

Written evidence submitted by Dr Peter Sainsbury, Compass Organisation

Closing the Learning Gap – Opening Up Opportunities for Adults

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gather the views of key stakeholders, partners and providers on their top priorities for adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 - 10 years.

The deadline for written evidence is 20 May 2016.

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

Please tick the appropriate boxes below

NO	I am responding as an individual
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number? Dr Peter John Sainsbury (Author on behalf of an organisation) peter.sainsbury@btinternet.com	
YES	I am responding as an organisation
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number? Dr Peter John Sainsbury (My details above) Member of Compass organization (details here) Compass, Neal Lawson, Impact Hub Islington, 5 Torrens St., London EC1V 1NQ jacqui@compassonline.org.uk	

Please tick a box from the list of options below that best describes you as a respondent.

	Business representative organisation/trade body
	Business
	Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
	Local Authority/ Combined Authority
	Local authority provider of adult and community learning
	Specialist designated institution
	FE College

	FE sector representative organisation/trade body
	FE independent learning provider
	Higher Education Institution
	FE charitable or not-for-profit learning provider
	Other education (please describe)
	Trade union or staff association
	Charity or social enterprise
	Student representative body
	Individual
	Policy adviser (please specify area of interest)
YES	Other Compass is an “unincorporated membership organization”

Introduce yourself

Dr Peter Sainsbury is a member of Compass and a contributor to the Compass “Big Education inquiry” which took place over the last 5-6 years. Compass published this national inquiry in 2015 and it is readable, together with its detailed Appendices, on-line at :

www.compassonline.org.uk

The document’s main author was Professor Ken Spours of the London Institute of Education, although many colleagues made contributions.

Within the education sphere, Compass involves itself with a holistic, total age range approach but its major theme is the urgent need for improving and cohering our national approach to education to prevent the see-sawing consequences to education as a consequence of its being a party political football. Education has become too centralised, competitive, individualised in the sense of its being only a “private good” and backward-looking. Compass sees education as a public/social good helping us to learn how to live together.

Executive summary

Compass believes that the time has come to re-assert the social value of learning in helping to bring about the three inter-related educational policies of a “Good Society”:

1. Social inclusion and democratic empowerment
2. Personal Growth and the increase in autonomy
3. Economic growth and advancement

We argue for:

1. A Cradle-to-Grave system of lifelong learning, funded fairly, to enable everyone to realise their potential and to develop at the time, place and pace that suits them.
2. A shift of power and resources away from Whitehall with greater local democratic accountability.

Written submissions are invited addressing the following points:

What is working well and/or not working well with regards to adult education in England?

1. Adult and community education has been outstandingly successful but has struggled to survive in the new skills-focused world alongside successive Governments’ fixations with academic learning as the only “Gold Standard” and lack of sufficient financial support. Compass pays tribute to organisations such as the WEA (Workers’ Educational Association), NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education), U3A and UnionLearn amongst those trying to uphold a lengthy tradition of working class education dating back to Victorian times. Compass wants to see the renewal of an invigorated citizens’ learning movement, one that builds on the possibilities of social networks and digital learning.
2. Consequently, there is not a sufficiently extended Citizens’ Curriculum – a life skills/citizens’ curriculum approach involving developing learners’ language, literacy and numeracy skills in an interlinked way, alongside and within other life skills including health, civic, digital and financial capabilities, as NIACE describes this.
3. Adult education classes, of a more formal type these days, continue to be run by Local Authorities who will keep data on outputs. The less formal approaches have withered and died away in the last 30 years.

4. Financial uncertainties will have negatively impacted upon the extent of informal adult education structures.
5. There are decreased opportunities and structures available to support informal learning at all ages beyond school. The germs of these developments were stifled from about 1990 onwards.
6. There still exist large numbers of trained and motivated people in society who could breathe life into new styles of education but there are few structures left within which to operate informally.

What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning?

1. Lifelong Learning is a key ingredient of national well-being in a democratic society, potentially providing the intellectual tools for every citizen to participate critically and positively in shaping a better future for us all, challenging narrow-thinking, prejudice and cynicism that threaten our democratic institutions. The challenges to our planet must urgently be combatted through public awareness and action involving everyone. Sustainability is one of the values on which Compass's proposals are based, not just ecological sustainability but everyone's capability to manage and shape society in a sustainable way.
2. "Learning through Life" (NIACE, 2009) has set out a strategy Compass endorses, particularly those measures that put learning power into the hands of disadvantaged learners through local democratic planning and through financial entitlements, such as the now almost discarded Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs).
3. A wider entitlement to adult learning, equally importantly, can bring joy, friendship, a sense of freedom and empowerment and increased self-esteem and self-confidence. Room must be found for mechanisms to involve those for whom education and involvement has passed by, with the intention of re-engaging them into active society. This process may sometimes begin with "Seriously Useless Learning" (TES writings of Alan Tuckett, introduced by Ian Nash, NIACE, 2014). It was a feature of the very developmental Phase Three Community Colleges in Leicestershire in the Eighties and Nineties, now phased out because of education cutbacks. (Ref: Personal communication with this document's author.) An entitlement to learning should be regardless of age, employment or benefits status, with automatic free entitlement to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL, for example, where needed. Programmes should be as flexible as possible and self-organised (with professional support, if helpful but without central Government micro-management) like those described by the Citizens' Learning Network. Family learning programmes should be encouraged. Learning Networks would help citizens to develop critical thinking skills together and apply them to human problems. A key characteristic of such

Networks would be relentless engagement with the big issues defined by ordinary people and through dialogue identify principles, causes and solutions. Success would be judged by the extent to which Networks demonstrated the relevance of learning in enabling people to bring about collective action for social change.

4. Rapid advances in digital technology can dramatically accelerate progress towards an inclusive lifelong learning system but there is a danger that this very technology will be yet another of the divides between the “Haves” and the “Have-Nots”. Compass proposes a shift in values within education to recognise and support those measures that allow digital technologies to promote a more inclusive and democratic society.
5. Given the permanence of social and economic change, almost nobody can expect to be qualified for life or equipped for changing roles and contexts solely through their initial education. Yet for all too many, opportunities cease when they leave school. There is a need for increased access to HE and FE, based upon different entry qualifications, which can take account of an individual’s previous experiences, not just their paper qualifications. Such access could be via supported, detailed CVs or school-college Progression Agreements worked out locally, involving employers and Community/ Voluntary organisations.
6. We would leave the case for FE colleges to be made for themselves but would support them in arguing against the dreadful cuts in funding they have experienced and are experiencing. We do not support the notion that only employers should be given responsibility for resources and qualifications in any local education planning process.
7. Different educational pathways should be treated with “Parity of Esteem”, recognising experiences as well as formal qualifications. This requires major publicity for the benefit of various “end-users” and the public at large.
8. Compass endorses the 157 Group (Future Colleges – rising to the skills challenge, 157 group, October 2014) in calling for stable structures, equal treatment (in funding and accountability), freedom to innovate and durable funding (a stable financial settlement within which to plan).

Do we have a sufficient demand-led approach to adult education? If not, what more needs to be done?

1. No, we do not!
2. The present “demands” originate in HMG’s narrow concept of education for economic good. This ideology needs changing as its practice excludes many from participation in normal life. Facilities and structures need nurturing that will expand the experience of education to everyone at times and places convenient for them. This requires a change of central Government attitude and the resurrection of more local planning and accountability.
As more localism returns, individuals will express their demands for what they recognise as needful experiences for them to fully participate in society, not only economically but socially as well. At present, disadvantaged individuals lack any practical locus for change in their circumstances.
3. More local centres of power need to make available resources in a monitored but more informal way so that individuals and groups can make use of civic amenities 24/7.

What evidence is there on the impact, added-value and/or cost-effectiveness of adult education?

1. Much evidence for the effectiveness of adult and continuing education is anecdotal in the minds of practitioners. Its significance should not be under-estimated, however. Quantitative evidence is more likely from the NIACE and WEA but is more than likely to be based on adult education as opposed to genuine Community Education, which is managed by more diverse organisations such as charities and self-help practices. Some Local (Education) Authorities which used to be able to run Community Education, prior to the financial cuts starting in the early Nineties, will have still some evidence of successes although many of their involved staff will now be retired or engaged on other matters. Similarly, (possibly retired) Principals of Community Colleges could be a resource for evidence on informal education policies, few of which have survived the economic onslaught.
2. There is insufficient collected data on many aspects of adult education, especially the less formal types, which, as experienced practitioners can verify, can bring about transformation in an individual’s life. Compass supports mechanisms to increase our knowledge base of “what works” and there needs to be an anonymised database of cost-effective interventions (cf NICE in the Health sector), with analysis and dissemination of best practice.
3. There must be data on the Adult Literacy and Numeracy movements of twenty years ago available in LA and HMG archives.

Name three major policy developments necessary to secure the future of adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 -10 years?

1. Consistency in and improvement of financial commitment to more locally organised educational structures and policies as opposed to greater central Government control. Devolution of power to make decisions and investment in the trust needed to operate autonomously are necessary
2. Developments in internet and digital policies need to be available for all citizens at times and places of their choosing so far as education and community participation are concerned.
3. Less formal types of Adult and Community curricular should be supported even though they do not seem to bear immediate economic benefit. These are an investment in people requiring the trust and confidence in them that will bear economic and social fruit in years to come.

	If your submission is confidential and you do not want it published please tick the box.
YES	Please confirm that have read the Terms of Reference and Guidelines on written submissions at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/