

Take Part in London's Big Society

A review of the latest evidence, policy & provision in
response to Londoners' active citizenship learning needs

London Civic Forum



the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker, the nurse, the shop keeper, the trader, the firefighter, the vet, the lollypop lady, the actor, the teacher, the webmaster, the chef, the parent, the rabbi, the cabbie, the dancer, the banker, the designer, the builder, the PA, the cleaner, the carer, the DJ, the bus driver, the printer, the carpenter, the charity worker, the musician, the administrator, the entrepreneur....It's amazing what Londoners can do when they get together.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for active citizenship learning in London has never been more urgent. With the Big Society high on the political agenda, the poverty gap widening across the capital and social discontent evident in the recent wave of riots and protests, many Londoners need targeted support to articulate their views, have a voice in decision-making and lead social change.

This review, conducted to inform the development of London Civic Forum's new Take Part London Programme, collates and analyses the latest research evidence, policy developments and current provision around active citizenship learning in the capital. It should prove a useful tool for anyone developing strategies for supporting active citizenship in London at present.

Part 1 explores the range of **new participation opportunities for Londoners** created by Big Society-related policy and initiatives. London's unique governance structures and current developments including the Mayoral elections, new policing arrangements and Olympic and Paralympic legacy create further opportunities, and complexity, to be negotiated by Londoners.

In Part 2 we review evidence around **London's participation landscape**, exploring the nature of active citizenship in the capital and particular needs which emerge from the city's unique social and economic characteristics. We identify social groups at risk of exclusion, issues around cohesion, extensive 'under the radar' community activity and existing social capital, and emergent forms of participation.

Part 3 analyses our **mapping of active citizenship learning opportunities** for Londoners, including our own Take Part Learning Programme, in order to identify strengths and gaps in provision. Our mapping can be accessed through LCF's online, interactive Participation Map, at www.shapeyourcity.org.uk.

Finally, Part 4 summarises six key **conclusions** drawn from this review, which are embedded in LCF's new Take Part London Programme:

1. Recognise & Use All Forms of Social and Cultural Capital
2. Frame Active Citizenship in the Participant's Terms
3. Use New Media Technology for Community-Building
4. Enable the 'Civic Core' to Support Others to Engage
5. Support Grassroots Activity
6. Engage the Private Sector

We believe these also serve as useful recommendations for any organisation developing active citizenship learning support for Londoners in 2012 onwards.

INTRODUCTION

London Civic Forum (LCF) is a hub for participation in London, enabling citizens to have a voice in the decision-making which affects their lives.

Since 2004, our Take Part Learning Programme has helped Londoners gain skills, confidence and knowledge for active citizenship through community-based activities. We have supported a wide range of organisations across sectors and across the capital to adopt, adapt and embed Take Part Approaches in their work with communities.

The need for Take Part learning in London has never been more urgent. With the Big Society, Localism and Decentralisation high on the political agenda, the poverty gap widening across the capital and signs of social discontent evident in the recent wave of riots and protests, Londoners should be encouraged to take up new opportunities to articulate their views, have a voice in decision making and lead social change. It is clear that the most disenfranchised will need support to do so.

With support from the Transition Fund, LCF has developed a new programme, Take Part London, to meet this urgent and evolving need.

This report details our review of the latest evidence, research, policy and provision around active citizenship learning needs. It includes:

- A policy review identifying key opportunities and risks for Londoners.
- A review of evidence of active citizenship learning needs in London, bringing together LCF's community-led action research with recent research by other agencies.
- A mapping of engagement opportunities offered by Local Authorities, the NHS and other agencies, on [LCF's interactive Participation Map](#).
- A mapping and gap analysis of active citizenship learning opportunities available to Londoners.
- Evidence-based recommendations for best practice in active citizenship learning to meet the needs of Londoners in the coming years.

We are pleased to share this digest of our findings, which should prove a useful tool for anyone developing evidence-based strategies for supporting active citizenship in London.

1 POLICY CONTEXT: London's Big Society

1.1 A recent history of the Big Society

Active citizenship has been on the political agenda for at least a decade and today receives cross-party support. Of central concern has been a desire to redefine 'the relationship of the state to the people it serves'¹ and to promote a concept of citizenship concerned with taking part in the wider community as well as individuals' rights and responsibilities. With this has come a range of activities to promote civic and civil society participation, including new forms of governance.

Although the emphasis has shifted over time, motivations have been relatively consistent: to strengthen democracy at a time when people have lost faith in politics and politicians; to promote links within and between communities in order to build social cohesion; and to create more responsive and more effective public services. Evidence of the benefits of community engagement across a wide range of policy areas, from crime and anti-social behaviour to housing and regeneration, has also been a factor². The Marmot Review, for example, made a firm link between citizens' participation in their communities, the added control over their lives that this brings, and a range of positive health outcomes³.

The Conservative party placed its weight behind this agenda with its 'invitation to join the government of Britain' through David Cameron's vision of the Big Society, 'where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities'⁴. Since the election, this has become an explicit part of the Coalition agreement. Yet the levers used to bring about change are not significantly different to those used by New Labour, namely:

- Devolution of power to the local level
- Promotion of citizen engagement and empowerment
- Public service reform

¹ Blunkett D, *Civil Renewal: A New Agenda*; Edith Kahn Memorial Lecture, 2003; p. 1

² Rogers, B. & E Robinson (IPPR), *The Benefits of Community Engagement: A Review of the Evidence*; Active Citizenship Centre, 2004

³ *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Executive Summary*; The Marmot Review, 2010; p24. This is especially insightful as London has a higher percentage of inpatients with psychotic disorders than elsewhere: 23% compared to national average of 14% (Norman M. & R Ali, *Stuck on London's Hard Shoulder*; The Young Foundation, 2010; p. 16-17)

⁴ Conservative Party, *Big Society Not Big Government*; 2010; p. 1

Under the previous government, a primary aim was to promote civic engagement, giving citizens and communities greater influence over public sector decision-making. In 2007 the Department of Communities and Local Government defined community empowerment as ‘the giving of confidence, skills and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for them’ and community engagement as ‘the process whereby public bodies reach out to communities to create empowerment opportunities’.⁵ This was reinforced by the Duty to Involve, which legally required public bodies to inform, consult and involve local people in decision-making.⁶

With the Big Society has come a new focus: citizens are encouraged to come together to solve problems themselves, rather than relying on the state. This creates a much greater emphasis on social action, with citizens taking a lead and creating or claiming their own spaces for participation, and less on their being invited in by policy-makers.

1.2 Governance in London

Governmental and administrative structures in London are different from those in other parts of the UK, and this will impact on how power is devolved to Londoners. London is governed through the Greater London Authority group (GLA), encompassing the Mayor of London and the London Assembly⁷. This arrangement includes different scales of representation, with a Mayor elected by the whole of London, and some members of the London Assembly elected by different constituencies across the capital.

London Councils is another important strategic body which brings together the leaders of London’s 32 local authorities to coordinate decision-making and support cross-borough and pan-London work. London Councils’ and City of London’s recent report, *Engaging London’s Communities*, by Tony Travers at London School of Economics, explores the implications of the Big Society and Localism for local authorities, focusing on the emphasis on contracting out to external providers and issues around developing urban parish councils⁸.

The Coalition government abolished regional government offices and structures in 2010 (including the Government Office for London), and established a Local Intelligence Team at the Office for Civil Society which covers each ex-region except Greater London, in recognition of the capital’s separate governance arrangements. With the abolition of regional development agencies, power and responsibility for London’s development has been consolidated in the GLA.

⁵ DCLG, *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success*; October 2007; p.12

⁶ This was measured as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (National Indicator 4). The CAA has now been abolished and the Duty ‘does not provide local citizens with a specific means to compel their local authority to involve or consult them’ (McMullin C, *Involving Communities: A Legal Duty?*; Urban Forum, 2010)

⁷ Read more on the Mayor, Assembly and GLA at <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london>

⁸ Tony Travers, *Engaging London’s Communities*; City of London and London Councils, 2012

Of particular importance in London this year will be the Mayoral elections on 3rd May 2012, the establishment of the new Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and the Policing and Crime Committee at the London Assembly, and pan-London developments around the 2012 Olympics and their legacy.⁹

1.3 Key policy measures

Across the UK, 2011 saw significant developments in the implementation of measures for the Big Society, including the Localism Act, Open Public Services White Paper, Giving White Paper, and initiatives including Community Organisers and National Citizens Service.

The Localism Act: devolution of power

Described as 'the biggest thing that government can do to build the Big Society'¹⁰, decentralisation is at the heart of the Localism Act. The legislation sets out to devolve power to the lowest possible level: to individuals, neighbourhoods and local authorities. Instead of putting the onus on local authorities to give local people a say in decision-making, the emphasis is on giving citizens the power to direct change themselves through new Community Rights to:

- **Bid for** land or buildings that are of value to the community, such as the village shop, community centre or a local park; at the same time local authorities are being encouraged to transfer assets to community ownership or management.
- **Build** new homes or amenities 'where they can demonstrate overwhelming local support' (through a referendum) short-cutting existing planning regulations.
- **Challenge** the way that public services are run and the opportunity to take over the running of those services themselves.

In this way the Act aims to create:

*bottom-up rights that will give local people the chance to take on powers that have previously only been exercised by local authorities. This is active democracy through participation, giving people the opportunity to be directly involved in shaping the way in which local decisions are made and public services are provided.*¹¹

Other measures include giving residents the right to develop neighbourhood plans and to veto council tax rises. The Act also opens the way for more directly elected mayors in cities across England, and gives tenants the tools to hold social landlords more strongly to account.

⁹ For more, see www.londoncivicforum.org.uk/london-wide-governance

¹⁰ DCLG, *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: An Essential Guide*; 2010; p. 2

¹¹ Cabinet Office, *Open Public Services White Paper*; 2011; para. 4.2

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act: communities for safety

This legislation gives citizens a greater say in how their area is policed through the direct election of Police and Crime Commissioners, and by requiring neighbourhood ‘beat meetings’¹².

Open Public Services White Paper: reforming service delivery

This White Paper aims to give individuals greater choice where services are used collectively, giving people direct control ‘either by transferring the ownership of those services directly to communities or by giving neighbourhoods groups greater democratic control over them’.¹³

It includes proposals to reinvigorate very local structures for democracy, choice and accountability such as town, parish and community councils, and to enable them to take control of local services. Where services are commissioned by the public sector there remains a strong emphasis on engagement ‘so that the public’s priorities drive the type of service that is commissioned’.¹⁴

Giving White Paper: supporting generosity

This paper sets out the government’s strategy to increase the numbers and rates of giving of time (volunteering and social action) and money (charitable giving and philanthropy). The paper sets out details of frameworks, incentives and models to encourage giving based around ‘making it easier to give, making it more compelling to give and better support for those providing and managing opportunities to give’¹⁵.

The White Paper outlines early details of initiatives based on models of volunteering such as time banking (giving time, for time) and micro-volunteering (giving small bits of time every so often), and new investments such as match funding and tax incentives to encourage charitable giving¹⁶.

Community Organisers Programme: action from the grassroots

From the launch of his Big Society vision, David Cameron has made a case for ‘more community activism and more community activists’. The Cabinet Office has sponsored the recruitment of 5,000 community organisers, whose role will be to galvanise social action, developing campaigns based on local concerns and priorities, encouraging people to come together and

¹² The full Act is available at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/13/contents/enacted

¹³ Ibid, para. 4.1

¹⁴ Ibid, para. 5.9.

¹⁵ Cabinet Office; *Giving White Paper*; May 2011

¹⁶ National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) et al; *Informing and Influencing Policy*; October 2011; p.2

make a difference, and helping communities to take advantage of the new rights set out in the Localism Act.

The programme is currently delivered by national umbrella organisation Locality, in partnership with community-led organisations who host the community organisers. Current hosts in London are Cambridge House, Southwark and Community Links, Newham (first round, 2011); the Selby Trust, Haringey and Somers Town Community Association, Camden (second round, 2011) and Cricklewood Homeless Concern, Brent (third round, 2012). Over three years 500 senior community organisers will be given a £20,000 bursary in their first year, after which they are required to fundraise to sustain their work. They will be trained in the Freirean 'Root Solutions: Listening Matters' engagement approach developed by Regenerate UK, The 500 will go on to recruit 4,500 volunteers as middle level organisers, and to support them in this role¹⁷.

Communities First: funding neighbourhood action

Community First is an £80m programme led by the Community Development Foundation, which runs until March 2015. It aims to help communities to come together through new and existing community groups, to identify strengths and local priorities, plan for the future and become more resilient, through:

- a £30m Neighbourhood Match Fund, where funds are allocated to the most deprived wards in England to support people to give time and expertise
- a national £50m Endowment Match Challenge, which aims to mobilise both national and local giving and philanthropy

Connections between Community First and the Community Organisers Programme will be made wherever possible.

National Citizen Service: youth action

National Citizen Service (NCS) is a two month summer programme for 16 year olds, with residential and at-home activities for teams of twelve. The programme is funded by the state and delivered by charities, social enterprises and businesses. The goal is that over time, all 16 year olds will undertake NCS.

NCS has three aims: 'a more cohesive society' by creating intense shared experiences for socially mixed groups of young people; 'a more responsible society' by helping young people

¹⁷ For more information on the Community Organisers Programme see www.cocollaborative.org.uk

reflect on such matters; and 'a more engaged society' through 'providing a structured opportunity for young people to understand and serve their local community'.¹⁸

Delivery is open to large national agencies as well as smaller local organisations: in London NCS delivery is currently mainly offered by large national provider The Challenge Network, with additional projects provided by Catch 22 and The Football League Trust.

Big Society Capital: investing in social action

Previously known as the Big Society Bank, Big Society Capital is an independent financial institution which was funded initially through funds released from dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts. It will invest in funds and operations which in turn make direct investments in front-line social enterprises¹⁹.

¹⁸ Conservative Party, *National Citizens Service Policy Paper*; 2011

¹⁹ More information at www.bigsocietycapital.com

2 The Participation Landscape in London

2.1 London in 2012

London is by far the richest part of Britain, but it is also home to the highest poverty rate in the UK²⁰ and an unemployment rate rising more quickly than the national average²¹. Not only does London house more social inequality than any other region in England, it is one of the most unequal cities in the world²². London's Poverty Profile 2011 identifies wide variation in levels of poverty and disadvantage between London boroughs; it also shows a clear link between the ethnic populations of some areas and their poverty and inequality profiles²³.

There is a wealth of evidence to show that the people who are most likely to engage with and benefit from participation activities are those who already have the capacity and skills to do so²⁴. According to Mohan, this civic core is 'a relatively small sub-set of the population...largely composed of well educated, middle-aged professionals: 57% have higher education qualifications; 33% have degrees and are aged 40-64'²⁵. These active citizens are often labelled locally as the usual suspects. However, we must be wary of defining participation too narrowly, in a way which obscures the activities of many groups of citizens engaged in social action which seems to fall below the radar.

In this age of austerity, active citizenship may be lower on the list of immediate priorities for many Londoners working hard to make ends meet. For example, research shows that individuals such as full-time workers and those with children are most likely to want to get involved in local decision-making²⁶, but may not have the capacity to do so.

2.2 London groups at risk of exclusion

LCF identifies a range of London groups at particular risk of exclusion in the current social, economic and political climate. Research including our Empowering Diversity Action Research Series, led by groups of disadvantaged Londoners themselves, highlights the extent to which

²⁰ 28% compared to 22% in the rest of England: [Key Facts], <http://www.londonspovertyprofile.org.uk/>

²¹ MacInnes T., Parekh A. & P. Kenway, *London's Poverty Profile Summary 2011*; Trust for London & New Policy Institute, 2011

²² Norman M. & R. Ali, *Stuck on London's Hard Shoulder*; The Young Foundation, 2010; p. 14

²³ MacInnes T. et al, *Ibid*

²⁴ DCLG, *Empowering Communities in Local Governance: A Systematic Review of the Evidence*; 2009; p. 19

²⁵ Mohan J, *Big Society is Threatened by Lack of Volunteers*; The Guardian, 24.08.2010

²⁶ Hansard Society, *Audit of Political Engagement*; 2011; p. 44

poverty, disadvantage, discrimination, cross-community tension, prejudice, and other factors create significant barriers to participation.²⁷ Amongst those in particular need of support are:

- Citizens who have not previously participated in community activity or governance, and may lack the confidence, skills and knowledge to get involved. Through the London Empowerment Partnership (2008-11) and Take Part Champion Programme (2009-11) LCF gathered a wealth of evidence of disadvantaged Londoners' need for learning support for active citizenship. For example, youth-led research shows that many marginalised young Londoners feel disempowered; they identify their own lack of basic knowledge about how to have a say as a key issue to be addressed.²⁸
- Individuals who identify with 'communities of interest' which are widely distributed across the city and not rooted in particular localities. These include minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and others. For example, LCF-sponsored research by Roma community members identified a range of factors in their exclusion from local decision-making and challenges the mainstream negative perception of their lack of willingness to engage²⁹. As decision-making is increasingly devolved to neighbourhoods, minority groups will have an ever decreasing voice at this level.
- Individuals who are new to an area, to London, or to the UK. Our recent Community Empowerment Partnership project with Praxis shows that there is little direct engagement with London's new migrant communities and they remain largely neglected by the public sphere³⁰.
- Citizens subject to discrimination. Our research with Black and Asian Minority Ethnic lone mothers shows how this group suffers from complex discrimination associated with being a single parent, a woman, and having an ethnic minority background, resulting in social exclusion³¹.
- Citizens lacking confidence in civic participation as a means for improving conditions, a position which often correlates with strong civil society activity. For example, our research into participation in faith-based communities emphasises increasing levels of dissatisfaction with and disengagement from public sector engagement mechanisms.³² Recently, disillusionment with practices in the finance sector have galvanised protest in

²⁷ London Empowerment Partnership, *various reports*; London Civic Forum, 2007 – 2011

²⁸ Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS), *Empowering Young London*; London Civic Forum, 2009; p. 14

²⁹ The Roma Support Group, *Improving Engagement with the Roma Community*; London Civic Forum, 2010; p. 3

³⁰ London Civic Forum & Praxis; *A New Voice in London*; London Civic Forum, 2008; p. 4

³¹ The Limehouse Project, *The (BAME) Lone Mother Equation*; London Civic Forum, 2011; p. 19

³² London Civic Forum; *Empowering Faith Communities in Engaging with Public Bodies*; 2009; p. 8

London and world-wide. Meanwhile a survey by the Committee on Standards in Public Life showed that public confidence in politicians suffered a steep drop between 2008 and 2010 as a result of the MPs expenses scandal³³.

2.3 Semi-connected London

Sadly, there is increasing evidence³⁴ to support the view that the UK and especially London are becoming ever more segregated, with a breakdown in community cohesion³⁵. Changes to housing benefit rules in 2012 are expected to create an exodus of poorer Londoners from inner to outer London areas, increasing segregation along class, race and poverty lines³⁶.

The problem created by segregation in London is compounded by both transience and isolation. Research indicates that active citizenship is often tied to the connection people feel to their local area and to personal relationships³⁷. However, in a city where around a third of residents were born abroad and where residents frequently move around the city³⁸ - Londoners' average length of residence is less than four years³⁹ - there are huge challenges for any attempt to encourage residents to invest time and energy in active citizenship. Finally, social isolation is a significant problem for several groups: 'older people, those who are unemployed, retired, or who live in areas that have thinner social networks overall, all tend to have fewer local connections'⁴⁰.

2.4 London's unique social and cultural capital

London's diversity is its strength. All groups in society have valuable and varied social and cultural capital. It is especially important to recognise the important contribution of solidarity; historically, identity politics and close personal ties within communities have mobilised social action. In London, many organisations and networks exist to support specific groups of citizens, such as Praxis⁴¹, which works with displaced people.

Citizens have access to different types of social capital: *bonding capital* – close ties between people in similar situations such as family and close friends; *bridging capital* – looser ties to

³³ For example, see www.publicstandards.gov.uk/Library/CSPL_survey_Final_web_version.pdf

³⁴ MacInnes T., Parekh A. & P Kenway, *London's Poverty Profile 2011*; Trust for London & New Policy Institute, September 2011

³⁵ For example, Trevor Phillips' statement in 2005 claiming that the UK is "sleep-walking into segregation", and Shepherd J, *Headteacher Expresses Alarm Over Racial Segregation in London Schools*; The Guardian; 4.10.2011

³⁶ MacInnes T et al, *Ibid*; p5

³⁷ NCVO et al; *Pathways Through Participation Summary Report*; September 2011; p. 5

³⁸ MacInnes T et al, *Ibid*; p. 14

³⁹ Furthermore, for example, Newham reported a 30% turnover in school pupils in a single year: Norman M. & Ali R.; *Stuck on London's Hard Shoulder*; The Young Foundation; 2010; p. 18

⁴⁰ Marcus G., Neumark T. & S Broome, *Power Lines*; Royal Society of Arts, May 2011; p. 3

⁴¹ <http://www.praxis.org.uk/>

similar people such as loose friendships and colleagues; and *linking capital* – helps ensure that people with different levels of power and status meet and learn from one another⁴². It has been suggested that some Black Minority Ethnic (BME) and Traveller communities have significant bonding capital but may lack in linking capital. There is evidence that BME community members have high educational aspirations, but lack the resources to capitalise on this⁴³; other research suggests that young people have untapped skills, knowledge and confidence in social media, networking, campaigning and promotions but lack connections to individuals with decision-making powers⁴⁴.

A crucial role of active citizenship learning is to unlock the skills, experience and knowledge of every individual, to enable them to share their strengths across communities, and to galvanise motivation for wider social activity.

2.5 Participation ‘under the radar’

It is estimated that there are between 60,000 and 900,000 small community groups in England and Wales⁴⁵, and that most of these are ‘under the radar’, meaning they receive little or no support from statutory or voluntary sector organisations. Grassroots groups led by communities themselves have the local trust, expertise and independence crucial to supporting the most marginalised Londoners. However, such groups are constantly at risk of burning out as a result of being under-resourced and under-recognised.

Research by LCF and others highlights the key role that community sector organisations can play in fostering participation. These organisations and networks contribute in a number of ways, for example by providing:

- A focus for collective action and a safe space, particularly for people from excluded groups, where they can come together, learn from each other and build the relationships needed to sustain and widen participation⁴⁶.
- Routes into and out of communities for those taking on leadership roles, so that they can be influenced - and held to account - by others in their community, thereby conferring a greater level of legitimacy⁴⁷.

⁴² Wilding N, *Exploring Community Resilience in Times of Rapid Change*; Carnegie UK Trust, August 2011; p. 10

⁴³ Dwyer C. et al; *Ethnicity as Social Capital? Explaining the Differential Educational Achievements of Young British Pakistani Men and Women*; Leverhulme Programme Conference, University of Bristol, 16-17 March 2006; p. 15

⁴⁴ Wilkinson R. & Leach M. et al; *Civic Limits: How Much More Involved Can People Get?*; Respublica; 2011; p. 8

⁴⁵ Newton D, *The Infrastructure Support Services Needed by Community Organisations in London, 2009 Onwards*; April 2010; p. 1

⁴⁶ NCVO et al, *Pathways Through Participation; What Creates and Sustains Active Citizenship?* September 2011

⁴⁷ Foot J, *Citizen Involvement in Local Governance*; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; 2009

- A means of sustaining engagement, on a personal level, creating ties of loyalty and obligation that go beyond the initial personal interest that motivated people to take part in the first place⁴⁸; at group level, understanding of the barriers and enablers to participation means that organisations are well placed to facilitate social action on an on-going basis⁴⁹.

It is important to acknowledge the different cultures and dynamics at work in communities and institutions (whether governmental, administrative private or voluntary). Eileen Conn characterises grassroots community activity as based on networks of ‘horizontal peer’ relationships, and contrasts it with the ‘vertical hierarchical’ relationships found in organisations⁵⁰. Their distinct dynamics mean that interaction between communities and institutions is necessarily complex, and familiar terminology such as ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ can obscure this. Learning which supports community members and organisational staff to develop a better understanding of these dynamics will help enable more transformational activity in the space of possibilities between communities and institutions⁵¹.

Meanwhile, also outside the radar is the private sector: a largely untapped resource with vast potential for supporting active citizenship, as identified by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA):

*Business in particular needs to play its part in fostering a new culture of civic participation and involvement. This is not just about providing the pro bono assistance, small grants or organised volunteering that has typified much CSR, it is about creating a more flexible environment in which employees are empowered to find the time to participate in civil society. At a local level – business leaders need to rediscover their roles as ‘pillars of the community’, taking on responsibility as civic and community activists alongside their economic role.*⁵²

2.6 New routes to participation

While the current decline in activities including voting, volunteering and donating to charity⁵³ has led to suggestions of a ‘democratic deficit’, many people contribute in ways not traditionally recognised as participation. Active citizenship can be formal or informal and can involve activities such as childminding, acting as a translator for your neighbour at a doctor’s

⁴⁸ NCVO; *Ibid*

⁴⁹ Miller S. & A Hatamian, *Take Part Final Report*; Community Development Foundation, 2011

⁵⁰ Conn E, *Community Engagement in the Social Eco-System Dance*; TSRC, 2011, p6

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p8

⁵² Wilkinson R., Leach M. et al; *Civic Limits: How Much More Involved Can People Get?*; Respublica; 2011; p. 4

⁵³ E.g. a government White Paper states that ‘the giving of both time and money has flat-lined’ (Cabinet Office, *Giving White Paper*; 2011; p. 4)

appointment, putting something in a recycling box, or not buying a certain product for ethical reasons⁵⁴. We have also seen a recent increase in campaigning, protesting and occupation.

Social media provides new space for active citizenship. Many now go straight to online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to share their views.⁵⁵ A 2011 study found that youth engagement in non-political online cultures can be a gateway to participation in civic and political life, including volunteering, community problem-solving, protest and political voice⁵⁶. Given these developments, it is essential that citizens involved in new or under-recognised modes of participation get the support they need to access the corridors of power. The 2001 *London Digital Neighbourhoods Study* by Networked Neighbourhoods offers further insight into current online community developments in the capital⁵⁷.

2.7 The Big Relationship

Reforming the relationship between government and Londoners is at the heart of the Big Society vision for the capital. Citizens tend to feel averse to measures perceived as imposed on (rather than developed with) communities, and this may have been exacerbated in the past by 'government's encouragement of comparatively narrow, highly formalised and structured forms of participation (e.g. public consultations, regeneration boards, health consultative bodies, formal volunteering)'.⁵⁸ This can dissuade some people from participating, limit the diversity of people involved, and inhibit less structured forms of participation.

Understanding and responding to citizens' personal experiences of participation is crucial to maintaining it. People tend to start participating in response to personal life events; the strongest indicator for sustained activity is the quality of the experience⁵⁹. Conversely, asked why they stopped participating, citizens often say that they have not been able to make an impact; there is evidence that this is largely perceived rather than real⁶⁰. More skilled, confident citizens lead more effective change, manage disappointment better, and persist towards a goal.

The Big Society vision requires citizens to navigate new policy in a climate of public spending cuts and widespread reform. It is clear that some are able to exercise active citizenship rights more easily others. and many Londoners are at risk of exclusion. In response, Londoners need support to develop skills, confidence and knowledge to influence the decisions which affect their daily lives, and to take part in social action to improve quality of life for all.

⁵⁴ NCVO et al, *Pathways Through Participation*; September 2011

⁵⁵ Davies, T, *Online Social Networks & Active Citizenship* (Conference: Helsinki); March 2011

⁵⁶ Kahn J., Lee N. J. & J.T. Feezell, *The Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures Among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood*; Youth & Participatory Politics, Feb 2011

⁵⁷ Report available at www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/capitalambition/projects/digitalneighbourhoods

⁵⁸ NCVO et al, *Pathways Through Participation – Summary Report*; September 2011; p. 9

⁵⁹ Ibid p. 5-6

⁶⁰ Ibid.

3 Active Citizenship Support in London

Approaches to participation that confer new rights and responsibilities on citizens will mean nothing if citizens are not in a position to fulfil their responsibilities or exercise their rights.⁶¹

It is clear from evidence and policy direction reviewed in the first part of this paper that many Londoners are not in a position to take up new rights and opportunities, and need tailored support to help them develop the confidence, skills, knowledge and motivation to participate in the Big Society.

3.1 Take Part in London

LCF believes that one of the most effective support mechanisms can be offered through Take Part, an evidence-based approach to active citizenship learning.

The Take Part approach is based on the work of Paulo Freire, and founded on the values of social justice, participation, equality and diversity, and cooperation. The key elements of Freire's approach – dialogue (conversation and reflection with others), praxis (reflection and political action) and conscientisation (developing a critical awareness of one's social reality) – are realised in a process of problem-solving and shared experience.

Learners gain confidence, skills and knowledge for participation through activities which are:

- **Learner centred** - encouraging people to reflect on their own past and their futures, and to share knowledge and experience;
- **Experiential** - valuing and building on people's prior experiences and knowledge;
- **Active and reflective** - enabling learners to learn by doing, and then to reflect on what has been achieved;
- **Community-based** - anchoring learning in a community context, focusing on wider community issues, working in inclusive ways and encouraging participation in community structures and networks.⁶²

⁶¹ Norris E. & S McLean, *Civic Commons: A Model for Social Action*; Royal Society of Arts (RSA), 2011

⁶² [What are the Take Part Learning Principles?] www.takepart.org

Groups of learners come together, supported by a facilitator, for informal sessions in which they shape and lead their own learning, share their strengths, identify issues of concern, take action in response and develop stronger critical awareness of their social environment.

LCF's Take Part London programme is founded on a wealth of expertise, best practice and resources developed since 2004 by community support organisations across England through the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) and National Take Part Programmes.

There is strong evidence that Take Part learning leads to:

- New confidence, knowledge and skills for learners, their family and friends
- Increased, more effective, participation
- Higher take up of further learning and employment
- Improved engagement practices at involved public sector agencies
- The development of strong networks and partnerships across sectors⁶³.

Take Part London at LCF makes a unique offer of London-focused active citizenship learning for civil and civic participation, helping citizens connect, act and influence at neighbourhood, local, city-wide and national levels. We currently run a wide range of activities in co-production with local grassroots community organisations and public sector agencies. These include Growing London, a partnership project with Ecolocal and the Workers Educational Association (WEA) supporting learning around community gardening and active citizenship for 45 Londoners, funded by the Skills Funding Agency, and a range of pilot activities in boroughs across the capital, and with pan-London communities of interest. For updates on our diverse activities, see www.londoncivicforum.org.uk.

3.2 What else is available to Londoners?

The UK and London is host to an array of participation opportunities: see [LCF's online Participation Map](#) for an extensive, interactive mapping.

However, learning opportunities to enable all Londoners to access these opportunities are limited. The following analysis is based on LCF's mapping of current learning opportunities, which are downloadable from our website⁶⁴, and logged on our online [Participation Map](#). We know that this is not yet an exhaustive list: please contact us with opportunities to be added.

⁶³ See e.g. Annette, J. & M. Mayo, *Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship and Beyond*, NIACE, 2011; Miller S. & A Hatamian, *Take Part Final Report*; CLG/CDF, 2011

⁶⁴ See www.londoncivicforum.org.uk/resources/take-part-resources/

Locality's Community Organisers (CO) Programme is now active in five London boroughs, and Regenerate UK has so far delivered 'Root Solutions, Listening Matters' training to around 16 London-based COs. This training supports COs to engage with, listen to and encourage self-help action for residents and 'volunteer organisers'; they have not yet received structured support enabling them to deliver skills, confidence and knowledge-building activities to develop self-sustaining active citizenship and leadership with the local residents and volunteers they encounter. LCF has agreed to help the two 2011-12 CO kickstarters develop Organisers' capacity in this area by running a 'Take Part Train the Facilitator' session in early 2012.

London Citizens (a branch of Citizens UK) offers a programme of Alinskian Community Leadership training which is free to members (largely faith groups, education agencies and larger VCS organisations). However, its reach into the community sector is limited, particularly to non-faith-based groups. Furthermore, there are fundamental differences in approach between Saul Alinsky's polarising model of organising and Take Part's Freirean focus on development through shared learning and new critical understanding.

Several other opportunities are limited to particular localities, like the **Young Foundation's Citizen's University** (Sutton) and youth programme **Uprising** (Tower Hamlets, Barking and Dagenham, Newham), and the active citizenship learning sessions delivered by some branches of the **WEA**.

Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) in each borough provide wide and varied support to voluntary and community organisations, with a focus on capacity building, strategic representation and network development. Many CVSs have in the past provided support around participation for individuals, but no longer have resources to do so. A number have expressed strong interest in offering active citizenship learning for individuals in the current context, and LCF hopes to develop partnership work supporting them to develop this.

Meanwhile national projects such as the **British Council Active Citizen Programme** lack the London focus essential to supporting residents of the capital to engage with the specific challenges of citizenship enacted at neighbourhood, local, city-wide and national levels. Another learning opportunity is provided UK-wide by the **Sheila McKechnie Foundation**, but this specialist support for campaigners targets only one specific type of participation activity. **Parliamentary Outreach** runs learning for citizens around national governance structures.

National membership networks including **Urban Forum**, **Locality** and **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)** offer learning around influence and representation, aimed at groups rather than individuals, to staff and volunteers at member organisations. **Operation Black Vote** provides support for Black, Asian and minority Londoners, including a Parliamentary shadowing programme and youth empowerment projects.

A range of active citizenship learning support based in London is concentrated around environmental action and engagement, led by organisations including **TalkAction**, **Groundwork**, **Ecolocal** and **Bioregional**. Some more London-based specialist learning opportunities are provided for communities of interest, such as the **Disability Law Service**, the **Roma Support Group**, and **The Asian Health Agency's Black and Minority Ethnic Leadership Programme**. Such specialised services are essential in London, and LCF's Take Part project has worked closely with many of them to help develop their offer. However, it is worth noting that most such activities' funding from London Councils is currently jeopardised.

Several opportunities require prior learning experience and confidence. For example, **Birkbeck College, University of London** and **London Metropolitan University** offer courses for adult learners around active citizenship, but such programmes often fail to reach the most marginalised because the most disadvantaged often do not have the confidence to take part.

LCF's Take Part London Programme offers tailored, accessible and informal community based learning, developed through outreach and in partnership with trusted grassroots community organisations. Our mapping indicates that this programme is currently the only offer of active citizenship support in the capital which:

- operates across London, working in partnership with pan-London equalities groups and neighbourhood-based community organisations;
- brings learners together from across neighbourhoods to share experiences, gain new perspective on local issues and develop a stronger sense of city-wide citizenship and ability to connect London-wide and local issues;
- supports Londoners to develop skills, knowledge and confidence for any form of active citizenship (e.g. civic participation, social action etc), as identified by learners themselves;
- is fully learner-led, active and reflective and community-based, supporting activity around themes identified by learners themselves;
- is accessible by all Londoners, and does not require literacy, fluency in English, prior experience of adult education or participation;
- and meets the learning needs of highly experienced civic and civil society participants, as well as those of citizens who have never participated before.

4 Conclusions

LCF is committed to the ongoing development of Take Part London to meet the evolving needs of Londoners. Our new programme is underpinned by the conclusions emerging from the current policy and research review, and we hope that others will find these useful in developing active citizenship learning support.

4.1 Recognise and use all forms of social and cultural capital

Active citizenship learning support should engage with, and enable, all forms of social and cultural capital, and in particular that held by the most disadvantaged and excluded Londoners. As detailed in Section 4, cultural heritage, personal relationships and individual experiences bring a wealth of skills and knowledge that are of value when shared with others.

The key is finding innovative ways to bring people together across communities to do so. We have found that an excellent strategy involves building active citizenship learning around informal activities in which many citizens already have skills – such as gardening, cooking, or sport. Some examples of good practice include London Civic Forum’s own *Growing London* project which works with partners to deliver a programme of active citizenship learning geared around developing container vegetable gardens around London⁶⁵ and the *FoodCycle* project which supports local communities to set up groups of volunteers who are empowered to collect surplus food, cook meals and serve it to those in need.⁶⁶

These projects give people the confidence to know that change is possible and that they are capable of leading it; allow the establishment and development of networks which can develop into other things; provide social networking skills; and trigger other forms of active citizenship.

4.2 Frame active citizenship in the participant’s terms

Active citizenship learning must be meaningful to each individual learner. Understanding the particularities of individuals and groups means knowing where people participate, what they do, why they do it, who they do it with, how they do it, and with what resources. Crucially, it means understanding the background of disadvantaged Londoners: knowing what barriers particular individuals and communities face, currently and historically.

⁶⁵ [LCF Launches Growing London]; www.londoncivicforum.org.uk, 24.8.2011

⁶⁶ [Home]; www.foodcycle.org.uk

Freire emphasised the importance of history in active citizenship learning. The historical perspective should be wide: a Londoner's historical landscape may include migration, colonialism, war, refuge and so on. Acknowledgement of this context supports critical understanding of the current context in which Londoners live, and can enthuse citizens with strong motivation for social action. A focus on history and culture also addresses issues around confidence and motivation, fundamental to active citizenship learning.

Active citizenship learning for under-privileged Londoners should inspire individuals to continue taking part by providing opportunities which are enthusing and satisfy the participant's psychological need for fulfilment. Individuals participate in order to get something they want or need from the experience, and this is overwhelmingly an emotional need. Thus, activities should be fun, sociable, organised well, built on participant's strengths, and offer gateways for future involvement and development.

4.3 Use new media technology for community-building

Social media and the internet are increasingly used as spaces for social and political interaction. Active citizenship for 2012 should engage people by combining face-to-face and online activities. Furthermore, support with accessing online learning and participation opportunities should be built into all active citizenship learning, particularly for those who are currently excluded from these spaces.

4.4 Enable the 'Civic Core' to support others to engage

Given support to do so, the already-engaged have a valuable role to play in engaging with and supporting new participants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, up-skilling and valuing experienced activists can help them break out of their often-negative relationship with local agencies and elected members.

This approach is also important because of the risk that the 'Big Society' may, in practice, 'consist of middle class actors trying to provide solutions to working class problems'⁶⁷, which could be both ineffective and divisive. Without open dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation between relatively disadvantaged communities and privileged communities, the already able will gain an even stronger voice at the expense of others.

4.5 Support grassroots activity

Strength, resilience and trust amongst underrepresented communities emerge across the grassroots, creating informal networks of expertise and support. Active citizenship learning is best delivered by, or with, existing community groups and equalities-based organisations, and

⁶⁷ Dinham A, *Active Citizenship in the Big Society*; Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010; p. 1

can be used to build the resilience of these essential and often-neglected resources. Such groups often maintain a long-term relationship with learners after formal learning has finished, and provide a springboard for learners to develop new social action and networks.

Further, learning which helps community members and staff in public, private and civil society agencies better understand the complexities of, and differences between community-level and institutional dynamics leads to more effective, transformational engagement between them.

4.6 Engage the private sector

Business has a crucial role to play in supporting civic and civil society, and it is important to support local and national private sector businesses to engage with individuals as citizens, as well as clients and employees.

Excellent business skills already run throughout many of London's more excluded communities: individuals and families have shown resilience and innovation by coming establishing successful local businesses, while others have skills developed through informal economies of community support. The private sector can help build on this social capital with expertise in sustainability, entrepreneurship, financial support and the confidence- and motivation-enhancing recognition of existing talent and skills.

4.7 Next steps

The new policy framework and other social pressures provide fresh challenges to Londoners becoming active citizens, especially for the most disenfranchised members of society. The Big Society agenda presents new opportunities for participation, but heighten the risk of exclusion for many Londoners, who need support to overcome barriers and grasp new opportunities. This especially applies to London's most under-privileged communities who will be hit hard by cuts and changes to policy and are at distinct risk of being excluded from power. London's diversity and distinct set of issues presents the need for approaches that are tailored for Londoners and grounded in communities.

The Take Part Approach provides the right kind of support in the current climate. This learning model has proved strength in empowering individuals through focusing on the particular strengths and struggles of individuals and communities, enabling learners to develop skills, confidence and knowledge to make a difference through civic participation and social action.

LCF's new Take Part London Programme, developed in response to this review, will launch in March 2012.