

# THE LEARNING REVOLUTION



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This version of *The Learning Revolution* differs from the version laid before Parliament on this page where the following text has been taken in:

We will work closely with the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, recognising their particular and varying responsibilities.

While many of the policies in this paper are specific to England, the challenges are common across the four countries of the United Kingdom. Each will consider the most appropriate arrangements in those areas for which they have devolved responsibility, in order to address the issues in ways that meet their own circumstances and needs.

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# Executive Summary

## The Learning Revolution

The boom in book clubs, on-line research and blogging, together with the continuing popularity of museums, public lectures and adult education classes, all demonstrate that people in this country have a passion for learning. They may not call it education, but this informal adult learning makes a huge contribution to the well-being of the nation. It is a revolution this Government is proud to foster and encourage.

Informal adult learning is taken up for its own intrinsic value. It encompasses a huge variety of activities: it could be a dance class at a church hall, a book group at a local library, cookery skills learnt in a community centre, a guided visit to a nature reserve or stately home, researching the National Gallery collection on-line, writing a Wikipedia entry or taking part in a volunteer project to record the living history of particular community.

Although informal learning can support the development of work-related skills, this movement is made up of a kaleidoscope of part-time, non-vocational learning where the primary purpose isn't to gain a qualification. People participate for enjoyment and are driven by their desire for personal fulfilment or intellectual, creative and physical stimulation.

Such activity also contributes to the health and well-being of communities by building the confidence and resilience of the individuals involved. The social relationships that develop as a result of this informal learning can provide networks of support and solidarity. For the low-skilled and under-confident, informal learning can be an important stepping stone to further learning and a more skilled future.

1. **A profound contribution.** The Government recognises that informal adult learning can transform individual lives and boost our nation's well-being. At its best, it can bring people and communities together, challenge stereotypes and contribute to community cohesion. It can unite the generations and help people remain active and independent into old age. At its simplest, informal learning can help build people's confidence and add to their personal fulfilment. For the low-skilled and those with a bad personal experience of formal education, an informal approach can provide a way back. In some cases it can be an important stepping stone to further learning, qualifications and more rewarding work.
2. **Making a virtue out of necessity.** Informal learning is important at any time. But during an economic downturn it is essential. Our top priority is, of course, the practical training which can help get people back to work quickly. This country has faced recession before and it has always bounced back because of its capacity for innovation, invention and creativity. In these tough economic times, informal learning can also make its contribution. No one would choose to face our current challenges. However, in the circumstances, there is a moral imperative to find activity with purpose for those affected by the recession. Opportunities must be seized. In a downturn new resources become available. These resources may come in

the shape of premises vacated in shopping centres. With firms on short-time working there may be more time to learn. People on reduced hours or looking for work may have the capacity to teach or volunteer, as well as more time to devote to learning. There may be people who want to put something back into their communities, to share knowledge, or to gain new skills. This is not the time to delay, but to increase support for informal learning and to harness the enthusiasm and commitment it brings with it.

3. **A consistent and on-going pledge.** This strategy reaffirms the commitment to informal adult learning across Government. It sets out how we will support a learning revolution by building capacity within individuals and communities and connecting the people who can make this happen. We recognise we can do more to ensure there is a wide choice of inspiring opportunities in every community, accessible to everyone.
4. **Inspired about learning.** Departments across Government do, and will, play an active part in supporting a flourishing landscape of informal learning:
  - The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) through its sponsorship of sporting, cultural and creative sectors, all of which can reach out to people, spark new interests and fuel existing ones
  - Communities and Local Government (CLG) through its work on active citizenship and community empowerment – ensuring that adults use their voice to shape the opportunities that are right for them
  - The Department of Health (DH) through its work to build health literacy and support active living
  - The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) through its leadership of the extended services programme, which opens schools as community resources and engages parents in learning
  - The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through the forthcoming strategy for an ageing society which will set out how to better engage and communicate opportunities to older people
  - The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) through direct funding to help support a core infrastructure of adult and family learning in each locality.
5. **Inspired about life.** Government cannot do this alone. Our role is to be a catalyst for innovation and change. We can provide the framework to support individuals, communities, the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to create opportunities for informal learning. To make the learning revolution a reality, we will need our partners in all sectors to play a role. We will work across Government, together with these partners to:
  - Build a culture which values informal adult learning in all its forms, with a wide range of organisations promoting it.
  - Support people to drive their own learning, in particular by making it easier for people who want to start 'self-organised' groups.
  - Link up the learning provided by the public, private and third sectors to broaden choice and clarify the opportunities for learners.
  - Make better use of technology to support learning and inform people about what's on offer.
  - Ensure there is a wide choice of high-quality learning opportunities for everyone.

- Increase access to informal learning for disadvantaged groups.
- Recognise the leadership role of local authorities in securing a broad range of opportunities for people across the country.

### 1: Building a culture of learning

6. Although there is a rich tapestry of informal adult learning, more can be done to help some adults overcome the barriers they face. We need to help these adults navigate through the choices on offer to identify and access the learning opportunities they want. We will need to build a strong and diverse coalition of organisations to promote learning and point adults to new opportunities. This will help unlock choice, connect learning and develop awareness of the benefits informal learning can bring. We will do this with the help of four initiatives: an Informal Adult Learning Pledge; a Festival of Learning; an Open Space Movement and a Transformation Fund.
7. **Informal Adult Learning Pledge.** We will invite organisations to show their commitment by signing the IAL 'pledge,' kick-starting a movement owned by people and organisations that promote learning for its own sake. Organisations signing the pledge will be ambassadors for informal learning, actively promoting participation and finding new ways to get more people involved. The pledge is the first step to fostering change on the ground.
8. **A Festival of Learning.** Building on the success of Adult Learners' Week in engaging new audiences, we will support a Festival of Learning in Autumn 2009. The festival will host a wide range of events, reaching out to people who already enjoy informal adult learning and to new groups of learners. It will be supported by a national campaign to promote the benefits of informal learning for individuals, organisations and wider society. This will reinforce the message that informal learning builds communities of confident,

#### The pledge's founding members include:

Becta, British Library, BT, BUPA, Business in the Community, Campaign for Learning, Channel 4, Cheshire County Council, Church of England, Citizens Advice Bureau, City Lit, Civil Service Pensioners Association, Communities and Local Government, Community Media Association, Croydon Council, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions, Digital Unite, Derbyshire County Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Educational Centres Association, Engage, English Heritage, First Bus, First Taste, Ginsters, Global Digital Broadcast, Gloucestershire County Council, HOLEX, Homeless Link, Kent County Council, Kew Gardens, LEAFEA, Life Academy, Local Government Association, Mars, Merseytravel, Microsoft, Museums Association, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, National Association for Voluntary & Community Action, National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Literacy Trust, National Trust, NIACE, Norfolk County Council, Open University, Royal Horticultural Society, RSPB, RWE nPower, Scottish & Southern Energy, Southern Railway, Sport England, SS Great Britain, Stockton Borough Council, The Age and Employment Network, The Association of Science and Discovery Centres, U3A, UK Online, Unionlearn, UNISON, UNITE, Voluntary Arts Network, Westminster City Council, Workers Educational Association.

We will work across Government and with our stakeholders to expand this list.

curious and creative people. It will also champion choice in informal learning, bring together new and innovative partnerships to support learning and create new connections.

9. **An 'Open Space' Movement.** We want a broad choice of learning options to be available, including traditional classes, activities in museums, libraries and other settings, as well as opportunities to learn online. Self-organised learning is an important part of the mix. Many people are already doing this. We want to empower more people to organise themselves to learn, with opportunities designed by communities for communities. But we know that starting a group can be difficult: it can be particularly hard to find low cost space locally, and people need more expertise and tips on how to build a successful learning group.
  10. We want to sow the seeds of an 'open space' movement where organisations throw open their facilities for informal learning at low or no cost. DIUS, DCSF, CLG, DH, and DCMS will work together with partners to open up spaces for informal learning in schools, colleges, libraries, community centres and healthy living centres, whether this learning is provided by the public, voluntary or self-organised sector. We will also develop a toolkit on how to set up, support and maintain a self-organised group.
  11. **Transformation Fund.** Seizing the opportunity to connect organisations involved in informal adult learning could have a transformational effect on people's lives. Partnerships between institutions with exciting content, such as broadcasters and galleries, and groups with credibility within communities, can open up learning for whole new audiences. We want to do more to capitalise on these opportunities for innovation to increase the ways in which adults can learn. We will invest in creative new approaches to reach and engage new learners through a £20m transformation fund. Bids to the fund will need to demonstrate how innovative ideas and new connections will address the barriers to learning some adults currently face.
2. **Increasing access to Informal Adult Learning**
    12. Our ambition is for every adult to be able to access and benefit from a wide choice of informal adult learning. Like many services and opportunities available today, some people find them easier to access than others.
    13. **Making learning accessible.** People who suffer socio-economic disadvantage may feel that learning isn't for them, or struggle to find out what is available. We will establish a national support package for Community Learning Champions to help them reach out to new learners, prioritising the most deprived areas. We will also take targeted action nationally and through our local partners to improve informal learning for older people and for families, and to increase informal learning in the workplace.
    14. **Older People.** Older people can find it harder to access learning. But with an ageing population, we know that learning for leisure in later life can maintain mental and physical health, and contribute to people's sense of wellbeing. The Government's forthcoming strategy for an ageing society will ensure that older people are able to make the most of learning. In addition we will work with NIACE, BUPA and First Taste, and in partnership with the Department of Health and key sector bodies to increase opportunities for informal learning in care homes.

15. **Learning at Work.** The best employers already support informal adult learning for their staff, because they recognise the benefits it offers their employees and the organisation. Traditionally, however, learning at work is used to increase vocational skills and earning power. We believe learning through the workplace – not necessarily in work time – should be encouraged, not least because of the opportunities for teambuilding and increased productivity it provides. We want to encourage other employers to follow their lead and will work with Business in the Community to provide practical examples of successful employer approaches to informal learning.

16. The Government funds more than 20,000 ‘union learning reps’ who make a huge contribution by encouraging people to increase their formal work skills under the Unionlearn banner. But they could also play a bigger role in encouraging informal learning. So we will work with Unionlearn to develop targeted action via the workplace, including opening 50 union learning centres to the wider community.

### 3: Transforming the way people learn through technology

17. Digital technology is becoming central to our daily lives. The Government recently published the interim report of *Digital Britain* which sets out a plan to secure Britain’s place at the forefront of the digital world. New technologies are changing the way people learn and interact with each other. The internet allows people to come together so that distance is no barrier. Technology will continue to offer innovative new ways to learn, and bring learning opportunities to people who would otherwise not have access to them.

18. **Digital Mentors.** We will use the transformation fund to encourage the use of broadcasting and technology to enrich learning and reach people who would otherwise not have access. We will only gain the maximum benefit if everyone can access new technologies and has the skills to use them. So tackling digital exclusion is key. We will ask UK Online to take a new role in championing informal learning as well as digital inclusion, and work with CLG to establish a network of Digital Mentors, aligning this with wider action to implement *Digital Britain* and CLG’s Digital Inclusion Plan.

19. **The Learning Revolution: The Web Portal.** We want people to learn and engage on their own terms. Joining a group or finding out about opportunities can be difficult, because there is no single online point of access where people can find out what is available. Often people simply don’t know opportunities exist or where to go to find out about them. To help people who are looking for opportunities, we will facilitate the creation of an online bank, listing opportunities for individuals and flagging up free or low cost spaces and facilities as they become available. These sites must be owned and promoted by users and organisations themselves if they are to be successful, so Government will make available all the information it can, and run a competition (building on the Cabinet Office’s “show us a better way”) to get the best people to design and build solutions.

20. **Broadcasting Forum.** We want to extend the development, use and sharing of exciting, inspirational content to open the doors to learning. But we know the rules on intellectual property are complex. We will set up a broadcasting forum to find solutions to these problems, with a view to encouraging



broadcasters to make materials free to access and open to share.

#### 4: Making it happen in Government and on the ground

21. The publication of this White Paper is the start of a journey. Bringing our vision for informal learning to life will take concerted and sustained effort from all partners at national and local level. To guide implementation and advise on future development, we will establish a National Advisory Group with high-level representation from our partners and Government departments. The group will have a remit to use their expertise and networks to champion informal learning and identify opportunities for new connections. The Cabinet Champion for Informal Learning, John Denham, will chair the group.
  22. A national vision for informal learning needs to be translated into action that genuinely affects people's lives. We need innovative local partnerships to facilitate the provision of diverse learning opportunities. To make this happen more effectively we will expect local authorities to show clear leadership and give them the remit to do so. This will allow them to secure a broad range of opportunities for people in local areas, working with local partners to reach out to more people.
  23. We expect local authorities to invest public funds smartly to complement private and third sector activity effectively, and make the most of more flexible funding. We will look to local authorities to co-ordinate related streams of funding, particularly those for areas of activity such as libraries, galleries and neighbourhood renewal. We will also empower people and communities to use their voice to influence how this money is spent. The Government will consider a new National Indicator for informal learning within the Local Government performance framework and encourage direct community representation on local informal adult learning partnerships.
- #### Our continuing commitment to invest in adult learning across Government
24. We are spending unprecedented amounts on adult learning – £3.3bn next year, helping over 3 million learners. Overall public investment in the FE system has increased by a record 53% in real terms between 1997/1998 and 2007/2008. The Government has taken the decision to re-prioritise LSC funding on longer, more valuable accredited courses that provide real help for people to get on in work and to earn higher wages, making a real difference to individuals, to their families and their communities.
  25. The priority given to vocational learning has led to an expected reduction in shorter courses funded by the LSC. Many were in areas like health and safety at work or food hygiene which are properly the responsibility of employers. Some have been in areas which, while popular, would not attract the highest priority, or where learners are willing to pay full fees. Recreational language classes used to be one of the short courses most heavily-subsidised by the LSC and many still take place, but in a different form. The Floodlight prospectus lists more than 1,100 courses in Spanish in London alone.
  26. ICT courses are clearly important to prevent digital exclusion. Free courses are widely available through UK Online and over 2 million people regularly use the centres, supported by around £10m funding each year from Government. But at present we are unclear about the extent to which we



are meeting the need for basic ICT skills. We have asked Baroness Estelle Morris to review provision in this important area.

27. Support from Government for informal adult learning is substantial and in many areas has increased significantly over the past ten years. DIUS has ring-fenced £210m for informal adult learning. In addition, we have continued to protect funding for specialist adult colleges and institutions such as the Workers' Education Association, Ruskin, Northern and Morley colleges and the Mary Ward Centre and City Lit to a total of around £40m in 2008/09. Funding for Unionlearn and Union Learning Representatives has increased to £21.5 million per year (a tenfold increase from 1998).
28. LSC-funded learning is just one part of the vast array of informal learning opportunities available through the private, public, voluntary and self-organised sectors and should be seen in that context. Investment from other Government departments helps secure an infrastructure which enables learning to thrive. Museums and galleries receive around £360m per year of DCMS funding. Free access has led to a public renaissance, with visits doubling since its introduction in 2001. Along with the National Lottery, DCMS will have contributed over £1 billion to the development of over 4,000 public sports facilities. Local authorities invest over £1 billion per annum in library services.
29. And learning opportunities without direct Government support continue to flourish. For example, membership organisations such as the National Trust and the RSPB offer professionally organised courses and events with experts in their chosen fields. The University of the Third Age (U3A) movement is expanding rapidly with over 700 local U3A branches established and total membership already rising to over 209,000.
30. In drafting this strategy we have been driven by what learners themselves are choosing to do. In future we need to be smarter in the use of public funds to support informal learning by joining up the different strands of Government activity, and complementing private and third sector activity more effectively. DIUS will provide an additional £30m<sup>1</sup> of funding in 2009–10 to support the innovation we want to see. We want to use this funding to support new ways of working and new approaches, strengthening the 'wiring' that needs to be in place for a learning revolution. We will invest it in promoting the benefits of learning, facilitating new partnerships and in funding innovative approaches to reach new and different learners. This will create a new momentum which will allow the informal adult learning revolution to blossom.