

A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning

**Response from the Consultations carried out by NIACE
from UK NGOs working in the field of Adult Learning**

June 2001

**Sue Waddington
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Process of the Consultations

NIACE published a summary of the memorandum in its journal 'Adults Learning' at the end of 2000 and invited views.

Links to the Memorandum and a questionnaire designed to provoke responses was placed on NIACE's website earlier this year.

Over a thousand organisations were sent the questionnaire and asked to respond to NIACE.

A consultative seminar was held on 13th June and attracted participants from leading NGOs.

(See appendix for further details)

The following report is a summary of the responses.

The View of UK NGOs

Introduction

The Memorandum was welcomed in that: -

- It provided the opportunity for debate and discussion around the key principles of lifelong learning and how these might be translated into practice.
- It presented an inclusive and comprehensive statement of the importance and relevance of lifelong learning to everyone.
- It indicated that further concrete action was to result from the debate.

The consultations also brought forward some criticisms of the Memorandum, which included: -

- The lack of attention given to equal opportunity issues; specifically the failure to recognise the significance of the barriers faced by particular groups including those with disabilities and learning difficulties, older people, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers and other groups vulnerable to exclusion.
- The over-emphasis on lifelong learning for employability and upward mobility in the labour market and the lack of recognition of the importance of lifelong learning for other roles and purposes.
- The failure to fully appreciate the importance of both informal and non-formal learning and the roles played by the voluntary and NGO sectors. The Memorandum's starting point was the traditional institutional culture of schools, colleges and universities.
- The need to put the learner and potential learner at the centre of the debate when considering issues around entitlement and accountability.

The Six Key Messages

1 New Basic Skills for all

- 1.1 The idea that basic skills should include a high level of complex skills that everyone should have the opportunity to learn, achieve and update was, on the whole welcomed as a new approach. However the skills listed needed further elaboration and explanation. (For example what is technological culture and what is included in social skills?). Considerable investment and cultural change would be required in the UK if these targets were to be met, because, for example, only a minority of people have skills in foreign languages. There were doubts about whether this was a realistic goal.
- 1.2 It is essential that the importance of the foundation core skills of literacy and numeracy are not neglected and priority should be given to these skills and the needs of adults and young people who require support in acquiring and developing them.
- 1.3 The emphasis upon skills for participation in the knowledge economy, by implication, neglects the skills and knowledge that people need for empowerment, confidence, social relationships and living in and contributing to tolerant, multicultural communities. These are as essential as the technical competencies that are included in the list.
- 1.4 There should be a greater appreciation of the need to discover what skills and knowledge people (individually, collectively and in particular communities and groups) actually want to learn and whether they have access to relevant and appropriate learning opportunities. This may be an area for further research.

2 More Investment in Human Resources

- 2.1 Mechanisms need to be developed to give individual learners the opportunities to make choices about investments in learning. In theory, schemes such as Individual Learning Accounts give people some choice (although these are restricted to vocational opportunities in the UK). In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, outreach workers have successfully discovered learning interests and helped design opportunities in which individuals have chosen to invest their time. There is room for further development in this field.
- 2.2 More concern was expressed about how the available resources were used rather than the over-all level of investment. The majority of existing investment in lifelong learning goes to traditional formal providers. Consequently the informal NGO sector and the 'hard to reach' groups of potential learners who are least likely to participate in formal courses, are disadvantaged. The funding divide reinforces the learning divide.
- 2.3 NGOs often provide innovative and successful learning opportunities that are short lived because the funding is not sustained once the pilot/start up period is over.

- 2.4 Partnerships between the formal and informal providers are usually dominated by the former because of their larger financial resources. This is unfortunate because it means that more innovative approaches are not mainstreamed and the traditional culture is likely to be maintained.
- 2.5 The complexities of funding arrangements (accounting requirements and performance indicators for example) again disadvantage smaller voluntary organisations and make informal learning activities more vulnerable to short termism.
- 2.6 Neighbourhood, local and regional regeneration schemes involving transport, health, environmental and economic developments etc should include resources for lifelong learning.
- 2.7 The use of resources for lifelong learning should be monitored to determine if issues of equity and equal opportunities are given sufficient weight.

3 Innovation in Teaching and Learning

The approach of the Memorandum was welcomed but two issues were raised.

- 3.1 In addition to the new learners and new learning contexts, the roles of new teachers and learning mentors should be developed. Those who are most successful in encouraging people to return to learning are often learning advocates who are working with their own peer groups. An increase in the professionalisation of adult education should not present barriers to the inclusion of grass roots teachers and mentors or down grade the bottom up approach.
- 3.2 There was concern about the over emphasis of ICT in the Memorandum and the consequent danger of down grading the benefits of social contacts and working and learning collectively. The latter often provides important benefits, such as raised confidence and self esteem. This added value of learning in a group is often over looked.

4 Valuing Learning

- 4.1 Valuing learning does not necessarily mean accrediting learning. Learning has a wider value than qualifications for the individual. Learning contributes to a range of longer term benefits for the wider society, including active citizenship, active ageing, improved social relationships, better health and crime reduction. Greater emphasis should be given to valuing the wider benefits that lifelong learning can bring.
- 4.2 The diversity of learners should also be recognised. They have many different backgrounds and aspirations. Different sorts of provision attract and are appropriate for different kinds of learners. Any accreditation system should therefore respect this diversity and not strive to fit everything into one model. The diversity of learners, learning providers and learning outcomes should be valued, promoted and made more visible.

5 Rethinking Guidance and Counselling

Advice and guidance are services that everyone needs, particularly those vulnerable to exclusion. Learning is only one of the fields where guidance may be required. Others include finance, health, relationships, retirement and housing. Many of the traditional support structures of the extended family or long-standing community have withered. In the face of increasingly complex economic and social situations, people often seek advice from outside agencies. Local services, especially those provided by NGOs and less formal mentors are very valuable. These local comprehensive services should be able to provide signposts to more specialised advice, once needs have been identified. These services are also valuable because they are independent and start with the needs and interests of the individual. They also need further development.

The importance of qualifications for guidance workers should not have the unintended consequence of excluding local, less formal guidance workers and mentors from involvement.

6 Bringing Learning closer to home.

- 6.1 Recognition should be given to the importance of recruiting and training local people from the relevant communities as education workers.
- 6.2 Available funding streams and programmes can distort the assessment of local learning needs and provision. The learning requirements of particular localities are then defined in terms of the funding criteria, rather than the other way round.
- 6.3 The process of competitive bidding for local funding for lifelong learning results in further inequalities of provision in different localities.
- 6.4 ICT does motivate reluctant learners and those in hard to reach areas to return to learning. However its importance as a learning tool can be exaggerated. Group learning and face to face support from a teacher gives returning learners greater confidence.
- 6.5 Problems of access to local learning opportunities and the necessary support structures still exist.
- 6.6 Consideration should also be given to communities of interest, since belonging to an interest group can provide the motivation and opportunity to learn.
- 6.7 Short term residential learning opportunities, away from home, also benefit learners and add to the richness of the experience.

Conclusions and Proposals

The Memorandum is welcomed in that it describes lifelong learning as relevant to everyone. The UK NGOs wish to emphasize that lifelong learning should not be seen as simply relating to employability, nor as an ‘ambulance service’ for deprived areas and socially excluded groups.

Main Points

1 We are aware of considerable inequalities in the present system of provision. The majority of education and training resources benefit traditional providers and traditional learners in the formal system. NGOs are meeting local learning needs and reaching out to non traditional learners but encountering barriers in sustaining and extending bottom up approaches because of the current distribution of resources.

Proposals

1.1 A percentage of available resources for lifelong learning should be ring fenced for the voluntary sector to build and sustain learning opportunities that are determined and chosen by the potential learners themselves.

1.2 Current funding sources and systems should be reviewed with the aim of simplification and making opportunities more transparent and appropriate for use by the voluntary and NGO sectors on a longer term basis.

1.3 Monitoring of programmes should be undertaken to ensure that resources benefit groups and individuals vulnerable to exclusion.

1.4 Consideration should be given to the use of ‘umbrella NGOs’ to manage and administer funding programmes

2 Learning should be seen in a wider context as contributing towards regeneration, social cohesion and a better, more open and tolerant society. All of the stakeholders involved in education and training as well as those engaged in social, environmental and economic policies and their implementation should recognise the contribution that learning can make and be prepared to work together on ‘joined up approaches’.

Proposals

2.1 Further research should be undertaken to demonstrate the wider benefits of learning. The promotion and dissemination of good practice of learning for social benefit should be encouraged.

2.2 Complementarity between education and training policies and programmes and those in other fields such as human resource development, social affairs and regeneration should be more actively pursued.

2.3 Formal traditional providers of education and training should contribute to social regeneration. Systems of accountability should include an assessment of the

contribution made in these wider fields, in addition to the narrower goal of increasing the numbers of qualifications achieved.

- 3 UK NGOs stressed the importance of having a local focus for lifelong learning and the contribution of informal learning opportunities. They emphasised their belief that: -
- decisions about learning opportunities should be taken by local people themselves;
 - local learning centres should be developed;
 - there is a need to capture and develop the talents of local people as learning mentors;
 - the quality of informal learning cannot be judged by formal qualification outputs.

Proposals

- 3.1 Further funding, research and dissemination should be undertaken to encourage; -
- the development of local people as education mentors, providers of front line guidance services and teachers.
 - the development of outreach work in particular localities.
 - the development of methods and approaches which place the learner and potential learner at the centre, including more comprehensive approaches to discovering what learners and potential learners actually want.
- 3.2 The Commission should develop a European Social Model which places more value upon the contribution that learning makes to a socially inclusive society.

Sue Waddington
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June 2001

Example of Good Practice on Lifelong Learning

A. IDENTIFICATION	
1) Title of good practice	“Prescriptions for Learning”
2) Country of origin	UK
3) Partners involved	NIACE – National Organisation of Adult Learning GNLP–Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership HAZ – Nottingham Health Action Zone EMDA – East Midlands Development Agency
4) Contact data on person & organisation responsible	Kathryn James Development Officer Learning and Health NIACE 21 De Montfort Street Leicester LE1 7GE 0116 2044281 email – kathryn.james@niace.org.uk
5) Target groups	People attending doctors surgeries from areas of Nottingham that have high rates of social exclusion – non-participation in learning, poverty, poor health.
6) Documentation available (format ? how to obtain ?)	“Impact of Learning on Health” – available in hard copy from NIACE Publication Sales Department, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE, (+44) (0)116 2044216 Evaluation report of “Prescriptions for Learning” – available in hard copy from Sue Rees, NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE, (+44) (0)116 2044256
B. DESCRIPTION	
<p>The project builds on two areas of knowledge. Firstly, that there is a link between poor health, poverty and low levels of educational attainment. Secondly, that adults returning to learning report positive effects to their mental and physical health. The project has based a Learning Adviser in three GP surgeries who works with individuals to help them access appropriate learning opportunities. Individuals receive on-going support to maximise retention and achievement and to support progression. Work has also been done to ensure effective collaboration between learning and health by raising the awareness of the benefits of learning among healthcare staff and by working with learning providers to reduce barriers to learning. The project is being evaluated to see whether the model of support is effective in reaching hard to reach learners, and is effective in improving retention and achievement and what the health impacts to learning are.</p>	

C. ASSESSMENT	
1) Impact: results, advantages and consequences	<p>The project has been successful in attracting ‘hard to reach’ non-participants in learning, many of whom had little or no previous qualifications.</p> <p>All referrals to the project have reported positive health benefits such as increased confidence and self-esteem, increased physical activity, improved sleeping as well as increased social networks and achievements in learning.</p> <p>Longer term evaluation hopes to show that this model will improve retention and achievement, as well as a reduction in the frequency of visits to doctor’s surgeries and reduced medication such as anti-depressants and tranquillisers.</p>
2) Indicators: measuring the result, costs and time	<p>Learning Adviser post (full-time) plus administrative support to work in one Primary Care area. Because the Learning Adviser works with individuals the work can be slow to develop and providers need to make an initial investment of time and money before significant numbers of new learners access learning eg first six months resulted in 80 referrals and approximately 45 new learners and 30 individuals still accessing guidance or awaiting start dates.</p>
3) Problems faced (and how they have been overcome)	<p>No easily identified funding stream. Project funding has been obtained through several sources but there is on-going work to find a permanent funding source.</p>
4) Success conditions for sustainability and transfer	<p>This project is very transferable and there has been a great deal of national interest (140 enquiries from organisations wanting to run similar projects). Information about the project has been disseminated nationally.</p>

Examples of Good Practice on Lifelong Learning

A. IDENTIFICATION	
1) Title of good practice	ActivAge Unit's Ageing Well and TransAge Action programmes
2) Country of origin	United Kingdom
3) Partners involved	Nationally: Dept. of Health; Health Education Authority, Merck Sharp & Dohme and PPP Healthcare. Locally: voluntary organisations (usually Age Concern organisations), individual older people, health and social services providers and educational providers
4) Contact data on person & organisation responsible	Vanda Brown, Head of ActivAge Unit, Age Concern England, Astral House 1268 London Road, London SE16 4ER.
5) Target groups	Over 50s age group
6) Documentation available (format ? how to obtain ?)	Explanation of Unit, examples of activities and projects in hard copy - website being revamped at the moment - from ActivAge Unit, address above.
B. DESCRIPTION	
<p>The Unit facilitates opportunities for people over 50 to continue to make a positive contribution towards the structure of their own lives, the lives of other older people and the life of their local communities using two UK wide programmes - Ageing Well UK and Trans Age Action. One based on improving and maintaining the health (widest definition including mental and social wellbeing) of older people, recognising they can be an important resource to themselves and to others; and an intergenerational programme which recruits and trains older volunteers to work with vulnerable children in a whole host of settings and activities. TransAge Action are in the process of offering a schools project based on pilots such as Designing Tomorrow Today (in conjunction with Bacon's College, London) and other similar initiatives such as those associated with older people and the arts. Each programme retains its own discrete identity but there are opportunities for sharing skills, resources and support. The UK Ageing Well network has led to a spread of ideas and good practice in Europe and internationally. The UK programme is in membership of Ageing Well Europe - which has considerable EU support - and exchanges have taken place where Volunteers (Senior Health Mentors) from each country were able to visit each other's projects to share ideas and to learn from experience. The establishment of the ActivAge Unit enables Age Concern England to reach out to older people who think they have no value and show them that their opinions, skills, experience and ideas are really relevant to all our lives through the development of these programmes. Currently there are 42 projects in full membership of the UK network with others waiting to join. All of the projects use volunteers - training older people themselves - over 400 people over 50 have now undertaken the Ageing Well core training programme. Activities on offer within the projects are numerous and diverse. They include: nutrition advice and cookery skills physical activity; counselling; accident prevention; reminiscence, IT skills, foreign languages, art classes, local history, befriending, creative writing; benefits and money advice; social dancing, flower arranging and crafts; aromatherapy and massage;</p>	

amateur dramatics; lunch clubs with activities; gardening classes; photography; LAY courses. The Ageing Well network includes Projects specific to the needs of ethnic minority elders.

C. ASSESSMENT

<p>1) Impact: results, advantages and consequences</p>	<p>Enhanced well being, less social isolation, better health and coping skills - less dependent older people, more self esteem and empowerment. Each of the Programmes has been constructed following extensive research and consultation with acknowledged experts in the field and continues to be supported by National Advisory Committees comprising these experts. In addition to enabling older people to make informed decisions about their own lives, as well as contributing towards the lives of their local communities, the major intended effect is to improve well-being amongst older people, leading to health and social gain and lower costs of health and social provision.</p>
<p>2) Indicators: measuring the result, costs and time</p>	<p>Lower costs of health and social provision - these programmes are an important tool of government policy. There are many factors that impinge on the realisation of quality of life for individual older people. These include maintenance of health; income, employment, access to provision of care, standards of care; adequate housing; security; clean and safe environment; personal desires and social relationships with family and friends. A major determinant is the dramatic shift in the age profile. In the UK in 1994, 18.20% of the population were over pensionable age. Over two-thirds of people aged 75 and over were women with 8,000 people aged 100 or over - by 2030 it is estimated that 34,000 people will be over 100. In the field of unemployment, in the UK, 50% of males aged 50 and over are no longer in full-time paid work.</p>
<p>3) Problems faced (and how they have been overcome)</p>	<p>Funding at local level - each project has to find funding from either local authority, lottery, charitable funds, etc. Employment of a co-ordinator is crucial for successful programmes but employment is seldom secure and time is spent looking for funding rather than expanding programme. Longer funding times or employing someone just to go out and secure funding has been successful. The key is building partnerships and alliances with health authorities, local authorities, community safety, etc.</p>
<p>4) Success conditions for sustainability and transfer</p>	<p>Pilots for innovation - Network to provide support and help at crisis times - mutual support from project co-ordinators by network meetings and brain storming sessions. Publicity and major sponsor and Government support takes these kinds of initiatives into mainstream.</p>

NIACE Consultation

Consultative Meeting

NIACE invited a wide range of representatives from the non-governmental sector to take part in the consultative meeting on the Memorandum, which took place on 13th June 2001. Those who were unable to attend were asked to send their views and ideas and were sent copies of the questionnaire to complete.

The following were invited to the consultation meeting:

1. Selected delegates from NIACE's 'Working Together' seminars

NIACE and the Workers Educational Association jointly held a series of briefing sessions between November 2000 and February 2001 entitled 'Working Together: Local LSCs and regional/local Voluntary and Community Groups'. Of the delegates who attended these meetings, 21 were invited to the consultation meeting on the Memorandum. These were delegates who were known to be active in the voluntary sector and were representative of a range of organisations including:

- The Anglican Diocese of Birmingham
- The Big Issue Foundation
- Community Service Volunteers
- Councils for Voluntary Service (London, Birmingham, Hull)
- Islington Training Network
- Learning City Network
- World University Service UK Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service
- Rochdale Racial Equality Council
- Workers' Educational Association

2. Representatives from key national umbrella organisations

Approximately 10 UK national umbrella organisations were invited to take part in the consultation meeting, including:

- National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
- National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- National Federation of Community Work Training Groups
- Development Education Association

3. Representatives from larger national voluntary groups

Approximately 10 large national voluntary groups were invited, including:

National Federation of Women's Institutes
MIND
MENCAP
Help the Aged
Age Concern
Pre Retirement Association
National Childminding Association
NACRO
National Youth Agency

4. Members of NIACE Executive Board

All members of NIACE Executive Board (35 members) were invited to take part in the consultation. NIACE Executive includes representatives from Universities (Leeds, Westminster), Further Education Colleges (Lewisham, Worcester, Solihull, Aberdare, City & Islington), Workers Educational Association and NATFHE (the University and Colleges Lecturers' Union), as well as local government.

5. NIACE contacts

Colleagues recommended by Development Officers within NIACE known to be interested in contributing to this debate were also contacted. These included representatives from Ford EDAP, Adult Residential Colleges Association (ARCA) and a number of Universities.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire on the Memorandum, which contained additional questions aimed at non-governmental organisations, was emailed to the following NIACE mail groups. All mail group members were also invited to attend the consultation meeting.

Mail groups:

- Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFEA) (221 members)
- Making IT Accessible (466 members)
- Lifelong Learning (756 members)

Web site

Information on the Memorandum, including a link to the EAEA web site and the full text of the Memorandum, was made available on NIACE's web site. Details about the consultation meeting and a link to the questionnaire, to be downloaded and completed electronically, were also posted on the web site.