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Recent Thinking In Lifelong Learning

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THE MAIN AIM OF THIS REVIEW IS TO IDENTIFY AND CONCISELY DRAW OUT THE KEY POINTS IN CURRENT AND RECENT LITERATURE ON A RANGE OF ISSUES RELATING TO LIFELONG LEARNING AND IN PARTICULAR ON RECENT THINKING ON TOPICS RELATED TO POTENTIAL NEW POLICY AREAS. THIS REVIEW IDENTIFIES DEVELOPMENTS IN THINKING SINCE THE LITERATURE REVIEW ENTITLED 'FACTORS INFLUENCING INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT TO LIFETIME LEARNING' (MAGUIRE, SHEFFIELD: EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT, RESEARCH SERIES NO. 20, 1993).

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PREFACE

Assumptions within literature reviews

It is often assumed in literature reviews that there is a clear focus to the topic and that it has well established boundaries - that there is a pre-existing object of knowledge. Where this is the case, it is possible to search for literature on that topic, review it and provide a representation of the various points of view there may be, the issues which are covered and the gaps that need further investigation. In general the literature review can be seen as a representation or reflection of that which already exists.

Selecting the boundaries

There is a naive realism embedded in this notion and it is unreflexive on the role of reviews in constructing the body of knowledge about which they write. A literature review is inevitably selective in that it involves choices about what to search for and establishes boundaries as to what is and what is not legitimate for inclusion. This suggests that what needs to be examined are the criteria for inclusion and exclusion as much as what is included and excluded. In relation to lifelong learning, this is particularly acute.

For pragmatic rather than academic reasons we have chosen to interpret 'recent' as primarily from 1993 onwards, as the last review of this sort funded by the Department for Education and Employment took place in that year (Maguire 1993). However, we judge it necessary to situate lifelong learning within a longitudinal and historical analysis of policy interest in this field.

What constitutes the literature?

More centrally though, we need to ask, what constitutes the literature of 'lifelong learning', and what notions of 'lifelong learning' are constituted in the literature, for as Hand et al. (1994) make clear in their similar study of individual commitment to learning, 'the creation of such language is central to the further development of any policy or strategy seeking to engender a situation where learning throughout life is, increasingly, seen as the norm'. The lack of a shared language and understanding is central to the difficulty of deciding what constitutes the literature on lifelong learning.

A policy strategy

Lifelong learning has largely developed as a policy strategy to support the wider aim of economic competitiveness. It has emerged as a challenge to established providers of education and training and part of the challenge has been the very concept of lifelong learning itself, and the way it has shifted the focus from institutional structures to people's participation and learning. Conventional front end notions of education and training have been discursively displaced - even if actual practices have a long way to go to catch up.

Rebranding

This has resulted in much 're-branding' of activity by organisations in order to position themselves and what they do favourably in relation to policy goals and possible funding (Eraut 1997). In some ways, the very nebulousness of the notion of lifelong learning - like the notions of education and training themselves (Campanelli, et al. 1994) - makes this feasible, but there is also a possibility that rather than providing a different policy framework for the reform of education and training provision, lifelong learning becomes itself 're-formed' by its adoption and translation into pre-existing institutional structures with management and professional cultures and agendas of their own (a familiar finding of studies of policy implementation - Bates 1998). Lifelong learning is thus in danger of becoming subsumed within pre-existing structures and interests rather than the former being the basis for the reform of the latter (Eraut 1997). An example of this is the DfEE's web pages where lifelong learning is a sub-heading of the training column (www.open.gov.uk), already limiting its discursive power to re negotiate what is widely considered to be the damaging divide between 'academic' and 'vocational' achievements (Young, et al. 1997). It would be equally possible to subsume education and training under lifelong learning and indeed, this is one of the central debates in the literature.

Multiple stakeholders

At present, there are the pre-existing influential stakeholders within the economy, and also other established institutions which are making their voices heard (e.g. Confederation of British Industry, Royal Society of Arts, Government departments, Local Education Authorities, Regional Councils, Library Associations, Universities Association of Continuing Education, Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education). What is missing from the current discourse are

the voices of learners themselves. It is noticeable that at the time when lifelong learning is coming to the fore, greater emphasis is being placed on individual self-reliance to cope with change. This leads to possibilities for lifelong learning to become constructed as compulsory, from which there is no escape (Tait 1998) and a potential to pathologise those individuals who may not come within the dominant boundaries of a learning society as excluding themselves. Individualisation within a certain notion of a learning society may re inscribe the blame for 'failure' which it is actually seeking to challenge (Macrae, et al. 1997).

Lifelong learning and employability

Within the literature on lifelong learning there is a greater emphasis on developing people's skills, competencies or capabilities for lifelong learning rather than more conventional subject matter. In the economic sphere, the notion of employability has moved to the fore, placing emphasis on individual skill development and preparedness for employment, with less concern for the availability of employment and appropriate opportunity structures. Thus, a notion of a learning society which sees inclusion mediated through participation in employment - although valuable to many - itself produces other exclusions.

Participation and social exclusion

In a sense therefore, a literature review shows lifelong learning to be in the making and an important question surrounds the stakeholders who are making it. We have already mentioned the powerful voices in the framing of lifelong learning - largely as a strategy for competitiveness, which is itself questionable as an adequate understanding of the role of skills and qualifications in relation to productivity and the global economic challenge (Ashton and Green 1996). It is also unclear that this is a competitive strategy adopted by all businesses (Keep 1997). This agenda, like policy at European Union level (Commission of European Communities 1995) has been modified in some respects by those with a concern for social exclusion. Here, as with the expansion of opportunity offered through the notion of learning rather than more traditional notions of education and training, social exclusion may be tackled by addressing exclusion or re-framing the concept of society. Notions of participation in liberal democratic structures and civil society may be displaced by concepts of a learning society, in which as long as one learns, one is not excluded and to learn is interpreted in the widest possible sense.

INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning can be understood in a number of ways. As referring to post-school provision. As concerned with adults who have left their formal education and training and returned at a later date. As encompassing the cradle to the grave. As concerned with only the economically active. These are not definitional problems to be resolved by recourse to an authority. They are issues over which there will be continual contest with temporary resolutions rather than agreed solutions. In clarifying the different positions we are simply illustrating those arenas over which contest does and will take place.

The boundaries of this review

The boundaries of this review are largely pragmatic.

Post school

They take lifelong as post-school, although we have severe reservations about this, as much can be learned from research on child development and schooling which would help better to inform some of the debates about learning post-school.

Beyond education and training

They view lifelong learning as transgressing the boundaries of education and training or at least having the potential so to do (Edwards 1997).

United Kingdom context

They discuss lifelong learning primarily within the United Kingdom context, although we consider also the impact of globalisation and the United Kingdom position within the European Union and in relation to the global context.

What constitutes learning?

They take learning for granted and also as problematic. Questions about what is accepted and valued as learning, where it occurs, how it occurs and how it is demonstrated play a powerful role in the wider processes of social and economic exclusion, where even the simple binary exclusion /inclusion is problematic given the various differential positions people have in relation to education and training, the economy, society, culture (Macrae, et al. 1997).

Wider literature

They take the primary literature as that which is to be found in the terrain of education and training, yet much which makes learning possible is in a wider literature field. Literature on health, social policy, welfare, employment, transport, the environment, gender, race, disability, the media, culture, to name but a few, all help to constitute fuller and different understandings about lifelong learning and what it is or could be.

Policy focus

They have a major policy focus as this is the terrain within which lifelong learning is being most powerfully asserted. There is thus a research base to evaluate the now and to speculate on the how of lifelong learning, but it is essentially visionary - a mission statement for a society for which modernisation has been posited as a primary and overwhelming goal (Kennedy 1997; Fryer 1997).

Traditional boundaries

Traditionally in education and training, the process of boundary-setting conceived post-compulsory education and training as involving different sets of institutional arrangements for different groups of learners and different forms of learning. Thus, higher education was for young people to learn academic disciplines and professions, further education was for young people to learn technical skills, and adult education was for adults to undertake general and recreational education. In the process, certain parts of the full range of actual lifelong learning activity was lost or marginalised and institutions did not position themselves as part of an overall framework. For instance, the major participation of adults in further education provision was not embraced as part of the field. Each sector had and has its own principal differentiated and differential interests, audiences, curriculum and practices.

Historical review

The provision of learning opportunities for adults has a long and diverse history with a wide range of providers, including the churches, trade unions, co-operative guilds and temperance organisations. However, for much of this century this diversity has not been reflected in policy. With the development of state support for organisations providing learning opportunities for adults, learning opportunities became associated largely with a few relatively discrete

forms of organised learning. These were provided through the Local Education Authority or Regional Council Adult Education Services or Institutes, the pre-1992 Universities' extra-mural departments and the Workers Education Association. From the second world war until the 1970s, this triangle of organisations were constructed as the field of lifelong learning, or as it is more usually put, 'adult education'. In other words, the field of adult education and the institutional concerns of adult educators were the dominant discourses of lifelong learning (Chase 1995). This marginalised those forms of lifelong learning taking place elsewhere, such as in the workplace, the home, local clubs, and lifelong learning as a terrain of practice, policy and study. It also left further and higher education in different policy compartments.

Purposes of adult education

The purpose of adult education was viewed as being to support individuals and groups who had benefited least from previous initial education; to promote personal and social autonomy and emancipation through forms of development associated with the liberal education of the arts, humanities and certain of the social sciences. This replicated and sustained the boundary between liberal adult education and vocational training. Participation and equality became guiding concerns of adult education, with recurrent worries over the restricted numbers participating and their privileged social profile. (Uden 1996; Sargant, et al. 1997).

Adult learning and adult education

The settings in which adults learn are far wider than the formal institutionalised provision of adult education. A focus on adult learning thereby helped to undermine adult education from within, even as there grew greater interest in the ongoing learning of adults in the context of economic, technological and demographic changes (Edwards 1997). The focus on learning gives rise to the possibility for a notion of lifelong learning, in the process of which the discourse of adult education is displaced, encompassing the much wider arena of practice. This itself becomes subject to contest and containment, as human capital theories moved to the fore in the 1980's resulting in the focus on skills development for economic participation.

The evolution of lifelong learning

With the shift towards notions of lifelong learning, the emphasis moves from provision to learners and learning, and from inputs to outputs, a process

associated with increased , commodification of learning and consumer relations. There is fresh impetus to notions of a learning society, but reconfigured from a concern with the provision of recurrent education (Abrahamsson 1993; Chadwick 1993) towards supporting diverse learning and learners. The threads of earlier meanings remain as part of the debates about lifelong learning, but they have been powerfully supplanted by different concerns. Thus, while debates have tended to focus on the vocationalising of post-school education, a more significant shift may actually be the individualising of lifelong learning (McNair 1996a) and its reconstruction as part of lifestyle practices and consumer culture (Edwards and Usher 1997b) and (Edwards and Usher 1997a), in which the identity of 'lifestyle learner' overlays and displaces that of 'educated person' in certain ways.

Sites for learning

These changes weaken the traditional boundaries between organisations within education and between education and other learning sites further opening up opportunities for lifelong learning and its accreditation. They also raise questions about which organisations should be recognised, and funded, for their role in delivering learning to adults. For instance, hospitals are workplaces and provide a great deal of training and staff development. They also engage in health education and promotion, and certain therapeutic responses to illnesses can be seen as forms of learning.

Key themes in the literature

The literature tends to focus on particular types of institution and institutional responses to changing circumstances. In the formal sector, for example, research on higher education is far more extensive than that on further and adult education, reflecting pre-existing status boundaries. Similarly, the literature on learning in the workplace tends to focus on large employers with established human resource management strategies rather than small and medium sized employers. The emphasis also tends to be on private sector employers, when in many locales it is the publicly funded sectors which are the largest employers.

In focusing on the formal sector and their relationships with employers and contributions to workplace learning, managing lifelong learning thus becomes reduced to managing the interface between individuals and employers and the providers of learning opportunities (LGMB 1996). Within this framework, all those outside the employment relationship and their learning are excluded. This provides a tidier policy base, unlike more inclusive notions of lifelong

learning. However, while strategic choices have to be made and priorities set, this can nonetheless be set within an overall framework of inclusivity.

There are for example an increasing number of private training organisations and commercially produced learning materials such language courses and CD-ROMs. The broadcast media and internet provide further resources for learning. Beyond this there is the learning supported in voluntary organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, and in social protest movements and self-organised groups such as Greenpeace and the University of the Third Age.

The role of 'lifelong learning'

Much of the literature contributing to the cause of lifelong learning is assertive and prescriptive. The term 'cause' is appropriate here as it signifies the power of the discursive strategy to marginalise dissent and to unsettle pre-existing forms of education and training. The policy discourse works hard to sustain a consistent and coherent vision capable of attracting support from a diversity of stakeholders, based on the twin requirements for economic competitiveness and social inclusion. Lifelong learning then becomes a rallying cry capable of uniting a diversity of interest groups behind a single banner proclaiming the need for change. Jenkins (1997) has noted that it is the very ambiguity of slogans, containing as they do multiple meanings and conflicting rationales, which allows them to mask local and sectoral differences and play a significant role in bringing about change.

Lifelong learning also provides a convenient rallying cry for stakeholders wishing to generate political, social or financial support. For those involved in education and training for example, 'it provides an excellent rhetorical basis for marketing their wares' (Eraut 1997).

The question of what 'work' concepts of lifelong learning and the learning society perform is picked up by Coffield (1997a) who suggests that rather than treating the learning society as a future destination it should be used reflexively in order to monitor change. He suggests using questions such as:

- What different types of learning society exist in the United Kingdom at present, who participates, who does not and what are the determinants of participation and non-participation?

- How appropriate and effective are current British policies on education, training and the economy, and how do they compare with those developed in Europe and further afield?

Such questions are helpful in highlighting that the learning society is not a 'uniform or nation-wide phenomenon' (Macrae, et al. 1997) and drawing attention to the differential relevance of the learning society for particular groups (Coffield 1997b).

LIFELONG LEARNING IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The fundamental economic, social and political shifts which have taken place on a global scale provide the context in which to consider United Kingdom developments and thinking in relation to lifelong learning. There is a general consensus that the major global shifts which have taken place have prompted a renewed interest in lifelong learning (Ashton and Green 1996; Green 1997; Taylor and Watson 1997; Reich 1993). The key features of globalisation which are commonly referred to include:

- _ increasing international interdependence
- _ growth of regional supranational organisations
- _ global ecological interdependence
- _ uneven development
- _ erosion of nation state and national identities
- _ small dependent local economies which are linked into multinational production
- _ a global division of labour
- _ predominance of market forces
- _ increased personal mobility

What problem is being solved?

Whilst there is a generalised agreement that processes of globalisation and modernisation have profound implications for educational theory and practice, the ways in which the problems are defined and the potential solutions are framed varies widely. At one end of the spectrum primary emphasis is placed upon global competitiveness with lifelong learning viewed as a critical ingredient in economic success. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who highlight global patterns of inequality, uneven development and ecological destruction, who view new forms of social learning as a critical ingredient in a movement towards realising patterns of sustainable and participatory development.

The global market

The market driven nature of current globalisation has fed upon the 'growth of world trade, the emergence of internationalised knowledge systems, the changing patterns of communication, the penetration of technology into the social fabric of communities, production, consumption and the promotion of internationalisation as a cultural value' (Dhanarajan 1997). As Forrester et al state 'there has been a major shift in the spatial organisation of capital ... (and) a qualitative shift in production methods in the advanced industrial countries' (Forrester et al 1995). These shifts are often characterised by neo- and post-fordist principles of diversity, differentiation and fragmentation. As technology, production systems and organisational structures have become more complicated so there has been a parallel increase in the need to augment experiences of education and work (Tuijnman 1992). As Edwards (1997) argues the neo- and post-fordist shifts in the economy are paralleled by similar shifts in education and training.

Key features

Three key features of globalisation and modernisation are reflected in policy towards the education of adults:

1. Concerns for the common good are replaced by a personal responsibility for self-actualisation
2. The idea of collective welfare is replaced by the legitimisation of social inequality, on the grounds of differential capacity to cope with the rationalities of the market and the commodification of social and cultural life.
3. The market is becoming a substitute for the state as a regulator of not only economic, but also social and cultural life. (Finger, et al. 1998)

These themes are of central importance in understanding how the discourse of lifelong learning is constructed, for they raise critical questions about whose needs are met when one moves beyond the rhetoric of equality and participation in lifelong learning.

New technologies

The shifts in economic and industrial competition are partially due to technological developments, for example as Clarke tells us the technological lead gained by the USA and Japan has been at the root of European anxiety

(Clarke 1996). The pace and scale of technological developments, particularly in information and communication technologies (ICT), and the penetration of technologies in many sectors of industry have produced strong concerns about how new technologies will impact on employment patterns and the working environment. The changing employment context is seen to require new working methods, and the key features of the ideal 1990s workforce are flexibility, adaptability and multiple skills. (Forrester, et al. 1995; Edwards 1997; Tuijnman 1992; Keep 1997). The learning requirements of the workforce revolve around the need for continuous training in a wider range of skills which serves to increase the adaptability of the employee to changing production methods' (ibid.).

The centrality of the economy

A number of European studies have argued that economic success depends on having a competitive 'high tech' industry, and that previous under-investment in vocational education and training have undermined European efforts to respond to changing economic conditions. Thus most European countries are now placing a 'heavy emphasis on policies to improve job training' (Tuijnman 1992).

In response to this changing context, the European Union has sought to promote technological competitiveness, and its concerns in relation to the economy and employment dominate its educational policy. For example in 1993 the European Commission published a white paper entitled '*Growth, competitiveness, employment - The challenges and ways forward into the 21st Century*' (Commission of European Communities 1993) in which the challenges of the 21st century were reduced to issues of employment and the economy. The European Union has entered the arena of education policy, and has adopted the lifelong learning rallying cry in response to technological innovation and the perceived crisis of European competitiveness. As Field observes, whilst the white paper pays lip service to the need for personal development, social learning and active citizenship, there was no sign of any concrete proposals in these areas. The significance of lifelong learning was defined in terms of employment and the economy (Field 1997).

This view was strongly challenged by the Council of Education Ministers, who, as Field tells us, attacked its vocational emphasis and instrumental approach, and challenged its linear view of the relationship between learning and economic growth, and its overemphasis on new technologies, thus ignoring:

significant demographic changes, the confrontation of cultures, environmental issues, threats to the ways in which we live together in democracy, and the serious problem of social marginalisation (Official Journal, in Field 1997)

Greater concern for social exclusion was evidenced in the 1995 Commission paper 'Teaching and Learning Towards the Learning Society.' (Commission of European Communities 1995)

Global citizenship

For a broad spectrum of actors in society today, the challenges of the 21st century revolve around a set of social, political and development issues. As Orr states: There are reasons to rethink education that have to do with issues of human survival which will dominate the 21st century (Orr, in Barber 1998).

As Merrifield observes, political lives are changing, sense of community is changing, and private lives are changing, as both the market and government intrude into what were once private spaces. These changes 'demand more than a simple retooling of workers' skills, they involve knowledge, networks, cultural mores and discourses (Merrifield 1997). He then poses a question which is a central concern for many educators today:

What does it mean to be a citizen in this changing world?

For many this is also the central question which should be addressed in the lifelong learning discourse (Ranson 1992; Riddell, et al. 1997). As a counter to the dominant economic model many adult educators argue that there is an urgent need to sustain the social purpose of lifelong learning (Martin and Shaw 1997) in a context wherein globalisation processes are having a profound impact on social, cultural and political lives. This requires a 'radical rethink rather than a simple expansion of our education system' (Riddell, et al. 1997). Whilst different actors emphasise different aspects of how globalisation affects our lives, and the corresponding ways in which education should address these issues, some common themes include democratic values, a need to foster a sense of global responsibility, and the need to facilitate civic participation in today's' complex societies.

Global values

Michael Barber, Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, is a strong advocate of the need for global perspectives in education:

if we're really going to have global perspectives across society, then all of us, Government, teachers, head teachers, and teacher trainers, must take responsibility for promoting a new set of core values for this society...

We need to promote, through the education system and a range of other institutions, the notion that the global economy operates within a moral framework based on democratic values and a respect for global interdependence. (Barber 1998)

In a series of research studies commissioned by the Development Education Association, it was found that in sectors such as higher education, (McKenzie 1997) initial teacher education (Alexander 1996) and youth work, (Bourne and McCollum 1995) global development education was increasingly viewed as an integral component of their work. The Workers' Education Association has initiated a global development education project which 'will focus on education about the impact of global change on the lives of people in Britain and across the world.' (WEA Project Mission Statement).

Cultural diversity

In response to the centrality of globalisation, Hall highlights the need to conceive of effective political action in relation to the global terrain. In his view a fundamental shift in the current context has been the way in which culture has been revolutionised, and has enabled people 'to enter society and influence its processes in many new ways.' (Hall and Jacques 1997) However as Lynch et al argue, the legitimacy of cultural diversity and in particular its relationship to social equity represents one of the major contemporary problems facing societies today, necessitating radical educational reform in order to overcome dysfunctional prejudices which sustain global inequities (Lynch 1995). For example, Lynch states in relation to anti-racist education that it is increasingly set:

within the context of a broader civic, moral, and political education which seeks to extend participation in the democratic process by equipping young people with the range of skills and dispositions needed to become...responsible and informed citizens. [Key stakeholders] have not yet however, begun to set such issues within a context of global rights and responsibilities.

Sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development was placed on national and international agendas through the 1992 UNCED conference on environment and development. Of key significance in the Summit was the 'redefinition of the environmental issues facing the planet as being inextricably bound up with the problems of the wealth - poverty gap, of inequity, of existing global terms of trade (Hickling and Hudson 1994). Furthermore education has been defined as having a central role to play in realising the goals of sustainable development:

Governments should strive to update or prepare strategies aimed at integrating environment and development as a cross-cutting issue into education at all levels. (Agenda 21 1992)

Social learning

From the perspective of sustainable development it is argued that current globalisation and modernisation processes have produced a profound crisis of development and an environment which calls for fundamental change, with social learning as the cornerstone of such change:

Actors at all levels must change fundamentally how they do business, how they consume products, and how they govern their daily lives and the affairs of states. In short, unlike more familiar crises, where doing more of the same but doing it better may be enough, societies must learn their way out of the environmental crisis. (Princen 1994)

The educational thinking and practice which these education and social movements and actors are attempting to promote implicitly address issues of lifelong learning, and yet too often those voices which represent a diverse range of groups in society are not heard or recognised in the dominant discourses of lifelong learning, as Edwards argues:

The increasingly influential discourses of a learning society harness lifelong learning in ways which are certainly prejudicial to some of the equity goals of supporters of alternative visions of society. (Edwards 1997)

VISIONS OF A LEARNING SOCIETY

The learning society is broadly conceptualised as a response to the challenges posed by contemporary conditions, and in particular the rate of change in many spheres of modern life. There is a general consensus that the major economic, technological, social, demographic and cultural shifts create unique challenges which require new forms of learning to equip people with the knowledge and skills to deal with profound change and uncertainty.

The learning society is invoked as a means to cope with change, to cater for diverse learning needs, to produce a highly skilled and flexible work force, to address the limitations of traditional education and to enhance participatory citizenship. In essence then, the learning society has become a 'catch all solution to a wide range of social issues with wide ranging appeal for politicians, educators and industrialists.' (Macrae, et al. 1997). Whilst there is broad agreement as to the key principles underlying moves towards a learning society, such as the need to increase access and participation, to provide continued opportunities for learning, and to recognise and value different forms of learning, when the ideal is translated into practice, the learning society reveals itself to be a highly contested and problematic concept which embraces many different interpretations.

Contesting visions

When debating the structures and organisational forms, or the role of key providers and the specific purposes of lifelong learning within the learning society, we are also asking questions about the 'current and future shape of society' (Coffield 1997a). For example a central tension running through current debates revolves around whether economic imperatives are perceived to take precedence over democratic and social imperatives. Thus whilst the following description of a learning society provided by Coffield identifies a number of salutary and seemingly unproblematic aims, controversy arises in relation to the relative importance attached to factors such as participation, equity, social integration and economic success in the design of policies and programmes of learning.

A learning society would be one in which all citizens acquire a high quality general education, appropriate vocational training and a job (or series of jobs) worthy of a human being while continuing to participate in education and training throughout their lives. A learning society would combine excellence with equity and would equip all its citizens with the knowledge, understanding and skills to ensure national economic prosperity and much more besides. The attraction of the term 'learning society' lies in the implicit promise not only of economic development but of regeneration of our whole public sphere. Citizens of a learning society would, by means of their continuing education and training, be able to engage in critical dialogue and action to improve the quality of life for the whole community and to ensure social integration as well as economic success. (Coffield 1997a)

The balance of the recent literature demonstrates the civic and communitarian aims identified by Coffield have so far been submerged within the dominant discourse of the learning society which foregrounds economic concerns and vocational education.

Current notions of a learning society available from the literature can be represented as follows:

An educated society

An educated society is committed to active citizenship, liberal democracy and equal opportunities. This supports lifelong learning within the social policy frameworks of post-Second World War social democracies. The aim is to provide learning opportunities to educate adults to meet the challenges of change and citizenship.

A learning market

A learning market enables institutions to provide services for individuals as a condition for supporting the competitiveness of the economy. This supports lifelong learning within the economic policy framework. The aim is for a market in learning opportunities to be developed to meet the demands of individuals and employers for the updating of skills and competencies.

Learning networks

Learning networks are where learners adopt a learning approach to life, drawing on a wide range of resources to enable them to support themselves. This supports lifelong learning as a condition of individuals in the contemporary period to which policy needs to respond. Society is a series of overlapping networks e.g. local, national, regional, global. The normative goals of a liberal democratic society - an educated society - and an economically competitive society - a learning market - are overlaid by a conception of participation in learning as an activity in and through which individuals and groups pursue their heterogeneous goals.

In these three strands there is a shift from the focus on the provision of learning opportunities to one on learning. However, each may be inscribed with a range of meanings and interweave with one another in any particular notion of a learning society or lifelong learning. For instance, Duke (1995) invests his notion of a learning society with meanings drawn from conceptions of an educated society and learning networks.

The dominant notion

The dominant notion in recent years has been of a learning society which embeds a learning market, with the market responding to economic issues and individuals rather than social imperatives. This may actually contribute to the fragmentation of 'society' as it was originally conceived. Older adults may be excluded from the possibilities and benefits of lifelong learning (Carnegie Inquiry 1993; Schuller and Bostyn 1996). The change in government and policy imperatives towards combating social exclusion - in which education and training has a crucial if not the crucial role - may alter this in the future, whether for economic, political, social or moral reasons (Ranson 1994). Recent policy (DfEE 1998a) attempts to promote social inclusion through economic inclusion.

Challenges to the learning market

Many commentators challenge the value of the learning market on three main counts.

First, they argue that the learning needs of society are simply too important to be decided by the marketplace, and they also identify ways in which the learning market reproduces patterns of inequality in terms of who can participate in learning (Macrae, et al. 1997; Coffield 1997a; McGivney 1996a).

For example many commentators share Martin and Shaw's concerns that current policy and practice silences the voice of many communities and undermines forms of locally based community and adult education (Martin and Shaw 1997; Riddell, et al. 1997; Benn 1997).

Coffield argues much of the discourse fails to recognise the structural barriers to learning such as class, race, gender and location. Furthermore a wide range of empirical studies clearly illustrate the social divisions which characterise patterns of participation in learning (Macrae, et al. 1997; Keep 1997; McGivney 1996a). Tett observes for example that adults who participate in education tend to be from a limited age range and socio-economic background, i.e.. they tend to be under 35, from skilled or professional backgrounds, and have had positive educational experiences, and non - participants tend to be from older age groups, ethnic minorities, the long term unemployed and semi- and unskilled occupations (Tett 1996).

Second, they argue that the 'logic of individualism fails to foster commitment to lifelong learning' (Riddell, et al. 1997; Elsey 1993; Gorard, et al. 1996). For example they highlight the importance of group loyalties, social networks and forms of social activism in facilitating involvement in lifelong learning.

Third, whilst recognising the importance of work-related learning, they also challenge the concentration on economic and employment concerns, (Coffield 1997a; Belanger 1994; Chisholm 1996; Macrae, et al. 1997) arguing for example that the social demand for learning which results from demographic, social and cultural changes also needs to be addressed. As Chisholm states:

And yet: becoming accustomed to the need to renew and upgrade knowledge and skills seems almost straightforward when compared with coming to terms with the shifting patterns of social and inter-generational relations that accompany contemporary technological and economic change. (Chisholm 1996)

Chisholm identifies such shifts as young people increasingly learning from each other and teaching their elders, and the need for flexibility and openness in mobile and multi-ethnic societies. She argues along with others that what is needed is not simply more accessible forms of learning, but

different forms of learning (Jansen and Van Der Veen 1996; Ranson 1994; Eraut 1997; Belanger 1994).

Possible futures

It may be necessary to develop alternative strategies to those which focus on the nation state and state policies as the cause of problems and capable of providing solutions to them - of providing the structures for an educated society. It is here that the notion of learning networks is significant. If the nation state redraws its boundaries of responsibilities, new gaps are created for action and these provide both possibilities and dangers, for example, new forms of voluntary practices can be engendered (Elsey 1993) and (Rifkin 1995). In this conception, adults participate in a variety of learning networks rather than in an educated society as such. In supporting such networks, as has been the case in other parts of Europe, the state may actually support the social infrastructure in ways which may not be as alienating as may be the case through more formal provision.

The concept of learning networks is closely associated with the concept of civil society, and serves to highlight the social purpose of education. Furthermore it can be argued that the notion of learning networks problematises notions of society in that different forms of sociality and learning networks are developing. Rather than being members of a single society, we are part of 'a series of overlapping and inter-related local, regional, national, international, global societies' (Edwards 1997).

If learning is seen as a function of social relationships rather than an essentially individual activity, then the concept of lifelong learning is extended beyond solely the acquisition by individuals of formal qualifications. Learning then ties in with a set of other relationships within organisations, families, communities and the economic sector (Benn 1997).

A number of research studies have recently highlighted the significant role which learning networks can play in support of lifelong learning (Benn 1997; Elsey 1993; Gorard, et al. 1996; Merrifield 1997). Learning networks which can include family and peers, community groups, voluntary organisations, social movements, and youth organisations connect individuals to the wider community and facilitate learning in many different ways. For example Benn argues that there is a mutually complimentary relationship between social activism and educational participation, and that when individuals participate in

society, they gain entry to local information networks and are therefore more likely to be aware of existing educational opportunities, and also that adult education serves to reinforce and even generate social activism (Benn 1997; McGivney 1990).

REALISING THE VISION

In reviewing the literature on lifelong learning a number of 'big issues' repeatedly come to the surface. They are issues which must be addressed within any strategy intending to promote learning or a learning society. By viewing policies and practices in relation to each of them it is possible to gain some insight into the sort of visions which are being promoted or represented. Each of these issues pre-date contemporary concerns with lifelong learning and the learning society, but each had been re-formed as a result of current debates. We have characterised them as:

1. The individual as learner
2. Participation and equity
3. Learning and working
4. Funding learning
5. Delivering learning

1. The individual as learner

The role of learning

Adults are subject to an explosion of information and knowledge, thereby placing greater emphasis on the process of learning which is ongoing rather than the content of learning, which is likely to go out of date. As individuals take increasing responsibility for their own decisions about lifestyle and identity, life planning and guidance also become increasingly important. Whether this is best addressed by a thrust towards reconstituting formal providers of learning opportunities as businesses with a greater emphasis on marketing is open to debate, although the welfare models available through publicly funded education and training have to date been no more successful in developing inclusive forms of lifelong learning (Kenway, et al. 1993; Tett 1993).

The role of education and training in developing learner autonomy is justified by reference to the uncertain economic, technological and social environment which learners will encounter. The demise of traditional bureaucratic career tracks (Kanter, 1989, in Watts, et al. 1996) and uncertainties around what

people will need to know in ten years time, means that simply loading up the 'front end' of education is not an adequate response. For instance, in the higher education context the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into HE (HEE 1997) anticipates a higher proportion of students studying intermittently, with more shorter programmes (Certificates and Diplomas) and more people returning repeatedly to update skills and knowledge, or to change career direction. Learners will be following increasingly individualised learning pathways, requiring greater flexibility and diversity from institutional providers, particularly in relation to guidance services (HEE 1997).

Personalised learning pathways

The idealised learner within market models of the learning society operates as an autonomous customer, constructing a personalised pathway through modular curricula leading to a tailored qualification, and owing no allegiance to any one institutional provider. Individuals are urged to invest in lifelong learning to 'develop their personal competitiveness' (DfEE 1995). Deliberative life- planning requires more comprehensive individual guidance and counselling, (Kennedy 1997; Dearing 1996) and individualised planning and recording mechanisms such as profiles, portfolios records of achievement (Assiter and Shaw 1993; Slusarchuk 1998), and most recently the Progress File.

From an elite to a mass system

Participation in further education and higher education has expanded rapidly over the last decade, and institutions are now offering a more complex range of opportunities to a larger student body. The student population is itself becoming more diverse in terms of age (more than half of those in higher education/further education are mature adults) in experience, motivation and learning needs. A major preoccupation has been how to manage the transition from an elite system of post compulsory education to a mass system, without a proportional increase in resources. The value currently attached to the notion of learner autonomy as a key characteristic of the lifelong learner can be read as a solution to this problem. McNair (1996a) presents learner autonomy as a normative goal, valued in all political camps. From the political right it is seen as a means of reducing dependence on state and employer; from the left it fits with the notion of individual empowerment, enabling learners to take control over their own lives and to challenge established norms in the distribution of power and privilege.

Individualisation

The centrality of the individual and individual learning to the development of lifelong learning is not without controversy. Chisholm for example suggests that this is part of a shift towards greater individualisation with increased flexibility and responsibility for over individual biographies (Chisholm 1996), whereas Rees et al argue it is part of an ideological offensive to undermine concern for the structural inequalities within society (Rees, et al. 1997). It can be used to mask the incomplete nature of information available and the unpredictability of future trends - choice is a risky rather than a rational business. It is the instability and insecurity of the environment which is given as the reason individuals must engage in planning, so they can impose order and control. But the very nature of the environment means this is never achievable. It ignores the unequal, structured distribution of opportunities for further development, as individuals are given the responsibility, but not the power to affect change and maintain control over their own destinies (Keep 1997). Individualisation is a process which although often constructed as an outcome of neo-liberal economics resulting in the privatisation of public and social life, is also viewed as integral to processes of modernisation. The extent to which it is an inevitable outcome of such processes or a goal achieved through such processes is open to question.

Participation patterns

Many studies still point to traditional opportunity structures and transitions, with settled patterns and trajectories of participation, to explain current trends in society. Local labour markets, social patterns and cultural opportunities all influence forms of participation, and who is participating in what, how and when and where. The patterning of subject choices and success rates and gender differentiated approaches to learning all indicate that individualisation projects a general view on society which only in fact impacts upon certain sections of the population - to a greater or lesser extent - and that practices are patterned by structures other than individualisation.

The context for individual learners would seem to be one of greater individualisation and uncertainty, but this should not be overstated. Keep (1997), for instance, suggests that job tenure is relatively unchanged - although there would also need to be some evaluation of the changing content of jobs. Schuller (1998a) suggests that more flexible school leaving

and retirement ages will be necessary to cope with more individualised, lifelong patterns of social and economic participation. (With this comes also the needs for a Population Participation Rate, rather than the current Age Participation Rate and a social as well as a human capital perspective on what constitutes a learning society, see also Riddell, et al. 1997). Flexibility is promoted as endemic to contemporary conditions, on the one side adaptive, on the other contributing to change (Edwards 1997; Johnston and Lunvall 1991; Nielson 1991).

Guidance

It is through guidance and counselling that individuals construct themselves and their decisions as lifelong learners. As the structures which governed the front-end model of education and training become part of the wider resources for lifelong learning, so decisions about learning opportunities become more individualised. Guidance starts to play a more central role for the individual in negotiating their situations and there is a need for greater diversity in the forms of guidance on offer and the contexts in which they are available (Chisholm 1996; Dent 1998; McNair 1996b). 'Learning Direct' begins to address these concerns.

The risk society

For some there is a tension between individualisation and risk. The risk society (Beck 1992) is one in which forms of economic modernisation result in threats to humanity - through, amongst other things, ecological degradation - just at that point where individualising processes make addressing the global collective concerns more difficult. This provides a set of challenges for organisations and practitioners to address. Jansen and Van der Veen (1996; 1997) suggest that lifelong learning has a greater importance, but a more modest role than is sometimes suggested as the challenges are so great, particularly in the environmental and political spheres. Individualisation and lifelong learning require a greater pragmatism in the claims for what learning can achieve including their contribution to economic competitiveness.

Lifestyle

Individualisation is linked to increased importance being given to the notions of 'identity', 'lifestyle' and 'image' (Field 1996). Here learning becomes part of the lifestyles of individuals, or at least those individuals for whom lifestyles is a meaningful characterisation of their practices - sections of the middle classes, particularly those in the cultural industries, including education. Thus

the adoption of the identity of 'lifelong learner' although universalised in many texts, may be specific to some groups and may take specific meanings for different groups. The culture industries both serve this learning and make it necessary. Aspects of this can be seen in the growth of marketing as a way of appealing to adults to learn (a key strategy for further education in (Kennedy 1997) and the ways in which adults as individual learners starts to open a terrain beyond that of established institutions and their practices. Difficulties arise when such positions are unproblematically extended to the population as a whole (McRobbie 1994).

The stress on individualisation tends to displace the consideration of lifelong learning as differentiated by other social categories - such as class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, location, disability and family circumstances (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1995). Individualisation is embedded in social, economic and political practices, and yet the policy debate on lifelong learning serves to decontextualise individuals - such as their families, locations and networks. Individuals may respond to changing circumstances as members of groups, and collectively. Addressing individuals in context may be crucial to lifelong learning - as some initiatives in family literacy and the possibilities for inter-generational learning indicate.

The assumptions about the individual learner which are embedded in policies - in relation to their age, concerns and abilities fundamentally shape whose lifelong learning is being supported and promoted and what type of learning society is being developed. As family patterns and roles alter (if they do) in response to and as a basis for policy, so the possibilities for and conditions of lifelong learning will themselves alter.

Curriculum issues

The structuring of the curriculum, and the availability of funding are central to supporting individual learners - and indeed there is the need for the modelling of one in relation to the other in more sophisticated ways than has been attempted to date - bringing together those with expertise in economics, management and the curriculum. In examining the literature relating to the individual learner, there is a fundamental tension between responding to individual needs and the agendas of other stakeholders - government, employers, trade unions, funding bodies, institutions, professional bodies. Policies directed towards individual learners are traversed therefore by a

range of interests which mean that it is not a 'pure' market response to individual demand which shapes the curriculum and who has access to it.

Structure and content

Policies in relation to the curriculum and their support for individual learners can be divided into two areas: structuring the curriculum and the content of the curriculum. On the former, there have been attempts to develop more flexible approaches which enable individuals to learn at their own pace and move in and out of learning as appropriate. There have been the development of accreditation of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and modularisation. There has been the attempt to capture the various learning experiences within Records of Achievement. Within these changes has been an eliding of the liberal student-centred and market approaches, each of which emphasises the individual but in different ways.

There has also been little investigation of what people learn as opposed to what is in the curriculum (Bloomer 1997). There has also been the growth of guidance and counselling as a central process in structuring the learning process in more individuated times - although the models of guidance in practice mostly continue to seek to match individuals to available opportunities. The commercial market has expanded and produces an increasingly diverse range of goods from which people learn. CD-ROMs, the Internet and the proposed National Grid for Learning all provide possibilities for learning, but are dependent upon prior access and accessibility.

The brokerage function proposed for the University for Industry offers an innovative approach to accessing learning products and services and making them available in the home, in the workplace and at learning centres across the country (University for Industry 1998).

The curriculum and core skills

In terms of the content of the curriculum, the most notable development in support of individualisation has been the focus on learner autonomy, learning to learn and the development of 'core skills' of one sort or another (Harrison 1996; McNair 1996; HEE 1997). These developments are held to provide the basis for individuals to negotiate the uncertainty of change - as individuals, although co-operating with others in teams in the workplace. Learning to learn and learning to labour become aligned in these developments. Thus, for instance, the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR 1995) talks of the

need to develop 'self reliance skills' which encompass career management and effective learning. The focus on the workforce alone, the projection onto all the workforce of trends which might only impact on certain elements of it and the emphasis on individual adaptation all suggest a model of the curriculum aimed at producing individual adaptation to labour market change - subject to the risk society (Beck 1992) rather than a part of the shaping of it. Autonomy is highly circumscribed with an explicit agenda of individual identity formation.

2. Participation and equity

Studies of participation

Research into factors affecting participation reveal a complex picture. Restricting her study to participation and non-participation in formal education and training McGivney (1990) focused on factors such as age, motivation, the cultural capital of individuals, and dispositional, situational, institutional barriers to access. Sargant (1996) drawing on earlier studies (Sargant 1991; 1993) examined participation in formal and informal learning. Despite these differences similar findings emerged: that those with minimum initial education, manual workers, adults from lower socio-economic groups and older people were consistently under-represented in the take-up of learning opportunities. Valuable though these studies are they do not reveal the extent to which factors may be mutually reinforcing, nor do they offer any evidence as to whether there are circles of causality. We do know that there are variations of take up relating to gender and ethnicity although here too there are variations within groups and by regions. The message is that i) aggregated figures can mislead and there is a need to unpack many figures purporting to depict the condition of adult learning and ii) it is essential for initiatives to be responsive to local variations.

Tight comments that the picture presented in national surveys, where the majority of respondents claim not to have studied at all since leaving school stands in stark contradiction to the studies of self-directed learning carried out in the seventies and eighties which found that most people regularly engaged in non-formal learning, concluding that the difference is probably accounted for by the different research methodologies adopted (Tight 1997). Similarly in a recent National Adult Learning Survey, the researchers concluded that the apparent increase in participation which they identified (74 per cent who engaged in learning in the three years prior to 1997 compared to 24 per cent reported in the NIACE survey in 1994) was 'because NALS succeeded in tapping a broader range of learning experiences than did previous surveys' As they commented;

While formal episodes of learning such as degree courses, attendance at training colleges, formal training courses organised by the employer at work and so on were immediately identified as 'learning activities, respondents were less clear about including informal, unstructured types of learning.... although the activity was included under the survey definition of 'learning', they themselves did not define it as such. This was particularly true of some learning at work that was seen as 'just part of the job'.... It was also true of particular types of non-vocational learning because again the purpose of the activity was not really seen as learning, rather the activity was done just for fun. (Beinart and Smith 1998)

This raises the fundamental question of what constitutes learning and whether it can be clearly differentiated from such things as experience and leisure (Coffield 1997b; Edwards and Usher 1997b).

Participation, opportunity and selection

Education and training can itself be seen as a form of selection based upon individual ability, standards and exclusion. It can also be constructed as increasing and widening participation. In the UK, comparisons with other countries in staying-on rates, levels of qualification, participation rates in technical, managerial and higher education and training are all drawn upon to support the case for greater participation. For those concerned at social exclusion, there is the need for increased and wider participation to support greater equity and social mobility (Tight 1993). Here the focus tends to be on the 'disadvantage' of those adults who did not 'benefit' from initial education and training in terms of qualifications, or the 'oppression' inscribed in social and economic exclusion and the need to transform the nature of education and training. Flexibility and the recognition of achievement provide the basis for practices aimed at promoting participation and inclusion.

Participation and non-participation

In general, there are three sets of inter-related themes which frame debates around participation and non-participation. First, there are those which focus on providers of learning opportunities, on the need to transform the provision of learning opportunities to enable more adults to participate. Time-tabling, crèche facilities, physical accessibility, flexible delivery systems are encouraged to enable this to happen. Second, there is literature which

focuses on the system of provision as a whole. This concentrates on the need for coherent frameworks of access and progression, not simply into and between institutions, but also with increased student and labour market mobility, across national boundaries. The focus shifts to credit frameworks, funding adults to learn and the need for a diverse range of learning opportunities (HEQC 1994). Third, there is the literature which discusses participation as an aspect of the exercise of culture and power. This addresses issues of participation not simply in terms of how learning is accessed, but also the content of that learning and its significance in the wider socio-economic and political context. It is institutional and systemic issues which have tended to dominate the debates about participation and non-participation and govern changes in the provision of learning opportunities. These are framed largely within an instrumental and technical form of rationality. Institutional change itself has been to enable access and to support systemic change.

Participation and institutional change

Where there is a focus on institutional change, providers of learning opportunities are critiqued for not adequately responding to adult learners and being unresponsiveness to the full range of adult learners (FEDA 1996). They do not provide sufficient information and guidance on what they offer and in support of learning to maximise retention and value for money (McGivney 1996b). Nor do they provide opportunities in settings or ways in which are appropriate to different adult groups. Staff attitudes do not help, as in many institutions staff feel 'intimidated' by working with adults, or with certain groups of adults. Provision needs to become more flexible and relevant and able to respond to the full range of adult requirements as a condition for increasing and widening participation. It is suggested that what is required is a combination of institutional change, curriculum change, changes in teaching and learning approaches and enhanced staff development. Policies, managerial structures and funding formulae are deployed to support the necessary changes, not always with the intended consequences (Ainley and Bailey 1997). Many initiatives highlight the parts of the adult population - target groups - that formal providers of learning opportunities were meant and needed to serve and how this was not and yet could be achieved by institutions.

Participation and employers

Similar efforts were placed into encouraging and exhorting employers, and particularly private sector employers, to provide more training for their employees and have a greater involvement in the provision of learning opportunities generally. Initiatives, such as the Investors in People programme, encourage employers to take a systematic approach to the development of their employees. Employers have been brought in to play a more central role in the formal sector, sitting on the governing bodies of institutions, participating in the Lead Bodies for setting national standards of occupational competence, providing the backbone for Training and Enterprise Councils/Local Enterprise Companies. Large employers have developed Employee Development Schemes which include the provision of guidance and counselling (Payne 1996; Harrison 1997; Carroll 1996).

Participation and systemic change

There are two broad strands in approaches to increasing and widening systemic participation. First, there are policies based in welfare state social frameworks. Second, there are approaches which promote a market in learning opportunities and particularly in qualifications. While this distinction is never pure in specific policies, it is useful in highlighting different approaches to systemic change. Critics of the market-led approach (Tett 1993) argue that concern for consumer choice marginalises concerns for equity and accessibility. Targeting of non-participant groups is suggested as a necessary alternative. However, research elsewhere suggests that educational interventions do not impact significantly on inequality (Rinne and Kivinen 1993). Even where opportunities have been targeted their 'failure' to fundamentally alter forms of cultural differentiation and 'success' in promoting individual mobility raises questions about it as an approach to addressing questions of equity. The binaries of welfare state and market, equity and inequity, in which the former are put forward as the positive alternative to the latter offers a too simplistic, if powerful, perspective on the provision of learning opportunities for adults.

Participation, culture and power

This leads into the third theme of culture and power. Here questions of participation and non-participation are argued to be restricted to access to provision, while the substantive content of the curriculum is left largely unchallenged, even as the delivery mechanisms become ever more diverse.

The notion of lifelong learning and access may well increase and widen participation, but this will be within certain cultural boundaries, signifying specific exercises of power. Indeed, part of that power is precisely in constructing questions of participation and non-participation as non-cultural - that participation can be extended through the technical alteration to the delivery of the curriculum alone (Alexander 1994).

The cultural perspective on participation and non-participation is overtly political in the sense it constructs education and training as continually subject to struggle and negotiation. Adults' participation or non-participation is part of the wider cultural struggles and negotiations in which, for instance, many working class people see educational institutions as 'not for people like them' (McGivney 1990). Here it is not just the way in which provision is organised which is at stake, but the content of learning and pedagogy, a point which has been to the fore in feminist and anti-racist critiques of education and training (Parsons 1993; Joseph, et al. 1990). In this, the institutional arrangements of learning opportunities are themselves held to be inscribed with a certain culture which positions certain groups unequally within and outside the cultures and canons of education and training. It is therefore the values, attitudes and practices inscribed in the provision of learning opportunities in relation to the values, attitudes and practices of the diverse groups within the social formation which are held to create the conditions for participation and non-participation.

These concerns are illuminated by an in-depth study of 16 year olds' participation in learning in South West London, an area of severe socio-economic deprivation. Macrae et al show that young people within this grouping occupy different positions in relation to the Learning Society (Macrae, et al. 1997) and argue that divisive routes and horizons for action established in compulsory education are reinforced in the education market and serve to privilege individuals who possess the cultural and material capital to access routes to better education and employment, thus:

Individualistic policies disguise and displace structural concerns, such as short termism in investment, lack of available jobs and structured inequity. (Macrae, et al. 1997)

Meanings of 'participation'

The factors which affect the participation of adults in learning are many and complex (McGivney 1990). The very notion of 'learning' is problematic, as learning for some is constructed as training and/or leisure by others. Equally, the notion of participation is contested. Does it solely involve people entering formal institutions of education and training? If not, then how do we assess the many learning projects individuals engage in? What makes a person's activity specifically a 'learning project'? Do we use enrolments on courses for statistical purposes? Or course completion's? At what age do we start to term someone an 'adult'? The basis for the collection of statistics needs to be understood before it is possible to evaluate their significance. Even then, the explanations of differential rates of participation by different groups vary. Motivation, the cultural capital of individuals, the counter-culture of groups, physical and situational barriers to access are all commonly found in the discussion of participation and non-participation. Yet even as apparently clear messages emerge from participation studies, their significance has to be evaluated, investing a particular meaning in the information presented.

Participation and social class

The link between social class and participation is marked in most studies. For instance, Sargant (1991) found that in the United Kingdom 'the proportion of people studying now/recently are 42 per cent of ABs (upper and upper-middle classes), 37 per cent of C1s (lower-middle class), 29 per cent of C2s (skilled working class) and 17 per cent of DEs (unskilled working class)'. A later survey found the respective levels of participation to be 53 per cent, 52 per cent, 33 per cent and 26 per cent (Tuckett and Sargant 1996). Thus, while overall levels of participation increased, these were still differentiated by class factors. If we focus on this factor, as well as current participation, class distinctions are also inscribed in the highest qualification obtained by individuals. Thus, in Britain in 1990-1, 35 per cent of the population were estimated to have no qualifications. For people from professional families the rate was 7 per cent. For those from unskilled manual families the percentage was 60 per cent (Central Statistical Office 1993). As economic and social deprivation are the main characteristic of non-participants, there is a question as to the extent to which learning opportunities can play a role in addressing this as an issue. This raises the question of whether resources should be pulled out of education and training to address more central issues of

deprivation, such as poverty and poor housing, thereby providing a firmer base for lifelong learning in the future.

Interpreting non-participation

To identify non-participants on the basis of characteristics provides the focus for the issue or issues to be addressed in seeking to increase or widen participation. In this sense, the description of a characteristic becomes a causal explanation. Yet what is cause and which effect is open to question. For instance, can limited initial educational experience be attributed to socio-economic background, or vice versa, or is there an inter-relatedness of factors which result in adult non-participation? If lack of initial education is a primary characteristic of non-participants, it may well be that resources should be placed into initial rather than adult learning to enable future generations to become lifelong learners. If this was the case, it is likely that current cohorts of adults would have to fund a greater amount of their learning themselves. In itself, this would have an impact on participation as funding learning is currently another barrier to access. However, a survey of adults (Tuckett 1994) found the majority felt the individual and employer rather than the taxpayer should bear most of the funding. Only 16 per cent said cost was an inhibition to studying. This suggests that although characteristics of non-participants can be identified, focusing on single factors as 'target groups' may not in themselves overcome barriers to participation. Any notion of some simple technical rational 'fix' to enable participation by all groups based on identifying the characteristics of those groups seems misplaced.

Participation, gender and ethnicity

As well as social class and age related characteristics, studies demonstrate that those adults without a qualification vary according to gender and ethnic origin (Central Statistical Office 1993). If adults' participation in learning is restricted, it is unclear whether this is due to the issues related to gender, ethnic origin, or lack of qualifications or a complex combination of a range of such factors which embraces all of the above and more. The picture is complicated further by statistics which illustrate that although a greater percentage of women overall lacked qualifications, in the period 1984-92 they have increased their participation in job-related training as a whole and in comparison with men (Employment Department Group 1993). However, it is important also to note that it is women with higher qualifications who tend to have most of such training suggesting important differentials among women.

There are differences inscribed within genders as well as between them. Profiles of participation and non-participation may change due to factors other than the characteristics of learners (Drew and Mahon 1995); in this case possibly due to the increasing participation of women in the labour market. These structural changes have meant that although part-time employment has increased at the expense of full-time employment, just over half the number of part-time employees were receiving training as full-time employees and fewer opportunities to train were provided. Women with higher qualifications are more likely to be in full-time employment and therefore have training opportunities available to them. However, there remain doubts over the perceived benefits of different forms of participation. For instance, adult employees satisfaction with training shows only 29 per cent of women were satisfied almost all or a lot of the time, while for men the proportion was 38 per cent .

The need to target men?

The focus on women's participation has led some to argue that the vigorous targeting of unemployed men has become an important priority in the provision of learning opportunities (Neville 1994). This is particularly true for young unemployed males with few or no qualifications who would traditionally have made the transition into industrial work for which demand has decreased. We are in complex territory and therefore the significance of 'return to learn' and 'return to work' programmes for women also needs to be assessed. If the outcome is largely to enable women to participate in the low paid, low skills sector of the labour market, how does this sit with the equity intentions of many of those working with that group? Providing opportunities for women to participate may not contribute to equity goals in any straight-forward sense. Thus, the changes in the provision of learning opportunities to enable increased and wider participation need to be situated in the wider changes in the economy and social formation to evaluate their significance.

3. Learning and working

The relationship between education, training and the performance of the economy is central to the literature on lifelong learning. There are three principle strands: those associated with changes at the macro level linked with the globalisation of capital investment; changes in the type and organisation of work; and changes in the skills required for employment. Central to the economic rationale is the need for flexibility, both in the use and development of skills, but also in their deployment in the workplace. There is often an implicit assumption in such debates that increasing flexibility is associated with up-skilling and multi-skilling, rather than down-skilling - or, as Aronowitz and DiFazio (1994) suggest, with a displacement of skill by knowledge. The numerous attempts to characterise the impact of economic change on the economy (e.g. Hutton 1995; Reich 1993) all suggest a highly differentiated labour market. This suggests that a picture is produced of economic change which is only applicable to certain sections of the labour force and population and with little detailed analysis of the forms of labour and skills deployed in workplaces.. There can be a differential impact on skills formation of workplace and employment change both within organisations and between them.

Differential access

Recent studies argue that the limited opportunities available for vocational education and training actually serve to marginalise the majority of the work force who have either limited or no access. For example Edwards argues that in the future 25% of the work force will have job security and training, whilst the other 75% will suffer from job insecurity and will have limited training opportunities (Edwards, et al. 1993). Thus there will be a core of highly skilled educated workers whilst the majority of the work force is consigned to the 'periphery' of low skill, low pay, low security work with training which can actually serve to 'inhibit job flexibility and inhibit possibilities of progression' (Forrester, et al. 1995).

The differential patterns of participation in learning is clearly illustrated in Beinart's study carried out in 1997. Those least likely to participate in vocational training are unskilled manual workers, older workers and women. Significantly, those adults who stay at home to look after a family are only half as likely as even the registered unemployed to have taken part in some

vocational training during the previous three years (Calder and McCollum 1998).

Technology and work

In addition to the requirement for flexibility to enhance competitiveness, there is also the impact of new technologies on workplaces - both the types of work available and the ways of working. Debates about fordist, neo-fordist and post-fordist forms of work organisation, lean production and mass customisation have ultimately rested on the implications of new technology and the requirements of firms and workers to be more flexible to respond to the diverse and changing requirements of the consumer market. For some, this is a positive move, as the compartmentalised labour of the production line, in which workers repeatedly undertake a specified task, gives way to team work with workers undertaking a variety of tasks and roles. The post-industrial artisan replaces the alienated industrial worker giving greater job satisfaction to individuals. However, Aronowitz and DiFazio (1994) argue that Taylorist management approaches have stripped computerisation of many of its radical possibilities sustaining neo-Fordist practices, a point illustrated in du Gay's (1996) study of retailing.

Core and periphery workforce

Changes in the economy are resulting in trends towards increased differentiation between a core of relatively securely employed workers and a periphery of part-time and temporarily employed and unemployed people. It is suggested that sections of the latter are effectively divorced from the economic and social benefits of the mainstream in the social formation. Economic development therefore requires and produces a marginalised section of the population in structural unemployment and poverty. Aspects of these problems are being addressed through the government's New Deal programme and reform agenda for the welfare state. However, there is also evidence that many choose to work part-time. The gendered nature of the choices and the consequences of them is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of part-time workers are women. Those with the most skills and qualifications are likely to witness an expansion of opportunity, while those with the fewest a contraction of employment. However, it is also the case that those in low skilled employment at the periphery have become a less numerically significant part of the labour force (Glyn 1996). Core workers can expect opportunities to become multi-skilled, increasing their skills both vertically within the sector and horizontally as they learn to do jobs previously

the responsibility of others. They can expect also to develop core skills, such as problem-solving and interpersonal skills facilitating working in a team. By contrast, peripheral workers will be engaged in low skilled or narrowly skilled jobs requiring little training or retraining. Core workers could enjoy substantial autonomy in their work, whereas Taylorist principles could be applied to peripheral workers. Indeed, the control over peripheral workers could increase. This has significance for issues of equity.

Gender, work and learning

Flexibility can be said to offer opportunities to many who would not otherwise have the opportunity to work and learn, particularly women. However, the continued marginalisation of women within the labour force seems to be the dominant trend despite increased levels of participation. Between 1978 and 1990, male full time employment in the United Kingdom dropped by 1,076,000, while that for women rose by 528,000. In the same period, male part time employment rose by 280,000 and that for women by 959,000 (Unemployment Unit and Youthaid 1991). Women are estimated to account for 97 per cent of labour force growth between 1990 and 2001. However, only 11 per cent of part-time workers would prefer a full-time job. There are also sharp differences in the economic activity rates for women according to educational levels. For example, in 1991, the average activity rate for women, aged 25-49 and who had completed higher education or equivalent training, was around 80 per cent or more, much the same as for men. By contrast, for women who had only basic education or less, the activity rate was less than 60 per cent in nine European Union member states. As the majority of part time workers are women, the process of restructuring may result in a predominantly male core becoming multi-skilled and more autonomous while female workers become ever more tightly controlled as they enter the workforce. Both of these points are open to empirical test and provide important benchmarks when evaluating opportunities for lifelong learning and its role in relation to equity and exclusion.

Education and training as a solution

Education and training are frequently invoked as the key to problems of economic performance and competitiveness (Forrester, et al. 1995). Yet there is little empirical evidence for the efficacy of education and training as a cure for economic ills. For instance, the underlying assumption behind much of the funding for education and training is that there is a skills shortage. Yet at the

time of writing, the latest Confederation of British Industry survey was reporting that the number of firms expecting to be hit by skills shortages had dropped 'significantly, from 17 per cent last October to 14 per cent in January' (TES 1998). Some labour market economists have for a number of years been proposing that the problem may well be a skills mismatch rather than a skills shortage (Haughton 1993). That is, that there may be sufficient numbers of workers with 'shortage' skills being produced, but they move into jobs which do not use those skills.

The reasons for this may lie beyond the spheres of education and training. There is evidence that some are not prepared to accept the terms and conditions under which they would have to work when using their training and skills (see for example the loss of trained teachers, nurses, and doctors from their professions after completion of training). Others, such as older workers appear to be discriminated against by employers - Tysome reports for example that although mature students get better degrees than younger peers, they are more likely to be jobless after graduation (Tysome 1998). Similarly the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) draw attention to the study by the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University which notes that 'compared with graduates from traditional backgrounds, those from manual backgrounds were more likely to be employed in clerical and secretarial positions and in jobs which did not specify a degree as a requirement' (Hogarth 1997).

The questions here which need further attention are: How valid are the informing assumptions behind the current policies: does the skills shortage actually exist and in what form? Are education and training the most effective interventions for tackling these social and economic problems?

In a paper published by the Centre for Economic Performance, Robinson argued that 'A further problem is that the structure of the British labour market is biased towards low-paid jobs with low educational content. Despite an increase in demand for skills, around two-thirds of employment in Britain is concentrated among the six lower occupational groups. Only 13 per cent of these jobs require reading skills of Grade C GCSE and above, and only 3 per cent need numeracy skills at GCSE Grade D and above'. He also argued that better qualified students take jobs which would have gone to the less qualified, leading to frustration and boredom for the former and reinforcing the sense of the pointlessness of education to the latter (Elliot 1997).

Whilst the link between the economy and education is sometimes overstated and simplistic, nevertheless, this perception has largely dominated the discourse, direction and development of United Kingdom vocational education in the 1990s. One effect has been described by Esland:

The displacement of responsibility for economic failure and decline from the political and economic arenas to the educational and training institutions... has had the effect of distorting public policy debate about the relationship between economic change, education and employment... It has also provided legitimization of the imposition of a market forces model on the education provided by schools and colleges. (Forrester, et al. 1995)

Unemployment and training

The condition of unemployment is not homogeneous. Unemployed managers are in a different position to unemployed shop workers, the older unemployed face greater hurdles to employment than youth. The unemployed are subject to the diverse and sometimes discriminatory selection practices of employers. Such differences are important. They can be challenged or reinforced by the prevailing conditions and the opportunities made available. Systemic differences in the areas of education and employment are largely reproduced among the unemployed. The literature on the United Kingdom's 'failure' to train, the significance of that 'failure', the form that training should take and the consequences of more training is immense. Training has become a vogue response to unemployment. For some, this is a basis for developing the skills and qualifications to enter the labour market more successfully. For others, it is a form of 'warehousing' in conditions where there is greater demand for jobs than supply (or demand rather than supply of labour). Since their early development in the 1980's the various schemes for the unemployed have been much criticised for their failure to provide appropriate levels of education and training, the lack of employment opportunities available for those at the end of their training and for masking the actual levels of unemployment (Benn and Fairley 1986; Cockburn 1987).

Training and employability

Over time, there has been a shift in priorities from providing training opportunities towards 'employability' measures. The latter assume that jobs are available and that unemployed people have the necessary competencies to do the jobs. The problem is the matching of particular people to particular

jobs. Employability measures help people through job search activities to look for jobs. They are also significantly shorter and cheaper to run than more extensive training programmes. Seemingly paradoxically in the early 1990's, as unemployment increased and job prospects decreased, more funding was placed in these programmes.

Value for money?

The outcomes of training for the unemployed has generated some scepticism that the tax payer has been getting 'value for money' or the individual significant benefit from the training provided, given they were significantly failing to achieve their stated goals of up-skilling and employment. Within overall outcomes have been significant differentials based on gender, ethnicity, disability, etc. (Unemployment Unit and Youthaid 1992a; Unemployment and Youthaid 1992c). This partly signifies the changing structure of employment opportunities vis a vis gendered subject choices (Unemployment Unit and Youthaid 1992d). Overall the outcomes of schemes for young people have been more favourable than those for adults over 25 and many adults over 50, mostly men, have disappeared from the formal labour market. Employability measures have proved more successful than training schemes and less expensive, but they have also tended to attract a lot of the managerial and professional people. In other words, it is the more highly qualified who are making use of this facility and it is those who are most likely to find employment and in the process there is some evidence of credential inflation (Grieve Smith 1993). The segmentation of the labour market has tended to be reflected therefore in the programmes for unemployed people (Unemployment and Youthaid 1992b). It is argued that there is a need to move away from the focus on individuals and their competencies towards structural issues surrounding the organisation of work and paid employment (Gorz 1989; Lipietz 1992) to fully address issues of unemployment.

The workplace learner

As a corollary to the autonomous and self reliant learner, employment practices dictate a shift towards the 'flexible worker' managing a 'portfolio lifestyle' and operating within a 'new covenant' defining employer/employee relations (Waterman, et al. 1996). Such developments have been supported by government policy, by TECs and LECs, and by national initiatives such as liP. Changes in the organisation of work and production demand an ever increasing mobilisation of the cognitive and affective resources of workers

and work-seekers, promoting an enterprise of the self as well as the workplace (du Gay 1996).

In Employee Development Programmes for example, workers are encouraged to engage in learning and development which goes beyond work-related training, increasing their own employability at the same time as they contribute to the 'common good' of the organisation (Corney 1995; Forrester, et al. 1995; Metcalfe 1992a; Payne 1996). It is a strategy for human resource management which views workers as an investment rather than a cost. The development of a learning culture then becomes part of a business strategy leading to greater productivity and profitability.

The learning organisation

Much has been written on learning organisations, mostly on how organisations ought to function and less on how they actually do. It is suggested that the capacity for organisations to reflect on and learn from their practices in order to be more flexible, efficient and/or profitable and/or effective has become crucial. To enable organisations to change, the work force has to have networks of communication within which to channel information and views, the opportunities to learn associated with facilitating flexibility and change, and ways of participating in decisions about these processes. This has been particularly marked in those organisations involved in employee development schemes, action learning sets, quality circles and the like (Metcalfe 1992a; Metcalfe 1992b). Flexible organisations may not be necessarily learning organisations, but to be a learning organisation flexibility is required from structures, managers and employees.

Characteristics of a learning organisation

Burgoyne (1992) identifies a number of characteristics for a learning organisation. These can be found to varying degrees within individual workplaces and may operate differentially within the gendered division of labour within organisations - with part time workers, mostly women being excluded from much training (Butler 1996; McGivney 1994). Learning organisations require: a learning approach to strategy; participative policy-making; open information systems; formative accounting and control; mutual adjustment between departments; reward flexibility; adaptable structures; boundary workers as environment scanners; inter-organisational learning; a learning culture and climate; and self-development opportunities for all.

It is not simply the provision of learning opportunities that distinguishes learning organisations from other types of workplace, but also the form and content that provision takes. Solving a problem, introducing a new product, scrapping an old one, reaching a different market have been constructed as requiring participants to see the future in a new way. Whether the organisation is a company, an educational institution, or a training provider, success in this rapidly changing environment is held to involve continuous learning and changes of behaviour. Organisations change only if the people within them change. Increasingly, learning is focused around how it helps the organisation to achieve its goals. What this means varies. Some organisations perceive it narrowly in terms of learning necessary new technical skills. Others take a broader view, that enhancing individual potential and performance and stimulating stronger identification within the workplace will improve the effectiveness of workers (Forrester, et al. 1995).

Industrial relations

Contrasting positions on the importance and significance of learning in the workplace are also found over the links between learning, skills and pay. They can be part of an explicitly anti-trade union stance, or in partnership with trade unions. In a survey of four industrial sector organisations and seven enterprises, Winterton and Winterton (1994) found that 'management in all the enterprises expressed a wish to involve employees closely in the arrangements for training, but the extent to which this entailed the union differed'. The question here is how far lifelong learning strategies are subsumed within conflict or partnership models of industrial relations. Important attempts at restructuring the relationships between skills, jobs and pay are therefore at work and the development of lifelong learning within employment needs to be explored in this context. Mostly, these are articulated from an employer perspective (Cooper 1997), with ideas about the new deal or covenant (Waterman, et al. 1996) between worker and employer to the fore. Here lifelong learning becomes part of an employment strategy aimed at securing flexibility among the work force and, in certain cases, preparing employees for future unemployment. The legitimate role of Trade Unions, as organisations themselves and in industrial relations in supporting lifelong learning is an under-developed area of research. A recent National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling and Trade Union Congress briefing usefully draws attention to the role of unions as advocates and deliverers of guidance (NICEC/TUC 1997).

Creating a learning culture

In her survey of employers providing non-work related employee development schemes, Metcalfe (1992a) found a number of factors resulted in attempts to create a learning culture within the organisation: expectations about future business developments and change; increasing emphasis on the quality of service and product; the desire to reduce any dependence on external labour markets; the desire to improve staff morale and motivation; and the desire to improve industrial relations. Even though the learning opportunities provided in such schemes are not necessarily related to the jobs of individuals or even the employment area of the workplace, the expectation is nonetheless one of increased organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

Who benefits?

There is ambiguity as to who benefits from such developments (Payne 1996). In some workplaces, notions of 'employee involvement', 'job enrichment' and 'empowerment' have become powerful forces in governing the approaches to training and human resource development as a dimension of developing a learning organisation (Yates 1994). However, the substantive changes taking place in workplaces suggest a far more ambiguous and contradictory set of processes and interests. Townley (1994) argues that the practices of human resource management, including appraisal and development, are part of a range of practices aimed at making the employees' behaviour predictable and manageable. Harrison (1997) indicates their role in devolving some of the responsibility for work related training and development from managers to employees, encouraging the latter to make their own learning choices and set aside their own time to pursue them. The nature of the choice offered to employees is questionable, for whilst they are given responsibility for anticipating their own development needs, they are given no real information about changes in the organisational structure or future trading patterns of their employer. Devos (1996) takes this further, arguing that systematic discrimination towards women in the workplace is masked by the current rhetoric of 'empowerment through learning.'

The role of employers

Although employers are positioned at the front of a drive towards wider skills development the CIHE point out that not all employers know what skills individual employees currently possess and suggest that skills audits would provide a valuable starting point for assessment of prior experiential learning

(APEL) and the for the further development of employee capabilities (CIHE 1997). Similarly, consideration needs to be given to the extent to which United Kingdom views about how 'skills' should be defined - deriving as it does from the 'scientific management' tradition - inhibit the growth and development of the United Kingdom's human capital. A cultural shift, towards the wider craft-based view of skills found in Germany for example, could result in a rather different picture of skill needs (Clarke 1996).

New role for Unions within companies

There is evidence of a growing perception that unions could play a key role in facilitating the growth of a training 'culture'. In a report (Caulkin 1997) for the Employment Policy Institute, Prof. William Brown of Cambridge drew attention to the current situation of unrepresented labour, backward employment practices and heavy reliance on performance related pay. At the same time, the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) has called for an enquiry into the state of employee relations. Unions are seen as 'supplying advice on work issues and chivvying managements' into providing better training, as well as providing their traditional 'sword of justice' (Caulkin 1997).

Despite all the efforts to widen and increase participation over the last ten years, it remains the case that it is those from higher socio-economic classes who have benefited most. Lifelong learning remains as a challenge to organisations and perhaps that is indeed its role - a constant reflexive challenge rather than a policy solution. Incentives for developing strategies for lifelong learning by organisations and providing an infrastructure may be as much as national government can achieve with more local solutions to be found within that framework. Lifelong learning may therefore need to become the problematic rather than the solution to economic competitiveness and social exclusion.

Tensions and inconsistencies

At present there would appear to be tensions and inconsistencies in supporting lifelong learning as a response to individual need, employment needs, employer needs, social needs, funding steers and institutional responses to them. As with the formal sector, the differences among employers are great. The funding of learners and learning is differentiated by size of employer, nature of employer, structure of the workforce and market position (Osborne, et al. 1996; McGivney 1994; Calder and McCollum 1998).

More strategically, the emphasis on the individual in policy is in tension with the need to create local and national 'pools of skills'. The notion that the skills necessary to support the economy and society can be developed from individual choices or led by employers (rather than employment) is argued to be flawed by previous and current skills mismatches and shortages (Haughton 1993).

4. Funding learning

Outputs funding model

The development of a market or quasi-market approach and the use of learning credits is closely related to the shift from an input model of funding (teaching time, training facilities and so on) to an outputs (or outcomes) system in which the providers are paid according to the supply of outputs (e.g. appropriately trained workers, qualifications, and so on) specified by the purchaser (e.g. the government, the funding council, the TEC, LEC, the employer). In addition, the 1992 Further and Higher Education Acts, re-defined what learning can be supported by public funds. Learning that led to assessment and certification attracted state funds whereas non-certificated learning was defined as leisure and must be funded by participants. Consequently many courses previously offered as non-vocational and non-certificated have become certificated in order to attract funding, i.e. a number of courses have been re-positioned and re-branded as a result of a change in the policy framework. This is but one illustration of how difficult it is to categorise courses and to contain them within policy boundaries. But while some courses have been able to re-brand others have not and the increase in fees for non-certificated courses has led to a large fall in the numbers of older adult learners (NIACE/ MORI 1994).

Within this policy framework funding organisations have placed more emphasis on outcome related funding (ORF). For example, some Training and Enterprise Councils have made training contracts which are 100% outcome related funded - training providers receive no fees until specified vocational qualifications are achieved - whereas with the Further Education Funding Council only a proportion of funding is outcome related with the remainder based on a headcount of learners and the nature of the programme. While both approaches have their advocates the trick is to get the funding balance of the different components right (Stanton 1996). Employers similarly are negotiating employee training and assessment contracts with public providers on the same basis (Calder and Newton 1995).

The funding of learning and learners

There has been a shift of emphasis from funding providers and provision to funding learners and learning. However, there is a noticeable lack of a literature on the economics of lifelong learning. Indeed, it is much more a

question of assumptions than evidence, partly at least due to the complexity of the terrain and the fact that decisions in and about learning are not purely economic decisions. There is often the assumption that finance is a prime reason for non-participation, yet Tuckett (1994) found that only 16 per cent of adults saw finance as a barrier to participation and the majority of those surveyed thought that individuals and employers should take more responsibility for funding learning. However, effects are being felt on patterns of participation as many learners are forced to alternate study with work, or accept long term debt as the price of learning. A recent NUS survey showed that over two thirds of students were in debt and the average debt for those over 26 was in excess of £7000. The older the student, the greater the debt (Garner and Imeson 1996). UCAS figures showing a drop of more than 18 per cent in the number of 'mature' applicants to full time higher education in 1998, following the introduction of fees, may suggest some caution (Thomson and Tysome 1998). This may be a temporary phenomenon or be a more ongoing issue.

Costs and benefits of learning for the individual

In recent years, there has been a shift towards placing a greater responsibility for the funding of learning upon the individual. This is partly due to the overwhelming cost of expanding the system of post-school education and training on previous assumptions. The general increase in disposable incomes has also made it feasible to argue for individuals to pay more. This is often on the assumption that the individual benefits from such investments. While this might be true for young adults who successfully complete higher education, there is evidence that older graduates do not experience the employment benefits of their younger counterparts (Tysome 1998). There is also little evidence of the individual benefits of participating in learning in employment. For those outside the workforce, any benefits can not be constructed in a simple cost-benefit nexus. In the interests of widening participation, learning which results in a wide range of outcomes - personal, social, economic, developmental - needs to be valued and supported (FEDA 1997).

The reinforcement of existing inequalities?

We therefore face a differentiated position in relation to learners and the types of investment they are making in learning and the possibilities for them to take on more of the cost. While the welfare state has been criticised for benefiting the middle classes most - free initial services tend to be used most

by certain groups - it is also the case that markets advantage those with already existing resources (Ranson 1994). Shifting the emphasis onto the individual to fund a greater proportion of their own learning may have simply re-inscribed the inequalities already existing in the elite system of education - extending the possibilities for lifelong learning for the few (a bigger proportion and more numbers, but still overwhelmingly from the higher status social classes). What appears to be needed is a funding system which differentiates between groups rather than focuses on individuals, with greater support for those with the least economic, social and cultural capital.

Current funding arrangements

Current funding arrangements have largely developed to cope with particular situations within specific parts of the learning system. There are vouchers for initial guidance, loans for certain categories of student, grants for others. Tax breaks for vocational qualifications, Career Development Loans, the support of employers, charities and families add to the complexity of the situation. Many adults fund their own learning or have it paid by their families. For instance, Sargant et al (1997) found that 49 per cent of retired people, 46 per cent of part-time workers and 46 per cent of those not working paid their own fees or had them paid by their family.

The move towards loans from grants (always for a minority) has opened up more availability for funding to learners, but on the basis of taking responsibility for repaying the loan. Here responsibilities may have displaced rights on the premise of individuals benefiting from their learning financially - something which may be questionable given the changing nature of the employment market and the supply of skills and qualifications.

Need for a review of funding?

The piecemeal nature of current policies results in a range of disparities and inequities. As with the welfare system as a whole, there would appear to be the need for a comprehensive review of the funding of learners and learning. This would entail in both public expenditure and taxation terms lifelong learning being supported as an investment - for individuals, organisations and society - and not a cost in the attempt to provide a financial framework within which a culture of lifelong learning can be fostered.

Part of this would also entail the funding of learning as at least in part it is the interplay of what is on offer for what cost and what can be afforded that points

to one factor in developing lifelong learning. Here in the formal sector there is a tension between what institutions wish to do and what government will fund - as the financial crisis in further education has demonstrated and as the quota system in higher education also shows. In both cases, it is not a response to individuals which governs the growth of the sectors, but the allocations and funding rules of the Funding Councils.

Thus, it is suggested that further education is more governed by funding criteria - of keeping people in the system - than actually ensuring achievement (Baty 1998). Where funding follows students, various elements can be built into the funding to drive the system. For instance, the Further Education Funding Council is considering introducing a widening participation factor in the funding methodology from 1998-9. The proposal is that factors are based on uplifts to students units calculated on the Department of Environment's index of local conditions applied at ward level (www.fefc.ac.uk/feffc/participation.html/).

It is argued in responses to Dearing (NCIHE 1997) that one of the key impediments to lifelong learning through further and higher education is the differential funding of full and part-time study (Tuckett 1997), yet this strikes at the established institutional interests and norms of those sectors. The Fryer Committee has supported the urgency for both FEFC and HEFCE of developing clear policies and funding arrangements to promote inclusive learning (Fryer 1997, Schuller 1998b).

Learning credits

An approach which has the potential to manage the differential cost of providing opportunity for different groups and one which is compatible with the market emphasis on the customer is a system of individual learning credits. Learning credits have attracted support from a number of sources . For example the Confederation of British Industry (1993) has argued for 'incentives for all young people through financial credits, to empower and motivate them and arm them with real influence and buying power in a new education and training market'. There has been a steady expansion of training credits since their introduction in Youth Training (DES et al. 1991) and by April 1995 as youth credits they were used by every TEC in England for access to Youth Training and Modern Apprenticeships. Their further extension as learning credits for all 16-19 year olds was floated in the 1995 White Paper on *Competitiveness* which noted that such a system would

'encourage education and training providers to be more responsive', a view which is shared by the TEC National Council (TEC National Council 1997).

Individual Learning Accounts

Calls for a switch in public funding of learning from institutions to learners, i.e. an extension of existing training credits system, have been made by others (Smith and Spurling 1997) while the TEC National Council has argued that public funding allocated by the Further Education Funding Council and HEFC should extend beyond colleges and universities to private firms (TEC National Council 1997). Individual learning credits (ILAs) have considerable versatility. Different amounts can be allocated to individuals depending on their circumstances and government policies. Thus individuals might have an entitlement to a minimum amount of education measured in years, levels or qualifications previously achieved as suggested in the Kennedy Report (Kennedy 1997; see also Commission on Social Justice 1993; Robertson 1997).

Extending ILAs

If the principle of individual learning accounts (ILAs) is widely adopted following the proposals in the Green paper, February 1998 (DfEE 1998a), it could be extended, for example, by allocating learning credits when people are affected by redundancy and by enabling them to be 'cashed' through a variety of providers including libraries, schools, companies and voluntary organisations. Further, senior citizens could receive an allocation as part of their pension entitlement. Potentially it could be extended to support learning networks. The drift of this proposition is that provision of learning opportunities supported through ILAs might begin to challenge the twin circles of privilege and deprivation: the virtuous circle in which those who have more education get more and the vicious circle in which those who have had less education continue to have less (Belanger 1994). The challenge for the new government is to deliver objectives beyond the narrowly economic objectives defined by the previous government in *Lifetime Learning* (DfEE 1995).

5. Delivering learning

The global dimension

The increasing globalisation of the learning market for 'leading edge' providers is also raising issues. Problems in variations in the quality of higher education franchise operations overseas is just one example. National boundaries mean increasingly less with growing use of e-mail, video-conferencing, computer conferencing, and the Internet, for distance courses offered internationally. As public funding of certain areas of provision diminishes, so government priorities carry less weight with providers. Learning becomes another commodity to be developed in ways most attractive to the targeted clients. Government's role then becomes one of regulation. One issue which arises from such developments is the effect on national provision if key providers are focusing on an international market.

The state as a purchaser and regulator

In recent years the radical changes in the way in which government manages the public sector have become more visible. In part this is an outcome of a broader drive to reduce the scope of the state while at the same time sustaining or extending its authority to act. Summarised by the descriptor new public management (NPM) its advocates argue that public services can be delivered more efficiently and more effectively by bringing the disciplines of the market to bear on the public sector. They do not necessarily argue that the state should withdraw from many existing responsibilities, as the New Right might do (Gamble 1994), but instead focus on replacing the state's responsibility as a provider of public services with that of a *purchaser* of public services in the marketplace and as a *regulator* of the market. As a purchaser the state sets objectives and agrees contracts and funding against specified outputs. As a regulator it sets performance targets, inspects quality control measures and the activities of providers and issues reports on their efficiency (e.g. National Training and Education Targets (NTETS) and annual reports from the Further Education Funding Council). The approach is seductive because it purports to deliver more for less as, it is argued, deregulation, competition and service to the consumer displace powerful public monopolies and established producer interests.

There has been a cross-party, cross-national embrace of NPM. While reforms in line with NPM precepts were introduced in Britain by a

Conservative administration (for example, Ibbes 1988), they were introduced by Labour governments in Australia and New Zealand whereas in the United States NPM-style reforms were first implemented at state and local levels (Foster and Plowden 1996) and were subsequently taken up by the Clinton administration following the publication of 'Re-inventing Government' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). (For a detailed policy statement on the application of NPM in government see New Zealand Treasury 1987; for a critique of the Treasury brief read Lauder, et al. 1988 and Boston, et al. 1988; for Britain see Foster and Plowden 1996; Pollitt 1993; and Ibbes 1988). So influential has this development been that by 1995 two-thirds of civil servants were working in 108 Executive Agencies and a further 65 agencies were in the pipeline.

New public management

The importance of NPM is that it sets the political context of a smaller less expensive state and an administrative and organisational context which provides the 'rules' under which public providers, erstwhile public providers and private providers compete to supply services to the state and to other consumers. Universities, colleges, schools, workplaces and other organisations which provide learning opportunities have all been affected by this shift in public policy (Pollitt 1993; Foster and Plowden 1996). Management itself had become a much more significant activity in supporting lifelong learning (Levacic and Glatter 1997).

While the concept of the market is a key characteristic of NPM it does not, of itself, preclude the pursuit of broader objectives of a learning society as an educated society or in supporting learning networks. However, there does need to be explicit policy guiding the purchase of services in relation to these broader objectives and mechanisms that support the delivery.

Effects of competition

In the United Kingdom the activities of the Manpower Services Commission in the late 1970s brought a host of private providers into training (see, for example Ainley and Corney 1990). They competed with colleges for contracts to provide training programmes. Competition began to change the ways in which colleges delivered learning leading in many instances to much closer associations with workplaces. Further action by government carried new public management, the market approach and competition forward. Examples include:

- _ the incorporation of colleges,
- _ the role and practices of TECs/ LECs,
- _ the performance tables established for schools and colleges in receipt of government funds,
- _ centralisation of school curriculum,
- _ the central specification of competencies required for head teachers, managers, and other workers,
- _ 'naming and shaming' providers who fail to meet specified outputs

Each of these examples facilitates some and handicaps other initiatives within the broad collection of learning opportunities that constitutes lifelong learning.

Centralisation and local autonomy

More broadly new public management encompasses such policies as the Public Finance Initiative, competitive tendering to supply services for local authorities and so on. The effect is both to exercise more control from central government over goals, objectives and resources and to concede greater autonomy to local institutions and units in how services are produced and delivered and for entrepreneurial activities.

Ideological motives

A particular attraction of NPM lies in its claim to introduce a 'scientific' and 'objective' methodology to the provision of public services. However, this is to overlook, for example, strongly political and ideological motives in introducing market reforms into education, for instance the emasculation of local authorities (Gleeson 1993); Ranson (1994) provides a powerful critique of ways in which markets act to advantage the stronger interest groups in society, widen inequalities and favour the interests of established white, male, middle and upper class value positions, and the ways in which in training policy has privileged employers' interests (King 1993).

Provider studies

A study by Tremlett et al (1995) provides a picture of how over 800 post-school training providers assess and account for the changes taking place and how they were responding. Key factors for further and higher education organisations were: local and central government initiatives, student demand, the cost of course provision and market forces. Private providers

presented a similar list, differing only with the addition of 'employer demand'. There had been an expansion of qualification-based and accredited courses and output related courses. While providers claimed that 40% of their courses were broadly developmental (59% in the case of 'adult education') many providers who had secured TEC funds expressed concern that the emphasis on qualifications accredited, competence-based courses, was stifling their ability to provide the traditional range of leisure, motivational and taster courses they felt were essential to 'hook' adults who might be put off by assessment and examination. They were also critical of the inflexibility of TECs: 'We had a large-scale redundancy programme announced locally some time ago. But the TEC won't let us put a package together for the unemployed workers because, I quote, 'It is not within the remit of your contract' (Further Education Lecturer quoted in Tremlett, et al. 1995). In sum the providers considered that i) provision was being driven largely by funding arrangements and ii) provision was becoming much more flexible. While these developments relate specifically to providers involved with vocational provision there was an evident concern that adult learning lacked a strategic view and that courses were being driven by short-term employment needs. There was thus a tension between funding principles based around a modernisers' position and a more progressive vision of lifelong learning.

Hard to reach groups

A further difficulty in delivering learning opportunities through a learning market is that some social and economic groups are more expensive to reach and to supply than others and they take longer to achieve satisfactory (funded) outcomes. Unless they are specifically identified and the additional costs are paid by sponsors, for example through a government programme, through a minimum learning entitlement for all learners (Kennedy 1997) or through higher benefit Individual Learning Accounts, the rational (non-historic, non-moral) decision will be to exclude them. Providing equity and equal opportunity is expensive. Unless measures to deliver these objectives attract premium funding they are unlikely to be supplied through the market.

Outcomes of rational decision-making

An assumption of market-based models for the delivery of learning is that *individuals* and *employers* make rational choices within a free market, or rather that the choices are based solely on a rational assessment of the market in learning opportunities. Research suggests that this may not be the case (West 1997). A study of training credits by Hodkinson and Sparkes

(1995) suggests that market approaches assume that individuals make technically rational choices. By ignoring critical issues of status and power, they are based on mistaken over-simplifications of social reality. Further illustrations of this can be found in the growing evidence that as competition develops between schools and colleges, schools restrict information which individuals get about learning opportunities in colleges (Ball 1997). This is an entirely understandable response by schools in the context of headcount funding and growing job insecurity within schools. Keep (1997) similarly points out that there is an undue 'risk of ignoring the major structural and societal barriers that confront many adult learners'.

The Institute of Personnel and Development blamed the commitment to market - based education for creating low expectations, wasteful competition between schools, colleges and employers, and reinforcing the belief that many are destined for unemployment or for a life of low-skill work that needs little preparation. The report also argues that 'over-emphasis on individual responsibility for learning dangerously ignores wider issues of social justice' (Crequer 1997). These concerns are reiterated in an in-depth study of 16 year olds' participation in learning in South West London, an area of severe socio-economic deprivation. Macrae et al show that young people within this grouping occupy different positions in relation to the Learning Society (Macrae, et al. 1997) and argue that divisive routes and horizons for action established in compulsory education are reinforced in the education market and serve to privilege individuals who possess the cultural and material capital to access routes to better education and employment.

Competition for learners

The advent of a market system made explicit the competition for learners. Public providers of education and training were re-focused and re-branded as businesses and to confirm this state of affairs a majority of members of governing bodies were drawn from business or industry and many principals became Chief Executives. Their tasks are to build the customer base, gain market share and to deliver increased productivity. But just like some businesses they can gain market share by cutting into the markets of other providers rather than expanding the market as a whole (e.g. schools offering in fill examination courses to adult learners to compete with established access providers), productivity can be increased by selecting only those learners who will quickly succeed and thus release output related funds, by cutting provision for non-traditional learners who are frequently more expensive, and by increasing staff: student ratios. In the process new

opportunities for new groups of learners might be developed and the market system might contribute to lifelong learning. But it can also reduce opportunities. Thus providers may well increase participation without widening it and even narrowing it: 'Providers recognised that much of the recent growth had been amongst their traditional adult clientele' (Tremlett 1995). It was FEFC's sensitivity to this issue which led to the setting up of the Kennedy Committee.

Skills and competencies

Consonant with an outcomes-led approach the state has begun to define the skills and competencies that it wants its workers to have. Thus competencies have been specified for head teachers by the Teacher Training Agency. Other vocational qualifications for industry and the professions continue but are increasingly squeezed by the advance of a rational bureaucratic structure. We are, according to some commentators, approaching the vision neatly captured by metaphor in George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993) in which 'people would move from rationalized educational institutions to rationalized workplaces and from rationalized education settings to rationalized homes. Ritzer's McDonaldization had four dimensions: 'efficiency', 'quantification and calculability' where everything is measured and costed, 'predictability' where discipline, order, systematisation, routine and methodological operation are the key features and, closely associated, 'control' (Hartley 1995).

Effects of competition

Competition can result in more responsive and innovative institutional practices than have been evident under traditional welfare models. It has been particularly effective where (as in further education) performance is tied to funding mechanisms which encourage retention of students (Oakeshott 1998). Marketing can be effective in promoting access, as providers go in search of new 'customers' and 'niche markets' adapting their administrative procedures and curricula to attract these groups (FEDA 1996). Collaborations between universities and large employers have created tailored degree courses, partly taught and assessed in the workplace (Sainsbury/ Manchester Metropolitan University, Vauxhall/ Luton University), attracting non-traditional learners into higher education.

At the same time, the effects of competition between providers have been remarked upon. For example, Doyle (Calder and McCollum 1998) argues that

there are at least two fundamentally different ways in which businesses can be made more competitive. The one is through static competition which focuses on low costs and takes the form of price cutting. The other is through dynamic competition where a business seeks to win through innovation and new 'leading edge' products. Given that the principal purchasers of lifelong learning are seen by government to be individuals and employers, there must be concern that those providers which go the 'static' competition route do not prune quality and standards along with costs. At the same time, those providers which go the innovative route and offer 'leading edge' products may well price their provision out of the reach of those groups which traditionally have been hardest to reach with learning and training opportunities.

Furthermore since providers of education and training are operating in direct competition for students, possibilities for collaborative and complimentary provision are diminished, and the impartiality of institutional guidance is placed in jeopardy. (Connelly, et al. 1996; Payne 1996).

Assessment and accreditation

Much learning in further, higher and adult education continues to be provision-led. However, as the organisations which support learning are extended, a question emerges over how the learning within them is to be encompassed, if at all. The result has been an increased attention to the provision and forms of assessment and accreditation and, in particular, assessment in the workplace. In this process, the notion of credit has itself been reconfigured with less attention to 'notional study time' and more focus on achievement and outcomes. Thus, as credit and the gaining of credit is given greater priority, the emphasis on the provider as the place to which one has to be attached for a certain period of time decreases. Introducing the notion of outcomes means that learning is divorced from the time it takes to achieve them and particular institutional arrangements within which they are likely to be gained. The focus on learning outcomes, and particularly the accreditation of those outcomes can be seen in the 1992 Further Education and Higher Education Acts, under which only learning which led to assessment and certification was funded. The effects of such a system is illustrated by a recent survey of adult learners which indicated three quarters of learners in the labour force and two-thirds of all adult learners were working towards a qualification (Sargant, et al. 1997). Somewhat less startling were the findings of Beinart et al who found that 41 per cent of learning

connected with work led to National Vocational Qualifications, City and Guilds or degree level qualifications (Beinart and Smith 1998).

Workplace Assessment

The introduction of NVQs saw a significant increase in the availability of assessment and accreditation in the workplace. It is estimated that NVQs are now available for 87% of the workforce (Beaumont 1996). There is continuing dispute about the numbers of workers and young people achieving NVQs (Robinson 1996), evidence of a reluctance of employers to make use of them (Callender 1992; Spilsbury, et al. 1995), weaknesses in the original design standards (Hyland 1994; Callender 1992; Prais 1989), criticisms of their implementation (Beaumont 1996), but the use of NVQs by employers is increasing. Improvements outlined in NCVQ's 'Criteria and Guidelines' (NCVQ 1995) and the positive responses by NCVQ to the criticisms presented in the Beaumont Review (See also NCVQ/ SCOTVEC 1996) seems likely to herald a further growth in the use of NVQs in companies. This may be further stimulated by a growing number of organisations committed to the Investors in People Initiatives which now involves 25,000 organisations and covers some 28% of the workforce (Stuart 1997).

However, judging by international comparisons the United Kingdom continues to lag behind the majority of leading countries in the proportion of young people at the NTETS at Foundation Target 1 (5 GCE grades A-C or (6) NVQ level 2) and at Foundation Target 3 (2 or more A levels or (6) NVQ level 3). For example, in France in 1994 the number of young people achieving the Baccalaureate - roughly equivalent to Foundation Target 3 - was approaching 60% of the relevant cohort which was significantly higher than the United Kingdom figure of some 40% of the 19-21 age group (Steedman and Green 1996).

Future goals also differed widely. In France the government aim for the year 2000 was for 80% of the relevant age cohort to achieve the Baccalaureate compared to 60% in the United Kingdom achieving one level 3 qualification (Green and Steedman 1997).

Work based learning and higher education

Since the launch of the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative in 1987 a number of government programmes have sought to improve the quality of the links between employers and higher education (for instance, Employment

Department 1992). This concern with linking learning and the work role reflects policy debates across Europe focusing on issues of economic competitiveness, skills formation and enterprise renewal (Sommerland 1996).

The impact of these programmes on the higher education curriculum has been patchy, since they have been targeted through a process of competitive bidding, on the assumption that proven good practice would percolate through to other institutions. Among participating institutions there is evidence of increased emphasis on work related projects and a more structured and integrated approach to work placements of all kinds. Studies have stressed the motivational value of involving learners in the negotiation of contracts between student, employer and academic institution (Stephenson and Laycock 1993); the value of the mentor relationship in supporting student learning (Oxtoby 1995); and the benefits of peer support (McDonnell 1993). A considerable literature has now developed around the place and nature of work-based learning in the higher education curriculum (Brennan and Little 1996). Whilst much of this literature is descriptive of curriculum innovations it also raises fundamental questions about the nature and purposes of higher education, definitions of knowledge and its assessment, and the relationship between students and institutions (Foster 1996).

Credit frameworks

Davidson (1992) identified five reasons for the development of credit frameworks. First, they break down boundaries to access as adults are able to move more easily into and within the 'system'. Second, they enable people who wish to study part-time and at differential rates to do so. Third, for individuals, programmes can be altered if personal circumstances change. Fourth, they encourage lifelong learning in expanding opportunity structures and enhancing motivation. Fifth, learning from a variety of settings can be integrated into assessed and accredited programmes of study. The flexibility and mobility offered by credit frameworks is also identified by Robertson (Robertson 1996; HEQC 1994).

Differential status

However, credit frameworks in themselves do not do away with issues of status and value, even if they do make possible a more explicit and open debate about what is valued through the processes of assessment and accreditation - making the learning process more transparent and institutions more accountable for what they do (Edwards 1997). Here the institutions

invested with the power to award credit remain powerful, both in terms of the differential values and status's ascribed to those institutions and the selective valuing of different forms of learning inscribed in different credit frameworks. Even as it is reconfigured therefore, the significance of institutions and stakeholders in arbitrating what constitutes worthwhile knowledge, skills and understanding is still apparent. Even as the award of outcomes-based credit foregrounds the criteria of selection, inclusion and exclusion which are central to the practices of education and training, it also provides new and varied forms of assessment and accreditation, providing opportunities for access and progression which would not otherwise exist. Portfolio-based assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment and learning contracts have all developed significantly in support of crediting learning across the life span and in different settings.

Flexible lifelong learning

In theory, credit frameworks allow individuals to move easily into and within the range of learning opportunities available to them. This contributes to the de-differentiation of the notion of full- and part-time study. Indeed, if lifelong learning is to be supported, it is suggested this distinction, with its attendant assumptions and funding implications, needs to be dropped and a more flexible understanding of flexible lifelong learning adopted (CVCP 1996). Individuals build portfolios of credit or records of achievement as they move in and out of and through the system. The system itself is not tightly bounded by attachment to specific institutional contexts, but involves a looser arrangement between the learner and the institution governed by the award of credit as people develop their learning 'careers'. There is still a structure, but the structuring takes place through the credit system rather than through institutional allegiances; more flexible and different power relations operate within it with greater emphasis being given to the guidance available to learners (Cooper 1996). There is concern that learning in this way will become mostly surface rather than deep learning in the conventional disciplinary senses of the latter.

Managing credit accumulation

Agreement between institutions enables a credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) to develop. Credit accumulation and transfer systems thus facilitate the management of the diversity of learning opportunities between different institutions, settings, countries and learning modes, encourage wider access and have the potential to eliminate barriers between different levels of

learning and between academic and vocational learning (Robertson 1993). Currently at least three accreditation systems co-exist:

- _ CATS, which is used for academic credit;
- _ National Vocational Qualifications which is a competence-based unit accumulation system, and
- _ credits awarded by the Open College Network (OCN) for the achievements of learning objectives which are negotiated by the learner and which frequently relate to the development of personal skills.

These are different but often complementary systems with OCNs, adult education or general education courses often leading to later progression to vocational courses (McGivney 1994, cited in Sargent, et al. 1997; see also Maguire 1997). The importance of different routes to education progression, particularly for women, has been underlined by McGivney (1994) as has the need for flexible learning opportunities for part-time study (Morrison 1992).

A promising initiative

One of the most encouraging developments is a credit framework produced by FFORWM, a consortium of Welsh Further Education Colleges working with the Welsh Office, Training and Enterprise Councils and other national bodies. This enables *all* learning, vocational and academic, to be mapped and linked. This facilitates student choice, customised learning programmes, accredited opportunities for core skills development, and a personal record of achievement in credit terms. Although initiated by the colleges the Further Education Credit Framework can be used by other providers who wish to follow its technical specifications. Thus voluntary organisations, workplaces and private training providers could draw on the database and deliver qualifications within the framework or propose their own for approval if new units are desired (Pierce 1996). Though the Welsh consortium's approach might be regarded as in competition with national accreditation systems it is more akin to a *lingua franca* enabling the individual level and size of units within a programme to be expressed (Stanton 1997). The more relaxed approach towards assessment seemingly signalled by NCVQ (1995) and its merger with Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA) to form the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), may facilitate this development.

Access to FE / HE

In seeking to increase and widen participation further and higher education institutions developed a variety of routes into their organisations such that eventually all offered some form of access provision (Tight 1993). These included recognition of prior uncertificated learning, individual assessment of capabilities, and open entry which was practised by the Open University from its inception in 1969. The accreditation of prior experiential learning, learning that takes place outside formal provision, has the potential radically to open up access to new types of learners and learning and to open access to qualifications (Butler 1993). Through it a host institution accepts learning which has been achieved elsewhere, perhaps through personal activities, community activities, or through workplace learning as proxy for traditional entry qualifications. Depending on particular practices an institution may award credit towards specified qualifications. More formally the accreditation of experiential learning was an important feature of National Vocational Qualifications which were introduced in the late 1980s. Acceptance of experiential learning erodes the boundaries between formal and non-formal organisations and undermines the distinctiveness and claims to a special expertise of the host institution.

Access initiatives

In many instances this opportunity became formalised in access courses, which also had the effect of creating new career opportunities for staff, bureaucratising admission to higher education by requiring learners to take an access course and preserving conventional assumptions about functions and practices of higher education, thus serving to constrain systemic change (Harrison 1993). More recently Robertson (1997) has argued that the recent expansion of higher education has not resulted in a 'more means different' situation, and that the aspirations of the access movement for a more learner-centred and 'democratic' system have been undermined and disappointed. In sum these responses have closed down some routes into higher education, re-establishing some boundaries while providing greater assurance that those that make it there know what to expect and are more likely to achieve. But can this be counted as a net gain or an opportunity lost? Might the cost of widening access and participation be a certain messiness as individual organisations explore new opportunities for engaging non-traditional learners? Should there be a 'risk fund' to support organisational

initiatives involving new types of learners, or a Learning Regeneration Fund (Kennedy 1997).

Learner mobility

Despite many market mechanisms and consumer approaches, the extent and directions of mobility of learners remains largely in the control of institutions and departments who will decide the type and amount of credit they are prepared to recognise. This is particularly true in the higher education context. This can be affected by subject-specific concerns, such as the dating of knowledge and skills, or by judgements about where the credit was earned and therefore the quality of learning (Davidson 1992).

Support for lifelong learning

More sophisticated analyses of curriculum content and processes are needed as a basis for more substantive understanding of the issues surrounding support for lifelong learning opportunities by organisations. Management oriented conceptions of good practice - such as that offered on widening participation in further education (FEFC 1997) - and quality frameworks - such as for guidance in higher education (HEQC 1995) - may be helpful in framing priorities within institutions, but they do not address systemic and wider societal issues. Here Kennedy's (1997) assertion that we know how to widen participation sounds somewhat glib.

Technology in the learning age

If the next quarter century is to be the learning age, it will need imaginative technical and human support systems (Schuller 1998b). The University for Industry and the National Grid for Learning are steps in that direction, pointing towards the importance of an extensive infrastructure, supporting opportunities in the home, the shop and the leisure centre as well as the workplace. Technology is capable of providing local access points (e.g., in libraries and shopping centres) for information and advice on career paths and future opportunities, and extending the hours of availability of services.

The development of Progress File opens up the possibilities for computerised records of achievement, which can be remotely accessed by learners, providing new opportunities for student support and for the transfer of credit between teaching institutions, employers, and across national borders. It also raises important issues of confidentiality and access.

The Information Society Project Office (ISPO) suggests that better and more affordable technology-based services can and must be developed, to increase take-up of opportunities (e.g., in education) by people who are currently unable to participate. Initiatives suggest that the United Kingdom's technological infrastructure will be able to support the technical demands of a large number of formal learners - probably in excess of 10 million per annum in the United Kingdom. Marketing of the Ufl and related initiatives may well result in the emergence of a demand of that size. What is less clear is what such a demand would mean for the supply side, the institutions and the voluntary sector, given that the cost of expanding current institutional buildings would be prohibitive, so the place of learning would have to be the place of the learner.

Whilst information and communication technologies are being put forward as a key to developing and extending lifelong learning (Thorpe and Grugeon 1994), little thought is given to the critical assessment of the adoption of such approaches (NIACE 1996). The technological imperative often seems to run ahead of assessments of impact (Kirkup and Jones 1996). There is no doubt a huge potential in these technologies, as is made clear in proposals for the National Grid for Learning, but potentials do not transfer unproblematically into outcomes, most notably in inscribing different forms of inclusion and exclusion. This is a problem recognised even by those who are most likely to benefit from the deployment of these technologies, the computer hardware and software companies (IBM 1996).

Open and distance learning

These technologies extend and develop more conventional notions of open and distance learning and indeed it may be that the latter needs to be subsumed within the notion of flexible learning, as a more comprehensive way of conceptualising institutional practices in relation to lifelong learning. Whether ICT is the most cost-effective way of supporting lifelong learning has yet to be established. Economies of scale require a technological infrastructure and a large audience. Well-funded demonstrator projects with little possibility for wider dissemination do not provide the grounds for cost-effective support of lifelong learning. Here print based approaches to flexible learning may still play a pivotal role, at least in the medium term.

Changing curriculum demands

Most discussion of open and distance learning is of a technical and practical nature, focusing on how to implement certain strategies and offering

evaluations of their successes and problems. Attempts to locate the significance of such developments within the wider processes of economic, social and political change have tended to be at the margins of debate (Farnes 1993; Raggatt 1993; Edwards 1995 and Field 1996). The curriculum demands upon providers change both in terms of content and delivery. The impact of different technologies on the curriculum and pedagogy need careful evaluation. To be educated and to be a lifelong learner may be two different things, particularly if more diverse forms of learning come to be valued, assessed and accredited. Also there are implications in the possibility for geographical dispersal, as learners and providers no longer need to be in the same place, although local economies tend to require a critical mass to be sustainable.

Personal skills and learner support

Much of the impetus behind the personal skills agenda has come from outside education (Barnet 1992) from employers and from government, for example funding initiatives such as Training and Vocational Education Initiative, Enterprise in Higher Education, and more recently the DfEE's 'Learner Managed Learning' and 'Career Management Skills' projects, which aims to embed skills of self management and a disposition towards self reliance in the formal educational curricula . These initiatives have been used to strengthen and formalise the connection between the learning outcomes from careers education and guidance and the learning outcomes from study in higher education (Watts and Hawthorn 1992; McNair 1996a).

Benefits to students

Benefits to students are stressed in the accounts of those institutions which have been most active in reshaping the boundaries between careers education, careers guidance, personal guidance and curriculum learning. The role of the tutor or careers advisor becomes to support the development of those skills associated with self-assessment, context assessment and decision-making. It is the responsibility of learners to deploy those skills in managing their own learning and development. The desired outcomes of learning are defined in terms of the acquisition of skills of self management and personal autonomy (Ball and Butcher 1994).

Provision through open learning

In some cases the teaching processes designed to achieve these aims have been transferred to the study of open learning materials (Ball and Jordan

1997). An array of open learning technologies are now available; action planners, personal profiles and records of achievement. In some cases the use of open learning approaches has been found to engender a shared sense of responsibility for the outcomes of learning and guidance, with careers advisors becoming 'facilitators and enablers rather than guidance gurus' (Ball and Jordan 1997). The impact of ICT on the provision of guidance has become a central area of interest (NCET 1994).

However these approaches can also be viewed as a new technology for self-regulation, a resource efficient means of extending the influence of the pastoral forms of power described by Usher and Edwards (Usher and Edwards 1998) Within this discourse, techniques for self-evaluation, such as personal profiles and records of achievement are viewed not as a means to empowerment, but as means of bringing people's inner lives into line with the gaze of government. The particular form of subjectivity which they are active in shaping is individualistic and self reliant, which fits well with contemporary notions of citizens and workers, but has the effect of displacing the more 'social' dimensions of peoples' lives.

The University for Industry

One initiative in lifelong learning to which the new administration is committed is the University for Industry (DfEE 1998b)). This is intended to provide a national learning framework for skills development. Using new technologies it is intended to expand access to courses and opportunities for training and on-demand on-line learning opportunities (Hillman 1996). In some ways the initiative represents continuity with the policies of previous administrations with its emphasis on skills development (DfEE and The Scottish Office 1996). However, coupled with ILAs and the stress on social inclusion the Ufi incorporates both economic and social objectives. Long experience and many analyses have demonstrated that training opportunities are significantly skewed in favour of the relatively well-qualified, those in higher occupational groups and those who work in large companies. By contrast poorly qualified, poorly skilled and older workers, particularly those in small companies, have few opportunities for further training. With little disposable income and uncertainty about future employment prospects in a changing labour market the risks of personal investment in training are high (Tremlett, et al. 1995). Moreover, as Robertson (1998) in a thoughtful discussion of the Ufi points out, an inability to access training does not only lead to economic exclusion but also to social exclusion. The learning framework described by the Ufi in

combination with ILAs, readily available guidance and access to learning opportunities through new technologies, perhaps in association with employee development schemes, has the potential to deliver more equitable goals as well as economic ones.

However, as Robertson acknowledges, there is a danger that too much will be expected of Ufl. The Ufl is a supply-side initiative and the history of training in Britain is littered with the failures of supply-side initiatives. For the Ufl to succeed it must move, as the Open University did, from a supply-side initiative to a demand-led training strategy. In this it will need to be supported in a number of practical ways, through ILAs, significant IT support for adults and, perhaps, by training levies. Moreover, it will need to constantly monitor the use of the Ufl and take-up of opportunities by learners to ensure that the technology does not deter the under skilled and poorly qualified from participating.

New ideas

Genuinely new ideas are also being piloted, particularly at the local level - for example a pilot literacy promotion scheme run by the London borough of Newham and Sainsbury's is designed to encourage parents to help infant children learning to read: free in-store book readings and free 'recipe cards' in the store highlighting simple ways to improve a child's reading (Ghouri 1998). Partnership projects such as this are growing and are seen by many as a desirable development. Two issues arise with such projects. The first is the danger of projects being 'cheque-book led' rather than needs led. Sponsors will have their own aims and objectives for their 'investment'. The issue of possible distortion of provision towards certain commercially important groups rather than socially needy groups clearly needs investigating. The second relates to the quality of the provision. Attempts are being made by organisations such as the British Association of Open Learning to establish a kite mark for learning materials and distance taught courses. The issue of whether this is the most appropriate route for quality assurance of innovative local pilots and of new forms of provision is one which has not yet been addressed.

New developments or rebranding?

The monitoring of the implementation of lifelong learning policies and of their success in achieving the desired changes will clearly present problems. In particular rebranding and repackaged developments confuse the picture. A

crucial issue in the United Kingdom will be how to provide those various kinds of support, and associated open learning material, without a significant increase in resources for colleges. An example is the IMS project, which the Open University may join with the support of Joint Information Systems Committee (on behalf of all United Kingdom Higher Education Institutes). It follows a simple precept: avoid replication of effort. As part of its work, a draft international standard for information interchange is under development within the Institute of Manpower Services, with the support of the American Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers and other standards organisations. The goal is to allow all institutions (and all students) to gain access to state of the art teaching material, regardless of where they are and at the lowest possible cost. This is intended to encourage the development of an efficient market in lifelong learning material and courses, and reduce the tendency for institutions to waste money creating virtually identical courses.

The IMS approach includes facilities for creating a distributed clearing house, linking multiple institutions, that combines accreditation for students and reimbursement for course providers. This goes much further than the centralised clearing house function that has been outlined in relation to the University for Industry. One notable prospective benefit for suppliers is that it offers the prospect of creating and automatically accrediting new courses by re-using parts of courses from many institutions, combined with up-to-date material from industry. Another anticipated benefit, for both suppliers and learners, is being able to tailor courses to individuals, leading to more efficient and effective learning. A further prospective benefit for learners is that it should be relatively easy to obtain personalised career advice, derived from information held by individuals about their preferred learning styles; accreditation information held on their personal Smart Cards or centrally; and centralised information about skill shortages and opportunities in various industries.

Repackaging and rebranding is not confined to public sector providers seeking to maximise funding, but also appears to occur with major players in the private sector. For example the British Aerospace 'virtual university' is being launched in 1998. It aims to offer continuous learning programmes ranging from NVQs to PhDs to its 44,000 employees, in partnership with universities and further education colleges. 'There is a huge amount of activity already with universities, and it will probably be a question of aligning, reaffirming and strengthening this activity ...' '...the virtual university is part of

British Aerospace's business strategy for competitiveness against a fast-changing aerospace industry that is undergoing massive restructuring...The university will not be seeking its own accreditation powers. It aims to work with other agencies and institutions who already have that authority' (Patel 1998). Such refocusing is essential in a learning organisation. The question which must be asked is whether the planned changes are sufficiently radical to meet the needs of a lifelong learning policy which has inclusiveness as a key, albeit not the major element and whether aspirations are achievable within the means envisaged.

GLOSSARY

AGR.....	Association of Graduate Recruiters
APEL.....	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
CATS.....	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
CBI.....	Confederation of British Industries
CIHE.....	Council for Industry and Higher Education
CPD.....	Continuing Professional Development
CVCP.....	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals
DfEE.....	Department for Education and Employment
EDP.....	Employee Development Programmes
EHE.....	Enterprise in Higher Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FEFCW.....	Further Education Funding Council for Wales
FFORWM.....	Adroddiad dros dro ar Fframwaith Credydu Addysg Bellach Cymru
GCSE.....	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HEE.....	Higher Education and Employment
HEFC.....	Higher Education Funding Councils
HEFCE.....	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEQC.....	Higher Education Quality Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers
IiP	Investors in People
ILA	Individual Learning Account
IMS	Institute of Manpower Studies
IPD	Institute of Personnel Development
ISPO	Information Society Project Office
LEC	Local Enterprise Company
LGMB	Local Government Management Board
MORI	Market and Opinion Research Institute
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
NIACE.....	National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education
NICEC.....	National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling
NPM	New Public Management
NTETS	National Training and Education Targets

NUS	National Union of Students
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
OCN	Open College Network
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
ORF	Outcome Related Funding
SCAA	Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UACE	Universities Association for Continuing Education
Ufi	University for Industry
UNCED	United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
YT.....	Youth Training

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