

Memorandum of Evidence to:

The Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning:

Lifelong learning and sustainable development

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1. Introduction and summary:

1.1 The Teaching & Learning Research Programme (TLRP) is the largest ever UK publicly funded programme of educational research, started in 2000, and covering all levels of education from early childhood through to adult learning and older learners and workers. The generic phase of TLRP, covering 4 phases of commissioned research across all 4 nations of the UK, will end in 2009, but a linked programme of work – Technology Enhanced Learning – funded by the ESRC and EPSRC, will continue until 2012.

1.2 Many of the research projects in TLRP, through the later phases of funding, bear on lifelong learning and sustainable development and details of all this work can be found through the TLRP website www.tlrp.org. These cover some of the projects funded through phase three on further and higher education, and work-based learning, the specific suite of seven projects on widening participation to higher education, and some associated projects, especially one on older learners.

1.3 None of the projects addresses directly the question of the relation between lifelong learning and sustainable development, defined as *Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. However, many of the projects did consider and recognise ‘the interdependence of economic, environmental and social development’ and the Leitch Report’s recommendations for ‘placing sustainable development at the heart of skills provision, ensuring that it is a fundamental goal of our economic and social progress’.

1.4 The TLRP projects do demonstrate the importance of lifelong learning – by individuals, by organizations and by public bodies - as a major form of education for the future of learning in the context of a rapidly changing global knowledge economy and society. They also contribute to informing UK *public debate* on the relevant issues and policies to be pursued to enhance effective teaching and learning across the life-course.

2. The Research Evidence on Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development: the view from TLRP

2.1 All the Widening Participation to Higher Education projects consider questions about how to deal with increasing social diversity and how to both

increase **and** widen participation to education of social diverse and disadvantaged groups, including adult learners returning to education through vocational and other routes (*TLRP Research Briefings numbers 38-44*). The question of equitable forms of teaching and learning to engage diverse groups of students, including those with vocational instead of traditional academic pathways into higher education, were considered. A particular focus on students pursuing mathematics programmes in order to enter higher education and for study of Science, Technology, Engineering or Medicine/Mathematics (STEM) subjects at university was addressed. Pedagogies to engage these students, and those studying a range of subjects in old (pre-1992) and new (post-1992) universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) was also of great concern. Mature students were in greater abundance at the newer HEIs. Our statistical evidence demonstrates that mature students fare better than traditional younger students in their learning outcomes.

2.2 One of these projects, in particular, '*Non-participation in Higher Education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice*' (Research Briefing 43) focused on the decision-making of adults (21-plus) and examined how their decision-making is embedded in networks of family, partners and friends. They took a group who were 'potentially recruitable' to HE and discussed with them their 'networks of intimacy'. They found that:

- 2.2.1 there is an untapped need for professional information, advice and guidance for adults across the life-course
- 2.2.2 there is an appetite for high quality, work-related and employer-supported provision, and for recognised qualifications that offer recipients tangible returns.

2.3 This project's findings linked with other TLRP projects such as the one on *Learning Lives* in showing the need for more educational provision for adults.

2.4 Another project in the suite of 7 focused on the problems of national policy formation, organisational development and student progression. The *Furtherhigher education: dual regimes* project (Research Briefing 40) found that:

- 2.4.1 separate funding and quality regimes have evolved despite the lack of a developed rationale for a two-sector system. They need to be regarded as parts of a common enterprise, with mechanisms to recognise and support this.
- 2.4.2 Equity and skills agendas are not easily aligned, but require strong and strategic coordination
- 2.4.3 an expansion of work-focused higher education will place new demands on the access and transfer functions of dual-sector institutions.

2.5 This project's findings map onto several of the other TLRP projects, especially those concerned with policy formation and implementation, around post-compulsory education, including further education, education for 14-19 year olds, and work-related learning. All point to the need for stronger strategic coordination and the role of the UK national government in this respect.

2.6 Many of the TLRP projects on post-compulsory education provide research evidence with respect to

- a. effective forms of education for achieving sustainable development
- b. a strong global dimension linked visibly to local concerns
- c. infrastructural developments to strengthen lifelong learning for sustainable development

Overall they show the importance of effective education, learning opportunities, and teaching to ensure the involvement and participation of individuals in local, national and family decisions affecting their lives as lifelong learners, and in relation to workplace learning, as well as learning in the family and at home.

3. The gaps in the research evidence: a TLRP perspective

3.1 Given the strong research evidence from the TLRP about adult learning, and the conditions under which effective teaching and learning can take place, there are only gaps with respect to directly addressing the question of sustainable development from a skills perspective. The programme provides a considerable untapped resource for this agenda.

3.2 The main gap, as regards the TLRP's evidence, is in the interface between research, evidence, policy and practice. The key issue is how to ensure that policy-making is either evidence-based or evidence-informed, rather than vice versa, namely that evidence is used to justify previously formulated policies, as evidenced in 2.4 above.

4. The key messages for the Inquiry: a TLRP perspective

4.1 The TLRP projects demonstrate the fundamental importance of lifelong learning – by individuals, by organizations and by public bodies - for the future of a sustainable society in the context of a rapidly changing global knowledge economy.

4.2 They also emphasise the vital importance of having a wide and deep *public debate* to concentrate upon the relevant issues and key policies to be pursued to enhance effective teaching and learning across the life-course.

