

Learning in later life - moving into 2006

This briefing paper presents an update on government policy, and how it links to learning provision for older people (those aged 55 and over).

Introduction

The demographic revolution offers challenges and opportunities for all of us: for government the challenge is to change attitudes and preconceptions about what an ageing society means and to stimulate innovative ideas and technologies to transform older lives. We must seize the opportunity to rethink policies and approaches to public services, in order to foster true independence and choice for older citizens and help them improve their quality of life. For that to happen, we must explode the myth that ageing is a barrier to a positive contribution to the economy and society, through work and through active engagement in the community.

Prime Minister's forward Opportunity Age: Meeting the Challenges of ageing in the 21st century (2005).¹

Summary

The projected increase of 2.1 million jobs between 1999 and 2010 requires 13.5 million new workers, owing to the departure of more than 11 million of the 1999 workforce through retirement, sickness, death or other reasons. Only one-third or so of the new workers will come from indigenous new young entrants to the national workforce: the balance will have to be drawn from a combination of three sources: a further increase in the proportion of women in the workforce (and Britain already has a high proportion by international standards); net in-migration; and older people staying on in the labour force or returning to it, or taking up new opportunities. For many older people this will be an act of choice, but for more a necessity, if they are to avoid an impoverished later life. Yet for many older people learning new skills has not been part of working life.²

The Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW) national survey of job change in 2003 found that 40% of workers who changed their jobs said that their new role had either 'required a lot more skills' or involved increased responsibility, but one third of these had received no support of any kind (training, guidance, advice, books, internet) to take on these new responsibilities, and the evidence suggested that this pattern strengthened with age.³

Education and training can play a significant role in supporting older adults to make informed choices about what combination of work, personal development and active citizenship works best for them – but only if a more coherent suite of policies can be developed. It should be the purpose of government policy to develop those policies, in the light of available resources.²

Documents, papers and initiatives

There has been a plethora of documents published recently on various aspects of ageing, including the following:

1. November 2004. **Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier.**⁴ This Department of Health White Paper aims to make a difference to the choices people make about their health and well being. The 3 core principles are:
 - informed choice;
 - personalisation, or individually tailored support;
 - working together in partnership.

Meeting new health challenges of the 21st century will need a step change in action. These arrangements reflect the need for Government, communities and individuals to take seriously their respective responsibilities for health. The commitments in this White Paper are designed to ensure more healthy choices are available and to shape the environment so that these choices are readily available to those who would otherwise be disadvantaged. This is the beginning of a journey to build health into Government policy and ensure that health is everybody's business...

(Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier. p. 181)

- ❖ **Informed choice, and individuals taking responsibility for their own health, requires informed individuals. Older people require this vital information in a variety of formats that should include advice, guidance and education.**

2. March 2005. **Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations.**⁵ This Green Paper from the Commission of the European communities emphasises the importance of the demographic challenge.

Ageing could cause potential annual growth in Gross National Product in Europe to fall from 2-2.25% today to 1.25% in 2040, with all that entails for entrepreneurship and initiative in our societies. These demographic changes are the result of three basic trends:

- continuing increases in longevity;
- expectations of continuing growth in the number of workers over 60;
- continuing low birth rates.

Elderly people in certain countries are increasingly choosing to move to another region or abroad: mobility is not the reserve of the young or of employed people. They are consuming more new goods and services and want to participate actively in social life, in particular in the voluntary sector. They may wish to continue working or to combine part-time work with retirement... (Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations. p. 9)

- ❖ **Continuing growth in the number of workers over 60 will require these employees to be trained, or retrained, so they can contribute to the changing working environment.**

3. March 2005. **Welfare to work: tackling the barriers to the employment of older people.**⁶ Tenth Report of Session 2004-05. House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts.

This report looks at:

- the importance of helping older people to find employment;
- the impact of labour market programmes to assist older people;
- other measures to help older people overcome the barriers to employment.

*Training and skills are important to employment chances. People with low qualifications are less likely to be employed and, on average, older people have lower qualifications than younger people.*⁷

However, the substantial fall over the past 10 years in proportion of the population with no qualifications has been more marked for older people. Nevertheless, 25% of those aged over 50 to state pension age had no formal qualifications in 2002, compared with 16% of the total working population.

(Welfare to work: tackling the barriers to the employment of older people. p. 38)

- ❖ *As older people remain under-represented in most forms of education, efforts should be made to provide training and education that is relevant and convenient to their needs.*

4. **March 2005. Excluded Older People, Social Exclusion Unit Interim Report.**⁸
Many older people experience exclusion affecting their everyday lives.

The opportunities that allow the majority of the population to have the best quality of life possible must be made available to all, including the most excluded. This is just as much about education, employment, leisure and active social roles as it is about health, housing and social care.

This consultation highlighted three key ways in which respondents say provision needs to improve if older people are to enjoy a better quality of life:

- joined up services are the key;
- intervening early is important, and investment in low level prevention can reduce costlier interventions later;
- older people generally know what they need and want, and they should be involved in the design and – where practicable – the delivery of services.

*Participation in social, cultural, religious and leisure activities is very important to people's quality of life. Encouraging such participation can play a key part in policy goals like improving health, reducing crime and building cohesive communities; and can also contribute to reducing loneliness.*⁹ *(Social Exclusion Unit, Making Connections. p. 33)*

- ❖ *Non-formal or community learning can provide the key to inclusion, not only by the social inclusion of attending sessions but also through personal development.*

5. **March 2005. Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work.**¹⁰ This White Paper sets out the Government's plans for the next phase of reform in skills and training. Proposing to invest in helping more adults to gain the skills they need both for productive and satisfying employment throughout longer working lives, and for personal enrichment through into active retirement.

On average, older people have fewer recognised skills and qualifications than younger people coming into the labour market. They are disproportionately represented among those out of work on welfare benefits. But as the demographic profile changes, with fewer young people entering the labour market, an expectation of a longer working life and an extended period of retirement, we will need to provide better support for older people to keep their skills up to date. Older people will be able to benefit, along with others, from entitlements and reforms... (Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work. p. 22)

- ❖ If older people need to keep their skills up to date, some will need encouragement and financial support to enter formal learning/training activities.

6. March 2005. **Opportunity Age.**¹ Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century. This document and its supporting evidence set out a framework for developing policies and the principles that the Government believes will underpin the strategy to manage demographic change.

As detailed in the recently published Skills White Paper, we have given a commitment to safeguard the continuing availability of a wide range of learning for leisure, personal interest and community development purposes. We expect older people to be significant beneficiaries of this safeguard.

(Opportunity Age. Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century. p. 37)

- ❖ Does the commitment to safeguard the continuing availability of a wide range of learning for leisure, personal interest and community development purposes, for older people, only apply to those who can afford it?

7. July 2005. **Equality And Diversity: Coming Of Age.**¹¹ DTI Consultation on the draft Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

As a result of the European Employment Directive, the Government will introduce regulations outlawing age discrimination in employment and vocational training. The consultation document Age Matters, asked for opinions about the most important policy issues. Taking into account the replies, the policy has now been translated into the age regulations.

- ❖ The Age Discrimination Regulations will allow courses to be directed at older age groups if this age group is, or has been, under represented.
- ❖ The regulations do not cover goods and services.
- ❖ The law also covers people taking part in, or applying for, employment related vocational training.

These publications represent a welcome focus on older people and indicate that a lot of thinking and talking about joined-up government is taking place in certain areas. Further encouraging initiatives include

- New Deal 50 plus** – since its introduction in April 2000 over 110,000 people have moved off benefits and into work with support from this programme. Evaluation has shown that the programme is particularly effective for those at the younger end of the 50 plus age range and those on ‘active’ benefits (Atkinson and Dewson, 2001).
- VITA** - Valuing older volunteers - Volunteering Initiative for the Third Age. It is a Home Office funded project, working to raise the profile of older volunteers, especially those over the age of 65. VITA is expected to run for two years in the first instance. It is co-ordinated by WRVS, but directed by a steering group of organisations from the voluntary sector.
- NCAA** – National Coalition for Active Ageing, established in 2005, to bring together key agencies and stakeholders to act as a collective voice and champion the cause of promoting physical activity with older people of all interests, abilities and ages.
- CEHR** - Commission for Equality and Human Rights, a new single equality body proposed by the Government. When implemented, the CEHR will:

- Bring together the three separate equality bodies that currently oversee and enforce anti-discrimination legislation;
- Cover three new areas of discrimination: sexual orientation, religion or belief and age;
- Be launched at the end of 2006, alongside legislation relating to age discrimination in employment.

Participation in learning

Older people staying on in employment, returning to it, or taking up new opportunities will benefit from education and training. But growing older for some people can bring about exclusion – from work, from family and society and from a sense of purpose. Continuing participation in learning can prevent or reverse this process, yet older people are almost invisible in most forms of adult education. Recent learning surveys show:

- The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, only 32 per cent of adults aged 55-64, 17 per cent of adults aged 65-74 and 10 per cent of those aged over 75 and over regard themselves as learners.¹²
- Recently published LSC data on participation in publicly funded further education shows that between October 2003 and October 2004 the total number of learners over 60 decreased by 7 per cent.¹³
- Older adults aged 65+ are now less likely to say that they intend to take up learning in the future than they were in 2002.¹²

The learning divide, like the income gap, is starker among older people. The *Skills for Life* strategy has been less successful at reaching and engaging older people with weak literacy, numeracy and language skills than the rest of the population; information and guidance services are less effective at reaching the older age cohorts than younger people; and older adults get less opportunity at work.

Yet this generation of older people have paid more taxes for education, and derived less benefit from the system than any other. The overwhelming majority learned early that education was not for the likes of them, and left school without formal qualifications. As a result motivation and guidance need to be key elements of a successful strategy.¹³

Recommendations

Successive governments' understandable concern with measures relating to the skills needs of the economy has weakened a range of other dimensions of lifelong learning. For more than a decade central Government has encouraged Local Education Authorities to reduce discretionary areas of expenditure to reallocate money to schools. It is unsurprising that many authorities, as a result cut back on investment in community based adult learning – the 'non-schedule 2' curriculum.

The result has been that for many pensioners, older people and others whose learning aspirations relate to personal development and cultural enrichment, there has been a marked diminution in curriculum offer, as funding priorities have led providers to skew the balance of offer in many localities. There is much that can be done to enable older people to begin or continue to enjoy the benefits of learning in later life:

- Recognise that older adults want learning opportunities that do not necessarily lead to exams and qualifications.

- Promote more widely the existing schemes to improve older people's chances of finding work (e.g. New Deal 50 plus) or setting up their own business (e.g. PRIME).
- Ensure that centres created for older people's activities do not just benefit those who are already 'joiners' but offer information and guidance, including peer group mentoring, on a range of opportunities across the whole community.
- Create opportunities for progression so older people can see a clear route to the achievement of their goals and therefore be encouraged to continue learning.
- Ensure that funding arrangements do not result in older people's provision falling off the end of Councils' priority lists. Encourage LSCs and other funding agencies to be imaginative in their approach. For example, bearing in mind the health and social benefits to be derived from lifelong learning, funding need not be seen as the sole responsibility of the education sector, but could also include Health and Social Services.
- Provide more opportunities for inter-generational learning.
- Have a properly negotiated curriculum - its core may need to be changed so that provision is relevant, timely and affordable.
- Give incentives to providers to take the learning out to the learner, i.e. to base some learning activities in community settings rather than in educational institutions.
- Encourage community-based, self-help learning initiatives. These may well result from local concerns, e.g. environmental issues.

(Briefing 2000 on Learning in Later Life, a NIACE Briefing Paper, September, 2000.)

References

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- 2 Tuckett, A. et al. (2005) **Demography and Older Learners: Approaches to a New Policy Challenge: a NIACE Policy Discussion Paper.** Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862012407
- 3 McNair, S. **The age of choice: a new agenda for learning and work?** in Tuckett, A. et al. *Demography and Older Learners: Approaches to a New Policy Challenge: a NIACE Policy Discussion Paper.* Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862012407
- 4 Department of Health. (2004) **Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier.** www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4094550&chk=aN5Cor
- 5 Commission of the European Communities. (2005) **Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations.** http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2005/mar/comm2005-94_en.pdf
- 6 Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General. (2004) **Welfare to work: tackling the barriers to the employment of older people.** Norwich: The Stationery Office. ISBN 0102930112
- 7 National Statistics. **Labour Market trends**, June 2002. www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMT_June02.pdf

- 8 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. (2005) ***Excluded Older People, Social Exclusion Unit Interim Report.***
www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=710
- 9 Social Exclusion Unit. (2003) ***Making Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Inclusion,*** www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=229
- 10 Department for Education and Skills. (2005) ***Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work.*** www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/
- 11 Department for Trade and Industry. (2005) ***Equality And Diversity: Coming Of Age. DTI Consultation on the draft Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.***
www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/consultation_doc_2006.pdf
- 12 ***Participation in learning, by age.*** NIACE Survey 2005
- 13 LSC (2005) ***Further Education, Work-based learning for young people and adult and community learning – learner numbers in England on 1 October 2004.***
DfES Statistical First Release, available on
www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000567/index.shtml

Surveys, reports and further reading

The Better Government for Older People. (2000) ***All our Futures: the report of the Better Government for Older People Steering Committee.***

Aldridge, F. and Sargant, N. (2002) ***Adult Learning and Social Division: a persistent pattern Volume 1.*** Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862011559.

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Aldridge, F. and Tuckett, A. (2005) ***Better news this time? The NIACE survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2005.*** Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862012385

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Aldridge, F. and Lavender, P. (2000) ***The impact of learning on health.*** Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 186201101X.

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Dench, S. and Regan, J. (2000) ***Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact.*** Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 184185199X.

Soulsby, J. (2000) ***Learning in the Fourth Age.*** DfEE. ISBN 1841852821.

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Department for Work and Pensions. ***New Deal 50+ for jobseekers***
www.newdeal.gov.uk/newdeal.asp?DealID=50PLU

Better Government for Older People Programme. (2000) ***Our Present for the Future***.

The PRIME Initiative - the national organisation dedicated to helping people aged over 50 set up in business. www.primeinitiative.org.uk

Aldridge, F. and Tuckett, A. (2003) ***A Sharp Reverse: The NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2003***. Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862011850

Aldridge, F. et al. (2004) ***Soft Structures, Hard Outcomes Headline findings of the NIACE Survey on Learning at Work***.

www.niace.org.uk/projects/LWSurvey/SoftStructures.pdf

Aldridge, F. and Tuckett, A. (2002) ***Two steps forward, one step back: The NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2002***. Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862011451

Aldridge, F. and Tuckett, A. (2001) ***Winners and losers in an expanding system: The NIACE Survey on adult participation in learning 2001***. Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862011257

Other useful information

Age Positive - encouraging employers to make decisions about recruitment, training and retention that do not discriminate because of age. www.agepositive.gov.uk/

The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning—www.learningbenefits.net

Chartered Institute of Public Finance - education statistics actuals and estimates.
www.cipfastats.net/

Department for Education and Skills - Research and Statistics Gateway
Wide range of statistics including post-16 learning. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/

Department for Education and Skills - National Adult Learning Survey 2002 Research Information Key Summary Statistics for LEAs www.dfes.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Council - National Learner Satisfaction Survey Published 29/03/05
The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has now carried out the third National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS). For 2003/04. www.lsc.gov.uk

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Education statistics. www.oecd.org/home/0,2987,en_2649_201185_1_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

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NIACE will be holding events/seminars throughout the next 15 months to inform and appraise the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006. For further details contact Celestine Harris celestine.harris@niace.org.uk

This is the sixty-eighth in a series of briefing sheets, which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues. Many earlier titles in the series are still available including:

- 67. Adult education working in care settings
- 63. Promoting financial capability provision for older people
- 60. Sources of funding for learning for older people
- 54. Mobile ICT resources for older learners
- 48. Older people and mentoring
- 45. Older people and learning
- 35. Cultural diversity - responding to the learning needs of older people from black and minority ethnic communities

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NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties, or insufficient resources. Registered charity number 1002775; Company registration number 2603322.