

# Developing the Expert Learner

## Active co-production of learning and the impact on mental health and wellbeing.



LSIS will provide grants of £2500 to five providers in the FE and skills sector to work with at least ten learners with mental health conditions and ten learners without declared mental health conditions.

### Background

There is a growing body of empirical evidence on the impact that adult learning has on improving wellbeing.

*‘That taking part in organised learning can help people exercise more control over their lives, contribute to their communities more effectively, and develop the confidence and skills that help us survive and thrive in tough times’<sup>i</sup>*

More specifically, participation in learning can also have a beneficial impact on mental health. Notably, using longitudinal data, Feinstein estimated that raising the educational level of women without qualifications could reduce occurrence of depression and so result in a national saving of £230 million annually.<sup>ii</sup>

The reasons for the positive impact of participation in learning are often dynamic and inter-related and include, among others, increased levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, increased levels of hope and optimism, greater social connectedness and a sense of belonging.

Practitioners who work with learners with mental health conditions have for a long time been reporting that their learners describe improvements in their mental health and that at times this can have a profound effect on their sense of wellbeing. It is unclear though whether it is the social aspects of learning, the acquisition of skills or qualifications or the process and act of learning that creates these benefits. Is there, for example, more we can do to enhance these beneficial effects?

This project will look at the impact participation in learning has on the mental health and wellbeing of learners when they are given the opportunity to become Expert Learners – to be active co—producers of their learning. It will ask the question – when learners are empowered to learn how to learn and to be actively engaged in their learning and development, does it have a greater impact on the positive mental health and wellbeing of

the learners involved. We also want to compare the impact being an Expert Learners has on learners with an identified mental health condition.

## What we want you to do

1. We would like you to work with at least 10 learners with mental health conditions and 10 learners without a declared mental health condition.
2. We would like you to work with the learners by using a resource called 'Developing the Expert Learner' which is available on the [Excellence Gateway](#)
3. At the beginning and at the end of the project you will ask learners to complete a wellbeing questionnaire, which we will provide.
4. You will work with an LSIS associate to provide evidence and material in order to produce a case study of the work you have done. The case study will be made available on the [Excellence Gateway](#) and on the [NIACE MHFE website](#) at the end of the project.
5. You will attend a 'Share and Learn' event at the end of the project (March 2012) in order to showcase the work you have done and hear what others have done as well. This is a compulsory part of the project, so please ensure that your costings cover the travel and subsistence for you and/or other staff or learners to attend. This event will be held in London or Coventry.
6. This work with learners will take place between November 2011 and March 2012.

Before you apply for this funding, have a good look at the resource we want you to use '[Developing the Expert Learner](#)' You might also want to look at [The Teaching and Learning Programme](#) also on the Excellence Gateway which provides useful resources and materials that will help you work through the 'Developing the Expert Learner' resource.

## Eligibility

Grants are offered to providers from the FE and Skills sector that are funded through the Skills Funding Agency

## Application

The attached template should be completed and sent to [equalities@lsis.org.uk](mailto:equalities@lsis.org.uk) by 5 pm on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011. A response outlining whether you have been successful will be sent from LSIS by 5pm on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011.

---

<sup>i</sup> Professor John Field, IFLL Commissioner and Director, Division of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education, University of Stirling quoted in *Learning Through Life. Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* (2009) NIACE

<sup>ii</sup> Feinstein, L. (2002) *Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning, 2: Health (Depression and Obesity)* Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.6 Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Institute of Education. London