

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

I worked at Liverpool Community College, the main provider of Adult Education in the city, from 1973 to 2007 as a Basic Skills tutor and latterly Course Team Leader of an Outreach Centre in one of Liverpool's most deprived areas. The funding came from Europe's Objective One money as at the time Liverpool qualified as one of Europe's poorest cities. I was responsible for setting up outreach provision there initially, talking to people about what they wanted to do, getting the centre up and running with appropriate staff and developing the curriculum to meet the needs of the students, most of whom had not engaged in education since they left school. The Adult Education offer ranged from short courses such as Local History and Creative Writing to a full time City & Guilds Business Admin course, with Basic English and Maths running alongside in support. Students could progress to Level 2 in GCSE English Language (which I taught) and Literature and Maths and many students progressed to courses, such as Access, on other college sites.

In 2000, the Fresh Start Faculty got the first Ofsted Grade 1 ever awarded, the faculty head was awarded an OBE and colleagues ran a course for other providers to explain how we did it. We also wrote a handbook of guidance for Union Learning reps on the subject.

Whilst I was there we started a local history project to record a lost community which, post war, once was where our building now stood. Here it is:

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=belle%20vale%20prefabs>

One of our Belle Vale Prefab Project books was dramatized by a WEA tutor and was performed in a local theatre. Ten years on and still going strong, this is also adult education – student centred, student led and inclusive! I'm not sure though whether the members regard themselves as students, however.

I will answer your questions in the Call for Evidence. (i) and (ii) are best discussed together.

- (i) What is working well and/or not working well with regards to adult education in England?
- (ii) What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning?

What works well for mainstream adult education courses does not necessarily apply to provision designed to meet the needs of "disadvantaged" adults as you define this group.

Niace's findings say "Opportunities to learn as an adult ... are not evenly distributed across society. As in previous years, the 2012 survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning."

http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/p/a/participation_survey_2012_-_key_findings.pdf

So with reference to this target group, provision must

- Be student centred and student led
- Provide supportive and welcoming initial contact and assessment
- Allow access to a flexible, responsive curriculum with appropriate qualifications starting at entry level, which allow for progression

- Use adult resource materials
- Be delivered by tutors with qualifications in adult education
- Be located in buildings which need not be glamorous but must be locally based in areas of need and accessible ie not a place that looks intimidating
- Be free – otherwise students can't afford to come

In this area, provision that does not work well doesn't tend to last.

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

Disadvantaged adults don't "demand". They do not lobby or protest. If they did, they would be provided for. All they need is a chance to say what they want when they are asked. So sensible consultation, informally, in a non-threatening, inclusive manner, is the best idea.

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

Can this evidence be adequately collated? It would require another research project to quantify it. It speaks for itself. The Fresh Start Faculty I belonged to had many staff who started off as students and finished up as tutors. There is evidence to hand of the damage to society and the economy of the number of people working in low skilled jobs for low wages – and the lack of investment in the people who are unemployed. Do we have to justify our education?

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

Policy firms up good practice. Without policy, adult education will remain piecemeal and inadequate, especially in the area we are discussing. At present, adult education is discretionary rather than mandatory. Can statutory requirements be built in to policy? They are necessary

- (i) to identify where the need is
 - (ii) to provide appropriate funding
 - (iii) to deliver decent provision
- so that real progress can be made.

Adult education provision needs to be comprehensively mapped locally and nationally.

As a sad reminder might I add that after a change of Principal and senior management, Liverpool Community College was recently renamed the City of Liverpool College. In August 2015, the last few remaining Outreach Centres, all in areas of high deprivation, including the one which I set up, were axed. The provision which took over 30 years to develop to cater for "disadvantaged adults" has disappeared.

In my professional lifetime there have been several attempts to close the learning gap, most notably perhaps the policy contained in David Blunkett's "Learning Age" programme. Nearly 20 years later, the gap is still there. Let's make sure it begins to close.