

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW CHANCES: NEXT STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING THE FURTHER EDUCATION REFORM PROGRAMME

Review of Informal Adult and Community Learning

a response from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, October 2011.

Overview

1. This document is a response to the specialist consultation on Informal Adult and Community Learning (IACL) issued by Government as part of its wider proposals for reform of the further education sector. It should be read alongside NIACE's contribution to that wider review.
2. As the UK's leading independent non-governmental organisation and charity for lifelong learning, NIACE welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's plans and believes that the challenges posed for IACL have resonance across the FE sector as a whole (especially given Baroness Sharp's Inquiry into *Colleges and their Communities*, sponsored and serviced by NIACE along with the Association of Colleges and 157 Group). The approach that Government takes to this dimension of its review may 'set the weather' for the whole *New Challenges, New Chances* consultation.
3. NIACE members are drawn from a wide range of places where adults learn: in addition to colleges and universities it has members from local authorities and voluntary/community groups, workplaces, prisons and many others supporting informal learning. In this response, NIACE's primary interest is in promoting a more equitable system that provides accessible and affordable opportunities for all adults to learn.
4. NIACE is pleased to note the recognition given in the paper both to its expertise in literacy and numeracy provision and to Baroness Sharp's inquiry. It applauds the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills for its commitment to a consultative approach, which allows the sector as a whole and members of the public to endorse, improve or counsel against the detailed proposals – allowing for better-informed decision-making.

5. NIACE warmly welcomes the recognition in the consultation of the importance of adult and community learning and the contribution it makes to building social as well as economic capital. We support wholeheartedly the government's acknowledgement that adult and community learning benefits individuals, families and communities in many and different ways.
6. NIACE also welcomes the aspiration to widening participation in adult learning, addressing historical funding inequities, supporting wider informal adult and community learning, ensuring that workforce development and quality assurance arrangements are appropriate and strengthening the evidence base for policy development. These challenges are complex and will need sophisticated analysis to reach solutions which produce creative approaches for including diverse adults and communities in a range of learning opportunities that satisfy diverse purposes and interests as well as securing voice for learners and citizens and helping build a society based on greater equity and social justice.
7. NIACE views the inclusion of ACL within a consultation addressing the vision and broader context of FE reform as a positive step that firmly and unequivocally locates ACL within a single ecology of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning. Informal adult and continuing education is not a marginal concern or an optional extra – it is at the heart of making lifelong learning central to people's lives.
8. This is particularly important as the reality of practice is that provision and different funding streams are often combined creatively by providers to enhance learning offers and progression routes for diverse groups of adults. It is disappointing therefore that the paper does not adequately cross reference the common issues and connections between the different elements of adult learning across its different sections. Thinking appears still to be 'siloes' and the potential synergies between ACL and other areas of the FE sector remain under-realised. Literacy and numeracy, quality assurance and teaching and learning qualifications are particular areas which will require whole-sector approaches and which will underpin success.
9. NIACE believes that high quality, fit for purpose and timely information, advice and guidance will be critical for the success of many of the policies proposed. It is a serious omission from the consultation document.
10. The central focus of the ACL consultation is quite understandably the £210 million Adult Safeguarded Learning budget, but this may inhibit the development of a robust and coherent vision across and beyond localities. It should be recognised that adult and community learning takes place in the context of a much wider learning offer, or ecology, as well as supporting other public policy priorities. Devising and operating local approaches to BIS funded adult and

community learning in isolation from this wider context could squander precious resources and reduce potential for economies of scale or maximising the benefit of different funding streams. There would be significant advantages in planning, organising and evaluating the impact of BIS funded adult and community learning in ways that stitch it into the wider offer and different funding streams across learning, local consultative frameworks and other areas of public policy. This would support learner access, support and progression as well as maximise use of resources and funding. For similar reasons, the wider context also needs to be taken into account when devising a methodology for addressing historical funding anomalies and considering approaches to quality assurance, impact assessment, initial training and ongoing staff development. NIACE also believes that the six challenges outlined for ACL have applicability for wider adult skills funding, which would benefit from a closer alignment between the economic and social outcomes of learning.

Challenge 1: The need to clarify Government objectives for spend on ACL and its role in supporting wider Government policy objectives, including the Big Society, localism, wellbeing, social inclusion and digital inclusion.

Q1. Do you agree that BIS-funded IACL contributes to the development of the Big Society and complements the delivery of other Government policies, and if yes, which policies and how might IACL's contribution be measured?

NIACE fully endorses the government's commitment to ensuring that adult and community learning contributes to cross-government policy objectives. NIACE research has illustrated the many ways in which ACL contributes to a range of policy areas including employment, health, environmental sustainability, criminal justice, regeneration, social justice and cohesion, community involvement, citizenship and volunteering, equalities, digital inclusion and well-being.

NIACE believes that ACL has potential to help heal social breakdown. Adults from different groups learning together can strengthen understanding and relationships across different groups and generations. ACL can help unite communities and build solidarity and hope in the face of huge economic and social challenges; the need for this is highlighted for example by the August riots in English cities. Adult learning is essential to enhance the capacity of citizens to contribute to their communities, develop resilience in the face of radical changes to public services, as well as to help to shape, deliver and evaluate the services that affect their lives. It can also equip adults to access publicly-held data although the complexities entailed in bringing this about remain substantial and further thought needs to be given to ensuring that those with poor skills, language needs, and learning disabilities are not excluded.

What is vital is that individuals and communities are included as co-producers in order to create solutions with and not for them.

Measuring the contribution of learning across different policy areas is a complex process, and where learning is one aspect of multiple interventions the specific impact can be difficult to isolate. Measuring impact can be both time consuming and costly and a too rigid approach can squeeze out innovation. A national framework as set out in Q3 would offer a cost effective flexible approach. BIS should also establish a methodology for calculating the value of learning benefits for different policy areas and use the evidence generated to make the case for cross departmental contributions to ACL provision. The work NIACE is carrying out on Social Return on Investment assessments of ACLF projects should help to inform a better understanding of how to measure impact. NIACE is keen to help the sector and Government learn from this work.

Q2. Should BIS funded IACL be aimed solely at supporting specific outcomes such as progression to training and employment, or enable progression in a broader sense?

There is an unhelpful confusion between outcomes and progression in the consultation paper. It is important to recognise that adults progress through their learning, achieve outcomes as a result of their learning and some progress to do other things. This progression can be a range of destinations and can be horizontal as well as vertical. It is also important to recognise that the initial impetus and reason for participation is often not directly related to the outcomes, with many learners reporting outcomes beyond what they expected.

NIACE believes that it would be reductive and utilitarian to fund only provision tied to progression to skills training and employment. This would endanger the expansive vision of adult and community learning that draws in the most disadvantaged adults and has diverse social and economic benefits for adults, families and communities. Progression to employment is an important and valid outcome, but must be valued alongside many other harder to measure outcomes which are and should be equally valued and valid.

Q3. If the latter, what other types of progression are relevant and how could they be measured?

BIS should recognise the range of potential outcomes and destinations that might include improvements in health, confidence and well being, community participation, activism and volunteering, independent living, further learning, environmental awareness and action, and digital inclusion. It is important that outcomes are not

defined too rigidly as this could militate against the creative, flexible and adaptive characteristics that are the strength of adult and community learning.

BIS should recognise the well rehearsed challenges in quantifying progression beyond learning. It is not always easy to identify a direct causal effect, especially when learning is one of multiple interventions, and progression is not always immediate but can take place over a significant time period. It can be time consuming and expensive to track the progression of adults after they leave the learning situation. Any approach devised should be cost effective and avoid creating a bureaucratic burden for learners and providers.

NIACE believes that a workable approach lies in developing a framework that sets out broad areas of learning outcomes which are each illustrated by social and economic indicators which are indicative but not prescriptive. This framework would encompass progress in learning, learning outcomes and progression from learning and could incorporate tools and approaches such as RARPA. It would recognise multiple outcomes and lateral as well as vertical progression and provide flexibility to accommodate a range of contexts and learning outcomes. It would also support learners to self define their progression, which can change and expand within as well as beyond the course of learning.

Q4. What should be the respective national and local roles in relation to IACL?

National role

NIACE agrees that the national government's role should be to set out a clear vision and strategic objectives for ACL. The consultation articulates something of this but the bold, far sighted and coherent vision that is required for ACL in the current context is missing. NIACE urges BIS to develop a more confident vision of ACL for the 21st century. ACL inspires adults at all life stages to develop a passion for learning. It fosters tolerance, mutual understanding, independence, and strengthens communities and families. Through adult and community learning, adults gain practical skills, knowledge and confidence and enhance their mental and physical well being. It cultivates adults' creativity and critical understanding of themselves and the local and global society in which we live; enhances their capacity to make informed choices, and respond to the changes brought about by globalisation and technological advances; develops their resilience in an increasingly uncertain world; and increases their autonomy and ability to take control of their lives and to influence the world around us.

NIACE urges BIS to consider the best place for ACL to be funded and developed as a programme. It is clear that the Government wishes to see change across ACL delivery – whether that be in existing or new ACL services which might need to be

more targeted, fees policies, diversification of income from other sources, re-distribution of the funding across the country, a change in culture or in other ways. That degree of change requires vigorous, determined and sensitive management; it also requires a developmental approach, building on good practice from the mainstream and from demonstration projects such as those funded by the NIACE-managed ACLF projects. The management of change in a programme like this, delivery of the support programme this would require and the management of innovation funds do not necessarily sit best with the Skills Funding Agency. One, two or all three of these activities could easily be contracted to other agencies in order that progress against the new policies is made properly and rapidly.

BIS should commission guidance on each aspect of the new infrastructure, including local planning and commissioning, community involvement, evidence requirements and quality assurance, which should be enabling rather than prescriptive. It should also work to bring in additional funding, including shared budgeting approaches. It should set a national participation target as NIACE has called for over many years.

A further function of national government should be to commission and support research to provide the evidence required to enrich knowledge and understanding of the processes and achievements of adult and community learning. An important aspect of this would be to continue to offer innovation funding (such as the Adult and Community Learning Fund) to support creative developments and draw together, disseminate and embed the learning from them.

BIS should ensure that policy and strategic direction continues to be informed by and responsive to the adult and community learning sector. This could be achieved by establishing a national Adult and Community Learning Forum comprised of individuals with knowledge and expertise across different sectors with a remit to advise government on ACL. The government should also secure the views of citizens, directly and using intermediaries such as community learning champions and union learning representatives to ensure a wide spread of views.

Local role

NIACE believes that strategy and detailed planning should be undertaken at local level by commissioning bodies to ensure that adult and community learning responds to local needs and priorities. Commissioning bodies should focus on building local learning cultures where learning becomes valued and sought after by citizens, organisations and employers. Other local roles include data analysis to inform planning, inspiring innovation, commissioning, workforce development, volunteer training and support, quality assurance, equality and diversity, information, advice and guidance, monitoring and evaluation and progression pathways should also be undertaken at local level.

Local decision making carries a risk that some groups will be excluded either through ignorance or intent. Government guidance with reference to the Equality Act 2010 should ensure that the national parameters are designed to ensure that equalities in access and outcome are maintained in local decision making.

Commissioning bodies should involve local people in planning and funding learning approaches and be accountable to local communities. However, robust approaches to including local people, including co – creation and participatory budgeting, need support which can entail significant amounts of time and resource. Imagination is required to ensure accessibility, with training and capacity development both for citizens, to learn how to take part, and for commissioners and providers to learn how to work effectively with citizens, who bring different skills and views to the table and will be interested in different levels of involvement.

Q5. What (if any) steps could facilitate the changing role of central Government in IACL?

A too rapid transition of responsibility from national to local bodies risks destabilising this work. The transition must be planned and implemented over a period of one to three years, and a programme of information and materials developed to support the transition. There needs to be adequate support for existing ACL delivery organisations to make changes and for new organisations to develop their practice and approach. There also needs to be support for innovation funding to stimulate the creative and new ways of delivering and managing ACL at local levels.

Q6. What are the implications of seeking a wider local provider base?

The benefits of widening the provider base are creating provision that includes a wider range of individuals and groups, especially minority groups, and is very responsive to their needs. In a commissioning model small organisations who want to offer provision below the minimum contract level and/or who do not currently have resources to comply with data and quality requirements can be contracted to offer specialist or targeted provision.

The £210m ASL budget is less than two per cent of the wider Adult Skills budget. Broadening the remit and the provider base carries the risk of increasing competition and risks destabilising good local providers for little benefit if confined to the safeguarded budget. This approach would squander precious resources and reduce potential for economies of scale and maximising the benefit of different funding. BIS should support local commissioning of all ACL in order to stitch it into different funding streams, local consultative frameworks and other areas of public policy. This would support learner access, support and progression as well as maximising use of resources and funding.

Q7. What would a localised IACL offer mean for providers, such as the Workers' Educational Association, delivering learning across localities?

As outlined in response to question 4, NIACE believes that a localised IACL offer should be established in the context of a national infrastructure which supports providers at local, regional and national levels to develop creatively in order to meet the needs of learners and communities. This should include an emphasis on partnership and networking within and across localities to ensure that resources are maximised and best practice is shared. Care should be taken, though, to ensure that any new structures do not place unnecessary bureaucratic burdens on providers which could diminish the impact of funding on individuals or communities.

Challenge 2: The need to ensure that Government funding is sufficiently focused on the most disadvantaged. Comfortably-off, educated learners are currently over-represented. However they pay fees which can cross-subsidise those who cannot afford to pay.

Q8. Should BIS-funded IACL be targeted or universal, and why?

NIACE supports the government's intention to direct state funding for ACL toward adults who have had least access to learning and have the fewest resources, with two important caveats. The first is that there needs to be an emphasis on access to lifelong learning which is accessible and attractive to all and not seen simply as a remedial service for the poor and underprivileged. The second is that NIACE believes that the Government should invest in ensuring that there is infrastructure in place in all localities which allows the ACL investment to sit alongside and lever in other funding from fees (from those who can afford to pay) and from other sources such as local community budgets.

A universal offer with ACL funding targeted on those most in need through fee remission is most likely to widen participation. Discrete provision can usefully be offered for those who need a safe starting point. It should be complemented by funding and fee approaches which offer adults from specific target groups the choice to access a full range of provision and ensure that learning does not become segregated on income grounds. This enriches individual learning opportunities without stigmatising adults labelled as disadvantaged and helps build social capital as adults from different backgrounds reap the benefits of learning together. Income must not be the sole determinant of funding priority and allocations as ACL can also

be a catalyst for reducing inequalities in relation to factors such as age, disability, gender, race, and sexuality.

Q9. What are the key challenges to generating fee income and what associated solutions would encourage more sophisticated approaches to income generation?

NIACE supports the principle that adults who can afford to pay should do so. High levels of fee income allow a larger range and volume of provision to run and greater scope for cross-subsidisation between classes. NIACE believes that local providers are generally best-placed to have the market research and intelligence to identify what residents are able to pay as well as what they are willing to pay for.

Fee policies should be designed to maximise both income and participation and based on the principles of fairness. There are different ways this might be done and there is scope for rigorously researched controlled experiments. NIACE would be pleased to present proposals to the Department.

Q10. In a localised model, what are the key challenges and associated solutions that would secure accountability for tax payers' investment?

NIACE agrees that, in order to secure accountability, it is important to define clear aims and objectives for ACL funding. It is crucial that these are tailored to meet local needs and that a range of stakeholders are involved in designing them, with appropriate support where necessary. Paragraph 15 of the consultation document outlines broadly how this might be achieved. It is important that the aims and objectives do not focus too narrowly on specific outcomes, but also consider the wider social impact of IACL on individuals and communities, supported by the data collection methods suggested in response to Q11 and Q12.

Challenge 3: The need to provide robust evidence for IACL. Social and economic impact measures for BIS-funded IACL are under-developed and Government does not collect data on non-government funded IACL.

Developing our knowledge of the social and economic benefits and impacts of ACL will provide robust evidence that enables government and providers to ensure that funding and provision is focused. BIS-funded ACL is only one aspect of a local learning ecology. Gathering evidence of BIS funded ACL in isolation provides at best a partial picture of the impact of adult learning and at worst is simply misleading and limits knowledge of the impact of public policy and investment.

There is a risk that a disproportionate evidence gathering burden is created that will have resource implications of high cost and time. This is also disproportionate compared to FE which has a much higher budget but where qualification data, which is relatively easy to collect, is used as a proxy for evidence of impact. Government should produce clear guidance on what constitutes valid evidence of ACL impact and make sure that evidence requirements are focused and proportionate. NIACE sets out in Q11 an approach that could address this issue.

Q11. Which, if any, of options a) b) and c) on page 13 present a proportionate approach to measuring impact? Are there any alternatives?

Options A and B are too limited in scope as clearly they will not provide sufficient evidence of the impact of ACL across adult learning and associated public policy areas.

Option 3 contains potential to gather useful data from a range of ACL relating to different public policy areas. To do this the data collected at local and national levels must be consistent and comparable. The outcomes framework that NIACE proposes in question 3 would provide a basis for evidence collection that uses standardised categories to support both BIS and providers to collect consistent and coherent evidence but is also flexible to fit local provision. Learner and community views must be sought to strengthen this evidence. BIS should also provide guidance on methodologies for collecting evidence although this should be permissive not prescriptive.

NIACE believes that carrying out more national research to complement local evidence is the most efficient and effective means of creating a valuable evidence base. A national learner survey has potential to produce valuable evidence of impact. However to do this the questions must be relevant to ACL learners and the survey accessible. NIACE experience of developing and conducting the individual and group survey to support this consultation has created valuable knowledge about learner consultation processes that could support this. This research should be established as a longitudinal study with provision to revisit a sample of respondents to track the long term impact of ACL which is a huge evidence gap.

BIS should also carry out research to investigate the impact and benefits of specific ACL themes, approaches or learner cohorts using appropriate social impact methodologies.

Placing monetary values on social impacts has value in making the case for the cost benefits of ACL but it is important that BIS maintains a realistic perspective on the uses and limitations of this. It can never be exact or accurate because of all the

different variables in play, not least learners' different starting points and circumstances and some social benefits cannot be measured in monetary terms.

Q12. What core information should recipients of BIS investment have to provide in relation to learner characteristics and learning activity?

NIACE believes that the principles underpinning data collection should be that all data required is relevant, it is clear how it will be used and collection is cost effective. Current requirements should be reviewed. The amount of data required should be appropriate and proportionate to the activity. Confronting potential learners with requests for personal data can be off putting and create tensions in engagement activity. On the other hand, consistent and coherent data is required to create robust evidence. A solution is to produce a set of common, minimum data requirements for all providers, with more in-depth data requirements for public funded provision.

The data should include quantitative evidence such as learner characteristics, equality indicators, type of provision, learning hours, fee levels and income and BIS investment. Qualitative evidence should include learner aspirations, outcomes and views on the quality of the learning experience and views of other stakeholders such as community members, unions and employers.

Q13. How can administrative data be used effectively to map fee income and learner disadvantage?

Consistency in the content and format of data collection will support analysis within providers and comparative analysis across providers and commissioning bodies. There are complexities in defining disadvantage as this is not necessarily wholly income related. Learner disadvantage data should take into account other variables based on learner characteristic data and factors such as postcode or rurality.

Challenge 4: The need to address funding anomalies and make funding fairer. Funding is currently based on an historical, and in many cases inequitable, distribution.

Q14. What factors should be taken into account in the distribution of BIS funding for IACL?

NIACE agrees with the government's intention to redistribute BIS funding more equitably. This will result in losers as well as winners and needs to be undertaken

gradually and without decimating or needlessly disrupting highly successful provision – but the nettle should be grasped.

Redistribution should widen the provider base and open up government funded adult and community learning to citizens in areas that are currently less well funded. NIACE believes that investing a proportion of the £210 million in infrastructure would provide every area with the capacity to develop a coherent and expansive learning culture and secure a range of ACL provision accessible to all residents.

Redistribution should be based on transparent principles that include fairness, equality and access. To support an infrastructure body in each area the revised formula for funding allocation will need to take population numbers into account. The provision element should take into account the complexities entailed in defining need, and include a range of indices relating to population, rurality, poverty and other forms of social exclusion.

It is critical to ensure that redistribution does not result in wholesale cuts to provision or the destabilisation of high-quality providers, whether local authorities, colleges or third-sector providers. The urgency of reform should be balanced with the time required to support a smooth transition to the new arrangements. A staged approach that supports progressive change should be adopted which could take up to five years to complete.

The government should carry out modelling exercises and risk assessment of approaches to redistribution before implementation to test the process and reduce the risk of unforeseen or unintended consequences.

Q15. Which, if any, of options a), b) and c) on page 15 would best secure more localised delivery and are there alternatives that could be considered?

A free market approach to securing ACL is likely to result in wasteful competition rather than collaboration and more attention on the most rewarding or easiest to attract learning. The costs and practicalities of managing direct allocation to providers are likely to result in the retention of a relatively small provider base and reduce opportunities for opening funding to new providers, especially smaller voluntary and community sector providers, particularly in the prevailing search for reducing costs through mechanisms such as the Minimum Contract Level. Tendering a few large contracts across England would distance resource allocation and responsibility for provision from local communities and introduce unnecessary and potentially costly layers of subcontracting.

A local commissioning body or partnership would be the most effective mechanism for securing localised delivery responsive to local needs and circumstances, attract

the widest possible range of learners, support collaborative partnering and get the best value for public spend on ACL. Local planning is most likely to ensure the most effective use of public funds for adult learning in helping to articulate and meet local needs and priorities. Commissioning models should be established to suit different local circumstances so that matters such as size and boundaries should be determined at local level.

Local authorities should lead or have a significant role in Commissioning bodies and partnerships as they are the only bodies with a democratic mandate from local communities. They also have a statutory equality duty which can support equitable provision of adult and community learning, have statutory responsibilities for the welfare of their communities, and are best placed to broker provision that works across public service areas.

Challenge 5: The need to create the conditions that will enable a much wider range of informal learning to thrive, whether this is supported by Government, self-organised in local communities, delivered in the private sector or enabled through harnessing the power of the internet.

Q16. Should BIS IACL funding be used to fund capacity building and innovation?

Innovation is essential to develop learning for the twenty first century. A radical approach to ACL is needed and this will require both capacity building and support and innovation funds to encourage change. This is the only way to ensure that ACL engages more adults and equips them to navigate their way round a changing and complex society and is offered in ways that support social justice and equality in the context of significant social and economic challenges, demographic shifts, public service reform and localism. Capacity building will be important to disseminate, embed and further develop these innovations.

Q17. If yes, how should funding be balanced and what type of activity should be funded?

Priority should be given to learning that reaches adults most distant from learning to widen inclusion and participation in ACL, develops new content and approaches and supports a wider range of organisations to get involved. This will include innovation projects, outreach and engagement activity and support for volunteers such as community learning champions and union learning representatives.

Access to learning through technology is important but not through ever increasing resources without support for adults to access them. There is already a vast store of free online resources. These can make the biggest contribution when used as part of a blend of learning approaches which include opportunities for learners to have opportunities to interact with each other and with tutors either online or face to face. The priority is not more resources but well- trained staff.

BIS should invest from the national budget a set amount of funds in innovation and capacity building/support. A baseline assessment should be established of the SFA costs of managing the ACL fund; savings on this amount could be used to invest in support and innovation. BIS may also wish to pursue additional funding as part of the Government's commitment to the Big Society.

Challenge 6: The need to ensure that workforce training and quality assurance arrangements support the new vision for BIS-funded IACL.

Q18. Is there a need for quality assurance arrangements to be changed in light of the potential changes to BIS funded IACL? If yes, in what way?

Current quality assurance arrangements are only partially relevant for the diverse range of ACL provision, settings and roles and will become even less aligned if the commissioning model that NIACE proposes is adopted. Commissioning bodies should have overall responsibility for quality improvement and assurance of all ACL in their areas. Opportunities and support to link into quality assurance processes systems should be opened up to self organised groups and other voluntary groups to improve learner experience.

Peer assessment between providers and at commissioning body level would offer a developmental and proportionate approach to quality assurance and quality improvement. Ofsted inspection of commissioning bodies would provide external quality assurance but must be appropriate for ACL and carried out by inspectors with relevant knowledge and understanding of the aims, value and complexities of ACL.

BIS should commission the extension of the Common Inspection Framework to include the commissioning role proposed in the response to questions and the full range of ACL roles, including community and workplace outreach and support, and arrangements for community involvement in the commissioning body. It should inspect the impact of ACL on communities, workplaces and the delivery of other public services. Ofsted should also ensure that all inspecting ACL are fully trained and equipped to inspect this sector through a secondment programme to engage and train sector staff as inspectors.

Q19. What adjustments to current workforce development arrangements in England would best support the new vision for IACL?

NIACE believes that appropriate and proportionate workforce training and development is essential to secure high quality provision for learners. NIACE does not believe that ACL teacher qualifications should be developed separately from other teachers as many aspects of good pedagogy are common to both, although the content and contexts are different, and teachers often work across sectors. However, workforce development and qualifications requirements are currently based on an FE full-time subject standards model which is not appropriate for many part-time, community-focused ACL roles. The arrangements must be adapted to suit the needs of the ACL workforce and volunteers.

Tutors range from full time employees to people offering a small number of hours a week or one off sessions. The ACL workforce includes staff with differing backgrounds including local people employed for their knowledge and ability to engage their peers. They are employed in a broad range of roles and include paid staff and volunteers. Training and qualifications have to be appropriate and proportionate. It is important to offer qualifications requirements and pre-entry training that are relevant to ACL.

Balancing access with professionalisation poses a challenge. Widening participation to include more adults, especially those who have had least access to learning in the past, has brought a range of adults from those groups into the ACL workforce and volunteer cadres. Their education backgrounds and qualifications will vary but the distinct contribution that each brings should be recognised, and appropriate training offered.

Realistic minimum standards and common qualifications are required to support progression and staff who work across different FE sectors and settings. This can be achieved through a training and qualifications framework consisting of core modules plus options that are subject, setting and role specific. Equally important is to offer routes in to the workforce and training modes that are accessible to adult and community workforce which includes community members who have relevant knowledge and skills for working with local communities but not necessarily the traditional entry qualifications.

Many smaller organisations and self organised groups do not have access to training and BIS could consider ways of opening up training and development to these groups, including digital solutions. For some it might be access to CPD sessions offered by learning organisations, but these will not be suitable for all and alternative means of offering support should be developed, such as materials, on line fora and

network meetings. Need and demand should be identified at local level and could be funded from a capacity building element of the overall budget.

Conclusion

NIACE would be pleased to supply further information and analysis about any of its responses. Please contact Dr Jane Ward (jane.ward@niace.org.uk), Programme Manager, in the first instance.

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