



Implementing the FE Workforce Strategy

A development
agenda for Local Adult
Learning Providers

A Workforce Strategy for the Further Education Sector in England has been published by Lifelong Learning UK since 2007. HOLEX, NIACE and UCU are amongst the national partners who have been supporting Lifelong Learning UK in a 'refresh' of the Strategy for the current year; that work has now concluded, and the latest version of the FE Workforce Strategy is available at <http://www.lluk.org/england/workforce-strategy-for-the-further-education-sector-in-england>

We have also collectively committed to producing a short, targeted document which highlights ways in which local adult learning providers – the 'ACL community', in lifelong learning terms – and other agencies can act to develop elements of the Workforce Strategy in the coming period. This implementation document, prepared following consultation and addressed to all in the ACL community, presents that material.

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Executive Summary

This implementation document describes the ‘ACL community’ and sets out the context in which it currently operates. We include an assessment of how local adult learning providers have contributed to development of their workforce to date, identify key challenges and advance a series of actions which can be taken in the short to medium term. In our view:

Local Adult Learning Providers

can, within available resources:

- give greater priority to collecting, reporting on and analysing data on the workforce
- use this data to plan recruitment and staff development strategies more effectively, and to identify skills gaps
- monitor and act on staff diversity at all levels
- ensure that workforce development issues are fully covered in self-assessment and improvement planning
- make full use of existing local, regional and national professional networks
- share good practice in the use of technology to support CPD.

National Agencies

should:

- clarify how informal adult learning will be reshaped, and how this will impact on the professionalisation and regulation of the workforce
- complete the Lifelong Learning UK led review of Professional Qualifications, and take forward actions recommended by that review
- share baseline information available on the ACL workforce and use that data to make the case for securing funding for plugging any gaps in initial teacher training
- undertake a fundamental review of current arrangements for the collection of robust data on the ACL workforce
- disseminate findings from current work on good practice in

the professional development of support staff, and promote future extension of this work to the ACL community

- secure a route through which future iterations of the Workforce Strategy for the Further Education Sector in England might be most effectively developed
- promote wider adoption and application of the Lifelong Learning UK Equality Framework for Lifelong Learning by adult learning providers
- work to better inform the design and delivery of national support and development programmes for ACL staff, and further develop existing provider support resources
- facilitate access to development funding by adult learning providers, including access to peer support.

HOLEX, NIACE and UCU

as national partners, will:

- work closely together to promote the interests of the ACL community and the staff who work in it
- work in an increasingly co-ordinated way on an agreed set of key issues and priorities
- continue to represent ACL community interests at national level
- keep member organisations and professional workers involved in adult learning informed of salient national developments
- maintain support for existing professional adult learning networks
- where funded, secure ACL community input into national development activities designed to enhance the workforce.

A description of the 'ACL Community'

For the purposes of this paper, we take the 'ACL community' to consist of a range of providers funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) whose primary mission is to deliver part-time learning opportunities to adults in local settings, often widely dispersed across the area. These include:

- the 150 Local Authorities that are funded via the adult safeguarded learning budget
 - some 100 such Local Authorities maintain their own, directly managed adult/community learning service and also attract wider SFA budgets to support more formalised programmes, including Skills for Life, qualification bearing courses and employer-based training
 - other Local Authorities primarily sub-contract the provision of general personal and community development programmes to partner providers, often local FE colleges; many of these Local Authorities, however, directly deliver other aspects of the adult learning portfolio, notably family learning
- 'former independent external institutions': these comprise approximately 35 third sector providers – both national organisations and locally focused community-based agencies – who specialise in widening participation amongst particular client groups/localities, and/or who may specialise in particular aspects of provision such as childcare training or ICT skills
- 'specialist designated institutions': 9 in total – 4 adult residential colleges, 4 London based providers and the Workers' Educational Association, which works nationally and has a long and celebrated history as providers of adult learning opportunities.

All such providers have a significant majority (90 per cent or more) of learners who are adult, and recruit subject experts to deliver programmes, often tailored to the needs of particular learners, which do not necessarily lead to formal qualifications. Most full-time salaried staff in ACL services tend to have at least some management responsibilities, while teaching staff are frequently part-time, often teaching for a very limited number of hours a year. Service management teams tend to be small, each holding a range of responsibilities. It is not uncommon to find one manager leading on both quality and staff development and administrative support is often limited, especially in outreach centres. Several 'ACL' providers use volunteer workers to support service delivery, and close operational collaboration with workers in partner organisations is not uncommon.

Data from the most recent Lifelong Learning UK Sector Skills Assessment suggests that the providers regarded as members of the 'ACL community' employ some 35,000 teaching personnel.

Prevailing Context

The FE sector as a whole, of which the ACL community plays a significant part, accounting for some 12 per cent of all SFA-funded learners, is undergoing widespread change as a result of emerging new coalition government priorities, in response to pronounced reductions in public funding and as a consequence of new approaches to 'localism'. The positioning of those providers specialising in adult learning potentially renders them more vulnerable to the wider changes taking place in further education.

The recent Skills for Sustainable Growth strategy document, an associated Skills Investment Strategy, and wider shifts in the way that public services are increasingly expected to be responsive to their users, all impact upon what is offered, how provision is made, who pays for it, and how providers need to account for their work and their performance. This in turn places increased, and in cases new, challenges on those working in the sector. Many local authorities are making substantial changes in what they do and how they operate; ACL services are being reviewed, moved into different directorates and in cases being targeted for externalisation. New legislation on 'leadership of place', which places an expectation on FE colleges to interact more with their localities, is likely to bring them into closer contact with ACL services, a move which may be a threat to or an opportunity for current arrangements for adult learning. Even with a government commitment to retaining the Adult Safeguarded Learning budget at current levels, the context suggests a high degree of uncertainty, and likely job losses, in the ACL community.

Recent Sector Skills Assessments undertaken by Lifelong Learning UK, discussion within the National Partners Group and consultation with adult learning providers as part of this exercise all point to **three key current challenges** facing the ACL community:

- reduced (and reducing) public funding, including reductions in both SFA funding for 19+ work and in Local Authority budgets which might have supported service activity. The combined impact seems likely to lead existing providers of adult learning opportunities to find cheaper and/or 'smarter' ways of working. This may well in turn result, quite quickly, in some fundamental changes in provider structural arrangements, a likelihood compounded by the introduction of minimum contract levels as a means of reducing SFA procurement costs.
- expected, but not easy to predict, and often highly localised, changes in staffing and in the nature and range of skills which will be needed as a result of provider re-engineering. Cost savings may well result in loss of established expertise as workforces are downsized and existing personnel leave the service and staff replacement is likely to be compromised by corporate Local Authority strategies, while general financial pressures may well inhibit staff development and upskilling.

- a lack of firm policy direction for informal adult and community learning (an area which is to be 'reinvigorated and reformed', following inconclusive moves under the Learning Revolution proposals of the previous government). When combined with continuing uncertainty around national expectations for a professionalised workforce, and possible moves to align service activity with the Big Society agenda and promote progression routes into formal learning, it becomes difficult to plan for future and emerging staff roles and service functions, while a potential widening of the range of agencies involved in informal learning activity presents additional challenges regarding partnership working, and in securing an appropriate skills base amongst 'new' providers.

This context, though especially challenging, is not entirely new. Recent years have seen shrinkage in the budgets of many adult learning providers, and/or frequent – and swift – changes in emphasis on what mainstream programmes might be offered. The sector has seen national priorities move from Skills for Life, via 'First Full Level 2' and towards more responsive work through the Train to Gain initiative, while the recent Skills for Sustainable Growth Strategy now emphasises Apprenticeships and targeted employability work with disadvantaged groups. The Adult Safeguarded Learning budget has meanwhile been frozen for much of the last decade.

Notwithstanding these shifts, adult learning providers have sought to remain focused on their mission and local priorities, albeit by developing new, often collaborative, working arrangements, securing fresh sources of funding and developing new programmes and delivery methods. These developments have placed some strain on existing staff, and have required redeployment, the development of new skills and, in some cases, recruitment of new expertise. This has been, and will be, a workforce in flux.

Individually, adult learning providers are very 'live' to the challenges they face in managing and developing the workforce, as has been obvious from responses to our online survey, which identified a range of specific concerns impacting on planning for workforce development in the coming period:

- securing effective cultural change, and enhanced flexibility
- the need for staff to be supported in effectively adapting to future demands on the service
- the introduction of more rigorous, cost-sensitive business processes
- the need to develop and implement new curricula, and new approaches to service delivery
- expected reductions in staffing capacity at middle and senior management level
- retaining staff and maintaining staff morale in the context of uncertain long-term job prospects
- specific concerns over the availability of teaching staff prepared to commit to intensive, high-level (and expensive) qualifying programmes, especially acute in the case of Skills for Life tutors.

Throughout this recent period, adult learning providers have by and large remained true to their mission of widening participation, and have continued to work in ways which offer a user-friendly, supportive and carefully designed route into further learning. Much effective use has been made of the flexibilities afforded by ASL funding, and adult providers are often at the vanguard of local initiatives addressing disadvantage and worklessness. The recently published HMCI Annual Report on 2009-10 indicates that the quality of teaching and learning in ACL is good: some 70 per cent of sessions observed were graded good or outstanding, compared with 55 per cent in colleges and 48 per cent in the work based learning sector.

Providers of part-time learning opportunities for adults have also made significant progress in contributing to the implementation of key areas of the national FE Workforce Strategy since it was published in 2007. They have enthusiastically supported the formalised introduction of a national approach to professional qualifications, and have responded positively to the introduction of formal CPD arrangements. Year on year, the number of providers contributing workforce data to Lifelong Learning UK collections has increased, and a growing proportion of adult learning staff are engaging in national upskilling programmes such as Business Interchange and/or contributing robust, reflection-based evidence to national databases such as the Excellence Gateway.

Alignment to Workforce Strategy Priorities

Core Priority: Ensuring equality and diversity are at the heart of strategy, policy-making, planning and training

Current assessment

- OFSTED identify commitment to equality and diversity as a characteristic strength of adult learning, and this is embedded in practice across the themes discussed in this section
- given that the majority of providers in this part of the sector sit within Local Authorities, most also sit within comprehensive corporate HR responses to equality and diversity legislation
- the promotion of equality and diversity in service delivery has been a key theme for workforce development in most providers, with many providing mandatory training for teaching staff
- monitoring of participation and achievement of learners by age, gender and ethnicity is generally well established, and matched against local population profiles. This is usually reported in self assessment reports, with associated actions identified where shortcomings are identified in the access, success and progress achieved by any particular group. Fewer services mention this kind of reporting, analysis and action planning in relation to staffing

- adult learning has traditionally offered a route for minority groups to move into teaching as a career path.

Identified challenges

- we detect some concern that current reductions and restructuring exercises will result in a less representative ACL workforce as younger full-time staff leave, and men, already under-represented in the adult learning workforce, are harder to attract into the profession.

Actions needed

- providers are encouraged to monitor and act on staff diversity at all levels
- promote wider adoption and application of the Lifelong Learning UK Equality Framework for Lifelong Learning by adult learning providers.

Priority 1: Understanding the nature of the workforce

Theme 1: Gathering robust data on the workforce

Theme 2: Using data to understand the workforce and improve future planning

Theme 3: Using data to understand workforce diversity and target actions

- the ACL community has recently submitted evidence to Lifelong Learning UK which suggests that some three quarters of teaching staff have, or are working towards, formal qualifications
- there is extensive monitoring for equality and diversity issues at the local level, and compliance with all statutory requirements regarding staff profile monitoring etc. The effect of this monitoring is however somewhat disparate. More probably needs to be done to ensure that the staff profile in adult learning fully reflects the nature of the client base, although providers suggest any disparity does not adversely affect success rates, and that feedback from learners does not highlight any disparity as a matter of concern.

Current assessment

- local adult learning providers keep and use robust staff data, which usually includes at a minimum teaching qualification status, CPD and observation grades. In Local Authority Services, this information is likely to be held at service level, but with other types of workforce data being collected and stored on disparate HR databases held by other council departments/service units
- national collection of data on the adult learning workforce is still developing, and at present remains voluntary
- adult learning has characteristically large numbers of sessionally paid staff working a limited number of hours per week, for a limited number of weeks in a year. The sheer numbers of staff involved may, at least partly, explain why relatively few adult learning providers (compared with colleges) are currently making annual workforce data collection returns
- lean management structures in ACL also impact upon the ability of providers to commit resources to exercises which are not a formal requirement of their funding agreement with the SFA

Actions needed

- providers should consider giving greater priority to collecting, reporting on and analysing data on the workforce
- use of workforce data at the local level could inform planning of recruitment and staff development strategies more effectively, and identify skills gaps
- available national baseline information on the ACL workforce should be more widely disseminated
- workforce data should be used to make the case for securing funding for plugging any gaps in initial training
- a fundamental review of current arrangements for the collection of robust data on the ACL workforce is needed.

Priority 2: Attracting and recruiting the best people

Theme 4: Recruiting the people we need

Theme 5: Increasing the diversity of the workforce at all levels

Theme 6: Improving and promoting the workforce image

Current assessment

- adult learning providers' recruitment policies and practice are generally well developed to attract the best people, and support the promotion of equality and diversity. Vacancies are openly advertised on websites, although at times a more proactive approach is taken to secure staff with the appropriate subject expertise and/or specialist experience
- Local Authority providers usually work within the council's mainstream HR processes, which can mean limitations on permanent contract offers. Corporate approaches also impact on the approach to application and staff selection, job evaluation, terms and conditions of employment and grading levels
- teaching staff who do not have at least PTTLS are required to undertake it on appointment and most providers support them to do this. Providers see merit in the universal application of such introductory training, regardless of the type/formality/subject matter of teaching
- adult learning providers effectively promote their support for teaching staff through professional mentoring, access to CPD and peer support in order to attract recruits. There are examples of the celebration of the achievements of staff on provider websites
- it has not been uncommon for adult learning staff to begin with a small, part-time teaching role and to

progress, with experience, through to organisational and management roles, although this career path may be compromised in the current funding climate

- subject knowledge is highly valued in adult learning establishments, and many teachers/tutors are recruited on this basis, following a 'dual professionalism' including membership of professional bodies associated with their curriculum expertise. Such moves are generally encouraged and, in cases (e.g. yoga), seen as necessary for effective delivery of programmes.

Identified challenges

- the wider framework for professional qualifications in the FE sector is regarded by many in the ACL community as disproportionate to the work of staff, many of whom are engaged (at least initially) on short-hours, part-time contracts. Qualification requirements can act as a barrier to recruitment. In this context, continuing lack of clarity about the applicability of teaching qualification requirements to those working in informal adult and community learning is unhelpful
- scope for attracting new staff is being compromised by funding constraints and, in Local Authority settings, by current recruitment freezes. Adult learning services' freedom to select new staff may also be affected by local authority redeployment strategies and in some cases there is little prospect of recruitment from outside the council for the foreseeable future
- in some providers, recent moves towards increasing the number of fractional posts is being reversed because of funding constraints which are, at least temporarily, disadvantaging them in the recruitment and retention of staff. This can also impact on the diversity of the workforce.

Actions needed

- workforce planning in ACL would be significantly helped by prompt clarification of future policy for informal adult and community learning, including the requirement for staff to achieve professional qualifications.

Priority 3: Retaining and developing the modern, professionalised workforce

Theme 7: Professionalising the workforce through relevant training and continuing professional development

Theme 8: Identifying, planning and delivering the required skills needs of the workforce

Theme 9: Ensuring appropriate leadership and management development exists at all levels of the organisation

Theme 10: Ensuring there is a flexible, fair and supportive working environment for the workforce

- local adult learning providers have well established patterns of developing teachers/tutors. Observations of teaching and learning are followed by identification of development needs which are met through individual support/mentoring or training, although this practice is not standardised
- in-house support and development programmes for teachers have frequently been planned with the IfL CPD requirements in mind. The national partners, including HOLEX, NIACE and UCU, strongly support the need for a professional body for FE sector teaching staff
- appraisal and review processes, which also identify development needs, are embedded for staff across ACL services. Where recruitment freezes and workforce contraction mean that existing staff are taking on more diverse roles, they are being supported to do this
- national networks are found useful as a means of sharing information and responses to the changing strategic context
- the allocation of LSIS Account funding to access external events is widely appreciated, though providers would like to be able to use such funds more freely, including being able to access support offered by other national support and development agencies
- the potential of the Excellence Gateway to support providers is widely acknowledged, and providers would welcome a refresh of the material available, and more targeted and contextualised resources.

Current assessment

- local adult learning providers demonstrate a real and deep commitment to the initial and continuing development of their teaching staff
- teachers/tutors are increasingly having to fund their own professional qualifications, and undertake this training in their own time, and these factors are proving to be a barrier to complying with expectations regarding a fully and 'appropriately' qualified workforce in adult learning
- the work of Lifelong Learning UK to identify models of good practice in developing college staff in a support role confirms that such staff play an important part in enhancing learner achievement; there is strong agreement in the ACL community for formalisation of support staff development strategies, including an entitlement to CPD

Identified challenges

- for some in the ACL community there is a high level of concern over how the current level of commitment to supporting and training staff might be maintained at a time of national funding constraint
- FE sector teacher training will be adversely affected by recent changes in HE funding, and this will be compounded by the Skills Investment proposal that in 2012/13 SFA funding for programmes at Level 3 and above will be replaced by loans. Experience to date shows that where training loans have been offered these have often been resisted, not least because of costs in relation to earnings for staff on low hours sessional contracts
- national partners have raised concerns about the qualification requirements being a barrier to recruitment of teaching staff in ACL, and have welcomed the creation of a working party under the BIS Workforce Stakeholder Group to discuss the issues in relation to evolving policy on informal adult learning. Meetings held to date confirm almost complete unanimity that while all parties want the requirement for ACL teachers to be qualified to remain, a new approach is needed that is both proportionate and staged. We look to the current Lifelong Learning UK review of Professional Qualifications to help address this
- widely dispersed provision compromises access to CPD for teachers, and this is proving to be particularly challenging in a context of fewer managers and decreased funding to pay for travel costs. Technology-based solutions for CPD are increasingly being used, with use of Moodle and online training modules
- there remains a large degree of uncertainty, amongst the teaching workforce, on the role of IfL. Questions have been raised about the value added for part-time tutors, some of whom regard their teaching as a secondary occupation

- the nature and pace of change in the FE system means that those assuming management and leadership roles often require specific, strategic updates
- current national development programmes do not always support the very varied needs of individual providers effectively.

Actions needed

- providers should ensure that workforce development issues are fully covered in self-assessment and improvement planning
- the Lifelong Learning UK led review of Professional Qualifications should be completed as scheduled, and actions recommended by that review should be taken forward promptly
- disseminate findings from current work on good practice in the professional development of support staff, and promote future extension of this work to the ACL community
- IfL should ensure it effectively demonstrates its usefulness to part-time ACL tutors
- providers are encouraged make full use of existing local, regional and national professional networks
- there is scope for more sharing of good practice in the use of technology to support CPD
- work is needed to better inform the design and delivery of national support and development programmes for ACL staff, and further develop existing provider support resources
- access to development funding by adult learning providers, including access to peer support, should be facilitated.

An Agenda for Action

Our consultations with the ACL community, and the assessment of prevailing practice, current challenges and identified development priorities summarised above, lead us as national partners to commit to various actions in the coming period. Our analysis also identifies a range of issues on which we urge prompt action by national agencies, and leads us to suggest ways in which providers, individually and collectively, might best commit available resources to be as effective and supportive of staff as possible.

We suggest that providers:

- give greater priority to completing a modified workforce data collection
 - analyse data on their own staff more rigorously, using the Lifelong Learning UK OLAP tool to compare their staff profile against sector norms
 - use this analysis to plan recruitment and staff development strategies more effectively and identify skills gaps
 - monitor and act on staff diversity at all levels
 - ensure that workforce development issues are fully covered in self-assessment and improvement planning and, where relevant to local arrangements, in annual business plans
 - make full use of existing local, regional and national professional networks to consider joint planning and delivery of development support where common needs can be identified
 - share good practice in the use of technology to support CPD.
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We urge prompt action:

- on clarification, by BIS, on the reshaping of informal adult community learning, including policy on the professionalisation and regulation of the workforce
 - in bringing to effective conclusion the current Lifelong Learning UK led review of Professional Qualifications, and to take forward actions recommended by that review, whether overseen by the BIS Workforce Stakeholder Group (in which HOLEX, NIACE and UCU all sit) or through other national groupings
 - to ensure that data from the Lifelong Learning UK 2010 ACL Aggregate Survey of Professional Qualifications, and other data collections, is used to make the case for securing funding for plugging gaps in initial training in the context of a largely part-time workforce
 - to revisit, through a fundamental but short-term root and branch review, current arrangements for the collection of robust data on the ACL workforce, and to use the outcomes of this to agree a new national specification for workforce data collection which is both proportionate to the needs of national agencies and attracts the confidence and commitment of adult learning providers, including those who sub-contract programme delivery
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- to put in place agreed arrangements for the implementation of this revised annual ACL workforce data collection exercise, including active promotion of the benefits to providers of making regular data submissions
- to encourage dissemination of findings from current Lifelong Learning UK work on good practice in the professional development of support staff, and to promote future extension of this work to take greater account of the ACL community
- by IfL to ensure that it effectively demonstrates its usefulness to part-time ACL tutors
- to secure a route through which future iterations of the FE Workforce Strategy for England, and associated community-specific papers, might be most effectively developed
- to promote wider adoption and application of the Lifelong Learning UK Equality Framework for Lifelong Learning by adult learning providers
- to work with LSIS, through established mechanisms linking to provider representative bodies, to
 - better inform the design and delivery of national support and development programmes for ACL staff
 - encourage greater flexibility in the use of LSIS Accounts
 - ensure that planned changes to the Excellence Gateway meet the needs of part-time teachers and tutors, including ACL-specific resources
 - secure further development of ACL management training programmes and resources, so that they reflect the current context in which adult learning operates
- to raise awareness of the need for access to development funding which addresses the needs of individual adult learning providers, including access to peer support.

HOLEX, NIACE and UCU will

- continue to work closely together to promote the interests of the ACL community and the staff who work in it, including sharing intelligence on workforce issues
- continue to represent ACL community interests at national level through active membership of relevant groups, including bodies charged with developing a strategic approach to workforce development and stakeholder groups charged with advising government on the development, implementation and review of workforce-related policies
- continue to deploy our available resources to ensure, as far as is possible, that member organisations and professional workers involved in adult learning are kept informed of relevant national developments, and are provided with both electronic and face-to-face means of sharing information and insights on practice
- maintain support for existing professional adult learning networks, and work with other partners to secure as wide as possible coverage across the ACL community
- seek to work in an increasingly co-ordinated way, and so focus collective energies, and where practicable pool resources, on a set of key issues and priorities as set out in this paper
- where resourced to do so, facilitate, co-ordinate and/or lead and manage direct ACL community input into national review, evaluation and development activities designed to enhance the workforce.

A note on methodology

In preparing this document we have been keen to ensure that we come up with an assessment, and a set of recommendations, that are meaningful to the wide range of organisations involved in provision of learning opportunities for adults, and have sought to take a clearly consultative approach. An online survey was conducted in October 2010, and face-to-face workshops were held in November, providing an opportunity for preliminary survey findings to be considered in more detail. In all, some 60 leaders, senior managers responsible for workforce issues and staff development, lead practitioners and other interested adult learning professionals have been involved. Their profile is representative of the ACL community: very small to very large providers, with a range of permutations of SFA funding streams; urban, suburban and rural; direct delivery and contracted out; and from the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors.

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Contact points

HOLEX, NIACE and UCU are keen to promote wide adoption of the actions recommended in this implementation document and will continue to feed views from providers across the ACL community, and individual practitioners, into their ongoing work on workforce issues. If you wish to comment on this document, to report on local activity or to raise related issues with us directly, please contact:

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Notes