

Practitioner Briefing 1: Adult Learning and Vocational Training

This briefing provides tips to practitioners in West London and UK to highlight best practices in social inclusion through employment. It is drawn from a wider research on *Good Practices in Social Inclusion through Employment*, using examples of Roma integration. The study is published as a separate paper for policy makers together with map of relevant organisations and further reading. The study is a part of the ESF funded project *New Pathways to Work in West London*, led by Ealing Council (2009-2013).

Summary: West London has a very complex and diverse range of vulnerable groups facing barriers to work. Many people in these groups have low skills and qualifications, and struggle to access adequately paid work in London's competitive and high-skilled job market. A key priority is improving engagement of disadvantaged groups in adult learning and vocational training. As we have described in the main paper, it is crucial that behind the individual practices are an integrated approach, multi-disciplinary working, participatory design, combining mainstreaming and targeting and creating an inclusive environment.

Context

A key issue for West London is the gap between low qualifications and training of a sizable proportion of the available workforce and the demand by employers for skills at an increasingly high level. The labour market is polarised between high-skilled and low-skilled, and competition for work is strong as jobs in London often attract people from wide areas. People with low skills who are in employment are often stuck at low pay. This is problematic given London's high cost of living. Alongside inactive and unemployed people on benefits who struggle to access the labour market, there are persistent pockets of deprivation and poverty in West London. There are also specific educational needs among Black, Minority and Ethnic (BAME) communities in West London, such as language learning and barriers in recognition of foreign qualifications and skills.

About the Practice

Key challenges for West London are to ensure vulnerable groups acquire the necessary skills to successfully compete in the labour market and to tackle worklessness and deprivation. This includes engagement of vulnerable groups in adult learning and vocational training, and provision of relevant courses that link to the needs of the local labour market and employers.

How can this be done?

The steps taken by practitioners on the ground can include:

- Working closely with specialist organisations and community members to review adult education services and improve accessibility for certain groups.
- Having dynamic and innovative ways of assessing people's skills: relying less on formal criteria, seeing people's strengths and potential, and valuing different kinds of experience.
- Offer training in key 'soft-skills' required by employers: tailor these to individuals, offering different levels and teaching styles.
- Supporting people to access language learning such as local English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes.
- Using informal and interactive teaching styles to help engage adults that have been out-of education, had negative school experiences or are intimidated by formal classroom learning.

Delivering training in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as part of a progression package: Action Acton. People are recruited to the project through voluntary organisations, Jobcentre Plus, posters at key locations such as supermarkets and libraries, social media and word of mouth. Learners' engagement is maintained by making the courses as interesting as possible through a variety of interactive teaching methods, but participants are normally self-motivated by default: 80 % achieve the ESOL qualification as they see the course as a step forward in achieving their aspirations. These aspirations include job seeking but also helping their children with learning, making friends, using resources and generally living more easily. Even though the course is just 3 months, many learners who participate become more confident, find jobs, or continue learning through various other higher and further education courses. Learners are also engaged by the provision of travel advice in London on public transport, museum visits and improved IT skills. This particularly helps new arrivals' integration through better orientation and awareness of local facilities. In the longer term, learners become more independent and start to feel more at home in the UK. The project also links with other work at Action Acton, such as access training for migrants who were teachers in their home countries or want to become teachers, providing a stepping stone into further teaching qualifications.

- Delivering courses that are specifically targeted to build on existing traditions and skills in certain communities e.g. construction, craft, sewing and music in Roma communities.
- Training people in skills and professions that help support other members of their communities e.g. health mediators, social care assistants, youth workers, teaching, community liaison workers.
- Offering in-employment vocational training and apprenticeships in real work environments, where people gain practical employment skills alongside education.

Combining Business Development and Developmental Work: Business Centre Nova Zagora-Bulgaria. The Business Centre works with both minority groups and majority populations in the town of Nova Zagora. It carries out a range of inter-connected activities in order to support employability. Along with help starting a business in the form of training, consultations and credits, it also offers a range of vocational qualification courses relevant to the labour market. An example is training in construction which is in high demand by employers and links to traditional Roma occupations. It also runs a 'crafts house' where people can develop craft skills as well as opportunities to develop IT and organic farming skills. A key approach of the centre is disadvantaged groups training in civil skills, such as in local governance and legislation, hand-in-hand with vocational skills training. The idea is that civil skills empower people to defend their rights in achieving better living conditions, which will help open up more vocational opportunities locally. In order to address the specific social exclusion barriers faced by the Roma, such as early school leaving and language barriers, the business centre works closely with the local by employing community mediators and trusted community teachers.

- Deliver courses within communities in geographic locations and meeting points that groups regularly use e.g. community centres, homes, cafes, churches and mosques.
- Offering part-time courses, distance or e-learning that can be combined with work or caring responsibilities.
- Provision of affordable or free child-care to help engage low-income mothers and adults with caring responsibilities.

Providing training in areas that are of interest to the community: GRT Achievement Service Ealing. Situated in Ealing which has a sizable Gypsy, Roma and Traveler population (GRT), this service provides a number of 'Taster Courses' for local GRT community members. The aim is to encourage further uptake of skills and training and to provide them with practical and useable skills. Beauty Therapy and hairdressing are of interest to a lot of young women in contact with the service, so they have designed a specific taster course to help them consider pursuing training in this field. It also gives them an opportunity to meet new people and have fun whilst learning in a relaxed environment. The course is delivered by a local Traveler woman who passed her GNVQ Beauty Therapy exams and who acts as an inspiration as well as a tutor to the young women she teaches. Promoting positive role models from within the Traveller Communities is felt to be important in raising aspirations and improve achievement. Other access courses include: Cookery to promote healthy eating and to celebrate Traveler's culture and traditions by using old family recipes and cooking methods; basic IT courses including email and online publishing; driving theory tuition, as driving is seen as an essential skill for young Travelers entering the job market; training in carpentry, building and handyman skills which is an area of interest for male Travelers. All these courses encourage participants to engage with further qualifications so that they acquire a skill which can be applied to work based settings.

- Facilitating better recognition of skills and qualifications of people from outside of the EU: creating guidelines, working with employers or giving information and support to help people access conversion courses.

- Providing holistic case-management support to address people’s wider needs that prevent them from engaging in learning e.g. health, housing, family and caring responsibilities.
- Active outreach and home-visiting, ideally by trusted community members, to promote available courses through word-of-mouth recommendations.

Training of minority representatives as community workers: Training of minority representatives as community workers can be effective in engaging disadvantaged communities. The UNDP funded SANE Project in Bulgaria where Roma people were trained to work as carers is a good example. It was often used by Roma grandmothers who would be paid to take care of grandchildren or other family members. This then allowed their daughters to go out to work. This was successful for the Roma because it made sense to them in terms of their family structures and needs¹. This practice was also used successfully in other Bulgarian social inclusion programmes in health and employment, funded by the ROMED Programme of the Council of Europe.² Community mediators were employed as a link between local groups, services and policy-makers. They know the needs of local communities and are able to communicate these to decision makers whilst at the same time translating the often bureaucratic language of rules, procedures and forms into the ‘common-sense’ language of the local community. Since December 2012 the ROMED Programme is active in the UK as well, training 27 Roma representatives from the main EU nationalities to work with Local Authorities. Finally, the Roma Support Group in West London and Free Youth Centre-Vidin in Bulgaria both use volunteering as an opportunity for Roma people to experience a work environment, develop ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ work-related skills, to expand their social networks and also to find a place to belong.

Making this Work Locally

To help practitioners implement this practice or improve existing work, there are some key success factors and also challenges to consider

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips on overcoming the obstacles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and ESOL classes need to be geographically and financially accessible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding of free ESOL classes may not continue post 2014, due to public sector cuts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for alternative sources of funding, EU Programmes provide such an opportunity and they are not at risk of cuts at present. Some of them, like ESF are currently changing procedures to allow for smaller organisations on the ground to apply competitively.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering training on different levels, using different formats and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with uncertain immigration status, lack of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a careful needs assessment to identify barriers and ways to overcome them. • Develop in parallel advocacy and legal advice services to help with status.

¹ See http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/capacity-development/social-assistance-for-new-employment-undp-bulgaria/CDG_case_stories_Bulgaria.pdf

² See http://www.zdravenmediator.net/en/index.php?page_type=text&page_id=60

Success factors	Challenges to consider	Tips on overcoming the obstacles
teaching styles, to better tailor to individuals needs e.g. with language classes.	documentation, no recourse to public funds, or asylum seekers can experience barriers in accessing ESOL classes and adult education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a portfolio in which each course leads to a progression. • Develop links with FE colleges and universities and explore opportunities for scholarships specifically targeting disadvantaged groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through NGOs already embedded in communities to access people that are excluded and marginalised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach and specific community engagement work can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build in time and resources in projects specifically dedicated to outreach and community engagement. • Although internet options are increasingly used by everyone, the most efficient ways of connecting to minority groups is by identifying key locations where representatives come together: churches, parks, pubs and cafes. • Consider home visits and what the best non-obtrusive ways to conduct them are.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining vocational training with placements in real work environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some work programmes do not place people in real jobs e.g. no options to becoming employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for alternative funding streams for job placements, for example EU Programmes and programmes of the Open Society Foundations. • Provide accompanying mentoring schemes to help with adaptation and building networks that can lead to further employment following the internships.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational training has to be tied to the needs of employers, local demands for certain vocations and skills shortages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placements can be low-skilled and do not develop employability (e.g. street sweeping), it can divert people who want to avoid this type of work into not claiming benefits and into the informal economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study carefully the employers' needs, identify large employers and deliver targeted training to matching candidates. • Offer placements as a part of a developmental portfolio in which the placements are not an end in themselves but a step towards further progression.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive work needs to take place to engage employers to host apprenticeships, vocational and in-work training schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that demand often outstrips supply in London's competitive job market, it can be difficult getting employers on board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do research the needs of the local employers and tailor training to these. • Organise dedicated meetings with employers to develop arguments for the benefits of these schemes. • Use positive examples and success stories from elsewhere. • Organise Job Fairs in combination with the above work to introduce in person the candidates and their skills, but to also give a chance to employers to advertise their opportunities. • Some funding streams allow for covering an average salary for the intern, which in effect means that the employer saves about three-six salaries for a high quality service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be a long-term strategy to train and support people into particular vocations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing long-term policies can be a challenge given changing funding climates and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategic plan to which the organisation sticks with some flexibility. • Look into options for alternative funding to support this strategic plan, e.g. linking to corporate social responsibility schemes of businesses.

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e.g. as health and social care workers.	political priorities.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal and community learning can be a 'route into' further employment training by engaging learners and getting them used to learning environments e.g. sports, arts, cooking & sowing groups etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It takes considerable time to build up trust and relationships with communities to deliver these activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in time and resources in projects for this. Identify and engage with local leaders. Make sure you regularly visit and immerse yourself in the local community to experience their problems and to celebrate their successes in their way. Turn your offices into space for the community, which they can use the way they need to: talk to members and ensure regular feedback on how are you doing and what else is needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free or part-funded courses, loans and grant bursaries to enable those on low-incomes to access training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recession - means that funding and resources are more limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look into EU funding streams and corporate social responsibility programmes of businesses. Speak about these challenges and organise the community to support you in your campaign.

These briefings are prepared by a team at the Tavistock Institute: Laura Stock, Dr Milena Stateva, Dr Kerstin Junge. The briefings are accompany a Research Paper under the title Social Inclusion through Education: Learning from Roma Integration. You are receiving these briefings because we have identified you as a key service provider. To request the paper and the other four briefings or if you do not want to receive further communication from us, please email us at: hello@tavinststitute.org