

# **Information for Social Change Number 28 Winter 2008/09**

## **Special Issue on Lifelong Learners**

### **Editorial**

In Lincolnshire I manage the Public Library Service and the Adult Learning Service. Both services have the same strategic objectives: to enable lifelong learning, to build social inclusion and to promote community regeneration. In many contexts it is possible to interchange Public Libraries with Adult Learning and vice versa.

Both services also face a number of challenges. Following a series of reviews Adult Learning was refocused away from leisure learning and towards skills development and employability. This has led to a large reduction in the number of adult education courses and enrolments. Public libraries are currently the subject of three separate reviews: a Modernisation Review by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS); a review of governance and leadership by the All Party Parliamentary Libraries Group; and a UNISON review. It will be interesting to see what direction these reviews point us in – and whether it is the same direction!

One side effect of all this scrutiny is that libraries have moved right up the agenda of both the DCMS and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Culture Secretary Andy Burnham is to work jointly with John Denham, Secretary of State at DIUS 'to ensure better access to libraries, museums and colleges as part of a wider government drive to introduce more adults to the pleasures of learning.'

The value of libraries (and other cultural venues) in 'informal education' has long been pushed, most notably by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) with its massive *Inspiring Learning for All* programme. But a DIUS consultation paper in January 2008, *Informal Adult Learning: shaping the way ahead*, showed very limited awareness of libraries' existing work, let alone their potential.

Current National Year of Reading projects got a mention, as did the success of Hampshire libraries in attracting Learndirect customers, and the well established UK Online centres, half of which are in libraries. But the Vital Link was ignored, despite its huge nationwide partnership work with emergent adult readers. This

has led, in turn, to the best selling Quick Read books involving top line authors, publishers – and the entire World Book Day publicity machine.

Responses to *Informal Adult Learning* came from CILIP, MLA, library aware bodies such as the Campaign for Learning and the National Literacy Trust, numerous local authorities and library services including those in Birmingham, Leicester, Lincolnshire and Sunderland. While DIUS was excited about ICT, the major call from respondents was for better access to private and public spaces and public funding especially for adults who have had least access in the past. 'Strong local partnerships' will be the key DIUS now says. And access to libraries is top of the list.

This edition of ISC celebrates the new alliance between libraries and adult learning. The scene is set in two key note papers by Dr Ray Shore. *Changes in Adult and Community Education* explores the impact of policy on organisations and individuals. *Learning, Learning Communities and Globalisation* looks at policy development and its impact on implementation. The historical links between public libraries and adult education are examined by Andrew Hudson in *Back to the Future?- Lifelong learning in libraries*.

My article on *Developing a NEETS Based Library Service* argues that public libraries have an important role to play in meeting the needs of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). My other contribution, *Policing Library Users*, considers some of the ethical and practical issues surrounding the recent MLA guidance on 'controversial stock.' I am a member of the CILIP Task & Finish Group which is currently discussing these issues.

I have also included my review of Shiraz Durrani's excellent new book *Information and liberation: writings on the politics of information and librarianship*. Finally, there is a summary by Jane Pitcher and Elizabeth Eastwood-Krah of their interim evaluation report on the *Quality Leaders Project (Youth) initiative*, which several public library authorities, including Lincolnshire, were involved in.

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