

BIS | Department for Business
Innovation & Skills

**REVIEW OF INFORMAL ADULT
AND COMMUNITY LEARNING**

Initial screening equality impact
assessment

AUGUST 2011

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Introduction

1. This initial screening Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) supports the 2011 consultation on proposals to reform informal adult and community learning. These form part of the Department's overarching FE Reform update covering policy developments since the publication of *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth* (November 2010).
2. Based on the outcomes of this initial screening and as set out below, we have concluded that the policy should proceed to a full Equality Impact Assessment.

The policy context

3. The term informal adult and community learning (IACL) describes a broad range of learning that brings together adults, often of different ages and backgrounds, to pursue an interest, address a need, acquire a new skill, become healthier or learn how to support their children.
4. Learning of this kind forms an important part of the wider learning continuum. This is learning undertaken for its own value to the individual or as a step towards further learning or training. It covers structured adult education courses taught by professionally qualified teachers, independent study including online, and self-organised study groups. It can be enjoyed by people in urban, suburban and rural areas, and take place in classrooms or village halls, libraries and other shared public spaces. It can be in short episodes or longer and is delivered by public, private or civil society providers or is organised by people for themselves through groups, clubs or societies.
5. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) supports informal adult learning in England through the annual £210 million Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) budget. Historically, this budget funded four separate types of learning:
 - Personal and Community Development Learning (£153m)
 - Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (£25m)
 - Wider Family Learning (£12m)
 - Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Areas (£20m)

The Government's 2010 skills strategy¹ announced that from 2011, providers would receive a single Adult Safeguarded Learning budget, allowing them greater flexibility to meet local needs across these four components. Providers are responsible for continuing to deliver a balanced offer that is responsive to the needs of the local communities. BIS also supports ten Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) and Unionlearn, both of which support unaccredited learning opportunities for disadvantaged adults.

¹ Skills for Sustainable Growth, November 2010

6. The Coalition Government is committed to IACL. *Skills for Sustainable Growth (November 2010)* announced that the BIS Adult Safeguarded Learning Budget of £210m per annum for IACL would be protected and reformed to ensure that it supports the Big Society and motivates the most disadvantaged people to learn and progress.
7. Through this budget, we want to develop and support social inclusion by providing more attractive and worthwhile opportunities like these for people who need more help to get on, like the disengaged, the homeless and those living on the fringes of our communities, those who derived little from their experiences in statutory education or who may face cultural barriers to undertaking further learning, unemployed people, offenders and their families, older people, those in care settings and people with disabilities. We are also keen to ensure that opportunities are open to those living in rural communities, who may face particular difficulties – including transport difficulties – in locating and accessing suitable provision.
8. We know that learning for many people in these categories can be at its most effective when it is delivered through informal adult learning and non-formal environments. It is especially effective in drawing in and engaging those who are not motivated by classroom-based learning. We do not want people's personal aspirations to be limited or blocked simply because their starting point is different.
9. Through a process of consultation and review we are seeking views and ideas to help inform the Government's decision on how IACL can be reformed to:
 - support learning for personal, family and community development and reflect the following Big Society principles:
 - **empowering local communities**: giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area
 - **opening-up public services**: enabling charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to offer people high-quality services
 - **supporting social action**: encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society.
 - engage and motivate disadvantaged groups to access learning, creating pathways towards positive outcomes relevant to that individual
 - focus public funding on enabling disadvantaged people to learn while securing fee income from people who can afford to pay, to ensure inclusive participation
 - deliver measurable positive impacts for people, families and communities, with minimal bureaucracy.
10. Our objective is to secure a better deal for those most in need of help in every community, based on the key principles of the Coalition Government: freedom, fairness and responsibility. Our intervention must be proportionate, transparent and targeted. This means that we must consider properly the potential impact of our reforms so as to avoid as far as possible an unjustifiable adverse impact on any protected group.

About this Equality Impact Assessment

11. On 5 April 2011 the new public sector Equality Duty came into force. The Equality Duty replaces the three previous duties on race, disability and gender, bringing them together into a single duty, and extends it to cover age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment (as a whole these are called protected characteristics or protected groups). Based on a proportional analysis we will outline the impacts, both positive and negative, on these protected groups.
12. Equality Impact Assessments are an important framework for demonstrating due regard through considering evidence and analysis to help identify the likely positive and negative impacts that policy proposals may have on certain protected groups of consumers and to estimate whether such impacts disproportionately affect such groups. This Equality Impact Assessment takes a preliminary summary view of the equality impact of the proposed reforms in IACL which will be embraced by the consultation document. Equality Impact Assessments are an important mechanism for ensuring that we gather data to enable us to identify the likely positive and negative impacts that policy proposals may have on certain vulnerable groups and to estimate whether such impacts disproportionately affect such groups.
13. Over the period March-May 2011, we have already actively engaged with a wide range of external stakeholders and policy officials across relevant Government departments through a series of policy roundtables. We will continue this process of engagement throughout the formal public consultation in summer 2011 and we will consider equality issues in all aspects of the proposed reforms. We were conscious, however, that we did not have all the evidence and information we need to reach a final, proportionate view on the impact of all the policy options. We have therefore commissioned the following additional pieces of research and analysis in order to enrich our evidence base:
 - analysis, down to household as opposed to postcode level, of the detailed characteristics of learners currently supported by the Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) budget
 - analysis of the outcomes reported by current and previous learners supported by the ASL budget
 - research to understand the extent to which providers set and use fee income strategies, and how they work at a local level
 - wider evidence on the benefits of adult learning (including evidence from a national call for evidence issues by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)
 - an evaluation plan for measuring the impact of BIS-funded IACL going forward – including a National Learner Survey.
14. Through the Individual Learner Record, the Skills Funding Agency gathers information about participation in Informal Adult and Community Learning by age, gender, learning difficulties/disabilities, ethnicity and disadvantaged areas. This is supported by a range of independent research projects by organisations such as AgeUK, NIACE and the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning. There is much less information about participation among those with the protected characteristics embraced by the extended public sector equality duty set out in the 2010 Equality Act, i.e. sexual orientation,

religion or belief, gender reassignment and maternity and pregnancy. However, we presently have no specific evidence or information that these groups are under-represented or in any other way disadvantaged in IACL.

15. The development of appropriate local systems for data collection and analysis is an issue for the consultation and reform process and will require a proportionate response. It will need to take into account the traditionally low declaration rate for some of these factors.
16. The consultation will welcome any evidence of under-participation among members of these groups, along with evidence that the reform process might disadvantage particular groups of learners and any other specific equality issues that we need to bear in mind. It will be important that partners and stakeholders who will be assuming responsibility for local planning and delivery of this provision are able to put in place appropriate and proportionate monitoring systems and are able to demonstrate that they have given proper consideration to the needs of all those in their communities.

The market context

17. This important stage in our reforms requires consultation with partners about key issues around funding allocations, building the local infrastructure, whom we should prioritise for public funding and how we can create progression pathways to further learning, skills training and employment. We want to encourage and support community-based programme delivery built on sustainable partnerships which can engage the most vulnerable people in their communities.
18. We want to concentrate our resources on those who most need our help while ensuring that those who are able to contribute to the costs of their courses should do so. There is a risk that targeting funding solely on the most disadvantaged groups of learners, including those who would otherwise not engage in learning, would mean that there would be no publicly-supported offer for learners who are able to pay.
19. Focussing investment on learning that only supports disadvantaged learners may risk marginalising them and losing the wider benefits of interaction between different groups in society. This may disadvantage other groups, including those for whom cultural barriers can be an impediment.
20. The Coalition Government's commitment to encourage people to make local decisions about the needs and priorities of their communities may mean that some disadvantaged groups may not come to be included as they are not seen as a priority.
21. Our reforms in this area will make a major contribution to the coalition government's values of freedom, fairness and responsibility and it is vital that we are able to collect and consider consultation responses from a wide spectrum of partners and stakeholders, from learners' representatives and networks, and from the learners themselves.
22. Through our consultation we will seek to assemble best practice, ideas and suggestions for improving the effectiveness of publicly funded, voluntary sector and self-organised learning to overcome barriers, improve social cohesion and progression, focus on disadvantage and engage new learners.

23. We intend through this consultation to ensure that local partners and delivery agents not only understand the importance of equal access to suitable learning opportunities but properly consider how best to meet learners' needs when planning the local mix of provision

Information and evidence

24. A clear aim of our developing policy is to concentrate scarce resources on those who need the most help and this means engaging and motivating more of the most disadvantaged adults as determined locally. We will ensure that our policies are formed so as to avoid as far as possible an unjustifiable adverse impact on any particular group.
25. For the purposes of this initial screening Equality Impact Assessment, we are taking a proportionate view of the impact of new policies or functions in IACL on people or groups who are protected by Equality legislation and for whom we have relevant information or evidence. These especially comprise: older learners, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and male learners. Although evidence available does not suggest widespread under-representation in this type of learning by females and Black and Ethnic Minorities (BAME), we believe it would be appropriate to include certain categories in our considerations, including single mothers, women living in communities where cultural barriers disadvantage female family members and adults in certain ethnic groups aged 65 and over.
26. Additionally we know that the acquisition of basic digital skills in an informal setting can be the first step along the road to more formal learning and sustainable employment for those who lack confidence and qualifications. However, the latest ONS statistics² for Internet Access show that 8.71 million people (17.5%) across the UK have never used the internet. The largest proportion of Internet users was in the 16 to 24 age group, at 98.7%, with 95.6% for adults aged 35 to 44. The proportion of Internet users declined with each successive older age group: while 57.0% of those aged 65 to 74 had used the Internet, only 23.8% of those aged 75 or more had done so.

Older learners

27. Although total household wealth is highest for those in their late fifties and early 60s, with those in the age group 45 to 54 in second place and those 65 to 74 in third, there can be very considerable differences in wealth within each group.³ This includes, for example, poorer retirees, who are characterised by low incomes and very little in the way of savings or investments, meaning finances are often difficult.⁴ For people in these categories, purchasing learning opportunities may not be an option.
28. Older people's participation in informal learning may also be hindered by difficulties in socialising, or they may have the simple conviction that learning is for younger people. In rural communities, older people in particular may face additional problems of mobility and a lack of local services.

² <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0810.pdf>

³ An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK, Government Equalities Office, 2010

⁴ Report to the Skills Funding Agency, Experian 2011

29. The evidence shows that those who engage in some form of learning activity keep mentally and physically active and can live longer and healthier lives and preserve their independence, meeting head-on the challenges of deprivation, disability and isolation. It can help to promote wellbeing, and protect against normal cognitive decline with age.⁵

- One in five pensioners in the UK lives below the poverty line⁶
- Many people over 80 face social exclusion, especially those who are single, divorced or widowed and those on low incomes⁷
- Although formal engagement in education and training declines at older ages, especially on retirement, this does not necessarily point to a decline in learning per se, but the probability of participation at older ages is likely to be greater among those who already have qualifications. Lower levels of participation among adults aged 65 and over in some ethnic groups, for example among Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, may be attributable to a range of attitudinal, cultural and economic factors⁸
- 91% of learners on provision funded through the Adult Safeguarded Learning budget are aged 25 or over. Around 40% are 50 or over⁹
- Research by NIACE shows that participation by age drops steadily eg 41% for those aged 45-54 to just over 11% for those over 75. Those who expressed an intention to learn fell from 26% at 50-74 to 8% for those over 75.
- Fewer than 20% of the workforce receive any pre-retirement advice or support¹⁰
- Nearly one quarter of the rural population is over the current retirement age (65+ for men, 60+ for women), compared to only 18% of the urban population. This greater proportion of older people in rural areas has implications for the local availability of IACL and presents access problems, e.g. in terms of transport, even for those who want to participate.

Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

30. People with learning difficulties or disabilities may face similar problems to older people and may also be seeking to develop the skills and confidence that support independent living.

31. People with learning difficulties or disabilities may be discouraged from participating in informal learning for many reasons such as inaccessibility of buildings and lack of reasonable adjustments to learning materials. They may also have attitudinal barriers such as low expectations and the fear or prejudice of others. All this can lead to isolation and social exclusion.

⁵ Feinstein et al. Learning through life: Future challenges; and Dewe and Kompier. Wellbeing and work: Future challenges;

⁶ Centre for Social Justice, 2011, based on UK Gov definition.

⁷ ELSA, 2006

⁸ Older people inside and outside the labour market - Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009

⁹ Statistical First Release DS/SFR10

¹⁰ Life Academy, 2008

- DRC research in 2007 found that 23% of disabled people lacked functional literacy compared with the national average of 16%. 31% lack functional numeracy compared to the national average of 20%¹¹
- About 1 million people in England (2% of the population) have a learning disability, of whom 796,000 are aged 20 or over.¹² 11% (87,400) of IACL participants declared that they had a learning disability against 76% (582,100) who do not¹³
- The NIACE participation survey 2011 examined potential barriers to older learners, one of which was a perceived lack of provision for those with disabilities.

Male learners

32. Only 25% (192,200) of participants in IACL are male. Generally male participation in Further Education is on a par with that of women.¹⁴
33. For the more disadvantaged, the financial barriers may be complicated by poor experiences of statutory education, family fragmentation, cycles of offending behaviour and homelessness.
34. Studies show that informal learning can be used as a strategy to avoid social problems such as excessive drinking and helps to address effects of disadvantage, particularly social exclusion, unemployment, stress, substance abuse and underdeveloped literacy skills.¹⁵
35. 2007 research¹⁶ found a strong correlation between taking informal courses and eventual achievement of Level 2 qualifications. Informal learning provides a way back into formal, skills-based learning and more rewarding work for people with low skills and negative personal experiences of formal education, by engaging them through their interests and building their self confidence.

Developing Policy options

36. The formal consultation will run from August to October 2011. We are working closely with frontline practitioners, stakeholders and other Government Departments to take forward our public commitment to review BIS-funded IACL, and to develop policy proposals from a wide range of perspectives.
37. In line with the Government's Localism Agenda, we will consider how to create the local conditions for policy objectives to be met rather than prescribing these from the centre. We will look to:
- remove barriers so that local people can make local decisions about the needs and priorities of their communities
 - build the capacity for local action
 - strengthen local accountability
 - enable a wider, more diverse choice of providers where needed.

¹¹ Social Market Foundation /DRC 2007

¹² Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University, 2004

¹³ Statistical First Release DS/SFR10 (balance represented by those who failed to declare)

¹⁴ Statistical First Release DS/SFR10

¹⁵ Golding et al, 2009

¹⁶ Sabates, Feinstein & Skaliotis (2007), 'Determinants and Pathways of Progression to Level 2 Qualifications: Evidence from the NCDS and BHPS'. *Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning*

Our overarching aim is to:

- Support flexible, innovative informal adult learning that develops social and economic capital at an individual, family and community level and supports the development of the Big Society.

Our objectives are to:

- Align the content, commissioning and delivery of BIS-funded informal adult and community learning to support social cohesion, digital inclusion, stronger families, democratic involvement and active citizenship (“Big Society”)
- Maximise the amount of informal learning taking place and the numbers of adults participating, particularly attracting more new learners
- Engage and motivate disadvantaged groups to access learning, creating pathways to support onward progression that is relevant to each person
- Focus public funding on supporting the most disadvantaged adults to access learning opportunities and secure fee income from those who are able to pay in order to encourage inclusive participation in learning

A list of organisations and individuals invited to the policy discussions to date is provided at Annex A.

Declaration

We are satisfied that proper consideration has been given to the needs of equality groups in the completion of this initial screening and that we have given due regard to the impact of policy or practices on particular communities, or on groups within communities. A full Equality Impact Assessment is required and should be completed by 30 November 2011.

Prepared by: John Gibson

Position: Senior Policy Adviser, Informal Adult and Community Learning, Teaching and Learning Quality and Curriculum Division

Date: 12 August 2011

Countersigned by: Stuart Edwards

Position: Deputy Director, Teaching and Learning Quality and Curriculum Division

Date: 12 August 2011

ANNEX A

List of organisations invited to join the initial roundtable discussions

157 Group
Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Age UK
Association of Colleges (AoC)
Association for Education and Ageing
Association of Learning Providers
Association for Learning Technology
Arts Council
BBC
BTCV
Business in the Community (BITC)
Campaign for Learning (CfL)
Channel 4
Church of England
City Lit
Community Learning Champions Support Programme
Continyou
CRISIS
Digital Unite
Enable
English Heritage
Family Learning Network
FE Colleges
Federation for Community Development Learning (FCDL)
Fircroft College
Government Departments
Hillcroft College
HOLEX
Institute for Learning (IfL)
JISC
Keystone Development Trust
Learning and Skills Employment Network (LSEN)
Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
LLU+
Local Authorities
Local Education Authorities Forum on the Education of Adults (LEAFEA)
Local Government Association (LGA)
Local Learning Partnerships
London Development Agency
Marine Society College of the Sea
Mary Ward Centre
Morley College
Museums Libraries & Archives Council (MLA)
National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
National Federation of Women's Institutes

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
National Literacy Trust
National Offender Management Service (NOMS)
National Open College Network (NOCN)
National Trust
National Union of Students
Northern College
Novas Scarman
Office for Disability Issues
Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Ofsted
Open University
Participatory Budgeting Unit
Princes Trust
Prisoners' Educational Trust
Race Online
RNIB
Royal Horticultural Society
Royal Society of Arts
Ruskin College
School of Everything
SCOPE
Skilled for Health
Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
Sport England
St Giles Trust
St Mungo's
The Age and Employment Network
The Big Lottery
The Learning Trust
The Reading Agency
Third Age Trust
Third Sector National Learning Alliance
TUC
U3A
University for Industry/Learndirect
UK online
Unionlearn
UNISON
Universities Association for Lifelong Learning
University and College Union (UCU)
Voluntary Arts England
Volunteering England
Women's Institute
Workers' Educational Association (WEA)
Working Men's College
YMCA

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