

General feedback on applications for Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) Fund

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1. Explanation of the process

Received applications were distributed to four markers. Two were staff from the Derbyshire office of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and two were staff from Derbyshire Learning & Development Consortium (DLDC). Scoring was undertaken according to a grid developed by the LSC, the essentials of which are provided in section 5.

The four markers and DLDC's NLDC Contract Manager came together to form a scoring panel to assess the scores and allocate the funding. Scores were placed into a spreadsheet, averaged and then ordered from the highest scoring to the lowest scoring. The panel then considered each project in turn from the highest scoring downwards.

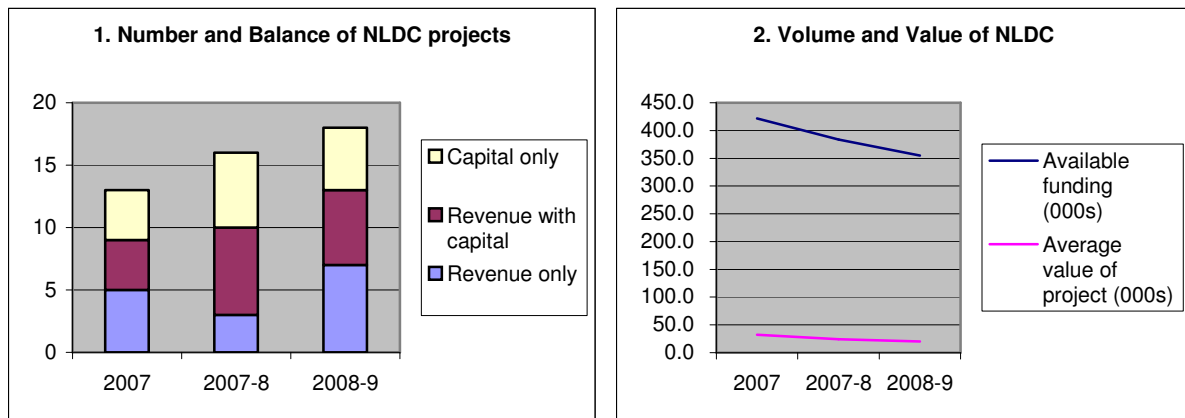
Projects were assessed for eligibility, value for money, contribution to the fund's outcomes, geographical focus and a range of other considerations before a decision was reached as to how much money to allocate. Where budget items were considered unnecessary or disproportionate these were trimmed. Then outcomes and funding were allocated proportionately to reach a level of delivery and funding that the panel considered a reasonable 'offer' for the suggested activity.

When available funds were fully allocated, remaining projects were reviewed to ensure that there were clearly identifiable reasons for these projects not being as worthy of funding compared to the projects allocated funding. Finally, the panel considered whether there were any major inequalities in the spread of projects in terms of sector, geography or target client groups.

2. Changes in NLDC funding allocations 2007-2009

The analysis that follows in the following sections has been drawn up after the 2008-9 NLDC allocations and in no way influenced the process described above. This is provided in the interests of transparency to assess whether the distribution of NLDC funding can be considered balanced.

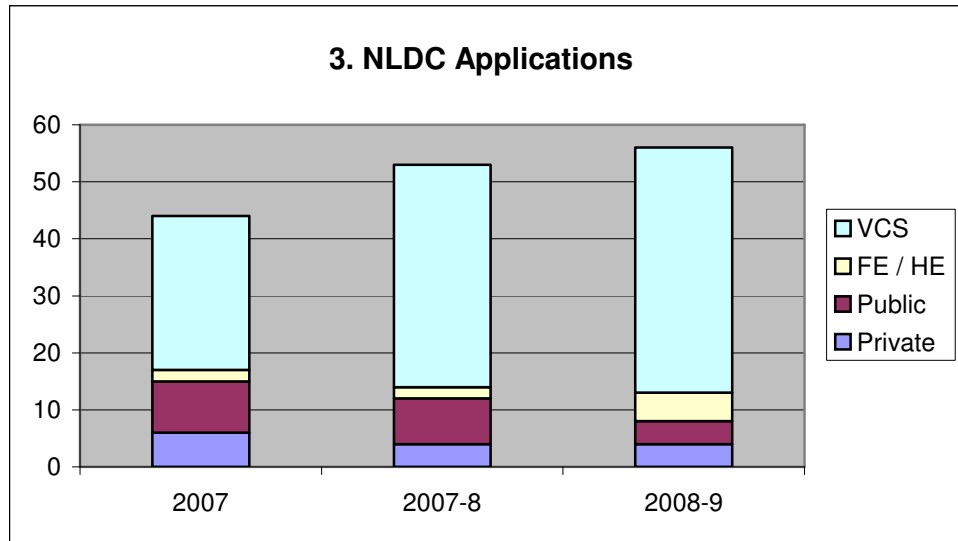
Graph 1 below shows the number of successful applications over recent years. The number of successful projects has grown, particularly in the distribution of revenue funding. This reflects the panel's desire in the past two allocations to try to maximise the impact of NLDC by distributing the funding as widely as possible. Firstly, this helps to meet the fund's capacity-building remit. Secondly, a wide distribution is more likely to reach a wide range of localities and deprived client groups.



However, as is shown in graph 2, this has occurred in a climate in which the amount of NLDC funds available has been falling. If available funding is falling and numbers of projects rising, the average level of funding for each project will necessarily fall. The level of average project funding, however, has not fallen at the same rate as the fall in available funding.

3. Patterns of applications 2007-2009

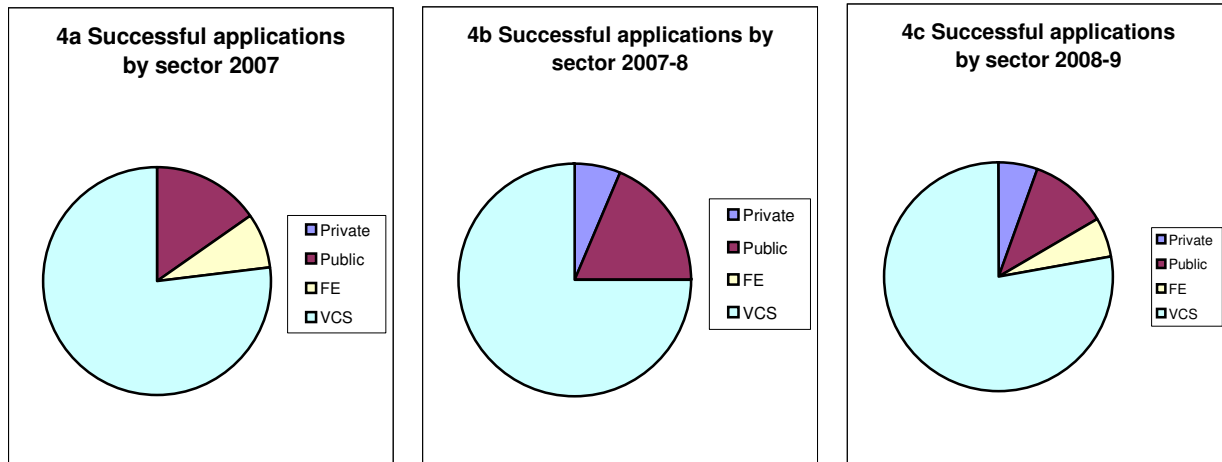
Graph 3 shows the numbers of application received and the proportion coming from each sector. For consistency with previous years, the figures for 2008-9 has been adjusted to account for separate capital bids that were linked to revenue bids. Although levels of applications have risen, it is important to take into account a growing tendency for organisations to make multiple applications. As later graphs will show, this seems to be the vogue in the Chesterfield area!



Graph 3 also shows levels of application from different sectors. Unsurprisingly for a fund that is specifically directed at the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), that sector provides the bulk of applications. Applications from other sectors seem to be in decline. Data below indicates that the decline is not linked to lack of success, as the number of successful projects from sectors outside the VCS seems to be proportionate to the levels of application from these sectors. Nonetheless, DLDC and LSC need to consider whether this is a cause for concern and if so, decide what action needs to be taken.

4. Patterns of successful applications 2007-2009 - by sector

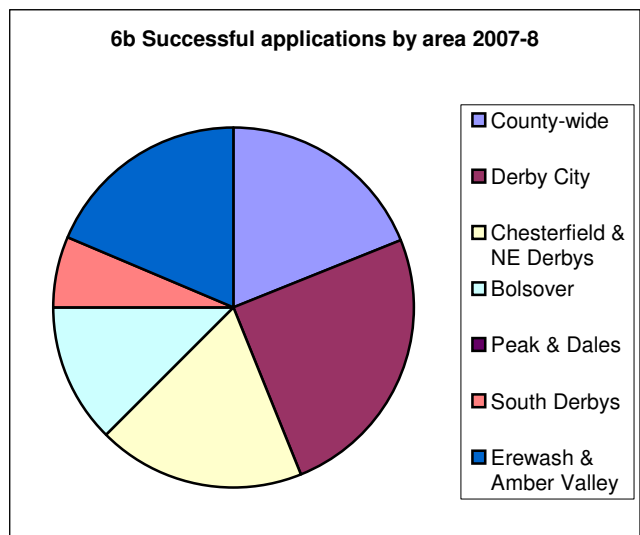
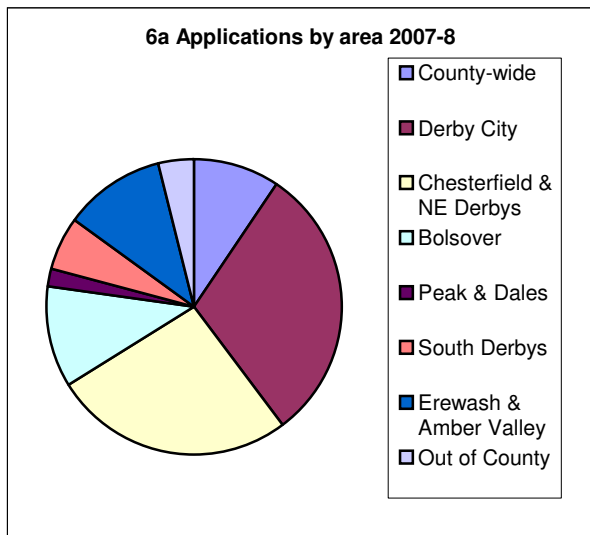
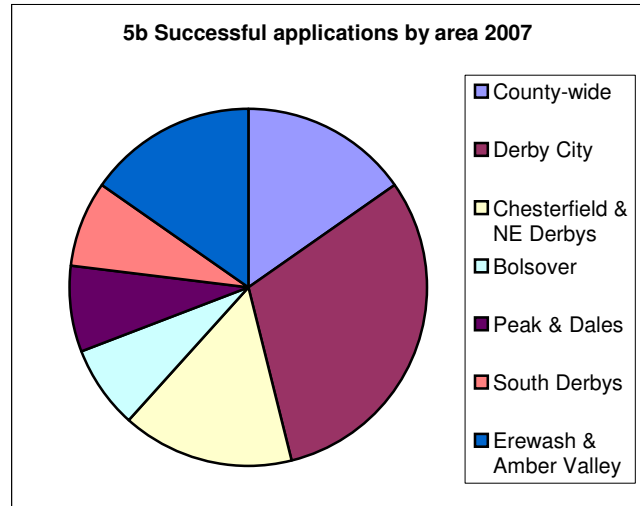
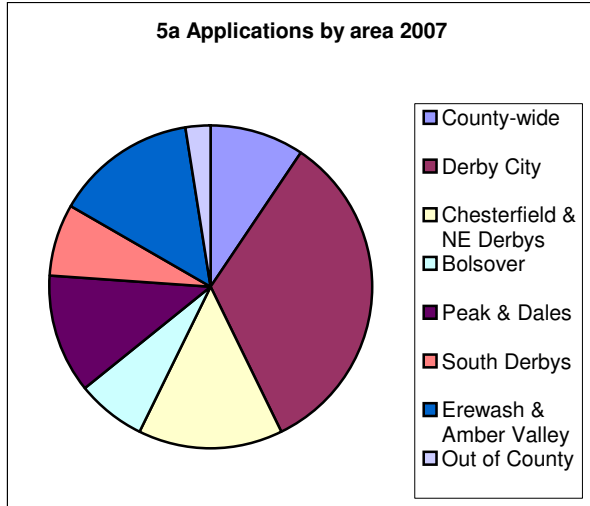
Graphs 4a-c below show the proportion of successful applications from different sectors. The proportion allocated to organisations outside the VCS has been steady at around a quarter over the past three funding rounds. In the most recent funding rounds the number of non-VCS organisations allocated funds has been proportionate to the total number of applications.

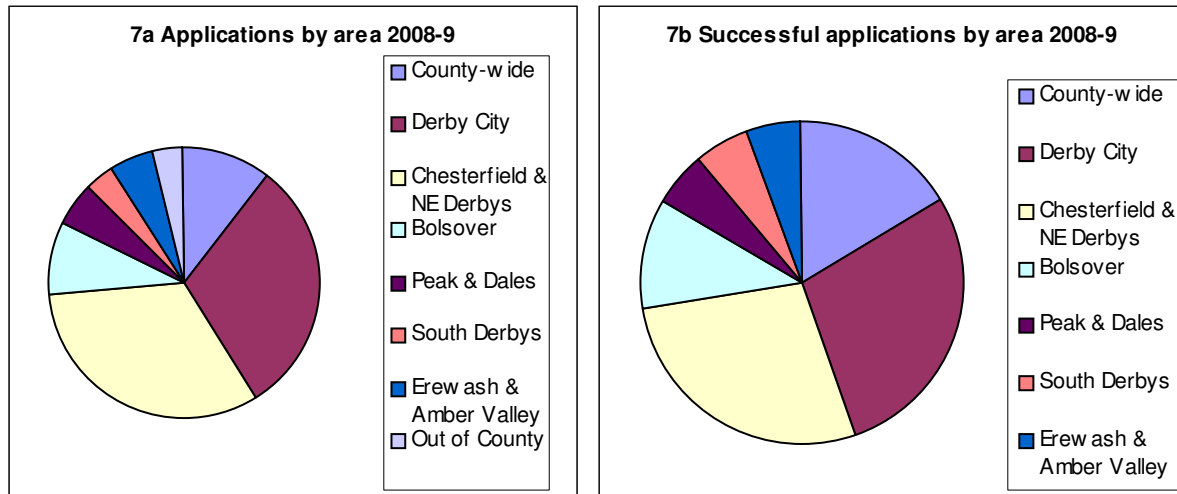


However, in 2007 there was a significant divergence between the proportion of applications from non-VCS sources and the proportion of successful projects from outside the VCS. This needs closer consideration, but it may be that applications from outside the VCS have settled to a realistic level, given that there is a clear VCS focus to the fund.

5. Patterns of successful applications 2007-2009 - by area

The two columns of graphs below compare geographical distribution of applications against distribution of successful applications.





There are three identifiable areas of variance:

- The distribution of projects outside Derby and Chesterfield varies from year to year
- The proportion of applications from Chesterfield has grown. As explained earlier, this is owing to a trend in multiple applications from chesterfield organisations.
- County-wide projects are disproportionately successful

Apart from these the distribution of funding is remarkably closely balanced to the areas of applications' origin. Only the third area of significant variance noted above is of concern. It may be that County-wide organisations are larger and better resourced and so have an advantage in the process. Alternatively, County-wide organisations may benefit from greater reach and an enhanced ability to identify gaps and develop provision that meets those gaps in a cost-effective way.

As the process seems to advantage County-wide organizations, this is not such a serious concern as if there was a leaning towards a particular part of the County. The imbalance is not to NLDC's reach or interface with clients, but, if one assumes that County-wide organisations are larger, the inequality is in the size and nature of successful organisations. This will be looked at and considered by DLDC and LSC prior to future funding rounds.

6. Factors that strengthened and weakened bids

The points below are provided against the various questions. Being allocated funds does not necessarily mean that some of the specific points below do not need attention! Some applications suffered from general weaknesses such as:

- Not seeming to have read the project specification carefully enough
- Falling foul of pitfalls highlighted in the guidance documentation provided
- Not answering the question (i.e. drifting or answering a different question)
- Not completing parts of the form
- Lack of structure and clarity
- Stringing together jargon into meaningless mulch!

Question	Strengthening factors	Weakening factors
Please give a brief summary of your project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative or building on previous good practice • Relevant to activity in the project specification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeding the word limit • Unclear what learning is being offered • Too close overlap with existing programmes • Too much dependence on one aspect of delivery (e.g. IAG) • Not focussed on LEARNERS • Learning activity too tenuous to progression
Please describe who your project is aimed at and how you will engage your target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target group clearly identified and eligible • Needs of target group described • Clear engagement strategies • Evidence of need being identified through research or user engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indications that delivery would also encompass 16-19 provision • Lack of plan B for engagement with difficult client group
Please explain what your project delivery plans are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed and clear Project Delivery Plan attached • Well-thought-through delivery plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to complete/attach Project Delivery Plan • Failure to focus on <i>project delivery mechanisms and milestones</i> rather than repeat or detail outcomes and targets
What are the output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A realistic contribution to specification's outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost per beneficiary disproportionate to available

targets of your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good balance of outcomes (learning activity, progression) 	<p>funding without clear reason for delivery to client group requiring high costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic target numbers (volume and balance)
What soft outcomes will be achieved and how will you measure these?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and varied list of soft outcomes • Reference to an established tool for measuring soft outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of incidental outcomes that did not demonstrate enhanced personal development for client • Failure to describe measurement methodology
What are your quality assurance arrangements for delivery of your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong systems for quality provision • <i>Supporting</i> reference to achievement of quality standards (Ofsted, Matrix etc) • Focus on Common Assessment Framework practices • Mention of trainer qualification & CPD • Mention of individual learner initial assessment • Mention of exit assessments • Clearly explained quality methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on past record • Insufficient explanation of the arrangements that will support the project as opposed to listing achieved standards (ie too much we have done; not enough we will do)
What systems do you have in place to monitor and review progress on your project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust MIS systems. • Experienced staff • Involvement / scrutiny of Board / steering group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing the point of the question by describing track record. • Meaningless string of jargon • List of tools (spreadsheets, paperwork) without any explanation of scrutiny
Please explain what partnerships are in place to deliver the aims and objectives of your project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership in place already • Role and contribution of partners clear • Good strategic choice of partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of connected organisations or referral agencies without any indication of role or contribution • A relationship with another organisation is not necessarily a partnership
How will you ensure that your project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing existing programmes • Utilising volunteers or existing services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on sound procurement practice • Cost is not the same as value

provides value for money?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound procurement practice • Cost effective compared to similar service or existing service in another field/area 	
How is your project providing additional services to those already on offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of other programmes • Evidence of mapping provision in area • Indication of distinctness of provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on hearsay or unsupported supposition
Please provide brief details of all the costs of your project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of detail • Costs link to delivery elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorrect separation of capital and revenue • Costs table not completed • Imbalance between management & delivery costs • Costs unrealistically / unnecessarily high