

Adult Achievement Awards Pilot Programme Evaluation

Learner-centred, lifelong and lifewide

21 June 2016

1. Context

In 2014, Newbattle Abbey College was asked by the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Partnership and Education Scotland to develop Adult Achievement Awards, based on the model of Youth Achievement Awards. The awards were credit-rated by Edinburgh Napier University in January 2015 and are available at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 6. In consultation with a national steering group, Newbattle established 10 pilots across Scotland, involving a wide range of sectors and agencies (*Appendix 1*). The pilot programme ran from September 2015 to February 2016 and included 150 learners. The work of the learners and partner organisations involved in the pilot programme is warmly recognised.

The Adult Achievement Awards implement key objectives of the *Statement of Ambition for Adult Learning*¹, launched in 2014 by the National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning. The forum's Access and Participation Working Group has overseen the pilot programme.

2. What is the impact of the Adult Achievement Awards pilot programme on learners?

The Adult Achievement Awards are supporting a lifewide range of learners covering the personal, work, family and community aspects of living. The pilot programme included carers, volunteers, adults with additional support needs, those seeking employment, adults pursuing leisure interests, travellers and offenders. The awards are working well for learners in a range of contexts including literacies programmes, English and Gaelic language classes, crafts, rural skills, work placements and courses in computing, cookery and first aid.

“It is important that the informal learning that takes place in everyday life is recognised and the sense of achievement for the student is awesome.”

Tutor, Pilot Programme

The range of learners participating in the pilot programme demonstrates that the awards are lifelong and accessible at all stages of a person's life. The majority of learners in the pilot programme were between the age of 40 and 74. 65% of participants were female. Only a few learners, 4%, were under 20 years old. Almost all learners completed the award at SCQF level 3 or 4. Only 2% completed the award at level 6, therefore further evaluation of the impact on learners working at this level may be required in the future.

“It's never too late to learn something new.”

Learner, Pilot Programme

Adult Achievement Awards are supporting learners already engaged in or new to accredited learning. The awards are also helping reengage those who haven't undertaken any accredited learning for some time such as at school or early in their working life. The award at SCQF level 3 is particularly accessible for learners with additional support needs such as dyslexia and mental health issues including high levels of anxiety. Further development of the award at SCQF level 2 may be of considerable benefit to adults with learning disabilities.

“The Adult Achievement Awards have been pivotal in getting me out of the house.”

Learner, Pilot Programme

A safe, secure and trusting learning context is key to the success of the award whether or not this is in a group or one to one setting, in the community, at home or in prison. All learners

1

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/communitylearninganddevelopment/about/policy/statementofambition.asp>

needed some level of support from a tutor or mentor. This ranges from minimal reassurance and guidance to intensive one to one support for the majority of those undertaking the award at SCQF level 3. All learners commented positively about their tutor and the support they received within the pilot programme. In some contexts, learners are also benefitting from peer support as they complete their award, particularly through group discussion.

“Made me more aware of my own strengths and has given me the confidence to continue learning.”

Learner, Pilot Programme

The Adult Achievement Awards are learner-centred. All learners involved are gaining in confidence and self-esteem, recognising what they can achieve and increasing their motivation to continue in their learning. Learners feel good about themselves. The Adult Achievement Awards are helping learners to reflect and reinforce their learning. The reflective journal is helping learners to think differently and to better recognise and understand their learning journey. A few learners expressed surprise at realising the skills they had gained through their learning. Most learners have a sense of achievement with some demonstrating real pride in their accomplishment. Learners enjoyed the challenge even a few who had to overcome some initial anxiety. Learners and tutors welcome the opportunity for progression through different levels.

“It gave me determination to carry on with more learning.”

Learner, Pilot Programme

A key aim of the pilots was to ascertain learners' views of the support materials. These were available in print and online and learners could submit their Reflective Journals for assessment in print, online, scribed or recorded. Almost all learners and tutors found the examples in the support materials helpful. However, a few learners would have benefitted from examples more closely relevant to their own context, for example English speakers of other languages. Further guidance for the witness or peer learner would also be helpful.

Almost all learners felt that the some questions in the pilot materials were repetitive. A better balance needs to be struck between reinforcement and repetition. The word count for each question should be reviewed and learners would benefit from clearer guidance on the length of their answers. There are some formatting and technical issues in the paper and online forms that need to be addressed. In developing the award further beyond the pilot stage, there is a need to consider the equalities dimension. This would mean providing material in accessible additional formats such as large print, braille and other languages including Gaelic.

3. What is the impact of Adult Achievement Awards pilot programme on learning providers?

The training delivered by Newbattle Abbey College helpfully introduced tutors to the Adult Achievement Awards and the support materials. A majority of tutors gained a fuller understanding through delivery of the pilot programme. For a few tutors, prior experience of delivering youth awards, such as the Youth Achievement Award, better prepared them to support learners undertaking an Adult Achievement Award.

“The tutor has been exceptional in her support, patience and ability to instil confidence.”

Tutor, Pilot Programme

All learners needed some level of support from a tutor or mentor. The amount of time needed to support some learners was often higher than initially anticipated. In the majority of the pilots this was successfully integrated into the learning provision. In group settings, tutors helpfully used group discussion to support individuals. However, in a few one to one settings, supporting individual learners was particularly time consuming. Learning providers need to consider carefully how to build Adult Achievement Awards into their learning offer to ensure they have the capacity to respond to future demand.

“An excellent way for students to set goals for themselves and monitor their progress”

Tutor, Pilot Programme

A lack of tutor confidence and experience in a new award resulted in some learners working at a level that was lower than their capability. In the majority of the pilots this was by choice to ensure a level of consistency. This decision was not always shared with learners who were often unaware of the different levels or what they mean. As the Adult Achievement Awards are rolled out beyond the pilot programme, learners and providers will benefit from clear and simple promotional materials. Experience from the development of youth awards shows that the full range of audiences including employers need to be considered when developing marketing materials.

4. To what extent do Adult Achievement Awards improve access and participation in adult learning?

The key features of the Adult Achievement Awards ensure that they are accessible to adult learners. The awards are optional, context-free and have no entry requirements. They complement informal learning and there are opportunities for progression to further accredited learning. The pilot programme has demonstrated that the awards support the *Statement of Ambition for Adult Learning* by being accessible lifelong, lifewide and are learner-centred.

“The most exciting development in adult / community education for years”

Tutor, Pilot Programme

The Adult Achievement Awards in the pilot phase are at too early a stage in their development to show if they increase participation in adult learning. What is clear by the response from learning providers is that demand for the awards is already high. This demand is significant from both the pilot programmes who wish to continue and additional providers who wish to offer the awards to their learners.

5. What effective and sustainable business models could be considered for the Adult Achievement Awards beyond the initial pilots?

Almost all learners and learning providers were strongly of the opinion that Adult Achievement Awards should be free to the learner at the point of delivery. Many of the pilots have a policy in place ensuring that adults can access learning at no cost. Charging is considered to be a significant obstacle to anyone already facing additional barriers to learning. The business model needs to take this into account.

The administration of the pilot programme worked well and communication between Newbattle Abbey College and the pilot providers worked effectively. However, some minor refinements to the registration of learners and internal processes are required to ensure this is maintained as the number of providers and learners increase.

The pilot programme adopted two different models for assessment. In almost all of the pilots the reflective journals were submitted directly to Newbattle Abbey College for assessment. In the Glasgow Colleges pilot, Glasgow Kelvin College assessed the reflective journals and these were then quality assured by Newbattle. Both of these models are effective and provide assurance of quality. Many of the pilot providers have experience as Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) approved centres and are therefore well placed to assess their own learners. There is also an opportunity for smaller or less experienced providers to be supported in a consortium model with, for example, a college or local authority as the lead organisation.

Other options could include applications from individual learners who are self-financing or supported by a grant such as an Individual Learning Account (ILA). These learners would engage directly with Newbattle Abbey College. This model may be most appropriate for learners working at SCQF level 6 as this evaluation has found that learners working at the lower levels can require a significant amount of support from a tutor.

Another possibility is for Newbattle to deliver a comprehensive package including all relevant cost elements but also provide the tutorial support for learners to complete their Reflective Journals. For most organisations, this model would probably not be sustainable in the long term.

It may be appropriate for Newbattle Abbey College to offer all of the above options to learners and learning providers but whatever model or models are implemented an appropriate quality assurance system needs to be maintained to ensure consistency and confidence in the awards as they develop and grow. This should also include a consideration of how training is delivered such as the use of online modules, frequently asked questions, introductory workshops and train the trainer approaches.

Experience from the development of Youth Achievement Awards highlights a need for further funding to be invested in growing and sustaining the Adult Achievement Awards. The investment could come from a mixture of sources including charitable trusts, sponsorship and the Scottish Government. Adult Achievement Awards have the potential to play a role in supporting and recognising parents' learning as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Also extending their reach, for example by developing the award at SCQF level 2, may benefit an even wider range of adults such as those with learning disabilities.

6. The evaluation of the Adult Achievement Awards pilot programme found the following key strengths.

- The Adult Achievement Awards are highly effective at delivering on the core principles of adult learning. They are learner-centred and accessible to learners of all ages.
- All learners are growing in confidence and increasing their self-worth, self-esteem, self-belief and self-determination.
- The reflective journal is helping learners to think differently and to better recognise and understand their learning journey.
- The Adult Achievement Awards are reinforcing and strengthening learning particularly for those who need additional support.
- Direct support from a tutor or mentor is highly valued by learners.

7. We discussed with partners how they might further develop the Adult Achievement Awards. This is what we agreed with them.

- Newbattle Abbey College should review and further refine the materials based on feedback from learners and tutors.
- The branding of the Adult Achievement Awards needs to be considered carefully to ensure that its value is recognised by all stakeholders.
- In developing a sustainable business model partners need consider pricing, the process for accreditation; quality assurance; and potential growth of the awards.
- Providers need to explore how to build the Awards into their learning programmes and activities.

8. What happens next?

Education Scotland is satisfied with the overall quality of the pilot programme and will undertake no further evaluative activity in connection with this stage of the Adult Achievement Awards. We are confident that Newbattle Abbey College and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report.

Newbattle Abbey College are developing a business model and will roll out Adult Achievement Awards beyond the pilot programme from August 2016. The National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning's Access and Participation Working Group will continue to work with Newbattle to support and monitor progress.

Simon Ross
HM Inspector
21 June 2016

Appendix 1 – Pilots

1. Aberdeen City Council
2. Angus Council
3. Dumfries and Galloway Council
4. Dundee Carers Centre
5. Glasgow Colleges (Kelvin, Clyde and City) and partners (Glasgow Homelessness Network, Rosemount Lifelong Learning and Deaf Connections)
6. The Highland Council
7. Inverclyde Council
8. Inverness College (Aviemore)
9. LEAD Scotland
10. Midlothian Council Social Work and Newbattle Abbey College

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