

TRAINING THE BRAIN ESSENTIAL AT EVERY AGE

LSC research reveals a 'brain training gap' in the North East

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People in the North East are not doing enough to keep their brains healthy, according to new research from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which reveals men and women do not realise how early the brain function begins to deteriorate.

The research found that 76 per cent of people in the region think the brain does not begin to decline until age 45 or later, yet expert medical opinion claims deterioration can set-in as early as 18 years of age*.

The research also revealed a 'brain training gap' as 55 per cent of those questioned in the North East recognise the need to train the brain even more so than the body (28 per cent), yet thousands are doing nothing, not enough or the wrong sort of exercise.

The research revealed that:

- 32 per cent of people do not take any exercise to stimulate the brain
- 62 per cent of people choose watching television as a way to stimulate their brain, yet the 'passive' stimulation that television provides means people are bypassing more effective activities that will have greater long term benefits
- 32 per cent of people spend between £20 and £100 per month on their body yet 18% of people spend nothing at all on their brain
- 68 per cent of people believe ad hoc learning is more beneficial than structured learning with only 17 per cent of people choosing evening classes as a form of brain training

The regional research mirrored the national findings which show that many believe their brain function is in decline. Some 30 per cent felt their brain had deteriorated in the last two years and 57 per cent thought their brain had declined in the last five years.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director of the LSC in the North East, explained: “The results of this interesting research show that people in the North East do not recognise the need to train the brain throughout life, with a lack of awareness about the benefits of structured learning, which is one of the best ways to ensure the brain remains challenged and stimulated at any age. There are a variety of ways to continue learning as we get older. Further Education can provide the route to structured learning and offers a huge choice of courses while learning in work will also keep your brain active. The North East’s Train to Gain service is helping thousands of people learn in the workplace – resulting in a positive impact on health and well-being, contributing towards maintaining employability and improving quality of life – and helping the region’s economy.”

The need for people to train their brain to halt this level of decline was backed-up by Professor Ian Robertson, Professor of Psychology at Trinity College Dublin. He said: “Exercising your brain is essential if you want to stop it from slowly deteriorating. Our brains need to be stimulated and challenged through ongoing learning in the same way as our bodies need to be kept fit. This will ensure we see off the ravages of time which contribute to the decline of cognitive power. Just as our muscles grow as we exercise them, so do our brains physically strengthen as we learn. Continually refreshing your skills and knowledge is important at every stage and age in life and the benefits that will be seen will last an entire lifetime.”

According to a host of medical experts, continuous learning at every stage of life is one of the best ways to ensure the brain remains healthy, and brain deterioration is kept at bay. Education and learning builds stronger connections between brain cells to slow down the ravages of time.**

Learning a new skill is one of the most effective ways to stimulate the brain as it challenges the memory, attention and thinking centres of the brain in a comprehensive fashion. The more education and training a person has in their life, the more densely connected are their brain cells and brains with better connected cells work faster and better.**

Other findings:

- The majority of respondents (88 per cent) read books to stimulate their brain, with 84 per cent doing crosswords or puzzles and only 17 per cent studying through evening classes
- 41 per cent of 25-34 year olds and 37 per cent of 35-44 year olds spend between £20-100 per month on exercising their body yet 17% of both age groups spend nothing at all on their brains
- The majority of people questioned in the survey said they would most like to improve their memory (47 per cent) and concentration (14 per cent) respectively

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Notes for Editors

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

References

**"We have 100 billion neurones at the age of 18, and from this age, we lose them at a rate of 50,000 or more a day". (Rob Eastaway, author on memory and broadcaster)

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