

Written evidence submitted by HOLEX

Closing the Learning Gap – Opening Up Opportunities for Adults

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gather the views of key stakeholders, partners and providers on their top priorities for adult learning for 2016 and over the next 5-10 years.

The deadline for written evidence is 20 May 2016.

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

Please tick the appropriate boxes below

<input type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an individual
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an organisation
What is your name, job title, address, email and telephone number?	
Dr. Susan Pember OBE Director of Policy HOLEX sue.pember@holex.org.uk	

Please tick a box from the list of options below that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Business representative /organisation/ trade body
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Authority/ Combined Authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority provider of adult and community learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist designated institution

	FE College
√	FE sector representative organisation/trade body
	FE independent learning provider
	Higher Education Institution
	FE charitable or not-for-profit learning provider
	Other education (please describe)
	Trade union or staff association
	Charity or social enterprise
	Student representative body
	Individual
	Policy adviser (please specify area of interest)
	Other (please describe)

Introduce yourself

HOLEX represents a network of 120+ adult and community learning providers and is the sector membership body for Local Authority Community Learning (ACL) services, Specialist Designated Institutions (SDI) and independent third sector providers. HOLEX members have the largest geographical reach of all adult education and learning providers. They educate, train and retrain 700,000+ adult learners annually and they provide quality provision - judged by Ofsted as the sector best for overall performance and top of the league table for customer satisfaction.

All HOLEX members share a joint mission to provide skills and learning that gives adults a second chance, supports their employment prospects and wellbeing, which in turn improves productivity and creates the circumstances for economic success. They have the capacity to touch very disadvantaged people, are cost effective and entrepreneurial, and use their state funding to lever in alternative forms of funding. They are also innovative and adaptive and have responded well to successive governments' directions and policy nudges, such as (in the last three years) developing the Government's 2013 concept of Community Learning Trusts.

All provide a unique service and many have national reputations as leaders in their field. They have been at the forefront of working with partners on difficult issues, such as securing employment for the long-term unemployed, troubled

families, family learning, refugees and improving mental health through education.

Executive summary

This submission describes what HOLEX sees as working well and describes what more Government needs to do to improve productivity and wellbeing through adult learning.

The sector is working well. Providers and services leaders now what is needed in their community and how to meet it. As evidence by Ofsted and recent BIS studies into cost, the ACL provider base is good and cost effective and, although there has been a reduction in national funding which has resulted in reduced overall adult participation, the services remain committed to their adult learners and still continue to educate and train over 700,000 students annually.

However, it is made difficult for providers to operate when there is no national strategy and/or policy framework for adult education, the infrastructure keeps changing and resources are limited. There is a national adult education policy vacuum which needs to be filled. It is essential that the Government takes the lead and determines a strategy for adult learning, employability and wellbeing, that brings together the different departmental interests. To ensure effective implementation, the strategy needs to be underpinned by policy frameworks for key areas such as ESOL, basic skills and digital inclusion, clearly stating who is entitled and who pays. There also needs to be national recognition for adult learning, promoted through a new adult career and guidance service that builds on present initiatives.

Written submissions are invited addressing the following points:

What is working well and/or not working well with regards to adult education in England?

Working well

Delivery: Using Ofsted criteria, the adult education provider base in England is predominately good with outstanding features. The services are working well and share the same characteristics. These are:

- Learner and community led.
- Focused on getting adults into work.
- Responsive to supporting social and integration issues.
- Working with partners to support those most disengaged and furthest away from integrating into society.
- Working with other council services to quickly react to local social and employment issues.
- High satisfaction levels.
- Demand for ESOL, Basic Skills and IT greater than supply.
- Local community provision - mostly at ward level.

There are working practices that are recognised as international best practice, for example:

- Curriculum organisation.
- Offer for ESOL and Literacy and Numeracy.
- Social integration and Prevent.
- Work on mental health and wellbeing.
- Partnership working on topics such as troubled families.
- Employability provision.
- Use of volunteers.
- Fee collection.
- Value for money - dual use of premises.

Not working well

- No overall government strategy on adult skills and education.
- Vacuum of national frameworks on key areas of delivery such as ESOL, English and maths and digital inclusion.
- The continual changing of the overarching infrastructure.
- Lack of strategic investment in adult education.
- Lack of national promotion about the benefits of adult education.
- Lack of recognition that learning a new skill is a good thing in its own right.
- Timely advice and guidance.

What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning?

Support for disadvantaged adults needs to be prioritised. If as a country we want to be more productive and improve wellbeing, going forward, we require many more adults to engage in learning and not just those in what we traditionally think of as the disadvantaged. We need to ensure there is provision for those in work and out, those thinking about a career change and those who are more mature and can benefit from education that improves wellbeing and makes for a healthier life.

Best practice shows the most effective way to motivate disadvantaged learners is through signposting and identification of need from a trusted source (friend, health visitor, teacher), local first step provision, support for other needs (including drugs and homelessness), easy learning steps that quickly become more stretching, regular assessment and feedback, national qualifications that have some meaning in the work place, recognition in the form of an awards ceremony and finally a mapped out progression route to further learning and/or a job.

Do we have a sufficient demand-led approach to adult education? If not, what more needs to be done?

Demand is varied depending on subject. Demand for ESOL and basic skills exceeds supply and the funds available. But take up in other areas, such as a

post 24 loan to support career change, is not in there mainly because there is no national publicity about this programme.

We have a good national adult career service resource, but it is under used and under promoted. In some areas the reach is patchy and we do not invest enough in letting adults know the benefits of learning.

On the one hand we have one of the most qualified workforces but, on the other, much of the workforce is underdeveloped and has a low skill base that leads to low productivity. One in five of our working population do not have good basic skills and need further training if they are to be productive. Many who trained for a trade or profession may not be able to continue in that occupation until retirement and will need to be retrained and we have a large increase of those who have retired who may become a burden on the health service if there is no infrastructure for education, social interaction and mental stimulation.

We need to stimulate demand through ensuring individuals understand the value of education, national endorsement for the programmes we have to support career change (for example, FE Loans) and promotion of the benefits of education to health, wellbeing and social inclusion.

What evidence is there on the impact, added-value and/or cost-effectiveness of adult education?

There is much evidence on the benefits of learning which can be found on the key adult education sites.

Also there are several recent studies that may be of interest to this research:

- The most recent is Professor Peter Unwin's work using BIS and DWP experimental data.
- Skills For Life (literacy and numeracy) evaluation demonstrates that it is possible with the right programmes to improve adult literacy skills.
- Recent research on adult community learning trusts - the Pound Plus project, which was started 2013.

Relevant extracts:

- 1. BIS-15-660-impact-of-skills-and-training-interventions-on-the-unemployed-phase. Full report can be found at:-**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-impact-of-skills-and-training-on-the-unemployed>

“The employment rate of 18 to 24 year olds in Cohort 2 who engage with some form of FE learning increases from 49% in the year before claim start date to 68% one year after.

For those who do not undertake FE learning in Cohort 2, the prior rate of employment is much higher at 55% and the proportion in employment one year later is lower at 67%. The employment rate of those who do not take up FE learning amongst Cohort 1 goes from 61% in the year before claim start, to 71% one year after; compared to a rise from 58% to 71%, amongst those who undertake FE learning.

We also see much higher proportions of FE learning amongst the most disadvantaged groups - for instance Group 3 who have no HMRC employment recorded in the 5 years prior to claim start date are the group with the highest proportion of FE learners. This suggests that we still observe the sort of negative selection effects amongst the unemployed that have confounded estimates of returns to low level vocational learning using survey data.”

2. Measuring the Net Present Value of Further Education in England

The full report can be found at:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-measuring-the-net-present-value-in-england>

These findings continue to show strong economic returns to a range of publically funded qualifications in the Further Education sector. Overall the new estimates of wage premia are very similar to the original ones. The main points to note are:

- There has been a significant increase in the estimate of the returns to a full L2. This is most likely because the method provides a better control for unobservable characteristics. For example, people with low or no qualifications on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) – the counterfactual in the original model – are a very heterogeneous group, many of whom would not take such qualifications, whereas the matched data only includes those who actually enter FE.
- There has been a small reduction in the estimate of the returns to Maths and English qualifications and a larger reduction in the estimate of the returns to qualifications below L2. However, the estimate for qualifications below L2 is likely to understate the ‘true’ returns since it will not capture any benefits in terms of progression to L2 and beyond. A recent evaluation of below L2 learning⁷ highlights the value of such learning in terms of progression, e.g. 26% of learners had undertaken further learning since their original course – half of these at a higher level.

3. Skills for Life (Literacy and Numeracy) Evaluation

The full report can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/.../12-p168-2011-skills-for-life-survey.pdf>

- Overall 57 per cent of respondents achieved a Level 2 or above score in literacy, which is a large increase from 44 per cent in 2003. Amongst 16-18 year olds there has been a 13 percentage point rise in the proportion achieving a Level 2 or above score since 2003, and amongst 19-65 year olds there has been a 12 percentage point rise.
- This equates to more than 1 million adults improving their literacy skills and achieving a level 2 or equivalent in literacy during the length of the programme.

4. Pound Plus Evaluation

- This evaluation looks at the way adult education can work with other services and individuals to secure extra funding and a joined up approach to adult wellbeing and educational gain.

The full report can be found at: -

<http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/community-learning/category/tags/pound-plus>

Available data on Pound Plus performance is shown in the following table:

Table 3: Pound Plus calculations, summer 2015		
<i>Provider</i>	<i>Type of provider</i>	<i>Pound Plus calculation – expressed as percentage of Community Learning allocation</i>
A	Local Authority maintained service	88% (ie £1 generates an additional 88p)
B	Local Authority maintained service	127%
C	Local Authority maintained service	63%
D	Specialist designated institution	84%
E	Local Authority maintained service	58%

F	Local Authority maintained service	90%
G	Local Authority maintained service	38%
H	Local Authority maintained service	134%

Name three major policy developments necessary to secure the future of adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5-10 years?

1. Overall Government strategy for adult learning, employability and wellbeing that brings together the different departmental interests.
2. Policy Frameworks for key areas such as ESOL, basic skills and digital inclusion clearly stating who is entitled and who pays.
3. National recognition for adult learning, promoted through a New adult career service that builds on present initiatives.

	If your submission is confidential and you do not want it published, please tick the box.
√	Please confirm that have read the Terms of Reference and Guidelines on written submissions at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/