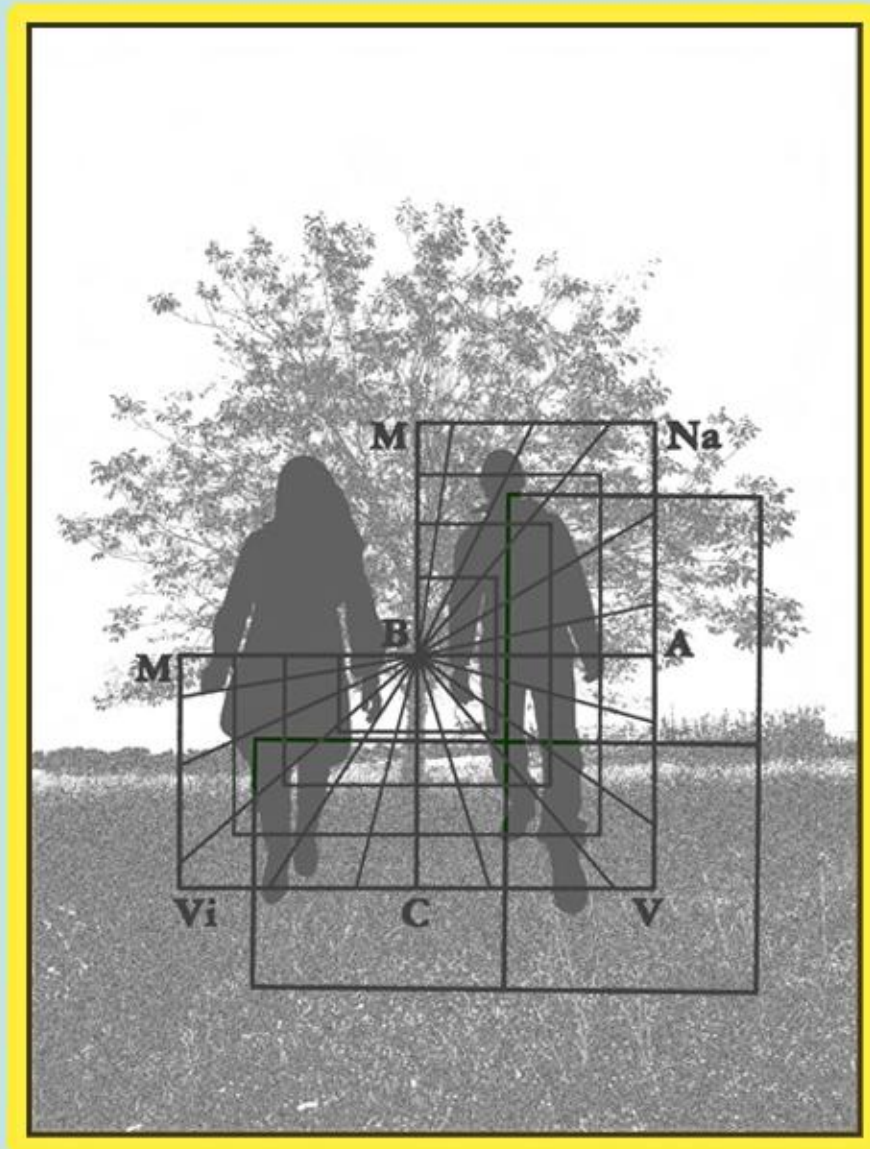


Mapping the UK Landscape of Tertiary Lifelong Learning

Discussion paper 2012/4.8.

Michael Osborne

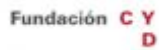




**Mapping the UK Landscape
of Tertiary Lifelong learning**

**Michael Osborne
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1. Context

1.1. *Socio-economic context*

The context for Adult Education in the UK is covered well by the UK's submission to UNESCO's 6th Confintea conference in Belem, Brazil. The expert producing the report in this project was one of the contributors to the UK's submission to Confintea. Therefore appropriate sections are included here together with additional commentary.

'The overall UK population continues to grow, although Scotland's population may be about the decline. There is also significant movement of population between regions, with a general drift of population (especially the more highly skilled) towards London and the South East), and significant changes in age structures, especially in some rural areas. Of the 60.6 million people in the UK in 2006, 77% were adults. Although the UK population is overwhelmingly white, some 10% of the population is from other ethnic groups, in general concentrated in large cities. Scotland and Wales have a smaller proportion of non-white people. In 2004 the European Union expanded to incorporate eight additional member states from Eastern Europe. The UK's decision to open its borders immediately to citizens of the new Member States led to a very large inflow of young adults (under 40) from Poland and other Eastern European countries. The main driver for population expansion is rising life expectancy. As a result of major improvements in the health of people aged 60-80, 21% of the population is now over 59, and this proportion is expected to continue rising for the foreseeable future'.

'Economically, the decade 1997-2007 saw the longest recorded period of continuous growth, allowing Government to make major increases in public expenditure, concentrated particularly on education, health, and overcoming social exclusion. The employment rate has grown to almost 75%, one of the highest rates in the EU, and especially strongly among women. The rise in labour demand (and other factors) has led to an increase in effective retirement ages, with 1.3 million people still in work after State Pension Age in 2007. It has also supported a surge of immigration from Eastern Europe following the expansion of the EU in 2004. This has led to a growing cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity in the population, with migrants increasingly dispersing from urban enclaves to smaller towns and rural communities. However, in early 2008 the UK economy was showing signs of slowing down. The 0.3% rise in GDP in the first quarter was the weakest in three years and the annual growth rate had been revised downwards to 2.3% (UK Report to Confintea, p.18)'.

Subsequent to this time economic prospects have declined further, and there have huge impacts in 2010 of a government public debt estimated at some £170bn. Only areas such as health,

policing and school education have been immune from swingeing cuts, of up to 25%. Therefore that Adult Education covered by public funding is likely to suffer drastic declines in support.

The Confintea Report indicates that socially, economic liberalisation has seen a widening of income gaps, and a slowing (perhaps to a halt) of the broad social mobility, which characterised the previous decades. While absolute poverty levels have declined, with a major reduction in child poverty, social exclusion remains a policy concern. Community cohesion has become a major focus of Government policy, fed particularly by concerns about international terrorism and the social exclusion of some ethnic and religious minority groups. The result was growing attention to the integration of new migrants, to the teaching of English and to citizenship education in schools. There has also been a focus on reducing discrimination against particular groups. Established legislation outlawing discrimination on grounds of gender, race and disability has been extended to include age, religion and sexual orientation, and a new overarching Council for Equality and Human Rights has been created to oversee implementation, and support enforcement in all sectors, including education.

This needs to be considered in the context of the transfer of educational powers to the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. So there are separate policy developments in each of the four countries of the UK, reflective to a large extent on the different politics of ruling parties in each countries (England (the UK Conservative/Liberal coalition), Scotland (the minority Scottish Nationalist government), Wales (the Labour/Welsh Nationalist coalition) and Northern Ireland (the cross party power sharing arrangement).

One major structural change was the creation in 2007, of first time, of a Government Department in England with an exclusive focus on post school education (DIUS (Department of Industry Universities and Skills) and subsequently in 2009 Department for Business, Industry and Skills (BIS)), separate from the Department for Children and Schools (although this now with new coalition government in 2010 become the Department of Education). This has created a sharper focus of policy attention on Further and Higher Education.

In Scotland, immediately after devolution in 2000, lifelong learning was linked with enterprise in a new department of the Scottish Executive, although in 2007, within a reorganised Executive, all departments were abolished and all sectors of education are now included in a new education and lifelong learning directorate within the Scottish Government. A further notable change has been the creation of a more centralised, and long term, process for policy development and monitoring across the UK Government. The former system of annual budgeting has been replaced by a three yearly “Comprehensive Spending Review” where Government reviews all Government programmes, and reallocates resources. These plans are then converted into “Public Service Agreements” (30 in the current cycle) which all

Departments are expected to contribute to, with specified performance indicators for each, and detailed monitoring and annual review by the Treasury. Three of the current 30 PSAs are the responsibility of DIUS, but twelve have implications for adult learning.

1.2. Historical-ideological context

There are very long standing traditions of adult education within the UK dating back to the end of the 17th century with the establishment of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to combat illiteracy. Later in the late 19th and early 20th century adult education organizations such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) emerged with a commitment to working class education, but without the religious connotations.

Adult education has also been a longstanding commitment of the formal sector for more than a century within specialist adult education colleges, further education colleges (with largely vocational purposes), community education and within universities. This is documented in detail in two histories written by Kelly (1991) and Fieldhouse (1996).

A major and distinctive, feature of UK ALE has been its strong publicly funded “non-vocational” adult education service. This was provided through Local Authorities until the creation of the Learning and Skills Council in 2001, when the funds were incorporated into the overall budget of the LSC in England and the National Council for Education and Training for Wales (ELWa) for Wales. Prior to that point Local Authorities had discretion over how much to spend on such services, and levels of provision varied from almost nothing, to extensive sets of large adult education colleges with large programmes involving thousands of learners. When the budget was transferred to the LSC, Government guaranteed that a sum equal to that previously spent by Local Authorities (£210 million p.a.) would be protected for similar provision (and the provision came to be known as “safeguarded” adult education for that reason).

The role of universities in the UK is perhaps atypical and worthy of particular attention. The pre-dominant tradition in university continuing education over the last 100 years has been that of Liberal Adult Education (LAE), which Newman associates with 19th century British ideas of learning for learning’s sake, knowledge as something valuable in itself and the pursuit of absolute truths (Newman 1994 pp.37-43). The first university continuing education within this tradition is normally regarded to be that of University Extension at the University of Cambridge in 1873, and was founded upon a impetus of providing university education for working men and according to Kelly (1992, p.219) the demand 'for university help in the higher education of women'.

From the early 20th century in the UK as a whole, but particularly England and Wales, links began to emerge between the universities and the movements concerned with political and

social change, such as the Workers Educational Association (WEA), the Independent Labour Party and the Co-operative Party. The expansion of LAE during the inter-war years in England and Wales was in part assisted by grants from the government's Board of Education to universities and certain approved associations, including the WEA, who were termed 'Responsible Bodies (RB)'. It was also during this time that universities began to develop Extra-Mural Departments, which co-ordinated their LAE programmes. However, the first department to be described specifically as a 'Department of Continuing Education', did not emerge until well into the 20th century at the University of Nottingham in the 1930s. Indeed even up until the present day, no common nomenclature is to describe the structures within which UCE is located. Collaboration between universities and the WEA, described by Stock (1996, p.11) as the 'Great Tradition' whereby the WEA identified the elements of programmes and recruited students, and the universities provided staff was at its strongest in the 1950's and 1960's, and only began to weaken subsequent to the Russell Report of 1973 (DES 1973) when a change in emphasis in the WEA's work was recommended. Nonetheless, these programmes of LAE survived and indeed flourished in a large number of the older (pre-1992) universities until the final decade of the last century. They consisted typically of short courses, often evening classes of 20-30 hours in duration, that were open to all who wished to participate and were offered at modest fees and without any mandatory assessment. Courses were located both within universities and in out-reach centres often some distance from the parent institution. In many universities, provision took on a variety of other forms. For example programmes were established that focused on older adults, such as the University of the Third Age and a number of universities offered Summer Schools and Study Tours.

A change of funding responsibility from the Department of Education and Science (DES) to the University Funding Council (UFC) in 1989 was paralleled by a more transparent funding methodology for UCE in the UK as a whole. Provision was extended beyond that of Liberal Adult Education (LAE) to categories that were termed 'credit bearing', 'Access' and 'disadvantaged'. These latter two categories focused in a very explicit fashion on those adult students denied access to the university system for a range of situational and institutional reasons. This change in emphasis in continuing education provision, which included the creation of mechanisms for access to mainstream degree provision, had already been in existence in both the non-university HE sector (polytechnics and higher education colleges in England and Wales and CIs in Scotland) and in the Further Education (FE) sector since the late 1970s. The move to the provision that explicitly focussed on under-represented groups was viewed by some commentators as a long overdue change in direction from the universities, the LAE tradition having moved away from its 'historic values, ... particularly its targeting of the working classes and also its commitment to "social purpose" adult education' (Fieldhouse 1996). In short, although programmes within the extra-mural tradition were open to all, in

effect they did little to stimulate new demand for learning from those with little or no previous experience of HE. Nonetheless many perceive that great damage was done through the changes of the 1990s. The introduction for the first time of 'credit-bearing' provision is seen by Gray and Williamson (1995) as the precursor of the very radical changes in funding arrangements that had occurred in the 1990s which produced an almost complete shift in UCE from non-accredited LAE to mainstreamed accredited continuing education. The effects of this shift were exacerbated in many regions by reform of local government, and consequent cost-cutting in this sector, which historically had financially supported significant elements of community-based university LAE. Around the same time, a focus on widening participation to higher education for disadvantaged groups and a greater policy commitment towards Lifelong Learning following the Dearing (HMSO 1997) and Garrick (SOEID 1997) reports of 1997 and subsequent Green Papers (DfEE 1998, SOEID 1998 and WO 1998) began to manifest itself in shifts in practice within universities. Activity within the aegis of widening participation, although dating back to the late 1970s became much more obvious in all universities through a range of activities. However, these activities became neither the preserve of departments of CE and nor were they solely (or even largely) directed towards adults.

The overall effect of these changes in the 1990s saw a shift of resource from liberal adult education to widening participation steered in universities by financial incentivisation and specific targets to recruit students with lower socio-economic status. The withdrawal funding by government in 2008 for students who are studying for a qualification that is at an equivalent level to, or a lower level than, a qualification that they have already been awarded and instead redirecting support to help those wishing to study in higher education in England for the first time, was for many Departments of Adult Education in universities the final 'nail in the coffin'. Since this rule was not introduced in Scotland, atypically a number of Scottish universities sustain historic levels of provision. However in the rest of the UK the traditional offer of Adult Education in universities has disappeared.

More details of these historical developments in university adult education can be found in Osborne and Thomas (2003) and Duke (2009), and of widening participation in Furlong and Cartmel (2009). Further in-depth analysis of widening participation can be found in Houston, McCune and Osborne (2011). Given that this area of activity is the most prominent manifestation of approaches that present alternative opportunities for adults, focus in depth is provided in section 5 of this report.

As is evident in legislative changes over the past decade the demise of adult education in non-vocational or leisure form in universities is paralleled by a similar decline the sectors that have been funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Funding from government is directed largely at

improving literacy and functional skills for employment and employability rather than to learning for its own sake (the 'safeguarded' adult education).

2. Political and legal framework

2.1. Political Framework

Within the UK, the national policy context for the field of adult education has been changing significantly in recent years. Policy in relation to adult education is embedded into broader lifelong learning policy that incorporates schooling, vocational education and training, and higher education. Therefore in policy statements these sectors are often referred to in a continuum, but with increasing emphasis on the young and on vocational skills. So for example in England, The Children's Plan, 2007 which sets out the strategy and delivery plans for children (0 to 19-year olds) and children's services for the next 3 years in the context of longer term ambitions for improving children and young people's lives is viewed as part of lifelong learning strategy. (see www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan).

The re-organisation of government departments in England in 2007 resulted in a new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) with a stated role to 'Raise participation and attainment by young people and adults in post-16 education and learning; and to tackle the skills gap amongst adults, particularly equipping people with basic literacy and numeracy'. This national policy context was influenced by the preceding Leitch Review (2006), by a subsequent implementation plan (DIUS, 2007), and related initiatives and campaigns. Notable amongst these is 'Our Future, It's in our hands', launched by DIUS in July 2007 as a marketing and communications campaign with the aim of improving the aspirations of employers and individuals to learning and skills in England. Whilst there is a clear emphasis on skills for employment and the need for improving the skills of younger people in the workforce, this approach aims to change the overall culture and improve attitudes to learning and training across the board. This campaign brought all the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) existing activities under the same banner and there is a dedicated website to advertise the campaign (<http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk/adults.html>).

The aforementioned Leitch Review, published in December 2006, had sent out some stark messages, warning that the UK must become a world leader in skills by 2020 if it is to sustain and improve its position in the global economy. Its context pre-dated the Action Plan and was UK Government's 2004 Pre-Budget Report, which highlighted the problems caused by the number of adults in the UK without basic literacy and numeracy skills (Leitch, 2006). In practice, a concern to remedy this state of affairs is reflected in national priorities for training

published by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with targets for increasing the number of adults who improve their skills and obtain qualifications each year at all levels, from functional literacy and numeracy to higher education levels (LSC, 2007). Priorities include:

- Skills for Life courses (literacy, numeracy and IT) for adults,
- Full Level 2 qualifications for adults without Level 2 qualifications,
- Level 2 vocational qualifications for working adults (through the Train to Gain programme, makes a significant contribution to enabling employees to access training in key competency areas and
- Level 3 qualifications (equivalent to GCE A-levels) for 19-25 year olds.
- Modern Apprenticeships sit alongside the Train to Gain scheme. For individual learners they provide an opportunity to learn new skills whilst working and earning and they integrate key skills for life competencies. This scheme is directed towards young people and adults.

There are particular target groups amongst the adult population. These are as follows:

- People who are unemployed and on benefits
- Low-skilled adults in employment
- Since 2009, Offenders in custody and those supervised in the community
- Other groups at risk of social exclusion, with a particular target of Black and Ethnic minority groups.

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) provision is focused on the most disadvantaged local authority districts and is targeted at people who are often low skilled and furthest from the labour market. Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF) supports a number of priorities including literacy and numeracy targets and cross-cutting areas linked to the social inclusion agenda and a focus on deprived communities. The UK has also committed to providing Armed Forces Service Leavers, who have completed six years full time service, with access to a fully funded first full level 3 or a first higher education.

In all parts of the UK Credit Frameworks are utilised as ladders of progression for adults. So for example, The Welsh Assembly Government established the national qualification framework for Wales in 2002. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) is an overarching meta framework including three main pillars of learning:

- Higher education;
- Regulated Academic and Vocational Learning - predominantly used in Schools and College; and
- Quality Assured Lifelong Learning – informal and non formal learning, company training and continuous and professional development.

The Welsh credit system is based on learning outcomes and level descriptors. The aim is to make it as easy as possible for learners to use credit accumulation to recognise their individual achievement towards progression and, where possible, towards incremental achievement of relevant qualifications or recognised learning programmes. Similar systems exist in Scotland and England.

In 2009, DIUS merged with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) to form the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The purpose of BIS is to bring all of the levers of the economy together in one place. The policy areas that it covers, which includes skills, further/higher education, innovation, science, business and trade are all seen as helping to drive growth. The major documents produced by BIS are shown below, and for FE are Skills for Growth (2009).

2.2. Legal Framework

The UK Confintea report summarises the plethora of policy documents have shaped the political landscape and affected adult learning. Four Acts of Parliament directly affecting post-school education have come into force in recent years, and two further Bills at that time of that report were in progress through Parliament and are now law. In addition, there have been national inquiries into Higher Education, Further Education, Basic Skills, Widening Participation, Skills and Competitiveness. There have been also a number of formal consultations, and a number of Green and White Papers.

2.2.1. Summary of key documents

1997 *Fryer Report: Learning for the 21st century* (recommended the creation of a new strategic framework of lifelong learning for all, to include both compulsory and post-compulsory education)

1998 *The Kennedy Report: Making Learning Work* (investigated patterns of participation in, and access to, further education, and is a significant document which helped to drive the widening participation agenda)

1998 *Moser Response: Better Basic Skills* (set targets for reducing functional literacy)

2001 *Skills for Life: the National Strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* (aimed to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004 through a promotional campaign and reinforcing the entitlement to free training in basic skills. The strategy also identified priority groups for targeting. These were unemployed adults and welfare benefit claimants, offenders, public sector employees, people who do not speak English as a first language and low-skilled in employment.

2005 *Foster Review: Realising the Potential – a review of the future of FE colleges* (This reinforced Government policy by recommending that colleges should direct their energies more strongly towards improving employability and providing economically valuable skills to their students).

2006 *Leitch Review: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills* (This has been very influential and recommended a major strategic change, and investment to move the UK into the top quartile of OECD countries in terms of adult qualifications by 2020, and proposed a new set of targets for the UK)

2008 *Informal Adult Learning - Shaping the Way Ahead* (Stakeholders were asked to help formulate mechanisms to determine the best use of existing public funds and support for private initiatives. This was the first Government paper since The Learning Age in 1998 that focused on informal and non-formal education for adults.

2008 *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver* (announced plans to replace the LSC by 2010 with two different bodies: the Young People's Learning Agency looking after 16-18 provision and the Skills Funding Agency looking at 19 plus provision. The latter would manage all adult learning outside higher education, and would have a funding rather than a planning remit. Most provision for adults would be routed through an expanded Train to Gain service, and through a re-introduction of Skills Accounts.)

2009 *Skills for Growth: the national skills strategy* (This is a national strategy for economic growth and individual prosperity. It creates a modern technician class through more advanced apprenticeships. It offers individuals the new Skills Accounts for adults and provides people with 'consumer choice' and better information about courses using online methods. It announced the replacement of the LSC by a new Skills Funding Agency (see <http://www.bis.gov.uk/skillsforgrowth>))

2009 *Skills Investment Strategy* (A development from the above)

2010 *Fuelling Growth - A blueprint for skills account and the adult advancement and careers service* (This sets out our plans for establishing the adult advancement and careers service and skills accounts by August 2010)

2010 *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (Brown Review)* (This proposed a removal of the fees cap for undergraduate Higher Education, although subsequent proposed legislation proposes a cap that increases from the current £3000 to £9000) (see <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/>)

With the election of a new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in May 2010, there have been some changes in the most recent plans of the former Labour administration. The new Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willetts, signalled some possible changes at HE level in a speech on 10 June. Amongst proposals being signposted to make HE more affordable and accessible is the possibility of FE colleges being able to offer external degrees of universities. This would potential have an impact on adults participating in HE level provision. Most controversial has been the plans in England to raise fees in Higher Education to up to £9000, which may have a deterrent effect on adult participation at this level. The influential Sutton Trust (2010 p. 3) argues that ‘with significant variation in fees, the risk is that non-privileged students will make higher education choices based on cost – or the perception of cost – rather than academic talent and that leading universities will become the preserve of the well-off’. Although the Trust’s arguments relate largely to younger people, previous research clearly shows that adults are highly risk averse in relating to the financial implications of higher education (see Osborne, Marks and Turner 2004). The plans were approved in a vote of the House of Commons on 9 December 2010 amidst extensive public protest.

2.2.2. *Green Papers*

1998 *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a new Britain* (consultative paper responding to Fryer Report with range of recommendations such as Independent learning Accounts and the University for Industry)

2010 *Going for Growth: Our Future Prosperity*: followed the release of Skills for Growth and it outlines the UK position on how people develop the skills and capabilities to find work and build the businesses and industries of the future. It articulated the Department for Business Innovation and Skills’ long-term strategy for working cross-Government to drive growth in core capabilities such as enterprise and knowledge. This strategy was supported by nearly £1bn in a Strategy Investment Fund

2.2.3. *White Papers*

1999 *Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post 16 learning* (first of a series of White papers on skills and set up the Learning and Skills Council).

2003 *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential* (aimed to strengthen the UK's position as one of the world's leading economies by ensuring individuals have the necessary skills to make them employable and adaptable and that employers had the right skills to support their businesses). It also announced the creation of 23 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to represent a new voice for employers and employees. SSCs are independent employer led organisations with a remit to identify solutions to the skills needs of different economic sectors and generate additional demand for skills and training.

2005 *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* (The document built on the 2003 White Paper and proposed to put employers' needs at the centre of the design and delivery of training. It put much stronger focus on learning for employability, skills and work and limited the amount allocated to learning for pleasure).

2006 *Further Education: Raising skills, Improving Life Chances* (Response of the Foster Report and amongst others things it set a new entitlement to free training for young people up to the age of 25. It introduced the 'Train to Gain' scheme)

2007 *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (Response to Leitch Report. It proposed a "skills revolution" to close skills gaps at every level by 2020, through a demand-led system where the needs of adult learners and employers were given priority. Adult learners would be given priority through Skills Accounts, which would give individuals greater ownership and choice over learning.

2008 *Raising Expectations: Enabling the system to deliver*, outlines the policies put in place to enable every 16 and 17 year-old to participate in education or training, and allow every adult to have the chance to improve their skills in order to find work or progress in their current employment.

2009 *New industry New jobs*: In preparation for an upturn in the economy this was the government's response to the need to make sure that people have the skills and business has the backing to take part in the new industries that will emerge, and that we are leading the way in developing and implementing the technology that will define the way people do business in coming years. *Skills for Growth*: was issued in parallel and it made six key commitments:

- Promoting skills for economic prosperity
- Creating a modern technician class through more advanced apprenticeships
- Investing in skills in the sectors on which future growth and jobs depend

- Empowering individuals through skills accounts giving people ‘consumer choice’ and better information about courses
- The introduction of monitoring arrangements for our best providers
- Simplifying the skills landscape in the next three years

2010 Skills for Sustainable Growth: outlining the new Coalition Government’s vision for reform of the Further Education and skills system in order to improve the skills of the workforce, the performance of the economy and engagement in learning. It also released *Investing in Sustainable Growth* on how it seeks to achieve its objectives through investing strategically in FE and skills over this Spending Review period. This paper acknowledged that savings will have to be made, but confirmed the Government’s commitment to continuing high levels of participation and performance.

2011 Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System: this announced that the maximum fee that could be charged to students at undergraduate level could be raised to £9000 with students receiving up-front loans to be repaid through a ‘pay as you earn’ scheme. For the first time, many part-time and distance-learning students would also be able to access loans to cover the full tuition costs. Regulatory barriers are proposed to be removed, allowing further education colleges and other alternative providers, including the private sector to more easily become providers. It is argued that this will improve student choice ‘by supporting a more diverse sector, with more opportunities for part-time or accelerated courses, sandwich courses, distance learning and higher-level vocational study.

2.2.4. Legislation

2000 The Learning and Skills Act - The Act gave the LSC the responsibility to manage and provide funding for further education colleges, work based learning providers, adult education institutions and voluntary organisations, as well as the task of encouraging employers and individuals to participate in learning. The legislation also provided the new body with a local presence through 47 local councils. Further responsibilities set by the Act were: provision of information, advice and guidance services, provision of equal opportunities and provision catered to the needs of people with learning difficulties. The Act also established a new Adult Learning Inspectorate to continually examine the quality of further education for people aged 19 or over; training provided wholly or partly on employers’ premises for people aged over 16; and training funded under the 1973 Employment and Training Act. Adult Education for non-vocational purposes moved from being a Local Education Authority responsibility to the LSC - this is the aforementioned ‘safeguarded’ adult education.

2002 *The Education Act* (amongst many things mainly relating to schools, this strengthen the strategic role of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC would be able to publish proposals for reorganisation of school sixth-forms to complement its existing powers in relation to FE colleges and training providers.

2004 *Higher Education Act* - The Act aimed to increase funding for Universities by introducing, for the first time in the England (and Northern Ireland), a student fee. It enabled Universities to charge full time undergraduate students up to £3,000 a year, provided that the institution satisfied a new regulator (the Office of Fair Access) that it had adequate arrangements for supporting poorer students, and those from non-traditional backgrounds.

2007 *Further Education and Training Bill* (This allowed further education colleges to award their own 2-year foundation degrees of short-cycle HE (as against needing universities as awarding bodies). It replaced the 47 local LSC Councils with nine regional ones)

2008 *Education and Skills Bill* (This make it illegal in England for anyone under 18 to not be in either full time education or employment with a significant training component. It will also formally create the entitlement for adults to not only free training in basic literacy and numeracy skills but also to achieve a first full level 2 qualification (ISCED 2). To ensure all adults have the opportunity to develop and update their key competences, England has guaranteed: full funding for any adult who needs Skills for Life (literacy and numeracy up to Level 2); full funding for any adult who needs a first full level 2; full funding for first full level 3 courses for all adults aged 19-25; and subsidised training at level 3 (subsidy in 08/09: 57.5% of course cost) for other employees).

2009 *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act* continued the reform of 14 to 19 education and training building on the Education and Skills Act 2008, which raised the age of participation in education or training to 18 for all young people from 2015, as proposed in *Raising Expectations: Enabling the system to deliver*. The Act puts in place the underpinning legislation required to deliver this policy and created the Young People's Learning Agency for England (the YPLA), which supports local education authorities (LEAs). It gave LEAs responsible for the education and training of: young people over compulsory school age but under 19, young people in custodial establishments, and certain learners with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 25. It established the Skills Funding Agency to fund demand-led adult Further Education and skills training in England replacing the LSC in 2010. It established the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) as the independent regulator of qualifications and assessments.

3. Structural and financial framework

There is no distinct “adult learning sector” in the UK. Rather adult education and lifelong learning in the UK are provided by various types of institutions and may be found in a range of locations as described by Osborne and Sankey (2009). Provision is offered: in sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges (FECs); via adult and community learning (ACL) in a range of settings (public and private) including community centres, libraries and museums; in universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); through work-based and work-related training; through Trade Unions’ provision; at private training providers; in prisons; via voluntary organisations such as the Workers’ Educational Association and the University of the Third Age; and via private sector businesses in the travel, hotel, tourism and guiding sector. In addition, there is much informal provision that remains unmapped.

In England and Wales, sixth form colleges offer largely full-time academic courses to students over compulsory school-leaving age (16 years). They were once governed by Schools Regulations, but were brought into the Further Education sector by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Also in England and Wales only, tertiary colleges combine the functions of a Further Education College (FEC) and a sixth-form college. Some were formed from the amalgamation of a sixth-form college and a further education college. All provide a full range of academic, community and vocational courses. FECs throughout the UK are autonomous incorporated institutions, having been taken out of the control of local authorities in 1992. They provide full- or part-time education and training largely for students over compulsory school leaving age. Furthermore, they offer traditional Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, including short-cycle HE, sometimes in collaboration with partner HEIs.

Adult and community education (ACL) is offered in a range of institutions variously known inter alia as adult education institutes or community colleges and is organised at the level of local or regional government. The provision is split between that which is employment-focused (usually with progression and qualifications) and that which is non-accredited and often delivered in small packages; it includes learning as ‘tasters’ and for leisure (known as Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL)). This non-accredited part of ACL was formerly designated as ‘non schedule 2’ provision and includes a diverse range of community-based and outreach learning opportunities, primarily taking place through local education authorities, the voluntary and community sector and until recently the Further Education Colleges. In addition to established adult education centres, ACL may be provided in a range of locations such as schools, community centres and leisure centres, and in conjunction with a variety of partner organisations including voluntary organisations, community groups and schools.

A range of provision is available to adults through some universities' Continuing Education departments (or units with different designations but similar roles)). Many provide non-award-bearing short courses as well as Certificates, although this form of provision has been the subject of considerable decline. A particular factor in this decline has been the recent introduction of the so called 'Equivalent Level Qualification' (ELQ) rule in England and Wales. This means that public funding for higher education and student support is focused on those students who have not already benefited from a higher education – rather than using it to fund students that already have degree-level qualifications that stops universities from drawing down government funding to subsidise adults who have already received higher education qualifications. Thereby the personal cost increases and becomes unsustainable and as a result many departments in existence for many decades have closed down (see Jones, Thomas and Moseley 2010). Many adults also enter mainstream undergraduate provision and benefit from a range of widening access initiatives, and to an extent these have been seen as the main priority of university's activities directed towards adults given the focus of such work on the socially disadvantaged. However, in the recent decades activities to promote wider access have also become increasingly focused on young people (including within schools as part of campaigns to raise awareness of HE at an early age) and this may to an extent be at the expense of adults. Some further is provided on widening participation in section 5.

Many adults are simply admitted with traditional qualifications or through other forms of flexible entry (see Thomas *et al.* 2005),). It is possible to obtain data on the numbers of adults in universities taking qualifications leading to awards at HE level, but accurate and comprehensive data relating to non-award bearing activity have proved impossible to obtain. So it can be reported that in relation to mature undergraduate entrants, while absolute numbers increased from 1998-2008, their overall share fell from 25 to 21 % during the same time period, because the relative numbers of young entrants grew (HESA 2009), but little can be reported for other university activity in adult education.

The nature of universities in the UK as autonomous organisations funded in part by the state means that there are relatively few policy levers in place to compel them to make available provision for adults. The main levers are financial incentives, and in difficult financial times more of these levers are concerned with young people and skills development than adult education for civic purposes (see Duke 2009 for an analysis).

Much of the provision in Further Education Colleges is funded through the State according to agreed formulae. Until 2010 in England this was through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (England) and thereafter the function for the funding of adult learning was taken by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). In other countries of the UK this function is taken by the Department

for Employment and Learning (DEL) (Northern Ireland) and by joint funding councils crossing FE and HE (Wales and Scotland).

Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, ACL has been funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for England (the SFA now has that role) and the National Council for Education and Training for Wales (National Council – ELWa), and is available to support all providers from which these agencies secure education and training services, of which there are many private providers. All providers have to be part of a Qualified Provider Framework to be eligible to tender for funds to run courses (see <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>).

There are no separate adult education centres or institutes in Northern Ireland, where adult education courses (including academic, vocational and leisure courses) are provided by the 6 regional colleges which comprise the statutory further education sector. In Scotland, funding from the Scottish government is passed to the 32 local authorities to Community Learning Strategy Partnerships where local providers of adult learning have access to resources (SOEID, 1999). Strategic plans are submitted by all partnerships, which indicate how the funding will be used to build capacity and a wide range of learning opportunities across all sectors. Like in other parts of the UK, the government places an emphasis on literacy.

Universities are funded in various ways for activity that pertains to adult learning. Some is metric-based and a 'reward' for previous performance and some is directed at specific projects. For example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) Workforce Development Programme has been helping universities to develop their capacity to deliver employer and learner responsive provision. Between 2008 and 2011, some £150m has been committed across more than 90 HE institutions to support a diverse range of HE - employer engagement projects. The majority of these projects explore employer co-funding where employers share with the state the costs of provision. In 2008/09 employer co-funded provision supported an additional 9,200 learners. Part-time study was the main mode of delivery (90% of co-funded learners), with the majority of the overall total studying at sub-degree level. HEFCE are forecasting around a further 20,000 employer co-funded places for 2009/10. The Workforce Development Programme has also led to a range of other achievements including the development and introduction of new forms of provision – training at times, places and means to suit employers and learners.

In England, for those who are wishing to enter HE there are upfront loans available to cover tuition costs. Repayment begins at the end of study and this is income contingent. Recent HE reforms will bring significant increases to the charges universities may make for tuition from 2012/13, with loan levels rising accordingly. The reforms will also extend upfront loans covering tuition costs to part-time students (including mature students).

Individuals wishing to undertake post-graduate study, and FE learners seeking study that is not currently supported by public funds, may look to apply for a Professional and Career Development Loan (PCDL). Up to £10,000 is available for course costs, subject to eligibility and acceptance by the participating banks. Repayment begins at the end of study. Fee remission, for those seeking first lower-level skills, enables individuals to study when otherwise it may not have been possible to afford. FE learners most in need of financial assistance may be able to receive discretionary funding to continue study. As part of moves to re-balance investment in skills, the Government is to introduce FE loans with individuals further contributing towards their cost of learning. The role of PCDLs will be reviewed as a consequence.

In general, there has been an increasing trend to on the one hand make provision more responsive to potential student demand and for adult students to make larger contributions to cost. Although small in scale, part of putting purchasing power in the hands of students was the introduction of *Independent Learning Accounts* (ILAs). individuals could claim up to £150 if they invested £25 or their own money in a virtual “account”. They could then use the total sum to buy vocational courses of specified types. Its success put too much pressure on available funding and there were administrative problems; therefore the scheme was withdrawn in England though continues successfully in Scotland. A new scheme, the Lifelong Learning Account, is being introduced in September 2011. This will build on an existing online tool, ‘myNextStep’, and enable users to log achievements and access information on learning and work. Following September 2011, further developments will enable users to signal demand for new courses and access vouchers representing entitlements which can be spent at an accredited learning provider of their choice as full or part contribution towards a course.

4. Problems and opportunities for participation in adult learning

Since 1996, NIACE has undertaken a series of surveys to measure adult participation in learning. These surveys have not only provided information on the proportion of adults participating in learning and a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not, but the comparison of results within the series, enables the examination of how patterns of participation change over time. (see <http://www.niace.org.uk/niace-adult-participation-in-learning-surveys>). Every year the survey asks respondents about their participation in learning and whether they intend to take up learning in the future. Every year the survey also asks additional questions about the learning that has taken place. In some years, additional questions are asked about a particular subject of interest. The NIACE surveys are based on a weighted population sample of 5,000 adults aged 17 and over in the UK and are included in regular omnibus market research

surveys. The survey is conducted annually, with headline findings published to coincide with Adult Learners' Week in May.

The work of NIACE shows that whilst there was a rise in total participation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this was followed by a fall in total numbers as a result of stronger concentration on more intensive programmes targeted more directly at particular economic and social needs. The average numbers of hours studied has risen significantly as a result of the growing focus on longer qualification bearing courses. Overall, women outnumber men, although there remain concerns that they do not always participate in programmes of equal status, and women from some ethnic groups are seriously underrepresented. Participation among different minority ethnic communities varies widely, with people of black African and mixed ethnic origin most likely to participate, and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin least likely do so. There is a strong social class bias in participation, with more than half of professional and managerial workers participating, compared to only one quarter of people in unskilled and semiskilled work doing so. Reported motivation to learn remains high, although this is not entirely reflected in participation figures. A number of campaigns and other initiatives have been taken to stimulate interest and encourage take up, at national and local levels. Most notable amongs these is Adult Learners' Week organised by NIACE (see <http://www.alw.org.uk/>).

The UK Confintea Report (p 14) states that 'the UK has traditionally had a very extensive range of part-time “non-vocational”, non-qualification bearing adult education delivered by public and voluntary agencies at local level. This work expanded rapidly in the late 1990s, driven by a policy to use such programmes to widen participation in education generally. However, since 2004 learner numbers in this specific kind of publicly funded provision have declined significantly. This follows the new policy focus on skills and by the transition from a managed to a market led model of education for adults, which has produced rapid fee increases for many learners'. This decline is, however, a result of a deliberate policy to focus Government support on priority groups and subjects, and the effect of this “deepening” strategy can be seen in figures 9 and 10 on p. 64 of the Confintea Report. This shows adult learners on the key LSC priority programmes rising, against the broader trend of a decline of participation in adult learning. A further factor is a great decline in adult education in the university sector because of successive changes to traditional extra-mural provision in the liberal adult education tradition, the last major change being the introduction of the 'Equivalent Level Qualiifcation Level' rule – which aims to target public investment in HE on those students who have not already had the opportunity to benefit from a higher education.

The 2009 survey of adults from NIACE showed that the proportion of adults reporting participation in learning had increased slightly, staunching the decline seen year on year from

2006-8. However, closer attention to the survey's findings told a different and more worrying story, and offered little cause for optimism. The proportion of adults currently learning at that time was at its lowest level since the Labour government was elected in 1997 and findings suggested that the real gains of a modest number of the least skilled were bought at the expense of many more of the educationally marginalised. However the NIACE report of 2010 (Tuckett and Aldridge 2010) showed a distinct change with according to the organisation's director, the 'first statistically significant improvement in participation by adults from social class DE - the poorest cohort, comprising unemployed people, semi- and unskilled adults and retired people'. The report announced that 'the proportion of adults who are currently learning, or have done so in the last three years, has risen by four per cent from 39 per cent in 2009 to 43 per cent in 2010, its highest level for 10 years. People in and out of work are reporting record levels of wanting to learn since these surveys started 20 years ago'. This is in part ascribed to a response to the uncertain economic climate.

There is an extensive literature in the UK on adult participation, far too extensive to quote in detail (see McGivney (1996), Davies and Williams (2001), Davies, Osborne and Williams (2002), Callender and Jackson (2005)). Studies concerned with decision-making to access higher education by adults by Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) are illustrative. Their findings clearly indicate that a highly motivated cohort of mature students wishing to enter Higher Education exists. However, many of these individuals approach the prospect of entering HE with trepidation and uncertainty. Most mature students have multiple roles of responsibility, which carry considerable emotional and financial burdens. For these students, the decision to enter education whilst high on their agenda is highly constrained. Considerable uncertainty still exists amongst potential entrants in relation to the financial arrangements for Higher Education. A significant number of people need greater financial support. They also, however, need more security, more stability, and more certainty in the arrangements that currently existed at the time of that research. Government agencies, if they wish more mature students to participate in HE, need to consider ways in which the arrangements for supporting students are made more transparent to potential mature students. This would include not only the provision of information about fees, loans and repayment schemes, but also the interface between the benefits system and study. The challenge is to provide coherent advice and guidance within an integrated, comprehensive and proactive service to meet the ever-diverse needs of potential mature entrants; the requirement is to create an individualised service for a mass market that can provide informed and unbiased advice.

The current government has been considering how to go about ensuring that all potential students have the information they need when deciding which courses to follow at university.

Proposals were forward as part of the the HE White paper, published in June 2011 (DBIS 2011). Amongst other proposals this proposes to ‘radically improve and expand the information available to prospective students, making available much more information about individual courses at individual institutions and graduate employment prospects’.

Such information may be very useful to prospective mature entrants. Certainly there was little evidence from this research of Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) at inter-agency co-operation in relation to such adult access to HE existed. Mature entrants often seek advice that covers such a diverse range of issues that inevitably uncoordinated and multi-level information provided causes great confusion.

This research also showed that professional advancement in general and career enhancement in particular were the most important motivators for potential mature entrants – but job responsibilities were also one of the most important barriers to participation. It is important to highlight the positive role that employers have, particularly in supporting the development of employees through part-time study. The Government recognises the importance of part-time study (especially to mature students), and the important role employers have to play in supporting students. Many employers already play a crucial role, but specific proposals to incentivise greater employer involvement in supporting students will be made in the prospective HE White Paper in 2011. It is also of note that under the current system, part-time students studying at 50% intensity or more are eligible for student support. However, under the Government’s proposed reforms of student finance, student support will be available to part-time students studying at 25% intensity or more.

However, it may also be crucial to continue to provide incentives for institutions to create greater flexibility in the ways that provision is made available. Whilst expressions of accessibility and flexibility are without exception highlighted in institutional statements, the reality in some institutions is that mature students are not a priority given the huge demand from well qualified young people, and this will be most pronounced in the most prestigious research-intensive universities, A UUK report (Thomas *et al.*. 2005: 14), using customised data from UCAS, shows that applicants from the highest socio-economic groups (SEGs) have increased their share of applications to the more selective research-intensive institutions and that these younger students are more likely to be from high SEGs than are adult applicants. Widening participation policy at national and institutional level in the UK has shifted to broader concerns associated with the situation of younger people in areas of socio-economic deprivation. For many institutions, mature students are now part of a much bigger picture. If they aid the meeting of enrolment targets, then this is a bonus for many institutions, but it is likely that special arrangements to attract this group will not receive as much attention as those focussed on school pupils. As reported by Thomas *et al.*. (2005), the relative emphasis on meeting widening

participation targets shifted in the last decade to these younger cohorts through schemes such as Aim Higher. There is a logic in such an emphasis since schemes of early intervention may have greater economic impact. As part of their proposals to reform HE funding and student finance, the Government introduced new measures to help widen access to HE. Firstly, any university that wanted to charge over £6,000 (from 2012, £9000) for its courses would draw up a new access agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). This would be expected to include activities such as outreach initiatives to attract more students to apply from disadvantaged backgrounds, and targeted scholarships and financial support for poorer students. Similarly, the Government is establishing a new £150 million National Scholarship Programme to help bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The details of the initiative have not yet been settled. However, the Government have invited the National Union of Students, Universities UK, the Director of Fair Access, the Sutton Trust and other interested parties to help design a scheme for both young and mature students.

The overriding issue in the UK is class and cost. Sargant *et al.* (1997) reported that in the United Kingdom twice as many people from the highest social classes A and B (as measured by employment status) participate in HE than do those from lowest classes D and E and this is confirmed in a later report (National Audit Office, 2002). The more recent Confintea report for the UK and Thomas *et al.* (2005) also state that despite the plethora of initiatives especially in widening participation, this divide still exists. Cost, particularly for provision that is not vocational and for higher education is a serious impediment to many adults. This is despite a number of mechanisms of funding support and in part is due to debt aversion as evidenced in a number of studies during the last 10 years, some cited in 6.4 below. A major concern as voiced by the influential Sutton Trust (2010 p. 3) is that ‘with significant variation in fees, the risk is that non-privileged students will make higher education choices based on cost – or the perception of cost – rather than academic talent and that leading universities will become the preserve of the well-off’.

The contribution of employers is largely unknown, and despite attempts over many decades to promote workplace learning (Brink et al. 2002), including accreditation of experiential learning (see Pouget and Osborne 2004) success is rather limited.

5. Clusters of measures

At a national level in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are a number of mechanisms to raise awareness of adult learning and to create some flexibility in provision. These areas are detailed here in the sections below.

5.1. Awareness - raising

Largest in scale is the University for Industry (see <http://www.ufi.com>), which was created in 1998 by the UK government and its online provider brand Learndirect was launched in 2000. Ufi was given a remit to use new technology to transform the delivery of learning and skills across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Learndirect has become the UK's largest online learning provider, reaching into local communities, the workplace and people's homes with flexible, accessible and supported online learning. It is one of the UK's biggest and most recognised e-learning brands, with a unique infrastructure enabling it claims more than 8,500 learners to log on and learn every day.

Whilst the University for Industry (Ufi), and the Learndirect brand that it uses for the courses it promotes, were set up with the aim of improving the availability and access to workforce skills, much of the work of Ufi is concerned with basic skills. Indeed the principal objective of Learndirect approved and promoted courses is 'to enable adults without a level two or Skills for Life qualification to gain the skills and qualifications they need to find a job or to achieve and progress at work' This further emphasizes the divide between adult non-vocational and vocational learning (http://www.ufi.com/home/section1/2_objectives.asp). According to the Ufi, some 2.6m learners have taken Learndirect branded courses since 2000 and there are 770 Learndirect centres in England and Wales. It should be noted that this represents 2.6 m separate pieces of learning which have been taken by a learner - these may be very short and discrete. However, Ufi courses are a brand and are marketed using a considerable media presence and through online and telephone guidance. Courses themselves are offered in collaboration with FECs, private training providers, voluntary and community sector organisations and Higher Education Institutions. These are branded as Learndirect centres. A separate Scottish Ufi and Learndirect exists funded by Learndirect Scotland.

Until 2008 Ufi also ran the learndirect Careers Advice service which provided free, impartial information, advice and guidance on courses and careers. In total more than 58 million information and advice sessions were conducted since the service began, with a 95% satisfaction rate delivered in the final year. This service is now available at

www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk and is part of the new Adult Careers and Advancement Service, launched in August 2010 by the Skills Funding Agency.

The adult advancement and careers service is described as a ‘next generation service’ providing expert and impartial careers and skills advice to adults in England. It will supersede the current Careers Advice Service telephone service (formerly learndirect advice) and local nextstep face to face services, by creating a single, national service available online, by telephone, or face to face. It will provide access to better information about the labour market and new tools to help adults plan their career development; a new professional development framework for careers advisers; and a new brand to raise the service’s appeal to the public (see <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/skills-audit/skills-account-blueprint>).

The new Coalition Government is bringing together careers guidance services for young people and adults, to build on the best of both, into a new service which is underpinned by the core principles of independence and professionalism. The new service, available by April 2012, will help young people and adults to make informed decisions about careers, skills and learning.

A measure, which is now also replicated in other countries, is the now very well established Adult Learners week each year organised by NIACE.

Linked to raising awareness, a number of incentives, as mentioned earlier, have been created, including Profession and Career Development Loans, Independent Learning Accounts and newly established Universal Skills Account.

5.2. Flexibility

Some aspects of raising awareness are also associated with widening participation, but perhaps more significant are mechanisms to improve flexibility of systems, particular of higher education. Historically attention to the notion of flexibility emerged internationally *inter alia* in the context of the use of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and in workplace learning. For at least two decades in the context of ODL, authors have been referring to the notion of learning ‘anywhere and anytime’ (see Wong, 2008, for an overview) and in a self-paced manner (Baldwin-Edwards 2004). Such learning needs are a function of policy imperatives to encourage and accommodate a more diverse constituency with situational demands linked to family, work and social obligations, disability, and geographical remoteness from higher education settings (Kember, 1999). It has also long been recognised that it is the structure of educational offerings that “expresses the rigidity or flexibility of the course’s educational objectives, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods” and “describes the extent to which course components can accommodate or be responsive to each learner’s individual needs” (Moore and Kearsley, 1996, p. 203). It follows that not only does flexibility apply to structure of provision, access routes to

those structures and pedagogic experiences therein, but, as noted in *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), greater flexibility also has a role in meeting the needs of a more diverse student body.

In the UK manifestations of flexibility include:

- flexibility in admissions. This means entry routes for those with alternative qualifications to those posited in the traditional model;
- flexibility of mode, both of attendance and of delivery, whereby students may study part-time, at a distance utilising technology or as a mix as seen in blended learning;
- flexibility of location, which may be related to the above, or may mean attendance not at a university, but in an FE college, a local community space, at the workplace or at home;
- flexibility of teaching, learning and assessment practices to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.
- flexibility in duration, with the introduction of foundation degrees, the use of other forms of short-cycle higher education or the option of accelerated learning or decelerated learning;
- flexibility in recruitment where, rather than the focus being on school leavers, a variety of other interventions are utilised. In-reach projects may encourage engagement with pupils at an earlier age in order to raise aspirations of higher education or they may engage at the level of the local community in the case of outreach to adults.

A range of forms of flexibility therefore exist in terms of when and where provision is offered, its mode of delivery (distance and face-to-face) and in credit accumulation and transfer. All of these forms of flexibility can be found across the system and include various forms of spatial, temporal and structural adjustments such as distance learning, part-time study, credit transfer and AP(E)L. The new Qualifications and Credit Framework introduced in England Wales and Northern Ireland, creates new flexibilities for the vocational qualifications system and is designed to support and encourage credit accumulations and transfer. The case of flexibility as it pertains to the university sector (Osborne and Young 2006) exemplifies the range of actions that take place. However, it is important to note that credit transfer between sectors is discretionary rather than mandated, AP(E)L is espoused strongly but remains marginal and part-time study does not receive too much priority in many institutions. Distance education for adults is of course manifest in the role of the Open University and a few other higher education institutions that offer some distance and mixed mode courses.

Further detail including a number of case studies of flexibility in relation to access to higher education is found most recently in Houston, McCune and Osborne (2011). These authors report that the use of alternative forms of delivery and the creation of flexible pathways through higher education (Outram, 2009), the development of alternative programmes of study, like the introduction of foundation degrees in 2001 (Greenwood and Little, 2008; Hicks *et al.*, 2009), the use of accelerated learning (McCaig, Bowers-Brown and Drew, 2007), and the opportunities made available through innovations in information and communications technology that have allowed the development of distance, blended and e-learning (Laurillard, 2002; Sharpe *et al.*, 2006) have, through the flexibility they offer, opened up new possibilities for widening access to, and facilitating successful participation in, HE.

These initiatives amongst others have between 1995-96 and 2007-08, seen full-time undergraduate numbers increase by over 25% across the UK as a whole and by almost 20% in Scotland. Over the same period the percentage increases in part-time numbers were much greater. Notably in Scotland, part-time enrolments rose by 280%. However, despite this expansion in participation, two main barriers remain consistently problematic at undergraduate level and beyond, namely disability and low socio-economic status. As a result the perceptions and experiences of disabled students and issues of access and participation of those from lower socio-economic groups remain firmly on the agenda (e.g. Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2005; Riddell *et al.*, 2007; Iannelli, 2007; PAC, 2009).

Performance indicators based on those in receipt of the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) (Directgov, 2010) were first published by HEFCE in relation to the WP agenda for students entering in 2000-01 when 1.4% of all undergraduates and 2% of all part-time students were in receipt of DSA. In 2007-08, 4.5% of all undergraduates and 2.4% of all part-time undergraduates were in receipt of DSA. In absolute terms, full-time disabled undergraduate numbers trebled to almost 49,000 over this time period, although part-time numbers decreased by a third to just fewer than 3,500. However, to give some indication of under-representation, 18% (or 10 million) of the working-age population in 2008 were covered by the DSA. In addition, 23% of working-age disabled people have no formal qualifications compared to 9% of non-disabled people (Employers' Forum on Disability, 2010). When examining the indicators for those in receipt of DSA, it should be remembered that those eligible to apply for the allowance are an extremely diverse group with various forms and levels of disability, which require specific and in many cases specialised support services (Riddell *et al.*, 2007; Fuller *et al.*, 2009).

There are some indicators of success in relation to social class and participation. From 1998 to 2008, the proportion of young full-time undergraduate entrants from state schools and from lower socio-economic groups increased, although the participation rate from low participation

neighbourhoods fell (HESA, 2009). However, the social composition of students has only undergone modest changes (HEFCE, 2009; HESA, 2009) and despite modest improvements in participation rates, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still under-represented in higher education (Bekhradnia, 2003; NAO, 2008). In relation to mature undergraduate entrants, while absolute numbers increased, their overall proportion fell from 25 to 21% between 1998 and 2008. A detailed synthesis of the research on social class and higher education is provided by Stevenson and Lang (2010).

6. The 5 priorities of the Action Plan on Adult Learning

In this section there follows an analysis of how the UK is addressing the five priorities of the EC's Action Plan for Adult Learning.

6.1. Analysis of effects of reforms in other educational sectors on adult learning

As was previously indicated there is no specific adult learning sector in the UK. Rather provision for adults is offered by a range of providers that include Further Education Colleges, Higher Education Institutions, and by a range of public, quasi-public and private providers in a range of locations.

It is the reform of what is eligible for funding from the state, irrespective of who provides it, that has had the greatest effect on adult learning. This has affected principally two areas of adult education in particular: Adult Community Learning and Liberal Adult Education in universities.

First, there has been a significant decline in the area of Adult Community Learning (ACL) in England as a result of re-designation by the LSC of what would be eligible for funding. The eligibility for funding has been implemented through a clear dividing line between General ACL and PCDL (Personal and Community Development Learning), which refers mainly to Skills for Life (basic skills) and related learning. In essence, in the ACL area the only courses that attract significant funding from the LSC are basic skills courses in literacy, numeracy and IT for all age groups, and for adults full level SAT 2 courses with contracts embedded within the Train to Gain scheme. A reduced level of funding is now directed towards eligible PCDL provision. Second, as previous indicated, there has been great decline in adult education in the university sector because of successive changes to the rules for funding traditional extra-mural provision in the liberal adult education tradition. These changes of policy from the funding councils for higher education (Scotland excepted) has lead to the demise of a tradition that dates from the late 19th century. In essence, this is a reflection over the past two decades of a shift in

priorities towards the widening of access to higher education and to early intervention during school years rather than second-chance education for adults. One focus of public investment in higher education is on those students who stand to benefit the most from it – that is, those who have not already benefited from going to university in the past.

Reforms to the funding of Higher Education being currently proposed in England may also have an effect on adult participation in that sector. Although there will be provision in new legislation for no upfront costs and payback only when income reaches a certain level, the perception of being encumbered with debt may have an adverse effect especially on adults from low-income backgrounds given the evidence of previous research, particularly that of Callender and associates (see Callender 2003; Callender and Jackson (2005; 2008) and that of Davies, Osborne and Williams (2002). The work of Callender and Jackson (2008) on over 2000 prospective students, including potential mature students, showed that financial issues do constrain choice of university for those from lower social classes more so than any others. Lower income students are more likely than their wealthier peers to perceive the costs of HE as a debt rather than an investment. The Government, however, has reviewed the evidence on the effects of increasing the charges levied against students in terms of participation levels (see Browne 2010: 22) and argues that a range of international and domestic evidence shows that increasing charges does not lead to a fall in participation – provided that adequate student support measures are in place to cover these charges. That is why the Government will cover the full costs of tuition upfront, and will not expect any student to contribute to the cost of their higher education until they are earning over £21,000. The Government is also extending student support for tuition costs to all part-time students studying at 25% intensity or more. The proposal that part-time students should be treated equitably with full-time students and also not pay upfront may have some positive effects.

6.2. Improving the quality of provision and staffing

In relation to standards in provision in England, in 2009/10, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) introduced a new inspection framework for Further Education Colleges, work-based learning providers, and adult and community learning. It has been extending the framework to other learning and skills providers during the course of the year. This framework looks at a range of aspects of provision, including providers' capacity to improve and their safeguarding of arrangements. A summary of key findings of the framework is found at Ofsted's website (see <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2009-10/Learning-and-skills>).

There also exists a Framework for Excellence (FfE), which is operated by the Skills Funding Agency to provide information for learners and employers ‘to help them make informed choices about post-16 education and training and to provide consistent management information on key performance indicators for all post-16 providers’ (see <http://ffe.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>).

In relation to staffing, in 2004 the UK Government set up Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the sector skills organisation for lifelong learning, with the purpose to develop new professional teaching standards for the whole Further Education system, as announced in *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (DfES 2004). LLUK is one of a network of 23 Sector Skills Councils (SSC) in the UK funded, supported and monitored by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). Each SSC is an employer-led, independent organisation that covers a specific sector across the UK. LLUK is responsible for the professional development of all those working in community learning and development; further education; higher education; libraries, archives and information services; and work-based learning. Since January 2005, LLUK has taken over the work of three former national training organisations, FENTO (Further Education National Training Organisation), PAULO (the National Training Organisation (NTO) for community-based learning and development and is NTO (Information Services NTO), together with the NTO responsibilities of HESDA (Higher Education Staff Development Agency).

The new professional standards for teachers/tutor/ trainer education in the lifelong learning sector identify the components of: an initial teaching award (Passport); qualifications leading to Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS) status; and other intermediate and advanced teaching qualifications (see http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org/documents/standards/professional_standards_for_itts_02010_7.pdf). The provision is accompanied by a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) expectation of teachers and trainers of, at least 30 hours per year. This initiative will provide a robust and co-ordinated (centralised) qualification framework for initial teacher education and CPD, which was started in September 2007.

Within the FE sector qualifications to teach have not historically been mandatory, although many staff have taken a formal university qualification at undergraduate or post-graduate level in pre-service or in-service mode. It is now the case in England that all new entry (2007) trainee FE teachers will be required to attain this QTLS status as outlined in the survey for special consideration and all FE teachers will have to achieve such status by 2010.

Existing qualifications and those being offered in the future may be utilised by not only FEC staff, but other parts of the lifelong learning sector including those involve in ACL. Not only are these awards offered at certain universities (where they may be incorporated within traditional academic awards), but also through Awarding Bodies such as the City and Guilds, whose

qualifications are offered in a variety of sites around the UK, often in FECs themselves (Scotland excepted).

Endorsement of qualifications offered by providers is undertaken by a subsidiary of LL(UK) called SVUK (Standards Verification UK Ltd) using its Endorsement Panel following recommendations made by its some 25 part-time reviewers. The term **endorsement** is used by SVUK to signify that generic teacher education qualifications have met a range of statutory requirements that including the standards for teaching and supporting learning and a range of quality assurance criteria. The different term **approval** is used to indicate that the content and assessment of subject qualifications for teachers in the specialist areas of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL have met have a range of statutory requirements including subject specifications and a range of quality assurance criteria.

However, we stand on shifting sands. In December following a review by UKCES, 2010, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills announced that it would not be relicensing Lifelong Learning UK. LLUK's existing license ends in March 2011 and it will cease to be a non Departmental public body at the end of March 2012. Discussions are in place around alternative arrangements for the future.

6.3. Increasing the possibilities to achieve a qualification at least one level higher

The possibility of being able to achieve higher levels of qualification are enhanced by the existence of a new qualifications structure in England, Wales and Northern Ireland developed as part of a programme of reforms to the vocational qualifications system. The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) underpins the recognition of achievement through the award of credit for the achievement of units and qualifications built up from those units at 9 levels from basic skills to Higher Education level. It is intended to encompass all accredited vocational learning no matter how or where achieved, and is intended to facilitate both accumulation and transfer of credit. The reforms to the vocational qualifications system were carried out by a number of delivery partners, including the Skills Funding Agency in England, Ofqual and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and overseen by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

All qualifications in the QCF are made up of units with a credit value that reflects its duration with one credit representing 10 hours of work. Every qualification in the QCF comes in one of three sizes; Award, Certificate or Diploma. Awards are made up of 1-12 credits (or 10 to 120 hours learning), Certificates 13-36 credits (130 hours learning) and Diplomas 37 credits or more (370 or more hours learning).

A new feature trialled in 2009 and introduced more widely in 2010 is the on-line Personal Learning Record (currently available via training providers). QCF achievement data can now be collected directly from participating awarding organisations and held on an individual's Personal Learning Record with the intention that this gives learners better oversight to manage their learning and make choices in the future. It is also intended that learning providers and advisers will also support learners to access and interpret their QCF achievement data via the Personal Learning Record.

6.4. Speeding up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups

It is very difficult to analyse the area of assessment and recognition of informal learning for any group let alone for disadvantaged groups. There is a long history of AP(E)L in the UK and arguably within the vocational sector it has been implemented through the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) framework which assesses workplace competence (see Pouget and Osborne 2004). However, although many institutions suggest that they offer AP(E)L schemes, the reality is that procedures are too expensive and time-consuming outside the NVQ system, although the new Qualifications and Credit Framework could support APEL if required. It cannot be said that there exists mechanisms for speeding up the process in the UK.

6.5. Improving the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

The monitoring of the adult learning sector has been described above and primarily is the procedures of the Adult Learning Inspectorate within Ofsted. This is systematic and occurs in accordance with specific procedures. The report of Ofsted on the Learning and Skills sector in England indicates that 410 providers were inspected in 2009/10 of which work-based learning providers and Further Education Colleges constituted some 75%. The detailed data shown by the Ofsted annual report appears to indicate that a robust system exists.

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