

Educational
Centres
Association



Signatories to the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change

Sustaining Adult Community Learning

*An Educational Centres Association (ECA)
response to
**Shaping the Way Ahead:
Informal Adult Learning***

Article 26.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Article 27.

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 1948

Based on a paper drafted on behalf of the Community Sector Coalition - CSC
by Titus Alexander, Head of Campaigning (Novas Scarman)

About the ECA

The Educational Centres Association (ECA) is a national umbrella body and registered charity* which was founded in 1920 as the Educational Settlements Association. Funded by successive administrations, the ECA contributed significantly to the development of thinking in the period leading up to the 1944 Education Act, and was an advocate for non-formal residential adult learning in the post war years. The ECA was engaged in the consultation regarding the Russell report, and has responded to subsequent consultations.

Association members were instrumental in launching the provision of Adult Basic Skills in the late 1970s and have continued to develop innovative practice across a broad range of learning agendas through the 20th Century and onwards to the present day. We are in reciprocal membership with NIACE and have as members Local Authorities, FE Colleges, Community and Voluntary organisations, schools, Awarding bodies, Universities and Museums. Under our constitution we have scope for direct election of adult learners to the main board.

In 2001 the ECA attracted audiences of over 500 people to a series of conferences run in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council, and has continued to offer conferences and opportunities for educators and learners to meet and discuss issues across a broad scope of adult learning issues within the arts and culture sector. It has also contributed to several successful European projects on the themes of Intergenerational learning and citizenship (such as the award winning Teddy Bear project).

The Association plays an active role in the Community Sector Coalition where it collaborates in the field of citizenship learning and empowerment, including helping to structure the 'Take Part' Learning Framework which links to TEACH, a second highly regarded Grundtvig project promoting leadership development in European citizenship education. Our Community Journalism Project, part funded by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, further extends our citizenship agenda in the field.

The ECA has won praise from DEFRA Minister Joan Ruddock for its encouragement of Environmental Learning and advocacy that comes during an extensive period of work contributing to Every Action Counts. Welcoming our May 2008 conference she said "40% of the CO2 emissions in Britain are the direct result of actions and decisions that we, as individuals make, each and every day. I warmly welcome this initiative which brings together a distinguished panel to help draw out the key messages which the Government, funders and learning providers need to address."

"If the environmental challenges which face us are to be met, it is imperative that we unlock the talents and potential of people in every community to help make a difference. I fully support the Educational Centres Association's objective of promoting the informal learning needed to help people understand 'greener living.'" Joan Ruddock, Minister for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Waste (30 April 2008).

This is reflected in the recent international joint statement, from the UK Royal Society together with the world's science academies, on the need for 'promotion of greener lifestyles' and its wider initiatives in the Public Understanding of Science, which it sees as key to better citizenship.

* Registered Charity 313302

A welcome approach

We welcome the consultation's wide scope and its recognition of the diversity and importance of adult learning. We urge the Government to acknowledge that this sector is more valuable than is reflected in the current level of funding by DIUS in comparison with the formal education sector. In our experience Adult Community Learning can be seen as highly efficient, flexible and entrepreneurial parts of the education system, characterised by the commitment and dedication of the staff who work in it yet despite this is little recognised and under-valued. We are concerned that the narrow, employer-driven interpretation of skills adopted by the Leitch Review has led to cuts in funding and support for adult and community learning by subsidising training that would otherwise be funded by employers themselves. In contrast the sector operates consistently with the remit given to the LSC at its foundation, 'to put the learner at the heart of everything we do'. Thus we remain committed to a belief that all aspects of provision should be built around engaging with learners and potential learners; reflecting the values which have formerly made the UK a world leader in this field.

We also note that other Government Departments, as acknowledged in the consultation paper, have been more innovative and supportive of community-based learning. However, funding from other Departments has often lacked the infrastructure and support available to more traditional adult education providers nor has Government combated the silo effects of this piecemeal funding which if better connected could undoubtedly be more supportive of the overtly economic skills agenda.

Further, we note that Treasury pressures are diminishing the resources available to all Departments of Government, including those cited in the Consultation Document.

We therefore hope that this consultation will lead to a more coherent, vibrant and innovative system, which gains wide commitment across Government to support and enhance the diversity of adult and community learning. This includes a traditional area of expertise in the sector, that of excellence in design & creativity that generates experimentation and innovation. In this we include inventiveness with the new technologies which have the capacity to protect the environment, are perceptibly changing the collective sense of citizenship and contribute in other ways to community wellbeing.

In regard to the latter topic we wish specifically to mention the issues of learning that relate to major global challenges such as - food scarcity, resource depletion, control of waste and emissions, reductions in biodiversity; which impact directly on citizens, call for an informed and aware response in a democracy and which are consistent with the agenda of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

What we want

To meet the diverse needs and aspirations of adults learning, we want a system that is: -

- learner centred, accessible and inclusive;
- builds understanding as well as knowledge of key concepts that underpin wider learning (cf. basic science and environmental issues)
- simple to understand yet flexible, comprehensive, responsive and accountable to the public;
- easy to navigate, connecting the wide variety of provision for learning available;
- low in administration, high in quality and funded consistently;
- an attractive alternative to passive or more solitary free-time activities.

and one which contributes effectively to community development and social cohesion

We hope that the following recommendations for the structure, funding and priorities of adult and community learning will release the potential of educators and providers to support the diversity of learners in our communities.

1. **“Adult and Community Learning” (ACL)** should be recognised as an independent, community based, pluralistic and diverse sector of education which supports adults learning throughout their lives in ways that they want. The sector includes all kinds of informal, community, local authority and other public learning providers and private bodies, as well as cultural institutions, libraries, museums, media and outdoor activities which support adults learning when, where and how they want. ACL is distinct from school, further and higher education, but may be provided by institutions in these sectors as well as organisations of all kinds, including informal community groups and national voluntary organisations.
2. Local authorities should have a statutory **“duty to secure adequate, accessible and affordable opportunities** for all adults to enjoy learning throughout their lives for pleasure as well as personal, community, economic and political development of themselves and society” (echoing aspirations of the 1944 Education Act). In the discharge of this function they should appoint suitably trained key workers to ensure that there is a reach into the most disadvantaged communities and that there is the necessary coordination for filling gaps in provision and planning progression.
3. **Public funding and accountability** for adult and community learning should be provided through three main channels:
 - 1) **Personal and Community Learning Grants** for people who have had least access to learning and are on low incomes, including older people;
 - 2) **Independent Community Learning Councils** within the Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreement framework;
 - 3) an independent **Adult and Community Learning Council (ACLC)** for strategic learning promoters and providers, such as the ACL, ECA, NEC, NIACE, WEA, Women’s Institutes, unionlearn, U3A, YMCA, residential colleges, broadcasters, internet learning and other national or specialist agencies.
 - a. **Personal Learning Awards** (or Grants) of up to £300 a year should be available as an entitlement to anyone who is on a low income or in receipt of income-related benefits. Grants should be able to fund any form of learning recognised by local or national Community Learning Councils. In addition, **Community Learning Awards** (or Grants) of up to £3,000 a year should be made available on a discretionary basis through intermediary agencies, like the former DfES Community Champions fund, to provide flexible support for community-orientated learning, including learning by doing, childcare, books, course fees, fares and other expenses, based on principles of individual budgeting developed in social care by ‘In Control’. Where possible, Community Learning Grants should be administered by community-based intermediaries and allocated with panels of local people, like the Community Champions Fund. These grants should be capable of further enhancement for those with more severe or complex needs
 - b. **Community Learning Councils (CLCs)** should streamline current partnership arrangements such as Learning Partnerships, PCDL Partnerships etc., into independent, elected bodies linked to local authorities through Local Strategic Partnerships and LAAs.

They should provide an explicit framework for learner representation and work democratically in order to bring together and manage funding for community based learning from other Government departments and agencies, such as education for citizenship (Home Office), democracy (Justice), community development and the

third sector (CLG, OTS), environment (DEFRA), enterprise (BERR), development awareness (DfID), health or the European Union.

DIUS should actively persuade all government departments and agencies to fund and support adult learning through these three channels.

Community Learning Councils should be made up of elected representatives of learners, community organisations and funding bodies rather than learning providers. As far as possible, their membership should be elected by recognised constituencies, such as all registered adult learners and voluntary organisations as well as local councils.

c. Regulatory Framework

Linked to 10 below there should be a new regulatory body which would ensure that buildings constructed by or currently operated with public funds are made available for Informal Adult Learning at a fair economic price, such that it is non-profit making and in a sustainable manner. In discharge of their function the CLCs should have powers to secure the use of such public interest buildings when not otherwise required.

d. Leadership

At both local and national levels, Community Learning Councils should be led by **Community Learning Promoters** who are experienced educators, not accountants, administrators or commissioners, who have important support functions. They should avoid the soulless, bureaucratic and exclusive procurement process of the LSC/Bravo Solutions. Community Learning Promoters should be able to fund any kind of provider and provision which enhances adult learning in line with the guidance on priorities agreed locally (see point 4 & 8). They should be able to provide block funding for larger adult and community education providers as well as small grants for community groups who provide opportunities for learning on a very local or specialist basis, such as a breastfeeding network or book club for the blind. They should aim to fund three year rolling budgets and apply the principles of the Voluntary Sector Compact.

They should be encouraged to develop innovative models of commissioning, grant-aid, partnerships and support, to enable community learning providers to improve the quality, reach and variety of learning opportunities.

Learning Promoters should be accountable for the adequacy, accessibility, affordability, quality and range of learning opportunities in their area, including public, private and community provision. They should ensure that funding is flexible, responsive, transparent and accountability with low administration, high trust and wide openness. This is based on the principle that the public benefits from

- diversity of providers and funding;
- delegation of decision-making over provision, funding and fees;
- clear responsibility for budgets, priorities, provision and delivery;
- coordination of funding streams;
- accountability to learners and elected representatives of the public.

4. Local Strategic Partnerships, Regional Assemblies and national governments should have a duty to consult on and set **guidance on priorities** for funding and provision of adult and community learning within their area, at least every five years, to inform but not dictate public funding (see 8 below). Specific guidance should be made available to support the sector generally in linking issues of sustainability to all course lines. This will require a major investment in staff development. Guidelines should also cover **fee levels, concessions and cross-subsidisation** to encourage access and participation in learning. Providers and funders should be free to set fees based on

their judgement of what will be most effective in attracting learners and widening access.

5. Increased support for those National Infrastructure Bodies that provide leadership and encourage learner and community engagement in the setting of strategy & goals for the sector.
6. Public funding through Local and National Learning Councils should seek to raise the **quality of provision** through eight channels:
 - 1) Regular, independent **surveys & research** into adults' aspirations, participation, experience and appreciation of learning, to inform planning and provision;
 - 2) **Adult learner's voice** and representation of learners through elected class contacts and representatives of identifiable groups of learners;
 - 3) **Training, support and development of staff** at all levels, including paid and unpaid educators in the community, voluntary and private sectors, supported by LLUK and HE institutions. The personal investment by part-time staff to share their enthusiasm and skills and to participate in increasingly mandatory training needs to be adequately recognised in terms of security of employment.
 - 4) Investment in accessible **facilities for learning**:
 - a. meeting spaces, libraries, equipment, online resources, workshops and other resources in public buildings and work places, wherever there is demand and appropriate supervision. Learning environments should be fit for purpose and adaptable for learners with disabilities and sensory impairments;
 - b. serviced stocks of technical equipment which are available from a pool to support locally based provision;
 - c. curriculum development and associated learning materials production to support key themes
 - 5) Systematic **feedback** from users, through on site and online feedback forms;
 - 6) Light-touch **quality assurance** standards, along the lines of matrix, for externally moderated self-assessment;
 - 7) Learner-centred self-assessment moderated by Ofsted **inspection**
 - 8) National **learning networks** and centres of excellence to share knowledge, innovation and practice in different fields of adult and community learning (eg citizenship, literacy, numeracy, family learning, sustainable development, etc)

7. Valuing Learning

We recognise the importance of learners valuing their own learning and would point to the need to create frameworks within which learners can share insights into their learning and experiences. This entails sensitive and effective tutoring to facilitate that sense of shared learning.

All adults should be encouraged to continue learning through a network of advice, guidance and motivation, including

- **learndirect** as a national telephone and online information and advice service
- locally maintained **national database** of informal as well as formal learning providers, including local community provision;
- the new Advancement and Careers Service for adults;
- **learning champions**, including Union Learning Reps, voluntary learning advisers and other trained advocates for learning

- clearer **progression routes** for people engaged in any form of learning
 - active promotion of all provision for learning by Community Learning Councils as well as providers.
8. DIUS should aim to **increase public, private and personal spending** on adult learning by encouraging local and national Learning Promoters and providers to be entrepreneurial, imaginative and innovative in making learning desirable and inclusive. The Department should also **redirect subsidies from training and vocational** courses for employers, which should be normal business expenses like machine tools, office equipment or health and safety, in order to increase spending on self directed learning which enhances the quality of life and well-being of society.
9. As a starting point for a national and local discussion, we propose the following areas as a guide, in order of priority for funding:
- a) people who have had least access to learning and are on low incomes, including older people;
 - b) learning that helps adults to **adjust to key life events** such as the onset of serious illness or disability. Appropriate modifications of facilities, courses and course materials should be supported by Government as a matter of course in order to ensure full integration. Learning environments should be fit for purpose and adaptable to the needs of those with disabilities and sensory impairments.
 - c) learning that contributes to **poverty reduction**.
 - d) **family learning and parenting education**, on the basis that social and personal returns are highest and learning within families is the foundation for learning throughout life.
 - e) learning for **environmental sustainability** and reduction in green house gases, extending and building on Every Action Counts, on the basis that these are the two most critical issues for society in the 21st century;
 - f) learning for **health and well-being**
 - g) Intergenerational learning that extends beyond the immediate family, as a way of working towards a more cohesive society that reduces fear and antagonism and engages children, parents, active older people and those at risk of disengaging socially and intellectually in their later years in shared interests and activities;
 - h) learning for **community development and social cohesion**;
 - i) learning for **practical politics and citizenship** to enable people to have a more effective say in decisions that affect their lives;
 - j) understanding and use of **new technologies**, including the internet and computers as tools for creativity, communication, research and empowerment.
 - k) learning that enhances **enjoyment and quality of life**.

Local areas and providers may use their judgement to interpret these priorities in ways that suit their area and also set their own priorities in response to local needs, demand and opportunities.

Local areas are encouraged to ensure that a full range of subjects and types of learning are available for all, by using a mixture of concessionary fees and subsidies.

10. We also propose that all publicly funded services should have a general **'duty to support community learning'** by offering spare capacity (buildings, facilities and staff) at or below cost to adult and community learning providers through local learning commissioners.

11. We look forward to seeing these principles incorporated in a **White Paper for Adult and Community Learning**, jointly supported by DCSF, CLG, DEFRA, DfID, DoH, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, OTS and the Prime Minister. This approach should be endorsed by the appointment of a Minister who has specific responsibility for this area of interdepartmental work and is supported by a discrete section within the civil service which is free of the skills agenda.
12. There is a need to resolve the lack of congruence between Local Authorities concerning this field of activity. At present different Senior Officers and Portfolio Holders have this remit which reduces their ability to **coordinate policy and resources** at regional and national levels.
13. The Association welcomes the recognition that learning resources can now be made available through an increasingly wide range of channels, from terrestrial broadcasting to the diversity of online platforms & wireless channels. The relevant Department of State and the regulatory authorities must maintain their role in securing capacity and quality in these essential services, as well as ensuring their responsiveness to adult learners' needs and expectations.
14. The Government should be supporting a wider range of European development activities relating to the 'blended' use of the new technologies in adult learning. Such initiatives should place demands on R&D capability and service providers to consult with informal adult learning organisations. This would help to bring benefits to present learners and local partners through establishing new hardware, software and systems to support a diverse curriculum, which would maintain UK and European organisations as global leaders in such fields. In doing so the Government should be ensuring that any new industry standards are consistent with the goals identified through this strategy, including their environmental sustainability and the long-term range of learners' needs.

This paper concludes with a number of case studies which are illustrative of our approaches to Informal Adult Learning.

Case studies

A Heritage of Support for Learning & Change in Communities

The history of the Educational Settlements was that Oxford academics, concerned at the deep poverty and distress of 19th Century urban dwellers, went to live alongside local people and introduced a range of new learning that would engage, inspire and change lives for individuals and communities.

The Universities, which had a proud history in this kind of work, should be helped to re-engage by being charged with using HEFC resources to support such approaches and to provide effective research capability for the sector.

In terms of the most disadvantaged of present day communities some models are of limited applicability. Unlike groups which can rely on members who are confident, well informed and to a considerable extent well funded in terms of accommodation, finance and transport there are significant areas in which this model will not yield the hoped for benefits.

If the Government's aspirations are to be met the model of provision would need to be more inclusive and to work more explicitly to support new learners. It is of course true that the scale of demand is likely to need the additional activities of mutual teaching and support groups in communities wishing and able to reinforce their own capabilities.

To achieve such ends community based training, which may not need to be accredited, should be provided at public expense to support facilitators and activists.

The support of Community Learning Champions who operate within communities and draw on the strength of relationships and local knowledge to signpost and broker for learning cannot be underestimated. Their role should be seen as complementary to that of the skills and knowledge providers.

Case Study - Milton Keynes “Know How” Learning Exchange.

In its early days the Milton Keynes Development Corporation employed a development officer who established a number of contact points for local people willing to offer or request new bite sized learning. The offer was in part designed to bring newcomers together to share and value one another’s experience. The highly individualised pairing which resulted seemed to be valued and the topics covered were unusual in being very specific, such as, “I need to learn how to mend my lawn mower” or “I would like to introduce you to the works of _____ who is my favourite author”.

Community Journalism

A neighbourhood group in Norwich started a newsletter under a Single Regeneration Budget programme. This enabled a woman with a severe speech impediment to thrive and find herself when she joined the newsletter editorial group. This helped her address her literacy problems and find a new means of expression in print. Her empowerment to take an active role in her community and the dramatic improvement in her speech through this activity seemed to go hand in hand.

Against this background, some time ago I suggested in-house courses in local centres to bring out the richness of experience of individuals and groups who rarely make the headlines and remain largely obscure in their own communities.

A chance remark to a hugely experienced media person with strong journalistic and editorial links, as well as deep involvement in community organisations, led to the suggestion of a pilot course. With the support of the Leicester Mercury and Radio Leicester as well as the City Council’s Adult Learning and Skills Director, the course is taking shape for a first offering in September. Key to its success will be the engagement of third sector bodies across the city and this already looks a strong aspect of the planning, with groups saying what a good idea it is and offering additional facilities. One of these is the Centre for Independent Living, offering its computer facilities for production and editing of the text and managing the images which make such a difference to any publication.

Alongside all of these developments, which are largely orientated towards print, we have looked at other media since the convergence in technologies, which is currently taking place – linking radio, TV, computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and the rest, will undoubtedly have an impact on the ways that individuals within and across communities interact with one another. We hope that if this first course is a success, we can branch out into that wider range of media.

One of the great things about planning the course now is the excitement about communities and these technologies. There is far less ‘fear of the new’ and the potential of ever cheaper devices and more rapid and diverse communication must in the longer term influence our sense of citizenship.

As I see it, with a backdrop of developing empowerment activity in the third sector, it is extremely important that we take opportunities to research possibilities and give communities some early wins from our endeavours with these changing technologies.

Bernard Godding, Educational Centres Association