

# UCU Response to the DIUS Consultation: Informal Adult Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead: Part 1

## **Introduction**

UCU represents 120,000 academic and academic related staff in universities, general further and specialist further education colleges and adult and prison education services. UCU represents adult learning practitioners across the country delivering formal and informal, accredited and non-accredited adult learning programmes. UCU members facilitate and guide learners through a host of unstructured adult learning opportunities.. Our response to this consultation is built on the experiences of these practitioners over many years.

UCU welcomes this consultation in bringing into focus an aspect of English education woefully neglected by governments over many years and suffering from an increasing emphasis on a narrow skills agenda. We recognise the increased investment in adult learning within this skills agenda, and the government's genuine desire to increase education and training opportunities for those who have least benefited from previous educational experiences and who have least to show in terms of qualifications. However adult learning policies over the last twenty, if not thirty, years have been progressively more driven by economic imperatives and rationales. Indeed UCU would argue that the economic imperatives are more 'apparent' than real, as we would argue that ignoring learning that is not primarily vocational actually works against the skills agenda

One result of this is that for far too long informal adult learning has been that part of adult learning existing on the margins and defined more by what it is not, rather than what it is and what it could be. Thus in the early 1990s following the incorporation of colleges, informal adult learning and non accredited programmes were termed 'Non-Schedule 2 Work' following the designation of programmes that would receive Further Education Funding Council funding in Schedule 2 of the incorporation legislation. Under the LSC there was some good work around the recording of achievement in non-accredited programmes and the creation of the lifelong learning partnerships. However informal adult learning has often seemed an after-thought and the changing nomenclature such as 'Adult and Community Learning' and 'Personal and Community Development Learning' has often served to confuse rather than clarify purposes and functions.

As a starting point for any consideration of informal adult learning, UCU would want to see emerging from this consultation, a coherent policy for lifelong learning in which, in which unstructured, non-accredited and accredited types of learning would all take their place.

## **The consultation**

1. UCU welcomes the intention of this consultation to reach a wider audience. We look forward to hearing what has been said in the structured discussions with specific stakeholders and networks to be engaged in this debate, including the findings of the proposed Citizen's Jury. We understand that the current NIACE commissioned Inquiry into adult

learning will not make its final report within the timescale of this consultation; however we are sure that DIUS will take into account the unfolding work of this Commission to date when reaching conclusions as the future of informal adult learning

### **A negotiated curriculum**

2. We do not entirely agree that negotiating the informal adult learning curriculum does not, and has not attempted to, involve learners. The history of adult education recounted in Chapter 2 of the consultation document, includes a great deal in terms of motivation, inspiration, content and mode of learning that sprang from learners and their organisation, especially that adult learning which originated in working class organisations and from working class learners. Indeed it had to, as the state at that time was neither going to support nor promote such learning.
3. We would also want to point out that many of the policies, funding, priorities and bureaucracy flowing from government policies over recent years has not made it easy to negotiate the curriculum with learners. If a truly negotiated curriculum is one of the outcomes of this consultation, these aspects of informal adult learning will need to be considered and amended.

### **A new vision**

4. UCU supports the hope that this consultation will lead to a new vision for informal adult learning. UCU members want that vision to embrace adult learning is at its core, a process of personal and community empowerment with inclusion, equality of opportunity and access to a broad, comprehensive and liberating curriculum, at its core. This we consider would link current and future adult learning to its rich past as part of radical social movements. UCU would set informal adult learning in a context of lifelong learning which is based on a universal entitlement to learning that is responsive to the needs of individuals. Communities and society in general. Adult learning in the context of lifelong learning will support a progressive vision of the wider world. The economic and social benefits of adult learning will be recognised and valued, including the contribution it makes to health and well-being, community and social cohesion, tolerance, debate and a sense of belonging that comes from taking part in learning with others.
5. Chapter 2 very helpfully sets out the range and spread of informal adult learning opportunities supported and promoted by various government departments. UCU would wish to see this updated regularly, perhaps annually, as one of the outcomes of this consultation. We assume that these opportunities will be reflected in proposed mapping of what is being offered in informal adult learning, which we welcome.

### **What is adult learning?**

6. Defining adult learning itself, never mind informal adult learning, has always been a difficult undertaking. Different learners may bring different motivations and aspirations to the same learning process. What is considered 'informal' and 'non-vocational' by one learner may be perceived as more formal learning experience by Additionally such learning experiences may be taken up with a vocational or employment goal in mind. As the consultation document states 'adult learning is often untidy.

We note that it is proposed to develop a definition of informal adult learning that can be used across government and stakeholders. We hope that any such definition is wide enough and flexible enough to include the full scope of adult learning.

7. The importance of any definition of adult learning can be seen from the way that consultation document talks about the great expansion of informal adult learning activity. The key question that must be posed in relation to this 'explosion', is whether such activity can be considered adult education or adult learning? If it can, then what kind of adult learning does it constitute?
8. There are as many definitions of learning as there are theories of learning. Most seem to focus on processes by which experience, knowledge, behaviour or practice undergoes a relatively permanent change. This may be through active processes of actual acquisition of facts, theory and practice and/or reflection. There are qualitative differences between various kinds of learning experiences. Clearly human beings spend their whole lives learning in one form or another and these experiences can run through the full spectrum from highly formal and structured to completely informal and unstructured. UCU would argue that the starting point for any discussion on what adult learning the state might support must be where that learning is an active and conscious process with some form of tangible outcome and based on some sort of inter-action between people, however mediated by technology.
9. The European Commission has adopted definitions of non-vocational education (European Commission 2001 which we consider would be a useful starting point in addressing the many issues and questions raised in this consultation. Non-vocational education is defined as:
  - Formal learning typically provided by education or training institutions, structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support and leading to certification. Learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
  - Non-formal learning not leading to certification but structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view;
  - Informal learning results from daily life related to work, family, or leisure. It is not structured in terms of objectives, time or support. It does not lead to certification and learning may or may not be intentional.
10. We would consider the subject of this current consultation can be positively defined as the learning that arises out of a spectrum of opportunities within the definitions of non-formal and informal as stated above. This does not deny the validity of all the activities described in the consultation document, but it does allow some differentiation of these.
11. So UCU would argue that whilst many of the kinds of informal learning that make up the expansion of informal adult learning laid out in the consultation document - book groups, membership of National Trust and English Heritage, viewing TV programmes and using the internet, for example - are different in kind to more structured learning activities with a coherent and recognisable curriculum and syllabus and perhaps a tutor. We would categorise the former more as access points to learning rather than substantial learning in their own right. Of course there should be a place for both. There should be connectivity between both sets of

experiences and both should receive state support. However we consider the latter is the essential component in the totality that is adult education and learning, especially in terms of the depth and breadth of the learning and as an element of progression in that learning? The consultation paper seems to put forward an equivalence between these two sets of informal adult learning opportunities that we do not believe exists. Another way to look at this is to define structured intentional learning as part of adult education, and the unstructured, more individualised learning as informal learning. The former may or may not lead to qualifications (and we accept for the purposes of this consultation that we're talking mainly about education which doesn't lead to a qualification). The latter can complement, or provide an access to adult education, but is usually different from it in some important respects. These would include the setting of negotiated outcomes, the presence of a qualified tutor or facilitator, systems of quality control and audit, equal opportunities, the encouragement of reflective and critical practice and learning, guidance on to progression opportunities etc Its also important to note that just because an adult education class isn't defined as 'FE' or vocational, it may still be very important in developing skills, knowledge and confidence for or in employment)

12. The consultation document puts forward three ways that learning can make a difference to adult lives: through formal development of skills around employment, through learning for family, social and civic development and cohesion and around the basic human needs for creativity and stimulation. We do not disagree with these purposes for learning. However there are others, and perhaps as importantly these are not self-contained silos. All learning is interconnected for the individual who undertakes it. The impact of learning for whatever purpose or motivation is not just about that purpose or motivation, but spills over into many if not all aspects of a person's life. Successful learning grows confidence and often promotes further learning perhaps across a wide range of topics and interests.

13. The consultation document declares,

"All forms of good adult education are valuable....adult education contributes immeasurably to the well being and health of our society' John Denham Secretary of State DIUS Forward

14. UCU completely agrees with this. Indeed we would go further and state that the mark of a civilised society is that it encourages, promotes and supports the provision of a comprehensive adult learning curriculum. This goes beyond elementary learning and encompasses high levels of skill and scholarship - from introductory tasters to deeper and more intensive learning experiences. It recognises that some forms of learning are cumulative and are built on the understanding of basic concepts. It also recognises that other opportunities will be generated and met by learners' own activities. A full, comprehensive, inclusive and accessible adult curriculum has to be delivered across all the sectors making up post-compulsory education. UCU members have been involved in the delivery of such provision over many years in universities, general and specialist further education and adult and community learning and prison education. The demography of the UK over the next few years makes the provision of this curriculum a necessity as the UK, along with many developed societies and economies is becoming an ageing society. This presents threats as

well as opportunities, many of which can be tackled through the promotion of genuine lifelong learning.

### **What is informal adult learning?**

15. In making this response we have used the term 'informal adult learning' from the consultation but consider it encompasses the second and third of the definitions covered in the European definition, and at times even learning that would be considered formal in the above definition.
16. We consider that the definition given in the consultation document of structured and unstructured part-time, non vocational learning not necessarily leading to a qualification, as a reasonable starting point for the discussions. Nonetheless we would hope that whatever conclusions and policies around informal adult learning emerge from this consultation, they do not cut off or cut short opportunities falling outside this definition but still valuable. Similarly although we find the categories of informal learning drawn from the work of McGivney useful, they should not be taken as encompassing all that should be included within informal adult learning.

### **Equality**

17. UCU would argue that adult learning of all kinds including informal adult learning has at its core equal opportunities. We also contend that access and opportunities for, and participation in, informal adult learning should not be limited by class, financial means, age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or perceived mental and physical ability. Access to informal adult learning must be access to a comprehensive curriculum. This is a curriculum that is not prescribed in its content, level or outcome. It should enable all who wish to participate in informal adult learning are able to do so in at the place, time and mode of attendance that suits their circumstances.

18. The consultation documents states that:

'The overall vision must be an inclusive adult education service in which people from all backgrounds can participate....everyone has the right to pursue their basic human needs for creativity, physical activity and intellectual stimulation. Learning is a key tool in securing equality of opportunity but at the moment that key turns most easily for people with confidence, money, motivation and opportunity to join in'

19. UCU would agree and support such a vision. One of the key outcomes of this consultation is to ensure that those without the confidence, money, motivation and opportunity have access to and are able to easily use the kind of informal adult learning that may flow from it. One aspect of this is the very uneven spread of opportunities and access across different parts of the country e.g. in some rural areas, people have to travel long distances to reach adult education provision; some areas have a very narrow adult education offer)

20. Although a chapter of the consultation document is devoted to 'Ensuring equality of access to learning', there is surprisingly little discussion about the equality aspects of the curriculum content of informal adult learning. Indeed a large part of this chapter is around a discussion of new technology and adult learning. There are of course profound equality issues in this particular area.

21. We would also have wished to see more in the consultation document about the ways that structured informal adult learning, the non-formal learning in the European definition above triggered some of the principal pillars of current adult learning policy and provision – literacy, numeracy, ESOL and Access to work and higher education. All of these had their beginnings in curriculum development in non-formal adult learning. We need to analyse the way such provision was developed and identify what are the elements to promote or prevent such curriculum innovation now and in the future. Similarly although there is reference to progression in learning in the document, it is in the very limited context of how informal adult learning can signpost opportunities for those who need and want to go further with their learning. We would have wished to see a far fuller discussion of how people can progress their learning across the boundaries, especially those between less and more engagement in learning, between non-formal and informal learning. Indeed progression may not just be to more learning, but could also include becoming more involved in activities such in their community or trade union activities. Such discussions have profound equality considerations which must not be lost in any discussions about the future shape and state support for non-formal and informal adult learning. Informal adult learning can play a significant role in social action and community cohesion. Learning how to act collectively to face down community problems, rebuild neighbourhoods and bring stability is a key educational process, yet that broader view of pedagogic activity as a collective experience seems to have been. It is not taken into account in a systemised and stable way in terms of the use of resources. There is much research that demonstrates efficacy of this kind of approach. If we are to tackle social deprivation at a neighbourhood level informal adult education has to be a key vehicle.

22. At the end of chapter on ensuring equality of access, the consultation document asks the question 'what are the implications for public policy in developing informal adult learning in the period 2009-2020, and whether 'the laissez-faire nature of these recent development means the

Government should leave well alone?’ Or does the Government have a key role in helping maximise and sustain the benefits of the arrangements.’

23. UCU considers that the Government does have a role in promoting and sustaining informal adult learning, not least through the use of public funds and subsidy. However we would also argue that the Government also has a role within any system of informal adult learning as the guardian of equality of opportunity, including ensuring equality of access of physical participation as well as equality of access to a comprehensive curriculum.
24. The state does have an important role to play as the regulator of various aspects of informal adult learning, especially where this involves the use of public funds. There can and will be tensions of processes and procedures arising from this, and the promotion and support of the wider forms of informal adult learning described in the consultation.
25. How can the interests and the access of those potential and actual learners without ‘confidence, money, motivation and opportunity’ be protected in what seems a rather amorphous world that is described in the consultation document as an explosion of adult learning? If regulation entails a certain amount of bureaucracy which it undoubtedly does, how can this not become another barrier to some individuals and groups who may wish to be part of informal adult learning? UCU would argue that a certain amount of bureaucracy is necessary to ensure and protect equality of opportunity in all its aspects. For example the gains in terms of physical access which should be opening up as result of the Disability Discrimination Act will need to be expanded to all organisations making up what may be a new informal adult learning sector. The mass of organisations delivering the explosion of informal learning activities will need to be able to demonstrate that they have in place policies and practices that ensure they are active, inclusive organisations, if they are to receive state support. The issue will be how to get the right sort of bureaucracy – simple, clear guidelines and meaningful requirements around the important issues, rather than labyrinthine LSC-style targets and forms
26. Informal adult learning has in the past been able to create learning opportunities for individuals and groups within society who may have been previously denied the full range of educational opportunities. Sometimes this has been providing separate provision where such learners can gain confidence as well as new knowledge and skills. However it is vital that the curriculum of all informal adult learning is open to all, and that provision for those without confidence, money or motivation is not limited in scope or accessibility or ghettoised.
27. One outcome of the current trend of government policy in adult learning is a polarisation between those who are able, confident and probably wealthy enough to navigate their way through and informal adult learning to have their learning goals met, and those who have been disadvantaged, sometimes severely so, in their ability to access learning of all kinds and are the focus of many government policies for those who have benefited least from previous learning experiences. In an ageing society there is an overwhelming need and urgency to create structures which promote lifelong learning for all.

## **Accountability**

28. It is clear that UCU is advocating a role for the state in promoting informal adult learning. This must mean the provision of public funds. There will need to be a discussion arising from this consultation, as to whether and how much of these funds should go on infra-structure and how much to support and promote actual provision
29. UCU considers that it is essential that existing local democratic structures are the principal route for allocating public resources for informal adult learning. Local authorities are democratically accountable to the communities they serve.
30. At a time when the structures around the totality of adult learning are being considered in another government consultation, 'Raising Expectations', UCU believes strongly that the planning, funding and co-ordination activities around informal adult learning should be located at the appropriate level, and one where there is the real possibility of local choices being able to be brought to bear on these processes. Indeed the Government has recognised this in relation to ESOL provision, and is moving 14-19 education to the strategic leadership of local government.
31. We believe that informal adult learning are profoundly local activities which should be co-ordinated, planned and funded under the strategic leadership of local government. Local government is also the conduit for many of the other government department resource streams from described in the consultation document, which can rightly be regarded as being part of the emerging pattern of informal adult learning. Local authority strategic leadership of informal adult learning could become the point where these different elements are welded into a coherent and consistent strategy. There is also evolving a set of processes and procedures in Local Area Agreements, Local Strategic Partnerships and Multi Area and Agency Agreements which can both give reality to this strategic leadership and act as vehicles for performance evaluation and management. In relation to informal adult learning, the local authority would have a duty to co-ordinate and collaborate with all providers of informal adult learning such as the WEA and those in the voluntary sector.

## **Quality**

32. One of the benefits that have arisen from the various policy developments in recent years around the totality of adult learning, has been the focus on quality and the components that make for quality provision and delivery. This has not always been easy in informal adult learning. But the impact can be seen in numerous OFSTED reports on adult learning services and in the unfailingly high adult and community learning student satisfaction levels among demonstrated in every national survey that has been made. It will be essential that there are continuing vehicles for maintaining and improving quality in all aspects of informal adult learning.
33. In the same way as we have described above the tensions between necessary regulation and oversight and its impact on the whole of the informal adult learning sector, the tensions between quality assurance and inspection will need to be managed in ways that can evidence and evaluate what is occurring without it becoming an additional barrier to delivery or a barrier to learners who can often put off by what they perceive as unnecessary paper work. There is recent practice in non-formal adult learning that can be drawn on positively such as the



introduction of processes for recognising and recording achievement in non-accredited provision.

### **The role of the practitioner**

34. UCU considers that countless, often unsung adult education practitioners have made, and continue to make, very significant contributions to the informal adult learning in this country.
35. Practitioners have always been drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, employment, roles and motivations. A constant theme has been their dedication, enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge. Their hard work and commitment has not only sustained informal adult learning through all the vicissitudes of public policy towards informal adult learning. These staff have often been at the genesis of the innovation and flexibility that characterises this sector. The very innovations that the consultation paper rightly acknowledges and recognises - literacy, numeracy, ESOL, for example -, have occurred because of the presence of professional adult educators able not only to devise innovative curricula to meet often unarticulated learning needs, but also to analyse and build these innovations into lasting and productive learning experiences. Informal adult learning practitioners are skilled in maximising individual and collective learning opportunities. In a desire to redefine and perhaps restructure informal adult learning, the commitment and genuine interests of these practitioners should not be overlooked or dismissed. This is not to neglect the contribution that has and is made to informal adult learning by many people who volunteer or in other ways contribute their enthusiasm and expertise unpaid. It will be vital that the recent developments to strengthen the professionalism and skills of practitioners in informal learning are not overlooked or diluted in expanding what is informal learning and what is supported by public funds. It is on this professionalism and continuous development that the quality of provision of informal adult learning rests.
36. Informal adult learning has always been characterised by its flexibility. This at least in some part comes from its employment of many part-time staff as teachers, tutors and learning support workers.. However this flexibility must not be based on exploitation. All those working in adult learning deserve and should receive proper recompense and support for their efforts. This should include secure employment opportunities, equipment and plant, and staff development that encourages and promotes the best possible learning and possibilities for reflection and the development of their practice.

### **Resources**

37. It is not possible to look at the current and future shape and dimensions of informal adult learning without reference to the resources allocated to its delivery and support. UCU recognises the resources that the Government has allocated and that it has guaranteed a safeguarded budget for non- formal adult learning since 2005. However it also must be pointed out that this budget has remained static at £210 millions will remain at this figure until 2011. Further more this amount is dwarfed by the investment in other forms of adult learning. The consultation document states that the DIUS funding for adult learning will increase by £600 millions over the next three years and that funding for FE has increased by 52% in real terms since 1997, and spending on higher education by 23%. Even within the government's stated priorities very

little of these increases has gone to sustain and support informal adult learning. The very explosion of informal adult learning extolled in the consultation document may in some part be because there is no longer funding to sustain learning programmes in more structured situations.

38. Even the £210 millions of the safeguarded informal adult learning budget is under great strain. This arises not only from the demands being made upon it by actual and potential learners, but also from various other strands of government policy around reprioritising resources for adult learning which then impacts on the demands being made on non and informal adult learning, squeezing available resources even more.
39. 55,000 adult learners have been lost to publicly-funded 'safeguarded' adult learning in the last year according to the latest figures from the Learning and Skills Council. This now means that in just three years there has been a fall of 184,600 adult learners in programmes for personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development.
40. The increasing financial stringency that non-formal and informal adult learning providers have experienced recently has had other effects on the infra-structure of the delivery. A NIACE survey of informal adult learning providers in August 2007, 'Sustaining Adult Learning: Making the Money Go Further' showed that such providers were making savings on crucial aspects of this. The way that the funding from the LSC for informal adult learning now operates, an increasing proportion of the costs of courses has to be met by the learners themselves as part of the course fees. As a result fewer can afford to learn, and fewer programmes are able to run. Many were reducing both curriculum and management staff who were key in the maintaining and improving quality. Many providers were introducing different grades of teaching staff with different rates of pay, and changing terms and conditions to enable them to expect more teaching hours from their staff. Some were reversing the move towards fractionalised posts they had embarked upon in response to European directives on equal rights for part-time staff and were increasing the number of temporary and sessional hour contracts. All providers surveyed expressed concerns that the terms and conditions they had to offer their staff in the public sector might be unsustainable if their LSC subsidy is reduced too far. This can only serve to weaken the position of what non formal adult learning survives.
41. Whilst recognising the vision and intention of the direction of travel of this consultation, and both the finite nature of and limitations on public spending now and in the future, UCU would argue very strongly that if the Government wishes to improve aspects of some provision of adult learning, such as making more resources available for expanded opportunities of informal adult learning, these must not be made at the expense of existing viable high quality existing provision informal adult learning. This is not to advocate a static situation in which the informal adult learning curriculum does not change and adapt, but is to argue there needs to be some protection for that provision which is used and valued by many adult learners. Part of this should be the creation and maintenance of a stable infra-structure able to promote and support many kinds of adult learning that encompasses support for quality and staff development and offers all adult learners and potential learners' information, advice and guidance around what is very complex landscape of learning opportunities. Without this the kind of curriculum that is based on equality of opportunity, then the very groups that the consultation document wants to open up learning to, will lose.

# **UCU Response to the DIUS Consultation: Informal Adult Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead: Part 2: responses to the specific questions posed in the consultation**

## **1. Understanding and improving on current provision**

### **a. How can we understand more about the factors that are driving this diversity of activity?**

UCU considers that it is vital that more is understood about all the factors driving adult learning in all its aspects, including informal adult learning in all its diversity. Clearly a number of complex and inter-related factors are at play. These include: the changing and increasingly complex nature of UK society within an increasingly globalised world, the never ending technological developments especially in communications; the changing natures of both work and leisure and work-life balance, the increasing commercialisation of leisure and non-work time, the impact of government policies and priorities across adult learning, and the amount of state resource that can be devoted to adult learning. Finding clarity and understanding as well as the interrelationships between these and other factors will not be easy. It is an analysis worth undertaking, not least to explore the many ways that all aspects of adult and lifelong learning fit together and hopefully reinforce one another.

The consultation's proposal to map what is offered by the public, private and voluntary sectors, including self-directed activities, is a good starting point for this understanding of informal adult learning. As ever with adult learning provision, there are issues about definitions and boundaries. These need to be clarified and agreed with all stakeholders. We consider the definitions put forward in the consultation document somewhat limited and have set out in the Part 1 of this response what we believe would be a better and more inclusive definition which would also take into account intended and unintended outcomes. This should lead to some sort of typology of informal adult learning that could be then used as the basis for the discussions as to where and how state support for this sector can best be used. We acknowledge that this mapping is not easy to quantify precisely, and we look forward to being included in any discussions on work around quantification.

As important as the mapping of provision will be to investigate and understand the pattern of informal adult learning and its drivers as well as the barriers to more effective delivery. There is also a need to identify the many and varied users and beneficiaries of informal adult learning. Again this will not be an easy undertaking. However it is essential information in analysing what is currently happening and in formulating any proposals on future shape and on the kinds of state support that would be most effective, especially in maintaining informal adult learning as a powerful force for inclusion and equality. We also need a much better understanding of a number of issues such as what has been the impact of recent fees increases to take-up for informal learning? Why are there differences in provision between different parts of the country? The NIACE Commission will be the source of important data on informal adult learning. However, commissioned research by university Education departments will also be necessary

### **b. What are the conditions that make it easier for learners to learn?**

We would suggest the following, some of which are referred to in the consultation document:

- Obtaining as an accurate a picture a picture as is possible of the range and amount of actual provision. This should emerge from the proposed mapping exercise. This will not only mean that there is a more complete picture of what is actually available, and to which learners and would-be learners can be directed quickly and effectively. It should also make it easier to identify gaps in provision and also connectivity between different aspects of informal adult learning. This should facilitate quicker responses to learners' needs
- The maintenance and the expansion of existing provision. We believe there are increasing gaps in provision as a result of the impact of various government policies. These must be remedied. Learners cannot learn if there is no provision. This is particularly important for those groups which the government has rightly made a priority - those who have been and are educationally disadvantaged. To use the words of the consultation document, 'the confident, those with money and motivation' will find learning opportunities. Those without these attributes may find it more difficult. Informal learning needs to maintain and indeed raise its local profile. However limited a 'menu/prospectus' approach to marketing informal adult learning may be thought, it does often mean there is a profile and presence for informal adult learning opportunities. As a starting point, the Government should raise the amount of the safeguarded quantum by at least the amount that annual inflation has decreased the £210 millions. We calculate this to be £32.2millions for the period 2005 to 2011 This should continue for the remainder of the period of this Comprehensive Spending Review, until 2011
- Accessibility: informal adult learning must be physically accessible and have access to the kind of additional learning support that some learners require and that is available in other parts of adult learning. Provision must be local as far as possible. Having to travel some distance to learn can be a barrier especially for the poor and unconfident. Clearly not every kind of provision can be made locally, and it may be that new technology has a role to play in making more specialist provision more accessible despite geographic and physical considerations.
- As the whole of the 14+ education and training system moves to new systems and structures, there needs to be a thorough review of the various strands of state intervention and support into adult learning. This could identify aspects of, for example, the various funding methodologies applying to informal adult learning to see if they make for disjunctions and create barriers to the effective delivery of provision. We had identified in the first part of this response on-going tensions between the requirements of state intervention, regulation and support which may make it more difficult for some organisations and groups to become part of the pattern of informal learning, and so increase learning opportunities.
- Strategic local planning: the consultation document has begun to identify the several initiatives and policies that make up informal adult learning across government departments. The proposed mapping exercise will undoubtedly fill out this picture. We fully expect there will be revealed an enormous amount of adult learning opportunities. This, in turn should present opportunities for much greater connectivity between these projects and possible pulling together of resources for both delivery and infra-structure.

This must rest on some form of local strategic leadership, co-operation, collaboration and planning. If informal learning is to achieve the vision set out in the consultation, then these functions must rest somewhere. We would suggest that they lie with local authorities as the most appropriate and democratically accountable public bodies. The Government will need to support, encourage and perhaps guide local authorities so that informal adult

learning can be an essential part of local authorities meeting the goals of their local area agreements around the delivery of many public services.

- Information, advice and guidance about the full range of informal adult learning: alongside the actual provision of informal learning opportunities, the other fundamental element to make it easier to learn would be good, independent, impartial, accurate information, advice and guidance around informal adult learning. This should also include information, advice and guidance around the various forms of learner and learning support. We are mindful that work is beginning on a new adult advancement and careers service. Whilst recognising that such a service's initial and main priorities will be around adult skills, employability and employment, it would be negligent not to investigate ways that such a service could be expanded to cover informal adult learning. Information, advice and guidance should not be limited to merely giving people the right information and pointing them in the right direction. It will be necessary especially with first time and hitherto excluded learners, to have active follow-up by education advisers enjoying the trust of the community. A model like this has worked for the University of Sunderland in Blyth Resource Initiative Centre, where the advisers are voluntary sector community workers.
- Outreach: one of the crucial means by which informal adult learning has responded in flexible, learner and community focused ways for very many years, is through outreach activities. The classic outreach method of working along side disadvantaged individuals and community groups, listening to and analysing their learning needs and then translating these into viable learning programmes with outcomes that meet, and at times transcend, those needs, still remains one of the most effective ways of extending informal learning opportunities and support for these individuals and organisations. However LSC funding methodology has not promoted such activity as well as it could. Funding follows the learner, and informal adult learning providers too often operate at the limits of their resources with little left over to fund outreach.

We would recommend that there be discussions with informal adult learning providers as to how whatever funding methodology is applied, is able to support necessary infra-structure including outreach. DIUS should also commission research into good practice in outreach with a view to promoting staff and professional development around it and the skills required. Such work would benefit not only informal adult learning, but all adult learning.

- The consultation document itself makes reference to financial barriers to access to informal adult learning. It is clear that there are financial barriers for the low paid in accessing and participating in all kinds of learning including informal learning. It is likely that for those on limited means, the choices around spending on necessities may not include adult learning whatever may be the benefits.

Financial barriers are not just around course fees, but also other costs such as travel, affordable child care, materials and sometimes even equipment. Evidence shows for example that the availability of learner support funds for informal adult learning has been crucial here. For example we have heard that these funds have really made a difference in Derbyshire in assisting people on low incomes. Discussions around the kind and amounts of state subsidy for adult learning and how this impacts on fee policies, needs further analysis.

This is an area where there needs to be more research. We have to be cautious about categorizing students – or rather – the types of categories and uses. The temptation for government policy to divide potential adult learners

into the deserving and undeserving with respect to funding or fee-remission policy, with the result that adult learning can become associated with remedial projects, and thus become a deficit model for education.. What is required are programmes of learning open to all, with appropriate courses for everyone – a community of learning.

We understand that NUS has recently commissioned the Learning and Skills Network to undertake research around the financial costs of studying in further education, including adults in informal learning settings. We believe that this will uncover vital and interesting information on the full costs of study. It may also identify the crucial points and costs where well-timed and well-directed financial support could make significant differences to learners.

In discussing the proposed mapping of informal adult learning provision, we also recommended that there should be an accompanying mapping of who is using the wide range of informal adult learning. Such research could yield crucial information on the extent to which financial as well as other issues are affecting some people and groups within the community. It is essential information in identifying the groups in society making up the 1.4 million lost adult learners. Similarly we also need an analysis of the composition of learners making up the explosion of informal learning including the self-directed learners referred to in the consultation document.

There has for many years been a great deal of confusion and inconsistency around how state subsidy is used, especially in relation to fee reductions and remissions. Recent policy changes seem to have complicated the situation and made availability of concessions and fee remissions even more of a post code lottery. There needs to be action on this to ensure that there is uniform policy and practices so access to informal learning is not based on where one lives. Such a policy however should not abolish the capacity for local providers to innovate in terms of fee policy – as has happened with the LSC fee rules.

### **How can we support people to be more instrumental in their own learning?**

There is quite a lot of evidence that many people are instrumental in their own learning. The very high rates of student satisfaction in informal adult learning recorded in successive student satisfaction surveys attest to this. Of course more can and should be done to extend this. It will be important to find out the facts on those who are currently instrumental in their own learning. If, as we believe, it is those with the confidence, motivation, money and opportunity, and we would add previous education success, then any additional support may well need to be targeted at those individuals and groups who face considerable barriers to being instrumental.

It may well be that increased participation in more formal adult learning such as in the workplace, will open the possibilities of people becoming more pro-active and instrumental in their learning. The involvement of trade unions and the establishment of workplace union learning representatives I have shown many how learning can have positive outcomes, and how they can be more instrumental in making their learning needs known and having them met.

Some of the points that we have raised above in relation to how to make conditions easier for learning will also impact on how much people can be instrumental in their own learning, especially the extension and strengthening of information, advice and guidance and outreach. This, we consider to be crucial in supporting more people to be instrumental. There could be some examination of the possibility of extending outreach into a system of community learning representatives, akin to union learning representatives.

**c. How can we support and develop models of self-organised adult education, learning from (for example) the U3A model?**

Again we consider that the proposed mapping of existing informal adult learning will reveal much very useful information which will enable government, stakeholders and providers to have a far greater understanding of what models of self-organised adult education already exist, and what makes them successful. This in turn should lead to developing a knowledge of where and what support can be most effective. This will have resource implications. We have already described how stretched we believe existing informal adult learning providers are. There is no room for resources to come from this area, without further serious cuts in provision. This means an increase in the amount of state financial support, in developing and supporting models of self-organised adult education. We would recommend that if additional resources can be found, serious consideration is given to creating again pump-priming funds such as the community learning fund and the union learning fund, both created after 1997, and both having great impact in terms of the projects they actually funded and also in the lessons learnt and used by others.

It will be necessary to define and understand what makes up successful models of self-organised learning. UCU would argue that this should include that learning was intended and conscious, that the learning activities are of high quality, and that the model operates with equality and diversity at its core. Self-organised learning should extend opportunities for learning. It must not be about setting up additional barriers. Government will need to ensure that models of self-organised learning are democratic and those participating in them, are accountable to their members and have proper governance with robust and proper ways of influencing, directing and controlling the organisation, so that it does not become the preserve of a minority. It may be that new technology and some the forms of inter-action developing around social networking may be useful here.

**d. How can we improve the connectivity between different kinds of learning episodes, for example by helping people move from watching a TV programme to using the web, to joining a group and then to pro-actively teaching or sharing information with others?**

Connectivity between different kinds of 'learning episodes' is very important if the amount of informal adult learning is to thrive and expand in the ways set out in the consultation's vision. We have tried to describe the crucial and particular differences between 'learning episodes'. This is not to rank value or prioritise them. But it is important to describe and recognise them and their characteristics. Connectivity must be improved between episodes which are more access points than vehicles for deep and lasting adult learning and learning provision (especially more structured provision) that can lead to deeper and broader learning if that is what is needed and wanted.

We have described some of the features that would be needed to improve this connectivity:

- Better infrastructure supporting all informal adult learning to ensure it is accessible and of high quality;
- More strategic local planning to link all informal learning activities geographically and locally and also through virtual links enabled by new technology to communities of interest and knowledge;
- More extensive and far better information, advice and guidance on informal adult learning and the support that may be needed for people to participate more fully.

- Expanded outreach capacity: this should not just be to community organisations with some kind of public profile, but to the many fairly loose and informal groups, for example book groups. Such contacts could make for better liaison, linkages and planning between informal learning providers and the activities of these groups.

In as much as the media, especially TV and radio, can be important stimulation to informal adult learning, then again there could be more liaison and forward planning between broadcasters and informal learning providers. This would enable providers to be able to plan ahead provision that might catch the interest engendered by media programmes and develop into deeper and more sustained learning.

It will be more difficult to capture interests developed through the internet as they will be much more amorphous and possibly transient. It may worth investigating the possibilities of creating web-based signposting and web sites where such interests could be recorded and through which follow-up possibilities could be lodged. In time this may be something that the new adult advancement and careers service could offer if its remit is extended to informal learning as we suggest. This whole area of connectivity between learning episodes is one that would benefit from sustained research by DIUS.

#### **e. How can we further develop the culture of volunteering to support informal adult learning?**

UCU acknowledges and appreciates the role and activities that volunteering can bring to informal learning. We look forward to seeing the results of the research referred to in the consultation document on identifying possible roles for volunteers in engaging and supporting ESOL learners. This could have important lessons for the use of volunteers in other aspects of the informal learning curriculum.

A very large numbers of volunteers may be engaged with informal learning according to the consultation document -11 millions in 150,000 registered charities and 300,000 unregistered ones. Many certainly would benefit from training and development for the roles. It is not clear, when this is unpaid work, whether such volunteers could access skills development as might be available if they were in paid employment. Some of the resources and support to volunteering will be supplied by non- and informal learning providers. It would seem to be a logical extension of the work around capacity building and neighbourhood regeneration of existing informal adult learning providers. Many of these providers have been engaged with the voluntary sector for many years. Given the recent developments in terms of developing the professionalism of informal paid teachers and tutors through the changes being introduced under 'Equipping Our Teachers' programmes that will be extended to LSC-funded adult and community learning providers from September 2008, access to these programmes could and should be extended to voluntary informal adult practitioners.

However UCU would strongly argue that volunteers should not be used for activities that have been undertaken by paid adult learning staff or as substitutes for these staff. However committed and enthusiastic these volunteers are, they all too often lack the training and professionalism of paid staff.

#### **f. What are the conditions most likely to foster innovative approaches to adult learning?**

The consultation document rightly recognises and values the number of crucial innovations that began in informal adult learning and are now part of the mainstream curricula of all adult learning -not just in terms of new programmes and course content, but also in materials development, learning styles and approaches, and



actual teaching and tutoring. The points we have already made in relation to improving conditions in informal adult learning will again be very relevant and pertinent to developing conditions able to foster innovation: the mapping of provision will almost certainly uncover such innovations. The provision of good universal information, advice and guidance on informal adult learning and for those using it and the provision of proper strategic leadership and planning should also assist in identifying areas of need that may benefit from innovative approaches. Good and sustained outreach work will continue to lead innovative approaches.

However, two important aspects and interlinked aspects of current informal learning I need to change to foster the conditions conducive to innovation. The culture that pervades all education and learning, including informal learning, is risk averse. It needs brave providers and practitioners to go beyond what seems safe and stable because of the high penalties for failure coupled with the financial stringency ever present in informal adult learning for at least thirty years. If the history of previous innovation in informal adult learning is analysed, it can be seen that there was room to innovate, experiment, mistakes could be tolerated, and experiences built up from which to learn.

This risk averse culture in adult learning stems in part from the funding methodologies which do not encourage innovation and also in part from the target-centred culture that has developed over the last twenty and more years. Additional resources for adult learning have all too often been linked to hard targets. Targets clearly have uses but should be proportionate and balanced with freedom of action. Of course any use of public funds has to be prudent and accountable. But this should occur after the event, not drive it. There is also a need to create space and opportunities that practitioners can reflect and debate on what constitutes best practice and how this can be transferred to others. In addition much innovation is driven by short-term project funding, with targets which do not permit flexibility and reorientation if a plan needs to be adapted.

## **2. The Government contribution**

### **a. Whether, and if so how, Government support for informal adult learning can be improved?**

Government should continue to support adult learning and despite the very tight expenditure limits that the Government is currently working to, every possibility for increasing and improving this support should be explored.

Government support comes in several forms, most clearly in the funds that are made available for informal adult learning. Whilst perhaps the largest and clearest sum is the safeguarded DIUS budget for informal adult learning, it is also evident from the consultation document that other Government departments are investing significant sums into initiatives and projects that, if not clearly informal adult learning, share many of its goals, practices, methodologies and practices.

The Government as we have indicated above also has roles as the arbiter of quality, as a regulator and in setting the frameworks for accountability and governance in public affairs, including informal adult learning providers. We have also pointed out that there are tensions between different aspects of these roles. For informal adult learning, it is creating space and opportunities to encourage new and sometimes innovative new providers and modes of informal learning, whilst keeping a proportionate accountability and bureaucratic processes necessary for the proper oversight and use of public funds. We have also stated that we consider the Government has an important role in ensuring that equity and diversity are at the core of all informal adult learning.

UCU looks forward to seeing the responses to this consultation. We would hope that we will be able to sit down together with Government and all the stakeholders to consider these, identify the many and various suggestions that will come as to how Government support for informal adult learning can be improved, and prioritise these in the light of existing resources and the need for existing providers to have some stability.

**b. Whether you agree that, given the diversity of demand, need and type of provision that is made, it would be inappropriate to aim for a common funding system across Government, or a centralised strategy?**

UCU is both unsure and perhaps a little sceptical about the appropriateness, and indeed the feasibility of aiming for a common funding system and/or a centralised strategy. That is not to say that there should not be discussions as to whether these are appropriate and feasible. There is clearly a need to explore and analyse the synergies, overlaps and differences between how funds are used and allocated to the field. There may well be actions short of common funding methodologies and/or a centralised strategy. Indeed it would be a good to see more connectivity, commonality and synergies between the various streams of DIUS funding as it may impact on informal adult learning; for example between the streams of funding for higher education, further education and workplace training and informal adult learning. One solution might be for it to be mandatory for any government department considering developing an initiative with an educational aspect to consult with other relevant departments, and to investigate the feasibility of joint-resourcing. The Department of Health, for instance, derives huge benefits from lifelong learning programmes – and should be expected to contribute to relevant schemes

**c. How can we ensure there is proper recognition and understanding of the wide variety of ways in which Government is supporting informal adult learning?**

The description of the wide range and extent of Government activity in support of informal adult learning is a starting point in the process of creating proper recognition and understanding. The proposed mapping exercise should further illustrate and recognise this. There is a need for greater co-ordination at national level of the extent of this support. This may require more inter-Departmental discussion and co-ordination. Perhaps the kind of high level stakeholder forum that came out of the Foster Report and the 2005 White Paper for further education should be established for informal adult learning. To give it status and profile we would suggest such a forum was chaired by a DIUS minister.

However it will also be necessary to raise local awareness of this support. This can be achieved by encouraging contacts and synergies between the various streams of policies, funds, initiatives and activity promoted and supported by Government. A single independent point of contact and focus for these activities could be established at local level. This would be of very great use to local and other authorities and agencies when they are creating their strategic plans and agreements to meet their goals across a range of areas and services. IT could become a useful focus for raising awareness at local level of the kinds and range of support Government is giving informal adult learning.

**d. How can we make better use of Government resources, for example better use of premises?**

Better use of Government resources in support of informal adult learning can be achieved at both national and local levels by much greater co-ordination and planning across the range of support that is being given. We have suggested two approaches which we consider have merit in our response to the previous question; one at

national level – much greater co-ordination and information sharing between Government Departments with consideration given to the creation of a high level ministerial chaired committee to give a much higher profile to informal adult learning across Government.

At local level which is where we believe that the better use of Government resources will actually be made, we have suggested a single contact/focal point – a ‘one-stop-shop’ for the various streams of Government support for informal adult learning. This could create the synergies between programmes that would mean better use of these Government resources.

We would also suggest that joint Departmental work in informal adult learning could be incentivised at local level. One suggestion might be a pump-priming fund made up perhaps by top-slicing from all the programmes that make up Government support for informal learning. Applications to such a fund would only be accepted if they could demonstrate active multi-agency and multi-Department co-operation and activity. A long time ago such a fund was very successful at a regional level in London. The ILEA’s ‘Education for Whole Community’ Fund in the 1970s made great progress in bringing different education sectors together to support a whole range of learning initiatives at local level at a time when these education sectors were impenetrable silos which rarely talked together, least of all worked together.

The question posed above asks as an example how there could be better use of premises. Finding and using suitable premises is often an issue for informal learning providers. We believe that the Government should investigate actions to free up the use of state owned buildings. Schools are often the venue that is well suited to use by informal adult learning. The Extended Schools initiative should have built into it a new expectation that schools are readily, easily and cheaply available for ‘informal’ adult learning, and that any adult learning offer made by the school should be integrated into any local adult learning planning process. A major initiative by government would be to publish and promote updated local directories of available publicly owned premises, and to ensure that preferential lettings charges are offered to voluntary organisations and/or those least able to pay. However, the opening access to school buildings should not be seen as a panacea, because some learners and potential learners may not always be comfortable revisiting the setting for previous poor learning experiences.

**e. Are there areas where Government should be actively removing barriers or creating new flexibilities in order to improve the use of resources?**

There must be areas where the Government could actively remove barriers or create new flexibilities. However as we have pointed out previously, there are tensions between proper regulation, governance and accountability for the use of public funds, and the flexibility, responsiveness and reducing the bureaucratic barriers. UCU would be happy to join discussions as to how these tensions might be resolved.

The consultation paper devotes a lot its discussions on the ways that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) might be of assistance in informal adult learning. Government could perhaps take action in ensuring that connectivity to ICT is more widely and economically available, for example in rural areas, in old peoples’ homes or in social housing.

### **3. DIUS-funded informal adult education**

- a. Is the adult education service basically a 1970s model, now overtaken by the developments summarised in Chapter 1? Or is it a successful service that has the potential, with the reforms currently in train, to develop and thrive in the 21st century?**

UCU considers that the way this question is posed is profoundly wrong – falsely polarising two models. We do not believe that this describes the reality of the past or present and it is not therefore helpful for the future..

The history of informal adult learning in this country which is briefly described in the consultation document, is a dynamic story, It is also a proof whereby the structures, models and the curricula of informal adult learning are a multi-faceted mosaic of provision from many sources that are transformed by innovation and experimentation within the pattern of provision in response to greater changes in society and learning.

Thus the 19<sup>th</sup> century pattern of informal adult education delivered through self-directed and self-organised groups based around family, community, social, political and religious organisations and with curricula as much about first chance and basic education, was transformed by the growth of mass literacy, changing demands and new communication technologies. It became municipalised with the beginning of local government's involvement with non-formal adult education. This was also the period of the development of a higher education response to adult learning with the emergence of university extra-mural adult education programmes and residential provision often specifically aimed at those denied opportunities for more formal deeper learning.

Again in the inter-war period there were further developments and consolidation of informal adult learning. In the absence of universal secondary education, adult education became a vehicle for first and second chance opportunities to gain qualifications, usually through local authority technical colleges.

Developments in the post-war period saw adult education continuing as a mix of voluntary, university and local government provision, although with a much greater focus on liberal adult education, non-vocational and recreational learning. It also saw the rise of village and community colleges an important element in providing for adult education in rural areas and a model which has become relevant again today.

From the 1970s there were again changes to both the curricula and the modes and methods of delivery of non-formal and informal adult education with a much greater emphasis on engaging those who had benefited least from formal and previous educational experiences. Alongside these developments in informal adult education, further education colleges, having lost much of their traditional markets with local employment, developed programmes for adults. Many of these started in the informal adult provision, but included progression to programmes carrying qualifications and leading to further learning and/or employment.

The key point is that the changes that occurred in adult education were always based on what was happening, rather than representing some distinct break. Part of the success of the evolving pattern of provision was that it was based on what was working.

Thus we do not agree that 'the adult education service is basically a 1970s model, now overtaken by the developments'; the current model has been developed out of the history and traditions of informal adult learning, and particularly given the twists and turns of governments' policies, the increasing focus on economic instrumentalism

in adult learning and the financial stringency this sector has faced, the sector is an extremely successful service well placed to meet future challenges as well as it has met those of the past. It has displayed a flexibility and responsiveness to adult learners that means that it is part of the cultural, social and civic fabric of this country.

**b. How are Local Authorities now organising their adult education services? What are their visions for the future and what are their experiences of different models of delivery today?**

Local authorities have provided opportunities for informal adult learning for over a hundred years. They remain the major location for a great deal of informal adult learning. Local authority adult learning services contribute directly to national agendas on a range of priorities identified in Local Area Agreements, including economic regeneration and social inclusion. Such Services work in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies, and often commission provision locally to meet strategic priorities combined with learning needs. They work together with other important local authority departments such as Children's Services, adult social services, libraries, arts, sports and cultural agencies and organisations. Local authority informal adult learning services have responded flexibly to changing local circumstances. They deliver their provision into the communities they serve. They use local data on their populations to direct their programmes to meet equality targets. They contribute to Comprehensive Area Assessment processes and can play a significant part in local social inclusion, employment and skills regeneration and into the Every Child Matters programmes.

We are aware that there is a great deal of transition in the way that many local authorities are now organising their adult education services. This is due in part as much to the changes that have taken place in the wider context of local government, not least the changing local education authorities to Children's Trusts and Children Services. Traditionally adult education has been part of Education Departments. This is clearly changing with many local authorities considering relocating it. Some always contracted informal adult education to their local further education colleges. The numbers doing this increased at the time of incorporation of FE, and again when the LSC was created. Despite a changing policy to discourage FE colleges to engage in and informal adult education, some local authorities and FE colleges maintain their informal learning contracts and provision. Other local authorities have located their adult education alongside youth services in community education sections; others have moved it or are relocating it to community and leisure services, others to economic development and regeneration departments. These moves often can bring informal learning into useful and positive contact and relationships with other council services and functions. But there will be challenges for these services and their staff in maintaining their expertise and professionalism around adult education. It will be useful to see from the responses from local authorities to this question the range of ways that local authorities are organising their adult education, and what they see as the benefits and perhaps the pitfalls associated with this.

**c. Have we taken partnership working as far as we can? The scale of the support from other Government departments is important for each partnership to grasp and take advantage of.**

The consultation document makes reference to partnerships with current informal adult learning structures and provision. It describes how many of these have come a long way and have adapted to the new planning and funding arrangements, and succeeded in recruiting a wide range of partners and used a variety of methods to progress their work. However the document goes on to state that these development and the speed of progress, are variable.

UCU would not disagree with this analysis but we feel that it is perhaps a little early for conclusive evaluations. Overall we feel that there is still some way for partnerships to develop, not least to take forward the vision set out in the consultation and any proposals that arise from it. For example we could see fruitful ground in terms of extending partnerships at local level whereby more established providers of informal adult education are offering support and assistance to less established community organisations in terms of meeting requirements and regulations around informal adult learning.

Perhaps what is needed most of all is some stability in policy development, including that around funding and quality assurance. This would mean the ground on which partnerships are built stops shifting, with the consequent need for constant adjustments.

As we have indicated in previous answers above, there is a need for partnership not only at local level, but also at national level given the actual and potential scale of Government support. We have made suggestions about how this could be achieved at local and national levels.

A key area is partnership between educational providers, and other organizations – voluntary sector, heritage and culture (galleries, museums, theatres), employers. Many organizations adopt an educational mission which they then provide in house (by appointment of single education officers, etc.) when in fact much more effective provision could be established through educational partnership.

**d. In terms of using the DIUS safeguarded budget, would it be better in future to focus spend on infrastructure and on the organisation of an effective service, rather than through direct subsidies to providers for putting on courses?**

UCU is very conscious that the resources for this period of the Comprehensive Spending Review to 2011 are both finite and very tight. The safeguarded budget flat lines at £210 millions from 2005 until 2011. We have recommended that this figure should rise at least to take into account inflation. We calculate this figure should increase by £33.2 millions to cover the period from 2005 to 2011.

However it is clear that the question of what is the best use for this resource will arise and must be answered as a result of this consultation and any proposals that arise from it. We have also made it clear that there is a need and urgency to maintain, expand and improve the infrastructure for informal adult learning. However UCU also considers that there are also very strong arguments that the continuing use of direct subsidies to providers is an essential component in maintaining equality of opportunities in non- and informal adult learning. We believe that it vital that the costs of informal learning be kept within the reach of all that may want to use it. There are financial barriers to participation in informal adult learning and subsidies are one important way of reducing these. It may well be that there will need to be discuss the balance between spend on infrastructure and on direct subsidy of provision, and ways that the amount spent on subsidy is used. But we are convinced that the some form of direct subsidy must remain.

As a minimum UCU would argue that Government should fund 'informal' learning provision which is put on for the public interest – social inclusion and cohesion, health and well being, safer communities, sense of place, rurality, and learning for its own sake which can offer progression into further learning (that will often be linked to the skills agenda). We also see advantages in such funding being directed through Local Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships and detailed in Local Area Agreements with reference to a new adult learning indicator. These

Partnerships and Agreement could recommend the volume and balance of funding which will go to structured and state regulated learning and that which will go to non-regulated activity or the provision of subsidised infrastructure. There could be three year adult learning plans will be developed along side local 14-19 strategic plans. The local authorities' plans would encompass provision for outreach work, market research, market testing, partnerships, third sector capacity building, project and partnership work which can demonstrate progression and sustainability, the maintenance and development of the infrastructure of learning.

**e. Do we need the service to become more learner-led? Would a way of doing that be to explore the possible use of real or virtual vouchers, taking advantage of new technologies? These might build on the Skills Accounts mechanism being phased in, starting in 2010.**

UCU is, as we have stated already, not as dismissive of the current achievements around informal adult learning being learner-led as the consultation document seems to be. Of course there is always more that can and should be done. But there are potential dangers in the service becoming unbalanced if learner-led provision is not monitored and evaluated, not least around the issues of whether all learners are learning and if not which learners are doing the leading.

UCU would be very reluctant to endorse possible use of real or virtual vouchers in informal adult learning. The example of Individual Learning Accounts is still very vivid for us. The new Skills Accounts are untried and the pilots are just beginning. Issues of how additional support and equity and diversity can be built into any scheme are still unresolved.

For vouchers to work they either have to be for such a small amount of money they cannot buy anything, or they work on the assumption that take-up will equal available resource, or be limited in some way. In practice the latter assumption tends to lead to an under spend, and a mismatch with need – as it is all but impossible to develop mechanisms for ensuring take-up is the same as funding. The likelihood is that at the end of a year, there will be unspent vouchers, since not all voucher holders entitled to study will be able to, whilst those who need to study may have exhausted their vouchers. The result is course closures.

There is an area around the use of vouchers that is not mentioned in the consultation document which UCU considers might be useful to investigate. This is the area of collective vouchers. We understand there has been some pilot work with trade unions around this which we believe might have applicability around community informal adult learning.

## **4. Equality of access**

**a. How can we do better in ensuring that no one is excluded from the benefits of learning? Or from the same opportunities that others enjoy?**

**b. How well do we understand the barriers to learning as they exist at present, and how they affect particular parts of society? To what extent are the barriers financial? What action would address each of the barriers?**

In answering this and the other questions arising from this chapter on equality of access to and in informal adult learning, we would refer back to the statements we have made in the first part of the this response where we made some general points,

and to the responses we have made to some of the earlier questions on other chapters.

Thus the better understanding of what provision is currently available and on who is using this, should lead to far greater understanding of who is currently excluded and why. Having a healthy and lively provision of informal adult learning opportunities which have a high profile, and which is backed by independent, impartial and universal information, advice and guidance services, would assist in identifying those who are excluded from learning and its benefits. Having strategic leadership and strong partnerships at local level would ensure that provision is balanced and such that it is meeting the needs of those who have been previously excluded. Having a strong and properly resourced outreach capacity would mean that providers had the ability to reach to the excluded and enter into dialogues with them as to how their learning needs could be met within existing and new provision. Direct subsidies to providers would keep the costs of participating in adult learning within the reach of all. This would need to be backed by coherent, consistent policies around financial support, concessions and fee remission so that access does not become dependent on geography. Government through its inspection and regulatory functions will also have an important role in ensuring that no-one is excluded from both provision and opportunities to participate. This is particularly important when looking at the less structured parts of informal learning provision. One thing above all may be required from Government. This is patience with regard to outputs from resource commitment. Derived and disadvantaged communities have suffered chronic deprivation over very many years, and the timescale for seeing wider benefits of any initiative (whether in health, education or employment) is proportionately long. Short-termism sets up failure, and only confirms the excluded in their cynicism about the benefits of provision.

Regarding the barriers to learning including financial barriers, we have dealt with this earlier in this response, and highlighted current research which may uncover new information. We do consider that whilst there is a considerable amount of information and knowledge on the barriers to learning, there is always more that can be learnt and we would encourage more research on this.

**c. What further actions could Government most usefully take to ensure more equal access to informal learning?**

We have already made suggestions as further actions that Government could take to ensure more equal access to informal learning. Some further suggestions would be more encouragement and support for the creation and implementation of equal opportunity policies by informal adult learning providers, with a strong emphasis on turning such policies into actual actions. All providers should undertake equality impact assessments of their policies and actions. As part of the regular discussions between the teacher associations and OFSTED, we have learnt of the proposed extension of inspection in schools to issues and actions around community cohesion. We believe that this could be extended to further education colleges and providers of non- and informal adult learning. However there will be providers, especially those in the community and less structured settings who will need guidance and support in formulating and implementing equal opportunity policies and equality impact assessments. The Government should provide this either directly or through local partnerships where providers with experience of this work could advise and guide those without this experience.

**d. What further actions could others most usefully take?**

We have indicated in the previous response some of what could be done. We also feel that all providers need to gather information on who is using their provision and match this to the known data on the characteristics of their catchment area, so that



they can identify who may not be participating. They should also examine and analyse why some are not participating and if there are actions to take around this. Local Strategic Partnerships should be taking a lead in this work.

**e. What more can Government do to overcome the 'digital divide' where the people who could most benefit from new ways of participating in adult learning are the least equipped to take advantage of them?**

The consultation document sets out some of the basic facts of the 'digital divide', and some of the actions and activities that are being initiated to help overcome this. It would be useful for further research on this so that some of the underlying features of this are clearer. For example the consultation compares the numbers of households in English regions with access to the internet. This is useful, but even more useful would be to know the composition of these households and who was using this access. It may be all the adults in these households but should it be only school age children in these households, then a very different set of conclusions and possible actions might result. However there should be research on who exactly comprises the 'have not' of the digital divide. This data will need to be correlated with who is not participating in the full range of adult learning, formal, non-formal and informal. It is highly likely this will show generational aspects of the digital divide, and possibly other correlations with class, income and perhaps gender. For example we know only 9% of older people participate informal adult learning, and that 82% of older people don't have access to internet (Adult Learning Feb 2008). Interestingly the consultation document quotes a figure that one in two learners over 60 is studying ICT. This would seem to open some areas for research. We also would want to know how many of those in the workforce have access to IT and IT training yet do not have internet access at home. It also may be worth exploring international examples of work in this area. For example in Korea, whole cities have free wireless access. Partnerships could be investigated with hardware manufacturers to make it possible for inexpensive machines (with minimal capacity for games etc.) to be available to providers to loan to students whilst on courses.

The consultation document also describes the investment that has been made in recent years to bring the benefits of new technology to adults in adult and community settings, and various initiatives and projects that DIUS and other Departments are funding. We look forward to participating in discussions to share and analyse any evaluations that emerge on these.

We know that new technology has been very useful for perhaps many but not all students in Skills for Life programmes. Knowing and understanding how this has proved positive for some learners but not for others, could be put to use in investigating ways that new technology can be used to increase participation, and what may be the limits of this. UCU has heard from some of its members there is some evidence that IT is not used as much at home for learning as it sometimes thought. It is often regular classes and contact with other learners that is crucial in maintaining learning activity. Internet is sometimes used more as back up for example using the BBC resources

Clearly there are important issues around access to new technology and its affordability. This may well be an aspect of the infra-structure for informal adult learning which should be explored further.

## **5. Broadcasting and technology**

**a. What are the barriers to making the most of technology for learners? How can these be overcome?**

UCU considers the main barriers to making the most of technology for learners to be:

- Good local access to facilities
- That these facilities are affordable and user-friendly
- Lack of familiarity and confidence among potential learners
- Lack of good information, advice and guidance

These can, and to a certain extent are being overcome by maintaining a stable and expanding provision of facilities that are within easy reach of all. There will be problems in rural areas, but there are many examples of good practice in terms of providers of adult learning creating mobile facilities. More resources for plant and equipment would help extend access. Facilities with new technology should be properly staffed with professionals who have the skills to demystify and teach the skills needed to make the most of new technologies in learning. Given the developments in initial training and continuing professional development that are beginning to reach informal learning providers, there is clearly a role for Lifelong Learning UK, the sector's skills council. We are mindful that the recently published and agreed FE workforce development strategy which includes LSC-funded providers of informal learning, does prioritise ICT training and development for the workforce. Serious consideration needs to be given on how this can be extended to informal learning providers who do not come within the remit of this Strategy.

**b. What do we know about the learning opportunities that will become available utilising new technology over the next 10 to 15 years? What is the best way of identifying these opportunities?**

Although some of the developments in new technology are known, and from this it may be possible to have some knowledge of what may be new possibilities of learning opportunities, 10 to 15 years is a very long time frame for considering what may develop. It may be more useful to consider a shorter timescale, perhaps no more than 5 to 10 years at most. In addition developments in new technology have a tendency to be very surprising and often not what and where they have been predicted. The history of new technologies is also littered with bold initiatives that have promised much and delivered little. It also could be said that we have perhaps not made as good a use of existing technologies in learning as might have been expected. Radio and television have been there for around 90 years and 50 years respectively, and it may be said that they have not always been used for learning as might have been predicted by earlier adult educators. We would urge caution in too great an expectation on technological solutions to learning needs.

However based on current trends, it may be predicted with an amount of certainty that some of the costs, including costs of hardware will continue to fall, that connectivity will continue to be an issue and it is unlikely that there can be a complete and satisfactory market solution to this, and there will continue to be an increasing supply of educational resources available through ICT. These may well be the areas that open up opportunities for government action.

**c. What opportunities, if any, are there to make learning a more central consideration in the future of broadband and the digital switchover? And in the development of mobile phone applications?**

**d. How can we make greater use of interactive television?**

**e. How can the connectivity between broadcast, physical and virtual resources and informal learning be further enhanced?**

We are not in a position to give a detailed response to these questions as they require a greater knowledge and understanding of the technical details around these developments than we feel we have. We would point out that the digital switchover and developments around broadband and interactive television do present opportunities for discussions around how learning considerations can become more central. Given the Government's role as the regulator in some of these developments, we would look to it to be far more pro-active. Consideration should again be given to writing obligations into the regulation of the media and broadcasters in advance of developments. We also believe that there is a disparity between the access to ICT, including the Internet that a 'formal' learner' in a university or college may have, and that available to the 'informal adult learner', including those in structured settings. This means the former has free access to a much wider range of learning resources on-line. We understand that the Government is currently consulting on copyright. If the result of this was that research were to be defined more widely than by academic level but also include private study, and so come under copyright exemptions, this could make a significant difference to the access of informal adult learners.

**f. How can we bring new Information and Communications Technology together with more established teaching and learning models so that there are integrated opportunities to learn?**

The consultation document rightly states that learners like the 'blended learning' learning approach which combines face to face contact with other students and with teachers and tutors with on-line and other technology driven learning. For UCU and its members active, successful learning is a social activity that takes place between human. Technology can assist and make these processes easier and perhaps even more productive.

The new ICT can be brought together with more established teaching and learning methods through the activities we have already referred to: good access to local, affordable facilities, good local strategic leadership and planning and much better information, advice and guidance. Above all it will depend on the informal adult learning practitioners and the skills and knowledge they can bring to these processes. Their commitment, professionalism and enthusiasm is beyond doubt. They must be given opportunities to develop their skills in new technology, and as importantly in its use in their teaching. A start has been made on this with the changes in initial teacher training and CPD for staff in LSC-funded providers. This must be extended to all informal adult learning providers. Any proposals for extending the range of Government support for informal adult learning must not be at the expense or dilution of these changes.

We also believe that ICT could be assistance in providing resources for learning in contexts where support might be available from other learners who could be contacted through ICT. In addition ICT could stimulate the supply of learning resources for existing informal adult learning programmes. For example it might be possible working with the established search engine to ensure that when searching the Web around a learning need, this could be linked to banks of downloadable information and resources.