



Conference Memorandum

*Key messages from the conference workshops summarised by Prof.
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1. Learning for older people has a critical role to play in the achievement of a wide range of social and economic objectives, including extending and improving working life, reducing dependency costs and improving health and well-being. Governments should therefore write into their policies a broader vision of lifelong learning, which fosters common understanding across ministries and sectors, is inclusive of people beyond working age and enables and encourages flexible forms of non-formal learning, as well as informal and formal ones. The EU should support lifelong learning which is truly lifelong, including through its funding programmes.
2. Often an "educational" intervention can be a very cost-effective way of achieving these social and economic objectives. Structures may already be in place – NGOs, libraries, health services, community centres, religious organisations, workplaces, families, associations and clubs, sport venues etc., and often they can be very effective at reaching hard-to-reach target groups. However, many people and agencies do not see these activities as “learning”, and the expertise is not formally recognised or accredited. Addressing the needs effectively calls for more collaborative working between agencies and services. It is critical that this is done at local level, but often it will need support, encouragement and stimulation from national level, for instance through the promotion of positive role models and learning ambassadors.

3. Older people represent an under used resource for society. Through intergenerational learning they can contribute to the learning of younger people, and they can in turn learn from younger people, providing a cost-effective "virtuous circle". Through self organising learning groups they can also play a major role in providing learning opportunities for other older people.
4. Although age brings changes in capacities and aspirations, the timing of these changes varies greatly between individuals, and there is no simple point at which people become "old". Individuals differ greatly in what they can and want to achieve, and stereotypes of ageing are damaging to older people, and reduce their capacity to contribute to society and to live satisfying lives. Policies need to recognise that life stages can be more important than chronological age, and to recognise individual diversity, the changing nature of the life course, and the contribution which older people can make through employment, self-employment and voluntary work. They also need to recognise that different countries and ethnic and cultural groups have different expectations of age and retirement.
5. All older people have a right to be consulted and engaged in the development of their own learning. Often they know best what, where and how, they need to learn. Self-organised approaches to learning are powerful and economical ways of providing opportunities to do so. However, many of those with serious and urgent needs do not recognise them, and professionals are also needed to develop outreach strategies, and learning opportunities which will attract and engage them.
6. If learning is to meet the needs and aspirations of older people, intermediary structures are needed, to bring together the diverse range of agencies (local authorities, adult learning institutions, health and social care agencies, and NGOs) to identify and meet needs and to facilitate learning. This may, but does not necessarily, involve providing courses, since many needs can be

met by other means, or through support for self-organised activities. However, resources will often be required to build capacity and for functions like securing accommodation and teaching resources, and to develop the teaching and facilitation skills of agencies and individuals.

7. A key role for intermediary agencies is to review the adequacy of learning opportunities available to older people at local and regional level, to share and develop good practice and to devise strategies for addressing gaps and weaknesses. Reviews of this kind could usefully build on previous work which has developed frameworks and models of key competences or learning needs.
8. In an ageing and shrinking labour market, making better use of older workers is a matter of competitiveness, not charity. However, work is required to convince employers of the business case for retaining older workers longer; of the value of investing in their training and of the potential of intergenerational learning in the workplace. This also needs to extend to intermediaries who support HR in SMEs. Older workers are less likely to be trained than younger ones, although the payback time for investment in training can be substantial, given the lower mobility, and greater loyalty of older workers. Employers should especially recognise the potential of older workers as "trainers" and mentors, using their experience and knowledge to support the learning of younger colleagues, by formal and informal means. Employers should be encouraged to develop lifelong age management strategies, which include training for, and by, older workers as a central element.
9. After the age of 50, unemployment often becomes permanent. This is a major policy concern, since it represents a loss of productivity and experience to the economy, a cost to the state and a risk to the mental health of individuals. Although training and qualification programmes can increase the opportunity for people to return to work, preventative strategies, involving training of those in work but potentially at risk of unemployment, are more cost-effective.

10. Career guidance and counselling is often seen as something only for young people, yet it can play an important role in enabling older people to continue to make a productive contribution to the economy, and to the voluntary workforce. Ideally, people should have opportunities to review their career aspirations and options throughout life, but this is particularly important in mid and later working life (perhaps around the age of 50), when they begin to make decisions about the timing of retirement, about changing job or work arrangements, and about aspirations and opportunities in retirement. Better informed decisions at this stage will often produce better outcomes for the individual, the employer and the economy.

11. Much is known about good ways of supporting and delivering learning to, for and with older people, through local and national programmes and individual projects, including projects funded by the Commission. However, this knowledge is not widely shared among the agencies who might benefit from it. In addition, the experience of work with those who do participate is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the needs of the majority who do not see themselves as "learners". Distillation, dissemination and critique of good practice should be a priority for future development.