



Macc Webinar: The Past, Present and Future of Adult Education in Manchester.

25 June 2020

Delivered by Dan Shercliff, Ryan Ellershaw and Kim Mayall-Birds from Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) joined by Cilla Ross from the Co-Op College.

In the aftermath of the First World War, adult education was recognised as a 'permanent national necessity' by the Ministry of Reconstruction who had been tasked with 'rebuilding national life on a better and more durable foundation.' In 2020 we again find ourselves with the need to 'rebuild' and adult education has a role to play. However, Covid-19 has led adult education providers to deliver a great deal of their provision online and many of these approaches are here to stay.

This webinar looked at:

- The power of adult education to enrich lives and bring communities together (lessons from the past)
- How adult education providers have responded to Covid-19.
- What adult education might look like in 20/21 and beyond.
- Different types of online learning and their benefits (it isn't just clicking through online quizzes!)
- Making online learning accessible for people with low digital skills.
- Finding the right course for you, your organisation and your beneficiaries.

Participants were asked to think about the following:

How can adult education providers and VCSE providers collaborate to enable Manchester to build back better?

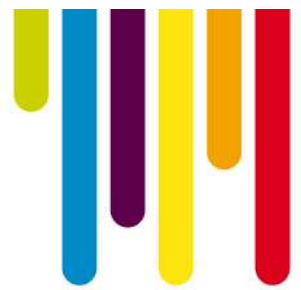
It has been a perennial problem for many years, An agreement is needed with learners ... accept it - manage expectations!

Not just a blank sheet of paper - ensure we identify what we have already - pool resources - create sustainable networks and links in a co-ordinated way

To my mind, adult education can add value and sustainability to emergent mutual aid groups, that perhaps lack structure and are learning by doing in terms of working together, but if we can help them to strengthen these collective efforts and to make them more sustainable...

Yes, identify what we have already and what is currently working

So it might be worth recognising in the first instance that, obviously, there is a wide range of organisations in both of these categories and some would consider themselves to sit in both. Therefore, each collaboration will look different with organisations needing to adapt what they do slightly in each case. I think there are some principles that lead to success in each case:



1. A strong relationship between organisations which is characterised by listening to each other and playing to each other's strengths.
2. Joint ownership of projects. In my experience, projects where one organisation considers themselves to be purely the provider and the other purely the customer are limited in how effective they can be. If something goes wrong, 'customer' are likely to move onto the next 'provider' to see if they can do better, rather than getting back around the table and adapting. The role that each organisation plays in those arrangements can become a bit passive and they do not benefit from each other's strengths.

In practical terms, the bit that often goes wrong is where individuals 'progress' from one organisation to another. Just 'sign posting' rarely works effectively. It requires individuals to start from scratch with a new organisation which can be daunting and is a missed opportunity to benefit from work which has already been done with that individual. Arrangements need to be much more fluid with individuals being supported throughout transitions and organisations communicating effectively throughout.

3. Clearly defined shared outcomes. When adult education organisations collaborate with others, I think one major source of tension can be that their intended outcomes do not match the priority ones of the partner. For example, one organisation might be primarily concerned about their beneficiary's wellbeing whilst the other might be more concerned about whether they pass a qualification. It could be that one organisation is concerned with getting an individual into employment now, whilst the other believes that there is lots of 'groundwork' that needs to be done in order to ensure that the individual is in a good place to secure sustainable work.

I'd suggest that having a conversation around the outcomes framework that I presented is a good starting point for any collaborative working to ensure organisations are all on the same page.

In order to establish these principles, adult educator and VCSE organisations need to get to know each other. I'd be really interested in having conversations with any organisation that wants to talk about:

- How we can inspire Manchester residents to engage in education.
- How we can train volunteers for specific purposes.
- Family learning and creating positive home learning environments.
- How we can address digital inclusion.
- Community based approaches to inclusion and anti-racism.
- Language barriers faced by Manchester residents.
- Enabling people to move towards employment.

Email me if you want to speak about any of the above (Daniel.shercliff@manchester.gov.uk)



What part does online learning have to play in achieving this?

As a digital trainer working often in difficult communities, the technical resources and stability for many people are often exasperating. Are there possibilities to explore improving this? Or finding access to better tech? How will local libraries work in future?

Digital democracy... Covid 19 has made it so clear that we don't have equal access to digital resources, that should be considered a citizens right...

We need to consider at all times those that are digitally excluded - older people, people without recourse to public funds etc. These are the people that often access informal learning through the voluntary sector.

And video technologies take much more bandwidth, so both simple-to-access technologies and also low bandwidth tools are crucial

And life / wellbeing skills, enhancing the whole person, as well

"quality of life" rather than solely employability

Digital inclusion / Equipment is a huge need that and on the agenda of many organisations.

Collaboration (from my experience teaching ESOL) seems to be one of the key positives of online learning. G Suite, Teams etc can foster working relationships between students in ways that group work in class never quite did. e.g. editing shared docs, co-creating resources, giving peer feedback (and feedback to teachers)

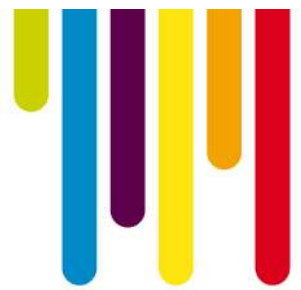
It's important to consider also low digitals and low English skills when people access learning and how this can be done within working time of staff.

Additional Questions

Q. How do you control the time you're working if students can be in touch with you flexibly?

A. (Dan) In the webinar Ryan and Kim explained that they had been working flexibly to meet the needs of learners and our staff really have shown their commitment to their learners since lockdown. However, throughout lockdown we have been dealing with a crisis and so many colleagues have worked schedules which are not sustainable in the long term.

The long-term challenge then is how we maintain flexibility for learners whilst also having manageable work schedules for teachers. The key to this is getting our balance of 'synchronous' and 'asynchronous' activities right. That way we are providing a package which enables some live interaction at times when teachers are working as well as activities which learners can complete at times to suite them.



Synchronous 	Asynchronous 
Students learn at the same time.	Students learn at different times.
Communication happens in real time.	Communication is not live.
Possibly more engaging and effective.	Possibly more convenient and flexible.
Allows for instant feedback and clarification.	Allows students to work at their own pace.
Examples Video conferencing, live chat, live-streamed videos.	Examples Email, screencasts, flipped videos, blog posts/comments.

Q. As a digital trainer working often in difficult communities, the technical resources and stability for many people are often exasperating. Are there possibilities to explore improving this? Or finding access to better tech? How will local libraries work in future?

A. (Dan) Totally agree! Access to technology can be a real barrier for residents.

Libraries have gifted some devices to residents since lockdown using the DevicesDotNow scheme and the council will also be investing in devices that can be gifted to residents in coming weeks.

GMCA are also introducing a scheme to provide some adult learners with the equipment they need to engage in learning.

The council is also continuing to develop public Wi-Fi infrastructure across the city in order to improve accessibility.

As an organisation we are working on a loan scheme for 20/21 so that learners can borrow devices whilst on courses with us.

Let me know if you're interested in finding out more about the council's work on digital inclusion or our approach to digital skills.

Q. Given there are expected to be 41% rise in severe depression, can there be more embedding of therapeutic and positive mental health elements included across courses?

A. (Dan) Yes. I think this needs to be a real focus of training for teachers in coming weeks and months.

The pastoral support of learners is going to be critical.

This problem also creates some potential for collaboration between adult educators and those working within VCSE organisations.