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Adult Education: Important for Health and Well-Being

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Credits

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- **Commissioned by the Institutes for Adult Learning**

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LEARNING**

Remit

Adult Education: Too important to be left to chance – IER;
published 2016

**Health and Well-being came through strongly as a theme
to explore further**

The aim of this new study was to:

- increase awareness of the benefits that adult education can bring to the nation's health & well-being
- stimulate further policy dialogue to accelerate progress on delivering those benefits more widely

Adult learning: Too important to leave to chance (2016)

The report made five recommendations:

- A national adult education strategy
- Rebalance commissioning/funding system so that there is support for education at all ages
- Improved IAG
- Build a better evidence base
- Closer working with employers

The evidence base which the report drew on – especially student surveys - had much to say on health & wellbeing

Key issues

- Prolonged decline in numbers participating in adult learning.
- Local/ Combined authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) face relentless pressure on planning and funding local community services.
- Currently, it is mainly left up to adult education managers and practitioners on the ground to make connections with health sector professionals and organisations
- Commissioners in adult education, health and social care sectors currently have very different priorities and use evidence in very different ways.

Learners' voice: Why it works

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“Adult learning keeps you young and it keeps your brain active.”

“Attending classes can also combat loneliness”

“You stretch yourself when you learn something new. So good for your well-being”

“When I developed arthritis, I felt on the scrap heap. Adult learning courses helped me find a new direction. “

Learners' voice: Why it's needed

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“I was advised by my doctor to come. They need more information to attract more people to adult learning”

“There are so many social issues that adult learning is dealing with that would otherwise cost the government a great deal.”

“I would have been on anti-depressants if I didn't come to this writing group. It has given me a sense of belonging and purpose.”

Three key messages

- Adult education helps keep individuals well and supports longer and productive lives.
- Adult education makes positive contributions to issues such as: ageing, loneliness, long-term conditions, mental health and well-being and community cohesion.
- Adult education helps save money in the National Health Service (NHS) and the social care system.

Why is this good work at risk?

- A policy landscape pre-occupied with apprenticeships, skills and qualification?
- A shortage of public funding?
- Lack of national strategic direction?
- Too much competition and duplication in the sector?
- Too much working in 'silos' at every level?
- Lack of awareness of the wide range of benefits of adult education?

13 successful case studies (1)

- Mental Wealth Festival, promoting ‘mental wealth’ (City Lit)
- Online centres to support communities to improve their digital skills for health (The Tinder Foundation)
- Survey to identify wider benefits of Adult learning (Provider)
- Greater Manchester’s Work and Skills Strategy – an integrated skills system
- Citizens Skills Curriculum for adults (Learning & Work Institute)
- Birmingham University Hospitals, NHS Foundation Trust and Adult Learning working together
- Jointly-funded English language courses for NHS patients (Birmingham)

13 successful case studies (2)

- A course that targeted people with actual or potential health and well-being issues (Oxfordshire)
- Providers working in partnership with niche health organisations (Northern College)
- Health and Education staff improving health in the community (The Bromley by Bow Centre)
- Supporting learners to access learning (Fircroft College)
- Exploring the impact of arts-based projects on improving health (Gloucestershire)
- Measuring improvement in mental health on adult learning projects (Northern College)

Adult education contributes to:

The Warwick University logo, featuring a stylized blue mountain peak above the word "WARWICK" in blue capital letters.

- preventing illness and infirmity from developing in the first place and worsening in the longer term
- enhancing well-being and quality of life in people of all ages
- helping reduce the gap between Britain's 'haves and have nots'
- improving functional literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- addressing many of the challenges the health and social care system is facing
- saving money in health and social care by strengthening prevention

Emerging priorities:

1. Greater alignment of strategic priorities and funding streams
2. Capturing the evidence
3. Getting the message across – to policy makers and professionals in adult education, health and well-being sectors
4. All policy interventions should take equity as a starting point

Recommendations 1 - 3

- Providers should bring the evidence alive and readily available.
- The government should develop a national tool(s) for measuring the impact of adult education on improving individuals health and well-being as a priority.
- Politicians and partners in adult education should disseminate policy briefings on specific aspects of this work to Ministers and health and well-being agencies and professional bodies.

Recommendations 4 - 6

- Adult education specialists should be invited to contribute to the development and delivery of health and well-being objectives at regional and local levels and they should present their findings to NHS Improvement.
- Adult education specialists and partners should advocate the health and well-being benefits of adult education to the wider public.
- Adult education should be incorporated onto the Prescriptions for Patients systems across all NHS England.

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