

Celebrating Older Learners

Seminar Report

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Celebrating Older Learners

Foreword by John Healey MP, Adult Skills Minister, Department for Education and Skills

Celebrating Older Learners. That was the title of the seminar which took place in March.

Like my predecessor, Malcolm Wicks MP, I am keen to celebrate older learners. We started the process with the Learning in Later Life Campaign which drew attention to the learning achievements of older people, including gaining qualifications (sometimes for the first time), developing new knowledge and skills, even beginning a whole new career. And the campaign drew attention too to the health and social benefits of learning later in life: increased self-confidence, increased feelings of health and well-being, increased engagement with the community.

But we should be celebrating the achievements of practitioners too. Practitioners like you who are committed to providing high quality, relevant learning opportunities for older people. I am pleased that so many, from such a diverse range of organisations, were able to attend the seminar in March. The event gave an opportunity to exchange ideas about many innovative and exciting projects involving a range of different partners, and the discussion sessions also highlighted many valuable issues for further exploration by us all.

This report seeks to bring together the innovative and creative suggestions made at the seminar - I do hope you find it of value.

JOHN HEALEY MP

Introduction

Older people are interested in learning: the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) showed that 67 per cent and 47 per cent of those in the 50-59 and 60-69 age groups respectively are learners. And additional research (*Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact*) shows that those who participate in learning report a range of benefits:

- 58 per cent reported that learning improved their enjoyment of life;
- 56 per cent reported an improvement in their self-confidence; and
- 36 per cent that learning had helped them cope better with everyday life.

But the picture isn't entirely rosy: NALS shows that 21% of the 50 - 55 age group and 30% of the 60 -69 age group indicated that they were not interested in learning (higher percentages than for any other age group). And the numbers saying they feel 'too old to learn' increases by decade from aged 40 - 49 (12%), 50 - 59 (22%), 60 - 69 year olds (30%).

So, how can we help older people to tackle the barriers to learning they face? How can we ensure that learning opportunities offer older people what they want? And are we really sure that we know what they want?

Please turn to Part Two if you would like to go immediately to the good practice lessons and recommendations. The rest of Part One provides background on the Celebrating Older Learners Seminar.

Celebrating Older Learners Seminar

The Celebrating Older Learners seminar on 19 March 2001 sought to address some of these issues by an exploration of some of the learning activities underway across England. Specifically, the seminar provided an opportunity for delegates to discuss what works – and what doesn't - and to extract some of the key elements in successfully developing provision for older learners.

The seminar also provided a valuable opportunity for Government and the Learning

and Skills Council to hear and discuss practitioners' views about later life learning more generally.

Over 70 delegates attended the event, drawn from a range of organisations including further education colleges, voluntary organisations, Learning Partnerships and local authorities.

Seminar Feedback

The majority of seminar participants who responded described themselves as 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the event. Comments included: 'The whole day was very interesting...particularly the opportunity to network and hear about other projects'; 'A welcome opportunity to speak directly to someone from the Learning and Skills Council about the concerns of older learners'; and 'Good opportunity to hear about new ways of doing things'.

The majority of respondents also described the speakers and presenters as 'good'. Malcolm Wicks was rated particularly highly: several delegates described his input as 'excellent'.

The key criticism of the event was its length – several delegates thought that a full day event would have allowed more time for discussion and enabled everyone to hear about all four projects.

This report

This report is divided into two parts: Part One discusses the aim of the Celebrating Older Learners seminar and provides the text of the speeches given by Malcolm Wicks, Lifelong Learning Minister, and John Sharman, Learning and Skills Council. It also offers background information on the four projects which were presented at the event.

Part Two is based on the group and plenary discussion sessions where delegates sought to distil the essence of a successful project; and to extract the key lessons which others

might find useful in planning and running their own activities. Part Two translates the points made into a) good practice and b) recommendations.

Your views on this report

This report seeks to offer useful information, both for delegates who attended the Celebrating Older Learners seminar, and, more generally, for practitioners who work with older learners.

Your views on the report are welcome. Please send any comments to:

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Celebrating Older Learners: Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Lifelong Learning

NB: Mr Wicks began his speech with some personal, unscripted observations about ageing and made some spontaneous points as he spoke. The following represents the core text of his speech.

Introduction

I'd like to offer you a couple of quotations about age: 'I grow old ever learning many things.'; 'I'd like my old age to be my best performance'.

Those are quotes from Solon, the Athenian statesman who lived in 6th Century BC, and from Maurice Chevalier. How about that for a diverse start! Though Monsieur Chevalier also went on to admit 'I prefer old age to the alternative'.

I'd like to add one final quote: 'I shall probably be a student forever.' So Chekhov has one of his characters say in 'The Cherry Orchard'.

And that's the business we're all in, and why we're here today – to help older people to 'be students forever'. In other words, providing accessible, flexible, learning opportunities. Whether we work in a local authority, a college, a voluntary organisation, or in Government.

Specifically, we're here to explore **how** we can do **what** we do better.

We'll hear later from project leaders who are running a range of innovative activities. They may offer a perspective which sheds light on the activities we're involved with. We may be able to solve a problem, or offer an alternative approach to help them.

Above all, it's an opportunity to talk – and listen – to others who are committed to ensuring that lifelong learning really is available right through life. And I include Government, and myself, in that.

Celebrating older learners

Most of you are probably aware of my Learning in Later Life Campaign which ran last year. I've described it before as a piece of 'serious fun'.

Serious because of its key aim – to highlight the many benefits of learning later in life. Increased self-confidence and self esteem. Increased motivation. Increased feeling of participation in society. And fun because that's what all the winners, indeed all the entrants, were having. Fred Moore, for example. Our oldest learner – now aged 108 – who has been attending art classes for the past quarter of a century. And Emily May Butterfield, aged 94, who has tackled her lack of basic skills and is now researching Captain Cook via the Internet.

Inspirational quotes from the Campaign's application forms could quite easily fill up the rest of my time today. I'll restrain myself to just a handful:

'My life has blossomed since taking up learning'. 'Learning has kept me independent, active and mobile'. 'I've made many wonderful friends'. 'If you want to stay mentally alert, take part in learning'.

Success stories

So there are plenty of success stories. Plenty of older people who know the benefits learning brings to their lives. And who don't let a day go by without learning something new.

But for every one of those success stories there's someone else who thinks they're too old to learn. Who had a bad experience at school. Who wants to learn but can't find the right course or topic. Who simply feels that learning isn't for them.

We need to reach those people. Help them tackle the barriers to learning they face. Show them the range of learning opportunities open to them. Encourage them to get involved.

Cross-Government activity

Government has introduced many initiatives aimed at doing just that. Encouraging participation. Increasing access. But before I talk about specific initiatives, I'd like

to spend a few minutes talking about cross-Government activity. Because Government really is committed to better serving the needs of older people.

The Better Government for Older People programme, for example. You probably all know as much as I do about BGOP. Suffice to say, it's a unique partnership between central government, local government, the voluntary sector, the academic world and, importantly, older people themselves. And it's played a vital role in improving public services for older people.

And most of you will be aware of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Older People. The IMG aims to improve the quality of life for older people and enable them to have an effective voice.

I chair the IMG sub-group on lifelong learning and leisure. Working with colleagues in Cabinet Office, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security, we're taking forward a programme to promote and widen participation in learning and leisure activities by older people.

Many of the initiatives I'll be talking about today are open to adults of all ages. But the IMG is specifically working to ensure that older people take full advantage of those initiatives.

Learning and Skills Council

So, let's move on to talk about the specifics. You'll be hearing more about the Learning and Skills Council from John Sharman. But no discussion of lifelong learning is complete without at least one reference to it.

Because the Learning and Skills Council will be the major catalyst for change in learning. It will sweep away much of the complexity which has surrounded our post-compulsory education system. It will break down the barriers between vocational and non-vocational learning.

The 47 local Learning and Skills Councils will consult with their local communities –

including older people. To ensure that the learning provided locally is what the community actually wants.

Local authorities, of course, have a proud tradition of adult learning, reaching almost three million learners every year. They'll continue to play a key role in securing locally accessible, community-based learning opportunities.

And we're investing heavily to ensure they can fulfil that role. By 2002 - 03 funding for adult and community learning will be a record £167 million. Also new capital investment – starting with £16 million in 2002 - 03 – in local adult education facilities.

Paying for learning

Of course paying for learning can be hard. In fact it's one of the major barriers to learning for older people. Our Individual Learning Accounts are open to everyone and help people save especially for education and training. They offer a generous system of discounts too: 20% off the cost of most courses and 80% off some IT training. Over 740,000 Accounts have already been opened.

learndirect and UK online

What else? Our **learndirect** centres – now over 800 of them – give people the opportunity to learn in places which offer an alternative to traditional academic settings. Sports and shopping centres, football and rugby clubs, community centres, churches, railway stations and libraries.

And UK online centres will ensure that everyone in the UK who wants it, will have access to the Internet and IT skills – and will help make the UK one of the world's leading 'knowledge economies'.

We've made sure that older people are one of UK online's key target groups. The UK online centre based in Age Concern, Waltham Forest, for example, provides free ICT access and training to people over 50. And it provides outreach for those who are housebound or in residential care.

A broader conception of learning

We're also working to broaden people's conception of what we actually mean by lifelong learning – and hopefully stimulate them to take part in it.

We're working with museums, galleries and libraries to explore their potential to promote and support lifelong learning. For example, The Yorkshire Museums Council's 'Making Memories' project which uses a variety of approaches – focused round a museum collection, a historic house and a gallery - to reach older learners.

We're working with broadcasters like the BBC to help turn passive viewers into active learners. Older people seem to be particularly interested in history: 70 per cent of the over 55s according to a recent BBC survey. So we had a hand in the BBC's History 2000 programmes like *Meet The Ancestors* and Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*.

We're supporting and encouraging family learning. Which can be informal learning within the family, family members learning together or perhaps learning about family roles, relationships and responsibilities. And by 'family' of course, I don't just mean mums, dads and kids. I'm talking grandparents and other relatives too.

And specifically for older learners

And specifically for older people? Well, we're encouraging older people to take up learning, whether through the initiatives I've already discussed, or more traditional learning opportunities like further or higher education.

I hope you've seen our leaflet to encourage people to do just that. Copies have been distributed to a whole range of organisation – libraries, LEAs, learning partnerships to name just a few. We've also produced a guide for providers which offers a reminder of some of the special issues encountered by older learners. 1

Development work

We fund a range of development activities. This year, for example, we've a project with the Community Education Development Centre to develop and pilot a course to give older people the skills – and perhaps more importantly the confidence – to pass on their skills and knowledge to their peers.

And we're always keen to find new projects or ideas to develop. You may already have an idea for a project you think will really help engage older people in learning. Or something you hear today may spark off a thought.

Either way, my DfEE colleagues and I will be delighted to look at any proposals you might have.

Research

Running alongside the initiatives and policies is our research programme. Because you can't run the one without the other.

Recent research has included the *Learning in the Fourth Age* report, researched by NIACE on DfEE's behalf, which highlighted the health benefits of learning for older people in care settings.

And *Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact* explored the benefits – including increased self-esteem and self-confidence – that learning later in life can bring. ¹

Questions for today

And what about today? As I said earlier, today's an opportunity for discussion. To discover what others are doing. To explore what we can all learn from each other.

In your groups, you'll be asked to come up with some key lessons and good practice to benefit us all. Let me give you some questions to consider. How can we be more creative in our approach? How can we be more innovative? How can we better meet the needs of older learners? I look forward to hearing your conclusions.

¹ Details of how to obtain copies are available in the 'Further Reading and Useful Websites' section.

Older Learners & the Learning and Skills Council: John Sharman, LSC

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a new organisation – in fact you can sense the anticipation and excitement as we move closer to the start date now just a few days away!

The LSC has been carefully designed and developed by the Department for Education and Employment in close conjunction with a range of partners in the post 16 learning sector. The design work has been taking place over the past twelve months or so and in the final phase people like me have been brought in to work on site at the Coventry national office to add our own particular expertise. Putting in place systems, procedures and policy that will help ensure that the organisation is fully operational from day one.

My job is to develop the LSC's national equal opportunities strategy and to help the 47 local LSC offices develop and implement their own local strategies and action plans.

Learning to Succeed

Let me go back a little while to 1999 and the Learning to Succeed White Paper which introduced the concept of a new post 16 learning framework and the LSC. There was to be a bringing together of resources and experience of the Further Education Funding Council and its regional structure and the network of 72 locally based Training and Enterprise Councils covering the whole of England.

In simple terms the FEFC remit has been on funding and inspection of colleges and the TECs have operated through a network of work- based learning providers with a business/enterprise remit at local level. In terms of equality of opportunity the FE focus has been on inclusive learning and on widening participation. The TEC model has been strategic as well as locally focused. The challenge for us now is to learn from the good practice developed through both models and apply it to the new structure and the new structure has to be just that and the learner needs to be at the heart of it.

Remit letter

So what is the LSC expected to do? David Blunkett the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, wrote last November to the Chairman of the LSC, Bryan Sanderson, and described an ambitious vision for the LSC of **a learning society in which everyone has the opportunity to go as far as their talents and efforts will take them.**

The Council's first corporate plan will focus on strategies and plans to achieve the post 16 national learning targets and there is also an expectation that the LSC will draw up an equal opportunities strategy and action plan.

This strategy needs to be consulted on widely, including ethnic minority communities and groups representing gender, disability and age diversity interests.

The LSC has been asked to increase the demand for learning by adults and to increase the supply of flexible high quality opportunities to meet their needs. This includes provision for the growing proportion of older people.

The LSC structure

The LSC will be a national organisation and the highest policy making forum is the national council. The 47 local councils have the status of committees.

The National Council consists of 16 members representing all the major partner organisations involved in the planning and delivery of post 16 learning and skills.

The Council is advised by two statutory committees: the Young People and Learning Committee and the Adult Learning Committee.

The Adult Learning Committee (chaired by John Monks of the TUC) advises the Council on the achievement of national targets for adults and for organisations (including Investors in People where the Council intends to monitor performance particularly closely). This will include advice on widening participation, raising attainment levels and improving basic skills among adults.

The Committee will also advise on skills and workforce development strategy and on

relationships with the Employment Service, NTOs, other sectoral and economic bodies and the Small Business Service.

Lifelong learning

I want to say a little more about the economic and social benefits of lifelong learning. It is widely recognised that all of us will need to continually update and learn new skills if we are to remain productive and competitive in the labour market. However it is also being increasingly recognised that participation in learning has much wider benefits contributing to the health and social well-being of individuals and communities.

The Institute of Employment Studies published last year (Feb 2000) a report into *Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact*. The key findings strike me as very relevant to today's seminar.

- 80% of learners reported a positive impact of learning on at least one of the following areas: enjoyment of life; their self-confidence; how they felt about themselves; satisfaction with other areas of life and their ability to cope.
- 42% reported an improvement in their ability to stand up and be heard and their willingness to take responsibility, and
- 28% reported an increased involvement in social, community and voluntary activities as a result of learning

So what are the challenges for the LSC in meeting the needs of older learners?

We need to recognise that :

- attitudes about age are discriminatory and limit adult participation in learning - older people have an equal entitlement to access to learning which the LSC through its local providers must deliver,

- older women, elders from black and ethnic minority communities, those who are poor or working class and those who are frail or have learning difficulties or disabilities, have even less opportunity to access learning - we need to positively promote wider

participation in more and better learning opportunities to include those who have not benefited previously or who are currently excluded,

- the voice of older learners is often unheard or un-represented – LSC has to ensure that the views of potential older learners are voiced loudly in its consultations, committees and that their views shape policy and practice in the same way as louder more vocal groups,

-the learning process is currently focussed and funded to deliver formal and vocational provision – learning programmes should come in all shapes, sizes and venues, with equitable funding and equal value placed on informal and formal programmes. Finally I would like to leave you with a plea to get involved in the consultation process at local and national level. Older learners need to make their voices heard.

The LSC and local LSCs need to consult on their strategies and to work in partnership to achieve outcomes and objectives. Input into the local participation and learning strategies and not just EO strategies would be welcome. There will also be further consultations in the next few months on issues such as skills/workforce development.

I am conscious that the LSC needs to be creative and innovative about learning curricula – and we need to make sure that curricula meets the needs of older learners. The LSC is well aware that all types of learning and not just vocational learning do make a contribution to economic success and social inclusion.

I look forward to hearing more about the practical interventions in the rest of the day.

THE KEEPING ACTIVE PROJECT : West Berkshire area

The Keeping Active Project began as a three month pilot to reduce falls amongst the elderly in residential homes and day centres. This was to be achieved through providing physical and mental stimulation via a wide range of courses including Tai Chi, gentle seated exercises, pottery, flower arranging, reminiscence and diet and cookery.

Courses are now provided in two residential homes and five day centres through co-operation between West Berkshire Council (Social Services and Education), Berkshire Health Promotion and Newbury College. Over the past year courses have been taken to 123 new learners. The budget for the year has been found through matching a Health Prevention Grant with Lifelong Learning Standards Fund.

Some practical issues:

- Support from care staff is vital – and it is important for the tutors to be able to talk with the care staff about the clients' needs.
- Tutors must have experience of teaching older learners - and must be paid well.
- Use a co-ordinator who can act as a responsible link between the centres/homes. Lots of different tutors making links with often-changing care staff in homes and centres can be a recipe for chaos.
- Don't forget material costs. It is important for clients in adult learning classes to have something tangible as an outcome and this will have a cost.

Out of 123 new learners, 44 per cent completed a student satisfaction form to give feedback. 91 per cent thought that they had learned either 'greatly' or 'moderately' and 89 per cent found the quality of tuition 'excellent' or 'good'.

One group being taught Tai Chi exercises reported some interesting self-perceived benefits from even a short 6 week course. Health benefits had mainly 'no change' or 'slight improvement' whilst general well-being and confidence were 'much improved'

or 'improved' (over 60%).

Those who benefited from the project include 4th age learners in residential homes and day centres and tutors who learned how to cope with many frustrations including learners with poor memory or physical disabilities, unfamiliar environments and uncertain class sizes. They also found it stimulating to work with, and learn alongside, 4th age learners. Care staff learned how to follow through sessions with ideas and suggestions, whilst professionals in Education, Social Services and Health Promotion have learned about other professional 'languages' and 'concepts' and to work together in a multi-agency partnership.

LITTLE ACORN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: Irwell Valley Housing Association sheltered housing scheme, Salford

Tenants at the sheltered housing scheme – which was surrounded by an area of high unemployment and poor housing - had for some time been experiencing a feeling of isolation in their own community – many of their old neighbours had moved away, houses had proved difficult to sell, many being eventually boarded up or bought by private landlords for conversion into flats, leading to a transient population in the area. Even more worryingly, tenants were often the victims of theft, muggings, burglaries and robbery.

On taking up post at Peterloo Court, new scheme manager, Denise Nelson, made one of her first priorities to enlist the support of the local police force. With the installation of CCTV cameras and a good working arrangement with the local patch officers, arrests took place and a quieter period followed. The next step was to bring the 'feel good' factor back to the scheme and the local community.

A community lunch in the scheme, open to everyone, young and old, kicked things off. At the same time, the local high school decided to get involved in the Greater Manchester Police initiative Make a Difference, which challenges young people to make a difference in their own community. The links made at the community lunch proved invaluable for the activities which followed.

Community fund raising activities and a healthy living project fired enthusiasm. Tenants began to work with an organisation called Anti-Rust, taking part in weekly sessions of Story Time Café – a forum where older people can pass on their life stories to children aged 8-10 from local primary schools. Tenants also started to work with the Year 10 drama group where pupils taped, edited and transcribed what was said at reminiscence classes, making the events into a play that was performed both at school and at the scheme.

Next, tenants began work on a wall hanging depicting life from 1900-2000, looking at the differences in living conditions and life styles. One afternoon a week, between 10-15 people went 'back to school' to get involved in a range of activities including computer-aided design, stippling, beadwork and stencilling. The project entered and won the GOSH competition being awarded £1,000 of working capital, match funded by IVHA.

Since conception, the project has continued to gain momentum. Participants have evolved with the project: the majority achieving a sense of personal development. And in the future? The project is now able to pay for expertise and employ a teacher for half a day a week and the group are working together to produce a book detailing their experiences in Salford during the war years. The project has recently applied for an Age Concern Millennium Grant for £10,000 to develop the project even further.

THE PLAY'S THE THING: Partnership project between Fircroft College, Women and Theatre Company, Birmingham Health Authority & Dudley Priority Health

The Play's the Thing uses drama to raise issues about education and social exclusion. It is responsive and designed to meet the educational needs it identifies wherever possible. Funded by DFEE and managed by NIACE through the Adult and Community Learning Fund, it ran for two and a half years. The project was completed in April 2001.

The project had three key aims:

- to raise issues about the barriers to education experienced by certain social groups by performing well-researched plays to audiences in health and community contexts;
- to record all post-play discussions about barriers to education as data for Needs Assessments studies; and
- to include all partners in the design of appropriate follow-up provision to meet some of the needs identified.

In the first phase of the project the target audience was women who have become socially excluded. A play, *Christine Goes To the Doctors*, was performed in health and community contexts, and courses were designed from the needs identified in the post play discussions.

Four residential courses and seven non-residential events were delivered at Fircroft College in 1999/2000 to fifty participants from the audience groups, which included many single parents and women who had experienced domestic violence. The courses were very successful, and all groups made return visits to attend other courses at the College. 20 per cent of participants have now enrolled for full or part-time Access courses.

Further target audiences amongst socially excluded groups were identified, including people with mental health difficulties; older Asian women and the homeless. Theatre company and College personnel researched the educational barriers experienced by these groups, from which they wrote three powerful plays. Performances were placed in contexts which were appropriate to the group, and the model was then repeated in which needs were identified and a response designed.

In the second phase the partners decided that the most useful response was to organise another tour of the plays to FE staff and college students to help them understand what happens when these groups try to take up mainstream educational opportunities. Student and staff opinions on the subjects raised are currently being reviewed, but already the staff response has been so positive that another tour of the play which focused on mental health difficulties is being arranged for staff development after the completion of the project.

PUTTING THE GROWTH INTO GROWING OLDER: North Tyneside

Age Concern's Community and Outreach Team, established 4 years ago, has built up a varied community-based programme of activities and learning opportunities for older people across the borough. The team is made up of a volunteer co-ordinator, a community worker, an activities organiser, an admin support worker, about 25 volunteers and a team manager. Between them they run a variety of physical activities, arts projects, introductory IT sessions, and college based courses, just a few of which are discussed below.

The ***IT for All*** project started in 1999 with a team of four volunteers offering introductory ICT sessions on a one-to-one basis using 'Computers Don't Bite' and 'WebWise'. The initial demand was overwhelming – it took the volunteers about six months to fit into sessions all those who phoned up in the first couple of weeks after the launch (through Radio Newcastle) and there is still a steady takeup. This has now grown to a team of seven volunteers who provide twelve weekly sessions plus the ***cyberCHATclub*** afternoon when people can practice and extend their skills as well as share troubleshooting tips. An outreach programme is now being developed with the help of New Opportunities Fund/ICT funding and volunteers will soon be taking their expertise out to day centres, sheltered housing and other community venues.

Wider involvement in lifelong learning has come through a different route – contact with two local colleges through having a community worker and activities organiser based on their premises. Over the past three years taster sessions have been held at one college in a variety of subjects including drama, textiles, flower arranging and IT, a ten week print-based course has been held at the other, and in July-August 2000 a Summer School took place at one of the colleges. This offered courses one day a week for six weeks in mixed textile techniques, IT, photography and use of the gym. In conjunction with one of the colleges we have also designed a new course for people who just want to use their computers at home (rather than for employment purposes). Called 'Computers for Living' it covers file management, word processing, desk top publishing, email and the internet.

Physical activity and involvement in arts projects also involves learning. Tai Chi is

particularly popular. Requiring a great deal of learning to remember the sequences, it is not only good for physical health but increases concentration and self-confidence. Similarly, chair yoga, movement to music, line dancing and swimming sessions all involve learning new skills and generate the confidence to move on to other new learning situations. Arts projects provide an opportunity for creative expression which many older people have never had before. Currently a 'Year of the Artist' dance, music and video project is running in a residential home and a visual arts and creative writing project will be starting soon in a day centre.

Good Practice

- Ensure that on-going quality evaluation is built into all learning provision.
- Embed older learners' provision into the mainstream. Too often activities are run simply because a specific individual is interested in working with older learners – and if he or she leaves, the provision leaves too.
- Provide staff development for those who support tutors. This is of particular importance in care and residential settings, to ensure that staff are aware of the importance of learning activities for older people – and the need to stick to a learning schedule.
- Don't try and do it on your own! Work with partners and other agencies – in particular you may find it useful to engage the voluntary sector – they're often the innovators – and find ways of sharing resources and linking provision.
- Consult with older learners – and prospective learners – to find out what they want. Don't try and impose what you think they want!
- Don't presume that all older people want to learn with their peer group. Some undoubtedly feel most comfortable with people of their own age – but others may welcome the chance to learn with younger people.
- Offer one-off taster sessions – preferably free - on a non-commitment basis to build confidence and stimulate interest.
- Wherever possible, offer learners the option of gaining a qualification from the course they're taking – but don't penalise those who don't want to.
- Offer provision which is flexible and tailor-made: it is important that older learners can explore their own interests rather than being restricted to certain regimented courses. For example, an information technology course which

focuses on the basics which older people can use everyday – how to e-mail grandchildren, how to surf the Internet, how to word process a letter.

- Acknowledge that ‘learning’ is only one part of a learning activity. The opportunity to socialise and make friends is just as important – often more so – than the learning itself.
- Be innovative - break away from traditional learning settings and traditional expectations that the learner will come to the learning. Instead take learning to the learners.
- Think creatively about where and how you can offer learning activities, and which partners you can involve. For example, consider working with ‘alternative’ learning providers such as theatres, libraries, museums and art galleries.
- Consider setting up a learning satellite or ‘one-stop shop’: a single, accessible location where people can go for advice on what learning opportunities are open to them e.g.: local GPs surgery or library.
- Recognise that ethnic minority learners – and tutors who work with them - will need additional support, e.g.: translation services, both for learners themselves and for learning materials, training for staff which takes account of particular sensitivities for ethnic minorities etc.
- Think about the physical issues faced by older learners: some may have hearing and sight problems which provision will need to address, e.g.: large print materials, specialist software for IT learning etc.
- Share your successes! Think about telling your local newspaper, TV or radio about what you and your older learners have achieved. This might attract more learners to the activities you’re offering, or stimulate prospective partners to approach you.

Recommendations

- The **Government**, in particular the Department for Education and Skills (formerly the DfEE) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, should encourage more 'alternative' learning providers such as theatres, museums, libraries, galleries to provide learning activities for older people.
- **Providers** should endeavour to build links with local 'alternative' learning providers and encourage them to provide learning activities for older people.
- The **Learning and Skills Council** should consider mapping existing learning provision and ensure that provision – and funding - builds on what is already in existence.
- **Providers** should engage with their local Learning and Skills Council and Learning Partnership to make them aware of the needs of older learners in your area and encourage them to provide funding for later life learning activities.
- **Providers** should endeavour to build consultation with older people into their provision planning processes.
- The **Government** and the **Learning and Skills Council** should consider how it can make more effective use of the media, both to stimulate interest in learning and to make people aware of the learning opportunities available to them.
- The **Government** and **NIACE** should consider how the impact of Adult Learners' Week can be increased to 'make it as successful as Red Nose Day'!
- **Providers** should ensure that on-going quality evaluation is built into all learning activities.
- Local **Learning and Skills Councils** should consider setting up 'satellites': a single place where people can go for information on the learning opportunities

available to them. These could be located in GPs surgeries, libraries, anywhere easily accessible by local people.

- **Providers** should acknowledge the special issues faced by ethnic minority learners and build support into learning provision accordingly, e.g.: translation services for learners and materials, appropriate staff training etc.

Further reading and useful websites

The following lists a number of publications and websites which may be of interest to you:

- *Learning in Later Life: A Guidance Note for Learning Providers and Supporters* (ref: LLL2)
- *Learning in Later Life* (leaflet aimed at prospective learners, ref: LLL1)
- *Fourth Age Learning Report* (ref: 4ALR, also available in a summary version, ref: 4ALRSUM)
- *Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact* (DfEE research brief, ref: RB183)

All publications listed above can be obtained free of charge by calling 0845 60 222 60 and quoting the relevant reference number.

- www.dfes.gov.uk (Provides information on all aspects of the Department for Education and Employment's work)
- www.lifelonglearning.dfee.gov.uk (The Lifelong Learning website provides information and links on the range of lifelong learning initiatives)
- www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk (Provides information on the BGOP network, including how to become a member)
- www.lsc.gov.uk (The website of the Learning and Skills Council)
- www.niace.org.uk (National Institute for Adult Continuing Education. The Information Services section offers a range of information including briefing sheets and potential funding sources for organisations)
- www.culture.gov.uk (Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Includes information on DCMS' support for education in museums and libraries)
- www.doh.gov.uk (The Department of Health website provides access to a wide range of publications, policy and guidance)
- www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk (The Issues across Government section on the Cabinet Office website provides a range of information including about BGOP and the Inter-Ministerial Group on Older People)



CELEBRATING OLDER LEARNERS: A SEMINAR FOR PRACTITIONERS

**Radisson Marlborough Hotel
Bloomsbury Street
London WC1B 3QD**

Monday, 19th March 2001

Programme

10:00 – 10:30 Registration. Coffee/Tea available.

10:30 Welcome.
Celebrating Older Learners

Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Lifelong Learning

10:50 Older Learners and The Learning and Skills Council

John Sharman, Equal Opportunities Manager, Learning and Skills Council

11:00 Learning From Each Other

In two groups, a series of short presentations and discussion, with a focus on good practice.

Group A

Facilitator: Jim Soulsby, NIACE

i) 4th Age Learning in Residential Homes and Day Centres

**Chris Minter
Lifelong Learning Project Officer
West Berkshire Council**

ii) The Play's The Thing
**Polly Wright
Fircroft College, Birmingham**

Group B

Facilitator: John Seymour, DfEE

i) Little Acorn Community Development Project

**Denise Nelson
Sheltered Housing Services
Manager, Salford**

ii) Putting the 'growth' into Growing Older
**Penny Remfry
Development Officer
Age Concern North Tyneside**

12: 20 Learning From Today

Plenary discussion, focusing on the key lessons/points each of us will take away from today and action points for the future.

13: 00 Lunch and Close