

Call for Evidence for the Moser Sub-Group

**Adult Basic Skills for Students with
Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities**

**Submitted by the National Institute of Adult
Continuing Education (NIACE)**

December 1999

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Appendix A

List of organisations who replied to the mailshot

Appendix B

Chart from Skills for People, Newcastle upon Tyne

**NIACE contribution to the Moser Sub-Group Call for Evidence
Adult Basic Skills for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities
December 1999**

Note on how the evidence was gathered

NIACE consulted in four ways by:

- Asking LEAs their opinions at a seminar on November 24th 1999, which was attended by 45 LEAs
- Mailing all LEAs in England. The replies received were cross disability and included organisations working variously with learners with learning difficulties, physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, mental health difficulties, dyslexia and dysphasia.
- Mailing a clear language letter to self advocacy groups run by/for people with learning difficulties
- Mailing selected organisations with an interest in learning difficulties (as other sub-group members were dealing with other specific disabilities)

Forty seven responses to the mail shot were received, including several tapes. A list of organisations who responded is given as Appendix A at the back of this document.

The material is presented under the section headings of the draft report, as agreed. No costings have been estimated at this stage, so there is no section 8. As requested, a lot of quotes have been drawn from the evidence.

The key recommendations for action are as follows:

- Provision is limited and patchy and requires an investment of resources.
- There should be a basic right / entitlement to basic skills education for adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, regardless of ability.
- The Moser definition of basic skills in relation to speaking and listening should be interpreted or expanded to include people who communicate by non-verbal communication methods such as sign, symbol or gesture.
- There should be an investment of resources for staff development to upgrade quality standards in basic skills for adults with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Both colleges and LEAs offering basic skills to adults with learning difficulties and /or disabilities should be given appropriate support.
- There should be a strategy to improve curriculum development, assessment, measuring achievement and progression in LEAs and the voluntary sector.
- There is a need to conduct research into the best ways of delivering basic skills to adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities.
- Current good practice and emerging research findings should be disseminated to offer ongoing practical advice to practitioners via a planned programme of development work, publications, newsletters and seminars. A web site on the Internet could also offer a means of support and dissemination.
- New materials should be developed, including a series of readers based on the lives and stories of people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, in order to provide relevant basic reading materials.
- Basic skills for adults with learning difficulties should include learning skills for self advocacy and skills for independence, which in turn has implications for inter-agency working.
- The response from self advocates has been very helpful in putting this evidence together. There should be continued consultation with disabled people about their needs, wishes and priorities in relation to basic skills education. Funding participation by disabled people in learners' forums may offer one way of achieving this.

Ancillary recommendations drawn from the text are:

- Transport to basic skills classes should be built into provision for people with learning difficulties or disabilities who cannot travel independently, to enable them to access provision.
- Basic skills classes should where possible be delivered in accessible venues.
- Basic skills provision should address the needs of learners who have more than one disability or who have multiple disabilities.
- Good practice guidelines for support and training of front line care staff in an awareness of basic skills issues should be developed.
- There should be better information and support available for family carers of people with learning difficulties in relation to basic skills issues.
- Resources should be invested in developing appropriate software for adults with learning difficulties to develop their basic skills. Funds for staff development should be invested in equipping staff with the necessary skills to use IT with adults with learning difficulties or disabilities. Support for home based learning where relevant for disabled students should be considered.

Section 1

Definition of basic skills for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

How do people with learning difficulties see basic skills?

“Classes for basic skills that would do things like read and write my own letters, get ready for my review so I can say what I want...so I can do the normal things that other people do, that need reading, writing and speaking skills.”

(St Owens Centre)

“Basic skills is important for adults with learning difficulties so they can be able to live and know what is expected. It is also about the “everyday” of life – this should be taught through life skills.”

(Macclesfield People First)

“I would like to learn about money and having a bank account and a cheque book.”

(Skills for People)

“At one college, I went to a class called “Speak for Yourself.” This was a class talking about equal rights, speaking for myself, confidence and other things ...I started to feel more and more confident.”

(CHANGE)

What does basic skills mean for people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities?

The Moser report definition is *“the ability to read and write and speak in English and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.”*

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) says that *“for people with a learning difficulty, this definition is far too narrow and could lead to the exclusion of some people from educational opportunities which arise as a result of the Moser group’s work or lead to the creation of inappropriate training regimes....BILD would strongly recommend that the definition of basic skills is expanded to include different forms of communication (including sign, symbol, gesture and other non-verbal forms of communication).”* NIACE would support this suggestion. A case study to demonstrate that people with learning difficulties and physical disabilities can develop communication and literacy skills by eye movement alone was sent in on tape by Northampton College:

“Because John has very few verbal skills, we communicate with eyes, blinking up for “yes” and down for “no”. John also uses a communication book – he scans his eyes along the book. Recently we have introduced a magnetic board for John. In the four corners of the magnetic board are magnetic numbers and letters. This has proved to be very effective. John thoroughly enjoys the sessions. Last week he was spelling words with four letters.”

Summary

People with learning difficulties want to develop their basic skills for a variety of purposes. The definition of basic skills should include non-verbal forms of communication such as sign, symbol or gesture.

Section 2

Assessment of barriers to access in competence in basic skills for people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities

People with disabilities and/or learning difficulties may have to overcome a number of major barriers to access learning. The multiple barriers which learners with disabilities may face are highlighted by Middlesborough Adult Education Service:

“There remain barriers to access for some students with difficulties and disabilities. Physical barriers such as transport and suitable venues exist; some students fear failure and need to gain confidence before joining a group. If inadequate initial assessment is made of student’s needs the learning experience may not be of good quality and this can become a barrier to improved competence in basic skills. It is essential that the programme delivered is relevant to the students’ needs and is not planned merely to gain accreditation. It must be recognised that students will progress in small steps. For some students lack of access to support workers or technical aids will become a barrier to improvement in basic skills.”

Key themes in terms of barriers recurred throughout the evidence submitted, and these are addressed individually below.

Transport

Many people with learning difficulties in particular are unable to travel independently. Transport is a recurrent and major theme in terms of barriers to access. It has cropped up repeatedly in work which NIACE has done over the past decade¹ and is backed up by evidence from the consultation process. If people can’t get to classes, they cannot join in. As research from the Norah Fry Research Centre evidence says: *“The biggest perceived barrier to attending college courses for most people was lack of transport.”* This is echoed by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities’ (BILD) evidence to the Select Committee on Education and Employment on opportunities for disabled people: *“Making arrangements for travel to and from college and finding additional monies to pay for transport arrangements continues to inhibit participation.”* Adults with learning difficulties too described the problem in their evidence. For example, Speaking Up in Gateshead says that people have to rely on day centre transport or else not go to classes. Skills for People told us: *“We need better transport so we can go to things.”*

¹ See for example “Adults with Learning Difficulties: Education for Choice and Empowerment” (1990, NIACE) and “All Things Being Equal?” (1998, NIACE)

Recommendation

Transport to basic skills classes should be built into provision for people with learning difficulties or disabilities who cannot travel independently, to enable them to access provision.

Access for people with physical disabilities

“The reading class is on the first floor and I can’t get there in my wheelchair.” (Skills for People)

Many buildings used for continuing education are still not accessible for people with physical disabilities. LEA providers have difficulty accessing money for adaptations. In a NIACE seminar held in November 1999 and attended by 45 LEAs, money for physical access was one of the top priorities in a list generated from group work. Several delegates explained that they worked in old Victorian buildings with very poor physical access. As Torbay Council put it in their evidence: *“Access is the baseline. Without accessible venues, true integration cannot take place.”*

Recommendation

Basic skills classes should where possible be delivered in accessible venues.

Lack of provision

Many of the self advocacy groups who replied to the consultation said they would like to attend basic skills provision but that none was available in their area. For example, members of the Moorland Advocacy Group in Witney said all wanted to improve their basic skills but *“no courses were available.”* In other areas, basic skills classes were full. One person from Skills for People said *“I would like to go to college and learn to do my name and address but there are not enough places.”*

Recommendation

There should be an entitlement to learn basic skills for people with learning difficulties or disabilities and equitable access to provision across the country.

Negative past experiences of learning

Two organisations described how bad experiences of learning in the past could deter people with learning difficulties from trying again. The Elfrida Society pointed out that:

“Many adults with learning difficulties have had very painful experiences of traditional education.” Research by the Norah Fry Research Centre told us that: “Some people had had extremely bad experiences and found it very hard to make a complaint, or to move things forward.”

A woman from CHANGE who is deaf and who also has learning difficulties describes how difficult she found college:

“College was hard for me. I learned about English and numbers. They were both hard. I learned about numbers for over one year. I am deaf and English is very hard for me. Sign language is my language. I feel that nothing has changed and that things aren’t better. Things in college are still hard for learning disabled deaf people like me.”

Recommendation

Basic skills provision should address the needs of learners who have more than one disability or who have multiple disabilities

Attitudes and expectations

Prejudice against people with learning difficulties can present a barrier to learners or potential learners. *“If people get to hear that you’re learning disabled, they automatically think you’re not capable of doing what they’re doing, you know...”* (Norah Fry Research Centre). Some people with learning difficulties resented being “labelled” and automatically put in discrete classes: *“They always put us in a pocket called “special needs”... We should be allowed to mix in if it is going to help us along in life.”* (North Hertfordshire People First).

There is still a danger that low expectations from teaching staff can be a barrier to people learning. Leeson Centre in Bromley told us of one person with learning difficulties who had been written off by adult education: *“One client was told by an adult education service that he would never be able to read and write. This made him more determined, and through a different approach from different people, he now has some skills.”*

Funding arrangements

Both people with learning difficulties and organisations spoke of the complexity of funding. Research by the Norah Fry Research Centre found that: *“There is a great variety in the type of support mechanisms on offer, so that most people [with learning difficulties] did not know of their rights to support, funded by the FEFC.”* The Elfrida Society says that smaller, community based settings, often in the voluntary sector, can provide a friendly and non-institutional setting for people with learning difficulties to learn basic skills. However, the demands of obtaining FEFC funding are often difficult for such organisations: *“Paradoxically, those organisations that have the greatest*

experience at promoting social inclusion are the very ones that are least able to cope with the administrative burdens of the highly complex and bureaucratic funding formulas that the FEFC have developed.” Torbay Council also describe the difficulties that small, community based organisations face: *“Smaller institutions that work more closely with the community often do not have the finance to start or maintain the work, even though they work in a wide range of settings where they can generate widening participation projects.”*

The Elfrida Society say that the emphasis on constant progression upwards *“doesn’t take into account that students with learning difficulties may have more difficulties with the retention of knowledge than people without disabilities... retention of knowledge should be acknowledged as a goal in itself.”* This view was reinforced by many other respondents from LEAs, for example Redbridge Institute of Adult Education, who wrote: *“The maintenance of skills is vital for students but is not reflected in the funding mechanism. In particular, we have a group of dysphasic learners who derive great benefit from the work which we do with them.”*

Reform of the funding system is advocated by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities’ (BILD), who say that a priority must be *“the reform of the disastrous and divisive funding system which has often enabled those responsible for commissioning or providing educational opportunities to neglect people with learning disabilities.”* Research by NIACE (*“Still A Chance to Learn?”*, 1996) found that some provision for people with more severe learning difficulties had been lost as a result of the split in funding after the FHE Act (1992).

Providing support

The provision of good quality support to help students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities learn basic skills is an essential strand of provision. The whole area of support featured strongly in the evidence submitted to NIACE.

What students with learning difficulties said

“It is important that support is available for people with learning difficulties to have access to the courses.”

(Macclesfield People First)

“There is not enough 1:1 support.”

Grapevine, Coventry

Providers spoke of the difficulty of funding effective support. Buckinghamshire County Council said: *“Funding mechanisms do not take enough account of cost of sufficient support for part time provision.”* Torbay Council commented: *“Courses that include an*

element of basic skills do not necessarily fit the FEFC criteria and consequently are not eligible for funding. Thus all monies to make them accessible (price, transport, care workers, resources) have to be generated by other means. This limits range and availability to all. Many disabled people do not have the monies to cover the costs of attending classes.”

At Southend Adult Community College, they recruit and train volunteers to work with students with disabilities on basic skills. However, there are not enough volunteers and there is no funding for the process: *“Support from trained volunteers is provided but it is often not possible to recruit enough volunteers to meet students’ needs. Substantial administration and management time is spent on recruiting, interviewing and supporting the volunteers themselves. Funding is not available for this process.”* Southend Adult Community College also describe in detail the difficulty of support staff from other agencies (such as care staff from residential homes) coming into basic skills classes to accompany learners. There is frequently lack of continuity and confusion over roles, which can disrupt learning. NIACE identified similar issues in *“All Things Being Equal?”* (1998). It is the view of NIACE that there is scope for good practice guidelines and for training of front line care staff in basic skills issues.

Recommendation

Good practice guidelines for support and training of front line care staff in an awareness of basic skills issues should be developed.

Patchy inter-agency collaboration

BILD says: *“There is clearly a need for much greater collaboration among the major statutory providers and voluntary agencies in providing services for people with a learning disability.”* Research by NIACE (op cit) strongly supports the need for better inter-agency collaboration. The Elfrida Society works in particular with people who have moderate learning difficulties. They say: *“In our experience, the quality of inter-agency working is patchy, to say the least. It is clear that there is insufficient recognition of the numbers and needs of people with moderate learning difficulties as there is no system for tracking people from one domain to another and one agency’s criteria may be very different to another’s. Furthermore, the funding arrangements are so specialised and so different from one agency to another that it is very difficult to provide a flexible and co-ordinated “package” to an individual that requires support from more than one funder.”*

Sefton Local Education Authority suggest a practical way forward in terms of liaison between agencies over the progress of an individual with learning difficulties:

“Reference to basic skills needs should be included as part of individual planning from the different agencies who may be working with individuals. Relevant information needs

to be shared by agencies who may be involved in delivery or assessment of basic skills needs, particularly when students transfer between providers. Could students be encouraged to take with them a Record of Achievement or at least information on personal learning goals?"

Lack of knowledge and information about opportunities for the carers of people with learning difficulties

Research into carers by the Norah Fry Research Centre (1999, *In Their Own Right*, Robinson, C. and Williams, V.) makes the point that many carers of people with learning difficulties are unaware that education can be directly accessed by a person with learning difficulties and their families. *"Carers generally did not realise that their relative could access further education directly. They assumed that they could only go to classes if they did so as part of their day centre programme, and that attendance would be at the discretion of the day centre."* There was also a barrier in that at the time of transition to adulthood, there was an assumption that education would be finishing: *"People at the stage of transition to adulthood assumed that their time in education was finishing for ever, and tended not to take account of continuing opportunities or basic skills classes."*

This theme was also picked up by an organiser from Oakmeads Community College, West Sussex Adult Education. She commented: *"I think there is a lack of information readily available to families who have a member with learning difficulties, who maybe does not attend a training centre and is not aware of opportunities open to them."*

Adults with learning difficulties from Grapevine in Coventry told us that: *"Sometimes problems at home stop us from going to college – parents worry about us."*

Recommendation

There should be better information and support available for family carers of people with learning difficulties in relation to basic skills issues.

Summary

The clear gaps in the quality and range of provision nationally are compounded by a range of other barriers. Transport, physical access and accessible information are barriers to learning basic skills. Funding and inter-agency work require clearer structures to be helpful. Negative attitudes and bad experiences of learning in the past can also block progress in acquiring basic skills.

Section 3

The vision: what ideal basic skills provision should look like

Entitlement

There should be an entitlement for people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities to learn basic skills if they choose to do so. This right was also advocated by people with learning difficulties: *“They believed strongly in the right of everyone to continue with their education and to have this respected by others.”* (Norah Fry Research Centre). This should be set in the wider context of lifelong learning for all, as emphasised by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities: *“It is important that the principle of lifelong learning is clearly recognised as applicable to the acquisition of basic skills.”*

Legal framework

The entitlement to basic skills should ideally be backed up by a legal right to education. This may be helped by the Human Rights Act (1998), due for implementation in 2000, which gives the right to education and the right not to be discriminated against. The Disability Rights Task Force is also keen to see enforceable civil rights for disabled people in education implemented. The recent Select Committee report “Opportunities for Disabled People” (1999) recommends extending Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act to cover education and training.

Basic skills for all

People with all levels of learning difficulties, including those with severe or profound and multiple disabilities, should be able to access basic skills at an appropriate level. It is clear that with skilled teaching, people with the most severe and profound disabilities can learn. For example; Oaklands College has just been awarded the Professor John Tomlinson AoC Beacon Award for inclusive learning (1999/2000) for their work with adults who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. This provision included outstanding practice in developing communication skills with the students.

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities describes as a priority the *“inclusion of those with more severe and profound disabilities in an educational strategy.”* Unless people of all abilities are included in the basic skills strategy, there is a danger that people may once again be described as “ineducable.” This was the label given to people with learning difficulties before 1971, when school education became a right. Many older adults with learning difficulties have thus not had any formal education at all.

Basic skills with the potential to change lives in a positive way for people with learning difficulties

Skills for People did a mapping exercise with people with learning difficulties called “My past, my present, my future” in which people looked back over their lives, considered the present and planned for the future. *“For many people adult life had been a case of going from one day centre to another without much sense of progression... People had very clear ideas about their future and what they wanted to achieve.”* Looking at the “life line” summaries for four people, they had been to a total of nine day centres between them. Skills for People say: *“People did not feel that they had made the choices at many points in their lives e.g. ‘day centre closed so I was sent to another one’.”* Their aspirations for the future included things such as “work in theatre”; “move in with a friend”; “cook for myself.” A copy of the chart is included for information at Appendix B.

The NIACE vision of basic skills would work with individuals at this point to offer basic skills tuition on a flexible basis and to support people in achieving their dreams and aspirations. For example, working in a theatre, living independently and learning to cook are all things which require basic skills. It is important to note that promoting independence for disabled people is a key theme of the Social Services White Paper “Modernising Social Services” (1998) and that “supporting independence” is already a theme pencilled into a DoH workshop to be held in late December 1999 to develop ideas for a new strategy for people with learning disabilities to be produced in 2000.

Helping people with learning difficulties to speak up on important choices and gain the confidence to make decisions is a vital part of planning for independence. Self advocacy skills should be an integral part of the basic skills curriculum. The development of more self advocacy courses in continuing education is backed up by three reports: “Inclusive Learning” (1996, HMSO), “Building Expectations” (1996, Mental Health Foundation) and most recently, “Opportunities for Disabled People (1999, Select Committee Report).

Assessment and achievement

Assessment is best carried out by observation. Adults with learning difficulties in particular may have very unevenly developed skills. The Basic Skills Standards should not exclude potential learners if their skills are below entry level. Particular thought may need to be given as to how to best include those with severe/profound learning difficulties. Northamptonshire County Council comments:

*“The new Adult Basic Skills Standards reflect a level of achievement beyond the scope of many people with learning difficulties. We would suggest a similar approach to that used by schools (special schools) in identifying and developing children’s pre-literacy and numeracy skills (P scales). Such an approach should encompass assessment and recording of progress and achievement of the building blocks of emergent literacy and numeracy skills for **adult** learners.”*

In setting achievement targets, steps must be small, achievable and centred on a learner's individual needs. Targets for achievement may, importantly, need to reflect issues such as the growth of confidence or appropriate use of skills, as the following case studies drawn from NIACE experience show:

Laura was the only learner with moderate learning difficulties in a literacy group. She was very shy, blushed easily and did not look at people when she spoke to them. Her confidence in communication grew when she was asked to take tea and coffee orders for the group. It meant she had to go up and ask people direct questions. She also took on a peer mentoring role in showing the other learners how to use the computer, which increased her self esteem and confidence in using her communication and basic skills.

Imogen had been taught to do basic shopping for herself and seemed to be coping quite well. On a routine visit, a social worker happened to look in the cupboards. They were stacked high with loaves and loaves of stale bread. The fridge was completely full of margarine. Imogen had been taught to buy two loaves every week and some margarine every week...and had been doing so regardless of whether she actually needed it.

Curriculum extension

NIACE has always argued for the widest possible curriculum offer for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Basic skills should be a choice. People with learning difficulties in particular are sometimes coerced into learning basic skills by parents and families or by care staff but are unlikely to make progress if they are not motivated:

Sam had moderate learning difficulties and was married with a baby. His wife and social worker both thought he should learn to read. He did attend tuition but made no progress - he was far more interested in woodwork!

NIACE is keen that the basic skills curriculum for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities should include:

- Opportunities for pre-literacy and pre-numeracy learning for those people with severe/profound learning difficulties
- Basic skills to support skills for independence, such as using money, using public transport, shopping
- Communication skills, to include self advocacy and speaking up type classes

- Literacy approaches drawing on life story work
- Opportunities for creative writing and self expression

Dearne Valley College holds very successful creative writing courses for people with mental health difficulties and in Bristol, there is a poetry group for people with learning difficulties which originated in a day centre. Both have produced some very high quality work.

Views from Local Education Authorities on a vision of how basic skills could be

Rather than attempt to edit these, they are presented as five selected extracts from the evidence, as they are all quite different in style and content.

- *Basic skills learning should be available on-line as well as in the classroom*
- *Basic skills learning should be available in the work place*
- *Basic skills learning should include literacy, numeracy, ICT, living skills*

Buckinghamshire County Council

- *offered by a range of providers in a range of settings*
- *agreed quality standards*
- *'joined-up' support and provision where appropriate, from a range of agencies e.g. adult education, social service, library and youth services, health authorities, voluntary agencies and charities*
- *for adults with learning difficulties, and where appropriate, basic skills integrated with a wider range of life skills*
- *primary basic skills offered by a range of providers to those adults, including those with learning difficulties / disabilities, who will benefit from such courses*
- *basic skills support integrated into mainstream full and part time courses*
- *a range of progression opportunities (sideways as well as upwards)*
- *comprehensive information and guidance*

West Sussex County Council Adult Education Service

Provision should be a right – and not by accident and the achievements should be seen as a continuum – and not the end of the process.

South Thameside College

Our vision would be one in which provision is available to all students who wish to improve their reading, writing and communication skills. The provision should be appropriate for individual needs, taught by skilled, trained staff allowing students to achieve their potential, have the opportunity to maintain their skills and work towards accreditation if appropriate. This could be achieved by planning and organising a variety of provision both discrete and integrated in a variety of venues. It would give the opportunity for lifelong learning and enable those students who may have difficulty progressing beyond a certain level to have the opportunity to maintain their skills. Adequate technical aids and support staff would be available to support students in their acquisition of basic skills. Providers and carers will recognise the integral part basic skills has in the individual's home, work and leisure activities.

Middlesborough Adult Education Service

Basic skills should be an integral aspect of inclusion. All adults should be enabled to reach their full potential and this entails removing the barriers to inclusion caused by lack of basic skills.

Basic skills provision should be wide ranging. The acquisition and improvement of basic skills should be seen as a way of widening experience and enabling greater participation in a variety of activities and experiences.

The way in which adults access help to improve their basic skills should be negotiable and varied and related to individual preference rather than be tied to available narrowly defined funding regimes. All adults should have the right to develop their skills to the best of their ability and the ways in which they do this should be interesting, relevant to a wide range of ages and lifestyles and freely accessible to everyone.

Above all adults should be enabled to fully take part in consultation before decisions are made and available choices should reflect this process.

Sefton LEA

Other specific suggestions about a future vision

People with learning difficulties should be included in inspection teams as lay assessors. (Norah Fry Research Centre). NIACE is aware that this has already been successfully done in recent years by the Social Services Inspectorate.

Summary

Basic skills provision should be an entitlement based on legal rights and accessible to all, regardless of the level of disability, who choose to learn. Access to basic skills should support independence, life planning and self advocacy.

Section 4

Evidence of the current quality of provision

Basic skills provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities is patchy nationally and is not available to all who want it. Concern about the quality of provision visited led to NIACE and BSA jointly producing the introductory book “Teaching Basic Skills to Adults with Learning Difficulties” in 1994. The quality of teaching in colleges is still poor, as reported in the FEFC publication “Basic Education” (1998): *“Much teaching fails to meet the needs of learners...particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.”*

Respondents to the Moser call for evidence had concerns about quality issues. The British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) makes two key points:

“Currently, the range and quality of basic skills provision for adults with learning difficulties is inadequate on at least two grounds. Firstly provision is uneven across the country and while some people have access to local authority or FE classes, there are many people with a learning disability who do not have any access to effective teaching. Secondly, the current patchwork of provision provided by local authorities, FE colleges and other providers, together with confusion surrounding sources of funding and eligibility criteria, means that it is difficult to establish coherent programmes for development of basic skills education provision.”

BILD comments that: *“There are many people with mild or moderate learning difficulties who have failed to acquire appropriate academic basic skills because they have never had appropriate teaching.”*

The Elfrida Society writes that the level at which literacy and numeracy basic skills are currently pitched for students with learning difficulties is a concern: *“Even students with moderate learning difficulties (to say nothing of students with more profound difficulties) and particularly adults who have spent considerable time in residential care, may have very limited skills. The London Open College Federation entry level has too high a starting point for many students. ASDAN is geared to young adults and not specifically focused on basic education and there is nothing for “beginner” level students.”*

In common with the FEFC, NIACE believes that accreditation can sometimes fail to stimulate or be of value. In addition, NIACE confirms the FEFC inspectorate view that initial assessment is not always effective or diagnostic, individual learning programmes are sometimes not evident where they need to be and some teachers have insufficient training in teaching basic skills to adults with learning difficulties.

What do LEAs say about quality?

LEAs are dealing with a wide range of learners, as is evidenced by the Adult College of Barking and Dagenham in what they say about their range of provision: *“We currently provide tuition that ranges from non-readers in discrete classes through to mainstream foundation levels.”* One LEA describes how a range of quality measures are in place:

“ We aim to ensure that all classes have a small number of students to allow individual needs to be met. It is also important that the group has suitable accommodation. Before a student joins a group it is essential that an assessment take place and that the progress of the student is frequently reviewed. The student’s aims and goals needs to be taken into consideration when planning and delivering their learning programme. Quality provision is achieved through consistent support to both tutors and students. This is backed up by effective quality assurance procedures.”

Despite the above measures, they say that *“the quality of learning experiences can vary.”*

Commenting on the quality of individuals’ learning experiences, Torbay Council comment: *“This will depend on the knowledge and skill of the tutor, well trained volunteers, appropriate materials, access, support – kit and care worker, motivation etc. All very variable from place to place unless you have a real support / training organisation in place...”* NIACE supports this view.

The need for better training for tutors and volunteers

A number of LEAs made suggestions about improving training as a route to developing better quality provision. These three extracts convey the key points made:

“There is little emphasis on training for staff who teach adults with learning disabilities. The City & Guilds 9285 concentrates on literacy and numeracy teaching and the evidence required makes it difficult for such a tutor to gain this qualification. Perhaps there should be a specific qualification for tutors who teach basic skills to adults with learning disabilities or least a module which can be “bolted on” to existing qualification or the new proposed qualification for basic skills tutors. Sometimes tutors have poor expectations of adults with learning disabilities. The opportunity for training may improve this.”

North East Lincolnshire Adult Education Service

“Increase funding available for training tutors and volunteers to improve and expand training, which should result in higher standards of teaching and learning – financial resources needed to encourage people into training and retraining”

Buckinghamshire County Council

“Tutors working in this area need to have opportunities for training and career progression. Having the majority of staff on part time, temporary contracts does not lead to a quality service as tutors cannot be expected to give commitment, although many do.”

Middlesborough Adult Education Service

Embedding training about the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into general basic skills tutor training was a further practical suggestion made in the evidence collected.

What students with learning difficulties say about current provision

Positive experiences

Out of the 22 pieces of evidence received from groups of people with learning difficulties, only four stood out as being very positive and enthusiastic about their experiences of learning. One individual wrote to say that she had attended a range of classes including literacy and that her local college was *“excellent...I just hope I can continue.”* Bristol and District People First reported that: *“In general, people were positive about their experience at college and said that tutors were generally supportive.”* Newham People First has a group for people with learning difficulties called “Black and Asian People First. *“Only one person from the group of 8 people had not gone to college or adult education.”* People had liked learning subjects in a range to include computers, writing, reading, using the telephone, time and money. *“Everyone wanted to go for more courses and for training.”* Derbyshire Speaking Out group reported that *“People who went to college and did reading and writing and number thought it was very good and enjoyed it.”*

Scope for improvement

People with learning difficulties wanted more classes, support, transport, and better information, as described in Section 2 on barriers.

There was sense from the evidence that people's potential had not been fully developed:

"I learnt a bit about reading and writing but not too much. I would have liked to learn more."

(Tape from Speaking Up, Cambridge)

"I want to learn to write my name – I've tried but I can't. I have not been to any reading classes."

(Skills for People)

The lack of opportunity to practise basic skills in real life was made by ECHO Users group: *"Some people do not get any chances to practise these basic skills in adult life."* This comment reinforces the necessity for basic skills tuition to make sense in terms of people's lives and experiences outside the class room. Lack of opportunity is a real issue: as people at Leasons Centre reported: *"Not given the chance to learn about money as other people look after it."*

There is also insufficient development of ways of showing that students learn.

Pace of teaching

Several people with learning difficulties did not feel that learning had been at the right pace for them and that it had been too fast, for example "Speaking Up in Gateshead" reported:

"Some people did maths but found it was too hard as they felt it wasn't explained properly."

"Some people were hurried along."

One person from Derbyshire Speaking Out group described their attempt to learn about computers: *"I couldn't catch up on the computer work – it was too fast. It made me feel unhappy and it put me off doing computers again. It would be better if it was made simpler."*

Many basic skills classes are two hours long. One student told us: *"I think two hours is too long. I get fed up and lose concentration."*

There were also comments about variety. Haringey People First said: *"The group members feel they are given the same courses every year."*

Communication difficulties

Communication with teaching staff had been difficult for several people. *“Some people said there weren’t enough alternative methods of communication or that people thought they couldn’t understand because their speech wasn’t clear.”* (Speaking Up in Gateshead)

A quote to conclude

The feeling that learning maths and English at college had been a struggle because of a lack of awareness of staff of the needs of people with learning difficulties was clearly put by this woman with learning difficulties from CHANGE:

“I felt the teachers were the problem. They didn’t understand learning disabled people. They didn’t have time to understand. They used difficult words. There was no access for me. They should have more training and be able to match the needs of all disabled people.”

Summary

The quality nationally of basic skills provision for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities is of concern. Better staff training is needed. There is clear scope for improvement in curriculum development, the use of assessment and in assessing achievement. People with learning difficulties who sent evidence had mixed experiences of learning, more negative than positive.

Section 5

Evidence of the quality of current learning materials, including IT

Gaps in materials

“One of the main gaps is suitable, published adult material for tutors to use with students.”

Middlesborough Adult Education Service

There is a huge gap in terms of materials for people with learning difficulties and disabilities that are adult, age appropriate and relevant to their needs, interests and lives. Finding material at the right level is a huge problem. At the NIACE LEA seminar held in November 1999, developing and funding learning resources for adults with severe learning difficulties was considered by LEAs to be a priority. As one delegate put it – *“not second hand or home made.”*

NIACE has details of Canadian literacy materials which reflect the experiences and lives of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Nothing similar is available in this country. Leeson Centre in Bromley wrote to say that there is *“limited access to special equipment e.g. large print books, suitable reading materials for adults.”*

It is unfortunate but true that sometimes children’s materials and equipment have been used with adults with learning difficulties. As the ECHO User Group told us: *“We want grown up ways to practice our basic skills.”*

Recommendation

Resources should be invested in developing a range of good quality materials to develop communication skills, literacy and numeracy for adults with learning difficulties.

What people with learning difficulties said about using computers

There was enthusiasm for the idea of learning via computers, as the following comments show:

“We would like to learn more and try more with computers.”
(Skills for People)

“We would like to use the computer – have a go on the Internet.”

(Grapevine, Coventry)

“Learning and using a computer is an interesting way to keep up your basic skills.”
(ECHO User Group)

Use of IT

The importance of IT as a tool for learning for disabled students is highlighted by the City Literary Institute: *“IT forms an important learning tool for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, both as an enabling tool and for motivating and interesting the students. It is essential that students have the opportunity to develop these skills and that staff are also confident in working with IT.”*

The Home Farm Trust (HFT) is a national voluntary organisation providing services for people with learning difficulties. HFT is developing the use of computer based learning in each day centre of its fifteen schemes nation-wide, with the support of a National Lotteries Charity Board grant. In doing so, they have researched available software. *“This research has shown that although there is extensive educational software covering literacy and numeracy and a wide range for children with special needs, there is virtually no software written specifically for adults with learning disabilities.”* HFT is now working with SEMERC and Keele University to produce *“basic skills software for adults with learning disabilities.”* This work is on the early stages and so far just one CD Rom has been produced, which supports numeracy skills for *“less able”* older adults with learning difficulties.

One difficulty is that staff development needs resourcing alongside the purchase of IT equipment. Funds are not always available:

“The college has developed extensive support systems for students who are sight impaired using the advice of the RNIB and library service networks. However, staff need extensive training in the use of new equipment and currently no funding is available for this.”

Southend Adult Community College

At the same college, the cost of software is a barrier to students practising their basic skills at home: *“The college has purchased specialist software to enable sight-impaired students to develop their basic skills and computer skills. Students are unable to practise their skills at home because the software is so expensive.”*

One LEA suggested that the supply and use of computers at home would be one way of expanding learning for people with learning difficulties:

“Students with learning disabilities benefit from the opportunity to use ICT. Often they may have a problem with writing by hand but can access ICT. Often they can use CD Roms to enhance and enjoy learning. The government is proposing to make computers available to those families in deprived areas. Perhaps people with learning disabilities could be targeted so the learning experience in classes could be extended to their homes.”

(North East Lincolnshire Adult Education Service)

Technical difficulties with using IT

Technical problems with using computer equipment and software can hinder learning in basic skills for students with learning difficulties or disabilities:

“Tracey has very limited hand use but accesses the computers using switches and a software package called “Clicker Plus.” However, more often than not, it is hard to set up on the computer and hard to get started, which denies Tracey access very often to the computers in order to use her literacy skills and writing skills.”

(Tape from Northampton College)

Recommendation

Resources should be invested in developing appropriate software for adults with learning difficulties to develop their basic skills. Funds for staff development should be invested in equipping staff with the necessary skills to use IT with adults with learning difficulties or disabilities. Support for home based learning where relevant for disabled students should be considered.

Summary

There are gaps in materials for adults with learning difficulties and/or disability to learn about to learn about basic skills. New learning materials need to be developed which are adult, relevant to peoples’ lives and which address communication, literacy, numeracy and IT.

Section 6

Evidence of current good practice

“Good provision involves developing basic skills linked to other areas of interest, takes account of modern technology and takes advantage of the developments in ICT that can support independence rather than reliance, develops personal skills, wider life experiences and creativity alongside basic skills. Adults should be given the opportunity to master a wide range of basic skills, with specific emphasis on skills that will enable them to pursue their own goals and opportunity to develop into new areas of interest. Different contexts for improving basic skills may be developed, for example community based learning, linked to voluntary activities, empowering community activity, peer learning and advocacy.”

(Sefton LEA)

Good practice is limited in the experience of NIACE. This section presents ten key features of good practice examples drawn from its work over a decade, and some brief snapshots, together with extracts from the evidence of adult education providers about their own work.

Ten key features: good practice in basic skills for adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities should:

- cater for people with all levels of disabilities and learning difficulties, including those with profound / multiple learning difficulties
- be relevant to people’s lives and experiences
- build on a multi-agency framework, which is essential in the many cases where people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities use health, social services and / or voluntary organisation services as well as education
- be flexible, with individual learning plans
- draw on support and transport as needed to enable people with disabilities to participate
- accommodate periods of ill health: for example, people with mental health difficulties may need to take a break from learning if they become ill
- support the growth of confidence and self esteem, as well as developing practical skills
- use real life materials and situations for people with learning difficulties so that basic skills are not taught in isolation from real life

- recognise achievement, through recording and celebrating learning outcomes or via relevant accreditation, where appropriate
- take place in a wide range of settings, to include colleges and adult education centres but also health, social services and voluntary organisations offering services where people cannot easily or practically access local learning centres (for example secure wards catering for people with mental health difficulties).

Snapshots of good practice based on NIACE's experience

Self advocacy classes

In Cardiff, over 100 people with learning difficulties access "Speaking for Yourself" classes delivered via community education centres, with joint funding from Social Services. Transport is provided. A relevant tutor training programme has been developed. (This example from Wales is included as there is nothing on this scale in England.)

Stepping Stones in Lancashire

Lancashire has developed a wide ranging inter-agency programme to support learners who have mental health difficulties into a variety of educational opportunities. Health, social services, adult education and the county's ten FE colleges are all involved. This initiative is wider than basic skills alone but provides a useful model for inter-agency collaboration in opening up opportunities for people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities.

Basic skills in Coventry

Coventry LEA has developed a range of provision in the past, to include liaison with Social Services day centres for people with learning difficulties, to enable those able to undertake Wordpower and Numberpower to do so. Creative courses responding to demand have included one developed to help students select and interview their own staff. A recent piece of work has developed education for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Bolton Community Education Service

In Bolton, courses are provided for all sectors of the community, including people with learning difficulties and people with mental health difficulties. Progression routes are built in. Bolton has also provided courses for carers of disabled people.

A word about carers

Current NIACE research has found that the one in eight of the general population who are carers often find education hard to access and that some carers themselves inevitably have basic skills needs or want to learn English for Speakers of Other Languages. There are particular needs for respite care so that carers can be free to attend education. (Further details on request)

What does the evidence from adult education providers show in terms of good practice?

There was evidence of interesting practice in the evidence submitted, as the following extracts demonstrate:

Southend Adult Community College describes its work with people who have had strokes: *“The college has excellent liaison with the Speech Therapy service, which enables people who have had a stroke to be referred to classes to help them regain their literacy and numeracy skills. Similar issues concerning transport to classes are evident for these students also. Flexible modes of attendance are often the most appropriate for students with health problems.”* Southend has also been addressing the issue of assessment for people with dyslexia: *“There is clearly a demand from students with dyslexia, who attend basic skills classes for study support with other courses, for thorough assessments to be made of their skills in order to apply for dispensation in examination. This assessment is expensive for students to arrange through private organisations and in-house assessment is desirable. The college is sponsoring one member of staff on the OCR Diploma in Specific Learning Difficulties, which is the required qualification by awarding bodies. This is a substantial and expensive course and it is anticipated that once assessments are offered in house the college will not be able to meet the demand from students.”*

The City Lit in London works with students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities and offers basic skills provision in the following ways through:

- the Continuing Education Section of its centre for Deaf People
- integration with support in the basic skills programme
- discrete provision for students with learning difficulties, who develop basic skills through a broad based curriculum

Brixham Community College has a charity called Access to Community Education (ACE) based there, which is run by and for people with physical disabilities *“and is seen as a means of empowerment.”* They seek funds for transport, care staff and specialist resources to support disabled students.

The Adult College of Barking and Dagenham has an Access Facilitator appointed in conjunction with Social Services. This person provides support to students with physical disabilities, learning difficulties or mental health difficulties *“across the curriculum and within the supported learning discrete provision.”* There are close links with health and social services and the college attends the local Community Care Action Group, which discusses local issues in relation to learning disabilities. Social Services Care plans highlight education needs for people with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and mental health problems.

West Sussex is using the Lifelong Learning Development Plan and partnership arrangements as the key for developments, including for those with learning difficulties and say: *“The advantages of this arrangement are that it:*

- *covers the geographical area of the County*
- *enables access at a very local level*
- *provides ‘stepping stones’ and small units of learning*
- *offers provision in a range of settings e.g. social services day care, adult education, discrete and mainstream classes, library settings, youth clubs, community settings and places of work.*
- *offers family literacy and numeracy as an integrated part of the Education Service. It is supported by the Education Advisory team, the Schools Library Service and the Education Committee and which links to home / school provision*
- *offers a range of provision and progression opportunities*
- *is open to all age groups*

We also work with local charities and organisations to develop provision and educational support. The West Sussex Adult Education Forum which is convened by the West Sussex Adult Education Service provides a means by which all the adult education providers in the County, including the FE colleges and agencies such as Social Services, meet to develop good practice and widen participation. Basic skills needs are a part of this process.

We are looking to the West Sussex Lifelong Learning Partnership to further develop collaborative relationships at local level. In West Sussex we are developing the framework to widen participation and meet basic skills needs. We ask the Technical Implementation Group to consider this and to recommend building on such successful arrangements and partnerships for the future.”

Summary

Good practice is limited in scope at present. Key indicators include an inclusive approach which is flexible, relevant, builds confidence, offers appropriate support and takes place in a multi-agency framework.

Section 7

Evidence of the needs and wishes of learners, trainers and teachers

What people with learning difficulties want from learning, based on research by the Norah Fry Research Centre and by NIACE

Evidence from the Norah Fry Research Centre (NFRC), which has consulted people with learning difficulties about what they want, shows that choice, being treated like an adult and having your learning recognised in the form of a certificate are all important. The NFRC evidence included in depth interviews with two students. It also involved a group of people with learning difficulties doing their own research and interviewing 47 people with learning difficulties about their experiences. The following direct quotes from people with learning difficulties illustrate the above points:

Choice

“It is important to be in charge and to choose for yourself what you want to do.”

Being treated like an adult

“Being a student, I think it’s better than being at (names day centre). You get treated better. You get treated more like an adult than a school kid.”

Getting qualifications and certificates

“I enjoy getting the qualifications I need and the skills that I need, especially to work in an office.”

“Going to college, what do you get out of it? When it’s finished and they say to you “You’ve passed” and you get your certificate and you’ve done it. And you can go home and say “I’ve got my certificate, I’ve done it”, and I think that is the biggest achievement.”

NIACE is currently producing a charter for learning based on replies from 100 self advocacy groups and groups of learners with learning difficulties in colleges and adult education centres. This will be published in May 2000 with an accompanying booklet, which is currently being drafted. Please note the following extract is a preview from work in progress. The work is supported by the National Charities Lottery Board and is UK wide. There will be twelve key points on the charter: in summary, adults with learning difficulties want the rights:

- To speak up and be heard
- To choose to go to classes

- To have support
- To have good access, including room for wheelchairs, lifts
- To be treated as adults, with respect
- Not to be bullied
- To have clear information
- To have good teaching
- To be able to do a course to get a job
- To learn in a nice place
- To have the chance to make friends
- To have fun learning

The booklet being drafted has quotes on the above key points and many other related topics.

What did people with learning difficulties in self advocacy groups say in response to the Moser call for evidence?

Quotes from people with learning difficulties have been interspersed throughout the evidence in different sections as appropriate. This section picks up on topics not covered elsewhere.

People wanted more opportunities for learning basic skills:

“We all think it is important to keep basic skills going. We need help to keep our basic skills going. This is important.”

(ECHO User Group)

“People wanted more opportunities to attend college.”

(Speaking Up in Gateshead)

“There should be more courses, more speaking up courses. They could do more college work like learning how to read and write.”

(Speaking Up, Cambridge)

“People really want to learn basic skills like reading and writing.”

(Skills for People)

Haringey People First wants local colleges to offer speaking up courses, which none of them do at present.

People wanted progression and the chance to learn work related skills

“Once one course has finished, other courses need to follow.”

(Lincoln People First)

“Different courses should be offered to people with learning difficulties. Courses where they can receive a qualification and help them get a job.”

(Haringey People First)

“What about learning work skills at college?”

(Lincoln People First)

People had experienced bullying and harassment of different types

“I used to stay off college because I was bullied by young people.”

(Jigsaw, Lancashire)

Members of self advocacy groups said that while attending classes, they had been harassed by other students. Haringey People First said that other students begged for money from them at college. One person from that group had even been beaten up and had stopped going to college. At least three other self advocacy groups mentioned name calling and bullying. Skills for People in Newcastle are planning to work with school children as a strategy to help stop bullying of people with learning difficulties.

People wanted clear, accessible information

“We want information about courses and how to get there. We want information about courses ourselves so that we can decide.”

(Lincoln People First)

“People got lost in college sometimes, because the directions were all written and they couldn’t read complex directions.”

(Speaking Up in Gateshead)

People wanted to be consulted about education

“It is important to speak out about education for / with adults with learning difficulties through a self advocacy group so their views can be heard, and [they can] voice concerns over their education and to have a say on courses they want to do.”

(Macclesfield People First)

One group wanted a drop-in basic skills service

“We think that a drop-in session where you could have confidential support with any of the reading, writing and number that you might want to do in your everyday life, would be a good idea.”

(ECHO User Group)

One group felt excluded from classes other than those for people with learning difficulties

“When you go to enrol [they say]- “You’ve got to go in with people like yourselves. People with learning difficulties ... Oh, we don’t want them, they’re shut away...”

(North Hertfordshire People First tape)

What needs and wishes did tutors express in the Moser call for evidence?

Quotes from organisers and tutors have been interspersed throughout the evidence in different sections as appropriate. This section picks up on topics not covered elsewhere.

Joint training

Sefton LEA wrote to say that this would be a useful step forwards: *“Staff working in the area of basic skills may not be specialists in working with people with learning difficulties or disabilities and often need specialist training and likewise staff working with adults with learning difficulties could have training in basic skills support. Some joint training would be useful.”*

Funding for taster courses

Southend Adult Community College feels that this would be a useful strategy: *“To facilitate the progression for people with learning disabilities, it would be useful to offer short taster courses. Current funding methodology requires courses to be at least nine hours in length, which is often inappropriate.”*

Longer time scales and flexibility

Medway Adult Education emphasises that flexibility is essential: *“For students with learning disabilities there is a need to realise that acquiring skills cannot always be easily and accurately assessed against assessment tests / specific outcomes / time scales or be related to funding. Longer time scales need to be in place for such students. An appreciation of the value and benefits of flexibility and recognising the necessity that the*

provision should address the importance of ‘maintaining’ basic skills is essential for many students with disabilities.”

Concern about deaf students

Southampton City College expressed concern in relation to deaf students. They offer “*Basic Skills for profoundly deaf young people with various combinations of communication including BSL*” and say that: “*Some revision of standards and adaptations of curriculum will be needed to ensure that the specific problem these students encounter in spoken and written English do not exclude them from access to progression routes and recognition of achievement.*”

Group size and funding

South Thames College say: “*The current requirements for group size is unhelpful as students with learning difficulties and disabilities need more attention and more time to progress. The funding mechanism needs to be looked at, as currently the smaller group size that these students require can only be achieved by the support budget. While there is theoretically a right to this, colleges have to make financial decisions and the support budget is limited with increasing competition for it. It would be more appropriate to identify funding as a right through the FEFC weighting system, topped up if necessary by the support budget e.g. a 100% weighting as these classes currently run at about half the number of students required for viability.*”

Summary

People with learning difficulties had clear ideas about what would be helpful, to include choosing to go to classes, support, good access and clear information. Tutors commented on a number of concerns, to include the need for joint training, longer time scales, effective group sizes, taster courses and the needs of deaf learners.

Section 9

Summary and key recommendations

Section summaries:

People with learning difficulties want to develop their basic skills for a variety of purposes. The definition of basic skills should include non-verbal forms of communication such as sign, symbol or gesture.

There are gaps in the quality of provision; in assessment, individual learning programmes, in curriculum development and in assessing achievement. The clear gaps in the quality and range of provision nationally are compounded by a range of other barriers. Transport, physical access and accessible information are barriers to learning basic skills. Funding and inter-agency work require clearer structures to be helpful. Negative attitudes and bad experiences of learning in the past can also block progress in acquiring basic skills.

Basic skills provision should be an entitlement based on legal rights and accessible to all, regardless of the level of disability, who choose to learn. Access to basic skills should support independence, life planning and self advocacy. Basic skills is often best learned through other activities directly relevant to students' lives.

The quality nationally of basic skills provision for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities is of concern. Better staff training is needed. There is clear scope for improvement. People with learning difficulties who sent evidence had mixed experiences of learning, more negative than positive.

There are gaps in materials for adults with learning difficulties and/or disability to learn about to learn about basic skills. New learning materials need to be developed which are adult, relevant to peoples' lives and which address communication, literacy, numeracy and IT.

Good practice is limited in scope at present. Key indicators include an inclusive approach which is flexible, relevant, builds confidence, offers appropriate support and takes place in a multi-agency framework.

People with learning difficulties had clear ideas about what would be helpful, to include choosing to go to classes, support, good access and clear information. Tutors commented on a number of concerns, to include the need for joint training, longer time scales, effective group sizes, taster courses and the needs of deaf learners.

The key recommendations for action are as follows:

- Provision is limited and patchy and requires an investment of resources.
- There should be a basic right / entitlement to basic skills education for adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, regardless of ability.
- The Moser definition of basic skills in relation to speaking and listening should be interpreted or expanded to include people who communicate by non-verbal communication methods such as sign, symbol or gesture.
- There should be an investment of resources for staff development to upgrade quality standards in basic skills for adults with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Both colleges and LEAs offering basic skills to adults with learning difficulties and /or disabilities should be given appropriate support.
- There should be a strategy to improve curriculum development, assessment, measuring achievement and progression in LEAs and the voluntary sector.
- There is a need to conduct research into the best ways of delivering basic skills to adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities.
- Current good practice and emerging research findings should be disseminated to offer ongoing practical advice to practitioners via a planned programme of development work, publications, newsletters and seminars. A web site on the Internet could also offer a means of support and dissemination.
- New materials should be developed, including a series of readers based on the lives and stories of people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, in order to provide relevant basic reading materials.
- Basic skills for adults with learning difficulties should include learning skills for self advocacy and skills for independence, which in turn has implications for inter-agency working.
- The response from self advocates has been very helpful in putting this evidence together. There should be continued consultation with disabled people about their needs, wishes and priorities in relation to basic skills education. Funding participation by disabled people with basic skills needs in learners' forums may offer one way of achieving this.

Ancillary recommendations drawn from the text are:

- Transport to basic skills classes should be built into provision for people with learning difficulties or disabilities who cannot travel independently, to enable them to access provision.
- Basic skills classes should where possible be delivered in accessible venues.
- Basic skills provision should address the needs of learners who have more than one disability or who have multiple disabilities.
- Good practice guidelines for support and training of front line care staff in an awareness of basic skills issues should be developed.
- There should be better information and support available for family carers of people with learning difficulties in relation to basic skills issues.
- Resources should be invested in developing appropriate software for adults with learning difficulties to develop their basic skills. Funds for staff development should be invested in equipping staff with the necessary skills to use IT with adults with learning difficulties or disabilities. Support for home based learning where relevant for disabled students should be considered.

Appendix A

List of organisations who responded to the mailshot by NIACE

Self advocacy groups and student groups run by / for people with learning difficulties

1. Haringey People First
2. Derbyshire Speaking Out Group
3. Lincoln People First
4. Calderdale People First
5. Jigsaw Disability Action Training, Lancashire
6. Speaking Up, Cambridge (by tape)
7. North Hertfordshire People First (by tape)
8. Grapevine, Coventry
9. Pendleton Brook Day Centre, Lancashire
10. Skills for People, Newcastle upon Tyne
11. Gillian Sedgwick, West Midlands
12. CHANGE, London
13. Leasons Centre, Orpington
14. Bristol and District People First
15. Northampton College students and tutors (letter and tape)
16. Moorland Advocacy Group, Oxford
17. Advocacy in Darlington
18. Newham People First
19. ECHO User Group
20. St Owen's Centre Student Council
21. People First of Macclesfield
22. Speaking Up in Gateshead

Local Education Authorities / other providers of adult education for people with disabilities where relevant

1. Adult College of Barking and Dagenham
2. Buckinghamshire County Council
3. Bolton Community Education Service
4. City Literary Institute, London
5. Doncaster College
6. Middlesborough Council
7. Medway Adult Education, Kent
8. NE Lincolnshire Adult Education Service
9. Northamptonshire County Council
10. Oakmeads Community College, West Sussex
11. Oxfordshire LEA

12. Redbridge Institute of Adult Education
13. Sefton LEA
14. South Thames College (Wandsworth Adult College)
15. Southampton City College
16. Southend Adult Community College
17. Torbay Council
18. West Sussex County Council

Other organisations

1. Anglia Polytechnic University
2. Bolton Action Research Centre for Inclusive Education
3. British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD)
4. The Elfrida Society, London
5. Home Farm Trust (HFT)
6. Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol
7. University of Huddersfield

APPENDIX B: MY PAST, MY PRESENT, MY FUTURE (FROM SKILLS FOR PEOPLE)



