

## **Later Life Learning and Local Area Agreements**

This paper is intended to help local authorities to develop their Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and to consider how and when education in later life can be offered. It explores the value of learning in later life, some of the ways it can be incorporated into Local PSAs and latterly highlights some of the features of the local adult education world.

PSA targets which are of particular relevance older people and learning in later life:

- No. 2. Improve the skills of the population, on the way to ensuring a world-class skills base by 2020;
- No. 8. Maximise employment opportunity for all;
- No. 15. Address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief;
- No. 17. Tackle poverty and promote greater independence and wellbeing in later life;
- No. 21. Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities.

*See Annex for further details.*

### **Access to education in later life**

#### **Signposting to learning**

At one level the older people can simply be signposted to existing education provision. But to do this they need to know just what is in existence. This information can be obtained from the usual formal education providers, UFI, Learndirect or those locations like libraries where they promote their programmes.

***Action 1: Identify education providers to help advise on the development of lifelong learning within your area.***

***Action 2: Obtain education programmes.***

However this misses out on the range of educational opportunities provided informally or non-formally through clubs, societies, University of the Third Age, libraries themselves, day care centres, sheltered housing and agencies like Age Concern. The mapping tool NIACE developed with Age Concern encouraged older people to map what provision existed in their own locality to better communicate with other older people just what exists inside and outside the formal sector.

***Action 3: Commission older people to use the NIACE mapping tool to determine and highlight the range of local provision.***

## **The value of learning in later life**

In making later life learning relevant, NIACE maintains that education is the key to:

- ensure that older people access the range of services on offer through their better understanding and ability to express needs;
- helping older people achieve fulfilment in later life;
- older people ageing well and healthily;
- overcoming problems, coping with crises and managing life changes and transitions;
- coping with poor skills levels;
- older people developing their voices – collectively and individually;
- developing new skills;
- sustaining older people's quality of life;
- helping older people to remain involved in the demographic process.

In January 2008, The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) launched “*Informal Adult Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead*”. (This publication may be downloaded from [www.dius.gov.uk](http://www.dius.gov.uk).) John Denham, the Secretary of State for DIUS, stated in the foreword of this publication that all forms of adult learning are valuable and contribute immeasurably to the well-being and health of our society. DIUS is asking the public to help them shape the future of informal adult learning. To assist DIUS to gather opinions and ideas from older adults NIACE has organised a listening event in April. The information gathered from the attendees will be fed into the consultation.

### ***Understanding services***

Pre retirement courses were created to help older people as they moved out of paid employment to understand what was on offer and how to access it. However such opportunities were available to only a few people and often too late for some decision making. One way of achieving this is by bringing people together. The coming together in a group is a learning process and often allows the peers to determine solutions from each other as opposed to the ‘expert’. It is a process which requires facilitation. For some individuals it may require a mentoring approach perhaps using other older people.

***Action 4: Ascertain how to use focus groups or groups of similar cohorts to determine issues, needs and solutions.***

***Action 5: Investigate how mentors can enhance this process.***

### ***Achieving fulfilment***

(PSA target no. 15)

Many older people find their later life is rudderless and are searching for a purpose. For some there is a frantic filling of time as a way of not addressing this issue.

There should be a process to help them assess their life experiences, consider what they might want to do now, what skills they need and what skills they have.

It is to be hoped that there will not just be a simple transmitting of information (however, it must be recognised that for many older people this is all they want). They may require access to statutory or formal education provision – particularly around literacy, numeracy and ICT, but quite often those programmes are not sensitive to the needs of older people. Therefore some brokerage may be required or the setting up of discrete provision.

This process of “personal needs analysis” can be the effective link into the range of intergenerational, artistic, volunteering, environmental, sporting, learning, campaigning, part time paid work, or similar opportunities that might exist locally.

***Action 6: Consult with local education expertise to devise a process to help older people assess life experience, “career” options and skills needs. [This can be in the form of a written document, web/ICT based or face to face depending on resources.]***

***Action 7: Create a directory of opportunity for older people.***

## **Ageing well and healthily**

(PSA target no. 17)

Health promotions campaigns which simply instruct are not as effective as those that work through peer mentors, or even alternative forms of communication like theatre. Research into the benefits of adult learning shows that those who do engage in learning are likely to lead healthier life styles, to be non smokers and to feel healthier (even with an illness). Applicants for NIACE’s Senior Learner of the Year Award provide testimonies to the “life saving” value of later life learning (“It made me forget my arthritis, it helped me overcome my depression”).

The UK Inquiry into Mental Health and Well Being in Later Life<sup>1</sup> highlighted the value of purposeful engagement and provides a useful climate for debates and action around the value of engagement in learning in later life.

The PSAs provide an opportunity to work with Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and others on health promotion strategies that might actually create educational programmes for, and with, older people. These programmes could explore life style, relationships, changing health and subsequent needs. Where resources are restricted, this might be an opportunity to consider collaborative working and sharing resources with the Learning and Skills Council and education providers in the area. The argument that investment by PCTs in ‘preventative’ learning activity might provide savings in health budgets, should be used.

***Action 8: Examine health promotion priorities and explore alternative ways of presenting them including theatre, focus groups, and education programmes.***

## **Managing life changes and transitions**

Life is full of changes and transitions. It is also full of crises. Some people can manage them, others cannot. Later life contains many such events and it is suggested that an inability to cope with them can lead to dependency. NIACE’s work around financial literacy and older people has shown that at times of financial crisis some older people contact advice agencies like Citizen’s Advice, and Age Concern, where their problems can be dealt with. Sometimes the problems are complex with underlying issues around relationships, employment and health, which also require addressing or signposting the individual somewhere else. What is needed is a service which can, in theory, be offered under one roof, showing the individual the required breadth of understanding of the complex issues faced in later life. The process of building up the

**An applicant for NIACE’s 2007 Senior Learner of the Year Award provides a testimony to the “life saving” value of later life learning.**

“Every morning when I wake I wonder what I will be like today- can I stand, can I walk, will my arms move or have my fingers swollen overnight. I do ache terribly after a lesson, but I wouldn’t stop ... So many things you can’t do, so you smile and think of the things you can do and returning to learning helps you to do this. Learning takes your mind off your problems; it keeps you engaged...”

individual's confidence and competence to better deal with such situations in the future, does not happen. This is mainly because "fire fighting" leaves no time for the "fire prevention."

NIACE's experience is also that some adults are more likely to approach education at a time of crisis or in anticipation of one. The testimonies of applicants to NIACE's annual Adult Learners' Week Awards indicate how life changing the acquiring of confidence, skills, connections and competence through education provision has been at such a time. As a consequence of this, built on their initial successes, people have been set on a learning journey. NIACE developed the Stageposts concept as one possible way of doing this. What will be required however the work is progressed, is awareness of the process among all the key agencies that will meet and reach older people in the locality. This might mean uncovering debt issues through a health screening programme, or routine work at a GP surgery or health centre. Similarly a relationship issue might be highlighted through domiciliary services of the work of a health visitor or occupational therapist.

**An applicant for NIACE's Senior Learner of the Year Award describes a major change in their life.**

"Having reached 50 and being made redundant made me have a long hard look at my life and career. I had been working in social housing for most of my working life and realised this was not what I had wanted to do... I chose to change what was left of my career path and do something I had yearned to do – hairdressing. For me life began at 50 not 40. It's no good sitting there thinking "I wished I'd have done something different with my life - do it"! There are opportunities galore".

***Action 9: Promote the management of life transitions through a life stages process, creating identifiable role models. Consider using elements of the Stageposts model, copies available from NIACE.***

***Action 10: Develop and deliver awareness training for all participants in these processes and all those agencies that are in a position to make referrals.***

## ***Developing education with older people***

### ***Coping with poor skills levels***

(PSA target no. 2)

**An applicant for NIACE's Senior Learner of the Year Award describes an adult learner support course.**

"As part of my learning, I am studying at Learndirect to obtain a Level 2 in numeracy. I am finding this challenging, but with the help and support of my tutors I hope to pass the examination in the near future".

Quite often one of the underlying problems is lack of confidence due, in no small part, to poor communication skills, literacy or numeracy. These concerns need to be identified sensitively and ways found to enable them to build capacity without labelling individuals. This can take several forms.

Locally there will be a range of First Steps provision catering for adults with basic skills needs. However, they are not necessarily sensitive to the needs of older people, and curriculum content, and teaching methods, may not be completely appropriate. There may need to be some form of brokerage undertaken with education providers, to help them better respond to these needs.

***Action 11: Develop links and communication with First Steps education providers in the area to ascertain availability and broker provision relevant to (some) older people.***

Capacity building could be explored through problem solving which gives the individual confidence and a quick achievement. Their progress could then be assisted through personal mentoring and/or sensitive peer supportive group work.

***Action 12: Determine how to respond to clients with low communication, literacy and numeracy skills levels. Audit all the local authority services to ensure none of the materials and processes militate against those with low-level skills.***

***Action 13: Consider developing peer-mentoring work to support clients with low-level skills.***

## ***Developing older people's voices***

(PSA target no. 21)

The report Social Exclusion of Older People<sup>2</sup> required older people to express their needs, dreams, fears and aspirations. For some older people this can be an easy process. They are confident in what they know, and feel, and they know where to make their feelings known. Some are active members of older people's campaigning organisations. However there are many older people who are disempowered, not only do they feel they have no voice, they are frustrated at times because they don't know what they need a voice for - possibly because their life changes, transitions and crises are unmanageable or unfathomable.

The movement to wider consultation with client groups is very welcome but there is a real worry that this process does not get past the very visible older people. In education it is difficult to determine the needs and wishes of the "non-learner" and this has to be true across most service delivery.

Work has been undertaken in different parts of the country around what has been described as "empowerment" curriculum – trying to develop new curriculum areas, or new ways of delivering education that are better attuned to the needs and life stages of older people. These developments have also worked with older people to explore the local democratic processes which impact on older people, and to help them better engage with them, if they wished to, either individually, or collectively. The process has also helped individuals to better ascertain and express their own needs, fears and aspirations.

***Action 14: Explore the creation of education programmes to help older people/clients better engage with the other services, and strategies, that engage with older people.***

## ***Developing new skills***

(PSA target no. 8 )

Older people need to consider their employability – irrespective of their age! This employability may not necessarily be about paid work, but effective engagement in what people want to get involved with. This may be an opportunity to make use of existing skills as well as experience and maturity, but also reveal a need or desire to learn new skills. Older people should be signposted to appropriate provision.

The Leitch Report and the 2007 implementation<sup>3</sup> is driving the national skills agenda and there will be a joined up employment and skills system. This is intended to ensure closer collaboration between information and advice services by creating a new universal adult careers service in England, working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. Any local and regional partnerships and strategy groups, as well as sectoral partnerships, developed as a consequence may create new skills training opportunities that older people might benefit from.

***Action 15: Map local, sectoral and regional skills partnerships and alliances.***

***Action 16: Develop appropriate skills diagnostic services or link to local Nextsteps, or similar provision, to help individuals to ascertain skills needs.***

### ***Making the guidance link***

Older people should be offered an opportunity for information, advice and guidance about all dimensions of the future – employment, fulfilment, health, finance, housing, relationships, opportunity for engagement etc. The new universal career service advocated in the Leitch implementation review<sup>3</sup> should present opportunities for the skills needs of older people to be considered, but it may not embrace the wider mid and later life issues that some older people may need to consider. Therefore it is vital that whatever Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is offered has breadth as well as depth and fully utilises existing provision and opportunities such as:

#### **Nextstep**

The Nextstep information and advice service can help individuals on the road to improving career prospects by learning new skills, retraining or gaining new qualifications. They offer free information on learning and work to anyone aged 20 or over. Nextstep can also offer free face-to-face advice if individuals have less than 5 GCSEs or have not yet achieved an NVQ level 2 qualification. [www.nextstep.org.uk/](http://www.nextstep.org.uk/)

#### **The Pension Service**

This website is published by the Government. It provides information for individuals about pensions and other pensioner benefits in the UK, whether they are planning for the future, are about to retire or have already retired. [www.pensionservice.gov.uk/home.asp](http://www.pensionservice.gov.uk/home.asp)

#### **Jobcentre Plus**

People over age 50 who want to work, the New Deal 50 plus programme could be the perfect opportunity. [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

#### **Health promotion campaigns and screening**

These are increasingly being offered to people at certain ages and stages of life.

***Action 17: Determine what “IAG” processes exist in the locality and ascertain how they can be built into the PSAs and how individual educational and skills needs can be included.***

### **Making the connection with local education providers**

Within the state sector there is a range of different provision at varying levels.

**Higher education** receives its funding through the Higher Education Funding Council. Although all universities recruit nationally most try to make some provision locally either at full cost, or bearing some subsidy. In some instances there are community-focussed programmes from which older people could benefit. In some areas there is discrete targeted provision aimed at older people. Some establishments have built up links with local Universities of the Third Age (U3A). The Open University also provides varying opportunities for those keen on learning on their own and over a long period of time.

**Further education** is funded through the Learning and Skills Council. Its main driver is the recent White Paper on the sector and the Leitch review on skills.<sup>3</sup> Some colleges deliver Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) which does reach older people. Some have in the past targeted older learners.

**Learndirect** offers advice and help to develop new skills, improve job prospects or change jobs. They have over 900,000 courses to choose from:

- **Find out about job and careers** – search over 700 job profiles;
- **Interactive careers area** – match your skills and interests to a job, get help writing a CV and find out about making decisions;
- **Help and advice** on funding, childcare and more!
- **Bi-lingual advisers** speak eight different languages!

Tel: 0800 100 900 <http://www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/>

### **Local authorities**

Local authorities have traditionally delivered adult learning for personal development or leisure purposes. This provision has ranged across languages, arts & crafts, ICT and physical activities. It did not necessarily lead to a qualification or require examinations to assess progress. Now redefined as Personal and Community Learning (PCDL) local providers must consider the learning needs to adults through strategic partnerships. However the programmes which they have been able to offer have been affected by funding changes, greater emphasis on skills acquisition and accreditation, wider access to improved competences in literacy and numeracy, and the Equality Age Regulations which came into force in 2006. It is becoming vital for local authority providers to find ways and means of working with others to strategically target older people, try to obtain funding from a range of agencies and provide general PCDL programmes that are affordable and equitable. Working with local partnerships should ensure a better realisation of the educational needs of older people.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships can be developed to access new funding as well as to create new learning opportunities. As the time to write and coordinate learning programmes and bids can be quite daunting, joining with other organisations to share time and resources can be a good idea. Also in the current climate, where it may be difficult to access 'traditional' funding for older learners, new ways have to be found to provide access to learning for this age group. Although partnerships and funding are relevant to all learners, these areas are particularly relevant to older people now, with the publication of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) Inspection Guidelines<sup>4</sup> which will affect those in care homes, and the Pathways to Work initiative to help people back into work.

It may require some imaginative thinking to find a partnership that suits everyone's goals and careful thought should be given as to how to set up and sustain partnerships. Here is a list of some of the potential advantages and disadvantages for you to consider:

**Advantages:**

- enhanced opportunities for access and participation;
- bigger pool of clients, so bigger market share for everyone;
- avoids overlap and duplication of effort and addresses gaps in provision;
- able to secure niche markets;
- economies of scale – broader, more flexible and cost effective offer;
- sharing information, resources and premises;
- reduction in workload, wastage, cost and time;
- brings together complementary skills sets and expertise;
- stimulates mutual learning and innovation;
- dissemination of good practice.

**Disadvantages:**

- loss of autonomy/fear of take over;
- increased complexity of financing, managing and monitoring such arrangements;
- diffusion of responsibility and potential loss of accountability;
- unrealistic expectations on the part of some partners.

For further information see NIACE Briefing Sheet 79: *How to work in partnership to fund projects for older learners*. [http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing\\_sheets](http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets)

***Action 18: Work with education partnerships, older learners and older people's organisations to create an older people's learning strategy.***

***Action 19: Consider undertaking a local, later life learning needs survey and use the mapping exercise as one response to it. This may indicate that some of the provision requested is already in existence but it needs to be made more widely available. It would be vital however to have some older people's forum, partnership or strategy body to work with in developing this action.***

## ***Funding learning***

Funding for PCDL has been "ring fenced" by Government but it has to satisfy a range of adult educational needs. It is important that complementary funding opportunities are investigated for older learners. The learning needs of older people should be argued for in local educational skills, economic and older people strategies. Funding could be argued for through European healthy cities, health action zones or other initiatives. It is important also to see what educational opportunities – if not resourced by – could be delivered by local Age Concerns and housing associations.

***Action 20: Create a directory of funding availability for learning and sources of grants for individuals.***

## ***Mapping Local informal provision***

Anyone who wishes to encourage older people to become involved in learning and ensure that the providers of learning offer excellent services to older people, should know what local informal provision is available. If this information is not known then a mapping exercise involving older people should be undertaken.

**The exercise could be undertaken by a range of agencies, such as:**

- groups of older people who want to know more about their local learning opportunities and want to encourage others to enjoy learning, e.g. pensioners groups, University of the Third Age groups, Retired and Senior Volunteers Programme groups, etc.
- those who wish to improve the quality of life for older people in their area, for example: voluntary organisations; community regeneration projects; providers of social services or health services, etc;
- those who wish to improve the economy or social cohesion in their locality: local authorities; Community Consortia for Education and Training; economic development agencies; Job Centre plus; development trusts, etc;
- networks of learning providers that are seeking to widen participation in learning.

**This exercise should:**

- involve older people in the process and define what learning means to them;
- allow the recognition of both formal and informal learning opportunities that exist already;
- provide an opportunity to build programmes of learning activities either for groups or individuals;
- assist the identification of gaps in provision and how to overcome them;
- demonstrate clear progression path and recognise the opportunities for a lateral development path;
- be complementary to any needs analyses;
- ensure that any responses to needs analysis are based on sound information.

Experience of previous mapping exercises carried out has shown that it has a positive effect in itself in increasing participation in learning by older people. It has also raised the awareness of learning providers and given them greater understanding of why some older people are not engaged in educational activities, the barriers they face and how to overcome them. A better appreciation of the types of learning activity that interest older learners increases the range and the quality of provision. Bringing different agencies together allows learners to access a wider range of opportunities often by crossing agency boundaries and sharing provision.

## ***Suggested reading***

- Stage Post paper
- Mapping Learning Opportunities for Older People

For copies of the above please ask Lois Gladdish, see contact details below.

## ***References***

<sup>1</sup> Lee, M. (2007). *Improving services and support for older people with mental health problems.*

*The second report from the UK Inquiry into Mental Health and Well-Being in Later Life.* London: Age Concern England. This publication may be downloaded from [www.mhilli.org](http://www.mhilli.org)

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, M. et. al. (2006). *The Social Exclusion of Older People: Evidence from the first wave of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) Final Report.* London: ODPM. This publication may be downloaded from [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/143564](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/143564)

<sup>3</sup> DIUS. (2007). *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*. London: DIUS. This publication may be downloaded from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/World%20Class%20Skills%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CSCI. (2008). *Key lines of regulatory assessment*. [http://www.csci.org.uk/professional/care\\_providers/all\\_services/inspection/kloro.aspx](http://www.csci.org.uk/professional/care_providers/all_services/inspection/kloro.aspx)

### **Useful links**

Older & Bolder - [http://www.niace.org.uk/research/older\\_bolder/default.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/research/older_bolder/default.htm)

Age Concern England - <http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/>

Better Government for Older People (BGOP) - <http://www.bgop.org.uk/home.aspx>

LSC - <http://www.lsc.gov.uk/>

Open University - <http://www.open.ac.uk/>

Opportunity Age - [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity\\_age/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/)

University of the Third Age – [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

UFI Learn Direct - <http://www.learndirect.co.uk/>

Lois Gladdish, Information Officer

Older & Bolder, NIACE

Email: [lois.gladdish@niace.org.uk](mailto:lois.gladdish@niace.org.uk)

Telephone: 0116 204 4227

Website: [http://www.niace.org.uk/research/older\\_bolder/default.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/research/older_bolder/default.htm)

April 2008.

## **Annex: PSA Targets relevant to older learners**

The following table lists those PSA targets of particular relevance to older people, learning and work.

<b>PSA No.</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Indicators relevant to Older Learners</b>
2	Improve the skills of the population, on the way to ensuring a world-class skills base by 2020:	1: Proportion of people of working age achieving functional literacy and numeracy skills; 2: Proportion of working age adults qualified to at least full Level 2; 3: Proportion of working age adults qualified to at least full level 3; 4: Proportion of apprentices who complete the full apprentice framework; 5: Proportion of working age adults qualified to Level 4 and above; 6: Higher Education participation rate.
8	Maximise employment opportunity for all:	1: An increase in the overall employment rate taking account of the economic cycle; 2: A narrowing of the gap between the employment rates of the following disadvantaged groups and the overall rate: disabled people, lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with no qualifications, those living in the most deprived local authority wards; 3: A reduction in the number of people on working age out-of-work benefits; 4: A reduction in the amount of time people spend on out-of-work benefits.
15	Address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief:	1: Gender gap in hourly pay; 2: Level of choice, control and flexibility to enable independent living; 3: Participation in public life by women, ethnic minorities, disabled people and young people; 4: Discrimination in employment; 5: Fairness of treatment by services.
17	Tackle poverty and promote greater independence and wellbeing in later life:	1: The employment rate of those aged 50-69 and difference between this and the overall employment rate; 2: The percentage of pensioners in low income; 3: Healthy life expectancy at age 65; 4: The proportion of people over 65 who are satisfied with their home and their neighbourhood; 5: The extent to which people over 65 receive the support they need to live independently at home.
21	Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities:	1: The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area; 2: The percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds; 3: The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood; 4: The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality; 5: A thriving third sector; 6: The percentage of people who participate in culture or sport.

