

Widening Participation:

Lifting the Barriers to learning

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)

NIACE has a core aspiration to provide **More, Different and Better** adult learning. This means an increase in learning opportunities; a diversity of types of adult learners and diverse learning opportunities as well as improved quality, effectiveness and efficiency in delivering education, training and learning activities. We know from our surveys that older people, those with disabilities and learning difficulties, people with few or no qualifications and people from particular minority groups engage in little or no learning beyond school. Barriers can be systemic, such as policies, (eg asylum seekers), costs or location. They can relate to programmes which are qualification-bearing when potential learners want non-formal opportunities or attitudinal; 'learning's for other people'. We gather evidence, advocate, campaign and influence policy –makers and providers and practitioners – as well as potential learners - to achieve our aim. We must not only break down the barriers but also stimulate demand and encourage people to think that learning can offer fun and fulfilment.

Influencing decision makers

We campaign, use academic research, parliamentary briefings and events; privately advise ministers and civil servants and offer training and publications for the adult education field. For example: We raise demand for learning through **Adult Learners' Week and Quick Reads outreach campaigns**. We negotiated funding to safeguard **community, family and neighbourhood learning in deprived communities, resulting in £210 million per annum**, since 2003. We conducted an Inquiry into the future of Lifelong Learning called ***Learning through Life***. (2009).

Advocating for particular people and situations

Examples of what NIACE wants:

Health and well-being

- Government to recognise the impact of adult learning on well-being
- Government to monitor savings which could be made on health budgets by investing in adult learning
- Department of Health to use adult learning as a preventative strategy
- Credited units of learning with a curriculum on how to manage your health at critical transition points

Older people

- Learning to be part of a broad ageing strategy
- A framework of a range of learning opportunities any older person can expect to find within their locality
- Clear responsibilities for local government to co-ordinate, lead and guarantee older people's learning

A more equal society

- Promotion of learning opportunities for people with disabilities and limiting health conditions
- Entry level curriculum for learners with learning difficulties – not driven by qualifications and accreditation
- Targeted resources and apprenticeship schemes for minority ethnic groups
- Government, as an employer, to model best race equality practices.

Family learning

- All family –related policy initiatives to acknowledge parents as adult learners
- Government to ensure that the learning needs of adult family members are considered alongside those of their children
- Secure recognition of the economic value of family and intergenerational learning to society
- All professionals working with children and families to have a shared understanding of the impact and benefit of developing learning with parents and carers

Active citizenship and cohesive communities

- Access for asylum seekers, and other excluded new arrival groups to the UK, to a range of learning opportunities, including English language
- More celebration and promotion of citizenship tests and award ceremonies
- Inclusion of lifelong learning as vital to regional and sub-regional economic development
- Rights for excluded vulnerable migrants to access further education funding, including Learner Support Funds

A resilient and productive economy

- Raised confidence amongst adult learning specialists about how to engage learners with maths and embed it in their curricula; this includes vocational tutors, Union Learning Representatives and literacy teachers and assessors
- Outcome-based, rather than target-based approach to adult learning
- Greater connections between Foundation Learning and Progression Pathways and the Welfare to Work programmes and skills for jobs
- Trained staff who can use ICT effectively with adult learners

Global skills and international development

- Recognition and implementation of adult learning as a universal human right
- Adult learning as an integrated thread in international aid programmes to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals
- Increased global skills, knowledge and understanding amongst UK population
- Optimisation of opportunities for knowledge transfer between countries about effective policies, processes and practices

Sustainability

- A national framework of sustainability capabilities
- Training to equip workplaces to adapt to changing circumstances related to climate change and sustainable development
- Development of resources to support whole organisational approaches to Education for Sustainable Development
- Teacher training and development to embrace learning for sustainability

Case Studies

1. NIACE worked with government to lead an education and training group as part of its Opportunity Age Strategy. It brought together all the national organisations dealing with **older people's learning** and produced a policy paper. The paper recommended priorities regarding older people's learning. Government has now agreed to sponsor a national conference to discuss the suggestions.
2. Over 5 years NIACE has developed a high profile for **mental health** and learning work. Building on evidence, the lead funding organisation for further education awarded NIACE resources to appoint nine Regional Project Officers who create regional mental health networks. This has resulted in greater visibility and impact of our work. The funding and activities are being

extended to include supporting adults into learning from other disadvantaged groups and who also have mental health difficulties. We recently developed a training package to support mental health and well-being amongst the further education workforce.

3. Government and funding agencies are keen to see progression so our **family learning** team at NIACE examined the progression routes of adults participating in family learning activities. This included economic, educational, personal, social and collective progression outcomes of learning. The key funding agency now measures success using these wider progression outcomes.
4. Following discussions with key civil servants, about the importance of community **learning in developing countries**, NIACE was able to secure funding for a scoping study. This examines how partnerships with adult and community learning organisations in the UK and African countries might work together for mutual benefit.

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