

# **ILA Scotland – A practical case study of demand-led funding for adult learning**

Hazel RUTHERFORD

*Higher Education and Learner Support Division*

*Lifelong Learning Directorate*

*Glasgow - Scotland*

## **Abstract**

A practical case study for demand-led funding for adult learning; looking at where we are now with ILAs in Scotland and where ILAs might go in the future. ILA Scotland is a national scheme which provides a learner funding entitlement (of up to £200 a year) towards payment of course tuition fees. It has been running since December 2004, and currently has over 90,000 account holders and over 55,000 active accounts. ILA Scotland is recognised as a valuable part of lifelong learning funding in Scotland, and has helped increase access to lifelong learning, especially for lower income learners, women returners and older learners. We are actively looking at widening the reach of the scheme by extending learner, provider and course eligibility.

## **Introduction**

ILA Scotland is a national scheme which provides a learner funding entitlement towards payment of course tuition fees. The key aims of the scheme are to:

- (a) to widen participation in adult learning by increasing interest and uptake;
- (b) to introduce new learners to adult learning and to provide an opportunity for those who have not recently participated in learning to do so;
- (c) to encourage more learning progression;
- (d) to encourage individuals to invest in their own learning;
- (e) to prioritise the learning needs of certain groups of learners (such as people on low income);
- (f) to support the development of a quality learning provider base in Scotland.

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) can help pay for a wide range of learning with a variety of approved learning providers, including private and community based providers, colleges and some universities. A wide range of learning providers participate in the scheme, to offer flexibility and encourage learner choice. All must hold accredited quality standards and be formally approved by ILA Scotland. The provider base has grown over time, currently there are nearly 300 approved learning providers, offering almost 16,000 courses at over 650 venues. Of these 300 there are:

- (a) 16 universities
- (b) 46 colleges
- (c) 67 community learning providers
- (d) 167 private training providers

The ILA Scotland scheme has two different offers, referred to as ILA200 and ILA100.

ILA200 learners must be 18, currently living in Scotland and must either be in receipt of benefits or have completed an income assessment which confirms that they meet ILA

## **ILA Scotland – A practical case study of demand-led funding for adult learning**

Hazel RUTHERFORD

*Higher Education and Learner Support Division*

*Lifelong Learning Directorate*

*Glasgow - Scotland*

Scotland 'low income' criteria. The income assessment threshold was initially set at £15,000 per annum ('earned' income), but from June 2007 was increased to £18,000 per annum.

ILA200 learners can access up to £200 a year towards the tuition fee costs of a very wide range of courses. There is currently no limitation on the subjects which can be studied or on the level of study which can be undertaken within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (although full-time higher education is excluded). There is no requirement for ILA200 courses to lead to formal qualifications or certification (although the vast majority of ILA learners do choose courses which lead to qualifications). To support learner progression ILA200 learners can have their funding entitlement renewed each 'learner year' (12 months after account opening and annually thereafter).

ILA100 learners must be 18 and currently living in Scotland but otherwise have no additional eligibility criteria to qualify to open an individual learning account. There is no income assessment for ILA100.

ILA100 learners can access up to £100 a year towards the tuition fee costs of a much more limited range of courses. ILA100 courses must lead to qualifications or recognised certification and can only be at or up to SCQF Level 6. These requirements are primarily intended to focus ILA100 resources on encouraging people with lower level skills (but whose income may be above the income threshold) to attain qualifications. ILA100 funding is also renewed year on year to support learner progression.

It is worth noting that while ILA applicants need to be ordinarily resident in Scotland, they do not require to be British nationals or to have spent a minimum residency period in Scotland (as is the case for example for higher education support). Although we do not presently gather nationality data, we are aware from learning provider feedback that a small but growing number of applicants are from EU accession states, especially Poland.

In both schemes the learner has to make a minimum contribution towards the cost of their course.

### **Participation and learner profile**

ILA management information is updated monthly. The statistical data here is to end December 2007. Learner numbers are cumulative from scheme start (December 2004 for ILA200, August 2005 for ILA100).

- (a) 91,000 accounts have been opened;
- (b) 56,500 ILA200 account holders have undertaken ILA-funded learning;
- (c) 4,500 ILA100 account holders have undertaken learning;
- (d) most ILA learners (88%) are aged 25+;
- (e) most learners (63%) take courses in college, 28% at a private/community based provider and only 9% at university.

## **ILA Scotland – A practical case study of demand-led funding for adult learning**

Hazel RUTHERFORD

*Higher Education and Learner Support Division*

*Lifelong Learning Directorate*

*Glasgow - Scotland*

### ILA200:

- (a) vast majority (92%) of ILA learners are ILA200, (ie. low income);
- (b) most are on low income but in work (75%);
- (c) most are female (74%);
- (d) pension age learners comprise 18%;
- (e) the majority (55%) have qualifications below HNC level;
- (f) most (82%) choose courses leading to qualifications or certification; 50%+ choose to do ICT courses, other popular subjects include health and welfare, business, arts and languages.

### ILA100:

- (a) most are female (but only 57%, much lower than for ILA200);
- (b) most (79%) work full-time;
- (c) most (54%) have qualifications at or above HNC level.

Alongside this management information (MI) there has also been extensive learner feedback gathered through external learner research surveys. There have been two waves completed of ILA200 learner research. Phase 1 follow up research with an initial cohort of ILA200 learners was published in March 2007<sup>1</sup>. The ILA100 learner research has produced initial findings (not yet published); and the final learner survey findings is due to be published in March this year. This will provide further learner profile information to complement the scheme MI plus comprehensive qualitative learner feedback on all aspects of the ILA learner experience. We also commissioned research to examine the views of both learning providers and intermediary agencies associated with the ILA Scotland scheme; the final report of these findings was published in December 2007<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Future of ILAs in Scotland**

Overall the evaluation has been very positive about the ILA scheme in Scotland with high levels of learner satisfaction (around 90%), and evidence of ‘value-added’ in that over half of all ILA200 learners would not have undertaken the learning without ILA Scotland support.

ILA Scotland is recognised as a valuable part of lifelong learning funding in Scotland, and ILAs have helped increase access to lifelong learning, especially for lower income learners, women returners, and older learners.

---

<sup>1</sup> The full report is available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/07115752/0> and a Research Summary at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/07115752/1>

<sup>2</sup> The full report is available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/13151715> and a Research Summary at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/13151656>

## **ILA Scotland – A practical case study of demand-led funding for adult learning**

Hazel RUTHERFORD

*Higher Education and Learner Support Division*

*Lifelong Learning Directorate*

*Glasgow - Scotland*

However ILAs should aim to have greater strategic impact in the future. We have recently carried out a policy review of ILA Scotland. The purpose of the review is to build on the existing policy model to develop an enhanced ILA offer for Scottish learners from 2008 to 2011, which supports and reinforces the Scottish Government's wider Skills Strategy<sup>3</sup>

We have identified a number changes that we could make to further open up the reach and impact of ILAs by extending learner, provider and course eligibility. Our emerging thoughts on this are to:

- (a) focus on the low income funding offer (ILA200) and potentially remove the non means-tested (ILA100) funding offer;
- (b) move towards a more targeted approach, directing more ILA funding at harder to reach learners (such as those with adult literacy and numeracy needs, or in low pay low skill employment);
- (c) integrate ILA funding better with a wider package of information, advice and guidance;
- (d) position ILAs more explicitly as a lifelong learning grant (ie. not necessarily requiring a personal financial contribution);
- (e) reinforce and expand the support role of intermediary bodies;
- (f) streamline scheme administration to make it more flexible and easier to use.

In addition we are introducing a £500 part-time higher education fee grant from next academic year, and this new funding will be delivered through a simplified ILA Scotland model.

Hazel Rutherford  
Higher Education and Learner Support Division  
Lifelong Learning Directorate  
Scottish Government

January 2008

---

<sup>3</sup> Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy (September 2007) at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/06091114>