



promoting adult learning / *hyrwyddo addysg oedolion*

Response to the Welsh Government draft budget proposals for 2014-15

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Introduction

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent charity which promotes adult learning across England and Wales. NIACE exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in learning of all kinds. Through its research, development, publications, events, outreach and advocacy activity, NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives. NIACE Dysgu Cymru, the Welsh arm of NIACE, conducts work in Wales supported by a Management Group, which is elected by NIACE members in Wales.

NIACE's work is driven by our strategic plan which is shaped by the needs of the adult learning sector. NIACE's current strategic priorities comprise:

- improving the accessibility, range and quality of the life skills that underpin lifelong learning and enable adults to participate in society;
- making learning in communities more diverse, sustainable, responsive, accountable and better connected with other types of learning; and
- improving the range and quality of learning in and for work, in order that adults are best equipped to gain, sustain and progress in employment.

To these ends, NIACE produces strategic and analytical work to high quality standards and has strong experience in research and development projects around learning that enhance social and economic well being. Since 1999, the Institute has worked on more than 1000 development and research projects including large-scale project work, national training programmes, national evaluations, quantitative surveys, and qualitative studies across many fields including equality and diversity, literacy, numeracy, financial capability, digital learning, health, well being and

pathways to employability for those furthest from the labour market. Further information on our work can be found at www.niace.org.uk.

2. NIACE Dysgu Cymru believes that adult learning – delivered across all sectors including Further Education, Higher Education, the workplace and in communities - plays a crucial role in supporting skills development and economic growth. However, there is evidence which demonstrates that investing in adult learning delivers benefits which are not confined to educational attainment but delivers improvements in health and well-being, builds strong communities, is vital for giving parents the skills to support their children, keeps an ageing population active and contributes to a prosperous and confident nation.
3. This submission has been prepared by NIACE Dysgu Cymru in response to the call for evidence from The Committees of the National Assembly. We are happy for this response to be published and would be pleased to give verbal evidence to the Committee or to expand on any of the points raised. We offer comments on the current policy focus in order to inform The Finance Committee's analysis of the Welsh Government's budget from a strategic, overarching perspective. Comments are based upon the indicative allocations for the 2014-15 financial year which were published in the Final Budget 2013-14 (restated in the Supplementary Budget 2013-14).¹

Reference Materials

- [Consultation Call](#)
- [Indicative Budget](#)
- [Programme for Government](#)

¹ The proposed budget is not available at the time of consultation but we expect it to be published in early October 2013.

General Comments

We believe that the benefits of lifelong learning are not restricted to a single aspect of the Welsh Government's *Programme for Government*. The benefits of enabling and empowering individuals to take control of their lives through education radiate throughout society creating a powerful, ongoing and interrelated driver for change.

▶ Economic Growth and Sustainability

- Businesses that invest in skills are two and a half times more likely to succeed

▶ Employability

- Individuals who are not in the labour market, and who undertake lifelong learning leading to qualifications are more likely to be employed at a later date.

▶ Family Learning

- After completing family learning courses, learners reported having gained new skills, greater levels of confidence and understanding, improved communications and changed relationships with their families and communities.

▶ Health & Wellbeing

- According to the Mental Health Foundation "education programmes provide a simple, low cost way of helping people to reduce symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety"

▶ Skills Development

- By taking action to develop skills such as literacy, numeracy, IT, health and wellbeing or financial awareness etc.. individuals are empowered to take ownership of their lives and the benefits delivered last for the rest of the individuals lifetime.

▶ Empowerment & Inclusion

- Adult learning not only provides a sense of belonging through regular social interaction in a reassuring environment but also helps to develop the skills needed for lifelong digital, social and economic inclusion.

▶ Lifelong Learning

- Research by the Institute of Employment Studies shows that investment in learning for older people can reduce the costs of medical and social care, and improve the quality of life for older people, their families and communities.

The value of supporting accessible, relevant, diverse and meaningful learning opportunities for those of all ages must therefore be considered to be of the highest priority by the Welsh Government.

Lifelong learning and the *Programme for Government in Wales*

In the section below evidence is provided for how lifelong learning directly supports the *Programme for Government*.

1. Growth and Sustainable Jobs
2. Public Services in Wales
3. Education
4. 21st Century Health Care
5. Supporting People
6. Welsh Homes
7. Safer Communities for All
8. Equality
9. Tackling Poverty
10. Rural Communities
11. Environment and Sustainability
12. Culture and Heritage of Wales

Growth and Sustainable Jobs

- The correlation between skills, employability and the economy is recognised in Wales and according to the Skills for Jobs: Priorities review undertaken by the Wales Employment and Skills Board in 2011 “Wales is under skilled by comparison with OECD competitor nations and most parts of the UK. It has too many no/low skilled people; and lags behind at all skills levels”².
- Research shows that individuals who are not in the labour market, and who undertake lifelong learning leading to qualifications are more likely to be employed at a later date.³
- Male workers who undertook work-related training in mid career (age 33-42) experienced 4 - 5 % higher wage growth over the period 1991-2000, as compared to similar workers who did not undertake any training.
- Those who were out of the labour market at the beginning of the period (1991) were more likely to be in work in 2000 if they had acquired a formal qualification in the interim.
- Businesses that do not invest in talent are two and a half times more likely to fail.
- For both men and women, work-related adult learning is associated with positive willingness to work. Those in the workforce who receive training are less likely to leave.

Public Services in Wales

“The rate of learning must equal or exceed the rate of change. Learning is what creates but also adapts, enlarges and deepens knowledge. Without new or adapted knowledge, it is not possible to change either the meanings we attach to our actions or the actions themselves”⁴ (Raelin, 2008).

We believe that the standard of Public Services in Wales can be enhanced and developed through effective work based learning. Furthermore we believe that learning and skills development is the greatest driver for organisational change and that it must therefore be financially supported as a high priority within the public services in Wales section of the *Programme for Government*.

² <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/110711skillsforjobsen.pdf>

³ Feinstein, L *et al* (2004) *The Labour Market Impact of Adult Education and Training: A Cohort Analysis*, Centre for the Economics of Education: London.

⁴ Raelin J (2008) *Work-Based Learning: Bridging Knowledge and Action in the Workplace*. Available from : <http://bit.ly/17V93T5>

According to a recent study by the Higher Education Academy, employers benefit from providing Work Based Learning⁵ in the following ways:

- established a clearer direction of travel for the organisation;
- development of new or improved existing policies, standards and contracts;
- improved service provision to the end users and improved quality of work improved performance of employees who are more self-sufficient and require less direct support;
- secured a positive attitudinal and behavioural change in staff in line with the values of the organisation;
- achieved external recognition and prestige;
- increased levels of innovation.

⁵ The Higher Education Academy – Work-based learning: impact study – July 2008
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/impact_work_based_learning.pdf

Education

"We all know that education, more than anything else, improves our chances of building better lives" Nelson Mandela

Relative UK Position

- Across the UK nations, adults living in Wales are least likely to say they are participating in learning. 42% of adults in Scotland, 40% of those in Northern Ireland and 37% of those in England report learning in the previous three years, compared with just 31% of adults in Wales.⁶

Decline

- In 2007 the number of part time learners in FEIs in Wales was 177,020 which fell to 145,175 in 2012. This is a reduction of 31845 or 20%⁷
- The total number of learners in FEIs in Wales in 2007 was 219,640 and in 2012 it was 191,185 . This is a total reduction of 28455 or 14%⁸
- Furthermore, in 2007 the total number of Community Learners was 56,380. This fell by 14465 or 29% to 41,915 in 2012⁹
- Going back a little further we can see that this is part of an even longer term trend in Wales
- There was a 20% decrease in FE learner numbers in total at Further and Higher Education institutions between December 2004 and December 2010.¹⁰
- There was a 30 % decrease in learners on all modes of study in FE colleges between 2003/4 and 2011/12 (all year count)¹¹.
- There was a 43 % decrease in learners on all modes of ACL provision between 2003/4 and 2011/12 (all year count)¹².
- There was a 30 % decrease in learners on all modes of study in FE colleges between 2003/4 and 2011/12 (all year count)¹³.
- There was a 43 % decrease in learners on all modes of ACL provision between 2003/4 and 2011/12 (all year count)¹⁴.
- Particularly worrying, given the focus of the Welsh Government on these areas, is the 29% drop in participation in FE from Community First areas between 2006 and 2011.¹⁵

We therefore believe that the Welsh Government should place a higher emphasis on all forms of adult and community leaning in order to counteract these worrying developments. We suggest that the Welsh Government could explore the potential for cost savings that adult learning can make across departmental budgets, so that additional funds can be found for provision.

⁶ 2012 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey Available from:<http://shop.niace.org.uk/2012-participation-survey.html>

⁷ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

⁸ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

⁹ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2012/120926/?lang=en>

¹¹ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

¹² <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

¹³ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

¹⁴ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/v/Hog>

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/120926furthered1011en.pdf>

21st Century Health Care

- Research shows that for every 100,000 women enrolled in adult learning in the UK an estimated 116-134 cancers per year could be prevented because of greater take-up of cervical smear tests¹⁶.
- Taking one or two non-accredited courses as adults is estimated to increase the chances of giving up smoking by age 42 by 14 %.
- Taking women without qualifications to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSEs of grades A-C) would reduce the risks of depression at age 42 by 15 %, worth an estimated saving of up to £200 million a year in the UK.
- Adult learning appears to slow the development of two brain lesions that are the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease.¹⁷
- It has been identified that 14 % of adults who took one or two leisure courses increased their sports/leisure membership between the ages of 33 and 42 compared to the predicted 9 % of adults with similar characteristics who took no courses of any type.
- Participation in adult learning is related to taking more exercise. It is predicted that taking three to ten courses increases the level of exercise between the ages of 33 and 42 by 18 %.
- Men with no qualifications who gain a level 1 qualification are up to 50 % less likely to become obese¹⁸.
- The highest category of expense for the NHS in Wales is on Mental Health¹⁹. According to the Mental Health Foundation "education programmes provide a simple, low cost way of helping people to reduce symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety."²⁰

Supporting People

- A quarter of the Welsh population will be 65 or over by 2030, compared to 22 % for the UK average.
- Research by the Institute of Employment Studies²¹ shows that investment in learning for older people can reduce the costs of medical and social care, and improve the quality of life for older people, their families and communities.
- For people aged between 50 and 71, being disabled or in poor health is a barrier to participation in learning. However, higher proportions of learners with disabilities or health problems reported various positive benefits of learning, compared to those in good health
- The same study showed that 80 % of older learners reported a positive impact of learning on at least one of the following areas: their enjoyment of life; their self-confidence; how they felt about themselves; satisfaction with other areas of life; and their ability to cope.
- Furthermore it showed that 42 % of older learners reported an improvement in their ability to stand up and be heard and/or their willingness to take responsibility.

¹⁶ Feinstein, L et al (2008) The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings, Institute of Education: London.

¹⁷ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/01/070123182024.htm>

¹⁸ Feinstein, L. (2002) *Quantitative Estimates of the social benefits of learning 2: Health (Depression and Obesity)*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.

¹⁹ <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Health-Finance/NHS-Programme-Budget/NHSExpenditure-by-BudgetCategory-Year>

²⁰ Mental Health Foundation (2011) *Learning For Life: Adult Learning, Mental Health And Wellbeing*. Available from : <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/learning-for-life/>

²¹ Dench S and J Regan (2000) *Learning in Later Life: Motivation and Impact*, Research Report RR183, Department for Education and Employment.

- There was a reported 28 % increased involvement in social, community and/or voluntary activities as a result of learning.
- Across the UK we spend on average just £60 per person per year on education for those aged 75 and above, yet the average cost of providing residential care for older people is around £465 per week. It is conservatively estimated that modest investment in learning opportunities for older people could save between £18.2m and £36.3m per annum across the UK, by delaying the need for residential care²².

Welsh Homes and Safer Communities for All

- There is evidence of a significant relationship between educational inequality and juvenile conviction rates for violent crime within local areas²³
- There is a further relationship between educational inequality and racially motivated crime²⁴

Equality

- Research findings²⁵ consistently identify a return from later-life investment in education through improvements in occupationally-based social status.
- Studies²⁶ find that taking three to ten leisure courses raises racial tolerance by almost 75 %.
- Whilst adult education does not appear to change the attitudes of those with extreme racist-authoritarian views, it does seem to prevent individuals from adopting such extremist attitudes.
- Taking part in adult education is associated with a greater likelihood of voting.
- Men with the poorest literacy and numeracy skills tend to lead a solitary life.
- Participation in each four types of adult learning (academically accredited, vocationally accredited, work-related and leisure) contributes separately to positive changes in social and political attitudes. Participation in three of the four course types (the exception being vocationally accredited courses) contributes to increases in civic and political participation.
- The effects on civic participation of taking leisure courses are particularly marked for those with qualifications below Level 2 at age 33.

Tackling Poverty

- A review of the available facts suggests that, for those who attempt to gain entry to the labour market from a situation of inactivity or unemployment, there is evidence of a monetary return attached to various levels and types of training and education.
- Because considerable inequality is already apparent when children reach school-age, families are one of the most powerful factors in determining children's life chances.
- Research²⁷ found that parental involvement in school was more than four times as important in influencing performance of young people aged 16 than socio-economic

²² Schuller T and Watson D (2009), *Learning Through Life*, NIACE

²³ Sabates R et al (2008) *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.26; Educational Inequality and Juvenile Crime: An Area Based Analysis*. Available from: <http://www.learningbenefits.net/publications/resreps/resrep26.pdf>

²⁴ Sabates R et al (2008) *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.26; Educational Inequality and Juvenile Crime: An Area Based Analysis*. Available from: <http://www.learningbenefits.net/publications/resreps/resrep26.pdf>

²⁵ Blanden J et al (2009) *The Effect of Lifelong Learning on Intra-generational Social Mobility: Evidence from Longitudinal Data in the United Kingdom*, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills: London.

²⁶ Feinstein, L et al (2008) *The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings*, Institute of Education: London.

²⁷ Nunn, A et al (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility*, Research Report No 450, Department for Work and Pensions: London.

class. Family learning is the most effective tool to involve the parents of disadvantaged children.

- After completing family learning courses, learners reported having gained new skills, greater levels of confidence and understanding, improved communications and changed relationships with their families and communities.
- In terms of vocabulary performance at the age of three, children of the least educated parents are up to one year behind their more advantaged peers²⁸.

Rural Communities

- Digital Inclusion is recognised by the Welsh Government in the *Delivering Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework For Wales*²⁹ as being a vital driver to overcome rural isolation and the social and economic disadvantages that result. Digital exclusion is frequently skills based and adult learning is therefore a crucial enabler to help overcome the social and economic disadvantages faced by rural communities.

Environment and Sustainability (including economic sustainability)

- In total there has been a 34.4%³⁰ rise in NEETS in the combined 16-24 year old age group. As we have already seen this correlates with a drop in learning participation in Wales there is therefore considerable work to be done to encourage participation and to help people of all age groups make the most of their learning and of their lives in a challenging economic environment.
- There are a number of work based learning and adult learning courses which develop awareness of the environment and sustainability, informing decision making and day to day environmental practices.

Culture and Heritage of Wales

- The culture and heritage of Wales is strongly supported by the Welsh Language provision such as Welsh for Adults which is delivered at a national level by providers across the country.
- Welsh Heritage is supported by a rich array of provision for adults which spans from history, music, literature and a range of other fields. Courses are available at all levels of learning through FE colleges, Community Learning venues, Museums, Universities, Lifelong Learning centres and a range of private and public providers.

Comments on the Indicative Budget

As the proposed budget is not available at time of consultation we are not able to respond directly to the figures proposed for the next financial year. The indicative figures from the previous years budget however appear to show no change. We appreciate the support that the Welsh Government has shown in preserving the ring fencing of adult education provision however, we would stress that due to inflation, the level of funding is actually declining in real terms. Consideration should be given at this point as to whether the Welsh Government can afford to constrain provision in this way in the current climate when the benefits are more crucial than ever to the economy and to the nation.

²⁸ Feinstein, L et al (2008) The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings, Institute of Education: London.

²⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/publications/comm/101208deliveringdien.pdf>

³⁰ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Lifelong-Learning/Participation-of-Adults-and-Young-People/Estimated1624NEET-by-Gender-EconomicActivity-AgeGroup>

We also propose that a greater level of budgetary detail should be available in the public domain to more easily identify what money is ear marked for what purpose. The current format makes it hard to identify where changes in funding have occurred over the years. For example, in the post-16 education budget, changes have occurred over a number of years in the different provision that is included in this funding source. It therefore becomes impossible to identify clearly and meaningfully where specific funding changes have occurred.

Conclusions

In this consultation response we have chosen to focus on the case for the links between adult learning and the ways in which they are essential to the Welsh Governments stated aims in its *Programme for Government*. We have chosen to do this because we believe that the importance of Adult Learning cannot be overstated and that it is possibly the most important single factor in driving economic growth and developing a fair, equal and prosperous society. It has a vital role in safeguarding the culture and heritage of Wales and provides positive health and wellbeing benefits to those who are fortunate enough to have access to it.

Our aim is to develop breadth and quality of provision and, above all, to improve accessibility in order to facilitate the Welsh Governments aims for an equal and prosperous society. As we have seen in the education section of this document, there has been a decline in recent years, in all forms of adult education despite the fact that there is an ongoing skills gap in Wales (as shown in the growth and sustainable jobs section of this document) and a rise in the overall number of NEETS (as shown under sustainability). Furthermore, public spending on education is overwhelmingly geared towards the first 25 years of life. At a time when the state pension age is going up, the default retirement age has ended and society as a whole is graying. In reality the need for lifelong learning is growing. In order to address this worrying trend we believe that a greater focus needs to be placed on all forms of Adult Learning by the Welsh Government and that greater investment is needed.

We believe that the benefits of Adult Learning will secure a better future for the people of Wales for example through radiated benefits such as the link between adult learning within the family and children's educational attainment (NIACE is currently working on an inquiry into family learning and will be glad to provide a copy of our report when it is launched in October). Greater investment in this area will result in wider cost savings across all areas of the *Programme for Government* through the positive effects that learning promotes. Reducing spending on lifelong learning risks incurring high costs in other areas of public expenditure such as health & social care, welfare benefits, criminal justice and social cohesion.

We believe that it is the greatest single factor for change that can be utilised and that this will also lead to enhanced economic performance at a national level.

NIACE Dysgu Cymru
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