Award no. L123251024

Award Holders: S. Riddell

Title: The Meaning of the Learning Society for Adults with Learning Difficulties

Full Report of Research Activities and Results
Full report of research activities and results

Background

In the ESRC's Learning Society Programme specification, the key concept of the learning society is defined as one 'in which all citizens acquire a high quality general education, appropriate vocational training and a job (or series of jobs) worthy of a human being, while continuing to participate in education and training throughout their lives' (Coffield, 1994). People with learning difficulties, representing about 4% of the population on a range of estimates, are particularly likely to experience social marginalisation and difficulty in accessing the labour market. It is therefore important to consider what opportunities the learning society is likely to hold for them, and to consider what can be learnt from their experiences which may be applicable to a wider social group. This was the central concern of the research reported here.

The Policy Context

Lifelong learning opportunities for people with learning difficulties are funded and delivered by a range of agencies including the Employment Service, Further Education, Adult and Continuing Education, Local Enterprise Companies, Social Work and voluntary organisations. In addition, the experiences of people with learning difficulties are shaped by a range of policy arena including community care, lifelong learning, employment, health and social security.

There are likely to be tensions both within and between particular policy arena. Within community care policy, there is a commitment to provision for people with learning difficulties in 'homely settings within the community' and to the provision of services reflecting 'normal life principles'. Attending to people's health and living arrangements is seen as a means of equipping them to engage in central life activities including education, training and employment (Scottish Office, 1999). The exercise of consumer choice from a range of excellent services has been seen for more than a decade as a means of assisting people to greater independence (Secretaries of State for Health, Social Security, Wales and Scotland, 1989). Inter-agency working is regarded as of paramount importance in providing services and in facilitating choice.

The theme of lifelong learning has become increasingly prominent in Government policy, signalled in the publication of a number of policy texts (Scottish Office, 1998; DfEE, 1998; 1999). Lifelong learning is portrayed in these texts as the key to individual and national economic prosperity, as well as the means of nurturing social networks, fostering social cohesion and improving quality of life for all. To maintain their employability, individuals are called upon to update continually their knowledge and skills, choosing from a range of competing education and training services.

Both community care and lifelong learning policies contain some potentially conflicting principles for people with learning difficulties. First, it is not clear that
they are able to operate as critical service consumers, partly because of their intellectual impairments and partly because of a potential lack of high quality services from which to choose. Whilst community care and lifelong learning policies recognise the contribution to be made by a range of service providers, the fostering of competition renders such co-operation potentially difficult. Community care policy emphasises the importance of participation in mainstream services, but lifelong learning policy implies that investment in individuals is likely to be in proportion to their capacity for wealth generation. A major focus of the study was to investigate the relationship between community care and lifelong learning policies and their implications for people with learning difficulties.

The study had three central theoretical concerns. These were the operation of quasi-markets in community care and education, the nature of adult status and citizenship for people with learning difficulties and the barriers encountered in attaining full citizenship. As the study progressed, there was a growing focus on the salience of human and social capital versions of the learning society.

**Objectives**

The main objectives of the project were the following:

- to explore the concept of the learning society and its expression in the policy and practice of a range of agencies including education, social work, Local Enterprise Companies and voluntary and user organisations.
  
  This objective has been met through the analysis of official policy documents and the conduct of key informant interviews and ethnographic case studies.

- to map services provided by these agencies throughout Scotland.
  
  This objective has been met through the analysis of official policy documents and the conduct of key informant interviews and ethnographic case studies.

- to assess the experiences of adults with learning difficulties at different points in their life cycle in relation to education, training and employment opportunities.
  
  This objective has been met through the ethnographic case studies.

- to develop key theoretical debates about choice, barriers to full social participation and the attainment of adult status by people with learning difficulties.
  
  This objective has been met through our analysis of data gathered by a range of means and our interrogation of these data through a number of analytical and conceptual frames.

- to develop ways of involving adults with learning difficulties in the research process in order to contribute to thinking about the development of policy and practice in the field of learning difficulties.
  
  This objective has been met through consultation with a reference group made up of people with learning difficulties.

**Methods**

The research was carried out in two main phases. Phase One (7 months) was a study of education, training and employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties in Scotland. Documentary analysis of policy texts was carried out and key informant interviews conducted with representatives of a range of agencies (see Riddell et al, 1997a for report of this phase of the work.)
The interviews were carried out, mainly by telephone, in late 1996 and early 1997, hard on the heels of regional reorganisation in Scotland which created 32 unitary authorities, each with education and social work functions, in place of the 12 regional authorities. Eight authorities were reluctant to be interviewed because they felt that their policies were still in a state of flux. In addition, six of the twenty two Local Enterprise Companies declined to be interviewed because they felt that their policies in relation to people with learning difficulties were insufficiently developed. Interviews were also carried out with informants from further education, the Employment Service, Careers Service (2) and the Scottish Office (Inspectors of social work and education).

In addition, interviews with 10 user and voluntary organisations were conducted. These organisations were selected to reflect a range of service provision and practice with regard to service planning. In particular People First Scotland is an organisation of disabled people and AccessAbility describes itself as 'disability-led'. The aim here was to understand the perspective of user organisations rather than that of professionals.

In all, 80 semi-structured interviews were conducted, each organised into five domains: the nature and characteristics of services provided by agencies; the groups of people with learning difficulties for which services were intended; the underlying service ethos and the conceptualisation of the target population; the extent to which people with learning difficulties were offered choice and personal progression; the existence of competition with other services within a social market. Respondents were informed of these domains well in advance of the interviews. These domains also formed the basis of the analysis which involved summarising responses under domain headings and thematising responses under these headings.

The second phase of the study, lasting over 18 months, consisted of case studies of 30 adults with learning difficulties in two authorities in Scotland (one urban and one rural), drawn from three age groups: the post statutory education phase (age 16 - 23), the post transition phase (age 28-35) and the middle to older age phase (age 40+). The case studies were selected to reflect the varied nature of the population in relation to gender, ethnicity, nature of impairment and level of contact with services and Table 1 summarises their key characteristics, the conduct of the fieldwork and the major life issues facing the individual.
## Table 1(a) case studies from urban area researched

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nature of impairment</th>
<th>Domestic circumstances</th>
<th>Primary responsible organisation</th>
<th>Main daytime placement</th>
<th>Primary context studied</th>
<th>Interviews conducted with significant others</th>
<th>Major issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Communication disabilities</td>
<td>Home: mother</td>
<td>FE</td>
<td>FE College</td>
<td>FE class</td>
<td>Mother – course tutor – keyworker – observation of FE class</td>
<td>Mother withdrew permission for case study to continue. Whole FE class researched while studying Open University module 'Equal People'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Heart complaint &amp; non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: mother - partner &amp; brother</td>
<td>Local voluntary organisation specialist training provider</td>
<td>LEC Skillseekers specialist training provider</td>
<td>Work placement</td>
<td>Voluntary organisation training manager – placement employer</td>
<td>Health problems &amp; difficulties finding employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Autistic spectrum</td>
<td>Home: parents - brother</td>
<td>FE</td>
<td>FE class</td>
<td>FE class – outdoor activities class</td>
<td>College tutors - parents</td>
<td>Need to find niche in which to use considerable IT skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regie</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non-specific learning difficulties – scarring as a result of an accident</td>
<td>Home – mother &amp; 3 siblings</td>
<td>Local voluntary organisation specialist training provider</td>
<td>LEC Skillseekers specialist training provider</td>
<td>Work placement</td>
<td>Voluntary organisation training manager – placement employer</td>
<td>Continual training – difficulties in finding employment – viewed as suitable for marginal employment only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Muscular dystrophy - non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: mother - brother &amp; sister</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>FE class</td>
<td>Home – FE class</td>
<td>Mother - father - course tutor</td>
<td>Serious debilitating health problems – limit engagement with education &amp; work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Down’s syndrome - moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: parents &amp; sister</td>
<td>Social work &amp; FE</td>
<td>Adult resource centre/classes at college</td>
<td>FE class – adult resource centre</td>
<td>Mother - keyworker</td>
<td>Difficulties in becoming independent from home and day care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mick</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Down’s syndrome - moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: elderly mother</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – FE class – dance class</td>
<td>Mother - keyworker</td>
<td>Over full timetable with only 2 hours work – benefits problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non-specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Supported in own home by housing association</td>
<td>Social work &amp; housing association</td>
<td>Adult resource centre &amp; Part-time work - via supported employment with job coaching</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – home - work</td>
<td>Keyworker – employer – voluntary organisation manager</td>
<td>Benefits difficulties permitting only 2 hours work per week &amp; supported living difficulties – problems surrounding development of intimate relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Down’s syndrome - moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Supported in own home by housing association</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre with part-time work at weekends</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – home – FE classes – dance class – camera class</td>
<td>Social worker – keyworker – home support worker</td>
<td>Issues around legal status of Incapax preventing increased independence and work – value of employment to increasing social contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: elderly mother</td>
<td>Employment Service</td>
<td>Supported employment – ES wage subsidy scheme</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Employer – union representative – manager of specialist voluntary organisation providing ES supported employment place</td>
<td>Rationalisation by employer leading to threat of disciplinary action and certification as disabled with Employment Service intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non-specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: brother &amp; brother’s family</td>
<td>Social work and voluntary organisation</td>
<td>Adult resource centre/ voluntary organisation specialist training provider work programme</td>
<td>Work – Adult resource centre – FE class – voluntary organisation recreation club</td>
<td>Keyworker – brother – voluntary organisation training manager</td>
<td>Failure of specialist training provider to cope with challenging behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non-specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Supported in her own flat (weekly visit)</td>
<td>Social work &amp; voluntary organisation provided supported living</td>
<td>Adult resource centre/looking for employment with assistance of voluntary organisation</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – home – FE class</td>
<td>Social worker – support worker</td>
<td>Previously worked full-time now restricted by benefits problems to P/T – social life structured around activities of now deceased mother, need for new social opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: elderly parents</td>
<td>Voluntary organisation providing supported employment</td>
<td>P/T work via supported employment through specialist training provider</td>
<td>Work – pub – cafe – voluntary organisation disco</td>
<td>Manger voluntary organisation supported employment provider - employer</td>
<td>Social life restrictions – benefits issues preventing increased hours of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Bed &amp; Breakfast: social work registered</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – swimming – voluntary organisation recreational activities</td>
<td>Keyworker - landlady</td>
<td>Loneliness - difficulties of living arrangements – cycles of training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: Employment Service - ES, Further Education – FE, Part time - P/T, Department of Social Security - DSS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Domestic circumstances</th>
<th>Primary responsible organisation</th>
<th>Main daytime placement</th>
<th>Primary context studied</th>
<th>Interviews conducted with significant others</th>
<th>Significant analytical issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific severe learning difficulties – severe mobility problems</td>
<td>Home: parents</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Parents – manager adult resource centre</td>
<td>Ongoing serious health difficulties - problems of diagnosis - day services provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home then supported accommodation</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Keyworker at adult resource centre</td>
<td>Allegations of abusive within family resulting move to supported accommodation – death of parent ended case study prematurely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: with mother</td>
<td>Local Enterprise Company specialist training provider</td>
<td>Training for Work programme placement - then unemployed</td>
<td>Home – work – voluntary organisation specialist training provider</td>
<td>Mother – employer – manager voluntary organisation specialist training provider</td>
<td>Cycles of training - failure to gain employment - abusive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: mother, father &amp; brother</td>
<td>Local Enterprise Company specialist training provider</td>
<td>Skillseeker/Training for Work/Employment Service supported employment - then unemployed</td>
<td>Work – home – jobcentre</td>
<td>Father – employer – manager voluntary organisation specialist training provider</td>
<td>Cycles of training - sporadic training &amp; support - abusive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imran</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Down’s Syndrome – non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Social work and voluntary organisation providing residential and day care</td>
<td>Adult resource centre/voluntary work - 1 morning per week</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – home – voluntary organisation recreational activities</td>
<td>Best friend - keyworker – mother</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with day services/difficulties in finding alternatives - depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mavis</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cerebral palsy – non specific severe learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: parents &amp; siblings</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Home – adult resource centre</td>
<td>Mother – keyworker at adult resource centre – social worker</td>
<td>Allegations of abusive by family - inadequacy of day services provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: mother &amp; father</td>
<td>Social work then voluntary organisation providing special education</td>
<td>Day services/ES work placement/PT vol. work</td>
<td>Home – work placement – voluntary work placement</td>
<td>Parents – keyworker – 2 employers – voluntary organisation (employment support) manager</td>
<td>Withdrawal from inadequate day services - difficulties encountered in accessing Employment Service/voluntary organisation work programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: parents and sister</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre – home – FE class</td>
<td>Parents – adult resource centre keyworker – course tutor</td>
<td>Increasing independence – lack of differentiated services preventing progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Supported in own home by housing association</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre - community education class - voluntary work</td>
<td>Home – adult resource centre – community education class</td>
<td>Boyfriend - community education worker – keyworker – home support worker</td>
<td>Lack of differentiated provision beyond day services to enable increased independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: Brother</td>
<td>Community Education</td>
<td>Part-time work</td>
<td>Work – community education class</td>
<td>Community education class co-ordinator &amp; course tutor - employer</td>
<td>Increasing independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewan</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non specific mild learning difficulties</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Social work and voluntary organisation providing residential and day care</td>
<td>Day services – Part time work</td>
<td>Home – adult resource centre</td>
<td>Keyworker – employer – adult resource centre staff</td>
<td>Restrictions on independence/employment opportunities imposed by DSS/social work/voluntary organisation funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Home: shares with husband</td>
<td>Social work and specialist housing association</td>
<td>Adult resource centre/looking for part time employment</td>
<td>Adult resource centre - home</td>
<td>Husband - keyworker</td>
<td>Supported in long standing marriage and own home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maud</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Group home: shares with three others</td>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Adult resource centre</td>
<td>Keyworker at adult resource centre – home support keyworker</td>
<td>Lifetime in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mild depression - non specific moderate learning difficulties</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Social work and voluntary organisation providing residential and day care</td>
<td>Day services/FE</td>
<td>Home – further education college – adult resource centre</td>
<td>Keyworker – further education college tutor</td>
<td>Difficulties adjusting to group home following 20 years in institutional setting - long term treatment for depression - restrictive nature of residential care preventing increase in social networks formed at FE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each case study consisted of at least ten 'sessions' (morning, afternoon or evening) selected to sample varied aspects of the person's life. In most cases significant others of the person's life (e.g. parents, partners or keyworker) were also studied. Field methods ranged from participant observation (e.g. mountain biking and muffin making) through semi-structured interviews to the innovative use of visual techniques. The latter included, for example, one person making a video about her discharge from long-stay hospital, several people being given disposable cameras with the request to photograph what was important in their lives for later discussion or the use of symbol cards to explore the evaluations of a further education class by non-speaking young adults. The data from each case study were analysed in terms of the theoretical concerns of the project (prior and emergent) and each case was written up into a long pen portrait of some 10-15,000 words. These provided the basic material for subsequent writing for publication.

A particular feature of this research was its commitment actively to include people with learning difficulties in the research process. In addition to the methods outlined above a formal research group of people with learning difficulties was convened to define issues for exploration, to explore them with University support and to disseminate findings through their networks. This process did not fulful the intentions of 'emancipatory research' and became, effectively, a 'focus group' The lessons of this process are analysed in Riddell S, Wilkinson H & Baron S 1998b.

Results
Findings from Phase 1: documentary analysis and key informant interviews

- Learning difficulties as a category included not only those with a background of a Record of Needs and/or special schooling but also adults who had difficulty with coping skills, oracy, functional literacy and numeracy, estimated by professionals as up to one third of people in areas of social disadvantage. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who had missed a lot of school due to accident or illness were also categorised as having learning difficulties.

- Much provision for people with learning difficulties is funded and delivered by social work departments. Key informant interviews revealed a mis-match between stated goals and existing services. Most day services took the form of traditional Adult Resource Centres, each providing a menu of activities geared towards leisure and recreation and often offered in segregated settings. For people with the most significant difficulties, the emphasis was on meeting both social care and health needs, with no attempt to develop work-related skills. More progressive Adult Resource Centres attempted to implement principles of person centred planning and offered supported employment opportunities. However, shortage of placements and restrictions imposed by social security rules meant that supported employment opportunities were too few and time-restricted to meet demand. In the urban area, Adult Resource Centres tended to specialise in particular types of impairment, some catering for people with more significant difficulties. All Adult Resource Centres had waiting lists and carers often opposed greater involvement of people with learning difficulties in training and employment for fear of losing a placement.

- Further Education has a statutory responsibility to 'have regard' to the needs of disabled students under the terms of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and premium funding is made available from the Scottish Office for this. Colleges as independent incorporated bodies appeared to interpret this duty differently with individual colleges sometimes specialising in one aspect of disability. Almost all students who attend post-school extension courses in FE are independent travellers. Young people with significant learning difficulties are generally not catered for in college. Little choice is available for post-16 students with learning difficulties. Because of a shortage of provision, colleges select students rather than vice versa. In the urban area, the three FE colleges worked closely together, allocating students to each college. There was thus no competition between service providers. Courses for older people were generally short-term and covered a range of leisure and life
skills topics. Here, the supply of courses was not able to keep pace with demand. In Further Education there was tension between the ethics of personal development and training for work. The perceived low level of 'employability' of people with learning difficulties sat uneasily with the general mission of Further Education to meet the needs of employers. People with learning difficulties were almost always taught separately from mainstream students and often used separate rooms and facilities when studying subjects such as home economics or horticulture.

- **In Community Education** services there was comparatively little emphasis on skills directly related to employment but more on personal and social skills in courses provided often through day centres run by the social work department. Community Education felt that it was an under-funded service and had lost out to FE, whose mission of meeting the requirements of the labour market was inimical to adequate provision for people with learning difficulties.

- **Local Enterprise Companies** (LECs) provided training with a particular focus on work related skills and confidence building for young people in normal workplaces, in special workshops and in Further Education colleges (Skillseekers). For older people, Training for Work Programmes were provided. The dominant ethos in the LECs was that of 'employability' - the acquisition of skills, attitudinal and technical, which would make the person an attractive employee. Within this ethos the person with learning difficulties could appear as a poor investment, being more expensive to train and potentially less able to adapt to changing work practices. Many training programmes, including Skillseekers and Training for Work, which claimed to cater for people with special needs, were targeted at the socially disadvantaged and specifically excluded people with learning difficulties who were seen as the responsibility of social services. The funding regime established by LECs, linking payment to the attainment of vocational qualifications, made this an unattractive area for most private training agencies. A minority of LECs attempted to include people with learning difficulties in their programmes, but often had difficulties in finding a training placement for them.

- **Employment Service** programmes included the wage subsidy supported employment programme and work preparation. Like the LEC programmes, these were geared at disabled people who, with some initial support, were able to hold their own in the labour market. The Employment Service offered no programmes for those with more significant difficulties who participated in voluntary organisations supported employment programmes.

- **Careers Services** have a statutory responsibility to work with young people with special needs after they leave school. Contact is normally initiated at the Future Needs Assessment, about 18 months before the statutory school-leaving age. Careers Services 'endorse' young people as having special needs for the purpose of participation in FE and Skillseekers programmes. A sifting mechanism operated, whereby some young people were channelled towards programmes leading to the open labour market (mainstream or special needs Skillseekers), whilst others, regarded as marginal workers, were channelled into FE extension programmes. People with the most significant difficulties moved directly from school into Adult Resource Centres. Young people with learning difficulties had little choice of route or service due to shortage of placements.

- **Voluntary organisations** operated supported employment programmes, funded from a range of sources including the European Social Fund and social work. Supporting people in a real job was seen as the best means of achieving social inclusion and enhancing their social networks. It was also seen as contributing to better health, access to normal living arrangements and opportunities to develop a range of social relationships. However, proponents of supported employment felt that the market was rigged against them so that there were far too few opportunities available to accommodate the number of people expressing a preference for paid employment. Instead, many people were being restricted to unfulfilling lives in Adult Resource Centres which offered few opportunities for the development of work related skills and personal growth.

Across services the following key conclusions may be drawn:

- Open labour market employment was seen as the ultimate goal of much provision but the segregated nature of training was felt to inhibit this.
• Supported employment schemes, not common and catering for only a few people each, were seen as more likely to result in open labour market employment.
• The potential for 'circuits of training' with little progression to an end goal was presented as a key weakness of existing service provision.
• There was little competition between providers or choice for service users. Budgetary pressures were felt to limit definitions of needs to those which could be met by existing services and choice of services was particularly difficult to maintain in sparsely populated areas. Choice for service users was reported to be at the 'micro' level of certain details within existing services rather than at the level of the nature of services.
• Evaluation of many services, particularly in the field of training, consisted of evaluative questionnaires. Whilst this was in accordance with the Scottish Quality Management Scheme, it did not provide opportunities for qualitative evaluation and did not appear to feed into changes in the programmes on offer.
• The planning of education services for this group of learners appeared haphazard ranging from formal development plans agreed between agencies on a long time horizon to planning being the responsibility of individual tutors at local level.
• Adult guidance services and impartial advocates were felt to be of increasing importance in helping people determine their own course through the complex web of provision. The need for an impartial guidance agency to inform people with learning difficulties and carers of the range of services on offer was necessary for their to be any possibility of choice for service users.

Findings from Phase 2 case studies

Findings about the location of people with learning difficulties in a learning society, drawn from the 30 case studies in the achieved sample, are presented below in relation to the salience of biographical features used to sample the population and in terms of three major sites of adulthood. Conclusions are then drawn in terms of the pre-existing theoretical concerns of the research and of theoretical concerns which the research stimulated. The insight which the study of adults with learning difficulties offers for the Learning Society Programme is explored through six test criteria derived from the Specification's working definition of the learning society. The section concludes with reflections on the significance of learning difficulties for the idea of a learning society.

Biographical Features

• Learning difficulties as a category was not pre-defined by the research team as it sought to understand how the term was used in practice and what were the consequences of this use. The research shows that the label is contested by the various groups involved: those so classified only rarely used the term in describing themselves, more often rejecting it and, when using it, placing it 'outside' their core identity; parents used the category actively to make sense of their experience of caring, to project a future for their children after their own deaths and to negotiate services with professionals seeking an 'ordinary life' for their clients; the use of the term by professionals reflected an unresolved tension in current thinking about 'learning difficulties' between such 'ordinary life' principles and the perceived need for extra-ordinary services to achieve these (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999a; Stalker K, Baron S, Wilkinson H & Riddell S, 1999).
• The age of case study individuals did not appear to document progression and personal development. The life situations of people in the three age/stage categories sampled were strikingly similar with one person about to 'retire' from a lifetime of training for work, on which the youngest of the sample were about to embark (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999). There was, however, evidence that younger people were more likely to participate in supported employment.
• The nature of impairment was predominantly presented in terms of medical categories, combined with functional assessments of 'life skills'. Multi-dimensional constructions of abilities and impairments were only present in a minority of cases and these tended to challenge the structure of service provision. Cases tended to be arrayed along a one dimensional continuum of ability and with choices
of services diminished with severity of impairment. (Stalker K, Baron S, Wilkinson H & Riddell S, 1999) Those who had learning difficulties as a result of lack of learning opportunities (poverty, accident or illness) occupied a marginal position in the labour market, undertaking, or heading towards, low skilled and insecure work in the grey or black economy. People with mild or moderate learning difficulties were usually based in Adult Resource Centres. Some had limited contact with the labour market through supported employment schemes. Those with the most severe learning difficulties spent all their time in Adult Resource Centres with no contact with the labour market.

- The urban case study area represented arguably the most developed service context in Scotland, with the best conditions for a welfare quasi-market to operate. The experience of the urban case studies suggests that choice between possible personal futures through choosing between fundamentally different types of service ('macro-choice') was severely limited, with choice effectively limited to details of the service being provided ('micro-choice') (Riddell S, Wilson A & Baron S 1999c)
- The rural case study area was characterised by sparse service provision with the consequences of little or no choice between services and of little differentiation of provision within services.
- Gender was a significant component in the construction of the identities of the case studies in two major ways: while the sexuality of all case studies was an issue for the participants this, reflecting wider gender roles, was particularly pertinent for the female cases; there was evidence, in some cases, that female gender roles, particularly those of 'domesticity', provided a resource which could be utilised to negotiate the demands of a learning disabled identity (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999)
- Ethnicity was the significantly absent dimension of the sampling frame. With the exception of one case (American Indian/Scottish) no individuals from ethnic minorities could be identified by the services in either urban or rural contexts. This was thought to be typical by service providers. Although, in UK terms, there is a relatively low minority ethnic population in Scotland (about 2%), it is unlikely that the absence of minority ethnic people from services is simply a product of sampling. Rather, it suggests that ethnic minorities do not seek services by way of the category 'learning difficulties'. It was not possible to pursue this striking phenomenon within the terms of the current research.
- Social class was not used in the sample design as prior experience indicated that 'learning difficulties' acted as a master category which substantially reduced the salience of social class. The circumstances of the case study individuals ranged from poverty to significant inherited wealth, with the former being most prevalent. Class position clearly impacted on the lives of the case study individuals, mediating rather than negating learning disabled identities. (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999)

Three major sites of adulthood were identified:

**Domesticity**
- Homes of origin provided the most common domestic location from birth until early middle age, with a move into residential care necessary as parents became incapacitated. Familial homes appeared to cover the full range from the significantly abusive to the highly cherishing, but entailed the continuing definition of the person with learning difficulties as child like (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999).
- Supported accommodation or residential group care settings provided for more independent living but the interaction of benefit regimes and systems for contracting services could act to lock people into inappropriate accommodation and hinder progression.
- Independent living was the least common domestic arrangement and appeared to depend on significant determination on the part of the case study individual and the availability of specific, and scarce, physical, social and professional infrastructures.
- Intimate personal relations were an expressed aspiration of many of the case study individuals but were not commonly established. Barriers to the formation of these ranged from the personal (e.g. poor initiation into the rituals of courtship) through the attitudinal (e.g. family or professionals doubts about capacity) to the social structural (e.g. limited social networks, inappropriate accommodation and low income) (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999).

**Daytime Activities**
• Work was widely perceived by the case study individuals as the key to progression and identity. For some people work was not an actively pursued option while for others, benefit regulations tended to inhibit progressive engagement with work. Those who had a limited engagement with work saw it as central to their lives (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilkinson H 1998b; Riddell S, Wilson A & Baron S 1999a).

• Training in a variety of settings provided the main daytime activity for the case study individuals but this was poorly linked to opportunities to put the training into practice in open contexts. Rounds of training, perhaps for life, appeared to be the norm (Riddell S, Baron S & Wilkinson H 1998a).

• Leisure classes provided a counter-point to training sessions but, in the absence of work, tended to be another slot in the timetable rather than self initiated development (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1998a).

• Supported employment schemes with job coaching or similar provided not only meaningful work and income but also engagement with new social networks. There was evidence that the Employment Service wage subsidy scheme could be used for the benefit of the employer rather than the employee (Riddell S, Wilson A & Baron S, 1999a).

Social Networks
• Special provision either in segregated settings or in special sessions in community settings dominated services contrary to the ethic of 'normalisation' which most services espoused. Inherited professional service structures and limited resources were the main barriers to better social integration (Stalker K, Baron S, Wilkinson H & Riddell S, 1999).

• Friendship networks tended to be limited to daytime service settings, accommodation and special leisure events organised for people with learning difficulties (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1998).

• Social skills developed in such segregated settings were not always appropriate for open settings, and could act in a self perpetuating manner (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999).

Conclusions

Prior Theoretical Concerns
• Choice and the welfare quasi-market, where the pre-conditions existed, did not appear to operate, with either co-operation between nominally competing providers or with purchaser and contractor agreeing an effective monopoly. Outside the conurbation the pre-conditions for the quasi-market in services for people with learning difficulties did not exist (Riddell S, Wilson A & Baron S 1999c).

• Adult status appeared elusive for most people with learning difficulties in terms of the key markers of economic and domestic independence and of the development of autonomous personal identities, intimate personal relationships and social networks (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999).

• Barriers to full citizenship at the personal (e.g. poor social skills), primary group (e.g. familial attitudes), institutional (e.g. segregated services) and social structural level (e.g. polarisation of the labour force) act and interact to maintain people with learning difficulties in a marginal position in contemporary society.

Emergent Theoretical Concerns
• Human capital and social capital theories emerged as a central concern of a group of projects in the Programme. Viewed from a human capital perspective people with learning difficulties are a deficit system. Viewed from a social capital perspective they can not only participate in networks of norms and trust but may act as a catalyst for the formation of such. This is being pursued in conjunction with Professors Schuller and Field in a book contracted with Oxford University Press (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilkinson H 1998a; Riddell S, Baron S, Stalker K & Wilkinson H 1997b; Riddell S, Baron S & Wilson A 1999c).

• Identity and risk emerged as significant theoretical issues from engagement with the experience of the 30 case study people. The attempts by these people to form their own identity, and thus to move between different social settings, foundered due to the power of their global, ascribed identity. This suggests that parts of post-modern and late-modern theorising have over-stated the decline of social
determination of identity (Baron S, Riddell S & Wilson A 1999). This is the focus of a book to be published by Policy Press

- The re-professionalisation of learning difficulties through social work claims to define normality and an ordinary life were highlighted by the 30 case studies. This is being pursued in a book contracted with Macmillan.

**Test Criteria from The Learning Society Programme's Working Definition**

- Access to excellent services was limited in terms of levels of provision and geographic spread and limited by the dominance of segregating provision.
- Developmental progression of the individual was notable in its absence. Services did not provide the framework by which the transition to adulthood could be made fully and a process of lifelong development undertaken.
- Contribution to the social and economic whole was limited by the scarcity of suitable work and appropriate support services, thus restricting opportunities for wider social engagement.
- Social integration was limited by the dominance of special social networks and the paucity of work opportunities.
- Participative citizenship was limited by the relatively closed nature of the social networks and by segregated provision.
- Equity for people with learning difficulties in terms of the Programme may best be defined as the combination of the previous five test criteria which, in their delineation of exclusion from mainstream social, economic and personal life-chances, suggest inequity.

**Learning Difficulties in a Learning Society**

- Social justice and learning difficulties: Current policy thinking, reflecting existing social attitudes, envisages social justice as being welfare provision for those who are unable to work. The experience of the 30 case studies suggests that the dichotomy on which this is predicated is, in itself, a powerful source of injustice.
- People with learning difficulties as pioneers of a 'learning society': The 'learning society' literature is characterised by enthusiasm for the idea of lifelong learning. People with learning difficulties have followed such a path for decades and raise the possibility of a nightmare version of the 'learning society': excluded groups confined to segregated settings undergoing continuous training as a form of warehousing.
- People with learning as catalysts for a 'learning society': As campaigns by people with mobility difficulties have helped access to public facilities for all, so may including people with learning difficulties in a 'learning society' improve access to learning for all. Clarity of vision, understanding and purpose, combined with supportive social networks, are especially important for enabling people with learning difficulties to learn. The conscious development of these can provide one foundation for the development of a wider 'learning society'.

**Activities**

During the course of the project, we have established a number of research networks. Sheila Riddell, along with Nicholas Watson of Edinburgh University, has been awarded an ESRC grant to organise a seminar series on the theme Disability and the Restructuring of Welfare. Stephen Baron, with Tom Schuller of Birkbeck College, University of London and John Field of University of Warwick, has been awarded a grant by the ESRC to run a seminar series on Perspectives on Social Capital. Other networks have been established, for instance, Sheila Riddell is participating in an ESRC funded seminar series on Lifelong Learning organised by Warwick University in collaboration with others. As well as participating in activities of the programme (see conference/seminar presentations), the research team organised the Scottish Dissemination Conference of the Learning Society Programme, sponsored by the Glasgow Development Agency. They also participated in the Learning Society Programme Conference at Church House, Westminster in July 1999, as well as contributing to numerous other seminars and conferences. Papers from the project have been presented to symposia organised by the Post-16 British Educational Research Association Special Interest Group and the Social Justice in Education BERA
Special Interest Group. The Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research, along with the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York and the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities at the University of Cardiff, has been designated the Employment Service’s Research Centre on Disability and Employment. The Strathclyde Centre, with SPRU and the Welsh Centre, will advise the Employment Service on research priorities and will have ‘preferred contractor’ status.

**Outputs**
In addition to existing publications (see information provided for REGARD), a number of publications are in process of production. A contract for a book is being negotiated with Policy Press and Stephen Baron is editing a book on Social Capital with John Field and Tom Schuller. Papers from Sheila Riddell’s seminar series on Disability and the Restructuring of Welfare are to be published in special editions of Critical Social Policy, Policy and Politics and International Journal of Inclusive Education. These special editions will include contributions from the project team. Stephen Baron and Paul Dumbleton, the vice chair of the project advisory group, are writing a book, to be published by Macmillan, on the re-professionalisation of learning difficulties.

**Impacts**
Project team members have disseminated results to a range of policy makers and practitioners including the GDA, Glasgow Alliance, the Careers Service and FE colleges. Sheila Riddell has participated in the work of a number of Scottish Office committees. She chaired the Scottish Office Advisory Committee on the Education of Children and Young People with Severe Low Incidence Disabilities, gave evidence to the Beattie Committee on post-16 provision for young people with special needs and to the Millan Committee’s review of mental health legislation in Scotland and acted as a stakeholders group member of the Scottish Executive’s Learning Disabilities Review.

**Future Research Priorities**
A number of new projects have spun off from this work. Sheila Riddell and Alastair Wilson have conducted research, funded by the DfEE, on Enable’s delivery of an innovative form of work preparation. Alastair Wilson contributed a paper on disability and social exclusion to a review of poverty in Glasgow conducted by the Department of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A proposal has been submitted to the ESRC to explore the impact of neighbourhood on access to and experience of lifelong learning for people with learning difficulties. A follow-up project is planned, focusing on personal communities of people with learning difficulties. We intend to revisit those who participated in case studies in this project and add an additional cohort in another urban centre.
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Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilkinson, H (1998a) Training from cradle to grave? Local Enterprise Companies, the marketisation of training and young people with learning difficulties Journal of Education Policy Special Issue on Social Justice in Education 13, 4 531-544

Riddell, S, Wilkinson, H and Baron, S (1998b) 'From emancipatory research to focus group: People with learning difficulties and the research process' in Clough, P and Barton, L (eds) Articulating with Difficulty: Research Voices in Inclusive Education London: Paul Chapman Publishing

Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilson, A (1999a) 'Supported employment in Scotland: Theory and practice' Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation special issue: European perspective on employment and disability, 12, 3 181-195

Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilson, A (1999b) 'Social capital and people with learning difficulties' Studies in the Education of Adults Special edition on the Learning Society 31, 1, 49-66


Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilson, A (1999d) 'Supported employment in Scotland: Theory and practice'
Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation special issue: European perspective on employment and disability, 12, 3 181-195


'The meaning of the learning society for adults with learning difficulties'

Case studies completed from phases one and two:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Living Arrangement</th>
<th>Main Placement</th>
<th>Major issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Richard Ronald</td>
<td>M 44</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home: elderly mother</td>
<td>Supported employment – ES wage subsidy</td>
<td>’Recruited’ to ES scheme following company rationalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bruce Basil</td>
<td>M 50</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home: elderly parents</td>
<td>P/T work via supported employment (job coaching?)</td>
<td>P/T work /benefits issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Billy Bobby</td>
<td>M 39</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Supported living</td>
<td>ARC/PT work - supported employment (job coaching)</td>
<td>Supported living difficulties/PT work –therapeutic earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Malcolm Martin</td>
<td>M 23</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home: parents &amp; sister</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre/Classes at college</td>
<td>Parents reluctant to consider supported living/lack of peer group friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mark Mick</td>
<td>M 33</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home: elderly mother</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>Mother dissatisfaction with day services/supported living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Catherine Clare</td>
<td>F 43</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Supported living in her own flat</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>Incapax issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Frances Fiona</td>
<td>F 43</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Supported in her own flat (weekly visit)</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre/looking for employment Real Jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Iain Liam</td>
<td>M 47</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home: brother and brother’s family</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre/Enable work programme</td>
<td>Failed work programme/appropriateness of the placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Brian Bryce</td>
<td>M 55</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Bed &amp; Breakfast social work registered</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>No home support question mark as to his accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Ricky Roger</td>
<td>M 17</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home –mother, partner &amp; brother</td>
<td>LEC Skillseekers special needs training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Robert Regie</td>
<td>M 17</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home – mother &amp; siblings</td>
<td>LEC Skillseekers special needs training</td>
<td>Casual employment after training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Kerry Kelly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Home – mother, brother, sister</td>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Serious health problems, social life centred around family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Steve’s ?</td>
<td>M 17</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td></td>
<td>FE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Mairi’s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td></td>
<td>FE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Karen Kirsty</td>
<td>F 28</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Margaret. A Maud</td>
<td>F 56</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Group home shares with three others</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>Death of mother resulting difficulties in supported living, boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Kathy Kate</td>
<td>F 47</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home – shares with husband</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre/looking for P/T employment</td>
<td>Marriage, independence and support issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 George Jack</td>
<td>M 21</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home then moved to supported accommodation</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>Apparent abuse at home led to moving into supported accommodation – death of mother ended case study prematurely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Margaret. D Mavis</td>
<td>F 27</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home with parents &amp; siblings</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
<td>Allegations by day services as to treatment at home, social work involvement, role of day services, benefit issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Employment/Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Michelle Maureen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home with parents</td>
<td>Adult Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dilys Doris</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Supported in her own home</td>
<td>ARC/Community Education/voluntary work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Isabel Isla</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home with older brother</td>
<td>Part-time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Craig Chris</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>FE/day services/college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Laurie Lois</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Training for Work/unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Susan Sally</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home: mother, father &amp; brother</td>
<td>Skillseeker/Training for Work/ES supported employment/unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Graham Greg</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home – mother &amp; sister</td>
<td>Full-time work – ES supported employment/wage subsidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Kita Ruth</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Day services/FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Delip Imran</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Day services/voluntary work - 1 morning per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Eddie Ewan</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Residential group home</td>
<td>Day services/PT work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Elizabeth Lisa</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Home: mother &amp; father</td>
<td>Day services/ES work placement/PT vol. work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning Society publications**

**Refereed journal papers**


Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilkinson, H (1998) Training from cradle to grave? Local Enterprise Companies, the marketisation of training and young people with learning difficulties *Journal of Education Policy Special Issue on Social Justice in Education* 13, 4 531-544


Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilson, A (1999) ‘The Learning Society and adults with learning difficulties’ *College Research*

**Papers in edited collections**


Report


Conference papers


Riddell, S, Baron, S and Wilson, A ‘Supported employment and work-based learning for people with learning difficulties’ Paper presented to the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Helsinki at Lahti, 22 – 26 September