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A word from the Director



We expect the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning to provoke some controversy as the work grows more intense. We would not be doing our job were it to do otherwise. Tricky questions are raised by investigations on every front – questions about levels of governance, the role of local authorities and the relationship between central and local government. Then there is the wider question of how responsibilities are shared between public and private concerns as well as the individual.

So, welcome to the third IFLL Bulletin. As you can see from the contents, the pace of the Inquiry's work has increased in recent months. We have not only kept up the work on our ten major themes, but also extended into difficult issues – mapping expenditure and analysing the impact of lifelong learning on different areas of individual and social life. We are also tackling

(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

Murziline Parchment, Director of Major Projects and Service Delivery, Mayor's Office, Greater London Authority

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

the very difficult question of who has, or should have, responsibility for what, if we are to have a genuine system of lifelong learning.

Reports on thematic seminars on wellbeing, migration, technology and poverty are included in this Bulletin. We are now more than halfway through addressing our ten themes and pictures are beginning to take shape. As an illustration of the kinds of issues these debates throw up, let me just foreshadow the discussion emerging on crime and its reduction through effective lifelong learning. Crime has huge costs – personal, social and financial – hurting the victims, their families and communities and the criminals themselves. It costs more than £40,000 a year to keep one person in prison, so anything that brings down the number of offenders must be a good investment. There are 80,000 prisoners in the UK - and three times that number on probation. A very high proportion are young men from Afro-Caribbean communities. What might better access to education and training do for these people? A lot, surely. But – and it is a big but – lifelong learning cannot be the sole solution. Jobs, local environments, drug policies and many other factors will shape the overall results.

One of the toughest challenges – for us in the Inquiry, and for all those involved in policy and practice – is to be clear how different bits of the jigsaw fit together. Evidence on that would help enormously – see our website for more information, or contact Helen Plant on helen.plant@niace.org.uk.

Three most frequently asked questions about the Inquiry

- What do you mean by lifelong learning?
- What is the overall goal of the Inquiry?
- What will the Inquiry produce?

Question 1: What do you mean by lifelong learning?

The Inquiry's interpretation balances *breadth* with *manageability*.

Lifelong learning focuses on adults returning to learning rather than on the initial period of education. It includes a wide range of learning modes from classes in institutions to informal settings for groups and individuals.

It includes people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts – in educational institutions, at work, at home and through leisure activities.

However, there can be no watertight definition. Initial education increasingly stretches well into adulthood, especially with many students mixing study and employment, and with the rapid growth of postgraduate education. The Inquiry will therefore pay attention to the relationship between initial education and lifelong learning, especially in the way further education and higher education are structured and funded.

While formal education and training are core elements of the Inquiry, it must also extend to less formal modes. The *intention to learn* and *some degree of organisation* should in principle be recognisable features of an activity for it to fall within the Inquiry's remit, but there is no restriction to certified or assessed learning.

Issues the Inquiry will consider include:

- the implications for schooling – curriculum, pedagogy, structure – of a significant shift towards lifelong learning

- 14-19 provision, notably its fit with a coherent lifelong learning system
- intergenerational learning
- the implications of technological developments on how and where people learn

Geographically, the Inquiry covers lifelong learning in all four nations of the United Kingdom. But we will also build in a strong international dimension, inviting evidence from other countries and testing our conclusions against their experience.

This is our working definition. We would welcome feedback and comment on it. Please send us your views to lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk.

Question 2: What is the overall goal of the Inquiry?

The Inquiry will offer an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK. This will involve:

- giving a broad rationale for public and private investment in lifelong learning;
- re-appraising the social and cultural value attached to it by policy-makers and the public;
- developing new perspectives on policy and practice.

Question 3: What will the Inquiry produce?

Over the autumn and winter the Inquiry will publish interim papers that set out the findings of the thematic reviews, the results of the expenditure research (for more information see 'Other Research' later in the Bulletin), and a suite of papers that explores the roles of different stakeholders.

Next summer, we will publish our final report and a strategic framework for lifelong learning, which is likely to include the following:

- a statement of vision and values;
- a mapping and stock-taking of current investment and participation in lifelong learning;
- the rationale for investment – to understand the effects of lifelong learning on social policy areas such as health, social care and crime;
- defined roles and responsibilities – if progress is to be made, who should do what;
- evaluation and measurement – to deal with how progress towards a 'learning society' should be recognised.

This is a provisional outline for a range of audiences. It has proved to be a very useful tool for promoting discussions and identifying where the various stakeholders might contribute. But it is still very much open for debate and revision. Please send us your views on the framework to lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk.

Inquiry in the Media

The Inquiry had good coverage in *The Guardian* for Adult Learners' Week. The supplement on 13 May featured two articles on our work. The Inquiry is increasingly being seen as a critical 'second chance' to meet the new century's challenges for lifelong learning, ten years on from the National Advisory Group on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. The Chair of the Inquiry Sir David Watson set out the key challenge facing the Inquiry: to raise the level of public and policy interest in lifelong learning as a basis for bringing about a cross party consensus about the need for change. He drew a parallel with the recent debate on pensions, which had resulted in just such a consensus.

For more information on media coverage of the Inquiry visit the website: www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/news.htm.

Thematic Reviews

The IFLL is running a series of seminars for each of the ten themes where evidence is gathered, analysed and discussed. Bulletin #2 featured summaries of the Inquiry's reviews of workplace learning and demographic change. During the spring, the focus has been on four further themes:

- Wellbeing and Happiness
- Migration and Communities
- Technological Change
- Poverty Reduction

Wellbeing and Happiness

Evidence is positive if patchy

Evidence to the Inquiry shows lifelong learning has a beneficial impact on our material circumstances. It alleviates poor physical health, unemployment, relative poverty and isolation - improving our sense of wellbeing. However, evidence of the impact of lifelong learning on mental health is weaker and newer. There is some research evidence of positive associations – for health rather than happiness – but there's little indication of what is causing what.

That said, testimonial evidence from organisations such as the WEA illustrates how active learning self-evidently improves a sense of wellbeing and happiness in people who participate. It is an important reminder that the Inquiry needs to take account of both academic research and personal experience in its deliberations.

The background to the current breadth of interest in wellbeing, happiness and lifelong learning was charted at the opening of this IFLL seminar by Commissioner John Field, Director of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education, University of Stirling. Discussions ranged from the widespread concern about the reported rise in mental ill health, depression and stress, to the unsettling effect of the dramatic changes associated with globalisation and technological change on traditional family and community support structures. There was also a focus on the latest research into happiness, which revealed that increases in prosperity in rich nations were not accompanied by increases in happiness. The sum of the available evidence makes this an important, if contested, area of debate.

Dementia and learning

This issue hit the headlines recently with two revelations. First, fantasy author Terry Pratchett announced that he was in the early stages of dementia but believed he could slow its development by staying mentally agile. Second, scientists reported that the number of people with dementia was expected to reach 1 million within a few years. According to Suzanne Sorenson from the Alzheimer's Association, educational achievement can be a factor, but it is very difficult to separate education from other lifestyle factors.

There is, however, evidence of the effect of 'cognitive reserve' – an apparent resilience to cognitive damage - masking symptoms of dementia. Lower-educated people with clinical symptoms start to show a slow decline earlier, whereas those with 'higher cognitive reserve' and good social skills can mask their symptoms. Once their symptoms are revealed, however, those with higher levels of education tend to decline faster.

Wellbeing is a by-product of learning

'Ask yourself if you are happy and you cease to be so', said John Stuart Mill after his own breakdown. To cite wellbeing as an outcome is not a good basis for argument in favour of adult education, according to Professor Kathryn Ecclestone of Oxford Brookes University. Happiness and wellbeing are by-products of good adult education but we should resist seeing them as ends in themselves. Be cautious about 'psychologising' learning, and avoid the 'meaningless and intrusive' assessments that seek to measure happiness, she insists. We should accept that wellbeing and happiness are likely to be and are self-evident outcomes of good education and learning activities and put our energies into resurrecting education as an aspiration.

Educational inequality

Looking at the question of by-products from another angle, John Field argued that a by-product of our current education system is a very wide distribution of attainment for both young people and adults. The inherited inequalities of the school system result in low confidence, which presents serious challenges for adult learners. The widening gap between the achievements of the top and bottom 10% of young people has profound psychological consequences for what people feel they can do in adult life. We know there is a fixed proportion of the population not participating in adult learning with no intention to do so. The skewed distribution of fundamental skills amongst adults raises critical issues of disposition, self-esteem, confidence and motivation, which are significant challenges for those working in lifelong learning.

Visit www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/themes/wellbeing for a full summary of issues debated at the Wellbeing and Happiness seminar.

Migration and Communities

Current national government policy on immigration presents a challenge for local government because it fails to recognise local skills needs and hampers the development of grass roots strategies for social cohesion.

Evidence received by the IFLL reveals a need for flexible policy responses since patterns and experiences of migration vary greatly across the country, for example, between rural and urban areas. The implications of migration and the changing patterns of communities for lifelong learning were considered in detail by the Commissioners Murzilene Parchment, Director of Major Projects, Mayor's Office, Greater London Authority, and Sir David Watson at this IFLL seminar.

Social integration and cohesion

The evidence showed how lifelong learning could play a key role in enabling migrants, both as individuals and as members of families, to take their place as members of UK society. Lifelong learning also helps non-migrants understand the position of migrants and can help to increase racial tolerance by providing a space where people can interact and get to know one another. This applies to formal, non-formal and informal learning, and the social role of vocational learning in bringing people together should not be overlooked. However, if lifelong learning is to promote social integration effectively, it has to engage in a much more substantial and sustained way with issues of social cohesion, and seek to identify what specific forms of learning will help to foster cohesion.

Policy must be flexible

Just as the patterns and experiences of migration vary greatly throughout the UK, so do the learning needs of different migrant groups. Policy responses are therefore required which enable sufficient flexibility to address local circumstances and need, and this applies as much to lifelong learning as it does to other service provision.

Employment and the labour market

Failure to recognise local skills needs also results in a huge waste of talent. Many migrants are not using the skills they possess, and these could make a vital contribution to economic development where they live. For example, many rural areas are characterised by low wage, low investment and low skill economies. Unemployment and under-employment (people working in jobs below their skill levels) result in a waste of human potential. The Inquiry should explore further what is known about the scale, in financial terms, of under-utilisation of migrant skills.

Language

Equally, the right of all migrants to learn English should be recognised as a necessary principle within any lifelong learning policy that aspires to enable people to function in society. Most employers are unlikely to pay voluntarily for ESOL for their workers since it would affect narrow profit margins, although there are beacon employers who do develop their employees' English language skills. If local and national government took the lead in providing employees with ESOL, it would send a powerful message.

Data problems

There are big problems with data gathering. Official statistics are incomplete, reflecting both the complexity of the task and the fact that irregular migrants deliberately remain invisible. Predictions on future migration patterns are equally unreliable. In the light of such difficulties, a robust approach to research is needed which triangulates data from a range of sources such as the Labour Force Survey, NHS Experion and school census.

Visit www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/themes/migration for a full summary of issues debated at the Migration and Communities seminar.

Technological Change

For the Inquiry to succeed in identifying how technology can meet the needs of lifelong learning, it must distinguish between fundamental trends and passing fads. But, as evidence to the IFLL technology seminar showed, this is a far from straightforward process in a world of such rapid change and innovation.

The seminar, led by Commissioner and Chair of the NIACE Board, Nick Stuart, identified a number of key challenges for the Inquiry, with often contradictory indications of the best way forward. Three significant themes emerging in discussions were:

- as mobile technology decentralises knowledge and individualises learning, there is increasing need to design 'collective learning spaces';
- continuing professional development is an imperative for an ageing workforce who know less about the new technologies than do their students; and
- there are mounting tensions as 'collective' learning grows significantly while policy towards qualifications focuses on the individual.

Changes in behaviour are what really count

One approach suggested at the seminar was to begin by looking at changing behaviours, rather than technologies, and to track back. The pace of innovation is rapid and continuous, with the IT industry described as being in a state of 'permanent revolution'. However, to understand fully the implications of technological change, it is necessary to look beyond individual innovations and to identify and trace longer-term shifts in behaviour that appear to be taking place. Not all of these may be driven solely by technology; hence the need to be able to distinguish between fundamental trends and passing fads. There are challenges in seeking to establish cause and effect.

Location and environment

The importance of location and the physical learning environment presents another key contradiction. It was evident that the de-centralising of knowledge would happen with the growth of 'any time, any place' devices, and that this increases the need to design spaces for shared or collective learning to prevent social isolation. However, parts of the HE and FE estate are outdated, and institutions need help from government and others to redesign and develop their space in ways that enable effective learning with new technologies to take place. Indeed, seminar participants said, a clearer view is needed of what such learning environments might look like.

Workforce capability

Research points to a current divide in both understanding and expectations between tutors and students in relation to the role and function of technology in learning. If new recruits to the lifelong learning workforce are 'digital natives', this could be expected to change, but we know that the age profile of the lifelong learning workforce is rising so the focus may need to be on continuing professional development. Understanding what skills are required of the lifelong learning workforce in light of technological change is an obvious but important challenge.

Blurring boundaries

The capacity of technology to blur boundaries within lifelong learning was repeatedly referred to and has considerable implications for policy. One of the strongest effects of technology is to blur the line between individual and collective learning. This has direct practical implications for assessment, and raises questions about how assessment systems should be adapted to reflect the fact that people learn with and from each other, and that the demonstration of their learning will increasingly be a collective output. The assessment issue is also linked to the blurring of the boundaries between individual learners and the 'cloud' of technology that surrounds them. On both these issues, a tension is posed by the role of technology when the overwhelming policy drive is towards qualifications attached to the individual.

The role of broadcasting

The potential capacity of television to address digital exclusion was considered. However, the Inquiry should review more fully the role that broadcasting has played historically in sustaining a 'grand narrative' of shared experience, and what the implications might be of that for the increasing diversity of information and communication technologies with which people interact.

Visit www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/themes/technology for a full summary of the issues debated at the Technological Change seminar.

Poverty Reduction

The Inquiry seminar on poverty reduction found little evidence of a direct causal relationship between lifelong learning and poverty reduction. The IFLL seminar on 1 May, chaired jointly by NIACE Director Alan Tuckett and Commissioner Leisha Fullick, Pro-Director of the Institute of Education, University of London, heard that while the current focus tends to be on individual and quantifiable economic returns, this only gets us so far in thinking about poverty reduction and more work is needed on the collective benefits that learning can bring to communities.

Gender, disability and care issues in employment

The key factor determining employment rates among men is not level of qualification but disability. This suggests that there may be a key role for health literacy in helping to address unemployment related poverty among men, both by improving preventative health behaviours and by equipping people to manage disability more effectively. For women, the presence of family responsibilities is the primary determinant of employment patterns.

Economic and wider well-being

The social as well as economic aspects of poverty should be taken into account, and there is clear overlap between this theme and that of well-being. Issues of confidence, happiness, self-esteem and control over one's life are interwoven with questions of material welfare. The impact of relative poverty and inequality, including unequal access to asset formation, are areas that would benefit from further investigation.

Financial capability

Financial literacy can have a critical positive impact on individuals' sense of agency, whatever their level of income. A general conclusion was that more work should be carried out investigating links between low levels of learning and financial deprivation. In light of the current financial climate, the Inquiry should explore what role the financial services industry might play in supporting financial education more widely.

Calls for Evidence

Thank you to all those people and organisations that have already submitted evidence to the Inquiry. We have received over 200 pieces of evidence so far. The evidence will inform the thematic papers that will be published this autumn.

Calls for evidence are now out on the remaining themes:

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

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

Focus on Sustainable Development

A brief paper on the website addresses the latest call for evidence on Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development. Public and political awareness of the challenge posed by climate change has grown rapidly in recent years at a general level, but there is still much to be done if this awareness is to be turned into meaningful action. This paper addresses some key points in making the call for evidence.

We are still keen to receive evidence on any of the themes up until the end of August 2008. Please send your evidence to Hanya Gordon c/o lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk

Other Research

Further research into lifelong learning being carried out or commissioned by the Inquiry team includes:

- Who pays for what?
- What are the benefits?
- What roles should different sectors play?

Who pays for what in lifelong learning?

The Inquiry has commissioned a suite of four research studies to find out how much is invested in lifelong learning by the public, private and third sectors, and by individuals. The focus of the first three studies is primarily on funding, but we are interested in both the time and money that learners themselves invest.

The first of these studies – on public investment – will be published later this year. It will set out in broad terms how much each of the main government spending departments and their agencies allocates for learning for the public and for its own staff. This is the first time such a comprehensive overview of public funding for lifelong learning has been attempted. The challenge for the Inquiry will be to identify where there is potential for policy freedom of action: i.e. where funding is not protected by long-term commitments or the legislative framework.

What are the benefits of lifelong learning?

The Inquiry is commissioning a small set of ‘social productivity’ analyses to demonstrate the potential impact on a range of social policy areas of investing in lifelong learning. The aim is to go beyond the narrow cost-benefit analyses of lifelong learning that relate only to employability or income returns. The studies will look at the effect on a wide range of outcomes, notably health, civic activity, crime, social integration and will include intergenerational effects.

What role should different sectors play?

To complement the thematic focus of phase one of the Inquiry, we are also commissioning papers to explore the implications of lifelong learning for further and higher education, schools, private and third sector training providers and local authorities.

Inquiry Meetings with Partners & Stakeholders

Local Authority Adult Learning Services

On 9 May, the national network of heads of local authority adult learning services (LEAFEA) hosted a half-day meeting to discuss and debate the role of local authorities in lifelong learning with Inquiry Director Tom Schuller and Commissioner Tom Wilson.

The meeting highlighted a number of points for the Inquiry to consider:

- the diversity of local communities served by local authorities: their different demographic profiles and migrant populations require bespoke local responses, often linked to wider local authority strategies, for example for supporting elder care, or fostering community and social cohesion;

- local authorities have a key role in planning and managing public spaces and infrastructures which could provide opportunities for learning; for example, through negotiating for broadband access to be provided as standard in new housing developments. But the need for complementary investment in human capacity to turn these potential opportunities into practice was stressed.
- the importance of secure funding for community development workers and other intermediaries – such as health visitors, citizens advice workers and librarians – who can play a key role in facilitating engagement in lifelong learning.
- the need for further work on the notion of ‘entitlements’ in lifelong learning and the linked issue of democratising Information Advice and Guidance – underpinning the delivery of IAG services with democratic principles that ensure people are aware of their entitlements; and
- the importance of developing valid and valued measures and measurement systems for lifelong learning.

The Inquiry has established an e-mail group to continue dialogue with LEA/FEA members.

Museums, Libraries, Galleries and Archives

On 29 May, Tom Schuller joined a seminar involving 20 leaders from the museums, libraries, galleries and archives sector to discuss their role in lifelong learning. There are some key points for the Inquiry to consider:

- the role of front-of-house libraries, museums, galleries and archives staff in opening up informal learning opportunities to visitors;
- the challenge of ‘scaling up’ successful, small-scale innovations; and
- the problem of how targets distort provision and the need to retain a broad range of opportunities for incidental learning, alongside more formal, focused activities linked, for example to the National Curriculum.

The UK-wide Inquiry

Wales

In April, the Inquiry went west for a seminar on lifelong learning in Cardiff hosted by the Welsh Assembly Government and organised by NIACE Dysgu Cymru. Teresa Rees, one of the Inquiry commissioners, and Pro-Vice Chancellor at Cardiff University, chaired the day which highlighted some key issues from the Welsh experience for the Inquiry to consider as it develops its UK-wide strategy.

‘Sophisticate Leitch’ for the Welsh context

Wales has distinctive levels of need which are not fully recognised in the Leitch agenda: 50 per cent of those with low or no qualifications are out of work; 25 per cent of the adult population have literacy needs; 50 per cent have numeracy needs. To achieve an 80 per cent employment rate will require encouraging 150,000 people into the workforce. The Welsh experience highlights some of the economic differences between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ Britain and raises questions about the lack of challenge to the economic consensus on which current learning and skills policy is based.

Welsh Workforce Development Programme

Developed as the alternative to Train to Gain, this programme was applauded for delivering what employers want and being clearly linked to businesses planning. As a result, employers are willing to invest in training. Individual employers are targeted through HR advisers / brokers who identify exactly what skills needs their business has, and seek to meet them. No specifications are made around levels / volumes etc, and what is needed must be mapped against the organisation's business plan. The initiative receives £2 million part funding from the Welsh Assembly Government – a low level of public investment. Employers pay up front and ultimately contribute between 50 and 75 per cent. The satisfaction rate is 80 per cent. However, the programme's success has been attributed primarily to the skills of the individual HR advisers, which raises questions about how effectively it could be delivered on a larger scale and standards be guaranteed.

Scotland and Northern Ireland

There have been early discussions with colleagues in Scotland about a seminar north of the border to take place later in the year, and a seminar in Northern Ireland will take place in early September.

Coming up this summer

In July

- The Inquiry will be focusing through seminars on the implications of lifelong learning for citizenship and belonging, and sustainable development.
- Commissioners will be looking at early conclusions from the thematic reviews.
- The Inquiry will be considering different models for financing learning with representatives from the financial services industry.
- We will be planning a major piece of work for the autumn to look at what future learning infrastructures – physical, virtual and human – will be needed to support lifelong learning in the 21st century.

Over the summer look out for

- Regular updates and opportunities to comment on key issues the Inquiry is debating. Visit our website at www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk

Have your say

Calls for Evidence

We are still keen to receive evidence on any of the Inquiry's ten themes up until the end of August 2008. Please see the website for details:

www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/calls.htm and send your evidence to Hanya Gordon c/o lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.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

We'll be posting discussion themes and topics on the website over the summer, so look out for opportunities to let us know what you think by emailing **lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk**

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Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning

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