

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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The Provision of an Enabling Framework for the RISE Learning Organisation

Abstract

The RISE Learning Organisation aims to substantially increase participation in higher education and training opportunities in those five counties which have been most seriously affected by economic restructuring, the closure of pits and the downsizing of steel production in Wales. The network of learning providers, learning action centres and their satellites provide learning opportunities 'from basic literacy up to degree standards with training tailored to the needs of local employers'. RISE has set itself ambitious recruitment targets and is keen to widen participation to learners from working class and currently excluded constituencies. RISE is also committed to working in democratic and participatory ways and claims to put learners at the heart of all policy developments.

NIACE was commissioned to provide an Enabling Framework for RISE Learning consisting of an Evidence Digest, a Learners'/Practitioners' 'Toolkit' and an Implementation Strategy. Underpinned by evidence-based research into participation patterns in adult learning, outreach strategies and good practice, the Toolkit was devised and tested in close collaboration with related stakeholders and finally supplied in published form, together with an implementation and evaluation strategy that was also negotiated and disseminated in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

The Evidence Digest discussed the following research areas:

- *motivations for learning*, attitudinal evidence on why people learn, what they see as valuable about it, key triggers and barriers, life stages etc.
- *the value of informal learning*, intrinsic importance of informal and non-accredited opportunities, and how these support progression to more formal and qualification-based learning
- *learners' views on assessment and learning outcomes*, their judgement on different methodologies, what they value about assessment processes, appropriate terminology, benefits and issues for providers/tutors
- *effective approaches to widening participation and outreach*, outcomes of more deliberative and participative approaches, key elements of successful strategies
- *the wider benefits of community-based learning*, evidence of greater community cohesion, familial, cultural and social capital, economic regeneration
- *value of qualitative as well as quantitative evidence*, the significance and contribution of narrative and other sources linked to learner-focused approaches, relationship with
- quantitative data, links to Common Inspection Framework and external inspection.

Research methodology:

The research team used an action-research approach comprising:

- ❖ Desk research/literature review to compile an annotated Evidence Digest
- ❖ Participatory consultation events with various groups of community-based learners, work-based learners, tutors, development workers, managers and local public and voluntary sector stakeholders to create the Toolkit..
- ❖ Action training sessions related to dissemination, training, monitoring and evaluation.

Key Findings

- ❖ The main conclusions of the project are: RISE's commitment to putting learners 'at the centre' of policy and practice was rhetorical rather than real. Considerable discussion – and disagreement – was taking place in professional contexts, in the presence of token learners, whose capacity to exert influence was minimal.
- ❖ The Evidence Digest provided compelling evidence about what was needed to move forward and about what works.
- ❖ The Toolkit provided an Enabling Framework and dedicated resource, produced in collaboration with learners, front line tutors and RISE managers, to support participatory developments, training needs and staff development across the organisation. Its usefulness could help to transform rhetoric into practice.
- ❖ The implementation strategy commented on strengths and issues apparent in the organisation and made recommendations for action regarding dissemination, training and support, evaluation and cultural change.

Recommendations

- ❖ RISE should make the recruitment of new learners a priority.
- ❖ The toolkit should be published, launched and disseminated to all RISE centres and satellites.
- ❖ A training and support strategy for front line tutors and learner representatives should be developed and implemented.
- ❖ The absence of an evaluation strategy was problematic and needed immediate attention.

Output

- an Evidence Digest
- a published Toolkit
- an Implementation Strategy
- training to develop a Support and Training Strategy
- training to support the development of an Evaluation Strategy.

Funder: RISE

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Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

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