

Lifelong Learning: Contributing to wellbeing and prosperity

“Adult learning has a really important role to play in encouraging active citizenship. I’m not just talking about what people learn about specifically, but how that learning makes them feel. Going along to college means meeting people, discussing what’s going on in the world, boosting your belief in what you can do. It’s that self belief that leads people to get involved with their communities and become more active citizens. Given that my vision for this country is for all of us to get involved and play our part in national renewal, I believe adult learning and the way it inspires people is crucially important.”

“We know that adult learning doesn’t just help people find work – it can also have benefits for people’s health and even for reducing crime.”

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP, May 2010 in *Adults Learning* volume 20, number 9.

SUMMARY

The Government wishes to make the UK a more economically robust and socially cohesive society. The contribution made by education throughout the lifecycle is not only through vocationally purposive learning following clear pathways but also, and equally effectively, through general programmes of lifelong learning that build understanding, skills and confidence.

Lifelong learning is, however, in a fragile state and facing an insecure funding future. Between 2004 and 2009 the number of publicly-funded places chosen by individual adult learners rather than employers declined by more than 30 per cent. Although learner numbers rose modestly in 2010, there is no space for further budget reductions without pushing an already weakened infrastructure towards collapse.

While college budgets for those aged under 19 have enjoyed sustained growth, those for adult learners have not kept pace and the financial flexibilities announced by the new Government do little too offset further reductions in 19+ provision put in place by the outgoing administration. Similarly, the safeguard for community-based learning, negotiated at 3% of total FE spending in 2003 has flatlined for three years and, now totalling less than 2% is now expected to meet a greater range of needs. In higher education too, a tradition of continuing general education and extra-mural study has struggled to survive. Despite this, lifelong learning has the potential to make a significant contribution in helping Government meet a range of economic and social challenges and real benefits could be reaped from modest increases in investment along the lines of the Community Learning Fund envisaged in the Conservative manifesto.

This paper sets out why lifelong learning matters and how it holds the potential to make a greater contribution to the country’s wellbeing and prosperity.

INTRODUCTION

1. In recent years, stimulated by OECD, governments throughout the Western world have recognised the importance of finding ways of capturing wellbeing as an economic and social goal. The contributions of Layard¹, Wilkinson and Pickett² and Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (the Sarkozy Commission)³ all point to the economic price of failing to secure the best of every person's contribution to social and economic life. Impoverished levels of wellbeing come with an economic cost.
2. The paper draws on what is now a significant body of quantitative evidence which underpins what every educator of adults understands: that lifelong learning is part of the apparatus of a civilised society, sustaining people in their current economic and social responsibilities and also offering a route to personal and social fulfilment, transformation, development and prosperity.
3. It makes the case for continued public investment in lifelong learning. While recognising the coalition government's determination to reduce the budget deficit, it suggests that this must not displace its other economic and social policy aspirations. It argues that lifelong learning is distinctive not only as a strand of continuing, post-initial, education but also a cost-effective 'amplifier' for the delivery of other public policy goals.
4. The paper is produced by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) as a submission to the Spending Review. NIACE is a non-governmental organisation and a charity with members drawn from the whole spectrum of post-school education. NIACE's analysis of research evidence suggests that support for the continuing education of the whole population will help Government deliver a wide range of policy objectives for economic prosperity and competitiveness and for greater social justice and cohesion across a range of policy arenas and departmental boundaries.
5. The paper suggests not only that quantifiable public benefits are associated with lifelong learning in terms of encouraging responsibility and employability but also that reducing public expenditure on lifelong learning could be a counterproductive way of making economies. Not only would lower levels of skills acquisition make it harder to improve the UK's economic competitiveness, but a reduction in spending on lifelong learning risks incurring higher costs in other areas of public spending such as health, welfare benefits, criminal justice and social cohesion.
6. NIACE has been encouraged by the coalition government's understanding that lifelong learning is about more than the acquisition of a narrow set of competences for the workplace, important though these are. In particular NIACE supports the words of the Prime Minister which open this paper but despite these, is concerned that the Spending Review process may find it

¹ [Happiness : Lessons from a new science](#) (2005) and [The Depression Report: A New Deal for Depression and Anxiety Disorders](#), (2006).

² [The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better](#) (2010)

³ [The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress](#)

easy to understand the public costs of lifelong learning but harder to appreciate the benefits and value as these affect the primary policy concerns of different departments of state.

7. The Prime Minister's words at the start of this paper echo an approach developed in *Learning through Life* (2009), the report of the recent independent Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning. This report recommended that lifelong learning policy should distinguish between four distinct phases of the lifecourse (reflecting how people now live their lives):

- Up to age 25 (learning to be adult);
- 25 - 50 (the high pressure phase - learning for career, home and family) ;
- 50 - 75 (the active third age, learning to make better use of talents and skills);
- age 75+ (growing dependency, when learning can reduce costs, improve independence and quality of life).

Each phase poses distinct challenges for broader public policy and for each, there is a case that engagement in learning can offer a cost-effective and socially valuable contribution. The current distribution of public spending between the four groups is massively weighted towards the youngest age group and this has been determined not on the basis of need or rational decision making but as a result of history, Whitehall organisation and lobbying. Unless addressed by the Spending Review, this imbalance is set to grow even greater and even less rational as a result of the country's changing demographic profile.

8. Our argument is that, in order to meet the challenges facing the United Kingdom, the adult population needs to be more:

- confident and capable;
- engaged and empowered;
- enterprising and curious
- cultured and reflective;
- tolerant and inclusive.

We need a society which ensures social justice for all and which celebrates diversity. In short, we need a learning society.

ADULT LEARNING PAYS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

9. Lifelong learning promotes health and well-being

- Research⁴ shows that for every 100,000 women enrolled in adult learning in the UK an estimated 116-134 cancers per year could be prevented because of greater take-up of cervical smear tests.
- Taking one or two non-accredited courses as adults is estimated to increase the chances of giving up smoking by age 42 by 14 per cent (*the most conservative estimates of the cost of smoking to the NHS exceed £1 billion per year*)
- Taking women without qualifications to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSEs of grades A-C) would reduce the risks of depression at age 42 by 15%, worth an estimated saving of up to £200 million a year in the UK.
- Adult learning appears to slow the development of two brain lesions that are the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease.
- 14% of adults who took one or two leisure courses increased their sports/leisure membership between the ages of 33 and 42 compared to the predicted 9% of adults with similar characteristics who took no courses of any type.
- Participation in adult learning is related to taking more exercise. It is predicted that 38% of adults with the characteristics of learners would increase their level of exercise between the ages of 33 and 42 without taking any courses. The estimated effect of taking three to ten courses is 7% points, increasing this percentage from 38% to 45%.
- Men with no qualifications who gain a level 1 qualification are up to 50% less likely to become obese⁵.

10. As part of the Spending Review, NIACE urges HM Treasury to monitor the benefits and savings that adult learning makes to the budgets of the Department of Health and allow for provision that falls between health and education to be properly recognised as a continuing priority for funding and to be protected from savings elsewhere.

11. NIACE urges the Department of Health to use adult learning in a preventative health strategy, working with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to make the post-16 learning sector an example for the promotion of positive mental health and well-being with a similar scheme to the NHS's pledge as a *Mindful Employer*.

12. The contribution lifelong learning can make to the recovery of good health is appreciated by the Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills through personal experience:

⁴ Feinstein, L et al (2008) *The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings*, Institute of Education: London.

⁵ Feinstein, L. (2002) *Quantitative Estimates of the social benefits of learning 2: Health (Depression and Obesity)*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.

“Education and learning are of course desirable in their own right. Education for education’s sake - learning how to learn - benefits the economy in the long term. Philistinism is bad economics. It is also fundamentally unacceptable”.

“A story from own life makes the point. My mother and father left school at fifteen to work in factories. My father eventually taught building trades in the local technical college: we need more people like him. My mother was a housewife and when I was ten she had a major nervous breakdown and spent time in a mental hospital. When she recovered she saved her mind through adult education - learning for the first time about history, literature, philosophy and art. We need more people like her too.”

Rt. Hon. Dr Vince Cable MP, speech, 3 June 2010

13. The broader case for recognising the significance of individual mental capital and mental wellbeing - and the importance of lifelong learning in this is supported by evidence from the Government Office for Science.⁶

14. **Lifelong learning contributes to a resilient and productive economy.**

- ***Research⁷ shows that individuals who are not in the labour market, and who undertake lifelong learning leading to qualifications are more likely to be employed at a later date.***
- ***Male workers who undertook work-related training in mid career (age 33-42) experienced four to five per cent higher wage growth over the period 1991-2000, as compared to similar workers who did not undertake any training.***
- ***Those who were out of the labour market at the beginning of the period (1991) were more likely to be in work in 2000 if they had acquired a formal qualification in the interim.***
- ***Businesses that do not invest in talent are two and a half times more likely to fail, whereas those that carry on training will recover more quickly.***
- ***For both men and women, work-related adult learning is associated with positive willingness to work. Those in the workforce who receive training are less likely to leave.***

15. NIACE is encouraged by the Government’s move away from an often crude target-driven approach with a tendency towards micro-management towards an outcome-driven system which encourages learning to meet the real needs of individuals and employers rather than simply accrediting existing skills. A system more flexible to local need as expressed by individual learners and employers is welcome as is one which places greater trust in educators’ competence and expertise - but further reforms are needed and need to be funded. In the absence of central prescription, ministers may need to

⁶ Foresight Programme (2009) *Mental capital and wellbeing: making the most of ourselves in the 21st century. Final project report.* Government Office for Science. (plus Field, J. *Learning and Mental Capital*)

⁷ Feinstein, L *et al* (2004) *The Labour Market Impact of Adult Education and Training: A Cohort Analysis*, Centre for the Economics of Education: London.

incentivise change and, at a time of spending cuts, to 'licence and legitimate' controlled experiments and innovation. This might include a re-balancing of provision for learners taking their first steps back into learning and progressing to formal qualifications, (covered by what the previous Government labelled the 'developmental education' budget in further education). This would also include a robust foundation learning stage which is inclusive and meets the widely different needs of learners with no, or partial, qualifications. Only Government can do this - market forces alone will not.

16. The market may have a part to play in wider qualification reform but the interests of employers, schools, colleges and universities are not necessarily the same as the interests of adult learners for career progression, labour market mobility and recognition of competence. This market failure is not in the long term national interest. Government has a significant role to play in holding the ring and ensuring sectional interests do not squeeze out the public interest.
17. Above level 2, market forces may have greater benefits - but even here, if the Government wishes to support take-up of education and training for occupations in science, technology engineering and maths, some ongoing public support may be required to stimulate demand in further and higher education.
18. Low levels of basic skills (literacy, language and numeracy and also oracy and financial capability) hold back business competitiveness and productivity and also limit personal effectiveness in other areas of life. The UK has made considerable progress over the past decade but the task remains substantial, especially among those 'harder to help'. Again, the human cost of relying on market forces to do this may be greater than the price of state intervention.
19. The same is true for provision made for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: market solutions alone are unlikely to ensure such students progress easily into employment. The mix of education, training and other support required will need continued public spending. Similar arguments may apply for many adults moved from incapacity benefits onto Jobseekers Allowance as a step towards labour market re-engagement.
20. The wider public policy goal of helping people to move from welfare dependency into work has a significant lifelong learning dimension. Recent work by NIACE for the Learning and Skills Improvement Service suggests that the further education sector can reach out successfully to people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) but doing so requires a funding system that is sufficiently flexible to customise learning in ways relevant to individual needs and aspirations. 'One size fits all' national programmes are of limited effectiveness.
21. Evidence from the Audit Commission (July 2010) suggests that young people not in education, employment or training at 16-18 have poorer life chances than their peers and are more likely to be a long-term cost to the public purse. National figures for 2009 show 9.2 per cent (183,200) of young people

aged 16-18 were NEET and the 2008 NEET cohort will cost an estimated £13 billion in public finance costs and £22 billion in opportunity costs over their lifetimes. Young men who were NEET are three times more likely to suffer from depression, and five times more likely to have a criminal record, than their peers.

22. As well as reducing the size of the 'NEET cohort' of 16 - 18 year olds, Government will wish to stop the growth of a 'mature NEET' population (including those with A-levels and degrees). Lifelong learning and recurrent education will be an important element of any preventative strategy.
23. People are most ready to believe that they can re-train and re-enter employment during the first few months of unemployment - so there is a need for early intervention through education. Employability skills cannot in themselves, easily be turned into a curriculum and 'taught' but lifelong learning, if allowed to be flexible and learner-centred, can help people gain or maintain the softer skills which are crucial for employability. These lessons also apply to apprenticeships where Government will need to anticipate the needs of the emergent economy in a way that employers, concerned to meet current needs, are less able to do.
24. Although the Government is instinctively reluctant to regulate employers, this has the effect of disadvantaging people employed in businesses where the employer is unconvinced of the value of training, or where the employer cannot see a way to release people to build their skills. For this reason NIACE would urge the Government not to amend employees' statutory right to request time off for training and indeed would go further and make tax relief for vocational training (currently worth £3.7 billion per annum) contingent on raising levels of participation and accreditation in learning at work, and reporting on training investment in company reports.

25. Lifelong learning helps the UK manage a changing demographic profile

- England's population is ageing and this trend will increase rapidly over the next 20 years. In 2009 around 17.7 million were aged 50 or over; by 2029, this will have increased to 22.9 million people.
- Research by the Institute of Employment Studies⁸ shows that investment in learning for older people can reduce the costs of medical and social care, and improve the quality of life for older people, their families and communities.
- For people aged between 50 and 71, being disabled or in poor health is a barrier to participation in learning. However, higher proportions of learners with disabilities or health problems reported various positive benefits of learning, compared to those in good health

⁸ Dench S and J Regan (2000) *Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact*, Research Report RR183, Department for Education and Employment.

- The same study showed that 80 per cent of older learners reported a positive impact of learning on at least one of the following areas: their enjoyment of life; their self-confidence; how they felt about themselves; satisfaction with other areas of life; and their ability to cope.
 - Furthermore it showed that 42 per cent of older learners reported an improvement in their ability to stand up and be heard and/or their willingness to take responsibility.
 - 28 per cent reported an increased involvement in social, community and/or voluntary activities as a result of learning.
26. The changing demographic profile of the UK has implications not only for skills but also for social cohesion. These changes are evident in the overall age profile of the UK population (and its countries and regions) and also in terms of patterns of migration and of engagement with the labour market by particular groups within the population.
27. Changes to the UKs age profile in the coming decade are largely predictable, yet the implications are only now being acknowledged in policy terms - most recently in proposals to raise the state pension age and scrap the default retirement age. If the timing and nature of people's exit from the paid labour market changes, there are key challenges for education and training provision. Skills Strategies to date have given patchy recognition to this. For example, older people have, too often, been seen only as dependent pensioners, the language needs of migrants to the UK have not been recognised and there has been little link-up between changing patterns of gender participation in the labour market and how this impacts upon children's early years education and family policy.
28. The Spending Review also provides an opportunity for Government to steer lifelong learning policy so that it better supports:
- a. the dissemination of age-related labour market information (regionally and sectorally) and identification of potential age-related skills shortages;
 - b. the encouragement and promotion of training initiatives to support flexible alternatives to traditional expectations of "retirement" from the labour market;
 - c. programmes for retraining/re-motivating employees who may have to retire later than they might have had anticipated;
 - d. self-employment and enterprise education and training for mature people preparing to exit the labour market gradually (mirroring young enterprise initiatives);
 - e. initiatives to support re-entry to paid employment for adults (whether returning from periods of domestic responsibility, ill-health, release from prison or for migrants joining the UK workforce);
29. There also needs to be a clear strategy for promoting older adults' participation in learning for purposes other than paid employment. The clear link between learning and positive health effects suggest that this can

save the Exchequer money, delay morbidity and prolong active citizenship. To illustrate, a modest programme of adult education in a care home has been reported⁹ as more than paying for itself through savings on medication and incontinence products.

30. The impact of an ageing labour force and a society with increasing numbers living in active retirement for decades cannot be under-estimated. Changing demography will affect everyone. Young people can expect much longer working lives, with more of their income committed to saving for their own retirement, and higher taxation as they meet the health and social security costs of a larger ageing population. Older people with assets and income and able to retire from full-time work will be able to look forward to two or three decades of active retirement which may include different forms of engagement with the labour market through a combination of voluntary and part-time work. Others may have to work longer than they expected or planned, as some pensions fail to provide hoped for levels of security. Each of these groups will have learning needs to be met in order to help them to adapt successfully to changed circumstances.
31. Because of the UK's changing demographic profile, NIACE believes that Government should give special consideration to educational opportunities for older people. For those aged 50-75, learning has a role to play in supporting prolonged economic activity and engagement in the labour force; and for all older adults it can make a marked contribution to the quality of life. It has positive impact of health and physical well-being which generate quantifiable savings in health and social care costs through delaying the onset of morbidity. Because of this, NIACE urges the Government to consider the introduction of an older learners' entitlement setting out a national framework of what is considered to be an appropriate range of learning opportunities any older person can expect to find in his or her local area.
32. NIACE also believes that the Spending Review provides an opportunity to reassess the role of local authorities in this process by considering giving them a clear role to coordinate, lead and guarantee older people's learning at local levels along with mechanisms for measuring progress. Whilst local authorities have a responsibility for the welfare and well-being of their communities, their role in adult education has been eroded. NIACE believes that they need to be given an explicit responsibility for the development of appropriate lifelong learning opportunities for older people.
33. A further educational need relating to demographic change arises from increased migration. In addition to migration from the EU and as asylum continues to be sought by people displaced by war, political instability and environmental crises there will be a continuing need for investment in English for Speakers of other languages, to help migrants settle and contribute effectively, and to ensure that their qualifications and experience can be used effectively. The absence of a robust mechanism for the recognition, accreditation and assessment of vocational and professional

⁹ *Informal Adult Education in Care Settings* (2010) Coracle films/NIACE for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

qualifications and experience gained overseas seriously inhibits the contribution migrants and refugees can make to the economy. For some groups of highly-qualified refugees unemployment continues at extremely high levels. It should be a Government priority to consult with the UK Commission on Employment and Skills about the establishment of a centre for overseas qualifications recognition in the next spending round.

34. Lifelong learning promotes social mobility, social justice and equity

- **Research findings¹⁰ consistently identify a return from later-life investment in education through improvements in occupationally-based social status.**
- **A review of the available facts suggests that, for those who attempt to gain entry to the labour market from a situation of inactivity or unemployment, there is evidence of a monetary return attached to various levels and types of training and education.**

35. NIACE welcomes the Government's instruction to the new Skills Funding Agency to prioritise increasing the number of apprenticeship places, reduce the number of 18 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training, and encourage more people to participate in adult and community learning. As part of this NIACE advocates the establishment of a system of Lifelong Learning Accounts and a £100m pa Community Learning Fund as envisaged by the Conservative Party before the election.

36. NIACE also urges Government to protect the continuation of funding for adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Lifelong learning has a central role in the lives of many people with learning difficulties or disabilities - providing access to and support in paid employment and in securing meaningful and stimulating lives for those for whom employment is not an option. There is a particular need to consider the role of learning in securing quality of life for adults with profound and multiple disabilities where a cross-departmental approach involving the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department of Health and the Department of Work and Pensions may be the best way forward.

37. Given that the Government plans to implement the Equality Act 2010 from October, there is a need for public resources for education and training to be distributed in ways that ensure particular groups are not unlawfully or unfairly excluded. In addition to the duties on public bodies to consider reducing socio-economic inequalities, there may be other public education roles for lifelong learning.

¹⁰ Blanden J et al (2009) *The Effect of Lifelong Learning on Intra-generational Social Mobility: Evidence from Longitudinal Data in the United Kingdom*, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills: London.

38. Lifelong Learning promotes strong and healthy families

Because considerable inequality is already apparent when children reach school-age, families are one of the most powerful factors in determining children's life chances.

- Research¹¹ found that parental involvement in school was more than four times as important in influencing performance of young people aged 16 than socio-economic class. Family learning is the most effective tool to involve the parents of disadvantaged children.
- After completing family learning courses, learners reported having gained new skills, greater levels of confidence and understanding, improved communications and changed relationships with their families and communities.

39. Concern about the human as well as the public spending costs associated with fractured or dysfunctional families suggest that the Government should consider increasing investment in family learning. Simply seeking to protect frontline spending on schools ignores the role parents have as every child's first educator. In addition, if the coalition's policies for schools encourage greater parental choice and agency, there will be an increasing need to grow and support parents' capacity for informed choice and to assume new responsibilities. Intergenerational learning can play an important role in this respect.

40. While the Government may be cautious about intervening in the private lives of families, there is little doubt that educational interventions can be effective in influencing family attitudes and behaviours. Protecting and promoting the child's welfare may be seen as paramount, but family learning benefits adults too. After taking part in family learning courses, learners report having gained new skills and insights, greater levels of confidence and understanding, improved communication and changed relationships with their families and communities. Research¹² has also found that parental involvement in school is more than four times as important in influencing the performance of young people aged 16 than socio-economic class. Family learning is the most effective way of involving the parents of disadvantaged children.

41. A 'learning family' where adults and children are enthused and involved in their own and each other's learning has other positive effects. Better relationships with parents, grandparents and carers as well as improved educational performance reduce the chances of children being excluded from school and going into care. Raising family aspirations through learning reduces the risk of a young person being out of education, employment or training while adult involvement in children's schools, pre-schools and

¹¹ Nunn, A *et al* (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility*, Research Report No 450, Department for Work and Pensions: London.

¹² Nunn, A. *et al* (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility*. Research Report No 450, Department for Work and Pensions: London.

communities is often a gateway to other forms of civic engagement, thereby contributing to the 'Big Society'.

42. The common sense of the African proverb, that 'if you teach a woman to read and write, a village will learn', is recognised in current family literacy programmes, but family learning has wider purposes than literacy, or role modelling for parents - important though both are. Where children and adults learn alongside one another both benefit, and an adult gaining confidence has a direct impact on their child's educational performance.

43. Lifelong learning develops active citizenship and empowered, cohesive communities

- Studies¹³ find that taking three to 10 leisure courses raises racial tolerance by almost 75% than the predicted change in this attitude for similar adults.
- Whilst adult education does not appear to change the attitudes of those with extreme racist-authoritarian views, it does seem to prevent individuals from adopting such extremist attitudes.
- Taking part in adult education is associated with a greater likelihood of voting.
- Men with the poorest literacy and numeracy skills tend to lead a solitary life.
- Participation in each four types of adult learning (academically accredited, vocationally accredited, work-related and leisure) contributes separately to positive changes in social and political attitudes. Participation in three of the four course types (the exception being vocationally accredited courses) contributes to increases in civic and political participation.
- The effects on civic participation of taking leisure courses are particularly marked for those with qualifications below Level 2 at age 33.

44. NIACE's analysis suggests that lifelong learning, especially informal adult community education, ought to be at the heart of Government's Big Society aspirations. Learning and critical reflection is what empowers individuals and communities to come together in inclusive neighbourhood groups to build the 'little platoons' of civil society.

45. The experience of the central government Transformation Fund for informal adult learning has demonstrated that modest sums of public spending can unlock the kind of innovative and creative changes that make a difference to the lives of individuals and the communities of which they are part. In this way lifelong learning is can be more than a public service but can become a powerful instrument of cultural change - providing a bridge between public,

¹³ Feinstein, L et al (2008) The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings, Institute of Education: London.

private and voluntary sectors whether at regional, sub-regional and local level.

46. Technological advances mean that some level of digital literacy and access is increasingly a pre-condition for effective active citizenship yet there remain almost 10 million adults across the UK who do not currently have the skills to make use of the online world and 4 million of these are also in socially excluded groups. More than 60% of people of pensionable age, for example, live in a home without access to the internet. This not only disadvantages individuals but it reduces the scope for Government to make savings through delivery of services online.
47. Although the Cabinet Office leads on the Race Online initiative, this is more than a marketing campaign. There is a case for a strong adult education dimension to the work, involving outreach to those furthest from engagement and support for adults to consolidate their skills and progress to more advanced usage. Consideration may also be needed of the costs and benefits of both informal and formal training in media literacy as explosion of access to digital content presents adults with need to make critical judgements about content and online activities for themselves and for their children.
48. More generally, and despite the closure of the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), technology has massive unrealised potential for cost-effective delivery of education and training. While large levels of public investment may not be needed, there may be a case on the grounds of cost-effectiveness to support the roll-out and transfer of the kind of good practice pioneered by the Open University and by initiatives such as i-tunes U. There has also been a growth in freely available digital content and the Open Educational Resource movement has already added to the existing stock of public and privately funded materials.
49. A further contribution that lifelong learning makes to cohesive communities comes from the role it plays in the rehabilitation of offenders and the prevention of recidivism. Crime and punishment costs the UK a huge amount in social as well as economic terms. In 2006, prisons alone cost more than £4 billion a year to run. Prisons are full of offenders with very low educational levels. Investing in better education and training opportunities gives hope of bringing about change in individual offender behaviours and attitudes and helping the offender reintegrate. A 2002 report by the Social Exclusion Unit (*Reducing Re-offending by Prisoners*) found that basic skills learning can contribute to a reduction in reoffending of about 12 per cent. Given that average prisoner costs are in the region of £40,000 a year, even the most modest assumptions about how a falling re-offending rate might translate into savings suggests considerable benefits will result.
50. Analysis¹⁴ also suggests that if the proportion of the working age population with no formal qualifications was reduced by one percentage point (and

¹⁴ Feinstein, L. (2002) *Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning 1: Crime*, Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning.

those people achieved a level 3 qualification) the savings in terms of lower crime would be of the order of £665 million per year in England and Wales.

CONCLUSION

51. Although this paper has focussed on further education, the concept of lifelong learning includes higher education too. Here, the publication of Lord Browne's review of fees and funding will give the Government a framework within which spending options for English HE can be assessed and decisions here may affect the future approaches of the devolved administrations also. The position of NIACE in this debate is to encourage the development of a system that does not privilege full-time study and place part-time students (overwhelmingly mature adults) at a disadvantage. A step towards such a system might involve rebalancing public support towards the costs of tuition rather than student maintenance. In addition NIACE would wish to see an end to those funding mechanisms which disincentivise universities from offering recurrent lifelong learning opportunities.
52. NIACE would welcome the opportunity to work with Government to pursue any or all of the matters covered in this paper.

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