



The Impact of Basic Skills Improvements on the Individual Well-being and Welfare of Service Personnel and on Social and Wider Life

The Services as an organisation as well as individual employing officers have 'duty of care' responsibilities to safeguard the welfare and well being of personnel under their command. That responsibility extends to their families and dependants. Although serving in the military, Armed Forces personnel continue to function within the broader civilian society. Improving literacy, language and numeracy skills within the wider defence community through Service initiatives and arrangements will assist individuals in operating beyond the Service environment. This has benefits for the UK and society as a whole.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

A wide range of evidence shows that

participating in Basic Skills (BS) learning often leads to increased confidence and self-esteem. Within the Army, half of respondents to a learners' survey (2006) reported that their course had given them confidence. Over half of learners also felt that BS training encouraged them to take another personal development course, suggesting that BS education can enhance the confidence of Service personnel to engage with further learning opportunities. Benefits for the confidence and self-esteem of BS learners are also fairly widely recognised by line managers in the Army. This suggests that gains in confidence within the classroom translate, to some extent, into increased confidence in other aspects of learners' working lives.



Health

Participating in adult learning has a range of positive effects on psychological and physical health. For example, individuals who take part in learning are more likely to give up smoking and to increase their exercise levels. There is also a positive relationship between individual health and BS levels. For example, women with higher literacy levels and men with higher numeracy levels are less likely to be amongst that group suffering depression. Further work is needed to interpret these findings for the Armed Services context. Service personnel face distinctive physical and psychological challenges at work, but also have access to work-based healthcare and support services with potentially equalising effects.

Social Capital

Participation in adult learning has positive effects on social engagement and tolerance. Individuals with better developed literacy, language and numeracy skills also tend to report more tolerant attitudes and have higher levels of political engagement than those with lower skills. This suggests that Armed Services BS provision has the potential to lead to positive attitudinal and behavioural changes among personnel. However, again, assessing the relevance of general evidence about the social benefits of adult learning for BS learning in the distinctive environment of the Armed Services is complex.



Family Effects

BS improvements among Service personnel may have positive effects on the cognitive outcomes of their children through the intergenerational transfer of skills. There are significant positive effects of parents' BS on their children's performance in cognitive tests, even controlling for a wide range of other factors such as parents' qualifications and parental IQ. Recent research finds no significant differences between mothers and fathers in terms of the transfer of skills to children.

Economic Benefits to Wider Society

BS learning in the Armed Services benefits wider society by preparing Service personnel

to engage more successfully with the employment market in their transition to civilian life. Individuals with higher BS are more likely both to be employed and to command higher wages. These effects persist even after controlling for other important influences on earnings, such as individual ability and family background.

Wider Benefits of Different Forms of Adult Learning

The individual and social benefits of adult learning differ according to the type of learning programme. For example, academic accredited courses are associated with more significant and consistent changes in social and political attitudes than other types of





courses. Employer-provided training seems to have a wider range of positive effects compared to other courses, including increased life satisfaction, decreases in racist and authoritarian attitudes and increased memberships of civic organisations. Further research is needed to identify why academic, vocational and employer-provided courses seem to differ in their effects, and where BS learning in the Armed Services fits within this picture.

Within the research on the wider benefits of adult learning, learning is sometimes framed in terms of creativity, breaking out of routines, and questioning and extending personal and intellectual boundaries. It is important to consider whether very structured, often short-term, BS and KS courses, of the type that are common within the Armed Services, will have the transformative effects that have been attributed to this kind of learning.

Further Research Questions

- To what extent does increased confidence brought about by BS learning translate into increased confidence in other areas of life and work for BS learners in the Armed Services?
- To what extent does evidence of the wider benefits of adult learning in general apply to the specific case of BS learning in the Armed Services?

Further information can be found at:

www.niace.org.uk and **www.nrdc.org.uk**