

What Adults Need

NIACE perspectives on a Skills Strategy

April 2003

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These papers are intended to be read either separately or together and have been drafted by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education as a contribution to the development of a national skills strategy.

They seek not to duplicate evidence on vocationally-orientated learning that may be submitted from other sources. Nor do they make the case for skills from an employer perspective. Instead they seek to use the experience and insights of adult learning for a wider range of social and economic purposes in order to ensure that the government remains sensitive to the wider benefits of learning and what these can bring to the development of a skills strategy.

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1. “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”

Adult and community learning – an evidence free zone?

- 1.1 Adult and community learning presents difficulties for a funding review, since adult learners use it in very different ways and publicly-supported programmes may be provided to meet different objectives. In addition, the term itself is used imprecisely and in different ways – sometimes referring to a funding stream, sometimes to a policy area and sometimes as shorthand for a curriculum territory.
- 1.2 There is now widespread recognition that adult and community learning can be a first step back into learning for adults alienated by the weaknesses of formal education. The success of the Adult Community Learning Fund over the last five years, of the laptop pilots, and the more modest successes of the non-schedule 2 pilots in colleges all testify to the ability of well targeted local provision, negotiated with potential participants to secure active engagement by groups under-represented in post-compulsory education and training. For them, the key is to secure easy access to learning – and, characteristically, providers make explicit provision for such groups free of charge, since there is persistent evidence that price can be a barrier to participation (from *Training in Britain*, 1989, onwards). This role is endorsed in the Strategy Unit report, *In Demand* (2002).
- 1.3 To make effective provision for under-represented groups, local providers need to call on an infrastructure that secures well-resourced outreach work; information, advice and guidance, childcare and eldercare support, a reasonable transport infrastructure – as well as access to facilities, materials and capable tutors.
- 1.4 Adult and community learning is also used by adults seeking to continue their education, to enrich their cultural experiences, to pursue hobbies and passions, and to meet people with common concerns. The availability of a wide range of opportunities varies widely in England, apparently as a result of local custom and practice, or the whim of local policy makers. Since participants are often choosing this form of cultural activity from a range of choices that might include the library, the cinema, concerts, or an evening at the pub, there has been a tradition of charging fees for such work, covering anything up to the total of explicit costs (de facto marginal costs) associated with the course.
- 1.5 Some adults (and as the years have passed numbers have increased) use adult and community learning provision to gain certification, either for its own sake, or as a stepping-stone to other qualifications. Usually, such provision has enjoyed a greater level of subsidy, and since 1992 markedly higher levels of public support. Other adults pursue certificated programmes through uncertificated provision.
- 1.6 More adults use provision for purposes where the educational goal may be secondary – recovering mental health service users attend classes as a part of

rehabilitation, because community based adult learning offers low risk settings for people to rebuild social contact; NIACE's Prescriptions for Learning programme highlights the role that adult and community learning plays as a preventive health measure. There is now clear evidence that participation in learning prolongs independent life, and active citizenship, and delays morbidity among older people. Each of these benefits can be seen to relate to the low cost, relatively low status nature of the provision.

- 1.7 Much of the provision in adult and community learning is tidy, easily identified through formal classes, with registers, and regular meetings. But some embeds educational provision in other community development activities such as those funded through the single regeneration budget. In this way adult and community learning forms an important part of the connective tissue for joined-up government – something that is not fully captured by the Learning and Skills Development Agency's work on a typology of adult learning. It is often this connective work that is most effective in widening participation. A significant minority of provision focuses on role education for active members of voluntary and community organisations. In the Pre-School Learning Alliance, Veronica McGivney's studies¹ show that women arrive at pre-schools with the aim of supporting their children, but stay for themselves, developing and clarifying learning journeys on the way. Family learning work has grown up in recognition that the inter-generational benefits of learning can be harnessed to the benefit of learners of different ages. The more complex the mix of purposes in the provision, the harder it is to generate simple, generalisable data. This has led policy makers to pay much less attention to informal learning and the less organised forms of provision, compared to more structured forms – yet both contribute to a learning society, and a flexible adult and community learning policy can foster both, just as it supports distance and on-line learning alongside local institutions and residential colleges.
- 1.8 Another function of adult and community learning is for public education programmes relating to health or civic welfare to be shared, and critically reviewed. Programmes around AIDs awareness, nutrition or drugs education fit this dimension – as does much of the public education activity of single-issue voluntary bodies in the housing and environment sectors. The programme of public lectures organised by universities, and much educational broadcasting, often fits this framework too.
- 1.9 And then of course, literacy, numeracy and English as a Second Language are at the heart of the adult and community learning agenda, both as explicit curriculum areas, and as embedded skills across the range of provision.
- 1.10 Evidence from the Nordic countries and from Canada suggests that where adult and community learning is widely accessible, participation levels are also high, and the speed at which regeneration occurs compares favourably with countries where there is little investment in community based learning. An analysis of this phenomenon, drawing upon OECD data is given in Kjell Rubenson's article *Adult Education and*

¹ Veronica McGivney, *Adults Learning in Pre-schools*, (NIACE/PLA 1998)

Cohesion (Lifelong Learning in Europe Issue 1/2003), where he uses data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (2000) to identify a distinctive Nordic model of adult education that builds social cohesion.

- 1.11 The relevance of this to the UK is illustrated by the decision of Ford and its unions to instigate a programme of financial support for white- and blue-collar workers to engage in learning outside of industrial training. The lesson of the EDAP programme is spectacular. Workers have access to independent learning advisers, and the freedom to study whatever they wish, in their own time, but with company-supplied funding to meet fees. The programme overturned normal participation patterns, with around a third of all employees taking part each year and around 90% having participated over a 10-year period. Absenteeism rates dropped, retention rates improved, days lost to industrial relations disputes plummeted. Over time, powerful progression routes were discernible in the studies pursued. The engine casings plant in Belfast turned itself from a plant vulnerable to closure into a world leader, selling products to General Motors in Brazil. Staff and managers ascribe the confidence to achieve this to the self-belief generated by the EDAP programme. At Dagenham, the programme has extended to include family numeracy for fathers and children. Employee development schemes are now quite widespread. Learning leaks.
- 1.12 The armed forces have seen the sense of investment in staff pursuing learning for its own sake – as a sensible industrial investment, and the NHS still maintains Individual Learning Accounts for staff.
- 1.13 The Treasury and Inland Revenue also recognise the case for a broad definition of which learning and developmental activities are to be encouraged. Regulations for what can qualify as a non-taxable benefit explicitly permit “a wide range of practical and theoretical skills”; the costs of activities such as Outward Bound, Raleigh International and Princes’ Trust as well as “an enjoyable course as an introduction to more concentrated job-related training” where this improves a person’s attitude towards training.
- 1.14 This produces a policy conundrum – where industry private and public sees the merits of investment in a broad range of education, not because it leads to immediate measurable outcomes, but because it underpins a learning culture, which is an effective precondition to more narrowly defined targets. Yet in public education policy we seem fixated on defining each of the overlapping purposes and benefits of cultural investment, in the belief that if outcomes cannot be explicitly predicted, and easily measured, the claim on the public purse is unjustified.
- 1.15 We recognise the need to give full-time 16-19 A level students a range of extra-curricular support and enrichment that will not lead to measurable benefits – in the belief that there is more to life than the specialist curricula pursued. The same thinking underpins the provision of cultural activities in universities. NIACE believes this confidence in the value of a rich investment in cultural activity should

underpin the review of funding of adult learning – and that this will result in a positive impact on the Government’s twin aspirations to foster social inclusion and economic prosperity.

- 1.16 It is not just because much of the provision has a long history of substantial under-investment that data capture is weaker in this sector – that will improve for the heartland of structured courses now that a secure platform has been created through the LSC. However, for those aspects of the work where adult and community learning makes its richest contributions to joined-up policy making, data will always inadequately reflect the complexity of cultural practices and achievements at play. This is a major reason for valuing qualitative studies, and for developing and sustaining learner-centred approaches to policy making.
- 1.17 Turning to recommendations on funding, the challenge is to recognise that those who can afford to pay should contribute, whilst at the same time recognising that many people alienated from education, and with little confidence in their own abilities would find even modest charges an inhibition to participation. NIACE believes that the following priorities and practices should be adopted:
- 1.18 **Priority should be given to securing a basic minimum of provision in every local LSC area – including basic skills, languages, ICT, a range of cultural studies, role education for active citizenship and community capacity development (for example, as parents or tenants), crafts, and sports activities – with provision within 45 minutes travelling time of the vast majority of the population. To secure this is likely to need modest increased public investment. NIACE suggests that Government should consider ring-fencing 3% of the total LSC spend (not simply the adult and community learning budget) for what we characterise as “3C learning”. What we mean by this is learning which falls outside the legitimate priorities of basic skills, the level 2 target and labour market-driven learning and which contributes to building community capacity; promoting active citizenship and to cultural enrichment.**
- 1.19 **A particular priority for adult and community learning should be widening participation and achievement for groups under-represented elsewhere in education and training. This will need sustained and increased investment.**
- 1.20 **A third informing goal should be the achievement (and NIACE believes participation) targets for basic skills, and the level 2 target – in support of the aspiration to create a skilled workforce and an active, informed citizenship.**
- 1.21 **To that end NIACE believes that the broad curriculum should be protected by adopting a high fee (40% explicit costs) policy for generally offered adult and community classes in colleges as well as LEAs and community settings, subject to the caveat that there are fee waivers and reductions for individuals on the basis of need, and for curriculum areas that meet an explicit public interest.**

- 1.22 **Fee waivers should be available for people qualifying for benefits, for people without a qualification at level 2 or above, and fee reductions should be available for poorer retirement pensioners. NIACE recommends reviewing the current practices highlighted in the NIACE fees survey to identify other specific categories.**
- 1.23 **Government priorities should include basic skills (free); work to promote social inclusion (e.g. ACLF, family learning, provision in NRU wards) – also free; ICT, at reduced rates; and foreign language teaching, also at reduced rates.**
- 1.24 **RDAs and Local Authorities should also have the ability to set priorities based upon their own labour market, community regeneration and inward investment strategies (i.e. cities of culture).**
- 1.25 **LLSCs, ideally through learning partnerships, should ensure that infrastructure costs for mapping needs, outreach, advice and information, childcare and eldercare, and transport are adequate to the needs revealed and to support the programmes adopted in their areas.**

2. The Level 2 Target

2.1 NIACE warmly welcomed the announcement of the Government's new level 2 target to reduce by at least 40% the number of adults in the UK workforce who lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010; and working towards this, 1 million adults in the workforce to achieve level 2 between 2003 and 2006, since it draws attention to an area of real vulnerability in the UK's education and skills strategy. The UK's performance in getting people aged 21 and under in the workforce qualified to at least level 2 is broadly comparable to France and Germany. For people aged 28 and above, however, the country's performance is significantly worse. This suggests that the battle to raise skill levels in the workforce is being lost in the workplace. Twenty years of exhorting employers to train their employees has had only a limited effect. The voluntarist approach as exemplified by Industry Training Organisations and National Training Organisations may have improved best practice among those employers already committed to learning but has not reached the rest in anything like enough cases. It remains true that workers with degrees are five times as likely as workers without qualifications to have had training in the last four weeks. And for the low-skilled, far too high a proportion of training is to meet minimum health, safety or hygiene obligations. Part-time and in particular, temporary workers do very poorly under current arrangements.

2.2 In considering how to tackle this market failure, Government has two types of instrument available. The first approach is to take legislative or regulatory powers to compel employers to spend money on training and development just as it requires them to maintain healthy and safe places to work. The second method is to use revenue from taxation to provide incentives to employers to put their employees through education and training activities. At present both approaches are being tried. The continued existence of the two statutory industry training boards shows how the former approach can work while the current Employer Training Pilots are evidence of the latter approach.

2.3 While favouring the roll-out of Employer Training Pilots, NIACE believes that the time has come to introduce an element of regulation, at least in those sectors which do not have a robust education and training culture. Regulation might be triggered, on a sectoral basis, drawing on advice from sector skills councils, where there is evidence that competitiveness and productivity are being held back significantly by an inadequately skilled and trained workforce and where voluntary arrangements are ineffective. A first regulatory step might take the form of a statutory requirement on all employers to establish a learning and development committee, analogous to a health and safety committee, to consider the businesses' education and training needs and to produce an annual report. We acknowledge that such an approach may be seen as burdensome on the smallest of businesses and alternative mechanisms should be considered. Nevertheless, we believe that the public interest is not best served by allowing some employers to opt out of a responsibility to train and develop their workforces because of a business model based on a "low-skill, low pay" competition strategy.

- 2.4 When deciding how to prioritise its own interventions, Government faces a difficult balancing act. Qualifications at level 2 appear to provide relatively small visible rates of return to individuals or employers paying for them. Nevertheless, in a labour market becoming more polarised between low-skill, minimum wage jobs and higher skilled occupations, level two qualifications provide a vital step in the progression ladder – without them, employees have only a restricted range of jobs available to them. On the other hand, most of the skill shortages in the labour market are around level 3 occupations and the government is under some pressure to ensure these are overcome.
- 2.5 If, as seems likely, the government is considering making the teaching, assessment and award costs of a first level 2 qualification available free at the point of delivery to all learners with low skill levels, there is a risk that there will be a squeeze on the funding available for other learning – both non-certificated provision and learning at and above level 3, which may in turn have consequential effects on demand for higher education. It is important to note that non-certificated provision remains an important first step in re-introducing adults to learning in non-threatening ways – so reducing the range of opportunities here would have the effect of removing one of the first rungs of a ladder. It would also have the effect of narrowing the contribution education and training can make to other strands of government policy.
- 2.6 NIACE believes that the 2010 level 2 target is ambitious, and is unlikely to be achieved without the injection of new resources in the next Comprehensive Spending Review, or the introduction of regulation as suggested above.
- 2.7 If the target is to be reached two further measures need to be addressed in our view. The first of these is to consider the nature of learning support needed to improve retention and achievement for learners. The Kennedy report, Learning Works, proposed the creation of a ‘New Learning Pathway’ for mature students in further education, below level 2, in recognition that tutorial support, mentoring and curriculum enrichment all play a useful role in sustaining motivation, building confidence and strengthening those tacit skills employers seek. The rationale for a learning support package of this type is accepted without question for full time 16-19 students following A-level programmes, and for mature students following Access courses preparing them for university entry.**
- 2.8 The second measure relates to the target itself. Currently, targets measure whole qualifications, and there is no recognised mechanism for units to be accumulated over time. As Treasury Minister John Healey points out, the gap between level 1 and level 2 takes young people five years of schooling to traverse. For adults, who often study in small episodes, the size of whole qualifications is itself a barrier. And for employers, over-complex programmes are a disincentive. NIACE has for many years been committed to the development of a coherent credit accumulation and transfer scheme, embracing further as well as higher education, to secure a qualifications system sensitive to adults’ needs.**

To this end, we welcome the possibility that arrangements for post-19 qualifications may be detached from those for 14-19s and urge the Department to work with the QCA and others to strengthen and support the extension of systems of credit accumulation and transfer, paying particular attention to the contribution which online learning might play in supporting mobility within such systems.

- 2.9 Finally, if targets are useful in concentrating attention and resources on neglected areas, they bring risks. There is a clear danger that planners and providers may target resources too narrowly on work leading explicitly to the targets, when adults' learning journeys are diverse, and benefit from a rich variety of offers. Too focused a curriculum risks becoming a barrier in itself.
- 2.10 There is a danger, too that the target becomes the primary focus of policy, rather than the skills and learning for which it is a proxy. This may lead us to underestimate the skill levels of people at work – perhaps especially the skills of women returners to the labour force – where the weakness of current strategies for recognition and accreditation of prior experience and learning are a continuing weakness of the system. In the end it is skilled, flexible and adaptable people we want. Securing qualifications is an important route to that end. But it is not the only one.

3. A Coherent Outreach Service

- 3.1 Since the publication of the Russell Report in 1973 policy makers have developed a range of measures to reach groups of adults under-represented in education and training. These include active labour market initiatives like the TOPS Preparatory courses and Home Office Community Development projects of the 1970s through to today's New Deals; national initiatives, like the 1970s and 1990s literacy campaigns, the REPLAN programme for unemployed people in the 1980s, the Union Learning Fund and the Adult and Community Learning Fund of this government; broadcast led initiatives like the BBC Second Chance and Webwise programmes; distance and on-line learning, like the Open Tech, the Open College and Ufi learndirect. The Individual Learning Account was also trialled to extend participation, though as it turned out a small proportion of beneficiaries were new to post-school education and training.
- 3.2 Thirty years of experience show the importance of intermediaries, liaising between education providers and communities they seek to serve, working to enable and empower communities to better articulate and realize their own learning ambitions. This is a role played in different ways by information guidance and advice services, union learning representatives, community learning centres, and outreach workers. It is a role strongly endorsed by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. More recently learndirect centres and UK online centres have contributed to extending the reach of the system but with an individual more than a group focus.
- 3.3 'Outreach' is used as an umbrella term to cover a cluster of different activities and policy goals. It 'has been defined variously as off-site provision; as a method of learning delivery; as support for the community; as a networking process; as targeted provision; as curriculum development; as marketing; as a way or style of working; as a set of particular aims or as a broad and multifaceted process involving numerous activities and stages.' (McGivney, 2000). One LEA officer, cited by McGivney describes outreach as 'whatever it takes to engage someone not currently learning in learning.', and Mace suggests outreach means 'three things at once: research, consultation and action. The outreach worker goes out with questions and an intention to provide some kind of appropriate answer to them. The guiding principle for both question and answer is consultation.' (Mace, 1992).
- 3.4 Characteristically, the answer may include learning provision shaped by the aspirations of local communities and the responsiveness of providers. However, there is no simple one-to-one relationship between the aspirations of communities and the existing course offer of institutions supporting outreach work, and the consultation can lead to little or no immediate gain in participation, though there is plenty of experience (one example is that of Northern College) showing that sustained outreach work, backed by responsive

providers and supportive financial arrangements can transform participation patterns in poor communities over time.

- 3.5 Such work does take time. The Neighbourhood Renewal preparatory report on Skills highlighted this. To make a difference to participation and to create a lifelong learning culture in the poorest neighbourhoods, it suggested, needed a commitment to plan for a twenty-year campaign. However, such long-term investment has been difficult to achieve in Britain, where the priorities, funding streams and structures for post-school education and training have changed substantially more than once over the last fifteen years.
- 3.6 OECD's 1996 policy paper, *Lifelong Learning for All* recognised the dangers of short-term planning horizons for some: *(Lifelong learning) is undertaken at a particular time ...and the benefits are reaped later. This creates difficulties where capital markets or other institutional arrangements, such as public budgeting practices, do not allow the comparisons of costs and benefits across time periods. It has the effect of squeezing out lifelong learning activities that do not produce benefits quickly and, by implication, rationing lifelong learning to those individuals who are likely to demonstrate the desired benefits most quickly, or who are capable of financing the costs on their own.*
- 3.7 Outreach workers and adult focused information, advice and guidance services were casualties of the 1992 further education legislation, when coherent local planning was eschewed for the rigours of the market, and institutions were funded only at the point that students enrolled. The development of a market in further education inhibited cross-institutional co-operation in many places, too. In that context exploratory work to stimulate participation, with no short term guaranteed outcomes became impossible for many institutions to sustain.
- 3.8 Guidance services became more narrowly tied to careers advice, and focused on the development of a professionally skilled cadre of workers. Links to less formal advice services were impressive in some areas, but provision across the country has been patchy. The development of Union Learning Representatives, acting as learning intermediaries for learners at work has developed a new dimension to the guidance and outreach activity, just as the Adult and Community Learning Fund has shown how outreach work attached to creative provision can create effective and innovative patterns of provision for the most excluded groups.
- 3.9 The Learning and Skills Act gave a welcome responsibility for planning to the Learning and Skills Council, and the government's remit and grant letters to the Learning and Skills Council highlight the importance of widening participation. This provides an opportunity for a more coherent approach to outreach, off-site provision and guidance work. However, the effect of the Government giving so much priority to headline targets may be to make longer-term investment, and the development of a coherent outreach capacity

in each area harder to achieve – except where it is focused on narrow activities likely to contribute quickly to the achievement of the targets. Given that caveat NIACE warmly endorses the idea that coherent outreach services should be developed for each area, to identify effective strategies of engagement with communities under-represented in education and training.

- 3.10 Strategic aims for engaging under-represented groups at work and in communities served should clearly lie with local Learning and Skills Councils. Their priorities should inform and shape the work of learndirect and neighbourhood learning centres, of information, guidance and advice services, and of area outreach services, which should in our view be located with local learning partnerships. The LLSC would need to convene network meetings of providers, ULF projects, IAG and outreach services to ensure that effective feedback from community consultation informs Councils' own planning and funding activity, and the response of institutional providers. Higher education institutions should be included in network meetings, to ensure that widening participation strategy in further and higher education is coherently developed.**
- 3.11 The case for locating outreach services with local learning partnerships is similar to that for siting guidance work with a network of local providers. The intelligence to be gathered by outreach workers needs to inform the full range of local providers and the local Council. However, outreach work is educational activity, and should be overseen by educators. Partnerships already have a remit for the learning dimensions of neighbourhood renewal in their brief, and the development of an outreach service capacity would strengthen that remit, as well as complementing the other strategies for engaging under-represented groups developed by institutions. Each area will have different priorities for the use of outreach activity, and partnerships should identify these in the light of LLSC strategic aims, and the feedback from work with target groups. Of course, even learning partnerships cover areas considerably broader than the communities that will best benefit from sustained dedicated work. That needs to be the responsibility of dedicated staff. Aims and time-scales will be important to identify, and a balance struck between measures to address short-term priorities for the system with longer-term goals. Funding agreements to resource the development of outreach services should be for a minimum of three years.**

4. Guidance

- 4.1 Government concern to raise skill levels and widen participation by increasing demand for post compulsory learning has highlighted the importance of effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) in helping adults and those who employ them to make effective decisions about learning and work. Although there is a tendency for IAG, like other support services, to become self replicating and self-referential (“the more therapists there are, the more people are discovered to need therapy”) there is little doubt that would-be learners find education, training and entry to skilled occupations confusing and that they benefit from access to information, advice and guidance.
- 4.2 One feature of guidance policy at national (English) level is the number of stakeholders involved. These include the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Trade and Industry. There are also various agencies involved such as the LSC; Jobcentre Plus; learndirect/Ufi; Worktrain and Business Link. Services are also supported by ESF, HEFCE and SRB while more general guidance is offered through Citizens’ Advice Bureaux. Although outside the adult IAG framework, the role of the Connexions service for young people cannot be ignored not least because local agencies running Connexions are often the same organisations contracted to deliver adult IAG.
- 4.3 At local level the visible faces of IAG are the 67 Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships (IAGP). IAGP’s provide free and accessible information and advice service to adult learners. All organisations in a Partnership deliver IAG either as their main function or as one service among many. Typical members include careers services, further education colleges, libraries, voluntary agencies and training providers. Although in membership of partnerships, the Jobcentres’ very focused function means that they have generally remained separate from partnership training activities that focus upon a careers service agenda.
- 4.4 Partnerships help their members supply IAG services by providing funding for delivery and resources, free training for staff and marketing materials. The current budget for this work, routed through the LSC, is £24m (2002/03), rising to £34.5m in 2003/04. Partners currently deliver about £1.23m information sessions a year and about 0.3 million advice sessions. The LSC expects this to increase to 1.45m and 0.5m respectively.
- 4.5 The current arrangements have a number of weaknesses:
 - Government and LSC priorities to support the level 2 target, basic skills target, HE participation target and broader workforce development goals are not those which IAGPs were set up to deliver. Many partnerships have been

impressive in reaching out to excluded groups and communities but there are, generally, underdeveloped links with the workplace.

- The developmental dynamic around workplace-focussed IAG has been with union learning representatives. As the role of a learning representative is voluntarily assumed within autonomous organisations, Government and public agencies need to develop a new range of innovative incentives to work with them. Similarly the engagement of large numbers of employers cannot be assumed although research conducted by MORI for the Guidance Council shows clearly that employers are, invariably, the most common source of IAG.
- The impact of IAG has yet to be properly measured although the DfES has recently commissioned a longitudinal study from IES and NICEC.
- IAG is too often considered as a silo separate from teaching and learning (it is, for example, wholly unmentioned in *Success for All*).
- IAGPs are fragmented, lacking a strong national brand.

4.6 The LSC is to pilot “enhanced services” in all areas from August 2003, but it is not yet apparent that all parts of the current system have the capacity to re-orientate what is offered, how and to whom. Although some IAGPs have developed effective partnerships with Business Links and other employment-focussed intermediaries, the orientation of others lies more with community-based outreach work than with industry and commerce.

4.7 In planning for the expansion and development of guidance in the future, NIACE believes that:

- policy needs to embrace and support the key role that employers and unions play in providing IAG;
- there is a need nationally to establish clear protocols for working with Business Link services and the Investors in People programme;
- development should also ensure that IAG is more closely integrated into teaching and learning strategies across the curriculum;
- re-invigorated learning partnerships, drawing upon the outcomes of strategic area reviews and FRESAs, should assume strategic co-ordination of IAG services and the need for maintaining separate partnerships should be reviewed;
- provision would benefit from distinctive national branding;
- while it is unnecessary to require people taking out new ILAs to get information, advice and guidance, beforehand, any new ILA should offer – and fund – the opportunity for IAG at the start and end of a learning episode.

4.8 **Overall, NIACE believes that IAG needs to be seen as a continuum - ranging from highly professionalised individual counselling, through mentoring relationships and appraisal-linked developmental planning in the workplace, through all teaching/learning relationships to the basic “signposting” of information. The key task is to secure a higher volume of good quality public, private and (not least by unions) voluntary sector provision. Some of**

this may be at level 4 but the majority is likely to be at level three and, additionally, is likely to be undertaken by staff for which the guidance role may not be central. In this respect, we believe that policy should reflect such diversity and not be dominated by specialist groups of providers.

- 4.9 **Guidance is essentially a derived demand and current levels of provision, let alone expanded levels, would be unlikely to continue without some degree of regulation and ring-fenced funding. There would, however, be concern if funding were top-sliced from other learning programmes to support guidance services. It is more important to provide high-quality teaching and learning and to integrate IAG within an educational process – including outreach work. A task for the Review therefore, might be to establish what would constitute a nationally acceptable minimum level of provision and ensure that this is secured by LSCs.**

5. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) in England

- 5.1 When ILAs were first introduced NIACE welcomed them as evidence of the government's commitment to adult learning but was sceptical that they were the best instrument through which to motivate individuals who have no prior history of participation to take up education and training. While acknowledging ILAs as a bold and innovative experiment, we found them unconvincing as a centrepiece of policy and saw their value as an interesting niche product to stimulate individual demand for learning.
- 5.2 NIACE was also concerned that the original scheme was an expensive way to widen participation. The fact that a quarter of genuine account users were already graduates suggests that the targeting of the scheme was not well-focused if the idea was to help those with lower levels of skills and qualifications. It was a design weakness that led ILAs to provide incentives to people who did not need them.
- 5.3 The failure of ILAs in 2001 was not due only to fraud, mis-selling and weak cost controls – these simply revealed structural problems that are detailed in the report of the National Audit Office in October 2002. The most important one of these was a lack of quality assurance arrangements to ensure that learners signing up would get worthwhile benefits from learning. The central lesson to be learned from the English ILA scheme is that policy ended up being driven by the technical mechanism. It lost sight of the need to ensure that different learners as well as more learners were engaged in learning and offered a high-quality experience.
- 5.4 NIACE understands that the government cannot afford to make mistakes with a successor scheme and welcomes the decision to delay the introduction of a new scheme to ensure that it is congruent with the review of the funding of adult learning. The danger, however, is that caution leads to a loss of innovation and creativity, leading ILAs to become nothing more than a bureaucratic mechanism. In particular, some attention should be given to ensuring that the mechanism does not drive the content – with all ILA-supported courses ending up conveniently costing the same as the maximum level of public support! As the Government considers options for a new ILA initiative, based perhaps around a narrower curriculum offer (ICT courses at or below level 2) and a lower contribution from public funds (perhaps £100), NIACE urges that certain principles should underpin the new development:
- ***High quality opportunities***
Any new policy should have visible but proportionate QA monitoring arrangements in place from the start. The arrangements for ILA1 in other parts of the UK suggest that this need not necessarily involve high levels of bureaucratic red-tape or additional elaborate systems to be put in place. While opening up the market to new providers remains important, it may be

appropriate to have “fast-track, light-touch” registration procedures for providers whose quality is subject already to inspection and scrutiny and which are already in receipt of public funds through the LSC, New Deal or other DfES initiatives. An additional layer of red-tape should not be necessary for such providers.

- ***Targeting of public support to those who have benefited least from education in the past***
A near universal offer may be unnecessarily generous, ending up providing public support to individuals already convinced of the value of learning, who would have been willing and able to meet the costs themselves. Without targeting, ILA2 may reinforce rather than change patterns of participation. A more tightly targeted system might prioritise either individuals (by level of prior attainment, or age for example) or communities or both.
- ***Design for expansion***
Although it is preferable for the government to start small (with level 2 ICT training for example) rather than launching an over-ambitious scheme, designing a new initiative so that it has the potential for expansion to other curriculum areas and for regionalisation (to meet particular skill needs) may be prudent.
- ***Resourcing prospective learners rather than providers***
The initial ILA initiative demonstrated the motivational benefits of putting purchasing power in the hands of the prospective learner. However, there needs to be enough investment in the provider base to ensure sufficient breadth of learning offers at all levels of complexity for learners.
- ***Advice and guidance***
In other parts of the UK (but not in England), ILAs could be used to purchase advice and guidance. If the new product focuses, at least initially, upon a far narrower curriculum at a particular level, it might not be appropriate to require extensive pre-entry IAG. There is, however, a strong case to consider ensuring that an element of guidance be included within all learning offered so that beneficiaries can consider their next steps. It is important that any new initiative be integrated with other developments in information, advice and guidance.
- ***Groups as well as individuals***
A culture that respects and values lifelong learning will not be built simply by individualised programmes. Learning is, at its best, a social experience. Individuals are motivated, supported and taught by their families and peers in their neighbourhoods and workplaces. Some of the ILA pilots experimented with the pooling of accounts - an area which would merit further development. There is also evidence from other community-based

lifelong learning policy initiatives that informed intermediaries can help encourage participation among groups of new learners.

- ***Choice for learners***
Even if a new initiative is restricted in the range and level of learning offered, the widest range of qualifications should be offered so that learners have some degree of choice to take up the opportunity most suited to their needs, wants and interests.
- ***Intermediaries***
A new scheme should build on the positive experience of ILA1 in engaging learning intermediaries (like union learning representatives and community outreach staff) in promoting the take-up of ILAs among targeted groups, and in offering ‘bare-foot’ guidance, and mentoring for new learners.

6. Paid Educational Leave

- 6.1 The UK government is a signatory to the 1974 International Labour Organisation convention C140 on paid educational leave (see <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C140>).
- 6.2 The strongest support for the principle of Paid Educational Leave comes at present from the trade union movement. It is an explicit policy of both the Trades Union Congress and a number of affiliated unions. Both NIACE and the Open University support the work of the union-led Paid Educational Leave Campaign. This Campaign has deliberately adopted a pragmatic approach to the promotion of paid educational leave and supports the current LSC/HMT Employer Training Pilots as steps towards a broader entitlement. In considering how this might be done our analysis is informed by:
- The case made by David Miliband (now schools minister) in his 1990 paper published by the Institute for Public Policy Research *'Learning by Right – an entitlement to paid education and training'*. This argues for a national target of five days education and training per [full-time] worker per year.
 - The examples of paid educational leave that exist in other EU nations including Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Austria and Sweden.
 - The transformative effect that light-tough regulation has had within the care sector where employers now offering training and development opportunities to a far wider range of employees than was the case when market forces prevailed.
 - The arguments made within the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning's Workplace Learning Task force.
- 6.6 The NAGCELL group advocated a "Minimalist Legislative Framework" this, it proposed, would be based on the principles of encouragement and incentive, more than penalty or punishment. One tried and successful approach in other matters which could be adopted here is that applied to Health and Safety in the workplace. There is substantial evidence from the experience of the Health and Safety at Work Act that enabling legislation can have a dramatic effect in improving the voluntary approach to workplace issues. Before the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act insufficient attention was paid to workplace health and safety by employers and employees alike. The requirements of Health and Safety Policy Statements from employers, the creation of safety representatives and the encouragement of Safety Committees among other developments transformed the approach to workplace health and safety.
- 6.7 The NAGCELL group recommended that a similar approach should be adopted for workplace learning. The statutory framework would have two principal components for encouraging partnership:

i. Policy Statements produced by employers clearly setting out not only a commitment to workplace learning, linked to the policy framework objectives in section 4 (above), but also an indication of how they are to be achieved.

ii. Learning Committees with equal representation from the employer and trade unions with responsibility for developing and monitoring progress in achieving the objectives of the Policy Statement.

From this process **Learning Agreements** could evolve defining rights and responsibilities, in relation to workplace learning, for employees and employers.

6.8 With the role of Union Learning Representatives now written into statute via the 2002 Employment Act, NIACE believes that the time is right to proceed with the next steps of a framework that will ultimately result in a national entitlement to paid educational leave.

6.9 NIACE recommends that the Government commission detailed research into the arrangements for paid educational leave in other EU states (and also associated measures such as the Danish system of Job Rotation) and begins a study on the potential impact such measures might have on UK employers.

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