

The Impact of Adult Learning on Work

European Agenda for Adult Learning 2015-2017



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- UK work programme coordinated by Learning & Work Institute funded by European Commission and UK government
- Final report in 2017 to include evidence of the impact of adult learning on three themes: *communities, health, and work*
- Plus research and development projects on adult basic skills (the Citizens' Curriculum), digital skills, and young adult employability (www.whatemployerswant.org)

Impacts for individuals, employers, society and the economy

Individuals:

- Labour market and employment benefits: greater access to the labour market, employability, progression , career change.
- Wider benefits: greater job satisfaction, better health and well being.

Employers:

- Productivity: employees more satisfied and committed to their work, workforce stability, adaptation to technological innovation.
- **Society & economy:**
- Labour market and employment benefits: Higher rates of economic activity, more people able and willing to work later in life, high tax revenues, better functioning of labour market, entrepreneurship levels are higher.
- Wider benefits: Better employment = positive impact on health, well functioning labour markets = positive impact on social cohesion

Labour market recognition and validation of learning is key

The inequality challenge

- Participation in learning is unequal
- Labour market access and outcomes are also unequal
- Does participation in learning address inequalities, or reinforce them?

- Employer supported learning most likely to reinforce inequalities
- Key factors in addressing disadvantage – targeting, outreach, purpose and partnerships

The evidence challenge

- Lots of evidence on positive impacts
- Focus on those which are easiest to measure e.g. Impact of qualifications on labour market outcomes
- Challenge to evidence benefits of informal learning
- Existing studies show benefits should not be taken for granted or expected to early – context plays a key role

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- Research paper currently being developed by Professor Lorna Unwin building on the Government Office for Science Foresight Report on Future Skills and Lifelong Learning (July 2016)
- What evidence do members of the England Impact Forum think we should be take into account as part of this research

Key questions for consideration

What evidence are impact forum members aware of that focuses on the relationship between learning (participation and/or educational level) and:

1. Access to the labour market?
2. Progression?
3. Productivity?

1. Learning 'as acquisition' or 'by participation'?

The evidence illustrates different paradigms of learning.

Firstly, 'learning as acquisition', where skills are developed through formal activities, supported by teachers, against a prescribed curriculum and with measurable outcomes.

Secondly, 'learning by participation', a process whereby individuals improve skills and performance through practice.

What counts as learning, who takes part and what the impact is, will depend upon which paradigm we use.

2. 'Learning as acquisition' is in decline

Quantitative measurement of 'learning as acquisition' shows that nationally the incidence of learning peaked in 2001, after which it has fallen steadily then stabilised in recent years. It has since fallen steadily, although in recent years it has stabilised at around 13%.

Reported training times have shortened. In 1995, 33% of training episodes lasted less than one week, but by 2012 this had risen 50%. This suggests that overall training volumes have fallen significantly.

Forum members may wish to consider what the impact of these changes might be, and whether there is evidence of this.

3. Employers' expenditure has declined

Real levels of training expenditure by employers have also decreased.

Between 2005 and 2011, there was a 14.5% real terms cut in training investment per worker. The 2015 figure suggests that this has been halted with nominal training expenditure rising from £43.0 billion in 2013 to £45.4 billion in 2015. However, investment levels per head have not risen.

Is this a problem – and do you have any evidence to support this?

Would better evidence on the impact of learning address this issue?

4. 'Learning as participation' is valued by employers

Despite the emphasis placed on attending training courses and the acquisition of qualifications, both are relatively low-rated by employees in terms of their helpfulness in improving work performance.

Activities more closely associated with the workplace – such as doing the job, being shown things, engaging in self/collective-reflection etc – are regarded as being more helpful in improving performance, reflecting the 'learning as participation' paradigm.

Are you aware of additional evidence that supports or contradicts this? What are the implications of this for evidencing the impact of learning?

5. The importance of learning on-the-job

At a time when formal workplace training has been declining, this evidence suggests that the importance of learning on-the-job is rising?

Are you aware of additional evidence that supports or contradicts this ?

6. To those that have... more!

Participation in all forms of workplace learning, **in both paradigms**, is skewed towards those at the top of the occupational hierarchy.

Are you aware of any additional evidence that highlights the impact of this, or of the impact in instances where this is not the case?

7. Not all learning is recognised and valued

Much of the qualitative evidence shows that learning occurs naturally in all workplaces as part of everyday activity in line with the **learning as participation** approach. However, not all learning is recognised and valued, and some workplaces are more capable of capitalising on their learning potential than others.

Are you aware of additional evidence on the impact of ‘learning as participation’? How might we better develop the evidence base for this?

8. Workplace learning is a collective process

Workplace learning takes many forms stretching across a ‘formal-informal’ continuum. In the main, it is a collective process involving employees working together to solve problems, to find better ways of producing goods and services, and to create more efficient practices.

This latter dimension also includes employees subverting procedures to ‘get round’ barriers to efficiency and/or to make their jobs more amenable.

Are you aware of additional evidence for this? How might we better demonstrate this impact?

9. What determines the variability of workplace learning?

International research evidence suggests that the key inter-related determinants in the variability of workplace learning environments are context (including employer behaviour and employment relations) and individual behaviour.

Is there evidence from your part of the UK to support this?

10. External recognition and accreditation

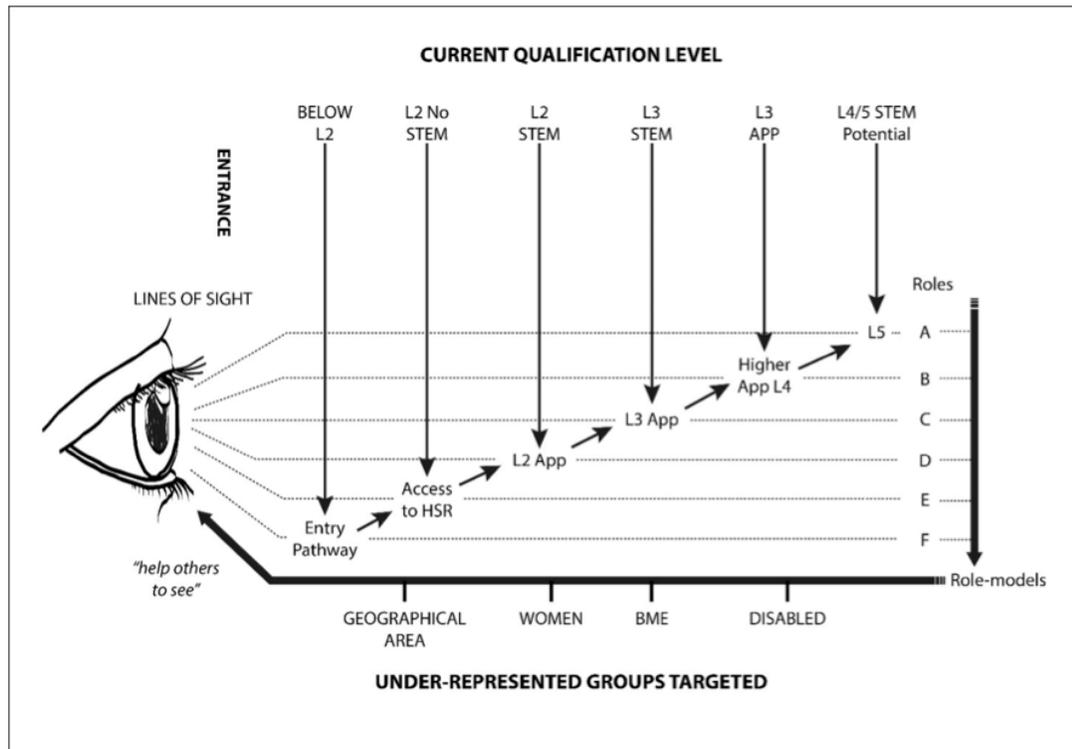
External recognition and accreditation of workplace learning is problematic due to its largely collective and dynamic nature.

What counts as 'learning' differs from one context to another.

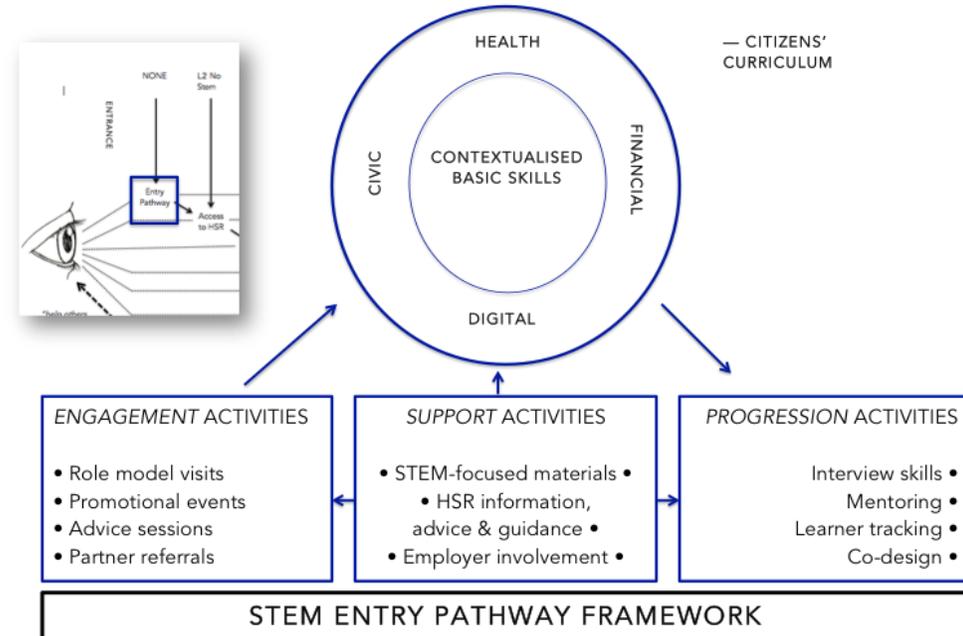
What are the implications for this in evidencing the impact of learning?

The importance of progression

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For more information or to feedback comments
please contact

Dr Fiona Aldridge

Assistant Director

Learning & Work Institute

Fiona.aldridge@learningandwork.org.uk

