

Delivering a programme of study for adult learners

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*In January 2016, NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
merged to form Learning and Work Institute*

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We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

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Executive Summary

Since January 2014, Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has been working with providers and other stakeholders to develop and evaluate a holistic approach to basic skills provision for adult learners – a Citizens' Curriculum. This model promotes learning which is locally-led, involves learners in shaping its contents, and interlinks basic skills in language (English for Speakers of Other Languages), literacy and numeracy with digital, financial, health and civic capabilities.

In 2015/16, L&W was supported by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to explore the extent to which the Citizens' Curriculum could form the basis for a programme of study for adult learners. This consultation aimed to establish a better understanding of how policy and practice in relation to funding for adult learning, quality assurance systems and qualifications could support the delivery of a 'programme of study' for adult learners in a range of settings.

The consultation adopted a mixed methodology to gather the views of providers, practitioners and learners. Two expert seminars were run with representatives from across the further education and skills sector; qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample of these representatives; a workshop was delivered with members of the Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFA); and a participatory focus group was carried out with learners. This report presents the findings of the consultation with recommendations as to how the Citizens' Curriculum could form the basis of an adult study programme.

Findings

The consultation found that formalizing learning into a programme of study necessarily brings challenges and that providers and practitioners will need further support in developing and delivering effective adult study programmes. Nevertheless, our work identified key benefits of a Citizens' Curriculum study programme:

- **Flexibility** in terms of focus on skills and individualized learning;
- **Co-design** of curriculum with learners to meet their needs, make learning relevant and increase motivation;
- **Broad focus** upon skills that enhance employability and progression, without losing the ability to adapt and meet learners' individual needs;
- **Flexibility in delivery models** including blended, peer and cascaded learning;
- **Destination** approach that progressed learners to a final goal, even if that goal changes;
- **Application in a range of settings** including community and family learning; and
- **Removal of focus on qualifications** and refocus upon the learning journey.

These benefits could help address and overcome many of the challenges faced at present within the adult learning and skills sector – for example in engaging adults into programmes of learning which develop their English and maths skills, and/or support progression into work. A key finding of this work is that in addition to providing a more engaging Entry level offer, the Citizens' Curriculum can also provide a 'wrap around' programme to vocational and employment-focused learning at Levels 1 and 2, offering greater support for progression.

The findings from the learner focus group conducted in this consultation suggest that a curriculum which is based in learners' lives is more likely to be relevant and engaging, therefore helping to address low participation in learning by disadvantaged groups. Learners displayed a strong focus upon practical and contextualised learning and the skills and subject areas that had a direct influence on learners' lives were often mentioned. Increased flexibility means that programmes of study delivered using the Citizens' Curriculum principles are better placed to exploit learner motivations than many other forms of learning currently available. Potentially, this has applications in fields such as improving the quality of English and maths provision, and in ensuring that it remains possible to deliver locally-led learning responsive to local communities under the reformed Adult Education Budget.

Conclusions and recommendations

This work has been carried out alongside piloting of the Citizens' Curriculum in English and maths provision. In the light of the findings from the pilots and the consultation above, and in recognition of recent policy developments and current priorities, we are confident that further work on the Citizens' Curriculum is beneficial to the adult learning, skills and employment sector. In our report on the pilots, we argue that this work should now shift in focus from piloting and consultation activity to work which supports and brings about a broader implementation: in policy, in the learning and skills system, and in classroom practice. Accordingly, we recommend here (and in our pilot report):

- Further engagement activity across the adult learning, skills and employment sector to achieve buy-in, including from commissioners, providers not previously involved in piloting, and more widely amongst sector representative organisations, executive agencies and other sector bodies.
- Further activity, and the development of supporting resources, to help commissioners and providers working in the context of a devolved Adult Education Budget use the Citizens' Curriculum model to ensure that devolved adult learning and skills includes a focus on Entry Level and basic skills learning which supports progression and meets local needs.
- Building upon the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities frameworks, the development and identification of further resources to support practitioners (including the use of peer volunteers and mentors) to adopt and implement a Citizens' Curriculum approach in their teaching, learning and support activities, particularly in alignment with current workforce development priorities for English and maths practitioners.

Introduction

Purpose of the Consultation

Since January 2014, Learning and Work Institute has been working with providers and other stakeholders to develop and evaluate a holistic approach to basic skills provision for adult learners – a Citizens' Curriculum. The Citizens' Curriculum goes beyond the simple delivery of discrete qualifications in English/ESOL, maths ICT and other provision at or below Level 1.

Evidence from the Citizens' Curriculum pilots suggests that effective provision should: i) interlink and embed learning across a range of skills and capabilities, including English / ESOL and maths skills and digital, financial, health and civic capabilities ii) reflect local needs, circumstances and priorities, and iii) motivate and engage adult learners through co-creation of the programme contents.

Our work to develop the Citizens' Curriculum in a range of contexts and funding streams (including the former community learning and Adult Skills Budgets) has demonstrated the potential to achieve better learner engagement and motivation to participate in learning, improved attitudes to learning and positive outcomes for learners in terms of progression (in learning and work) and work readiness.

The BIS consultation, *A Dual Mandate for Adult Vocational Education* (2015) asked if per-learner funding should be considered in adult learning contexts, particularly in skills provision for those without Level 2 qualifications, and for those with skills needs at lower levels. Evidence from NIACE's Citizens' Curriculum pilots (2015), suggests that there are considerable benefits in delivering adult basic skills provision as an inter-linked programme of capabilities in language/literacy, numeracy, digital, financial, health and civic skills. Many of these elements, which are engaging and motivational for adult learners in a range of settings, can be unaccredited but they can also be linked to qualifications in English/ESOL and/or maths as required.

The way that adult learning is planned and funded is undergoing substantial change. The 2016-17 Skills Funding letter¹ outlined significant reforms to the funding of adult further education, with the introduction of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), which replaced three funding streams: funding for adult further education outside of apprenticeships; community learning; and discretionary learner support. Its principal purpose is to fund learning that engages adults and helps people to move towards work, an apprenticeship or further learning, or otherwise helps people who are furthest from learning and/ or the workplace. As the letter explains, this funding 'has been protected in cash terms, in recognition of the contribution that adult education can make to both improving productivity and creating opportunities for socially excluded adults to turn their lives around.' The intention is that providers will have greater flexibility to develop a mix of provision that responds effectively to

¹www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-funding-letter-april-2016-to-march-2017

local needs.² In this context, there are new opportunities for commissioners and providers to develop new and different delivery models, potentially including those that adopt a programme of study approach. In fact, the idea of a holistic programme based on underlying principles and outcomes for learners rather than achievement of qualifications has clear parallels with the study programme concept, which now operates in 16-18 FE provision.

The work presented in this report was supported by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and aimed to establish a better understanding of how policy and practice in relation to funding for adult learning, quality assurance systems and qualifications could support the delivery of a 'programme of study' for adult learners in a range of settings. In particular, it explored the extent to which the Citizens' Curriculum could form the basis for a programme of study for adult learners by identifying the potential benefits, challenges and opportunities to taking this approach and producing a potential model for the delivery of an adult study programme based on the Citizens' Curriculum.

About the Citizens' Curriculum

The Citizens' Curriculum is an innovative and flexible approach to language, literacy and numeracy provision which places the needs of learners and communities at its core. The underpinning principles of the Citizens' Curriculum approach are:

- **A holistic approach to provision for adult learners interpreted through the local context**

Evidence from the Phase 1 piloting activity, our initial scoping work, the Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF) projects and *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times* supports the idea that learning opportunities are more likely to engage and motivate adult learners if they are related to local needs, circumstances or a particular context.³ This contrasts with 'top-down' or 'supply-side' approaches which simply offer adults a pre-determined range of learning opportunities.

- **Learner involvement in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests**

Evidence from our scoping work and *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times* stresses the value of co-design of the curriculum with learners. This further supports locally interpreted programmes with the engagement and motivation of learners, by increasing the relevance of the offer. Adopting such an approach may require providers and practitioners to move towards a more participatory approach to the design of the curriculum and establish new or more effective ways of gathering learner feedback.

²www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/496195/Adult_Education_Budget_changing_context_and_arrangements_for_2016_to_2017.pdf

³ Simon Beer, *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times* (Leicester: NIACE, 2013)

http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/community-learning/sites/default/files/resources/A_new_curriculum_for_difficult_times.pdf

- **An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities**

Research shows the potential of embedded approaches to language, literacy and numeracy to be effective in motivating and engaging learners⁴. The Citizens' Curriculum extends this to suggest that as many of the capabilities as are relevant in the context, and to the needs of learners, should be interlinked in the provision of learning opportunities. However, the way in which this is achieved may vary across different contexts.

When referring to the different capabilities within the Citizens' Curriculum, we do so in the broad senses set out by Schuller and Watson⁵:

Digital capability refers to the digital skills needed for employment and beyond, and the ability to use, create and understand digital media and communications. Digital inclusion (having access to new technologies) is a necessary pre-condition for this.

Health capability comprises: the ability to understand one's own physical and mental health, and take action to maintain and improve it; the ability to make effective use of health services; and the ability to understand the circumstances which lead to good and poor health.

Financial capability 'stresses an active, skills based approach to personal finances rather than the importance of knowledge on its own' and therefore goes beyond earlier conceptions of financial literacy, which focused on the ability to make effective decisions about money management.

Civic capability is a broad category, concerning an individual's ability to participate in cultural activity in any form. It may include formal citizenship learning and active participation, for example through volunteering, but also less formal participation as an 'active spectator'. Informal learning and engagement with cultural institutions can play an important role here.

L&W believes that this approach has great potential to engage adults, including the most disadvantaged, and motivate them to participate in learning provision which addresses English, maths and language needs whilst developing the wider skills and capabilities needed in today's society. This was supported by the findings of the Phase 1 piloting activity, which broadly confirmed the feasibility of the Citizens' Curriculum approach in a range of delivery contexts across the adult learning and skills sector, and resulted in the following benefits:

For providers:

⁴ See Casey, H. *et al.*, *The Impact of Embedding on Learning and Achievement* (London: NRDC, 2005); Eldred, J., *Developing Embedded Literacy, Language and Numeracy: Supporting Achievement* (Leicester: NIACE, 2005); Roberts, C. *et al.*, *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL. Seven Case Studies* (London: NRDC, 2005).

⁵ Tom Schuller and David Watson, *Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* (Leicester: NIACE, 2009), p. 8.

- Improved partnership working which supported the recruitment of learners into provision.
- Added value to the curriculum offer, which became more engaging through the interlinking of English, maths and language skills with other capabilities.
- An improved curriculum offer which, through greater learner involvement, was felt to be more responsive to the needs of learners.

For practitioners:

- Improved ability to make learning relevant to adults' lives and articulate the wider benefits of participation in learning, through a focus on the interlinked capabilities of the Citizens' Curriculum approach.
- For practitioners with less experience in the creation and co-design of flexible provision tailored to the needs of individuals, a greater appreciation of the value and benefits of this approach and keenness to embed this further in their practice.

For learners:

- Improved attitudes to learning, particularly with regard to English/language and maths, leading to progression into further learning opportunities.
- Improved skills and attitudes supporting employability, including increased motivation to seek work and/or participate in voluntary work, and for some learners, progression into employment or work placements.
- Improved engagement in the wider community and improved confidence and ability to use public services.
- Improved skills relating to particular capabilities within the Citizens' Curriculum, such as improved confidence to speak English or to use technology.

16-19 Study Programmes

In 2011 Alison Wolf was commissioned to report on the state of education for 14-19 year-olds in the UK. The report provided a review of the current education system, including current issues and challenges faced by young learners following both academic and vocational education pathways. The report also issued a number of recommendations, which later informed the establishment of Study Programmes for young learners.

Wolf recommended that education for young people be regrouped around the priorities of:

- Progression – both into further or higher education, and work; providing a stronger and coherent link between young people's education and their personal and professional aspirations
- Information, advice and guidance that is accurate, extensive and **honest** to ensure that young people had all the information required to take life-changing and life-defining decisions
- Simplification of a system that was seen to be unduly complicated in terms of the qualifications offered, administration of various schemes, equivalences between

qualifications, funding mechanisms and repetitive directives from various governmental levels that contributed to a largely bureaucratic system of micro-management

The Study Programme approach aims to provide young people with robust and challenging routes to progression in education or employment. As such, the focus is very much on progression and encouraging learners to work towards a higher level than their previous attainment. It also has a strong focus on work experience and the applicability of qualifications to industries and particular jobs.

Programmes are to be designed around the needs of the learners and can take many forms. All Study Programmes offer:

- a core aim (substantial Level 2/3 vocational or academic qualification; or substantial work experience for those unable to study at Level 2)
- participation in non-qualifying activity, including work experience
- study of maths and English to GCSE Grade C or above (or stepping-stone qualifications towards GCSEs).⁶

Study Programmes for 16-19 year-olds were introduced from September 2013. From August 2014 it became a condition of funding that all students aged 16-18 who did not have a grade C or above in GCSE English and/or Maths continue to study these subjects as part of their Study Programme. This also applied to learners aged 19-25 who study for 150 hours or more and have a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

⁶ AELP. 2012. *Implementing Study Programmes (including traineeships)*. Bristol: AELP, p. 5.

Methodology

In order to address the research objectives, the consultation adopted a mixed methodology consisting of the following activities:

An Expert Seminar, including an extended workshop in which the project aims were explored thematically. Attendees were recruited via an open call to Learning and Work Institute contacts. Delegates included: FE providers, Government department representatives, sector organizations (including one representing students), independent adult education specialists, Citizens' Curriculum pilot hosts, and further education practitioners.

Qualitative interviews with a selection of representatives from the sector which discussed the key themes and questions emerging from the Expert Seminar in more detail. The interviews focused upon input measures, content, support for providers and quality assurance. Interviews were audio recorded and subjected to a thematic analysis to identify key emergent themes and recommendations.

A workshop with members of the Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFEA) to explore the challenges and benefits of an adult study programme from an Adult and Community Learning perspective. Delegates participated in roundtable discussions and made note of the critical issues using a thought sheet which address five key questions –

- What would an adult study programme look like?
- Which learners, in which contexts, could benefit?
- What support would providers need?
- How could quality frameworks support it?
- What changes would need to be made?

A participatory focus group with learners, which explored three key areas: why learners engage with adult education; what they like to learn; and, how they like to learn it. The group featured a combination of kinesthetic activities, group discussions and targeted questioning. Learners were recruited from an open call to adult education providers and practitioners

A second expert seminar that brought together delegates from the initial seminar for a feedback session with extended workshop. Research and consultation findings were collated to produce a draft Principles and Requirements document. This was then presented to delegates at a second Expert Seminar for feedback and suggestions.

Participants for the consultation were recruited through existing networks of contacts and an open call for participants addressed to the Further Education sector, including regulatory bodies, awarding organizations, governments departments with stakeholder status, further education providers, practitioners and consultants. The breadth of stakeholder involvement was key to the success of the consultation so a diverse range of representatives were

sought in preference to higher volumes. The scale of the resulting consultation was as follows:

- Approximately 30 sector representatives from learning providers, government departments, regulatory bodies, sector bodies and student bodies;
- 6 follow-up interviews of 45 minutes duration with selected delegates;
- Approximately 20 members of the LEA FEA network;
- A group of 12 learners.

Findings

Sector Consultation

Key benefits of a Citizens' Curriculum study programme:

- **Flexibility** in terms of focus on skills and individualized learning
- **Co-design** of curriculum with learners to meet their needs, make learning relevant and increase motivation
- **Broad focus** upon skills that enhance employability and progression, without losing the ability to adapt and meet learners' individual needs
- **Flexibility in delivery models** including blended, peer and cascaded learning
- **Destination** approach that progressed learners to a final goal, even if that goal changes
- **Application in a range of settings** including community and family learning
- **Removal of focus from qualifications** and refocus upon the learning journey

Key challenges of a Citizens' Curriculum study programme:

- **Retaining flexibility** whilst providing a coherent programme of learning
- **Deciding upon input measures** to identify learners who would benefit from the Citizens' Curriculum approach
- **Ensuring that a programme of study for adult learners does not exclude** intergenerational learning and unaccredited learning that has significant wider impacts
- **Ensuring that the commissioned outcomes of programmes of study for adult learners are appropriate for all** adult learners, particularly those working below Level 1, and include a range of outcomes alongside progression into employment
- **Prioritisation of learning aims within the programme**, particularly those outside of accreditation frameworks
- **Supporting providers** practically and through funding methods to deliver programmes

Demographics, Stakeholders and Commissioning

Behind many benefits and challenges above lies the acknowledgement that adult learning, skills and employment is a diverse sector. It was felt that an adult study programme would not be broadly appropriate for all learners, but a number of key demographics could benefit from a Citizens' Curriculum study programme. These were:

- Hard-to-reach/disengaged adults
- Learners with Entry level skills unable to engage with vocational qualifications
- Unemployed adults – particularly those lacking work experience

- Adults with ESOL needs

Identification of learners who may benefit from the Citizens' Curriculum programme of study should be led by the commissioning approach adopted. It was felt that a collaborative commissioning process was necessary to ensure that the needs of local communities and learners are appropriately met. Three different commissioning approaches were suggested:

An area based approach using local area outcomes to identify a socioeconomic need. This approach has been trialed by a Citizens' Curriculum host site and the socioeconomic benefits are encouraging. This would involve working with local authorities, local public services and other organizations to identify a demographic with a particular need. A course would then be designed to help meet that need. Learner involvement would help to refine the design of the course so that their needs and preferences were also met.

An employment based approach in which learners are referred through partner organizations including the Department for Work and Pensions. Programmes could then focus upon literacy, numeracy, communication, civic, digital and other skills that would help to support learners into employment.

An individual needs based approach in which learners self-refer to Citizens' Curriculum programmes as a way back into education. Referral can also be made through mutual discussion between learner and learning provider.

Commissioning processes will necessarily be different and would depend on which partner organizations were involved. An individual needs based approach, for example, may involve community venues including libraries and schools in the establishment of provision that can bridge barriers to learning. An area based approach, in contrast, would involve the local authority and public services in establishing a socioeconomic need that can be addressed through education. Stakeholders for commissioning could, therefore, include the following:

- National Careers Service
- Social Services
- Confederation of British Industry
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Job Centre Plus
- Emergency Services
- Apprenticeship Providers
- Work Academies
- Libraries
- Housing Associations
- Employers
- Other Learning Providers
- Schools

Delivery Models

Content, structure and prioritisation of aims should be heavily learner-led. In order to facilitate this, a modular approach to the Citizens' Curriculum study programme was suggested by some. This recognised both the range of subjects and topics that could be

covered by the Citizens' Curriculum whilst also allowing learners to select their preferred learning options. However, it was also recognised that bringing together the different elements of the Citizens' Curriculum in classroom delivery could lead to highly relevant and useful learning opportunities e.g. developing literacy and digital skills at the same time.

The consensus was that English and Maths qualifications should form the substantial qualification element of the programme, where appropriate. In addition, work placements, experience or taster sessions could also form a part of the programme where it is appropriate for learners to work towards vocational goals.

Popular modules (or elements) suggested include:

- English and Maths (Functional Skills and milestone learning)
- Digital Skills
- Confidence Building
- Employability
- Taster Sessions
- Vocational Qualifications/Modules
- ICT Skills⁷
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Enterprise/Self-Employment Skills

Additional modules mentioned by single delegates include: civic skills, ESOL, learning styles, CV writing skills, volunteering, cooking, health skills, money skills and work experience (the latter with the caveat that it is only to be an option and not a requirement). The range and scope of modules suggested fit well with the basic Citizens' Curriculum capabilities framework, thus suggesting that the programme of study approach may be broadly compatible with the Citizens' Curriculum.

Progression and achievement could be defined using the destination model, with a range of different 'end destinations' being appropriate for adult learners. Suggested progression routes include:

- Progression through milestone learning to Functional Skills
- Progression through Functional Skills levels
- Progression to further learning
- Progression to vocational learning/adult apprenticeships

⁷ ICT skills refers to learners' abilities to use standard computing hardware and software. For example, writing a CV using word is a demonstration of ICT skills. Digital skills, on the other hand, are comprised of composite communication skills utilised through a range of interactive mobile platforms. Using social media, for example, is a demonstration of digital skills. In that sense, digital skills and digital capability includes more than 'computer' or 'ICT' modules.

- Progression into volunteering or employment
- Increased participation in the community
- Increased participation in family learning
- Increased involvement with child's schooling

Under the new Adult Education Budget, further opportunities to deliver non-regulated learning may be created, and the need to maintain such opportunities and recognize the value of unaccredited learning provision was made very clear by all sector representatives. It was felt that providers should not be penalized if a learner leaves a programme early to progress through a different route to their intended learning destination. It was suggested that the Community Learning and Innovation Fund (CLIF) pilots could provide outcome measures for learning and development that was unaccredited. Such measures may include:

- Positive mental health outcomes
- Positive physical health outcomes
- Positive family relationship outcomes
- Voluntary work outcomes
- Employability outcomes

Public service statistics could be used as an outcome measure in areas where there was a recognised problem. There are two notional difficulties with this approach, however; firstly, there are ethical considerations when collecting data that is by its very nature not anonymous. Secondly, data sharing across organisations in different sectors is not currently standard practice and so it may be difficult to replicate this type of data collection. Issues of defining and measuring the impact of non-regulated learning, including the use of data sources, have been considered in recent L&W work supporting community learning reform.⁸

Employability could be an outcome measure, but only if it was not limited to employment statistics alone. Whilst seeking employment may be appropriate for some learners, not all will be able to quickly progress into work. Despite the challenges of supporting a diverse range of adults into employment, it was felt that employability outcomes were critical to the success of the Citizens' Curriculum. Developing basic skills, community awareness, digital skills and personal skills all contribute to an individual's ability and propensity to engage fully in the socioeconomic sphere. Providers felt it was important to keep this outcome in mind when designing and delivering Citizens' Curriculum courses.

⁸ L&W (2016) *Defining and Measuring the Impact of Non-Regulated Learning. Report of Findings from Provider Consultation and Desk Research* (Unpublished Report to BIS)

Quality Assurance and Provider Support

Recognizing and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA). It was felt that the RARPA framework could be useful in helping providers to define and measure unaccredited learning. The framework is already in use with providers and has been generally well received.

Citizens' Curriculum accredited centres were suggested as a way of ensuring the integrity of the principles of the Citizens' Curriculum. There was some support for this suggestion although there were considerable reservations that this accreditation would not be valuable and would result in yet another bureaucratic process for providers.

Open Badges were viewed as a possible framework for unaccredited learning. This would require substantial development as the existing Badge framework is geared towards digital skills. Partner organizations would have to be involved in the design and production of a set of Citizens' Curriculum badges that were meaningful to education providers and employers.

The Ofsted Common Inspection Framework and the Education and Training

Foundation's professional teaching standards were two quality assurance measures that would also impact on teaching of the Citizens' Curriculum. In addition, larger providers often have extensive quality assurance procedures that would be adequate to ensure quality of Citizens' Curriculum programmes.

In terms of provider support, many respondents showed interest in a best-practice sharing and peer support network that connected Citizens' Curriculum pilots and new providers. This was felt to be more beneficial than exhaustive curriculum documents that may inhibit the flexibility of the Citizens' Curriculum.

Staff development was another area in which providers requested support. These requirements tended to focus upon encouraging tutors to work collaboratively, including developing team-teaching techniques. Training on the Citizens' Curriculum itself along with coaching, mentoring and guidance skills were a key staff development need. Practitioner and provider feedback from the Citizens' Curriculum pilots also suggests that professional development in areas such as co-design of learning content, embedding and contextualising English and maths skills, and quality assurance in non-regulated provision could also be areas where further support would be required.

Learner Consultation

The focus group consisted of 12 adult learners who were undertaking a Functional English course at a large Further Education College. The group had an equal mix of male and female participants and covered a range of backgrounds, abilities and ambitions.

- Learners were aged between approximately 20 and 50 years
- Learners were working between Entry Level 1 and Level 2
- 6 learners were employed
- 5 learners identified English as their second/other language
- 3 learners aimed to go to university

The learners were comfortable in each others' company and had a supportive and inclusive dynamic. All learners felt able to contribute to discussions and subsequent focus group activities yielded a range of responses from all learners. There was also a collaborative atmosphere to the group, with high level learners empathetically offering support to lower level learners before and during the focus group activities. Learners were particularly skilled in group discussions, which in turn allowed all learners to contribute equally and all learners felt they had ample opportunity to take part.

Motivations for Learning

The group was divided into three smaller groups. Each group was given a set of flashcards which were printed with potential reasons why the learners signed up to their current course. These descriptors were selected based on the inverse descriptors used in the NIACE Participation Survey 2015 (reference question: reasons for not engaging in learning), and others were adapted from the confirmed benefits of learning as reported in the Participation Survey. Descriptors presented to the focus group were:

- To get a job
- Satisfaction
- Something to do
- Improve my health
- Support my family
- Personal development
- To get better at my job
- Improve my self-confidence
- Get a qualification
- Meet new friends
- I'm interested in the subject
- Satisfaction

Each group was asked to discuss the descriptors and identify the main reason(s) they signed up to their current course. As discussions were taking place the facilitator circulated around the groups to encourage learners to consider their main motivation first and any additional motivators as a secondary focus. During circulation and note taking it was noted that all learners' opinions were contextualised to their personal circumstances. A number of learners had clear aspirations to go to University, for example, and this guided their decision. Similarly, a number of learners noted that their or other employers valued qualifications and they felt that achieving that qualification would support their career aspirations. Alternatively, other learners who had not yet formulated clear career goals were more concerned with improving self-confidence and achieving a sense of satisfaction.

Crucially, all learners felt strongly that descriptors were interlinked and that all motivations were important to a certain degree. Each group did, however, come to an agreement on which descriptors they valued the most. Each group ordered the descriptors and a photograph was taken to preserve the results. In order to combine the preferences of each group each descriptor in each list was assigned a numerical value based upon its list-placement. The most important descriptor was assigned the value 12 and the least important descriptor was assigned the value 1. Each descriptor thus accumulated three values, which were then combined to give an overall value for each descriptor. The descriptors could then be ordered based on the combined value (Table 1, below).

The top two motivations for learning were 'improve self-confidence' (27) and 'get a qualification' (26), which reflects the dual focus amongst the learners on goal-directed

learning and personal development. Indeed, the top five motivations included a mix of goal-directed reasons ('to get better at my job') and wider personal and social impacts ('to meet new friends'). The least valued motivations for this group were 'improve my health' (5) and 'support my family' (7) although the group itself recognised that this may be due almost entirely to their personal circumstances not making these particular motivations a priority. The learners were keen to acknowledge that for other adults, these factors may play a more decisive role and the group made clear that the relatively low position of these descriptors was in no way intended to devalue them as potential motivations.

Table 1: Why You Learn

	Score	Rank
Improve self-confidence	27	1
Get a qualification	26	2
Meet new friends	18	3
Personal development	15	4
Get better at my job	14	5
I'm interested in the subject	12	6
To get a job	12	7
Something to do	11	8
Satisfaction	11	9
I enjoy it	9	10
Support my family	7	11
Improve my health	5	12

Valuable Skills and Activities

Each group was given a set of flashcards that listed a range of skills, abilities and subjects. These descriptors were selected to correspond to the major Functional Skills areas and additional areas covered by the Citizens' Curriculum. Each group was asked to discuss the descriptors and identify the main reason(s) they signed up to their current course. As discussions were taking place the facilitator circulated around the groups to encourage learners to consider their main motivation first and any additional motivators as a secondary focus.

During groups discussions it was notable that learners displayed a strong focus upon practical and contextualised learning. The skills and subject areas that had a direct influence on learners' lives were often those that were identified first. In addition, there was a noted emphasis upon English and maths skills both as something that learners felt was important and as something that learners recognised as valued by employers, colleges and universities. Interestingly, in relation to technology skills, learners valued general 'computer skills' above broader 'using technology' skills.

Again, learners recognised that many of the skills and subject areas listed were interlinked, particularly when it came to the broader skills such as 'dealing with problems' and 'goal setting'. The group recognised that whilst they ordered the descriptors based on their preferences, all of the subject areas were of interest and relevance to them.

As before, ordered descriptors were assigned a numerical value, this time with 18 being the most desired subject area and 1 being the least desired. Each descriptor had three scores which were then combined to arrive at an overall ranking for each descriptor (Table 2 below).

Table 2: What You Like to Learn

	Score	Rank
Dealing with problems	40	1
Reading and writing	37	2
self-confidence	37	3
Accessing information	35	4
Managing money	32	5
Communicating with others	32	6
Skills for employment	32	7
Goal setting	31	8
CV writing	29	9
Computer skills	29	10
Using numbers in daily life	27	11
Using technology	24	12
Healthy living	21	13
Supporting Children	20	14
Caring for family	16	15
Finding and using local services	13	16

Interestingly, the most desired area of learning was ‘dealing with problems’. Rather than being a subject area, this is a composite skill that arises from familiarity with a range of different topics and themes. This lends support to the Citizens’ Curriculum hypothesis that learning across the different capabilities gives rise to personal and social benefits that span capabilities rather than strict subject areas. It also reflects the more general emphasis upon learning that has positive practical implications for learners’ everyday lives.

‘Reading and writing’ and ‘self-confidence’ were the joint-second most desired areas of learning, reflecting the learners’ acknowledgment in earlier activities of the importance of English qualifications both to them and to prospective employers. Again, the inclusion of self-confidence at this level suggests that the learning process for adults is richer than simply attending a course with a qualification aim, and that self-esteem is incorporated into the achievement of their educational goals.

At the opposite end of the scale, the lowest scoring topics or skills were ‘independent living’ and ‘building relationships’. The learners did acknowledge, however, that this was based merely upon their preferences and personal circumstances rather than an inherent devaluation of the topics themselves.

Modes of Learning

Each group was given three learning scenarios to read through and asked to write down what they liked and what they disliked about each one. The group was then brought back

together for a short discussion with learners choosing a preferred learning option and justified their choice.

Learning scenario 1 detailed a course that lasted 6-8 weeks, with three in-college sessions per week. The course focused on a themed project to learn about the local area and embedded digital, civic and financial capabilities alongside wider English skills. Comments on this scenario were generally positive with learners remarking that they 'like working [as a] group' and that the project format sounded interesting. The description of this scenario lacked any mention of qualifications and it is interesting to note that one group thought that the learners in this scenario were 'not really learning anything', despite it sounding interesting. Another group noted that the 'course [was] too short, we don't think there is enough time to learn properly'.

Learning scenario 2 detailed a course that lasted for one term, with learners attending college once per week. In addition to classroom learning, blended learning was used to make resources and additional support available through the college's website. This scenario had the overall aim of completing a Functional Skills qualification and incorporated supporting topics including healthy living, goal-setting, CV writing and using online services like Universal Job Match. It also included the opportunity of a work placement during the course. Comments on this scenario were positive, with learners appreciating the range of topics studied. The inclusion of Functional Skills was noted by one group as being a benefit of this scenario and all groups felt that the course was purposeful. A small number of learners liked the opportunity to gain work experience, whilst the remaining learners thought that this was beneficial to learners who were not currently in employment. One group also felt that the use of blended learning was a very positive element, as it was 'good for people with other commitments like full-time jobs'. One learner noted that parents or employees would be able to learn at their own pace and on a timescale that suited their other commitments. Another group, however, felt that 'once a week [was] not enough' even with additional online learning support and resources.

Learning scenario 3 detailed a course that lasted one year, with learners attending college 4 times per week. Learners were given a choice of modules, including English, maths, ICT, community engagement, first aid, parenting, communication and volunteering skills (among others). The course also offered taster sessions led by local employers and the option to gain qualifications in one or more modules. Sessions are delivered in the college, in community venues and with a range of delivery partners. This learning scenario garnered mixed opinions from the learners, with reservations being expressed over the length of the course and the frequency of the sessions. Several learners felt that the 'course is too intensive or time consuming' whilst for others the intensity of study would be beneficial. The decision as to whether the course was appropriate would ultimately be one of personal choice, and learners recognised that for many younger adults or those with 'lots of time to learn' this option would be very good. Particular advantages of this learning scenario were the variety of modules, the opportunity to go into the community to gain experience and knowledge from different groups of people, and the ability to choose modules that fit with personal learning goals.

To conclude the focus group, the three smaller groups were brought together to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each of the learning scenarios. The resultant transcript was thematically analysed to highlight the themes that were important to the learners. Much of the discussion mirrored the written comments outlined above and three key themes emerged.

The learners displayed a **strong focus upon work** in two differing but interconnected ways. Firstly, there was recognition that many adult learners – including several of the focus group participants – worked full- or part-time whilst studying at college. This necessarily imposed some barriers to attending college for frequent lessons, as employers may only allow them a limited amount of time off work. One learner noting that,

‘My employer will only let me have one day off [...] where she’s paying me for that, if I go back for another two hours [...] they’re saying we can’t do it, otherwise you’ll have to go in and do it yourself and you won’t get paid. So that’s what she can’t do and, she said, it’s your job and all and we’ve got to think of your job at the same time.’

The ability to work around employment commitments was thus very important to the learners. The group also recognised that family or caring commitments can similarly mean that some adult learners cannot attend multiple sessions per week; one learner noted that the blended learning option given in scenario 2 was an effective way of providing flexible support for adult learners who may be able to fit additional learning around their work and family.

Secondly, the learners acknowledged that skills for work and work experience could be valuable assets for adult learners. Again, there was understanding that this would be dependent on personal circumstances: those learners who are already employed may not benefit from a work placement, but may still find value in developing their communication and persuasion skills in a work-based context. One learner summed up the overall feeling towards work placements by stating that,

‘I think it should be an option for those who want to do a work placement but I think they should give it as a choice.’

Choice was another strong theme emerging from the discussion along with the connected themes of subject range and personalisation. When considering all of the learning scenarios, the group highlighted that while they preferred certain options, other adult learners may have different needs and preferences. As a result, the learners valued the scenarios that offered the largest range of subjects. In fact, learning scenario 1 was felt to be too specific and too focused to be more broadly appropriate for other learners. One learner noted that although the course sounded interesting, it was somewhat limited by its narrow focus.

‘If you are very interested in this subject – this specific subject – then I think it could be very interesting, especially because it is not very long.’

Another learner felt that,

‘...it might get a bit boring, especially if you do maths and English. It’s alright if you want the qualification, I suppose.’

A number of the written comments for the learning scenarios indicated that learners appreciated having a choice of topics or modules so that they could personalise their learning journey. Having said that, however, learners also appreciated purposefulness in their education; some felt that scenario 1 was too specific yet it lacked clear progression towards a learning goal. The other scenarios, however, provided more structure and purposefulness and the learners felt that real achievements could be made during these courses.

Building upon many of the themes already outlined the **time spent in class** and the **duration of the courses** also impacted upon learners’ perception of the learning scenarios. Scenario 1 was felt to be too short for any real progress to be made, whilst being in college several days per week was felt to be too taxing for some adult learners. Similarly, scenario three was felt to be both too long and too intensive with many learners pointing out that it would be very difficult for many adult learners to fit this course around their employment and family commitments.

One learner remarked that they thought ‘one day a week is enough’, although other learners added that if a different topic was addressed at each session, two or three lessons per week could be doable. Flexibility was another quality that was valued by learners, with the blended learning approach in scenario 2 being supported by several learners as allowing adults to learn in ways that suited their employment and family schedules.

Similarly, the duration of the course was important to learners. Whilst, 6-8 weeks (just over half a term) was felt to be too short for real achievements to be made a whole year was felt to be too long. Learning over such a long period presented difficulties for learners whose circumstances may be subject to change. Again, scenario 2, which featured a course that lasted one term, was considered to be most appropriate as it gave enough time for progress to be made, but not so much that long-term commitment to the course was compromised.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The focus group highlighted several key themes that were important to the learners involved. The group also gave considered responses in relation to the anticipated needs of other adults who may also be engaging with education. The key findings from the focus group were:

- The diversity of adults’ needs and requirements should always be considered when designing learning solutions;
- Key motivators for adults are improving self-confidence and gaining practical and useful qualifications;
- Adults place high value upon maths and English skills, with the caveat that these skills are more appropriate when contextualised in everyday life and work;
- Learning programmes need to be flexible to allow adults to learn around their other commitments.

The focus group discussions highlighted a number of key considerations in terms of the content, format and delivery of adult learning programmes. Key recommendations made upon these considerations are as follows:

- Programmes should offer a real choice to learners; a choice of learning objectives, qualifications, supporting modules and delivery methods.
- Programmes should be around 16 weeks in duration.
- Programmes should be delivered using a range of teaching and learning methods to increase flexibility, including blended learning and other innovative approaches.
- Programmes should offer qualifications to those who wish to take them, including English and maths qualifications, but these should be contextualised so that learners understand the skills and value the learning process.
- Where possible, programmes should strive to develop the skills and abilities of learners in ways that support their overall aim, with recognition that skills and abilities are interlinked throughout life.

Principles and Requirements Validation

The findings were synthesised into a draft principles and validation document (see Appendix A) that prioritised the emergent themes and foci of the Citizens' Curriculum programme of study. The document combined the overarching principles of the Citizens' Curriculum with those of an adult study programme.

The Citizens' Curriculum is a **holistic approach** that is **interpreted through the local context**. It is **learner-led** in determining the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of learners. And it is **an interlinked combination** of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities.

The Citizens' Curriculum programme of study is **needs based** and combines the needs of learners, local areas, education provider and local labour markets to provide learning programmes that fulfill personal, social and economic needs. It is **flexibly designed and delivered** so that adults with diverse needs can access provision easily and in ways that enhance their lives. Citizens' Curriculum programmes of study **enhance learners' self-efficacy** and help them to take control of their lives, goals and ambitions in ways that lead to real-world benefits. Citizens' Curriculum programmes work to **support learners into further education or employment** through the fulfillment of learning goals that add value to individuals' lives and communities.

A synopsis of research activity, together with a draft Principles and Requirement document was presented to delegates at the second expert seminar. Discussion of the findings and outputs for the project was encouraged and feedback was noted by the Learning and Work representatives who attended the meeting. This feedback was then collated and incorporated into a second draft of the project documentation. Appendix A contains the final validated draft of this document.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This consultation has attempted to understand the benefits and challenges in using the Learning and Work Citizens' Curriculum as the basis for a programme of study for adult learners. We have examined this from the perspective of providers, practitioners and learners.

Formalizing learning into a programme of study necessarily brings challenges - for example, identifying the target audience of beneficiaries, and establishing the balance between the flexibility of the programme and its coherence. Nor should the development of a programme of study for some kinds of adult learners mean that all adult learning should be delivered as a programme of study. Providers and practitioners will need further support in developing and delivering effective adult study programmes.

Nevertheless, our work has identified key benefits of a Citizens' Curriculum study programme:

- **Flexibility** in terms of focus on skills and individualized learning
- **Co-design** of curriculum with learners to meet their needs, make learning relevant and increase motivation
- **Broad focus** upon skills that enhance employability and progression, without losing the ability to adapt and meet learners' individual needs
- **Flexibility in delivery models** including blended, peer and cascaded learning
- **Destination** approach that progressed learners to a final goal, even if that goal changes
- **Application in a range of settings** including community and family learning
- **Removal of focus on qualifications** and refocus upon the learning journey

These benefits can help address and overcome many of the challenges faced at present within the adult learning and skills sector – for example in engaging adults into programmes of learning which develop their English and maths skills, and/or support progression into work. A key finding of this work is that in addition to providing a more engaging Entry level offer, the Citizens' Curriculum can also provide a 'wrap around' programme to vocational and employment-focused learning at Levels 1 and 2, offering greater support for progression.

The findings from the learner focus group conducted in this consultation adds weight to the evidence from the Citizens' Curriculum pilots – namely that a curriculum which is based in learners' lives is more likely to be relevant and engaging, therefore helping to address low skills and participation in learning by disadvantaged groups. Learners displayed a strong focus upon practical and contextualised learning and the skills and subject areas that had a direct influence on learners' lives were often mentioned. Increased flexibility means that programmes of study delivered using the Citizens' Curriculum principles are better placed to exploit learner motivations than many other forms of learning currently available. Potentially, this has applications in fields such as improving the quality of English and maths provision,

and in ensuring that it remains possible to deliver locally-led learning responsive to local communities under the reformed Adult Education Budget.

This work has been carried out alongside piloting of the Citizens' Curriculum in English and maths provision. In the light of the findings from the pilots and the consultation above, and in recognition of recent policy developments and current priorities, we are confident that further work on the Citizens' Curriculum is beneficial to the adult learning, skills and employment sector. In our report on the pilots, we argue that this work should now shift in focus from piloting and consultation activity to work which supports and brings about a broader implementation: in policy, in the learning and skills system, and in classroom practice. Accordingly, we recommend here (and in our pilot report):

- Further engagement activity across the adult learning, skills and employment sector to achieve buy-in, including from commissioners, providers not previously involved in piloting, and more widely amongst sector representative organisations, executive agencies and other sector bodies.
- Further activity, and the development of supporting resources, to help commissioners and providers working in the context of a devolved Adult Education Budget use the Citizens' Curriculum model to ensure that devolved adult learning and skills includes a focus on Entry Level and basic skills learning which supports progression and meets local needs.
- Building upon the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities frameworks, the development and identification of further resources to support practitioners (including the use of peer volunteers and mentors) to adopt and implement a Citizens' Curriculum approach in their teaching, learning and support activities, particularly in alignment with current workforce development priorities for English and maths practitioners.
- Where appropriate, further work by L&W with local authorities to develop progression pathways in specific local contexts (e.g. the current L&W work to create Citizens' Curriculum Entry Progression Pathways to STEM careers in Doncaster and Birmingham)

Appendix A: Principles and Requirements

NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) – now merged with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to become Learning and Work Institute (L&W) – was commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to investigate whether a programme of study for adult learners based upon the Citizens' Curriculum could work in practice. As part of this project L&W has consulted with a range of sector specialists, practitioners and stakeholders to discuss the benefits and challenges of implementing an adult programme of study.

Research activity on the project has included a high-level Expert Seminar with a range of stakeholders, a series of in-depth interviews with a selection of sector specialists, a workshop with adult learning stakeholders and focus groups held with adult learners to gather their opinions and preferences. These activities have contributed to the following draft Principle and Requirements, which has been validated by a range of stakeholders at a second high-level Expert Seminar.

Citizens' Curriculum

The Citizens' Curriculum is an innovative and flexible approach to language, literacy and numeracy provision that places the needs of learners and communities at its core. The Citizens' Curriculum is:

- **A holistic approach interpreted through the local context**

Evidence from the Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF) projects, *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times* and our Phase 1 piloting activity shows that learning opportunities are more likely to engage and motivate adult learners if they are related to local needs, circumstances or a particular context. Citizens' Curriculum programmes attend to the individual needs of the learner in the context of local outcome measures, ensuring that skills development is beneficial to learners and their local community.

- **Learner-led in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests**

Co-design is a key feature of the Citizens' Curriculum: co-design with learners, with employers, with further and higher education providers and with local authorities. Co-design encourages ownership of the learning programme whilst also ensuring the needs and interests of individuals and the local community are met. Adopting co-design as a principle of learning encourages participatory approaches to learning that help to build confidence, communication and problem solving skills.

- **An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities**

Research shows the potential of embedded approaches to language, literacy and numeracy to be effective in motivating and engaging learners⁹. The Citizens' Curriculum extends this to suggest that wider skills and capabilities should be interlinked in the provision of learning

⁹ See Casey, H. *et al* (2006) *The Impact of Embedding on Learning and Achievement*; Eldred, J. (2005) *Developing Embedded Literacy, Language and Numeracy: Supporting Achievement* Leicester, NIACE; Roberts, C. *et al*. (2005) *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL. Seven Case Studies*. London: NRDC.

opportunities. This should always, however, be led by the needs of individuals in the context of local area needs.

Principles

Adult learners over the age of 19 who have identifiable socioeconomic or skills needs may be offered a Citizens' Curriculum programme of study. The aim of the programme is to (re-)engage learners in learning supporting progression towards relevant outcomes, including greater self-efficacy, community engagement, further learning or work. Citizens' Curriculum programmes are:

- **Needs based**

The needs of learners, local areas, education providers and local labour markets all play a crucial role in Citizens' Curriculum programmes. Local outcome measures inform collaborative relationships in which local authorities, employers and education providers work together to commission Citizens' Curriculum programmes that have the potential to fulfil social and economic needs.

- **Flexibly designed and delivered**

Individual aims and goals are defined and supported within the context of local area profiles that ensure both learners and communities benefit maximally from the provision.

Individualised, high-quality support and guidance is provided from the outset and on a continuous basis to ensure the programme can adapt to the changing needs and demands of learners' lives.

- **Enhancing learners' self-efficacy**

The Citizens' Curriculum aims to help learners take control of their lives, goals and ambitions in ways that lead to real-world benefits. By equipping learners with the tools, skills and knowledge to navigate and engage with their local community, labour market and economy the Citizens' Curriculum supports learners to develop problem-solving skills and resilience that helps them prepare for the challenges of the future.

- **Supporting individuals into further education and employment**

Supporting learners' personal and professional development, the Citizens' Curriculum develops skills and abilities that have real application in life and work. Learners are encouraged to set and achieve realistic yet ambitious goals that enable them to access further education, training or employment that meets their needs.

Requirements

A Citizens' Curriculum Programme of Study should strike a balance between providing flexibility for learners to define their own learning goals and providing a coherent pathway to further education and, where appropriate, employment. Whilst it is anticipated that the model would be used primarily in Entry level learning, programmes at Level 1 and above may incorporate a vocational skills element, with the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities 'wrapped around' making the model suitable for use in a range of adult learning, skills and employment settings.

Support and Guidance

From devising achievable goals to finding employment opportunities within the local area, Citizens' Curriculum programmes provide wrap-around support and guidance. Providers are encouraged to partner with local authorities, employers, providers of further or higher education, the National Careers Service and other appropriate organisations to provide comprehensive and appropriate support.

Literacy, Language and Numeracy

The core of the Citizens' Curriculum lies in developing the literacy, language and numeracy capabilities of learners in ways that are appropriate and effective. Developing literacy, language and numeracy skills through learning that makes use of every-day contexts, in and out of the learning environment, nurtures the interpersonal, self-confidence, resilience and problem-solving skills that develop an individual's self-efficacy.

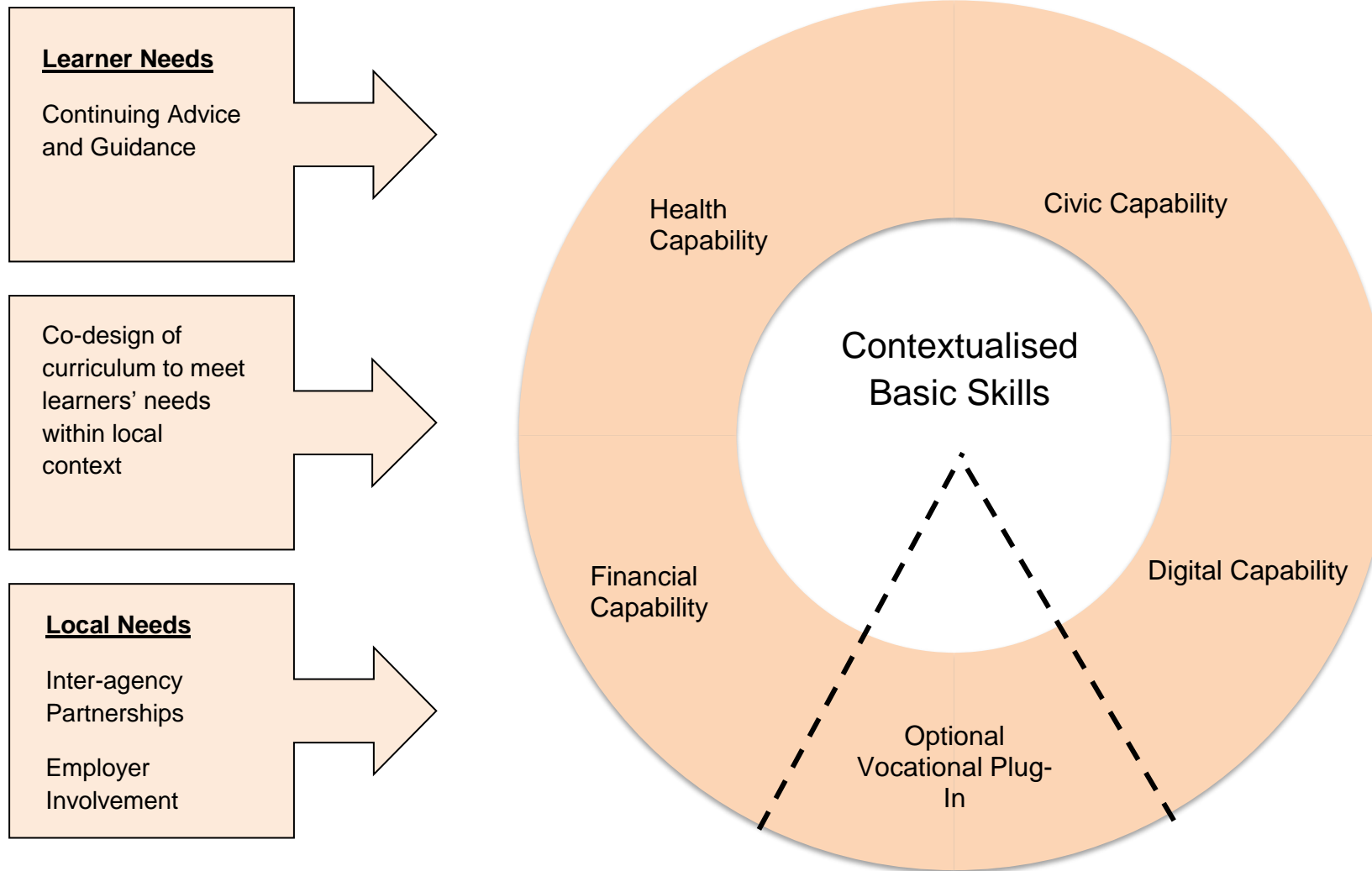
Wider Capabilities

Embedding literacy, language and numeracy skills in wider civic, health, financial and digital capabilities provides the every-day contexts that makes sure learning is applicable to, and drawn from, learners' lives. Capabilities are selected based on the needs of the learners, and no single course need address all of the capabilities. Many of the capabilities link closely to others and providers may find it appropriate to mix-and-match the capabilities based on themes that are important to learners. The model overleaf demonstrates how this process might look.

Vocational Skills and Employability

Citizens' Curriculum programmes support learners into further education, training or employment through fostering skills and abilities that allow learners to be effective and proactive employees. Whilst employability can be developed through the civic capability (engaging with local services), digital capability (CV writing skills, applying for jobs online) and health capability (stress management and self-awareness), these are supported by the literacy, language and numeracy skills that help employees to achieve and progress. Links with local employers are encouraged, taster sessions for local industry and vocational qualifications may be offered where it is appropriate, for example to meet learner aspirations or where local commissioners and partnerships wish to create a 'line of sight' from entry level provision to higher level skills and employment opportunities in the local economy.

The Citizens' Curriculum Programme of Study



* For further guidance on themes that could be included in each capability, please visit the [Learning and Work Institute](https://www.learningandworkinstitute.org.uk/) website and download the Citizens' Curriculum Capability Guidelines

Citizens' Curriculum: A Continuous Process

