

Social value of adult learning for adult social care



This briefing paper on the social value of adult learning for adult social care has been produced by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) on behalf of the Local Government Group for cabinet members, newly elected members and directors of adults' services. It provides a short overview on how adult learning provides outcomes that support and add value to a variety of local priorities as well as being of intrinsic value in its own right.

It contains examples gathered through case studies and through using a Social Return on Investment approach. This approach recognises the wider value of adult learning and focuses on assessing that value from the differing perspectives of learners, partners and funders.

NIACE believes that adult learning is essential, not only to create and maintain a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce, but also for personal development, and for a just, inclusive and democratic society. We work to secure high-quality education and training systems that are responsive to the diversity and complexity of adults' needs and aspirations as learners. We have a particular focus on those who have not benefited through formal education systems and those who are under-represented in existing provision.

Further briefing papers are available on the social value of adult learning for community empowerment and for children and young people's services. The series aims to support established and newly elected decision makers to take a broad based approach to considering the role of adult learning in their locality.

Introduction

Adult learning and skills provision in local authorities can take many forms: it may be facilitated through the voluntary and community sector, commissioned from a variety of local partners including through new business models such as community interest companies or social enterprises, courses may be provided directly by the local authority. In many localities it is a mix of all of these: decisions have been made to use the right solution to meet local needs. In the current climate these decisions will inevitably have a financial focus. However, alongside this sits a whole range of social, economic and community values. Adult learning and skills can support older people to gain new skills and maintain existing ones; facilitate responses to demographic change by ensuring an active engaged older population; support communities to participate in local democracy; as well as providing the right mix of skills to support local economic growth.

Local authorities provide a range of services for older learners: attention is currently honed on the major challenges of funding and providing social care. Sometimes the significance of adult learning in improving health and well-being and the quality of life for older people is overlooked. Ensuring that learning activities

support other interventions becomes even more critical at a time of reduced funding.

Enhancing informal adult learning for older people has longer-term benefits that can help increase people's quality of life and reduce health and social care costs.

Social value

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a term used in many ways. NIACE, working with adult learning providers in local authorities, has tested a specific model sponsored by the Cabinet Office. It assesses social and economic value and was developed in 2008 by a consortium of the SROI Network, the New Economics Foundation (NEF), the Charities Evaluation Services (CES), the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the New Philanthropy Council (NPC). It was also supported by the Scottish Government.

The model is based on seven principles:

- involve stakeholders;
- understand what changes;
- value the things that matter;
- only include what is material;
- do not over-claim;
- be transparent; and
- verify the result.

It is a standardised approach with a fixed six stage methodology.¹ It identifies the changes created by a project or activity through the relationship between the inputs into the project, the outputs and the outcomes from

the perspective of the people who have been changed by the activity. It is now being used in the UK and internationally.

Social Return on Investment is particularly relevant for adult learning with its key message of valuing what matters and capturing the impact of learning in contributing to changing learners' lives and assessing how a project or activity creates change for the provider and other key stakeholders. It enables a fundamental review of what changes from an activity and an assessment of its level of success in creating social value for all involved.

“It made us think not only about what is happening but why does it matter.”

The approach provides critical information to inform local decision making. Examples and key learning points from our work with local authorities on SROI are included in these briefings.

Learning in Later Life at Blackpool Council

Blackpool Council Adult and Community Learning is working with a network of private care homes to develop new approaches to adult learning for care residents.

The key element of the programme is that the residents have ownership of the curriculum: sessions are designed to meet the varying interests and needs of the residents, some of whom have Alzheimer's and dementia, others with sight impairment and some are receiving palliative care. Learning sessions have included memory books, arts and craft activities, use of technology and digital cameras, music



¹ Assurance and accreditation of the approach is through the SROI Network: <http://www.thesroinetwork.org>

sessions, creative writing, including haiku as well as producing newsletters and quizzes. Some sessions are held in a local library, whilst others take place in the care homes. Learners are accompanied by care staff.

The Council initiated a Social Return on Investment approach to evaluate the project and to put in place a structure for gathering evidence on the impact of the learning that can be fully implemented in the future. A steering group directs the project evaluation: it is made up of care home residents, council staff from adult learning and social care and managers and care staff from the residential homes.

The impact of the new approach is varied and significant. Learners and care staff benefit from the sessions taking place in the library: some learners have met with old and new friends, all have enjoyed learning new skills and trying new activities, staff from different care homes share ideas and contacts and the care home staff attending sessions have gained the skills to repeat some of the activities with other residents.

For the residents the benefits have been both social and physical:

“It keeps my brain active: I learnt how to use the internet – when I got back to my room after the session I cried: I thought of everything that I’d missed out on over the past 20 years”

Doreen, aged 90

For some learners the activities provide short and achievable stimulation in the here and now, even if they are unable to retain the learning. Families and friends reported to care staff a new sense of confidence and well-being with the memory books and outcomes of craft sessions providing a new focus for two-way

conversations during visits.

“If you don’t use your hands, they seize up, like old people’s hands”.

Ray, aged 75

The care home’s staff also reported other benefits of the sessions: for some residents the sessions have turned out to be a form of pain control with a measurable reduction in requests for pain relief when the sessions were taking place. For another resident the sessions meant a reduction in depression and less frequent requests for staff involvement. For others, sleeping patterns have improved.

“Talking over things in the sessions settled by my mind so that I can sleep, I don’t need to call for help at night”

Dorothy, aged 90

As a result of the SROI approach showing the value of the learning sessions, Adult and Community Learning has worked with the care homes to establish simple recording systems to gather these outcomes in a systematic way that is appropriate for each care home. One home now records the positive benefits of learning where it had previously only recorded if residents were ill, or “off kilter”. Another has designed a separate form for the learning sessions to supplement its care plans. These supplement the tutor’s records of the sessions. This joint approach provides the critical momentum to capture the true impact of the activity for all of the partners involved in the project and has led to the development of a simple set of tools to capture the data. The council is building on the success of the involvement of care staff in the by providing accredited training in activity co-ordination, this includes work experience and micro-teaching sessions.

Adult learning for older adults at Norfolk County Council

Norfolk County Council's Adult Education Service has a long track record of organising and delivering learning programmes specifically designed to respond to the needs and interests of older adults. The service's Learning in Later Life team were keen to trial the SROI process and to learn more about the potential of the approach for measuring and accounting for the impact and the social value of adult learning interventions with older adults in care settings.

The SROI analysis focused on a reminiscence programme delivered by the team last autumn in a Salvation Army run Day Centre in Norwich. The programme consisted of seven weekly sessions, with each one focused around a particular theme e.g. childhood. A core group of seven adults participated in the programme – five men and two women aged between 65 and 90 years. A volunteer at the centre also attended the sessions and provided support to the tutor.

For the majority of individuals in the group, this was the first reminiscence programme they had taken part in. They spoke of the following outcomes:

- felt more comfortable talking about their lives to other people who were interested - "so many young people these days are not interested in the past";
- an interesting programme which provided mental stimulation – "I don't think I'll get Alzheimer's now because my mind is more active following the reminiscence";
- spending time with other people attending the day centre and getting to know them better – a few mentioned feeling inspired by others in the group;
- an opportunity to communicate with others and maintain/improve skills - "I have trouble with speech... and this group helped me practice my speech";
- a learning experience - "That's how you learn things - by talking to each other"; and
- something to think about outside of sessions and discuss with family/ friends.

R has had a stroke which has left him with hemiplegia and expressive dysphasia. In the first group session, he communicated largely through one and two word answers to fairly closed questions, and appeared unable to communicate beyond this. However, in Week 2, the tutor began the session by asking participants to mime a game they had played during childhood, which R was able to join in with. In subsequent sessions he used mime and drawing to supplement his speech and was thereby able to communicate a wealth of memories about his interest in cooking and music, his family and his working life. For some of the other participants, this was the first time they had been able to get to know R.

In discussing the group with the tutor, B said several times that the discussions had really stimulated his thinking and brought memories to life for him again. He said that coming to the reminiscence group gave him a "warm feeling of self worth" as he was able to talk about things which other people hadn't previously known about him. This has boosted his self esteem and given him hope of continuing mental alertness and the ability to participate in meaningful activities.

Adult learning for older adults at Derbyshire County Council

Derbyshire County Council is committed to improving the quality of care available to older people living in residential care and enhancing their quality of life and independence.

In autumn 2009, the Adult Social Care Team commissioned First Taste, a local charity, to provide a training programme for activity organisers and care workers in residential care homes. The programme is on-going and aims to increase the knowledge and skills of staff to provide stimulating activities to residents. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life of residents through their participation in activities.

Both the local authority and First Taste are interested in the SROI methodology as a way of capturing and evidencing the outcomes and impact of the training programme. A trial of the approach has shown the following benefits for programme participants:

- increased knowledge and skills;
- new/improved relationships between public and private sector care staff;
- identification of training needs and signposting to other learning opportunities; and
- enhanced job motivation and satisfaction.

Policy issues

Provision of the range of services for adult social care in local authorities and in particular, the challenges around the long-term funding of residential care is complex. Recent proposals made by the Commission on Fairer Care Funding² (Dilnot Report) highlights that social care could cost the State about £2.2 billion a year depending on the level at which a cap on an individuals' lifetime contributions towards their social care costs might be set. Whilst NIACE would never claim that adult learning is the solution to these issues, it is useful to recognise that many central Government policy initiatives fail to integrate the lifelong learning needs of the population as we move into a period of demographic change. Opportunities are missed to use lifelong learning as a preventative measure and to

support and maximise existing resources. Britain has an ageing population: over the last century, average life expectancy has increased by thirty years and this trend is set to continue: by 2026 the number of people aged 85+ will double and the number aged 100+ will quadruple³. It is expected in 20 years' time that over 1.7 million more adults will have a need for some form of care or support⁴.

However, despite this need, there has been diminishing opportunities for learning by older people; a sharp decline in training at work for those over 55; an emphasis on the economic purposes of education and training rather than the need for learning beyond work such as maintaining an independent lifestyle.

2 The Commission on Funding of Care and Support (2011) *Fairer Care Funding*.

3 Government Actuary's Department, 2007.

4 HM Government (2009) *Shaping the Future of Care Together*. London: TSO.

NIACE argues for a model covering four stages of life as a coherent and systematic approach to lifelong learning: up to 25, 25 to 50, a third age of 50-75 and a fourth age for people over 75 with a reflective curriculum offer for later life⁵, such as that seen in the case studies.

Demographic changes can provide opportunities as well as cost implications. *Building a Society for All Ages* argues that:

“We must make the most of the opportunities that demographic change is bringing and change alongside it. Healthier, more active later lives could result in significant savings in the costs of health care, social care, pensions and benefits. It has recently been estimated that improving healthy life expectancy by just one year each decade could generate a 14 per cent saving in spending on healthcare and an 11 per cent saving in spending on benefits between 2007 and 2025.”⁶

This is echoed in Cllr David Rogers’, Chairman of the Local Government Association’s Community Wellbeing Board, in his response to the Dilnot report:

“At the heart of reform also needs to be prolonging independence through better public health, leisure and transport schemes, more adaptable housing, new technologies, personal budgets, neighbourhood projects and better advice for self-funders and neighbourhood projects.”⁷

The new Health and Wellbeing Boards potentially provide councils and NHS partners with the opportunities to take a wider view of health and wellbeing in localities, including giving communities a greater say in the services needed to provide care for local people and tackle the wider influencers of health such as transport, housing and leisure services. Shadow Boards are already set up in 97 per cent of council areas.

Adult learning and skills are integral to both of these agendas. The provision of learning opportunities for older people can play a role in helping councils to delay the need for costlier care packages and supporting individuals to stay independent for longer as part of the overall prevention and personalisation agenda in adult social care.

The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) is reviewing the way both skills provision and adult and community learning are currently provided.⁸ A key element of the reform agenda is to allow new flexibilities for further education providers, including local authorities, across all types of learning and to specifically refocus government support for adult and community learning to maximise its contribution to wider policy agendas and continues to contribute to people’s quality of life, health and well-being.

NIACE argues that the social value that learning creates is more effectively supported if it is strategically planned to focus on the

5 For more details see Schuller T. and Watson D. (2009) *Learning Through Life, Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning*. Leicester: NIACE. More details available at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/default.htm>

6 DWP (2009) *Building a Society for All Ages*, p. 15.

7 http://www.local.gov.uk/web/10161/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10161/49737/NEWS-TEMPLATE

8 *New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme* available at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/fe-and-skills-new-challenges-new-chances>

outcomes it achieves for learners, organisations and communities.

Northamptonshire County Council, through the Adult Learning Service, are developing a partnership approach with the local NHS trust to use informal adult learning as a way of promoting individual wellbeing. The Council's action is a "Learn2b"⁹ project for adults suffering mild to moderate mental distress. Learn2b offers non-medical interventions that are educational, fun and relaxed, where people can participate in an activity they are interested in. The courses are focused

on the themes of creative expression; and wellbeing.

In the second year of the three year pilot project, participants' hospital anxiety and depression scores were reduced on average by 25 per cent – the equivalent of taking someone from moderate to mild or mild to sub-clinical levels. These results are on a par with conventional clinical interventions. Yet they cost £65 per intervention, compared with £364 for a year's supply of anti-depressants and approximately £20 per GP visit.¹⁰

Conclusions

Working closely with local authorities to assess the social value of adult learning has yielded both expected and unexpected results. The provision of learning opportunities for older people can impact on health, well-being and building stronger communities in a very specific and measurable way.

The research has shown how the targeting of provision can contribute to and meet the strategic objectives of the locality. It has highlighted how joint working can enhance the value of provision and how using a specific methodology, such as social return on investment, provides evidence-based outcomes on the impact of learning for older people.

Previous NIACE research in this area: 'Enhancing informal adult learning for older people in care settings'¹¹ investigated the changes from adult learning provision for older adults, the list is wide-ranging:

For older people:

- improved confidence, self esteem and sense of wellbeing;
- better physical and mental health;
- increased mobility;
- improvements in motor skills;
- lower levels of depression;
- lessening of incontinence;
- less dependence on medication;
- faster recovery rates;

9 The Learn2B project is an innovative partnership between Changing Minds Northamptonshire PCT, Northamptonshire County Council, Adult Learning Service and the Mental Health Foundation.

10 Mental Health Foundation (2011) *Learning for life- Adult learning, mental health and wellbeing*.

11 Aldridge, F (2009) *Enhancing informal learning in care settings*. NIACE: Leicester

- better ability to manage pain and illness;
- increased levels of resilience and ability to cope;
- changes in behaviour;
- maintenance, and for some, improvement of attention, communication and memory skills;
- reduced dependency on others;
- reduced isolation;
- development of stronger relationships between carers and those being cared for;
- increased sociability with other older people being cared for;
- greater levels of engagement, by providing opinion, speaking up and communicating with others;
- development of new skills;
- improved levels of motivation to participate in day-to-day activities; and
- greater enjoyment of life – something to look forward to and to talk to others about.

From family and friends:

- eases worry about friends and relatives in care;
- makes caring easier (if at home);
- improves communication; and
- raises expectation of what the older person can do.

For care staff/care givers:

- increases self-confidence and commitment;
- greater job satisfaction and reduced turnover;

- better communication with and understanding of residents; and
- skills development.

For organisations:

- improves well-being of those older people for whom they provide care;
- brings visible health and behavioural improvements in older people;
- improves communication and dialogue;
- lessens need for medication;
- reduces medication and other care costs;
- improves atmosphere in care settings;
- enhances opportunities for staff development;
- improves workforce morale; and
- helps partnership working and interagency co-operation.

Capturing social value relies on working with a range of stakeholders to assess the true impact of adult learning in a process that is more than just a tick box consultation: the recipients of services are the key stakeholders and their voice shapes, influences and flow through the process. It takes into account all the other factors that contribute to the changes: it does not over claim the benefits of the learning.

The approach supports councils and their partners to answer fundamental questions that are needed to prove effectiveness at times of tough decision making such as “why are we doing this? What’s the impact?” This is a method that can support local authorities

to develop the new approaches needed to respond locally to demographic changes.

But equally importantly, using a model to capture social value enables thinking about the objectives of a service in a different way. For adult learning providers, it often brings their thinking closer to that of their partners, by focusing on broader outcomes for adults, as well as on learning specific goals.

NIACE promotes the importance of the social and economic value of adult learning for older people as an integral part to the national policy debate across government departments and

as a key role in local strategic agendas. The evidence gathered from this research illustrates we are talking about much more than just delivering courses: adult learning provides wider outcomes that are fundamental building blocks to the health and wellbeing of older learners. Our role is to support local decision makers to consider adult learning as part of a package of interventions to achieve their objectives at a time of change.

“We are now talking the same language as commissioners in the NHS.”

Further information

NIACE is an independent non-governmental organisation and charity. It is a membership body with corporate and individual members drawn from a range of places where adults learn: in further education colleges, universities, local authority services, community settings, prisons and in their own homes via technology. The ends to which NIACE activities are directed can be summarised as being to secure more, different and better quality opportunities for adult learners in the UK. It is particularly concerned to advance the interests of those who have benefited least from their initial education and training.

NIACE works in partnership with the Local Government Group to carry out these aims in localities. Further information can be found at www.niace.org.uk and www.local.gov.uk/adultlearning.

For more information on this briefing contact: Penny.Lamb@niace.org.uk, NIACE's lead on Impact Measures or Alistair.Lockhart@niace.org.uk, Project Officer.

Our thanks to all the colleagues, partner organisations and learners in Blackpool Council, Derbyshire County Council, Herefordshire Council, Liverpool City Council, Manchester City Council, Norfolk County Council, Sheffield City Council for their support and enthusiasm in working with us to assess the social value of adult learning.



Published by NIACE
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE

Copyright ©NIACE 2011

<http://shop.niace.org.uk>
