

**Expert Seminar on Poverty Reduction
and Lifelong Learning
1 May 2008**



Summary of Key Points

- 1 Methodological / conceptual issues There are 'more gaps than evidence' of a direct causal relationship between lifelong learning and poverty reduction. It is therefore important that the Inquiry focuses on the ways in which lifelong learning can be part of other approaches to reducing poverty, and operates in interaction with other policies. The title of this theme should be reviewed.

There is scope for the use of more varied methodologies. The current focus tends to be on the individual and on quantifiable economic returns. This only gets us so far and more is needed, for example, on the effects of collective learning, and the collective benefits that learning can bring to communities. Longitudinal studies, comparative studies with other disciplines and sectors, and biographical / autobiographical accounts also have potential to shed further light on the subject.

- 2 Qualifications and employability Two models were put forward to describe the links between qualifications and employability. IES suggest that there are three roughly equal elements to employability: assets, deployment and presentation. Only the first directly measure qualifications. The others may be acquired through a range of means, which may or may not include intentional learning. Alternatively, what employers look for in recruits can be described as objective factors (i.e. what is on a candidates CV, including qualifications) and subjective factors (e.g. attitudes, presentation, etc). Programmes focused on developing jobsearch skills may be as effective as skills training at moving people into work. This suggests an expanded role for specific kinds of careers advice.

Echoing earlier seminars, the point was made that qualifications gained by young people entering the labour market carry weight with employers as a sign of competence in ways than those obtained in later adulthood may not.

- 3 Labour market incentives The discussion prompted questions about the role of financial incentives (e.g. tax and benefits systems) that recall debates from the workplace seminar about different types of incentives for learning. These include both internal levers within the learning and skills system and external incentives. Looking at the relationship between different types of incentives from the learner perspective could provide important insights.

- 4 Gender 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.
- 5 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 on 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.
- 6 Financial capability Financial literacy can have a critical positive impact on individuals' sense of agency, whatever their level of income. The Inquiry should explore more widely the notion of a set of key capabilities.
- 7 The role of intermediaries CAB advisers are key intermediaries who work with people at points in their life when there may be high motivation to learn. There may therefore be potential for the development the advice and guidance aspect of their role.
- 8 Integrated employment and skills Articulation between the benefits system and learning is critical. People on benefits are known to avoid taking up training or moving into low-paid work because it is perceived to be financially risky and destabilising. To address this issue, it is intended that the adult advancement and careers service will provide advice on skills and employment that is linked to financial advice.
- 9 Values It was noted that the questions under discussion were highly political, but also moral and value laden, and that this raised fundamental questions for the Commission about its own value base.

Inquiry Secretariat
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