

**Education and Culture Committee**  
**Scrutiny of the 2013-14 Draft Budget**

**Age Scotland**

**Introductory Remarks**

Since 2007 the Scottish Government has made supporting sustainable economic growth their principal policy objective. However sustainable growth and ever increasing GDP is by itself a poor barometer for measuring Scotland's economic, social and environmental progress as it simply measures the volume of cash, not how it is being spent, who is benefiting or whether the money has been generated by say polluting activities.

The proportion of total Scottish income going to the richest tenth is noticeably higher than a decade ago: 29% in 2008/09 compared with 25% in 1998/99. If a few individuals get incredibly wealthy it can distort figures and increase GDP even at a time where most individual's income are declining.

Policies that promote GDP at the expenses of other more meaningful measures of progress risk exacerbating this situation and contributing to greater inequality, social immobility and environmental damage. Age Scotland believes that the Scottish budget should be used to reshape the public sector so that it promotes and enhances those areas of public life which make the most significant impact on our health, well-being and happiness. These policy priorities do not necessarily conflict with sustainable economic growth, but by looking beyond economic growth and GDP and focusing on a broader set of indicators that more accurately capture both well-being and sustainability will better address the wider social and environmental problems in our society.

**Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning**

	<b>2012-13 Budget £m</b>	<b>2013-14 Draft Budget £m</b>	<b>2014-15 Plans £m</b>
Colleges & Adult Learning	7.9	7.0	6.3
Employability	1.2	0.8	0.8
Higher Education	2.0	2.0	2.0
Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser	6.0	3.4	3.4
Youth Employability & Skills	46.9	66.6	50.0
Skills Development Scotland	176.4	187.4	185.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>240.4</b>	<b>267.2</b>	<b>247.5</b>

Access to appropriate classes, courses and groups can bring considerable benefits to physical and mental health and help to prevent social exclusion and isolation. For many older people the wider benefits of learning in later life are not motivated by the

acquisition of academic or vocational qualifications, but are the result of a desire to stay active, develop new social networks and gain new skills and knowledge. To ensure increased enrolment into lifelong learning, courses must suit the differing learning needs of Scotland in the future and this must include opportunities to participate in part-time and full-time learning at colleges and universities.

However the Scottish Government's Budget makes notable cuts to the Colleges and Adult Learning which does not reflect the country's changing demography or consider the needs of older adult learners. The Budget instead reflects the views of the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group who recently stated in evidence to the Finance Committee that only quality, sustainable employment should be the outcome of all skills and employment measures.

The International Longevity Centre UK identified low skills as one of the reasons for early retirement<sup>i</sup>, which is likely to lead to an increase in benefit claims. Yet managers who employ older workers value their experience and knowledge, and so there are potentially substantial benefits of providing greater public funding in order to up skill older workers.

Further there is a growing body of evidence to show that engagement in learning can deliver significant benefits to health and well-being. The interim report of a National Institute of Adult Continuing Education project which investigated learning in residential care, demonstrated that participation in learning can: reduce isolation; improve both physical and mental health; reduce dependence on medication; improve recovery rates; reduce dependency on others and lead to a greater enjoyment of life.<sup>ii</sup> For example, in one care home that began offering learning, the use of incontinence products was reduced by about 75%. Clear benefits such as this, quite apart from improvements to quality of life, could also contribute towards significant cost savings. While there are similar benefits to increasing the provision of lifelong learning within communities and among people of all ages, quantifying the outcomes can, unfortunately, be challenging.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Recommendations**

The Government's budget is critical in determining what the environment will be for older learners. Before making any cuts to the adult learning budget line, Age Scotland recommends a full evaluation of the impact of learning, particularly in terms of its health and societal benefits – and any possible savings to the wider public sector. Furthermore, any audit would benefit from an analysis of the of the third sector's role in supporting the delivery of adult learning courses.

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<sup>i</sup> International Longevity Centre, The future of retirement, 2010

<sup>ii</sup> Enhancing informal learning in care settings, NIACE, Oct 2009

<sup>iii</sup> See for example Cote J, Identity capital, social capital and the wider benefits of learning, London Review of Education, (2003); or McNair S, Migration Communities and Lifelong Learning, IFLL (2009).