

Research & Development

informing policy and practice in adult learning



The Wider Benefits of Adult Learning

Mark Connolly, Gareth Rees & Cerys Furlong

08/01
March 2008


Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

niace
dysgu cymru
promoting adult learning
hyrwyddo addysg oedolion

Contents

List of Tables:

Table 1: Returns to Education in terms of Income	5
Table 2: Returns to Specific Qualifications	6
Table 3: Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications by Gender	7

1. Introduction **3**

2. A Review of the Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning **5**

Economic Benefits of Adult Learning	5
Non-Economic Benefits of Adult Learning	8
Learners' Views and Public Value	11

3. Learners' Views in Wales: an exploratory study **13**

Methodological Approach	14
Theme 1: Learner Identity	14
Theme 2: Negative Inter-generational Attitudes	16
Theme 3: Non Instrumental Benefits and Credentials	16
Theme 4: Social Aspects of Learning and Progression	18
Theme 5: Benefits to Family and the Wider Community	18
Theme 6: Confidence and Personal Empowerment	20
Theme 7: Improved Mental and Physical Health	21

4. Conclusions and Recommendations **23**

This research was undertaken on behalf of NIACE Dysgu Cymru, by Mark Connolly and Gareth Rees of the Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

The Wider Benefits of Adult Learning

NIACE Dysgu Cymru
3rd Floor
33-35 Cathedral Road
Cardiff
CF11 9HB
Tel: 029 2037 0900

Company registration number: 2603322
Charity registration numbers: 1002775

For further details or copies, contact Cerys Furlong at the above address or email cerys.furlong@niacedc.org.uk

NIACE Dysgu Cymru has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE Dysgu Cymru works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.
www.niacedc.org.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1** The benefits to be derived from participation in adult learning are of increasing importance to policy-makers. The contributions which work-related adult learning can make to sustaining competitiveness and economic growth have become a focal point of government strategies, not only in the UK, but more widely across more developed economies. In particular, shifting towards a knowledge-based economy, with high rates of innovation in technology and work organisation, is acknowledged to require both higher levels of skills and, equally importantly, the capacity to adapt to such changes through learning throughout individuals' careers. Not surprisingly, therefore, many governments have directed extra resources at work-related adult learning, reflected in, for example, programmes aimed at developing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as a wider range of vocational knowledge and competences. This approach is clearly illustrated in the Leitch Report (HM Treasury, 2006) and the Westminster Government's responses to it.
- 1.2** This emphasis on the instrumental benefits of participation in adult learning begs the question as to what other benefits derive from participation in this kind of learning. Adult educators have frequently argued on the basis of their experience that forms of adult learning which are not directly work-related can have positive effects on people's working lives, through, for example, building confidence, developing learning skills and improving knowledge of the learning opportunities that are available. Here, the idea that participating in any form of adult learning can lead to progression to more advanced programmes (including ones that are directly work-related) has been important. However, there is a need for more systematic evidence in relation to these propositions.
- 1.3** More recently, there has been a growing recognition that participation in adult learning can also have positive effects on a range of wider social outcomes. Hence, researchers have argued that there are close relationships between educational participation and health outcomes, wider social and political attitudes and community-based benefits. Such research has met a need, identified by researchers who have increasingly recognised the need to provide evidence of these wider benefits of learning, particularly in the context of funding pressures and the shifting policy emphasis towards more narrowly defined vocational education and training. In addition, this research has also been of interest to policy-makers who have been concerned to develop approaches which cross conventional policy divisions, especially in the light of the Welsh Assembly's reform programme on public services, Making the Connections. More specifically, the role of adult learning in community regeneration has been of particular concern, as, for example, in the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme. Although evidence exists for these wider benefits of learning, and given the pressures faced by providers of post-16 education and training, there is a need to build on the existing research base upon which not only education but wider social policy decisions can be made.
- 1.4** This study attempts to contribute constructively to these debates, with a particular focus on the experiences of learners in Wales. The policy and social landscape in Wales is different to that in England, and other parts of the UK. Therefore it is right to explore the experiences of adult learners and the impact of adult learning in Wales, in greater depth. The study's objectives were:
- To identify the benefits of learning to individuals, communities and the economy/society;
 - To develop a methodology which would inform more extensive and in-depth research in the future;

- To assist the Welsh Assembly Government in its strategic aim of 'making the connection' across policy areas, such as education, health, economic development, culture and social justice, by investigating the impact of learning across different Government agendas;
- To identify future risks in terms of social policy.

As these objectives make clear, the intention was not to make a definitive contribution. Rather, the study was seen as a preliminary one, providing a basis both for further, more extensive research work which could contribute more systematically to the development of the Welsh Assembly Government's policies.

- 1.5** This initial, exploratory research took place in the form of face-to-face interviews with 32 learners from across Wales. Each of the learners were asked about their own personal learning experiences and the wider benefits they may have experienced through undertaking this learning. The interviews produced interesting and emotive 'stories' of learning, which capture the learner's 'voice' explaining their views, attitudes and feelings towards their learning experiences. Each of the stories has enabled the researchers to draw out and analyse themes, which are presented, with examples, later in this report.
- 1.6** Section 2 provides a brief review of the existing evidence on the benefits which flow from participation in adult learning. Particular attention is paid here to those benefits which are not directly work-related. Section 3 presents the results of the face-to-face interviews with adult learners. The interviews provide significant insights into the ways in which learners themselves understand the benefits which arise from their participation in adult learning. This is an essential element in constructing an account of the total public value which derives from the provision of adult learning opportunities. The final Section summarises the principal findings of the study and sets out their implications for future research and policy development.

2. A Review of the Research on the Wider Benefits of Adult Learning

2.1 Economic Benefits of Adult Learning

There is a widespread acknowledgement that education contributes positively to economic activity. At the macro-economic level, innumerable econometric studies demonstrate the strong positive effect of education on long-term economic growth (Barro, 1997). There are also many micro-economic studies which show the returns which accrue to individuals from their investments in human capital formation. Here, the crucial relationships are characteristically between extra years spent in education and/or higher levels of qualifications, on the one hand, and increased earnings, on the other. For adult learning in particular, it is the impact of qualifications that is most important in this literature. However, it should be emphasised that qualifications reflect only part of the benefits that accrue from adult learning (and this point will be returned to later).

2.2 Table 1 exemplifies these positive relationships between education and increased earnings for a number of more developed economies. The size of the earnings premium attached to extra education varies from one country to another (and is especially marked in the United States and the United Kingdom, for example). However, it is the consistency of the positive effect which is most striking.

Table 1: Returns to Education in terms of Income

Relative earnings of the population earning income from employment, aged 25-64
Upper secondary = 100

Level of education		Below upper secondary	Post secondary	Tertiary
Canada	2004	78	102	138
Denmark	2004	82	103	126
France	2005	86	N/A	144
Germany	2005	88	111	156
Italy	2004	79	N/A	160
Netherlands	2002	84	N/A	148
Sweden	2004	87	120	127
Switzerland	2005	76	109	156
UK	2005	69	N/A	161
USA	2005	67	110	175

Source: OECD (2007) Education at a glance 2007. Paris: OECD.

- 2.3** More sophisticated econometric analyses demonstrate that this relationship between extra education and increased earnings persists even when account is taken of the costs and duration of the extra education and of individuals' innate ability and wider social characteristics. Education would appear to have an independent effect on earnings. Moreover, to the extent that these increased earnings reflect the value of enhanced productivity to employers, there are distinct social returns to investment in human capital formation too (although at lower levels than those to individuals).
- 2.4** Specifically in a UK context, work by the Centre for the Economics of Education at the London School of Economics/ Institute of Education over the past few years reveals the following results (for example, Dearden et al., 2000). An additional year in full-time education after 16 years of age increases earnings for men by around 11% and for women by 18%. Table 2 gives additive wage premiums for specific qualifications. To calculate the return to the usual route to a degree, one must sum returns to O levels/GCSEs, A levels and a degree. This suggests that males with a degree earn up to 67% more than unqualified workers. It remains to be seen, however, how this is affected by the rapid and substantial growth in the numbers of graduates over recent years.

Table 2: Returns to Specific Qualifications, %

Qualification	Men	Women
O levels/ GCSEs	12 - 21	10 - 19
A levels	15 - 18	18 - 23
Degree	10 - 28	21 - 26
Level 1-2 NVQ/BTEC First	Nil	Nil
Level 3-5 NVQ	6 - 9	1 - 5
C&G Craft	4 - 7	Nil
C&G Advanced	7 - 10	Nil
ONC/OND/BTEC National	7 - 12	8
HNC/HND	6 - 22	3 - 12

- 2.5** As can be seen, returns to academic qualifications are significantly higher than those to vocational qualifications. However, this gap is narrowed substantially when account is taken of the number of years taken to acquire a qualification. Of particular interest are NVQs, which compare badly not only with academic qualifications, but also the established vocational ones, especially at lower levels. Some studies have found that NVQ Levels 1 and 2 actually produce negative returns (although NVQ Level 2 is positively associated with entry to employment). However, this varies by sector. Moreover, where NVQ Level 2 is obtained via an employer's own training programme, returns are highest; and they are lowest when obtained through a government training scheme. Similarly, apprenticeships leading to NVQ Level 3 or above – combining delivery by employers and by learning providers – yield significantly higher returns (although this applies much more clearly to men than to women).

- 2.6** Research relating specifically to Wales is much sparser. However, recent studies – using a very similar methodology – have been carried out at Swansea University, which suggest that returns in Wales are broadly consistent with those elsewhere in Great Britain (Table 3) (Sloane et al., 2003).
- 2.7** It is more difficult to identify the economic impacts of adult education specifically. It has been shown that where older workers acquire higher levels of qualification – through tertiary education, for example – returns are lower than those to younger workers, simply because the opportunity costs of their participation in education tend to be higher and their increased earnings less certain. However, the evidence specifically on the impacts of directly work-related adult education is more limited.

Table 3: Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications by Gender, 2003

	Wales		GB	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Higher degree	85	85	84	86
First degree	66	66	71	72
Degree equivalent	56	56	54	53
NVQ 5	48	48	55	53
NVQ 4	40	40	38	45
NVQ 3	30	30	29	23
A level	30	30	27	28
NVQ 2	14	14	12	10
O level/GCSE	23	23	23	20
Other	11	11	6	7
NVQ 1	12	12	4	-6

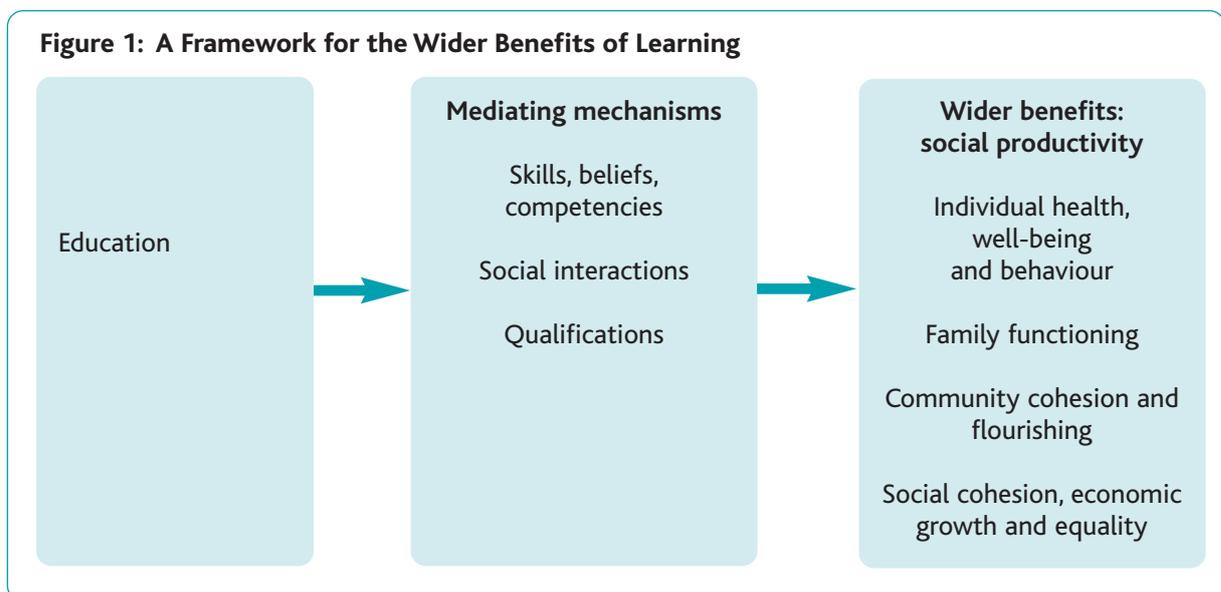
- 2.8** Nevertheless, the studies which are available indicate that work-related adult education, especially where it is provided by employers, does have a positive impact on the earnings of individuals (Blundell et al., 1996; Feinstein *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, where earnings and productivity are considered separately, the evidence suggests that increased participation in training has direct, positive impacts on productivity, which are greater than the associated wage increases, thereby producing positive effects on profits. Accordingly, both individual workers and their employers benefit from greater participation in work-related adult education (Blöndal et al., 2002; Dearden *et al.*, 2006). It is also clear that the acquisition of qualifications during adulthood improves chances of entering the labour market, as for women returners, for example (Jenkins, 2006).
- 2.9** The Centre for the Economics of Education has also done work specifically on the returns to basic literacy and numeracy. Hence, workers with Level 1 numeracy skills earn around 6-7% more than their less skilled peers (after making allowances for previous education and family background). For a given level of numeracy and literacy at 16, improving an adult's numeracy skills to Level 1 will raise their earnings by 6%. However, the returns to literacy are more difficult to delineate, varying between 1% and 11% returns to Level 1 literacy (after making allowances for previous education and family background), depending on the data source used.

2.10 Non-Economic Benefits of Adult Learning

Over recent years, an increasing body of research has been developed which explores empirically the wider social returns which accrue to participation in education, using robust quantitative methodologies (similar to those used to estimate economic returns). In the US, a number of studies have explored the relationships between education and the incidence of social problems. Hence, for example, it is estimated that a 10 percentage point increase in the rate of high school graduation would cut the murder (arrest) rate by between 14% and 27%. A 1 percentage point increase in the graduation rate would lead to a reduction in crime of between 34,000 and 68,000 offences, with a social benefit of \$0.9 to \$1.9 billion per annum (Lochner and Moretti, 2001).

2.11 Unfortunately, relatively little research of this kind has been conducted in the UK context, still less in Wales specifically. However, researchers at the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning have developed important theoretical approaches, as well as some evidence on the statistical relationships between education and a range of wider social phenomena (Schuller et al., 2004).

2.12 Figure 1 summarises a framework for conceptualising the wider benefits of learning (Feinstein and Sabates, 2007). Here, a distinction is drawn between the immediate outcomes generated by participation in learning and the wider ones that are summarised in the idea of 'social productivity'. The former include three distinct groups: skills, competences and beliefs; social networks; and qualifications. This emphasises that, whilst qualifications are frequently used as the sole indicator of effective learning (largely because of ease of measurement), they present in reality only one part of the picture. Whilst they may signal that an individual has acquired particular bodies of knowledge, understanding and skills, they do not necessarily do so (as they are subject to significant measurement error). Even if qualifications are widely accepted as an important currency in the labour market by employers and others, they do not necessarily provide a valid measure of the economic and social productivity of learning. Certainly, it is important to keep distinct the actual acquisition of skills from the attainment of qualifications.



2.13 It is also clear that the acquisition of skills is complex. Conventional economic analyses – as we have seen earlier – emphasise the value placed on skills by employers, reflecting their contribution to marginal productivity through wages paid. Such skills are regarded as including cognitive ability, technical knowledge and competences, as well as a range of soft skills, such as effective communication, group working and so forth. Future Skills Wales (2005) reports that the skills most commonly identified as lacking amongst employees are soft skills such as problem solving, customer handling, communication and team working. In fact, NIACE's survey on learning in work shows an overwhelming preference for less formal ways of learning to improve performance; it reveals that activities more closely associated with the work-place, such as doing the job, being shown techniques by colleagues, engaging in self-reflection and active observation, can be of more help to employees in raising their performance than attending formal training courses. One in four employees reported that training courses were of little or no value in improving work performance; and around one in three thought that studying for qualifications has not helped them at work (Felstead et al., 2004).

- 2.14** The framework also emphasises that the processes of learning are strongly affected by the attitudes and beliefs of individuals about themselves and their relationships to learning opportunities. For example, Schoon and Bynner (2003) emphasise the importance of 'resilience', the capacity to respond positively in the face of adversity, in enabling people to overcome obstacles to effective learning. Similarly, some researchers have argued that individuals' 'self-concept', their perception of their own abilities and worth, has a crucial effect on their learning (Marsh, 1990). Others have emphasised the social dimensions of 'learner identity' and, in particular, the extent to which normative expectations play a part in shaping this (Rees et al., 2006). Perhaps the key point here is that 'resilience', 'self-concept' and 'learner identity' are all shaped by previous experience, not least within education itself. Therefore, it is often the task of adult learning to overcome the effects of negative experiences of learning in earlier life, especially where the aim is to compensate individuals for previous educational disadvantage. This is not readily captured in the acquisition of qualifications, although it does map on to adult educators' experiential testimony to the positive effects of adult learning on people's self-confidence and learning behaviours.
- 2.15** The third element of immediate impacts identified within the framework relates explicitly to the social context. Here, it is argued that people's experience of participation in education is more often than not collective. Educational settings can thus provide important support to individual learners; but equally, can be sources of conflict and distress. Moreover, participation in learning programmes can have the effect of changing the social networks of which people are a part. In this way, existing social networks may be strengthened and interaction within them intensified, thereby giving rise to increased bonding social capital. Alternatively, new social networks may be opened up, leading to new forms of interaction with individuals from different social backgrounds, thereby giving rise to increased bridging social capital (Field, 2005). Again, whilst such impacts are unlikely to be expressed in the acquisition of qualifications, they remain highly significant, especially, for example, in the context of community regeneration projects.
- 2.16** These immediate impacts are not simply important in their own right, but also constitute mediating mechanisms between education and 'social productivity'. Social productivity here refers to the capacity of education to produce outcomes of social value. Such outcomes can be conceived in terms of the achievement of positive life chances, potential and the sustaining of positive developmental trajectories. Alternatively, they can be viewed as the avoidance of negative outcomes, such as crime and other anti-social behaviour, health problems, social division and disengagement, and so on. The key argument, however, is that participation in learning is capable of generating significant effects of these kinds; although, of course, it is not guaranteed to do so. Hence, investment in education is not only economically productive, but also socially productive. It produces social outcomes which are of value to society, even where such outcomes are not transacted economically and are correspondingly difficult to measure in economic terms.
- 2.17** There is also a growing body of empirical evidence that relates to these complex relationships between participation in learning and social productivity. It should be emphasised that the statistical analyses should be interpreted sensibly. In strict terms, even statistically significant relationships may not imply causal relationships; for example, it may be that other factors, not included in the analyses, may have brought about the changes in both education and wider social outcomes. However, at a minimum, this body of work provides robust evidence which is consistent with the conclusion that there are substantial social returns of this kind to education and training. What follows should be regarded as illustrative, rather than an exhaustive summary of the research.
- 2.18** Important relationships have been established between learning and crime (Feinstein, 2002a). For example, taking 1% of the working age population from no qualifications to the achievement of Level 2 would reduce the costs of property crime in England and Wales by between £10 million and £320 million per year. If those same people were taken to Level 3, the saving would be between £80 million and £500 million. Extending these results to other forms of crime, if the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications was reduced by 1 percentage point and those people achieved Level 3 qualifications, the saving in reduced crime would be £665 million per year in England and Wales. This would translate into a saving of some £37 million per year in Wales alone (calculated simply on the basis of the size of the Welsh population).

2.19 There are also significant relationships between education and health (Feinstein, 2002b). For example, it is estimated that raising qualifications from no qualifications to Level 1 would reduce the probability of depression for women by between 6 and 10 percentage points. The effects are more pronounced amongst women, but a reduction of 6 percentage points is estimated for younger men. Raising qualifications from no qualifications to Level 1 for 10 per cent of women is calculated to save between £6 million and £34 million per year in treatment costs for depression. Similarly, raising qualifications for men from no qualifications to Level 1 is estimated to reduce the probability of obesity by between 5 and 7 percentage points. More recently, Chevalier and Feinstein (2006) have estimated that raising women's qualifications from none to Level 2 would reduce their risk of depression at age 42 from 26 per cent to 22 per cent, that is a reduction of 15 per cent. This would lead to a reduction in costs of some £200 million per year across the UK and some £10 million per year in Wales (again calculated simply on the basis of population size).

2.20 The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning also provides evidence on the social impacts of participation specifically in adult learning (of all kinds) (Feinstein and Hammond, 2004). Hence, it is shown that adults (aged between 33 and 42) who have taken one or two courses are significantly more likely to have:

- given up smoking (one in eight additional people gave up smoking);
- increased their level of exercise (almost one in five people); and
- increased their reported life satisfaction (the general decline in life satisfaction that takes place in mid adulthood was reduced by 14 per cent).

There are also some grounds for concluding that participation in adult learning is related to:

- reduced alcohol consumption;
- reduced incidence of depression; and
- an enhanced likelihood of recovering from depression.

All forms of learning (academic accredited, vocational accredited, work-related and learning for leisure) have effects on improved health practices. Intriguingly, however, the effects of taking leisure courses are especially pronounced.

2.21 The same researchers have also explored the relationships between engagement in adult education and a wide range of social/political attitudes and beliefs (Feinstein and Hammond, 2004). Accordingly, there is robust evidence that adult learning is related to:

- increased 'race' tolerance (by a third);
- a decrease in authoritarian attitudes;
- reduced political cynicism; and
- heightened political interest.

These can all be regarded as indicative of a strengthening of civic engagement. And this is also reflected in the relationships between adult learning and reported political behaviour, with participation in adult learning associated with:

- increased take-up in membership of organisations (one in three more people joined at least one more organisation); and
- increased tendency to vote (comparing the 1997 and the 1987 General Election).

It is also striking that participation in all forms of adult education contribute to positive changes in social and political attitudes. However, the impacts of accredited academic courses and of leisure courses are especially marked. Moreover, whilst vocational courses leading to qualifications (the form of adult education most strongly supported by government currently) do not have impacts on civic participation, leisure courses have significant impacts here, especially amongst those with qualifications below Level 2.

2.22 Learners' Views and Public Value

One of the strengths of the research synthesised in the preceding sections is that it is based upon robust quantitative analysis, using large-scale, representative datasets. It is thus reasonable to suggest that the results are generalisable to the population as a whole. Moreover, the evidential basis for the conclusions drawn about the nature of the relationships between adult learning and social productivity is clearly understood.

2.23 It is important to emphasise, however, that there are also studies of the impacts of adult learning that emphasise the views of the learners themselves and the ways in which they experience such learning (Osborne et al., 2004). More specifically, some researchers have drawn upon learners' own life courses as a resource in encouraging them to reflect upon the impacts which participation in adult learning has had on their lives (Ahleit, 2005; Preston, 2004). Clearly, the evidence derived in this way is very different from that discussed in previous sections, reflecting the radically distinct methodologies employed. However, the conclusions drawn from these qualitative studies are highly congruent with those derived from quantitative analyses.

2.24 In particular, such qualitative studies stress the extent to which people's orientations towards engagement with learning in adulthood are conditioned by the 'learner identities' that they develop from childhood. More specifically, such identities are seen to reflect not only key aspects of their family upbringing, but also their wider engagements in community activities and, most crucially, in education itself (for example, Gorard and Rees, 2002). What is crucial here, however, is the extent to which these 'learner identities' can be transformed in ways which permit access to adult education by people whose 'learner identities' have previously been negative. There are also important questions as to how far experiencing adult learning is itself transformative in terms of the development of new 'learner identities' as a pre-condition of further educational and wider social development. As with the quantitative studies, the qualitative evidence supports the view that such transformations do certainly take place, although it remains unclear why this occurs for some individuals, but not for others (for example, Gallacher et al., 2002).

2.25 It is also important to note that studies which engage with the learners' own views and experiences have recently taken on an added significance in the context of the development of the concept of 'public value' (Benington and Moore, 2007). Here, the essential idea for present purposes is that a key dimension in judging the worth of policies is the extent to which they are valued by service users and citizens in the wider community. Hence, for example, the 'public value' attached to the provision of opportunities for adult learning should include some measure of the judgements made of this value by the learners themselves and their communities. Moreover, it is likely that such judgements are based on a holistic evaluation of the impacts of participating in adult learning, taking account of the whole range of educational and wider social effects (rather than narrower, instrumental approaches). Hence, the concept of 'total public value' may well be a useful one to adopt in seeking to make judgements about the effectiveness of investment in the provision of adult learning opportunities.

3. Learners' Views in Wales:

an exploratory study

3.1 Background: the need for Welsh research

Very little of the research reviewed in the previous Section was based in Wales (although see, for example, Gorard and Rees, 2002). There is no reason to believe that the general relationships that have been identified between participation in adult education and economic returns and social productivity do not apply in Wales; or that the experiences of learners in Wales are distinctively different from those in the rest of the UK. Indeed, many of the quantitative studies reviewed are based upon data which apply across Britain as a whole.

3.2 Nevertheless, there remain questions as to the extent of Welsh specificities. Hence, for example, the available evidence suggests that the magnitude of economic returns to learning in Wales are somewhat lower than for Britain as a whole, probably reflecting the current performance of the Welsh economy and its history over recent decades. Whilst almost no direct evidence is available, it may be too that the relationships between adult learning and social productivity are affected by the social conditions which are characteristic of different areas of Wales: for example, the rather high proportion of individuals with basic skills problems; the generally lower levels of qualifications in the workforce than in other parts of Britain; the well-established concentrations of ill-health and disability in parts of the South Wales Valleys; and so on (for example, the Webb Report, 2007). It may also be the case that less tangible features of Welsh society are reflected in the impacts of adult learning. For example, characteristic attitudes to women's role in the Welsh economy and society or shared ideas about the role of Welsh education in relation to social mobility and, in particular, vocational preparation may have significant effects.

3.3 It is also important to emphasise the undoubted distinctiveness of the Welsh policy context. Since their inception, the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government have pursued policies which aim to address the needs of the Welsh economy and society. This has resulted in the development of policies which are distinctive to Wales, especially in education and other areas of social policy, such as health-care provision (for example, Rees, 2004). In the present context, therefore, questions arise as to the extent to which this distinctive policy context is reflected in the relationships between adult learning and social productivity in Wales.

3.4 Of especial interest here are the linkages across traditional policy boundaries. The Welsh Assembly Government, during the second Assembly term, set out a reform programme for the delivery of public services in Wales – 'Making the Connections' – which, inter alia, emphasises the need for greater co-ordination between providers to deliver sustainable, high-quality and responsive public services. It also highlights the need to ensure that public services are responsive to the needs of users and their communities more widely; and that citizens are directly involved in the development of strategy. Similarly, the Beecham Report (2006) on local service delivery put much more effective co-ordination between organisations, sectors and services at the heart of its 'vision of small country governance'. In this context, therefore, the nature of the relationships between participation in adult learning and wider social productivity take on a greater significance. In particular, crucial questions are posed as to how far public investment in learning can achieve returns in terms not only of economic development, but also across a range of other policy areas, such as health and crime prevention. Certainly, these kinds of question are key in considering strategies to tackle social disadvantage through community regeneration strategies such as Communities First (see, for example, Communities First, 2006).

3.5 For all these reasons, therefore, it is clear that there is a need for further exploration of the wider impacts of participation in adult learning in the specific economic, social and policy contexts of Wales. To this end, it was decided to carry out a small-scale, exploratory study.

3.6 Methodological Approach

The principal aim of this exploratory study was to begin to assess the need for further, larger-scale research, which could provide an evidential basis for more effective policy for the provision of opportunities for adult learning. Given the restrictions of time and other resources, it was decided that the most effective approach would be through qualitative interviews with learners.

3.7 Interviews were conducted with 32 learners, drawn from locations across Wales. It should be emphasised that no claims are made as to the representativeness of this group of interviewees. Whilst they were drawn from different types of learning settings, it was not possible to do this systematically. Similarly, although the interviewees are drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds (in terms of factors such as their age, gender, family background, ethnicity and previous educational experience), again they were not selected to be representative of the social characteristics of adult learners in Wales generally. Moreover, it was not possible to access individuals who are not learners. Accordingly, it is best to regard each individual interviewee as a case-study of an adult learner; and this is how they are presented in what follows. The views which they expressed in interview provide interesting and – potentially, at least – important insights into the impacts of adult learning on social productivity.

3.8 The semi-structured interview, allowing for the interviewee to explore his/her own learning experiences, was deemed the most appropriate method of data collection for this type of research. Interviewing in this way enables the interviewee to explore his/her personal experiences of learning; accordingly, the interviews were based on an aide-memoire of key topics, rather than a formal interview schedule. The interviews were designed to facilitate the interviewee in reflecting upon both his/her experiences of adult learning and, crucially, the wider benefits that s/he has experienced from participating in learning. The objective was to capture the interviewees' own views, attitudes and even feelings, rather than to impose an externally constructed framework on the interview (Osborne et al., 2004). More specifically, following, for example, Ahleit (2005) and Preston (2004), the interviews used the interviewees' own life course as a resource in encouraging them to reflect upon the impacts which participation in adult learning has had on their lives.

3.9 All interviewees were given a clear explanation of the aims of the research project and their role in it. They were informed that although the interview was recorded, all interviewee responses would be anonymised.

3.10 All the interviews have been subjected to conventional thematic analysis. More specifically, initially, the interviews were analysed in terms of the meanings which the interviewees themselves intended to convey, removing any areas of ambiguity or lack of clarity. Secondly, the interviewees' responses were analysed in terms of the themes which were signalled in the existing literature (as outlined in Section 2); and careful note was made of any new themes which emerged. In the remainder of this Section, these themes are discussed and illustrated by reference to the interviewees' own words.

Findings and Themes

3.11 Theme One: Learner Identity

As Section 2.14 describes, a person's 'self-image' or 'self-concept' is often predicated upon a perception of his/her ability and worth, which is forged through early formative experiences of education. All but two of the participants within this study identified early learning experiences that were for the most part, if not entirely, negative. Other research has suggested that due to its industrial heritage and post-industrial economy negative learner identities and negative attitudes to formal learning in general may be common in Wales (Gorard and Rees, 2002). Such a negative learner identity and consequent negative self-image often results in a self-perpetuating cycle - both at a personal and importantly in a Welsh context, at an intergenerational level - leading often to both social and economic exclusion. Research discussed in Section 2.14 indicates that adult learning can play an important part in redressing previous educational disadvantage and subsequent negative learner identity and self-concept.

Case Study 5

Although many of the interviewees for this study expressed negative experiences within early schooling, *Case Study 5*, a long-term unemployed male from South Wales, best described how early educational disadvantage precipitated a self-perpetuating cycle of negative learner identity resulting in negative self-image and subsequently into long term unemployment.

'In primary school I remember being told to sit at the back of the class while everyone else got on with their work and I was just left there. When I went up to secondary school, then I just got into trouble. There was me and my crowd and I guess if there were bullies in the school, we were the bullies but it started in primary school. I was just left there and that's where it began, it just went on from there. I was left at the back just drawing because I was a bit of trouble and then it just escalates from there. Friends of mine they went to college and they had jobs going as carpenters, plumbers' mates or whatever and now they're fully qualified in what they went into. As for me, I know I won't get work at the end of this, but I'm learning something. I was forced here at the beginning but now I'm glad as I'm learning things that I feel that I should have learned at primary school.'

The experiences of learners such as *Case Study 5*, compelled to take Government retraining courses, were particularly illuminating in this regard.

Case Study 3

Case Study 3, a long-term unemployed male from South Wales, explains how his negative early learning experiences forged a negative 'learner identity'. This negative identity, especially in relation to his poor basic literacy, impacted upon how he viewed himself. Although compelled to study, his experience of adult learning was certainly transformative in establishing a new learner identity and, subsequently, general self image/self concept; or as he put it, having 'a better ego of yourself'.

'I'm doing Word power and Number power. I want to get a certificate to say that I'm able to write. I used to think I wasn't able to write or spell. I always believed I couldn't do it 'cause I was always told I couldn't do it in school. Now, I can and it's made a hell of a change to my life....'

Interviewer: In what ways?

In every way. I don't have to avoid things no more, like the newspaper or forms but I think it most of all it's changed me. I don't feel like I'm dumb or that like I did at school, I can talk to people better now, well I could always talk to my family like but now outsiders and things I can talk to them too ... they don't treat you like an idiot here, they pick up where your problems are and they work with you at your own pace.... I always thought that I could never do it but since I came here I now know that I can do it. It gives you a better ego of yourself.'

Although sceptical of the prospective employment opportunities emanating from his 'compelled' course of study, he believed that if he was able to achieve even low-level employment ('a warehouse man') he would now have the confidence and ability to progress within a career. 'At the end of the day, it's up to each individual whether they want to learn or whether they don't want to learn and it's as simple as that. But ... even with the English, the Maths and the PC work I still don't reckon I'll get a full-time job. It's like I achieved this 'cause I wanted to do it, now I'm more confident, if I have to go into a warehouse now and start at the bottom rung but now I know that I can work myself up as I have the confidence in myself.'

Case Study 8

These experiences of a negative learner identity and the transformative power of learning expressed within *Case Study 3* clearly resonate with the experiences of *Case Study 8*, who was also 'compelled' to undertake learning as part of a government retraining initiative. He relates clearly how his formative negative educational experiences impacted upon his self perception and how this, in his opinion, curtailed his career and life opportunities resulting in him indulging in low level crime to make a living; or as he terms it 'a bit of the fiddle'.

'Basically I'm here 'cause I have to be here. But I don't have to learn when I'm here, I could just mess. But I enjoy the learning now. After I left school, see, there was nothing for us, nothing, no training, no schooling, no apprenticeship nothing. We were seen as the bad ones, the no hoppers. What else was there for us except a bit of the fiddle?'

As with *Case Study 3*, learning not only provided skills necessary in the workforce – having the basic skills to fill in job applications ('forms and all that') - but perhaps more importantly confidence that was absent due to his negative learner identity.

'I think the bottom line for me would be the confidence in yourself and you feel you can go after the better jobs. Once I have the confidence and know the things I should have learned in school, then I'll be able to go after the better jobs that I wasn't able to before because of the forms and that.'

3.12 Theme Two: Negative Inter-generational Attitudes

Such negative learner identities and attitudes to learning are often the result of 'anti-learning' attitudes that are passed from one generation to the next. Adult learning, especially amongst those who have been exposed to these kinds of attitudes as a child, can play a key role in breaking this negative cycle.

Case Study 1

Case Study 1, an unemployed man in his fifties from Cardiff, relates how his father's attitude towards learning deprived him of acquiring even a basic education.

'My father had no time for school, he was a better reader than I am now, I think, but he hated the teachers. He just wanted me to start earning, anyway I could. My mother would probably have wanted me to stay on for a while, but I was getting into so much trouble they thought it would be better if I just quit.'

Case Study 4, a long-term unemployed man from South Wales, also explains how his father was hostile to school and forced him to quit at an early age.

'I wanted to do apprenticeship in carpentry. The old man wanted me to come out of school, to go straight into work, more fiddle than anything else. I think my family give up on me, they tried their best but I wasn't having none of it. They tried heavy handed tactics, but it didn't wash with me.'

3.13 Theme Three: Non-Instrumental Benefits and Credentials

The instrumental benefits of adult learning have been emphasised in policy to the extent that, as argued in Section 1.2, wider, non-instrumental positive personal and social outcomes have at times been overlooked. While the link between learning and economic development at both a national and an individual level is of vital importance, there has been a tendency to see participation in adult learning exclusively through the lens of human capital theory, where the learner is seen to be motivated merely by the desire to maximise her/his position within the marketplace. As Sections 2.22 and 2.23 argue, this is a narrow view of both the benefits and motivation for participation in learning.

Case Study 7

Case Study 7, a middle-aged, unemployed male from North Wales, reflects upon his motivations for partaking in learning which is at odds with an exclusively economic interpretation of adult learners' motivations. This student decided to pursue his studies in basic skills instead of a course in Home Electrical Engineering that, by his own admission, might have 'made me a few bob'. For this learner, addressing his negative learner identity and building a positive self-concept was more important than maximising his earning potential.

'I was going to do 30 weeks over there in electrical work, fixing washing machines and they said come over here. Because I was doing well here in my English and Maths, I decided to stay here 'cause I said yes, I am learning. My end with the electrics was I was going to use it, if something breaks in my house I would fix it or even make a few bob fixing things for others. This place is different, they wait till you understand something. That fact gives me more satisfaction with myself. I used to think I was as thick as two short planks, to be honest. I always thought I could never do it, but since I came here I now know I can do it. In the end you think more of yourself.'

In interviews conducted with older learners, the realisation of an economic pay-off for learning was irrelevant. Their motivations for and outcomes from learning were located within the wider conception of the benefits of learning outlined in Section 2.12 and discussed in more detail below. A corollary of a narrow, economically-driven conception of learning is in some cases an over-emphasis on accreditation. While all the learners interviewed enjoyed the feelings of achievement associated with completing a course, some particularly the elder interviewees, found taking a formal exam off-putting and, consequently, did not attach value to certificates issued for passing examinations.

Case Study 15

'I've always been involved in learning. I've always been one to set myself targets, but they've been targets that can be met and that's why I've always been involved in learning. I worked my way from plasterer to general foreman, but it was not for the money, it was more for my own personal satisfaction. I just wanted to prove to myself that I was able to do it and that was the same with this computer business now. I set out to prove that my brain was still working. When I started with the computer, I didn't know how to switch the thing on even. Why was I so thick about it? It was because I didn't know anything about it at all.'

Case Study 17

'So after we retired, a friend said "I'm thinking of starting a computer class, will you be interested?" So I said "Kev, yes I want to know how to get the information back out". So that started me off. It was computers for the illiterate, but I've worked my through, I've done courses in Photoshop, computer maintenance, hardware and software, building computers, so really I am a qualified repairer now. I've got a City and Guilds certificate for that. To tell you the truth, I don't want the certificates but some courses like the City and Guilds ones you had to sit the exams and because I was interested in building computers I thought, well, I don't want to sit the exams but it was a necessary part of it.... I've been pursuing the courses for knowledge, basically knowledge. You learn something new every day, that's the way I look at life. I'm always asking questions even though I don't know the answer and there's usually an argument over the answer, but I do it for fulfilment knowing at the end of the day that I can do it. As I said, when I first started work inputting data into the computer I didn't know where it was going, but now I know how to input it and to take it out and to do spreadsheets and you name it I can handle it, it's thoroughly enjoyable but it came so late in life.'

3.14 Theme Four: Social Aspects of Learning and Progression

As discussed in Section 2.15 and illustrated in Figure 1, the vast majority of learning takes place within a social context and that experience of learning is likely to be collective. This social aspect of learning was expressed as fundamentally important for a number of the interviewees for this study. For many of the interviewees, experiences of learning not only allowed for an extension of their social network, but also strengthened existing social networks.

Case Study 19

This was particularly evident within a group of mothers in a small valleys' community, who were studying a course that might enable them to become helpers within a primary school (though as in the interviews above they expressed little confidence that the jobs would actually materialise). Not only had their experiences of learning strengthened the social bonds within their small community, but also resulted in them enrolling for other courses.

'It's brought us all closer together. We all knew each other, went to school together, but we drifted apart. I guess this and the kids too has brought us all closer. We've booked for other courses now that we have done this one - things that we would never have thought of doing, first aid for one. Having done this, I know that I can do it now, see, but before whether it was because of school or that I didn't think that I would be able to do things like that. We have all met each other, so we're more confident. But I would come on a course on my own now, but it would be better if we all could do it together.'

Case Study 23

Case Study 23 spoke of the value of learning in creating new social networks that she had lost after her job ended due to a chronic illness.

'I really got back into learning when I lost my job. It was then that I started learning. My motivation was to meet people. When you go to work, you meet your colleagues, you get to know them and you set up a little community. But when you leave that, you lose your community so I wanted to re-establish that community, to meet like-minded people. So I came into learning. Things fascinate me and some of what I have learned has been of use to me, like the languages as I travel and I have been able to use the languages. I failed dismally at sign language, but I had the biggest laugh ever. So we had a laugh then.'

3.15 Theme Five: Benefits to Family and the Wider Community

The wider social benefits of learning can be appreciated not only at a community, but also at the family level. Several of the interviewees, especially married women, described how participation in learning had resulted in positive benefits within their family unit. However, one interviewee described emergent tensions within her marriage because of her increasing competence, confidence and assertiveness.

Case Study 11

Case Study 11 relates how her studies in computers have allowed her to help her children with their own school work and given her the confidence to run a support group for mothers whose children suffer from a disability similar to her own sons.

'I went to the college to learn computers. There was a time when I had to ask my children, but they ask me now when they are stuck on the computer. I was getting left behind, but now I am on power with the kids in school and that has given me more confidence with this group. Because I now run this support group because most of what we do is now on the computer.'

Case Study 26

Case Study 26 described herself as a 'serial learner' and relates how learning has given her an outlet and escape from her day-to-day family life.

'I started to do sewing at the local college, I didn't want to do something that took up all of my time, I just wanted to keep my brain active I guess. But I also did it 'cause when you have young children, all that you meet is young children and I'm one of those who enjoys meeting new people and having new experiences so I went on and did interior designs and soft furnishings for five years. But of course it was only one day a week, but that one day a week allowed me to be me, not the mam that I was the other six days, so that particular day I was out with new people from all over... I wouldn't say I had a lot of confidence then, mind, but perhaps at the end of it I had more confidence, you wouldn't think I was once a quiet one.'

Case Study 18

These experiences had clear parallels with those of *Case Study 18*, who describes how the skills she learned while studying benefited both her, her family and the community in which she lived.

'When I learned those skills I helped with my children and I helped in the school then and I did a lot of the arty crafty projects in the school and I helped with the costumes for the nativity play. So even though I didn't go to college at that time, I used the day I had set aside to help in the school then. So by learning those skills it gave me the confidence to go and help other people and to share those skills. Even the children, I would sit and sew with the children in the schools, so I passed on what I learned and even though it was basic at that time, I passed it on to the children.

My family benefited because of that day out that allowed me to recharge my batteries and my children always had the best costumes in the nativity play and I changed my curtains every year... I became a happier person because I was being more than the mum that I wanted to be. I really think that you need something to keep your mind active and to do something and think yes I can do that.'

Case Study 6

The benefits to family life were also recounted in the reflections of *Case Study 6*, an English ex-soldier now living in a small village in the South Wales valleys. In his interview, he explained that studying Welsh helped him bond with his daughter and feel more integrated within his adopted country.

'I started learning Welsh mostly because my daughter was learning Welsh in school and because I was living in Wales and my daughter could now speak a bit of Welsh. I didn't want to get left behind. I think then I just got the bug and kept going and now I speak pretty well. I go up and visit an old army friend of mine in North Wales now and it's great to be able to hold my own in the pubs and that and I think they are a bit surprised at this Cockney speaking Welsh, but I love the chance to get to use it.'

3.16 Theme Six: Confidence and Personal Empowerment

The outcome that the vast majority of learners identified when interviewed for this study was increased confidence, which, in turn, results in a wide variety of positive social benefits and social productivity, as described in Section 2.17. This was most pronounced amongst those identified as having a negative learner identity.

Case Study 28

Case Study 28, a divorced mother from a South Wales village, spoke of how her experiences of learning have given her renewed confidence, allowing her, as she puts it, to come 'out of her box'.

'Well, this has really changed me as the other girls will tell you. I've really come out of my box. It's given me so much confidence in everything I do now. The others sometimes say that they wish that I would go back into my box again, but I am confident now in what I believe and I'll stand up for things now when I wouldn't before. I don't want to go into my own private life in too much detail, but I think I didn't stand up for myself enough, especially at home when things went wrong. I just wish that I had the confidence then that I have now.'

Case Study 30

Case Study 30, a twenty-year-old, unemployed man from North Wales, explained how his experience of bullying in school resulted in his loss of confidence, which has been restored following his re-engagement with learning, firstly through a drop-in and finally a full time secretarial course.

'When we went to high school, everything went to hell in a handcart. To tell you the truth, I was bullied for how I look. There was a lot of mickey taking girls, lads, all sorts, so consequently I spent a lot of time off. But luckily for me, my time off involved learning playing the bass guitar. Because of that I was reluctant to go back to learning. I was really nervous because of those bad experiences. So I started with a couple of things like drop in courses and the like and then I moved on to more permanent courses and just when I was getting used to it and beginning to get a bit of confidence, one of the bullies from school joined the course and that really knocked me back again. But I've managed to get over that now. I have a child of twelve and he lives with his mum and because of that my confidence was absolutely on the floor, but as the course has gone on, my confidence has risen to what it was when I was a teenager. Because of this I started the rock night thing again and just in general being with people, getting on the phone with people again and I can express myself a lot better now, just because of the confidence thing. So taking this course has had a totally positive impact on my personal life.'

- 3.17** The social benefits which accrue from increased confidence through involvement in learning are multi-faceted.

Case Study 20

Case Study 20 relates how her studies have empowered her when dealing with her daughter's teachers and how she no longer feels intimidated during parent-teacher meetings at her daughter's school.

'They use posh words in parents' evening that we usen't to understand. But now we've had them on the board here, so we learned a glossary of new words that teachers could use in conversation and instead of freaking out about what she means,

we knew because of what we learned in here.'

'Sometimes teachers would use words to intimidate us. My daughter was doing a maths class and her teacher says "So I was doing this with Katy today" and I felt really stupid and I think he did it on purpose. But I don't think I would be intimidated now.'

3.18 Theme Seven: Improved Mental and Physical Health

The relationship between education and health has been documented in several studies and discussed in Section 2.19. These studies indicate that involvement in learning has a significant positive impact upon mental health and preventing or recovering from depression.

Case Study 21

In a candid account of her experiences of post-natal depression, *Case Study 21*, a 32-year-old mother from South Wales, tells of how her depression resulted in a loss of confidence and how enrolling in courses of learning helped her break the negative cycle precipitated by her illness.

'After I had Sean I had post-natal depression. I was stuck inside the four walls day in and day out. He was a difficult child, so for me then I had to get out. I was stuck in the house twenty four seven. When I first went into these things, I got really shy, I had no confidence whatsoever. But since I done these courses I do feel more confident. I think that if I didn't do these courses that I would be going slowly loopy.'

Case Study 31

Case Study 31 recounts a similar story of a negative spiral of depression and loss of confidence in the wake of his job loss, which he managed to break out of by enrolling in courses in his local Community College.

'I was working in sheet metal when I hurt my back and had to give up the job. I've been on disability ever since. I really loved my job, so it was a hard, hard blow for me. I guess I went into a bit of a rut after that, I was really down. I'd always been inquisitive and was first to go forward for things at work, but I lost that. I really believe if I hadn't taken the classes I did, I would still be in that place. I got back my inquisitiveness and started to make friends and slowly I came back to being myself. Doing these courses makes being on benefit bearable, it kind of gives me a focus, new friendships and keeps my mind alive again.'

Case Study 32

Case Study 32, a mid-thirties, single man from North Wales, studying a university access course, claims that his re-engagement with learning helped him realise how his use of drugs were leaving him demotivated and socially and personally unproductive.

'Before, I tried to study but at the time I used to smoke quite a bit of weed, so that wasn't helping things go in, so I never really could motivate myself. So I ended up going in and out of factory jobs and then I got a job with the Royal Mail which I enjoyed, but I really felt that I needed to stretch myself more. So I started with this access course and I don't think that I've looked back. It was only when I started this that I realised how much the smoke was stopping me from thinking and I guess I needed that at the time, with my father dying and all that. But now I know I need a clear head, I need to be able to think or I won't be able to learn and this has made me realise that and opened up all kinds of new doors for me.'

- 3.19** This study was born out of the need to address a perceived dearth of research into the relationship between adult learning and economic and social productivity, in the particular context of Wales. Within a policy context where the Welsh Assembly Government is attempting to formulate policy solutions specific to the needs of Wales, this gap in the research base into the relationship between learning and social and economic regeneration is something that needs to be addressed. The interviews conducted for this report were part of an attempt to address this perceived gap. The general themes which emerged from the interviews with 32 adult learners across Wales – learner identity; negative inter-generational attitudes; non-instrumental benefits and credentials; social aspects of learning and progression; benefits to family and wider community; confidence and personal empowerment; improved mental and physical health – while by no means exhaustive, can be seen as the first step towards a rearticulation of the wider benefit of learning within the context of social productivity and public value.
- 3.20** Although exploratory by nature, these findings help illustrate the wider, non- instrumental benefits derived by adults from their continued involvement in a variety of learning activities. They help to underline the need for a stronger evidential base on which policy-makers can construct new initiatives. In the following Section, a framework is set out through which such an evidential base can be constructed.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

- 4.1 There is very powerful evidence that demonstrates the relationship between participation in learning and economic returns, both for individuals and the economy more widely. There are also strong grounds for believing that adult learning of all kinds, but especially when linked specifically to work-place needs, produces positive returns of this kind. Accordingly, investment in the provision of opportunities for adult learning can be justified in these terms for employers, individual workers and, especially where market forces fail to produce the desired outcomes, for the state. Moreover, given that the Welsh economy lags behind other parts of Britain, there is a particular need to ensure that economic activity is developed in ways which ensure that the demand for skills is increased to match increases in supply; and the state has a critical role to play here (for example, Webb Report, 2007).
- 4.2 There is also an increasing body of evidence that shows that participation in adult learning is linked to a range of wider social benefits; it contributes to social, as well as economic productivity. Adult learning can exert positive influences on people's 'learner identities'. In particular, where individuals have come to see themselves as 'non-learners' as a result of their previous family and school-based experiences, adult learning can bring about significant transformations in such negative learner identities. These transformations, in turn, can have significant effects on people's progression to further learning, as well as in their employment careers. There is also evidence to suggest that more positive learner identities can have beneficial impacts on learning within families and in the wider community.
- 4.3 There are also strong relationships between adult learning and social outcomes such as health, health-related behaviour and crime. Here, quite precise calculations can be made that show the magnitude of these kinds of benefits in terms of savings to the public purse. In addition, there is increasing evidence that demonstrates relationships between participation in adult learning and the development of more positive social and political attitudes, as well as greater civic participation. Adult learning can play a significant role in sustaining a democratic political culture.

This initial, exploratory piece of research demonstrates the power of the learner voice in describing her or his own story of their learning experience. The themes and the case study examples above show the remarkable contribution that learning can have on an individual's life, their family and their wider social networks. This research has demonstrated a clear need for further work in this area, particularly in Wales.

4.4 Future Research and recommendations

The bulk of the evidence on which these conclusions are based has not been derived from studies located in Wales. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the conclusions remain highly pertinent to the development of policy on adult learning in Wales. There is no reason to believe that the relationships which have been identified do not apply in Wales. A number of studies are based on samples which are representative of Britain as a whole. But even where this is not the case, the findings remain applicable within the Welsh context, because the relationships which are identified are general in character.

- 4.5 This suggests, in turn, that constructing a more effective evidence base for the development of policy in Wales will involve the systematic assessment of the research conducted not only within Wales, but more widely too. In fact, in the case of the existing quantitative studies, they depend for the most part on surveys which are representative at the British level, but are not so for Wales alone (because of the size

of the specifically Welsh samples). It is to be hoped that new sources of data that are representative at the Wales level will become available in future years (reflecting the development of the Welsh Assembly Government's national data strategy), thereby providing the basis for new quantitative research on the wider social benefits of adult learning within Wales. However, in the meanwhile, it is essential that the results of new research, whether conducted in Wales or elsewhere, are evaluated and fed into the processes of policy development for the provision of opportunities for adult learning.

- 4.6** *Recommendation One: The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that the results of all research on the relationships between adult learning and economic and social productivity are evaluated robustly and fed into the appropriate processes of policy development.*
- 4.7** In addition to this kind of research evaluation and synthesis, and given the divergence of education policy since devolution, there is also a need for further studies which examine the particular circumstances of targeted groups, thereby providing important insights which go beyond the more general relationships identified in the quantitative studies. Two examples will be used to demonstrate this argument.
- 4.8** It is well established that there are very high concentrations of incapacity and ill-health in parts of the South Wales Valleys. Whilst the general relationships between adult learning and improved health outcomes have been analysed, it would be extremely instructive to carry out an investigation of the social processes which underpin such relationships: how and why do such relationships come about? Detailed, qualitative investigation of the learning needs and behaviour of individuals who are incapacitated or otherwise in poor health would provide a strong basis for the development of adult learning initiatives whose intended outcomes would be specifically to improve health, rather than simply improve learning.
- 4.9** Adult learning is integral to the Welsh Assembly Government's strategies on community regeneration through programmes such as Communities First. More specifically, not only is skills acquisition viewed as essential to re-engagement with the labour market, but also the bottom-up process in which citizens make a key contribution to the development of regeneration strategy depends upon a range of sophisticated social skills. However, much more needs to be known about how both these skills sets are generated in reality and what their effects are. Again, detailed qualitative research has the potential to uncover the social processes through which the general relationships between adult learning and community regeneration actually work out in practice.
- 4.10** *Recommendation Two: The Welsh Assembly Government should commission in-depth, qualitative studies of the processes of adult learning amongst targeted population groups in Wales to provide a stronger basis for the development of policy initiatives for such groups.*
- 4.11** For both quantitative and qualitative research studies, the central implication for the development of policy is that the impacts of investment in adult education yield substantial returns not only in economic terms, but also across a range of social policies too. In coming to judgements about the value of investments in adult learning, therefore, it is the whole range of impacts which should be taken into account, rather than just the narrowly defined economic ones. This also suggests that in calculating the 'total public value' of strategies for adult learning, a key element should be the views of the participants in adult learning, as well as the wider communities from which they are drawn. These views are likely to generate important insights into how participation in adult learning is actually experienced. In addition, deliberative approaches to the evaluation of alternative approaches to the provision of opportunities for adult learning are likely to provide important evidence, rooted in the experience of ordinary citizens, about their effectiveness. Taken alongside other forms of evidence, this has the potential to contribute to a far more responsive policy process, with more effective outcomes.
- 4.12** *Recommendation Three: The Welsh Assembly Government should adopt deliberative methods in the evaluation of provision of opportunities for adult learning, engaging both the users of such services and citizens more widely.*

References

- Ahleit, P. (2005) Stories and structures: An essay on historical times, narratives and their hidden impact on adult learning, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 37, 201-12.
- Barro, R.J. (1997) *Determinants of economic growth: a cross-country empirical study*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Beecham Report (2006) *Beyond Boundaries: review of local service delivery*, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.
- Benington, J. and Moore, M. (2007) *In Search of Public Value: beyond private choice*, London: Palgrave.
- Blöndal, S., Field, S. and Girouard, N. (2002) *Investment in human capital through post-compulsory education and training: selected efficiency and equity aspects*. Economics Working Paper No.333. Paris: OECD.
- Blundell, R., Dearden, L. and Meghir, C. (1996) *The Determinants and Effects of Work Related Training in Britain*, London: Institute of Fiscal Studies.
- Chevalier, A. and Feinstein, L. (2006) 'Sheepskin or Prozac: the causal effect of education on mental health', Discussion Paper, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Communities First (2006) *Interim Evaluation of Communities First: Final Report*, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.
- Dearden, L., McIntosh, S., Myck, M. and Vignoles, A. (2002) 'The Returns to Academic and Vocational Qualifications in Britain', *Bulletin of Economic Research*, 54, 249-74.
- Dearden, L., Reed, H. and Van Reenen, J. (2006) 'The Impact of Training on Productivity and Wages: evidence from British panel data', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 68, 397-421.
- De Coulon, A., Marcenaro-Gutierrez, O. and Vignoles, A. (2007) *The Value of Basic Skills in the British Labour Market*, London: Centre for the Economics of Education.
- Feinstein, L. (2002a) 'Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning, 1: Crime', *Research Report No.5*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Feinstein, L. (2002b) 'Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning, 2: Health (depression and obesity)', *Research Report No.6*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Feinstein, L. and Hammond, C. (2004) 'The Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital', *Research Report No.8*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Feinstein, L. and Sabates, R. (2007) 'The Public Value of Adult Learning: skills and social productivity', mimeo.
- Feinstein, L., Galindo-Rueda, F. and Vignoles, A. (2004) 'The Labour Market Impact of Adult Education and Training', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 51, 266-80.
- Felstead, A., Fuller, A., Unwin, L, Ashton, D, Butler, P and Lee, T (2004) *Better Learning, Better Performance: Evidence from the 2004 Learning at Work Survey*, Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
- Future Skills Wales (2005) Sector Skills Survey, Cardiff: Future Skills Wales.
- Field, J. (2005) *Social Capital and Lifelong Learning*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Gallacher, J., Crossan, B., Field, J. and Merrill, B. (2002) 'Learning Careers and the Social Space: exploring the fragile identities of adult returners in the new further education', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21, 493-509.

- Gorard, S. and Rees, G. (2002) *Creating a Learning Society? Learning careers and policies for lifelong learning*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- HM Treasury (2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: world class skills – Final Report* (The Leitch Report on Skills), London: The Stationery Office.
- Jenkins, A. (2006) 'Women, Lifelong Learning and Transitions into Employment', *Work, Employment and Society*, 20, 306-28.
- Lochner, L. and Moretti, E. (2001) 'The Effect of Education on Crime: evidence from prison inmates, arrests and self-reports', *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 8605*.
- Marsh, H. (1990) 'A Multidimensional Hierarchical Model of Self-concept: theoretical and empirical justification', *Educational Psychology Review*, 2, 77-172.
- Osborne, M., Gallacher, J. and Crossan, B. (2004) *Researching Widening Access to Lifelong Learning*, London: Routledge.
- Preston, J. (2004) 'Identity, Learning and Engagement: a qualitative inquiry using the NCDS', *Research Report No.13*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Rees, G. (2004) 'Democratic Devolution and Education Policy in Wales: the Emergence of a National System?', *Contemporary Wales*, 17, 28-43.
- Rees, G., Fevre, R., Furlong, J. and Gorard, S. (2006) History, biography and place in the learning society: towards a sociology of life-long learning. In Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J-A. and Halsey, A.H. (eds.) *Education, globalization and social change*. pp.926-935. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schoon, I. and Bynner, J. (2003) 'Risk and Resilience in the Life Course: implications for interventions and social policies', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6, 21-31.
- Schuller, T., Preston, J., Hammond, C., Brassett-Grundy, A. and Bynner, J. (2004) *The Benefits of Learning: the impacts of education on health, family life and social capital*, London: Routledge.
- Sloane, P., O'Leary, N., Murphy, P. and Blackaby, D. (2003) *Returns to Education: a survey of findings*, Swansea: University of Wales, Swansea.
- Webb Report (2007) *Promise and Performance: a report of the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales*, Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.