

London Borough of Camden

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote innovative ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local and community groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the London Borough of Camden's Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. The report highlights the aims and objectives of the Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project and the achievements of the project.

The grant

The Elections Office of the London Borough of Camden partnered with the Camden Civic Society in Autumn 2003 to deliver the Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project. The Elections Office is responsible for electoral registration and administering all elections within the London Borough of Camden and has experience working with local schools. The Camden Civic Society is a voluntary organisation established to promote high standards of community planning, conservation and regeneration for the benefit of the Borough of Camden.

The primary aim of this project was to enable Camden's secondary school students in years 10 to 12 to follow the electoral process and political campaigns leading up to the Greater London Authority and European Parliamentary elections on 10 June 2004. The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a

sum of £23,295 to the London Borough of Camden for the Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project and an amount of **£10,690** was paid out. This decreased payment reflects a reduction in the project's timeframe from 11 to six months.

The Commission's grant covered salary costs for a part-time coordinator and additional administrative costs from the Camden Civic Society. The Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project ran from January to July 2004.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of the Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project were to:

- address issues of low turnout at elections in Camden by providing specific learning opportunities about the elections in 2004, which can be cascaded down within the schools and to parents; and

- enable young people to collect campaign literature, attend hustings¹ and assess the effectiveness of campaigns.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- form a core group of 50 young people from Camden schools to participate in organised activities;
- recruit 10-20 students to participate as Poll Clerks for part of polling day on 10 June 2004;
- develop learning materials to be used in schools prior to the 10 June 2004 London Mayoral and European Parliamentary elections; and
- receive requests from Camden schools for follow-on work after the elections.

Evaluation

The London Borough of Camden and the Camden Civic Society utilised the Voter Turnout Working Party to monitor and evaluate the Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project. The following methods were used to assess the success of the project:

- monitoring the number of students and schools active in the project;

¹ An event organised by groups or individuals to provide a platform for candidates standing for election to address electors. Such events may focus on a particular issue, such as health or traffic congestion or may be more general forums for discussion.

- feedback forms distributed to students after events and activities;
- a post-project feedback session with the core group of students; and
- evaluation forms sent to schools to assess the learning materials.

Deliverables

Over the seven-month project Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing delivered the following:

- forty-two pupils took part in the core group activities. Four Camden schools participated – Parliament Hill, La Sainte Union (LSU), Hampstead and Camden School for Girls;
- five different types of activities were piloted during the seven-month project;
- learning materials were developed and forwarded to all Camden schools. Three schools incorporated the materials into their curriculum;
- sixteen students took part in polling day activities as Poll Clerks on 10 June 2004; and
- a total of 3,118 secondary school students from all nine Camden secondary schools participated in all activities over the course of the project.

Resources and project management

Retired Teacher, David Robertson was hired to coordinate all project activities which were overseen by a

steering group and in turn reported regularly to the Voter Turnout Working Party.

The project delivered the above activities as documented below:

- project coordination: **£9,690**;
- and
- Camden Civic Society administration: **£1,000**.

Total: **£10,690**.

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

The Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project was targeted to reach year 10 to 12 students in the London Borough of Camden. Over 3,100 pupils participated in five different types of activities, representing approximately one third of the Camden secondary school population. These activities included polling station work experience, visits to democratic institutions, school assemblies with candidates for the London Assembly elections, learning materials developed for schools and mock elections held at schools. All of these activities were well attended and well received by pupils.

The students who gained the most from the pilot events, however, were those who worked as polling station clerks and the core group of students, who visited the London Mayor and Assembly headquarters, attended a meeting with London MEP, Richard Balfe, and made a trip to Brussels funded through the European

Office of Camden's Policy and Partnership Division. Two students in this core group also attended the Local Government Association Conference in March 2004.

These visits had the greatest impact because pupils engaged more with experiential activities where they could meet politicians in smaller groups and feel actively involved rather than being spoken to by candidates in large school assembly environments.

The polling day activities were also effective at providing an understanding of democratic processes by engaging students in an interactive learning experience. Each student attended a training session and was then assigned the task of observing voters' behaviour and reactions to casting their ballot.

The lesson plans, mock elections and school assembly meetings with London Assembly candidates were able to reach larger numbers of students than the core group events. However, student feedback regarding the school assemblies suggested that students took away more learning from the smaller group activities. Additionally, the degree of success achieved by the lesson plans is difficult to determine since none of the teachers provided feedback or returned evaluation forms. However, at least three schools reported using the learning materials and the Elections Office has received a number

of requests for further materials for the next general election, suggesting a number of teachers felt they would be worth using with their students again.

Longer-term evaluation

There is a high degree of interest in continuing to deliver certain aspects of this pilot in Camden and in other UK boroughs. Several Camden schools have already contacted the Camden Elections Office to explore how they could replicate some of the activities in anticipation of the next general election. Additionally, the Voter Turnout Working Party has proposed that a permanent part-time position be established in the Borough to ensure a staff person is dedicated to preparing for future elections and the activities tested during this pilot can be continued. Any continuation of the activities on a long-term basis will be dependent on appropriate resources being identified by Camden.

At present the activities that the Borough of Camden would like to replicate in future are the visits to democratic institutions, polling station work experience and updates to the learning materials for future elections. Although there has been no extensive feedback received from teachers regarding the learning materials, the requests for updated materials suggest teachers feel they add value to the curriculum. If this aspect of the pilot is rolled out, it will be important to find a new strategy for collecting teacher feedback

in order to understand the benefit to and impact on students.

To determine the long-term impact of this pilot it will be important to maintain contact with the London Borough of Camden to track any further rollout of these activities and replication in other boroughs across the UK.

Conclusions

The Camden Schools 2004 Election Shadowing project achieved its aim of enabling Camden's year 10 to 12 secondary students to follow the electoral process and political campaigns leading up to the Greater London Authority and European Parliamentary elections on 10 June 2004. The key activities that proved most successful were students acting as Poll Clerks, visits to London Mayoral and Assembly Headquarters and the European Parliament in Brussels. These provided a more interactive and hands-on learning environment for students and were effective at creating a deeper learning experience as well as raising students' awareness about democracy.

Unfortunately the project was initiated five months later than anticipated and as a result the original plan had to be adjusted to ensure it would be feasible to deliver the core activities by 10 June 2004. This was an important decision as it helped ensure a reduced project would still be able to engage effectively with students, especially when logistical

problems arose around harmonising project activities with school and exam schedules.

The impact of this pilot has the potential to be long-term if the London Borough of Camden repeats any of the tested activities and is able to establish a permanent staff position. Furthermore, if other communities and boroughs across the UK choose to pilot any aspect of this project the impact would be greater still.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice and 'lessons learnt' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Developing strong relationships with staff at individual schools was crucial to the project's success.
- Re-evaluating the project plan to meet new timelines and scheduling challenges enabled the project to re-focus and meet key objectives of the original plan.
- Face-to-face meetings with politicians in small groups at democratic institutions provided the greatest

learning experience for students.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Competing demands on secondary schools' extra-curricular time was heavy and conflict between exam periods and the pre-election period highlighted the importance of planning with schools from the beginning of the academic year.
- Arranging activities away from school premises was more time-consuming than anticipated because of the detailed planning involved, including the need for risk assessments, which had to be signed off by head teachers and parents.
- The range of activities envisaged at the start of the project was overly ambitious and it became important to identify the optimum number of events that could be successfully planned and the budget required to enable those activities to take place.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Richard Lefley from the Elections Office of the London Borough of Camden at Richard.Lefley@camden.gov.uk or visit their website at: www.camden.gov.uk/democracy

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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