

RESEARCH REPORT

LEARNING LIVES: LEARNING, IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN THE LIFE-COURSE Gert Biesta, John Field, Ivor Goodson, Phil Hodgkinson and Flora Macleod

1. BACKGROUND

The idea of lifelong learning has played a prominent role in educational policy since the 1970s. Whereas lifelong learning was initially focused on personal development and growth, it has increasingly become part of a ‘new educational order’ in which the policy emphasis has shifted towards its economic function. Recent research in the UK has explored differing dimensions of lifelong learning, different lifelong learning trajectories and identities, and the wider benefits of adult learning.

Most existing research on lifelong learning is characterised by an *institutional focus* in that it studies learning within institutional settings or in function of educational policies and practices. In contrast, the Learning Lives project has taken a *biographical approach* by focusing on individual adults and their learning biographies and trajectories and the interrelationships between learning, identity and agency in their lives. It has used a combination of life-history research, longitudinal interpretative life-course research and analysis of longitudinal panel survey data.

The main ambition of the project has been to investigate what learning ‘means’ and ‘does’ in the lives of adults. We have used a broad conception of learning which includes learning in the context of formal education and work-settings and learning in and from everyday life. Whereas biographical and life-history methods have been utilised in researching adult and lifelong learning, the Learning Lives project is exceptional because of its scale, length and its longitudinal ‘real time’ design, and because it has combined analysis of interview data with analysis of quantitative longitudinal data.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

overall aim

“To deepen understanding of the complexities of learning in the life-course whilst identifying, implementing and evaluating strategies for sustained positive impact upon learning opportunities, dispositions and practices and upon the empowerment of adults.”

We have fulfilled this aim through a combination of empirical findings, theoretical and conceptual development, and the development of strategies for the improvement of learning through the life-course (see section 4; annex 6).

objectives

“(1) To develop a theory of learning and identity transformation in the life-course based upon an elaboration and understanding of life histories, learning biographies and identity transformation, and their relationships with learners’ dispositions, practices, attainments and perceptions of control across a variety of social, cultural and educational settings.”

We have achieved this objective. Based on our findings we found it helpful to make a distinction between ‘learning from life’ and ‘learning through life.’ To understand

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the ways in which adults learn from their lives, the role of narrative and narration in such learning, and the significance of such learning for their identity and agency we have developed a theory of narrative learning (see section 4). To understand the relationships between learning, identity and agency in relation to adults' dispositions, practices, attainments and perceptions of control across a variety of settings we have deployed and further developed a theory of learning positions and dispositions (see section 4).

“(2) To determine the effectiveness of strategies for the enhancement of learners' dispositions, learning practices, attainments and opportunities to use knowledge to assert control over their lives.”

We have achieved this objective. We have investigated and evaluated such strategies in a naturalistic way by focusing on how they were experienced by the participants (see section 4; annex 6).

“(3) To develop strategies for the enhancement of learning, teaching and guidance opportunities by integrating part of the research with programmes of post-compulsory teacher education, higher education, adult careers guidance, work-related advice and training, and a community support group.”

The original proposal entailed involvement of staff from adult learning organisations in the research and the implementation of strategies for improvement. In the revised proposal, agreed by TLRP and ESRC, this element was taken out.

“(4) To promote research capability among both practitioners and educational researchers.”

We have achieved this objective with regard to educational researchers (practitioners were not involved in the revised project). The use of life-history methodology at this scale combined with longitudinal interpretative life-course research has been unprecedented. As BHPS data have rarely been used in educational research we also had to develop specific expertise with regard to data management and analysis. As a result the research team has developed a significantly new set of research skills (see section 3; annex 2).

(5) To develop opportunities for the effective communication of the outcomes of the project to policy-makers.

This objective has been achieved through activities at local, regional, national and international level (see sections 5, 6 and 7; annex 3 & 4).

3. METHODS

3.1 Design

The project combined retrospective life-history research, longitudinal interpretative life-course research and quantitative survey research. The first two approaches used interviews for data-collection. We conducted 528 interviews with 117 people, 59 male and 58 female, aged between 25 and 84 at first interview over 36 months. Most

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interviews lasted for about 2 hours. The average number of interviews per individual was 4 to 5 (see annex 1). We decided, with agreement from TLRP/ESRC, to use data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), an annual panel survey of each adult member of a nationally representative sample of 5,500 British households (ca. 10,000 individuals per wave). Our decision was based on the size, quality and representativeness of this data-set. It allowed us to conduct longitudinal analysis at a scale that would have been impossible if we had collected our own data.

3.2 Data-collection 1: interview data

First interviews focused on the life history (“Can you tell me about your life?”); subsequent interviews increasingly focused on ongoing events in the lives of interviewees. Interviewers took an open approach, asking for clarification and elaboration, with progressive focusing on key project interests and themes. In the final interview participants were asked about their experiences of taking part in the project. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and checked by the interviewer. Transcripts were made available to the participants; they were not required to read or check them.

3.3 Data-analysis 1: interview data

Building on our experience with the analysis of large qualitative data-sets,¹ we developed an approach that suited the logistics and objectives of the project. After each interview research fellows wrote short papers, capturing salient experiences and early interpretations. Over time these developed into substantive records of ongoing analysis. We used two approaches for systematic data-analysis in an iterative relationship. *Thematic analysis* focused on larger numbers of cases around particular themes, using both theoretically driven analysis and data-driven analysis. *Biographical analysis* focused on the in-depth analysis of individuals and resulted in the construction of detailed individual case studies. Interim findings were reported in conference papers and project working papers; summative analysis was documented in three summative working papers on learning from life, learning through life, and learning and generations (annex 3). All working papers were made available on the project website (www.learninglives.org). Full transcripts of interviews with 55 participants were deposited in order to make data available for other researchers.

3.4 Data 2: BHPS variables

Given the fact that BHPS is not strong on measuring informal learning, we played to its strengths by focusing on formal part-time education and training during adulthood (our dependent variable). Our independent variables were age, gender, cohort (generation group), place (UK nation-state), social class, occupational status, household tenure, disability (objective & subjective), employment status, income status, marital status, parenthood and family status. We used a number of variables to study family background and intergenerational influences (see annex 2).

3.5 Data-analysis 2: BHPS

The longitudinal structure of the BHPS made it possible to follow individuals over time and develop an understanding of changes in the patterns and predictors of participation and non-participation in formal education and training. The size of subsamples gave our analysis more statistical power than any previous analysis at UK level. The analytic

¹ Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G.J.J., Gleeson, D., James, D. & Postlethwaite, K.C. (2005). The heuristic and holistic synthesis of large volumes of qualitative data. A paper presented at the RCBN Annual Conference, Cardiff.

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techniques we used included event history, latent class, and log-linear models. The analytical advantages of using longitudinal data were the ability to: (1) study patterns, trends, and dynamics of participation by focusing on individual change over time (2) study transitions between states of participation and non-participation, what triggered the change including the timing of a change of state in relation to other transitions and events; (3) study individual specific effects on patterns of participation; (4) study the effects of events (natural interventions and imposed interventions such as policy change) (5) control period, age and cohort specific effects; (6) consider the impact of time-varying predictors on participation (see annex 2).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Researchers were guided by the research ethics code of the British Educational Research Association. We ensured that participants understood the nature of the research and that they were aware that they could withdraw from the project at any time. We asked for signed consent for participation and separate signed consent for inclusion of transcripts in the data deposit. Participants used self-chosen pseudonyms (except where participants decided to use their own names). We omitted sensitive data where publication might be harmful to participants and anonymised background data in order to protect participants from possible recognition. The particular nature of the interviews could raise sensitive issues and could lead to expectations on the side of the interviewees that would go beyond the competency of the researchers. In those cases where we felt that relationships were developing beyond research relationships we made participants aware of opportunities for help and support.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Empirical Results

A major finding is that **learning of some sort is ubiquitous in people's lives**. Though hardly surprising, the project has generated extensive, fine-grained longitudinal evidence of the variety, scope, characteristics and trajectories of learning in the life-course. This has helped us to understand the value and significance of learning in people's lives. Our analyses have also generated insights into interrelationships between **learning, identity and agency**.

(1) Longitudinal evidence of learning through the life-course: The project has generated detailed evidence of the ubiquity and variety of learning in adults' lives. Much learning is tacit and routinised; major life changing events often trigger learning, just as learning can lead to significant changes in people's lives; adults have widely differing dispositions towards learning. For many learning is merely a factor of life, a continual striving to deal with problems than as learning per se. For a minority the sense of being a learner is an important part of their identity. In some cases this learner identity is focussed around formal educational but always with substantial informal learning related to it. Learning is sometimes valued for the outcomes it brings, but people often value the process of engagement in learning for its own sake. Judgements about what counts as good or worthwhile learning differ significantly and the judgements of individuals may be at odds with official policy which can impact negatively on adults' opportunities to learn what is important to them. Learning is not necessarily a positive experience and does not necessarily have positive outcomes. Progression and transitions in people's lives, such as retirement, can valuably be understood as learning processes. Especially within education

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and employment there are significant barriers to progression for some people. (See SWP1²)

(2) Longitudinal evidence of learning from life through narrative and narration:

The project has generated detailed evidence of ways in which adults learn *from* their lives. The life-history methodology has helped us to explore the significance of narrative and narration in such learning processes, something we have captured in the idea of ‘narrative learning’ (nominated output 1). We have found that stories and storying are important vehicles for learning from one’s life and have been able to show how differences in the ‘narrative quality’ of life stories (narrative intensity; descriptive-evaluative; plot and emplotment; flexibility) correlate with different learning *processes* (‘learning potential’ of life-stories) and differing learning *outcomes* (‘action potential’). We have found important differences in the efficacy of life storying and have been able to establish relationships between styles of narration, forms of narrative learning and agency. We have found that the ‘capacity’ to learn from one’s life is not necessarily fixed but can be learned. Life stories play a crucial role in the articulation of a sense of self which means that narrative learning is a form of ‘identity work.’ Narrative learning operates at the intersection of ‘internal conversations’ and social practices of story telling, which means that for many the social opportunities for narrating one’s life story are an important vehicle for narrative learning and an important avenue for improving the capacity for narrative learning. (See SWP 2.)

(3) Longitudinal evidence of trajectories of participation in part-time education and factors influencing participation:

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis contributed to these findings. Analysis of qualitative data identified two types of engagement with part-time education and training. Some participation involved low levels of involvement, with little impact upon identity. Some adults develop a high level of involvement, where being a learner/student becomes an important part of their life and identity. It is this high level involvement which can lead to personal change, including the achievement of agency (see below). For those people, participation in part-time education and training is a long term process, not a ‘quick fix.’ Analysis of the BHPS gave us a detailed empirical understanding of participation in part-time education and training, of the factors influencing such participation and of trajectories of participation. Knowing change at the level of each individual gave us a more accurate picture of the true extent of change and non-participation than has been hitherto available and drew attention to the need to re-conceptualise effects from a longitudinal perspective to avoid focusing on instantaneous effects. We evidenced (i) that participation, in most cases, did not result in a higher level qualification; (ii) stronger gender effects than cross-sectional findings particularly amongst the younger cohorts studied although young women who made an early transition into parenthood had a higher probability than any of their contemporaries of returning to formal learning later on.; (iii) an age effect that strongly suggested that almost everybody just stops participating by age 55; (iv) that participation patterns were influenced by (a) prior learning and, separately, employment, including the nature of that employment in terms of the manual/non-manual divide (b) externally imposed events in people’s lives as well as the choices they made, including the timing of these events and choices (c) one’s social class status at age 14 and mothers’ and fathers’ education and work histories. (See SWP 4; annex 2.)

² Summative Working Paper : see annex 3 for an overview.

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(4) Learning and identity: We have defined identity as one's sense of self and have theorised this more specifically in terms of the dispositions people have towards themselves, life and learning. We found that dispositions together with positions (see below) can both enable and constrain learning. Many aspects of the sense of self remain implicit but can become more explicit at times of change and crisis, although this is not necessarily the case as particular dispositions and a particular sense of self may also prevent learning and change. The narration of one's life story is not only an important vehicle for expressing one's sense of self, but also for articulating and actively constructing such a sense of self. Relationships between identity and learning often become clear at times of crisis and change. When people go through major life changing events they are often presented by a need to learn. Learning can then contribute to changes in some dispositions, and thus a person's identity. It is, however, possible that existing dispositions are so strong that learning and subsequent change in identity do not happen. Our data suggest a widespread 'need' for the construction of a (coherent) life-story that helps individuals to make sense and come to terms with their life and adjust to changes in their lives.

(5) Learning and agency: We have taken agency to be about the (situated) ability to give direction to one's life (see below). We have found that learning itself may or may not be agentially driven: it can be self-initiated or forced by others or be incidental. Learning may result in increase or decrease of agency. Increased agency seems to be more obvious and common, but much depends on the extent to which people acknowledge that they have learned something. This is more obvious in relation to formal education and training, often because qualifications open up new possibilities for action. Experiences of successful learning also impact positively on people's self-confidence, which in turn can lead to increased agency in many aspects of their lives. The research indicates that the extent to which learning 'translates' into agency, depends on a range of factors and also on the particular 'ecological' conditions of people's field of action. Decreased agency through learning occurs when people learn that things are too difficult or that they cannot cope, which, in turn, impacts upon their sense of self.

4.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Results

The project has contributed to theorising and conceptualising learning across the life-course in the following ways.

(1) Learning, position, identity and agency

Building on earlier work on learning cultures and a cultural understanding of learning,³ we have developed a framework for understanding learning through the life-course in which we see learning as enabled and constrained by the interrelationships between the positions of the learner and the learning, and the dispositions and actions of the learner. There are different types of position including social structures, such as class, gender and ethnicity; the generations to which people belong; and the situations, such as work, community, etc. where the learning takes place. All these change over time, but generations is a particularly important and neglected way of understanding learning through the life course (see SWP 3). Any situation, such as work, family or college, in which people are active has a learning culture: the cultural practices that enable and constrain learning in that situation. Learning cultures operate like Bourdieusian fields and

³ Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G. & James, D. (2007). Understanding learning cultures. *Educational Review* 59(4): 415-427.

Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G.J.J. & James, D. (2008). Understanding learning culturally: Overcoming the dualism between social and individual views of learning. *Vocations and Learning* 1(1): 27-47.

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are relational. The cultural practices (including learning) consist of positioned and unequal social relations, and the various forces making up the field are relationally inter-dependent. Using Bourdieu, we understand identity as the dispositions people have towards themselves. Identity is embodied, not just cognitive, and partly tacit. If and when identity changes, learning is an inherent part of that change process. Learning can contribute to and facilitate identity modification, but can also work to consolidate existing identity(ies). Interrelationships between the person and their positions are mediated through the availability and utilisation of capital. Our research shows that economic, cultural and social capital are all significant. One of the ways in which capitals work is through the actions of the learner and others. Some of those actions can be seen as either achieving or utilising agency (see above). Learning, dispositions, identity and positions all enable or constrain agency. Agentic activity can contribute to changes in dispositions and identity, and to some aspects of position. Agency can help to reorientate and reposition people in relation to the generations and social structures they inhabit and the learning cultures they participate in, and can contribute to activity in new situations and therefore new learning cultures. Such repositionings are not always agentic in origin. Agency is influenced by the positions of the actor, the positions and actions of others, and by the identity and dispositions of the actor. It can contribute to the consolidation of and/or change to any of these. The achievement and utilisation of agency is enabled and constrained by learning, and can, in turn, enable and/or constrain new learning. (See SWP 1.)

(2) Narrative learning

Building on existing research on biographical learning we have paid specific attention to the role of narrative and narration in the ways in which people learn from their lives. We have developed a theory of ‘narrative learning’ in which the life narrative is not only the outcome of learning but is also seen as a ‘site’ for biographical learning. What distinguishes a life narrative from a life story is the presence of a plot: an organising principle that allows the narrator to select, organise and present life-events in a particular (sequential or thematic) order. The presence of a plot can be taken as an indication of biographical learning. The efficacy of such learning is related to the extent to which the narrator is aware of the plot. Key concepts in our theory of narrative learning are ‘narrative quality’ (a range of different characteristics of narratives); ‘learning potential’ (the extent to which life narratives allow for learning from one’s life); and ‘action potential’ (the practical outcomes of narrative learning). The action potential is important for agency, whereas identity is an important aspect of the learning potential of narratives. Although there has been attention to narrative and narration in adult learning and in educational research more generally, we have found no attempts to ‘translate’ this into a theory of narrative learning. (See SWP 2.)

(3) Agency and identity

The project has made a major contribution to theorising and conceptualising agency, particularly through work documented in Occasional Working Paper 5. The paper provides a systematic overview of literature on agency, focusing on attempts to theorise agency in its own right. Based on this we have developed an ecological conception of agency-as-achievement, which focuses on how agency is achieved through actions of individuals under particular ‘ecological’ conditions. In the working paper and subsequent presentations and publications we have used this framework to characterise and analyse agentic orientations and achievements in relation to particular ecological conditions. A

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PhD student, supervised by Biesta and Macleod, conducted research on the relationships between identity and narrative in the work of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur.⁴

4.3 Methodological Results and Innovations

(1) Learning Lives has been the first major study to use BHPS data for understanding learning across the life-course. Our analyses have shown the power of the techniques we have introduced for understanding factors and trajectories in participation in part-time education and have also given us a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and the potential of the BHPS for educational research.

(2) While there have been several large-scale studies of learning across the life-course, none have used a longitudinal ‘real-time’ design. Our analyses have shown the strengths of such a design, particularly with regard to understanding the intersections of life and learning. They have also helped us to understand the mutual relationship between (understandings of) the past and (understandings of) the present, which has been indispensable for our work on narrative learning.

(3) We have used the ability of the BHPS to identify learning trajectories for further exploration of such trajectories within individual case-studies. This has allowed us to explore the way in which typical patterns and trajectories are ‘biographically achieved’ within individual lives.⁵

(4) The integration of findings from BHPS, life-history and life-course research has been particularly relevant for understanding the place of formal learning in people’s lives and has given us a deeper understanding of the circumstances of the lives of those who are persistently absent in formal education and training. We are beginning to (i) unmask individual heterogeneity hidden in the BHPS analysis; (ii) tease out the separate effects of participation and qualifications attained with qualifications only capturing one aspect of the learning experience; (iii) unravel age, lifecourse, period and generation effects; (iv) separate effects of externally imposed events from individual choice.

(5) We have shown that different research methods have strong affinities to different theoretical conceptions of learning. Thus, biographical methods favour views of learning as construction, ethnographies favour learning as participation, and survey analysis favours learning as acquisition. This means that combining findings from different methodologies is far from straightforward, whilst also beneficial.⁶

(6) The project has been an ‘experiment’ in conducting large-scale multi-method and multi-site longitudinal educational research and therefore potentially contains important lessons for the design and conduct of similar projects. Some of our working methods

⁴ Zhao, J. & Biesta, G.J.J. (2008). Lifelong learning, identity and the moral dimension. The ‘reflexive project of the self’ revisited. In J. Crowther et al. (eds), *Whither adult education in the learning paradigm?* (pp. 558-565). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh/SCUTREA.

⁵ Macleod, F.J. & Biesta, G.J.J. (in press/2009). Transitions and Learning in the lifecourse: reconceptualising effects from a longitudinal perspective. In K. Ecclestone, G. Biesta & M. Hughes (eds), *Change and becoming in the lifecourse*. London/New York: Routledge.

⁶ Hodkinson, P. & Macleod, F. J. (in press) Mixing methods and blending data: The case of researching learning. *Building Research Capacity Newsletter*.

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and practices, particularly in relation to the use of ICT, have themselves been the object of research.⁷

4.4 implications

We have developed research-informed strategies for improving learning across the life-course (annex 6). This document will be made available on the project website and will be published as an occasional TLRP publication. It will also be included in the Gateway book and a TLRP research commentary on Lifelong Learning.

We have identified four avenues for improving learning across the life-course:

- provision of planned courses
- personal support
- enhancing learning cultures
- providing opportunities for narration.

Concrete improvement of learning through the life-course depends on a combination of these avenues. We have outlined this in relation to three examples: learning at work, learning at college, and community learning.

5. ACTIVITIES

We prioritised academic conference presentations in order to benefit from feedback from the (inter)national research community. We gave about 90 conference presentations (including invited keynote lectures) in the UK and USA, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Greece, Australia, South-Africa, and Canada (see annex 4). In the final project year we successfully targeted annual conferences of the British Educational Research Association and the European Educational Research Association for project-wide seminars.

Communication with practitioners and users has included presentations at:

- regional and national conferences of the Learning and Skills Research Network;
- the International Conference of the Association for Education and Aging & NIACE;
- the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance;
- seminars of the Leeds University Lifelong Learning Seminars Series (May 2007: Continuity and change in learning lives; November 2007: 'Never too late to learn: Living and learning through later life; February 2008: Life histories: Theoretical and methodological issues)
- dissemination workshop at the NIACE conference 'Learning in later life'

In January 2008 we held a major dissemination event in Bridgwater, organised together with Learning South West (Taunton), NIACE and the Learning and Skills Council. This event attracted a wide audience, including learning and skills policy makers, learning providers and practitioners from the South West and beyond. A report appeared in *Adults Learning* (June 2008).

⁷ Laterza, Vito, Carmichael, Patrick & Procter, Richard (2007). The doubtful guest? A Virtual Research Environment for education. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 16 (3), 249-267.

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6. OUTPUTS

6.1 Dataset

Transcripts of interviews with those participants who gave permission to do so were deposited at the UK Data Archive. The Learning Lives data-set will progressively become a unique historical document about adult learning in the 20th and early 21st century.

6.2 Publications

Annex 3 contains an overview of all project publications (including project working papers). The *Oxford Review of Education* will publish a special issue on the project (2010). A proposal for a book on *Narrative Learning* (Goodson & Biesta, with Tedder & Adair) has been accepted by Routledge. We are finalising our proposal for a Routledge/TLRP Gateway book.

6.3 Presentations and dissemination

See section 5 and annex 4.

6.4 Website and newsletters

We made project information available through our website (www.learninglives.org). We monitored use from July 2007 onwards. The site received regular hits from the UK and other countries, including Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany; Canada, the US, Australia, Asia and Latin America. We are developing a post-project version of the website, which will remain available for the foreseeable future.

We produced 3 issues of our newsletter (annex 5) which were distributed in hard copy and via the website.

6.5 Project film

WebsEdge TV produced a short film on the project, called *The Learning Life*. The film shows the challenges faced by adult learners when trying to access learning opportunities and then use their new skills in productive and meaningful work. The first showing was at the annual meeting of the Scottish Trade Union Congress (April 2008). The film had 4 further showings on Information TV (SKY 167) in June 2008. The film will be available on the post-project website and the film and about 5 hours of footage will be available for further dissemination (including teaching and CPD).

7. IMPACTS

On the academic research community:

- we have been consulted researchers from the UK and abroad on questions of methodology and design;
- the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults gave the project a central place at their 2007 conference in Roskilde, Denmark;
- several researchers from abroad have visited us to learn more about the project
- our work is beginning to be quoted in academic presentations/publications.

On policy:

- John Field has advised the OECD on the development of its Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences
- John Field was appointed to the Commission of Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning, and has been leading its work on well-being across the life course, which drew on analysis conducted in Learning Lives.

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- Phil Hodgkinson provided a submission to the Inquiry.
- John Field has been seconded to the Government Office for Science as science co-ordinator for the Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Well-being, which is taking a life course approach to its subject.
- The Scottish Funding Council sought advice from John Field on learner dispositions and decisions, as part of its report on learner choice (2007).
- Ruth Hawthorne and Geoff Ford participated in the Government Review of Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults, and made contributions to the Age and Employment Network and the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

Impact on participants:

- many of the interviewees have indicated that participation in the project has had a significant positive impact on their lives.⁸

8. FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The Learning Lives project has demonstrated the value of large scale multi-method longitudinal research for understanding learning through the life-course, particularly for understanding the complex interactions between informal and formal learning and life. It has also demonstrated the value of using the BHPS for longitudinal educational research. When research examines learning in particular contexts, more work should be done on relating that learning to people's wider lives. There is a need for more research that takes a longitudinal perspective on learning, wherever that learning is located. There is a need for more ethnographies of learning, devoting attention to the complexities of learning in relation to place, especially outside education and work. There is a need for more mixed methods research on learning and education, which seriously engages with the relationships between methodology and conceptions of learning.

[4999 words]

⁸ Tedder, M. & Biesta, G. (2008) *"Almost a Therapy": Taking Part in a Life History Research Project*. ESREA Life History & Biographical Research Network Conference Canterbury 8 March 2008.