

WEA WARWICK INQUIRY

Submission from Tom Schuller.

Please forgive the very schematic nature of the submission; it is the only way I can meet the deadline.

Many of the points and recommendations which I would make more fully if I had time are to be found in the outputs of the 2009 NIACE Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong learning, and its final report *Learning Through Life*, which I co-authored with David Watson.

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

Some parts are flourishing, eg U3A; but often in ways which will accentuate the learning divide.

Not working:

- The grossly lopsided approach, concentrating on apprenticeships
- The decline/almost demise of much of the broader programmes of adult education, notably local authority and university extramural departments.

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.

Providing multiple paths and options.

Allowing for their uncertainty about what learning means, and what it might bring.

Not treating it as a separate activity per se, ie linking it to eg health concerns, domestic issues or general employability, rather than to specifically defined objectives.

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?**

I'm not sure how helpful it is to make a sharp demand vs supply side distinction. The challenge is enabling people to understand what the opportunities and benefits of AE are, develop their own motivation and be adequately supported.

Having said that, I would say:

- Demand is shaped in part by the availability and quality of supply (hence the need to maintain a wide and diverse range of learning opportunities), and by services which help people articulate their own needs and which respond to these.
- Guidance is important, integrated into other services

- the reintroduction of *individual learning accounts*, redesigned, would be a major step forward, and could change the nature of demand significantly. (We recommended this in *Learning Through Life*.)

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

A lot! Ranging from 'hard' evidence from large-scale longitudinal studies – cf especially the work of L. Feinstein, C. Hammond et al at the Wider Benefits of Learning Centre (see also T. Schuller et al *The Benefits of Learning* 2004); through a huge range of studies to an enormous mass of personal testimony. Any Adult Learners Week (now Festival of Learning) event will show this.

On cost-effectiveness, the 2009 Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning produced many reports on different impacts of AE and did some very simple 'public value' analyses, combining hypothetical argument with empirical data and using very modest assumptions to show the value of AE.

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/AboutIFLL.htm?redirectedfrom=niace>.

Internationally the Unesco Institute of Lifelong Learning in Hamburg has made the wider benefits of learning the main theme of the forthcoming Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE). This contains a lot of evidence from around the world on the effects of ALE, especially in relation to health, civic society and employment.

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

- a. Proper recognition of the implications of demographic and labour market changes, set alongside analysis of the relative proportions of resources devoted to initial (up to 25) education vs adult education.
- b. Allocation of clear responsibility to take forward policy, recognising the diversity of provision so that central 'coordination' is not appropriate.
- c. Learning accounts, see above.