

The college was over-subscribed, and attracted students from outside its catchment area. There were 2000 students aged 14-19, including a large sixth form of 1000 students. Approximately 3000 adult learners attended the college, and typically the college facilities were used by 4-5000 people each year for private functions such as weddings and parties.

The college was entering a new phase as it joined the government's Extended Schools programme. This involved increasing provision of services and activities further, often beyond the school day, in order to meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community. The college hoped to become a national leader of extended schools within the next three years.

#### Purpose and mission

The college's development plan outlined the college's ethos as being:

*to enable everyone, but particularly those who have had least benefit from education in the past, to benefit from coherent, accessible, affordable and high quality educational opportunities throughout their lives - offered with a structure of support and progression*

The Vice Principal (Community Education) said that in his view, a community school was about:

*maximising the use of facilities... for the benefits of the local community, and addressing their needs... giving priority to those most in need... We might see ourselves as Robin Hoods, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, in that we will charge those who can afford it, and we will subsidise those people who are in hardship.*

The Community Tutor described the core of a community school's aims as being *'lifelong learning, for everybody, from mums and babies to elderly people'*. In her opinion a community college should be one which was:

*at the heart of the community; here for people of all interests and ages... it should be open for as many hours as possible, and (there should be) all sorts of people mixing... it should be a reflection of society itself.*

### **Management**

The college governing body, comprising approximately eighteen members, met once a term. It included representatives of the teaching staff, the LEA and other locally-elected representatives. It had two sub-committees, one for finance and the other for community, which also met once termly. The first general meeting, held in October, was a public meeting so that local people could raise any issues or concerns that they had about the college.

### **Facilities**

As a Technology College, the college has been equipped with extensive IT facilities, including:

- ◆ a dedicated community IT suite
- ◆ additional computer suites incorporating approximately 600 computers
- ◆ an IT suite, themed as a spaceship.

The themed IT suite was designed mainly for use with pre-school children and their parents but was now also used with children and adults with special needs, as well as teachers in training sessions. There was a range of specialised art and design workshops, as well as classrooms, sports halls and fields and drama facilities, and a dedicated community lounge. All of the school's facilities were available for community use between 3pm and 9pm during weekdays, and also on Saturdays. Most of the facilities were used by the school until 3pm. Some activities and courses were offered during holiday periods.

The college had its own nursery and playgroup, both of which were open to all members of the community.

The college was proud of the quality of its facilities, and undertook at least one major refurbishment programme annually costing between £750,000 – £1m. It was currently developing a new sports complex including a double-sized sports hall with spectator seating to meet the anticipated demand of the sports and recreational needs of the future. Off-site facilities were utilised, such as village and church halls and primary schools, and the college had installed several satellite themed IT suites, for example in a local primary school and in a Red Cross Family Centre, as well as computers in the training room of a local supermarket.

The college had installed CCTV throughout the premises, but had not experienced significant losses of equipment through theft.

## **Community Learning**

### **Adult learners**

The college offered a wide variety of courses for adults, including those leading to qualifications and '*leisure-based activities*', most of which were advertised under the headings of Languages; Art, Craft and Design; Yoga, Health and Feeling Good; Sport, Fitness and Dance, and General Interest.

Courses that lead to qualifications were subsidised by the Learning and Skills Council; leisure-based courses were currently subsidised by the Local Education Authority, and some courses were free of charge. Students were charged between £10 and £92 to attend the courses, which lasted up to 30 weeks. Fee remission was offered to students on benefits and their dependents. In the future all of the central funding will come from the Learning and Skills Council and not the LEA.

The Vice Principal (Community Education) felt that there have been considerable benefits from the presence of adult learners, for example through the improved behaviour of young people attending the college. Although sessions were timetabled so that adult classes ended at a different time from other lessons (to reduce the pressure on corridor space), young people had adapted to sharing facilities with parents with pushchairs and adults in wheelchairs, and showed consideration and care when moving around the college.

### **Adults learning Basic Skills and returning to learn**

The college wanted to 'expand the provision of daytime Literacy and Numeracy courses at all levels from Entry 1 to Level 2' and ran 'First Steps to qualifications' courses, such as 'Pathways to English' and GCSE Maths for adults requiring opportunities to learn Basic Skills. There were also courses designed to encourage people who may not have engaged in formal learning for many years to return to learn. These focused on developing practical skills, such as applying for jobs, and aimed to build learners' confidence in a supportive and friendly environment. Many of these courses were subsidised by the LEA's 'Widening Participation' Fund, and free childcare was offered through the college's nursery or through payment to a childminder where needed.

### **Vulnerable learners**

The college ran courses for vulnerable learners, such as adults with learning difficulties, physical or sensory impairments, or adults recovering from long term mental illness. For example, the college ran an educational and social group providing a range of courses including computing, cookery, arts and crafts, music and basic skills for adults with learning disabilities, for which transport was provided free of charge, if requested.

### **English as a Second Language (ESOL)**

Members of the community whose mother tongue was not English were underrepresented in the college, and the college planned to increase its provision for adults with ESOL needs. It already ran some courses to attract ESOL learners, the most successful of which combined ESOL teaching with computer skills. Tutors felt that the success of this course in part could be because learners felt that this was less stigmatised than courses that focussed solely on English language teaching.

### **Family Learning**

The college ran Family Learning activities both in satellite centres and in the college, enabling parents and children to learn together. In a programme called 'Keeping up with the Children', parents were shown how to help their child with a specific literacy or numeracy activity, or to learn through play. The programme was designed to give parents ideas to extend their children's learning using everyday resources, such as playdough.

Sessions held in the 'Spaceship' themed IT suite gave parents confidence to use popular educational software with their children. Some of the sessions were held on Saturday mornings, specifically for fathers to be able to attend with their children. The 'Dadz and Kidz' project was funded jointly with the Red Cross, who had a specific target of working with single fathers and their children.

The college worked in partnership with a local environmental centre to provide 'Fun Day' activities for families, such as pond-dipping and badger watching.

### **Recruiting learners**

The college was pro-active in its work to attract people who had not traditionally accessed post-compulsory education or training. The college's development plan stated the college's commitment to '*ensure that equality of opportunity and diversity of learners are fundamental to all that the college does*'. It also stated that the college would work to '*eliminate barriers to encourage all reluctant learners to join the college's learning programmes.*'

The learners were targeted primarily in three ways:

- ◆ through the content of the programme of courses and activities on offer
- ◆ in the methods of recruitment employed to attract new learners
- ◆ through partnership working, often involving the use of off-site facilities in the community (see below).

The accessibility of the building and of information, the approachableness of staff and the college's charging policy were all factors which were considered carefully in relation to recruitment.

Community Tutors produced publicity for adults with low levels of literacy, and personally distributed leaflets at the gates of local primary schools, at playgroups, local advice centres and in supermarkets. They talked to potential students as they handed out leaflets, and in this way actively encouraged students who may be anxious about returning to learn. The tutors were themselves local people who had brought up children in the area, and brought the benefits of their own links with the community to the programme.

The college employed some development workers, who worked alongside staff employed by the Local Authority funded by the European Social Fund. Some of the development workers had successfully engaged new learners through a *'slow, gentle process of meeting them in their own homes'*, befriending, supporting and encouraging them and providing students with lifts to the college. Although this was a resource-intensive process, some members of staff felt that this was the only way of engaging some new learners. The Vice Principal commented that it can be helpful to set workers specific targets, such as recruiting a certain number of people for a particular course.

The idea of 'learning champions' was being developed in the college. 'Learning champions' were described as individuals (paid or unpaid) who are actively part of the local community, and who have strong local networks. They act as advocates for the college in recruiting new students, particularly those who might not traditionally access post-compulsory education, or those people who live further away from the college, for example in outlying villages. Staff felt that using existing students in such a way was one of the most effective means of publicity, and an important way of involving learners in the life of the college and the community.

### **Access to opportunities**

The college was committed to providing the facilities necessary to enable learners to overcome barriers to participation. This included the provision of a childcare service at the college. In addition to enabling parents to attend classes the playgroup also helped some of them to begin to become familiar

with the college, which gave them the confidence to take up learning opportunities themselves.

The college located satellite facilities, such as IT suites, in places designed to reach new learners, such as primary schools in the most deprived areas, family centres, village and church halls and supermarkets. Members of staff were keen to further develop college outposts in the centre of the community: *'we need to help people to combine education with their lives, for example by locating (learning opportunities) in local shopping areas. This is particularly important for people who don't have cars, and can't necessarily access the main college site easily.'*

The college was aware of the fact that its current opening hours restricted some potential college users. The needs of shift workers were being considered, and in the future the college may offer courses through the night, either at the college or elsewhere.

Careful attention had been paid to the physical accessibility of the college, making it as user-friendly as possible, with careful signage and sufficient parking. Members of frontline staff ensured that verbal information about courses was clear, and delivered in a friendly manner.

### **Young people**

The college had recently started operating a programme called 'Curriculum Extra', targeted at students attending the college to participate in extra-curricular activities. The Vice Principal (Community Education) commented that feedback from universities had suggested that students have a better chance if they are able to show that they are able to manage their time well outside of school, as well as inside. They had enrolled 20 per cent of the sixth form in a variety of courses, for example First Aid, food hygiene and childminding, as well as GCSEs not offered in the daytime, such as Punjabi and Spanish.

There had been a recent shift in the culture of learning at the college, with students attending the college in the evenings alongside community adults. According to the Vice-principal it was intended that:

*sixth formers will suddenly notice that the courses will be attended by 50 per cent students and 50 per cent adults this time next year - it could be their parents working alongside them.... That will engender a notion of discipline, they'll be sharing expertise with adults... and that can only be a good thing for their personal development... I think it will make (students) more community-minded because they've got to do it in their own time; if they've signed up and don't turn up they'll be tracked down... It's another lesson of life, really.*

There had been a recent county-wide reorganisation of the youth service, resulting in a more separate relationship with the college. In the past the youth

service had played an important role in the life of the college, for example by working off-site in the re-engagement of young people who had become excluded or disenfranchised. There had also been some differences in approach between youth workers and teachers, for example to issues such as tackling drug dependency, which had led to some tensions. It was suggested that one possible way of aiding the integration of the youth service into the college could be through youth workers taking on tutor groups.

### **Younger children**

The college had an on-site nursery that had recently expanded its provision to offer full and part-time care for up to 32 children per day, aged between three months and five years. It was open between 8am and 6pm, providing 'wrap-around childcare', and was offered for staff and students at the college, as well as all other members of the community. Occasionally a girl of school age had a baby whilst at the college, and the proximity of the nursery enabled the college to help support the young mother whilst she remained within formal education. The nursery had its own garden and paved play area, and regularly utilised college facilities such as the Spaceship IT suite (designed for children aged nine months and upwards) and minibuses.

The college also had a 26-place playgroup for children aged three to five, which ran every week day from 9.30-12.00. Most of the places were funded by the Local Education Authority. Children up to year 6 were also provided with after school care until 6pm; they were collected from school and given a light snack before being collected by their parents. The college also ran a playscheme for children up to the age of ten during the summer and Easter holidays.

### **Community groups**

A wide range of community groups which meet individuals' social needs utilise college facilities. Community Tutors had set up groups for particular client groups, such as older or physically handicapped people, which had since become independent and were now successfully run by individuals in the groups. The membership of other groups, such as Mums-to-be and babies, changed more rapidly and so Community Tutors remained involved. Some groups were delivered by the college off site, such as a group for people with learning disabilities at a local day centre. Sometimes the group used college facilities, and people were offered a choice of three educational activities, such as healthy living, music therapy, IT, sport or cooking. In the summer, the group's activities focused around walks, the park and public houses.

Various other special interest community groups regularly met at the college, such as needlework group, choirs and church groups.

### **Private use**

The premises were regularly rented out for large private functions, such as weddings and parties.

### **Partnership working**

The college had a positive and pro-active attitude to networking and working with partners. The Vice Principal commented that:

*One of the things that I do think has paid dividend is networking and making as many contacts as possible.... So, for example, ... I chair an early years partnership in the area. I sit on the local authority's Early Years Partnership and that led to ... a three day placement with the DfES...Last year I had a three day placement at the Learning and Skills Council.*

In this way, he explained, he had been able to make contacts, find out about the funding mechanisms of sponsors and about key developments in policy concerning community provision.

The college was part of a sub-county Community Education Partnership and worked specifically in a strategic partnership with two other lead providers, also community colleges, as well as other schools. The Community Tutor described the importance of the 'spirit of cooperation' that developed through working with other schools and colleges over many years. It was important, she added, to know which courses other colleges were offering and to plan together accordingly. For example, some Further Education colleges were able to run IT courses more cheaply than the college, which had impacted on student numbers. The college worked alongside the local FE college to contribute to the IT components of its HND in Childcare course, and also with a nearby college located in a more deprived area to provide modules which the other college is unable to provide. Educational Action Zone funding was transferred to fund these courses.

College staff networked with other colleges through area meetings to ensure that all aspects of a particular learning need, such as basic skills, were available in the area. They also attended various professional specialist interest groups, such as the Family Learning Network, and GAIN (the Guidance Advice and Information Network) which provided support and information and helped ensure that the college kept abreast of legislative changes and requirements, such as those in the Disability Discrimination Act. Benefits of networking included the sharing of ideas and good practice, and the opportunity to discuss issues as they arise.

The college worked with voluntary agencies, local primary schools, an environmental centre and churches, Social Services and private businesses, many of which hosted courses or activities organised by the college, and some of which housed satellite outposts, such as IT suites, provided by the college.

Once a week, community tutors at the college attended a voluntary organisation called Helping Hands, which provided advice on a range of issues, including housing and pensions, to local people. This gave the tutors



the chance to talk with people about courses, activities and facilities offered at the college and other colleges in the area. The college also worked closely with the local volunteer bureau. The bureau recruited and police checked volunteers, and matched their skills with the needs of the college, such as teaching basic skills.

Two major local employers had recently entered into partnership with the college. The companies would pay half of the costs of any courses undertaken by their employees, and the remaining cost would be met by the college. The project was supported by the Learning and Skills Council, and the funding would not be restricted to any particular courses. The college had also installed a number of computers in the training room at one of the businesses' premises and courses would be offered there for employees, which would be linked to the company's appraisal system. In the future it was anticipated that other members of the community would be able to benefit from the convenience of attending courses inside the store.

The college was starting to work with foster carers and with families who did not have IT facilities at home, through departments of Social Services, such as the Child Inclusion Team. Social Services had paid for the hire of the IT suite and tutor on occasions, and children had attended the course as a prize for entering a competition. The college also worked closely with a local day centre, providing courses and facilities for clients with learning disabilities. It was also considering providing health care on the premises in the future.

Discussing the nature of partnership work, the Vice-Principal commented:

*Community education is all about 'can do' and meeting needs. So in relationship to partners, it's what are their needs? and how can we help them achieve them? - especially when it meets our needs as well... If you establish the confidence and trust, it's amazing what you can do.*

### **Quality assurance**

The college had set quality assurance procedures at all levels, which were managed by the Quality Assurance Manager. The college produced its own customised evaluation forms for each course. The evaluation forms were designed by the course tutors and asked students to assess their skills at the beginning and then at the end of a course.

The Quality Assurance manager also set targets for attendance and retention. If a student did not attend a course for two weeks, the college would know that there was a problem, and the student would be unlikely to come back unless steps were taken:

*We try and engage with them and talk and see if there's a problem. We ring them up, write letters...to try and re-engage them...say we really want them back.*

The college had a rolling programme of observing tutors, and providing constructive feedback to them on their performance. Feedback from students was also being sought through the development of Learner Forums.

The college had instigated a 'mystery shopper' system. Researchers in the guise of learners tested the quality of the learners' experience, and highlighted strengths and weaknesses.

The college produced a termly newsletter, which in the future would include individual success stories of adult learners, for example.

### **Lessons learnt**

Staff at the college were asked 'What advice would you offer other areas who wanted to develop community schools? What are the main lessons that you have learnt?' Some of their responses are given below.

Vision, leadership and a willingness to take risks were key ingredients mentioned by members of staff interviewed. They felt that it was important to 'think as broad and off the planet as possible' and to:

*Go for glorified failure rather than soft success ... In other words, go for the stars and don't worry about not achieving it. We all make mistakes. Don't go for the safe option of organising a few yoga classes and keep fit classes. Really push the boat out.*

All staff felt that a community college needs to have an understanding of the nature and needs of the community at its core. A needs analysis should be completed before courses are offered, to see the type of courses and activities that local people want to engage in, when and how they want to engage in them and at what cost. Good practitioners should be sought out to provide help with planning.

At the same time a community college needs the complete support and commitment of the principal, staff and students. Staff emphasised the need to develop an appropriate culture in the college. One member of staff suggested that the term 'learning centre' rather than 'community college' might be more appropriate:

*By that I mean whether you are a child of statutory age, a sixth former, a pre-school child, an adult, you are coming to a learning centre... we are about something that is one. And I think that has to stem from the headteacher.... If the headteacher says 'we are a community centre and our resources belong to everyone, whether OHPs, computers... they belong to everyone. Nothing is closeted... they are for everyone's use.' Once you break down that barrier you find you have gone someway to having a community approach.*

A dedicated community team was also considered to be an important ingredient in the success of a community college. The experience of one

member of staff had led him to the conclusion that tutors suited to teaching young people and adults could be quite different:

*Some of the best people (to be community tutors) are those members of the community who have a commitment to their interest, whether that be needlecraft, computers or coastal navigation. They tend to be the best teachers, if they have a real enthusiasm.*

Local people need to be involved in the development of the community college from the outset. According to one interviewee it was important to:

*Network and get to know as many people as possible. Organise forums in the college, get people talking and forge links with local people. And employ local people who know the area... if they know how to get into people's homes and talk to them and be 'Learning Champions' they're invaluable.*

Consideration should be shown in particular to members of the local community living in close proximity of the college, regarding noise, litter and parking at the college and in the surrounding area, for example. Sometimes community schools struggle to overcome adults' perceptions that schools exist purely for teenagers, who in turn can be viewed as threatening and intimidating by other members of the community. Exercises such as litter-picks by students can help to build positive relations with local people.

Support mechanisms also need to be in place for harder to reach students. For example, Learning Champions and development workers can be employed to ensure that harder to reach students are engaged in the life of the college. Childcare, a flexible charging structure including some free courses and transport need to be available to open up the college more widely.

Understanding the funding structures, targets and agendas of sponsors were also noted as being fundamental to the success of any community school. Experience in the college suggested that funders tend to be generous with future funding when the college had helped them to deliver the sponsors' targets.

The college had paid careful attention to its publicity and marketing, to maximise the number of potential college users reached. A marketing exercise established that three stages of publicity were needed to maximise the number of potential learners attracted to the college. Publicity began with door-to-door publicity of 26,000 households in July, then flyers were dropped through doors throughout the summer, followed by a flyer at the end of August detailing which courses still had vacancies. Postcards for potential students to send to the college requesting a brochure are also distributed widely.

Staff at the college described a shift in approach to adult education in recent years, away from the notion of 'night school'. Consequently, it is important

that schools are able to offer a significant number of facilities for community use during the daytime, as well as twilight and evening hours.

## APPENDIX 1: Existing Facilities

During the course of this research respondents were asked to provide details of current facilities within the Pen-y-dre catchment area which were or could be used by the community, including those used for learning or training. The respondents referred to:

- ◆ Forsythia Close
- ◆ Gellifaelog Junior School
- ◆ Goetre Junior School
- ◆ Gurnos Community Centre
- ◆ Gwaunfarren Primary School
- ◆ Gwernllwyn Junior School
- ◆ ICI Pavilion
- ◆ Johnny Owen Centre
- ◆ Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- ◆ Pant-y-scallog Primary School
- ◆ Pen-y-dre High School
- ◆ Pen-y-dre Youth Centre
- ◆ Safer Merthyr premises

## APPENDIX 2: The Sample

NFER researchers conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with pupils at five primary schools and at Pen-y-dre High School. In addition, interviews were held with young people at a drop-in centre in Merthyr Tydfil and those attending the Merthyr Tydfil Summer Skills programme.

The majority of the primary school pupils were in year 6. The sample included those who were in year 6 in July 2003 and those who had entered year 6 in September, 2003. All of the pupils interviewed in July 2003 were intending to attend Pen-y-dre High School the following September.

Groups of young people were interviewed at two locations. The first was a drop-in centre in the town centre. Most of the young people were aged over 14 and a majority were from the Gurnos area. All of them said that they attended the centre on a regular basis, usually four times each week. According to one, *'it's something to do, it keeps me out of trouble'*. Others said that they saw it as the main place to use facilities such as pool, play-station, and to listen to music and to dance. According to one there was nowhere else where he would go.

Interviews were held with the following staff at Pen-y-dre High School:

- ◆ the headteacher
- ◆ the active citizenship manager
- ◆ the Welsh-Bac coordinator
- ◆ the school bursar
- ◆ the head of physical education.

Interviews were also conducted at five junior or primary schools within the Pen-y-dre catchment area. These were:

- ◆ Gellifaelog Junior School
- ◆ Goetre Junior School
- ◆ Gwaunfarren Primary School
- ◆ Gwernllwyn Junior School
- ◆ Pant-y-scallog Primary School.

The research team approached and interviewed a range of organisations which are engaged in activities within the Pen-y-dre High School catchment area or

which work with young people in the County Borough. These included representatives of:

- ◆ 3Gs Development Trust
- ◆ Freshstart Programme
- ◆ Groundwork
- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil CBC Housing and Technical Directorate, Recreation and Sports Development section
- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil CCET
- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Group
- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil Youth and Community Education Department
- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil Youth Partnership
- ◆ National Council –ELWa
- ◆ Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- ◆ OASIS
- ◆ YPAG.

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