

Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the provision, best practise and inclusion of men by the Workers Educational Association (WEA) in the European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 3 Rebuild Project 2003. The aim of the study is to investigate the inclusion of male learners in community provision in County Durham by the WEA and other county organisations and providers. This would allow for a greater understanding of the barriers to engaging men in learning, the provision available and current best practice being implemented. The research was conducted within the context of the European Social Fund Project Rebuild in the year 2003 and within other provision during that period provided by partners and other organisations. The research base was across County Durham.

This research provides a particular example of ad hoc provision. There are systems in place however; they are not working to their optimum and all organisations are addressing the issue of male learners in a different way. It is clear there is still an outmoded and unjustified view of male learners in some organisations with regard to them as a group and the need to engage them at all. The demands of outputs ensure that even attempting to engage male learners can be daunting and time consuming thereby not offering the incentive to invest time and resources in engaging them at all. Nor, with few exceptions has the issue of understanding the need to engage male learners by radically reviewing men as learners, addressing the internal organisational issues of provision and establishing a strategy to engage male learners in Co Durham been studied within a professional development by any individual organisation other than Family Learning in County Durham. Nonetheless there is training in this area of provision available however it requires both management and the development worker to engage if it is to be of any value.

The methods employed were interviews with past ESF students and tutors with regard to the current provision and courses, a group interview of a current dad's group on the same issue, interviews with development workers and management from other organisations on their provision, best practise and success in engaging male learners and interviews of other key personnel within the county who could provide information or advise on engaging male learners.

The report concluded that there is a need for an overarching strategy for the inclusion of male learners in community provision in Co Durham and one organisation should lead this development. There is a need for training for all those involved in engaging men by developing as men friendly organisations and within that addressing the needs of male learners through provision and IAG. The need to have realistic targets set by funders and managers and that allows the necessary resources and time to engage, retain and progress men as learners.