

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

NIACE Dysgu Cymru

‘Communities and their Schools’

Schools are for Adults too!

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education is a charity and a company limited by guarantee dedicated to promoting the interests of adults wherever they learn. Its remit covers England and Wales, and since 1985 its work in Wales has been led by a discrete committee, NIACE Cymru. Following devolution NIACE Cymru was reconstituted as NIACE Dysgu Cymru.
2. NIACE Dysgu Cymru works with providers of all kinds to ensure that good practice is shared across sectors. It works closely with the National Assembly for Wales, with ELWa and the Welsh Local Government Association, and services the All Party Assembly Group on adult learning. NIACE also co-ordinates Adult Learners’ Week each year across the UK.
3. The Institute’s priority is to represent the interests of, and improve opportunities for learning for adults who have benefited least from previous education and training, and through that focus the extension and enrichment of opportunities for adults more generally, wherever and whenever they learn.
4. As part of this work, NIACE undertakes regular annual surveys of adult participation in learning in the UK, with booster surveys for Wales to secure statistically reliable data. The message of the surveys is consistent – in education, if at first you don’t succeed, you don’t succeed. Those people who extend their initial education are twice as likely to undertake a course of education and training as those who left at sixteen or earlier. The older you are the less likely you are to participate. Different parts of the UK enjoy different volumes of provision for adults, and different overall participation. Professional, managerial and white-collar workers are twice as likely to join in as manual and unskilled workers. People with access to the internet are more than twice as likely to be current or recent learners as people without access (see Appendix 1).
5. Current participation is also a major predictor of future participation. Not only do the education system and employers alike reinforce this learning divide by offering most to those who have already done well in education, but non-participants themselves internalise the message, saying ‘education is for other people’. NIACE’s survey research shows that more than 90 per cent of adults recognise that learning makes a significant difference to life chances – leading to better jobs and job security, to a richer social life, and to improved chances for your children. Yet more than a quarter still said that learning is not for the likes of them. Stephen Gorrard of Cardiff University’s research parallels these findings, but identifies the strongest links in influencing future participation to be with social class and initial schooling.

6. Schools are the bedrock of a lifelong learning society, which is why NIACE Dysgu Cymru was keen to make a submission to the ‘School of the Future’ enquiry.
7. The case for strong links between schools and the communities they serve can be succinctly put:
 - links with the community help schools in raising pupil’s motivation, expectations and achievement;
 - in many locations (and particularly in rural settings) the school is the main, or even the only place that can provide the community with sports and other facilities. Using the local school as a centre for adult learning, childcare facilities and for meetings helps regenerate and strengthen communities;
 - offers schools access to a wider range of experience to draw on for the education of young people than school staff can supply;
 - promotes community cohesion by re-engaging adults (and in particular parents) in learning – reinforcing links between school and home experience;
 - extends the curriculum for young people and adults alike;
 - improves security.
8. The Community Education Development Centre (CEDC), with which NIACE works closely, identifies the following characteristics of community schools. They say the school:
 - views working with its community as an important element in raising the standard of pupil’s achievement;
 - builds partnerships with other organisations that are accessible and inclusive, and contribute to the education of pupils;
 - works towards creating communities of lifelong learners;
 - helps strengthen its community through providing opportunities for lifelong learning, personal development and the pursuit of sporting, artistic and cultural opportunities;
 - serves the families of pupils, as well as the local business, voluntary groups and individuals who live or work in the school’s community.
9. NIACE has evidence of a wide range of different ways schools engage with adults.

Kind of school	Kind of provision	Management
Secondary	Infill into mainstream school classes – <i>possibly declining</i>	Usually school, sometimes college partnership
Mainly secondary (some primary)	Mainly formal – evening programme; plus day if rooms available – <i>the dominant model</i>	LEA Service – directly or management devolved to school
Mainly secondary (some primary)	Mainly formal – evening programme; plus day if rooms available – <i>growing importance</i>	Further Education College (may include provision contracted by LEA)
Primary	Family learning, work with parents, learning for adults from this – <i>increasing importance</i>	School and/or LEA
Secondary/primary	Formal/informal learning for adults – self-financing or using other funding sources – <i>growing importance</i>	School
Secondary school/community colleges	Community learning (any of the above) – <i>possibly declining</i>	School – with funding and specialist staff

10. There is long standing evidence that the development of schools as centres for community education can work well. There is, too, widespread good practice in family education and parent education. However, as the CEDC characteristics make clear, schools cannot develop community education in isolation, and effective partnership working takes time, skills and patience – when many schools are feeling challenged in addressing successfully their core mission.
11. Effective partnerships needs to be secured with the CCETs, with individual further and higher education institutions, with businesses and voluntary and community organisations:
- to map needs;
 - to undertake outreach work with under-represented groups;
 - to identify the most effective patterns of provision, and to avoid unnecessary duplication;
 - to secure informed information, advice and guidance for learners and potential learners;
 - to share best practice in quality assurance;
 - to offer development opportunities for governors, managers and staff.
12. Where adult education has been solely located in schools there has been experience that adults’ needs as learners take second place to those of young people. Adults have much to contribute as learners alongside young people, as the success of family literacy programmes testify – but their needs cannot be limited to those areas where they can support the education of the young.
13. Any expansion will also need to be built on practical and effective attention being given to Health and Safety considerations – to secure the safety and well-being of young people and other users.
14. To realise a vision where all schools – primary and secondary alike – are local learning centres for the communities they serve will involve a good deal of work. In England, NIACE is this month publishing a policy discussion document, ‘Schools are for Adults too’. Appendix 2 comprises the summary of the report,

and I will make copies of the published report available to the committee, as soon as they arrive.

15. Meanwhile, we believe the recommendations in the report provide a useful checklist for the tasks to be undertaken to strengthen existing good practice. We recommend:

16. The National Assembly for Wales should:

- adopt the aspiration for schools to become local learning centres, working in partnership with all other relevant interests to serve the needs of their communities, and create a strategy to achieve this;
- state national expectations for how schools should serve the needs of adult learners, together with the support that the Assembly and local government, ELWa and the inspectorate will provide to achieve these;
- give guidance on how schools should define 'community' in developing their role and on how they should meet the needs of adult learners;
- address these points in statutory guidance;
- evaluate the curriculum offer of existing local learning centres in schools and other settings, including initiatives to counter exclusion and to promote access to ICT; assess how far it meets the needs of adult learners and is sustainable; identify good practice and produce a strategy for further development;
- require evidence, in bids for specialist status and other funding, of an appraisal of the learning needs of the community and of how the proposal complements the contributions of other providers and will be sustainable;
- evaluate the impact of school support strategies on adult participation in the medium to long term;
- consider circumstances in which constraints on the use of delegated school budgets should be relaxed, to enable the school to implement an approved and non-profit-making action plan for serving adult learners in its community;
- require schools to show how the local community is involved in managing facilities and programmes of adult learning for which they receive additional funding.

17. CCETs should work with LEAs to:

- expect to take the lead role in helping schools to develop their role in adult learning and in securing collaboration for this;
- map the involvement of primary, secondary and special schools in serving adult learners; the potential for development and the needs for improvement;
- provide a consultancy and support service to help schools develop their community engagement and their role in adult learning, and build partnerships for this purpose;
- provide small-scale but continuing funding for schools to train and employ organisers or community education workers to develop learning on their premises;

- extend quality support for adult community learning to adult learning in school settings and link this to the development of school self-evaluation;
- incorporate adult learning in school settings in both their Adult Learning Plan and their Education Development Plan.

18. ELWa should:

- use its strategic role to ensure that funding for adult learners on school premises, including the use of funding for family learning, is steered through CCET plans;
- work with CCETs to evaluate the potential for adult learners in school sixth forms in the course of Area Reviews;
- include adult learners' views of learning on school premises in learners surveys;
- adopt funding models and requirements for recording learning that are appropriate to informal, community-based learning.

19. ESTYN should

- consider the relevance of school activities to the community's adult learning needs and the quality of community involvement in its own right when evaluating schools' links with the community;
- develop a framework and guidance for evaluating the experience of adult learners in school sixth forms;
- consider the school's performance in meeting community learning needs as the success factor;
- collate and publish overviews of progress in these areas.

20. Governing bodies should:

- promote and support effective participation and representation;
- develop policies and programmes for the community dimension of schools;
- promote partnership between home, school and community;
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership.

21. Schools should:

- recognise and develop the partnership between home, school and community;
- involve parents and other adults in learning and development;
- communicate effectively between all partners, institutions and organisations involved in learning;
- design and manage a curriculum which satisfies statutory requirements but also reflects the expectations and needs of the local community;
- consider and develop the use made of the community as a learning resource and the use made by the community of the school's resources;
- provide opportunities for parents, employers, industrialists and other adults to become involved in learning and development.

23. NIACE and its partners will be happy to help in ensuring that the lessons of what works effectively in community outreach, informal learning and family learning inform developments. With partners we would be happy to contribute to the

curriculum and staff development needed to make sure that the best practice becomes common practice.

Appendix 1

Figure 1: Current/recent participation in learning in Wales, by terminal age of education

Base: all respondents=100%

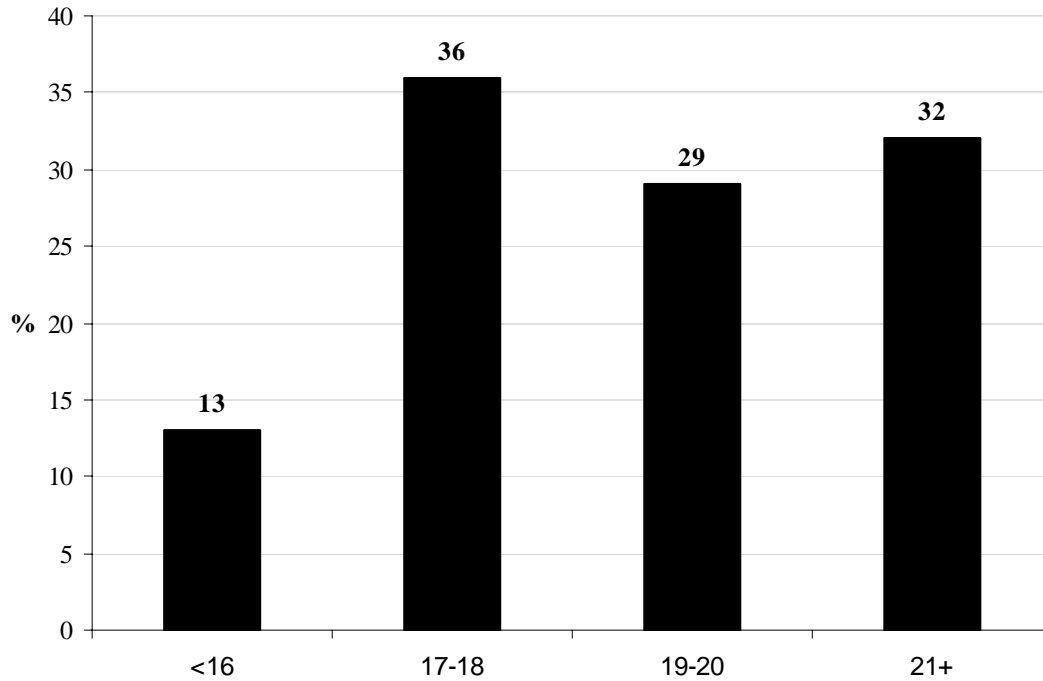


Figure 2: Current/recent participation in learning in Wales, by age

Base: all respondents=100%

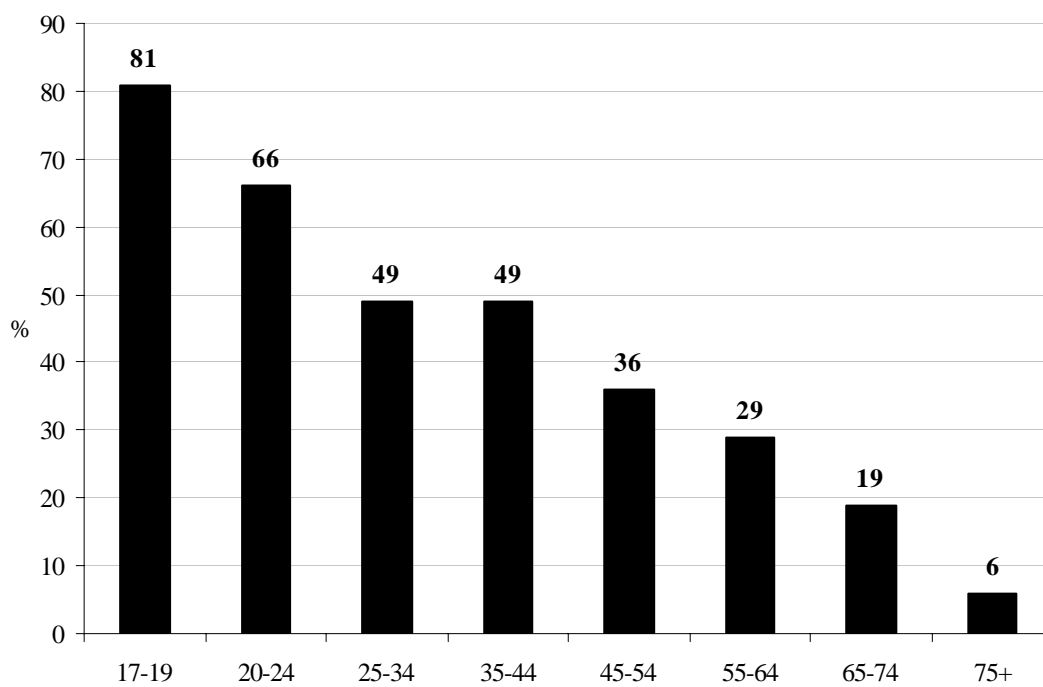


Figure 3: Current/recent participation in learning in Wales, by socio-economic class

Base: all respondents=100%

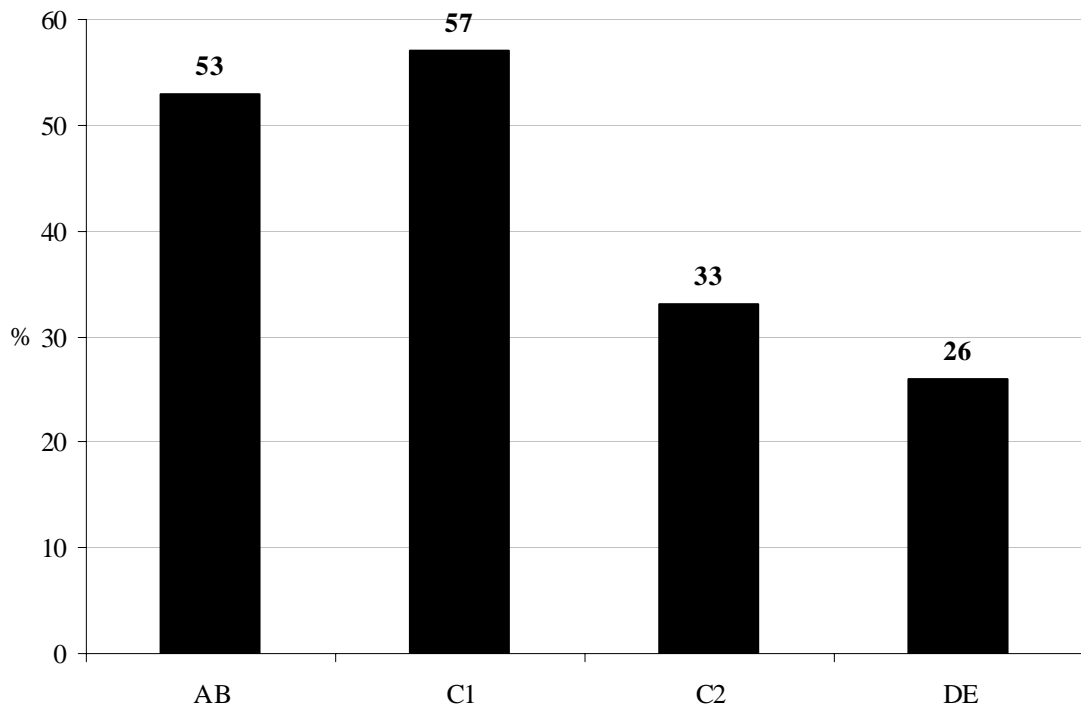
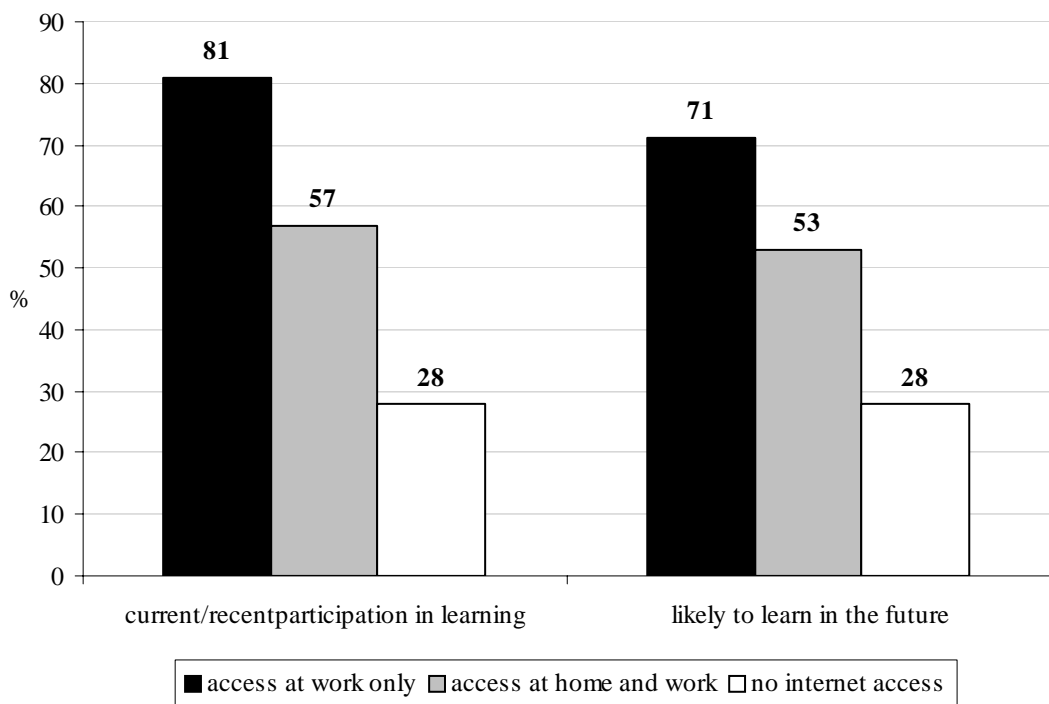


Figure 4: Participation in learning and future intentions to learn in Wales, by access to the Internet

Base: all respondents=100%



Appendix 2

Summary – Schools are for Adults too

The Introduction sets the scene by arguing the importance of schools' actual and potential role for adult learners, but contrasts these with the barriers created by current priorities and the significant limitations of some practices. Leaving schools to make their own way is not good enough. They need a clear message about our expectations, to work in collaboration, and to receive the support they need in order to contribute to creating learning communities.

The Recommendations are addressed to government, Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Inspectorates, and NIACE and its partners, including the Local Government Association (LGA). They draw on Key Ideas at the end of each chapter. All the recommendations offer pointers for schools wishing to start or improve their work.

Chapter 1: A new policy environment? discusses four policies that lead to a new view of schools' relationship with their communities. These are:

- The rationale for improving participation in learning as an essential element in social and economic regeneration
- How we therefore define local or neighbourhood learning, and tensions in current thinking on this
- The idea of schools as local learning centres and the focal point for learning in their communities
- Issues of partnership and community ownership.

While there is a strong steer for schools to engage with adult learning needs, we lack a consistent vision for local lifelong learning and its importance to communities for schools to work with.

Chapter 2: How adults go to school reviews the range and variety of practice. It starts with the more established models, such as classes on school premises, joint use and self-financing; the statutory basis for these; and judgements about their merits. The importance of family learning for adults leads in to the powerful concept of the 'full-service school'. 'New platforms' with potential for engaging adults include specialist status for secondary schools, Excellence in Cities (EiC), Education Action Zones (EAZs) and enrichment schemes such as Healthy Schools, Active Schools, Eco Schools, Artsmark and out-of-school-hours activity – with 'supplementary schools' being particularly important to some communities. There is insufficient evaluation of the merits and impact of the different models. There is also much unrealised potential because 'adult' dimensions are not adequately considered and we do not know enough about the views of adult learners.

Chapter 3: Creating success begins with the barriers, the most fundamental being continuity of funding and the lack of a consistent view about schools' relationships with their communities and adult learners. It offers examples of how partnerships can overcome these, with schools becoming part of a network of interests. It underlines the importance of exploiting existing community roots, but also the need for schools

to draw on external expertise. It suggests that we should also think of what schools owe to their communities, adult learners and partners, and calls for a 'new deal' for schools that will recognise these changed expectations and redefine the idea of the 'community school'.

The **Appendix** gives a checklist for schools starting to engage with adult learning (or reviewing their own practice) with a note on some helpful resources.

Introduction – Schools are for Adults too

Schools are not only places where adults once learned; they are where huge numbers of adults continue to learn. They represent one of the most important and accessible learning resources available to communities. We do not know how many adults use this resource, but if we add up those attending classes on school premises, parents learning informally or formally and volunteers, the total runs into millions rather than thousands. Not forgetting, of course, teachers, support staff, lunchtime supervisors and school governors are also learners in the normal course of their work. Schools matter for adult learning.

In providing learning in various ways for the community, schools draw on a powerful tradition. LEA classes have always used schools, as the still-surviving usage of 'night school' suggests. The 'village college' movement started in 1930s Cambridgeshire took forward a vision of schools at the heart of learning for communities. This was developed in the 'community college' model adopted by some LEAs in the 1970s and 1980s, and can also be traced in the, then, widespread practice of attaching centre organisers to secondary schools. The flowering of family education also has deep roots in local practice. There is now an impressively wide range of engagements between schools and adult learners, as this paper will show.

Two agendas are pushing this engagement forward. For some schools, understanding that lifelong learning is rooted in learning to learn leads on to a re-valuation of their purpose: that they are there to develop competent, confident learners. This understanding helps to break down the boundary between school and the rest of life, and leads to a perception of schools as learning organisations and as a learning resource for others. More prominently, the agenda for widening participation in learning, intrinsic to strategies for social and economic inclusion and community wellbeing, means that we must look for resources that are close to hand and familiar: we cannot afford to ignore schools.

While we may know what goes on in our own localities, there is no consistent national sense of schools' contribution: schools do not yet have a defined mission for adult learning. On the one hand, an emerging cluster of initiatives and policies propose a focal role for schools as neighbourhood learning centres. On the other, the government's priority for schools is consistently presented as being to raise standards, with little attention to the context in which this is to be done.

Moreover, the barriers are massive. It is not only that schools lack a clear message. The weight of expectation for schools lies in the National Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, target-setting and pupil achievement. Teachers' workloads are high, and the workloads of heads and managers are increased by further

devolution of funding and responsibilities. It is not surprising that thinking in many schools looks inward. In addition, the expectations of the OFSTED inspection framework and restrictions in the use of funding provide real disincentives to engage with adult learning. Schools are not generally encouraged to believe that working with adult learners is valued, or a priority in its own right, rather than an adjunct to enabling children to succeed. In such circumstances, there is no ingrained culture of response to adult learners.

Yet many schools have moved beyond their traditional contribution of providing a home for adult classes, and beyond an instrumental use of adult learning to support pupil attainment, to a wider vision. This recognises that inter-generational learning is distinctive and valuable in its own right; that adult learners in school may start with supporting children but should be encouraged to learn for themselves; that communities have a right to access and that this can be mutually enriching. Schools can then be seen as contributors to building their communities and raising collective aspirations.

This paper gives examples of this, but more where the vision is partial. ‘Community’ funding opportunities for schools do not necessarily require them to tease out the distinctions between improving public access in general terms and genuinely widening it, or between community involvement and adult learning opportunities. Many schools provide some sort of ‘community’ learning, but this may be limited in scope, interesting in its own right but leading nowhere, and unrelated to other local learning. At worst, it may subvert other, longstanding strategies to build up a service and widen participation. Alternatively, schools may not make the most of their own potential because they do not recognise the strength of informal learning, and therefore fail to draw out the further learning opportunities from activities or projects. Some schools may simply not accept that the business of adult learning is relevant to them, or make the link between excluding pupils and the parents’ sense of exclusion.

Schools, then, make their own choices about how they define their role and whether and how they contribute to adult learning. The intellectual and practical support they draw on to inform these choices is a matter of happenstance – committed individuals; the presence of adult classes; involvement in family learning; LEA strategies; being in an action zone or regeneration partnership; knowledge of funding and access to it; or links with local networks or national organisations... Perhaps the route in does not matter. What does matter, however, is that the response should be a considered one. If we do not give clear messages about our aspirations for schools and adult learners, and if we do not support schools in fulfilling these, we will fail both schools and adult learners: adults, because they need accessible local learning; schools, because they deserve the richness that the presence of adult learners brings.

This policy discussion paper, therefore, has two aims: first, to explore the policy issues and the case for adult learners in schools; and, second, to look at this in practice. I have used examples that are positive in the main. Many schools are already a long way down the road. What can we learn from them, and what support do schools need to engage successfully with the wider learning needs of their communities?