



An evaluation of the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development

Final report, June 2013

Gayle Whelan and Hannah Timpson

Applied Health and Wellbeing Partnership



Applied Health and Wellbeing Partnership

The Applied Health and Wellbeing Partnership supports the development, delivery and evaluation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, through the innovative generation and application of evidence for effective and sustainable health and wellbeing commissioning.

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This report contains a selection of students' artwork and remain the copyright of the creator and the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development. The front page drawing was created by one of the centre's students and is a depiction of LCAD's building on Francey's Street, Liverpool city centre.

Executive summary

Liverpool is a largely deprived city where one in five residents is unemployed. High unemployment and high rates of individuals without formal qualification makes it difficult for some residents to gain employment, further compounded by the fact there are six unemployed persons per job vacancy across the city. It is also estimated that a fifth of the population have never used the internet.

The Liverpool Centre for Arts Development (LCAD) bridges the gap between lack of skills and unemployment by equipping students with digital and computing skills and offering vital employability skills. The centre is unique in offering inclusive free-of-charge courses to anyone irrespective of their personal circumstances or experience.

This evaluation has involved stakeholders at the heart, from staff and volunteers at the centre, to former students, some who have progressed to employment, volunteering and further education.

This research shows that over a three year period, LCAD has supported 108 students to gain qualification and accreditation for employability, ECDL and photography skills. Its students were of all ages and experiences, with an age range of 20 to 71 years. Classes were of mixed ability – incorporating individuals who reported not being able to turn a computer on, to those who had learnt some basics in their prior workplace, but did not have confidence in using computers.

Nine intakes of 12 students (total 108) culminated in at least 12 students gaining full-time employment since graduating from the centre, and a further 54 students enrolling in further education or training. As ten students were aged over 60 and retired, this means that two-thirds (67%) of working-age students attending LCAD went onto paid employment or further education and training. Five also reported doing unpaid volunteering roles.

All students enjoyed the course and reported many positive outcomes, which centred around four main themes of social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, new skills, and volunteering.

Students reported that the courses offered by the centre were a life-line for them, creating an opportunity to try new things and benefit from new skills, including ones specifically relevant to the workplace. By attending courses two days a week, students had something to look forward to and were kept busy for the whole of those days, doing something they enjoyed. This had a profound effect on their mental health and general wellbeing. Attending the centre also had the effect of changing individuals' outlook on life. Even though they were no longer participating in courses at the centre, students remained positive and optimistic. The courses had instilled routine and structure that had stayed with them: many students reported being more organised as a result.

Students arriving at the centre were most often marginalised from society through mental ill-health, age, unemployment, a lack of workplace skills, or no formal educational qualifications. Upon their induction, they met new people and made new friends. Throughout their engagement with the charity, they were supported to improve their educational achievements, learnt vital workplace skills, were encouraged to be creative and have fun (particularly with cameras and gardening), and they learnt confidence and pride as a result of the new things they had learnt. Many had also taken on new hobbies and interests.

The social value created by LCAD was wide ranging. With a large number of students going on to further education and even fulltime employment, this charity successfully helps to

provide students with the necessary skills to compete in the workplace and to better themselves educationally. This has the effect of individuals having more disposable income and becoming tax payers rather than receiving benefits as they once had. As some students were also volunteering, this meant that they were able to share their newfound skills with the wider community, and to help improve others' lives. As this was unpaid, this also created much value for the services or organisations which rely on unpaid work to deliver their services.

Students reported that LCAD was not simply a free course, but the start of a new chapter for them. The centre supported them to help themselves in improving their own outcomes and to enjoy doing so.

A number of recommendations have been made should further funding be secured to maximise the social value potential of LCAD. This includes: analysing all questionnaires and including data in annual reports, expanding the course to run for longer and increase its capacity to accept new students, continue with expanding its networks and partnerships for the benefit of students, and, maintain the opening of the Art and Soul Community Café and the Resource Hub to further support and engage the students during their time at the centre and afterwards.

Gayle Whelan
Community Asset Research Assistant
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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive summary	3
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Research into the need for the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development	6
1.2 Liverpool Centre for Arts Development	7
1.3 Aims and objectives of the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development	8
1.4 Social value	8
2. Methodology	9
2.1 Scoping exercise.....	9
2.2 Engagement activities	9
2.3 Secondary data	9
3. Results	11
3.1 Secondary data.....	11
3.1.1 Monitoring data	11
3.1.2 Induction questionnaires.....	11
3.1.3 Post-course questionnaire data.....	12
3.1.4 Progression questionnaire data.....	14
3.2 Engagement activities.....	15
3.2.1 Social	15
3.2.2 Mental health and wellbeing	18
3.2.3 New skills learnt	18
3.2.4 Volunteering.....	20
3.3 Annual reports.....	20
4. Discussion	23
5. Recommendations	28
6. References	29



Picture 1: Herb box created by students on the Sowing Seeds of Knowledge course

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Applied Health and Wellbeing Partnership, (AHWP) at the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University. The AHWP supports the development and delivery of health and wellbeing services, by generating and applying evidence to ensure effective commissioning, while identifying innovative approaches to sustainable health and wellbeing. This report presents an evaluation of the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development (LCAD) and presents evidence for the social value that is created by engagement with the project.

1.1 Research into the need for the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development

With persistently high levels of deprivation across the city, Liverpool is ranked the most deprived local authority area in England (Liverpool City Council, 2010). This position is unchanged from the 2004 and 2007 Indices of Deprivation. Deprivation is particularly widespread and severe in communities in north Liverpool, including Everton, Kirkdale and Anfield, which are some of the most deprived areas in England. The concentration of high deprivation also encompasses the city centre, spreading from Everton in the north to Kensington and Princes Park. Outside of the inner core, Speke, Garston, Croxteth and Norris Green also experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country (Liverpool City Council, 2010).

In Liverpool, one in five residents (21%) is without work – a total of 67,580 (Liverpool City Council, 2013). Worklessness is more evident in more deprived communities, with a third of Liverpool's most deprived wards (including Princes Park, Kensington and Fairfield and Everton) experiencing unemployment rates that are twice the national average (Liverpool City Council, 2012). Of those not in work, 20,130 individuals were claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (Liverpool City Council, February 2012 data). There is also a shortage of jobs with six Liverpool jobseekers to every unfilled job vacancy in the city, compared to 4:1 nationally (Liverpool City Council, 2012).

There are also huge divides in digital and computer skills; one in five residents has never had access to the internet (Liverpool Vision, 2012). It is estimated that 90% of jobs require some computer skills (Liverpool Vision, 2012) and with more jobs being advertised only on the internet, a lack of basic computer skills is further marginalising and excluding individuals from society.

With almost a third (29%, n=111,500) of Liverpool residents of working age (aged 16 to 64) having no formal qualifications (Liverpool City Council, 2013a,) the need for employability skills and computer training is vital to fill the gap between qualifications and work experience. In Liverpool, there are currently only a few organisations¹ delivering employability training, including Jervis Training which offers free Level 1 Employability and Personal Progression Training for the unemployed, and Greenbank College which charges £150 each for Level 1 and 2 awards in Employability and Personal Development. A range of IT courses are offered across the city, but not in combination with employability skills.

¹ Information gained from the government's National Careers Service website:
<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/courses/pages/results.aspx?K=employability&StartDate=Anytime&SearchType=SIMPLE>

1.2 Liverpool Centre for Arts Development (LCAD)

LCAD is a charitable community training centre based in the heart of Liverpool city centre. The centre offers a range of activities as part of the In Your Hands community arts and employment skills programme, which prepares and educates individuals using components of employability, computer training and photography skills.

LCAD's base on Francey's Street in Liverpool provides space for local artists to share their work and has an outside space for use by artists. The centre also hosts the Art and Soul Community Café, which was set up in September 2012 as a social enterprise to provide a social environment for students. The centre also has a resource hub, which is for use by students and the general public which includes computers and Wi-Fi.

Aims and objectives of the project

LCAD has outlined four key aims of the project, which are to: increase employability through improved levels of basic skills, increase levels of self-esteem and confidence, gain qualifications, and improve levels of health and wellbeing. Its objectives are to provide a number of courses and resources to enable students to achieve these aims.

In Your Hands community arts and employment skills programme

The In Your Hands course is open to Merseyside residents who are either unemployed, or want to enhance their personal development. The course runs for two days-a-week over a ten-week period supporting individuals by offering three core areas of competence:

- Employability Skills Vocational Qualification Level 2 certificate provides key transferable skills and covers: personal effectiveness and success at work, communication skills, team skills and positive working relationships, health, safety and security.
- IT Skills: Beginner's Basic Skills and/or European Computer Driving License Certificate (ECDL) are offered over a five-week period. These sessions include: using email and internet and internet security (basic) and word processing, Microsoft Excel spread sheet and presentation software and improving productivity using information technology (IT).
- Creative Skills Workshops: Using arts as a tool for therapy and confidence building, a range of taster photography sessions are offered, which cover basic digital photography, and involve: using a camera, examining photographs, themes in photography, digitally manipulating photographs, and photograph framing, all of which culminated in an end of course show. Another aspect of the creative skills are the Sowing the Seeds of Knowledge gardening sessions which provides basic skills of potting plants and growing herbs (see picture 2).

In Your Hands has been delivered three times a year for the past three years, with the most recent course beginning in March 2013. LCAD received Big Lottery Funding to deliver the sessions for a three-year period, and funding has now ceased, although a bid to extend the project is currently being submitted. The centre has also received funding from a number of partners, including Liverpool City Council and Knowsley Council. LCAD has received accreditation by Education Development International, the Chartered Institute for IT, and the British Computer Society, and is a UK Online centre.

Art and Soul Community Café

At the time of this evaluation, the Art and Soul Community Cafe had been open for ten months as a social enterprise, and considered the next chapter for the organisation, with an emphasis on sustainability. The café is open to students and the public and is staffed by a former Liverpool Centre for Arts Development student. It is hoped the cafe will provide

training opportunities in food preparation, menu planning, stock ordering and customer service. The café is currently open from 10am - 2pm Monday to Thursday (see picture 3 for its logo, created and designed by one LCAD's former students).



Picture 2: Art and Soul cafe logo

Community Resource Hub

The community resource hub is a free-to-use area within LCAD's building which offers a space to use computer facilities for those who do not have their own computers. The hub promotes social interaction and offers the opportunity for students to practice their computer skills whilst attending the centre.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development

LCAD aims to provide students with vital computing and employability skills while gaining creative skills in the arts. The project has four main outcomes which centre around ensuring the student is supported and that the impact of their engagement with the project is maximised. These outcomes are:

- Project outcome 1 – increased employability through improved levels of basic skills. Associated milestones: completion of one, two or three aspects of the In Your Hands training; participation in workshops and exhibitions.
- Project outcome 2 - Increased levels of self-esteem and confidence. Associated milestones: numbers attending and partaking in student exhibitions (see picture 4; students preparing work for end of course exhibition), students involved in project management, learning new transferable skills, community volunteering.
- Project outcome 3 – Gaining qualifications. Associated milestones: successful completion of In Your Hands, accessing further education/learning opportunities.
- Project outcome 4 – Improved levels of health and wellbeing. Associated milestones: taking up a creative hobby, increasing health and wellbeing, reducing levels of stress.

1.4 Social value

The aim of this evaluation is to explore the benefits of engagement with LCAD in relation to health and wellbeing, and the social value that is gained as a result. With the Public Value (Social Value) Act 2012 requiring public authorities to consider how services they procure might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of communities, it is also timely to consider the wider impacts of community projects on the areas they thrive in.

This research involved understanding more about social value of LCAD, as this was deemed the most appropriate way to analyse the social impact of the project. Key stakeholders (students and those who run its activities) were directly involved with the evaluation, ensuring that their views and experiences were represented and thematically analysed.

This evaluation provides evidence on how engagement LCAD affects people's lives, and the impact of this for the greater Liverpool area.

2. Methodology

Assessing the social value of LCAD is an effective and meaningful way to evaluate a project by outlining its worth and benefits. Stakeholders' direct involvement in the evaluation ensured that changes that occur as a result of engagement with the project were openly measured, and its value accurately accounted for. This required a mixed-methods approach, adopting both quantitative and qualitative tools to assess the wider impact of the project on individuals' health and mental wellbeing, new skills learnt and accounting for its social value.

The project methods were developed in collaboration with key staff members. The evaluation approach, feasibility and appropriateness of the selected methods were discussed and agreed upon during the initial scoping phase of the evaluation.

2.1 Scoping exercise

In May and June 2013, project team members met with the principal researcher to consider the evaluation and to discuss the components of the evaluation. It was agreed that the scope of the evaluation would focus on examining activities over the past three years, and consider the outcomes generated from this engagement. It was agreed that the process would involve a number of methods, including: engagement activities (a focus group and interviews) as well as analysis of secondary data provided by the LCAD charity, which includes satisfaction and progression surveys and annual reports.

2.2 Engagement activities

	Number
Focus groups	3 Focus groups with ten former students
Interviews	2 Former student case study interviews 3 LCAD staff/volunteer interviews

Focus groups

Three focus groups were held at the beginning of June 2013 with ten students. The focus group worked on identifying key themes relating to the social value which was created as a result of engagement with the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development. The focus group offered an opportunity for students and volunteers to share their opinions on the services provided by the charity, as well as their personal gains. The focus groups were informal and semi-structured and were conducted at LCAD's base in Liverpool.

Case studies

Two case studies involving former students were included as part of this evaluation to provide evidence of students' progression through the charity, and understand their personal experiences.

2.3 Secondary data

Questionnaires:

It was agreed during the scoping exercise that the evaluation would include quantitative analysis of questionnaires that are routinely implemented by LCAD and collected at three time points: the student's induction; on completion of the In Your Hands programme; and, progression data taken at the time of this evaluation.

- The induction questionnaire covered name, address, year of intake, area of residence, age and gender.

- The post-course questionnaire involved: basic demographic information, current employment status, which aspect of the training most suited the student's needs, how they rated each aspect of the course, suggestions for changes to the course, whether tutors were supportive, whether skills increased, whether there were changes in health and wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem, whether one-to-one mentoring was beneficial, and, general comments.
- The progression questionnaire asked students: what they were doing now, how satisfied they were with the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development, whether they would recommend the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development to others, and, general comments. Former students were also asked to record three words that describe their experiences of the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development.

The data from these questionnaires were tallied and analysed descriptively by the principle researcher.

Annual reports:

The centre has produced annual reports for each of its three years: 2011 (covering April 2010 to end of March 2011), 2012 (April 2011 to end of March 2012) and 2013 (April 2012 to end of March 2013). These reports have been included in this analysis.



Picture 3: In Your Hands students' preparing their art work for exhibition at the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development

3. Results

3.1 Secondary data:

A range of data are already collected by LCAD, including monitoring data of students, pre- and post-course questionnaires and a final progression questionnaire to understand what the student has gone on to do. The following section described the analysis of these data.

3.1.1 Monitoring data:

Over a three year period, 108 students attended the centre and took part in all or some aspects of the In Your Hands course. This total figure is made up of 36 students each in years 1, 2 and 3 (12 on each course). There were more female (71%, n=77) students than male. The age range of students was 20 to 71 years, with almost a third (32%, n=34) of students being in their forties. The average age of students was 42².

Table 1: Ages of students attending LCAD

Age group	Number
20s	20
30s	18
40s	34
50s	23
60s	9
70s	1
Total:	105

Most students who attended the courses lived in Liverpool, with three travelling from the Wirral. Liverpool residents were spread across the city, however the most common postcodes were from the L8 area covering the City Centre, Dingle, Toxteth areas and L15, Wavertree.

3.1.2 Induction questionnaires:

A questionnaire was completed by 16 students after they had received their induction with LCAD. The questionnaire covered initial impressions of the centre, its staff and whether they understood how the individual components of the courses fitted together (E.g. ECDL with Employability and Photography). Some students said they did not know what to expect of the course but that staff were open and friendly and they were made to feel welcome. All stated that they were given enough information, had the opportunity to ask questions and understood information regarding their course.

“Very good. A little more clarity on the layout of the course” (Year 1 In your Hands student)

“Good – warm and approachable, frank and honest about course content etc” (Year 1 In your Hands student)

² Three students did not complete the date of birth field

3.1.3 Post-course questionnaire data

A total of 125 post-course surveys were collected from students after they had attended each of the three components of the In Your Hands programme – employability, ECDL and photography (56 from Year 1, 53 from Year 2 and 16 from Year 3 intakes)³. The survey asked students to rate their satisfaction of the course (ranging from poor, average, good to excellent). This covered:

- Course overall - how easy the course was to understand, whether it met the student's requirements, whether topics were covered in sufficient detail, overall rating of the course and whether they would recommend it to others.
- Course content – clarity of training content, course materials supporting learning, quality of training materials, overall rating of course.
- Instructor – ability to provide real world experience, respond appropriately to questions, preparedness, knowledge of subject matter and presentation abilities.

Year One results

For the Year 1 ECDL students (n=22), learners mainly recorded that the course overall, its content and instructor was good or excellent. Over a quarter (27%, n=6) of students selected the excellent option for all aspects of the course.

For Year 1 Photography students (n=19), the majority (84%, n=16) of course attendees selected that aspects of the course (overall, content and instructor) were average, good or excellent. Three students selected that every aspect of the course was excellent.

For Year 1 Employability students (n=15), the majority rated the course overall, its content and instructor as good or excellent. Over a quarter (27%, n=4) stated that all aspects of the course were excellent.

Year Two results

For Year 2 ECDL students (n=16), over a third (38%, n=6) stated that all aspects of their course was excellent. The remainder selected that aspects of the course overall, its content and instructor was average, good or excellent.

Half (50%, n=7) of the Year 2 Photography students recorded the course in its entirety as excellent. The rest recorded aspects as mainly excellent and good.

Overall evaluations of the In Your Hands Programme (which includes photography, ECDL and Employability) for 23 Year 2 students, found that most (65%, n=15) rated all aspects of the course as good or excellent. Two students (9%) reported the entire course as excellent. A quarter of students (n=6) recorded some average scores.

Year Three results

A different questionnaire was used for year three students which asked them to rate the extent that the course had helped or made a difference to applying for new jobs, ranking from 1, no difference to 5, tremendous difference. Of the 16 responses, over a third (38%, n=6) said it had made a tremendous difference. A further 5 students selected rating 4, and a further four students selected 3.

Furthermore, this questionnaire was further adapted to capture more information and comments from students attending In Your Hands. A total of 64 of these questionnaires were completed. At the time of completing the questionnaire, nine students were in work, 45 were unemployed and eight were in further training/education. Two stated they were unable to work due to sickness. The questionnaire asked if, as a result of their course, students had:

³ Students were asked to complete an evaluation form for each element - employability, ECDL and photography - and therefore one student may have completed up to three separate questionnaires.

increased their skillset, improved their employability skills, experienced an increase in health and wellbeing, experienced an increase in confidence and self-esteem, and whether the course had led to a new creative hobby.

All students completing this section (n=54), stated that they felt they had improved their employment prospects by attending courses at LCAD. The majority of students reported that as a result of engagement with LCAD, their health and wellbeing had significantly (58%, n=37) or moderately (28%, n=18) improved and they felt better, and 11% (n=7) reported no change. Students also reported that they had improved their confidence significantly (45%, n=29) or moderately (44%, n=28), with four students reporting no change (less than one per cent). As a result of In Your Hands, the majority (72%, n=46) had taken up a further hobby, including digital photography, the internet and computing, crafts and volunteering.

On all questionnaire forms, students were given the option to comment on any aspect of the course. Comments included: having a five minute break when using the computers and more time using computers, offering a wider range of courses at the centre, including basic maths and English skills as well as offering more creative arts classes. Students agreed that they would like more photography sessions as part of their course. One student commented that there should be more scope for students at different levels to progress, suggesting having classes according to ability. A handbook for students to follow the course with was also recommended. Many students also stated that the courses should be longer, and go into more depth. A small number of students commented that they would like more facilities, such as film equipment.

“I would like to have been on the course for longer. I really enjoyed it and learned a lot, that’s why I don’t want to stop now because I felt like I was achieving a lot and don’t want to go back to doing nothing” (Year 2 student).

“The Employability aspect was a little rushed – would have liked more info/help with interview skills. Would have liked to do more photography (not just basic)” (Employability student)

The majority of students who wrote comments were very positive of their experiences with LCAD. Many said that as a result of the course, they had increased their confidence, made new friendships, and overall, had enjoyed their experiences on the course.

“I think the course was very good – inspiring. I definitely have taken a great deal from this course” (Year 1 student)

“I learned to use a camera, which gave me confidence. [tutor] was so enthusiastic... which drew the whole class together. We all got to know each other and I made a lot of friends (Photography student)

“Got a job just before finishing [the course] I couldn’t have done it without them! Thank you” (In your Hands student)

3.1.4 Progression questionnaire data

As part of the three-year evaluation of LCAD, a progression survey was designed to determine what students had gone on to do after attending their courses. A total of 30 questionnaires were returned from students who had attended LCAD in the past three years – almost a third (29%) of its total student numbers. Twelve students had progressed to paid employment, taking up positions including sales consultant, paid volunteer with MerseyCare and placement in a school. Some former students were also volunteering while working, and a further five students recorded that they were now volunteering but not working. Three students stated they were continuing studies elsewhere. One student was retired and another was medically unable to work.

All students were very satisfied with LCAD, stating that they found it excellent, and they had gained so much more than their courses had offered:

“I started the course after being unemployed for six months and before that I had worked for 34 years with one employer so I felt I was out of my depth as far as CVs and social interaction and I was totally ignorant as far as PC experience. The course has changed that – I am continuing to learn and I have revived hobbies and interests that I haven’t thought about since leaving school. I now look forward to the future. The staff are really good – and made me feel important and very welcome” (Year 2 student)

“The centre is just a fab place. All the staff could not have been any more friendly and helpful and they are there for you even now which is good to know. They made me so welcome from the first time I came which helped me so much. I really enjoyed the courses and they helped me with my everyday life and I’ve improved so much. The computer exam was the first I ever took which I am very proud of. I really hope the centre can continue for other people. It has been great for me and my family. I owe them a great amount” (Year 2 student)

“I believe without a doubt that if I had not been on the LCAD course I would still be stuck at home and would not have been in the position I am today, where I find myself with the basic skillset that I have been developing and I have used those skills to get back in the workplace as a volunteer. I also feel very much that LCAD gave me the confidence to believe I am good enough to go back to the workplace. The staff at LCAD made all of us feel comfortable and relevant in society no matter what our backgrounds were, they supported all of us and made a difference” (Year 2 student)

“It changed my life in a way that kick started me back to work again and gave me the confidence to go and find a new career path” (former student)

All students stated that they would recommend LCAD to others and many had already told their family and friends about the centre.

“I would whole-heartedly and unreservedly recommend LCAD to others. I would not have the opportunity I have now, and I could not have done this in a nicer, more welcoming environment” (former student)

“It is a really good initiative which provides learning and skills’ development in a non-threatening (i.e. non-daunting) environment” (former student)

Students completing the progression questionnaire were also asked to write three words that describe how being part of a LCAD had made them feel. This is present below (figure 2) with the most often used words showing larger and bolder. Confidence and inclusion were the mainly reported words, followed by friendly, valued, welcome, alive, improve, positive, optimistic and happy.



Figure 1: Word cloud of student responses to three words that describes how LCAD makes you feel

3.2 Engagement activities:

As part of this evaluation, a series of focus groups involving ten former students were held at LCAD. A further two case study interviews were conducted with former students (see case study 1 and 2 boxes), along with three interviews with staff at the centre. The findings of these activities have been thematically analysed. Four main themes emerged from the qualitative data gained during these engagement activities. These were social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, new skills, and volunteering. The following section is divided into these four themes, with a selection of quotes to support the findings. For the purposes of the report, participant details have been anonymised.

3.2.1 Social:

The engagement activities highlighted that many students had turned to the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development at a pivotal time in their life. Having experienced unemployment, physical or mental ill-health, many students had become withdrawn and felt excluded from society. Some had learned about the course from others they knew, or had been sign-posted to the centre from various agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. A number had found out about the centre whilst attending a counselling service which was based in the same building. The

reasons for attending the courses were wide-ranging, from learning skills to get back into the workplace, becoming IT literate and as a change of scenery. Many openly explained how before attending the centre, they were desperate and frustrated and were determined to change their lives.

“I was desperate, I’d always worked, and after 31 years, the Jobcentre weren’t any help. There weren’t a lot of places offering to teach someone who’s middle-aged. I felt isolated and I was frustrated as I had worked all my life. I felt belittled because of my age and lack of confidence in using computers” (former student; focus group 1)

“You were a non-person elsewhere, just a number. Here you were a person, they know your name” (former student; focus group 1)

“I was isolated. I wouldn’t go out of the house for two/three days at a time” (former student; focus group 1)

Prior to starting the course, many students described how they felt nervous, scared and excited. However, this was quickly alleviated once they had taken part in the induction and had met new people. Many reported being put at ease by the centre staff who were approachable, friendly and helpful.

“I was very nervous at first, but excited. I didn’t know what to expect. I had mixed feelings as it was all new – a complete change in my life” (former student; focus group 2)

“There was a void in my life when I came out of work, and after moving, I didn’t know anyone and I wondered what to do with my life” (former student; focus group 1)

For many students, the main benefit they had gained from attending the centre was the social aspect: they had made new friends, felt an integrated part of society and no longer felt reclusive, withdrawn or isolated. Many had reported making friends whom they socialised with outside of the centre, and who they still kept in touch with. One female student had recently moved from Manchester before starting the course offered at LCAD. She had not made any new friends and had felt isolated. Becoming part of the centre had offered her the opportunity to feel a part of the city, and to make new friends and “to be social again”.

“I bonded really well with my group. Often I’d felt that there were cliques I wasn’t part of in other courses I attended. But here was different.” (former student; focus group 1)

“It feels like a family here. Part of the success of this centre is the social aspect. You make friends and you’re all equals. You’re all at the same stage at the same point” (former student; focus group 2)

“I loved coming here, meeting friends and then having lunch at the café with them” (former student; focus group 2)

As a direct result of the course, many students had bought their own computers, or had been given them, and they kept in touch with family and friends via emails and social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Consequently, they continued to feel included in society and were not isolated. Many now shopped online and had expanded their social horizons by booking holidays and paying for event tickets online, including travel there and back. Many reported that they would not have bothered trying to go to events as they were unable to buy tickets. Shopping online had also helped them save money as they were able to compare prices and find prices cheaper than in the shops.

Case study 1, 63-year old male student:

“I was struggling with health problems. I was unemployed as I had just lost the job I had had since I was 15. I had worked all my life and had no qualifications. I had worked my way up and then I was made redundant. But at my age, I felt out of sync, useless, I had no money and felt it was all against me. I was a recluse and lost social contact with people. I was withdrawn and depressed and had counselling. I had heard about this course and my twin brother urged me to go and do it. I came to LCAD and was made to feel very welcome. I was quiet, but I soon settled in. The people were nice and I owe them a lot. They helped me through everything. I began to feel part of society and I really enjoyed coming here and the learning. I made friends and I was able to share my experiences with them. One friend in particular was very supportive. I couldn’t wait to come to LCAD each week and that surprised me. During the course I was signed off by my counsellor – the course had helped me universally. During the course I went on a diet and lost weight and I was feeling good, health wise. The course increased my self-confidence. My brother was really pleased with my improvements and that I was part of something again.

It’s great now. I have internet access at home and my own email account. I’d never had a computer before, but my brother bought me one. I enjoy golf now and music again. I pull up videos on the computer and I have my own playlists now and I find listening to music relaxing. I am much more organised now than I was before. As a result of coming to LCAD, my health has improved, as well as my mental health. I was really struggling before but now I’m thankful for what I’ve got and I no longer feel sorry for myself. It’s all down to LCAD and I hope it can continue. I would definitely recommend it to anyone. It put me back in society and onto a new part of my life. I’d like to come back and do other courses”.

3.2.2 Mental health and wellbeing

Prior to enrolling on courses at LCAD, many students reported a range of health problems and mental illnesses. These ranged from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. The courses offered by the centre gave students an opportunity to try new things and benefit from new skills. It also gave them structure, routine and focus to their week. By attending courses two days a week, they had something to look forward to and they knew they would be kept busy for the whole of those days, doing something they enjoyed. This had a profound effect on their mental health and general wellbeing. One student had been in counselling prior to the course, and was subsequently discharged during because of the leaps and bounds he had made whilst attending the centre.

Case study 1, 49-year old female student:

"I was long-term sick, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and was depressed. I hadn't worked in a while and I had lost my confidence. I was nervous before coming here, but I needed computer skills and wanted to learn. It was good to come here and get the support of others – it really made a difference to me. I passed my ECDL and I had a great sense of achievement and I thought "I can do it now". I was very interested in photography and want to do more. The art aspect of the course has definitely helped me reduce my stress. I can switch off. I now have the "yes I can" attitude and it's had a massive impact on my life.

The group work we had to do helped me gain confidence in a supportive environment. I have made friends and I keep in touch with them now. The social aspect of this course is very important. The computer facilities here helped me to put in practice what I'd learnt and let me do it on my own. Coming here gave me a chance when no one else would. They believed in me, so you can believe in yourself. I am still learning and come in regularly to use the Resource Hub as there are no facilities like this elsewhere. At the library you have to wait for a free computer and then you only have a limited time on it. I don't know anywhere else like it. Here you can say hello to people – coming here helps with isolation.

It's taking me a while to recover from my health problems, but I want to get back to work and LCAD is supporting me in this. I have seen people change and other courses elsewhere haven't had this effect on me or others I know. LCAD brings all the elements together and makes a person. You are taken as an individual and made to feel important.

This centre is a hidden jewel for learning and development and more people should use it. Increasing signage outside the centre would make the centre more visible and it may be used by more then. I've told my friends about it and would definitely recommend coming here to others".

3.2.3 New skills learnt

Many students reported that they had gained many new skills since attending LCAD. These skills were learnt as a direct result of the course content, for example, how to use computers (many students reported not knowing how to turn a computer on prior to enrolling), photography and creative arts, and compiling CVs. However, the students had learnt much more. After the course, they had gone on to develop hobbies and interests that they had

previously forgotten about or were not interested in, for example golfing, crafts, sewing and gardening. They had learnt independence also; this was in part facilitated by the Internet, which meant they could book holidays on their own, or organise events, when they had previously relied on others, or would not have bothered with.

The new skills they had learnt also had the effect on empowering students, making them feel more confident. This confidence had the dual consequence of spurring them on to do more with their lives and to feel more fulfilled, but also had the effect of improving their health and wellbeing: they felt more confident and they felt better about themselves because of it.

“With computers, I see things in a different light. I have a different perspective on things, and I question things too. I enjoy more in life” (former student; focus group 1)

“I like trying new things now and it’s opened new doors for me. I have gained confidence from learning and from achieving something. It has made a difference” (former student; focus group 1)

Personal qualities such as acceptance and being non-judgemental were also reported by former students, who felt they had learnt these by being part of a diverse, but welcoming group. Students felt they were able to share personal experiences with one another and were openly able to talk and share problems. If students felt out of their depth with what they were learning, they also felt able to let their tutor know and be helped.

“We’re all equals and have different stories, but there is no competition” (former student; focus group 1)

“I got to know people better. People have problems but you’re not judgemental of them anymore. In work life you never have the time to get to know or understand people, but here it’s different” (former student; focus group 1)

“I did feel out of my depth in parts as the groups were mixed ability. But I got over the hurdles and nothing was a problem to them [LCAD staff]” (former student; focus group 1)

The creative aspect of what the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development offers was considered by students as one of the main things that stood the centre apart from other learning establishments. They felt great pride in their achievements with the centre and having the opportunity to exhibit their photography work around the centre at the end of the course was very important for them.

“It’s reawakened my passion. I’d forgotten about being creative” (former student; focus group 2)

“It surprises you just how good your photos can be” (former student; focus group 2)

“It’s good having the creative aspect as it’s not so intense and a break from the computers” (former student; focus group 2)

Ultimately, the students had also experience pride and a sense of achievement as a result of attending LCAD. Many students stated that their confidence had been knocked prior to starting the course through unemployment or life experiences. Attending the courses made them feel good, and subsequently, many reported a difference in their lives. Students felt more included and had really enjoyed the courses they had been involved in.

“I had previously been told I wouldn’t succeed” (former student; focus group 2)

“I loved coming here it felt great learning” (former student; focus group 2)

“I’m not so isolated now, it’s opened my life up” (former student; focus group 2)

3.2.4 Volunteering

Many interviewees and focus group members reported taking on a volunteering role since attending the centre. Some of these volunteering opportunities were forged from the partnerships and networks created by LCAD. Students reported being able to put into practice the new skills they had learnt. One former student had volunteered with the centre and another was a trustee on its board. Another was a volunteer for MerseyCare and explained they had continued their learning after taking on this responsibility by developing their computer skills including PowerPoint and presentations.

3.3 Annual reports:

As part of the funding agreements from the Big Lottery Fund, LCAD provides annual update reports outlining how it had reached its milestones. This section summarises these reports.

Year One (2010/2011)

A total of 36 students received accreditation and certification having completed courses within the centre (EDI Entry Level certificate, Entry Level Certificate in Preparing for Employment, the ICT European Computer Driving License certificate, and Digital Photography). The Year 1 report described the partnerships that were forged with other agencies, including JET services, Creative Space Team, Stop Clever and other training providers. The report also described profile raising activities, including working with the voluntary and community sectors, and students and staff participating in exhibitions and setting up stalls at a range of events. The Year 1 report described how partnership working offered students more opportunities as part of attending LCAD, and also meant that staff

were able to share best practice and gain new ideas on how best to develop the centre as well as develop future joint ventures to help sustain the centre's future.

Student questionnaires (induction and post-course) were designed to understand what the students thought of the sessions. As a result of this feedback, the timetable of activity was adjusted and more positive feedback was given in subsequent programmes. The questionnaires found that 30 people had taken up a creative hobby in the past year, all 36 students had increased their health and wellbeing and also reported reducing stress levels. A total of 135 local residents had visited student exhibitions in which all 36 students had been involved in project managing, learning transferable skills as a direct result of planning and organising of exhibitions of students' photography work. These skills included planning, budgeting, promoting and public relations.

A total of 20 students from this first year's intake were signposted towards further training and education. This included six attending Creative Space workshops, six went into further education, and eight have become active in their community and are accessing further training. At the end of year one, four students reported having gained full-time employment as a direct result of attending the In Your Hands project. Three students had also taken up volunteering roles in their communities, one of which was on the board of their local primary care trust. Another student worked with a creative arts-based organisation, which delivers community art projects, and another took a position with an outward bounds organisation, working with young people.

The report demonstrated how students were actively encouraged to take up creative skills as a hobby, as it encouraged fun, freedom and relaxation. A total of 30 students reported taking up a hobby since starting courses at the centre and 24 students attended Art for Growing workshops and Red Dot Exhibitions.

Year Two (2011/2012)

At the end of year two, all students reported many of the same outcomes as the previous year's intake, including project management skills, taking up a hobby and further education. Health and wellbeing and reduced stress was also reported by the majority of this intake.

A total of 36 students (72 over the two years) had completed courses at the centre, gaining accreditation and certificates for their learning. The Year 2 report described that the Liverpool Centre for Arts Development had continued working with other local organisations and partners, including Liverpool in Work Services. All students completed the photography aspect of the course, and 20 students later took up photography and/or gardening as a hobby. Questionnaires reported that students had increases in health and wellbeing and reduced levels of stress.

As a result of student exhibitions, another 220 members of the public had attended students' artwork exhibitions over the year, which were managed and project planned by the students, adding further expertise to their skillsets.

At the end of the In Your Hands programme, a number of students were signposted to further education or training. Consequently two students went on to further education and five attended Creative Spaces workshops and seven enrolled on the Sowing Seeds of Change gardening project, held at the centre. Five students became volunteers, two who became involved with LCAD and three within the wider community. One student also became a trustee at the centre. As a result of their engagement with LCAD, four students gained full-time employment (a total of eight over the two years).

Feedback gained from the students highlighted that changes introduced to the sessions at the end of the first year, were well received. Consultation with students, stakeholders and the wider community to discuss the impact of the centre and future plans was positive.

Year Three (2012/2013)

In Year Three, all 36 students (108 in all over the three years) had gained accreditation and certificates through the In Your Hands programme.

The Year Three report described how further working partnerships were developed with Jobcentre Plus, credit unions, Regenda Housing Association and other training providers. This has also had the effect of ensuring that maximum student numbers were reached at each intake. These partnerships also facilitated one-to-one mentoring offered the opportunity to match the skills of students with the network of connections created as part of the centre.

As a result of consultation with previous years' students, the report highlighted how a Digital Skills session had been included as part of the In Your Hands sessions. This included group workshops, team work and collective reflection as part of the end of project exhibitions. A total of 260 members of the public attended these, with a culmination of 400 visitors to the final exhibition held in March 2013.

The report stated how many students had been signposted to further education and training during the third year, which had resulted in two students attending business start-up workshops and five progressed to further training elsewhere.

By year three, LCAD had gained charitable status and were able to open its Resource Hub consisting of an IT suite and Wi-Fi facilities, a facility accessible to all past and present students, and allowing students to build on the skills they had learnt at the centre.

Feedback from students over each of the years highlighted that it was felt that the courses should be longer. The annual report outlines, that whilst it was not possible to increase the length of the courses for these intakes, it would be considered if future funding could be secured. Feedback highlighted the usefulness of one-to-one mentoring and a need to expand this provision. This was not possible during the time frame, and was something that LCAD reported would be addressed once further funding became available.

4. Discussion

The section outlines the impact and outcomes of LCAD in the context of the four main project aims, and the subsequent changes that occurred for students as a result of engagement with LCAD. The social value of these changes has also been assessed.

This evaluation has involved stakeholders at the heart, from staff and volunteers at the centre to former students, some who have progressed to employment, volunteering and further education. Interviews and focus groups with former students highlighted that the most important outcomes of engagement with the centre, involved: social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, new skills learnt and volunteering. Students reported that the skills and friendships they gained continued long after they had left the centre and was having a marked impact on their life. Friends continued to meet on a regular basis and many had gained the “learning bug” and had taken up other courses elsewhere.

LCAD bridges the gap between lack of qualifications and unemployment by equipping students not only with digital and computing skills, but with vital employability skills. The centre also supports them with one-to-one mentors developed as a result of networks and partnerships with organisations and agencies in the local community. The centre is unique in offering inclusive free-of-charge courses to anyone irrespective of their personal circumstances or experience.

This research shows that over a three year period, LCAD supported all 108 students to gain qualifications and accreditation in employability, ECDL and photography skills – with a 100% success rate. LCAD’s students were wide ranging, aged between 20 to 71 years, with an average age of 42 years. Classes were of mixed ability – from those who reported not being able to turn a computer on to having learnt some basics in their prior workplace, but did not have confidence in using computers. There were more female (71%, n=77) students than male.

Nine intakes of 12 students (total 108) culminated in at least 12 students gaining full-time employment (11% of all students⁴) since graduating from the centre. A further 54 students (50% of all students) had enrolled in further education or training. As 10 students (9% of all intakes) were aged over 60 and retired, this means that 67% (n=66) of working-age students attending LCAD go onto paid employment or further education and training. Five also reported doing unpaid volunteering³ roles.

All students involved in the research, and who completed questionnaires over three time-points reported that they had enjoyed the course and reported many positive outcomes, which centre around the four main themes of: social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, new skills, and volunteering.

The students reported that the centre offered them a life-line – an opportunity to try new things, benefit from new skills, particularly skills relevant to the workplace. It also gave structure and focus to their week. By attending courses two days a week, students had something to look forward to and they knew they would be kept busy for the whole of those days, doing something they enjoyed. This had a profound effect on their mental health and general wellbeing. One student had been in counselling prior to the course, and was subsequently discharged during because of the leaps and bounds they had made whilst attending the centre. Attending the centre also had the effect of changing individuals’ outlook on life. Even though they no longer were participating in courses at the centre, they

⁴ This figure is taken from progression surveys filled out by just 29% of all students attending LCAD. It is therefore anticipated that this number will be higher but is outside the scope of this research.

remained positive and optimistic. The courses had instilled routine and structure that had stayed with them: many students reported being more organised as a result.

Having had positive experiences of the centre, some students had gone on to volunteer in their own communities, giving something back to others who were socially excluded or marginalised. One student had taken up a position within LCAD and another had become a trustee on its board. By opening up the centre to its students in this way, this ensured that students' voices were heard and taken into account in day-to-day running of the centre. It also offered to students the positive outcomes that occurred as a result of the courses offered there: their former- student volunteer was an advocate for the success of the centre.

Whilst all experiences of the centre were overall very positive, some students highlighted areas for improvement. For example, the structure of some sessions were changed in line with students' comments and this led to improved flow between the three components of the In Your Hands programme. Many also commented that they would like the courses to be longer and for a wider range of subjects, especially creative ones, to be offered. It is anticipated that the programme would be expanded, if successful in securing future funding.

The Art and Soul Community Café was a success among students, who ate and socialised there before, after and even on days when they were not on courses. It was a meeting point for many, and was used by students from elsewhere as well as staff from businesses in the surrounding area. The Resource Hub was a similar success, with many students using the facilities to practice their newfound skills as well as apply for jobs and partake in online courses.

LCAD delivered its courses with the aims of meeting its four project aims of: increased employability, increased levels of self-esteem and health and wellbeing, and gaining qualifications (see Table 2). By surpassing these targets, the social value that is created is maximised.

Table 2: Project aims and outcomes

Project aims	Outcomes
Increased employability	12 students gaining fulltime employment post-course 67% of all students go onto employment or further education or training
Increased levels of self-esteem	Students' involvement in end of course art exhibitions All students reporting positive outcomes since attending LCAD
Gaining qualifications	100% completion rate - all 108 students completing courses they enrolled on On completion of In Your Hands, half (50%) of all students went onto further education or training
Improved levels of health and wellbeing	Five students volunteered for community initiatives and local employers 72% of students reported taking up a new hobby since enrolling at LCAD

The social value created by LCAD is wide ranging, with benefits experienced related to: social inclusion, improvements in mental health and wellbeing, new skills learnt, and

volunteering (table 3). With a large number of students going onto further education and even fulltime employment, the charity helps to give students the necessary skills to compete in the workplace and to better themselves educationally. This has the effect of individuals having more disposable income, becoming tax payers rather than receiving benefits as they once had. As some students were also volunteering, this meant that they were able to share their newfound skills with the greater community, and to help improve other people's lives. As this was unpaid work, this also created much value for the services or organisations they worked with, who rely on unpaid work to deliver their services.

Table 3: Possible social values created as a result of engagement with LCAD⁵

Social Value	Outcomes	Possible values
Social inclusion	Making new friends	Cost of annual socialising
	Social networking (email, Facebook and Twitter)	Cost of monthly Internet subscriptions
	Leisure activities/hobbies with friends	Cost of booking leisure activities with friends – holidays, concerts and theatre
	Student exhibitions	Cost of project management to organise the exhibitions
	1015 Liverpool residents visiting student exhibitions	Cost of a ticket if event was charged, cost of parking, and cost of refreshments
	Promotion of LCAD	Cost of a social marketing and/or advertising campaign
Mental health and wellbeing	Reduced stress depression and anxiety	Reduced cost to NHS of prescriptions, fewer annual GP appointments No longer needing counselling – cost saving to NHS
New skills	Qualifications	Cost of course if paying for it privately
	Hobbies	Cost of continued learning (courses, training, workshops etc.) Cost of taking up a new hobby, equipment, time etc.
Volunteering	Unpaid work	Cost if national minimum wage was applied for each hour worked as a volunteer
	Gaining vital work experience	Cost of the role that the volunteer is fulfilling if it was salaried

⁵ These examples are financial proxies of the expected social value can be valued as a direct result of the outcomes achieved by former LCAD students

The fact that the courses offered by LCAD gave structure and routine meant that mental health and wellbeing among former students was much improved, and stress was alleviated. In some cases, counselling treatment was ended as it was no longer necessary since the individual had attended the centre. Students who spoke of being depressed and reclusive prior to engaging with the charity stated that they no longer felt “at a loss” and had purpose and meaning in their lives now. As students had made new friends, some of whom they continued friendships with once the course had ended, meant that they were more social, and met up for coffees and meals, went on events and even holidays together.

This social aspect added to individuals’ feeling of being socially included in society, when they previously felt excluded. Some reported staying at home for days at a time without leaving the house, or seeing another person. As the majority of the centre’s former students were marginally excluded from society through retirement, ill-health and unemployment, integrating them back into the community through an inclusive and informal gathering two days a week, had resulted in large changes to their lives. Students were using public transport or getting exercise by walking to the centre; they were preparing for the session by buying stationery, computers and other resources and equipment. Some were using cameras that they had not used in a while. And from the creative aspect, many students took up a hobby or interest that was new or long-forgotten. All these aspects resulted in a far fuller and rewarding life.

Greater confidence and pride in their achievements meant that students were able to go on and try new things – whether it was hobbies, photography, travelling or socialising more. Many went on to learn more, enrolling in further courses. One student in particular was in the processes of launching a new silversmith business, and others were forging new career paths with their new skills.

Better understanding of IT and the Internet had resulted in many students having their own computers. Some had bought these themselves, others had received them as presents. Consequently, most students now had their own email addresses and were active on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which further added to their social inclusion.

By involving students in feedback and suggesting changes to the delivery of sessions at LCAD also had the added purpose of including the students in the design of their own education. Students’ comments were taken on board and valued, and this was noted by students. Staff at the centre were seen as friendly, happy and most importantly for many, approachable. Tutors actively engaged the students in the sessions; all of which had the knock-on effect of ensuring the students kept coming back and were eager to learn. This is also supported by the fact that all nine intakes over the three years were at full capacity and all students went on to pass the components of the course they started.

The networks and partnerships that LCAD had created had further supported students in their learning and had facilitated further volunteering and educational or training opportunities.

In conclusion, students arriving at the centre are most often marginalised from society through mental ill-health, age, unemployment, lack of workplace skills or no formal educational qualifications. Upon their induction, they met new people and made new friends. Throughout their engagement with the charity, they were supported to: improve their educational achievements; learn vital workplace skills; be creative and have fun (particularly with cameras and gardening); and consequently, became more confident and had pride in their work. Students were very proud of their achievements and the certificates they had received on completion of In Your Hands (see picture 5). Whilst attending the centre, former students had also learnt more about themselves and what they like, with many taking up new hobbies and interests.

LCAD is not simply a free course, but it is the start of a life-affirming change, supporting individuals to help themselves to improve their own outcomes and to enjoy doing so. This creates measureable social value that is empowering to students, but can also be felt among their social networks, in their future workplace and with Third Sector organisations and projects who benefit from the volunteers or staff who have progressed through the LCAD charity.



Picture 4: Former LCAD students with their course certificates

5. Recommendations

Following this evaluation, a number of recommendations have been made with regards future evaluations and monitoring should funding become available to continue and expand the project.

- A number of questionnaires are currently distributed to students at three time-points. These questionnaires should be analysed on an annual basis, and the findings reported as part of LCAD's annual reports. These should be fed back to students to reinforce their involvement and engagement with the charity. This feedback is vital for transparency but also evidences the outcomes of the charity and reinforces to student that their evaluation comments and opinions are being considered.
- Expand the course so they run for longer and include more computer skills and creative arts. Many students reported that they would like the centre to offer more opportunities for further education.
- Increase the number of intakes per year to involve even more students.
- Continue with existing networking and partnerships. Not only do these help refer and identify individuals who would benefit from engagement with the project, but would ensure a link for those seeking volunteering or further employment opportunities.
- The café is a social meeting point for many students who also use the Resource Hub. Continuing with these facilities while running courses is integral to the sustainability of the centre. Students felt that the centre was a very socially inclusive place because they did not come there to learn, but to meet people and use the facilities. The fact that the café and computer resources are accessible by the public is also helping to ensure that the centre is a vital asset for its community.

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The final report will be available on the Centre for Public's Health website:
<http://www.cph.org.uk/expertise/population-health/>.



Applied Health and Wellbeing Partnership
Centre for Public Health, Research Directorate,
Faculty of Health & Applied Social Sciences,
Liverpool John Moores University,
Room 2.49, 2nd Floor, Henry Cotton Campus,
15-21 Webster Street,
Liverpool.
L3 2ET.