

Contents

Director's Comment – A New Threshold for Learning	p1
The Range of Inquiry Outputs	p2
Inquiry in the Media.....	p3
Thematic Reviews.....	p4
Crime and Social Exclusion.....	p4
Sustainable Development.....	p5
Citizenship and Belonging.....	p6
The UK-wide Inquiry – Northern Ireland	p7
A Focus on Sectors	p8
The Public Value of Lifelong Learning.....	p9
Funding Lifelong Learning	p10
Upcoming Events	p11
Have your say	p11
E-bulletin sign-up	p12

Director's Comment – A New Threshold for Learning



One question that comes up repeatedly in the exchanges I and my Inquiry colleagues have with people outside is whether we are concerned only with adult learners. The short answer is no; we are dealing literally with lifelong learning, but we are concentrating primarily on those who return to learning some time after finishing their initial education, however long that may have been.

But a question which naturally follows is: when does adulthood start? This is of critical political importance because where you draw the line influences enormously what your picture is of the opportunities open to adults, how much you see being spent on adult learning and so on. If you take the legal definition – adult at 18 – then almost every single undergraduate should be counted as an adult learner. This would mean that we had millions of adults spending hundreds of millions of hours on learning,

(continued on page 2)

The Inquiry Themes

- Prosperity, Employment and Work
- Demography and Social Structure
- Wellbeing and Happiness
- Migration and Communities
- Technological Change

- Poverty Reduction
- Citizenship and Belonging
- Crime and Social Exclusion
- Sustainable Development
- The Roles of the Public, Private and Voluntary Sectors.

The Commissioners

Sir David Watson, Professor of Higher Education Management, Institute of Education, University of London (Chair of the Commission)

John Field, Director, Division of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education, University of Stirling

Bob Fryer, Chief Learning Advisor, Department of Health

Leisha Fullick, Pro-Director (London), Institute of Education, University of London

Helen Gilchrist, former Principal, Bury College

Clare Hannah, Head of Organisational Development, EWS Railways

Teresa Rees, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Cardiff University

David Sherlock, former Chief Inspector of the Adult Learning Inspectorate

Nick Stuart, Chair, NIACE Company Board

Tom Wilson, Head of Organisation and Services, TUC

supported by public expenditure of billions of pounds. Intuitively, this looks wrong to those of us who have long fought for a better balance between initial and adult education.

But trying to work out an alternative is very tricky. Here is a radical suggestion, which would cut through some of the problems. The age at which most people in the UK – bar a few doctoral students – have finished their initial education is 25. Most finish well before, and some of these have already re-entered the education system. But 25 is a pretty good cut-off point – better anyway than 16, 18 or 21, I would suggest (this is a personal view – not that of the Commissioners).

Other factors also speak in favour. Neuroscience tells us that the physical brain finally matures around the age of 25. It's the age at which many young people who engage in crime grow beyond criminal activity, and we could do with a clearer transition bridge for them to find their way back into education and work. In short, it's roughly the age when young people more or less settle into a more stable pattern of life, professionally and personally, having explored various identities and various parts of the world.

This touches directly on several parts of the Inquiry's work. I would not necessarily suggest basing institutional policies and structures on an age cut-off of this kind. But it would mark a radical shift in our reckoning if we began thinking in terms of an initial phase up to 25 – with intermediate points at, say, 14 and 19. People under 25 would not be excluded from adult provision, but they along with everyone else would be clear about where it started.

These are just musings at present. In other areas we have made much practical advance. As you will see from the rest of this Bulletin, the Inquiry has been busy completing thematic seminars, and a host of other activities. In particular we have launched an innovative web-based scenario-building exercise on learning infrastructures. And we are starting to publish IFLL papers of different kinds. All these are flagged up in the pages and links which follow. Chase them up, and let us know what you think.

Look out for Tom Schuller's blog at www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/blog from 18 November.

The Range of Inquiry Outputs

Jenny Williams, Inquiry Development Officer, gives an overview of progress to date.

Now in the second year of the Inquiry, we are publishing a range of interim papers in the run up to the final report next summer. The first, which launched the series of publications on public value in September, is the paper on the *Impact of Lifelong Learning on Poverty Reduction* by Ricardo Sabates, Senior Research Officer at the University of London's Institute of Education, available at www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk

The range of papers to be published over the next few months illustrates the scope of the Inquiry. Our goal is to offer an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK which is likely to have five components:

- a statement of vision and values;
- a stock take of current spending on and participation in lifelong learning;
- an analysis of the public value of lifelong learning;
- an overview of roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in lifelong learning; and
- proposals to measure and evaluate such learning.

There will be four suites of papers. The first suite will include papers on each of the ten themes (see page 1) that have shaped the first phase of our research, distilling the evidence submitted to the Inquiry and considering the implications for the development of a lifelong learning system. The second looks at lifelong learning from seven different sector perspectives: pre-school, school, further education, higher education, local authorities, private providers, and voluntary and community organisations. The third group comprises studies commissioned by the Inquiry on spending and investment in learning by the public sector, private employers, the third sector, and individuals and households. Finally, papers on public value will tackle a range of questions on what we should understand about the effects of lifelong learning and the benefits it brings both to learners and wider society.

Our first three thematic papers, which should be freely available on the website by early in the new year, are on Demography and Social Structure, Technological Change and Wellbeing and Happiness. Sector papers on Schools and Further Education will also be available in January 2009. November has also seen the start of a detailed study of learning infrastructures – physical environments, technologies and people – which will involve scenario planning and feed into the Inquiry's strategic framework proposals next spring.

The Inquiry is also holding a number of 'conversations' exploring other dimensions of lifelong learning, including seminars on learning across the UK – Wales, Northern Ireland (see summary on page 7) and Scotland (December) and London (new year). The RSA is arranging an event for us in January on the science of lifelong learning (see *Upcoming events* on page 11). We are also in discussions with representatives from the financial services sector about new models of funding and saving for learning – though these may look different in the wake of the financial crisis.

We are pleased that learners are taking an active part in the Inquiry. They have sent testimonies as evidence to the Inquiry, a selection of which will shortly be published on the Inquiry website, and are involved in the scenario planning project. From January, with support of Inquiry Commissioner Leisha Fullick we will talk in detail to learners in order to test the Inquiry's initial conclusions. Finally, Tom Schuller is inviting international evidence to inform the Inquiry's thinking about the key features of a national lifelong learning system.

So, the Inquiry Commissioners and support team are busy. In addition to stimulating debate through the interim papers, we ask you to point us towards further evidence. We'll also be testing provisional conclusions with you through the Bulletin, our website, and a number of events. Please tell us what you think – we are still collecting 'top propositions' for lifelong learning – and what we've missed by emailing lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Jenny Williams, Inquiry Development Officer

Inquiry in the Media

While still at a relatively early stage for dissemination, the Inquiry has seen significant coverage in the media – not least the eight-page *Guardian* special supplement, *Time to Learn*, (23 September) which has appeared as a reprint at almost every subsequent adult learning conference and seminar. It highlighted ground-breaking research on Alzheimer's. There were contributions on key themes from Stephen McNair on demography, Leisha

Fullick on poverty, and an interview with Bob Fryer. The three main political parties also responded to the Inquiry's key questions. Earlier in the summer (July), the TES reported on the evidence to the Inquiry on sustainable development and lifelong learning which, the report said, should be on the school and college curriculum, as part of a revolution akin to that which colleges are making with new architecture and energy-saving building design. The latest edition of *Adults Learning* also explores the Inquiry's work with an article by Tom Schuller on the difficulties faced when trying to assess the true levels of public/private sector and individual spending on learning.

For more information on media coverage of the Inquiry, visit the website:

www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk

Thematic Reviews

The Inquiry has continued its series of seminars for each of the ten themes where evidence is gathered, analysed and discussed. Summaries of the final three themes explored in recent weeks appear below. These were:

- Crime and Social Exclusion
- Sustainable Development
- Citizenship and Belonging

Crime and Social Exclusion

Complex problems demand multi-agency solutions

The evidence to the Inquiry confirms social problems are complex and have no single cause. This is certainly true of the links between social exclusion and crime and the role that lifelong learning can play in reducing re-offending. There is little evidence to suggest that a lack of basic skills is, in itself, predictive of re-offending. But poor basic skills *are* related to other factors known to be associated with offending, such as poor school experience, unemployment, social exclusion, and various psychological and cognitive factors. A key question for the Inquiry is how to articulate the interconnectedness of these issues and assess the part that lifelong learning can play.

For example, providing post-prison support is essential. Without it, all the investment in prison education is thrown away in the first three weeks if there are no planned pathways to further education, training or a job. The targets for this work should be raised enormously and linked to essential support with housing, benefits etc. Financial literacy can be a way of helping prisoners prepare to re-join the world outside, assisting them to (re)develop decision-making skills.

The Inquiry seminar highlighted the difficulty of using standard models of cost/benefit analysis to assess the contribution of lifelong learning to other public policy priorities when in reality the interrelationships between the issues are much more complex. The Inquiry's public value studies are attempting to explore this key issue.

A life course approach

A large proportion of our prison population consists of young men. There is, therefore, a serious question about how we deal with 19-26 year olds as evidence presented to the Inquiry suggests that many young people grow up and out of crime at around 25. One conclusion might be that we should look at this as a separate phase of young adulthood, but it is doubtful whether the current evidence is robust enough to plan differentiated interventions for this age group. Nevertheless, there is potential for a stronger emphasis on a life course approach which:

- reflects the diversity of pathways and is not tied to chronological age stereotypes; but which also
- reflects what we know about patterns of development.

Support services need greater ambition

Much prison education is too narrow and is overwhelmingly focused on basic skills with a subsequent lack of support for people with qualifications at level two or above. Supporting progression to avoid people getting stuck repeating level 1 programmes without imposing a single vertical model of progression is a key challenge.

The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) has insufficient resources to support informal learning, which could broaden the curriculum. Seminar participants suggested this is particularly acute in relation to creative learning, most of which is offered by voluntary organisations working in prisons – evidence from the Shannon Trust, for example, indicates encouraging prisoners to take on teaching roles can be an effective way to secure greater autonomy within the prison environment, though there is a significant issue about not appearing to make crime / prison offer rewards which are not available to others.

Prison officers are potentially key intermediaries for learning, but for some, their own literacy and language needs require attention. The introduction of Union Learning Reps schemes amongst prison officers is an encouraging development but more remains to be done to raise the profile and quality of the service.

Sustainable Development

The Inquiry's seminar on sustainable development posed some large and difficult questions. Should sustainable development be adopted as the framework to underpin the whole lifelong learning system? How should we understand the relationship between economic, social and environmental outcomes? Work so far on the relationship between lifelong learning and sustainable development has underlined the breadth and complexity of this theme. How can balance and coherence be achieved?

Reconnecting the social and economic

Learning and skills policy in the UK has resulted in growing polarisation between skills for economic development and learning for wider personal and social purposes, evidence to the Inquiry shows. Sustainable development makes it clear that this separation is both unhelpful and untenable. It offers a way of reconnecting the social and economic purposes of learning and developing more holistic approaches. There are arguments for placing sustainable development at the core of lifelong learning, providing an overarching conceptual framework for policy and practice. Parallels with the development of approaches to equal opportunities

may be helpful, for understanding both what this might look like and the challenges and obstacles to achieving it.

Global capabilities

Sustainable development stresses the need for action which recognises that global as well as local and national contexts impact upon our daily lives and is fundamentally inter-related. Lifelong learning has an important role to play in the development of the 'global skills' that will strengthen people's capacity to deal individually and collectively with the opportunities and challenges that are presented by globalisation.

Such skills cover a wider range of capabilities than will be addressed by the narrow focus on vocational skills that dominates post-16 learning. Risk, complexity and uncertainty are central challenges for individuals and communities in this globalised context, so critical thinking skills and the capacity to evaluate and interpret political, scientific and media messages are particularly important.

At the same time, sustainable development poses a powerful challenge to the prevailing policy focus on skills development for economic growth and international competitiveness. Learning for activism, and learning that draws on the knowledge and experience of those outside the adult education sector, including social movements, are important dimensions.

Workforce and curriculum

It is not yet clear what the form and content of the curriculum to support sustainable development should be. More examples of good practice are needed, locally, nationally and globally. However, it is unlikely to be solely an 'expert curriculum' based on developing knowledge about sustainable development. Rather, there may be greater potential in developing approaches which empower the lifelong learning workforce to build their own skills and knowledge to embed sustainable development within the curriculum.

Citizenship and Belonging

Power, exclusion and structural inequality

Evidence presented to the Inquiry shows that lifelong learning has the potential to enable adults to develop critical perspectives on social, economic and political issues that are essential for justice-centred citizenship. But even the terms of the debate, such as *citizenship*, *belonging* and *social cohesion*, are politically charged and contested concepts.

Constructions of citizenship and notions of social cohesion must be treated cautiously because they may be based on norms which explicitly and / or implicitly marginalise certain groups and individuals. In this way, they can collude with and perpetuate structures of power and inequality. This makes the question of who controls the learning a central issue for this theme.

Presenting his paper on this theme at the seminar, Bob Fryer challenged traditional education for 'reinforcing, perpetuating and legitimising social injustice'. He described the best lifelong learning as a democratic process rooted in the principles and practices of social justice and 'open and subject to scrutiny and challenge in so far as its compliance with the declared canons of social justice are concerned'. The need for an inclusive, democratic

approach is particularly necessary when exploring issues of race, diversity and difference, he argued, calling for 'minimum common elements of citizenship' to apply to all learners.

Citizenship, skills and pedagogy

Skills training is not necessarily the antithesis of citizenship learning. Debates around the development of critical citizenship need to engage with mainstream skills agendas; e.g. literacy, skills for work. People do not stop being citizens when they are at work, so what are the implications of this for lifelong learning? Behind this is a wider issue: citizenship is not something to be learned directly, but indirectly. So whilst we should pay some attention to curricula/content issues, there should be a focus on action learning and pedagogy.

Roles of the state and voluntary sector

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) has traditionally played a key role in developing lifelong learning for active and critical citizenship, and creating independent, subversive spaces for people to engage collectively and tackle structural inequalities linked to gender, race and class. But Government policy that has sought to give a greater role to the VCS has privileged large VCOs and, almost paradoxically, squeezed out smaller organisations which are unable to win contracts.

In the current political climate, the role of the state in civic society may be one of the defining divisions between the main political parties, i.e. with Labour seeing the state as an enabling force and the Conservatives viewing it as something to be rolled back in favour of voluntary civic participation. The Inquiry should consider what the role for lifelong learning might be in building civic capacity in a way that is inclusive and equitable?

Technology

New technologies are enabling different kinds of learning to support citizenship, and alternative forms of citizenship to emerge; e.g. global social movements. This enhances the need for universal access to technologies and the competences to use them. Lifelong learning policy and practice need to understand how to make the most effective use of media and cultural technologies, and how online interactions translate into offline actions.

The UK-wide Inquiry

Northern Ireland

A gathering in Northern Ireland on Tuesday 9 September 2008 was part of a series of expert seminars to explore the major themes of the Inquiry and to gain insights into perspectives from different parts of the UK.

Economic and social inequalities

In spite of the peace, Northern Ireland remains deeply divided. Segregation on the grounds of gender, religion and intellect is enforced through the school system, and impacts significantly on subsequent life chances. There is a polarised distribution of educational attainment, with high levels of progression to higher education (HE) alongside large proportions of the population with low or no qualifications (20 per cent) or low literacy levels (24 per cent). These inequalities are not challenged by the lifelong learning system.

Moreover, levels of economic inactivity are high in Northern Ireland and economic and educational disadvantage are strongly linked to gender, class and religion, with working-class Protestant men registering high levels of exclusion.

Learning and skills strategy

Concern to address this low level of economic activity drives current learning and skills policy. Key aspects of *Success Through Skills*, the Northern Ireland skills strategy, are:

- the need to enable progression, especially for those who appear stuck at Level 1;
- outreach work for those furthest from the labour market, of all ages, with a possible expanded role for the voluntary and community sector;
- a unified and unitised qualifications framework (which can only happen within the broader framework of UK-wide reforms); and
- a focus of public funding on learning that leads towards qualifications.

Sustaining learning beyond skills

Substantial European funding has been available to support diverse forms of learning in the post-conflict context. But this is soon to end, and the prioritising of funding on learning for employment and economic development means that providers that might have been able to fill the gap (e.g. WEA, Ulster People's College, Educational Guidance Service for Adults) are facing cuts. There is a continuing need for social and political education.

Joining up policies

Making the connections at policy level between the economic development, social justice and social cohesion agendas will be critical, the seminar heard. Much has been done to address Northern Ireland's democratic deficit, and it could be argued that 'over-government' is now a risk. Effective communications across different levels and departments of government are essential to connect economic and social policies and provide a platform for lifelong learning, but achieving this will be challenging.

A new language for lifelong learning

Whilst current policy acknowledges the role that learning can play in building social cohesion, its emphasis is overwhelmingly on skills development for economic ends. Experiential and informal learning, culture and unwaged work, for example, need to be embraced within the lifelong learning framework. The Inquiry needs to find a vocabulary for talking about lifelong learning which encompasses the full spectrum of learning and is meaningful across a wide range of audiences. The importance of developing a common language that is both relevant and fresh has been identified as significant in the Northern Ireland context but achieving this is a key challenge for the Inquiry generally.

A Focus on Sectors

The Inquiry has commissioned a set of papers to explore the role of different sectors in lifelong learning. These papers will cover early years, schools, further education, higher education, local authorities, private training providers, and voluntary and community sector. As part of this work, Ursula Howard is leading a project on how further education (FE) colleges could help to realise a new framework for lifelong learning. A seminar for key

FE sector stakeholders at the Institute of Education in October considered some of the emerging issues.

Role of FE in Lifelong Learning

Policy, planning and strategy should start by recognising that FE's strength lies in leading and supporting local economic development, and individual and community well-being through partnership working. It was felt generally that a much more autonomous FE system was needed and there was endorsement of leadership approaches which promote public value as strongly as market values. The seminar heard that to be most effective in lifelong learning, colleges need significantly more funding flexibility to enable them to plan over a longer term, and respond to changing local needs.

Teaching and learning quality were top priorities for colleges and should be at the heart of any settlement. But the emphasis should be on offering life-changing chances and a rounded education, not just skills. The increasing attention being paid to health, happiness and well-being agendas might enable these roles to be recognised and developed. With appropriate lines of accountability, to funders, learners, employers and communities, the seminar called for colleges to be trusted to do the job which their professional capability and capacity fits them to do.

An important part of the college experience comes from the social spaces where students relate to each other outside classrooms and support each other through informal learning and local activities. Participants at the seminar called for colleges to be encouraged more to innovate and engage in research and development to shape and improve future learning opportunities.

The Public Value of Lifelong Learning

The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Poverty Reduction

Adult education is a key service in the fight against poverty but it has to work alongside other measures aimed at improving people's lives, a detailed study of the impact of lifelong learning on poverty reduction shows. The research was carried out for the Inquiry by Ricardo Sabates, Senior Research Office at the University of London's Institute of Education, as part of the wider exploration of the public value of such learning, not only for individuals but for families and wider community. The evidence suggests that lifelong learning works best when it is part of a broad set of initiatives and responses to the complex challenges people face at various stages in their lives.

Dr Sabates says: "Individuals engaged in lifelong learning are more likely to improve their livelihoods through better employment opportunities, higher income, broader understanding of financial markets, better health and healthier behaviours, access to health services, knowledge of health conditions, among others. However, the effectiveness of lifelong learning in reducing poverty is very much dependent on its integration with other policy measures."

In his paper, he explores the impact of the range of policies since 1997 which were designed in particular to tackle poverty, worklessness and neighbourhood deprivation. Sabates' investigation concludes that participating in adult learning can help substantially to reduce poverty but not in isolation from other policies. He calls for more rigorous research on issues such as the income effects of adult education, the impact of financial literacy,

the employment and health effects of adult learning, basic skills and health literacy, and the impact of lifelong learning on reducing child poverty.

The Impact of Lifelong Learning on Poverty Reduction by Ricardo Sabates is available to download from the Inquiry website at www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/papers

Funding Lifelong Learning

The Inquiry has commissioned a series of studies on public, private, individual and third sector funding of lifelong learning, but Tom Schuller, Director of the Inquiry has revealed a number of reasons why counting up the money spent on adult learning is far from easy. His concerns are spelled out in an article for the October edition of the NIACE journal *Adults Learning*.

The Government spends enormous sums educating and training people who are legally adults, that is, over 18. But most of this is spent on undergraduates undertaking first degrees, leaving relatively little for everyone else, he says. Defining a different age for the beginning of adult learning would be extremely problematic, but there is a strong argument for a better balance of spending throughout our lives than the current 'front-loaded' system, which assumes that most of our learning has been done by the time we are 21.

Then there is the question of the balance between spending by Government, by private employers and by individuals. Employers in England claim to be spending £38 billion a year on staff training, but the basis for this is not secure and we need a much more accurate and transparent means of assessment. Government spending goes far beyond the budgets of the 'education' departments and agencies – DCSF, DIUS and the LSC. Both Defence and Health spend very large sums on training their own staff.

And lastly, what do individuals spend? This is more complex than trying to calculate what we spend on our own training to advance our careers and on evening classes. Foreign language self-study guides for our holidays surely count, but what about the guide books? And should we also include cookery books, DIY manuals and nature documentaries? Even if we could agree a definition, finding out what is spent in all the likely categories would be an impossible task.

The full version of Tom Schuller's article is available at www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/news

Adults Learning can be obtained from <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications>.

Upcoming events

- **18 November**

Helen Gilchrist, Inquiry Commissioner and Ursula Howard, visiting research fellow at the Institute of Education, hold a breakout session on the Inquiry at the Association of Colleges annual conference in Birmingham. The theme is the role FE colleges should play in the provision of lifelong learning.

- **24 November**

Tom Schuller speaks at a joint NCVO/Carnegie UK event on social capital, at County Hall, London. For more information, visit the Inquiry website: www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk

- **1 December**

Inquiry Commissioner Bob Fryer speaks at the NIACE Policy Conference: 'Local Power and Adult Learning' about the Inquiry's thinking on putting the 'local' in lifelong learning. For more information, visit www.niace.org.uk/conferences

- **11 December**

An invitation seminar in Scotland – as part of the series to explore the major themes of the Inquiry and to gain insights into perspectives from different parts of the UK – takes place in Edinburgh.

- **20 January 2009 from 6pm**

The RSA/IFLL seminar on the science of lifelong learning will focus on what new research, especially in neuro-science, and tell us about the scope for and best methods of lifelong learning. For more information and to book a place please visit the RSA website: www.thersa.org/events

Have your say

Calls for Evidence

While the thematic seminars have reached completion, the Inquiry is still seeking feedback (or even further evidence) on the interim papers as they are published.

Of particular interest, as we take the theme of sustainable development forward, we would like to broaden our current evidence base. In particular, we would welcome further examples of the practical ways in which sustainable development principles are informing developments in the learning and skills sector. This could include: strategic and operational planning; learning and teaching practice; and curriculum design and delivery.

We also welcome evidence on the role that sectors have in providing and maintaining lifelong learning (see a *Focus on Sectors* on page 8)

Please send your contributions to: lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk

See Inquiry website for details: www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk

Top Propositions

Have we received your top three propositions for lifelong learning? Please send them to lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk

Send us a comment

Sponsored by:



E-bulletin sign-up

Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning

To receive Inquiry bulletins by email, please visit www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk or complete this form and fax it to Hanya Gordon at NIACE Fax: 0116 204 7080.

Name _____

Email address _____

Job title _____

Organisation _____

Data Protection

NIACE has notified its details to the UK Data Protection Registry under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide on this form will only be used to keep you informed about NIACE activities.