



**ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING**  
**BASIC SKILLS PROVISION FOR ADULTS:**  
**POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

(November 2010 – Final report)



**CONTENTS**

<b>ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>BASIC SKILLS PROVISION FOR ADULTS:.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Audience for the guidelines.....	5
1.2 Basis of the guidelines .....	5
1.3 Aim and objectives of the guidelines .....	7
<b>2 CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Basic skills at European level .....	8
2.2 National developments in basic skills provision.....	10
<b>3 STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDELINES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 Structure of the guidelines .....	11
<b>4 GUIDELINES: SECTION 1 - POLICY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Policy-making.....	14
<b>5 GUIDELINES: SECTION 2 - PRACTICE.....</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1 Planning at the learning setting.....	18
5.2 Outreach – making contact .....	20
5.3 Access – Getting in - Guidance .....	21
5.4 5.4 Access – Getting in - Validation .....	22
5.5 5.5 Persistence – Staying on - Programme .....	23
5.6 Persistence – Staying on – Teaching Approaches .....	25
5.7 Persistence – Staying on – Learning Support .....	27
5.8 Achievement – Getting on – Assessment and Qualification .....	28
5.9 Progression – Moving on – Progression .....	30
5.10 Quality Assurance - Policy .....	31
5.11 Quality Assurance – Staff development.....	32
5.12 Quality Assurance – Monitoring and evaluation .....	33

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Priority Action 3 of the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* (2007)<sup>1</sup> seeks to “increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before (‘go one-step-up’), especially adults with literacy and numeracy challenges, low-skilled and low-qualified adults and those with difficulties achieving a full qualification. The *Basic Skills Provision for Adults: Policy and Practice Guidelines* are the outcome of the learning generated by a range of activities that took place in the period 2008 – 2010 under Priority Action 3 as part of the 2008-2010 ‘roadmap’ of the Adult Learning Working Group on the Action Plan (2007). The activities include three Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), a related PLA, the compilation of the European Inventory of good practice<sup>2</sup> and the accompanying analytical report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”*<sup>3</sup> and a final Workshop on basic skills. The findings of the UNESCO global conference, CONFINTEA VI (December 2009), are also taken into account.<sup>4</sup>

The overall aim of the guidelines is to contribute to the development of effective policy and practice in adult basic skills provision in the Member States. The guidelines focus on adult basic skills provision in a wide range of settings and the intention is to support policy-makers, providers and practitioners to plan, design, deliver and review basic skills provision for adults in formal adult education and training settings, in the workplace, in the community and in other non-formal settings.

It worth noting that the term ‘basic skills’ is not universally used, or indeed, approved of, throughout Europe. Use of the term may simply imply a focus on upskilling those with low levels of education/qualifications, as opposed to directly addressing adult literacy, language (for migrants) and numeracy for individuals at the lower end of the literacy and numeracy continua. Thus, to maintain a focus on the most disadvantaged adults, some countries prefer to refer explicitly to ‘adult literacy’, ‘adult numeracy’ ‘language (for migrants)’ or to all three in combination as LLN (adult literacy, language [for migrants] and numeracy). ICT (information and communications technology) skills are also frequently referred to explicitly and separately. However, in other countries the term ‘basic skills’ implies a clear focus on the literacy, language, numeracy and ICT needs of the most disadvantaged adults as well as including a focus on upskilling low-skilled and low-qualified adults<sup>5</sup>.

The first PLA under Priority Action 3 took place in Dublin in January 2008, the second in London in April 2009 and the third in Oslo in March 2010. The Dublin PLA dealt with literacy; the London PLA addressed the broader topic of going ‘one step up’ in qualifications and the persistence needed to do this, while the Oslo PLA focused on the scope of basic skills within the context of key competences and the support systems needed to provide them. A fourth related PLA, on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which took place in Prague in June 2009 focused mainly

<sup>1</sup> Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* (2007) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”, Final Report*, Annex 2: Inventory of Good Outreach Practices. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”, Final Report*. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (2010) Belém Framework for Action [http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/working\\_documents/Belém%20Framework\\_Final.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/working_documents/Belém%20Framework_Final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The Adult Learning Working Group for the Action Plan (2007) decided at its meeting of October 2010 that while the term ‘basic skills’ should be used in this report, the term should be taken to include a strong focus on literacy, numeracy, language (for immigrants) and ICTs.

on low-skilled and low-qualified individuals for whom the validation and/or the acquisition of basic skills is a critical issue<sup>6</sup>.

Participants in the four PLAs came from the 31 countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and included representatives of national, regional and local government, government agencies, the social partners (national and European), research institutions, public, private and civil society providers and NGOs. A number of European bodies also participated, including ETF (European Training Foundation) and the EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults).

In a further initiative as part of the 'roadmap' of the Adult Learning Working Group, in 2008 the European Commission launched a study for the production of an inventory of good practice and projects for reaching low-skilled individuals with a focus on identifying the key success factors for reintegrating people in the labour market, in education and training and in active participation in their community<sup>7</sup>.

### 1.1 Audience for the guidelines

The potential audience for these guidelines includes all stakeholders in the provision of adult basic skills in the Member States, including national, regional and local policy-makers, funders, formal adult education and training providers, employers, trade unions and community-based organisations offering opportunities for non-formal learning and low-skilled and low-qualified adults themselves.

It was clear from the PLAs that Member States are committed to addressing the challenge of providing basic skills for adults with literacy and numeracy challenges and low-skilled adults, and numerous initiatives and approaches are employed. However, it is recognised that Member States are at different stages in the development of adult basic skills policies and practice and, thus, the extent to which any or all of the guidelines presented here are is/applicable to individual countries depends on the stage of development of their policies, systems, strategies and practices in this regard.

Moreover, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, responsibility for basic skills provision rests with the Member States and along with relevant stakeholders they will utilise the guidelines as they see fit in their national, regional and local contexts.

### 1.2 Basis of the guidelines

The guidelines draw on a wide range of discussion, feedback and recommendations from the four PLA activities, the European Inventory, the accompanying analytical report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up"*, the findings of CONFINTEA VI and the recommendations from the Workshop on Basic Skills where the findings and recommendations of the PLAs and the report were discussed and, by way of triangulation, validated.

Recommendations to policy-makers from the Dublin (D), Prague (P), London (L) and Oslo (O) PLAs relate to the need to:

- clarify terminology and concepts (D; L )
- generate reliable base-line information (D; L; P)
- explore the role of a statutory right to primary and secondary education for adults in increasing participation in adult learning (O)
- integrate literacy policies into lifelong learning policies (D)

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.skill.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm> for full reports on the four PLAs.

<sup>7</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report.*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

## Basic skills provision for adults: policy and practice guidelines

- develop and implement a national action plan for literacy and/or basic skills (D; L; O)
- involve all stakeholders in planning and co-financing adult basic skills provision (D; L)
- actively involve employers and trade unions in adult basic skills provision (D; L; O)
- raise participation rates (D) and explore the role of national/regional targets (L)
- put in place national measurement systems to monitor policy-making and policy implementation and establish a practice-policy feedback loop (L)
- generate a 'data service' culture which incorporates "numbers and stories" and may include use of a Unique Learner Number ULN] (L)
- launch and support parallel research programmes as part of basic skills initiatives to inform developments (L; P; O) and to demonstrate the wider benefits of basic skills acquisition for the economy and for society (D; L).

Recommendations to providers and practitioners from the four PLAs relate to the need to:

- engage in active outreach to attract low-skilled individuals into formal or non-formal learning wherever it is provided (D; L; P; O)
- integrate guidance into every stage of the individual's learning journey to facilitate access, support persistence in learning to the stage of achievement and enable progression (D; L; P; O) in a context where 'dipping in/dipping out' is a feature of the participation of low-skilled adults in structured learning (L)
- include an option for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in adult basic skills provision in recognition of the reality that many 'low-skilled' individuals are more low-qualified than low-skilled (P)
- ensure skilled and qualified-staff to teach basic skills through requirements in relation to initial professional development and ongoing opportunities for continuing professional development (D; L; P; O)
- explore the role of volunteers in the provision of adult basic skills (D)
- develop learning -centred programmes (D; L; O) and adopt an integrated approach to teaching of basic skills within a key competences framework, with specific teaching of the core basic skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence at the heart of a basic skills programme. Other key competences can be taught and learned transversally within the existing context.
- address numeracy & mathematics learning specifically on the basis that they are frequently overlooked in basic skills provision (O)
- embed basic skills/core competences in vocational courses to improve 'persistence' (L; O)
- recognise that for many low-skilled adults progression to the achievement of qualifications may be 'zig-zag' rather than vertical (L)
- provide adults with the option of gaining appropriate qualifications on a national framework of qualifications or within an overall qualifications system (D; L)
- establish a quality assurance system for basic skills provision, including monitoring and evaluation (L; P; O).

CONFINTEA VI emphasised literacy as the foundation skill on which to build others and calls for clear goals and deadlines, financing and technical support to create large-scale and sustainable literacy programmes to eradicate illiteracy.

The analytical report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”* presents an analysis of the detailed empirical data on 64 good practices from 33 European countries along with the case studies of 14 of the identified practices which are presented in the European Inventory of good outreach practices<sup>8</sup>. The report states that the challenge of low-skilled individuals exists to varying degrees in all countries and the inventory of approaches demonstrates that effective solutions exist in the majority of countries, albeit with a limited scope and for very specific target groups only<sup>9</sup>. On the basis of an analysis of these effective solutions, the report makes recommendations to European-level stakeholders, to national, regional and local policy-makers and to practitioners in relation to five key factors for successful basic skills provision, namely:

- the political/institutional framework
- integrative strategies approach
- structural and organisational components
- didactical design
- evaluation and monitoring.

When the report was presented at the Workshop on Basic Skills in Brussels (June 2010) it was recommended that its many policy and practice findings and recommendations be translated into a set of concrete guidelines on the development of policy and practice on basic skills. These guidelines are a response to that clear recommendation.

### 1.3 Aim and objectives of the guidelines

The guidelines seek to support policy-makers at national, regional and/or local levels, providers in a wide range of settings – formal and non-formal, including formal adult education centres and schools, the workplace and the community – and practitioners to maximise the outcomes of basic skills provision for all stakeholders, especially adults with literacy and numeracy challenges and low-skilled individuals. The guidelines represent a kind of ‘toolbox’ from which the various users may choose to adopt those guidelines most relevant to their requirements and the stages of development of basic skills provision.

The specific objectives of the guidelines are:

- to support policy-makers and related stakeholders to develop, fund, implement, monitor and review policies and initiatives to respond to the basic skills learning needs of adults with literacy and numeracy challenges and low-skilled adults in a wide range of settings
- to support providers and practitioners to adopt a systematic approach to basic skills provision so as to reach, support, teach and assess low-skilled individuals to enable them to go ‘one step up’ in terms of their qualifications and to develop the key competences for family and community life, for work and for lifelong learning.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”, Final Report, Annex 2: Inventory of Good Outreach Practices.* [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”, Final Report, p. 7* [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

## 2 CONTEXT

### 2.1 Basic skills at European level

Over the past decade up to 2010 the issue of basic skills has been to the forefront of education and training discourse at European level and has been an integral part of the 'Lisbon process.' In the late 1990s international surveys such as IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey)<sup>10</sup> showed that in many European countries a considerable share of the adult population did not have the reading and writing skills necessary to function in their daily lives or in society as a whole. Individuals at risk in this regard included early school leavers; older adults; people with a disability; prisoners/ex-prisoners; and migrants.

While the educational attainment levels of adults in the Member States have improved considerably since 2000, 77 million Europeans aged 25-64 (close to 30% of the working age population) still have at most lower secondary education<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, all the evidence points to the need for a highly qualified labour force to achieve the European Union's goal of becoming a more dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, there remains strong evidence that beyond the current economic downturn there will be more and different jobs in the EU by 2020 than there were in 2006<sup>12</sup>. Many of these new jobs are expected to require the highest qualifications levels. In 1996, for example, 31% of jobs needed low level or no qualifications. By 2020, this proportion is expected to fall to around 18%<sup>13</sup>.

The gradual loss of low-skilled jobs in the labour market and the lack of highly-qualified workers means that investing in second-chance education and the upgrading of existing skills among the labour force (especially those who do not have the minimum level of qualification required to enter the labour market, namely, Level 2 of the European Qualifications Framework) is of paramount importance.

In the period 2000 - 2010 the need for all citizens to acquire and constantly update their basic skills for a wide range of personal, social, civic, cultural and economic purposes has been regularly restated in the European Union, including in the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme (2002)*<sup>14</sup>, by the Brussels European Councils (March 2003 and March 2005) and in the re-launched Lisbon Strategy (2005)<sup>15</sup>.

In 2006 the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>16</sup> set out eight competences covering knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to a range of contexts which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active

<sup>10</sup> OECD (1995) *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey*. Paris: OECD; OECD (1997a) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society: Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Paris: OECD; OECD (2000) *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Paris: OECD.

<sup>11</sup> Commission Staff Working Document, *Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training, Indicators and Benchmarks 2009*. SEC (2009) 1616.

<sup>12</sup> Cedefop (2009) *Continuity, consolidation and change; Towards a European era of vocational education and training*. Cedefop Reference series; 73.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe [Official Journal C 142/01 of 14.06.2002].

<sup>15</sup> [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisbon\\_strategy\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisbon_strategy_en.htm)

<sup>16</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>.

citizenship, social inclusion and employment. The Recommendation placed a particular emphasis on language, literacy, numeracy and ICTs and underlined their fundamental role in learning when it declared “Competence in the fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT is an essential foundation for learning, and learning to learn supports all learning.” In addition, the acquisition of these basic skills gives access to learning leading to improved qualifications levels, e.g. upper secondary qualifications.

The Communication on adult learning (2006)<sup>17</sup> and the subsequent Action Plan on adult learning (2007)<sup>18</sup> invited Member States to address the challenge of the persistently high number of early school leavers who enter adulthood without a qualification. The May 2008 Conclusions on adult learning<sup>19</sup> recognised the need to raise the skills levels of a significant number of low-skilled workers with a view to enabling all citizens to adapt to technological change and future skills needs. In 2009, *ET2020* the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training to 2020 recognised that “the major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone”<sup>20</sup>.

In May 2010 the Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training<sup>21</sup> adopted by the Education Council invited Member States to:

- strengthen policies to enable the low-skilled, unemployed adults and, where appropriate, citizens with a migrant background to gain a qualification or take their skills a step further (“one step up”), and broaden the provision of second-chance education for young adults;
- promote measures to ensure that all have access to the basic skills and key competences needed to live and learn in the knowledge society, in particular literacy and ICT skills.

Participation in adult learning – formal, non-formal and informal – is clearly a key means for individuals to raise their basic skills levels. However, low participation rates in adult learning present a major barrier in this regard. In addition, the reality that adults with the lowest levels of initial education and training participate least in adult learning constitutes a double barrier to raising their literacy, language and numeracy levels. The recent Adult Education Survey indicates that more than one-third (35.7%) of the EU’s population aged 25-64 participated in formal or non-formal learning in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>22</sup>. Job-related non-formal learning is where the majority of adults participate and participation rates decrease with age. Significantly, the survey also confirmed that education levels and occupational status have a strong impact on participation. Highly-skilled, white-collar workers have the highest participations rates, while highly-skilled and low-skilled blue-collar workers tend to have equally poor chances of participating in structured learning in every country surveyed. This presents a major challenge to raising participation levels in basic skills provision in many countries.

Participation in adult learning varies enormously between countries. In 2008, 9.5% of the EU adult population aged 25-64 participated in learning on a four-week reference period, ranging from a low of 1.4% to a high of 32.4% – see Figure 1.

---

<sup>17</sup> Communication on Adult Learning *It is never too late to learn* (2006).

<sup>18</sup> Communication on an Action Plan on Adult Learning, *It is always a good time to learn* (2007).

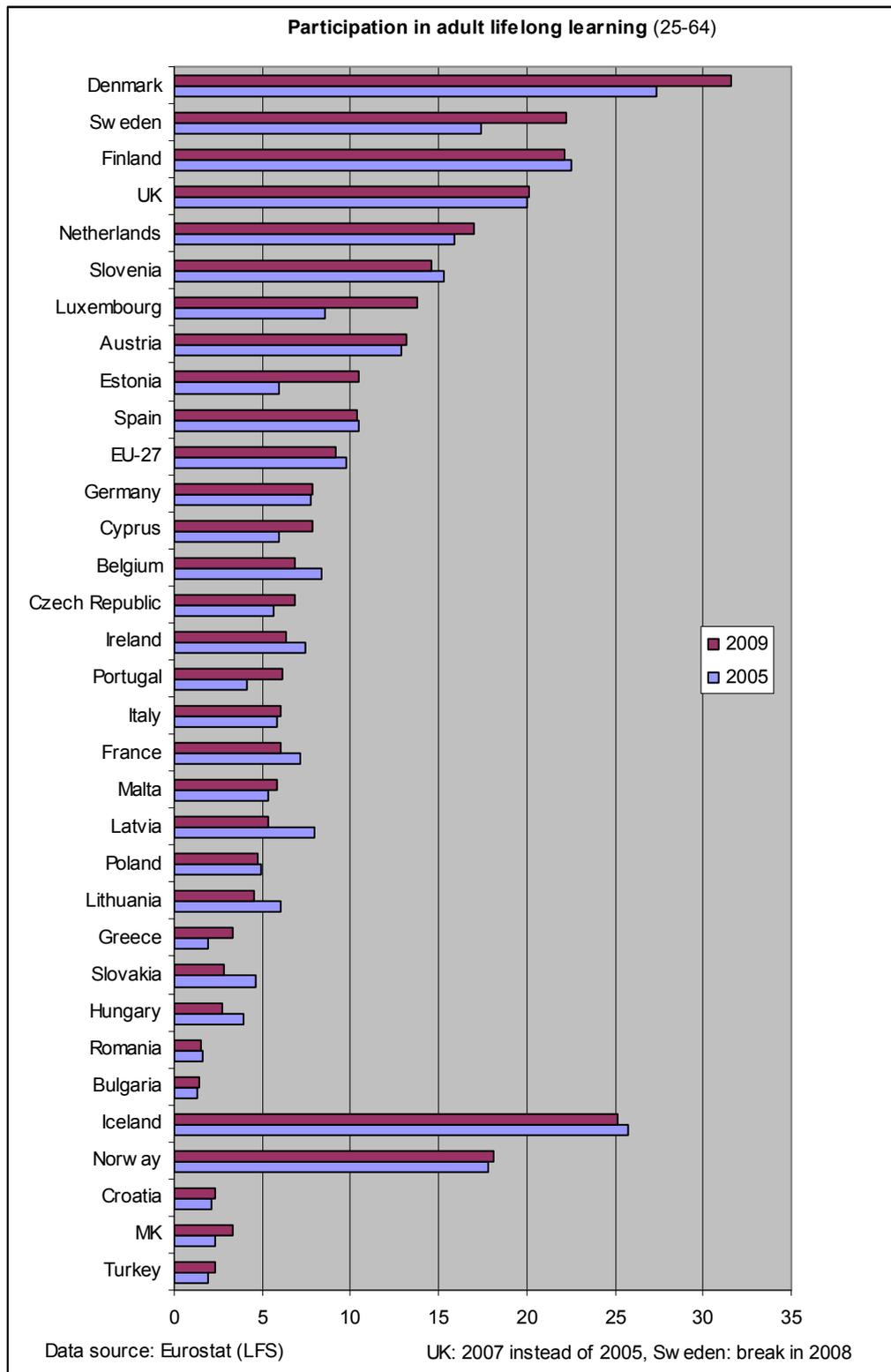
<sup>19</sup> OJ C 140, 6.6.2008.

<sup>20</sup> Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009. Official Journal of the European Union C 119/2, 28.5.2009 <http://eur-ex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

<sup>21</sup> Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training, 11 May 2010, Brussels. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/114374.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/114374.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Boateng, S. K. (2009) Significant country differences in adult learning. Eurostat Statistics in Focus. 44/2009.

**Figure 1: Participation of adults in lifelong learning, 2009**



**2.2 National developments in basic skills provision**

The Background Reports for the four PLAs and the European Inventory describe a range of significant measures that are contributing to the development of a robust, even if fragmented, provision of basic skills for low-skilled individuals in the Member States, including:

- the emergence in many Member States of a broad understanding of the term 'basic skills' based on the framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. At the same time, the areas covered by the term *basic skills* vary across countries by range and scope, but also in terms of how well developed basic skills policy and practice are.
- a focus on labour market needs and on how employers, the workplace and the community can enable low-skilled individuals to take their qualifications "one step up";
- collaborative arrangements between key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels for the development of policy and the provision of resources for basic skills;
- a range of measures to promote basic skills for adults, including: legislation; funding; information campaigns; programmes of basic skills;
- established or emerging guidance services to support and motivate adults seeking to develop/improve their basic skills;
- initial and continuing professional development (IPD and CPD) opportunities, qualifications and career pathways for basic skills practitioners;
- basic skills assessment and qualifications on a national framework of qualifications (NFQ) or external assessment and certification of basic skills according to regional and/or national criteria.

### 3 STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDELINES

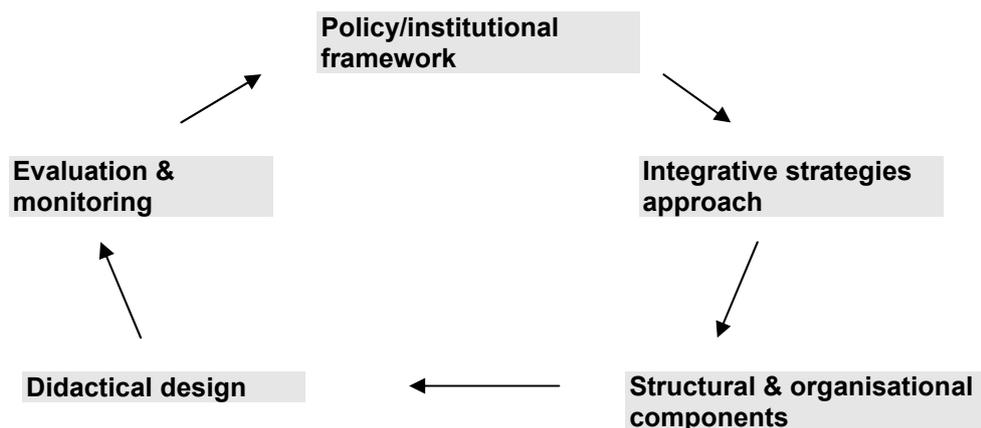
#### 3.1 Structure of the guidelines

Section 1 of the guidelines covers policy-making for basic skills provision. Many recommendations on policy-making emerged from the four PLAs. In addition, the analysis of good practices carried out in the report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up"*<sup>23</sup> highlighted a number of key factors which tend to foster the success of the educational actions promoted - see Figure 2. These factors operate at both systems and provider level and in Section 1 they are used to focus the guidelines at the level of policy-making and funding.

**Figure 2. Success factors identified in the practices described in the European Inventory**

---

<sup>23</sup> op. cit. p. 13.



The *policy and institutional framework* refers to the existence of a context where all key institutional actors, public and private, state and enterprises have the institutional instruments necessary to promote a policy aimed at outreach to low-skilled adults.

The *integrated strategic approach* refers to the multiplicity of places and actors involved in basic skills provision. To reach low-skilled adults it is essential to transform their life and work environments into places of learning.

The *organisational components* refer to the need for programmes aimed at outreach to low-skilled adults to include three essential components: a) policy measures capable of increasing demand; b) support and guidance services at all stages of the learning journey; c) measures which assure the quantity and quality of learning opportunities.

The *didactical design* refers to the need for learning opportunities to take new didactical forms related to work and daily life and based on less formal and embedded methods.

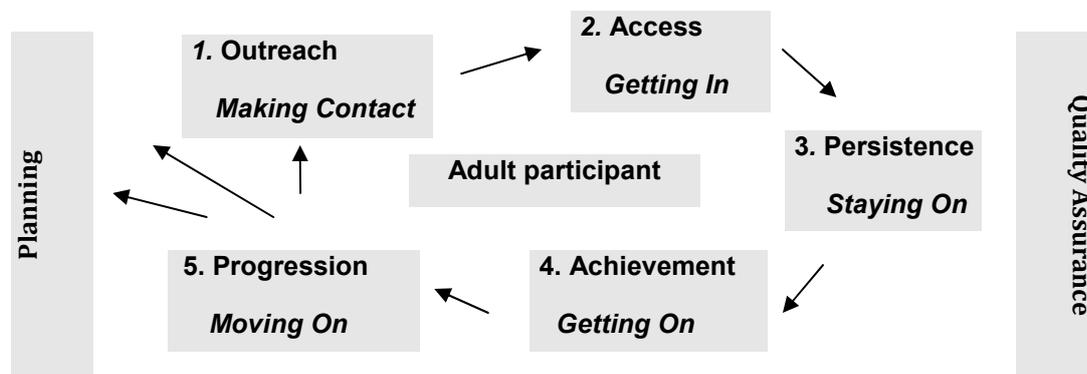
*Evaluation and monitoring* highlights the necessity to adopt a results-oriented approach as well as an approach which takes into consideration the desired impact of the interventions.

Section 2 is also based on recommendations from the PLAs and the report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”*. The concept of the ‘learner journey’ which provides an overview of the key elements of a participant’s experience in any adult learning setting offers a useful framework to structure the practice guidelines. As indicated in Figure 3, the journey begins with making contact with the adult learning opportunity wherever it is located, either directly or as a result of **outreach** by the provider<sup>24</sup>. **Access** to the actual learning opportunity and induction are the next stage in the learner’s journey, followed by the critical stage of **persistence** or continuing with the learning activity to reach the stage of **achievement** in terms of overall outcomes, including qualifications. The final stage is **progression** from the learning setting to a wide range of options, including further

<sup>24</sup> In these guidelines the term ‘provider’ is taken to include all providers of basic skills learning opportunities in public and private formal education and training settings, in the workplace and in community-based settings. The term does not include teaching and support personnel (including teachers, trainers, tutors, outreach workers, validation personnel and guidance personnel including counsellors, mentors and coaches) who are referred to as ‘practitioners’ in the guidelines. In addition, the term ‘learning setting’ is used to indicate any physical learning environment. Although, in general, the PLAs did not focus to any extent on distance learning as an approach to basic skills provision, the study *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”* did include this approach so it is referred to in the guidelines.

learning where the journey begins again. It should be noted that Figure 3 does not necessarily imply an uninterrupted 'learner journey'. From time to time or, indeed, more frequently, the life circumstances of the individual participant in an adult learning opportunity may serve to bring about interruptions and/or delays in his/her learning endeavour.

**Figure 3. The learner's journey**



An integrated approach at all the stages of the journey is essential to the acquisition of basic skills by low-skilled individuals. Guidelines for each stage are book-ended, on the one hand, by guidelines on **planning at the learning setting** for basic skills provision and, on the other, by guidelines in relation to embedding **quality assurance** policies and practices, especially monitoring and evaluation.

**Note:** The European Inventory and the accompanying report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up"* provide examples of good practice for all the stages of policy-making and practice in basic skills provision.

## 4 GUIDELINES: SECTION 1 - POLICY

#### 4.1 Policy-making

##### Guideline No. 1.1

##### Policy-making

To address the persistent challenge of social and economic exclusion experienced by many low-skilled adults in Europe and to support economic and social development, there is a fundamental need for national, regional and local authorities, together with all related stakeholders, to intervene at a wide range of levels and in relation to a wide range of issues to guarantee learning opportunities that enable low-skilled and low-qualified individuals including adults with literacy, language and/or numeracy difficulties to achieve basic skills<sup>25</sup>. The individual must be at the heart of the policy development triangle comprised of:

- government departments to establish the necessary framework and to monitor the system
- the demand side, including the social partners who are among the most important stakeholders
- the supply side, including: providers (education and training providers; employers; museums; libraries; prisons; religious groups/bodies; social/cultural organisations; third sector organisations); teaching and support personnel.

##### Guidelines

##### General

- 1.1.1 Terminology and concepts are clarified and the scope of basic skills is defined.
- 1.1.2 The need to reduce the number of low-skilled individuals and the urgency of developing quality basic skills provision are recognised and acknowledged by public authorities and other stakeholders.
- 1.1.3 The perception of the value of basic skills provision is promoted among all stakeholders, including employees and employers.
- 1.1.4 Reliable base-line information is gathered and the exact dimension of the low-skilled phenomenon and its distribution among various economic sectors and among various groups of the population are known. Data on the low-skilled population are disaggregated to identify numbers with literacy and numeracy challenges and those who are low-qualified rather than low-skilled.

##### Framework conditions and priorities

- 1.1.5 Public policy creates the frameworks – legislative, governance, financial, institutional, learning, informational, qualifications and regulatory – to move from ‘supply-side thinking’ to ‘demand-side thinking’ to motivate low-skilled individuals to engage in structured learning to improve their basic skills and where necessary to gain proficiency in literacy, language and/or numeracy.
- 1.1.6 Governance issues are addressed with a view to creating local, regional and national frameworks, structures and partnerships which include public authorities, social partners and civil society.
- 1.1.7 Raising rates of participation in basic skills learning is a key priority. The achievement of well-defined, measurable and reachable participation targets is supported by appropriate resources based on information on the scale of under-achievement.
- 1.1.8 A statutory right to education equivalent to primary and secondary level exists for low-skilled and low-qualified adults.

<sup>25</sup> Recommendation of the PLAs and the report ‘Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications ‘one step-up’.

- 1.1.9** Policies enabling low-skilled individuals to take their qualifications ‘one step up’ concern not only education and training policies but also ‘collateral’ policies including welfare, labour, health, rural development, regional and economic policies.
- 1.1.10** Basic skills policies are integrated into lifelong learning policies and basic skills provision has multiple objectives and serves the individual, the society at large and sustainable economic development.
- 1.1.11** A national/regional action plan for basic skills promotes adult basic education and training through all forms of learning – formal, non-formal and informal - and in a wide range of life settings, including formal education and training centres, the workplace, prisons, libraries, museums, hospitals, the army and the community.
- 1.1.12** Policy-makers work with providers to ensure the maintenance of policy priorities as they evolve through the responsibility chain.
- 1.1.13** The inflow of low-skilled school leavers to the adult population is addressed through a range of preventative and remediation measures in the formal education and training system before individuals leave the schooling system.

#### **Stakeholders**

- 1.1.14** All national, regional and local stakeholders, including ministries, regional and local authorities the social partners and civil society actors, are involved in policy-making and in planning for and co-financing adult basic skills provision. Responsibilities are clearly defined. Employers are motivated to strengthen a culture of learning in and outside the workplace and to be part of the infrastructure for supporting learning.
- 1.1.15** Partnerships of stakeholders at all levels contribute to the development of an integrated, coherent framework of systematic and effective strategies to address the needs of low-skilled and low-qualified adults and all economic and social organisations, public and private, define their own *Skills and learning development plans* for upgrading the qualifications of low-skilled people.
- 1.1.16** Implementation costs are shared among the various stakeholders, with direct costs being supported by public authorities and indirect and opportunity<sup>26</sup> costs by companies and individuals. Fiscal incentives support employers and workplaces that provide basic skills learning opportunities.
- 1.1.17** Because more choices mean more chances, there is a synergy between different forms of provision and bridges between the different learning pathways, creating more opportunities for learners to move between different learning opportunities.

#### **Addressing barriers to participation**

- 1.1.18** Publicly-supported awareness campaigns guarantee open access to quality information on basic skills learning opportunities.
- 1.1.19** Systematic steps are taken to boost demand for basic skills provision among the ‘hard to reach’.
- 1.1.20** Lifelong guidance services support the basic skills learner at all stages of his/her learning.
- 1.1.21** Learning programmes, whatever their location, are sufficiently accessible, flexible and learner-centred to enable learners to achieve at least ‘one step-up’ in their qualifications.

---

<sup>26</sup> The benefit (s) foregone from an alternative use of the time and/or money devoted to enabling, providing and/or participating in basic skills learning opportunities.

**1.1.22** Measures to overcome financial obstacles to participation include, for example, free or low-fee provision, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), incentive-based saving, tax relief or benefit entitlements for those who left school early or who have not gained appropriate skills.

#### **Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

**1.1.23** Over-arching national/regional/local policies, targets and funding attract low-skilled individuals into validation processes to gain credit for their non-formal and informal learning.

**1.1.24** Partnerships of stakeholders are in place to support validation, including assessment bodies, formal education/training providers at regional and local levels; public employers; large corporations; MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises); trade unions; social welfare systems; labour offices; churches; libraries; museums; prisons; army; social/cultural organisations; third sector organisations and low-skilled and low-qualified individuals.

**1.1.25** Guidance is at the heart of validation processes.

#### **Qualifications**

**1.1.26** National, regional and local qualifications systems include opportunities to achieve qualifications at low levels. Such systems allow for the accumulation of credit in small steps towards a full award.

#### **Quality Assurance**

**1.1.27** A 'data service' culture which incorporates "numbers and stories" (quantitative and qualitative data) is promoted and data collection on provision and achievement in basic skills is cross-governmental not just for the education and/or labour ministry. The possibility of developing a Unique Learner Number (ULN) system and a set of 'core indicators' for monitoring and evaluation is explored.

**1.1.28** Recording methodologies are part of a data chain linking all levels from individuals to providers to policy-makers.

**1.1.29** Systems-level quality assurance includes a focus on the accreditation of providers of basic skills and on tailored initial and continuing professional development of teachers/trainers of basic skills.

#### **Practice-policy-practice loop**

**1.1.30** Parallel research programmes inform developments and demonstrate the wider benefits of basic skills acquisition for the economy and the society.

**1.1.31** Impact evaluation is supported, promoted and financed. The timing of such evaluation allows sufficient time to collect data, to evaluate them and to disseminate the findings.

**1.1.32** A feedback loop from practice to policy to practice enables providers, practitioners and participants to inform policy and influence policy and practice changes through the transfer of effective approaches.

**1.1.33** Monitoring and evaluation in relation to basic skills inform and support policy-making, evaluate policy implementation and evaluate policy-making itself.

## **5 GUIDELINES: SECTION 2 - PRACTICE**

## 5.1 Planning at the learning setting

### Guideline No. 1.1

#### Strategic and operational planning

The majority of the low-skilled population in the European Union is active in the labour market. In 2008 the total active labour market rate for the ISCED-2 group (lower secondary education) was 62.7%. In some countries they represent more than 50% of the labour force. Thus the workplace is a key setting where low-skilled individuals can participate in structured learning. While this fact in itself is positive and indicates the strong potential demand for upgrading coming from the labour market, it nevertheless poses challenges for the provision of learning in combination with work. Several of the selected good practices in the European Inventory focus on this challenge<sup>27</sup>. In addition, the local community is a setting which can generate new learning experiences<sup>28</sup>. Bringing learning closer to learners of basic skills is the guiding principle and the critical importance of providers being rooted in their local/regional community and having a strong knowledge of the social, cultural and economic environment in which they are operating is frequently underlined.

Learning settings for basic skills provision, be it a formal education and training centre, the workplace or a community setting, will need to develop a strategic plan which determines values, vision, mission, goals, objectives, policies, priorities, strategies and quality assurance approaches to shape the basic skills learner's total experience in the learning setting. In the context of basic skills provision in the workplace, a decision as to whether it is basic skills *at* the workplace or *for* the workplace or both will need to be taken.

Operational planning will link the strategic plan to the learning activities which the learning setting will enable/deliver and the resources required delivering them within a given operational period. The operational plan will outline actions, roles, responsibilities, timelines, success indicators, monitoring strategies and budgets for the delivery of basic skills provision. While some of the actions arising from the planning processes may be mandatory, for example, keeping financial accounts and learner records, the majority will be the result of choices taken and decisions made by management, teaching and support personnel, frequently in consultation with the low-skilled individual, to maximise the learning outcomes for him/her.

Institutions, organisations and bodies where the core business is not education and training may find it useful, or even essential, to collaborate with and draw on the expertise of, education and training providers to enable them to provide learning opportunities for staff, for members or for the general public

#### Guidelines

##### General

- 1.1.1** As a basis for planning, an initial review of the learning setting's vision, mission, policies, procedures, practices and programmes is carried out to establish the centre's position in relation to basic skills provision. Strengths, weaknesses and gaps are identified and thereafter addressed as part of an overall action plan.
- 1.1.2** Where a learning setting includes more than basic skills provision, policies and procedures make specific reference to the provision of basic skills.

<sup>27</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final Recommendations*. Annex 2: Inventory of Good Outreach Practices p. 9.

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.14

### **Addressing barriers to participation**

- 1.1.3** There is a focus on the “demand side’ through outreach services; guidance support; access; induction; needs analysis; appropriate learning programmes; learning supports; assessment and qualifications opportunities and quality assurance approaches.
- 1.1.4** In recognition of the reality that many ‘low-skilled’ individuals are more low-qualified than low-skilled, opportunities are available for the validation of their non-formal learning, including adequate guidance and support measures.

### **Learning Programme**

- 1.1.5** The low-skilled/low-qualified individual is at the heart of the planning and implementation of the learning programme and his/her life settings become sites for learning basic skills.
- 1.1.6** The learning setting adopts the most appropriate, effective and sustainable teaching and learning models, including distance learning as appropriate.
- 1.1.7** Assessment approaches are sensitive to the needs of the learners and appropriate qualification options are available to learners.
- 1.1.8** There is a whole-institution focus on supporting learners’ persistence in the learning endeavour and the necessary supports in this regard are available to each individual.
- 1.1.9** Progression is a key principle of the learning programme, whether to qualifications, a new learning level or both within an understanding that progression is not always linear or vertical.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- 1.1.10** The objectives of monitoring and evaluation are clarified at the very beginning of the programme planning so that the necessary procedures are integrated into the process of programme delivery.
- 1.1.11** Management information systems are in place to judge need and to provide guidance on how resources should be deployed.
- 1.1.12** The operational plan contains a process for monitoring progress in relation to effective practice in basic skills.
- 1.1.13** Evaluations of processes, of results and of impact are distinct so as to provide clear data on all elements of provision, especially outcomes for individuals and other stakeholders.
- 1.1.14** A provider-level quality assurance system has the capacity to provide a range of quantitative and qualitative feedback on the effectiveness of the basic skills provision.
- 1.1.15** The implementation of the strategic and operational plans is systematically reviewed. Results are used to maximise investment and to identify the most effective ways of addressing the basic skills needs of workers and members of the community in general.

## 5.2 Outreach – making contact

### Guideline No. 2.1

#### Making Contact

The *integrated strategic approach* recommended in the report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”* refers to the multiplicity of places and actors involved in basic skills provision. To reach low-skilled adults it is essential to transform their life and work environments into places of learning. The workplace and the local community - with its libraries, museums, cultural centres - the home, the business, the army, associations, prisons etc. are all places which can generate learning experiences. Outreach work would include raising the issue of basic skills learning with these potential providers of learning opportunities for low-skilled/low qualified individuals.

Outreach strategies are critical to engaging low-skilled and low-qualified adults in structured learning in these settings. Good outreach work includes networking; partnership, brokerage, bringing the learning opportunity close to the learner and time. A wide repertoire of outreach activities is essential to reach individuals with distinct profiles. Outreach is highly-skilled work and as such requires practitioners with high competence levels. It is essentially about forming relationships that build trust and enable the possibility of structured learning to be introduced to the individual and acted upon by him/her.

Learning “ambassadors” who act in the workplace and/or the community can be important motivators of low-skilled and low-qualified adults. In the workplace union representatives could fulfil this role and in the community parents could be reached by their children’s teachers. Leisure activities could also be used as entry points. In the community non-formal providers and other third sector organisations with strong community links play a key role in reaching low-skilled individuals. Unemployed individuals may be best supported through employment services in the context of job-related guidance. Staff of such services will require specific training to undertake such a role. Immigrants may be reached initially by members of their own communities.

On-line and/or telephone guidance has a role to play in outreach for those who are at distance or who might wish to preserve anonymity at the initial contact stage.

#### Guidelines

- 2.1.1 Inter-agency partnership and co-operation are a key feature of outreach strategies to low-skilled and low-qualified individuals in the workplace and in the community.
- 2.1.2 Outreach is systematic and sustained through community links, outreach events, information centres, open days, invitation days, talks, briefings, publicity campaigns, media advertising, adult learning weeks, word of mouth, demonstrations, taster courses, contact points in libraries, hospitals, schools, community centres, local clubs and churches.
- 2.1.3 Existing learners act as ‘champions’ and role models to reach their peers.
- 2.1.4 Outreach personnel have the competences to carry out their work and continuing professional development opportunities are in place.
- 2.1.5 The cost of outreach work is built into national, regional, local and provider-based funding structures.
- 2.1.6 Evaluation of outreach work goes beyond quantitative measures on the understanding that outreach takes time, may take time to show results and is essentially process work.

**5.3 Access – Getting in - Guidance**

**Guideline No. 3.1**

**The role of guidance**

The induction and orientation stages of access are critical for a prospective basic skills learner. Guidance as a one-to-one activity is an essential support at the access stage. In collaboration with the basic skills practitioner(s), the guidance practitioner guides the potential participant through needs analysis, assists him/her to identify the learning programme s/he wishes to follow and serves to clarify the requirements of that programme. Guidance supports participants to set learning and progression goals, to identify ways and means of achieving them within the provision, to develop an individual learning plan and to identify any learning supports needed for a successful learning experience and worthwhile outcomes.

A multi-actor approach is required to assist potential learners to agree an individual learning plan (ILP). While basic skills teachers will usually play a front line role in this regard, the role of a professional guidance service is important during all stages of the ILP - initial, ongoing, formative review, concluding and summative review.

**Guidelines**

- 3.1.1** Guidance is a key aspect of access practices and processes in the learning setting.
- 3.1.2** Providers of guidance are sensitive to the challenges faced by low-skilled and low-qualified individuals in terms of participation in basic skills provision and adapt their practices accordingly.
- 3.1.3** Guidance activities create an atmosphere of empathy and respect, including a non-judgemental focus on the individual's learning and related needs.
- 3.1.4** Guidance activities are carried out on a one-to-one and group basis and relate to the personal experience of each individual.
- 3.1.5** Guidance personnel have the competence and the facilities to provide guidance as part of distance learning.
- 3.1.6** Guidance personnel lead a whole-team approach to induction of the individual into the learning activity and deliver a guidance 'curriculum' that covers areas such as needs analysis; goal setting; level choices and individual learning plan.
- 3.1.7** Guidance personnel carry out initial screening (preliminary assessment) to identify whether an individual may have a literacy and/or numeracy need. If such a need is identified a more thorough assessment is undertaken by staff with specific training in teaching adult literacy and/or numeracy.
- 3.1.8** A multi-actor approach is in place to assist potential learners to agree an individual learning plan (ILP). The basic skills teacher and the guidance personnel play key roles in this regard.
- 3.1.9** Guidance personnel provide structured initial and formative assessment to identify any additional learning supports needed by the individual.
- 3.1.10** Guidance personnel support validation of non-formal and informal learning, as appropriate.
- 3.1.11** Guidance personnel provide support in relation to scheduling and sequencing learning events to suit individual personal circumstances and in relation to learning approaches and methods.

## 5.4 Access – Getting in - Validation

### Guideline No. 4.1

#### The role of validation

The availability of validation of non-formal and informal learning can act as an incentive to participation in structured learning for low-skilled individuals, especially those who are more low-qualified than low-skilled. The benefits of validation for the low-skilled or low-qualified individual are personal, learning-related and labour-market related. Personal benefits include: increased self-esteem and self-confidence; self-awareness of capabilities and consequent empowerment and the opportunity to embark on a professional and personal project. Learning-related benefits include: formal recognition of learning outcomes not already certified; a stimulus to engagement in formal learning and further non-formal learning; possible tailor-made training to supplement existing identified competences; a reduction in opportunity costs through exemptions which eliminate or reduce the need to spend time and money re-learning what has already been learned. Benefits for employers include a reduction in the time away from the job required by an employee to achieve a qualification.

However, obstacles to participation in a validation process are manifold, particularly for low-skilled individuals. Therefore, guidance is critical to the validation process. The key roles of guidance personnel relate to: the provision of information, motivation and stimulus; the identification of an individual's existing learning outcomes; the provision of support for the development of his/her portfolio of evidence; making recommendations for further education and training.

#### Guidelines

- 4.1.1 Guidance services are integral to the provision of validation opportunities.
- 4.1.2 Trade unions act as brokers of validation in the workplace.
- 4.1.3 Access to the validation process is free of charge or for a small fee. Fiscal arrangements such as tax relief are available to individuals and employers who use the validation process.
- 4.1.4 A user-friendly system of validation with user-friendly tools/processes is in place.
- 4.1.5 'One size fits nobody' so validation has tailored approaches to fit low-skilled individuals who are able to have the same person to guide him/her through the entire validation process.
- 4.1.6 Validation practitioners have specific competences to work effectively with low-skilled individuals.
- 4.1.7 Quality assurance of validation processes reassures users, builds trust and acceptance and proves that the outcomes of validation of non-formal and informal learning are valid and reliable.
- 4.1.8 All the users of the validation process, including public authorities, individuals, employers and education and training institutions are involved to develop explicit and transparent process-related standards for all stages of the validation process, including guidance, assessment, validation and certification.
- 4.1.9 The continuing professional development of validation practitioners is a critical component of quality assurance and internal quality assurance of validation processes in place.

## 5.5 Persistence – Staying on - Programme

### Guideline No. 5.1

#### Learning Programme

Persistence in the sense of ‘continuing in learning activities in spite of difficulties’ is a learner-centred rather than organisation-centred concept that sees the demands of learning from the learner’s rather than the provider’s point of view<sup>29</sup>. The concept recognises the complicated, irregular pattern of learning in busy adult lives. For example, most adults with poor basic skills are in employment and women with poor basic skills are more likely to have more than three children, with the probable attendant care responsibilities. The idea of ‘dipping out’ (temporarily) rather than ‘dropping out’ is key to the concept of persistence. Non-traditional and hard-to-reach learners appear least likely to persist and engagement with learning has to occur at the ‘right time’ with emphasis on small steps, such as improvement in self-confidence, rather than a focus on qualifications.

Certain supports will enhance persistence, including: support from peers, mentors and guidance professionals. Other factors that support persistence include: a supportive social network; role models; and setting and revisiting realistic but challenging goals. Where the approach adopted is that of distance learning particular attention must be paid to how the learner is supported to persist at his/her learning endeavour.

The explicit learning programme is a key means by which individuals achieve their learning goals. Adults with basic skills challenges require learning opportunities that place the learner at the heart of the activity and take into account work, home and other responsibilities and interests. Learning content, structuring of the learning, scheduling, teaching/learning methods and learning supports are crucial in supporting individuals to overcome the barriers to participation experienced by busy, reluctant or sceptical adults.

The *didactical design* recommended in the study *Enabling low-skilled individuals to go ‘One Step Up’ with their qualifications* refers to the need for learning opportunities to take new didactical forms related to work and daily life and based on less formal and embedded methods. The key to didactical design is the codified knowledge which the adult does not yet possess but which is in use in his/her life or work environment. The European Inventory identifies that embedding basic skills in the workplace and in life contexts such as social or religious groups, prisons, the army, and other community settings, is an effective way of reaching low-skilled adults. Research demonstrates that learners on ‘embedded’ courses are more likely to persist and have higher success rates than learners on ‘non-embedded’ courses<sup>30</sup>.

Flexibility is a key enabling principle for structuring a learning programme for low-skilled and low-qualified individuals. It facilitates modularisation, unitisation of content and individualisation. Basic skills learning may be organised in a range of ‘packages’ and levels such as: starter courses; family learning; workplace basic education; themed basic skills (for example, through childcare, eldercare and family finance studies); targeted initiatives (for example, basic skills for men); basic skills integrated into skills learning.

Overall sensitivity to the challenges which the low-skilled individual frequently faces is an essential characteristic of providers seeking to provide them with appropriate learning opportunities.

<sup>29</sup> See [www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm](http://www.ksll.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm) for Final Report on the London PLA.

<sup>30</sup> op.cit. p13.

### **Guidelines**

- 5.5.1** The educational processes of the learning programme are located in the daily life situation of the individual, are capable of establishing meaning in his/her immediate environment and are in tune with his/her needs, workplace, family and social life.
- 5.5.2** The learning setting offers a wide range of choices appropriate to the particular circumstances of the individual. Learning settings in the workplace offer learning activities that are contextualised in and based on, work-oriented competences and aim to develop the basic skills of the workers. Where distance learning is the approach adopted there is sufficient flexibility to accommodate the needs of low-skilled individuals.
- 5.5.3** A wide range of relevant, accessible learning opportunities that meet individuals' and other stakeholders' needs have been identified through consultation, negotiation and assessment, as appropriate.
- 5.5.4** An integrated approach to teaching basic skills within a key competences framework is adopted, with specific teaching of the core basic skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence at the heart of a basic skills programme while other key competences are taught and learned transversally within the existing context.
- 5.5.5** The need to teach numeracy explicitly and separately is explored in recognition of the fact that, in general, the teaching of numeracy gets less attention than the teaching of literacy and can be 'lost' in an integrated learning situation.
- 5.5.6** As appropriate, basic skills are embedded in vocational courses by teachers/trainers with a strong commitment to the practice.
- 5.5.7** Course organisation, including individualised learning pathways with the necessary supports, takes into account the needs of the individual and is designed to emphasise the development of competences that are transferable to a wide range of life and work situations.
- 5.5.8** Courses are modularised to support participation, motivation and recognition of achievement. The learning programme includes options for assessment, certification and progression.
- 5.5.9** Guidance personnel recognise that 'dipping in/dipping out' is a feature of the participation of low-skilled adults in a structured learning programme and provide a 'continuity of concern' during the 'dipping out' period.

## 5.6 Persistence – Staying on – Teaching Approaches

### Guideline No. 6.1

#### Teaching Approaches

Teachers and good teaching are key factors in the motivation, persistence and achievement of the individual engaged in learning basic skills. Teachers working in the area of basic skills are first and foremost facilitators of learning and require a holistic approach that goes beyond a concentration on educational processes only. To enhance learner persistence and achievement, teachers must have multiple skills including, strong professional knowledge; teaching skills; support skills; social and personal skills; guidance skills; assessment skills and team work skills.

Learners on 'embedded' courses where basic skills teaching by a trained practitioner is 'embedded' in vocational and other training are more likely to persist and have higher success rates than learners on 'non-embedded' courses<sup>31</sup>. Active, participative approaches based on 'blended' teaching methods and rooted in the life, community and work environment of the individual bring best results when working with low-skilled and low-qualified adults<sup>32</sup>.

A basic skills teacher needs specific training and qualifications in teaching adult literacy, numeracy and other key competences. In terms of attitude, an effective basic skills teacher needs to be innovative; creative; enthusiastic; flexible; dedicated, patient and aware of the difficulties adults face in seeking to improve their basic skills. In terms of practical competences, the teacher of basic skills needs to be able to: place the individual at the centre of the endeavour; understand the individual's objectives; stimulate motivation and provide a flexible learning environment, including ICT-supported learning opportunities; identify a range of basic skills in everyday living and help individuals develop a competent use of those basic skills; teach logical reasoning and problem solving; work as a member of a broader team and embed basic skills learning in areas such as vocational training. In addition, the basic skills teacher needs to be a good listener; a good communicator; a good facilitator; be conscious of his/her guidance role and be a leader who understands the dynamics of a group and who can also work on a one-to-one basis<sup>33</sup>.

#### Guidelines

- 6.1.1** Individual learners and other key stakeholders in the learning setting such as employers or civil society actors are partners in the teaching and learning process.
- 6.1.2** The accumulated life experiences of the adult learner are acknowledged.
- 6.1.3** Teaching approaches recognise diverse learning needs and styles and adapt to learners on an on-going basis.
- 6.1.4** Teaching and learning methodologies are customised to the needs of the individual, for example, identifying the learning plan with the participant and creating modules and materials to suit the learner.
- 6.1.5** Teaching and learning methodologies are appropriate to the learning setting.
- 6.1.6** Learning to learn, self-directed learning and blended learning are encouraged and supported throughout the learner journey with a view to encouraging and supporting learner autonomy.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "One Step Up", Final Report, Key Factor Analysis and Final*

*Recommendations.* [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)

<sup>33</sup> See Looney, J. (2008) *Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults – Improving Foundation Skills*. Paris: OECD for an examination of the impact and implementation of different teaching, learning and assessment practices for adult literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) learners.

- 6.1.7** Individuals are supported to adopt an active approach to their own learning, to keep records of their learning and to build up a portfolio of achievement.
- 6.1.8** The role of formative self-assessment by learners and the importance of giving learners feedback to enhance motivation and, thus, persistence are recognised and supported.
- 6.1.9** Individuals have opportunities to experience success in their learning endeavour on an ongoing basis. Achievement is regularly reinforced by teachers as learners may not readily recognise when they are making progress.
- 6.1.10** Individuals have opportunities to practise and improve their basic skills within and outside the learning setting.
- 6.1.11** A guidance function is included in the profile/duties of basic skills teachers.
- 6.1.12** On-going research provides information on how teaching and learning basic skills can be improved and on the factors which contribute to successful learning, such as teaching mathematics explicitly and separately.

## 5.7 Persistence – Staying on – Learning Support

### Guideline No. 7.1

#### Learning Supports

The provision of learning supports in a systematic, sustained and structured, but flexible, manner is vital to improve the persistence and achievements of low-skilled learners. A co-ordinated, multi-agency one-door ('one-stop shop') approach will deliver the best results through a focus on the support measures which enable/support adults to learn. Such a 'one-stop shop' not only coordinates a variety of advisors and guidance sources and helps identify relevant courses for learners, but also advises on financial support and other instruments at national/regional level.

Within the learning setting ('on programme') useful supports include: guidance and counselling; initial and formative assessment; realistic but challenging goals; study skills support; a supportive social network; mentoring and role models. Practical supports include direct financial incentives, assistive technology, assistance with transport and childcare/eldercare.

Where the learning takes place in the workplace, employers establish good links with education and training providers in the interests of the learning and progression of the learners.

#### Guidelines

- 7.1.1 Appropriate learning supports are available to all participants to enable them to benefit from the learning programme.
- 7.1.2 Individual 'subject' teachers and guidance professionals have complementary roles to play in supporting learning; supporting flexibility and persistence and identifying and supporting 'next steps'.
- 7.1.3 Where literacy and numeracy teaching and learning are embedded in practical subjects, the teaching team consists of the practical skills teacher and the dedicated literacy and/or numeracy teachers
- 7.1.4 In the workplace, coaches, mentors and/or union representatives provide guidance and support to learners 'on programme'.
- 7.1.5 Where a distance learning approach is adopted adequate supports are available to the individual to ensure that his/her being 'at a distance' from the provider, teacher/trainer and peers does not become an obstacle to learning and to persistence.
- 7.1.6 Practical supports include direct financial incentives, assistive technology, assistance with transport and childcare/eldercare.
- 7.1.7 The provision of these supports is built into funding formulae in the learning setting.

## 5.8 Achievement – Getting on – Assessment and Qualification

### Guideline 8.1

#### Assessment and Qualifications

Throughout Europe there is a growing emphasis on the outcomes of adult learning as opposed to a previous strong emphasis on inputs. Outcomes include knowledge, skills and attitudes or, as they are more commonly characterised nowadays, key competences and specific skills. The Action Plan on adult learning states that it is not enough to simply attract adults into education and training, there must also be a real opportunity for them to progress and raise their level of qualification and to better integrate in all aspects of life.

Assessment approaches and qualifications are pivotal in the development and recognition of adult basic skills. Assessment can serve a range of purposes, namely, to sum up learners' achievement at the end of a programme (summative assessment) and to help the learning process of individuals by identifying specific learning needs and adapting teaching accordingly (formative assessment). These different purposes are not mutually exclusive. In the field of adult learning where 'assessment for learning' in addition to 'assessment of learning' is gaining momentum as a learner-centred approach.

Improving the impact of participation in basic skills learning is a key challenge throughout Europe. The availability of qualifications with credible currency on the labour market and in society in general plays a key role in improving the impact of participation in all kinds of adult learning<sup>34</sup>. Levels 1 and 2 of the EQF are significant for adult basic skills. At Level 1 of the EQF the relevant learning outcomes are: basic general knowledge; basic skills required to carry out simple tasks; and the competence to work under direct supervision in a structured context. At Level 2 the relevant learning outcomes are: basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study; basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools. In many countries basic skills are assessed according to a range of established external standards and the potential of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in relation to basic skills is already visible in a number of countries.

Feedback at the level of the individual user is critical. To motivate low-skilled individuals small-size steps are required. Credit is a critical building block in the achievement of qualifications and national qualifications frameworks need to accommodate small, clear, transparent steps toward full awards for low-skilled individuals.

Finally, qualifications provide affirmation, recognition of added value and progression. They are also part of the practice-policy feedback loop in that they enable transparency and accountability on the part of teachers and facilitate funders to measure outcomes and returns on investment.

<sup>34</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf)

**Guidelines**

- 8.1.1** The importance of combining challenge with support for individual learners is understood by teachers and trainers.
- 8.1.2** The need for a careful and sensitive use of language with regard to assessment and qualifications for low-skilled and low-qualified individuals is recognised.
- 8.1.3** Individual education levels on entry and exit from the learning setting are recorded so as to measure progress.
- 8.1.4** The qualifications framework/system offers the possibility of recording learner achievement in small steps/credit so as to provide positive feedback and motivation for the individual.
- 8.1.5** Flexibility to enable outcomes to be achieved in different ways within a framework of national standards.
- 8.1.6** Teachers/trainers have the competences to manage whatever the assessment approaches are used and to keep the adult learner at the centre of practices and processes.
- 8.1.7** A provider database for recording, tracking and monitoring all learner achievement local, regional and national data collection systems.
- 8.1.8** The wider benefits of learning, beyond skills and qualifications are kept in mind, given that acquiring basic skills has a significant impact on areas such as active citizenship, well-being and health.

## 5.9 Progression – Moving on – Progression

### Guideline 9.1

#### Progression

Progression in the sense of ‘moving on’ from the existing learning endeavour is a goal and principle of basic skills provision within a lifelong learning framework. Progression for many low-skilled individuals may not be linear; rather it may be multifaceted, complex, holistic and zig-zag. In practice progression may be in very small steps and upwards, across, and downwards, with multiple starts and stops to accommodate important life events. It is important that learning programmes and a qualifications system/framework are able to support these kinds of progression.

Time is a key ingredient in the achievement of progression by low-skilled individuals whose life circumstances may make it difficult for them to commit to regular and long-term participation in basic skills provision. In addition, they may find that they require a substantial amount of time to make progress in acquiring basic skills. The role of guidance as a one-to-one and/or group activity in relation to progression is widely acknowledged, particularly in the case of individuals who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to progress to various learning and other opportunities.

Recording and tracking progression is a significant challenge to data systems, but is essential to serve the interests of individuals, employers, civil society organisations, funders, researchers and policy-makers.

#### Guidelines

- 9.1.1 Progression is a fundamental goal and principle of participation in basic skills provision in the learning setting and this is communicated at the appropriate time to the individuals engaged in the learning.
- 9.1.2 Progression is broadly understood and defined and the learning setting and other contexts are able to accommodate such a broad understanding.
- 9.1.3 Guidance to support progression is in place from the very beginning and progression beyond the basic skills provision is a key objective of the individual and identified in his/her individual learning plan (ILP).
- 9.1.4 The progression options of all participants are recorded and analysed to identify patterns and trends in relation to all participants.
- 9.1.5 Destination data are collected and fed into local, regional and national data through an established data chain.
- 9.1.6 The guidance service provides a ‘continuity of concern’ when the individual has moved on.

## 5.10 Quality Assurance - Policy

### Guideline No 10.1

#### Quality Assurance Policy

Quality assurance has both an intrinsic role in guaranteeing improvement, accountability and significant outcomes in basic skills provision and an extrinsic role in supporting exchange *between* that provision and the immediate and other contexts. Quality is a complex, multi-dimensional and flexible concept. All definitions of quality are context-bound in terms of place, topic under discussion, expectations and purpose. Thus, quality is not just a technical issue but has strong political, social and cultural dimensions relating to the explicit and implicit economic, social, cultural, political and individual purposes of basic skills learning in a region or country at any given time<sup>35</sup>.

According to the Global Report on Adult Learning (GRALE) prepared for the CONFINTEA VI Conference (December 2009)<sup>36</sup> the most important dimension of quality is relevance which means that adult learning provision must represent an effective route to and support for, personal and social change and must engender and sustain motivation to participate and support persistence in learning to the achievement of individual goals. Other dimensions include equity, efficiency and effectiveness.

In practice, quality in education and training systems is seen as having three components: quality of *structure*; quality of *process* and quality of *result*<sup>37</sup>. While policy-makers, funders and, thus, quality indicators often focus on the third component, quality of result as expressed through qualifications and progression, quality is essentially generated and maintained in education by the first two, especially the quality of teaching and learning processes. Within a learning setting quality of process concerns all aspects of the 'learner journey' including access, induction, learning content, teaching and learning methodologies and materials, learning supports, assessment, qualifications, progression opportunities and evaluation mechanisms.

#### Guidelines

- 10.1.1** The quality assurance policy in the learning setting is systematic and formalised and serves as a key tool to monitor and assess the development, the extent and the impact of basic skills provision.
- 10.1.2** The quality framework encourages teamwork and collaboration and recognises that each stakeholder has a part to play in ensuring quality.
- 10.1.3** The quality assurance model encourages partnership and collaboration between all stakeholder groups and staff and management are open to learning.
- 10.1.4** Indicators of quality are agreed by personnel in the learning setting and include an indicator on persistence.
- 10.1.5** Indicators inform strategic decision-making in the learning setting and beyond and result in measurable improvements in learning outcomes.
- 10.1.6** Indicators feed into local, regional and/or national quality indicators for basic skills provision. The provider is part of a systems-level quality assurance approach which includes a focus on the accreditation of providers of basic skills and on the initial and continuing professional development of teachers/tutors of basic skills.
- 10.1.7** The quality assurance process is a positive evaluative experience for all involved and leads to tangible achievements in terms of basic skills.

<sup>35</sup> See Background Report for the Workshop on Quality, Brussels June 2010 p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/grale/>

<sup>37</sup> See Background Report for the Workshop on Quality, Brussels June 2010 p. 5.

## 5.11 Quality Assurance – Staff development

### Guideline No. 11.1

#### Initial Education and Training and Continuing Professional Development of Staff

Priority Action 2 of the Action Plan on Adult Learning, *Improve the quality of provision*, underlines the critical role of adult learning staff as a key determinant of quality. Quality is essentially generated and maintained in basic skills provision by the quality of teaching and learning processes. Evidence points to a greater impact on achievement from literacy/basic skills tuition by qualified literacy/basic skills specialists and that the qualification levels of numeracy teachers have an impact on the learning outcomes of adult learners<sup>38</sup>.

The professional development of basic skills teachers/trainers is rudimentary and fragmented in the majority of Member States. In many countries there are no formal qualification requirements to be a basic skills teacher/trainer though many hold a diploma or a bachelor degree though not necessarily in a related area and may have specifically chosen to work in the area of basic skills through a commitment to supporting low-skilled individuals. Depending on the level and duration of initial professional development which frequently takes place on an in-service basis, such courses as exist address the theory of adult learning, teaching and learning methodologies, assessment and front-line guidance. In addition, there may be short courses ranging from a day to cover specific topics such as teaching approaches, quality assurance and integration of ICTs etc.

In a context of a very mixed picture in relation to the initial education and training of basic skills teachers/trainers, there is a tremendous need for the continuing professional development of such personnel as part of ensuring quality basic skills provision.

#### Guidelines

- 11.1.1 The key role played by highly skilled teachers/trainers in persistence and achievement in basic skills learning is clearly recognised and supported.
- 11.1.2 Skilled staff are in place as a result of requirements in relation to initial professional development and ongoing opportunities for continuing professional development
- 11.1.3 Teachers/trainers adopt an integrated approach to teaching basic skills, including mathematics/numeracy, in the context of the learning setting which provides opportunities for teaching and learning other key competences such as learning to learn, cultural awareness, creativity, entrepreneurship and problem solving.
- 11.1.4 Teachers/trainers embed basic skills learning either through initial professional development or through continuing professional development.
- 11.1.5 Teachers/trainers have the competence and commitment to teach as part of a team when basic skills are embedded in practical training courses.
- 11.1.6 Teachers/trainers have the competences to facilitate learning in workplace and other non-formal settings such as libraries, museums, prisons, the army, church organisations and third sector organisations.
- 11.1.7 Teachers/trainers have the competence to deliver online teaching/training distance learning, as appropriate, and to support individuals through such learning.
- 11.1.8 Teachers/trainers have access to on-going continuing professional development (CPD).

<sup>38</sup> See Final Report on London PLA <http://www.kslll.net>

## 5.12 Quality Assurance – Monitoring and evaluation

### Guideline No 12.1

#### Monitoring and Evaluation

*Evaluation and monitoring* recommendations in the report *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications “One Step Up”* highlight the necessity of adopting a results-oriented approach as well as an approach which takes into consideration the desired impact of the interventions being promoted. This includes provider self-evaluation and the constant improvement of quality and may also include an independent, public system of inspection and quality control.

Reliable quantitative and qualitative information is essential to provide feedback to a learning setting on the effectiveness of learning programmes and associated activities. Such feedback enables a better response to the learning needs and demands of individuals, enables the improvement of the quality of provision and informs the development of evidence-based policies and practices. Specifically, monitoring and evaluation provide information on participant satisfaction levels, integration levels, achievement and progression. The importance of feedback loops all along the way

The benefits to policy-makers of having a regular collection of consistent, detailed data for comparability purposes are widely documented. The benefits to research institutions of having a data bank from which to develop the evidence base and extend understanding of basic skills issues so as to improve services to learners and feed into policy development are widely recognised. Research institutions also have a key role to play as collaborators in projects/initiatives where they work in parallel with the provider to provide evidence-based feedback so as to improve policy and practice in relation to basic skills provision.

#### Guidelines

- 12.1.1** The value of an overall holistic system to generate data and provide information for all stakeholders is recognised and supported.
- 12.1.2** The objectives of evaluation and monitoring are clarified at the very beginning of the learning programme so that the necessary procedures are integrated into the process of programme delivery.
- 12.1.3** Indicators of performance and quality inform the monitoring and evaluation approach.
- 12.1.4** Data collection is part of the management information system of an institution rather than an imposition from outside. The principle of ‘collect once, use many times’ applies.
- 12.1.5** Personnel have the competences to work with data collection systems.
- 12.1.6** All learning programmes implement a process of constant monitoring of results. Such a process is promoted, supported and financed.
- 12.1.7** ‘Numbers and stories’ capture the full range of adult learning outcomes.
- 12.1.8** Management information systems judge need and identify the most effective ways of addressing basic skills needs and provide guidance on how resources should be deployed.
- 12.1.9** The availability, role and impact of guidance are monitored, including in relation to the support of diversity and the promotion of basic skills.
- 12.1.10** The learning setting is part of a feedback loop from practice to policy enables providers, employers, practitioners and participants to inform policy and influence policy changes.

