



Adult Education

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This note gives an overview of adult education provision and funding, including recent changes on provision. It deals with adult education outside of further and higher education courses, focusing on the acquisition of basic skills and 'informal' learning undertaken by adults in their leisure time.

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1 Background

Adult education has become a focus of attention since the Government's Skill Strategy introduced a commitment to improve basic skills among the workforce. There has been much concern about changes in provision of adult education courses as a possible consequence of funding being targeted at the priority areas of basic skills and adults lacking level 2 qualifications,¹ rather than at other vocational or life skills courses.

1.1 The Skills Strategy

To address the issue of skills the Government published The Skills Strategy White Paper, *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*² in July 2003. The Skills Strategy aims to:

...strengthen the UK's position as one of the world's leading economies by ensuring that employers have the skills to support the success of their business, and that employees have the necessary skills to be both employable and personally fulfilled³.

In the [Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 2008 Annual Report](#), the Government states its aim with regard to skills and learning:

PSA: Tackle the adult skills gap (Department for Education and Skills SR04 PSA 13)

Increase the number of adults with the skills required for employability and progression to higher levels of training through:

- improving the basic skill levels of 2.25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007 (element 1); and

¹ Level 2 qualifications are equivalent to 5 GCSEs at A* to C

² Department for Education and Skills, *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*, Cm 5810, July 2003

³ Ibid., page 11

- reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010. Working towards this, one million adults in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006 (element 2).

The report states that the Government is on course to achieve these targets:

Element 1: Improving the basic skill levels of adults

Current position

Against a baseline of nil in 2001, the latest outturn shows the 2007 milestone of 1.5 million adults benefiting from improved basic skill levels has already been exceeded, with over 1.7 million learner achievements. This represents good progress towards the 2010 target.

Other comments on performance

Participation in Skills for Life courses remains strong. Over 4.7 million people have taken up over 10.5 million learning opportunities between 2001 and July 2006. We expect to report that we have exceeded 2 million achievements when we receive the next update from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

...

Element 2: Reducing the number of adults in the workforce who lack Level 2 qualifications

Current position

The interim target of an additional one million adults in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006 was reached in 2006. We now have 74.7 per cent of the economically active workforce qualified to at least Level 2 – which represents approximately 18.2 million adults compared with 16.1 million adults in 2001. There is, however, a very challenging growth trajectory to 2010, requiring an increase in publicly funded first Level 2 achievements from 148,000 in 2005/06 up to almost 400,000 in 2009/10.⁴

1.2 Skills for Life

The Government's Skills for Life qualifications are designed to help individuals with the needs of everyday life in terms of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. ('Basic Skills' courses sometimes referred to are the same thing, and lead to the same qualifications.)⁵

On 26 June 2008 a Westminster Hall debate was held on the Skills for Life initiative. The Under-Secretary of State, David Lammy, said regarding the aims of Skills for Life:

Our purpose is not simply economic...a good grounding in the so-called stem subjects is essential in a democracy that must consider the pros and cons of genetically modified foods, biometric data or nuclear energy.⁶

He also restated the Government's goal under the Skills for Life initiative, for 95% of adults to have functional literacy and numeracy skills by 2020.⁷

⁴ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, [Investing in our Future: Departmental Report 2008](#), May 2008

⁵ Direct.gov pages on [Skills for Life qualifications](#)

⁶ HC Deb 26 June 2008 col 146WH

In June 2008 the National Audit Office (NAO) published its report: *Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*, which discusses the impact of the initiative so far and outlines areas for improvement. The report argued that it is too soon to know the true impact of the initiative on the UK's skills base, but that good progress had been made towards the targets of participation and achievement the Government has set. It also noted that less progress has been made with achievement in numeracy as compared to literacy, and that provision and achievement varied significantly across the country. On the value for money of the initiative, the NAO concluded:

The Skills for Life programme has engaged 5.7 million learners on 12 million courses with 7.6 million achievements, at an overall cost of £5 billion. This represents an average cost of £660 per achievement. The value for money of the Skills for Life programme can be improved if the Department can increase the success rates (the percentage of participants who achieve a qualification or meet the relevant learning aims of the course). It remains a challenge to achieve this while still recognising that there is significant value to be gained from engaging those hard-to-reach learners at the lower entry levels, who can improve their literacy or numeracy skills, even though they may not achieve a qualification.⁸

1.3 Leitch Review of Skills

Much of the debate in this area is informed by the *Leitch Review of Skills* published in December 2006. The report sought to encourage ambitious action in skills policy:

Skills matter fundamentally for the economic and social health of the UK. I have listened to key stakeholders at home and to eminent thinkers abroad. There is consensus that we need to be much more ambitious and a clear message that the UK must 'raise its game'. This is an urgent task.⁹

The review's key findings were:

- The UK has a strong economy and world-leading employment levels, but its productivity trails many key comparator nations; poor skills are a key contributor to this problem as well as having wider impacts on social welfare.
- Over the last decade, the skills profile of working age people in UK has improved. For example, the proportion with a degree has increased from one fifth to over one quarter of the population.
- Despite these improvements, the UK still does not have a world-class skills base:
 - over one third of adults in the UK do not have a basic school-leaving qualification – double the proportion of Canada and Germany;
 - five million people have no qualifications at all; and
 - one in six do not have the literacy skills expected of an 11 year old and half do not have these levels of functional numeracy.
- Looking ahead to 2020, global, demographic and technological change will place an even greater premium on the UK's skills profile.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ NAO report 2008, Executive Summary pg 10

⁹ Leitch Review, Executive Summary pg 1

- New analysis conducted by the Review shows that, if the Government meets its current ambitious targets for improving the UK's skills, by 2020:
 - the proportion of working age people without any qualifications will fall to 4 per cent; and the proportion holding a degree will increase from 27 per cent to 38 per cent; and
 - this will have significant benefits for the economy – increasing annual productivity growth by 0.2 per cent with a net benefit to the economy of £3 billion a year, equivalent to 0.3 per cent of GDP.
- However, even if the UK can meet these targets, the nation's human capital will still fail to be world-class. Considerable problems will remain; at least 4 million adults will still not have the literacy skills expected of an 11 year old and 12 million would not have numeracy skills at this level.
- The Review has analysed more ambitious scenarios for 2020:
 - tackling the stock of low skilled adults without qualifications, basic literacy and numeracy;
 - investing more in intermediate skills; and
 - further increasing the proportion of adults holding a degree.
- In all of the scenarios, the analysis shows the significant economic and social benefits that would result from higher productivity and employment gained through improving skills.

In July 2007 the Government published its response to the review, [World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England](#). The response articulates the Government's acceptance of the Review's position and targets, and sets out proposals to achieve them.

2 Government Policy on Adult Learning

Government funding for further education is targeted at certain national priority groups. The Government priorities are set out annually in a letter from the Secretary of State for Education to the Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The *LSC Grant Letter for 2007-08*¹⁰ states that Government funding is 'targeted at those who will benefit most', such as young people, disadvantaged persons and people with low skill levels. The main aim of Government funding is to improve the skills of the workforce. An example of this is the [Functional Skills pilot](#), directed at providing functional English, mathematics and ICT skills. Courses that do not come within any of these priority groups are no longer subsidised and therefore tend to charge higher tuition fees.

General information about adult learning is available on the relevant [Direct.gov web pages](#).

The Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Innovation, Universities and Skills stated in a joint letter to Further Education colleges in September 2008:

Colleges are...essential to delivering this government's commitment to engaging and helping those most excluded from education, the labour market and society. Many colleges already do this, in a myriad of ways: giving people the language and skills

¹⁰ Secretary of State for Education and Skills, [LSC Grant Letter 2007-08](#), 18 October 2006

they need to participate as active citizens; helping them to develop the skills they need to enter the workforce; and encouraging them to progress further so they can truly unlock their talents.¹¹

Fee Remission

The LSC document *Funding Guidance for Further Education in 2007/08*¹² sets out the categories of learners who are eligible for fee remission on courses:

The categories of learners who are entitled to fee remission are (learners only need to be eligible under any single entitlement category):

- 16–18 year olds (the Secretary of State does not expect tuition fees to be charged to full-time or part-time 16–18 year olds)
- learners studying their first full Level 2 qualification.
- 19–25-year-old learners studying their first full Level 3 qualification.
- those in receipt of income-based benefits, formerly known as means-tested benefits, that is:
 - a. unemployed people in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - b. those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit
 - c. those in receipt of Housing Benefit
 - d. those in receipt of Income Support
 - e. those in receipt of Working Tax Credit with a household income of less than £15,050
 - f. those in receipt of Pension Credits (Guarantee Credit only)
- unemployed people in receipt of contribution based Jobseeker's Allowance
- the unwaged dependants (as defined by Jobcentre Plus) of those listed above
- offenders who are serving their sentence in the community
- those taking learning aims that are funded as basic skills as defined in Section 3 of this Guidance, excluding English for speakers of other languages
- asylum seekers eligible for LSC FE funding according to the *LSC Learner Eligibility Guidance 2007/08* and in receipt of the equivalent of income-based benefit (assistance under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) and their dependants
- certain learners participating in LSC-funded projects where identified in the project specification.

The fees payable for further education courses vary for each student depending on a person's individual eligibility and the type of course studied. Older people are still eligible for fee concessions if they are studying certain courses such as basic skills courses and first full level 2 courses (5 GCSE equivalents). However, older people may find that they are no longer eligible for fee remission on courses which do not seek to meet the targets the Government has set out regarding life and work skills.

¹¹ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and Department for Children, Schools and Families, [joint letter from the Secretaries of State to colleges](#), 17 September 2008

¹² Learning and Skills Council, *Funding Guidance for Further Education in 2007-08*, March 2007

Funding

Funding arrangements for many adult education courses have changed in the last few years as a consequence of further education institutions focusing funding on these priority areas and consequently squeezing funding for other types of courses. The application of the changes in funding for courses and rules on eligibility for fee remission has resulted in many institutions having to increase fees for courses, or in some cases to drop uneconomic courses. The number of places available on recreational classes and short courses has reduced markedly in the last two years.

Government funding for non-vocational adult education comes from the Personal and Community Development and Learning (PCDL) fund. Information given in answer to a Parliamentary Question on 13 March 2008¹³ showed that PCDL funding has dropped from a high point in 2004/05:

Adult Education: Finance

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2008, Official Report, column 516W, on adult education: finance, what the funding for adult education provision was in each of the last five years, broken down by programme.

Bill Rammell: The departmental annual report 2007 for the former Department for Education and Skills sets out adult funding provided through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) from 2001-02 to 2005-06 based on the LSC published accounts. The following table provides an extract from the DAR showing adult participation funding for further education, Train to Gain, 19+ work-based learning and personal and community development learning programmes. Other funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, University for Industry/learn direct, capital and learner support is not broken down by age so is not included in the table.

<i>Extract from table 8.9— Breakdown of expenditure by the Learning and Skills Council within departmental expenditure limit 2001-02 to 2005-06</i>					
<i>Outturn (£ million)</i>					
	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
19+ Further Education	1,692	1,695	1,882	1,902	2,011
Train to Gain/Employer Training Pilot	n/a	7	33	89	142
19+ Workbased Learning	154	211	213	243	232
Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL)	153	194	225	237	229
Adults Total	1,999	2,107	2,353	2,471	2,614
<i>Source:</i> DfES departmental annual report 2007					

¹³ HC Deb 13 March 2008 c599

Further information on the breakdown of adult funding for the period 2005-06 to 2010-11 is provided in table 5 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report 'Sustainable employment: supporting people to stay in work and advance' published on 27 February 2008. The presentation of this information is consistent with the 2008-09 LSC Grant Letter published on 16 November which reflects the introduction of the adult learner and employer responsive funding models from 2008-09.

Information on recent PCDL grants can be found in the Annual Grant Letters sent by the Secretary of State to the Chairman of Learning and Skills Council (LSC).¹⁴ These letters show that funding for PCDL has been frozen at £210 million 2006/07. The LSC Grant letter for 2008/09 shows that this level of funding will be safeguarded until 2010/11.¹⁵ The 2008 DIUS annual report shows the level of funding for adult safeguarded learning since 2002-03 and its safeguarded level until 2010-11:

Programme	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Expenditure (£m)	198	225	241	229	222	221	210	210	210

N.B. The figures for 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11 are planned.¹⁶

This response to a Parliamentary Question sets out the Government's position on non-LSC funded courses, and targets for colleges to accept them:

David Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills what plans his Department has to require colleges to accept targets from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for adult education courses which are not themselves funded by the LSC; and if he will make a statement.

Sion Simon: We are committed to continuing to increase Government investment in adult skills. Alongside this investment from Government there needs to be a shared responsibility for investment in skills and training by learners and employers, especially where they realise the greatest private returns. Increasing income through fees, including activity not funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a key part of ensuring there is a full range of provision available to adult learners. The LSC have developed a consistent national framework designed to help colleges understand the scope they have for increasing fee income. While some colleges have responded very proactively and innovatively to this agenda, increasing both income and choice for learners, other colleges have not seen it as a priority. We have therefore been working with the LSC, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the Association of Colleges to create a package of support consisting of good practice guides, a fees toolkit and workshops. This support is designed to help all colleges understand how they can adopt fee strategies which have seen other colleges expand fee income and increase learner choice. Alongside this the LSC have introduced fee income targets to ensure that the profile and importance of this agenda is clear to all colleges. This will also ensure that we are able to recognise the overall volume of education and training delivered by FE colleges outside of LSC funding.¹⁷

¹⁴ Learning and Skills Council [Annual Grant Letters](#)

¹⁵ Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Innovation, Universities and Skills, [LSC Grant Letter 2008-09](#), 16 November 2007

¹⁶ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, [Investing in our Future: Departmental Report 2008](#), pg 113

¹⁷ HC Deb 15 October 2008 vol 480 c1325W

Numbers of learners

The response to a Parliamentary Question in October 2008 lists the number of learners under the heading of Adult Safeguarded learning in recent years:

Mr. Simon: Informal adult learning is highly valued by Government. We have made an unequivocal commitment to sustain its funding, with £210 million available every year until the end of the CSR period. This year we have also conducted a wide consultation on informal adult learning because we recognise the enormous contribution that this activity makes to the quality of life, health and well-being of individuals, neighbourhoods and wider society. These consultation findings will provide the basis for a new informal adult learning strategy for the 21st century.

Table A shows the total number of Adult and Community Learners (now referred to as Adult Safeguarded Learning) from 2002/03 through to 2006/07. These figures are the closest proxy available to what was also termed "Personal and Community Development (PCDL)".¹⁸

<i>Table A: Adult and Community Learner numbers for 2002/03 to 2006/07</i>	
	<i>Adult and Community Learning</i>
2003/04	842,100
2004/05	871,400
2005/06	793,400
2006/07	745,500
<i>Note:</i> Figures prior to 2003/04 are not available <i>Source:</i> Various statistical first releases	

A table in Annex 2 of the DIUS Departmental Report 2008 *Investing in our Future*¹⁹ shows that the numbers of learners on adult safeguarded learning courses are expected to drop over the next few years:

Table 13 Numbers of adult learners in England, 2006–07 to 2010–11

The table below sets out the projected numbers of adults in learning across the range of LSC-funded programmes from 2006–07 to 2010–11. These are based on LSC modelling and are consistent with those presented in the LSC Statement of Priorities (November 2007). It is expected that over the CSR period public investment will support on average over 3 million adult learners per year.

¹⁸ HC Deb 29 October 2008 vol 481 c1121-3W

¹⁹ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, *Investing in our Future: Departmental Report 2008*

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-2011
Total learners (000s)	3,063	3,086	3,129	2,898	3,142
Adult safeguarded learning (000s)	658	660	630	605	585

Source: Learning and Skills Council's annual Statement of Priorities

1 Due to the overlap of some categories of learning the figures in each category will not sum to the total.

2 Developmental learning is defined as learning below Level 2 outside of the national qualifications framework and learning above

Level 3 and is based on indicative figures published in the LSC Statement of Priorities, November 2007.

An article in the *Times Educational Supplement* on 18 April 2008 commented on reduced learner numbers and shift in provision:

Colleges are moving away from traditional adult education at an ever-increasing rate, with even "safeguarded" provision losing nearly one in six students.

Figures from the Learning and Skills Council show that adult numbers last October were 1.04 million - down by 151,000 on the previous year.

While the number of teenagers in further education rose by just over 3 per cent, the shortfall is in adult education, where student numbers fell by 12.7 per cent.

It reflects a shift to longer courses designed to improve the skills of workers, with nearly 4 per cent more adults taking Level 2 courses - equivalent to five good GCSEs - and nearly 3 per cent on Level 3 (A-level equivalent).

Since the courses take more time, fewer students overall tend to be recruited. But in what is known as "adult safeguarded learning" - the £210 million a year programme to preserve some of the adult education courses that were devastated by the shift towards work-related study - numbers still fell by 17.5 per cent in spite of a constant level of funding.

Alan Tuckett, director of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said the trend may be partly explained by colleges taking on more expensive work for disabled or disadvantaged students.

But he added the rate of decline suggested the safeguard was not enough to preserve a broad range of adult education courses.

Over the last three years, the safeguarded provision has actually fallen by 41 per cent, from 440,000 in 2004 to 259,000 at the start of this academic year.

Mr Tuckett said: "If the downward trend from the October figures was to continue, learner numbers in the safeguarded provision would be close to disappearing in five years' time. We can't afford these numbers to drop any more since that, after all, was the rationale for the adoption of the safeguard in the first place."²⁰

²⁰ "Adult Learning in free fall", *Times Educational Supplement* (TES), 18 April 2008

The following Parliamentary Question outlines the Government's response to the concerns of the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning (CALL), surrounding the perceived drop in adult education course places – figures the Government disputes:

David Taylor: Staff and students at local colleges have contacted me about the call of the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning to restore the 1.5 million adult education course places lost by the further education sector and the communities that it serves since 2006. What do the Government plan to do about those lost places for local people and their FE colleges, given the clear social and economic benefits of adult education, in terms of universal access to basic skills, social inclusion and personal development?

Sion Simon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I have come across the CALL campaign. It is clearly well meaning, but I think that it is misconceived. The overall investment in further education has increased massively and the only thing that has changed is the way in which the places are structured. We have moved towards a smaller number of higher-quality places with more of an impact on skills and employability. Simply to count numbers of places rather than thinking about the quality of learning does not make sense.²¹

The Government has also defended its position in the House of Lords:

Lord Young of Norwood Green: My Lords, we do not agree with that figure. The accusation is based on the latest full-year statistical first release for 2006-07, and refers to the reduction in places across all Learning And Skills Council-funded further education provision for over-19s. This is not just about informal learning. With our funding, we are maintaining our commitment. Our moral for adult learning is "Quality, not quantity".²²

Press Coverage and Interest Groups' Concern

Adult education has been discussed in many newspaper articles; one particular article in *The Guardian* on 2 May 2006²³ commented on the effects of cuts in adult education in relation to older people and health:

The numbers of people aged 60 and over signing up for further education colleges has plummeted by nearly 25% this year compared with last.

This decline, which is almost certainly due to a combination of increased fees and the reduction in courses brought about by Labour's funding policy, appears to make nonsense of government efforts to present a coherent approach to older people.

While other Whitehall departments such as health and work and pensions preach the health benefits of learning for the over-60s, it is the Department for Education and Skills that stands accused of swimming against the tide.

"There is no joined-up government here," said Andrew Harrop, policy manager for the charity Age Concern. "I think the DfES really isn't interested in learning for social and community purposes. Its only focus at the moment is the skills agenda."

The DfES responded to the disjointed government accusation by declaring that it had raised spending on further education by nearly 50% since Labour came to power.

²¹ HC Deb 16 October 2008 vol 480 c914

²² HC Deb 3 November 2008 vol 705 c3

²³ ["Adult education cuts are not a healthy option"](#), *The Guardian*, 2 May 2006

The decline in non-vocational courses has affected the numbers of retirement age people in adult education, giving some indication of the broader effect. In a [September 2008 report](#) Age Concern expressed concern at the sharp decline in people over 60 participating in state-supported learning, which was down 38% between 2005/06 and 2006/07.

3 'Informal' Adult Learning

A DIUS consultation, [Informal Adult Learning - Shaping the Way Ahead](#), was carried out in early in 2008, discussing the future of informal (i.e. non-vocational) courses. The Government has now published its [response to the consultation](#). The large volume of responses to the consultation (5,500) has prompted the Secretary of State for DIUS, John Denham, to state that he will meet with organisations concerned with adult education to discuss proposals to take forward, as has been reported in the press.²⁴

In its [response to the consultation](#), the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), a non-governmental organisation, recommended a more structured and better funded approach to self-directed informal learning. It also recommended the creation of an Informal Learning Innovation Fund to stimulate participation and encourage best practice.

NIACE is also part of the [Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning](#), which seeks to advance resurgence in adult learning.

This Parliamentary Question discusses Government spending on informal adult learning (the local information asked for has been omitted from the response):

Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills what his policy is on the provision of recreational courses for older people in colleges of further education; what funds have been made available (a) nationally and (b) in Gloucestershire, for providing recreational courses for older people at colleges of further education in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Bill Rammell: [holding answer 25 March 2008]: We recognise the many wider benefits of participation in learning and its vital contribution to personal health and wellbeing, community involvement and quality of life as people age. Learning helps older people to fulfil themselves as active citizens and as members of their families and communities. People who keep mentally and physically active not only live longer but live happier and more fulfilled lives and pursuing informal adult learning can play a real part in this. We remain fully committed to ensuring that older learners in every area can benefit from a wide range of informal adult learning opportunities, including learning for its own sake, for personal fulfilment and to sustain an active role in the community, through further education colleges and other learning providers, including the Third Sector. We have also safeguarded funding for learning for personal and community development at £210 million through to 2010/11.

...

Overall Government investment in the further education sector has increased by 52 per cent. in real terms between 1997 and 2007. Participate funding for adults will increase to around £3.6 billion in 2010-11, an increase of over 17 per cent. compared with 2007-08. We have continued to realign funding towards basic literacy and numeracy, full level 2 and full level 3 qualifications providing skills for employment and further progression in learning away from, for example, very short or low quality courses. This

²⁴ ["Forces gather against Labour on adult learning"](#), *Guardian*, 21 October 2008

has enabled us to support significant increases in participation for young people and adults in these key programmes, providing them with the education and skills they need to fully participate in an economically successful and socially cohesive society. We want to develop a new vision for informal adult learning for the 21st century. In January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, launched a wide ranging consultation, "Informal Adult Learning: Shaping the Way Ahead", which re-affirms our commitment to this kind of learning and its importance in meeting the basic human need for creativity and stimulation—as well as improving health and well-being in our communities. We want to look at the many different ways in which Government and other organisations support adult learners and to understand what learners from all parts of society actually want. We have been greatly encouraged by the tremendous response of our partners, stakeholders and learners in taking this important consultation forward. I would strongly encourage individuals and organisations, both in Gloucestershire and across the country, to take this opportunity to contribute their views and ideas.²⁵

This response to a further Parliamentary Question states that the Government will be proposing new policy in this area early in 2009:

David Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills when the response to the consultation on informal adult learning will be published.

Sion Simon: "Informal Adult Learning—Shaping the Way Ahead" started an important debate about the role and nature of informal adult learning in the 21st century. The response to the consultation exceeded expectations, with around 5,500 responses. We published the Central Office for Information's consultation report and the DIUS response on our website on Thursday 9 October. Informal adult learning is highly valued by Government. We recognise the significant contribution it makes to the quality of life, health and well-being of individuals, neighbourhoods and wider society. We have made an unequivocal commitment to sustain its funding, with £210 million available every year until the end of the comprehensive spending review period. DIUS officials are now developing the proposals arising from the consultation, working closely with a wide range of stakeholders. These policy proposals will pave the way towards a new informal adult learning strategy to be published early next year.²⁶

A Parliamentary Question in the House of Lords mentioning this proposed new policy also suggests it will be accompanied by significant debate in the House:

Lord Young of Norwood Green: Its officials are developing and impact-assessing proposals arising from the consultation as the foundation for a new informal adult learning strategy to be published early next year, surely an appropriate time for a lengthier debate on such a vital issue.²⁷

In an article in the *Guardian* in October 2008 discussing possible changes the DIUS Secretary of State John Denham said:

"...we are right to have focused attention on vocational qualifications. On the other hand, some of that spirit which was valuing learning for its own sake and saying that we want to provide opportunities to learn - even if people are doing it simply because

²⁵ HC Deb 31 March 2008 vol 474 c591-2W

²⁶ HC Deb 13 November 2008 vol 482 c1390W

²⁷ HL Deb 3 November 2008 vol 705 c1

they want to stretch their horizons ... that was a good spirit, and what I hope we're trying to do is rekindle it and to do it in a way that's appropriate for the 21st century."²⁸

4 Other Reports and Media Comment on Adult Learning

In July 2008 Help the Aged published a report, *Learning for Living*, advocating a strategy specifically aimed at older people, to prevent their drift into isolation and exclusion. The report highlights financial, citizenship, health and ICT literacy as key areas that could be addressed to improve the lives of older people.

In November 2008 the *Times* reported a survey that suggested that the financial crisis was prompting an upsurge in demand for adult education as people retrain to seek new employment:

Millions of adults are going back to college to retrain in an attempt to survive the credit crunch, according to research commissioned by the Association of Colleges (AoC), London.

Those made redundant or who fear for the future of their jobs are at the forefront of the drive to upgrade skills, it says. A fifth of adults intend to gain further qualifications in the next year, and a third of those want to do so because of the economic downturn. Some colleges are already reporting increased enrolments.

The survey by YouGov questioned more than 2,000 adults and extrapolated their responses to make them representative of the English population. It found that 8.4 million people had switched career in the past three years, and that 3.2 million workers aimed to do so in the next year. More than eight million adults were making plans to "skill up" in the next year. Money was a powerful deciding factor for almost two fifths of respondents.

David Collins, president of the AoC, said: "The economic situation will trigger people to reassess their situation and make bold decisions."²⁹

However, a *Guardian* article published in September 2008 raised concerns that any such rise in demand may not be able to be accommodated:

In the 1990s recession, adult learners were expected to pay just 25% of the cost of their courses, while today it is 50%. Will they be willing to pay higher fees as their resources become more stretched?

As the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace) points out, some 1.5m adult learning places funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) have already been lost in the past two years.

Niace's director, Alan Tuckett, says: "In the last major downturn, colleges had a funding mechanism to enable them to respond to customer demand. Now there are too many barriers to getting the money. The rules are very complicated.

"It is not good for people who want to do a bit of learning that does not lead to a full qualification. I think it will hurt this time around if people cannot do short courses that keep them stimulated while actively looking for work."

John Latham, principal of Cornwall College, thinks colleges need to be "light on their feet to cope with changing demand in what is going to be a fast-moving 12 months".

²⁸ "Forces gather against Labour on adult learning", *Guardian*, 21 October 2008

²⁹ "Millions retraining to survive the economic crisis", *Times*, 10 November 2008

He says: "The perceived wisdom is that recession leads to people being interested in returning to education and gaining a higher level of qualifications to stay competitive in the jobs market. We need to ramp up the offer to make sure the options are there to provide people with training for a different job."

Julian Gravatt, director of funding and development for the Association of Colleges, says: "Colleges will only benefit from an increase in demand if the government increases spending on education and training. The credit crunch is crunching government, too, and there are other competing demands. Colleges need to make a good case for more funding."³⁰

³⁰ ["Ready for the crunch?"](#), *Guardian*, 2 September 2008