

Survey of adult education in England

Written evidence from:

Olive Home

AE classes attended:

Woodwork, Hammersmith and Fulham AE, 5 hrs pw.

Dutch language, King's College, Strand, 1 1/2 hrs pw.

Other classes:

Russian language, University of the Third Age, Hampstead, 3 hrs pw.

Choral singing, Hackney Singers, 2 hrs pw, + 3 concerts pa.

This gives me a timetable for the week. I don't want to become like the pensioner who called to me from her third floor window, "What day is it?"

Language/s and making things are my delight. I pin my hope of evading dementia on the elaborate grammar of Russian, and the contrast with Dutch.

U3A classes are run and attended by pensioners who want to keep their minds working.

Dutch at King's college is attended by young people, for work reasons and for personal reasons.

During 2013 - 2016 they have been of British, Polish, Chinese, Spanish, French, Nigerian, Belgian, South African backgrounds.

Woodwork at Hammersmith AE is attended by:

- a homeless man
- people intending to working independently as handymen, as furniture restorers, or makers
- beginners
- people who sit at a screen all day and long for creative activity. This is most noticeable at Saturday classes. These people arrive early and leave last.
- pensioners adding to their skills and to their confidence in their ability to finish a fine piece.

Choral singing at Hackney Singers is attended by people who come to rehearsal after a day's work, and some pensioners. We all love singing, being in a choir, the physical exercise that singing requires, and learning. The choir began as an AE class, went independent in the 1990s.

My observations on Adult Education:

AE is not statutory; learners are there by choice.

Learners have families, jobs, other demands on their time.

A class runs if the right number enrol; otherwise, the class doesn't run.

If numbers drop, the class is cut; tutors lose work and learners lose places.

Classes are mixed ability; if the range is too wide, attendance drops.

AE is for enthusiasts; hobbyists drop out.

AE could provide courses for trade qualifications, if learners were enrolled for those qualifications.

If other learners are included to raise numbers, it is a strain on the class and on the tutor.

As an example, a woodwork class at Hammersmith and Fulham AE enrolled learners for City & Guilds Carpentry, together with learners working on their own projects; C&G Carpentry was later discontinued.

I was a tutor in English as a second language in Hackney and Tower Hamlets Further Education for twenty years. People come to ESOL classes for many reasons:

- to learn to speak / read / write / understand
- to get out of the house
- to see people
- to qualify for benefit
- to keep up with children now at primary school
- to look for a new life with children now at secondary school
- to manage depression
- to prepare for citizenship

Learning English isn't always the first reason in the list.

AE adds value to people's lives.

It combats depression and loneliness.

It keeps people out of the doctor's surgery.

It keeps minds and bodies working in an ageing population.

Three major policy developments to secure the future of AE:

- fractional contracts for tutors, no more hourly paid contracts
- wider advertising
- speed up the enrolment process

I wish had all the answers.

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