



**OLDHAM  
LOCAL LEARNING  
PARTNERSHIP**

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**‘BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE  
FOR OLDHAM’**

**The Local Learning Partnership Plan**

**Spring 2003**

**Please note: Learning Plan is being reviewed – due to be  
published Spring 2006**

## **BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE FOR OLDHAM**

This summary document updates and moves forward the “*Building a shared future*” publication produced by Oldham’s Local Learning Partnership in June 2001, following the disturbances in May.

### **THE VISION**

Oldham’s present malaise is compounded by the fact that in the national and regional mind it is associated with racial strife and a lack of cohesion. This is damaging, not only from a public relations point of view, but also because it is in many ways inaccurate and gives no hint of potential strength within the town. Although it is true, as pointed out recently by the Audit Commission, that in terms of leadership and direction there are issues for Oldham, it is equally true that Oldham does have strengths that can be built upon.

The accepted picture of Oldham as a town of industrial blight, poor housing, racial tension, polarisation and violence is far from the full picture. There are features of Oldham that, if properly co-ordinated, supported and developed, could substantially change the quality of the town. There is no reason why Oldham should not enjoy the success of other northern towns, such as Huddersfield and Preston, which have similar industrial antecedents and many of the attendant difficulties. These towns, however, have identified a successful focus for renewal and have effectively concentrated their energies with significant results.

Oldham has, in fact, made considerable progress in terms of education over the past decade. Rates of participation, retention and most of all achievement, have considerably increased post-16 with the vast majority of Oldham’s post-16 provision being above the national average, which is particularly significant. In terms of progression to HE, there has been a concomitant increase. These successes have only pointed up the considerable educational potential that Oldham’s population presents. Furthermore, these successes have largely been achieved by dint of the efforts of individual institutions, supported by the Connexions Service. Similarly, through the efforts of the Local Education Authority, a series of successful initiatives has been introduced pre-16. These have led to an increase in achievement, rising at a rate above the national average for the last five years. Education in Oldham has been further enhanced by *Excellence in Cities*, the effects of which are beginning to be seen, and by an active and thriving voluntary and community sector that has addressed the learning needs of many individuals who do not have access to institutional education and training. The partnership that has brought about Oldham Business Management School is unique to the region and is limited only by finance and support. The cumulative effect of these individual successes, with infrastructure and financial support would be of considerable significance.

What Oldham desperately needs at present is strategic leadership in a variety of areas that will enable it to move forward. One of the strengths of Oldham has been the consistently improving quality of its educational provision, particularly post-16. The Local Learning Partnership believes that, were the town to whole-heartedly back a series of high impact educational measures, then the town could look to education working in partnership with health, crime and disorder, housing, business and the environment to significantly regenerate and move to a far

better future. The fact that Oldham has not sufficiently co-ordinated its resources in the past, does not mean that it is not able to do so in the future.

However, this demands an agreed strategy and programme to be supported by the decision-makers in the communities and for the co-ordination of resources to support such initiatives. This programme would seek to harness the talents and abilities of all partners in the educational field and have them working to a common goal. The combined effects of the voluntary sector, Connexions, training providers, Colleges, Chamber along with the statutory sector would make a great impact on the situation of the town.

This ability to produce an effective and disciplined strategy is essential and a lack of this in the past has prevented progress. If we are to move forward, we have to move away from the divisive and self-defeating process of sectional groups of bidders scrambling after pots of money. This means effectively uniting behind a strategic focus that could create a prosperous educational and skills environment, similar to those achieved by Huddersfield and Preston. In essence, the vision that underpins this strategy is encompassed through two radical proposals, which will be expedited through five high impact strategies.

- a transformation, led by the LLP and its constituent members, of how partnerships with employers in all sectors will be organised to enable young people to access sustainable skills, career prospects and work opportunities;
- the expansion of higher educational opportunity in the town, through the raising of achievement pre- and post-16 and staying on levels post-16, leading to the creation of the University College of Oldham.

The strategies are :

1. Success at 19
2. The University College of Oldham
3. The Oldham Apprentice
4. 'Grow our own' professionals
5. Re-skilling the workforce and Oldham's communities

and these will be addressed later in the paper.

### **OLDHAM'S LOCAL LEARNING PARTNERSHIP (OLLP)**

The OLLP has the responsibility of developing strategies and delivery plans for improving post-14 education in the borough of Oldham. The partnership consists of Oldham's schools, Colleges, Connexions, training providers, employers, voluntary sector organisations engaged in education and training, Oldham Chamber of Commerce, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

and the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (the LSC). The Learning Partnership is the educational arm of the Local Strategic Partnership.

The aim of the OLLP is to create a real distinctiveness and quality in the education, skills and opportunities of its people. It is the OLLP's belief that an inclusive, highly educated, aspirant, enterprising and skilled group of young adults can be developed in the town. Business and cultural development and growth will flow from this cohort over the next 10-20 years.

### ***Trends to date***

Some of the key achievements attributable to the work of the partnership since the publication of *'Building a Shared Future'* include:

- 2002 A-C GCSE results have improved by 1% from 41.4 in 2001 to 42.4 in 2002;
- during the 1990s there was a significant increase in the participation of young people from BEM communities in post-16 education and training and a significant increase in their achievement. However, participation has remained relatively stable over the last 4 years at around 84%;
- the number of 16 year olds engaged in full-time education or training has risen from 78.8% in 1999 to 80.6% in 2002;
- specialist schools have opened in Technology, Sports, Languages, Art and Science.
- the number of 19 year old students succeeding at 'A' level or level 3 equivalent has risen significantly over the past 10 years;
- there are currently 1,422 young people from Oldham following Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA) and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA);
- 300 14-16 year olds are following pre-apprenticeship and vocational studies;
- full-time BA and BSc honours degrees are now available at Oldham Business Management School and in Oldham there are currently 375 full-time HE students. There has been a significant increase in part-time HE students;
- there has been an increase in the number of adults taking basic skills (numeracy and literacy) and also in Information and Communications Technology;
- 18 new learning (LINK) centres have opened across the town;
- Connexions service established;
- there has been significant workforce development in construction and health care. Meeting the North West's Development Agency's identified occupational growth and skill shortage areas.
- national recognition for equality of opportunity and diversity post-16;
- it is estimated that 300 jobs have been created across the partnership and an additional £20m of funding drawn into the town.

### ***Future***

OLLP considers that significant progress has been made in the last four years. However, this is only a start. For the town of Oldham to regain its confidence and aspiration, its social cohesion, its citizens' economic, environmental and personal health, considerable investment in the improvement of our young people's education, training and opportunity is paramount. The young people of Oldham are its hope and future and the OLLP has identified five key strategies that we consider will make a difference.

Recent achievements have been enhanced through innovative use of existing funding streams; although, much more could have been achieved had all of the additional support that was anticipated following the Oldham Independent Review been forthcoming.

## **FIVE KEY STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

### **SUCCESS AT 19**

#### ***Our Analysis***

Presently, 42% of Oldham's 16 year olds achieve five A\*-C grades at GCSE - the national average is 51%. The aim is to bring Oldham's performance to 50% by 2004. However, the current figure masks significant underachievement across certain groups: in particular white and BEM males. At any one time, an average of 8% of 16-18 year olds are not engaged in employment, education or training. This percentage rises to an average of 12% for young people residing in the seven priority wards. Serious concerns relate to the destinations of certain groups of young people leaving full-time education at 18 and 19. There are equal concerns regarding the numbers of young people in modern apprenticeships and those progressing on to higher education, particularly from white 'working class' and ethnic minority backgrounds.

However, widening participation and achievement post-16 during the 1990s has shown what value can be added between 16 to 18 enabling students, previously considered unsuitable, to matriculate for HE courses. This improvement has emphasised the considerable latent potential within the population and more needs to be achieved for as long as Oldham under-performs in achievement at 16, it will under-perform in comparison to other similar towns.

A salient feature for regeneration needs to be the ability to facilitate the maximum successful progression from an increase in achievement at 16 through to post-16 education. There is a further factor to be addressed amongst this age group, as the OLLP considers that segregation in housing and schools in Oldham raises serious concerns about social cohesion. Whereas, obviously, the OLLP cannot address all aspects of this, it needs to look to the successful multi-cultural establishments in Oldham and to development in Citizenship for a lead.

#### ***Our Solutions***

There needs to be greater support and better choice of options for young people aged 14-19. Central to this is an effective transition and support programme that will enable students to successfully transfer from 11-16 organisations to post-16 education and training and be supported there. This includes not only curriculum support, but workshop support and monitoring, in addition to diagnostic packages of compensatory education. It has already been established that multi-cultural cohesiveness works in a 16-19 context and Oldham needs to build on these strengths to enable the town to exploit the potential of this large group and to raise significantly the level of achievement.

It is also necessary that this should be under-pinned by a comprehensive curriculum package of Citizenship skills that provide the base for Citizenship activities. The need for this in the town is recognised but it remains largely unsupported. In addition, there must be early planned pathways to apprenticeship for all ages between 16 and 19 and this will be considered later.

#### ***By 2005***

Participation and retention post-16 will have increased. A comprehensive 14-19 Citizenship curriculum will have been established and an increased number of Citizenship based activities,

including a Youth Council will have grown. A comprehensive transition and support programme will work across the 14-16 and 16-19 sectors, enabling vulnerable students and those at present with the potential to access Level 3 post-16 courses, to be fully supported and thereby succeed. The number of young people accessing higher education, quality apprenticeships and vocational pathways will have significantly increased. The 14-19 group will be the body that consults partners and evaluates the success and direction of the project.

## **THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF OLDHAM**

### ***Our Analysis***

Presently, 27% of Oldham's 19 year olds progress to higher education, a high percentage of whom study within 10 miles of Oldham: the national figure is 35%. The aim is that by 2010, 50% of the nation's 18-30 year olds access some form of higher education. The industrial decline in Oldham, a town where many small employers compete on low wage cost rather than through technology-based business, results in a lack of value added enterprise, with a concomitant diminution of opportunity for young people.

Oldham Business Management School was established to try to ratify this situation and made an early impact and is now catering for almost 1,000 full- and part-time students on undergraduate and professional programmes. Amongst its achievements to date has been establishing the School for Entrepreneurship to stimulate business in the creative and high technology economy. However, this has only scratched at the surface of the task and a radical increase in the scope and vision of Oldham Business Management School is essential if the educational and development needs of Oldham are to be fulfilled and Oldham is able to compete with more successful towns with better HE provision. The lack of University presence in the town feeds the lack of aspiration, the lack of ideas and the dearth of creativity.

### ***Our Solutions***

The town desperately requires a focus for post-19 education and training to effectively mobilise the skills and potential of young people and to replicate the way that development of post-16 institutions changed the face of post-16 education in Oldham in the 1990s. The courageous and radical decision to build a Sixth Form College transformed Oldham from an exporter of Level 3 students at age 16 to an importer. It not only increased participation and achievement within Oldham but established Oldham as a post-16 nexus for the North East and Greater Manchester.

A similar initiative, on a larger scale, needs to be launched with HE. Recent research has demonstrated that most young people have decided whether or not to progress to higher education by the age of 14 and often it is a lack of self-belief and aspiration which prevents many from the lower socio-economic groups from contemplating a University Education. It is necessary to create a critical mass of HE in the town as a stimulant to the economy, to regeneration and to aspiration.

This could be supported by the idea of a Junior University, bringing together staff from schools and Colleges, University teachers, local employers and Careers Advisors to provide strong support and clear direction. A pilot collaborative programme, designed by academic staff from the schools, Colleges and OBMS, could establish a continuous pathway from Key Stage 4 to Degree level in at least two subject areas: Business and Computing.

In parallel, there would be a staged programme of advice, practical experience, visits and academic support; much of this would take place at key transition points, such as the choice of

Key Stage 4 options and progression from school to College. Major aspects of the programme would be information and guarantees concerning financial support; employer inputs to the Careers and teaching programmes to assure students of the relevance and career prospects of their course of study; summer schools to provide students with experience of new methods of study and visits to new institutions when moving from one stage to another, and teaching inputs from higher education teaching staff to accustom students to higher level study.

By this means, Oldham would address directly the groups of its population who have not formerly seen themselves as higher education students and open up pathways to the town's own provision or, where appropriate, to other higher education providers. This model could subsequently be applied to other Oldham Higher Education schools (such as Care and Education) and by this means provide the bedrock for a University College in the town.

The development of leisure facilities, better housing and the increased use of technology, will inevitably result in a regeneration of the business community in Oldham. It has been proven that graduates will remain in the area thereby promoting a thriving, dynamic and success-driven culture in town. The expansion of Oldham Business Management School, The Oldham College and Oldham Sixth Form College, working alongside partner Universities (particularly the University of Hull and MMU) will lead to the creation of a 'University College of Oldham'.

The current provision in Business, Law, Computing and Management delivered by Oldham Business Management School could be extended to offer undergraduate and professional programmes through 'Schools' of creative industries; professional development; regeneration and environmental technology.

### ***By 2005***

There would be a predicted 2,000 undergraduates in the University College of Oldham, growing to around 5,000 by the year 2010. New development would be required to house this growth in numbers and additional accommodation would be earmarked for further expansion. The School for Entrepreneurship will have been established as a Regional Centre, thereby stimulating spin-off businesses in the area, in line with the North West Regional strategy. The growth of entertainment and leisure facilities would lead to Oldham rapidly developing, which would, in turn, lead to both cultural and business regeneration.

## **THE OLDHAM APPRENTICE**

### ***Our Analysis***

Many industrial and business sectors are identifying skills gaps when attempting to recruit trained staff. For several years a key plank in the Government's strategy to address these 'occupational' skills shortages has been the re-introduction of apprenticeships, now called 'modern apprenticeships' at Foundation (NVQ level 2) and Advanced (NVQ level 3).

The response by both employers and trainees to this initiative has been mixed. In Oldham the number of 16 year olds leaving school and entering formal apprenticeships declined 3 years ago and has now stabilised at around 8% of the cohort. Of this percentage only a small number are from the ethnic minority communities of Oldham. The government has set a target that 28% of all 16-22 year olds take up an apprenticeship by 2005.

In Oldham the employer base is very limited, as is the diversity of local opportunity, which therefore restricts local choice for those wishing to access work-related training. Oldham has failed to attract, to any significant extent, the new and particularly knowledge based industries and sectors to replace the decline in employment in the traditional industries. The mobility of young people and the extent and availability of a quality experience of work prior to employment are also barriers, although the picture is not totally bleak. Oldham sits on the edge of one of the fastest growing and dynamic local economies in the UK. Manchester has sought to, and is successfully managing to establish itself as a regional centre for many of the 'new economy' sectors. Oldham students should have the opportunity to access the experience of high quality employers outside Oldham.

A lack of pro-activity in creating innovative apprenticeship schemes, by the town's major employers, particularly the large public sector organisations, compounds the problem. There is a need for flexibility between being in full-time education and in an apprenticeship. However, modern apprenticeships are too complex in terms of their availability and how to apply, and the perception is that they have had little impact.

### ***Our Solution***

A radical approach by developing something known as 'The Oldham Apprentice', the aim being to create a distinctive model in the town, whereby employers from the region come to recognise Oldham as 'the' place where innovative, quality apprentices are trained. The Oldham apprenticeship model would be more flexible, allowing young people the opportunity to move easily between education and apprenticeship. The perception of apprenticeship would, in this way, become a positive and viable proposition.

By reviewing the processes of recruitment and funding methodology, and removing the existing age constraints, more of the town's major employers, particularly within the public sector, would be encouraged to offer quality apprenticeships providing high quality work experience, encompassing the new technology-related sectors.

In summary, adding value in a unique model, innovative public sector engagement, a much wider employer base, an extensive and kite-marked work placement/ experience linking the student with an employer at an earlier stage, a pre-apprenticeship Oldham model and far greater progression to HE would lead to regional and national recognition for the 'Oldham Apprentice'.

### ***By 2005***

The Oldham apprenticeship model is established and understood locally, regionally and nationally. The numbers of young Oldham people accessing apprenticeships has grown by 50% to 12%. The number of 16-20 year olds from Oldham's ethnic minority communities has doubled. The number of pupils on the Oldham pre-apprenticeship scheme has grown to 200. Oldham's public and major voluntary sector organisations have clear commitments to employing a diverse range of young apprentices in innovative ways.

## **'GROW OUR OWN' PROFESSIONALS**

### ***Our Analysis***

The public sector and a range of not-for profit organisations, given Oldham's industrial decline, are the town's major employers. OMBC and the Health Trusts are the most significant of these employers, with joint workforces of approaching 25,000 people.

Hard statistics of how many ‘professionals’ within the private and public sectors come from Oldham’s communities are difficult to establish. Records are kept by the larger organisations and these are being examined. However, the number of local people employed in ‘professional positions’ is generally thought to be very low. When applied to the more deprived areas of Oldham this percentage will be considerably smaller.

There is considerable expertise of ‘Growing our Own’ within the voluntary and community sectors of Oldham, which now has a significant workforce. The number of professionals, proportionately, is estimated to be much higher in these sectors. Historically a large number of paid staff within voluntary organisations have gained their experience and skills through volunteering and accessing the training opportunities made available through this work. In Oldham at present there are in the region of 20,000 volunteers.

Within some areas of the public sector early work has already begun to develop ‘grow our own strategies’ however these do not yet sit within an overall strategy.

### ***Our Solution***

Build on the work that has taken place in the voluntary and community sectors and develop, within the town’s major employers, clear strategies to engage with ‘harder to reach groups’. Through this engagement pools of potential professionals will be linked with employers; they will be given appropriate experience, training and mentoring and access to positions as they become available. Major public sector organisations, working with the voluntary sector, will commit and lead this transformation through three year planning cycles. Role models and ambassadors will be developed across an extensive sector range of professional opportunities.

Specific measures to facilitate this might include:

1. standardisation and simplification of application procedures;
2. exploring a pool system, analogous to a clearing house, whereby promising applicants for one post could be referred for consideration to other posts;
3. providing support and advice in application and interview procedures and recognising previous work experience as a route to employment;
4. exploring practical support in areas such as language and child care and investigating job guarantee schemes.

### ***By 2005***

Targets are set and monitored for professional job opportunities across the major public and ‘not for profit’ organisations. Role models and ambassadors are established and are actively engaged in the hard to reach communities of Oldham. Pools of potential employees are clearly established and linked with employers. Statistics are available in all major employment sectors in order to benchmark the progress of plans and targets. To establish a practitioners’ forum through which experience can be shared and successful strategies developed.

## **RE-SKILLING OLDHAM’S COMMUNITIES AND THE WORKFORCE**

### ***Our Analysis***

Within Oldham it is estimated that 30% of adults i.e. 30,000 local people do not have the literacy and numeracy skills/ levels in order to make a full contribution to the economic

development of the town and its local communities. Nearly 30% of the Oldham work force has no academic or vocational qualifications and approximately 5,000 adults who are second language speakers have no functional English. Add to this the issues associated with occupational re-skilling and the shortage of ICT skills a serious and significant concern is developing.

Many organisations are making a contribution to addressing these needs but no systematic, overall 'essential', basic, adult learning skills strategy that makes a real sustainable impact is in place across the borough.

### ***Our solution***

An ambitious, innovative, co-ordinated strategy and plan which places the emphasis on the learner. Learning opportunities are provided on the doorsteps of this group of people, be it in the workplace, in the local library, in the community centre or in the home. Essential skills education, training and qualifications will be considerably extended across the borough.

The various public sector institutions, over 100 voluntary sector organisations, learn direct and the town's major employers will combine to revolutionise how adults can access advice, guidance skills and education. This strategy clearly integrates with the plans to 'grow our own professionals'. In addition to this development a significant expansion of broader, adult education and learning will begin to address many of the social and personal needs of various groups and organisations within specific communities. These programmes will be developed and developed in a number of venues across Oldham.

This will result in the definition of a basic skills entitlement within the borough, with a concomitant system of quality assurance, reinforced through a programme of staff development.

### ***By 2005***

Research will have resulted in a mapping of provision and standards across the borough and, predicated upon this, an Oldham wide strategic plan will be in place, with funding, to provide a coherent, understood and progressive programme of adult basic and essential skills. An additional 2,000 adults will achieve a basic and essential skills qualification. Ten major employers will be involved in these developments. A 20% increase in community and voluntary learning access points across the borough.

A vehicle for communication of issues such as standards, funding, support and progression with employers needs to be in place and working. This, however, is an extremely ambitious vision as, bearing in mind the variety of organisations involved in provision and the already outlined lack of large scale employers in the borough, a great deal of co-ordination is required and the question the Partnership must answer is who will undertake to organise and expedite this? The question here is not simply one of additional funding, it is also one of rationalisation.

### **SUMMARY**

We need ambition and vision. The young people of the town need real and visible opportunity. Oldham needs an identity. The OLLP thinks that this identity is highly educated, creative, highly skilled, motivated, flexible young people and adults who believe they can make a real contribution to Oldham's economy and the communities in which they live.