



***WORKING AND LEARNING TOGETHER:  
COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
AND THE BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY  
VOLUNTARY SECTOR***

**REPORT ON  
LEARNING CONNECTIONS/BEMIS  
JOINT CONFERENCE, 25/1004**

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25/10/04**

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## **Introduction**

This is the report of a conference that took place on 25 October 2004 in Glasgow. It brought together people from a wide range of black and ethnic minority voluntary organisations and communities across Scotland.

They explored the community learning and development agenda and its relevance to them together with some of the key agencies in this field. The conference was organised jointly by Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure Scotland (BEMIS) and Learning Connections, which is part of Communities Scotland, the Scottish Executive's housing and regeneration agency. Malcolm Chisholm MSP, the Minister for Communities, gave the keynote address.

This event was the first of its kind in Scotland. The report aims to capture the key issues from the day and to help those who were there on the day, and others, to work together to take these issues forward.

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*SUMMARY*

Both Learning Connections and BEMIS (Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland) carried out consultations in 2003 that highlighted that the black and ethnic minorities voluntary sector (BEMVS) saw community learning and development as very relevant to them, but that neither the sector nor black and minority ethnic communities were fully a part of the community learning and development planning process.

BEMIS and Learning Connections jointly planned the conference on 25/10/04 as a way of starting to address this issue.

The conference was chaired by Jonathan Squire of BEMIS and attended by 54 delegates, including representatives from a wide range of black and minority ethnic voluntary organisations from many different parts of Scotland, together with people from other agencies with key roles in community learning and development.

The keynote address was given by Malcolm Chisholm MSP, Minister for Communities. He told delegates:

“We want to make sure that our policies for Community Learning and Development are as relevant for black and minority ethnic communities as we are sure they should be, and to encourage you to play a key role in taking them forward. We need your continuing involvement both to get the policies right and to make sure they’re delivered effectively.”

A presentation by Learning Connections outlined the key points of the Scottish Executive guidance for Community Learning and Development, and highlighted support for implementation of the guidance; Rami Ousta, Chief Executive Officer of BEMIS, then outlined why Community Learning and Development is important for black and minority ethnic communities, barriers to real partnership work, and BEMIS’s work to build the capacity of black and minority ethnic communities to engage with Community Learning and Development.

Workshop sessions focused firstly on the policy agenda for Community Learning and Development, and its implications for black and minority ethnic communities, and later on issues for the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector in developing practice in Community Learning and Development.

Jonathan Squire and Lillias Noble, head of Learning Connections, finished the day by emphasising the shared commitment to follow-up action, and encouraging delegates to make sure that their local Community Learning and Development Strategy involves them.

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## **Background**

### ***BEMIS and Learning Connections***

Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure Scotland (BEMIS) came into operation in December 2001, with direct support from the Scottish Executive, as the first Scottish-based black and ethnic minorities-led umbrella body for the black and ethnic minorities voluntary sector. BEMIS is an intermediary body with a remit to support the development of the diverse BEMVS in Scotland, raise its profile, and empower both the sector and the communities it represents across Scotland.

BEMIS's strategy is based on capacity building, partnership work and direct engagement with grass-roots community groups, policy and decision making bodies and all key stakeholders. Through this strategy BEMIS has striven to ensure that the voice of the BEMVS and of black and ethnic minority communities is heard on local and national issues and in the policy and decision making process at all levels.

Since 2001, BEMIS "has grown to become one of the leading organisations that operates at a national level and provides direct support to the black and ethnic minorities voluntary sector, as well as the key stakeholders" (BEMIS Annual Report 2004).

Learning Connections was established in 2003 as part of the Regeneration Division of Communities Scotland, the Scottish Executive agency for housing and regeneration. Learning Connections has responsibility for policy advice to Scottish Ministers on Community Learning and Development issues, and for supporting implementation of policies in this area of work (it also has responsibility for supporting people working in the field of adult literacy and numeracy).

### ***Consultation on New Guidance for Community Learning and Development***

Between January and March 2003, Learning Connections organised a consultation process on the Scottish Executive's draft guidance on Community Learning and Development, *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities*.

Despite wide-ranging participation both in consultation seminars and through written comments, and significant efforts to make the process as inclusive as possible, it was apparent that black and ethnic minority perspectives had not been adequately included. However, the consultation supported the view that the new guidance should place strong emphasis on equalities issues, and ensure that the proposed new Community Learning and Development Strategies fully involve excluded groups and reflect their concerns.

## ***Consultation on Community Development and Learning – Black and Ethnic Minority Perspectives in Scotland***

In April and May 2003, BEMIS, working in partnership with the UK-wide Federation for Community Development Learning, undertook a series of three consultation and information events around Scotland on the theme of *Community Development and Learning – Black and Ethnic Minority Perspectives in Scotland*.

Among the key issues identified through this consultation were the importance of community development and community learning for the black and minority ethnic communities in Scotland, and the need for a range of actions to support their involvement.

### ***The Need for Partnership Work***

These two consultations highlighted the need for new partnerships between the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector, on the one hand, and the Scottish Executive, and Learning Connections in particular, on the other. It was clear that these were essential if the issues identified in relation to Community Learning and Development and the black and minority ethnic communities were to be addressed effectively.

In this context, BEMIS and Learning Connections made contact with each other and began to explore the potential agenda for partnership work.

### **What the Conference Aimed to Achieve**

Through discussion, BEMIS and Learning Connections identified that key aims in working together should be to:

- ensure that community learning and development strategies and services engage more fully with black and ethnic minority communities, and
- support the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Scottish Executive's commitment to community learning and development.

It was agreed that a jointly-organised conference would be an ideal way of starting to address these aims. Equally, there was agreement that a conference would provide a starting point in bringing about the changes required, rather than simply being an end in itself.

### **Who Took Part**

The conference was chaired by Jonathan Squire of BEMIS. The keynote address was given by Malcolm Chisholm M.S.P., the Scottish Executive Minister for Communities. During the morning plenary session, Rory MacLeod, Community Learning and Development Manager, Learning Connections, and Rami Ousta, Chief Executive Officer of BEMIS, also provided inputs.

BEMIS had identified, in agreement with Learning Connections, facilitators for the workshops; Learning Connections staff took notes in each of the workshops and

assisted the facilitators. A list of the people who undertook these key roles is provided in Appendix 4

Not including BEMIS and Learning Connections employees, the Chair, speakers or facilitators, 54 people participated in the conference.

### **The Themes for the Day**

In his keynote address, the Minister set the Scottish Executive's policies for community learning and development in the context of its wider priorities, and highlighted the link between these policies and the Executive's commitment to race equality.

#### [Text of the Minister's address](#)

The extracts that follow here highlight some of the key messages that he gave the conference.

**“This conference ... focuses attention on our policies for Community Learning and Development... I think it is very important that we do not see greater participation by communities and helping people to build their skills and confidence to take control of their lives as an optional extra. We believe that they are absolutely vital to achieving greater social justice, to building better public services and to creating a smarter, more successful Scotland.”**

**“We all have a responsibility to work to achieve race equality and it is only in that context that communities will indeed be able to take more control of their own futures.”**

**“Community Learning and Development takes the concerns of communities as its starting point. It supports people to bring about change through community based learning and action. It links together wider access to lifelong learning and support for communities to participate in the decisions that affect them.”**

**“Community Learning and Development has another important dimension. .... We recognise that it's particularly important that young people are supported to have a voice in society and to be active, responsible citizens – indeed to be an integral part of our communities. That's why youth work is an integral part of Community Learning and Development.”**

**“*Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* states very clearly that resources for Community Learning and Development should be targeted in order to help close the opportunity gap between the well-off and those who are disadvantaged. It also makes very clear that contributing to race equality (and to progress on other equality issues) must be a key consideration in doing this.”**

**“In highlighting all of these positive improvements I do also want to be clear and honest about where we are starting. I want to acknowledge that, in general, the previous Community Learning Strategies did not engage black and minority ethnic communities in the way we would have wanted them to. And as a result, your communities have not enjoyed the benefits that they could and should have done.”**

**“Scotland should be dynamic and inclusive, a place where people want to come and live and work, where whatever your background and wherever you live, you are able to contribute to its well-being and share in its benefits. Today’s agenda is vital in ensuring that wish becomes a reality.”**

Rory MacLeod of Learning Connections then outlined the key points of the Scottish Executive’s guidance for Community Learning and Development, *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities*, and the support for implementation of the guidance being provided by Learning Connections. He highlighted that the guidance

- Sets out three national priorities for Community Learning and Development (CLD):
  - Achievement through learning for adults;
  - Achievement through learning for young people; and
  - Achievement through building community capacity;
- Emphasises that CLD resources must be targeted to achieve social justice, and that addressing equalities issues is a key part of this.

He then told the conference that Learning Connections is delivering a support programme targeted to the needs of each Community Learning and Development Partnership, and is committed to a continuing programme of support.

[Learning Connections presentation.](#)

Rami Ousta then outlined why BEMIS sees Community Learning and Development as important, some of the barriers facing black and minority ethnic communities and the need for real partnership work, with agencies willing to share power, in order to overcome these.

He went on to question the concept of partnership with stakeholders and invited new approaches to engaging with the diverse and under-represented community groups. In addition, he invited stakeholders and partners to get rid of the traditional concepts of engagement and develop more solid approaches that are based not only on “willingness to engage” but commitment to different levels of engagement with the diverse black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and communities.

Rami referred to BEMIS’s consultation work to illustrate the needs the conference aimed to address:

“(There is a) lack of real information available to the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and diverse communities on what is CLD and how to engage in the process”

and highlighted the work that BEMIS is doing to build the capacity of black and ethnic minority communities to engage with CLD.

[BEMIS presentation.](#)

## **The Policy Agenda for CLD: Issues for the BEMVS and BME Communities**

### ***Key points from morning workshops***

The morning workshops gave delegates the opportunity to consider the messages they had heard from the Minister and in the other inputs, and identify the issues arising for them about the Community Learning and Development agenda. Key issues noted by the facilitators and scribes were collated at lunch time and fed back to the final plenary session.

Willingness to change was identified as the starting point for all the other changes needed.

From that starting point, the key issues in making the aspirations set out in the speeches to the conference a reality for black and ethnic minority communities were identified as being to:

- Make the link between policy and practice;
- Ensure that black and minority ethnic communities are involved at all levels, both within local communities and in policy- and decision-making;
- Address:
  - Issues in partnership working (when organisations feel they have to protect funding, this leads to people working in their own “silo”);
  - Resource issues (both financial and other resources, including availability of staff time);
- Recognise:
  - Diversity, for example, the existence of “minorities within minorities”, and the importance of language and culture;
  - That there are black and minority ethnic communities in rural as well as urban areas, and they face distinctive issues;
- Identify examples of agencies engaging directly with people and giving up some of their power, and then share these;
- Develop and acknowledge black perspectives on Community Learning and Development;
- Empower black and minority ethnic development workers;
- Develop:
  - Quality accredited training for community groups and agencies;
  - More research to provide better information on community issues, needs and services; and finally
- Build trust.

## **Developing Practice in CLD: Issues for the BEMVS and BME Communities**

### ***Key points from afternoon workshops***

In the afternoon workshops participants had the opportunity to discuss their own experiences in the areas of work covered by the National Priorities for Community Learning and Development (as set out in *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities*). Each of the workshops was encouraged to identify key issues that need to be addressed to take these areas of work forward, and to ensure that black and minority ethnic communities have the support they need.

Key points were briefly fed back into the final plenary session and these have been supplemented from the notes taken in the workshops.

### ***Workshop1: National Priorities for Community Learning and Development – Adult Learning***

- There are hard to reach groups: different methods of engaging are needed, and we need to share ideas on breaking down barriers, recognising the time that takes and that there is no one easy answer.
- The main barriers are:
  - language
  - discrimination
  - access to information
  - accessing funding.
- Staff with minority language skills can be helpful in reaching hard to reach groups.
- It has to be recognised that it takes time to build up trust.
- We need to build bridges between formal and informal learning so that there is ease of movement between providers and levels.
- Good links within partnerships are helpful in accessing information (both for staff and for learners). Staff changes often mean that lines of communication break down.
- Good links to other organisations are needed, but also links to communities and others who work in the community – e.g. home helps.
- Temporary funding sources are problematic for long-term development.
- Policy/partnership working must have a grassroots base and all partners need to be empowered.
- Many commented on the difficulty of understanding some of the language in *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* and official papers and requested Plain English please.

### ***Workshop 2: National Priorities for Community Learning and Development – Youth Work***

- We need to start where young people are, make sure that work to develop skills is relevant and fun, and ensure young people feel valued.

- Black and ethnic minority young people have often had previous negative experiences and feel disenfranchised, so it is important to make sure they see clear positive results from involvement.
- There are many of the same issues in black and ethnic minority community groups as in others; there is no need for fear and over-sensitivity by Community Learning and Development staff, in fact this is often itself a cause of tension.
- A national framework for youth work is needed, and local networks that can work within this.
- There is a need to use new or different approaches to reach out and attract black and ethnic minority young people to participate beyond those who are already in the habit of doing so.
- It is important to recognise that there are “minorities within minorities” whose needs can often be ignored, for example black and minority ethnic young people with special needs.
- There is a need to invest in sustainability.
- Social and economic changes and other factors mean that both local circumstances and the national picture change quickly: work practices and approaches need to be constantly updated and opportunities for improvement taken.

### ***Workshop 3: National Priorities for Community Learning and Development – Building Community Capacity***

- There is a need to break down and clarify the language used in policy documents to describe “community capacity building”.
- Black and minority ethnic communities have had negative experiences of agencies wanting to build capacity in communities in ways designed to help the agencies themselves achieve their objectives: real community capacity building needs to take place on the communities’ own terms.
- There was scepticism about the real commitment of agencies to support communities to build their own capacity, and concern that there is often a “tick box mentality”.
- Community capacity building needs to involve a two-way learning process: all communities have different skills, these need to be recognised and people need support to build confidence in the skills they have.
- BEMIS’s role in supporting black and ethnic minority voluntary organisations to build community capacity was highlighted. There is a need for agencies and stakeholders to support BEMIS in carrying out this role.
- There is a need for real consultation before frameworks intended to support community capacity building are completed: without this communities are put into the position of having to comply with something imposed on them.
- Empowering individuals, groups and communities was seen as fundamental to the process of building community capacity and also as a key means of breaking down some of the barriers identified.

### ***Workshop 4: Black and Ethnic Minority Communities Influencing Service Delivery through Community Action***

- Policy makers need to listen to black and minority ethnic communities and ensure they are built into structures.

- Agencies need to share power.
- Seeing practical results from planning and consultation is vital for building engagement by black and minority ethnic communities; the “success” of such exercises should be redefined to make clear that it is about implementation and results, not simply producing reports.
- Community Learning and Development Partnerships need to show what the results of their work are.
- Language issues need to be addressed.
- Building community capacity and enabling communities to do things for themselves is essential if communities are to influence service delivery effectively.
- There is a need for clarification of who monitors whether engagement is happening.
- Community Learning and Development Partnerships have a key responsibility to make links with black and ethnic minority groups, and BEMIS has an important role in supporting and enabling such engagement.

### **The Next Steps**

After delegates had heard the feedback from the morning and afternoon workshops, Jonathan Squire noted that a whole range of important issues had been highlighted, and assured delegates that the conference would be the starting point for follow-up action. He then asked Lillias Noble, Head of Learning Connections to say a few words in conclusion.

Lillias echoed Jonathan in confirming that there was real commitment, from Learning Connections as from BEMIS, to addressing the issues that the conference had discussed. She urged delegates to make use of the positive statements the Minister had made in his speech in local discussions and to make sure that their voices are heard in Community Learning and Development Partnerships.

Jonathan closed the conference by thanking everybody who had contributed to organising it and everyone who had attended.