

THE ROLE OF ADULT LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES

A stimulus paper for the UK European Agenda for Adult
Learning, 2015-17

1 Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is the UK National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning. The current programme is a continuation of the work begun by NIACE in 2012 and is jointly funded by the European Commission's Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency and the UK Government's Department for Education (DfE). The activities aim to contribute to the European Agenda, by linking adult learning to wider socio-economic policy in the UK; raising awareness of the value of adult learning to UK citizens, and increasing the participation of low-skills or less well qualified adults.

As part of the 2015-17 programme of work, we are undertaking an overarching strand of work that will result in a summative report. This will bring together the latest evidence on the impact of adult learning on different policy areas. It will also draw on evidence produced by the research and development work from other strands, including the Impact Forums.

The overall aim of the work is to explore, examine and undertake research on the contribution that adult learning can make to different areas of policy in the UK, specifically health, work and communities.

The overarching research question for the 'communities' strand is:

What is the role that adult learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) plays in social, civic and community life?

There are three subsidiary questions to consider:

- How does adult learning support individual citizens and their families contribute to the communities they live in?
- How does adult learning help citizens become more active in civil society

and political life, more tolerant of diversity and more aware of environmental issues?

- How does adult learning promote cultural development, from the arts to spirituality, helping citizens become well-rounded and resourceful in shaping their societies?

This paper addresses each of these questions in turn and ends by discussing the implications for policy and practice in the UK, including the adult learning workforce.

2 Terminology

“There can be few aspects of life to which education has no contribution to make.”

Adult Education: A Plan for Development (The Russell Report), 1973.

2.1 Social, civic and community life

For the purpose of this paper, we have used the term “social, civic and community life”. This is for two reasons: the word ‘community’ is a notoriously slippery one—Brookfield (1983) referred to it as having ‘the power to inspire a reverential suspension of critical judgement’; and, we thought it would be useful to use the same terminology as the most recent *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (UNESCO 2016).

GRALE III analyses two other overlapping domains (employment / work and health / well-being) which also reflect our two other research themes. The point about interconnectedness is an important one, particularly given the focus of our current paper. It highlights, in research terms, what is common sense: that adult learning benefits many parts of our lives simultaneously. For example, a course of learning may directly benefit our employment prospects but also have a positive impact on our well-being, and help us support others in our community at the same time.

Having said that, the employment / work and health / well-being strands are relatively easy to define compared to the catch-all ‘social, civic and community life.’ As GRALE III recognises, adult learning and education (ALE) exists in a symbiotic relationship with the communities it serves; it is both a condition of community development and a consequence. ‘While ALE can lead to social change, civic and social structures also affect the availability and quality of ALE.’¹(107)

¹ Unesco UIL (2016) *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, Hamburg, UIL

2.2 Adult learning

As our survey of the literature shows, when considering the role of adult learning, we are immediately faced with multiple definitions, contexts and understandings. It is something that is seen differently from country to country and from context to context. It embraces anyone who learns after the end of initial education (however long that may be) whether in a village hall, a local library, an adult education centre (or outreach centre), a further education college, higher education institution or a workplace. Its purposes are as wide-ranging as the venues including learning for pleasure and leisure; to develop a skill or interest; to gain employment; to change employment; to enhance and increase skills and knowledge in work and at any level from 'beginner' to 'advanced', post-doctoral study.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (2014)² suggests that:

Adult education is a core component of lifelong learning. It denotes the entire body of organised learning processes, formal and non-formal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities and societies.' (2014:2)

GRALE III uses the following definition of adult learning and education (ALE):

Formal, non-formal and informal learning and education for a broad spectrum of the adult population. It covers learning and education across the life-course and has a special focus on adults and young people who are marginalized and disadvantaged' ³ (2016:28)

The emphasis on those who are marginalized or disadvantaged is a reflection of the intention of some providers to try to address inequalities of opportunity and support those who have not been able to take full advantage of initial education. But in many European countries, including the UK, adult learning is not limited to these groups of people. Whilst courses, workshops and learning programmes are often designed for those returning to learning following unfulfilled schooling experiences, adult learning also includes opportunities for those who have benefited from initial education but who want to pursue further learning as an adult.

² Unesco UIL, 2014: 2 Working Draft for discussion: Recommendation for Adult Education, 2015, Hamburg, UIL

³ Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016, 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, Hamburg, Germany, UIL

³ Brooks, G and Burton, M, 2008, Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector, London, NRDC, IoE

Generally speaking, UK policy-makers and practitioners utilise the terminology of ‘formal, non-formal and informal learning’ used in the research community across Europe. For example, Brooks and Burton, define adult learning as:

The entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities which are undertaken by adults after a break since leaving initial education and training, and which results in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.’⁴

In 2011, the European Platform for Adult Learning and Education (EPALE), adopted the following description:

The term adult learning covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities – both general and vocational – undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.’⁵

These two definitions are very similar and embrace a full spectrum of learning, in all forms and all levels for a diverse range of purposes. But other researchers have indicated that there are problems in embracing the whole range of ‘informal’ learning activity when thinking about public policy. In England, ‘formal’ learning has been used to describe learning, which leads to qualifications and ‘informal learning’ has been the portmanteau term for what is predominantly non-accredited, now described as ‘non-regulated’ learning. Learning activities which could be described as ‘incidental’ and gained from such things as reading, television, group discussion or conversations in such places as the pub, club or faith organisations are generally excluded from these. Where there is the closest alignment between the use of ‘informal’ learning in the UK and European contexts, is the area of ‘intentional’ informal learning. This could be characterised by a programme of self-study set by an individual or group by themselves. An example may be teaching yourself to play the guitar or bake a cake by watching a demonstration on YouTube. Where this type of informal learning is of interest to researchers and policy-makers alike is where it is inspired by other forms learning: attending a music course, or watching *The Great British Bake-Off* on the BBC (the UK’s publicly funded broadcasting service).

England’s Learning Age Green Paper (1998) identified the importance of such learning activities as part of fostering a learning society in an age of global knowledge and information⁶.

⁵ web-site accessed January 2017; <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/what-epale-definition-adult-learning>

⁶ Department for Education and Employment, 1998, *The Learning Age*, London, DfEE
http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15191/6/9780101379021_Redacted.pdf accessed March 2017

In some areas, a popular descriptor for adult learning and education is Adult Community Learning (ACL). The Welsh Government indicates that ACL's purpose is for:

taking the first steps into learning; providing skills for life and embedding basic skills; providing skills for independent living and skills for work; contributing to personal development and wellbeing, and developing active citizenship.⁷

The Scottish Government adopts an even broader term: Community Learning and Development (CLD), embraces a range of activities and policies including youth work, family and adult learning; adult literacy; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); community development and community capacity-building.

Such diversity of descriptions and understandings creates a challenge for audiences listening to or reading about adult learning, adult community learning, adult education or UNESCO's 'adult learning and education'. Internationally, adult education is recognised as a core component of lifelong learning. It denotes the entire body of organized learning processes, formal and non-formal, whereby those regarded as adults, by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities and societies.⁸

2.3 Lifelong learning

In addressing the issues outlined above, some governments, organisations and agencies have tried to address this diversity, complexity and breadth by using the term, 'lifelong learning'. This embraces all 'types' of learning from 'cradle to the grave'. Schuller et al helpfully suggest that:

Lifelong learning includes people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts – in educational institutions, at work, at home and through leisure activities. It focuses mainly on adults returning to organised learning rather than on the initial period of education or on incidental learning⁹

Interestingly, despite its range of excellent papers, the current UK Foresight Study of Skills Lifelong Learning does not define what 'lifelong learning is. Given the current UK policy context, the focus is on returns for the economy.

⁷ Welsh Government, 2016: Review of adult community learning in Wales; Welsh Government

⁸ UIL, 2014, p2, *Working Draft for discussion: Recommendation for Adult Education (2015)*, Hamburg, UIL

⁹ Schuller, T, Watson, D, 2009: *Learning through life; Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning*, Leicester, NIACE

Some of the papers highlight what one calls ‘the dearth of evidence’ around the impact of non-formal and informal adult learning.¹⁰

A number of other studies highlight the challenges of assessing and reporting on the social impact of adult learning. As Social Impact Scotland states:

When we think about measuring, assessing or evaluating social impact we are naturally focusing on the results of an activity, and not on the activity itself. For this reason, you could say that social impact assessments and evaluation focuses on the outcomes of an activity, and not on the processes or outputs that make up an activity.¹¹

In a previous paper in this series for the European Agenda for Adult Learning, as part of the ‘Health’ strand, we focused on non-formal learning, due to the methodological challenges in looking at informal learning in this field.

In this paper, we feel definitions are important as they beg the question which type of learning is the most effective in achieving social impact for different members of the community. Examining definitions also helps us to understand to what we are referring when we talk about adult learning and education.

As we have demonstrated, terminology is complex and presents a lack of consistent understanding of the vocabulary. Jacques Delors’ work for the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century¹² remains a useful way of thinking about the purposes of education for adults: *learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together* and *learning to be*. These concepts resonate strongly with some of the purposes and many of the outcomes of adult learning in building social capital and social cohesion for and with communities.

¹⁰ Bhutoria, A. 2016: Economic Returns to Education in the United Kingdom, Foresight, Government Office for Science

¹¹ <http://1068899683.n263075.test.prositechosting.co.uk/understanding-social-impact/what-is-social-impact/> accessed January 2017

¹² UNESCO, Learning: The Treasure Within; The International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, 1996, UNESCO Publishing

3 How does adult learning support individual citizens and their families contribute to the communities they live in?

3.1 Social Capital

The 2016 *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (GRALE III) suggests that adult learning and education must be seen as part of a larger set of social, cultural and economic practices.¹³ GRALE III further suggests that the social practice aspects of adult learning and education should be seen as having three key aspects of contributing to social, civic and community life. This implies that learning is not simply a process of acquiring knowledge, skills or qualifications but has additional outcomes too. These multiple dimensions resonate with the work of Schuller et al, which suggests that the benefits of learning can be identified as building human, social and identity capital.¹⁴ They explain that social capital is formed from networks in which people are active and where people are enabled to have access to other individuals and groups. This outcome and benefit of learning was endorsed by Fujiwara's work on valuing the impact of adult learning, which revealed how taking part in learning improves social life and helps to build relationships.¹⁵ Preston and Hammond,¹⁶ had previously found that Further Education (UK), which includes learning for and with adults, was effective in developing social networks and helping people to feel included. Similarly, the recent review of Adult Community Learning (ACL) in Wales¹⁷ reported that ACL helped to reduce social isolation and encouraged social inclusion and cohesion.

Whilst adults usually participate in learning as individuals, the social capital, built in the process of learning with others, seems to be not only a positive outcome of participation but an aspect which helps adults to successfully complete their learning programme or activity as well as support transition to further learning. The WEA 2016 Impact Study¹⁸ revealed that 84% of learners, who had taken part in a WEA course, reported that they had made new friends as a result of joining in learning activities. An earlier study, of the impact of the Adult Community Learning Fund¹⁹, a fund that was designed to

¹³ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) p20, 2016, 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, Hamburg, UIL

¹⁴ Schuller, T, Preston, J Hammond, C, Brassett-Grundy, A, Bynner, J, 2004, The benefits of learning; the impact of education on health, family and social capital, London, Routledge

¹⁵ Fujiwara, D, 2012, Valuing the impact of adult learning; an analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life, Leicester, NIACE

¹⁶ Preston, J and Hammond, C, 2002, The wider benefits of further education; practitioner views, London, Institute of Education

¹⁷ ARAD Research, 2016, A Review of Adult Community Learning in Wales, Cardiff, Welsh Government

¹⁸ WEA, Adult Education Impact Report, 2016, Improving Lives and Communities through Learning, WEA

¹⁹ Field, J et al, 2001, Evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund, London, Department for Education and Skills

widen participation in learning by adults, through community-based opportunities, found similar outcomes. It indicated how self-confidence, social skills, social integration and higher social capital were developed through learning.

I think I've become much more confident and outward looking; networking is much more effective now. I've found a voice.'

It's the confidence you get. At one time I couldn't face anybody but now...I'll speak straight out'. I used to think that I was in a boat of my own but now I realize that I'm not alone. A lot of us are in the same boat. We draw on each other's strengths.'²⁰

A later evaluation of the same initiative found that learners had built their confidence, sense of self-worth and social contact with people from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly in the neighbourhoods or communities where learning was offered and where they lived.²¹

Raised social capital led to reports of a reduced sense of social isolation; increased sense of individual worth; increases in aspiration and in involvement in local voluntary and community organisations.

Feinstein and Sabates declared that learning that does not take into account social capital is less productive.

Simply increasing skills via the provision of educational qualifications, without redressing social needs, will not be particularly productive in the long run. Our research suggests that social capital, positive social networks and relationships between groups, high levels of social engagement, and personal resilience and mental health, are important for a well-functioning society that is going to be able to respond to the future challenges.²²

This work suggests that, not only are social outcomes identified as positive, and, sometimes un-intended outcomes of learning, they should also be acknowledged as vital aspects of the learning process and are of wider benefit than only to the individual. Acknowledging that whilst social capital is not acquired in the way that skills and qualifications, or human capital, may be developed, Schuller and Watson suggested that,

²⁰ *ibid* p 47

²¹ The Institute for Employment Studies, 2002, *Impact of the Adult and Community Learning Fund*, Brighton, the Institute for Employment Studies.

²² Feinstein, L and Sabates, R, p11, 2007, *The Public Value of Adult Learning; Skills and Social Productivity*, London, IOE

... getting more education is a powerful way of increasing access to networks.²³

3.2 Learning to develop individual skills

Learning to develop individual skills, or 'learning to know' as Delors termed it, has a social impact. Such a view emphasises the link between people who come together to learn in and as a group, and the building of social capital. This would be particularly true where learning is focused on issues of common interest or concern, such as environmental initiatives or community development activities. However, research indicates that even where learning focuses on individual skill and knowledge, such as the development of essential or basic skills, social capacity has opportunity to grow:

There is clear, convincing and statistically significant evidence that participation in ALN (Adult Literacy and Numeracy) provision, and having higher levels of ALN, have a positive personal and social impact on individuals and communities. The personal and social impact of literacy and numeracy learning often takes time to emerge, and emerges in forms and context that are removed from formal learning environments.²⁴

Such findings were endorsed by studies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, America and Scotland.²⁵ Similarly, the OECD report of 2013, on the Survey of Adult Skills,²⁶ indicated that people with low levels of literacy tended to have less trust of others and so have fewer social networks. Those with literacy levels of 4 or 5 are twice as likely to report strong levels of trust and social networks. Developing individual skills and knowledge would therefore appear to help increase social capacity. Whilst the causal nature of such data is difficult to assess, the links are important as trust is the 'glue' of social capability.

In a similar way, the individual acquisition of ICT skills seems particularly helpful in building social capital. Such individual skills help to develop social contact and co-operation and increase problem solving skills as well as self-confidence. These in turn, encourage participation in further social arenas²⁷.

Research into the impact of adult learning is often undertaken based on the current level of qualification of learners. Due to the correlation between level

²³ Schuller, T, Watson, D, p15, 2009, Learning through life: inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning, Leicester, NIACE

²⁴ Vorhaus, J et al, 2011, Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills, Research Paper 61, London, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ OECD, 2013, Skilled for Life? Key Findings from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD

²⁷ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016, Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, Hamburg, UIL

of qualification and wealth, health, and career prospects (among other things), a number of studies have focussed on learners below level 2 (EQF 3). For example, the 2013 *Evaluation of the Impact of Learning Below Level 2* sets out the main findings from an evaluation of the impact of learning Below Level 2 in Further Education in England.

This study analyses impact on: employment status, earnings, benefits, progression into further learning, work prospects, and job searching. The strong economic focus gives the *raison d'être* for public funding below level 2, where there is market failure (employers or individual will not fund it themselves). It argues the dominant motivation to learn for learners below L2 is not to 'get a job'. Therefore, there are messages about the sort of learning that is the most appropriate entry point.

When considering the purposes and impact of learning, it is important to consider, along with the existing level of qualification, the life-stage of the participants. This has been a major finding of the range of participation surveys, commissioned by UK government, which have detailed market segmentation that takes the analysis further, comparing trends in attitudes to learning over time and between learners and 'non-learners':

One of the most significant differences between learners and non-learners is their general interest in learning with learners reporting a much greater interest in learning, training and education.²⁸

McNair (2015) has further analysed the implications of the survey's findings for older adults:

"The most widely cited benefit of learning was 'Helped me pass on my skills and knowledge to other people' (28%, declining with age), followed by 'Improved my chances of getting or staying in paid work' (24%, almost all by people under 65), and by 'Helped me get involved in society' (14%) and 'Helped me improve or maintain my health' (13%), both of which rise with age. One in ten cited 'Helped me get involved in the digital/online world' (peaking among the 65–74-year-old group). Smaller, but significant, numbers cited 'Helped me to manage my caring responsibilities', 'Helped me cope with life crises', 'Improved my reading and maths' and 'Improved my chances of getting or staying in voluntary work'." (2015: 6)²⁹

²⁸ BIS, 2012, *National Adult Learning Survey 2010*, London, BIS

²⁹ McNair, S 2015, A Better future for us all; a policy paper on older people, <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-resources/life-and-society/better-future-us-all?redirectedfrom=niace> accessed March 2017

The Citizens' Curriculum³⁰ adopts an approach based on the three capitals model and the 'capabilities' defined in *Learning Through Life* (2009). This is a model based on co-creating a curriculum relevant to participants' everyday lives. In doing so it starts from the basis that participants have capital to invest in (and add value to) the process—and its outcomes. The Phase 2 evaluation of the programme's pilot found the Citizens' Curriculum resulted in "statistically significant outcomes for learners". Using the New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database³¹ and Fujiwara's monetary value of adult learning³², it can be "calculated that the pilots created a public value of at least £1,443,390."³³

Parents too, have reported how learning how to help their children in the most effective ways, has increased their own confidence in their parenting role and in assisting their children as well as improved the relationships with their families. In the 2016 WEA Impact report, 54% of grandparents recorded such positive social outcomes of joining in learning activities.³⁴ The development of social capacity and networks, it seems, are not dependent upon collective learning but the growth of individual knowledge, skills and understanding can also lead to positive social impact.

A number of studies have highlighted the interplay between learners gaining self-confidence and becoming more effective in a number of arenas, including those highlighted later in this report. For example, a two-phase study of over 600 literacy and numeracy learners in Scotland examined various aspects of their learning experiences and their perceptions of the impact that learning had on their lives. It analysed the changes in social capital and self-confidence experienced by learners between the two phases and explored the complex connections between engagement in learning and the development of self-confidence, an increasingly positive identity as a learner, and enhanced social capital.

Many practitioners and learners report increases in confidence as a result of participating in learning. A study in 2004 built upon this anecdotal evidence to attempt to identify the nature of confidence and its importance as an outcome of learning. It also set out to capture and record changes in confidence during a learning period. The resulting action research report and tool kit was called,

³⁰ <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/>

³¹ <http://www.neweconomymanchester.com/our-work/research-evaluation-cost-benefit-analysis/cost-benefit-analysis/unit-cost-database>

³² Fujiwara, D. (2012) Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning: An analysis of the effect of adult learning

on different domains in life. Leicester: NIACE.

³³ Learning and Work Institute, Citizens' Curriculum, Phase 2 project report (October 2016) Stevenson, A., Robey, C., Downes, S., Leicester, Learning and Work Institute

³⁴ WEA, 2016, Adult Education Impact Report, 2016, Improving Lives and Communities through Learning, WEA

Catching Confidence.³⁵ One of the conclusions of the study was that individuals and groups could identify changes in confidence as a result of learning, which led to them engaging with issues of importance for their community, well-being and regeneration. Learners recorded how building confidence was important to help deal with any kind of change in work and broad life situations. It seems that participation alone can build the social capital of an individual, which can be used in different contexts.

This kind of outcome was beautifully illustrated in a recent collection of adult learners' stories³⁶ where a learner in Australia reported making many excuses not to engage in learning English, as a Turkish first language speaker. She was not encouraged; others suggested her language skills were 'good enough'. After many attempts she did join a course; 'At the end...I was the student who was asking questions and started to have confidence and make lots of friends...I started to volunteer to be a first-aider, help in the community ...and help migrants in the English class...'p165

Tett and Mclachlan (2007) argued that increases in social activity and networking, reported by learners, had been developed through being at the centre of a range of new networks in relation to their tutors, other staff and fellow students. This "led to more engagement locally." The study stressed an important point that we shall return to later in this paper:

Learning and its benefits are dynamic and a number of positive changes in learners' lives are illustrated to show the impact of participation in literacies learning.³⁷

4 How does adult learning help citizens become more active in civil society and political life, more tolerant of diversity and more aware of environmental issues?

Some research sources identified how part of building social capital included building cohesion and developing tolerance through contact between diverse cultural and ethnic groups. The wider benefits of further education, studied by Preston and Hammond³⁸, indicated that further education appears to be

³⁵ http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace_en/files/resources/Catching-Confidence-Final-Report.pdf accessed March 2017

³⁶ Furlong, T and Yasukawa, K (eds), 2016, *Resilience; stories of adult learning* Derby, RAPAL

³⁷ Tett, Lyn and Maclachlan, Kathy (2007) *Adult literacy and numeracy, social capital, learner identities and self-confidence*. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39 (2). pp. 150-167.

³⁸ Preston, J and Hammond, C, 2002, *The Wider benefits of Further Education; practitioner views*, London, Institute of Education

effective in bridging differences between ethnic groups and different ages. They suggested that this leads to greater tolerance, cultural development and fosters 'community esteem'.

A later study of an overview of research into the wider benefits of learning found that the development of social capital was a highly significant outcome.³⁹

Drawing on studies from different countries and contexts the work revealed how greater community cohesion, tolerance and trust was created as a result of learning with people from different backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds or religious faiths. Similarly, the recent WEA report⁴⁰ indicated that 81% of participants said that, as a result of joining in learning, they mixed with people of different backgrounds and cultures. This indicates how learning, not necessarily primarily designed for such purposes, helped to contribute to social cohesion. Such outcomes were also recorded by Feinstein et al (2008); Schuller et al (2009); GRALE III (2016) and ARAD (2016), suggesting that understanding difference and living positively with diversity and developing tolerance and trust were, for many people, results of participation in learning.

Delors argued that adult learning helps to equip us for an active community, civil and political life, or to better live together. There are a number of studies and projects that look at impact in this arena. The Eden project research director reported: "Getting to know your neighbours through an initiative like The Big Lunch will bring you joy and happiness and will also help save you and the UK money."⁴¹ The Eden Project's impact report stressed the importance of community engagement, involvement, getting to know your neighbours, neighbourhood watch, local litter picks, community lunches and teas, indicating that this equates to £55.5bn in welfare terms and £18.1bn to the macro economy improving UKGDP by 1%.

The 2016 The Casey Review, which looked into opportunity and integration in the UK stressed that "English language is a common denominator in ensuring everyone is able to speak English, [and] enjoys strong public support." Based on the attitude surveys undertaken as part of its evidence gathering, it concluded that "lack of English skills presents a clear barrier to social and economic mobility" and therefore:

³⁹ Centre for Research on Wider Benefits of Learning, *The Wider Benefits of Learning: learning and community vitality*, 2011, Germany, Bertelsmann Stiftung, for European Lifelong Learning Indicators (ELLI)

⁴⁰ WEA Adult Education Impact Report, 2016, Improving Lives and Communities through Learning, London, WEA

⁴¹ <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/connectedcommunities>
accessed Feb 2017

There is an impact on community cohesion and integration: 95% of people living in this country think that to be considered “truly British” you must be able to speak English (up from 86% in 2003) and 87% of people with English as their main language felt they belonged strongly to Britain compared to 79% of people without.⁴²

This is not an uncontested view among those practitioners that work with second language learners, particularly in the field of participatory ESOL. Bryers and Winstanley (2016) stress the importance of learners’ defining their learning outcomes, which may not assert the primacy of English language acquisition. The role of educators is to empower learners to challenge the views of others such as those cited in the Casey Review.

Mayo and Annette (2010)⁴³ explored the link between adult learning and citizenship, citing capacity building programmes in voluntary and community organisations; training and development of volunteers; as well as volunteer outcomes related to self-confidence and personal growth. The WEA impact study 2016 reported a 31% increase in learners’ interest in local and national affairs; 20% had taken part in a campaign for the first time; 15% had contacted local or national authorities; 4% joined a Trades Union or political party. 21% of participants began voluntary activities; 55% reported gaining skills to help with volunteering, and of these 87% were speakers of other languages and 71% were on benefits.⁴⁴

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) published a summary leaflet⁴⁵, on the importance of adult learning, which included an analysis of the impact of learning on voting in political elections. The European Social Survey finds a strong and consistent positive relationship between years of education and an interest in politics. Every additional year of education, in general, raises the likelihood of voting in national elections by 3%. EAEA indicated that those adults who participate in one or two courses are 13 % more likely to vote. Adult learning certainly does appear to foster an increase in active citizenship. The OECD *Survey of Adult Skills* also found that those with higher levels of literacy are more likely to have higher levels of political efficacy and are more likely to participate in volunteering activities.

⁴² Casey, L. 2016 *The Casey Review A review into opportunity and integration*, London, Department for Communities and Local Government

⁴³ Mayo, M and Annette, J, *Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship, and beyond*, 2010, Leicester, NIACE

⁴⁴ WEA Adult Education Impact Report, 2016, *Improving Lives and Communities through Learning* London, WEA

⁴⁵ On-line leaflet EAEA, Why is adult learning important? <http://www.eaea.org/media/policy-advocacy/adult-education-in-times-of-crisis/2013-why-is-ae-important-leaflet.pdf>

5. How does adult learning promote cultural development, from the arts to spirituality, helping citizens become well-rounded and resourceful in shaping their societies?

A former UK Secretary of State responsible for adult education in England once said that tax payers' money should be directed to learning which led to employment and qualifications suggesting that plumbing and engineering were more important than Pilates or flower-arranging.⁴⁶ Such prioritization - although it is not atypical of UK government thinking in recent years - suggests a lack of understanding of how arts and cultural activities, offered in community locations, can be, not only ways to fulfil human potential, build social capital, contribute to community cohesion, but also lead to economic and financial outcomes.

As Jane Thompson (2002) noted the word 'culture' is often used in two ways: a reflection of beliefs and values; and the arts. In designing this type of provision, learners should be regarded as social actors and not empty vessels to be filled.⁴⁷ These dimensions are intertwined; art, crafts, drama and music often emerge from and are expressions of belief and value systems as well as custom and tradition.

A number of case studies have been presented over the years of how, for example, a flower-arranging course could lead to establishing a 'blooming' floristry business. The current state of evidence makes it difficult to say whether a keep fit or Pilates class means someone is fitter for personal, family or work purposes. Or if participation in a dress-making class leads to an 'haut-couture' business. The problems of 'intention' and 'attribution' are nowhere more stark than in the area of cultural development. However, individual testimony has indicated that, for some people, the initial motivations and intentions to learn can, subsequently, develop into something more ambitious, profound and of greater impact. This indicates how, what appears to be learning for pleasure and leisure and often placed in a 'hobby' or 'entertainment' box, should be valued for the enormous but unpredictable potential identified.

The Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) demonstrated how informal, arts and cultural learning opportunities are often ways to attract, encourage and support people into learning who believed they were not capable of achieving.⁴⁸ Such courses were regarded by participants as less threatening than vocational training programmes, when delivered in local venues, often by

⁴⁶ Macleod, D, 2006, Johnson: Fund more plumbing and less Pilates, Guardian, 7th June 2006

⁴⁷ Thompson, J, 2002, *Bread and Roses: Arts, Culture and Lifelong Learning*, Leicester, NIACE

⁴⁸ NIACE, 2002, *On the Case; Studies from the Adult and Community Learning Fund*, Leicester, NIACE

someone known in that community; they offered ways of opening doors to further learning. The evaluation showed these were closely linked with more inclusive practices, where arts activities, such as particular forms of tailoring, carving, painting or music reflected a particular culture or tradition, encouraged participation amongst minority communities, opened up cultural awareness to others and foster understanding. Arts and cultural learning can be ways of supporting steps to other, sometimes vocational, forms of learning and a necessary foundation for more focused skills agendas.

Participation in community arts initiatives, funded by the Adult and Community Learning Fund, identified how people were drawn into learning through such activities as creating a community tapestry, erecting a village 'totem' or replicating a modern version of the Domesday Book. Many of them discovered new interests, new skills and knowledge as well as new friends; many progressed to further learning.⁴⁹

Whilst the social and community outcomes of learning 'the arts' are demonstrable, there are, arguably, more profound reasons for participation in learning. GRALE III showed that 'cultural learning' was reflected in a huge diversity of settings where it allowed people to connect emotionally and was particularly effective with older learners in enhancing quality of life. (2016:109). The GRALE report also refers to the work of Innocent (2010) for the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning on how neutral, non-hierarchical spaces such as museums can promote understanding and intergenerational learning, in particular. Similarly, libraries can provide resources for self-directed learning and spaces for self-organised groups to meet. Similarly, Thompson distinguishes between learning spaces (such as libraries) and learning providers (who may utilise those spaces).⁵⁰

The WEA Long term impact study (undertaken in 2013) looked at the impact that WEA courses have on increasing cultural participation and sustaining behavioural change. It found there was a longer-term impact of learning on cultural participation:

In their free time, most of the students read (93 percent), listen to music or play a musical instrument (87 percent), exercise (76 percent), go to cinema, theatre or concerts (82 percent), visit museums or other historic sites (83 percent) and engage in arts and crafts (49 percent). Twenty-seven percent of students also claim that they do any of these things more frequently than last year. This is evident from comparison with last year's data, when 83 percent of students read, 71 percent listened to music, 61 percent exercised, 67 percent went to cinema or

⁴⁹ Tyers C, Aston, J, Institute for Employment Studies, 2002, *Impact of the Adult and Community Learning Fund*, IES

⁵⁰ Thompson, J, 2002, *Bread and Roses: Arts, Culture and Lifelong Learning*, Leicester, NIACE

theatre, 63 percent went to museums, and 40 percent did arts and crafts. In total 44 percent of students reported that they started doing more cultural activities in their spare time as a result of their courses during the wave 1 study. The majority (58 percent) of these students also continued doing these things at that frequency 18 months after.⁵¹

The 2016 WEA Impact Survey also provided evidence that informal learning-including arts – leads to increased social capital, confidence and active citizenship. It states;

The Government recognises that informal adult learning contributes to other Government policies by improving people's (especially older people's) health and wellbeing, ability to access digital technologies, cultural development and active citizenship, all of which can potentially decrease burden on public finances.

The report found 77% of learners were encouraged to do more cultural activities as a result of learning.⁵²

Fegan identified the importance of community arts by quoting the Arts Council of England:

Being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people's lives. This is true not just for individuals, but also for neighbourhoods, communities, regions and entire generations, whose sense of identity and purpose can be changed through art. (Arts Council of England, *Ambitions for the arts*, 2002)⁵³

Fegan cites many examples of arts learning activities, which involve people from diverse ethnic community backgrounds and in different community locations. He argues that people are more likely to take part in their local community if they are involved in activities they enjoy and that have demonstrable results. Fegan lists how people learn with and from each other; build new knowledge and skills; get involved in participatory, interactive and creative activities which involve problem-solving and critical thinking. Arts activities are not only effective in attracting more and different people into learning but develop skills which are useful in work and in community engagement. The research summarises the impact of arts learning as being beneficial to individuals, neighbourhoods and communities.

⁵¹ Workers' Educational Association 2014 *Long term Impact of WEA Adult Education*. London: The Workers' Educational Association

⁵² accessed Feb 2017 <https://www.wea.org.uk/about-us/our-impact/2016-impact-report>

⁵³ Fegan, T, 2003, *Learning and Community Arts*, Leicester, NIACE

6 The implications for policy and practice in the UK, including the adult learning workforce

6.1 Assessment, measurement and concerns

If social and community outcomes are important, then ways of assessing and measuring them must be considered. The Social Impact Scotland website indicated that, when measuring, assessing or evaluating social impact, the focus should be on the results of an activity rather than the activity itself.⁵⁴ Fujiwara (2012) was able to cast light on the value of social outcomes by using a Wellbeing Valuation approach, to identify that not only does participation in adult learning improve social life and build relationships but has a value of £658 to the individual.⁵⁵ The evaluation of the Eden Project reported returns of £55.5bn in savings on welfare bills.

However, no matter how positive the social outcomes associated with adult learning, some sources indicate that the direct link between learning and social impact may not be so readily evidenced; the causal link appears difficult to identify. The BeLL project (2014) revealed that whilst mixed research methods (i.e. both quantitative and qualitative approaches) have been used in studies, randomised research investigations have not been carried out. BeLL suggests that research has revealed strong evidence of social interaction and the development of social networks, especially for people who have benefited least from prior education, but much of the evidence has been based on perception and not objective evidence⁵⁶.

Whilst similar concerns were expressed by Field (2005), in his blog on Social Capital and Lifelong Learning,⁵⁷ when he reported little systematic assessment and measurement of evidence, he acknowledged that there are sufficient indicators of a beneficial association between social capital and lifelong learning. In summary, it seems that whilst causal links are not easy to identify, there is sufficient evidence, from diverse studies, to suggest that participation in adult learning does lead to positive social outcomes.

Some adult educators may argue that it is better to 'get on with the day job' of delivering learning rather than measuring impact in areas of life where it is hard to attribute cause and effect. A counter argument, in times of public funding cuts, might be that providers need to know which learning has the

⁵⁴ Social Impact Scotland Website

<http://1068899683.n263075.test.prositehosting.co.uk/understanding-social-impact/what-is-social-impact/> accessed January 2017

⁵⁵ Fujiwara, D, 2012, Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning; An analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life; Leicester, NIACE

⁵⁶ Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency, 2014, Benefits of Lifelong Learning in Europe: Final Report, Brussels, Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency

⁵⁷ Field, J (2005), web-based, Social capital and lifelong learning; the encyclopedia of informal education, <http://infed.org/mobi/social-capital-and-lifelong-learning> accessed January 2018

most impact and where to target resources. Along with such decisions, work needs to be done looking into the potential impact of not having adult learning provision. Recently, research by the Centre for Economic and Business (2017) estimates the cost of disconnected communities but doesn't explicitly link learning to possible ways of addressing this.⁵⁸

David Hughes (2013) in his introduction to NIACE's work on the Wider Outcome Planning Tool⁵⁹ highlighted that:

The impact of adult education is messy, irregular and very personal. Our challenge is how we document this impact in a clear and systematic way that meets the needs of decision makers in these challenging times.

The approach sets a number of outcomes under various themes (physical health; mental health; family relationships; other social relationships; volunteering; employment/employability; learning; agency; other changes for individuals; changes for community; changes for organisations) and asks providers to look at these against particular target groups (such as older learners.)

More recently, Learning and Work Institute (2016-17) has been commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE)⁶⁰ to develop and trial a limited number of social metrics for Adult Education Budget (AEB) funded provision. These metrics could potentially sit alongside the existing Outcome-based Success Measures (which measure progression to employment and training).

It is envisaged that the social metrics project will support providers to better evidence the positive and wider outcomes of community learning. The project will work with providers to build on their existing processes, support them with using validated measurement tools and understand what practical support is required by providers in collecting, analysing and using this data to influence stakeholders and local commissioners.

L&W is working with six ACL providers who are testing a range of metrics on confidence & progression (two providers); empowerment (one); social relationships (one); and, health and wellbeing (two).

All pilots are being supported by L&W to use a number of validated tools with their learners to evidence the outcomes related to their selected social

⁵⁸ CEBR (2017) *The Cost of Disconnected Communities* (Executive Summary) via <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/sites/default/files/The%20Cost%20of%20Disconnected%20Communities%20Executive%20Summary%20-%20Eden%20Project%20Communities%20and%20Cebr.pdf>

⁵⁹ NIACE (2013) *Wider Outcomes Planning Tool*, NIACE, Leicester

⁶⁰ The UK Government Ministry of State responsible for adult learning in England

metric. These are now in process of being tested with their learners at the start of their selected community learning courses.

6.2 What sort of teaching and learning seems to optimize social outcomes amongst adult learners?

As we have seen earlier in this paper, any discussion of the most impactful approaches of delivering adult learning is highly context-specific. Approaches like the Citizens' Curriculum and participatory ESOL are based on starting from where the learners are and designing learning programmes collaboratively with them. Other research has focussed on existing qualification levels of potential students / participants, or their 'human capital.'

The Citizens' Curriculum pilot in Wirral reported that goal setting in particular "gets [learners] on a positive way of thinking straight away. Then when you're saying right, you're doing this next and doing that, they want to suck it up then and go yeah, yeah I'll do this". (2016: 40)⁶¹

Beer (2013) stresses the growing importance of co-design with learners. Adopting such a model 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.⁶² Jones and Dixon (2014) looked at the impact of certain types of learning with offenders. They found that 'personal social development learning' can act as a progression route to other learning. (2014: 6-7)⁶³

As Field and Tuckett (2016) acknowledge in their recent report for the UK Foresight Study on Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Qualitative research suggests that informal learning activities involving self-study and the pursuit of hobbies and interests are particularly important for older adults (Withnall 2009). This body of research focuses mainly on intentional learning. Incidental learning, defined as 'a by-product of some other activity' (Marsick and Watkins 2001), is little studied outside of the workplace, and remains poorly understood.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Stevenson, A., Robey, C., Downes, S, October 2016, *Citizens' Curriculum, Phase 2 project report*, L&W, Leicester

⁶² Beer, S. (2013) *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times*. Leicester, NIACE

⁶³ Jones, E. and Dixon, A (2014), *The Impact of Personal Social Development Learning for Offenders*, NIACE.

⁶⁴ Field, J and Tuckett, A. (2016) *Informal Learning in the Family and Community*, Government Office of Science Foresight Report

Evaluations of employee development that use informal and non-formal approaches (e.g. Ford's Employee Development Assistance Programme) have shown that those who left compulsory education with no/ low qualifications and received little or no subsequent learning often benefit from informal or non-work related programmes (Maguire and Horrocks, 1995).

The main message from the literature is that the most impactful approaches are those that involve the learner in their co-design and build on the capital they bring to the learning programme. This will vary due to a number of contextual factors that will determine motivation and course content: previous learning experience and qualifications; age and life-stage; geography and location.

6.3 Are adult learning and education teachers, tutors and facilitators equipped to help develop social outcomes?

There is relatively little research that addresses this question specifically. The current workforce picture across the UK is complex. In England, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) publishes annual data on the workforces in FE Colleges, Local Authority (LA) Adult and Community Learning and Work-based learning as well as those in the 3rd sector and private training providers.⁶⁵ These reflect the areas where the majority of adult learners might be found, but excludes Higher Education. In a nutshell FE college staff are younger than those in the other three sectors; 60% of their workforce is part time compared with LA and 3rd sector staff of 80%; and 66% are female compared with 74% in the other combined sectors. FE College staff are also better paid than their counter-parts in the other sectors. Analysis of these data suggests that the sectors which are most likely to have most influence on community learning and building social capacity, whether with particular groups of people or in identified neighbourhoods, is predominantly female, in part-time sessional employment and receives less pay than FE teachers.

In relation to qualifications, the ETF found that in LA sectors more than 60% of the workforce had a degree or higher and 75% had a teaching qualification or were working towards one. This suggests that the workforce is well qualified but providers reported having particular difficulties in finding staff to teach English, Maths, ESOL and ICT.

In relation to offering Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to equip such staff to be effective in supporting and optimising social and community outcomes, no data can be identified. There appear to be no recent records of the CPD which teachers in the LA sector have undertaken nor any surveys which ask for their developmental priorities.

⁶⁵ Frontier Economics: *FE workforce data 2014-15*, ETF; <http://www.etf-foundation.co.uk/research/workforce-data/fe-workforce-data-reports-2014-15/> accessed February 2017

There is evidence of CPD being offered in such places as the Institute of Education (at University College London)⁶⁶ and Northern College.⁶⁷ Individual institutional data might reveal more insight into the participants and the kind of CPD they accessed. Without accurate data, issues of access, entitlement, cost and equity across the workforce must be questioned as well as how the workforce shortages might be addressed. These shortage areas have been identified by UK government as skills priorities for the adult population.

Sharp (2010)⁶⁸ in her *Colleges in their Communities* inquiry report highlighted some of the issues in teacher training, particularly in relation to the additional roles played by, for example, link workers, in supporting access from community centres as well as in understanding the wider issues associated with learning for and with community purposes. Such challenges may have diminished with the demise of many College Community Learning Centres and the overall reduction in FE College staff over recent years. The ETF workforce report revealed a 9% decline in the number of staff in the sector, amounting to twelve thousand staff over a 3-year period. This has resulted in a total workforce of around two hundred and thirty-five thousand. Comparable diminution of the workforce in the combined LA, Private Training Provider and 3rd Sector Providers was guesstimated at a similar rate resulting in a total of seventy-one thousand, four hundred staff. Interestingly, data was only gathered for the FE College sector.

Such challenging data reflects the current public sector priorities on the development of skills for work and employment rather than a more holistic lifelong learning approach which embraces skills and social and community outcomes.

In Scotland, the adoption of a Community Learning and Development (CLD) approach⁶⁹, appears to be attempting to offer a more 'joined up', and less divisive sectoral, provision of opportunities, with an emphasis on communities. The policy is led by Education Scotland and includes youth work, adult learning, adult literacies and English for speakers of other languages. In particular, 'it supports the sector to build capacity to embed policy in practice through activities such as producing guidance, training opportunities and grant funding.'

The CLD Practitioners Website in Scotland declares that 'professional learning is key to the effectiveness of those who work in community learning

⁶⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/courses/short-courses-cpd>

⁶⁷ <http://www.northern.ac.uk/content/?id=37>

⁶⁸ Sharp, M, 2010, *Colleges in their Communities: A dynamic nucleus*, Leicester, NIACE and CFE

⁶⁹ <https://www.education.gov.scot/what-we-do/Supporting%20community%20learning%20and%20development> accessed March 2017

and development.’⁷⁰ Commitment to developing the adult learning sector to support learning in and with communities, is clear in the programme to develop future leaders in the sector.⁷¹

Teacher trainers have become interested in professionals’ role in promoting social justice alongside delivering what is largely still a centrally planned curriculum. Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2016) have mapped the decline in participation in adult learning alongside the disappearance of democratic learning spaces.

7 Questions for further discussion

The evidence cited and quoted in this stimulus paper indicates that many researchers and practitioners have identified multiple social benefits from adult learning and education. Many of these benefits link closely with both health outcomes (identified in other EAAL UK stimulus papers) and demonstrably with direct and indirect economic outcomes. The benefits identified relate to individuals, families and communities in all their diversity and meanings but also directly to the financial value placed upon them in savings to welfare benefits budgets as well as contributions to macro-economics. The biggest challenge would appear to be that of establishing the *causal impact* of learning on social and community gains. Without research, such as randomised controlled trials, this is not possible to establish with absolute certainty. However, as Field indicates, there is sufficient evidence to assert a strong link between all forms of learning and social and community benefits. And more recently, work by the WEA has asked learners to attribute the impact of their learning.

Yet policy-makers and commissioners are not just interested in the impact of adult learning as why it should make greater demand on funding than other interventions. Despite decreasing budgets and participation across the UK, we are still a relatively wealthy country. Moreover, we must ask whether investment in adult learning might be more economically effective in addressing issues relating to such issues as health, productivity in the work-place and community cohesion, than more expensive interventions, often post-problem identification. Our work on impact raises further specific questions about the use of that funding within education, and makes us ask what types of learning are the most impactful? And for which groups?

Sharing and addressing arising questions with practitioners, policy-makers and researchers could illuminate, challenge or add to the evidence

⁷⁰ ibid

⁷¹ <https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/DevelopingLeaders.pdf>

systematically gathered through the literature. Impact Forums and EPALE networks offer opportunities for such additional insights; their knowledge and experience could add to our understanding of the impact of adult learning on communities, in whatever ways they are defined.

What price will we pay for **not** 'learning to know, to do, to be and to live together?'

Stimulus questions:

Do the multiple understandings and definitions of adult learning and community learning help to reflect the range and diversity of learning opportunities or do they add to complexity and confusion? What descriptors or terminology should we use, especially when presenting our findings to wider audiences?

1. Why are outcomes relating to communities, social relationships and civic participation important? Should we identify these in more systematic ways and if so, how could we do this? Are these outcomes measurable?
2. Are there particular forms of learning, which seem to foster social and community outcomes? How might they be identified and advocated across the adult learning sectors?
3. Where adult educators are aware of the social and community impact of learning:
 - a. What do practitioners do to help optimize social outcomes?
 - b. Are these practices formalized or 'intuitive'?
 - c. Should these approaches be identified and shared widely?
 - d. What continuing professional development would help?

JE/ MR May 2017