

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
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Press Release
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For immediate release

90-YEAR-OLD JACK IS LEARNING TO SPEAK RUSSIAN

Jack Lewis, aged 90, from Redditch, is one of the oldest language learners in the country and is currently learning to speak Russian. Jack's remarkable achievement will be awarded with a Regional Senior Learner Award from the organisers of the UK's largest festival of learning, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), as part of Adult Learners' Week 17th – 23rd May 2008.

Jack has been attending classes at the Brasshouse Language Centre in Birmingham for approximately 12 years and when the Asset Language Assessments became available in Russian in 2006, he successfully completed the Russian Breakthrough Reading and Listening assessments – the oldest learner to have gained accreditation in this way.

Jack's interest in Russian began in the 1980s when he visited the country with his wife. Rarely missing a year without visiting, he has usually attended a university summer school and he was one of the organisers of a charity event which involved cycling from St Petersburg to Moscow to raise money for an orphanage in the capital.

Having left school aged 14 with a very basic education, Jack's nominator, Gail Hughes, explains that Jack "has found learning in later life very rewarding – even though it's not easy at 90 years of age... Learning Russian has made Jack more satisfied with life [and]... he's quite proud of what he has achieved".

His learning also brought him a Russian daughter-in-law, now sadly deceased, who was very special to him. Jack met Natasha, an English teacher, when he was at summer school in Russia. They got on extremely well and she came to visit his family in England for five weeks. At the end of the stay, Jack's son announced that he and Natasha were getting married.

David Lammy, Minister for Skills, said, "I never fail to be inspired by the stories I hear about learner's achievements. Jack's hard work confirms my belief that improving your skills can be a life changing experience."

He continued, "The benefits better skills bring to learners and those around them are wide-ranging. On the personal level people become more confident and have higher self-esteem, and individuals can develop better job prospects. More widely this can lead to parents being better able to help their children with homework and learner's employers becoming more competitive. Any adults wanting to improve their skills can call 0800 100 900 and find out about the courses in their local area."

Rachel Thomson, Senior Campaigns Officer at NIACE, said, "In spite of the fact this is the 17th annual Adult Learners' Week we continue to be amazed by the quality of the nominations we have received. Jack's story is an indication of how learning can transform lives completely. All of this year's winners have shown a huge commitment, passion and creativity throughout their learning journeys. Their achievements are all the more inspiring due to the challenges they have overcome and they fully deserve to be recognised as outstanding and inspirational adult learners."

James Plaskitt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, and Minister responsible for ESF, said, "I am pleased that the ESF is again sponsoring Adult Learners' Week which provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate learning and communicate how it can help people improve their job prospects. I hope that many more people will be inspired to take up learning opportunities after hearing the inspirational stories of the winners of this award."

Ends

To contact Jack Lewis please phone Gail Hughes on 0121 303 1631

For further information on Adult Learners' Week please contact:

Ed Melia, NIACE Press Officer, on 0116 204 4248 or 07795 358 870.

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Notes to Editors

1. Jack Lewis will be presented with a Regional Senior Learner Award at the West Midlands Adult Learners' Week Regional Award Ceremony at Kings Hall, Stoke on Trent on Wednesday 21st May 2008 from 10:30am – 12:30pm. Journalists and photographers are invited to attend. More information is available from Ed Melia, NIACE Press Officer, on 0116 204 4248 or 07795 358 870 or ed.melia@niace.org.uk
2. Adult Learners' Week, 17th–23rd May 2008, is the largest annual celebration of adult learning in the UK. It is supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the European Social Fund, learndirect, the National Learning and Skills Council, Ofcom - the Office of Communications, the Quality Improvement Agency, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and City and Guilds. More details at: www.alw.org.uk
3. Adult Learners' Week 2008 will include the following national events:
 - Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th May: **Cultural Diversity Weekend**
 - Monday 19th May: **Adult Learners' Week National Award Ceremony** - QEII Conference Centre, London
 - Tuesday 20th May: **National Policy Conference** *Adult Learning and Culture* to be held at the London Chamber of Commerce
 - Wednesday 21st May: Quick Reads Learners' Favourite Award and Voice on a Page to be held at The Globe Theatre
 - Thursday 22nd May: **Learning at Work Day** – *What makes learning at work, work* at the Victory Services Club, Marble Arch
 - Friday 23rd May: **Silver Surfers Day**
4. A national helpline - **learndirect** - is available year-round for confidential advice and information about careers and courses. The call handlers will have access to the NIACE website and can give information about local activities during Adult Learners' Week. Calls are free on 0800 100 900.
5. Events for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are listed in the interactive online calendar at www.alw.org.uk/calendar where you can search by keyword, your preferred date and by the region you live in. Or call **learndirect** free on 0800 100 900 to find Adult Learners' Week events local to you.
6. The themes for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are:
 1. Globalisation and the changing world of work
 2. Environmental Sustainability
 3. Technological Change
 4. Citizenship and belonging in a diverse society
 5. Demographic change
 6. Poverty reduction
 7. Changing expectations and perceptions of the Third Sector
 8. Well-being and happiness

7. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the leading non-government organisation for lifelong learning in England, and exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in better-quality learning of all kinds. It campaigns for, and celebrates the achievements of, all adult learners.