

Written evidence submitted by Ofsted

Closing the Learning Gap – Opening Up Opportunities for Adults

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gather the views of key stakeholders, partners and providers on their top priorities for adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 - 10 years.

The deadline for written evidence is 20 May 2016.

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

Please tick the appropriate boxes below

<input type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an individual
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am responding as an organisation
Jos Parsons, principal officer, further education and skills policy, Ofsted. Jos.parsons@ofsted.gov.uk	

Please tick a box from the list of options below that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Business representative organisation/trade body
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Authority/ Combined Authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority provider of adult and community learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist designated institution
<input type="checkbox"/>	FE College

	FE sector representative organisation/trade body
	FE independent learning provider
	Higher Education Institution
	FE charitable or not-for-profit learning provider
	Other education (please describe)
	Trade union or staff association
	Charity or social enterprise
	Student representative body
	Individual
	Policy adviser (please specify area of interest)
X	Other (please describe) Office for Standards in Education (independent national inspectorate and non-ministerial government department)

Introduce yourself

The following is what we have been able to provide within the rather tight deadline. We should be happy to discuss any of these findings.

Written submissions are invited addressing the following points:

What is working well and/or not working well with regards to adult education in England?

Ofsted related the following in HMCI's Annual Report 2014/15 following inspections in the 2014/15 academic year:

'Inspections this year show that the successes of this provision lies in how they deliver educational benefits to disadvantaged communities, such as:

- breaking cycles of low achievement by helping parents and hard to reach communities to gain skills and qualifications
- developing 'learning champions' – volunteers in local communities who can support learning
- working with partners best placed to deliver a wide range of courses to support adults from disadvantaged communities.

Where providers declined or did not improve, this was linked to leadership and management. This included a mixture of insufficient oversight, lack of clarity in how leaders and managers evaluated the provision, lack of governance and not addressing fundamental areas for improvement over time. Other weaknesses included insufficient use of data to monitor the provision in order to respond quickly to a decline in the proportion of learners achieving qualifications, or slow improvement in the outcomes and the learning experience for learners. Another challenging factor was the impact on provision where providers were subject to changes in management, restructure or merger.

Inspectors have identified that in some local authorities, spending reductions have had an impact on the quality of their adult learning provision. This year, four community learning and skills local authority providers have been judged inadequate. In these providers, the loss of senior management posts had not been managed effectively. Managers did not monitor the performance of all their teachers closely enough and as result did not consistently identify or tackle emerging weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. Though delivering community benefit is a key aim for this sector, they also failed to monitor whether their community development and employability programmes were having any positive impact in the lives of learners or on communities.

In good or outstanding community learning and skills provision provided by local authorities, leaders and managers tuned in quickly and effectively to match changes in funding to the needs of the adults within the local community. Managers kept an ear to the ground, collaborating efficiently and effectively with, for example, the voluntary and public sector, third sector organisations, and other education providers.

Inspections in 2015/16 have been conducted in accordance with the new Common Inspection Framework launched in September 2015. The following common strengths and weaknesses have been identified in inspections so far this academic year:

Common strengths identified in providers judged good or outstanding

- Good individual support for learners from teachers and support staff
- Strong partnerships that ensure the curriculum meets local needs community and national needs
- Effective strategies to enable the most disadvantaged adults overcome barriers to learning and make good progress
- Good development of learners' confidence and the personal and social skills that they need for work and in their daily lives
- Good development of learners' English and mathematics skills

Common weaknesses identified in providers judged requires improvement or inadequate

- Weak self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements
- Insufficiently specific targets for learners that take little account of starting points or aspirations
- Weak assessment and monitoring of learners' progress and achievement
- Low expectations of learners and insufficient challenge
- Weak feedback following assessment that does not help learners to understand what they need to do to improve
- Poor development of learners' English and mathematics skills

What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning?

n/a

Do we have a sufficient demand-led approach to adult education? If not, what more needs to be done?

n/a

What evidence is there on the impact, added-value and/or cost-effectiveness of adult education?

n/a

Name three major policy developments necessary to secure the future of adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 -10 years?

n/a

	If your submission is confidential and you do not want it published please tick the box.
	Please confirm that have read the Terms of Reference and Guidelines on written submissions at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/wea/call_for_evidence/