

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Briefing

**Better
Government**
FOR OLDER PEOPLE

LIFE LONG LEARNING

“ I am pleased to introduce the latest Better Government for Older People ‘Briefing’ which focuses on lifelong learning. The Government is committed to widening participation in learning by adults, and this includes encouraging people to learn in later life. I am glad that my Department and BGOP are working together to help achieve this aim.

Our National Adult Learning Survey, published last year, shows that three out of four people aged 50 – 59 are now learners, with many continuing their learning into their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond. We are working hard to ensure that older people take up the many learning opportunities open to them, whether they wish to develop new skills, build on existing ones, improve their employability, keep up with their grandchildren, or develop a new interest. Learning can also help older people to stay active and healthy.

I hope this ‘Briefing’ will demonstrate how learning can influence and be a part of a wide range of other activities, and perhaps raise some issues for you to think about in the work you are engaged in. I do hope you find it of value.”

Margaret Hodge, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills.

Joined up Messages and Thinking

The wider benefits of learning enable older people to contribute effectively to the development of older people's strategies. "Learners centred approaches are about empowering the learner and making the learner 'Masters' of their own destiny". Such an approach ensures the development of self-confidence, willingness to take on "responsibility, greater engagement with community development and social inclusion.

Two older people's strategies (Middlesborough Council and the London Borough of Camden) have secured learning as a key component of their strategies for an aging population.

Better Government for Older People seek to ensure that links are made between learning and other policy agendas:

- **Health:** reduces 'dependency' and enhances well-being. (NSF Standard 8).
- **Volunteering/citizenship:** Supports neighbourhood renewal, regeneration and social inclusion.
- **Social inclusion:** Tackling the cause of poverty e.g. Learn Direct, UK online.
- **Community planning:** Capacity building and engagement of older people in local decision-making.
- **Employment:** Skills to re-enter the work force. (e.g. Age Positive).

The Network has numerous good practice examples of Local Initiatives, partnerships with Learning Skills Councils (LSCs) and the Department for Education and Skills demonstrating how older people as life long learners achieve social inclusion.



department for
education and skills

It is never too late to learn!

by Jim Soulsby NIACE

"Why do we have to keep repeating this well-known expression when older people know it to be true? Or is the climate changing that wider society is now accepting that it is true? Are we beginning to see examples of older people successfully engaging in learning activities just like other people and as a consequence convincing the world.

Any climate change is not brought about just by chance. For many older people the opportunities are there, for others the chance to reflect on life's successes and failures as an aid to planning the future is also there. But for lots of older people any sense of purpose in later life is missing. The chance to access learning opportunities for fun, fulfilment, curiosity or as a step to other things is not within their thinking. Education is seen as something for others, those who

did better in initial education, those who were made to feel that they had succeeded in something, those who had good communication skills and could assess and articulate their needs".

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, exists to help give those excluded, diffident, marginalised and lacking in confidence:

- 'a voice'.
- to encourage their participation in all forms of adult education, and to influence the way we promote, teach, locate time and charge for adult education.
- to remove whatever institutional and attitude barriers that exist which might compound any sense of exclusion.

NIACE's Older & Bolder work promotes educational opportunities in the very widest sense for older people. For statistical purposes (and it is important to collect such data to underpin our arguments) we start at age 50. But the argument is about creating opportunities for people who feel they are discriminated against, ignored or excluded because they are seen as 'too old'.

This occurs to some people in their 30s and 40s where employment is concerned. But we also all know people in their 60s, 70s and 80s who would never wish to identify themselves or be seen by others as old. So we try not to label, stereotype or put into compartments.

Older & Bolder works with a range of agencies to develop its agenda. For Government we provide an information service for the Department for Education & Skills to help inform them, education providers and the general public on issues to do with learning in later life. As well as responding to need, O&B investigates issues to build up arguments, test practice, influence policy and better involve older people in the processes.

In recent years we have:

- Promoted the learning needs of older people who do not speak English through a sound tape of learning testimonies in 14 different languages.
- Developed the issues of financial literacy in later life. Where education and guidance fit in helping older people understand and influence the financial processes which impact upon their lives

and what is the quality of the relationship between older people and those who provide those services?

- Considered the learning needs of older people in care settings to ensure they are not overlooked.
- Celebrated the learning achievements of older people by assisting the DfES find and honour the oldest learner in England, and annually highlight the Senior Learner of the Year.

Older and Bolder fully supports BGOP having contributed to the very first BGOP national conference on learning in Wolverhampton in 1999. Over the next few years we are looking forward to working with BGOP to explore how better learning provision can be made available for older people; how the Older People's Advisory Groups (OPAG) can influence policy and practice encouraging older people to come forward and how to create education programmes to help older people better evaluate and understand their lives to help them plan their futures.

We know that BGOP already has good links with education providers at local and regional levels. We are delighted to share progress and will gladly try to answer any questions you might have on how to improve and sustain such relationships.

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Jim Soulsby has been an O&B Development Officer for 6 years, prior to that he spent 11 years at the University of Central Lancashire developing a range of learning opportunities for older people. In 1999 Jim co wrote with Shiela Carlton, 'Learning to Grow Older & Bolder' a NIACE policy discussion paper. In 2002 Jim contributed a chapter on age discrimination in education to Help the Aged's evidence review on age discrimination.

In 2002 Jim joined the BGOP Management Board and was invited to contribute to the Partnership Group on Older People Chaired by the RT Hon Ian McCartney. At various times Jim has been chair of Age Concern Lancashire, co-ordinator for the European Network on Ageing and Ethnicity, trustee of Age Concern England, trustee of the Dark Horse Venture, and mini bus driver for older people's educational visits.



Ransackers

Ransackers is an adventure in residential education and action research to be based at Coleg Harlech (Wales); New Battle Abbey (Scotland), Ruskin College (Oxford) and Plater College (Oxford).

Older learning will themselves choose, and with the help of experts, design their own projects. The learning comes from the individuals own thinking and reflecting on their own experience of life and work.

If you would like to receive more information on Ransackers, please contact the Better Government for Older People London office.

Watch out for Future Thematic Briefings

2003	Month / Year
<i>Employment Choices (Pension Service) (No.8)</i>	<i>January 03</i>
<i>Regeneration / Neighbourhood Renewal / Third Age Service Development (No.9)</i>	<i>March 03</i>
<i>Health & Social Care (Mental Health) (No.10)</i>	<i>May 03</i>
<i>Race & Diversity (No.11)</i>	<i>July 03</i>
<i>3 Nations BGOP (No.12)</i>	<i>September 03</i>
<i>World Assembly on Ageing update on implementing (No.13)</i>	<i>November 03</i>

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