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Adult Education

Too important to be left to chance

Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE, Karen Adriaanse and Dr Sally-Anne Barnes



Research Report for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education (APPG) – Inquiry into Adult Education

Contents

Executive summary	4
1. Introduction	8
1.1. Project overview	8
1.2. Methodology	9
1.3. Report structure	10
2. Adult learning: Why does it matter?	11
2.1. Traditional patterns, changing transitions	11
2.2. The adult education landscape	15
2.3. Challenges and opportunities	16
3. What's happening in the current system?	19
3.1. Post-16 sector – major change and transition	19
3.2. Devolution	19
3.3. Area Reviews	21
3.4. What's working well?	22
3.5. What's not working well?	24
3.6. Trends	25
3.7. Economic and social costs	28
3.8. Unique characteristics of adult education	30
3.9. Preparing learners for a successful life in Britain	32
4. Adult learner participation or non-participation	34
4.1. Motivation	39
4.2. Barriers	41
4.3. Overcoming barriers	43
5. Leading to successful outcomes	48
5.1. Professionalism and partnerships	50
5.2. Tracking progress and outcomes	52
5.3. Top policy priorities	53

6. What needs to change?	54
6.1. Focus on life skills and prosperity	56
6.2. Information, advice and guidance	57
6.3. An evidence-based system	58
6.4. Employers, skills and productivity	58
7. Five key recommendations	60
Appendix 1 Call for Evidence respondents	62
Appendix 2 Key stakeholder interviewees and other contributors to the report	63
List of tables and figures	
Table 1.1 Population change in English regions, mid-2014 to mid-2024	12
Figure 1.1 Percentage population change in English regions by age groups, mid-2014 to mid-2024	13
Figure 1.2 Economic inactivity by main category in the UK (aged 16 to 64), seasonally adjusted – February to April 2011 to February to April 2016	14
Figure 3.1 Adult (19+) Learner Participation in Government-funded Further Education by Level 2	26
Figure 3.2 Adult Learner (19+) Participation and Achievement in Education and Training	27
Figure 3.3 Adult Learner (19+) Participation and Achievement on English and Maths Courses	27
Figure 4.1 Geographic profile of respondents (n=543)	35
Table 4.1 Current situation/status of all respondents (n=543)	35
Figure 4.2 Types of course(s) undertaken by survey respondents (n=484)	36
Figure 4.3 Type of course undertaken by region (n=484)	37
Table 4.2 Reasons for taking part in an adult education course (n=531)	40
Table 4.3 Barriers that make it difficult to start and/or complete a course by region (n=543)	42
Table 4.4 Sources of encouragement for adult learners (n=531)	45
Table 5.1 Skills improved as a result of attending an adult education course (n=531)	49

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We would like to thank representatives from the research project Steering Group, as well as nine Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) - City Lit, Morley College, Hillcroft College, Northern College, Ruskin College, Working Men's College, Mary Ward Centre, Fircroft College and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) - who each contributed and supported the research. Additionally, we are indebted to the following individuals and organisations who participated in telephone interviews and/or gave us permission to share their views within the report: Nick Bell, Chief Executive, Prospects Group Ltd; Neil Carberry, Senior Policy Adviser, Confederation of British Industry (CBI); Caroline Fairbairn, Director General, Confederation of British Industry (CBI); David Hughes, Chief Executive, Learning & Work Institute; Scott Knowles, Chief Executive, East Midlands, British Chamber of Commerce; Bob Harrison, Chair of Governors Northern College & Education Adviser, Toshiba, Northern Europe; Dr Sue Pember OBE, Director of Policy, HOLEX; David Russell, Chief Executive, Education Training Foundation (ETF); Baroness Sharp of Guildford, House of Lords; Rachael Egan, West Midlands, Combined Authority; Ruth Spellman OBE, Chief Executive, Workers' Educational Association (WEA); Steve Stewart, Chief Executive, Careers England; Mary-Vine Morris, Senior Policy Director (London), Association of Colleges (AoC); Trevor Phillips OBE, Chair of Trustees, Workers' Educational Association (WEA); and Andreas Schleicher, Director for the Directorate Education and Skills, (OECD). Also, a special note of thanks to Stef Poole and Sally Wright at IER for their invaluable input and support. Finally, we would like to thank Chi Onwurah MP for her input and review of the findings and the commitment she and other Parliamentarians have made to keeping the spotlight on adult education.

University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER)

Established in 1981 by the University of Warwick, the Institute for Employment Research (IER) is a leading international social science research centre. Its research is interdisciplinary and made relevant to policy makers and practitioners. It is renowned for consistently delivering high quality research. The work of IER includes comparative European research on employment and training as well as that focusing on the UK at national, regional and local levels. IER is concerned principally with the development of scientific knowledge about the socioeconomic system rather than with the evolution and application of one particular discipline. It places particular emphasis on using social science in the effective development of policy and practice and in collaborating with the policy and practitioner communities, to bring this about.

Executive summary

The APPG for Adult Education commissioned the Warwick Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick (April – June 2016) to conduct research into the needs of adult learners.¹ This work was managed by nine Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) including: City Lit, Morley College, Hillcroft College, Northern College, Ruskin College, Working Men's College, Mary Ward Centre, Fircroft College and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) – each has its own identity, mission and distinctive approach, which adds to the rich diversity of adult education.

Our primary focus is on adult education, and on adults returning to learn. Learning can occur in education or training institutions (offline or online), the workplace (on or off the job), the family, or cultural and especially, community settings.

The research team collected evidence through the following channels:

- **A literature review:** Some 45 sources of research and analysis have been identified and reviewed, spanning practice and experience across the UK and internationally. The main purpose was to inform and complement the core project research on the need, reach and areas for policy and practice development for adult education. The findings can be downloaded from:
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/
- **A formal call for evidence:** There were 34 responses received to a formal 'Call for Evidence', ranging from individual adult education tutors to major organisations. The detailed responses can be accessed from:
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/
- **An online survey of adult learners:** This aimed to engage as diverse a group of adult learners as possible to cover all key demographics and life stages. There was a particular focus on disadvantaged or disengaged students. The online survey attracted responses from 543 adults, all but 2 per cent of whom had attended adult education courses and spanning age groups from under 30 to over 65 years.
- **Fieldwork:** This included a total of 169 adult learners currently or previously attending programmes run by six SDI providers and 39 adults not currently learning, but who were attending a private provider for a programme of support for people who are unemployed.
- **Town Hall meetings:** Two open meetings were held in the Wirral and Newcastle, attended by some 60 people interested or involved in adult education in a wide variety of roles. The findings from the Town Hall meetings captured the voices of adult learners featured throughout the report.
- **Telephone interviews:** A total of 12 key stakeholder interviews were conducted with leaders from education, employment and community sectors to ascertain their views on and experience of adult education provision in England.

How can a greater priority be given to adults' views to support a demand-led approach?

Nationally, adult education providers indicate there is a government policy 'lopsided fixation' on both young people and apprenticeships, at the expense of other forms of adult education. Yet, the evidence base shows adult education often plays a significant role in reaching out and engaging people in learning through often outstanding partnerships with community groups, local authority departments and public services (Ofsted, 2015). The very wide range of provision offers a first step back into learning for so many and leads them onto pathways into work, including where appropriate, apprenticeships.

Local and newly Combined Authorities will be accountable for the allocation of funds with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in setting the agenda and identifying priorities within local communities. It is therefore critical that the contribution of adult education including its contribution to improving health and well-being (which are pre-requisites for progression into and within employment) must not be lost or forgotten within current and any new devolution arrangements.

It is clear that most providers of adult education have invested in reaching out to people who are disadvantaged one way or the other. Many of whom would not otherwise know about adult education and what it could do for people in their circumstances. Yet, adult education providers have developed the expertise, teaching skills and resources to deliver non-qualification provision and/or bite-sized units that successfully engage these adults in learning again, offering a stepping stone to success. Any policy or practical interventions need to reflect this and provide flexibility.

Post-devolution, local Skills Commissioners will be required to make investment decisions - which is why their role is so central to the sustainability of adult education now and in the future.

What practices and models of learning best motivate non-traditional students to keep on going with their studies, while other from a similar background drop-out?

- Good quality provision demonstrated by high achievement rates and positive Ofsted outcomes nationally for local authority providers and many further education (FE) colleges and Specialist Designated Institute (SDI) providers
- Inter-generational learning is starting to grow, involving parents and grandparents learning alongside children
- Partnership work with trade unions where workplace and community learning centres have been able to reach learners who face major barriers in accessing adult education and training
- Community-based adult education, such as University of the Third Age (U3A), which is filling gaps in other provision. Local authorities, further education (FE) colleges, universities and Specialist Designated Institute (SDI) providers are also making significant contributions to outreach and community activities.
- In the adult survey, when asked their reasons for taking part in an adult learning course, respondents provided a range of reasons, but an overwhelming proportion reported that it had been for their own personal development (75 per cent). The 39 people either on the work programme or referred to the provider from Jobcentre Plus to work on their Curriculum Vitae (CV) were familiar with colleges and training providers, but not Adult and Community Learning providers, such as the SDIs, local authorities and not-for-profit providers with

charitable status. None had a written job or career plan. Nearly all were looking for low level work, mostly because that was all that they deemed available to them. Those over 50 years old were very concerned that they were unlikely to find work because of the attitudes of employers.

What do we know already about the added value, cost-effectiveness and impact of adult education?

The UK Government's Foresight report on mental capital and well-being highlighted the costs of over £100 billion for mental ill-health in the UK, and £27 billion to UK plc in terms of sickness absence, presenteeism (i.e. the practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one's job) and labour turnover. In addition, nearly 40 per cent of all incapacity benefit at work is due to the common mental disorders of depression, anxiety and stress. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014)² links well-being to social connections, economic security and income, natural and built environment, and education. We found that attending adult education courses could directly improve the lives of individuals and contributed positively to all these areas.

Many participants in the fieldwork felt that many policy makers did not understand the true benefits of adult education. They were keen that the money for adult learning should be protected and that MPs and their advisers should understand the wider social benefits of attending a community-based class and the money it can save the health service, social services and other departments. They felt that having a pay policy for adult learning was fair - so that those that can pay do and support those that can't. However, the service still needs to be subsidised so that more people can attend, especially those who have significant barriers to work or being active in their communities.



What policy development is needed to secure the future of adult education?

Recommendation 1

Establish a national and regional strategy for adult education, health, employability and well-being – bringing together the different departmental interests, led by a senior Minister to provide an accountability and quality assured framework at a national and regional level. There needs to be clear criteria for providers to capture, collate and disseminate the full benefits of adult education, including improvements to their health and well-being and participation as an active citizen against the accountability and quality-assured framework.

Recommendation 2

The new commissioning system needs to have an adult education framework that seeks to rebuild and rebalance resources fairly for adults across the different life-stages. National and local provision for adults' needs to reflect a coherent view of our changing social, economic and cultural context. The matter of identity, of how people describe who they are and the values they hold, is an important conversation to be had with Commissioners in local areas. We learned from adults who were not engaged in adult education that many felt vulnerable, had limited choice on what was available when it comes to addressing their feelings of isolation, loneliness, mental and physical challenges.

Recommendation 3

Provide careers information, advice and guidance in local communities and build capacity in the adult education workforce to make greater use of labour market intelligence and mid-life reviews. There is a need to broaden and strengthen the capacity of the adult education workforce, thus raising the profile of this important work. Training and professional support should be available for all those involved in delivering education and training in various capacities.

Recommendation 4

Ensure a systematic approach to identifying and gathering evidence on the full impact of adult education. Data on the outcomes achieved by adult learners should not be overly bureaucratic, but it needs to be openly available for individuals, employers and commissioners to enable informed choices.

Recommendation 5

More employers need to step up and offer opportunities to adults, particularly older adults, keen to remain active in employment. Employers could offer so much more by offering adult education experiences on their premises through local partnerships.

Over the next five to 10 years there is a need to build on outstanding practices that are often unique to current adult education provision. **Adult education should be a national priority.** A series of policies and practices are needed so that the benefits of adult education are not taken away from those who need it most. **A national debate** can forge that sense of shared national purpose for adult education. And it is a debate in which, as well as the local commissioners of adult education, many more citizen voices should be heard – the voices of those for whom the services should be designed and those adults who have most to gain from them. This really is **too important to simply be left to chance.**

I. Introduction

“Adult education can help change lives and transform societies – it is a human right and common good.”

(European Adult Education Manifesto for the 21st Century)

“The provision and quality of adult learning remains patchy, and those who need it most currently get the least of it. More work is needed to support adult learning in local communities – this should be a key ingredient in adult education developments in the 21st century.”

(Andreas Schleicher, Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD).

‘A broad highway that all could travel.’ That’s how Keir Hardy – Britain’s first Labour MP – envisaged education for all back in the 1890s.⁴ Since then, there is a mountain of evidence – be it in government data, books, reports and millions of individual case studies – that prove adult education has significantly changed so many people’s lives. Many adults have found their way onto the highway and have made up for lost time by discovering their potential and skills, achieving things they did not know they were capable of. Many have developed self-belief and resilience enabling them to be more active citizens or support their families and communities in a way they would not have believed possible. However, still not everyone finds it easy to get on that highway or to navigate their route along it. Too many of those who could benefit most from making the journey are missing out. That’s why the newly formed All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Adult Education is making educational provision for adults the focus of its first priority. As the APPG’s Chair explained at the Group’s launch:

“We need more opportunities and support for adults to learn throughout their lives, whatever their circumstances. Our world is constantly changing and learning helps many people to make the positive changes they need – whether it’s finding a better job or broadening cultural horizons.”

(Chi Onwurah MP)⁵

I.1. Project overview

The APPG for Adult Education commissioned the Warwick Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick (April – June 2016) to conduct research into the needs of adult learners.⁶ This work was managed by nine Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) including: City Lit, Morley College, Hillcroft College, Northern College, Ruskin College, Working Men’s College, Mary Ward Centre, Fircroft College and the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) – each has its own identity, mission and distinctive approach, which adds to the rich diversity of adult education.

3. European Association for the Education of Adults (2015) Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century. Brussels: 5th December 2015. Accessed on: 4th May 2016. Available from: <http://www.eaea.org/en/policy-advocacy/manifesto-for-adult-learning-in-the-21st-century.html>

4. Gillard, D. (2001) Education in England: A Brief history. Available from: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter03.html>

5. Available from: <http://wea.org.uk/news/New-Parliamentary-Group-for-Adult-Education.aspx>

6. Available from: <http://wea.org.uk/news/New-Parliamentary-Group-for-Adult-Education.aspx>

Our primary focus is on adult education, and on adults returning to learn. Learning can occur in education or training institutions (offline or online), the workplace (on or off the job), the family, or cultural and especially, community settings. We use ‘learning’ to refer to all kinds of formal education and training (organised/accredited). We also include non-formal (organised unaccredited) and informal approaches (not organised, e.g. learning from colleagues or friends) provided these have a degree of adult education focus.

The aim of the study was to scope the need, reach and areas for policy and practice development for adult education concerning disadvantaged adults. Four key research questions emerged:

- How can a greater priority be given to adults’ views to support a demand-led approach?
- What practices and models of learning best motivate non-traditional students to keep on going with their studies while others from a similar background drop-out?
- What do we know already about the added value, cost-effectiveness and impact of adult education?
- What policy development is needed to secure the future of adult education?

1.2. Methodology

The research team collected evidence through the following channels:

- **A literature review:** Some 45 sources of research and analysis have been identified and reviewed, spanning practice and experience across the UK and internationally. The main purpose was to inform and complement the core project research on the need, reach and areas for policy and practice development for adult education. The findings can be downloaded from: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/
- **A formal call for evidence:** There were 34 responses received to a formal ‘Call for Evidence’, ranging from individual adult education tutors to major organisations. The detailed responses can be accessed from: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/
- **An online survey of adult learners:** This aimed to engage as diverse a group of adult learners as possible to cover all key demographics and life stages. There was a particular focus on disadvantaged or disengaged students. This included:
 - Existing adult students from a range of localities drawn from the SDIs; and
 - Students who had started a course of learning, but not completed it.

The online survey attracted responses from 543 adults, all but two per cent of whom had attended adult education courses and spanning age groups from under 30 to over 65 years.

- **Fieldwork:** This included a total of 169 adult learners currently, or previously, attending programmes run by six SDI providers and 39 adults not currently learning, but who were attending a private provider with support for people who are unemployed. Focus groups were conducted with learners and local community representatives to examine the impact of learning, what works and challenges. Where possible, it was ensured that men and women were represented equally, disadvantaged groupings and drawn from both urban and rural areas. The fieldwork activities captured the voices of adult learners which are featured throughout the report.

- **Town Hall meetings:** Two open meetings were held in the Wirral and Newcastle, attended by some 60 people interested or involved in adult education in a wide variety of roles. The findings from the Town Hall meetings captured the voices of adult learners which are featured throughout the report.
- **Telephone interviews:** A total of 12 key stakeholder interviews were conducted with leaders from education, employment and community sectors to ascertain their views on and experience of adult education provision in England. The main purpose was to capture their voices and identify key emerging policy priorities.

By drawing on these varied sources, the aim has been to develop a full picture of the benefits of adult education for individuals, employers and communities focusing on what works well and what needs to be improved to make best use of the resources available for adult education, particularly in addressing the needs of those most disadvantaged in our society. This research provides an opportunity to relate recent research into adult education policy and practice of 2016 and look forward to the next five to ten years.

1.3. Report structure

Chapter 2 discusses why adult education matters in the context of a changing landscape across England.

Chapter 3 reviews what's happening in the current landscape, including devolution, area reviews and the opportunities that lie ahead, drawing upon participants' experiences and their views of the current and future direction of adult education.

Chapter 4 captures the voices of adults participating in learning and those who are currently not engaged in formal adult education to illustrate their motivations, the barriers they face and ways in which they overcome barriers to learning.

Chapter 5 explores what leads to successful outcomes and provides some brief illustrations of good and interesting policies and practices to feed into future developments.

Chapter 6 focuses on what needs to change now and in the future in order to maintain and further strengthen adult education across England.

Chapter 7 sets out five key recommendations for implementation at a national, regional and local level.

2. Adult learning: Why does it matter?

“ Adult education at its best connects people, helps to reduce loneliness or feelings of isolation within communities; it can instill a sense of empowerment through the joy of learning and/or help people get back to work or positively change direction. ”

(Baroness Sharp of Guildford)

In this section, we explore the changes in society that are impacting on the lives of adults, the current landscape, evidence from Ofsted, on adult education providers performance and challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Key findings

- The ageing society is upon us and services will need to adapt accordingly
- There is an urgent requirement for more adults to be economically active for much longer than in previous generations due to changes in state pensions and increased lifespans
- Everyone’s lives involve transitions, but for a growing number the frequency and scale of these are increasing
- Adult education provides many opportunities to equalise societies on a larger scale
- The quality of provision of the 238 community and skills providers is high; 86 per cent of them were judged to be good or outstanding at their latest Ofsted inspection.

2.1. Traditional patterns, changing transitions

Latest figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS, June 2016)⁷ indicate the UK population grew by half a million last year to 65.1 million. The largest percentage increase was in England and the lowest in Wales. The older population has continued to rise, with more than 11.6 million people (17.8 per cent of the population) now aged 65 years and over, and 1.5 million people (2.3 per cent of the population) aged 85 years and over in mid-2015.

“ All regions of England are projected to see an increase in their population size over the next decade, with London, the East of England and South East projected to grow faster than the country as a whole. The population is also ageing with all regions seeing a faster growth in those aged 65 and over than in younger age groups. ”

(Suzie Dunsmith, Population Projections Unit, Office for National Statistics)

7. Office for National Statistics (2016) All data related to population estimates, London, 23rd June 2016.
Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datalist>

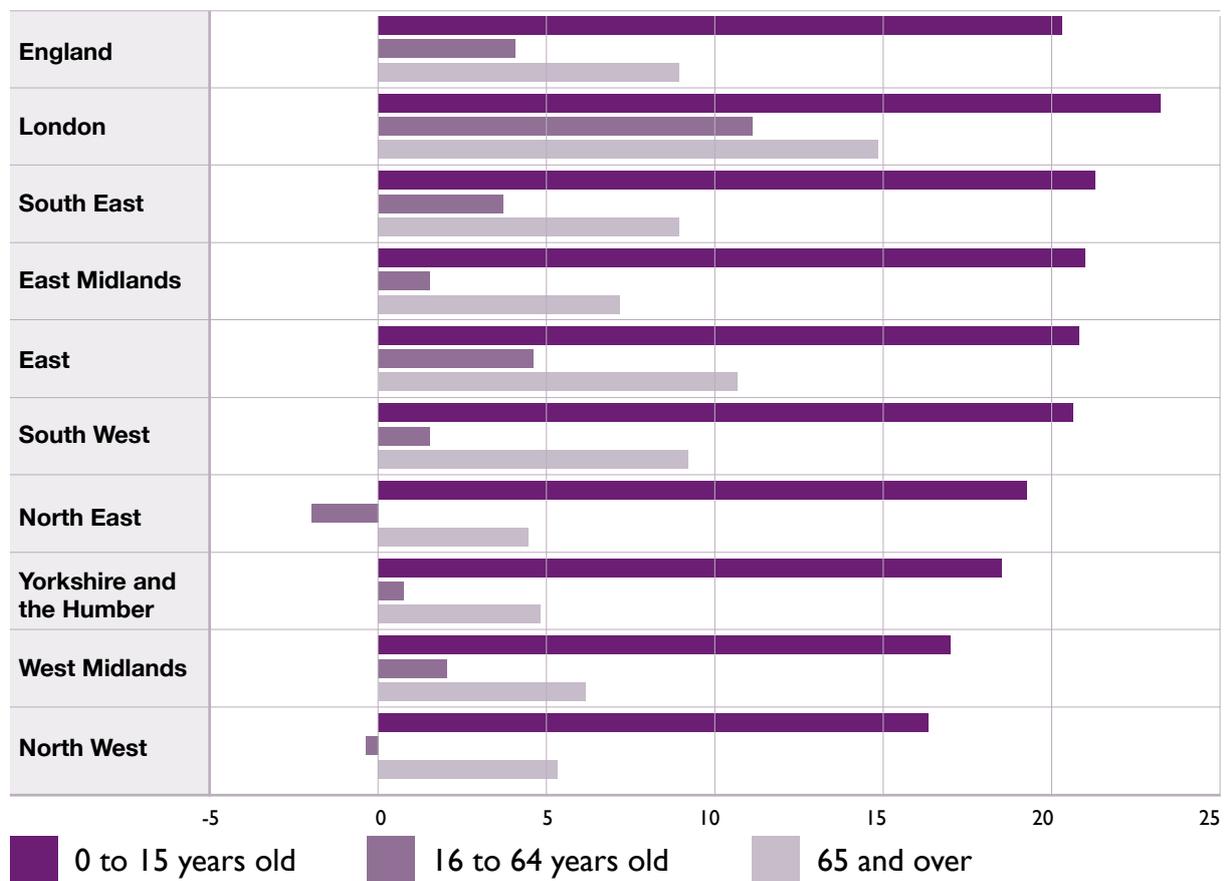
Table 1.1 Population change in English regions: mid-2014 to mid-2024

	Mid-2014	Mid-2014	Projected change over 10 years	Projected percentage change over 10 years
England	54,316,600	58,396,300	4,079,700	7.5
London	8,538,700	9,708,000	1,169,300	13.7
East	6,018,400	6,554,300	535,900	8.9
South East	8,873,800	9,596,200	722,400	8.1
South West	5,423,300	5,816,500	393,200	7.3
East Midlands	4,637,400	4,950,200	312,800	6.7
West Midlands	5,713,300	6,052,400	339,100	5.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	5,360,000	5,608,900	248,900	4.6
North West	7,133,100	7,409,100	276,100	3.9
North East	2,618,700	2,700,600	81,900	3.1

Source: Office for National Statistics – Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding

Clearly, there is an urgent requirement for more adults to be economically active for much longer than in previous generations due to changes in state pensions and increased lifespans (Eurostat, 2014).⁸ The employment rate for women (69.2 per cent) was the joint highest since comparable records began in 1971, partly due to on-going changes to the state pension age for women resulting in fewer women retiring between the ages of 60 and 65 years (ONS, op. cit). Data from the Office for National Statistics (op.cit) shows that the number of 18 year olds in England is projected to decline overall between 2012 and 2020 and it will be 2024 before the 18 year old population recovers to 2015 levels. Focusing on older age groups, Figure 1.1 below shows that the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase in all regions by an average of 20 per cent between mid-2014 and mid-2024 as a result of the general ageing of the population as projected in the national population projections. The fastest growth in those aged 65 and over is seen in London, where the number is projected to increase by 23.6 per cent from slightly under 1 million to 1.2 million over the 10 year period.

Figure 1.1 Percentage population change in English regions by age groups: mid-2014 to mid-2024



Source: Office for National Statistics

With a shrinking population of traditional “working age” supporting a growing retired one, we all will need to do things quite differently from previous generations and learn to structure our lives, as well as public, private and third sector services, in new and differing ways.

“ The traditional notion of a three-stage approach to our working lives - education, followed by work and then retirement is beginning to collapse: life expectancy is rising, final-salary pensions are vanishing, and increasing numbers of people are juggling multiple roles. ”

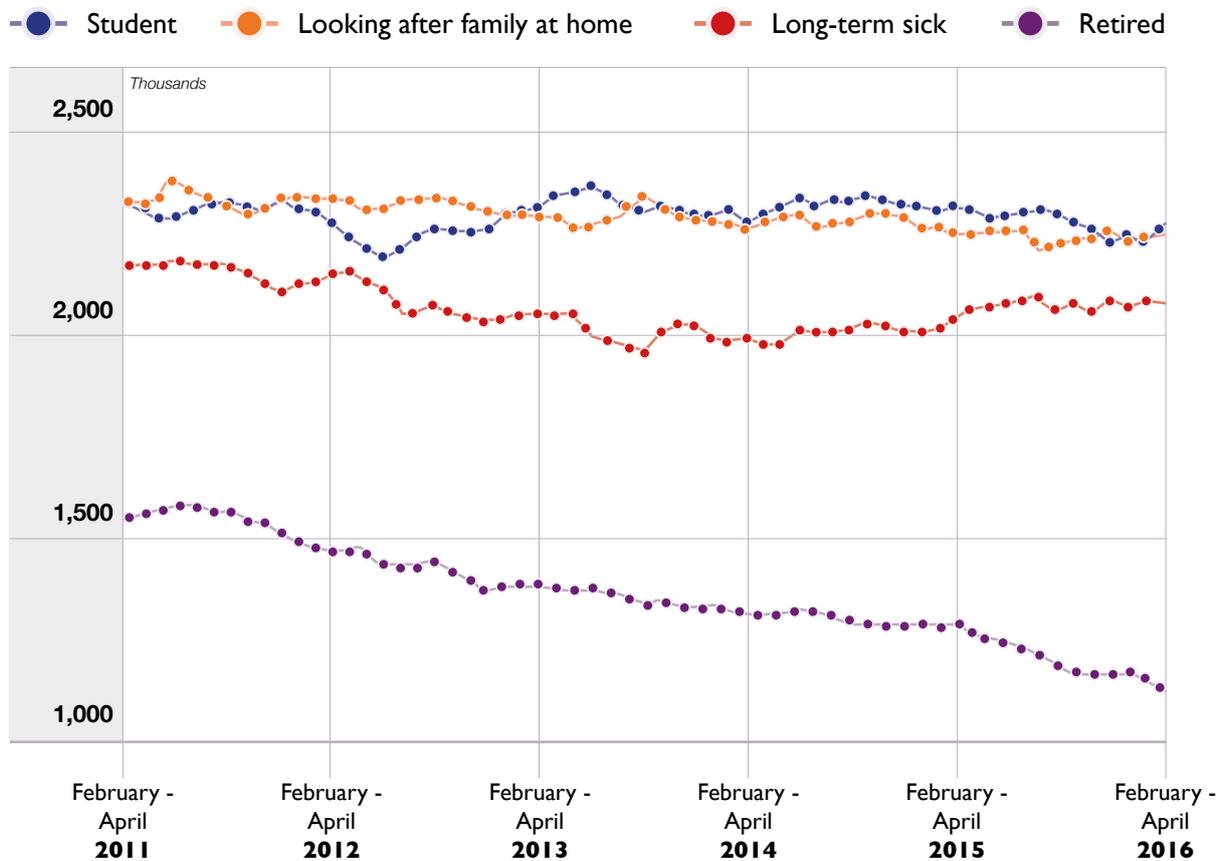
(Lynda Grattan, Professor of Management Practice, London Business School & Andrew Scott, Professor of Economics, London Business School)⁹

Everyone’s lives involve transitions, but for a growing number the frequency and scale of these are increasing. Changes in the economy mean people are having to change jobs and fields of work more often than in the past.¹⁰ Portfolio work is on the increase: for example, someone might be driving a taxi part of the day, renting out the driveway for somebody who wants to park their car, looking after an elderly relative and working for a delivery company in the evening. We are all more likely to have to be far more versatile in coping in changing roles and changing personal circumstances.

9. Grattan, L. and Scott, A. (2016) *The 100 Year Life: Living and Working in An Age of Longevity*. Bloomsbury Publishing, London. Available from: <http://www.100yearlife.com/>

10. Eurostat (2015) *Population Structure and Ageing*, Brussels, June 2015. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing

Figure 1.2 Economic inactivity by main category in the UK (aged 16 to 64), seasonally adjusted – February to April 2011 to February to April 2016



Source: Office for National Statistics

Some responses to the Call for Evidence highlighted:

“ A slowness to realise that as people work longer, they are less likely to stay in the same career for their whole working life and therefore need access to funding to re-train, at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. ”

(The Open University)

“ Individuals' identities are changing and we see more portfolio working and/or self-employment for people of all ages. Individuals have to adjust to new ways of living their lives. ”

(Call for Evidence)

Some people are on journeys of personal transition, for example, coping with a disability, mental health or domestic issues, or addiction problems, recovering from an accident, being made redundant or preparing to leave prison. Adjusting to a new phase in life, such as retirement, represents another form of transition, which can be aided by the support, new skills and new interests that adult education can offer. Increasing migration has seen more adults arriving in England with more varied backgrounds and a wider range of educational needs to help smooth the path to cultural integration. There are plenty of reasons – economic, social and moral – to help adults reconnect with education. As the then Prime Minister, David Cameron put it earlier in the year:

“ The economy can't be secure if we spend billions of pounds on picking up the pieces of social failure and our society can't be strong and cohesive as long as there are millions of people who feel locked out of it. ”

(David Cameron, Prime Minister, January 2016)¹¹

2.2. The adult education landscape

Ofsted's (2015)¹² Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector praised the adult education sector for the way that it provides educational benefits to disadvantaged communities and breaks cycles of low achievement by helping adults who may have often felt that learning was not for them to gain skills and qualifications. Inspections demonstrated that many adult education providers were successful at working with partners best placed to deliver a wide range of courses to support adults from disadvantaged communities.

In its official statistics Ofsted (June 2016)¹³ identifies 238 community and skills providers whose core aim is generally to provide adult education, including in some cases work-based learning for young people and adults. These are mostly local authority providers, not-for-profit providers with charitable status and specialist dedicated institutions (SDIs) that receive funds directly from the Skills Funding Agency. These providers typically provide courses at designated learning centres and they also use a wide variety of community-based venues such as schools, community halls, libraries and children's or health centres; many of these are based in areas of deprivation. Local authority provision often takes place on many hundreds of different locations and the WEA runs hundreds of courses in different sites across the country. Some of these providers, especially the local authorities, sub-contract some of their provision to small organisations that have expertise in supporting specific client groups, such as adults with mental health or drug or alcohol issues or those with specific learning difficulties or disabilities. A few local authorities subcontract a significant proportion of its adult education budget to the local general further education (FE) colleges and many FE colleges also have a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency to deliver adult education. They also use community venues as well as their main college sites.

Ofsted's findings (op cit.) show that the quality of provision of the 238 community and skills providers was high; 86 per cent of them were judged to be good or outstanding at their latest inspection, although not all of these grades were specifically for adult learning. The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) for education, early years and skills¹⁴ for inspections from September 2015 restructured the inspection of further education and skills, requiring a separate grade and report for each of the follow types of provision: 16 to 19 study programmes; adult learning programmes; apprenticeships; traineeships; provision for learners with high needs; and 14 to 16 full-time provision. From September 2015¹⁵, the further education and skills inspection handbook requires inspectors to consider how well each strand of a provider's adult learning programme(s) – such as vocational training, employability training and community learning – has a clearly defined purpose that is well met through each relevant learning programme. Another of the eight points listed asks inspectors to consider how well learning programmes enable learners to overcome

11. Prime Minister's Speech on Life Chances, London: 11th January 2016.

Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-life-chances>

12. Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2014/15 page 68.

Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201415-education-and-skills>

13. Further education and skills inspections and outcomes as at 29 February 2016: data, charts and tables: Table 4.

Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-as-at-29-february-2016>

14. The Common Inspection Framework. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015>

15. Further education and skills inspection handbook from September 2015.

their barriers to employment and/or to becoming more independent in their communities. The most recent management information from Ofsted¹⁶ show there is significant inconsistencies in how well the providers have met these and the other criteria in the inspection handbook. Of the 97 grades awarded for adult learning programmes, just over half were judged to be good or outstanding. The three providers with outstanding provision were a not-for-profit organisation, an FE college and a local authority provider. However, the five providers judged to have inadequate adult learning programmes were also from a similar mix of providers. All of the nine specialist designated institutions for adult learning were judged to be either good or outstanding at its latest inspection.

2.3. Challenges and opportunities

Recent findings from the OECD (June 2016) outlines:

“ There are an estimated 9 million working aged adults in England (more than a quarter of adults aged 16-65) with low literacy or numeracy skills or both. This reflects England’s overall performance in the Survey of Adult Skills - around average for literacy, but well below average for numeracy relative to other OECD countries in the Survey (OECD, 2013). These 9 million people struggle with basic quantitative reasoning or have difficulty with simple written information. They might, for example, struggle to estimate how much petrol is left in the petrol tank from a sight of the gauge, or not be able to fully understand instructions on a bottle of aspirin. Here they are referred to as ‘low-skilled’. Weak basic skills reduce productivity and employability, damage citizenship, and are therefore profoundly implicated in challenges of equity and social exclusion. ”
(OECD, 2016, p.9)¹⁷

Digital technology is transforming almost every aspect of our public, private or work life (Davos, 2016)¹⁸. For every individual – the learner, the worker and the citizen – the natural consequence of technological innovation is a requirement to continue learning throughout life. Adult education has brought computing skills to millions of adults who thought they would be left behind forever, through courses in village halls, libraries and community centres. But there are still millions more people who are unlikely to be able to book a doctor’s appointment online, keep up with their children’s work at school or have a good chance of sustained employment because of their lack of skills and/or confidence in using technology. There is significant scope to do more:

“ Don’t force new technology into old pedagogy [...] it’s not about technology, it’s about new ways of thinking ”
(Bob Harrison, Chair of Governors Northern College & Education Adviser, Toshiba – Northern Europe, 2016)¹⁹

Millions of people define their well-being in terms of health (DoH, 2014).²⁰ The UK Government’s Foresight report on mental capital and well-being highlighted the costs of over £100 billion for

16. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/monthly-management-information-ofsted-further-education-and-skills-inspections-outcomes-from-december-2015>

17. OECD (2016) Building Skills for All: A Review of England – Policy Insight from the Survey of Adult Skills, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Economic Development. Available from: <https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf>

18. Davos World Leaders Conference, Switzerland, 14th January 2016.

Available from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>

19. For further information. Available from: <http://www.setuk.co.uk/>

20. Department of Health (2014) *Well being: Why it matters to health policy – Health is the top thing people say matters to their well being*. London. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277566/Narrative_January_2014_.pdf

mental ill-health in the UK, and £27 billion to UK plc in terms of sickness absence, presenteeism (i.e. the practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one's job) and labour turnover. In addition, nearly 40 per cent of all incapacity benefit at work is due to the common mental disorders of depression, anxiety and stress. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014)²¹ links well-being to social connections, economic security and income, natural and built environment, and education. We found that attending adult education courses could directly improve the lives of individuals and contributed positively to all these areas.

“ I hated maths at school but now I know I will need to improve my skills and get the qualification so I can train to be a nurse. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ It is good to have a safe and helpful learning environment. It is easy to stay at home. Being 'forced' to go out of the house once a week is not a bad thing at my age. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ My English has improved so much that I can make phone calls on my own now and speak to my daughter's teacher. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I have gained so much knowledge. I can understand grammar. At last I know what a comma is. My text messages make more sense. When I write I can say what I want to say and not just what I can spell. ”

(Adult Learner)

Adult education provides many opportunities to equalise societies on a larger scale. In this context, education and skills deficits need to be addressed as a priority to improve the economic and social prosperity of all citizens. While the number of jobs in the UK is expected to rise by about 1.8 million over the period 2014 to 2024, that growth will be strongest for highly qualified managers and professionals. (UKCES, 2014; Störmer et al., 2014)²² In contrast, the jobs that have traditionally enabled those with little in the way of qualifications to get into work and get on will be in decline. For example the number of openings for process, plant and machine operators, skilled tradespeople, and administrative and secretarial roles will all be in decline over the coming years. By 2024, it is expected that only 2 per cent of those in employment will have no formal qualifications (op cit.)²³. In the years ahead, skills and qualifications will play an increasingly central role in determining individual employability, career progression and earnings potential (CBI, 2014 & 2015)²⁴.

21. World Health Organisation (2014) Second joint meeting of experts on targets and indicators for health and well being in Health 2020, London, 3-4 April 2014. Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/253673/Meeting-Report-April-meeting-final-WEB.pdf?ua=1

22. UKCES (2014) *Working Futures 2014 – 2024*. Wath-upon-Deane: UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514285/Working_Futures_Headline_Report_final_for_web_PG.pdf
See also: Störmer, E., Patscha, C., Prendergast, J., Daheim, C., Rhisiart, M., Glover, P., and Beck, H. (2014) *The Future of Work, Jobs and Skills in 2030* (Evidence Report 84). Wath-upon-Deane: UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303334/er84-the-future-of-work-evidence-report.pdf

23. Op cit.

24. CBI (2014) *Building a Better Off Britain: Improving Lives by Making Growth Work for Everyone*, November 2014. Available from: <http://news.cbi.org.uk/news/our-package-of-measures-to-build-a-better-off-britain/> See also: CBI (2015) *The Path Ahead*, CBI/Accenture Employment Trends Survey 2015, London, December 2015. Available from: <http://news.cbi.org.uk/news/job-creation-up-but-skills-shortages-rising-labour-costs-start-to-bite-cbi-accenture-survey/the-path-ahead/>

All adults already beyond school age should have the chance and encouragement to start accumulating skills and qualifications that will lead to better, more fulfilling life chances. They should also be better equipped to support their families and local communities. However, there is a serious decline in the numbers of students participating in Level 3 courses²⁵, as well as enrolment of part-time and mature students in higher education²⁶, mainly as a result of funding and policy decisions. The number of 24 years and older adults participating in education at Level 3 and Level 4 (A-level / Diploma) in 2013/2014 fell to 57,100 from 400,000 in 2012/2013, a drop of 86 per cent (Hughes, 2014)²⁷.

A fixation on apprenticeships?

“ It feels like apprenticeships are the only show in town at the moment and whilst these are absolutely important, so too is adult education embedded in our local community. ”

(Town hall participant)

Nationally, adult education providers indicate there is a government policy ‘lopsided fixation’ on both young people and apprenticeships, at the expense of other forms of adult education. Yet, the evidence base shows adult education often plays a significant role in reaching out and engaging people in learning through often outstanding partnerships with community groups, local authority departments and public services.²⁸ The very wide range of provision provides a first step back into learning for so many and leads them onto pathways into work. For so many and this can lead them onto pathways into work, including where appropriate, apprenticeships.



25. Skills Funding Agency & Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2016) *Statistical First Release, SFA/SFR34*, Coventry /London, Released 23rd June 2016. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/530819/SFR_commentary_June_2016_final.pdf

26. Office for Fair Access (2016) *Outcomes of Access Agreement Outcome Monitoring for 2014/2015*, London: May 2016, p. 7. Available from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016.04-Outcomes-of-access-agreements-monitoring-1.pdf>

27. Hughes, D. (2014) In Ed. Coryton, D., *Basic Skills Bulletin*, 169, Education Publishing Company, Crediton.

28. Ofsted (2015) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2014/15* Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 121 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. December 2015. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/483347/Ofsted_annual_report_education_and_skills.pdf

3. What's happening in the current system?

“ Adult education isn't simply a leisure activity – it is the life blood for conversation in any vibrant community and local economy ”

(David Hughes, CEO, Learning and Work Institute)

In this section, we review what's happening in the current landscape, including devolution, area reviews and the opportunities that lie ahead, drawing upon participants' views and experiences on the current and future direction of adult education.

Key findings

- Devolution of political and financial powers is creating new partnerships and delivery arrangements
- Employers and adults do not have a sufficient role in determining demand for adult learning
- Provision is influenced too much by funding regimes – often to the disadvantage of those who would benefit most
- There are some worrying trends regarding adult education participation rates
- Evidence is available on the economic and social returns on investment
- Adult education is deeply rooted in local communities; therefore, new funding and delivery arrangements should be a priority for Skills Commissions.

3.1. Post-16 sector – major change and transition

As the post-16 sector moves into a period of major transition and uncertainty, *New Challenges New Chances* (BIS, 2011)²⁹ remains a key reference point for adult education providers in England. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is currently developing a new Skills Vision document. It is crucial that this new policy document recognises the positive impact of adult education (in all its forms), especially provision that takes place in community based settings. There is a potential risk of a narrow (employment-focused) definition of outcomes that fails to recognise individuals and communities also benefit greatly from social, education and health-related outcomes.

3.2 Devolution

Devolution of political and financial powers is creating the emergence of strategic partnerships and new delivery arrangements at both a local, and sub-regional/regional level.³⁰ As of March/April

29. OBIS (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System*, London 1st December 2011. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/145452/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan.pdf

30. There are around 150 local authority providers, most of the GFE colleges have adult skills budgets and community learning funding – as will third sector providers and a few independent learning providers.

2016, devolution deals with nine areas had been agreed (p.3).³¹ Discussions have also taken place on further devolution to Greater London. For example, London has recently appointed a new 'Skills Commissioner'. Similar approaches are likely to emerge in other geographical areas with Commissioners influencing the use of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) from 2017-18, followed by full devolution of the budget from 2018-19 in those areas that have skills in their devolution deals and meet the required readiness conditions.

“ These plans aim to align adult education arrangements to local economic priorities. However in doing so, there is a danger that individual skills interests and priorities will be overlooked which could lead to greater disengagement from education. Devolved budgets also run the risk of distancing locally funded provision, aimed at preparing adults for employment and apprenticeships, from the nationally funded, sectorally divided apprenticeship offer. The local offer may not reflect national priorities. ”

(Association of Colleges)

A more optimistic viewpoint was highlighted:

“ New flexibilities within the AEB may help the direction of delivery to meet local needs. This needs to be balanced against the ability to respond to national/global trends.

Adult education provision needs to be comprehensively mapped locally and nationally.

Consistency in and improvement of financial commitment to more locally organised educational structures and policies as opposed to greater central Government control.

Funding streams that allow for 5-year local authority-led adult education strategic plans, accountable to the Community Learning Trust Board, which identify the needs and aspirations of an area and how these will be addressed. ”

(Call for Evidence)

A recent National Audit Office (NAO, 2016)³² report highlights the following key facts:

- 10 devolution deals agreed to date, 34 devolution proposals received from local areas in England by September 2015.
- £246.5m additional investment funding per year, as part of devolution deals (£7.4 billion over 30 years)
- 16.1 million people living in areas subject to devolution deals, 9 new mayors of combined authorities to be elected in 2017.
- 155 staff in the Cities and Local Growth Unit
- 7 HM Treasury staff in their central team supporting devolution deals, supported by its departmental spending teams and other specialists 25 per cent real-terms reduction in local authorities' income between 2010-11 and 2015-16, taking account of both central government funding and council tax, as estimated in November 2014
- 8 per cent real-terms reduction in local authorities' income from 2015-16 to 2019-20, taking account of both central government funding and council tax, based on current estimates. (p.4)

31. House of Commons Library (2016) *Devolution to Local Government in England*, London, 5th April 2016. Available from: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07029>

32. National Audit Office (2016) *English Devolution Deals*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Department for Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury. Available from: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/English-devolution-deals.pdf>

Local and newly Combined Authorities will be accountable for the *allocation of funds* with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in setting the agenda and identifying priorities within local communities. It is therefore critical that the contribution of adult education including its contribution to improving health and well-being (which are pre-requisites for progression into and within employment) must not be lost or forgotten within current and any new devolution arrangements.

3.3. Area Reviews

Area Reviews are well underway across England. These aim to ensure colleges, local councils, employers and other training providers determine the Further Education model for young people and adults that works best for their area (BIS, 2016)³³ – working towards fewer, larger colleges. All areas are required to undertake a full review of further education and skills provision, and to have agreed arrangements with the Government for managing financial risk. There is a clear expectation from the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills:

“ Ultimately we would expect funding agencies, local areas with devolution powers and Local Enterprise Partnerships only to fund institutions that are taking action to ensure they can provide a good quality offer to learners and employers, which is financially sustainable for the long term. ”
(Nick Boles MP, Minister of State for Skills)

Whilst some Area Reviews include adult education providers, such as SDIs and local authority providers, it is widely considered prudent for these providers to be pro-active in this regard - new local models for adult education and skills will emerge beyond 2017-2018. Some respondents to the Call for Evidence reported that:

- Localism – the drive to get providers to work more collaboratively to use their funding in a more aligned way to meet local needs is gathering momentum.

Some brief examples of what is currently working well in adult education include:

- Good quality provision demonstrated by high achievement rates and positive Ofsted outcomes nationally for local authority providers and many further education (FE) colleges and Specialist Designated Institute (SDI) providers;
- Inter-generational learning is starting to grow, involving parents and grandparents learning alongside children;
- Partnership work with trade unions where workplace and community learning centres have been able to reach learners who face major barriers in accessing adult education and training;
- Community provision for adult education, such as University of the Third Age (U3A), which is filling gaps in other provision, local authorities, Further Education (FE) colleges, universities and Specialist Designated Institute (SDI) providers are also making significant contributions to outreach and community activities.

In the absence of adult education providers being involved systematically in all the reviews throughout England, there is real danger that provision for adult community learning could be easily overlooked – simply left to chance.

33. H M Government (2016) *Reviewing post-16 education and training institutions: Updated guidance on area reviews*, London, March 2016. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/520838/BIS-16-118-reviewing-post-16-education-and-training-institutions-updated-guidance-on-area-reviews.pdf

“ Constant changes to funding also contribute to the unsettled nature that can prevent some learners from engaging with adult learning. The outcomes of Area Reviews and Devolution are eagerly anticipated; however these could also have wide reaching implications for the sector which could be both opportunities and threats to adult learning. ”

(Call for Evidence)

The voices of adult learners need to be heard so that planned provision is relevant and linked to their individual needs.

“ We work in local communities with young mothers and new arrivals to the area to make sure they feel part of our local community. ESOL provision is in high demand. ”

(Town Hall participant)

“ In some Scandinavian countries greater attention is given to involving adults in service design and delivery – why do we not do more of this? ”

(Town Hall participant)

3.4. What’s working well?

Feedback from learners (via survey responses and fieldwork visits) found that their adult education courses gave them opportunities for improving mental health and well-being, intercultural and community relations, family and parenting, physical health and new attitudes and behaviours derived from both informal and formal learning.

“ I had a motorbike crash and lost hope – coming here has changed my life. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I couldn't write when I left school. I had no certificates. At last I'm waking up my brain and this should help me get a better job ”

(Adult Learner)

Some respondents indicated that many things are working well in the sector for adult learners. For example, the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA) indicated:

“ The contribution of adult learning to improving health and well-being (which are prerequisites for progression into and within employment) is very significant and needs to be recognised in future devolution arrangements. Partnerships are strong, particularly to support unemployed adults with low skills and low/no qualifications into work. Strong partnerships with Public Health are essential for improved health and well-being for adults and their families. Achievement rates, wider outcomes and learner satisfaction rates are all high in Adult Learning and the Pounds Plus model works well in Community Learning to demonstrate added value. ”

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) Unionlearn pointed out:

“ The TUC welcomes the existing funding provision to level 2 literacy and numeracy and vocational level 2 progression and qualification for unemployed learners but the TUC is very concerned that many learners are left out because there is no funding for workplace ESOL or enough employer appetite to support their staff’s learning. ”

Trade unions have been successful in engaging disadvantaged learners by building networks union learning reps (ULRs) to provide peer-learning support. The peer support and establishment of workplace learning centres and partnership work with employers have been instrumental in motivating adult learners to take up learning opportunities.

HOLEX³⁴ reported the sector is working well, for example:

“ Providers and services leaders know what is needed in their community and how to meet it. As evidence by Ofsted and recent BIS studies into cost, the Adult Community Learner provider base is good and cost effective and, although there has been a reduction in national funding which has resulted in reduced overall adult participation, the services remain committed to their adult learners and still continue to educate and train over 700,000 students annually. ”

The NCFE³⁵ indicated:

“ The recent expansion in Advanced Learner Loans policy, and plans around maintenance loans for learners undertaking Technical and Professional Education are positive steps in encouraging more adult learners to undertake courses to increase their skills or earning potential!”

The Workers’ Education Association (WEA) reported it welcomes:

“ The introduction of the Adult Education Budget and the continuation of support for community and non-accredited learning, but they noted that the current SFA funding formula is complex and doesn’t always support the delivery of English and maths to harder to reach groups. ”

Employers such as the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) reported:

“ The Government’s commitment to maintain the Further Education budget in cash terms for the next 4 years gives certainty to training providers. This certainty should help to ensure that the increased focus on apprenticeships does not detract from other adult education provision, meaning apprenticeships are part of a diverse skills mix. ”

Overall, it was reported that open access programmes of short courses, accredited and non-accredited, are providing excellent opportunities for adult learners. Preparatory and foundation level programmes, including blended learning and online provision, to develop skills and capabilities for progression to degree level study are highly effective in supporting adult returners.

34. HOLEX represents a network of 120+ adult and community learning providers and is the sector membership body for Local Authority Community Learning (ACL) services, Specialist Designated Institutions (SDI) and independent third sector providers.

35. NCFE is a national Awarding organisation. For further details visit: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/>

3.5. What's not working well?

Many respondents highlighted the need for stability and joined-up approaches:

“ Constant change and instability in adult education provision is a hindrance in engaging disadvantaged learners. It is difficult to maintain partnerships when funding and policy goalposts keep changing. Long-term government skills strategies and emphasis on engaging stakeholders, trade unions and provides as well as employers, are likely to reap benefits in providing learning opportunities to disadvantaged learners. ”

(Trade Union Congress)

“ It is made difficult for providers to operate when there is no national strategy and/or policy framework for adult education, the infrastructure keeps changing and resources are limited. There is a national adult education policy vacuum, which needs to be filled. It is essential that the Government takes the lead and determines a strategy for adult learning, employability and well-being that brings together the different departmental interests. To ensure effective implementation, the strategy needs to be underpinned by policy frameworks for key areas such as ESOL, basic skills and digital inclusion, clearly stating who is entitled and who pays. There also needs to be national recognition for adult learning, promoted through a new adult career and guidance service that builds on present initiatives. ”

(HOLEX)

Shrinking resources and uncertainty at both a national and regional/local level were identified as a real concern:

“ Lack of funding stability over past 5 years has not been helpful in ensuring continuity of service and a positive image for the sector. The Autumn Spending Review in November 2015 provided a welcomed opportunity to stabilise, but failed to take account of rising employer costs (including apprenticeship levy). ”

(West Midlands Combined Authority)

“ The Adult Community Learning (ACL) infrastructure is generally under resourced – strapped Local Authorities, no access to capital funding in past, no financial reserves to draw on, salaries low. ”

(Town Hall participant)

“ The implications of Brexit have yet to be fully understood – many community organisations benefit from European Social Funds – will replacement funds be available if and when needed for adult education community programmes? ”

(Telephone interview)

Evidence shows funding for adult education has slipped down the policy agenda of successive governments and therefore has not been seen as a high priority.

Now, after almost ten years of consistent cash cuts the adult education budget is fixed, in cash terms, for the next four years at £1.5 billion.³⁶

3.6. Trends

Financial support is increasingly moving towards loan funding for adult education at level 3 and above. From 2016-17, the Skills Funding Agency will merge with the two strands of funding: (i) adult skills funding, which broadly supports accredited provision for adults; and (ii) community learning funding, which broadly supports non-accredited provision for adults and families into a single 'Adult Education Budget'.³⁷ Funding in 2016-17 for apprenticeships will be separate from the Adult Education Budget. The new single budget includes regulated and the more flexible non-regulated provision so that learners can, if required, get a foothold into learning before progressing to the next stage at a higher level which then must be accredited. Traineeships are also within this budget. The arrangements for provision aimed at the most disadvantaged who are more likely to benefit the most, have yet to be agreed at a local and regional level.

Across England, there are some worrying trends such as:

- Analysis of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) of 2013-14 indicates that, compared to the 2012/2013 academic year, there has been a drop by 31 per cent in the volume of learners aged 24+ on courses eligible for 24+ Advanced Learning Loans funding (BIS, 2016)³⁸;
- A high number of adults with low English and maths skills (OECD, 2016)³⁹;
- An increasing demand for provision in ESOL with long, often unmanageably large waiting lists (AoC, 2015)⁴⁰.

“ In England, an individual over the age of 25 and in possession of a level two qualification is not eligible for public assistance to update their skills or change occupation, even if they are experiencing working poverty. Their only option is to take out a learning loan, but the offer has not proved popular. The high course costs—even where concessions apply - is a big deterrent to attracting disadvantaged students. ”

(Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

“ Many of the most disadvantaged people need better access to adult learning. Participation rates in adult learning have been decreasing over the years, and participation from disadvantaged groups and those with no qualifications is lower than for other groups. ”

(Workers' Education Association)

In higher education, although improvements to widening participation and fair access continue, absolute disparities in higher education participation between advantaged and disadvantaged areas remain large. These differences remain even when prior attainment and ethnic background are taken into account, suggesting that there might be other barriers to higher education progression, beyond GCSE attainment and ethnic profile (Hefce, 2015)⁴¹. Professor Les Ebdon CBE, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education responded to the Call for Evidence by highlighting:

37. Skills Funding Agency (2016) *Adult education budget funding and performance management rules Version 3 Document reference: E For the 2016 to 2017 funding year (1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017)*. Coventry. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534080/Adult_education_budget_funding_and_performance_management_rules_2016_to_2017_V3.pdf

38. BIS (2016) *Evaluation of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans: An Assessment of the First Year*, May 2016, London, p.16. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522875/BIS-16-22-evaluation-of-24_-advanced-learning-loans-an-assessment-of-the-first-year.pdf

39. OECD (2016) *Building Skills for All: A Review of England – Policy Insight from the Survey of Adult Skills*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Economic Development. Note: The OECD concluded that low attainment in basic skills was “profoundly implicated in challenges of equity and social exclusion”.

40. AoC (2015) *The experience of colleges using new ESOL QCF Skills for Life Qualifications*, London, p.14. Available from: <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/The%20experience%20of%20colleges%20using%20new%20ESOL%20QCF%20Skills%20for%20life%20qualifications.pdf>

41. Higher Education Funding Council (2015) *Higher Education in England 2015: Key Facts*, London, July 2015.2015/15. p.3. Available from: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Analysis/HE,in,England/HE_in_England_2015.pdf

“There has been a deeply concerning reduction in part-time and mature student numbers. There were just over half the number (52 per cent) of mature entrants in 2014-15 compared with 2009-10 levels.

Mature learners are twice as likely to drop out in their first year of study, compared with young entrants. It is therefore vital for universities and colleges to consider what more they can do to attract and support mature learners.

They also experience challenges accessing relevant information, advice and guidance (IAG) about entering higher education. Policy developments that can help to secure the future of adult learning include: revising the fee and support regulations to encourage flexible modular provision, and encouraging credit accumulation and transfer between recognised awarding institutions.”

Evidence also shows a decline of much of the broader programmes of adult education, notably local authority and University extra-mural departments, for example, during this research we learned the University of Leicester had announced that they were undertaking a consultation with the intention of closing the long-standing Vaughan Centre for Lifelong Learning.⁴²

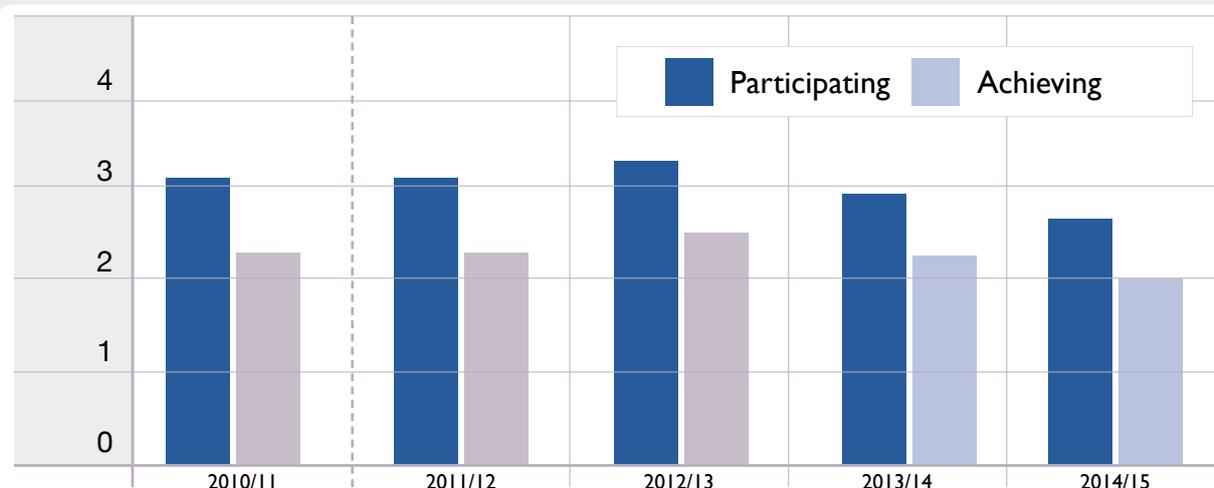
Dr Tony Ellis, Chair of the UALL England⁴³ (Strategy Group) and Director, Lifelong Learning Centre, University of Leeds in his response indicated:

“There is significant provision of adult learning in higher education, including work that is focussed on widening participation. Numbers of part-time entrants to HE have fallen sharply in recent years and continue to drop. Full-time mature entrants have fallen less steeply and began to increase from 2013/14.”

(UALL and LLC, University of Leeds)

Recent trends below indicate signs of downward adult learner participation in Government-funded Further Education and achievement rates, including English and maths.

Figure 3.1 Adult (19+) Learner Participation in Government-funded Further Education by Level 2



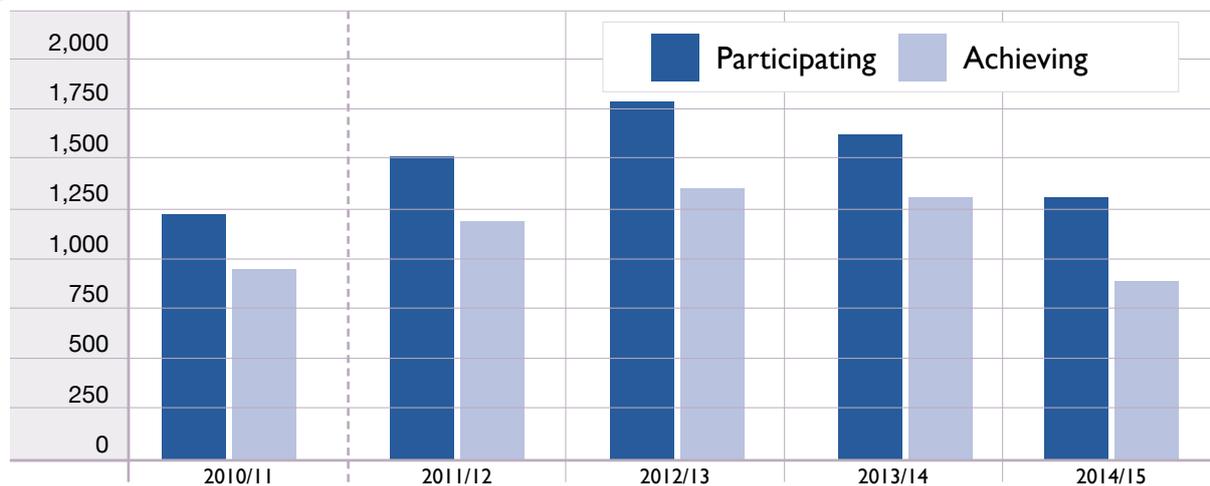
Source: Skills Funding Agency & Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2016) Statistical First Release, SFA/SFR34, June 2016

42. For more details visit: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/unions/ucu/news/round-up-of-opposition-to-the-proposed-closure-of-vaughan-centre>

43. The Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) is a professional association for the lifelong learning community within higher education.

Figure 3.1 shows that the total number of adult learners participating in government-funded further education in 2014/15 was 2,613,700, a decrease of 10.8 per cent on 2013/14. The total number of adult learners achieving a government-funded further education qualification was 1,983,200 in 2014/15, a decrease of 12.4 per cent on 2013/14.

Figure 3.2 Adult Learner (19+) Participation and Achievement in Education and Training

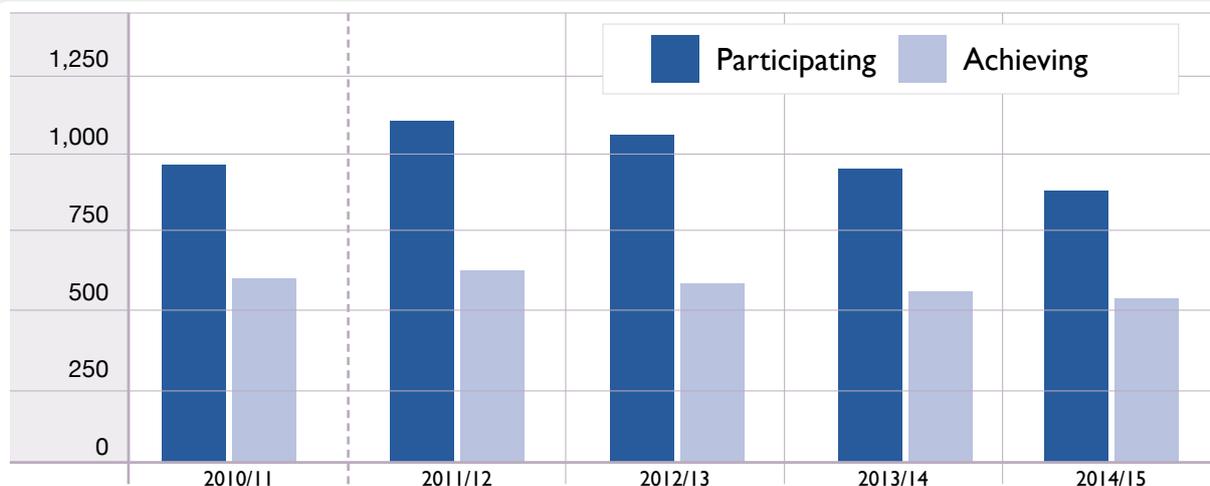


Source: Skills Funding Agency & Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2016) Statistical First Release, SFA/SFR34, June 2016.

Figure 3.2 shows that the number of adult learners participating in government-funded Education and Training in 2014/15 was 1,355,000, a decrease of 15.5 per cent on 2013/14. The total number of adult learners achieving a government-funded further education qualification was 1,114,600 in 2014/15, a decrease of 16.6 per cent on 2013/14

The number of learners participating in an English course fell by 5.5 per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15 to 668,600; the number of learners participating in a maths course fell by 6.6 per cent to 623,900 and numbers participating in an ESOL course fell by 5.8 per cent to 131,100.

Figure 3.3 Adult Learner (19+) Participation and Achievement on English and Maths Courses



Source: Skills Funding Agency & Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2016) Statistical First Release, SFA/SFR34, June 2016.

Figure 3.3 shows that adult learner participation on English and maths courses rose between 2010/11 and 2011/12, but has since fallen from 1,083,000 in 2011/12 to 905,600 in 2014/15.

The number of learners participating on an English course fell by 5.5 per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15 to 668,600; the number of learners participating on a maths course fell by 6.6 per cent to 623,900 and numbers participating on an ESOL course fell by 5.8 per cent to 131,100.

“ Valuable vocational courses such as Health and Social Care at level 2 have been withdrawn e.g. by Leeds City College in the adult education centres due to limited funding. This makes it more difficult for adults to gain the necessary qualifications that are in demand in the local economy. Funding is needed for valuable vocational courses for adults who are motivated to learn and progress. ”

(Adult Education Provider)

3.7. Economic and social costs

There are economic and social costs to not providing basic skills and significant gains in providing them. Field (2015)⁴⁴ highlights:

“ We have, in recent years, seen a remarkable expansion in serious research attention to lifelong learning and its benefits. Economic factors such as income and employment play an important part in lifelong learning. They can provide people with reasons for joining learning programmes, as well as featuring in policy decisions on financing provision. The direct economic effects of lifelong learning potentially include impacts on earnings, on employability, and on the wider economy. And since higher incomes or steady employment tend to have further effects on health, well-being and sociability, it also follows that the economic effects of learning have indirect outcomes. ”

Some selected examples include:

- A Canadian study showed that among adult workers who participated in education, there were clear wage effects for those who received a certificate, but minimal returns for those who did not (Zhang and Palameta 2006).⁴⁵
- A British study showed that women who were inactive in the labour market and then obtained qualifications as adults were much more likely to find paid employment (Jenkins 2006).⁴⁶
- Another study showed a marked impact of education on moving out of non-employment into employment for women and men, along with a smaller impact on the tendency to remain within the workforce for women (Jenkins, Vignoles, Wolf and Galindo-Rueda, 2003).⁴⁷

44. Field, J. (2012) Is lifelong learning making a difference? Research-based evidence on the impact of adult learning, In Aspin, D., Chapman, J., Evans, K., and Bagnall, R. (eds.) *Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012.

45. Zhang, X. and Palameta, B. (2006) *Participation in Adult Schooling and its Earnings Impact in Canada*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada

46. Jenkins, A. (2006) Women, lifelong learning and transitions into employment, *Work, Employment & Society*, 20, 2, pp.309-28

47. Jenkins, A., Vignoles, A., Wolf, A. and Galindo-Rueda, F. (2003) The Determinants and Labour Market Effects of Lifelong Learning, *Applied Economics*, 35, pp. 1711–21.

- A study in 2010 examined the combined effects of learning on earnings and employability. The authors argue that previous studies have tended to examine each in isolation. Their work, based on longitudinal labour force data, shows evidence of an employability effect; people who learn are more likely to be in work, especially if they have been out of the labour market for some time. When taken together with wage effects, the employability benefits help produce quite significant increases in overall earnings (Dorsett, Liu and Weale 2010).⁴⁸

It is important to bear in mind that any attempt to measure impact is inevitably reductive. Any educational activity such as adult education leads to a range of impacts, many of which are difficult to predict or measure. However, from an adult learner perspective:

“ Adult learning has a direct impact on cost savings [...] especially social services and those funding mental and physical health. I would have been on anti-depressants if I didn't come here for the writing group. It has given me a sense of belonging and purpose. ”

(Adult Learner)

There is very little research on the monetary value of adult education and almost certainly nothing on the value of the impact of adult education on different domains in life. A recent BIS report (2016)⁴⁹ notes available evidence on employment and earnings returns to Community Learning is sparse. Some European studies⁵⁰ highlight both the economic and social returns on investment. A few examples of added-value savings identified from the literature review include:

- Adults participating in a part-time course leads to: improvements in health, which has a value of £148 to the individual; a greater likelihood of finding a job and/or staying in a job, which has a value of £231 to the individual; better social relationships, which has a value of £658 to the individual; and a greater likelihood that people volunteer on a regular basis, which has a value of £130 to the individual. (Fujiwara, 2012)⁵¹
- Using a well-being valuation method, researchers' estimate that the value of undertaking a part-time course has a positive effect on people's life satisfaction which is equivalent to £1,584 per year. The corresponding value of one part-time course is £754.37.⁵²
- In the 2011 census, more than a third (37.6 per cent) of those who were economically inactive with no qualifications were long-term sick or disabled. While it's hard to pin down the nature of the link, US research shows people with better levels of education have lower levels of chronic health conditions.⁵³

48. Dorsett, R., Liu, S., and Weale, M. (2010) Economic benefits of lifelong learning. London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

49. BIS (2016) *Mapping investment in adult skills – which individuals, in what learning and with what returns?* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523037/bis-16-47-mapping-skills-investment.pdf

50. European Association for The Education of Adults (2015) *Adult Education in Europe: A Civil Society View*. Brussels. Available from: http://www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/adult-education-policy-in-europe-country-reports/country-reports_2015.pdf

51. Fujiwara (2012) draws on the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). On average people who undertake part-time learning take two courses per year and therefore the researchers divide the annual values by two to get a per-course unit of value. Available from: <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/content/valuing-impact-adult-learning>

52. Dolan et al (2012) *Valuing Adult Learning: Comparing Wellbeing Valuation and Contingent Valuation*, London. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34598/12-1127-valuing-adult-learning-comparing-wellbeing-to-contingent.pdf

53. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) *Health, United States, 2011*, USA. Available from: http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/p0516_higher_education.html

- Family learning and supporting parents with their children’s education increases the overall level of children’s development by as much as “15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups [...] It embeds changes in attitudes, behaviour, understanding and skills in the family. Evidence from the USA shows that for every \$1 spent on family learning there is a \$12 return.”⁵⁴

Most studies of the economic effects of adult learning are broadly in line with what human capital theories might lead us to expect. That is, those who invest in new skills tend to reap a return in higher wages.

“ Skills are the number one business priority.They’re crucial for raising our productivity and staying globally competitive.”

(Caroline Fairbairn, Director General, Confederation of British Industry)

“ Having a clear focus on apprenticeships is absolutely necessary for economic wellbeing to help boost business and improve opportunities for young people and adults, but we also need to make sure the wider aspects of adult education are not overlooked – we need both.”

(Scott Knowles, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce)

Some respondents expressed their concerns:

“ With the changes in funding providers are increasingly concentrating on apprenticeships and this is having a detrimental impact on adults that need to access vital courses and qualifications (e.g. English and maths qualifications). ”

(Town Hall participant)

Findings from the research Call for Evidence, Town Hall meetings and interviews with senior leaders, indicate there is a stated danger that national policy for adult education could disappear by 2020. The negative consequences of this for individuals’ well-being and active citizenship are apparent. Also, after the vote to leave the European Union (EU), there is now even greater expectations for British citizens to fill skills gaps, skills shortages and job vacancies in the labour market. Overall, more will need to be done across England to upskill, reskill and support adult learners in their life and work experiences over time.

3.8. Unique characteristics of adult education

“ Only the providers who invest time and resources in reaching out to their communities and building trusted partnerships can be truly effective in providing a first step to re-engagement in learning. Adult learning is critical to helping many people turn their lives around.”

(Dr Sue Pember OBE, Director of Policy, HOLEX)⁵⁵

The unique characteristic of many adult education providers (though not all) is that they prioritise taking adult education out to the community and in doing so, are particularly successful at engaging those who benefit from this the most. They do this because they:

54. TBaroness Howarth of Breckland, OBE (2013) *Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales* – see also: J. J. Heckman et al. (2010) ‘The rate of return to the High Scope Perry Preschool Program’, *Journal of Public Economics*, Elsevier.

55. The HOLEX network of Community Learning and Skills providers draws its membership from local authority services, specialist designated institutions and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisation

- use sub-contractors with local / specialist expertise e.g. voluntary service organisations working on specific housing estates or with specific disadvantaged groups;
- use local venues for learning (libraries, community centres, children’s centres, hostels);
- have detailed demographic information regarding local wards and local learning needs;
- have good links with local elected members, including Health and Wellbeing Board members;
- use ‘Pound Plus’ approaches to add value to the public purse;
- have close links with key local services, e.g. Job Centre Plus, mental/physical health services, social housing, Troubled Families, and/or community development teams.

“ I live mostly in a “white” village and I’m beginning to make friends with learners from other cultures that I would not normally meet. At first I was worried about talking to Bangladeshi students, in case I said anything to upset them. ”

(Adult Learner)

The literature review findings gave strong insight to specific areas of adult education and how these make a positive impact. These headlines below may be valuable for local Skills Commissioners to utilise as part of their strategic dialogue on opportunities and gaps in local provision. Key components of adult education and its positive impact include:

Active citizenship, democracy and participation: People who participate in adult education have more trust in the political system, participate more in society, by voting, by volunteering or taking active roles in communities.

Life skills for individuals: Adult learners feel healthier, lead healthier lifestyles, build new social networks and experience improved well-being.

Social cohesion, equity and equality: Adult education provides many opportunities to equalise societies on a larger scale and to create fairer societies as well as more economic growth.

Employment and digitalization: Workplace learning is one of the key drivers for adults’ participation in lifelong learning. At the cusp of enormous digital changes, adult education can help in closing the digital gap.

Migration and demographic change: Civic education and intercultural learning can create integration-friendly cultures. Language and basic skills training will enable migrants to become active citizens in their new home countries. Learning seniors are more active, volunteer more, work longer and are healthier.

Sustainability: From environmentally friendly consumption and transport to energy efficiency, citizens need a lot of information and innovative spaces to develop new lifestyles, new projects, and new approaches. Adult education can help provide the information, the debate spaces and the creativity

Source: Adapted extract taken from the European Association for the Education of Adults (Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st century), Brussels, December 2015.

3.9. Preparing learners for a successful life in Britain

Ofsted inspection handbook for further education and skills requires that inspectors examine how well providers prepare learners for a successful life in modern Britain and promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different backgrounds, faiths and beliefs. Inspectors found that staff at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council received regular and well-targeted training to widen their understanding of new topics, such as the promotion of British values in the curriculum.⁵⁶

A new 'Citizen Skills Entitlement' for adults, proposed by the Learning and Work Institute, merits further consideration by policymakers and practitioners.⁵⁷ Building on this, the idea of an education savings account for adults recently mooted by a Specialist Designated Institute (SDI) for adults to draw upon through the course of their lives, as and when necessary, is also worthy of further exploration. For example:

“ An Education Savings Account (ESA) would enable individuals to save for their future education and skills needs to meet the changing requirements of the labour market. This could also encourage and attract employer contributions, particularly if government were to allow tax relief on employer contributions. In a practical way this would create longer-term and more stable funding streams to support vital investment to improve productivity and economic growth. ”

(Ruth Spellman, CEO & General Secretary, Workers' Educational Association)

Life design models such as those found in Australia, Canada and New Zealand can also provide stimuli material for further discussion. For example:

- The Australian Blueprint for Career Development is a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating career development programmes for adults (and young people) Visit: <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Australian-Blueprint-for-Career-Development.pdf>
- The Blueprint is Canada's national learning outcome framework of the competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) citizens of all ages need to improve lifelong to prosper in career and life in the 21st century. It has its origins in the U.S. National Career Development Guidelines. Visit: <http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/blueprint.html>
- Healthy Families New Zealand aims to improve people's health where they live, learn, work and play in order to prevent chronic disease. Visit: <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/healthy-families-nz>

Most importantly, profiling the current life design work delivered by SDIs will demonstrate to new local Commissioners and local strategic partnerships. There is also an opportunity to review progress being made with Individualised Learner Records (ILRs) to assess the take up rates at a regional or sub-regional level.

These ideas should act as a trigger for meaningful policy dialogue about the role of lifelong learning - for example, there is a new Skills Agenda for Europe and a move towards a recently proposed. Whichever model is taken forward, this requires an agency with integrity and credibility to ensure the right checks and balances are put in place, for those who need this most. (Skills Guarantee (June 2016)).⁵⁸

56. Available from: <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/53722>

57. Learning and Work Institute (2016) *Citizen Skills Entitlement for Adults*, Leicester. Available from: <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum>

58. http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2016/0610-education-skills-factsheet_en.htm

With their new commissioning role, Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships' (LEPs) are likely to have planning strategies that focus on employability skills and employers' needs. However, these strategies would benefit greatly from closer scrutiny on the importance of engaging more adults (and families) in learning i.e. finding ways to connect with non-participants in education and training to help prepare them for work-readiness and/or active citizenship.

Whilst adults (particularly older learners over 65 years) may not be an immediate priority for the LEPs, it is clear that local (and national) partnerships that co-invest in adult education are likely to see significant returns on investment and productivity over time. Recent work undertaken by Bimrose et al. (2015)⁵⁹ on women's career development throughout the lifespan: an international perspective provides strong insight to inter-sections of social disadvantage sometimes identified as a single social variable when in reality it is often multi-dimensional disadvantage that needs to be addressed. The works examine the career stories of older women (age 45 – 65) and the implications for policy, research and practice. From a geographical perspective, a lack of access to private transport and/or the difficulties posed by the cost of public transport in rural areas presents major challenges for low income adults. In many cases, a lack of confidence or exposure to networks or opportunities strongly militates against adult learner participation.



59. Bimrose, J., McMahon, M. and Watson, M. (2015) (eds.) *Women's career development throughout the lifespan: an international exploration*. London: Routledge.

4. Adult learner participation or non-participation

“I was lucky to have a friend who knew about this college. It should not be left to luck!”

(Adult Learner)

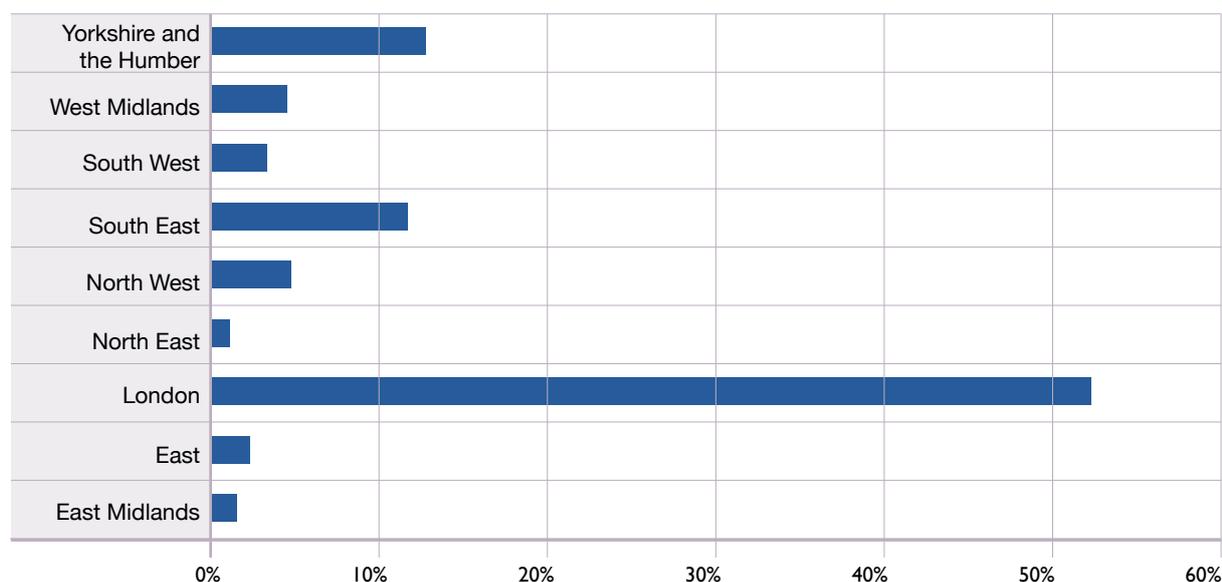
In this section, we capture the voices of adults participating in learning and those who are currently not engaged in formal adult education to illustrate their motivations, the barriers they face and ways in which they overcome barriers to learning.

Key findings

- The voices of adult learners need to be heard and used more to ensure that national and/or local provision is relevant and linked to individual needs.
- Age discrimination and other inequalities could be a significant barrier to extending the working age of the population and must be tackled.
- Lessons need to be learned on how to reduce barriers to engaging in adult learning and ways to overcome these.
- The benefits of adult learning need to be promoted better. What adult learning can offer and the benefits need to be promoted to potential learners and disseminated to policy makers better.

In total, 543 respondents completed the online survey. The main results are presented in a separate report – available from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/adult_education_too_important_to_be_left_to_chance_survey_report.pdf. The majority of survey respondents (65 per cent) were qualified at Level 6 or above, engaged regularly with learning (98 per cent) and, over the last three years, had attended between 1 and 5 adult education courses (73 per cent). A total of 169 adult learners currently or previously attending programmes were interviewed in focus groups on the premises of six SDI providers (Mary Ward, London; Morley College; Northern College, Barnsley; WEA, Scunthorpe; Fircroft College, Birmingham; WEA, Liverpool). The aim was to capture the voices of those who may not have completed the online survey due to access issues. Where possible, it was ensured that the learners interviewed represented the full range of backgrounds, development needs and learning goals at each of the providers, including learners from disadvantaged groups. They were drawn from both urban and rural areas and where possible, men and women were represented equally. The fieldwork also included interviews with 39 adults in London and Sheffield not currently in formal adult learning, but who were attending a private provider for a programme of support for people who are unemployed.

From the survey results, around half of all respondents lived in London (52 per cent), 16 per cent in Yorkshire and the Humber, 13 per cent in the South East and small numbers across other English regions. Two respondents lived in the devolved nations. Figure 4.1 below shows the geographic profile of respondents.

Table 4.1 Geographic profile of respondents (n=543)

Fieldwork participants were drawn from London, Yorkshire & Humber, West Midlands and the North West regions.

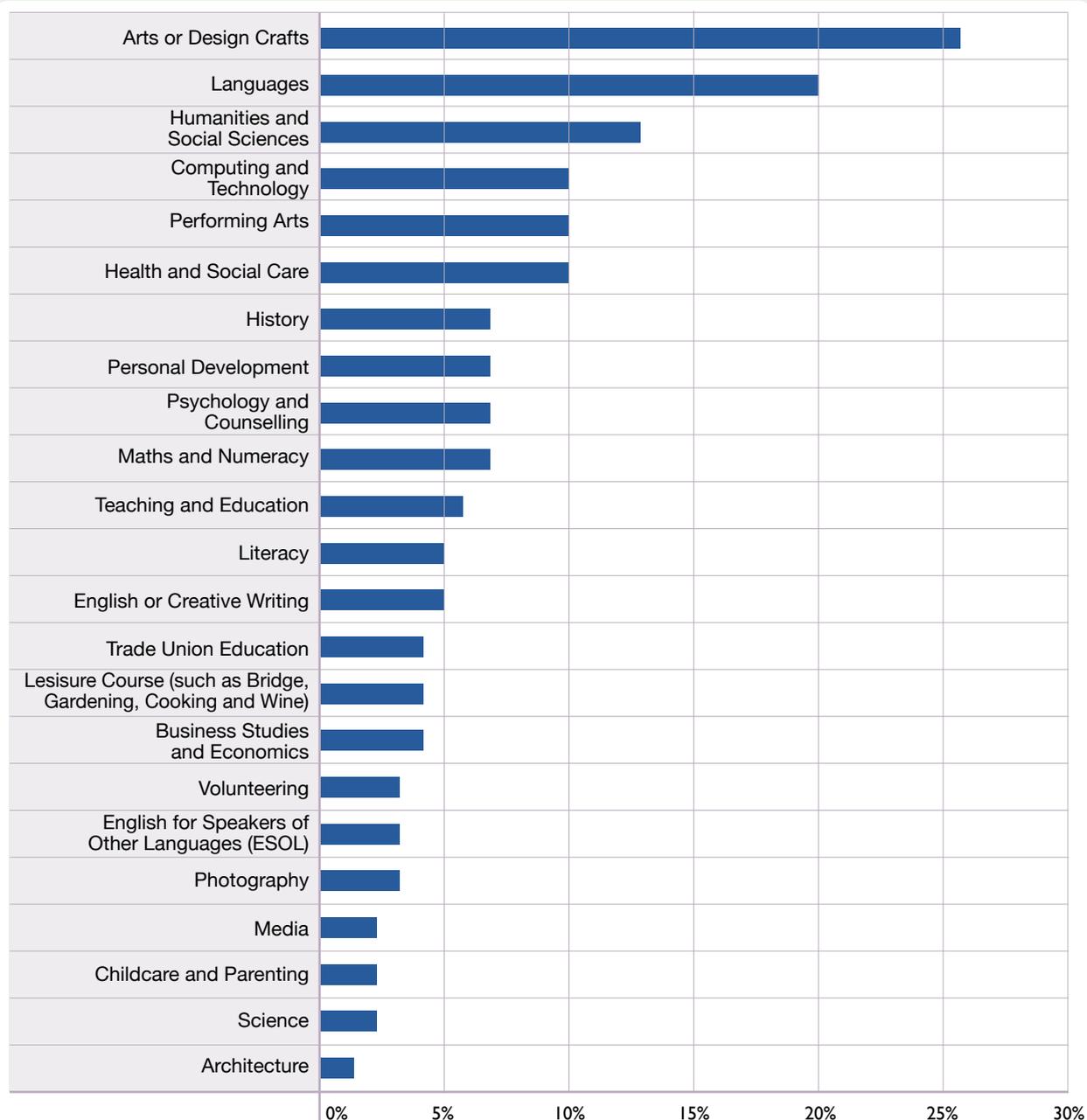
The current situation or status of the survey respondents shows many reporting different status. The majority of respondents are employed full-time (31 per cent) or retired/semi-retired (28 per cent). Table 4.1, below, shows the current situation or status of all respondents.

Figure 4.1 Current situation/status of all respondents (n=543)

Current situation/status	Number of responses	Percentage
Full time employed	168	31%
Retired/Semi-retired	150	28%
Volunteer/charity work	67	12%
Part time permanent	52	10%
Self-employed	47	9%
Unemployed and seeking work	39	7%
Unemployed not seeking work due to health	33	6%
Full or part time education or training	32	6%
Part time temporary	22	4%
Full time temporary	14	3%
Unemployed and not seeking work (due to personal circumstances, in a caring role, personal choice)	11	2%

Fieldwork participants were drawn from the full range employment status and backgrounds: from people not working, on benefits, to part-time/full-time employed, self-employed and retired.

Figure 4.2 Types of course(s) undertaken by survey respondents (n=484)



In addition to the types of courses mentioned above, fieldwork participants attending adult education were engaged on a wide range of courses such as: maths; English; sewing; quilting; using computers; computer maintenance; multi-media editing; experiencing classical music; gaining self-confidence; creative writing; line drawing; drawing and painting in different media; counselling; French; Hindi; Italian; archaeology; sculpturing; sociology; social science; peer mentoring; Access to HE in humanities, social sciences, midwifery or nursing.

Figure 4.3 Type of course undertaken by region (n=484)



The backgrounds of students engaged in adult learning from the fieldwork visits included:

- Older students were mostly attending to develop an interest and meet people, many also said that this was helping combat loneliness, depression, mental health – most were able to pay. Most of the older learners felt that the courses had given them a purpose and had kept them active.
- Most of the short residential courses and some of the day courses attracted people with a history of drug and alcohol dependency, mental health issues, domestic issues and disabilities.
- Courses in social sciences, peer mentoring, computing skills and other technology attracted people who had been made redundant, injured at work, developed long-term illnesses and wanted or needed a new direction.
- Access to HE courses, either generic courses in humanities or social sciences or more specific courses in midwifery or nursing, gave adults a chance for a new career in an adult learning environment.

- English and maths provision, mostly at a lower level, was attended either by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who were gaining greater independence or those who wanted to catch up after failing to succeed in these subjects at school.
- Learners attending ESOL provision were either referred by the jobcentres to develop their English language skills or to increase their employability. Some adults had joined (and often paid for themselves) in order to help their children be more independent in their everyday lives, and eventually gain employment.
- Those who were retired wanted the discipline of the subject such as creative writing, sewing, quilting, sculpturing or to keep an interest going, such as archaeology. They also typically wanted to gain confidence by meeting people and have something to focus on and make the most of the time they now had to do things they couldn't do when they were younger. More specific examples include, 'I joined because I wanted to':

“ Improve the quality of my life. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Open up new segments of my life. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Learn to use clay to express myself and improve my dexterity (has MS and could no longer hold a pen) ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Have a purpose when I was at a low ebb ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Get help with dexterity after a brain injury ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Get out of the house - a break from caring for my husband ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Re-engage after an injury ”

(Adult Learner)

- Those in work had specific reasons for joining:

“ got bullied at work and needed to get on track so I decided to improve my literacy and maths skills ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I'm working with vulnerable adults and joined the counselling at level 3 course because I needed more in-depth work ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I couldn't write when I left school. I had no certificates. At last I am waking up my brain and this should help me get a better job ”

(Adult Learner).

4.1. Motivation⁶⁰

The importance of developing resilience is already acknowledged in European policy, but the key is how to develop practical measures which will help individuals overcome setbacks, engage in continuous learning and, if necessary, adopt new identities, which in some cases almost amounts to individual reinvention (Field, 2010)⁶¹. Support for the development of certain coping strategies, including emotional capacities, to overcome structural and/or dispositional barriers (Bimrose et al., 2008⁶²; Cardoso and Moreira, 2009⁶³; Fuller and Unwin, 2006)⁶⁴ is important in this respect. Adult education supports individuals to consider their return to education, enhance their skills and employability, and utilise their skills effectively in the labour market. Researchers suggest there are at least six key factors influencing participation in adult learning:

- Social relationships: make friends and meet others;
- External expectations: complying with the wishes of someone else with authority;
- Social welfare: desire to serve others and/or community;
- Professional advancement: striving for job enhancement or professional advancement;
- Escape/stimulation: alleviate boredom, escape home or work routine;
- Cognitive interest: learning for the sake of learning itself.

There are many beneficiaries of such adult education, including individuals, their families and communities, and the organisations where they study and work, as well as society as a whole. As set out in ‘Changing Lives’ (WEA, 2015)⁶⁵ adult education impacts upon individuals’ educational; economic and employment; and/or social outcomes in many different ways. The benefits to individuals can be far reaching, impacting positively on their health and wellbeing, as well as improving their chances of sustained employment.

The focus groups with learners revealed that there was often a strong personal history behind their reasons for joining an adult education course. This was sometimes: a dramatic change in circumstances through, for example, illness, injury, redundancy or grief; a determination to escape from personal conflicts, be they an addiction or difficult circumstances at home; or a personal determination to achieve personal goals, including entrepreneurial activities and/or to continue to be active in their retirement. Some adults involved in the fieldwork stated:

“ I wanted to re-engage after my injury.”

(Adult Learner)

“ I was a stay-at-home Mum and wanted to do something for myself. I was getting depression. I started with literacy and I've done 6 short courses and now I'm doing peer mentoring. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I'm future proofing. Who knows what will happen to me. I want to be independent as long as possible – shopping and booking services online may not be just nice things to have [...]. ”

(Adult Learner)

60. It is known that quite a few people start adult learning courses, but then drop out. It is of course not possible to talk to these people, so the question to current learners is ‘what has kept you on your course, or enabled you to complete previous courses?’

61. Field, J. (2010). Preface. In: Ecclestone, K. et al. (eds). *Transitions and learning through the life- course*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. xviii-xxiv.

62. Bimrose, J. et al. (2008). *Adult career progression and advancement: a five-year study of the effectiveness of guidance*. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research

63. Cardoso, P. and Moreira, J.M. (2009). Self-efficacy beliefs and the relation between career planning and perception of barriers. *International journal of educational and vocational guidance*, Vol. 9, No 3, pp. 177-188.

64. Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2006). Expansive and restrictive learning environments. In: Evans, K. et al. (eds). *Improving workplace learning*. London: Routledge, pp. 27-48.

65. WEA (2015) *WEA Adult Education, Changing Lives: Impact Research Report*, 2015, London: Workers’ Educational Association. Available from: <http://www.wea.org.uk/download.aspx?id=3509>

“ This short course on digital technology will help me grow my small media business. It has been a life-line. The equipment seems excellent and the tutor has very good expertise and explains the techniques very well. ”

(Adult Learner)

The 39 people either on the work programme or referred to the provider by Jobcentre Plus to work on their Curriculum Vitae (CV) were familiar with colleges and training providers, but not Adult Community Learning providers. None had a written job or career plan. Nearly all were looking for low level work, mostly because that was all that they deemed available to them. Those over 50 were very concerned that they were unlikely to find work because of the attitudes of employers.

In the adult survey, when asked their reasons for taking part in an adult learning course, respondents provided a range of reasons, but an overwhelming proportion reported that it had been for their own personal development (75 per cent).

Table 4.2 Reasons for taking part in an adult education course (n=531)

Reasons for taking part in course	Number of Responses	Percentage
Own personal development	408	75%
Own enjoyment	163	30%
Improve my health and wellbeing	162	30%
Improve job prospects	150	28%
Meet new people	144	27%
Improve qualifications generally	138	25%
Active contribution to society	92	17%
Change in personal or family circumstances	78	14%
Meet people wouldn't normally mix with	76	14%
Study close to home	66	12%
Reduce loneliness and isolation	57	10%
Take part in community activities	56	10%
Assist in recovery	44	8%
Get onto further education course	42	8%
Support children's or grandchild's learning	40	7%
Get into higher education	38	7%
Equip from discrimination	17	3%
ESOL, Improve basic skills	16	3%
Get into apprenticeship	6	1%
Other	4	1%

4.2. Barriers

A significant proportion of respondents face barriers to starting and/or completing an adult education course. The survey findings highlighted this can be about finances and low confidence and/or self-esteem. Regional differences are evident; in the East of England lack of transport was a barrier; and a lack of housing in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber was a barrier.

It is clear that attending a course has a positive impact on improving: knowledge and skills for personal goals (84 per cent); motivations to keep learning (71 per cent); being able to make well informed decisions about next steps (58 per cent); and confidence in dealing with new situations (51 per cent). Around half of respondents thought that hearing from others who had already done the course would attract others to take up learning (51 per cent). More government financial investment (40 per cent) and more adult education opportunities were also suggested.

Survey respondents were also asked about the barriers that they might have experienced making it difficult to start and/or complete an adult education course. Fifty per cent of respondents reported no barriers – this is hardly surprising given the majority were already enrolled on an adult learning programme(s). Whilst others reported a wide range of barriers. Finance was the most significant barrier reported (27 per cent), with low confidence and/or self-esteem reported next (14 per cent). Table 4.4, below, lists further barriers. Respondents also cited barriers in addition to those listed. A significant barrier was the timing of courses; some with a disability were unable to travel early in the morning, for others the timing did not fit with working full-time or fit with personal circumstances with working full-time or fit with personal circumstances. Other barriers reported included: courses not running or closing after one term; tutors being unavailable for the course; and the lack of subject options.

Across all regions, financial problems were the most reported barrier to starting or completing an adult education course. Other barriers noted of significance by region, include:

- The East of England was the only region where lack of transport was cited as a barrier;
- Lack of housing was only reported as a barrier in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber;
- Cultural or linguistic barriers were only reported as a barrier in London, the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber; and
- Time pressures were only reported in the South West, the South East and London.

Table 4.3, below, shows reported barriers by region with colour coding to represent the intensity of reporting; red reports high proportions and green low proportions.

Table 4.3 Barriers that make it difficult to start and/or complete a course by region (n=543)

Barrier	East Midlands	East of England	London	North East	North East	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire & The Humber
No barriers	19%	8%	43%	34%	23%	46%	18%	10%	16%
Financial barriers	12%	21%	19%	8%	23%	14%	25%	11%	15%
Low confidence or self esteem	4%	4%	7%	15%	9%	6%	4%	16%	12%
Mental health issues	4%	8%	3%	15%		3%	7%	8%	11%
Personal health issues	15%	17%	5%	8%	3%	1%		5%	5%
Caring commitments	8%	4%	5%	8%	9%	3%	11%	5%	5%
Age	8%	8%	4%	8%		2%	0%	9%	7%
Put off education at school	4%	4%	1%		11%	5%	7%	13%	8%
Lack of study skills	8%		2%	8%	9%	3%	7%	9%	5%
Few opportunities to progress in work	4%	4%	4%		11%	1%	7%	6%	3%
Lack of transport	8%	17%	2%			3%	7%	1%	6%
Fitting around work	4%		2%			5%	4%	1%	2%
Discrimination	4%		2%			1%		4%	3%
Time pressure			1%			3%	4%		
Cultural or linguistic barriers			1%					1%	1%
Lack of housing			1%						1%
Other		4%	1%		3%	3%			1%

Nearly all the adults interviewed in the fieldwork who were not in learning and/or were unemployed had little awareness of adult and community learning. Many knew about vocational and employability courses run by colleges or private training providers and felt that these were low level courses that might not help them gain employment. Very few of them said that they had a written career or job plan and they were unaware of the role adult and community learning could have in increasing their chances of sustained employment. Disadvantaged adults are not a homogenous group. The examples from the learners above show that disadvantage can strike at any time, as well as be ingrained through life-long poverty, disability, depression, learning difficulties and/or isolation.

For example, it is clear that most providers of adult education have invested in reaching out to people who are disadvantaged one way or the other. Many of whom would not know about adult education and what it could do for people in their circumstances. Yet, adult education providers have developed the expertise, teaching skills and resources to deliver non-qualification provision and/or bite-sized units that successfully engage these adults in learning again, offering a stepping stone to success. Any policy or practical interventions need to reflect this and provide flexibility.

“ When I developed arthritis a couple of years ago, I knew I couldn't continue in construction. I felt on the scrap heap. I started a few adult learning courses to help me look for a new direction and found social sciences. I build my way up to level 3 and I am now at university, with a career ahead of me. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Many of the tutors have been adult learners on similar courses, so they know what you are going through. They emphasise/not sympathise. The supportive learning environment they create allows you to go beyond what you believed to be your boundaries. ”

(Adult Learner)

Finally, both survey and focus group respondents were asked their views on what would attract more adults to take up learning, particularly those who may not think adult learning is for them. Around half of the survey respondents thought that hearing from others who had already done the course would attract others (51 per cent). More government financial investment (40 per cent) and more adult education opportunities were also suggested.

4.3. Overcoming barriers

In the fieldwork, many of those who had stipulated that they had joined adult learning because of challenging personal experiences, said that they would like to put something back by being a volunteer, paid tutor or peer mentor. The vast majority of the fieldwork participants said that they had chosen their course because of the friendly and non-threatening learning environment. They often cited that this helped them overcome the real fear of returning to learning. Many of them had not achieved at school or had not been in a formal learning environment for many years. They therefore typically felt that they were not ready to go to the large FE college and preferred to be among other adults only. This included those on the Access to HE courses. The residential courses provided ‘a break from life at home’ and an opportunity to ‘have time for me’. The community-based venues also had a significant impact on enabling learners to attend easily, as these classes were conveniently situated in residential areas or on bus routes. Just over one third of the learners were recommended to attend a specific course or a provider by family or friends or someone in their community who had attended or were attending an adult learning course. This personal insight into what to expect often made it easier to make the first step into a classroom.

The quality of teaching and the progress that they were making were the most common reasons learners gave for remaining on their course and turning up for each session. They also all had clear learning goals which motivated them to attend. Those who had paid for the course said

that the financial commitment also helped. They all liked learning and felt that the teaching was important to help them stay on. They understood that some people dropped out because of personal reasons or the cost of attending or because they felt they were not making the progress they had hoped to.

“ I had a bad experience of education in the past but here teacher listens to me and didn't judge so I felt included and have therefore stayed. I am treated with respect. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I know that I'm on my way to a better life. I am therefore determined not to give up. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I like the idea of improving my maths and English skills. People are very friendly and approachable. Why would you not want to come? ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I have learning difficulties, but at the FE college, we were just in K Block - we couldn't learn with other people. Here, you feel normal. The feedback they give you is very helpful and encouraging but they also set you high standards - at school, they kept giving me tidying up and photocopying tasks to do to keep me quiet. No-one there expected me to achieve. Here everyone notices when I have made even small steps. ”

(Adult Learner)

The online survey explored how the learners found out about their courses, what encouraged them to join, any barriers they have had to accessing the provision and the impact or benefits of taking part. The findings showed that attending a course can have a positive impact on improving: knowledge and skills for personal goals (84 per cent); motivations to keep learning (71 per cent); being able to make well informed decisions about their next steps (58 per cent); and confidence in dealing with new situations (51 per cent).

“ Adult learning keeps you young and it keeps your brain active – especially when you're learning something new – stretching yourself. This is important for your well-being. Attending classes can also combat loneliness. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Fear of failure and the financial and personal commitment will make me see this course to the end. This Access to HE course is the last opportunity to change my life, so I'm not going to let it go. The support, personal coaching, peer support have all made a difference. The tutors put in the effort, so must you ”

(Adult Learner)

Respondents were also asked what had encouraged them to join their course. A significant proportion reported that the course subject had been a source of encouragement (80 per cent), whilst location and transport links were a further important factor (42 per cent) together with the reputation of the college, course or tutor (42 per cent). Table 4.4 provides an overview of the range of sources of encouragement reported by respondents.

Table 4.4 Sources of encouragement for adult learners (n=531)

Reasons encouraging individual to join course	Number of	Percentage
Subject	432	80%
Location or Transport Links	228	42%
Reputation of the college, course or tutor	228	42%
Affordable or financial support available	166	31%
Fitted around family or personal circumstances	166	31%
Personal recommendation or connection	105	19%
Guidance and support from an organisation	62	11%
Other	9	2%

About a fifth of respondents reported that as a result of their course they had become involved in voluntary activities and a further 10 per cent were planning to do some voluntary work as a result of their studies.

Nearly all the adults interviewed who were not in learning who were unemployed had little awareness of adult and community learning. Many knew about vocational and employability courses run by colleges or private training providers and felt that these were low level courses that might not help them gain employment. Very few of them said that they had a written career or job plan and they were unaware of the role adult and community learning could have in increasing their chances of sustained employment. Disadvantaged adults are not a homogenous group. The examples from the learners above show that disadvantage can strike at any time, as well as be ingrained through life-long poverty, disability, depression, learning difficulties and/or isolation.

For example, it is clear that most providers of adult education have invested in reaching out to people who are disadvantaged one way or the other. Many of whom would not know about adult education and what it could do for people in their circumstances. Yet, adult education providers have developed the expertise, teaching skills and resources to deliver non-qualification provision and/or bite-sized units that successfully engage these adults in learning again, offering a stepping stone to success. Any policy or practical interventions need to reflect this and provide flexibility.

Both survey and focus group respondents were asked their views on what would attract more adults to take up learning, particularly those who may not think adult learning is for them. Around half of the survey respondents thought that hearing from others who had already done the course would attract others (51 per cent). More government financial investment (40 per cent) and more adult education opportunities were also suggested.

The fieldwork participants also emphasised the importance of easy access to courses enhanced by central or community-based venues, flexible course timing and good physical access for those with restricted mobility. When asked their views of other measures needed to increase participation in adult learning, two strong messages emerged:

1. Policy makers needs to understand the difference adult learning can make so that they make it a priority for funding; and
2. The promotion of adult education needs to be improved.

Heartfelt messages from adult learners to policy makers

Many participants felt that many policy makers did not understand the true benefits of adult education. They were keen that the money for adult learning should be protected and that MPs and their advisers should understand the wider social benefits of attending a community-based class and money it can save health, social services and other departments. They felt that having a pay policy for adult learning was fair - so that those that can pay do and support those that can't. However, the service still needs to be subsidised so that more people can attend, especially those who have significant barriers to work or being active in their communities.

“ A day at this adult learning college should help anyone understand the difference it makes to individuals. People without English like me need to learn the language to get a job. Twice a week is not really enough. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Adult learning has direct impact on saving cost for other departments - especially social services those funding mental and physical health. I would have been on anti-depressants if I didn't come here for the writing group. It has given me a sense of purpose. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ This learning centre is saving the cost of social services. There are so many social issues that adult learning is dealing with that would otherwise cost the government a great deal. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ More politicians should understand that it is important to be able to retrain as an adult. Not everyone sticks to the same job - especially like me if you have had a break from employment to have children. I need help to be as employable as I was before. ”

(Adult Learner)

Getting the message out to more potential adult learners

The fieldwork participants, including those who were not currently in learning, all felt that adult learning was poorly marketed at government level. They felt it a lost opportunity for the many who do not realise that adult learning is truly for all adults.

“ I was advised by my GP to come.They need more information to attract more people to adult learning. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ It is notable how adult learning is not just for retired people. More younger people should know about it. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ More must be done to attract more people to adult learning. Many people do not have a clue how the system works.This could be reached through mother and toddler groups - or schools, libraries etc. ”

(Adult Learner)



5. Leading to successful outcomes

“ The quality of teaching is so important ”

(Adult Learner)

“ They found out I was dyslexic and the support has made all the difference. At last I know I am not stupid! ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Knowing that I'm on my way to a better life. I will not give up. ”

(Adult Learner)

This section explores what leads to successful outcomes and provides some brief illustrations of good and interesting policies and practices to feed into future developments.

Recent theories and practices have emphasised the importance of personal agency leading to successful outcomes. Savickas et al, (2009)⁶⁶ ask: “How many individuals design their own lives in the human society in which they live?” Systematic interventions indicate the need to take holistic views of individuals with emphasis on the cultural and contextual location of adult education. Richardson and Schaeffer (2013)⁶⁷ indicate it is necessary to have a course of action about learning and/or work that advantages individuals and has potential for satisfaction, success and meaningful careers.

Key findings

- Life design models and personalised accounts merit closer scrutiny
- Upskilling the adult education workforce is a prerequisite for economic growth and social mobility
- Increased promotion of the range, availability and benefits of adult learning is needed at a national, regional, sub-regional, local and adult learner level
- Better informed careers guidance provision on progression pathways is needed for all adults, including those in work

Respondents were asked a number of questions in the online survey on the outcomes of attending an adult learning course. First, respondents were asked about what skills they had improved as a result of their learning. A significant number reported that their subject knowledge had improved (68 per cent). Improvement in softer skills was also reported, as well as improving their learning and study skills. Table 5.1, below, presents the range of skills improved as a result of attending an adult learning course.

66. Savickas, M. et al. (2009) Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77: 239 -250

67. Richardson, M. S. and Schaeffer, C. (2013) Expanding the discourse: A dual model of working for women (and men's) careers, in Patton, W (ed) *Conceptualising Women's Working Lives: Moving the boundaries of Our Discourse*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Table 5.1 Skills improved as a result of attending an adult education course (n=531)

Skills	Number of Responses	Percentage	Skills	Number of Responses	Percentage
Subject knowledge	368	68%	Research	109	20%
Confidence	254	47%	Problem solving	108	20%
Creative	197	36%	Teamwork	96	18%
Self esteem	189	35%	Analytical	86	16%
Learning	182	34%	Computing or digital	84	15%
Communication	164	30%	Organisational	76	14%
Critical Thinking	145	27%	Reading	72	13%
Language	120	22%	Numeracy	55	10%
Study Skills	110	20%	Other skills	50	9%

The most significant outcome reported was an improvement in:

- Knowledge and skills for personal goals (84 per cent);
- Motivations to keep learning (71 per cent);
- Being able to make well informed decisions about next steps (58 per cent);
- Confidence in dealing with new situations (51 per cent).

Learners in the focus groups were asked about what motivated them to stay, for example:

“ The teachers are very good and patient. They are good at relating English and maths into your everyday life. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ The fact that the peer mentoring course is 2 days over 6 weeks gives you a chance to reflect on your learning. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ I didn't fit into a FE college, but I fit in here. It feels less stressful – more liked a 'little learning break' – but you know you're learning. ”

(Adult Learner)

As a result of attending adult learning courses, significant outcomes are reported by the survey respondents. For the majority, they had improved their subject knowledge and a range of soft skills, whilst others had become involved in voluntary activities. Respondents also, significantly, reported that attending a course had positively impacted on their knowledge and skills for personal goals, motivations to keep learning, ability to make well informed decisions about their next steps, and their confidence.

Participants in the survey and fieldwork reported evidence of adult education providers' responding directly to their needs in a wide range of community settings. For example:

- *Community and collective learning*: provision ranging from archaeology to volunteering with strong elements operating in disadvantaged constituencies.
- *Cultural awareness*: highlighted by some as enriching and essential during the fieldwork activities.
- *Co-construction of meaningful curriculum between tutors and adult learners*: specialist support for those able to pay and those most disadvantaged – various types of adult education providers, including the SDIs, do many of these well and to the benefits of many.
- *Co-development of training*: adult education tutors, parents, health advisers, employment specialists, employers/employees, mentors and administrators coming together within communities, though there is significant scope for more to be done in this regard.

In some cases, we found evidence of students dropping out of their course mainly for financial and/or family reasons. But reaching into local communities is something adult education providers are particularly good at. While the research has identified the full benefits of adult education to so many individuals, providers do not generally collect this information as a matter of course. Many learners may know privately that the course has helped them overcome significant barriers to learning, work and participating in their daily lives, but this may not be recorded or discussed with the tutor or provider. This means that the true value of what leads to successful outcomes for adult learners is generally unknown by the general public and key policy makers.

5.1. Professionalism and partnerships

“ Cross boundary working between institutions and professional bodies is essential, creating a single teaching profession from early years, through schools, FE, adult education and HE. Without this professional interchange adult education will never come out of the rock from which it is under and get the support it merits from the wider profession and the establishment. ”

(David Russell, CEO, The Education Training Foundation (ETF)).

Moving forward by bringing together the skills and assets of all partners to deliver a public service (both online or offline) for adult learners' consumption is now essential. New local, regional and national arrangements must rely heavily on a range of collaborative and partnership activities, with both a national (top-down) and regional/local (bottom-up) level. Success lies in having a clear mandate and set of priorities that capture the voices of adults, particularly those most in need of support. Front-runner devolution areas may choose to share frameworks

of this type with other geographical areas, including activities with professional bodies and membership organisations. Community-based adult education providers widely recognised for their professionalism should be included – and their bids taken seriously – given their unique contribution to community engagement and active citizenship. There should be real opportunities ahead to build on the expertise and capacity to deliver in local communities. Post-devolution, local Skills Commissioners will be required to make investment decisions - which is why their role is so central to the sustainability of adult education now and in the future.

Since the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (Schuller and Watson, 2009)⁶⁸ much has changed in the education and employment landscape; however, many of their initial observations remain highly relevant today. New evidence gathered as part of this research shows the era of an ageing population is truly upon us. Disadvantaged adults can be brought back to learning, and encouraged to develop, through their families, in differing community settings, including in the workplace. But this needs leadership and coherent policies along the lines of those found in countries such as: Australia, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and New Zealand. These countries have adult education policies and frameworks that provide examples of innovative policies and practices. For example, it is easy to locate an overview of the development and ‘state of art’ in adult learning and education in Australia.⁶⁹ The Parents Next Project helps parents to identify their education and employment goals, develop a pathway to achieve their goals and link them to activities and services in the local community. Canada’s progress report for the UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2012) sets out a coherent overview of key policies, practices and challenges.⁷¹ Croatia’s country report on Adult Education, prepared for the European Association for the Education of Adults, highlights this is an important component of the education system, which is confirmed in a number of strategic documents (p.5).⁷² Lifelong learning is an important principle of Norwegian education policy. Basic skills training and validation of prior learning play a significant part in its adult education policies.⁷³ The Swedish government supports adult education providers in organising guidance courses to facilitate the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)⁷⁴. New Zealand’s national careers service working closely with adult education providers to provide culturally relevant information, advice and guidance to indigenous groups.

Selected further examples of innovative policies and practices:

- One Stop Guidance Centers in Finland (Ohjaamo) – Ministries of Employment, Education, Social and Health working closely to provide seamless services to adult under 30 years old⁷⁵.
- IBOBB-Café in Austria – An information platform and access point for anyone who has questions concerning educational and vocational options, including support with social issues. This is a cross-sectoral co-operation platform.⁷⁶
- Regional Guidance Centres (Denmark) – A blended online and offline support service for young people and adults in transition, particularly those interested in higher education.⁷⁷

68. Available from: <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFLL-summary-english.pdf>

69. Available from: http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIIL/confintea/pdf/National_Reports/Asia%20-%20Pacific/Australia.pdf

70. Available from: <https://www.employment.gov.au/parentsnext>

71. Available from: <http://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/file/adult-learning-and-education-canada-progress-report-for-the-unesco-global-report-on-adult-learning-and-education-grale-and-the-end-of-the-united-nations-literacy-decade/>

72. Available from: <http://www.erisee.org/downloads/2013/2/b/Country-Report-on-Adult-Education-in-Croatia%202011%20ENG.pdf>

73. Available from: <http://www.vox.no/English/Adult-learning-in-Norway/>

74. ELGPN (2012) *Lifelong guidance policy development: A European Resource Kit*, Finland: University of Jyväskylä, p. 31.

75. Available from: http://www.euroguidance.nl/_images/user/evenementen/2016-06-13%20-14%206th%20LLG%20conference%20NL/Workshop2-Ari-pekka-One%20Stop%20Shop%20Ohjaamo.pdf

76. Available from: http://www.euroguidance.nl/_images/user/evenementen/2016-06-13%20-14%206th%20LLG%20conference%20NL/Workshop3-PeterHartel-IBOBB_Cafe_STVG.pdf

77. Available from: http://www.euroguidance.nl/_images/user/evenementen/2016-06-13%20-14%206th%20LLG%20conference%20NL/Workshop%204-Regional%20Guidance%20Center-TorbenFaarup-DK.pdf

- The Bridge Project – Guidance for Lower Skilled Adults (Germany, France & Sweden) – A multiple access strategy designed to reach lower skilled adults including mobile guidance and adult education in the workplace.⁷⁸
- The TLC Pack, Germany – An approach involving occupational specific, language resources to support migrants already working – or aspiring to work – in the care giving sector. It recognises the necessity to develop intercultural competences among migrant care givers and offers a number of activities to achieve this aim. The TLC Pack offers a practical response to an existing problem: while the number of migrant caregivers across Europe is growing, many of them lack the necessary language and intercultural competences.⁷⁹ We found many examples of engaging and life changing adult education in the regions of England, but these are largely hidden to the general public, policy-makers and Ministers with very uneven provision, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

5.2. Tracking progress and outcomes

The skills, training and dispositions of the practitioners who deliver adult education are critical to ensuring quality and extending the evidence-base for local, regional and national provision. Having up-to-date knowledge of and expertise in education and labour markets are becoming more essential. A recurring theme throughout the research is that the success of adult learner outcomes is strongly influenced by the initial training, continuing professional development, competencies and personal capacities of the professionals that deliver it. There is currently no national adult education workforce development framework to guide future planning and investments in this regard.

“ As the largest prime provider of the National Careers Service and a prime contractor for the Work Programme we are acutely aware how important it is for adults to continue to access good advice, education and training throughout their working lives. Understanding local labour markets and informing skills agendas is essential if adults are to maintain and improve their living standards. Adult education policy must feed into local skills agendas and link to existing policies and practices so that innovation and effective local partnership working is not lost in new and evolving policy development at a local and/or national level ”

(Nick Bell, Chief Executive, Prospects).

Adult education providers recognise diversity and inclusivity and are therefore particularly skilled at engaging with a variety of people and groups within local communities and involving them in making decisions about the relevance and quality of adult education policies and practices. Their goals are to improve the experience for individuals, contribute to social justice, develop effective and efficient services and strengthen accountability. Identifying ways to track and support adults as they progress in and out of differing modes of learning is a contemporary challenge that needs to be addressed. The extent to which Individualised Learner Records (ILRs) are proving effective requires closer scrutiny, particularly in relation to the take rates of 24+ student loans.

In many cases, the face-to-face channel remains a preferred option, especially if the presenting problem is complex, conditional or requires a confidential and empathic approach, particularly for vulnerable individuals. Online facilities with the option of telephone, email, web chat and/or crowdsourcing are rapidly expanding.

Other key challenges to be met include: realizing the full potential of web 2.0 and 3.0; how quality-assured data is collected, what kinds of data collection are now needed how might the results be used to inform service design and improvement as part of evidence-based policies and practices. This should not be overly bureaucratic but need to be openly available for individuals, employers and commissioners to enable informed choices. There was a clear aspiration for different providers to work together to offer adult learning programmes in ways that make the best use of specialised knowledge of the worlds of education, social care, health services, well-being, training and employment.

5.3. Top policy priorities

We invited all participants in the research to identify at least three top priorities for policy development that could improve adult education over the next 5 to 10 years. Respondents identified the following policy areas for development.

- Greater policy attention with clear national and regional/local frameworks for adult education
- Funding for vulnerable and/or disadvantaged adults should not be solely based on a student loan system
- ESOL and basic skills investment is urgently required
- Employers need to step up and offer more opportunities to older adults
- Increased access to careers information, advice and guidance for adults and young people.



6. What needs to change?

In this section, focus on what needs to change now and in the future in order to maintain and further strengthen adult education across England.

Key findings

- Strengthen the infrastructure for adult education
- Focus on lifeskills and prosperity
- Improve awareness of and access to careers Information, advice and guidance
- Develop a more robust evidence-based system
- Greater involvement of employers in adult education is needed to improve skills and productivity at local and national levels.

Strengthen the infrastructure for adult education

Current government policy for adult education in England has failed to respond to the major demographic challenge of an ageing society, to growing cultural diversity and variety in life, and changing employment patterns as young people take longer to settle into jobs and older people take longer to leave work. There is a need to **halt the significant reductions in adult education provision** by ensuring that adult education is appropriately funded beyond 2020 and to further safeguard the Adult Education Budget, as part of on-going settlements between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HM Treasury. With the likelihood of further cuts to government budgets since the vote to leave the EU, local Skills Commissioners (who will hold the Adult Education Budget purse strings once a locality's budget is devolved) will need robust data to identify key priorities and investment decisions.

“ We are acutely aware how important it is for adults to continue to access good advice, education and training throughout their working lives. Understanding local labour markets and informing skills agendas is essential if adults are to maintain and improve their living standards. Adult education policy must feed into local skills agendas and link to existing policies and practices so that innovation and effective local partnership working is not lost in new and evolving policy development at a local and/or national level ”

(Nick Bell, Chief Executive, Prospects).

Planned local commissioning for adult education within **devolved responsibilities should be based on a set of broad national adult education standards and priorities** that recognise the wider social, cultural and economic benefits of adult education and not just focus on training in employment skills.

A national adult education framework that brings together health, social care, well-being, cultural and scientific development, alongside skills and employability would be a major step forward.

The devolved and locally-led strategic plans for adult education could then be linked to both local and national accountability and quality frameworks. A ministerial champion working at a cross-departmental level would add gravitas, authority and connectivity to disjointed policies.

“ We’re living here so we need to speak English [...] it’s better for the country and for the society that we have English skills. There are therefore high returns for the investment in helping us all improve our language skills. ”

(Adult Learner)

Devolution is creating a patchwork quilt of very uneven provision. The role of a national organisation(s) within a national adult education framework is important for accountability and equity purposes. Transparent policies and practices are necessary for key areas such as basic skills, ESOL and digital inclusion. The adult learners on ESOL courses highlighted the importance of provision that directly helps learners achieve their personal goals, be it to support their children in school, gain a job or participate in their communities. ESOL provision is also essential for those whose English is above Level 2 and who may, in some cases, need sector-specific language support.

“ We are obviously a society in the midst of tremendous turmoil, working against a background of globalisation, technological change and demographic transformation. All of these changes are demanding a level of personal reinvention that we haven’t seen for a century or more, and the need for readily available adult education is growing every day. ”

(Trevor Phillips, OBE, Chair of Trustees, Workers’ Educational Association (WEA))

There is no **ESOL policy in England** - instead ad hoc guidelines are being developed at a grass roots level. In Scotland (June 2015)⁸⁰ and Wales (June 2014)⁸¹ a national ESOL policy exists. In England, there is also a need for **‘parity of entitlement’ for ring-fenced funding** for ESOL provision to be considered part of basic skills funding and workforce development arrangements. Many adult learners are looking for **flexible ‘step on step off’ provision**, yet the move has been to reduce flexibility by suppliers. As it currently stands, a single institution has to be responsible for awarding a qualification. This leaves little incentive for institutions to collaborate around credit accumulation and transfer. Making progress in this area would be a significant boost to flexible learning. For example, changes might support mixed modes of study through different providers to add up to a qualification – allowing a student to combine distance learning delivered by one provider with more traditional on-site provision through another. While government motivation for promoting regional/cross-sectoral strategic partnerships may initially be financial, there are further opportunities for adult education to be embedded in differing types of partnerships and delivered locally. That is particularly the case if it is to stretch out successfully into communities to reach more of the most disadvantaged, those who have become lost to education. Some examples might include:

80. Available from: <http://www.esolscotland.com/>

81. Available from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20373/1/140619-esol-policy-en.pdf>

- **Co-operation** on providing adult education through innovative approaches e.g. working on employer premises, outreach, mobile delivery and/or blended learning and educational guidance for careers and other life issues, such as mid-life reviews, parenting, inter-cultural relations, community engagement or retirement, particularly for targeted or marginalised groups in their local communities.
- **Collective actions** between and across agencies on tracking adult learner progress, using open source data, intelligence sharing, information exchange and pooling of resources to achieve maximum impact for adult learners. In some cases, clustering provision and/or sharing expertise across institutions or membership bodies may become more necessary.

6.1. Focus on life skills and prosperity

Some 5.9 million adults in the UK have never used the internet although between 75 per cent and 90 per cent of jobs require at least some computer use and offline households are missing out on estimated savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online (RGS, 2015).⁸² Individuals with poor numeracy tend to take longer to leave the family home if they are men, have children younger in life if they are women, and are more likely to live in disadvantaged housing and to experience homelessness. Patterns are often replicated in subsequent generations.⁸³ With an ageing population and as retirement ages rise, people are facing longer working lives with the consequent need to update skills and add to their knowledge. Adult learners feel healthier, lead healthier lifestyles, build new social networks and experience improved well-being. **Life design models** such as those found in Australia, Canada and New Zealand can provide stimuli material for further discussion at a local level, as discussed earlier. Life skills now include new ways of thinking about careers and the dynamic context in which they evolve. And the pace of change can only increase in the years ahead.

Most importantly, **profiling the current life design work delivered by SDIs** will demonstrate to **new local Commissioners and local strategic partnerships** the real value of its impact. For example, it is effective in getting people hooked on learning through ‘bite-sized’, short and/ or residential courses that can transform outcomes for people in deprived communities, reduce social exclusion, increase social mobility and enable families to break the cycle of deprivation.

A new ‘**Citizen Skills Entitlement**’ for adults, proposed by the Learning and Work Institute, merits further consideration (see also: Mid-Life Health Check below).⁸⁴ The idea of an **education savings account (ESA)** for adults recently mooted by a Specialist Designated Institution for adults to draw upon throughout their life, as and when necessary, is also worthy of further exploration.

Blended and online learning offers many students the vital skills they need in their everyday lives. According to ‘Go on UK’, 23 per cent of people in the UK lack digital capability and it is as important as literacy and numeracy. A highly effective way to develop and keep up-to-date the digital skills of adults is to embed use of digital into face- to-face teaching and to offer a blended approach to learning. While many courses include some form of multi-media resources, there is a lack of investment in adult education tutors, many of who are part-time workers) who need to be equipped and trained to provide differing forms of ‘blended learning’ e.g. webinars, massive open online courses (MOOCs) etc.

⁸². Royal Geographical Society (2015) Digital Divide in the UK. Online Available from: <https://21stcenturychallenges.org/what-is-the-digital-divide/>

⁸³. Lister, J. (2013) *The Impact of Poor Numeracy Skills on Adults, Research Review*, London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), Institute of Education (IOE), University of London

⁸⁴. Available from: <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/content/mid-life-career-review-%E2%80%93-niace-proposals-endorsed>

“ Technology-enhanced learning is opening up opportunities to reach adults in new ways which don't require full-time attendance. ”

(The Open University)

6.2. Information, advice and guidance

“ I'm willing to do something different but this needs to interest me. I have no idea where to go for this sort of advice. ”

(Adult Learner)

“ Other people have a negative view about me returning to education and going to University. I have been outside education for so long, now I have found a way in because this college gave me self-belief. ”

(Adult Learner)

Adult learners involved in the fieldwork and the survey highlighted the importance of knowing where to find opportunities and where their course might lead to, particularly those who had been reignited with the joy of learning.

Many of the adults interviewed, including those in learning, had long term plans that motivated them to attend a course or look for a job. These included wanting to work with disadvantaged people, start their own business or work in health or social care. However, most of them found it difficult to describe their next stages to achieving this, including those who had planned to go to university after the Access to HE course. The majority were not fully aware of all the services provided by the National Careers Service. Highly visible and accessible information and career guidance is crucial in achieving educational support for career transitions and other life issues, such as mid-life reviews, parenting, community engagement, or retirement. Levels of awareness of student loans was moderately low, particularly when it came to older adults. This concurs with earlier findings from the BIS (2016) Evaluation of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans where two-thirds of learners (64 per cent) had not heard of the loans at the point where they had first started thinking about learning.

“ More adults are in need of good quality information and guidance to help them make the right choices about the study options available to them, particularly those wanting to progress in work or looking for a career change. Adult education is vital on a lifelong basis and individuals need support to continue to learn and to acquire new skills in order to escape low pay jobs and to help businesses grow. ”

(Mary Vine-Morris, Policy Director, Association of Colleges (AoC))

The world has changed fundamentally over the last decade. We have seen the disappearance of the job for life, the emergence of the knowledge economy and loss of many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Millions of people work in jobs today, which did not exist when their parents left education and first went into work. New types jobs are beginning to emerge e.g. urban farmer, virtual reality experience designer, remote health care specialist, end of life planner and many more. We learned from adults that many felt they had limited choice on what was available when it comes to addressing feelings of isolation, loneliness, mental and physical well-being.

“ We are heading for huge problems with skills gaps and skills shortages – if we don't get our citizens young and old in the right place doing the right things then everyone will suffer. Hence, we need to ensure there is high quality information, advice and guidance for everyone. ”

(Steve Stewart, CEO, Careers England)

6.3. An evidence-based system

An evidence-based system is required to gather robust information on the take-up rates of adult education loans by disadvantaged groups, and more policy dialogue and critique is needed on the effectiveness of this practice. The voices of adults needs to be captured regularly, particularly those not engaged in adult education. Data on the outcomes achieved by adult learners should be openly available for individuals, employers and commissioners to enable informed choices – not just formal qualifications achieved. This is probably the weakest aspect of adult education and needs to be a priority for development. As the learners interviewed indicated, far too few people that have a say in policy and funding for adult learning really understand its true impact on individuals and communities and in turn, national and local economies. Many providers understandably feel that gathering data on course, completions, progress, and destinations can be time consuming, bureaucratic and above all expensive. National and local systems need to be developed to facilitate the collection and dissemination of this critical evidence on the impact of adult education. Some providers' practice in recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement is very effective, but this is the minority. In far too many providers, Ofsted inspection reports show that the process is too narrow and the good practice needs to be shared more widely.

6.4. Employers, skills and productivity

So called “skills shortage vacancies” now make up nearly a quarter of all job openings in the UK, leaping from 91,000 in 2011 to 209,000 in 2015 (UKCES, 2016).⁸⁵ Some 2 million additional jobs are likely to be created for managers, professionals and associate professional groups by 2022. Together these occupations are expected to increase their share of total employment from 42 per cent to 46 per cent (op cit.). Over half of UK businesses (55 per cent) are not confident there will be enough people available in the future with the necessary skills to fill their high-skilled jobs (CBI, 2015)⁸⁶. Half of businesses report they are aware of current problems among at least some of their employees in basic literacy (50 per cent), numeracy (50 per cent) and IT skills (46 per cent). Between a third to a half of employers with a basic skills gap report an increase in the number of errors made by staff, a constraint on the introduction of new and/or more efficient processes, and/or a reduction in product or output quality (BIS, 2016).⁸⁷ The cost of outcomes associated with low levels of adult numeracy is estimated to be around £20.2 billion per year, or about 1.3 per cent of the UK's GDP (National Numeracy, 2014). Adult education providers can and do reach many adults who are far away from the labour market.

85. UKCES (2015) UK Employer Skills Survey, 2015, Evidence Report 97, Sheffield: Wath-Upon-Dearne

86. Available from: <http://news.cbi.org.uk/reports/education-and-skills-survey-2015/education-and-skills-survey-2015/>

87. BIS (2016) *Impact of Poor Basic Literacy and Numeracy on Employers*, Research Paper 266, London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, February 2016.

Where employers and trades unions identify basic skills needs among their workforce they should be able to arrange for adult education provision in the workplace. Cedefop (2011)⁸⁸ and Unionlearn (2016)⁸⁹ already demonstrate this can be achieved, but this requires investment. The use of incentives to skill, reskill and upskill employees, including releasing them to continue training, was identified in the research as a priority. The great majority of jobs already require digital skills to some level and the proportion will rise further in the years ahead. Those seeking to take up apprenticeships and other work opportunities will need to be equipped with the basic skills to learn and progress successfully.

Over the next five to 10 years there is a need to build on outstanding practices that are often unique to current adult education provision. **Adult education should be a national priority.** A series of policies and practices are needed so that the benefits of adult education are not taken away from those who need it most. **A national debate** can forge that sense of shared national purpose for adult education. And it is a debate in which, as well as the local commissioners of adult education, many more citizen voices should be heard – the voices of those for whom the services should be designed and those adults who have most to gain from them. This really is **too important to simply be left to chance.**



88. Cedefop (2011) *Learning while working: Success stories on workplace learning in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

89. Available from: <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/english-maths-and-ict>

7. Five key recommendations

The research has identified that adult education is indeed important to individuals and local communities and that it has a pivotal role to play in supporting local and national social and economic agendas. However, we are at a turning point with seismic change taking place across England to the policy and funding mechanisms for post-19 education. Over the next five to 10 years there is a need to build on the sometimes outstanding practices that are often exclusive to the current adult education provision. Currently there are too many adults who are not able to reach their potential, or who are unable to cope with their current circumstances. Adult education has many of the answers. A series of policies and practices are needed so that the benefits of adult education are not taken away from those who need it most.

From the research, we highlight five key recommendations as follows:

Recommendation 1

Establish a national and regional strategy for adult education, health, employability and well-being – bringing together the different departmental interests led by a senior Minister to provide an accountability and quality assured framework at a national and regional level. There needs to be clear criteria for providers to capture, collate and disseminate the full benefits of adult education, including improvements to their health and well-being and participation as an active citizen against the accountability and quality-assured framework.

Recommendation 2

The new commissioning system needs to have an adult education framework that seeks to rebuild and rebalance resources fairly for adults across the different life-stages – national and local provision for adults' needs to reflect a coherent view of our changing social, economic and cultural context. The matter of identity, of how people describe who they are and the values they hold is an important conversation to be had with Commissioners in local areas. We learned from adults who were not engaged in adult education that many felt vulnerable, had limited choice on what was available when it comes to addressing their feelings of isolation, loneliness, mental and physical challenges.

Recommendation 3

Provide careers information, advice and guidance in local communities and build capacity in the adult education workforce to make greater use of labour market intelligence and mid-life reviews. There is a need to broaden and strengthen the capacity of the adult education workforce, thus raising the profile of this important work. Training and professional support should be available for all those involved in delivering education and training in various capacities.

Recommendation 4

Ensure a systematic approach to identifying and gathering evidence on the full impact of adult education. Data on the outcomes achieved by adult learners should not be overly bureaucratic, but it needs to be openly available for individuals, employers and commissioners to enable informed choices.

Recommendation 5

More employers need to step up and offer opportunities to adults, particularly older adults keen to remain active in employment. Employers could offer so much more by offering adult education experiences on their premises through local partnerships.

Over the next five to 10 years, there is a need to build on outstanding practices that are often unique to current adult education provision. **Adult education should be a national priority.** A series of policies and practices are needed so that the benefits of adult education are not taken away from those who need it most. **A national debate** can forge that sense of shared national purpose for adult education. And it is a debate in which, as well as the local commissioners of adult education, many more citizen voices should be heard – the voices of those for whom the services should be designed and those adults who have most to gain from them. This really is **too important to simply be left to chance.**

Appendix I Call for Evidence respondents

- Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA), West Midlands Combined Authority
- Association of Colleges, London
- Celia Kelly, Liverpool
- CITB, London
- Compass
- Dr Roberta Jacobson OBE, Hon.
- Senior lecturer, IHE, UCL
- Greg Coyne, Director for Curriculum and Quality, Workers' Educational Association, London
- Horex, Worcestershire
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London
- Margaret Greenwood, MP
- Martin Yarnit, retired, Worcester
- NCFE, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- OECD, Paris
- OFFA, Bristol
- Ofsted, London
- Olive Home, retired teacher, London
- Open University, Milton Keynes
- QAA, Gloucester
- The Co-operative College, Manchester
- The Reading Agency, London
- The Universities Association for Lifelong Learning
- Tom Schuller
- TUC unionlearn, London

Please note in addition, eight responses were marked 'confidential' which have not been included in this listing.

Appendix 2 Key stakeholder interviewees and other contributors to the report

Nick Bell

Chief Executive, Prospects Group Ltd

Baroness Sharp of Guildford

House of Lords

Neil Carberry

Senior Policy Adviser, Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

Rachel Egan

Director, West Midlands Combined Authority

Caroline Fairbairn

Director General, Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

Ruth Spellman OBE

Chief Executive, Workers' Educational Association (WEA)

David Hughes

Chief Executive, Learning & Work Institute

Steve Stewart

Chief Executive, Careers England

Scott Knowles

Chief Executive, East Midlands, British Chamber of Commerce

Mary-Vine Morris

Senior Policy Director (London), Association of Colleges (AoC)

Bob Harrison

Chair of Governors Northern College & Education Adviser, Toshiba, Northern Europe

Trevor Phillips OBE

Chair of Trustees, Workers' Educational Association (WEA)

Dr Sue Pember OBE

Director of Policy, HOLEX

Andreas Schleicher

Director for the Directorate Education and Skills, OECD

David Russell

Chief Executive, Education Training Foundation (ETF)

