

Open Doors Skills for Life Network 2005/06

Evaluation Report



Learners with Quick Reads books in Huddersfield library

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Background:

The Open Doors sub-regional networks were set up by MLA Yorkshire to support museums, libraries and archives in Yorkshire to work with the Skills for Life agenda. The network was set up in response to feedback from delegates attending the Open Doors conference in May 2005, who asked for more opportunities to network and hear about best practice in this area. The network was run as part of the Open Doors project.

The purpose of the network was to:

- Discuss, debate, learn and develop ideas regarding museum, library and archive education and the skills for life agenda
- Promote and facilitate information exchange and partnership working
- Provide a focus for regional development and a point of contact for professionals who seek to develop services for skills for life learners
- Contribute to the identification and development of a regional network of museums, libraries and archives that can deliver Skills for Life learning opportunities
- Provide a focus for future working and embedment within organisational provision

The Open Doors network is coordinated by Abi Hackett on behalf of MLA Yorkshire.

Network activities 2005/06

Four Open Doors network groups, covering Humberside, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire respectively, were formed in September

2005. Each of the networks has met a total of four times between September 2005 and April 2006.

Evaluation of the Open Doors network

At the fourth meeting of the Open Doors network, members were asked to complete a pre-prepared evaluation form. Members who gave apologies for the meeting were emailed the form and asked to complete and return it. A total of 22 forms were returned, approximately half of the number of organisations represented on the Open Doors network.

Region	Forms returned
Humberside	6
South Yorkshire	9
West Yorkshire	5
North Yorkshire	2

Role of the Open Doors network

Members were asked what they thought the most useful role of the Open Doors network had been. Results are shown below, showing that three clear themes emerged as the key role of the Open Doors network this year.

Role of the open doors network	Humbe r	North	Sout h	West	Total
Exchanging and sharing ideas / good practice	3	1	4	3	11
Partnerships / networking / contacts	2	1	6	1	10
Raising awareness / profile of skills for life	6	0	0	1	7
Coordinating ideas across the sub-region	1	0	0	0	1

These responses indicate that sharing of ideas, information and good practice, providing an opportunity for partnerships and networking, and generally raising the profile of Skills for Life as an area of work are all roles that were identified and valued by a large majority of the members of the Open Doors network.

The roles picked out also map closely to the initial aims of the Open Doors network (see page 1), in particular to discuss ideas, exchange information and identify key partner organisations, which suggests that these aims have begun to be met.

Learning through the Open Doors network

Respondents were asked if they had learnt anything through the Open Doors network. The majority of respondents did feel that they had learnt something through the network, and responses were very varied. Popular answers included the role of museums, libraries and archives in Skills for Life, about regional strategy, the resources available in museums, libraries and archives, the work going on around the region and about Skills for Life organisations and websites.

The variety of responses to this question perhaps reflects the diversity of people attending the Open Doors network, and the differing needs, interests and prior knowledge of the members.



ESOL learners visit Leeds Library

Changes in Skills for Life / museum, library and archive activities

2005/06

Respondents were asked to complete a table asking them about four areas of Skills for Life within their organisation: learning opportunities offered, staff training and development, partnerships and policy and practice. These areas are loosely based on the '4Ps' of the Inspiring Learning for All framework.

Respondents were asked to comment both on what changes had taken place within their organisation in the last year, and the role, if any, they perceived the Open Doors network to have played in these changes. The intention was for the forms to firstly give a flavour of the changes that are currently taking place, and secondly to explore the way the existence of the Open Doors network has influenced these changes.

The relationship between change and the Open Doors network is a complex one, as acknowledged by some respondents, and it would not be expected that the Open Doors network would be responsible for all changes taking place within an organisation, particularly with consideration to other initiatives and support mechanisms which have been available to museum, libraries and archives and Skills for Life providers this year (e.g. Quality Initiative, the Vital Link), and the development of good practice that was existing in organisations prior to this.

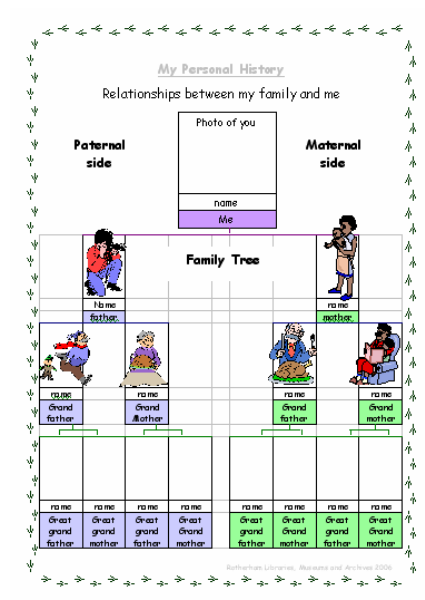
The following information gives a summary of the responses given for each of the four areas of Skills for Life.

Learning Opportunities

Responses showed that significant new learning opportunities were being offered across the region since last year, including, for example, an increased number of suitable resources available in libraries in Humberside, involvement in new initiatives such as Test the Town in South Yorkshire and new learning

programs and resources offered by libraries in West Yorkshire as a result of the RaW campaign.

In some cases, involvement in the Open Doors network had provided ideas and support, in particular through contact with others doing similar things. Some respondents felt that the Open Doors network has played a very strong role in these changes by providing contacts and raising awareness; for example, four respondents from South Yorkshire reported that learners had had a visit to a museum, library or archive, sometimes for the first time, as a result of discussions at the Open Doors network.



Family History learning materials developed at Rotherham archives

Training / staff development

A high proportion of museum, library and archive respondents had been involved in staff training since last year. Most popular was one day awareness training, although other staff development included City and Guilds 9295 qualifications, Learning Champions training, training on working with young people, attending a conference and dissemination of information from the Open Doors network to other staff.

In several cases, the Open Doors network provided information about training opportunities, and other information that could be disseminated to staff.

Partnerships

A large percentage of respondents had formed new partnerships or strengthening existing ones this year, included 100% of Humberside respondents.

In many cases, contact through the Open Doors network had led to forming of new partnerships and relationships, both between museum, library and archive staff and Skills for Life providers, and within the museum, library and archive sector. Some respondents also felt that involvement in the Open Doors network had strengthened existing relationships.



*'Inspiring Skills for Life learners through museums, libraries and archives'
conference organised this year*

Policies and Practice

Respondents suggested a very wide range of changes under this category, included increased outreach activities, improved signage and generally becoming more 'learner focussed'. The BBC RaW campaign, which was launched this year, was mentioned by several respondents. Two respondents

mentioned specific policies for learning / Skills for Life which had been changed or developed this year.

One Skills for Life respondent from Humberside felt that they could consider museums, libraries and archives more in planning and policy making due to increased awareness and knowledge through the Open Doors network.

Generally these changes seemed to have been wider and independent of involvement in the Open Doors network, although some respondents felt that the Open Doors network had raised awareness and leant momentum to these activities.



Learners from York College take part in activities at the National Railway Museum

Changes to museum, library and archive Skills for Life provision since September 2005

The table below summarises the percentages of Open Doors member organisations (museums, libraries and archives and skills for life organisations) who have changed their Skills for Life practice since September 2005.

Changes to learning opportunities	77%
Changes in training / staff development	86%
Changes in partnerships	86%
Changes in policy and practice	59%

Figures are generally high, and suggest a fast pace of change in this area of work currently. The lowest percentage is given for 'policy and practice'. More work could be planned for this area in 2006/07, including for example discussions of the Vital Link Improvement Framework, and collection of Skills for Life / adult learning policies from museums, libraries and archives with a view to sharing good practice.

Impact of the Open Doors network since September 2005

The table below summaries the number of incidences of change which respondents attributed mainly to the Open Doors network, based on 22 respondents in total.

Impact on learning opportunities	11
Impact on training opportunities / staff development	7
Impact on partnerships	9
Impact on policy and practice	5

These figures are likely to be minimum numbers, as only approximately 50% of Open Doors network members returned evaluation forms. However, they are useful for identifying a clear link between change and the Open Doors network. The figures also show that involvement in the Open Doors network was most likely to support change in learning opportunities offered and partnerships identified. This mirrors the most popular responses given to the 'most useful role of the network' question, and also reflects the initial aims of the Open Doors network, which was to be a practical, practitioner-based forum.



BBC RaW campaign at Kirklees library

Discussion

In September 2006, a report was compiled after the first Open Doors meetings, recording who attended, what key issues were discussed, and what people hoped to get out of the network.

The strongest information need mentioned at these initial meetings was that both museum, library and archive staff and skills for life practitioners felt they needed more information about the other sector, beginning with a better understanding of how the other sector worked, what it did and what its priorities were.

Evaluation at the end of the year suggested that the Open Doors network was an effective tool for meeting these needs; respondents frequently mentioned the increased awareness of what was available and what different people were doing as being a benefit of the network, and exchange of information was considered the most useful role of the Open Doors network overall. 86% of respondents formed new partnerships and contacts as a result of the network, and one respondent explained that because they understood the context of Skills for Life better, they now know where to look for partnerships.

At the start of the Open Doors network, many attendees had already been involved in the use of museum, library and archive resources with Skills for Life learners. The feeling was that this work needed to be more strategic and sustainable.

Responses at the end of the year showed that significant numbers of changes (77%) had been made to the learning opportunities offered by members, and 59% of respondents had made changes to policy or practice in the last year. The role of the Open Doors network in this area seems less clear, and programs such as the Quality Initiative and Vital Link improvement strategy are likely to have played a bigger part. However, respondents felt that the Open Doors network had increased the profile of Skills for Life within organisations, and that finding out how others were doing things in other areas was also seen as a useful function of the network, which had brought about organisational change.

Next year the Open Doors network will continue, with more input from the members into the day to day running of the network. The groups have also decided on the most useful function of their network for the future year; for example, the South Yorkshire group aim to become more focussed on practice, with meetings that include visits to different museums, libraries and archives and creative sessions to come up with new ideas and activities that learners could be involved with at that venue. West Yorkshire group also plans to focus on practice, in particular sharing ideas, resources and case studies with each other. The Humberside group will focus on exchange of

information and coordinating of activities across the sub-region, including coordination of the RaW campaign. Because the North Yorkshire group has such small numbers they plan to merge with the West Yorkshire group and attend those meetings.

Conclusion

Evaluation of the first year of the Open Doors network has been very positive overall; there has been a great deal of support and enthusiasm for the concept of the network, and the meetings have fulfilled a variety of roles over the past year, and can be demonstrated to have played a role in the change and innovation that we are currently seeing in this area of work. Members considered the Open Doors network to be a useful forum for information and support, which is reflected in the continuation of the Open Doors network this year.

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