

June 2015

Peer Power

Energy Mentoring Programme

Impact report

Overall aim

Over the past year, thirty new community energy projects have been supported with the help of the Energy Mentoring Programme run by Co-operatives UK and the Community Shares Unit.

The programme, supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, provides a structured programme, allowing new community groups hoping to set up a renewable energy generation project access support from trained and experienced practitioners (mentors).

This report summarises the views of the groups involved in this programme and highlights the success of peer mentoring, with each community energy group receiving up to six days of support.

What is unusual about this project is that we have tried a methodology for business development that, as an alternative to the costs of traditional sources of business support, creates a modest but enabling reward structure for practitioners to support those who are following them.

The challenge of scaling community energy, across all the relevant renewable technologies, is also about learning. How do we accelerate learning, in order to accelerate practice? One answer which can now be added into the mix is energy mentoring.

Delivered by



Funded by



Key outputs

We received 32 applications and recruited 14 mentoring organisations. We received 45 applications from community energy groups and currently 30 groups are receiving support. Within six months of opening up applications to community energy groups, we reached our capacity and there is a waiting list.



Groups and mentors by location

Mentoring organisation

1. Bath & West Community Energy
2. Brighton Energy Coop
3. Community Energy Warwickshire
4. Gen Community
5. Grand Union Community Energy (GUCE)
6. Green Fox Community Energy
7. Morecambe Bay Renewable Energy (MORE Renewables)
8. Plymouth Energy Community
9. Sharenergy
10. South Brent Community Energy
11. Hockerton Housing Project Ltd
12. OVESCO
13. Sheffield Renewables
14. Berwick Community Trust

Community energy groups (mentees)

1. Chase Community Solar
2. Energise London CIC
3. Exeter Community Energy
4. Frome Renewable Energy
5. Liverpool Community Renewables Ltd
6. Rochdale Community Energy Group
7. South East London Community Energy (SELCE)
8. Sustainable Harborough
9. Tamar Energy
10. Transition Town Totnes
11. Tring Community Energy (TRICE)
12. Lymm Community Energy
13. Power for Good
14. K-SET Killington and District Sustainable Energy Trust
15. Gloucestershire Community Energy
16. Bishop's Castle Community Energy
17. Greater Manchester for Community Renewables
18. Christow Community Land Trust
19. Wilmslow Community Energy
20. York Community Energy
21. Cumbria Action for Sustainability
22. Cardiff Community Energy
23. Solar Energy (SE) 24
24. Brent Pure Energy
25. Renewable Energy for Hartlepool
26. Tyneside Community Energy
27. Romsey Community Energy
28. Temple Guiting Community Renewable Energy Project
29. Gower Power Co-op
30. Moss Community Energy

Mentoring organisations (practitioners)

The programme recruited 14 mentoring organisations and over 30 individual practitioners provided up to six days of support to new community energy groups. Between them this represents over 30 years of experience and expertise.



Projects supported by technology type

The majority of groups are looking to install solar pv on either schools, community buildings, churches and residential properties and this equates to projected size of installation 7.5MW. At least four groups are working with their local authority.



Solar pv:
23



Planned solar
pv installation
7.5MW



Wind turbine:
4



Hydro:
2



Heat / Biomass
1

Projects supported by location

There was a fairly balanced mix between urban and rural schemes.



Urban:
16



Rural:
14

Reasons for getting involved

In depth qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals from ten schemes involved in the programme – five mentors and five organisations who had received support, and the headline learning:

- They recognised the role of ‘pioneers’, and wanting to learn from successful projects
- Some already knew, or knew of, their mentor, and wanting to formalise the arrangement
- Some wanted mentoring help because they had some experience already but wanted to initiate a more complex project
- For mentors, a strong motivation was wanting to pass on experience, to help other groups, thereby helping the sector as a whole
- Some explicitly saw this as ‘giving something back’, as they had been helped by more experienced groups and wanted to do something in return
- While for others, it was the fact that they hadn’t had help when they set up that prompted them to become mentors
- Mentors were often approached by new groups asking for help, and the mentoring scheme provided a chance to formalise the mentoring arrangement.

Satisfaction with the support received through the programme is high, at



more than
92%

“ It’s terrific, it’s just what the community energy community needs, and it would be great if it continued ”

Richard Pearce, Lymm Community Energy (mentee)

What help did mentors provide / benefits?

- The main benefit of the mentoring scheme for the groups supported, stressed time and time again, was the 'peer' element – having help from someone who had established a similar project, and faced similar challenges. This was a huge confidence-booster. It was also an efficient way of passing on relevant information. People felt it was more relevant and time-efficient than sources of online support. It also compared favourably to the use of consultants, which few groups could afford, and consultants were not seen as providing the moral support element which groups found important
- The most important factor for many was the moral support and confidence-building that mentors provided
- Some of the schemes being mentored were more experienced than originally envisaged when the mentoring scheme was established. Mentoring has proven useful to a range of groups, not just those starting out
- Having a mentor, as part of a formal scheme, was useful in discussions and negotiations with third parties, including local authorities, building owners or landowners, and community representatives
- Having a mentor helped a group to coalesce, and gave some groups a firm sense of purpose
- Some of the groups felt that having a mentor had made a significant (and in some cases pivotal) difference to the success of their scheme.



Key highlights & learning

Chase Community Solar

A selection of groups were interviewed and their views are captured in the following case studies. Many of these groups were supported to undertake a community share issue.

- Chase Community Solar received support from GenCommunity and raised £750,000 for their share offer to put solar panels on council house roofs in Cannock Chase District
- They acknowledged the importance of the moral support and confidence-building that they received:

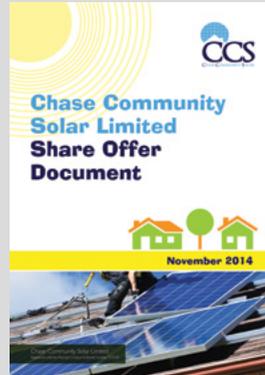
“A lot of it has been moral support... this is a personal relationship between me and Andy (mentor). This has been an enormously challenging scheme personally, there have been quite a lot of moments of dark despair, and it helps that they’ve been through some similar experiences and come out the other end”

Mike Kinghan,
Chase Community Energy (mentee)

- mentors emphasised that these exchanges were useful for them as well:

“It’s helped me by having a two-way information flow on pricing, viewing different parts of contracts and gathering information on what actually works, where money’s come from. It was very good for sharing knowledge.”

Andy Heald,
GenCommunity (mentor)





Liverpool Community Renewables (LCR)

- Sharenergy supported Liverpool Community Renewables (LCR) to issue a pioneer share offer to raise £80k for the purpose of developing solar PV projects on primarily non-domestic roofs
- Having a mentor made a significant (and in some cases pivotal) difference to the success of their scheme:

"Jon Halle made a massive difference to the development of our project. If it had not been for his advice and support we would never have got as far as we did in the time we did"

Ed Gommon

Frome Renewable Energy Co-operative (FRECo)

- Frome Renewable Energy Co-operative (FRECo) exceeded their target and raised £283,000 within one week of launching their share offer. This will finance solar PV systems totalling 200 kW of new generating capacity in Frome
- They were supported by their mentor, Pete Capener, Bath & West Community Energy
- Pete thought a formalised mentoring scheme was a good idea and wanted to test the principle of mentoring:

"I've always felt that the mentoring principle of communities supporting other communities is the best way of disseminating experience, and this felt like the best opportunity to test that"

Key highlights & learning



Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAFS)

- Mentees recognised the role of 'pioneers,' and wanting to learn from successful projects. Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAFS) received mentoring support from Kevin Frea, Halton Lune / MORE Renewables to develop a hydro scheme:

"There are some pioneers who deserve so much credit, and they've laid the best foundations for others to follow. There really is a track record, not just administrative and financial but also important for investors to see that these projects have worked up and down the country.

Kevin's been fantastic in getting us to focus on the things that we really really need to get right, like VAT, leases, the prospectus. They helped with details of the business model, how to account for inflation, what assumptions to use"

Phil Davies,
Cumbria Action for Sustainability
(mentee)

Power for Good

- Power for Good received support from Community Energy Warwickshire. They aim to raise £42,000 through a community share offer to install photovoltaic solar panels on the roofs of places of worship and their community buildings
- Groups benefitted from quite detailed technical advice and support – often beyond the level expected when the mentoring scheme was established:

"It was the financial projections, we kept looking at them and they weren't stacking up, but Barbara and Roger put the figures through their system and talked to us about depreciation, how to factor that in, and that helped a great deal. They did a training day for us about the business plan and share offer document. I'd had a couple of attempts at writing the Plan and they showed us how to integrate it all."

Margaret Healey-Pollett,
Power for Good (mentee)

GMCR



Greater Manchester Community Renewables Limited (GMCR)

- Greater Manchester Community Renewables Limited (GMCR) is a community benefit society run by volunteers to install community owned renewable energy across Greater Manchester
- Having a mentor, as part of a formal scheme, was useful in discussions and negotiations with third parties, including local authorities, building owners or landowners, and community representatives:

“When we go to meetings with Manchester City Council or with AGMA we’re able to say ‘and we are being mentored by Jon Halle from ShareEnergy and Pete Capener, Bath and West Community Energy ... So it’s brought a certain amount of credibility to our group.”

Kate Gilmartin,
Greater Manchester Community Renewables (mentee)

Lymm Community Energy

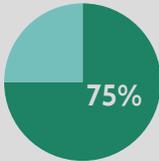
- Lymm Community Energy has been set up as a Community Benefit Society (CBS) by Low Carbon Lymm. They are working with Warrington Borough Council to enable local people and organisations to invest in renewable energy installations that benefit the local community
- They received support from their mentor, MORE Renewables and their comment about the programme is representative of the overwhelming positive feedback received:

“It’s terrific, it’s just what the community energy community needs, and it would be great if it continued, in a slightly enhanced form. It’s that personal experience, isn’t it? There’s nothing like that when you’re discussing how to launch a share issue, there’s quite a lot of ins and outs that you have to address, and if someone’s been through that you get that personal experience. It’s the experience of someone who’s been involved in setting up a community energy company, and the problems they’ve had to face, and how they’ve overcome them. It’s definitely the personal contact”

Richard Pearce,
Lymm Community Energy (mentee)

Importance of community energy, leverage and value

The success of the programme reflects the rapidly expanding community energy market. This growth is demonstrated by recent figures from the Community Shares Unit, our co-funder and partner for this programme.



The CSU reported that in 2014, 30 share offers were launched seeking to raise £24m for community energy projects, representing half of all share offers and 75% of investment raised.



The amounts seeking to be raised by community energy groups in 2014 were more than twice the amounts for 2013.



The CSU reported that to date in 2015 the targeted amount to be raised by community energy groups is £14 million.

£4 million



To date, 11 groups supported through the programme aim to raise nearly £4 million from community shares.



Every £1 spent on support through this programme has potentially leveraged £120 of additional funding, a ratio of 1:120.

Partnership and sign-posting

As well as the direct support from mentors, the website www.energymentoring.org.uk provided useful resources and sign-posted to helpful organisations including Community Energy England (CEE). We have also highlighted funding sources and nearly all the groups involved in the programme have successfully applied to either the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) or the Urban Community Energy Fund (UCEF).



Newsletter and social media



The @energymentor twitter account has 300+ followers



The monthly newsletter has 200 subscribers.

Find out more at www.energymentoring.org.uk
or get in touch at energy.mentoring@uk.coop
follow us on twitter [@energymentor](https://twitter.com/energymentor)

Delivered by



Funded by

