
What ever happened to the Learning Age?

Perceptions of Progression and Achievement
in Adult and Community Learning

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- Some background
 - Perspectives of practitioners and learners: Observations and Findings
 - Relate to wider policy drivers and developments
 - Questions and comments
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Findings: The Tutor

- Tutors consider the progression of their learners to be important but understand 'progression' in a wide variety of ways.
- There are many instances of informal information systems and informal networking in operation to support progression as well as more formal systems. A variety of sources of information is used and a diversity of advice practices.
- The interviewed tutors, in the main, thought there were good opportunities available in their area for progression although there were difficulties persuading learners in some settings that such opportunities might be suitable for them.

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- Tutors recognised a role in supporting progression and expected a professional partnership with providers.
 - Some tutors find there is excessive emphasis on formal progression routes through examination and certification which are not compatible with the life circumstances of many learners.
 - Tutors identified numerous barriers to learning that they thought would deter people from initially joining a course or continuing to a further course.
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Findings: The Learner

- The **language** learners use about learning in describing their perceptions of progress and progression is grounded in complex life experiences and they do not use the same language as practitioners and policy makers.
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- **Learners tend not to associate the concepts of learning and progression together**
 - **Learners' perceptions of progression are influenced by the subject they study and by their personal goals and circumstances**
 - **New learners as well as regular learners could be attracted to courses if they found the subject interesting and the tutor sensitive to adult needs**
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- **Learners expect tutors to provide information and advice about possibilities for progression although, in some cases, such provision was limited**
 - **Learners do not associate progress in life only with education**
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- Our principal recommendation is that:

Learners at whatever level and of whatever subject will need good quality support to find their way around a system that has become increasingly complicated.

Implications for:

- **Practitioners (tutors and tutor trainers)**
 - **Managers of institutions**
 - **Policy makers (funders and politicians)**
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Implications for Policy makers (funders and politicians)

- To acknowledge and celebrate the ***complexity and diversity*** of the existing provision for adult learning
 - To make provision - including appropriate resources and staff - ***for independent information and advice for adult learners***
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- To ensure that targets for learning in adult and continuing learning are ***meaningful to learners*** and attainable by tutors and providers
 - To ensure that the range of acceptable outcomes from learning include ***social and economic criteria***
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Recent policy drivers

- Leitch Review of Skills -2005
 - Foster Review of FE- *Realising the potential* 2005
 - White Paper- *FE Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances-* 2006
 - DFES Consultation paper- **Professionalising the Workforce-** 2006
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FE: White paper: Raising Skills improving life chances

A specialised system focused on employability

‘...we need to establish a clear mission for FE, focussed on the employability and progression of learners, is central to delivering the skills and qualifications which individuals, employers and the economy need...’

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- ‘but for older adults (after age 25) the arguments are different. The state cannot and should not pay for all education and training for adults. Adults and their employers receive substantial direct benefits from many forms of training and qualifications, in the form of higher wages and higher productivity. It is only fair that they should contribute to the cost.’
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So what has happened to the Learning
Age for Adults?

Questions and comments
