



The conference was planned by a group which reported to the UK reference group for the EAAL. This comprises of the UK National Agency for Erasmus +, EPAL UK, NIACE Cymru, Scotland's Learning Partnership, the Forum for Adult Learning Northern Ireland, and NIACE in its role as National Coordinator.

The focus of the conference was: "despite research showing that learning of all kinds has a profound impact on people's lives (health and independence, earnings, civic engagement etc) it has become less of a priority for both the public and private purse. Is one of the reasons we are becoming more reluctant to invest in adult learning is because we cannot see its impact?"

The conference aimed to showcase the research NIACE and its partners had undertaken as part of the EAAL on: basic skills and the Citizens' Curriculum; digital skills, young adult employability; and, working with excluded groups. The aim was to report on the progress of the research strands alongside developments in each of the four UK administrations responsible for adult learning policy.

As part of this work the partners established impact forums across the UK to look at the research evidence and contextualize it for local planning and policy frameworks. The conference had inputs from the Forums in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, looking at how they evidence impact and demonstrate the value of adult learning to those that pay for it.

The conference was held at the 'City Lit,' one of the greatest adult learning institutions in the UK. The Principal of the Institute, Mark Malcolmson, welcomed delegates to the conference and emphasised the support of adult educators for the EAAL.

NIACE and its partners would like to thank City Lit staff and students for letting us join them for two days, the use of the excellent teaching rooms, and the wonderful catering.

## DAY ONE



David Hughes, Chief Executive of NIACE, opened the conference with a speech that outlined the purpose and process for the event. He thanked EPAL UK for providing the background presentation that explained the [EAAL \(European Agenda for Adult Learning\)](#)

David stressed that the conference was epitomized by a combination of pragmatism and evidence gathering. It was not just about having the evidence about the impact of adult learning but getting the message across. He encouraged delegates to use social media (#elearning) and pose questions and observations on Twitter to feedback into the conference and involve people across Europe who were unable to attend in person. The keynotes would also be streamed live to ensure our messages reached a wider audience.

David thanked NIACE's partners on the UK Reference Group and the wider, diverse set of organisations involved in the programme over the past three years.

He stressed that although the work since 2012 had demonstrated the multiple benefits of adult learning, there were still people who didn't quite buy into it yet. Adult educators need to be better at influencing governments and policy-makers, as well as individuals to invest in their own learning. To this end, we need a much sharper focus of the impact on, for example, public health whose funders would rather invest in big campaigns to influence healthier lifestyles than use adult learning as a tool for this.

We cannot just rely on anecdote—even powerful stories of adults turning their lives around through learning—but focus on the statistics on impact. For example in health there are double blind trials, which look at the relative efficacy of certain drugs. These provide the rationale for investment. Should we be emulating these approaches in adult education?

The lack of investment in adult learning in the UK for the past few years has been a concern. But recently David had been heartened by latest updates on Europe 2020 and the briefings from EAEA. These emphasised some common concerns right across Europe around the jobs and employment crisis (particularly for young adults), sustainable economic growth, radicalization and violence, and of course the current refugee and migration crisis.

There were three factors that came to the fore:

1. the impact of an ageing society
2. the effect of digitalization of 'everything around us' in work and society (at a time of poor basic and digital skills), creating a danger of people missing out as a citizen as well as work place.
3. the reality of a global world knowledge economy and the need for Europe to compete in it

David said it was good to see many policy documents across Europe moving towards an appreciation of the importance of lifelong learning again, with the message that Europe is a good place to live *and* work. David was encouraged to see that 16 countries had lifelong learning strategies, but was surprised that it said the UK was one of those! One of the challenges in working across the UK is keeping track of all the strategies.

In England there had been lots of different strategies in recent years, many of them very good, but there was no overarching strategy or coordinating principle across government. On the other hand, Scotland had an admirable ambition to be best the place for lifelong learning; this was a statement to be applauded.

Our research as National Coordinator over the past year right across the UK had shown, a very broad set of benefits that come from investment in lifelong learning. Delegates would be hearing about these and the work of the four UK Impact Forums throughout the event.

As just one example, David emphasised the work of the young adult employability project that was showcased in the UK Parliament the evening before the conference. This was a project that combined evidence based approaches and practical support for young adults, working in partnership with employers like Barclays Bank and Topps Tiles to create a website for young people co-created with the young people themselves.

It was a great example of how the EAAL is being translated into the UK context in each of the four administrations. In fact the presentation from the Northern Ireland project the evening before showed MPs and Peers the work of young adults with learning difficulties to develop a similar approach in Belfast.

### **CLICK [HERE](#) FOR DAVID'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

David introduced the conference's keynote speaker, Professor Tim Harford.

Tim Harford brought a perspective from outside the 'usual' adult learning arena, an economist's perspective and his ability to communicate clearly and help lay people to understand the impact of numerical data on our thinking and attitudes, to ultimately inform and influence practice and policy.

Tim Harford was a member of the Financial Times editorial board. His column, 'The Undercover Economist', which revealed the economic ideas behind everyday experiences, was published in the Financial Times and Slate. He was also the only economist in the world to run a problem page, 'Dear Economist'. Tim presented the BBC television series 'Trust Me, I'm an Economist' and now hosts the BBC radio series 'More or Less', which can be heard on Fridays on BBC Radio 4.

Tim's writing had appeared in Esquire, Forbes, New York magazine, the Washington Post, and the New York Times. Tim won the 2006 Bastiat Prize for economic journalism and is also an award-winning speaker.

### **TIM HARFORD, TRIAL, ERROR AND THE GOD COMPLEX**



Tim's talk focused on the role of randomized control trials (RCTs) in the development of solutions to identified problems. RCTs consist of running control groups alongside those being offered an intervention, as a way of proving the efficacy of that intervention. In this was RCTs address the 'so what?' as well as the 'what if?' question of thinking about impact. What is the impact of adult learning? What if we didn't make an intervention? Without such hard and fast evidence, policy makers are prone to succumbing to the God Complex—deciding they know what's best based on the evidence that most appeals to them. Given that many policy makers have very little direct personal experience of adult learning, particularly second chance education, then the prognosis is not good. In contrast the area of health touches all people's lives, regardless of wealth, education, or social class.

In the field of epidemiology, seventy-five RCTs are being conducted per day; in adult education there have been nine trials in 22 years! In the area of learning and skills policy, it often felt that people set out to prove a belief rather than test an hypothesis. Perhaps the absence of RCTs in the field were due to the possibility that their findings would drive policy. As Tim said, 'Randomised trials produce very clear evidence; it's very hard to argue with them.'

THE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF TIM'S SPEECH CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR TIM'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

RESPONSE: JANINE ELDRED, NIACE :



*Jan worked at NIACE in the areas of widening participation; literacy, language and numeracy; health and disability equalities; young adults and more recently, international aspects of adult learning. She was an Assistant Director for NIACE until 2010 when she became a Senior Research Fellow, in a freelance capacity.*

*She has worked as a teacher and tutor organiser in Adult Basic Skills, a community outreach worker, a Local Government Officer and Head of Faculty of Foundation Studies in a college of Further Education.*

*Jan has a Masters degree and a Doctorate in Adult Literacy. In 2011 she acted as specialist advisor to Lord Boswell of Aynho, the Chair of the Commissioners of the NIACE inquiry into adult literacy in England. She represents NIACE on the Global Campaign for Education, Policy Committee and is chair of the Literacy Working Group, advocating adult literacy in international development. Jan has presented at many international events. She recently organised an All Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Literacy and International Development. Jan has published on a wide range of adult learning topics in both domestic and international contexts.*

The first response was from Dr. Janine Eldred, a specialist in adult basic skills and a researcher who worked on the National Literacy Inquiry in 2009. Jan thanked Tim for an engrossing speech and made two comments.

The first of these was on the emphasis of teaching phonics in schools; the second on the UK government's focus on employment and skills to the detriment of an analysis of the impact of adult learning on health, well-being, citizenship etc. There was a host of evidence as to the benefits of adult basic skills conducted by the National Research and Development Centre at the Institute of Education (University of London).

In addition the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is conducting an RCT into adult literacy and numeracy and will report in the spring of 2016. Dr. Eldred conducted the literature review for that study so she shared some of Tim Harford's concerns about the ethical questions involved in RCTs. She highlighted some of the dilemmas that adult educators could face in choosing who should benefit from an intervention and who would not.

Jan's question for Tim was: how can we best use evidence that comes from research to best advocate for adult learning?

**RESPONSE: GINA EBNER, EAEA [DN add logo HERE]**



The next response was from someone working at the European level, Gina Ebner, General Secretary of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA). She stressed that member states had the responsibility to enact policy recommendations and proposals at the European level.

In some countries one hears the argument that 'we have always done things this way'. If one needs to confront such a viewpoint, one needs hard evidence. Studies like OIAAC are important in showing the scale of literacy issues, for example, in particular countries—and therefore the resources and approaches that are required to address them.

The European Commission supports an evidence-based approach but that begs the questions as to what is comparable at the European level; what works well in one country might not work as well in another. So understanding the different traditions in each country allows us to better analyse the data and challenge preconceptions.

The key question remains: how can we best convince policy-makers at whatever level of the impact of adult education. For so long this has focused on the impact on employment, but recently there has been interest from the Justice directorate at the European level working on anti-radicalization, integration, tolerance, and other matters that are so important across the whole continent at this time.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

David Hughes thanked both responders and added his own response:

1. that there is an element of inertia among policy-makers is true, but we also need to ask ourselves whether we suffer from the God Complex too.
2. It is really important to engage learners in making the case but we should not over rely on them. We need large scale factual studies alongside anecdotal evidence of the benefits of learning
3. We often find it difficult to come up with the isolating factor that really makes a difference or has the most impact
4. Often policy in England has suffered from U-turns, which are based on political expediency and not the evidence

David asked how we could overcome these aspects of the God Complex and how we manage and capture the longer-term impact of learning.

## RESPONSE FROM TIM HARFORD

- On the subject of direct versus indirect impact and short term/long term, Tim said short term/long term was not such a problem: you just keep track of people and you keep going back. Economists have discovered recently that having run various randomised trials in social policy in the 1970s that what looked like rather disappointing results in the short term turned out to be profoundly positive in the long term. The only trouble with that is politicians aren't very patient. At least it's a known technology as to how we solve that.
- Direct versus indirect, or tangible versus intangible impact, is more difficult. The only thing that you can really do is when you're specifying the evidence that you're gathering, let's say for the sake of argument you're running a randomised trial. You've got to be clear that there are two or three key things that the trial is testing, but also you are going to gather various other things, various other bits of data and observe them. It is possible to gather data, for example, on subjective wellbeing, how happy are people with their lives, for instance. But in the end you can only measure things that can be measured and there will always be things that can't be measured. So we can't do better than to show some awareness of that.
- I completely agree that adult education is very complex. I'm just an economist we just study the economy. So I've got no particular brief for doctors, I'm not a doctor, I didn't train as a doctor. I don't know that I would agree that adult education is more complex than medicine. You listed some of the ways in which it was complex and everyone is different. People might have several different things going on in their lives, different meanings, different context, but that's also true for somebody who shows up in a doctor's surgery. They might have a broken leg but also they're suffering from diabetes and depression and spousal abuse that the doctor might have an opportunity to detect and have a particular gene [unclear] so medicine is complicated too. We probably shouldn't argue about whether it's more or less complicated, the question is: given the complexity, can randomised trials still tell us something?
- I think the answer is yes and that's why the doctors are running 75 a day and in adult education we're running roughly one every three years worldwide. More trials give us more information, but we mustn't be too reductive. We mustn't say we did this one trial and it worked in this one place and therefore it must obviously work for everybody in every context. That's why you have to keep running trials.
- So rich and powerful people get sick, they get cancer, they have children, they get toothache, they all die in the end. So rich and powerful people think that medicine is important, they think hospitals are important. Not everybody goes for help in learning to read at the age of 40. Most of the people who do are not rich and powerful people. So there's a built-in bias against adult continuation of education in the political system and I don't know what the solution is to that. That just makes things harder.
- But there is a tradition in medicine that I think is useful for us to bear in mind. In medicine practice and research they're very intimately bound up, so when you train to be a doctor you are educated by professors of medicine who are also doctors. They are practising in hospital and they're running randomised trials in the hospitals and their practice is informing their research. Then what they discover in their research informs practice. So doctors, because they all read the *British Medical Journal* with summaries of the latest research, there's quite a tight connection that we have less in other professions.

- We have less in economics, we have less in policing, I think we have less in education. It exists but it's weaker and I think if we could get more teachers running their own research projects and being engaged in that, then sharing those research projects and taking more interest in each other's research projects, that is independence and power, knowledge is power for the teaching profession
- Mainstreaming is hard. You discover that something works, how on earth do you get it out there? I think the depressing way to try to do it is a group of researchers find something out, try and sell it to some politicians who are eventually going to in a top-down order a bunch of teachers to do it. The teachers then don't quite believe it, even if the research is really good, because it came from the politicians. It's much better to have this professional to professional communication such as happens with *British Medical Journal*, such as happens with the Cochrane Collaboration.
- I'm sure it exists in education but the stronger that we can make that professional fellowship of practitioners and researchers working together and cut the politicians out - I apologise to all the politicians in the room but you don't always help. The more that can happen, the quicker new ideas get spread. Very often - I study organisational change, very often organisational change happens despite the people at the top. Often the best thing that people at the top can do is to look down, realise something exciting is happening and encourage it, rather than actually trying to inflict it on people from the top.

Dr. Fiona Aldridge said in her conference blog [HERE](#):

- “However, these issues are not insurmountable. NIACE is currently involved in two RCTs to test the effectiveness of delivering English and maths through blended or face-to-face learning, and to evaluate a Citizens’ Curriculum approach to supporting ESA claimants into work. We should only give up on the idea of control trials in adult education when we are absolutely satisfied that we already have compelling evidence to demonstrate that we know exactly what works.”

## WORKSHOPS: THE IMPACT OF ADULT LEARNING

### WORKSHOP ONE

#### DIGITAL SKILLS: NIACE, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, AND MEMBERS OF THE SCOTLAND IMPACT FORUM



This workshop was chaired by Joyce Black, NIACE with contributions from Susan Easton, Head of Digital Learning, NIACE, Kevin Campbell Wright, Project Officer, NIACE, and

Fraser Reid, Senior Policy Manager (Digital Participation - Skills) at The Scottish Government.

This workshop focused on the need for opportunities for lifelong digital skills, for life, for work and for learning. It builds on evidence, previous inquiries and research (including PIAAC) to discuss priorities, approaches, resources and initiatives across the 4 nations which are effective in:

- developing basic digital skills
- providing progression pathways to advanced digital skills
- supporting teachers to use learning technologies
- using technology to assist niche groups to participate in learning

Workshop participants:

- Heard about NIACE research which evidences why the development of digital skills are essential for individuals, families, communities and the UK
- Received presentations outlining successful digital skills projects from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Discussed how learning technologies can be used with niche groups in family and community settings and in secure environments
- Agreed what the key messages, challenges, and recommendations are for policy makers in Scotland, the UK and the rest of Europe

Fraser Reid talked about Scotland: A world-class digital nation by 2020. What are the challenges? Review of drivers, evidence and priorities.

Kevin Campbell Wright reviewed the challenges from the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) set up by the government in England. He focussed on recent research into blended learning (what skills do learners needed), and the European and FELTAG webinars (what skills do teachers need).

Susan Easton talked about the Self Organised Learning website (tools to support learning), and EA Pro (how open badges motivate learning), Maths on the Virtual Campus (engaging learners in the secure estate)

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR SUSAN EASTON'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

Feedback was given by James McHarg, Scotland's Learning Partnership, and a member of the Scotland Impact Forum

## **WORKSHOP TWO**

**THE CITIZENS' CURRICULUM: ROCHDALE COUNCIL, NIACE, AND MEMBERS OF THE ENGLAND IMPACT FORUM**

This workshop was chaired by Mark Ravenhall, Chair of the England Impact Forum, with contributions from Alex Stevenson, Head of ESOL, NIACE, and Helen Chicot, Rochdale Council.

With the publication of the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) in October 2013, a new impetus has been given to a) ensuring the UK policy community has the best evidence bases available to support policy formation, b) supporting the continued development of improved approaches to adult literacy (English), numeracy (maths) and problem-solving in technology enriched environments (digital learning), and c) supporting access to learning and progression for disadvantaged groups.

NIACE is currently strengthening and extending this work through the Citizens' Curriculum project – an approach which is locally-led, actively involves learners in deciding the course content, and interlinks language, literacy and numeracy skills with financial, digital, health and civic capabilities.

#### Workshop participants

- Heard about NIACE research that outlined why a Citizens' Curriculum approach is appropriate
- Received a presentation from one of the Citizens' Curriculum pilots in Rochdale that provided cost-benefit evidence of the impact of this approach
- Discussed what the messages are for policy makers in the England, the UK and the rest of Europe

Alex Stevenson outlined the current participation research and in particular the English and Maths challenge:

- The **Skills for Life Survey** (2011) showed that 1 in 4 adults have low levels of numeracy skills; 1 in 6 have low levels of literacy skills.
- **OECD Survey of Adult Skills** (2013): 16.4% scored at the lowest level for literacy; 24% for numeracy.
- UK **Census data** (2011) recorded around 850,000 adults 'non-proficient' in the English language.
- **English government agency data** shows that from 12/13 to 13/14, adult (19+) participation in English, maths and ESOL provision has fallen by 7.6%, 10.7% and 4.8% respectively

**Alex stressed that the Citizens' Curriculum has helped more adults to reach the levels of confidence, self-esteem, knowledge and skills which they need to make the most of their talents and to realise their ambitions in life.**

The pace of social change, across public services, work, technology, health and society requires all adults had solid digital, health, financial and civic capabilities to be able to

respond and adapt to the changes around them. At the same time, adults' English, maths and language skills are critical to underpin improved personal, economic and social outcomes. Yet participation in learning provision which addresses these needs is falling, and current approaches do not sufficiently engage or motivate adults to take part.

The Citizens' Curriculum aimed to provide more space for learning to be co-designed between the professionals and the learners in ways which both encourage creativity and innovation as well as being purposeful and leading onto further learning and other positive outcomes.

A key feature of the Citizens' Curriculum was the interlinking of English and maths skills with digital, health, financial and civic capabilities and the recognition that not all of these elements require formal accreditation.

NIACE wanted to ease back from the very strong focus on qualifications as the main output measure of publicly-funded learning which we believe reduces creativity and restricts positive outcomes, particularly for people with lower level skills. A more flexible approach, through the Citizens' Curriculum helps to motivate people into learning by supporting their interests and tapping into the things they want to achieve.

The findings from the Citizens' Curriculum research and the next steps in its development can be found in the attached slides.

### **CLICK [HERE](#) FOR ALEX STEVENSON'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

Helen Chicot outlined the Citizens' Curriculum work in Rochdale and how impact was measured. She outlined the background to the area:

- Large social housing estate
- Before the pilot, learning participation was 2.3% compared to a borough average of 3%.
- Target, at the start of the pilot was to increase participation to 3% in 12 months.
- The pilot aimed to target: the general population (increase participation), young men and lone young parents, intensive support to households / families where there were known difficulties

Helen outlined the impact of the project:

- Improved participation in learning from 2.3% to 3.8% (above the target and the local average)
- Skills improvements (progression and achievement in qualifications)
- Employment outcomes
- Health improvements
- School attendance improvements
- Improved home / school relationships
- Reduced incidents of domestic abuse
- Reduced volume of call-outs to the police
- Reduced A&E attendance
- Improved home learning indicators (families with young children)
- Improved wellbeing (WEMWBS)
- Mental health improvements
- Improved engagement and retention in drug and alcohol support

- Reduced drug and alcohol intake
- Unreported crimes identified
- Partnership Enforcement Team interventions
- Adult safeguarding in place

The pilot was able to benchmark what was likely to happen otherwise, based on previous evidence and compare the value of these impacts using the Cost Benefit Analysis process. Ethnographic research from Sheffield University had revealed some interesting findings about the delivery model. These would be reported on in the next phase of the project evaluation.

Feedback was given by Helen Chicot, Rochdale Council, and a member of the England Impact Forum.

## **WORKSHOP THREE**

### **EXCLUDED GROUPS: SUSANNAH CHAMBERS, NIACE, AND MEMBERS OF THE WALES IMPACT FORUM**



The workshop was chaired by Dr. Jan Eldred, Senior Research Fellow, NIACE, with contributions from Susannah Chambers, Head of Family and Community Learning, NIACE, and Shelley Morris / Claire Arnold from Monkton Primary School.

This EAAL work-package aimed to enable better support for those practitioners working with socially excluded groups and those furthest from learning including ex-offenders, offenders in the community, homeless people, care leavers and young adult carers. NIACE used existing networks of practitioners and paraprofessionals (such as community learning champions and learning ambassadors) to build a strong evidence base to demonstrate impact and the effectiveness of community learning approaches to reach, engage and enable progression of excluded learners. This workshop focuses on one approach: family learning.

#### Workshop participants

- Heard about NIACE research that outlines why family learning was an appropriate approach to engage excluded groups
- Received a presentation from one of the successful family learning projects in Wales that provides evidence of the impact of this approach
- Discussed what the messages are for policy makers in Wales, the UK and the rest of Europe

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR SUSANNAH CHAMBER'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR SHELLEY / CLAIRE'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

Feedback was given by John Graystone, chair of the Wales Impact Forum

## **WORKSHOP FOUR**

### **YOUNG ADULTS: NICOLA AYLWARD, NIACE, AND MEMBERS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND IMPACT FORUM**

**Forum for Adult Learning NI**

**NIACE** The National Voice  
for Lifelong Learning

The workshop was chaired by Fiona Aldridge, Assistant Director, Development and Research, NIACE, with contributions from Emma McCabe, The NOW Project, Northern Ireland

This work package represented a continuation of the groundbreaking work in the 2012/14 NC work programme. This project worked with young adults and a group of employers to look at what an 'employable citizen' of the future is. The aim was to build a community of practice for employers, learning providers and learner representative groups. The NIACE project team worked with community partners in England, Scotland and Wales to train a team of young people as researchers to interview employers.

**The second stage has been to extend this approach to Northern Ireland, and run a seminar in the UK parliament with invited participants from across the UK and Europe (MPs, MEPs, local councillors) to discuss the findings and actions.**

Workshop participants

- Heard about NIACE research that outlines why young adult employability is an appropriate approach
- Received a presentation from the young adult employability project in Northern Ireland, other parts of the UK that provide evidence of the impact of this approach
- Discussed what the messages are for policy makers in Northern Ireland, the UK and the rest of Europe

Nicola Aylward outlined NIACE's work and in particular the impact of the work in England, Scotland and Wales Emma Mc Cabe, NOW, from the NI Young Adult project Feedback was given by Niall Casey, Invest NI, and a member of the NI Impact Forum.

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR THE NOW/NIACE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

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## **PLENARY SESSION: WHAT ARE THE COMMON MESSAGES ABOUT IMPACT?**

The session was introduced by David Hughes, who was joined by a number of colleagues who have been involved in the UK Impact Forums in each of the four administrations. They would give feedback on the workshops they attended.

- James McHarg of Scotland's Learning Partnership fed back on the workshop on digital skills in Scotland
- John Graystone, Chair of the Wales Impact Forum fed back on the workshop on Excluded Groups and Family Learning in Wales.
- Helen Chicot, a member of the England Impact Forum, reported back on the Citizens' Curriculum pilot in Rochdale.
- Niall Casey, of Invest NI fed back on the NI workshop on young adult employability.

**James McHarg of the Scotland Impact Forum** fed back from the workshop on adult learning and technology, which focussed on three questions:

- where do we want to be
- how we want to get there, and
- what needs to happen.

The ambition in Scotland was that everyone should be digitally skilled and have participated by 2020. But the workshop also noted, in terms of impact, that there's a problem about language when we use the word 'digital', whether it be 'digital participation' or 'digital skills'.

Some of the members of the group felt we needed clearer definition. This should be first of all about what we mean by 'digitally skilled' and what we mean by having 'participated'.

Susan Easton from NIACE went through some of the research that they'd done that - 20 per cent of Europeans have not used the internet. When you're talking to policymakers and you want to make an impact, the way of doing that is to say 80 per cent are literate in terms of their use of a digital technology. So we're only targeting 20 per cent of the population.

When you try to influence policy makers, it's much easier when you say to them that it's not a huge task, it's only 20 per cent of the population that we need to address.

In terms of what needs to happen, clearly a lot of work had already been done around partnership and NIACE were talking about how their staff were involving Barclays Bank, O2 and a whole range of big providers already in work to roll out digital training.

There was also an online resource available so that people can go and access webinars and other training material online. There are other European colleagues who are doing something similar, so Jim said it was about pooling that together to ensure that we have the most effective resource.

A very important statement was made by a number of the members in the group and that was that we need a whole community response to upskilling that 20 per cent in the target group. There were examples of projects in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where communities were training people and upskilling them in becoming civically engaged. This is a crucial message to policy makers.

**John Graystone, Chair of the Wales Impact Forum**, fed back from an excellent presentation from Monkton Primary School, which has really worked very closely with adults, with pupils. The workshop was very impressed with the work it had done and summarised by Susannah Chambers, from NIACE.

There were two messages. Firstly, the need for flexibility and understanding your community and the importance of understanding the community you're in and investing a lot of time in knowing that. You can't suddenly impose a solution without that evidence and that research.

The second point, following on from the session earlier on this afternoon, is the importance of - in terms of evaluating family learning is evaluating the effect on adults but also on pupils. A lot of the work we tend to do, tends to evaluate the work of the adults.

It was felt very important, politically, for us to show the impact it has on the pupils in the school. Because, again, we're very conscious - you have different government departments responsible for different types of learning on different age groups. If you could bring those together to show there's a common end positive result that would actually help a lot.

Like many schools in Wales, Monkton School has had its Family Learning grant cut, so schools have now looked at other sources of funding such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant in Wales, or the Pupil Premium in England.

Wales also has 'Community First' funding and allocated that funding to work on community learning. So rather than saying 'aren't things dreadful' we have to stop now look for other sources of funding, look for other sources of inspiration. Certainly Monkton School have actually done that.

John said it was a fact that government departments cover different age groups in terms of policy and funding. The workshop saw that as a challenge to be overcome, not a reason for not doing things. So it was beholden on us to make sure they are getting information to show the success of what they're doing, to help shape policy.

**Niall Casey of the Northern Ireland Impact Forum** fed back on their workshop looking at how to be more effective in bringing young people into employment.

The group were asked to identify what we considered were the main issues, which centre around a lack of a coherent strategy to make young people more work ready. In Northern Ireland there is already an evidence base where we know we have gaps that are not learners to achieve that. The work done under the 'What Employers Want' project gave us very specific pointers. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, essentially, reinforced exactly those skills and characteristics that employers were seeking that they feel they are not getting on initial recruitment.

So the group concluded that there was a need to develop a strategy and use the evidence base to be very clear about where the gaps are and create focus.

In doing this it was felt that there needed to be a much more effective engagement between employers and providers, with good quality information, advice and guidance, plus practical elements such as placements, and ensuring we have the right capability and experience within the teaching profession to deliver that.

**Helen Chicot, of the England Impact Forum** fed back on their workshop on how you can measure impacts. The group looked at the case for investment and what measurement tools exist.

For example in Greater Manchester Helen's team uses the New Economy: Cost Benefit Analysis tool which outlines the fiscal benefits, the cashable benefits, as well as the economic and social benefits. These are directly linked to the Treasury Green Book, so it's really robust and an accepted form of analysis linked to policymakers.

One of the things we feel is missing is access of professionals to research particularly to peer review literature and to share that evidence with each other and have that space for discussion. That isn't just in terms of the delivering professionals but also involving the community - that co-production is vital.

Helen stressed that when we're talking about making a case it is important to understand the kind of infrastructure and the rhetoric context that we're working in, at that time. Currently the policy language is about the economy and growth, about a high wage, low benefit state. So the case that we've got to prove is that adult learning delivers those objectives. That cuts across lots of government departments, not just the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, or the other relevant departments across the four administrations.

Within those departments we've also got complex supply chain structures as well. So we've got to be making that case at all of those points. Finally, Helen emphasised that we need evidence on not just why people learn, but also why people don't learn and the relative impacts of those, as well.

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## CONFERENCE DINNER

The conference reception and dinner was hosted by the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, a major UK think tank and influencer, established in 1754. The RSA's historic venue just off The Strand was the perfect place to celebrate the transformative impact of adult learning in the UK. Each course of the meal was preceded by a short talk by adult learners from whom adult education had been a life-changing experience:

- [Amanda Scales](#), winner of the Outstanding Adult Learner of the Year award in 2012;
  - [Adele Tilly](#), selected by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal as the recipient of the first Adult Learners' Week Patron's Award in 2015;
  - [Lee Hughes](#), recipient of the 2015 Outstanding Individual Learner award.
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## DAY TWO

David Hughes opened day two of the conference with a summary of the preceding day which focused on why thinking about impact is important and some examples of how this is done in the arenas of the UK EAAL work-programme:

- Young adult employability (Northern Ireland)
- Family learning and excluded groups (Wales)
- The Citizens' Curriculum (England)
- Digital skills and inclusion (Scotland)

David reminded delegates that the focus of the conference was the impact of adult learning. Since the last conference for this programme in Edinburgh in 2013, the impact forums have discussed international benchmarking surveys such as the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills.

At the beginning of day two we are fortunate to have an input from OECD looking at the lessons from around the world about how impact of adult learning is reported and why transnational comparators are important.

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER: SIMON FIELD, OECD



*Simon Field is an expert on the comparative international analysis of vocational education and training systems. As leader of the OECD's flagship programme of work on vocational education and training over many years he has led and delivered reviews of policy in more than a score of countries throughout the world. He is the lead author of the OECD's two main publications on vocational education and training policy (Learning for Jobs, 2010 and Skills Beyond School: Synthesis Report, 2014 ) as well as many individual country reviews.*

*He has published extensively, not only on education policy but also historically on topics as diverse as how the weather affects crime patterns, and refugee resettlement. He holds a Ph. D. in philosophy and social policy from the University of Cambridge and an M. Sc. in Economics from Birkbeck College London. He was born and brought up in Belfast in Northern Ireland.*

### 'ADULT SKILLS: SOME ISSUES FOR ENGLAND'

Simon Field talked about the impact of transnational benchmarking, OECD's views on the importance of sharing knowledge in an international environment and why this has a positive impact on learning. Do European nations all face the same challenges? What

can we learn from our European and international partners? For this purpose he focused on England as case study.

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR A FULL TRANSCRIPT OF SIMON FIELD'S SPEECH

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR SIMON FIELD'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

David thanked Simon and introduced Jan Eldred who has been touring the UK for the past year looking at the way adult learning is talked about and evaluated in the each of the four administrations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

### **DR. JANINE ELDRED: LESSONS FROM THE UK EAAL IMPACT FORUMS**

Jan presented her findings on the commonalities and differences, as well as what can be learned from the range of approaches used. Jan Eldred on the work of the Impact Forums and answered the following questions:

- who's been involved?
- how impact information is collected across the UK?
- the key questions on a theoretical model based on levels of impact: on individual, communities, nations, and Europe-wide (e.g. mobility)?
- what are the lessons we can learn from this?
- what are the questions we need to ask ourselves in the following sessions?

These questions were:

1. **Why should adult learning organisations gather impact data?**  
*What difference does it make, to whom, why and how?*
  2. **What difference does adult learning make to other policy agendas?**  
*Which policy agendas in particular? How does it make a difference? Who benefits?*
  3. **How can adult learning organisations get key impact messages to diverse policy makers?**  
*How can we help policy makers to, not only see the impact, but also act upon the information?*
  4. **How can we sustain and develop the quality of provision, and of learners' experiences?**  
*How can we do this whilst also responding to multiple policy agendas, contexts and purposes? How does gathering impact information help us?*
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# UK IMPACT FORUM OPEN SESSIONS

## SESSION 1. Northern Ireland Impact Forum

### **Collaboration on Impact - Learning from a Shared Measurement Approach within post 16 Employability Programmes in Northern Ireland**

Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland in conjunction with the NEET Strategy Forum (those Not yet in Education, Employment or Training), New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) and Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI), piloted a shared measurement approach to impact called the JET (Journey to Employment) programme.

**Forum for Adult Learning NI**



The aim of the study was to develop a common framework that would support the Voluntary, Community and Social Economy sectors to implement shared impact practice, which would lead to more effective services and more robust impact measurement at organisational, service, programme, strategic and procurement levels.

The session will describe the context in which the study was developed, the findings and learning from the pilot along with the potential implications to policy.

## SESSION 2. England Impact Forum

### **Capturing the wider impact of adult learning provision.**

The England Impact Forum has been looking at examples of how learning providers capture the wider impact of adult learning provision. In looking at these examples we have been asking four questions:

- How can impact be summarised?
- What appear to be the key success factors?
- What can be generalisable and replicable in other contexts?
- What is relevant to UK and European policy contexts?

The session will examine a range of approaches from the Workers' Educational Association, the Community Health and Learning Foundation, and the Northern College (a residential adult education college in England).

All approaches demonstrate that gathering impact information is part of reviewing and evidencing the difference which adult learning makes, to the whole organisation, its partners and stakeholders, as well as policy makers, contributing to greater accountability and demonstrating a return on investment.

**THE POSTER PRESENTED BY THE WEA CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

**THE POSTER PRESENTED BY THE COMMUNITY HEALTH & LEARNING FOUNDATION CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

**THE POSTER PRESENTED BY THE COMMUNITY HEALTH & LEARNING FOUNDATION (close-up) CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

### **SESSION 3. Wales Impact Forum**

#### **Measuring and evidencing impact**

This session will explore the practice and approaches to measuring the impact of adult learning from three perspectives;

Monkton Primary School has been developing a whole community approach to teaching and learning. Operating in an area of high social and economic deprivation the school has become a Neighbourhood Learning Centre, providing a Gypsy/Traveller Education Service and using the Pupil Deprivation Grant to provide learning opportunities to support parents to gain skills for employment.

Welsh Water/Dwr Cymru has been delivering a bespoke Essential Skills Workforce Development Plan, the programme has now become a best practice model shared with other large organisations across Wales.

The newly merged WEA/YMCA Community College Cymru provides adult learning opportunities to over 20,000 learners. Delivery is community based, including workbased learning opportunities. It provides access to education for adults from all backgrounds but with the focus particularly on those who have missed out on learning or who need a second chance.

**THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION 'IMPACT PLANNING' BY LEARNDIRECT CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

**THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION 'MEASURING AND EVIDENCING IMPACT' BY WEA / YMCA WALES CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

**THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION 'THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY LEARNING' BY MONKTON PRIMARY SCHOOL CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

## **SESSION 4. Scotland Impact Forum**

### **Impact Rewards**

This session focused on three different approaches to gathering impact data and discuss how we can use this information better to tell the story of adult learning:

The partners in the workshop were:

- Education Scotland, who will share with the group *the How Good is Our .....?* A tool for self-evaluation used by local authority adult learning providers and now adapted for use in a range of other contexts.
- Learning Link Scotland will present their toolkit *Explaining the Difference* designed for smaller organisations to help them show the impact and outcomes of their work.
- Scotland's Learning Partnership will discuss and present a recent piece of work with learners across Scotland which captures the impact of adult learning on participants and asked them to design a new quality indicator for engaging those furthest away from adult learning.

**THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION 'EVIDENCING THE IMPACT' BY LEARNING LINK SCOTLAND CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)**

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### **KEYNOTE SPEECH, Michael Davis, UKCES**



*Michael Davis is the Chief Executive of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). UKCES is a government funded, industry-led organisation providing strategic leadership on skills and employment issues across the UK. He previously held the position of Director of Strategy and Performance.*

*Before joining UKCES Michael was Managing Director of CFE. Based in the East Midlands, Michael led CFE for just under 10 years from a start up to becoming a national specialist in policy and programme management for skills, enterprise and economic development.*

*Whilst in the East Midlands Michael was also a non-exec director then investor and Chairman of Lastolite Ltd, a leading manufacturer of backgrounds and lighting control*

systems for the photo and video industry. Michael was also Governor and then Chairman of Leicester College.

Michael graduated from Lancaster University with a degree in Economics in 1994. His first years after university were a mix of working in accountancy, a new business start-up and then into business development and public policy.

## **PEOPLE AND SKILLS: TRENDS, CHANGE AND MEASUREMENT**

Michael Davis, UKCES, highlighted the opportunities continued lifelong learning brings for UK citizens. Particularly in light of the recent increased profile of the UK at the World Skills show and, as the voice of employers, you can share their views and perspective of what impact lifelong learning brings to them and their workforces

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR MICHAEL'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR A TRANSCRIPT OF MICHAEL'S SPEECH

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## **FINAL PLENARY PANEL SESSION**

### **Why should adult learning organisations gather impact data?**

Michael Davis, UKCES, fed back on the Northern Ireland impact forum session. He stressed that influencing policy makers it was very important to know who you were trying to influence. Some people are influenced emotionally, so you get them to experience provision; others are more analytical, so you use data. You don't just have to do this for the lead policy-maker (such as a minister) but their immediate peer group; those people they work with on a day to day basis. So if an individual is influenced by case studies but their peers are influenced by hard data, then it still will not work if you just take one approach.

Michael said that the session looked closely at how do we improve what we do. *If we don't know how the work do makes a difference then how on earth are we supposed to persuade other people?*

### **Michael concluded:**

“So it feels to me that we need to make it must more mainstream in terms of that's what we do and I think really need to, again, look at the emergence of data and how we gather data. It shouldn't be seen as a bureaucratic process. We should be designing it into the delivery of our services. So that we start off with a really clear idea about the profile of the user groups and customer groups that we're working with. Then we start to collect data on the difference and the outcome. Then, hopefully, that creates a circle of constant products improvement and service improvement. That would be no different to how any other business runs.”

### **What difference does adult learning make to other policy agendas?**

Helen Sciafe, Welsh Government, fed back on the Wales impact forum session, which had a presentation from Maggi Dawson from the Workers' Educational Association (Wales) about the long list of other policy areas that adult learning impacts on. Most of them were

quite obvious things like employability and skills but also things like housing (and the role of housing associations delivering adult learning).

**Helen concluded:**

“The trick is in stopping [adult learning] becoming an education silo and recognising that. One of the things is about perhaps being more cross-cutting, having more cross-cutting measures. So you've enforced that cross-cutting working by having measures that are not just education-based.”

**How can adult learning organisations get key impact messages to diverse policy makers?**

Phil Denning, Education Scotland, fed back on the Scotland impact forum session. He said the thing that came out of our group was that we have to be really clear about what we mean by 'impact'.

Often impact is a word that most adults associate with a car crash or a bomb falling. We tend to talk actually about what differences adult learning made to you in your life and in your community and with your family et cetera. It's about talking about that about adult learning making a difference.

The second issue was about 'who gives the message'. One of the differences seen in Scotland as opposed to the rest of the UK is that if adult learning organisations go in and talk to ministers and say; adult learning is brilliant; policy makers will say 'well you would say that wouldn't you because you want funding.'

But one of the changes in Scotland was the learners were saying adult learning is making a difference to inspectors. These messages were included in government inspection reports so the messages were heard.

The third are is 'understanding what keeps politicians awake at night.' The Forum pointed out that not many politicians you talk to get complaints about adult learning. But they are concerned about are things like productivity, family learning, which is all about the early years. So you prevent problems there. It has an impact on school education and parental qualifications. There is also the difference adult learning makes in the justice world, particularly in the prison population. The argument there is prison is a very expensive way to rectify what are usually previous faults earlier in life. So you can try and save money through learning.

Finally there is the cost of health care in the UK with an aging population. In Scotland the Chief Medical Officer has taken an interest in the role of learning in addressing such issues as dementia, falls, isolation, loneliness etc. We need to get better at linking to health and doing what the early years sector did and ask the medical profession to provide their evidence for them.

**Phil concluded:**

“It was medical research that they then used and said, early education is not just about play. It's not just about sitting in a sandbox. It's actually about your initial human development. If you get this wrong the problems multiply all the way through life.”

**How can we sustain and develop the quality of provision, and of learners' experiences?**

Shakira Martin, National Union of Students, fed back on the England impact forum session. She said we need to recognise is the diversity within adult further education. That

is so diverse and we are serving a diverse range of students from different backgrounds and different upbringings and lifestyles. The key thing in thinking about impact and quality is remembering this diversity.

Because of this diversity, we need different models. There is not a one size fits all about the sector. This results in a tension between demonstrating impact for funding and demonstrating impact for students and learners.

It was important that in demonstrating quality to inspectors that providers work with learners, students and their representatives such as Student Unions. The sector is often excellent at what it does but is not so good at sharing best practice. Instead of having different pockets of everybody doing something here there and everywhere let's identify what we're good at and what we're not good at and work together in creating an excellent model.

**Shakira concluded:**

“What’s... so great about further education is that it's a journey. It's not the destination and that is all part of the impact. Two years ago I couldn't sit like this. I never spoke like this. It is education, it is being able to mess up, come back, learn, reflect. That has given me and 4.1 million other people the exact type of ‘oomph’ that we need...”

“The Northern College said that when they delivered their change model it took a year and in that year the part of the learning was going through all those barriers and challenges and getting there in creating an excellent model...”

“For me, what I would love to see Ofsted recognise soft skills as impact. That the fact I've completed my qualification [and] necessarily haven't moved immediately into a job. Maybe it could have taken me five years. But in that time I have learnt about timekeeping. I've learned about presentation. I've learnt about organising. I've learnt about privatising. These things is what again you can take into society. I am able to negotiate. I'm able to have conversations with different people who I would never talk to because of being of the soft skills that I have gained over the time.

“At the end of the day it's about people like me and further education, adult education has like me as a Black, working class woman, from a deprived area got me sitting up here with like this is the potential of what could happen if we get it right.

“Let's get the impact right!”

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## **JOYCE BLACK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NIACE: 'WHAT NEXT FOR THE UK WORK PROGRAMME 2015-17'**



*Joyce Black is Assistant Director for Development and Research at NIACE, leading on 'Life and Society' across the organisation's Strategic Plan. She also has oversight of NIACE's Equalities work.*

*Joyce is the relationship manager for the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), overseeing NIACE's annual programme of development and research activities in agreement with BIS policy leads. She leads on NIACE's role as the UK National Coordinator for the European Union's Agenda for Adult Learning, co-funded by the European Commission and BIS. Before joining NIACE in 2002, Joyce worked for over 20 years in a further education college and as the Manager for Learning Support.*

*Joyce sits on the Executive Board of the European Association for the Education of Adults as a Vice President, and on the Executive Committee of the European Basic Skills Network – both of which NIACE is a member. She is also Chair of the Corporation Board for one of the three Sixth Form Colleges in Leicester.*

*A great believer in lifelong learning, Joyce is also a qualified Aromatherapist – great for chilling and relaxing.*

Joyce Black who has led the work for the UK National Coordinator for NIACE since 2013 outlined what would happen next. NIACE on behalf of its partners, and with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, had successfully secured funding for another two years.

Joyce stressed that the plan was to build on the successful work since 2012 and in particular the recent successes of the four impact forums. As we had seen throughout the conference there has never been as great a need for adult learning, adult skills, adult education—the work we all do.

Moreover it is important that we share our learning across national boundaries and demonstrate better the far-reaching impact of adult learning.

We have heard from Simon Field today about the importance of transnational comparators. The OECD Survey of Adult Skills indicated that the UK, like most European nations, faces significant challenges in attainment in basic and digital skills. These challenges are more acute for groups such as 16-24 year olds, socially excluded adults & those out of work. A number of our work-packages focus on the needs of these groups. The focus of the UK work is on improving skills for low-skilled individuals and participation in learning for groups currently excluded from education, training and the labour market. We will help bring about change by influencing both policy makers and practitioners. A key

issue we have identified is the need to engage a wider audience outside of adult learning policy/practice circles.

So what are we going to do about this?

We expect the programme will have the following outcomes and impact by 2017:

- Greater awareness of the EAAL in the UK, and policy coherence between the four UK national administrations and the UK government, ensuring policy development is evidence-based, accessible and effective
- A *State of the Nation (or Nations)* report outlining the current state of play in UK adult learning to inform future policy development
- A fully piloted Citizens' Curriculum with outline longitudinal findings that provide evidence for future policy development across the UK and Europe to enhance basic skills levels & other key competences
- Documented evaluations of young people-led participant research to inform policy development & practice
- Influential reports from UK impact forums on how they have contextualised research to enable better regional policy development & planning
- A fully trialled & developed CPD programme to support adult educators in the four UK nations to better use technology to support under-represented groups
- The direct participation of 200 practitioners & policy makers in two international conferences in the UK, with the involvement of EC colleagues, EPALE & other NC
- Virtual participation of 5000 people interested in adult learning policy development via social media

Joyce thanked NIACE's partners: Scotland's Learning Partnership, the Forum for Adult Learning Northern Ireland, the National Agency for Erasmus+, and EPALE UK for their support putting this programme together.

The first thing to say is that we will be continuing our support for the impact forums which will continue to contextualise European and UK research to influence policy making in each of the administrations.

NIACE will continue to provide the latest research on young adult employability, digital skills, and the Citizens' Curriculum, and to bring all this together in a State of the Nations report.

Joyce outlined the timescales.

- Winter 2015: establish research group, write policy briefings, impact forum meetings
- Spring 2016: further research, EPALE blogs
- Summer 2016: interim State of Nation report and year one conference or webinars
- Autumn-Winter 2016: further EU & UK research
- Spring-Summer 2017: final reports
- Autumn 2017: final conference

Joyce thanks again to City Lit for hosting the event, the UK government and the European Commission for their financial support, and for all delegates for attending. She hoped everyone would continue to stay in touch with the programme for the next two years.

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR JOYCE'S POWERPOINT PRESENTATION**

## EVALUATION

The conference was attended in person by 120 delegates from 20 countries. In addition the event reached over 119,000 accounts via Twitter, with:

- Between 900 – 1,500 unique tweets.
- 500 additional retweets
- A tweet (unique or retweeted) with the hashtag #EULearning appeared across twitter in excess of 300,000 times
- Most tweets reaching around 10,000 people.
- 122 YouTube Views over 24 videos
- 41 livestream views, an average of 24 people per individual broadcast

All delegates rated the conference as 'good' or 'very good'.

### Comments included:

"It was a brilliant 2 days – I hope everyone enjoyed it as much as I did. Thank you!"

"It is really inspiring to work with practitioners from other regions and countries."

"I have reflected on how impact evidence is collected and used in my own organisation."

"Better evidence by organisation isn't the only answer to getting adult learning funded as good evidence needs to be presented and articulated in a political context and a more collective approach might have a bigger political impact. Unfortunately we all chase our own funding and compete more than collaborate."

"I learnt a lot about the deficiencies of the English Education System from [OECD] plus a lot about the Citizens' Curriculum and Family Learning."

"I have been using the OECD data and insight in explaining to decision maker the impact of not having level 2 English & maths skills."

"Excellent insight into current research on those with low level Literacy skills...To help inform the delivery of Offender Learning education in SW England."

"Some more information as to how adult education is funded within England and contacts as to how we could learn from this in Northern Ireland where there is a very bleak policy environment for adult education."



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union