

Community Learning Mental Health (CLMH) Research Project: Summary of key findings

What was the CLMH research project?

The CLMH research project aimed to assess the potential for adult and community learning courses to help people develop the tools, strategies and resilience to manage, and aid recovery from, mild to moderate mental health problems. Adult learning providers in England were selected to develop and deliver short, part-time courses for adults experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

The findings presented in this leaflet are intended to be used by adult learning providers and commissioners who are considering offering, or continuing to offer, mental health and wellbeing-focused courses. The leaflet describes the overall findings from the evaluation, and experiences of learners in this region. When considering the findings, note that this type of provision was new to many learning providers and may have taken time to establish.

The project and evaluation took place in two phases. This leaflet provides findings from phase two (September 2016 to August 2017), which was run by the Department for Education (DfE). More information on the two phases can be found in the full evaluation report. DfE tested three distinct approaches in phase two by randomly assigning each research site to one of three groups:

Group A

Courses on **managing symptoms of mental health problems** (e.g. how to manage anxiety).

All participants were experiencing **mild to moderate mental health problems**.

Group B

Courses on **traditional community learning topics** (e.g. yoga, digital skills, painting).

All participants were experiencing **mild to moderate mental health problems**.

Group C

Courses on **traditional community learning topics** (e.g. yoga, digital skills, painting).

Participants were a mix of learners, **some with mild to moderate mental health problems and some without mental health problems**.

How was the CLMH project evaluated?

DfE commissioned a team led by Ipsos MORI to independently evaluate the CLMH research project. The evaluation included:

Online surveys completed by phase two learners before, during, and at the end of their participation.

Data collection was done by learning provider staff with learners, as part of a guidance process related to learners' individual goals.

Surveys asked about learners' demographics, wellbeing, learning self-efficacy and other information.

The evaluation team analysed this data to see if there were changes over time.

Interviews with 58 learners, six to nine months after learners had finished their courses.

These interviews included 12 people who did not complete their course.

They took the form of a conversation to ask about their course and what did and did not work well.

The evaluation was not able to compare outcomes for people in the CLMH project with outcomes for people with similar mental health problems who did not take part. Therefore, we cannot confidently claim that the project made a difference to learners' mental health, compared with other forms of mental health support or with no intervention. However, many learners who took part in the courses reported some positive changes in their mental health and wellbeing.

What did phase two of the CLMH research project look like?

Fifty-two adult learning providers across England took part in the project, covering **57** local authority areas. Most (**39**) of these adult learning providers were based in a local authority, but some were colleges (**8**) and some were other types of learning organisation (**5**).

Courses offered varied within and between groups A, B and C. However, the format of delivery, or the 'model' across each group was the same, and determined by DfE as:

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG):

Up to 3 hours of 1:1 guidance: a pre-course assessment as well as on-course support and guidance for every learner.

Short, part-time non-formal adult education courses:

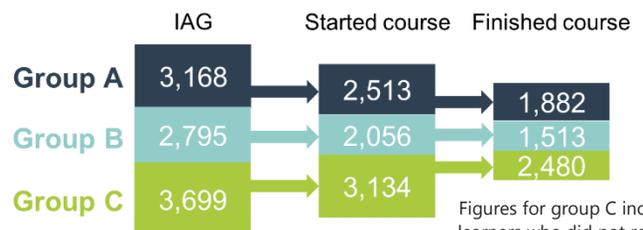
15 hours over 3 to 6 taught weeks. Most courses lasted for 5 or 6 weeks.

Non-formal 'top-up' workshops:

Offered at least once every 4 weeks, for people who had progressed from courses and needed subsequent support.

Three-quarters (**76%**) of learners who began their course completed it.

One in six learners (**17%**) took part in a top-up session.



Figures for group C include learners who did not report symptoms of a mental health problem.

Who took part in the CLMH project?

Age, disability, ethnicity and gender identity

Middle-aged people were over-represented compared with the overall population. Around three in ten learners (31%) had a **disability** other than, or in addition to, a mental health problem. 18% of learners were from **BAME groups**, compared with 12% of users of the IAPT service. Just over three-quarters (76%) of learners were **female**, a greater proportion than among users of the IAPT service (65%); 24% were male and 25 learners described themselves as having other gender identities.

Employment and caring responsibilities

Around a quarter (26%) of learners said they were **in employment (full or part-time)**, while 18% reported being **unable to work due to illness or disability** and a further 16% were **unemployed**. The project reached a greater proportion of people who were unemployed or unable to work compared with the IAPT service. One in eight (13%) said they were **retired**. Almost a quarter of learners (24%) reported that they were the **primary carer for a child or children under 18**.

Qualifications and social mobility

15% of learners had **no qualifications**; 17% had qualifications **below level 1** as their highest qualification; 32% had **level 2 or 3 qualifications**, and 15% had **university-level qualifications**. Around three in ten learners (31%) said they had received **free school meals** during their time at school, and just over one in five (22%) reported coming from **families that had received income support** when they were at school.

Mental health needs and support

Of learners who started a course in groups A and B, 96% had **symptoms of mild to moderate mental health problems** (the project target group); in the 'mixed' group C, 63% were in the target group and the remainder did **not appear to have symptoms of mental health problems**. Two-thirds (67%) of learners reported receiving other support for their mental health. Among these learners the most frequently mentioned sources were: their GP (53% of those who stated they were receiving other support); medication (39%); friends and family (34%), or NHS mental health services (30%).

What did the evaluation find overall?

Learners reported their symptoms of mental health problems over time using standardised scales. The findings below compare symptoms before and after participating in the course.

Unless otherwise stated, findings are for all learners who had symptoms of mild to moderate mental health problems at the start of their participation (the 'target group').



Of those learners who started a course and had mild to moderate mental health problems, 51% had **clinically significant symptoms of depression**, 55% had **clinically significant symptoms of anxiety**, and 40% had **both**. The remainder had symptoms suggesting **milder mental health problems**.



Recovery:

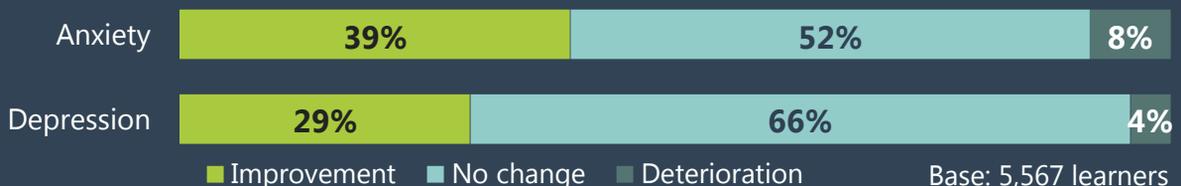
Slightly more than half (**52%**) of 3,633 learners who started their course with **clinically significant** symptoms of anxiety and/or depression no longer had clinically significant symptoms at the end of their course.

Wellbeing:

The average wellbeing of learners completing a course was **20.0** at IAG and **22.4** at the end of the course. This would move learners from the bottom quarter of the population in terms of wellbeing, to be closer to the average (**23.2**).

Learners in group C without symptoms of mental health problems also showed improvements in wellbeing. These learners' wellbeing was higher than average at the start of their course (**25.5**) but improved to be in the top quarter of the population in terms of wellbeing (**27.4**).

Changes in self-assessed symptoms of depression and anxiety for all learners with mild to moderate mental health problems:



Learning and other outcomes:

Four out of five (80%) of learners said they had made **progress in learning**, and over half of learners (52%) said they would **go on to further learning**.

More than three-quarters of learners also reported improvement in taking a **positive approach** to things (79%) and **looking after their general health and wellbeing** (77%).

Learners also showed improvements in their learning self-efficacy, particularly in **feeling confident to ask for help** if they got stuck.

Differences between groups:

The findings collectively indicate that **group A had the most positive outcomes**, followed by group C, with outcomes for group B being the least positive. All else being equal, **learners in group B were found to be less likely to recover from depression** than learners in group A and group C. There were no significant differences between groups in recovery from anxiety.

This may indicate that courses which are explicitly focused on managing mental health symptoms are more effective at improving mental health outcomes than general adult learning courses. Learners in group A were more likely to report feeling **more optimistic and relaxed** as a result of participating, while learners in groups B and C were more likely to report **increased confidence and skills** as the biggest change for them.

What were the findings for our region?

Greater London

Learning providers in this region had a target to achieve 2416 learners in total. 1575 learners took an IAG session in phase two, and 1364 started a course. Of those learners who took a course, 75% completed it. 3% of learners were signposted to other services.

32% of learners were aged 18-39
47% were aged 40-59, and
21% were aged 60 or over.
51% were from minority ethnic backgrounds:
23% were South Asian
10% were Black
18% were from other or mixed ethnic backgrounds.
82% of learners were female.

31% of learners were in employment.
16% were unemployed.
13% were unable to work due to illness or disability.
50% were claiming welfare benefits.
9% had no qualifications.
13% were from families that received income support when they were at school.

These figures should be interpreted in the context of local demographics.

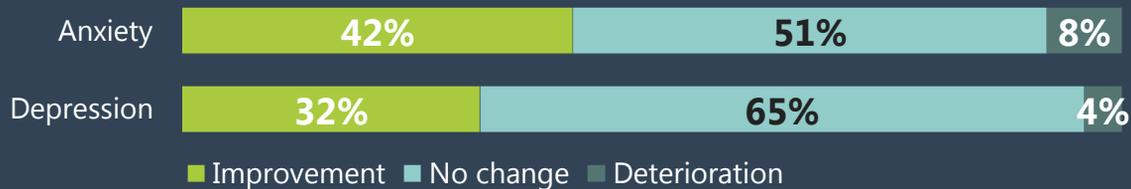
Recovery:

57% of learners who started their course with clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and/or depression no longer had clinically significant symptoms at the end of their course.

Wellbeing:

The average wellbeing of learners completing a course was 20.2 at IAG and 22.6 at the end of their course.

Change over time in mental health self-assessments:



Base: Learners in target group with distance travelled measure

Learning outcomes: 52% of learners said they would go on to further learning.

Where can I get more information?

Full published report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-learning-mental-health-research-project>

Additional information about the project from Ipsos MORI:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/evaluation-community-learning-mental-health-research-project>

Animated video of project findings:

<https://youtu.be/mCEP7V4iGLs>