

Call for evidence

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I am submitting this evidence as an individual. I have taught adults on a range of courses, including literacy (termed 'basic skills' at the time), Pre-Access, Access in the settings of F.E. and adult education as provided by the local authority delivered in libraries and other community settings.

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

- I am not currently working in adult education. I would, however, make the observation that there appears to have been a real reduction in the provision of what might be called 'leisure' classes, i.e. those for which there is no examination. This is to the detriment of our society, and is a matter of concern for older people in particular who may feel marginalised and suffer from social isolation.

2. What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning? Practice may relate to activity in the classroom or beyond the classroom.

- provide a rich and stimulating curriculum with a range of courses including both those leading to qualifications, and those that might be deemed 'leisure'
- in the adult centre of the FE college where I worked, I taught on Access to H.E., Pre-Access (GCSE equivalent), and basic skills. It was important that there was a broad range of courses and levels; this helped motivate many students who saw the college as a place of real opportunity, and somewhere they could progress; it meant that the college was seen as somewhere for people who 'could' do things, rather than for disadvantaged adults who 'couldn't'
- In FE, deliver classes to adults in a separate building to where provision for teenagers is made. For disadvantaged adults it can take courage to come to college; having the kids from down the street in the same building can be de-motivating
- advertise basic skills courses in simple language, with friendly graphics, in community settings
- ask the adults what they would like to learn - and provide the courses they are interested in; a rich and varied curriculum should be developed
- basic skills courses should be free; the cost of other courses should be kept as low as possible
- offer 'Improve your English' and 'Improve your Maths' classes
- for basic skills students, provision in community settings where the student won't feel 'embarrassed' to attend
- provide locally, so that students won't have to spend money on bus fares
- provide a creche
- disabled access
- have equality and respect at the heart of everything
- qualified tutors
- friendly and non-judgemental environment
- cafe/tea area where students can chat and mingle

- provide courses targeted at particular groups, e.g. 'Women back to work'; I devised one called SUMO (Surviving Unemployment and Moving On), although this was not taken up by the college
- The initial assessment of a basic skills student is key to making sure that the student understands that this is **their** learning and that they are in control of the types of learning that they are going to do. The student's interaction with the tutor must be friendly, non-threatening, non-judgemental.
- A simple form that has a list of things on it such as 'Write my address', 'Write a note', 'Write a birthday card', 'Write a postcard', 'Fill in a form', 'Write a diary', 'Write a poem' and so on, with two columns alongside showing 'Can do', and 'Would like to do' can be an invaluable tool. The tutor holds the pen and has a general chat with the student about the things on the form, asking if they're things that they can do or things that they would like to do, ticking the relevant boxes. From this a work plan can be mapped out with the student.
- Student-centric learning materials are key for basic skills students. For example, the 'language experience' technique takes the day-to-day language of the student and from that creates learning materials so that the student finds themselves having the opportunity to read words from a page that have already come out of their own mouths. Through this technique the students own use of language and therefore their own culture is valued and reflected in the learning materials so that they don't feel that they are having to somehow 'learn' a culture that may be unfamiliar to them.
- The 'language experience' technique can also be delivered with the aid computer software: the tutor takes down the words of the student and produces them on the computer screen, accompanied by a recording of the tutor reading out their own text. This can be then given to the student to use using very simple keyboard commands so that the student is in control of how frequently they read their own language on the screen. Removing the tutor from the scenario in which the student goes over their own language is very powerful because it removes tension. It doesn't matter how patient a tutor is, at some level the adult learner senses that there is tension there as they are learning to read.
- The tutor can create learning materials for the basic skills student to good effect. For example, I had one student who I created literacy materials about his favourite football team 'Marine FC' every week. Over the course of six months, he made great progress because he was highly motivated to read and write about Marine FC.
- Students with a low level of or no qualifications should be given the opportunity to work in a way that shows their progression, and to acquire qualifications if they would like to. When I taught literacy, each student would keep their work in a ring binder and was encouraged to date and save every piece of work they did, regardless of how many 'mistakes' there were. Initially, there would be resistance to this, but when I explained it would help us understand how much they had progressed, they were fine with it. Occasionally paper that had been screwed up and thrown in the bin was retrieved, smoothed and put in the file! Every six weeks I would do a review with the student, and having the folder was key to showing just how much they'd improved. I found that students found it quite a revelation to see how much work they had done and how much they had improved. The folders became a source of great pride.
- A framework in which students can progress including access to qualifications, such as the Merseyside Open College helps motivation; developing assessment methods that are constructive and supportive of students is a good way to motivate and retain disadvantage students.
- When thinking about who the disadvantaged groups are, in addition to considering those with low level qualifications, those with no qualifications and those with a sense of being marginalised, I would like to specifically mention prisoners. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of the

benefits of identifying those with low levels of education in prison and providing them with good educational opportunities; the benefit is not just to the prisoner, but very often to their children as well. It is important we give prisoners the opportunity to develop self-esteem, and education is one of the best ways to do this

3. Do we have an approach to adult education which is sufficiently demand-led? If not, what more needs to be done? Who or what, in your view, determines demand?

The idea that somehow adult education for disadvantaged adults can be demand-led seems to me to be misguided. How can those most marginalised in our society possibly know that a) they are marginalised and would benefit from education and b) understand that the state might provide this for them? It seems highly unlikely that they will be able to do either of those things, and my experience of working in adult education would seem to bear that out.

We need to be pro-active in reaching out to those most in need. I have also put a suggestion about this under the 'policy developments' question.

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

If you speak to anyone who has ever delivered adult education, they will tell you of the impact that it can have on people's lives. That's why it's so rewarding. If we fail to provide educational opportunities to all throughout life, we are failing to provide the environment in which people can grow as people and reach their full potential. Education is valuable in itself. It doesn't have to lead to a qualification or a job.

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

- There should be a statutory requirement for the government to identify areas where there are below-average levels of literacy and numeracy and to then provide basic skills education free of charge in the community. Clearly this is a broad-sweep suggestion, and would need refining. Rural areas would need to be carefully considered.
- There needs to be a much greater vision for what adult education can be. I remember the 1970s when you could walk past schools in the evening and they would be full of adults doing woodwork, pottery, poetry, quilt-making, Classics, History, French, and so forth. Why do we no longer provide this?
We should **all** be given the opportunity to learn throughout our lives (and the costs should be low), and we should be able to do this in an environment where un-assessed learning is as valued as assessed learning. This is particularly important given that we live in an ageing society. Social isolation amongst retired people is recognised as a serious public health issue. I would also make the observation that, whilst everyone would agree that it's a good idea to provide swimming pools so that people can keep physically fit, there does not seem to be the same understanding that we also need to keep our minds fit, and that having somewhere to learn in a social setting and study Maths, paint, make music, write poetry or learn a language is equally important.
- We need to train adult basic skills tutors and provide them with secure employment. Basic skills tutors are very often women on insecure temporary contracts. As a society, we should consider the work that basic skills tutors do as important as that of nurses and doctors. To be unable to read and understand the world through reading, and to be unable to write with confidence is to experience real deprivation. As one of the richest nations on earth, it is unacceptable that we allow our citizens to lead lives of such deprivation.

