learning and skills development agency

attracting new learners
international evidence and practice

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Edited by Sue Taylor and Helen Cameron

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface *Christine King*

Introduction 1

What triggers participation? *Ursula Howard* 3

A comparative perspective 11

Motivation to learn: the social and community dimension 15

Attracting new learners through learning programmes and qualifications 19

Attracting new learners in the workplace 23

Case study A The role of learning in the economic development of Latin American women *Celita Eccher* 31

Case study B Overcoming employees' reluctance to take part in vocational education and training *Wolfgang Hendrich* 33

Case study C Collaboration in Australian vocational education and training *Sue Kilpatrick* 35

Case study D The Campaign for Learning in the UK *Bill Lucas* 37

Case study E Informal learning in the UK *Veronica McGivney* 39

Case study F German cultural institutions as gateways to learning *Achim Puhl* 41

Case study G The experience of a UK trade union in reaching non-traditional learners *Tony Chandler* 43

Conclusions and next steps 45

Appendix 1 International research seminar participants 49

Appendix 2 Glossary and websites 51

Appendix 3 Statistical comparisons 55

Bibliography and reference list 63

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David Istance (OECD), who provided a vital comparative perspective on lifelong learning, as well as emphasising the links between early learning and learning later in life

Alan Tuckett (NIACE), who developed the international theme further, with reference to adult participation and efforts in various countries to increase demand for learning

Tim Down (DfES), who offered a perspective on how government contributes to stimulating demand and what more needs to be done

Frank Coffield (University of Newcastle), who focused attention firmly on the need for a concerted national strategy for lifelong learning

Celita Eccher (REPEM, Uruguay), who inspired the seminar with a presentation on the power of learning and learning networks for women in Latin America as the route to economic independence

Hilary Steedman (London School of Economics), who stressed the advantage to be gained by focusing on the workplace as a territory for engaging new learners

Tim Oates (QCA), who reminded us of two things: that many factors combine to influence individuals' life chances – history, culture, economics and politics as well as learning and qualifications; but that success or failure in learning early in life has profound and long-lasting effects

Achim Puhl (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung), who urged us to think broadly and creatively about learning environments and to consider the role of cultural institutions as motivating settings for learning

Martina Behrens (Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education), who illuminated our discussion on the meanings of 'learning' and 'vocational training' with reference to the system and culture of youth training in Germany.

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Preface

Would you be convinced by the slogan 'Learning is fun'? Is it fun? Or does the phrase sound righteously dull, and something to be avoided at all costs? The participants at this international consultation gathered – not to discuss strap-lines – but to consider how we can remove some of the barriers to learning that clearly exist. How can we cut through our own preconceptions and find new ways of thinking about participation in learning? The context was one of challenge: we allowed ourselves no clichés or slick answers and no drifting into complaints about underfunding or the impossibility of the challenge. We were seeking to share good practice and to find solutions.

It quickly became clear that more of the same would not do. Our strategies have worked and are working, but not deeply enough or fast enough. We learned to look at ourselves and at our own prejudices, as well as to confront the deterrents that our 'non-learners' live with. What is learning? Do our reasons for learning 'stack up' for people who appear to have no interest in it? Do we offer what they want? Are we willing to learn from them and to read the hard messages they are sending?

We ended up with some great new ideas and a lot of good practice to implement. Equally importantly, we shared a realisation that, with great humility, we have to be willing to think and listen in new ways. If learning matters, if we really do believe this, then we have a new and exciting path to walk before we can relax into the knowledge that learning speaks for itself and that all we have to do is to help people remove the barriers.

The participants at the international seminar had a lot in common: a passion for learning and a firm belief in its value to individuals and communities at a personal, social and economic level. We discovered that this passion crossed national and international boundaries and that we shared a great deal of experience. The research papers and case studies were met with tough questioning and the debate tumbled energetically over into all the informal spaces that the conference provided.

As Chair of the seminar, I pay tribute to the hard work, honest heart and thought searching of the participants, and to the superb skills of the organising team. We found some answers but, as with the best learning experiences, we left knowing that we had set ourselves the next set of questions to explore.

Christine King
Vice-Chancellor
Staffordshire University

Introduction

Although the UK has an impressive record in developing initiatives that enable adults to take a 'second chance' with learning, its position remains weak in international league tables showing levels of qualifications in the workforce and of participation in education after the age of 16. For economic as well as social reasons, we need to attract many more people into education and training, particularly those who have been out of touch with learning for a long time and those who have benefited least from education and training in the past.

To address this problem and contribute to policy, practice and research, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) organised an international seminar in June 2001. The purpose was to discuss ideas and evidence on successful ways to generate new demand for learning, with a particular focus on individuals and communities who are 'hard to reach'. We set out to identify the kinds of strategies that might promote success in the UK, and directions for research. Researchers, policy-makers and opinion-formers attended the seminar, which was planned in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The introduction in April 2001 of national and local learning and skills councils in England (and comparable arrangements in Wales) provides the impetus for looking afresh at what motivates people to engage in learning. Increased demand for learning and higher levels of achievement are key goals for the LSC, charged with funding and planning all learning provision (except university education) for those aged over 16. Government needs to know how resources can be put to best effect to raise levels of participation and achievement. Thus, the current climate offers opportunities for policy-makers and practitioners to engage in more open discussion and to contemplate new ways of doing things.

The LSDA aims to contribute to debate about the scope for action and influence by a variety of stakeholders in the UK, to stimulate increased demand for learning. 'Stakeholders' include government, funding bodies, employers, campaign bodies, and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Most importantly, they include individuals, whether as learners, prospective learners, employees or members of families or communities.

This publication presents key messages from the seminar. It does not aim to be a full record of the proceedings but highlights important themes, ideas and conclusions from the speakers' presentations and papers and from the many and varied discussions that took place in plenary and in small groups. The views expressed are therefore those of the seminar participants.

The report is written from a UK perspective, and more particularly from the perspective of the English education system. We hope that the findings will interest readers in other countries who are looking for ways to promote demand for learning. For readers who wish to find out more about some of the organisations mentioned, a glossary and website details are given in Appendix 2.

The remainder of the report is organised as follows:

- *What triggers participation?* (pages 3–10) offers a conceptual framework for the seminar findings.
- *A comparative perspective* (pages 11–13) looks at participation and performance in UK education and training compared with other EU and OECD countries.
- *Motivation to learn: the social and community dimension* (pages 15–17), *Attracting new learners through learning programmes and qualifications* (pages 19–22) and *Attracting new learners in the workplace* (pages 23–27) comment on three sources of demand for learning:
  - society and community
  - learning programmes and qualifications
  - the workplace.

  Each chapter ends with a summary of the challenges for policy-makers and practitioners.
- Seven brief case studies (pages 29–44) have been selected and edited from the research and practice described by seminar speakers.
- *Conclusions and next steps* (pages 45–48) distils the main ideas from the seminar on the next steps for research and strategy.
- Appendices contain details of the seminar participants, a glossary and website list, and a statistical commentary.
- Finally, a bibliography and reference list is provided.

What triggers participation?

Increasing participation in learning is not a new priority for policy-makers or practitioners. There have been numerous initiatives and national and local campaigns to address the issue. These have often been successful in the short term. But sustaining growth and higher levels of participation by wider social groups has proved elusive. In short, despite great efforts, the overall picture remains the same: uneven and unequal patterns of participation. A new and different approach is clearly needed.

Previous policies and practices have been characterised by their focus on the supply side, by analysis of the profiles of those who do and do not participate, and by a detailed understanding of barriers to participation. Research from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS, see Beinart and Smith 1998) and others provides substantial evidence of patterns of participation and confirms the educational and sociological factors that deter large numbers of people from participating in education and training beyond the age of 16.

Barriers to participation

Those who are least likely to participate in publicly funded education and training provision are those with few or no qualifications, especially those whose initial education has failed even to equip them with adequate literacy and numeracy skills. Helena Kennedy's (1997) phrase 'if at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed' remains relevant. Non-participants are also likely to suffer either absolute or relative poverty, and to be from working class families and some ethnic minority groups. Among these social groups, men are often under-represented in learning, particularly older, unemployed men and manual workers. Problems with disaffected and underachieving boys threaten to accelerate gender trends (Phillips 1993; McGivney 2000; Meadows 2001). Many women, too, think that education is, in McGivney's (1990) phrase, 'for other people'.

On the supply side – government, education providers, experts and researchers – there is a strong conviction, backed by evidence, that learning is in an individual's interest. Research shows that qualifications, especially those at or above Level 3, bring better earnings, and improve health prospects and well-being (see the work of the Centre for Research on Wider Benefits of Learning, and the Centre for the Economics of Education). Learning breaks cycles of deprivation and contributes to social levelling. Policy initiatives emphasise the value of learning to improved productivity, flexibility and competitiveness in the modern economy. The contribution of learning to citizenship, strong communities and a less divisive society is also underlined. This commitment to lifelong learning is backed by resources. But however important all these factors are, they do not of themselves change anything much for the better.

The habits and norms of the education system inhibit change. The supply side works and thinks within institutional frameworks – we appear more comfortable debating the participation problem with fellow professionals than connecting with people 'out there' whom we seek to support. It is easy to observe, for example, the speed with which debates on 'demand-side' policies and initiatives slip effortlessly back into supply-side territory, where the language, culture, infrastructures and policy environment are comfortingly familiar. Unless initiatives are influenced by potential participants, they are unlikely to achieve long-term impact or culture change.

There is a 'traditional' supply-side language of participation that is often abstract and negative. It typecasts complex adult citizens as non-participants, non-learners, the excluded, the vulnerable, the disengaged, the disaffected, the hard-to-reach, the underachievers, the bottom 20% and so on. The language is more positive when signalling initiatives to raise levels of participation: target groups, campaigns, learning funds, outreach, in reach, inclusion, local communities, neighbourhood regeneration, adult returners, realising potential, access etc. This language still, however, suggests the extension of existing activity to more people: the missionary model.

A change of focus: from supply to demand

What we need now are imagination, creativity and an understanding of how to motivate adults to take part in learning as a route to improving their life chances. This will require a strategic, systematic and sustained focus on the 'demand side'.

The remainder of this chapter offers, first, a brief review of developments over the last three decades: how have we tried to widen participation and with what success? Some key questions are then addressed, each with scope for further research.

- Why is it important to shift the focus from supply to demand and from provider to learner?
- What motivates individuals to take action to engage in learning as the chosen way to improve their lives? How do people begin to see change as within their grasp?
- What can the concepts of social and human capital tell us about the role of learning in wider social and economic developments?
- What positive roles can other people and organisations, including brokers and intermediaries, play in the process of engaging individuals in learning? What are the best ways of communicating with people who may be unaware of opportunities or distrustful of the systems that have failed them?

Lessons from the past

1970s: campaigns and social movements for learning

In the 1970s, renewed evidence of poverty, poor housing and homelessness emerged, together with the discovery of widespread problems with adult literacy and numeracy, and persistently strong class differences in educational attainment. Much of the evidence was initiated from below, through cultural and social movements for change. Policy responses recognised the need to support community development, particularly in inner cities following the replacement of 'slums' with new housing estates. Adult learning was often explicitly linked to movements for reform and community building, with an emphasis on women and working class communities and on groups at least as much as individuals.

Funding, at least to some degree, followed demand for adult learning in this period, and there were ambitious, innovative national media campaigns to stimulate new demand for adult literacy among the estimated 2m adults with problems. But the campaigns were not developed into a sustained strategy. Instead, the policy focus shifted, and interest waned (see Wells and Tuckett 2001). Basic skills provision became supply led. Wider efforts to raise participation were channelled into short-term initiatives.

1980s: initiatives focused on skills and work

Unemployment in the early 1980s created reluctant demand. Recession, new right politics and the sharp rise in unemployment led to a growing emphasis on retraining, work preparation and a range of skills and employment-related interventions. Local authority adult education programmes declined under serious funding pressures. Initiatives were powerfully led and influenced by the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission. The focus was increasingly on individuals getting back to work, or changing direction towards the service industries as opportunities in manufacturing declined. From a broad, fairly open vocational curriculum in the early 1980s, a succession of 'targeted' training programmes for young people and adults became progressively narrower, shorter and more utilitarian.

Early 1990s: growth and learning as a business

Growth was the goal of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) when it was established following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. And growth was quickly seen to happen, often through franchising schemes with business, as well as in the community. Growth in itself, however, was neither a social nor an economic goal. It was the means to achieve business success for individual colleges, competing with each other as 'learning businesses' rather than pursuing growth for 'our country's good'. Policy watchwords and indicators of success, related to the demand side, were 'customer focus', 'client centred' and 'diversity and choice', with UK competitiveness as the overall policy goal for this period in post-16 learning. Competitiveness between providers was assumed to provide the most efficient way of reaching more learners, while offering the taxpayer value for money. It remains unclear to what extent any significant new growth was achieved, or whether colleges were simply 're-labelling' existing learners and using public funding to enhance existing employer training and private sector learning for leisure.

In higher education, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, growth was encouraged as a policy goal but aimed at increasing rather than widening participation. And in higher education, unlike further education, there proved to be a bank of pent-up demand for degrees. This was successfully unleashed, supported by a system of financial support for learners that enabled participation to rise to approximately 30%. Polytechnics were rewarded with the status of university, which helped their promotion. This quantum leap was clearly unsustainable without radical change to the system. A cap on numbers was followed by the gradual replacement of the grant system by loans and, in 1997, the introduction of a requirement for some students to contribute towards their tuition fees. Although the numbers of women in the system had grown significantly, the class and ethnic profile of participants shifted little. After 1997, the numbers of mature students and those from lower social class groups declined, as a result, it is argued, of the introduction of tuition fee contributions.

Late 1990s: widening participation

Widening participation became the key issue in further and higher education in the mid-1990s and radically changed the approach to growth. The FEFC's Widening Participation Committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, concentrated on 'those labelled as failures'. Its 1997 report focused on 'making social cohesion a prominent goal of education'. Kennedy reintroduced social justice and equality as educational currency and as aims for the future, and she set out a programme to address the fact that 'the children of the working class have not been the real beneficiaries' of growth and expansion. The Dearing Report on higher education (1997) also addressed 'widening participation', including the role of further education in preparing non-traditional learners for university. The initiatives to widen participation that followed Kennedy have, however, still focused more on the supply side – for instance the additional funding for providers serving people living in particular postcode areas.

2001: from supply to stimulating demand

The recent change in terminology to 'stimulating demand' – reflected in our choice of title for this book – signals a new and overdue focus on demand. It implies that we need to find out what people want. Stimulating demand for learning is part of the new language to address the national targets for participation and raised qualification levels. This is new territory. There has never been a comprehensive and sustained national strategy focused on demand, and followed by a coherent set of actions. Government, with many partners, needs to develop such a strategy, using existing policy platforms such as the recently established Learning and Skills Council framework, and the neighbourhood renewal strategy.

Learners, learning and education provision

Finding out what people want is critical to a strategy to stimulate demand.

An emphasis on 'learners' and 'learning' (what people do) rather than on 'education and training' (what is provided) has already begun to shift the language subtly towards the potential learner. Lifelong learning, as a broad policy aim, has strengthened the shift. Our title 'attracting new learners' aims to emphasise that, short of introducing statutory penalties such as benefit withdrawal or training levies on employers, participation in learning is a choice that is independent of government. This choice is taken – or not – by individuals, organised groups and communities, and employers.

Lifelong learning is, as John Field (2000) argues, 'beautifully simple', but is also a 'loose and all-encompassing' term. At its broadest, lifelong learning does offer possibilities for addressing demand. It focuses on the learner rather than the system. It is what everyone does 'without even knowing that we are doing it' (Field 2000). Lifelong learning celebrates and worships learning, but avoids the question of what learning the state should fund.

The 'renaissance for Britain' called for in David Blunkett's introduction to *The learning age* (DfEE 1998) paints a vivid portrait of an earlier golden age of learning driven by demand in communities and by self-help, when 'men and women, frequently living in desperate poverty, were determined to improve themselves and their families. They did so through the creation of libraries, study at workers' institutes … at evening classes … and by correspondence courses' (DfEE 1998, p8).

There is a great deal of truth in this picture (see, for example, Harrison 1961). Blunkett might have added that whatever the motivation of individuals, whether to improve themselves, their children or their social class, the enterprise was itself a social one. Libraries, mutual improvement societies and workers' institutes were created by people acting together to support those who shared their dreams. It is also the case that the learning was financially self-supported, individually or mutually, and that the whole tradition began an inexorable decline once the state system of education, elementary and technical, was established. The past would suggest that demand, motivation and hunger to learn are about more than statutory supply of education and training provision, compulsory or otherwise.

Lifelong learning begins to focus on people (demand) rather than systems (supply) because it admits the notion that people learn all the time, consciously and unconsciously. This breadth could force us to be more specific about stimulating demand for publicly funded learning by:

- clarifying and analysing the extent to which a learning culture is already alive and growing outside the formal education and training system. John Field and Frank Coffield have launched an important debate on this subject, based on substantial research (see, for example, Coffield 2000b; Field 2000)
- identifying the types of learning that are appropriately supported by state funding
- deciding precisely what kinds of learning the government and its agencies are selling, or want to stimulate new demand for, to support economic and social policy goals

- investigating whether there is evidence that formal learning nourishes the social and economic fabric and produces a learning culture
- agreeing which kinds of learning are best left to the learners themselves. A person or group may not take kindly to their hobby, passion, belief or acquired knowledge being 'colonised' and subjected to inspection, measurement or compliance in the interests of 'capturing' social capital for public policy goals.

How participation is germinated: more lessons from the past

Widening participation is, as argued above, the most far-reaching concept in the UK's ambitious drive to become a 'learning culture'. For 'participation' goes beyond engaging in learning. It encompasses citizenship, self-development and individuals' capacity for influence and action in pursuit of their own and their community's interests. This contrasts with the culture and language of the 1990s, which reflected a 'provider–customer' model of learning and emphasised the delivery and consumption of learning as a product.

Thus, 'widening participation' addresses how more individuals might be active in society and work as well as in learning, and how change can be triggered 'from below' as well as from above. Historians and sociologists, in particular Max Weber (2001), have developed our understanding of how the discontinuous change which created 'the modern world' came about. A strong ethic was one force. It was expressed by people forming associations and groups around their beliefs and interests, often dissenting ones. A number of thinkers have developed these ideas, including Christine King, with her work on pilgrimage, both in its medieval religious form, and in modern-day secular manifestations; and Stephen Yeo, with his work on mutual and voluntary organisations and organic learning (eg see King 1992a, 1992b and 2000; Yeo 1976, 2001). Writers like these have shown how small groups are capable of generating new ways of thinking, acting and learning – 'ordinary' citizens engaging in extraordinary levels of activity. And, as Hobsbawm (1968) remarked, the English industrial revolution came about through the mushrooming of 'unplanned activities of small men' rather than orchestrated action or government policy.

The early 21st century may be a similar watershed with fast-changing economic and social patterns. This is the post-industrial age, a new century shaped by new forms of communication, and global developments in business creativity and innovation. We are living at a time marked by the strength of both new and traditional beliefs and allegiances: an age of paradox. Are there lessons from the past about how people become more active social agents?

Social capital

Social capital is now a key concept in thinking about ways to develop a learning culture. It can be seen as critical in relation to attracting new learners. There are five reasons for this.

- The development of social capital and its relative, social enterprise, are key policy goals that also foster certain types of learning. Social cohesion, active citizenship, and the revitalising of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, all involve learning, however informal it may be, or however incidental to the main goal.
- A 'social capital' approach to learning takes account of the ways in which demand for learning can be met through wider forms of social or economic participation (eg participation in clubs, interest groups, faith groups, credit unions).
- There is evidence (eg from Nordic countries) that through activism in community and civil society, including self-directed learning, individuals and groups will develop employability and higher level skills. This approach advocates the development of human capital and employability through social capital.
- Social capital can be critical to improving state provision, not just to increasing participation in it. As Robert Putnam (2000, p19) pointed out, the concept of social capital was invented in 1918 to describe the importance of community involvement to successful schools.
- Social capital is both individual and collective. It can therefore contribute to developing lifelong learning and widening participation by helping to break down unhelpful divisions between individuals and groups (including employers). Individuals make connections with others to support their own self-interest. They also join groups whose activities support social goals. Both public and private good can be served at once.

However, Putnam (2000) warns against social capital romanticism – it is not always a good thing. The goals of particular groups can be 'bad', and the ways of operating can be exclusive rather than inclusive. Putnam emphasises the difference between 'bridging' social capital, which is open and expands to increase participation, and 'bonding' social capital, which is closed. This distinction illustrates the negative side of the idea: although everyone is learning as part of social being, they may be learning anti-social things that exacerbate exclusion.

Brokers and intermediaries

There are at least two different types of brokers and intermediaries with clear roles in relation to demand. The first group consists of organisations whose role as brokers is often driven by policy – whether their own or government policy. Such organisations occupy an important position between potential or vulnerable learners and education providers. Some are statutory and government sponsored. Others are independent and voluntary organisations that promote learning. They tend to be public organisations, or on the public–private boundary. Examples include the Connexions service, information, advice and guidance (IAG) services for adults, the employment service, youth services and Learndirect.

The second group is private. Intermediaries in this group may be individuals who act as mentors or leaders for learners. Sometimes the second group is attached to the first. Sometimes they are teachers and parents, more often not. Successful learners can often name one good teacher. But those less confident about learning may have been hindered by their immediate relationships and circumstances, and are often influenced by more episodic contacts and the timely intervention of significant figures. Such intermediaries are often people who are described as 'charismatic', because they tap potential for change, appearing at the right moment to enable individuals to grow. They may be football coaches, IT teachers, enthusiasts, religious believers, craftspeople, poets, good neighbours or even complete strangers whose 'entry' into an individual's life makes a lasting impact (see Howard 2001). Sometimes they are peers who themselves have made a shift in the direction of their lives. Sometimes intermediaries are books that inspire or open a window on a different world.

The nature of brokers and intermediaries may be more visible in less developed societies, as it is in earlier epochs in Britain. Understanding the motivational force of such interactions is a critical area for research.

A comparative perspective

Compared with other countries, including EU competitors, the UK has weaknesses in a number of key areas (see Appendix 3 for a detailed statistical commentary). These include:

- levels of literacy and numeracy in the population
- qualification levels in the workforce
- participation in education and training at age 17
- the lack of a 'learning culture' that is well embedded in organisations and communities (see, for example, case study D, on the need for learning to be 'valued, understood, wanted and widely available').

Arguably, in the UK, we have tolerated or adjusted to low skill levels, particularly in numeracy. An important consequence is that business and industry operate below optimum productivity levels and that we are trapped by a 'low skill equilibrium'. The recent report, *Skills in England 2001* (Campbell 2001) indicates the scale of the problem we may face: though improvements are being made in the 'stock' of skills held by the workforce, demand for higher skills continues to rise.

The development of human capital is viewed as a priority within the OECD. In an OECD study of progress in implementing lifelong learning strategies, the UK belongs to a group of countries that ranks third (out of four 'tiers'), described as 'characterised by comparatively weak and uneven performance on the available measures' (OECD 2001b, see chapter 2, *Lifelong learning for all: taking stock*). The OECD study is cautious in assessing country progress in implementing lifelong learning goals, in view of the lack of measures designed to support such judgements. There are, however, lessons we can learn. Our adult literacy problems and 'long tail' of poor educational attainment are the key factors that prevent us from ranking with the Nordic countries that stand out from the rest, with 'good performance across multiple sectors', or joining the second tier of countries that 'do well but have certain gaps or weaknesses'.

An added problem facing the UK is that of a 'learning divide' – between social classes, and between those with recent experience of education and those without. As Veronica McGivney (2001b) says, 'most surveys of adult participation continue to show that the majority of people who engage in adult, further and higher education are those with longer schooling, higher qualifications and higher socio-economic status' – thus affluence leads to learning rather than vice versa. Cohort studies reinforce this impression – those who come from the most advantaged circumstances and gain most through education in terms of qualifications are the ones continuing with it. We need instead to 'provide the means by which the learning society can be owned by all its citizens, not just by those who have tended to own learning in the past' (Bynner 2001).

The contributory causes of the UK's problems include:

- a lack of investment, resulting in supply-side rationing, including a very part-time approach to improving literacy. Evidence points to the connection between investment and outcomes: Sweden, which ranks second only to Denmark in the percentage of GDP spent on education (see Appendix 3 Figure 3) also has the lowest rates of poor literacy and numeracy among adults (Appendix 3 Figures 6 and 7)
- reluctance to use a range of additional 'levers' of an informal or formal kind to encourage or even coerce employers to play a stronger role in workforce development. Additional incentives – tax relief and interest-free loans, for example – could be offered to individuals
- the lack of a systematic approach. For example, mass campaigns to promote learning can succeed, but not in isolation; education policy needs to engage with social policy.

The UK government is putting substantial effort and resources into a wide range of initiatives, including the University for Industry (Ufi), e-learning, and information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults. A national strategy for basic skills is now emerging. But there is recognition that more needs to be done, and other governments, such as those of the Nordic countries, are arguably already making greater efforts than the UK. Here, we have a tendency to innovate well and follow through badly. Good practice is established and recorded but often not as widely disseminated and replicated as it should be. Education and training is subject to frequent changes, and overall the UK system looks too complex: a huge array of policy initiatives, but fundamentally flawed by our lack of strategy.

Initiatives to date have tended to emphasise the supply side, through steps to reduce the barriers to participation and improve access to learning for reluctant learners and the 'hard to reach'. A fresh approach, with a focus on a systematic approach to creating new demand, is needed. What is the best way to communicate with potential learners? A useful start would be to look at the resources devoted to marketing learning – how much do we spend on doing this? Has the UK missed a golden opportunity (in the most recent government re-shuffle) by not creating a Department for Education and Culture, which would have been one way to communicate the important role of cultural activity as a route to learning for many people? (See case study F on links between cultural and educational institutions.) We also need to communicate better with employers, to make the business case for employee development.

International research suggests that centrally driven policies can make a difference to adult participation and lifelong learning. Sweden, for example, introduced a package of measures in the 1970s, including social benefits for adult learners, subsidies for outreach activities, group targeting and an Educational Leave Act. These measures 'led to a more equitable post compulsory education system than in any other part of the industrial world' (McGivney 2001b).

In England, policy-makers, advisers and practitioners share a wealth of knowledge about 'what works' in stimulating and sustaining demand for learning. Among the many ingredients of successful practice are respect for learners, peer support, and learning programmes that are negotiated with learners (Coffield 2001). The hard task is converting knowledge into practice. Awareness of the benefits of learning and of the opportunities available has certainly risen and government can take some credit for this. However, to achieve the lifelong learning society to which government aspires, something more is needed. Key problems that we need to address include short-term funding, piecemeal support, and not enough recognition of the value of informal learning and the part played by community and voluntary organisations.

It is salutary to consider the situation in the UK in the context of work in the less developed world, where supply rather than demand is more often the barrier to learning. Leaders of popular education movements in such countries face the challenge of convincing governments, bilateral and multilateral organisations of the need to make adult learning a priority. In these countries the campaign for learning is inspired by a conviction about the power of education to overcome many forms of injustice and intolerance (see case study A on women's education and economic development in Latin America).

A significant observation made by international colleagues is that, by comparison with other OECD countries, the UK appears less interested to learn from international experience and to engage in joint debate about how to solve problems. This can give an impression of complacency. It is also a missed opportunity to find inspiration and example to help solve the problems we face.

Motivation to learn: the social and community dimension

What triggers participation in learning among people who seem least attracted by it? Finding an answer to this question means understanding the roots of the disaffection or indifference shown by some groups and communities towards 'organised' adult education and training. There is a tendency for policy-makers and providers to view the people as the problem. 'Non-participation' in learning might appear to signal unwillingness or lack of motivation to learn, to be remedied by exhortation, increased promotional effort, or even compulsion. There is a risk of patronising and even stigmatising individuals and communities and reinforcing feelings of inadequacy, low confidence and alienation.

Not taking part in education can be interpreted in other ways. The influence of social, economic and cultural factors should not be overlooked. Poverty, geography and individual life histories combine to influence decisions to get involved in learning or to drop out and not return, even when opportunities are offered.

Not taking part in formal learning can represent a very rational approach, where the individual has weighed up the costs and likely benefits and judged the outcome unfavourable. Or there are mixed signals: workers are urged or required to gain higher skills, but employer demand remains weak in some sectors, with the result that the quality of jobs on offer may not repay the investment in skills. (Case study B, based on research in Germany, illustrates these issues by examining workers' reluctance to take up training.) And there is likely to remain a 'hard core' of people who resist continuing education and training, even when barriers are removed.

On the other hand, a great deal of learning goes unrecognised by the 'organised' system of adult education provision. Often it is informal and community based or private and self-funded, and increasingly focused on leisure activity and the personal priorities of individuals (Field 2000).

We know that lack of success at school exerts a potent and lasting influence, and a number of conditions need to be in place to combat deep-seated negative reactions. As one researcher writes, 'The extent to which groups who have been under-served by the school system are able or prepared to participate in post compulsory education and training programmes depends on a number of inter-connected factors: former educational experiences; cultural or group norms; the ways in which provision is presented, its perceived relevance, what it costs and where it is delivered' (McGivney 2001b).

Reluctant learners are more likely to be attracted to learning when there are clear outcomes for individuals or communities. The REPEM movement in Latin America, for example, shows how learning linked with the goals of income generation and the development of leadership skills can be a vital ingredient in successful schemes aimed at women in the community (see case study A).

For individuals in disadvantaged communities who feel they lack power to improve the course of their lives, motivation to learn may need nurturing. Discovering a desire to learn and continue learning goes hand in hand with the development of personal capacity to take decisions, make changes and influence events (whether in one's own life or on behalf of the community). This leads to a 'virtuous circle' in which learning supports action, achievement and the growth of self-esteem, which in turn drives the motivation to learn more.

Very often, shared commitment towards a goal other than learning, such as an improvement sought by the community, can be the spur, as the Latin American example shows (case study A). Networks and associations at various levels from local to regional and global are therefore valuable in creating and promoting learning, as they are in overcoming social exclusion. By helping to find and exchange information about successful practice, networks encourage more people at grassroots level to become engaged in learning, as well as acting as a force for change in public policy.

Informal learning in more developed countries – just as in Latin America – can be triggered by a recognition of individuals' immediate priorities and concerns: a personal interest or the wish to bring about change for family or community, perhaps through voluntary work or community activism. 'Informal learning that arises from social interaction and involvement in the community can be transformative and lead to significant personal development outcomes' (McGivney 2001b). For people with unhappy recollections of school and little or no experience of learning since school, having an enjoyable and productive engagement with learning in a familiar local environment can stimulate new enthusiasms. Case study E illustrates how this can happen.

Although educational progression may never have been an explicit aim, this positive contact with learning can mark the beginning of a continuing learning path and lead people to a more planned and structured learning process. Informal, community-based learning can also have a 'cascade' effect, as individuals who are inspired by their own discovery of learning pass this enthusiasm on to their families, colleagues and communities.

These lessons point to ways in which the goals of the community and civic society can differ from those of the economy and the labour market. Economic interests are focused on the need to fuel a competitive economy by improving employability and combating low skill problems. These are important goals.

There is a risk, however, that the values of the market dominate our thinking about what motivates people to learn. In finding ways to improve the lot of disadvantaged communities, these different goals and underlying value systems need to be kept in balance. In particular, the conceptions of communities about their learning needs must be better understood. Promotion of learning should reflect what matters to people, their families and communities. Neighbourhood renewal and cultural enrichment must go hand in hand with economic goals. Case study E argues that workers who are most skilled in connecting with individuals and community groups and acting as intermediaries are often marginalised, with low pay and temporary contracts.

Campaigns can play an important part in raising the 'cultural legitimacy' of learning. But a campaign strategy needs to be well linked with policy and practice if it is to be genuinely effective (see case study D).

Box 1 summarises the steps that policy-makers and practitioners can take to recognise the social and community roots that feed learning expectations and aspirations.

Box 1 Challenges for policy-makers and practitioners

- Link learning with goals that matter in people's lives.
- Strengthen communities as locations for learning and supporters of learning.
- Provide support for networks in and between communities. Networks can demand learning and help embed a learning culture.
- Bring informal learning into the mainstream of provision, linking social policy objectives and resources with those of the learning and skills domain.

Attracting new learners through learning programmes and qualifications

It goes without saying that formal curricula and qualifications are not the only influences on motivation to learn. As suggested earlier, previous learning experiences and present social and economic circumstances also play an important role.

Many different factors interact: it is thus not possible to 'test' the impact of learning programmes and qualifications in the laboratory sense.

That said, initial education in school should, at its best, provide the foundation of knowledge and skills that people need to go on learning throughout life. Sadly, in the UK, there is a persistent problem of young people leaving school ill-equipped in literacy and numeracy. This has inevitable repercussions on government subsidies for remedial work at FE level, to improve the stock of basic skills in the working population. The work done in the FE sector is strongly influenced by what happens in schools.

As well as providing a secure foundation for adulthood, initial education should cultivate the desire to go on learning throughout life. In the English education system, individual learning careers and learning habits are often determined at a very early stage. It can be argued that attainment in the National Curriculum tests (known as SATs) at age 7 already has an impact, not only on how children view themselves, but also on how they are treated by others and whether they are subsequently encouraged into an academic or vocational route.

Another characteristic of the English system is that staying on at school has tended to be for those who follow the academic route – the route that more often leads to further education and better employment outcomes.

Thus, the long-term effects of school success or failure demonstrate that how we are taught and assessed or examined early on has a potent and lasting influence. For a substantial minority, the English system of schooling does not encourage continuation in learning.

There is great potential here to bring about change in how we establish and nurture motivation to continue learning. This argues for dynamic interaction between professionals working in schools and post-16 institutions. Simply prolonging initial education is not the answer. Much depends on the nature of the learning experience and the outcomes for individual learners. The government's proposal to create a more coherent 14–19 phase of education indicates, perhaps, a recognition of the drawbacks of the examination threshold at 16.

As with the school curriculum, adult learning programmes and qualifications clearly can influence demand in important ways. Factors that are likely to deter people from engaging or continuing in learning include:

- a complex qualifications system that is difficult for learners and potential learners to grasp. Learners need to be able to see a clear path forward
- a lack of information and guidance tailored to adults' needs
- weak links between informal and formal learning, and too little recognition of informal learning as a key source of demand for learning. We need to understand more about the relationship between formal and informal learning: we know a lot about what works, but much less about how to transform this knowledge into widespread effective practice
- the low value placed on vocational qualifications compared with academic success (see the next chapter)
- shortcomings in the way we communicate with learners and potential learners about the benefits of learning programmes and qualifications and where they might lead.

For adults with low or no qualifications, access to reputable certification at lower levels is important. It can provide recognition of competence, to help with progress at work or provide a route out of unemployment. It can give individuals, whatever their jobs, a secure sense of occupational identity. The lack of clear paths from informal to formal learning and from non-accredited to accredited learning can inhibit progress. Weak connections between qualifications at different levels also cause problems.

Adults who have had little or no contact with education for some time will need flexible and non-intrusive arrangements for assessment and qualifications if they are to be encouraged to continue. Groundwork is being done by the LSC on a kite-marked approach to accreditation of prior learning (APL). Finding ways to measure outcomes – particularly the outcomes of informal learning – calls for creativity and also care in deciding what should be measured and what should not (Greenwood *et al* 2001).

A credit system encompassing the existing qualifications framework and other types of learning may be an option to consider. Research on the London Open College Network system of credit-based learning, offering curricula targeted particularly at people who are educationally disadvantaged, indicates the success of 'bite-sized credits', coupled with childcare and 'a generally more flexible approach to the adult learners' engagement with the course' (Bynner 2001).

Turning to the curriculum as a stimulus for learning: if we interpret 'curriculum' in the broadest sense, to incorporate how and where learning is delivered, there is evidence to show that different settings can increase motivation to learn. For example, cultural organisations outside the education system – such as local libraries, art galleries, museums and archives – can motivate, 'animate' and provide individualised support for learners, working in partnership with others. Case study F, based on Stuttgart city library, illustrates how this can work.

The Stuttgart case study recognises that, in the internet age, educational organisations are no longer the sole repositories of knowledge and information – these are much more widely dispersed and freely available. Thus, there is potential for organisations to collaborate in support of learning – to help make learning part of daily life. For example, adults may need personal help to access learning and to choose learning methods and media that suit their needs and interests. There is scope to connect learning through cultural institutions to personal counselling and job counselling services, thus 'linking up' help for individuals (see case study F).

Learning that is integrated into other activities – 'wrapped' and 'hidden' learning, learning 'en passant', learning and guidance combined with arts, music and cultural activities – can provide the all-important stimulus or first step into learning. Much more could be done to exploit the potential of cultural institutions as 'gateways' to learning. In the UK, the Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative indicates the possibilities. This initiative, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), includes pilot projects involving museums and galleries in family learning activities and other activities aimed at young people and adults with little or no experience of education since leaving school.

The lifelong learning 'industry' commands a huge budget. Marketing and communication are key ingredients in business success, in education as in other industries. There is a case for saying that far too little attention has been given to how we communicate about learning – how we use the tools of marketing and promotion. In other industries, this would be viewed as a serious problem. We need to examine how resources are used to best effect in devising ways to communicate with learners and prospective learners. Selling 'learning' by focusing on qualifications and courses as the essential 'products' of learning may not always succeed in stimulating new demand. For some adults, the potential gains (eg the ability to cope with practical, day to day challenges; better quality of life, relationships, job prospects) are more persuasive arguments for getting involved, especially when these are seen to have immediate relevance to their lives.

Box 2 summarises the challenges that face policy-makers and practitioners in developing learning programmes and qualifications that are attractive to the widest possible audience.

Box 2 Challenges for policy-makers and practitioners

- Encourage learning providers to develop more innovative learning settings that attract new learners. This will require staff development resources to cope with change, as well as skills to collaborate with other organisations.
- Create learning opportunities that fit into the patterns of daily life.
- Develop school curricula and qualifications that pave the way for lifelong learning for all – recognising the powerful influence of schooling on attitudes to learning later in life.
- Find ways to simplify the qualifications system.
- Investigate robust and creative ways to recognise achievements resulting from informal learning.
- Improve pathways between different types and levels of learning and market these effectively.
- Market the benefits of learning (eg in quality of life and job prospects).
- Encourage a widespread programme to bring cultural institutions into lifelong learning and to strengthen the links between the education and cultural sectors.

Attracting new learners in the workplace

How do the skills of the UK workforce compare with other countries? During the 1990s, the three largest EU economies – the UK, France and Germany – all saw improvements in the proportion of their workforce qualified to Level 3 (see Appendix 3 Figure 5). The UK ranks second, with just over 40% qualified to Level 3 by 1998, compared with just under 40% in France.

Germany, however, remained well ahead, with over 70% qualified to Level 3 by 1997. Germany has the advantage of its highly developed 'dual system' of training, covering all occupational sectors, which ensures that the majority of young people leaving school before the age of 18 or 19 undergo a 3-year training combining work-based learning and Berufsschule (offering vocational and general education).

So, what can be done to improve matters in the UK?

Most of the adults in the 'at risk' group – those with no further education or training after compulsory schooling – will be employed for most of their working lives. The workplace therefore represents a huge, under-exploited opportunity to bring more people into learning, particularly the less skilled. It is a place where people's interest in learning can be inspired and sustained throughout working life, particularly in the case of those who have had unsuccessful experiences of schooling.

This is an opportunity that must be seized by stakeholders, including government and the LSC, if we are to make significant improvements in the short to medium term on both the flows and the stock of skilled and motivated adults.

The UK's underlying problems include:

- weak regulatory frameworks, with a largely voluntary approach to training by employers
- a lack of clear signals from the labour market about the value of qualifications
- inequality of access to workplace learning opportunities, with the main beneficiaries of spending on workplace vocational education and training being the young, the more highly skilled and those working in larger organisations
- too many unqualified young people entering the labour market. Only 60% of young people in the UK are at Level 2 or higher, and only 40% have a Level 3 qualification. In other EU countries, 80% of young people are at Level 3 or higher. (The problem for Germany is the reverse of that in the UK: in Germany it is not a question of stimulating more young people to gain vocational qualifications but of supplying an adequate number of training places to meet demand.)

- the lack of a reputable full-time vocational route to Level 3. Existing UK apprenticeship provision is uneven and successful achievement of the full qualification remains too rare. Other countries, where all but 20% reach Level 3, are characterised by a strong vocational route to Level 3 qualifications
- the low value placed on vocational qualifications compared with academic success.

For many workers, this deeply embedded cultural attitude results in a lack of a sense of 'occupational identity' as a source of self-worth. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Germany, where training endows individuals with occupational status, embodied in the notion of 'Beruf'. Trainees also acquire a core of transferable knowledge and skill that enables them to progress and to change occupations. Moreover, the possession of qualifications conveys an entitlement to specific wages, as well as eligibility for invalidity insurance, and the right not to accept employment below the level of the qualification.

Despite this catalogue of problems, the outlook for the UK is not entirely discouraging. Already there are some signs of change, with employers setting the agenda, promoting shorter and more focused courses, and an increase in the learning opportunities available.

Ending the flow of poorly qualified young people into the labour market would be an important step forward. Foundation and advanced Modern Apprenticeships currently offer the best hope of bringing the UK closer to its EU partners in the proportion of young people qualified to Level 3. Effective regulation to ensure the quality and consistency of apprenticeship qualifications would help. We should benchmark our apprenticeship training, drawing on research evidence on the defining characteristics of successful provision.

Employees, however, still face a number of barriers to taking up learning opportunities (see, for example, case study G). These include a lack of financial support and time off to learn, apprehension about taking up learning after a long break, and uncertainty about whether personal investment in training will pay off in terms of better pay and prospects. Case study B, based on research in Germany, supports the argument that, if learning at work were rewarded, individuals would start to make rational decisions about learning and training.

Many workers may feel that their problem is not a lack of skills but a lack of qualifications, and fear that 'owning up' to being unqualified may result in being stigmatised and victimised at work. Confidence to overcome the barriers is not helped when the language used by providers to promote learning seems intimidating rather than motivating.

Encouragement and incentives for less skilled employees are vital: it is known that this group of workers is less likely to accept training when it is offered, perhaps because of a rational decision based on their perception that the benefit will not outweigh the cost.

Trade unions can be influential in promoting confidence and changing cultural attitudes, by:

- encouraging peer support for learning in the workplace. Advocacy of learning by peers is powerful and free of the constraints and obligations faced by employers (see case study G)
- giving credibility to work-based learning initiatives

- working in partnership with education and training providers and with employers to 'reach out' to non-traditional learners in the workforce
- using their lobbying and brokerage powers to enable employees to 'demand' learning. The government's proposal (incorporated into a new Employment Bill, DTI, November 2001) to give union learning representatives the same rights as other union representatives recognises their value in increasing access to learning opportunities at work (see also DfES, May 2001)
- taking steps to enrich work content and to encourage technical and organisational innovation
- working with employers to set and upgrade skill standards
- monitoring the quality of training provided in the workplace.

UNISON, the trade union for people working in public services in Britain, supports the concept of 'workplace partnerships' that can identify training needs, resolve problems, help with the quality assurance of learning and promote a culture of learning in the workplace. Such partnerships can help employers to 'grow their own professionals' by investing resources in the skills of existing staff and thus helping companies to maintain or increase their competitiveness. (Case study G gives examples.)

Better workplace learning calls for good learning products and attractive publicity. Focusing on individual employees' personal development, their needs and goals, will help, by showing how learning can lead to new skills, occupational progression, the ability to cope with change, and wider choices in the labour market. At the same time, delivering learning to groups of employees provides 'strength in numbers' ('I did it, so can you') and helps overcome the apprehension of employees who have had no contact with learning for a long time.

In the Netherlands a more coercive approach has been adopted towards employees, placing strong emphasis on individual responsibility to maintain employability.

While unions and employees can exert pressure, it is employers who hold the key to increasing demand for learning in the workplace. For example, they can:

- require or encourage higher skills among employees
- show that successful learning will be recognised and rewarded, to enable employees to make rational decisions about taking up learning opportunities. Employees' motivation to learn and continue learning is higher when employers show that they value learning and reward success. In Germany, vocational qualifications are highly regarded by employers and viewed as evidence of an employee's self-discipline and motivation to learn
- enable employees to deploy new skills and knowledge acquired through learning by reviewing roles in the workplace and deploying the new assets acquired through training
- provide material and financial support for continued vocational training
- build up the teaching skills of experienced employees, by encouraging them to train as mentors to new recruits
- capture the benefits of informal training gained by workers on the job

- invest in the kinds of in-company innovations that rely on high levels of skill in the workforce. Technical changes biased towards skills will increase the opportunities for workplace learning
- work with unions and trainers to define and review occupational skills, and assess these skills on the job with trainees.

How can employers be persuaded to play their part? Measures shown to succeed in other countries range from informal 'levers' through to more formal approaches. Informal levers include exhortation, advice and help, the provision of learning facilities (such as e-learning) and the encouragement of union learning representatives. Also in this category are frameworks such as Investors in People (IiP), the National Training Organisations (NTOs) and partnerships of various kinds including 'social partnerships'.

Social partnerships between the state, employers and employees tend to be stronger in other countries. Such partnerships could be one way both to place pressure on employers and support them in playing a more active part in lifelong learning in the UK. Germany, for example, has complex but well-established and well-understood social partnership relationships including sectoral agreements, subsidiarity arrangements, works councils, the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, and so on.

Formal levers on employers include employee rights (to time off for learning, and/or to funds for learning), rewards and levies, product regulation and contract compliance. Corporate governance rules offer an additional route, for example, through such measures as 'human resource accounting'. Setting higher skill standards is another lever to encourage employers to invest in upgrading skills.

Such measures are needed, as it is clear that the UK's voluntary approach towards employers' responsibility to train employees has had only limited success. Stronger frameworks are now needed to draw employers in as serious social partners in a lifelong learning enterprise. Experience in other countries, such as the Netherlands, Canada and Germany, suggests that a tougher approach can succeed. Indeed, the impact of health and safety regulations in the UK shows that regulatory requirements can be effective in increasing demand for training.

'Carrots' can be combined with 'sticks' – support as well as pressure, recognising that employers may be deterred from getting involved in training. There are genuine concerns to be overcome, such as:

- difficulties in predicting longer term skill needs
- difficulties in estimating the returns for both the employer and for staff
- training provision that may be less than ideal in terms of its location, quality, timing and cost
- the issue of who should pay – for both the direct cost of training and the indirect cost in loss of staff time on the job.

Persuasive tax incentives would give employers more encouragement to train their staff. Stimulus can be provided through proactive brokerage services with good communication skills. Case study C, based on experience in Australia, comments on the roles of training brokers and local coordinators in building collaboration aimed at increasing the take-up of vocational education and training.

Bearing in mind the message that learning may not be the primary aim, employers are likely to be more receptive to brokers who can promote the goals of higher profit and business success via a range of services and facilities, with learning as a key component. Smaller employers would benefit particularly from this kind of service.

Another option may be to find ways to link small firms with larger companies to share education and training resources. However, creativity, flexibility and a personal approach will be necessary to reach very small and micro businesses, for which the Small Business Service (SBS) may not be the first port of call. Such firms tend to build their professional identities around informal networks and websites, small clubs and other gatherings. Effective brokers will need to find supportive ways to link with networks and groups of these kinds.

Box 3 summarises the challenges for policy-makers and practitioners in taking advantage of the major opportunities available to increase demand for learning in work and work preparation.

Box 3 Challenges for policy-makers and practitioners

- Introduce a stronger regulatory framework for workforce development, including equality of access to workplace learning opportunities.
- Provide incentives for employers to support workforce development and continued vocational training.
- Support and evaluate the success of 'brokerage' services, such as union learning representatives and the SBS, in encouraging greater participation in learning.
- Stimulate a cultural change in the value placed on vocational skills and qualifications, by promoting learning as a key ingredient in business success.
- Examine ways to support training for self-employed and casual workers.
- Encourage regions to 'demand' learning. Regional development agencies are important stakeholders – develop their capacity to provide an effective source of demand.
- Look for ways to achieve more effective interaction between national policies on workforce development, intermediate actions (by brokers such as SBS business advisers in England, and similar services in Scotland and Wales), and individual companies.
- End the flow of poorly qualified young people onto the labour market.

case studies

Case study A

The role of learning in the economic development of Latin American women

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This case study reports the findings of a competition that was organised for economic undertakings run by women (Concurso Emprendimientos Económicos Liderados por Mujeres). The competition made it possible to identify a large number of relevant experiences in the various regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. Nine enterprises were selected by the judges as winners for their respective countries. What follows is some of the good practice identified.

The enterprises enable women to generate income from their productive work. They are created by the women themselves, and provide opportunities for them to further their education and personal development as well as nurturing group development. Examples of the enterprises in the competition include: coconut processing in Brazil, street cleansing services in Peru and tomato sauce processing in Venezuela.

Common features of these groups are that they are owned and managed by women, often using democratic processes. They are legal entities and therefore able to work with the state and development agencies. They all have programmes of education that enable their members to learn both the technical and business skills associated with the enterprise. They often support their members with health and personal development education and small loans at times of family crisis.

The nine winning enterprises have demonstrated their success in the following respects.

1. They have enabled their members to **successfully manage their economic ventures** in terms of income, availability of equipment and marketing channels, as well as access to credit and opportunities for training.
2. They have developed **participatory and democratic models of organisation** that combine business operations with the development of personal and group skills.
3. They have all **facilitated changes in personal identity**, increasing the self-esteem of the participants, enabling them to see their families in a new light, and allowing them to establish new relationships within the nucleus of the home – between spouses, among children, between parents and children. This has made it possible for the participants to share the burden of household chores, permitting them, in turn, to attend to their economic undertakings and dedicate their time to economically productive work.
4. They have managed to **generate income** for all group members. For some women, this was the first time they had earned money.
5. The money earned by the women has made it possible for them to send their children to school, buy new household equipment and improve their homes.
6. Their participation in the undertakings has **enabled the women to become better integrated and recognised within their communities and within institutional structures**, in some cases even on a national level.

7 Their common efforts have given the women a sense of solidarity that has become a source of psychological, social and political support for them.

8 Their ventures have come to **serve as examples for other women and groups**, in some cases on a national scale.

This case study illustrates the importance of the social and economic context in stimulating the desire to learn. Learning was instrumental in enabling the women to gain economic security. However, learning was also expressive of the solidarity that arose from common life experiences. The case study serves to demonstrate how working with people with similar life experiences or needs can create a supportive atmosphere and the incentive to learn.

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Case study B

Overcoming employees' reluctance to take part in vocational education and training

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Research was conducted at the University of Flensburg among semi-skilled and skilled manual workers and craftsmen in selected regions in Germany between 1993 and 1998. The research aimed to explore the attitudes of workers who had not taken part in vocational training beyond that they had received as young people.

Among those interviewed, reasons for not taking up training were given as:

- further vocational training will not lead to changes in my job or work conditions (64%)
- further vocational training involves too much additional strain besides everyday work (62%)
- further vocational training will not improve my prospects of promotion (53%)
- further vocational training takes too much time (47%)
- I cannot reconcile further vocational training with my family or home duties (44%)
- further vocational training will cost too much and I will suffer too great a loss of earnings (41%).

From this it is concluded that increasing participation requires more than restating the economic rationale for training. It involves constructing social reasons for participation that are significant to the workers concerned. As in the UK, the higher the level of initial training, the more likely continuing participation is. Workers whose family and peer group did not have positive experiences of further training were more difficult to convince. East Germans who had seen training schemes without related job opportunities were concerned that they could become overqualified. An emphasis on formal qualifications meant that much of the unstructured on-the-job learning experienced by workers went unrecognised by employers.

A workshop with non-participants explored the factors that would encourage them to take up learning. These factors included:

- courses free of charge and payment of incidental costs
- competent and qualified teachers
- convenient location
- small learning groups (maximum of eight)
- enough jobs available in the skills for which training is offered
- obligation upon employers to allow training in work time
- more influence upon training decisions by works councils
- learning should be fun and increase self-esteem and personal satisfaction.

A repeated theme in the workshop was the lack of recognition from employers that further training incurred costs of time and money and disrupted domestic routines and responsibilities.

Recommendations to employers and providers wishing to stimulate demand for training included:

- increasing the quality of further training, focusing on definitions of quality put forward by non-participants
- increasing the availability of information, advice and guidance about opportunities
- improving learner support, in particular regarding the cost of training and being able to train during work hours
- working with potential participants to demonstrate concrete benefits from participation.

Resistance to training is complex and may be influenced by seven inter-related factors, described below. Those wishing to increase participation in the workforce should find these factors helpful in analysing situations and proposing action.

1. **Age related issues** Older workers need their confidence as learners building up. Learning alongside younger employees with more recent qualifications may be daunting.
2. **Employer attitudes** Some employers were resentful of disruption to work schedules caused by training, others saw training as something employees were told rather than persuaded to do. Negative attitudes coming from employers discouraged participation.
3. **The quality of the learning experiences** The teaching approach towards older workers was seen as important. Making the learning fun, breaking it up into small steps and taking participants' questions seriously were seen as important motivators.
4. **Training as more than technical knowledge** Workers valued training that was broader than their immediate job. They wanted basic IT training that acknowledged their anxieties about new technology.
5. **Labour market relevance** Training needed to be clearly related to opportunities in the labour market or within the employer's business. There needed to be a realistic chance of the efforts of undertaking training being rewarded with a better job or promotion.
6. **Financing learning** Lack of recognition of the incidental costs involved in training was a deterrent. A clear commitment to financial support from the employer or the state was important.
7. **Personal circumstances** Employees sought recognition of the way in which training might disrupt their domestic responsibilities and financial support where they incurred additional costs such as childcare.

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Case study C

Collaboration in Australian vocational education and training

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Collaboration and partnerships are never simple, nor are they uniform in their influence and outcomes. In each case collaboration occurs for specific purposes in specific places at specific times, and its very nature means that some stakeholders will be included and other groups may not. This case study presents conclusions from a study of vocational education and training (VET) arrangements for adults in 10 regional sites in Australia.

Purposes for collaboration

Seven purposes for collaborative activity, or drivers of VET collaborations, were identified in the study.

1. Community collaborative response to adversity – for example, providing the skills for a heritage site opened in response to mining closures.
2. Collaborations based on cultural association – for example, providers forming partnerships with indigenous cultural associations to increase the take-up of VET.
3. Enterprise-driven partnerships – this was the least common, employer-driven model of collaboration.
4. Natural resource management and community-led multi-sectoral collaborations – for example, collaborations built around environmental issues involving the voluntary sector and schools.
5. Policy-driven collaborations – for example, VET providers collaborating to provide work placements.
6. Provider-driven collaborations – collaboration between VET providers and schools to enable schools to offer VET in remote rural areas.
7. Skills development for industry – collaboration in areas of skill need in a particular industry.

Factors that emerged as enhancing the effectiveness of collaborative arrangements, and consequently the outcomes of planned and negotiated training, were:

- **opportunities and structures for interaction** that facilitate networking and collaboration
- **human infrastructure** that included enabling leadership, and training brokers and/or local coordinators who facilitate the operation of ongoing relationships
- **some shared visions, values and trust** among the partners in the collaboration; partnerships with a vision that allows a mix of meeting the needs of individuals, the community and the region were the most successful in terms of VET outcomes
- **networks extending outside the community** that give access to advice, resources and specialist providers.

What are the barriers to effective outcomes from collaborations?

Insufficient quantity or quality of the factors discussed above reduce the effectiveness of outcomes. The study found three additional factors that worked against effective collaboration:

- the small size of some communities means there are not enough groups and individuals with time and skills to plan and negotiate to meet local training needs
- a tension between competition (a feature of current Australian VET policy) and collaboration was seen to reduce the effectiveness of VET, especially in the thin markets of smaller towns and rural areas
- not enough continuity of programmes, or local personnel wasted resources in keeping up with changes or boosting waning enthusiasm.

VET outcomes of effective collaborations

Outcomes of effective collaborations can be summarised as:

- savings from shared resources
- increased and better informed demand from VET clients (individuals, enterprises and communities)
- identified, accessible training pathways for clients
- better community response to change
- improved social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Conclusion

Effective collaborations maximise the outcomes from scarce human, physical and financial resources in regional communities by identifying, articulating and negotiating to meet demand for VET. Often the need to avoid duplication of services and maximise the range of opportunities in small communities with access to few resources is mentioned as a reason for collaboration. In similar vein the pooling of resources is an important driver of collaboration/partnerships between people and organisations in the more isolated communities. The most effective collaborations are those that include life skills, such as social skills, literacy and numeracy, and personal development as well as skills for work. The common aims of the partnership drive the learning agenda, which therefore develops its own compelling rationale aside from learning 'as a good thing'.

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Case study D

The Campaign for Learning in the UK

Bill Lucas, Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning, UK

The Campaign for Learning (CfL) started as an initiative of the RSA (the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) in November 1997. It developed into an independent charity funded by contributions from government, business and the voluntary sector.

The CfL is working towards a vision of an inclusive society, in which learning is valued, understood, wanted and widely available to everybody – a world in which everyone is seen as having the potential to learn. The mission of the CfL is to create an appetite for learning in individuals that will sustain them for life.

There are social, functional and emotional barriers to learning. Emotional barriers, such as previous bad experiences of learning, need individual support if they are to be overcome. Functional barriers, such as money and childcare, need action by government, employers and learning providers. Social barriers, such as a poor publicity climate, peer pressure and family background, can be overcome by effective promotion of learning. This is where the CfL plays its role. It raises awareness through annual 'Learning at Work Days' and 'Family Learning Weekends'. It promotes positive stories about learning through its Learning Press Agency. It provides research and resources that support learning promotion.

The awareness events allow a wide range of partners to participate around a common theme and so generate interest in national and local media.

The key lessons learnt from the CfL to date include:

- the effectiveness of good public relations
- the importance of working with partners and through networks
- the value of intermediaries
- the power of peer groups
- the benefits of a multi-layered approach that links promotion to policy and practice
- the advantages of consistency.

Although the CfL aims to alter attitudes to learning throughout the UK, it is clear that learning promotion needs to be targeted. Audiences need to be identified using criteria such as age, gender, ethnicity, previous qualifications, working life stage, family status, employment status, income and location. The tone and style of learning promotion need to be consistent with other media accessed by the target audience. Focus groups can be very helpful in identifying the most appropriate media to use. For example, work with a group of young mothers identified that, although the television was the most common medium used, they also read nearly everything that their child brought home from school. Newspapers and magazines were less relevant to this group.

Much of the effort to attract new learners is put into overcoming functional and emotional barriers by working with learning providers and individuals. The message of the CfL is that learning also needs to be seen as significant and legitimate in the wider society if it is to capture people's attention. Well-executed learning promotion needs to run alongside and complement other policies. Potential learners are sensitive to signals from the wider culture.

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Case study E

Informal learning in the UK

Veronica McGivney, Principal Research Officer, NIACE, UK.
Case study adapted from McGivney (2001b).

I recently met a young mother from an Afro-Caribbean community in London who, through her involvement in a pre-school group, had joyfully discovered a talent for creative writing. This had opened up a whole new world for her and she was now busily composing children's stories, sharing them with other parents and reading them to children in local primary schools. She would never previously have considered joining a creative writing class: 'Before this I thought all life was 9 to 5. Other people wrote and drew. It didn't happen in my world.' For this woman, as for so many others, the opening up of 'imagined possibility' had been enabled not by formal education but by the informal learning process she underwent in a voluntary group (McGivney 2000).

There is no universally accepted definition of informal learning. It is a broad and loose concept that embraces a huge diversity of learning activities, contexts, styles, arrangements and settings. Because of its scale and diversity and because it is often both a part and a product of ostensibly non-educational activities, it is difficult to estimate the amount of informal learning that is undertaken. Informal learning is more inclusive than formal learning: people with less schooling and qualifications are just as likely to be learning informally as those with higher academic achievements, and there is not the same falling off with age as there is in formal learning.

Through my own work I have become increasingly convinced of the value of informal learning, not only for its own sake but also as a means of revitalising communities and as a route into more structured learning for people who would not normally consider undertaking an organised education or training programme. It also helps to overcome social exclusion by providing what Clark (1992, pp125–126) has described as 'the three S's: a sense of security, a sense of significance and a sense of solidarity'. Clark maintains that the first provides people with a safe space in which to learn, the second reaffirms their sense of identity by making them feel valued and that they have a particular role to play, and the third provides a sense of togetherness and 'a wider world to which to belong'.

As a result of the learning that arises from the development of interests, community activism or voluntary activities, people's confidence grows, their interests widen and they identify a desire for more information or new skills. At this point they frequently move into a more planned and structured learning process. In order to move from informal learning to structured education or training programmes, however, people need information, encouragement and referrals to appropriate provision. In many informal learning contexts I have found that this kind of support is frequently provided by people such as community and development workers, health visitors, playgroup leaders, community education tutors, outreach and guidance workers – people who inform, motivate, enthuse, encourage and advise individuals and groups involved in informal learning and act as intermediaries between them and formal education providers (McGivney 1999).

The contradiction at the heart of so many widening participation initiatives has been that those who are most committed and effective at being intermediaries are usually the most poorly paid and insecure workers; those who, as one recently commented to me, 'put in 150% of time for 50% of pay'.

Although informal learning is the most widespread form of learning, until recently it has received little recognition and investment. Informal learning should be valued and supported for its own sake, not just for its contribution to educational progression. It should not be transformed into something different by funding regimes and constraints related to targets. This would be counter-productive and deter many potential learners. It is precisely the flexibility, creativity and responsiveness of much informal learning that opens up to people the possibility of engaging in formal and accredited learning.

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Case study F

German cultural institutions as gateways to learning

Achim Puhl, Scientific Staff, German Institute for Adult Education, Germany

In Germany, cultural institutions such as libraries, art galleries, museums and archives operate separately from learning institutions such as adult education centres, colleges and university continuing education departments.

The rapid change in the way in which knowledge is made available is, however, blurring some of the boundaries between institutions. Flexible delivery over the internet enables people to consult information at times and places of their own choosing. Individualisation of curricula means that learners select modules that reflect their interests, but as a consequence often need more individual support to create a learning pathway. Integration of public policy means that there are new expectations of collaboration between institutions in different spheres. Initiatives such as learning cities and learning centres suggest a more integrated approach. These developments have led to a new emphasis on informal learning with friends and colleagues – 'learning en passant'.

A range of initiatives was tried in cultural institutions in Stuttgart to encourage an interest in learning. These included:

- surveys of visitors to cultural institutions to see if they had any learning needs
- readings about artists in foreign languages as a way of stimulating interest in language learning
- placing a line of red tape on a library floor from the travel guides to the language learning packs
- creating notice boards about learning opportunities in cultural institutions.

The initiatives varied in their success but they created a network of agencies that were able to make referrals to each other. This included a network of agencies able to offer information, advice and guidance to prospective learners, which included the library, the adult education centre and the professional spiritual welfare institute.

Conclusions from this work were that to stimulate demand for learning a range of factors are needed:

- access to information both virtually and locally
- counselling in different stages in the process
- increased confidence and competence as learners
- experiences that animated learners' interest
- social interaction to support interest.

Lessons for cultural institutions included:

- providing easily accessible information and themes
- wrapping or hiding learning in motivating settings
- dealing with visitors in a personal way
- embedding opportunities for learning in existing social and institutional contexts.

Lessons for learning providers included:

- use of cultural institutions to attract learners
- being more open to the links between informal and formal learning
- integrating counselling into the different phases of the learning process
- presenting learning as fun and desirable rather than a dull necessity.

This case study illustrates how pre-existing interests can be translated into learning participation when institutions in different spheres collaborate with learning and guidance providers.

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Case study G

The experience of a UK trade union in reaching non-traditional learners

Tony Chandler, Head of Learning and Organising Services, UNISON, UK

UNISON was formed in 1993 from the merger of three earlier public sector unions that represented semi-skilled and manual workers. The union inherited a history of educational work with members and has a national education staff of 40, which is large for a UK trade union.

After some pilot work, UNISON reached a national agreement with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in 1996 to deliver Return to Learn (R2L) courses nationally to UNISON members. The R2L courses were targeted at those likely to have been previously disadvantaged in the education system, including women, black workers, part-time workers, low-paid and manual workers. The number of students continued to expand and it became apparent that the courses could expand further if partnership arrangements with employers were entered into. Munro, Rainbird and Holly (1997), in their evaluation of partnership courses, show a range of employers involved such as health authorities, local authorities and universities.

The partnership with employers has meant that courses have been opened up to all staff and not just UNISON members; a side-effect of this has been to increase staff awareness of the role of UNISON. The courses have helped participants, who often did not get much access to employer-provided training, to gain the confidence to deal with the rapid pace of change experienced in most public sector workplaces.

An important feature of the R2L courses has been their focus on personal development – enabling students to discover and manipulate information in new ways and evaluate it critically. This increases the self-confidence of students and their ability to progress to further learning. UNISON has a carefully tiered system of opportunities provided by its Open College. Students have also progressed onto other employer-provided opportunities such as NVQs.

Whereas the earlier R2L courses targeting purely UNISON members were undertaken in the students' own time, it has been a principle of the partnership courses that the course should take part in work time with students doing assignments in their own time. This means there are some potential difficulties in attracting people onto the courses, which need to be monitored and tackled where they arise. They include:

- ensuring that the publicity about the course reaches everyone who might benefit. There is a temptation for line managers to be discouraging when faced with the prospect of releasing staff from their duties for a course
- avoiding problems of stigmatising participants as having poor literacy and numeracy, which can occur if there is a peer culture suspicious of education.

Union activists and previous students can be helpful in overcoming these obstacles and offering moral support to students.

The role of peer support in learning has gained increased recognition and, supported by the DfEE (now DfES) Union Learning Fund, a number of unions have developed the role of 'union learning representative'. The role of the representative is to encourage and advise members of learning opportunities. The representatives often share a level of trust that can engage those who would be embarrassed to admit their learning needs to their manager. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has developed training and accreditation for these representatives. Now government proposes to give them the same recognition and facilities as are enjoyed by other types of trade union representative.

Unions such as UNISON see the development of union learning representatives as a way of building long-term capacity that will ensure that those least likely to take up training are aware of the opportunities open to them and have the support they need to take them up. The peer relationship, rather than the managerial relationship, is used to stimulate demand.

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Conclusions and next steps

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of the international seminar was that, as participants shared their experience of adult learning across 10 countries, such a wealth of common knowledge and viewpoints emerged. Despite the great diversity of learning contexts, there were many areas of agreement about the characteristics of reluctant and 'hard to reach' learners, the key problems to address, and the kinds of learning programmes that succeed in attracting new learners.

If practitioners and policy-makers already agree on so many of the key factors that can trigger or deter demand for learning, what is it that puts a brake on progress? Part of the answer lies in the shortage of sound research evidence based on evaluations of the impact of different initiatives (Hillage and Aston 2001). Knowing what has worked in generating new demand for learning from particular groups of learners, and what kind of impact was achieved, would help in decisions about replicating good practice. Judging what kinds of initiatives will transfer readily to the UK's new funding and planning framework is an additional task.

The second key factor that helps explain the UK's difficulties in creating substantial new demand for learning is the lack of a strategic approach: many initiatives have been funded, locally, regionally and nationally, often with outstanding results, but without the necessary breadth of impact or long-term support that is needed.

The paragraphs that follow distil the main ideas put forward in relation to:

- strategies to promote increased demand in the UK
- directions for research on attracting new learners.

Strategies to promote increased demand in the UK

Make 'joined-up' action a priority

This point cannot be overemphasised. Action to promote demand needs to be much more 'joined up', with stronger links between social and cultural objectives on the one hand, and the learning and skills agenda on the other. Social and educational interventions can reinforce one another: a neighbourhood with strong social capital (strong networks and community groups) can provide the foundation for developing human capital (higher skills and qualifications).

Those who are engaged in developing new national initiatives – whether in the learning and skills arena or focused on social and cultural aims – should be in touch with the LSC, its resources and scope for influence. This will help promote 'joined-up thinking' and avoid the failure of good initiatives.

Government policy provides an important framework that can either encourage or discourage the kinds of partnerships most likely to generate new demand for learning. Partnerships of employers or providers, on the other hand, can result in a common agenda for action to stimulate demand (see case study C, on models of collaboration in Australia).

Create an intelligence bank of tried and tested initiatives

Local LSCs and learning providers need to know 'what works best' in stimulating new demand for learning, to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. An accessible bank of information about initiatives that have been the subject of evaluation would be an enormously valuable resource to assist in funding and planning decisions and in the dissemination of good practice.

Develop the role of guidance and 'brokerage'

Initiatives in many different countries show that those who are in the position of intermediary or broker can be the catalyst that inspires adults to take up learning and helps learning providers to change the way they operate. At one extreme 'intermediaries' may be large organisations with resources and power, while at the other they may be 'barefoot community workers' with low status and pay but huge grassroots influence. In between is a great range of professionals, such as teachers and advice and guidance workers, as well as people in semi-professional and voluntary positions, who can influence the take-up of learning opportunities.

Investing in effective brokers and brokerage services is clearly an important way forward. Brokers need to be central to lifelong learning provision, not marginal. A key task, however, is to identify what kind of brokerage brings most added value, to avoid the risk of simply putting in place an additional layer of bureaucracy. Another task is to ensure that intermediary services reach those that most need them: for example, although advice and guidance has expanded to include IAG, Connexions and Learndirect services in the UK, some sections of the adult population are not touched by these. A report by the government's Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) has proposed the foundation for a comprehensive workforce development strategy (PIU 2001). It suggests improved information and guidance services, including exploring the concept of union learning representatives in non-unionised workplaces, small firm networks and local communities.

Bring informal learning into the mainstream of provision

Participants at the international seminar were united in their belief in the value of informal learning. It is worthwhile for its own sake, as well as offering an attractive route to engagement with more formal, organised learning, particularly for adults whose experiences of formal learning have not encouraged them to want to learn further. Examples from around the world testify to the power of community-based learning to transform the lives of individuals, families and communities. Informal learning in the workplace should also be nurtured and receive proper recognition alongside formal learning.

To use this potential to the full will require a new approach that draws informal learning into the mainstream of provision and addresses the status differences between informal and formal learning. These differences extend to the treatment of teachers and other workers. As one commentator (McGivney 2001b) writes, 'it is paradoxical that the work that probably requires the most highly developed and complex skills in all post compulsory education – development work with very diverse social and ethnic groups – is usually the least recognised and rewarded'.

Make the path from lower to higher qualifications much more visible and straightforward

A clear route from lower level to higher qualifications would help motivate reluctant learners, who find the present system complicated and incoherent. Making the rewards of learning visible so that the learner sees how the first rung on the ladder can lead to a degree is a spur to get involved and stay the course. As one participant argued, 'lifelong learning starts at the age of 3'.

Strengthen the social partnerships and regulatory frameworks that support workforce development

Experience in a number of countries demonstrates that stronger social partnership between employers, employees and the state can provide the right mix of pressure and support to engage employers as committed partners in workforce training and development. Regulations can also act as a spur to increase the amount of workforce learning available and could help distribute workforce learning opportunities on a more equal basis. A variety of other formal and informal incentives could be used in the UK to good effect to encourage employers to play their part in stimulating demand for learning, particularly among lower skilled workers.

Develop school curricula and qualifications that pave the way for lifelong learning for all

School success or failure is a predictor of engagement with learning later in life. Much more could be done to develop learning programmes and qualifications that set all young people – not only those who follow an academic curriculum – on a path to continuing engagement with learning in their working life and beyond.

Directions for research on attracting new learners

What lines of inquiry should be pursued, to help ensure that policy and practice in the UK are informed by the best evidence available? In the light of the agenda outlined above, the international seminar put forward a number of proposals for research, with a strong recommendation that, wherever possible, an international perspective should be adopted. These proposals are summarised below in the form of a set of research questions.

In consultation with practitioners and the research community, the LSDA is using these questions to influence its research priorities and those of the new, independent Learning and Skills Research Centre. We hope that the questions will stimulate interest and debate among a wider audience of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. Our aim is to encourage the development of research programmes that deepen understanding about what motivates adults to get involved in learning, and offer informed evidence for change.

Research questions: what we need to know and understand

- How does informal learning relate to formal learning? How can we strengthen the connections?
- How do school and learning early in life affect learning in adulthood? What are the implications for creating a genuine lifelong learning system?
- How can we develop an effective strategy for using different kinds of learning 'intermediaries' – the professionals and volunteers who act as catalysts or 'brokers' for learning?
- What is the evidence of the impact of large-scale campaigns to bring people into learning?
- How can knowledge of 'what works' be applied more effectively to generate systemic change in policies and practices, rather than creating new initiatives and greater complexity?
- What kinds of legislative and regulatory frameworks will work best in stimulating demand via employers? What kinds of social partnerships work well?

Appendix 1

International research seminar participants

Organisations are based in the UK, unless indicated otherwise.

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Appendix 2

Glossary and websites

APL Accreditation of prior learning. A procedure to enable learners' knowledge and experience to be taken into account in assessing their level of learning and the amount of further study needed to achieve an award.

basic skills Literacy and numeracy skills.

Berufsschule Vocational training college in Germany.

CEE Centre for the Economics of Education (cee.lse.ac.uk). Based at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE.

Centre for Research on Wider Benefits of Learning (www.learningbenefits.net). Based at the Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

CfL Campaign for Learning (www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk). A national charity that promotes the goal of an inclusive society in which learning is 'valued, understood, wanted and widely available to every individual'.

Connexions (www.connexions.gov.uk). A new advice and support service for all 13 to 19 year olds in England. Introduced in 2001 to coordinate, extend and improve the range of services available to young people.

credit-based learning Learning programmes divided into smaller elements. Success in individual elements results in the awarding of 'credits' towards a broader qualification.

DfES Department for Education and Skills (www.dfes.gov.uk). Formerly the Department for Education and Employment, DfEE.

FEFC Further Education Funding Council. Replaced in April 2001 by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

IAG Information, advice and guidance services for adults.

IiP Investors in People. A national quality standard that sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

Learning and Skills Research Centre An independent research centre established in 2001 to increase national capacity in research on post-16 learning. Based at LSDA.

Learndirect (www.learndirect.co.uk). Developed by the government-supported Ufi (University for Industry), the Learndirect service provides online learning through local learning centres.

London Open College Network One of a number of regional open college networks (OCNs) licensed to offer accreditation services for adult learning, with the aim of supporting wider access to lifelong learning opportunities. OCN qualifications allow learners to achieve credits for their achievements and to accumulate and transfer credits.

LSC Learning and Skills Council (www.lsc.gov.uk). Established in April 2001, with responsibility for funding and planning all learning provision in England (except university education) for those aged over 16.

LSDA Learning and Skills Development Agency (www.LSDA.org.uk). A strategic national resource in England and in Wales (Dysg, Learning and Skills Development Agency for Wales). LSDA provides services to help develop policy and practice in post-16 education and training.

Modern Apprenticeships This scheme enables young people to gain recognised vocational qualifications at foundation and advanced levels through training in the workplace and off the job.

Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative Funded by the DfES, involving museums and galleries in family learning activities and other activities aimed at young people and adults with little or no experience of education since leaving school. The activities are coordinated and publicised by the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries (CLMG: www.clmg.org.uk).

NALS National Adult Learning Survey. Commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment in 1996, following studies published in 1994, 1995 and 1996.

National Curriculum This defines the minimum educational entitlement for pupils of compulsory school age. It sets out the requirements to be taught in each subject and at each stage of the school curriculum.

NIACE National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (www.niace.org.uk). A national organisation for adult learning in England and in Wales (NIACE Cymru). NIACE works to advance the interests of adult learners and potential learners and to improve opportunities and widen access to learning opportunities.

NTO National Training Organisation. NTOs will be replaced from March 2002 by a network of Sector Skills Councils whose role is to identify skills shortages, anticipate future needs and deliver action plans to address these.

NVQ National Vocational Qualification. The NVQ framework of vocational qualifications in England and Wales consists of awards at five levels of competence, based on national occupational standards and criteria.

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (www.oecd.org).

PIU Performance and Innovation Unit (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk). A government unit within the Cabinet Office. It aims to improve the capacity of government to address strategic, cross-cutting issues and promote innovation in policy development and implementation.

QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (www.qca.gov.uk). QCA in England, with partner authorities in Wales and Northern Ireland, has responsibility for standards in education and training. It maintains and develops the school curriculum and assessment, and accredits and monitors qualifications in schools, colleges and the workplace.

R2L Return to Learn courses, run by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA: www.wea.org.uk) in partnership with UNISON.

RDA Regional Development Agency. Established by government to coordinate and promote regional economic development and regeneration in England. See the Department for Trade and Industry website (www.consumers.gov.uk/rda).

REPEM Red de Educación entre Mujeres de América Latina.

SATs Standard assessment tests (part of the National Curriculum assessment regime in England).

SBS Small Business Service. Provides support for the small business sector and ensures that the voice of SMEs informs government.

SMEs Small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Ufi Ufi Limited (www.ufiltd.co.uk) operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It manages Learndirect (a national learning advice service) and plays a key role in government strategies for adult learning, basic skills, social inclusion, workforce development and business competitiveness.

Union Learning Fund This government fund supports projects to increase union capacity to encourage and support learning in the workplace. Evaluations of the Union Learning Fund and of the role of union learning representatives (see case study G) have been conducted; a research brief is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/ulf

UNISON (www.unison.org.uk). British trade union with over 1.3m members working in the public services and for private contractors providing public services and essential utilities.

WEA Workers' Educational Association (www.wea.org.uk). National voluntary organisation providing learning programmes.

Appendix 3

Statistical comparisons

This appendix presents statistics comparing the performance of UK education and training with results in other countries, based on seven indicators:

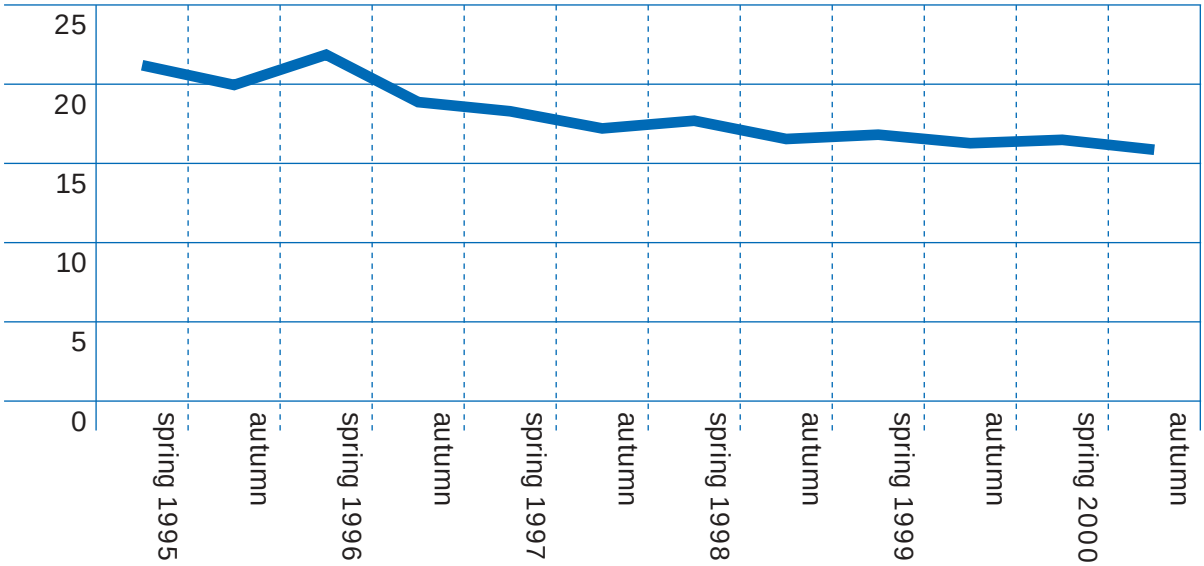
- qualifications among people of working age
- spending on secondary education
- percentage of GDP spent on all education
- participation rates of 17 year olds in education
- the percentage of the population of working age qualified at Level 3
- the percentage of adults at the lowest levels of literacy
- the percentage of adults at the lowest levels of numeracy.

Qualifications among people of working age

To gauge how successful UK education policies are, it is useful first of all to consider how many people lack qualifications. Figure 1 shows how the percentage of people of working age in the UK without qualifications has changed in recent years. The percentage is slowly decreasing. However, the 16% of this population still lacking qualifications in the autumn of 2000 equates to approximately 5.7m people. The rate of decrease appears to be slowing. One interpretation of this is that there may be a 'natural' rate of around 15% of the working age population who will lack qualifications. With current population projections, this would mean a permanent state of around 5–6m people in the UK workforce who will not possess even basic qualifications – a situation that does not bode well for the future of the economy.

Figure 1

Percentage of UK working age population with no qualifications, spring 1995–autumn 2000

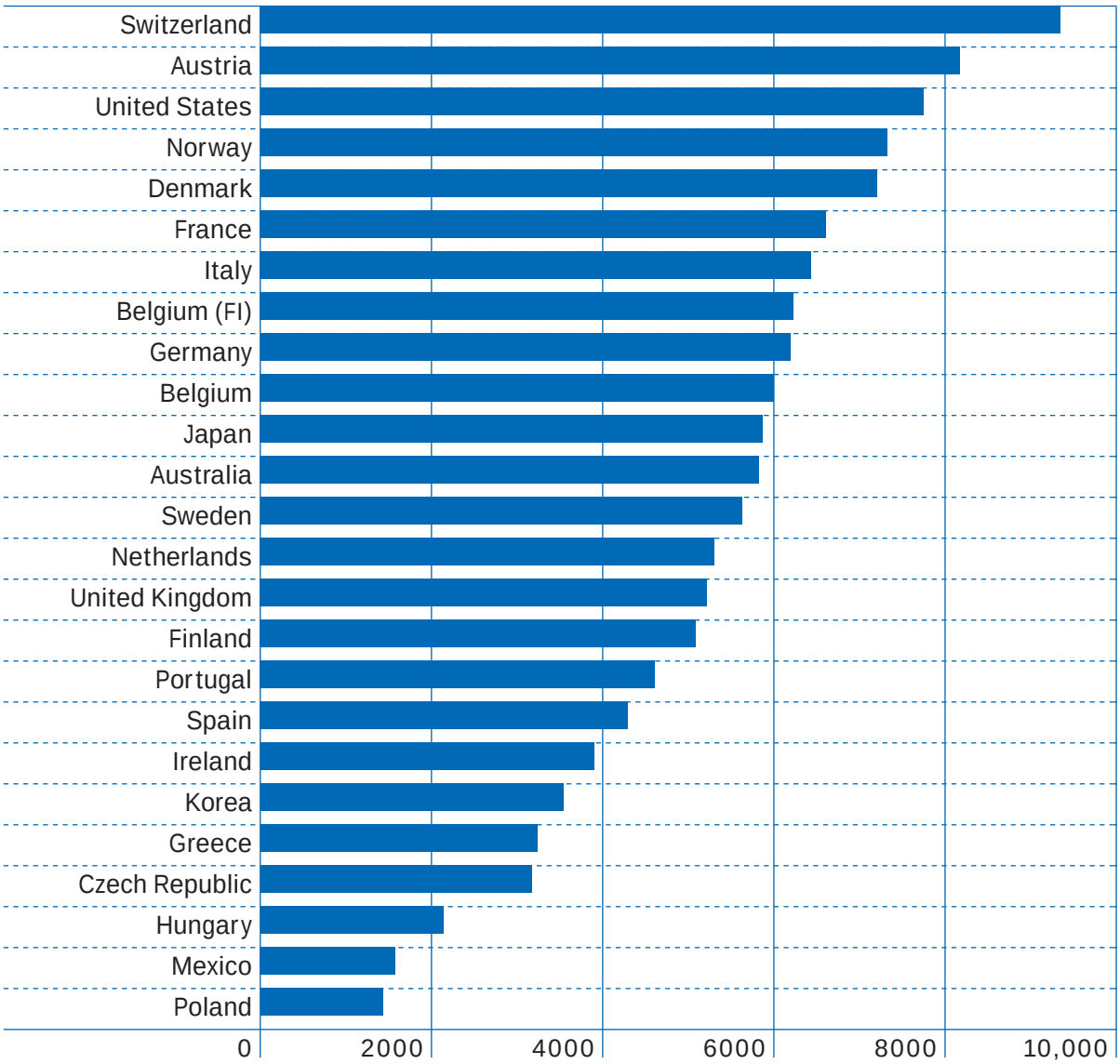


Source: DfES 2001.

Spending on secondary education

An important indicator of the priority given to education can be found by looking at how much countries spend. Figure 2 shows how much (in US dollars) a number of OECD countries spend per pupil on secondary education. The figure should be treated with caution, as the length of secondary education differs from one country to another. For instance, in Belgium and Germany education is compulsory up to the age of 18, whereas in the UK compulsory education ends at 16, and in Greece at the age of 14.5 years.

Figure 2
Amount spent per student on secondary education (US$), 1998



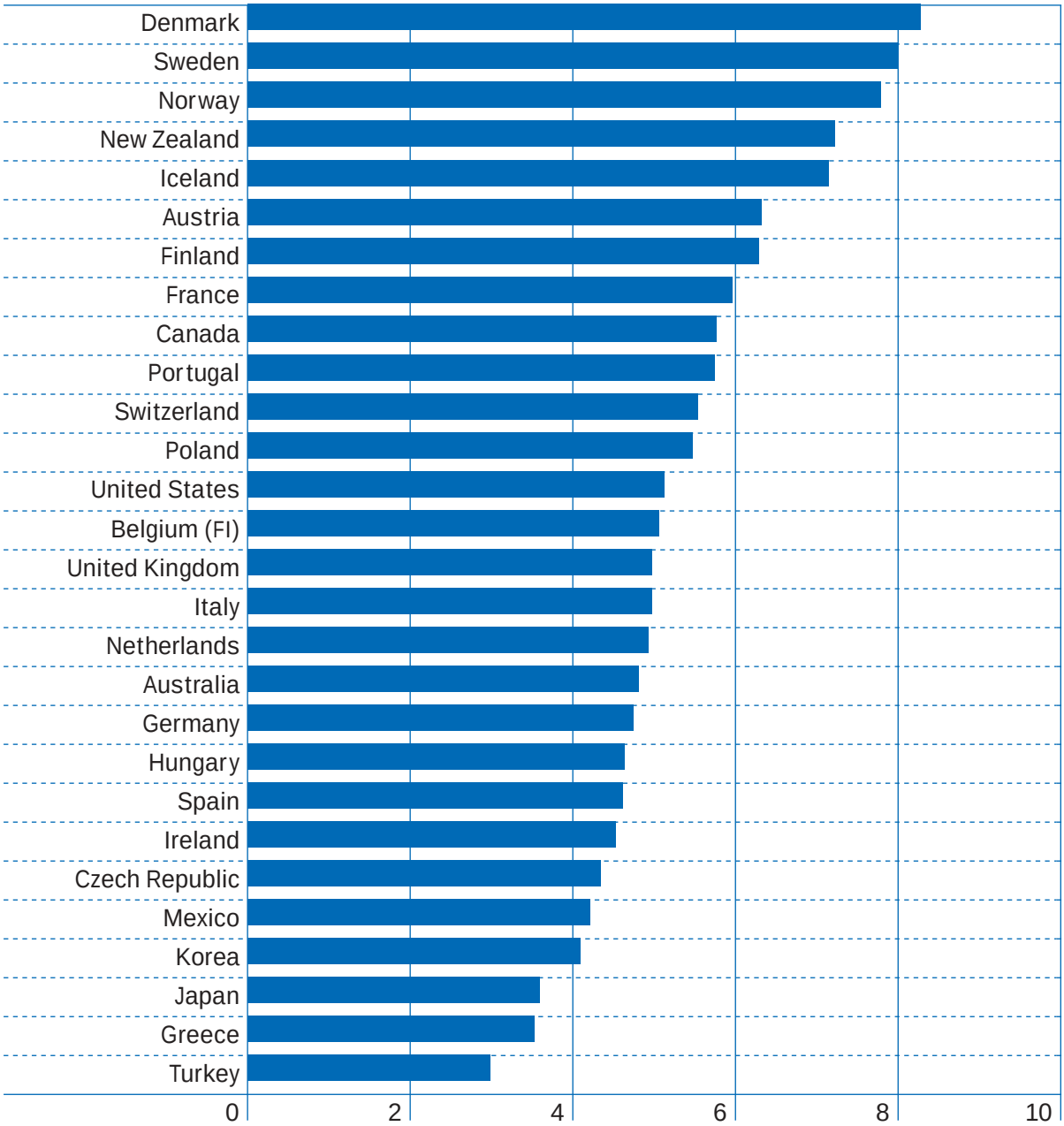
Source: OECD 2001a.

As this chart shows, the UK spends less per student than most of the larger countries in the OECD, which may help to explain why the skills of young people in the UK lag behind those of other countries.

Percentage of GDP spent on all education

Figure 3 shows a range of OECD countries with the proportions of GDP they spend on education. It should be noted, however, that these proportions can be influenced by demographic factors – the proportion of young people in a country would, naturally, have a huge bearing on the amount spent.

Figure 3
Percentage of GDP spent on all education, 1998



Source: OECD 2001a.

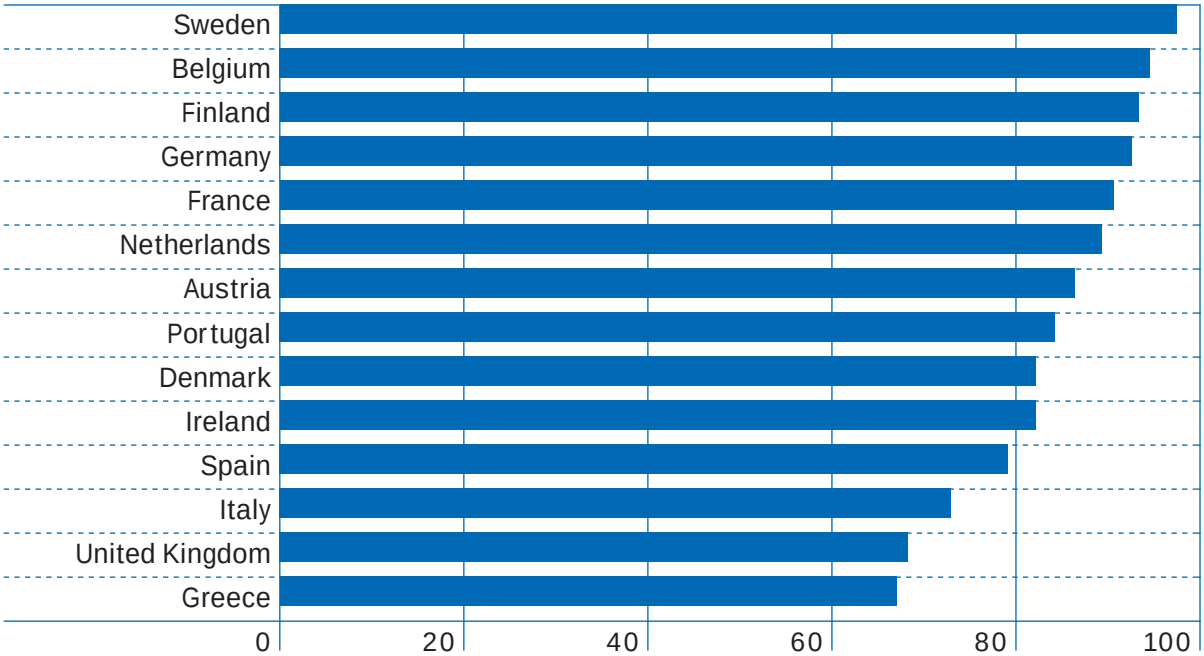
Although the UK does spend more as a proportion of GDP on education than other 'G8' countries such as Japan, Germany and Italy, it still spends proportionately less on education than the USA, Canada, France and the Nordic countries.

The amount of financial backing governments give to their educational policies clearly will have some influence on the skill levels of the workforce, not least because they will want returns on their investment. But there may well be other factors, in addition to politics, that influence the numbers of young people who acquire new skills. These factors include, for example, employment opportunities, the attitude of young people towards education and training, and parental influences. All of these will combine in the decision of young people to continue in education and training beyond compulsory school leaving age.

Participation rates of 17 year olds in education

Figure 4 shows the participation rates in education at the age of 17 of EU countries in 1998.

Figure 4
Participation rates of 17 year olds in education by EU country, 1998



Source: Office of National Statistics 2001.

The figure shows that only Greece has fewer 17 year olds in education than the UK, thus indicating that a vast number of young people are lost to the education system at a relatively early age, unless they can be encouraged to return later. The figures are influenced by the differences in the ages at which compulsory schooling ends – Belgium, for instance, has compulsory schooling up to the age of 18. Another factor may be that some countries – Greece appears to be a notable example – are more successful in keeping older students in education. Greece has 59% of its 20 year olds participating in education, the highest proportion in the EU, compared with 43% of the UK's 20 year olds and only 29% of Austria's 20 year olds.

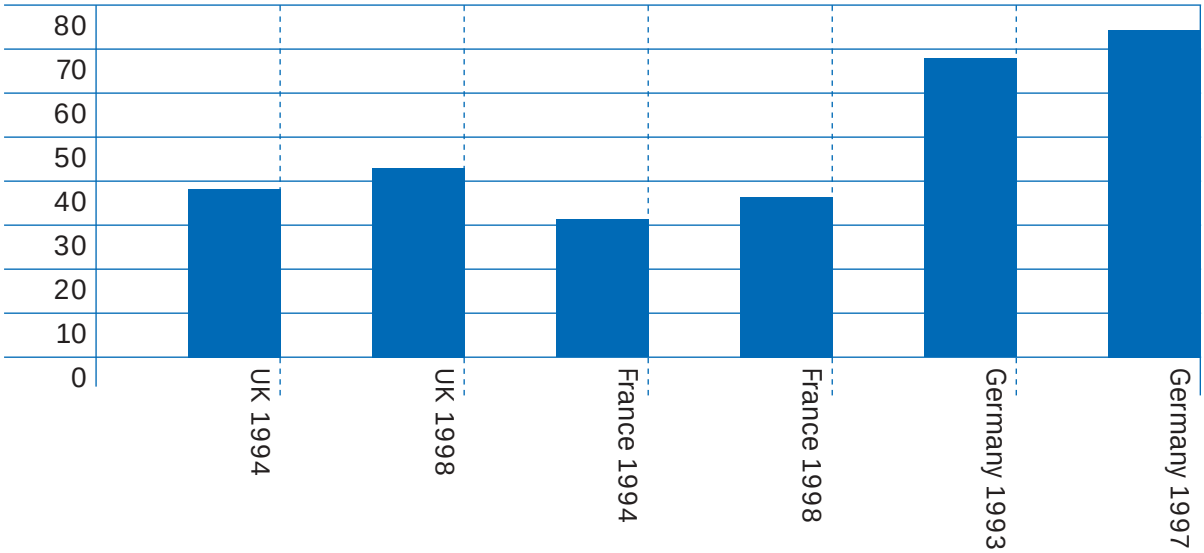
The data suggests a 'learning divide' in some countries: people who are in education at the age of 17 appear to be more likely to be in education at the age of 20, rather than older people returning to education having finished learning at an earlier age. This situation is particularly evident in the UK. Using data collected in the National Child Development Study, Professor John Bynner of the Institute of Education argues that several factors explain participation and progression in post-compulsory education and training (Bynner 2000):

- family background – people from less affluent families are not as likely to participate in education and training
- achievement at school – traditional 'barriers to entry' like entrance requirements to some courses may hinder participation for some people
- length of time spent 'at home' – women bringing up families have been less likely to participate
- employment – people who are unemployed may see themselves as gaining less 'value' from education and training than those employed.

Percentage of the population of working age qualified at Level 3

Turning to the skills of the UK workforce, how do we compare with other countries? Hilary Steedman of the London School of Economics argues that, at Level 3 – the so-called 'technician level' – the UK is being left behind by its main EU competitor, Germany.

Figure 5
Percentage of workforce qualified at Level 3, by country and year



Source: Steedman 2001.

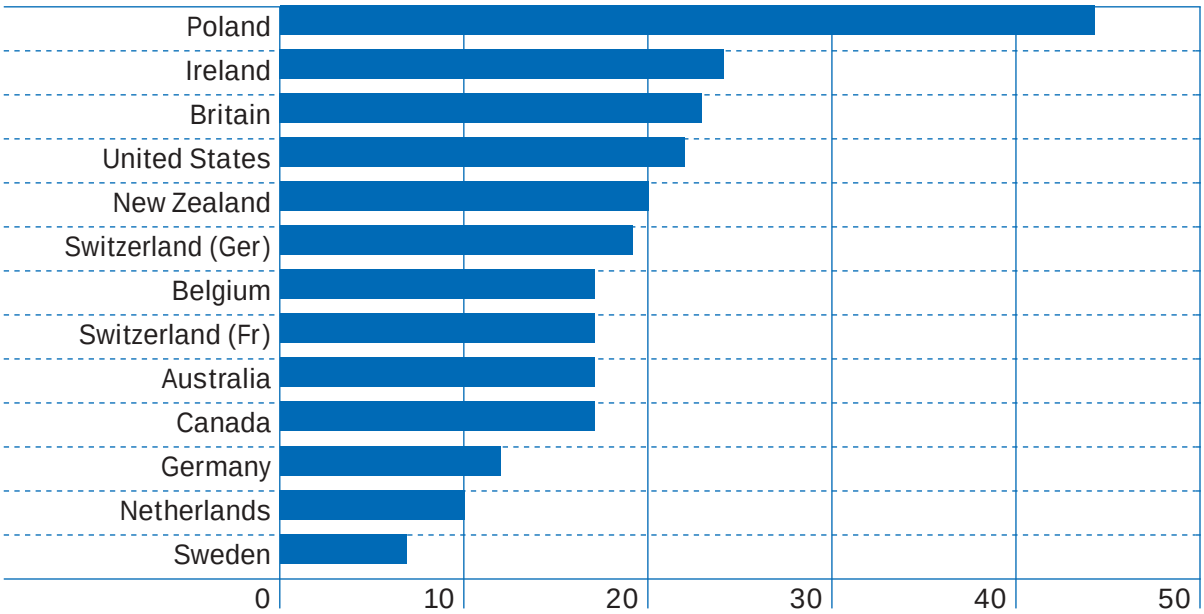
Figure 5 shows the proportions of the population qualified at 'Level 3' in the three largest EU economies (the UK, France and Germany) and how these have changed in recent years.

As the bar chart shows, although all three countries have increased their proportions of the workforce who are qualified to 'Level 3' during the mid-1990s, both the UK and France have some way to go before they can match the skills of the German workforce. Around three-quarters of the German workforce are qualified at 'Level 3'; both the UK and France only have around 40% of their workforces who are qualified at the same level. Substantial investment will be needed before the level of qualifications in the UK's workforce matches that of Germany.

Percentage of adults at the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy

What are the underlying reasons for poorer performance in the UK? One explanation may be found in the International Adult Literacy Survey, conducted by the OECD in 1997 to examine the differences between countries in terms of literacy and numeracy performance. Figure 6 shows the percentages of people in a range of countries whose literacy skills were found to be at the 'lowest level'.

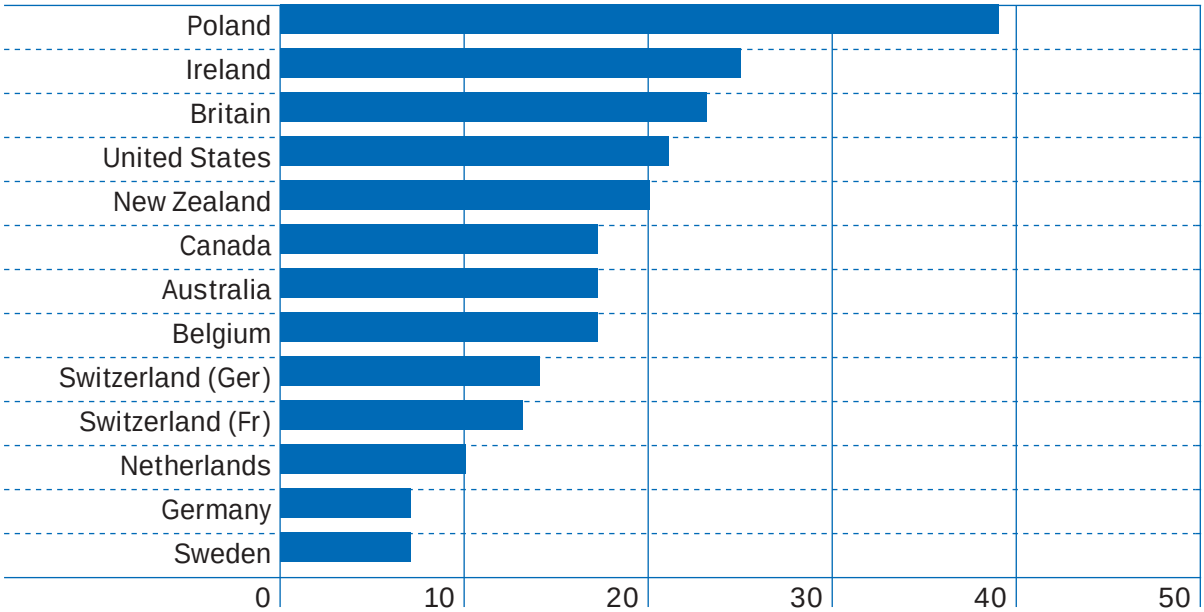
Figure 6
Percentage of adults at lowest levels of literacy, 1997



Source: OECD 1997.

As the figure illustrates, Britain is one of the worst-performing countries. Figure 7, which gives corresponding data on numeracy skills, shows Britain in the same poor position relative to other countries.

Figure 7
Percentage of adults at lowest levels of numeracy, 1997



Source: OECD 1997.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this statistical review suggests a correlation between a country's participation rate in education, and levels of literacy and numeracy. It is surely not a coincidence that Sweden and Germany are both near the top of the charts for participation rates in education at the age of 17, and have very few people with low levels of literacy and numeracy. Proving that there is a correlation between investment and high literacy/numeracy levels is more difficult, since, for example, the United States spends 50% more per secondary school student than the UK but has similar levels of illiteracy.

The evidence does, however, enable us to highlight several issues that the UK should address with some urgency:

- the problem of keeping young people, particularly teenagers, in education and training
- a lack of investment in the secondary school system
- the culture of 'pre-determined failure', which family backgrounds heavily influence
- ensuring that young people leave school with adequate levels of literacy and numeracy
- bringing the skills of the UK workforce up to the levels of our main EU competitor, Germany.

Improvement will take time. But the UK needs to act to address these issues sooner rather than later, or lag behind other countries in its economic, educational and social progress.

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You may enjoy learning, but how do you convince others that learning can be both useful and fun? How can the UK attract more people into education and training? What can we learn from the experience of other countries? An international research seminar held in the UK in June 2001, 'Attracting new learners', brought together researchers and policy-makers to address these questions. This publication presents the key messages. Introductory chapters look at what triggers participation in post-16 learning in the UK, and compare the UK's performance with that of other countries. Three important sources of new demand, or 'triggers', for learning are then considered: society and community, learning programmes and qualifications, and the workplace. Seven case studies follow, based on research and practice in several countries. The publication ends by proposing strategies to promote increased demand in the UK and directions for new research.

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