

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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## Introduction

1. This paper summarises and analyses *The Learning Revolution*<sup>1</sup>, a DIUS White Paper on the Government's new strategy for adult informal learning. It will examine the proposals within the paper, and place them in the context of developments within adult learning and other parts of the education system in recent years. It also considers implications for the sector and for the programmes and services offered by LSIS.

## The debate on adult informal learning

2. The level of priority and funding given to adult informal learning has been a source of controversy since the creation of the LSC and the identification and transfer of funding for adult community learning (as it was then called), and the decision to create a safeguarded budget. According to the Campaign Alliance for Lifelong Learning (CALL)<sup>2</sup>, a non-party campaign group, some 2 million adult learners' places have been lost since 2005. David Willetts, the Conservative shadow secretary for DIUS, claims that 1.5 million learner places have been lost '*under this government*'<sup>3</sup>. In October 2008, Paul Mackney of the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE, a supporter of CALL), also cited the 1.5 million figure in an article for the *Times Education Supplement*<sup>4</sup>, adding '*When you draw attention to the loss of 1.5 million adult learning places, ministers always say it's just a few holiday Spanish classes we have lost - a luxury next to the pressing needs of employer-led training. While languages, literature and culture have fallen by 107,000 students, the greatest decline in learner numbers comes in health, public services and care (477,000), ICT (394,000) and preparation for life and work (248,000)*'.
3. There was also considerable controversy over a decision by DIUS in autumn 2007 to redirect £50 million of funding away from students studying for a second academic degree at an equal or lower level than their first degree (equivalent or lower qualifications, or ELQs). A January 2009 plan to provide £25 million in public funding for universities to work with employers and the jobless to meet job market needs was interpreted by some as a partial compensation for the lost ELQ funding.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging\\_learners/informal\\_adult\\_learning/~media/pubs/L/learning\\_revolution](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_learners/informal_adult_learning/~media/pubs/L/learning_revolution)

<sup>2</sup> [www.callcampaign.co.uk](http://www.callcampaign.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7958945.stm>, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6003908>, published October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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4. In *The Learning Revolution*, the Government defends its record on adult learning. The paper states that *'we are continuing to invest significantly in adult education, including almost £1.5 billion annually supporting learning below level 2. In recent years we've rightly prioritised DIUS investment from a high number of short courses into longer courses that offer the greatest opportunity to gain skills for employability and further progression in learning'* (Learning Revolution, paragraph 7, p. 11). DIUS avers that it will spend £3.3 billion on adult learning<sup>5</sup> next year, *'helping over 3 million learners'* (paragraph 24, p. 8).
5. Regarding the trend away from funding shorter courses, *The Learning Revolution* states *'the priority given to vocational learning has led to an expected reduction in shorter courses funded by the LSC. Many of these are in areas where employers have a statutory duty to provide training, such as health and safety, first aid at work and food hygiene courses. 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 1,000 Spanish courses in London alone'* (Learning Revolution, paragraph 8, p. 11).
6. The paper goes on to say that its support of vocational training has allowed *'record numbers of learners to achieve full level 2 and 3 qualifications and basic literacy and numeracy skills'*. DIUS adds that *'we continue to safeguard £210m specifically for informal adult learning and provide around £40m each year for Specialist Designated Institutions – providers who offer regional and national expertise in informal learning'* (paragraph 9, p. 11). DIUS also lists the support given to adult informal learning by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and its associated agencies (the Arts Council, the National Trust, etc.), which fund libraries, museums, theatres, sports facilities and other venues.

## The strategy

7. *The Learning Revolution's* strategy for adult learning is divided into three chapters:
  - *building a culture of learning;*
  - *increasing access to informal adult learning, and;*
  - *transforming the way people learn through technology and broadcasting.*

### Building a culture of learning

8. DIUS identifies three *'systemic weaknesses'* in the current informal adult learning system:
  - *the role and benefits of informal adult learning are not always clearly understood by policy makers, stakeholders and potential learners;*

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<sup>5</sup> It states *'adult learning'*, not *'informal adult learning'*.

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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- *Government departments, and our partners, need to be better joined up to maximise the impact of public investment in learning, and;*
  - *adults, providers and facilitators of learning need more information in order to make connections, signpost potential linkages and progression routes* (paragraph 1.2, p. 15).
9. The paper contends that informal adult learning lacks a ‘*common identity*’ and ‘*shared purpose*’, both among providers and learners. ‘*The many adults who take part in informal learning experiences - in libraries, museums, colleges, theatres, offices, pubs or online – often don’t recognise themselves as participating in learning at all*’ (paragraph 1.3, p. 15). The Government proposes to ‘*establish a clearer identity for informal learning*’, ‘*raise the profile, visibility and connectivity of informal learning across central Government and stakeholder organisations*’ and ‘*engage all those organizations and groups who deliver or facilitate learning so that they know they are part of the informal learning movement*’ (paragraph 1.4, p. 15).
10. DIUS is developing a set of ‘*core principles*’ for adult informal learning, in collaboration with NIACE (which developed the initial draft) and other organization. The final draft of this will be published during Adult Learners Week 2009 in May. The full draft is too long to reproduce in full, but can be found on page 16. Its ‘*overarching principles*’ for adult informal learning are:
- *learning to know – becoming inspired, discovering and exploring, developing a passion for learning, acquiring knowledge and understanding of ourselves, our immediate world and beyond*
  - *learning to do – gaining skills, confidence, competence and practical abilities*
  - *learning to live together – learning tolerance, mutual understanding and interdependence, sharing the experience of learning with family and friends*
  - *learning to be – developing ourselves, our mental and physical capacity, wellbeing and autonomy, and our ability to take control of our lives and influence the world around us.*
11. In addition, organisations can sign up to a Learning Pledge, which will commit them to the core principles and a ‘*practical, individual contribution to implementing the strategy*’. The pledge is aimed at a wide array of entities, which include *Government departments, local authorities, the cultural sector, sports bodies, national membership organisations, broadcasters and technology companies*’ (paragraph 1.6, p. 17).
12. DIUS will ‘*support*’ the staging of a Festival of Learning in the autumn of 2009, which ‘*will host a wide range of national, local and virtual events focused on engaging more and different groups of learners*’. In addition, DIUS ‘*will sponsor an annual informal adult learning EXPO event which will bring together all organisations with an interest in informal learning*’ (paragraphs 1.8-1.9, p. 18).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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13. In terms of monetary commitments, the department promises a £20 million Transformation Fund for a variety of different initiatives, such as self-organised courses, using empty high-street shops as learning venues, vouchers for courses or partnerships between learning providers. *'We will retain maximum flexibility, ranging from say, 100 percent grants for small community organisations to matched funding for schemes involving local government, colleges and universities and partnerships making the most of technology and broadcasting'* (paragraphs 1.10-1.11, p. 18).
14. The Government wants to encourage an *'open-space movement'*, through which organisations will pledge to make facilities available to adult learning courses. The movement *'will encourage organizations wherever possible and practical to make open space (ie free or low-cost space) available for informal learning. The Learning Revolution logo will help learners locate these spaces'*. Some facilities that may become available under the programme include libraries, houses of worship, museums, workplaces and libraries (paragraph 1.14, p. 19). DIUS also believes colleges should provide space for these courses: therefore, DIUS *'will insert a requirement into the Financial Memorandum for colleges to consider how they will open up their premises and facilities'*, and require them to publish their *'community access policy'* annually (paragraph 1.15, p. 19).
15. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) will promote the strategy in the universities sector, and explain to HEIs how they can demonstrate their commitment and contribution through the informal learning pledge and, as part of their strategy for the social dimension of the third stream of funding, will set out how HEIs can work with others to support the wider engagement of the community through informal learning (paragraph 1.17, p. 19-20). DCSF will encourage schools to sign the pledge, while DCMS, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department of Health will champion the pledge in their sectors.

## Increasing access to informal adult learning

16. DIUS's goals in this portion of the strategy are to:
  - *widen informal learning opportunities for older people*
  - *reach out to people who are disadvantaged*
  - *develop a package of support for community learning champions, and;*
  - *increase the availability of informal learning in the workplace* (p. 23).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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17. In the first strand of this agenda, focusing on the older segments of the population, DIUS *'will work with the Life Academy and other older people's organisations to improve the availability of pre-retirement activity'*, including *'extending the availability of structured pre-retirement courses offered by colleges and other learning providers'* and *'developing free online pre-retirement resources'* (paragraph 2.7, p. 25). DIUS will also work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to offer pre-retirement courses in the workplace, and with several partners to improve learning opportunities for older people in care. The department pledges to improve information about learning opportunities available to older people, and to combat age discrimination (but ensure that older people can obtain concessions on course costs).
18. In extending learning opportunities for the disadvantaged, Learning Revolution announces that *'the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) will spearhead a new forum for third sector organisations with an interest in informal adult learning to encourage joint working, build new partnerships and develop new delivery models to widen participation and reach out to new learners'* (paragraph 2.16, p. 27), DIUS will continue its Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) fund, which distributes £20 million a year, and will review its funding for family learning, *'to ensure that family learning continues to meet local needs and priorities but also that it can focus effectively on specific aims'*, such as combating crime, increasing parental engagement, reaching out to minority families and aiding families coping with disabilities (paragraph 2.18, p. 27)
19. The White Paper promises a programme supplied with up to £3 million to support *'community learning champions'*, which will be designed and delivered by a national partner. The programme will encompass:
  - *a network and national advisory group for community learning champion schemes;*
  - *regional events and an annual conference for community learning champions;*
  - *a light touch system for assuring quality, improving outcomes and improving data sharing to track outcomes;*
  - *a coherent training and development framework and access to continuing professional development, and;*
  - *successful and sustainable approaches to recruiting volunteer champions* (paragraph 2.22, p. 28)
20. DIUS will ensure that learning champions form *'strong links'* with the new adult advancement and careers service, and with a CLG programme, *Take Part*, which encourages civic engagement in the locality. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council will establish a *'challenge fund offering small grants to enable museums, libraries and archives to develop capacity and encourage innovation in supporting self-organised learning'*, and create an Adult Learning Board (paragraph 2.23-24, p. 28-9).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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21. Regarding the final plank in the section, encouraging workplace learning, the Government states that it is currently spending £21 million per annum supporting these activities, in funding given to the unionlearn scheme, which is run by the Trades Union Congress (TUC). It intends to increase this support by expanding the Collective Learning Fund, which provides matching funds for workplace learning (the paper does not say by how much). It also intends to open 50 Union Learning Centres to wider varieties of adult informal learning courses and *'scope a scheme to encourage employers, as part of their corporate social responsibility, to offer premises for informal learning free or at low cost to employees and/or for local community groups'* (paragraph 2.27, p. 29).

## Transforming the way people learn through technology and broadcasting

22. In the third chapter of the strategy, DIUS seeks to optimise the use of new communications technology to support informal adult learning. Specifically, it will act to:
- *help adults develop skills, confidence and access to technology so they can participate in a wider variety of learning experiences;*
  - *support teachers and leaders of informal learning to make the most effective use of digital technologies;*
  - *harness the power of technology to create more, and different, learning opportunities;*
  - *stimulate new partnerships, using broadcasting and technology as a bridge to bring learners together, cross traditional boundaries and spark new ideas or ways of doing things, and;*
  - *maintain momentum so informal learning is at the forefront of emerging technologies* (paragraph 3.6, p. 33).
23. DIUS will work with other Government departments to implement the national digital inclusion plan, which was published in the White Paper *Digital Britain*<sup>6</sup> in January 2009. DIUS itself will commission Estelle Morris, Lady Morris, a former education secretary<sup>7</sup> *'to chair an independent review of ICT Skills for Adults'*. This *'will address both the user skills required to participate effectively in the digital society and the best delivery mechanisms to engage and upskill adults'* (paragraph 3.8, p. 33-4).
24. DIUS and CLG will together create a network of Digital Mentors, who will *'support grassroots-led online activity'* in deprived communities (paragraph 3.12, p. 34). The department will also ask Becta *'to undertake a proof of concept trial to explore how disadvantaged adults could be supported through Adult Access'*, though the paper does not specify what Adult Access is (it appears to be comparable to the DCSF programme Home Access, which provides home internet for low-income families) (paragraph 3.13, p. 34-5).

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/broadcasting/5631.aspx/](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/5631.aspx/)

<sup>7</sup> From 2001 to 2002. She was also arts minister (2003-05).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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25. The Government wants to create better online resources to inform potential learners about courses available. *'But Government is not best placed to design or deliver these products'*. Therefore, DIUS *'will run a competition to invite developers to show just what's possible'*, and *'offer funding to help start up the best ideas and invite some leading local authorities and their partners to work with us to share data and to test application on the ground'* (paragraph 3.17-18, p. 36). DIUS will also ask Becta *'to develop, maintain and promote a directory of online resources for informal learning, to signpost people to all the great national and international resources'* (paragraph 3.22, p. 37).
26. Becta will also undertake work in using new broadcasting technologies to support adult learning. It *'will explore with broadcasters and others how the standard set-top-box, including the 'red button' feature, might support informal adult learning with additional or improved information and signposting'* and, with partners, *'will consider how a wider range of relevant content might be made available to support informal learning using the internet and digital TV platforms'* (paragraphs 3.24-25, p. 38). DIUS also wants to spread adult informal learning in the virtual world Second Life<sup>8</sup> and similar online communities (paragraph 3.26, p. 38).
27. The £20 million transformation fund (see paragraph 13) will be used *'to encourage new and exciting ways of using the power of technology and broadcasting to engage learners who currently lack the confidence and skills to make the most of technology'* (paragraph 3.28, p. 39). DIUS will work with community radio to advance adult learning, and set up a *'high-level broadcasting forum'*, to *'bring together organisations with an interest in making the most of broadcasting for informal adult learning purposes, including making more content free to access and open to share'* (paragraphs 3.29-30, p. 39).

## Implementation

28. At the centre, the Government will establish a National Advisory Forum *'with representatives from our key partners across the public, private and third sectors'*, and *'a remit to advise on implementation and steer the strategy's future development'* (paragraph 4.2, p. 42). The *'forum will establish a high level group to help drive progress and maintain momentum'*, and will be supported by all organisations who have signed the Learning Pledge (paragraph 4.3, p. 42).

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<sup>8</sup> <http://secondlife.com/>. A number of businesses and organisations operate in Second Life, including ABN Amro Bank, Dell Computers, BBC Radio 1, Disney, Sky News, IBM, ING, Harvard University, Reuters, Toyota and Mazda. Second Life' 'GDP' was estimated at between \$500 and \$600 million in 2007.

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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29. Implementation on the ground will be managed by local government, which *'will provide the local leadership and necessary infrastructure to create a joined-up, innovative and broad local learning offer'* and *'ensure informal learning plays a strong role in local strategies for community cohesion, active citizenship, health and well-being'* (paragraph 4.4, p. 42-3). Local authorities will also build *'strong partnerships to implement their local vision of informal adult learning'* (paragraph 4.6, p. 43), and integrate adult learning into their Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and the strategies that they develop. DIUS *'will enable local authorities to shape the funding from Learning and Skills Council [and] Skills Funding Agency to facilitate the join-up we want to see'* (paragraph 4.7, p. 43)
30. Local authorities will be responsible for five *'core elements'* of the strategy:
- *innovation: public funds used flexibly, complementing private and third sector investment effectively, enabling learning opportunities to thrive by building new partnerships and connections;*
  - *universal access: all adults able to shape and access the learning activities they want for personal development and fulfilment wherever they live, whatever their qualifications and income;*
  - *targeted support: those in most financial need given greatest support. In relation to taught courses, most adults should contribute in part or in full to the cost of their learning wherever it is provided, and local areas should actively use fee collection to reinvest in extending the reach of what's on offer;*
  - *collaboration: a wide range of partners and services working in partnership, aligning funds where appropriate, to maximise the scope for offering high quality, inspiring learning opportunities, increasing choice and helping adults move from one learning opportunity to another;*
  - *promotion: the maintenance of good, up-to-date information on informal learning opportunities to be freely and openly available to local communities* (paragraph 4.5, p. 43)
31. These arrangements presage changes in the funding system for adult learning. DIUS will continue to provide the money for a *'core offer'*, but it expects local authorities *'to use public funding flexibly to increase the range and number of learning opportunities'*. For example, they could give grants to third-sector providers, or work with organisations like the Women's Institute to examine adult learning needs (paragraph 4.8, p. 44).
32. A *'working group'* will be set up in 2009-10 *'with support from the LGA [Local Government Association], a group of the leading Local Authorities, the LSC and other partners to develop this approach'* (paragraph 4.9, p. 44).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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33. New accountability measures will be put in place to support the adult learning programme. This may include an adult learning indicator in the National Indicator Set for local government<sup>9</sup>. Ofsted will introduce a new inspection system for adult learning from the autumn of 2010. LSC targets may also be modified to allow local authorities more flexibility to deliver the programme (paragraph 4.10, p. 45).
34. A complete list of the new policies promised by *The Learning Revolution* is provided on page 47 of the White Paper.

## Implications

35. The informal adult learning sector is a very broad church, lacking an agreed taxonomy within the larger FE and skills sector. Consequently, its boundaries with other types of provision are highly porous. The adult learning sector is also somewhat less visible to policy-makers than other parts of the FE sector composed of larger institutions (eg, general FE colleges). Thus, this part of the sector is likely to welcome a specific strategy backing informal adult learning.
36. However, it is unclear how radical a change *The Learning Revolution* marks in Government policy. It promises little new money for the sector – the £20 million Transformation Fund represents about 0.1 percent of the DIUS budget. The strategy rests largely on mechanisms to animate action through existing resources and drawing on capacity available across public services and facilities, and through voluntary or self-organised solutions. It does not herald substantial new resources, and may presage a new approach to policy implementation consonant with economic recession. Nor does the strategy address specific concerns raised by NIACE and others – for example, the 1.5 million adult learning places NIACE claims have been lost in recent years, or the cuts to ELQ funding.
37. The implementation plans follow the general trend in Government policy-making towards devolving more authority and autonomy to local authorities, and towards partnerships between those authorities and other stakeholders. It explicitly builds on the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) introduced earlier in the decade, and the new National Indicator Set that supports them. It also echoes the Government's efforts to create a more joined-up approach among central Government departments.
38. The emphasis on self-organised projects is also interesting. DIUS has been urging the creation of 'self-organised networks' of providers in the FE and skills sector as a whole, while the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) funds community projects devised by lay people on their own initiative.

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<sup>9</sup> The paper lists 21 national indicators and 5 Public Service Agreements (PSAs) to which adult learning can contribute – see p. 46).

# LSIS Brief Guide

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## *The Learning Revolution*

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39. As yet, the proposal for colleges to develop Community Access Strategies has not been introduced. However, an amendment to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill, currently before the House of Lords, proposes that a duty be placed on colleges to promote economic and social well-being in their communities, which could embrace in part the intention of the proposed Community Access Strategies. When enacted, this duty might be used to promote the importance of informal adult learning to support an institution's Community Access Strategy.
40. Applications for the Transformation Fund are due by July 12<sup>th</sup>. The prospectus can be found at [http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging\\_learners/informal\\_adult\\_learning/transformation\\_fund](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_learners/informal_adult_learning/transformation_fund)

## Questions for LSIS

41. Should LSIS offer support for institutions developing their Community Access Strategy? If so, what kind of support?
42. Do the recommendations for improving the use of technology in adult learning hold any implications for LSIS programmes and services?

Please let me know if you have any thoughts around these or other points raised in this brief guide. Responses may be sent to the e-mail address below.

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# LSIS Brief Guide

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*The Learning Revolution*

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