

Submission to the Commission of Inquiry on Lifelong Learning from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence on adult learning and demographic change.

Our comments are based on what we have learned through our research, consultancy, advisory groups and electronic forums. Our focus is on people with learning disabilities throughout life and across the UK, so our comments will apply to all the six themes identified for the Inquiry.

It is now well recognised that there is an increasing number of young people with learning disabilities who are surviving into adulthood with very high support needs, including those who are dependent on a variety of medical technologies, such as artificial feeding and ventilation. They and their families share with other people with learning disabilities aspirations for learning and indeed progression into work, yet these aspirations are often ignored or are poorly served. There are two common kinds of problematic situations that people experience:

- exclusion from adult learning opportunities on the assumption that the person will not benefit, or because they cannot demonstrate that they can meet progression criteria, or for lack of 'reasonable adjustments' regarding transport and support
- over-inclusion in poor quality provision, such as 'revolving door' courses that are offered as a substitute form of day care and are not tailored to the individual's developmental or vocational interests.

People with learning disabilities and their families value adult learning for a variety of reasons:

- personal development
- skills development (e.g. independent living)
- vocational learning that leads to work.

It is helpful that recent Learning and Skills Council documents (such as 'Learning for Living and Work') acknowledge the wish of people with learning disabilities to work and to have learning opportunities that support this ambition, but there is also a slight danger that other reasons for learning will be neglected.

Developments in adult learning also need to take account of wider Government policy, such as:

- increasing emphasis on individualised funding so that people can arrange and direct their own support
- the current renewed emphasis on support for family carers, including opportunities for personal development and for entry or return to work.

The Foundation would therefore like to see:

- more people with learning disabilities (including those from minority ethnic communities and those with high support needs) participating in a wider range of adult learning, with attention to personal and skills development as well as learning for work
- this range of learning opportunities to include mainstream learning opportunities (with 'reasonable adjustments' where required) as well as opportunities aimed specifically at people with learning disabilities
- individualised funding for learning and for the transport and support that people with learning disabilities may require in order to participate
- creative approaches to measuring progression, so that people with high support needs still gain recognition for their achievements in learning, even if these are in very small increments. This needs to be accompanied by acceptance that some people will take a very long time to complete a course of learning
- approaches to accreditation that support the point above, i.e. that will recognise small steps.

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