Through Inclusion to Excellence: Learners, Learning, Listening and Letting Go...

A literature review of NIACE’s published and unpublished materials, between 1996 and 2004, in relation to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, performed by Viv Berkeley

Commissioned by the Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the LSC’s Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector

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Of interest to the further education system, researchers and academics
The Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC’s) Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector commissioned the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to review its published and unpublished literature in relation to this cohort of learners. This document reports the findings of that review.

Further information
For further information, please contact:

Learning and Skills Council
National Office
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

www.lsc.gov.uk

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Dr Peter Lavender – Director for Research, Development and Information

Preeti Parmar – Secretarial Assistant, Health and Disability Equality

Sue Rees – Administrative Secretary, Health and Disability Equality
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Paragraph number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Themes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-agency and collaborative working</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning that promotes health improvement</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to learners</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Skills for Life agenda</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners who miss out</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing and length of courses</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-learning</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

1. As part of the strategic review of the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC’s) planning and funding of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the post-16 learning and skills sector, the Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the LSC’s Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector (the Steering Group) commissioned NIACE to review its published and unpublished literature in relation to this cohort of learners. At its inaugural meeting, the Steering Group stated that the review should build and move on from the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996). With this in mind, this review of the literature takes account of material produced by NIACE between September 1996 and November 2004. It does not include documentation from this date to that of the publication of the report, as the literature review was designed to inform the first stage of the review process.

2. The focus was to centre on three key questions:

   • What practices should be kept and built upon in developing provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
   • What barriers and gaps are currently present in provision?
   • What solutions and plans are required to address these problems or to implement successful practice more widely?

Methodology

3. The following methods to gather information were used:

   • A search of the NIACE website was conducted.
   • Many of the Adult and Community Learning Fund projects that focused on adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were analysed for both critical success factors and barriers that were encountered within each project.
   • The NIACE response to consultation documents was examined.
   • A search of NIACE publications was undertaken.
   • Unpublished work produced by NIACE was also reviewed.

4. This report summarises the work NIACE has conducted in relation to this cohort of learners. For a wider review of the literature, please refer to the literature review conducted by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (now the Learning and Skills Network or LSN) (Faraday et al, 2007).

5. Many of the unpublished findings come from the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) projects. The ACLF was created as the Government’s attempt to support and enhance participation in adult learning. It ran for six years, totalled £30 million, and provided national exemplars on widening participation. A wide range of providers could bid for the fund and strong encouragement was given to forming partnerships using the strengths of the voluntary and community groups, together with the services of traditional providers such as colleges. NIACE and the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) managed the fund for the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), with NIACE managing a total of 320 projects during the 6 rounds.
Summary of Findings

The key findings are as follows.

- There is evidence of collaborative working between organisations. However, this continues to be problematic. Much needs to be done to promote effective partnership working.

- Although there is a growing awareness of the needs of learners with mental health difficulties, these learners continue to be stigmatised.

- NIACE has a growing evidence base to suggest the powerful benefits of learning to people’s lives, such as those of improved health and enhanced self-esteem.

- There is increasing evidence to suggest that learners have been given a voice. This work, however, needs to be encouraged, especially in the light of the current emphasis on organisations working in person-centred ways.

- There is much confusion in relation to funding. Evidence suggests that providers are using the Skills for Life agenda as a means of securing provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, just because of the funding it attracts.

- There is an emerging belief that the timing and length of courses are impeding learners and that new models of provision need to be encouraged. These new models should give the learner greater choice and, it is hoped, greater autonomy.

- Progression continues to be an issue. Successful programmes seem to build it in from the outset. Worryingly, there are still learners who are attending the same course year after year, without apparent progression.

- Evidence suggests that the continuing problem of transport impacts greatly on some learners’ lives.

- There is some evidence to suggest that e-learning and access to ICT is improving for many learners. One of the benefits of introducing e-learning in smaller organisations has been the discovery of a wealth of hitherto unrecognised potential in staff. This can only be advantageous for learners, as staff share their experience and knowledge with them.
Emerging Themes

Inter-agency and collaborative working

7 The need for inter-agency and collaborative working is well documented (Sutcliffe and Jacobsen, 1998; Jacobsen, 2002; James, 2002; James and Nightingale, 2004). James (2004) believes ‘the strength of our collaborative working impacts on what we can offer individuals’. NIACE (2004) called for learning providers:

to ensure that the needs of people with learning disabilities are addressed within current and future partnership arrangements.

8 NIACE (2003a) in Briefing Sheet 36 stated that:

Greater collaboration between agencies will mean that education has to define more clearly what precisely it is that education can offer to people with learning difficulties.

9 A common theme running throughout the ACLF projects is that of partnership working, as in the following examples.

- In the Healing Arts Project (September 2003: for learners with mental health and/or emotional difficulties) partnership work was believed to be one of its greatest strengths.

- For the Creative Links Project (July 2004: for learners with mental health difficulties) ‘effective partnership working, working with the right partners and having a shared vision’ were cited as crucial factors in its success.

- Scope managed the Value in the Community project (October 2003: for learners with learning difficulties) and saw the ‘rich variety of opportunities available via partnership working and delivery’ as being of benefit to its learners.

- From the start of its project the Strathcona Theatre Company (April 2000: for learners with learning difficulties) actively recruited a partnership organisation that could offer sustainability once the project money had run out.

10 Much remains to be done, however, to encourage effective partnership working. Whilst the above examples are good, there are instances when partnership working has not been without its tensions. For example, Interactive Development Ltd (May 2004: for learners with severe and complex learning difficulties) had issues with its partners throughout the project, including the following.

- Key staff left each partner organisation and were not replaced.

- There was no ownership of the project at management level.

- Partners showed little commitment to the project.

- One partnership organisation tried to manipulate the project to suit its own agenda, and when this failed it did its best to discredit the work of the project.

- Another partner failed to support Interactive Development Ltd (Interactive) in finding suitable volunteers.
11 In its evaluation report, Interactive says:

This experience has made us appreciate the difficulties of working in partnership with other organisations who might not be as committed or share the same ideals as ourselves and has identified the pitfalls inherent in relying on individuals in partner organisations who may not always be around to fight your corner.

12 In Briefing Sheet 37 for the learning disability partnership boards, NIACE (2003b) stated that ‘provision for people with learning difficulties is often less effective than it could be because of a lack of planning based on a collaborative, interagency approach’. Maudslay and Nightingale (2004) noted ‘that there needs to be far more opportunity for sharing between different agencies’.

Key issues

13 Sharing information and working in partnership allow learners to have a more coherent programme of learning. The question needs to be asked, ‘How do learning providers share information, such as learner targets, not just between agencies but among themselves, and in doing so start to build effective partnerships that put learners’ needs first?’

14 This search of the literature demonstrates the need for development work in this area. Just as inclusiveness is a ‘larger and prior concept to integration’ (FEFC, 1996), the same could be said of sharing and partnership. Getting the sharing aspect correct within each organisation would go a long way towards setting the foundations for effective inter-agency collaboration. Therefore, there is a need to:

- look at the barriers within organisations that prohibit sharing and prevent the learner from having a truly inclusive learning experience
- consider how sharing information translates into best practice for effective partnership work.

Learning that promotes health improvement

15 James (2001) considers learning that promotes health improvement for those with mental health difficulties to be a growing area of work. In her ground-breaking study *Prescribing Learning*, James describes how learning advisors are placed in health centres to enable any member of staff there to refer individuals to discuss with them whether they want to access learning. A health visitor from Gloucester wrote:

The Learning for Life project offers our patients the chance to increase their confidence and self-esteem, and has resulted in many happier individuals, especially those who go on to achieve a qualification. The ‘buzz’ they get from their achievement has supported some people into employment and/or further study.

16 James (2001) believes there are lessons to be learned by education providers from this work. These are that the learning:

- is person-centred and individualised, thus allowing for the diversity of learners’ needs
- should not be time-limited
- has guidance that may involve something practical, such as taking the learner to visit a learning situation.

17 Aldridge and Lavender (1999) found participation in learning had a definite impact on health and well-being. In their survey of successful learners, they found that 89 per cent of respondents reported improvements in emotional and mental well-being from taking part in a learning activity. James (2003) believes that colleges have the potential to be places for health promotion because they have a history of adult and community learning to draw on. She states:

Traditions of adult and community learning are based on consultation, and learner-led curriculum which have resonance with health promotion as a vehicle for personal development, self directed change and empowerment.

18 Turner and Watters (2001), in a study of learning outcomes, told the story of a creative writing student who had spent many years in a psychiatric hospital. They described how ‘when he set off from home to his class he was proud to see himself as a student, he was no longer “just a dosser”’.

19 The literature points to a strong link between learning and health, which is borne out by the work of the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre. A number of the ACLF projects that targeted learners with mental health difficulties were
leisure- or arts based. Many learners want to learn for learning’s sake and are uninterested in attending basic skills or exam-based classes, the areas that attract most funding. Leisure courses are not a priority area for Government, yet the evidence indicates that it is these courses that are often a first step to learning for adults, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is this very provision that is ‘energising, life-enhancing, health-giving and career-building’ (Turner and Watters, 2001).

20 ‘People with mental health difficulties are known to be amongst the most stigmatised and socially excluded group in society’ (James, 2001). Of the ACLF projects in round 5, 16 per cent were health-related, including adults with poor mental health; 9 per cent of the projects in round 6 targeted adults with mental health difficulties. However, given all the work being undertaken in this area, ‘it is unclear how far we have come in improving access to learning’ (James, 2002) for these learners.

21 It is important that learning providers do not make incorrect assumptions about the type of learning they should provide for learners with mental health difficulties (James, 2001; Maher and Aitkinson, 2003). The Social Exclusion Unit (2004) believes that ‘potential learners can be constrained by low expectations, with some college and health and social care workers assuming that they cannot or do not want to access mainstream education’. It is interesting that the majority of the ACLF projects targeted at health improvement, including that of adults with mental health difficulties, were in the area of the arts.

22 In 2001, the NIACE–National Youth Agency (NYA) Young Adult Learning Partnership (YALP) conducted a survey of over 200 providers in both the formal and the informal learning sectors. Aylward and Smith (2003) revealed that only a small number of the responses to the survey gave examples of highly effective provision and that ‘the findings overwhelmingly indicated that despite awareness of increasing numbers of young adults with mental health difficulties, there was a lack of targeted provision for this group of learners and potential learners’. When asked why this might be the case providers cited:

- competing priorities
- lack of strategic partnerships in this area
- lack of knowledge and information.

23 NIACE (2002) Briefing Sheet 29 states that in order to be effective, learning should:

- focus on the needs of young adults themselves, and that the learning should be relevant to their lives
- be conducted in an accessible, safe and comfortable environment, away from the stigma and embarrassment often associated with mental health difficulties
- address the low self-confidence and negative self-perceptions experienced by many young adults
- offer access to a range of services, including one-to-one learning support, group work and counselling.

24 It would be reasonable to assume that the same factors could also apply to educational provision for adults with mental health difficulties. This search of the literature showed a gap in the evidence for ‘mentally disordered’ offenders. In the Reed Report (Chiswick, 1992) a ‘mentally disordered’ person was described as one who had broken the law. The term ‘mentally disordered offender’ was applied to adults in hospitals such as Rampton Hospital, and regional secure units.¹

25 In the search through the literature to 1994, it was evident that there was no reference to research conducted by NIACE in this area of work, although substantial evidence was given to the Reed Committee by NIACE and was cited in the many publications of the Committee. This does not indicate that such research is not taking place, but for the sector to have a true reflection of the situation, provision is worthy of further investigation.

**Key issues**

26 The key issues include the following.

- Working with offenders with mental health difficulties needs further investigation of the type and quality of provision being offered to them and of what support is being offered to staff.

¹The term ‘mentally disordered’ is not the definition chosen for use by NIACE or the post-16 learning sector. Its use in the particular research cited reflects dated terminology.
• We need to know if learning providers are making assumptions about what provision is suitable for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including learners with mental health difficulties.

• The voices of learners who have benefited from learning need to be heard and their stories told; in fact their stories can be the curriculum for others.

• Learning providers may need to look to creative solutions such as those suggested in Prescribing Learning as a model of best practice, and to think about how they might replicate them in their organisations.

Listening to learners

27 Maudslay and Nightingale (2004) found learning providers who believe that the ‘process of identifying learners’ hopes and aspirations has encouraged a more focused curriculum and influenced programme design’. This is further borne out in the evidence from the ACLF projects. There are some examples of good practice where it has been the learners who have decided the content of their course:

• The Homeloan Scheme (June 2004: for learners with disabilities whose access to ICT was adversely affected) believes that its programme was led by the needs of the learners. This was due to the fact that learners were being supported on a one-to-one basis and therefore teaching was highly individualised.

• Learning Links Visual Impairment Project (2004: for visually impaired learners) arose from a learning needs analysis of visually impaired people in Portsmouth. The conclusion drawn as a result of the questionnaire was that people were interested in learning ICT skills.

• Eldred (2004) gives voice to practitioners involved in the ACLF focus groups:

  Negotiate, discuss, listen!

  Leicester

  Build in time to talk to learners: listen to them and keep listening: you don’t know everything at the beginning.

  Manchester

  Make time for individuals’ feedback – tutorial time – this helps support.

  Manchester

28 There is growing evidence, exemplified below, to suggest that learners are being given a voice.

• NIACE sold 351 of its Training for Change packs. This pack supports disabled people to become trainers themselves.

• In one of the Wireless Outreach Network projects in 2004, some of the disabled learners participating in the project subsequently became trainers themselves.

• The Interactive Development Project (2004: for learners with severe and complex learning difficulties) engaged volunteers who had learning difficulties to work in a learning support capacity.

• The successful pack Living Our Lives (DfES, 2001), created to provide discussion materials for those learning literacy, contains the autobiographical life stories of adults with learning difficulties.

• The Charter for Learning published by NIACE (2000b: for and by people with learning difficulties) has proved a very successful resource and is often referred to in the field. In one case a college used it as a basis for a quality audit of its provision, and several colleges have used it to develop their own charters.

29 Ravenhall (2001) believes that the concept of practitioners listening to learners is ‘fundamental to their work’. Whilst this concept may appear on the surface an easy one, there are some learners, for example those who are non-verbal and those who have profound and complex learning difficulties, to whom we need to pay particular attention when seeking their views.

30 Interactive Development Ltd (May 2004: for learners with severe and complex learning difficulties) found that the complexity of the learner’s disabilities made it difficult to involve them in the development of the project. However, the tutors delivering the course were able to give valuable feedback to day care staff on learner responses to various activities and experiences, and to suggest follow-on activities which the person might be supported to undertake. In addition, each learner was provided with a pictorial, personal record of the course. This information is hoped to be of use to staff in undertaking person-centred planning exercises.

31 When involving learners, providers need to factor into learners’ learning the skills of decision-making and ensuring there are feedback and accountability mechanisms in the decision-making process (NIACE, 2004). Dee (2004) believes that students’
involvement in the person-centred planning process is enhanced by developing their skills to use digital cameras, Dictaphones and so on.

**Key issues**

32 Listening to learners is crucial and affords them the dignity they deserve. For many learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the traditional methods of garnering feedback will not be suitable. The examples referred to are not of large learning providers, but smaller voluntary bodies. Larger post-16 learning providers could develop these examples to extend the concept of listening to learners across their own organisation.

33 The principles of *Valuing People* (Department of Health, 2001) concern rights, independence, choice and inclusion. As the effects of person-centred planning and person-centred planning approaches derived from *Valuing People* start to reach learning providers, it is important that they respond by working in person-centred ways.

34 Other issues that need to be addressed include:

- Identification and dissemination of best practice in listening to learners
- Consideration in the review of the results of the NIACE project on embedding person-centred planning approaches.

**The Skills for Life agenda**

35 The Pre Entry Level Curriculum Framework (PECF) was published in 2002, since when NIACE has trained 3,058 practitioners in its use. NIACE holds some information on the impact of the PECF training. It comes from training impact forms given to delegates on the second day of the three-day training events. This is not an ideal situation as the delegates had little time to assimilate the information, reflect on it and decide what changes, if any, they might make to their practice. There were follow-up conversations through email, face-to-face interviews and telephone calls.

36 Black (2003) described the emerging findings.

- Learning became more focused on personal goals identified through the milestones.
- Individual learning plans were more relevant, individualised and accessible to learners.
- Differentiation was a higher priority in planning and delivery.
- Assessment, both initial and diagnostic, had improved.
- There was a more consistent approach to working with adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

37 The following issues also gave concern.

- There was a lack of understanding by managers. Delegates felt there was little acknowledgement by management of the changes that were involved in implementing the PECF in a meaningful way. Some delegates also felt that they felt ‘disempowered’ as their managers had little idea of what the PECF was and of the impact it would have on learners’ achievements.
- Inspectors gave mixed messages. Delegates from one college said that the inspectors were looking at every aspect of the provision from the point of view of the impact of the PECF on the learners and their learning experience. Other delegates told of inspectors with little awareness of the PECF.
- Funding decisions caused consternation. Some delegates expressed concern that if funding became solely attached to literacy or numeracy, many other skills this cohort of learners required could be missed or ignored. Maudslay and Nightingale (2004) found, within the sector as a whole, that there was ‘the persistent belief’ that non-accredited learning would not attract funding. This in turn would put pressure on managers to ‘fit learners with learning difficulties into an outcome-related curriculum of basic skills teaching’. This clearly backs up the initial findings from the training impact forms.
- It was noted that learners of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) with learning difficulties received relatively little attention. One delegate wrote:

> Many people from other cultures with learning disabilities are hidden away and do not come to classes. It is difficult to decide whether the students’ problems are due to language issues or learning difficulties.

- It was clearly felt by those concerned that there was a training gap for teachers working with this cohort of learners. NIACE is currently researching this aspect of provision.
Key issues

38 The key issues are the following.

● The PECF is a major curriculum framework and involved ground-breaking work. Three years on there may be a need for further consultation and dissemination to get a clearer picture of the use of the PECF within organisations.

● There is an urgent need for clear messages regarding funding. To make learners fit into an outcome-related curriculum of basic skills as a means of funding provision goes against the concept of inclusive learning and may not be meeting their real learning requirements. For many years after the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 came into force, learning providers wrongly thought there was a need to have accreditation attached to their courses as a means of funding them. This led to learners following inappropriate courses and accreditation routes. There is a danger that something similar may happen with the Skills for Life agenda.

● There could be enhanced training for senior managers in the context of the PECF and the benefits it brings to their learners and staff. There is also a need to find ways and means of supporting staff in implementing the PECF and in obtaining information about what inspectors will expect.

Learners who miss out

39 Sutcliffe and Jacobsen (1998) found that provision for students with learning difficulties from marginalised groups exists, but it is ‘rare and often fragile’. They found few examples of provision for adults with learning difficulties who:

- were older
- had profound and/or multiple learning difficulties
- were from black or other minority ethnic groups
- were women
- presented what was described as ‘challenging behaviour’
- had sensory difficulties
- had a dual label of learning difficulties and mental health difficulties
- had a history of institutionalisation.

40 In rounds 1–5 of the ACLF projects, 22 per cent of the work was conducted with black and minority groups; in round 6 it was 19 per cent. There was little evidence of work targeted at learners from black and ethnic minorities with a learning difficulty and/or disability. These learners do exist. Of the 610 respondents to a household survey of asylum seekers, refugees and other newcomers from abroad, 12 per cent identified themselves as having a disability or long-term illness (Phillimore et al, 2004). The Aasha Project is another example (Maudslay, 2003).

41 Also missing out on learning opportunities were those people who may experience prejudice on a number of counts. Sutcliffe and Jacobsen (1998) believe that some people may even ‘face threefold discrimination in seeking appropriate provision such as the man with learning difficulties who is also deaf and black’. They also point to people with learning difficulties who have additional sensory impairments as possibly missing out on learning. These difficulties can often go undetected, and appropriate support and provision for them is not readily available. It is estimated that 40 per cent of adults with a learning difficulty also have hearing or visual impairments. NIACE (2000a) identifies the needs of this cohort of learners as frequently going unrecognised, and advises that learning support needs should be assessed through a multi-agency approach.

42 The carers of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also miss out on learning opportunities. Sutcliffe (2000) found that provision was patchy and underdeveloped and the few good examples that existed were all based on partnership and built on a cross-agency model of working.

43 If we look at other research findings, for example learning as a means of improving health and well-being, it would be reasonable to surmise that there may be a correlation between the carers, their learning experience and the people they care for. If carers are improving their sense of well-being and feeling more positive about learning, this can have a knock-on effect on the people they care for. There is a clear role in understanding how family learning can support this cohort.
Key issues

44 Little evidence exists to suggest that provision has moved on since Sutcliffe and Jacobsen’s work in 1998. It seems that marginalised individuals continue to miss out, and this needs reviewing. There is a need to:

- consider undertaking a small-scale mapping exercise for each of these groups of learners to get a clear picture of level and quality of provision available
- investigate the reason why these groups are being marginalised and what steps are needed to address the issues.

Timing and length of courses

45 One barrier to learning that seemed to crop up frequently was that of the timing and length of courses. NIACE (2003) indicated that:

the structure of current education provision which tends to be more focused around the notion of specific, time limited programmes of learning does not always lend itself to adhering to a person-centred approach

46 and that perhaps at some point in the future:

learning providers may need to seek a different pattern of provision which responds more appropriately to the needs and aspirations of people with learning difficulties.

47 This is also true of learners with mental health difficulties. Mather and Aitkinson (2003) believe that the:

fluctuating and sometime cyclical nature of mental health difficulties means that some learners may have to dip in and out of learning and that the current linear model of learning does not support this.

48 Henshaws Society for Blind People (June 2004) found that being tied to the timing and length of courses was a challenge for its project, and the Healing Arts Project (September 2003) found that learners with mental health difficulties could not always be relied upon to turn up to sessions with regularity; when they did, they could not always focus for long periods of time.

49 Art Shape Ltd (May 2002: for learners with learning difficulties) stated in its final report that community-based learning:

does not always lead to employment, reading and writing, accreditation, it does not have to be in groups of 10 and that the standard college model is out of date.

Key issues

50 If providers are to take on board the issues of person-centred approaches as outlined in Valuing People (Department of Health, 2001) and discussed by NIACE (2003a; 2003b; 2004), there is a real need for them to think how best they will support the process. Dee (2004) believes that:

the current funding model does not support the kind of changes that providers are beginning to make as they begin to adopt person-centred planning approaches.

51 There is a need to consider how the current models of funding and provision can be modified to make the system truly inclusive. A model needs to be developed that gives learners more choice and will allow them to access provision that is best suited to them and their lifestyles.

Progression

52 Progression, or lack of it, was an area that emerged in much of the literature. Jacobsen (2002) found ‘individuals remaining at college for years, sometimes repeating courses, or returning to the day centre from which they were originally referred, only to come back to college a few years later’. She found examples of transition to work provision rare and difficult to find. North End and North Lynn Community Trust (2004: for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) found at times that the carers’ attitudes acted as a barrier for learners. It found that carers and homes simply ‘expect their clients to come to the same course continuously. This does not offer progression or a chance for others to enjoy the same course’.

53 There are examples in the literature where effective progression can be found.

- As a result of accessing ICT, the Learning Links Visually Impaired Project (2004) had 6 learners who progressed to a creative writing class and 12 who took part in a pottery course.
The Home Loan Scheme (2004: for learners with disabilities whose access to ICT was adversely affected) cited examples of learners handing back their borrowed PC and buying their own; one learner became a volunteer with the scheme; one learner went on to study with the Open University; another has gone on to take a teaching course with City and Guilds; and one learner has progressed to a college course to study art, after learning how to incorporate ICT into a hobby.

**Key issues**

54 There needs to be further investigation into the barriers to progression for those learners who attend the same programmes year after year. Learning providers may need support in how best to signpost learners to new and exciting opportunities. For many people change can be difficult to cope with. This can be especially true of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who may have attended a course for many years and have a close circle of friends associated with that course. In one of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Taking the Work Forward projects, the learning provider used an advocacy organisation to support 10 people in moving on from a class they had attended for a number of years (Dee, 2004).

55 Interestingly, Scope (2003: for learners with physical, sensory and/or learning difficulties), and the Strathcona Theatre Company (2000: for learners with learning difficulties) counted as one of their critical success factors the manner in which they built in progression routes from the outset of their projects. Consideration, therefore, should be given to:

- ways in which learning providers can be supported to focus on progression routes for learners (this could include encouraging local LSCs to allocate money for providers to work with local advocacy organisations to support the moving-on process)
- conducting a small study of the existing barriers to the progress of adult part-time learners with learning difficulties, and of recommendations made for overcoming these barriers.

**Transport**

56 Transport to and from the learning place was seen as central to the ACLF projects.

- MacIntyre Care (February 2004: for learners with a range of disabilities) encouraged peer support to overcome transport problems.
- Its project money allowed Henshaws Society for Blind People (June 2004) to put transport support in place until learners could travel safely; this approach both facilitated participation and empowered learners by promoting independence.
- Interactive Development Ltd (2004) utilised its project money to target learners with severe and complex learning difficulties, and believed that without the transport budget, its learners could not access community venues or take part in activities and experiences outside the day centre.
- In the Village Visually Impaired project (2004) lack of transport was seen as a real barrier to other progression routes.

57 According to Sutcliffe and Jacobsen (1998), having access to transport can make a huge difference, especially for learners living in rural areas. They found that there was a tendency for day centres to run transport to fit the schedule of the day service as a whole, and not that of the student. One such example was of a student who arrived 30 minutes late to his class and had to leave 10 minutes early, in order to fit in with the day centre transport schedule. This meant that he lost 40 minutes of his 2-hour class.

58 Nightingale (2004), in her comprehensive report on transport, suggests eight main categories of transport-related barriers to learning for people with learning difficulties. She cites them as:

- quality and accessibility of public transport
- quality and accessibility of provider or contracted transport
- quality of information and advice on transport
- problems with partnership and co-ordination
- the impact of transport on learning choices
- quality and quantity of transport and/or independence and/or mobility training
- incomplete legislation
- complexities of funding.

59 Nightingale further suggests some quick fixes in addition to longer-term solutions. However, at the heart of any solution must be:
the principle that providers of transport, whoever they may be, must make provision that fits the learner, their needs and the needs of the educational provision being offered, and not the convenience of the transport provider or contractor.

Key issues

60 From the report it is clear that without the support for transport, many learners would miss out on learning opportunities. Providers need to share strategies for overcoming many of the difficulties with transport each learner has. NIACE has consulted on this process. Suggestions include the need to:

- consider the findings from the two NIACE studies on Transport to Learning
- investigate the extent to which transport is a barrier to participation and learning
- identify and share creative solutions to transport issues.

E-learning

61 Evidence suggests this is a growing area of work and one that warrants more attention. Speaking during Adult Learners' Week, Learning at Work Day 2004, Alan Johnson, then the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, described ICT as:

a powerful tool, enabling more learners to participate in education. E-learning allows more people to study at a time, a place and a pace that suits them. E-learning can be delivered in almost any environment and at any time of day and offers a more inclusive, less threatening way to learn.

62 The DfES Laptop Initiative for Adult and Community Learning (supported by NIACE) lent 1,500 ICT packages to local education authorities and selected voluntary and community organisations for use in adult and community learning. The packages included a laptop, a colour printer, a scanner, software, support and training. Of the 90 organisations that received the equipment, about half indicated they were using them with adults with learning difficulties (NIACE, 2001). One participating organisation said that the equipment:

extended the range of opportunities we are able to give to cancer patients and their carers to learn new skills as both a distraction therapy and an investment in the future.

Ilim Project

63 One of the unexpected outcomes in MacIntyre Care (Wireless Outreach Networks (WON) Project, 2004) was that staff upgraded their IT skills by supporting learners in using the laptops and assistive technology they purchased. The Leonard Cheshire Day Services (WON Project, 2004) discovered that they as employers were unaware of the IT skills that many of their staff had.

64 The Homeloan Scheme (2004: for learners with disabilities) wanted to increase access for people with disabilities in their own homes, by lending computers to the individuals. The benefit for the learner was a highly individualised, tailor-made programme led by his or her personal needs. The programme manager felt that:

the variance between accessibility and disability is often blurred, usually through a lack of understanding on either the part of the learner or the tutor.

65 E-learning and the plethora of devices giving access to IT can open up a completely new world for many learners. One provider gives an interesting series of analogies for the perceived value of ICT:

It starts as a monstrosity of little value, then becomes an interesting gadget, then a glorified typewriter, and then becomes a useful little gizmo and gradually gets promoted to becoming indispensable as the learner engages in internet and emailing or even expanding their use of the office suite of programmes.

Homeloan, 2004

66 Ian (Westminster Association for Mental Health, WON Project, 2004) found the laptops useful because when he did not want to work alongside other people he could carry the laptop into another room.

Key issues and recommendations

67 The evidence clearly demonstrates how much a window on the world e-learning can be. Learning providers should be encouraged to use it in as many learning situations and in as many innovative ways as possible. There is a need to consider:

- publishing best practice guidelines for teachers when dovetailing ICT and their subject matter
- finding and disseminating further examples of best practice.
Conclusion

68 When introducing *Inclusive Learning: Report of the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee* (FEFC, 1996), the late Professor John Tomlinson felt that the Committee was not:

> recommending an idealistic dream, but the reality of extending widely the high quality which already exists in pockets, locked in the minds and actions of the few who must become the many.

69 Whilst the work of the review did not seek to replicate the work of Tomlinson but rather move on from it, the question needs to be asked, ‘What distance has been travelled since Tomlinson?’ There have been significant achievements, but the evidence indicates that issues remain, among which are the following.

- Myth and mystery continue to surround funding.
- The timing and length of courses seem to be contributing to stagnating provision and learners.
- Some groups of learners continue to be stigmatised.
- Examples of the perpetual learner, attending the same class year on year, can still be found.
- It is imperative to find ways to move forward if learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are to get the provision and service they need and are entitled to.
Annex:
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