

NEED TO READ: A SKILLS FOR LIFE PROJECT  
NORTH WEST MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES COUNCIL

FINAL REPORT

The MLA NW Skills for Life initiative planned to establish a part time adult basic skills development officer within the North West Learning Team for Museums, Libraries and Archives. The project aimed to:

- develop and monitor three pilot projects in museums and libraries in Manchester delivering adult basic skills programmes for learners, including those in priority groups identified in Skills for Life. These pilot projects were developed and monitored in partnership with the Manchester Basic Skills Consortium (a partnership between Basic Skills providers)
- thoroughly evaluate and report on the 3 pilots and disseminate the findings both regionally and nationally

The project aimed to carry out research with museums libraries and archives in Manchester and three other neighbourhood renewal areas in Greater Manchester to:

- raise awareness and understanding of the Skills for Life Strategy
- initiate customised training on adult learner support for museum, library and archive staff

In addition the project would

- Advocate the role of museums, libraries and archives for adult basic skills delivery with members of the Manchester Basic Skills Consortium and with the local LSC and other regional stakeholders in Manchester and in the 3 other selected Neighbourhood Renewal areas

This project aimed to deliver the following identified outcomes for this initiative:

- a) Promoting better understanding of the National Strategy for adult Literacy, Numeracy and Language amongst staff in museums, archives and libraries
- b) Promoting better understanding of the role museums, archives and libraries can play in stimulating and supporting adult learners in developing their literacy, numeracy and language skills amongst Learning and Skills Councils and basic skill providers
- c) Develop approaches to measuring the impact museums, archives and libraries have on people's literacy, numeracy and language skills
- d) Report on the role museums, libraries and archives can play in delivering the Government's adult basic skills target amongst priority groups

In delivering the outcomes above, the project hoped to make a significant contribution to developing capacity within the sector to deliver adult basic skills programmes in the future.

This report covers the development of MLA NW Basic Skills initiative to date and how it plans to continue work in this area in the future.

- 1 Survey of museums, libraries and archives
- 2 Pilot Projects
- 3 Evaluation
- 4 Bolton, Oldham, Salford
- 5 Future developments

## **1 Survey of museums, libraries and archives**

About 150 key staff in museums, archives and libraries (including HE) in Manchester, Salford, Oldham and Bolton were surveyed to find out:

- their awareness of skills for life needs amongst their users
- awareness of the national strategy
- whether they have run any skills for life projects
- whether they have done any skills for life training
- whether they would like to receive skills for life awareness training

The survey was done by means of a questionnaire which was devised by MLA NW and York Consulting.

Only one questionnaire was completed for each library district which meant there was in fact a possible total of just 38 replies. 21 replies were returned, a response rate of 55%.

The results of the Manchester survey will be used to direct future work by MLA NW.

From the survey it appears that there is relatively little skills for life work happening within museums, libraries and archives in Manchester at present, however almost all respondents were interested in the BS Awareness Training offered by MLA NW. Although the survey showed little Skills for Life activity taking place, this could well be down to the definition of what Skills for Life encompasses. As well as formal and accredited learning, Skills for Life can also include informal sessions aimed at encouraging people back into learning, something that many museums, libraries and archives offer to a great extent. For this reason we feel it is important that our project offers staff training in basic skills awareness. With this training, staff will be in a position to develop informal learning opportunities sensitive to people with possible basic skills needs and be able to signpost learners on to accredited learning if appropriate.

## **2 Pilot projects**

In September 2003 museums, libraries and archives in the Greater Manchester were informed of the project and invited to show interest. Of those that responded, and could manage the necessary timescale and staff commitment for completion of the project, the following were keen to take part:

The Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester  
The Imperial War Museum, North  
Central Library, Manchester

None of the 3 sites had run Skills for Life projects before, although the MSIM has worked with one of the Manchester Consortium's tutors in the past when she brought her Basic Skills students into the museum as part of their course.

The Imperial War museum already has a thriving volunteer and training programme where the volunteers work at the museum as interactors and FOH. The museums present target audiences are: returners to work, loan parents, kids at risk of exclusion, the disabled and ethnic minority groups.

Working in partnership with the Manchester Basic Skills Consortium means that we were able to offer training for the museum and library staff, and also support with the development of their Skills for Life courses

## **Awareness raising**

We held an initial awareness-raising day for both pilot and consortium staff as all felt they would like to be more informed about each others organisations. The consortium gave an overview of Basic Skills teaching and the library and museum staff informed the consortium about their work with learners. This was followed by a lively discussion of ideas for using resources to teach basic skills.

## **Training**

In January 2004 a 2 day Basic Skills Awareness Raising course was held for pilot staff (open to all – FOH, marketing, education, curatorial). The course was delivered by the Consortium and held at all 3 sites (MSIM, Central library, IWM North) and was Unit One of the Level 2 City and Guilds Certificate in Adult Learner Support 9295. Further training at college to complete the level 2 was offered, free of charge, and is now being undertaken by pilot staff (July 2004).

Number of staff undertaking

Unit one, level 2 course only:	41
Exam for unit one:	19
To complete Level 2, 9295:	9

Evaluation: Some staff found the course a very good introduction to the issues. The ICT facilitators at Central library, for instance, found it gave them ways of identifying people's needs and gave them ideas on how they could help people.

*A really good eye opener as to what is needed to engage learners.*

Many people, however, found the course was too basic for their needs and could have been delivered in one day rather than two. Other comments were that that they would have liked the course to be more targeted towards museum and library specific issues, for example, working with ESOL groups.

The feedback from this training has been used to inform future training developments (see Bolton, Oldham and Salford section).

MSIM plan to cascade the BS awareness training down their staff: a practical session for staff directly involved in the delivery of Skills for Life provision, centred around the needs of learners and the delivery of Basic Skills courses, and short briefings for Front of House staff which will outline some of the issues surrounding Basic Skills and in particular the needs of Adult Basic Skills learners as visitors.

## **Course development**

Following the awareness training, the pilot sites developed their own short 'taster' courses aimed at Basic Skills learners. All 3 were offered support to do this by Consortium staff. Both IWM North and MSIM have skilled staff, familiar at working with outreach, ESOL and other 'hard to reach' groups and therefore were confident to develop their projects themselves with some consultation. Central library has had little experience of this kind of delivery or audience and therefore, worked closely with Consortium staff to ensure embedding Basic Skills in their short course.

## **Central Library: Your Street Now and Then**

Central library decided that by combining the tutoring skills of the Manchester Consortium and the subject knowledge skills the Local Studies Librarian, a useful and interesting course could be developed which could benefit basic skills students and introduce them to the resources held in Central Library:

The course aimed to:

- Run a taster for embedded ABS over 2 weeks, 2 hours per week and signpost learners to relevant agencies on completion
- Have approximately 6 learners on the taster to enable both individual and group working
- Use the theme of 'Your Street Now and Then' with current web information (Manchester libraries 'Picture Your Street') alongside Local Studies materials being used to drive the sessions
- Train one Local Studies worker and IT Facilitators in supporting ABS and make them available to develop and support the course

An existing group of ABS students was contacted through Action for Employment (AFE). The students on the courses at AFE are from a wide variety of backgrounds, with different levels of literacy and social skills and the courses are intended to give the students skills to help them find employment.

The local studies collection of photographs was a focus for the sessions. Students talked about the area of Manchester they lived in and looked at old photographs of the area. They were given single use cameras to photograph their locality. They brought the photographs to the session the following week and discussed them. They were introduced to the computerised local image collection. The library's ICT facilitators helped them look at local history websites, in particular the "Picture Your Street" site.

The session helped some of the students to develop a greater interest in their neighbourhood. They also had an opportunity to discover the variety of resources in Central Library.

Outcomes: The sessions were successful and had some excellent outcomes for staff and learners, for example, some of the groups joined the library and were keen to come back and explore the resources, and 2 signed up to computer training in the library.

*'I didn't want to come but I'm the last to leave'*

After the project, the lead staff member said she had been approached by a BS provider and she was able to speak confidently about what the library could offer in way of support and resources. This confidence building is one of the best legacies that could have come out of this project!

Central library is committed to becoming a learning organisation and the Skills for Life project has contributed to their plans. *Specifically, staff within the newly created Learning and Young People section have the remit of supporting learning, and Skills for life will be included in this.*

- *They will be in a position to prepare the ground for future courses by contacting tutors and agencies working in the field, building up a working relationship with them and asking them what would be most useful to them.*
- *In addition, within the new Community Services section of MLIS, the post of Co-ordinator: Access to Services has the remit of working with communities who currently do not/cannot access our services. This includes those with life skill needs.*
- *We acknowledge that local history is a strong hook on which to hang life skills training, We are in the process of adding all of our digitised local prints to our library website – 70,000 images. This vast resource will be available to use in all of our libraries, and will now also be available in college classes etc. We know, through the work of this project, that the images can be used to great effect with life skills students.*

**This case study worked well in a library using the photographic and electronic resources but the same idea could be easily transferred and adapted to an archive setting.**

## **Museum of Science and Industry**

A short course with embedded basic skills was devised by Museum staff in consultation with Manchester Consortium and Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES).

The course was piloted with a group of adult learners contacted through MAES. The group were all parents with children attending a local Primary School. All of the learners had English as a second language.

Delivery was in three stages. The first two sessions were based in the school, a location familiar to the learners and the final session was delivered at the Museum.

The overall theme for the course was Local History & ICT, with specific elements focussing on the Cotton Industry and Industrialisation. Opportunities to learn English and improve ICT and literacy skills were embedded into the course structure.

The theme was introduced through the use of several websites, a worksheet and vocabulary of words that would be encountered during later sessions. A handling box of Museum objects was used to reinforce the vocabulary they would encounter at the Museum.

The visit to the Museum involved a short tour of the steam engines and textiles gallery. The tour was designed to explain the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the key role of cotton manufacture and trade in Manchester's history. It built on vocabulary and knowledge accrued in previous sessions and included practical activities, opportunities for discussion, involving speaking and listening skills and the development of new vocabulary. The tour also included simple literacy activities for which the Museum developed resources.

The Museum plans to build on what it has learnt during this project to develop a new service for groups of Basic Skills learners in the form of short courses that can be booked by teachers to fit in with what they are already teaching in class. They will build on strengthened relationships with Basic Skills providers, such as Manchester Adult Education Service, City College Manchester and MANCAT.

The Museum will also continue to train and develop its staff in order to deliver this new service and to sustain the training already provided by this project.

Outcomes: Before this project, MSIM was already involved in family literacy work, however they are now strengthening their relationships with providers and widening their provision. They discovered that the local history of Manchester could have direct links with people from other countries as one of the positive aspects of these sessions was that many of the women could make links with cotton growing and manufacturing in their countries of origin. They had also talked to their children about the project and were keen to revisit the museum with them. With this pilot, the complex subject of industrialisation was used to expand vocabulary and explore new ideas by careful introduction and reinforcement over 3 sessions using a variety of learning styles.

## **Imperial War Museum North**

This project was of particular interest to IWM North as it was especially relevant to its already established community lifelong learning Volunteer Programme. At present the Programme offers a short NVQ level 2 course run by a local college that looks at communication, presentation, numeracy but IWM have found that the level of the course is sometimes too high for their volunteers as many require some basic skills input.

For the project itself IWM ran a course with embedded basic skills for an ESOL group that they already had links with. The students from Greenheys Adult Education Centre visited the museum for a full day and were able to compare their own experiences of war and conflict with that of others in history. Although some found the experience disturbing, they benefited

from the visit and some wanted to return with their children. Museum staff felt that more preparation in the form of introduction to the vocabulary of war would have been beneficial for this group.

However, as a result of the basic skills awareness training provided by this project, and entering into discussions with BS providers, the museum began to focus on exploring the possibility of developing Basic Skills provision beyond short courses. They felt that a much more flexible and relevant way to move forward was to develop an embedded Cultural heritage course that would contain a series of sessions that were specific to the museum - its collections and message. A number of the sessions could also be taken individually and run for FE colleges to support teaching that was already occurring in the classroom. They also plan to have the sessions and appropriate resources downloadable from the Museum's website, thereby increasing accessibility.

IWM are now in the process of exploring development of this new Cultural Heritage Basic Skills course.

### **3 Evaluation**

The evaluation sought to measure:

1. The impact of the project on the students
2. The impact on the pilot sites
3. The impact of the project on MBSC (Manchester Basic Skills Consortium)
4. Whether awareness of skills for life amongst staff in museums, libraries and archives had been raised by the project.

Evidence of learning gathered in the evaluation was measured using the Generic Learning Outcomes as developed by LIRP, Leicester University

Key findings:

#### *Skills for life teaching in museums and libraries*

1. Skills for life covers a wide range of abilities and is not just about help with basic writing, reading and arithmetic.
2. Skills for life teaching can be very informal and includes social skills and cultural awareness. Some tutors regularly take classes out of the classroom. Museums and libraries can provide excellent resources for this type of learning.
3. When museum and library staff offer users a personal welcome and show them how to use their resources, reluctant or unconfident learners can start to see themselves as legitimate users of the service.

#### *Pilot sessions*

4. Most students had stimulating experiences at the pilot sessions.
5. The pilot sites have learnt about how their resources can be used in skills for life learning

#### *Awareness of skills for life*

6. Most staff that completed the initial questionnaire are aware of the national skills for life strategy however knowledge of how to implement 'skills for life' in a work setting appears to be low.
7. Museums, archives and libraries in Salford, Oldham, Manchester and Bolton appear to do little work with skills for life learners.
8. Few staff at museums and libraries have a skills for life teaching qualification.

### *Building capacity*

9. Museum and library staff that completed the awareness training found it useful and a significant proportion of them want to go on to complete the level 2 qualification.
10. The Manchester Basic Skills Consortium is keen to do further work with museums and libraries.
11. The vast majority of respondents to the survey said they would like to be offered free training in skills for life awareness.
12. None of the pilot venues want to run accredited Basic Skills courses themselves. Rather, they want to support courses run by existing skills for life providers.

## **4 Bolton, Oldham and Salford**

These three areas of Greater Manchester were selected for the MLA NW basic skills initiative as they are designated regeneration areas of Manchester. The project aims to offer Basic Skills Awareness Training to all MLA staff in these areas, delivered by local providers.

Learning from the evaluation of the pilot projects, MLA NW developing a one-day Awareness Raising course, based on an existing one, but contextualised for MLA staff, using resources and case studies relevant to their needs. Barriers, marketing and signposting will be strong elements of the course. A steering group has been formed to drive this forward.

Representatives from 3 Salford colleges, BS key workers from the Bolton, Oldham and Salford Learning Partnerships, and key library and museum staff form the steering group.

The colleges will deliver this course to museum, library and archive staff, offering a number of sessions so that many staff from the MLA's will be able to take up this opportunity. MLA NW is encouraging all staff to consider this training: managers, front-line workers, security, and learning and access/ community development/ outreach/adult education etc.

A key element of this part of the initiative is to broker relationships between established BS providers and MLA staff and support this with easily accessible information on local contacts, both for signposting learners to if they choose to move on to an accredited course, and for partnership working.

## **6 Next Steps**

Evaluation of the Need To Read initiative and information gained through the mapping will inform the development of future work in the northwest. A development plan will be drawn up which will rollout the project to areas of the northwest that are designated as regeneration areas and are likely to include East Lancs. Blackpool and Barrow.

The MLA NW website will be developed to include case studies drawn from the NW and links to other useful sites including the Canadian 'Reading The Museum' site.