



Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning in Scotland

Early in 1999, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) formed a partnership with key Scottish organisations: Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish Enterprise (SE), the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) to assess gender equality issues through the theme of lifelong learning in Scotland.

The partnership of funding organisations appointed the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) to conduct the study from Spring of that year.

The overall aim of the project was to assess the current state of gender equality in lifelong learning given recent changes in the political climate of Scotland. It addressed new initiatives and issues which have arisen since the earlier EOC publication *Equal Opportunities in Education and Training in Scotland - Setting the Agenda* (1995).

It also examined persistent issues which recur in any discussion of gender equality and learning. The focus was on structured learning opportunities rather than informal self-directed learning activities.

The concept of lifelong learning contains two main elements:

- the empowering of the individual through education;
- the gearing of educational provision for adults and young adults towards work-related training and professional development.

Lifelong learning in its widest sense is a learning experience from 'cradle to grave' and incorporates all learning opportunities whether they arise at work or leisure, or are directed at employment or recreation. Thus, while any discussion of lifelong learning must look closely at vocational learning, the report also attempts to consider broader aspects of the issue.

Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning in Scotland by Janet Powney, Joanna McPake, Lynne Edwards and Sheila Hamilton was published in the EOC Research Discussion Series in Spring 2000. It is available free of charge from the EOC (see back page for details).



Scottish Enterprise



The Scottish Council for Research in Education



Highlands & Islands ENTERPRISE



Scottish higher education funding council



Scottish further education funding council





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Methodology

A number of approaches were used. These included an ongoing review of recent research and the collection and analysis of documents from organisations and agencies providing lifelong learning opportunities. Groups and organisations concerned with equal opportunities and with developing the constitution and procedures for the new Scottish Parliament were included.

Contact was also made with key informants by telephone, e-mail or face-to-face interview. Through their knowledge and experience of gender equality and lifelong learning the informants provided essential advice on the most important issues.

The themes identified from these contacts were formulated into a series of briefing papers. These were made available for comment in discussion groups consisting of education and training specialists in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness, by correspondence and on the SCRE website. Over 140 individuals and leading Scottish organisations commented on the briefing papers. These then formed the basis for the report.

The case for equality

This project addresses the gender implications of resourcing and structuring lifelong learning opportunities and the observable effects of these policies. The case for equality in relation to lifelong learning and gender arises from two issues of principle:

- Gender equality in lifelong learning is a matter of social justice;

- Enhancing gender equality in lifelong learning will enhance Scottish society and the Scottish economy.

Obstacles which prevent participation in and achievement through learning will differ from person to person, depending on their circumstances. By categorising people in certain ways it is possible to identify certain themes. Gender is an important categorisation, and it is essential that gender equality and equal opportunities are mainstreamed into the lifelong learning debate i.e. fully integrated into all legislation, policy, consultation, development, implementation, evaluation and review processes.

Key findings

Context of lifelong learning in Scotland

Many contemporary policies and statements from public bodies are aimed at inclusiveness. The agenda for the Scottish Parliament includes raising awareness, improving access, extending participation and encouraging learners of both sexes to progress to more advanced knowledge, understanding and skills.

Initiatives include the Scottish University for Industry, University of the Highlands and Islands Project, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, New Deal and New Futures Fund, Higher Still, the National Grid for Learning and the Childcare Strategy for Scotland.

Most of these relate to work and to improving skills, attitudes and qualifications to enhance employment prospects. HIE, SE and the Local Enterprise Companies are especially



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concerned with this. A further encouraging feature for lifelong learning is the number of partnerships between voluntary and public bodies working together to make appropriate provision.

The relationship between employment and the changing demographic profile of Scotland is extremely important. Scotland's population will decrease and become relatively older over the next two decades, and women will continue to comprise the majority among those who are 55 and older. The service sector will increase and manufacturing jobs decrease. There is likely to be a continued increase in temporary, part-time and self employment.

Women have been disadvantaged in employment in terms of pay, opportunities for progression and in equitable participation in public life. The establishment of an Equality Unit within the Scottish Executive and indeed, the high representation of women in Cabinet Portfolios in the Scottish Parliament, suggests that inequalities will now be addressed. However, the situation will require careful monitoring and for progress to be reported.

Gender is one of several variables operating against equality of opportunity. There remain women and men who are socially and economically excluded by cumulative disadvantage arising from a range of factors - low income, poor housing, poor health, lack of educational qualifications and marketable skills, racial discrimination. From their early years, children from certain backgrounds can be disadvantaged in their formal education.

There has been considerable research and action to enhance gender equality; current policy documents from many sources and some research evidence address lifelong learning. There is little previous work that addresses gender as a central issue in lifelong learning. Key themes identified in this study seek to bring the two strands of gender equality and lifelong learning together.

Access to lifelong learning

Financial barriers affect all those on low incomes. There is now increased flexibility in both sources of funding and in the nature of learning provision offered after the school leaving age. Yet the emphasis on work related lifelong learning and the gaining of qualifications could divert funds away from adult education that offers a first step to further learning.

In much of rural Scotland physical access to learning can be a major barrier due to the lack of a flexible public transport system and the practical difficulties in arranging childcare.

Information and communication technologies

There is no doubt that ICT will improve access to lifelong learning and play an increasingly important role in providing up-to-date information and a wide range of educational opportunities in the 21st century. ICT will support distance learning and offer more flexibility as well as new approaches for adult learners.

However, more men than women are participating on computing and ICT courses in further and higher education and there remain problems of access for those who cannot afford costs of equipment and telephone access.



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Training and employment

The workplace can be a powerful learning environment. Learning at work has taken on a new impetus with employer funded schemes and learning centres as well as employers working in partnership with other organisations. A number of Government schemes for young people and adults promote learning opportunities and many initiatives are focused on those who are disadvantaged or seek to redress inequalities.

At the same time there are many disincentives, especially for women, who wish to continue their studies. Women fill most of the temporary, part-time, low paid jobs which have no available learning opportunities. The benefits system can also discourage a return to education.

Learning and teaching

Gender issues are central throughout all aspects of learning and teaching. A key concern is to ensure that gender stereotyping is not reinforced in learning environments, e.g. in terms of subject choice, level of learning, mode or style of learning or in the gender balance of staff.

Public policy documents now tend to refer to equal opportunities issues. At local authority and school level there are policies which seek to raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly boys. The anti-education stance taken by some boys from lower socio-economic groups is also present in some men who are reluctant to pursue further learning unless it is directly associated with employment.

Across FE and HE women are now outnumbering men both in entrance and total student enrolment. However, subject choice is still heavily gender

stereotyped and the low uptake by women of science and engineering courses in both FE and HE continues to be an issue.

Structures to promote gender equality

Structures determine the rules, methods and progress in large and small organisations throughout Scotland as a whole. They include organisational systems and lines of accountability as well as the rules which affect the provision and accessibility of learning opportunities.

Equality issues are peripheral rather than mainstream concerns for many government, public and private bodies. The aim of structures, policies and procedures in schools, colleges, local authorities, the voluntary sector and the Scottish Executive should be to raise achievement and self-esteem to encourage a learning culture that encompasses everyone in Scotland.

Recommendations

The report contains a series of recommendations including suggestions for monitoring. It should be noted that these are the views and recommendations of the researchers and that they do not necessarily represent the views of all the project partners.

The recommendations illustrate that gender is integral to any consideration of lifelong learning. Gender is a key factor in gaining access to, or in developing, resourcing or operating, learning opportunities.

The recommendations are applicable at different levels but should be of interest to all those concerned with lifelong learning, most notably the Scottish Parliament.



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Many actions are aimed at those in charge of organisations that affect learning opportunities. Governing bodies, chief executives, university and college principals, headteachers and leaders of voluntary groups are responsible for considering what they can do both routinely and purposefully to promote and sustain gender equality.

It is strongly recommended that the Scottish Executive should lead by ensuring equality in the example it sets, in requiring good practice in others and in making it possible for everyone in Scotland, regardless of gender, to benefit from lifelong learning.

Access

Recommendations

All organisations should maintain an annual gender audit of access to learning provisions;

Increase the budgets for local provision of learning opportunities;

Provide adequate resourcing for information, support and guidance;

Implement a national guidance policy which takes into account the different needs and circumstances of various groups of men and women;

Promote access for both women and men to non-traditional gender stereotypical subject areas;

Simplify student funding across FE and HE to improve access for all;

Encourage HE institutions to set a child care quality standard. The children of students and staff should be offered a good quality learning environment that in return could provide the institution with teaching practice and research possibilities;

Maintain and extend provision of vocational, community education and Adult Basic Education courses as a foundation for further learning and employment.

Areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- The impact of government initiatives to improve rural public and private transport;
- The equality of opportunity offered by Individual Learning Accounts and the New Deal initiatives - especially in relation to the rural economy;
- Access by gender to adult educational guidance including that being developed through Adult Guidance Networks;
- Any gender-bias in the use of learning resources in FE and HE.

Information and Communication Technologies

Recommendations

Set targets for ICT provision in schools, colleges and universities and public access sites, in relation to computer hardware, software, availability of distance learning and training;

Establish rights of access: for example, everyone in Scotland should be no more than 10 miles away from a publicly accessible ICT point;

Encourage employers to ensure that senior managers have sufficient training in how ICT can help to implement (or inhibit) gender equality in the context of lifelong learning - possibly by building this into Investors in People (IiP) awards;

Encourage female workers to learn higher order ICT skills in order to develop their careers;



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Make increased provision to support ICT users at all levels of education and for those using public access sites;

Establish a nation-wide standard for ICT competence (possibly using the European Computer Driving Licence);

Identify the most effective ways of supporting work-based learning through ICT;

Balance the quality of ICT awareness and skills in teacher training. Invest in further training and continuing practical support for teachers in post;

Ensure that future needs are identified and that provision is made to update skills and equipment as current technologies become dated.

Areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- The gender bias in software available for educational purposes and games designed for children;
- The provision and take-up of in-service ICT training for teachers and employees in other sectors;
- The competencies in ICT use expected of newly qualified teachers;
- The continuing use of ICT for teaching purposes at all educational levels;
- Gender differentials in access and use of ICT, focusing on e.g. age, the range of users and their use of ICT;
- The effectiveness of the Government-funded discount system which enables families with school age children to buy or lease ICT equipment.

Training and employment

Recommendations

Ensure regular publication of gender disaggregated data on the take-up of training and employment places;

Improve workplace practices to encourage admission to, and progression within, the 'knowledge economy' for both women and men;

Conduct regular gender audits in the workplace;

Provide incentives, support and guidance for employers to train and offer progression to their workforce;

Re-appraise Government training programmes for the unemployed based on labour market intelligence and the collection and analysis of core data to reflect gender issues;

Re-appraise funding and benefit rules applicable to women and men undertaking lifelong learning in its broadest context;

Increase ongoing support (including financial support) and guidance in lifelong learning to make sure that 'flexible working' is a positive rather than a negative experience;

Increase the number of courses for women wishing to become self-employed.

Areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- The gender balance in employment in different sectors of the economy;
- The quality and effectiveness of training programmes for women and men;



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- The gender composition of interview panels for selection, appointment and promotion;
- The survival and progress of new businesses monitored by gender, ethnicity and disability.

Learning and teaching

Recommendations

Provide appropriate resources for early and subsequent education which are not gender biased;

Address the way equal opportunities policies are put into practice in the curriculum and in approaches to learning and teaching;

Individualise records of learning for all, and for all ages;

Fund pilot interventions to encourage change in the attitudes of those boys and girls who are alienated from education;

Commission research to identify where there are gender differences in the way in which people respond to different learning styles;

Set targets for a more even gender balance of staff in schools;

Ensure that examples of good practice in different sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary, voluntary) are available both within and between the sectors;

Encourage Education Business Partnerships to maximise their role and the services available through them;

Encourage more gender inclusive approaches to marketing learning opportunities through Local Learning Partnerships.

Areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- The gender balance of staff in nursery and primary schools and in the senior management of schools;
- The gender balance of students in different subjects, as well as overall, in FE/HE, adult and community education;
- The way in which gender equality and other equality issues are addressed in the training of teachers and lecturers.

Structures to promote gender equality

Recommendations

Learning organisations should refocus on the gender debate by adding or endorsing targets related to gender equality and ensure that they reflect the lifelong learning concerns and priorities of women and men;

Provide a good information base for action through regular self-audit of the gender balance at all levels within Scotland's education and training organisations;

Redress gender imbalances in the boards, executives and standing committees of organisations;

Establish incentives for employers, organisations and employees to go beyond mere compliance with regulation towards embedding gender equality in the total ethos of the learning environment;

Review tax and benefit systems for ways in which to support women and men more appropriately to learn throughout life;



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Reward provision of enhanced opportunities for targeted groups and publicise names of organisations which do not follow best practice;

Invite the Scottish Executive to monitor progress on a variety of issues including: the gender balance in the policy making community; the work of the Equality Unit; and the implementation of gender related initiatives for lifelong learning.

Areas to monitor and evaluate include:

- The information base that enables an organisation to monitor and review its activities through an audit (or self audit) of relevant aspects of the present situation;
- The impact of strategic plans and structures on gender equality and lifelong learning at work and in educational institutions;
- The gender balance and salaries of both teaching and administrative staff in senior positions in learning institutions;
- Staff development programmes which are designed to promote organisational self-evaluation that include raising gender awareness;
- How the principle of equality is embedded in the work of the Scottish Executive through the work of the Scottish Executive's Equality Unit, and any contradictory policies which arise from different departments in the Executive.

The next step

This study aims to provide a foundation for addressing gender equality issues in relation to lifelong learning by focusing on the barriers preventing women and men from participating in lifelong learning.

It includes a health warning for those making and implementing policies to be both positive and attentive; positive in the vision of creating a learning society for everyone regardless of their gender; attentive in ensuring that gender equality is fully integrated into legislation, policy and practice by examining the gender implications of every proposed initiative.

The study has made the economic and social justice case for mainstreaming gender equality. It provides findings and recommendations which can be used to influence and inform decision making both within national and local organisations, and within the policy and practitioner communities. By using these findings and recommendations each organisation concerned with education and training should now aim to contribute, as appropriate, towards ensuring gender equality in lifelong learning.

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