



## Looking to Learn: Investigating the Motivations to Learn and the Barriers Faced by Adults Wishing to Undertake Part-Time Study

**LOOKING TO LEARN:  
INVESTIGATING THE MOTIVATIONS TO LEARN AND  
THE BARRIERS FACED BY ADULTS WISHING TO  
UNDERTAKE PART-TIME STUDY**

**RALF ST.CLAIR  
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT AND  
LIFELONG LEARNING  
DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY INTRODUCTION AND AIMS**

1. This study was conducted on behalf of the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department of the Scottish Executive, with the following three research questions driving the study:

1. What motivates adult learners to take up learning opportunities?
2. Can we distinguish between the relative importance of interest in the subject/enjoyment of learning as opposed to more instrumental reasons (related to jobs for example)?
3. How do these vary for different sectors of the population?

2. The study uses a model of participation in adult learning derived from the theories of Maslow and Herzberg. The model suggests that rather than being a universal activity that is inevitable once certain barriers are removed, participation is the result of basic needs being fulfilled, certain factors being satisfied, and the presence of a specific motivation for learning. In the context of this study it is important to recognise that only some of these factors may be affected by policy frameworks. For the purposes of this discussion, participation in learning means being involved in an activity leading to new information or understanding, either alone or in an organised setting.

3. The study lays out policy interventions that have the potential to support part-time participation by certain under-represented groups of adults in non-formal and formal education. The lack of available and specific data makes the analysis more complex than otherwise would be the case, but throughout the document the aim is to develop a number of specific, concrete recommendations for policy to support participation.

### **Background and context**

4. The growing interest in lifelong learning over the past twenty years has placed more importance than ever before on questions of why adults choose to participate, or not participate, in education. Part-time learning is a particularly important area to consider as it may act as a critical pathway to educational involvement for people who have historically been excluded from education.

5. The majority of studies on participation identify factors associated with educational engagement without analysing why those factors matter. For example, social class background predicts educational engagement very well, but there is little further research on why it has the effect it does. In this study, the author has created a theoretical model allowing the specific effects of different factors for different groups to be discussed.

6. There are a number of questions that could helpfully be addressed at policy level to assist with understanding lifelong learning. These include what levels of participation are reasonable to expect in a learning society, what standard measures should be used to define and capture participation, and whether there are priority areas within lifelong learning. There

is a need to avoid the assumption that everybody should be learning all the time, and that some participation must lead to more participation.

### **Findings and recommendations**

7. Many of the central factors in decision making about participation are difficult to affect directly through policy because they are highly subjective, rooted in long-term experience, and based in values or culture. An example is an individual's belief that they are too old to learn, which can be seen as a personal judgement reflecting what they have heard throughout their life and their cultural values surrounding learning. This individual is unlikely to participate in learning however easy access is made by policy initiatives.

8. The research shows consistently that the dominant reasons for educational participation tend to be vocational, and policy can play a role by increasing the benefits of such learning for all involved. However, learning for other reasons is also valuable, and helps to create a culture where learning is the norm. While policy may be able to ensure that the basic requirements for a wide range of learners to participate in learning are addressed, it may be harder to increase motivation.

9. Learners may not distinguish between interest and instrumental reasons for participating in education. Once the learner's basic needs are met, they are likely to be most motivated by learning which is both interesting and beneficial economically. If the learner's basic needs (such as employment income or an equivalent) are not met, then it is more likely that educational participation for a purely instrumental purpose will be considered.

10. The factors affecting the decision to participate in education are analysed for a number of key under-represented groups. Due to lack of specific data this analysis relies on theoretical generalisation, meaning that the evidence-based general model for decision making on participation in learning is applied to the group in question to generate insights into their particular circumstances. This approach is not as reliable as evidence-based information on each group, but suggests that people will participate in learning when there is:

- Some protection from financial risk
- Flexible provision
- Peer and academic support for learners
- Clear information about how learning can benefit the learner

11. One of the challenges to understanding lifelong learning is that the structures, policies, and measures used to frame and analyse learning are left over from the previous era of highly differentiated and exclusive education. They tend to create rigid boundaries between formal and informal education, for example, or between full-time and part-time participation. It would be helpful for adult participation in learning if the procedures for entry into learning, the availability of funding, and other practical factors were as seamless and consistent as possible.

12. There is a need for more empirical research to identify the particular factors influencing the participation decisions of specific groups of people, an area about which data is lacking.



## CHAPTER ONE UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION

1.1 This chapter provides an overview of the more influential theories of why adults participate and do not participate in education. These theories have all shaped the way that researchers address some of the most basic questions about participation, such as who participates or what counts as participation. The theoretical lens of the researcher directly affects both the results and the meaning given to those results, and so it is important to understand the perspectives lying behind the current body of research on participation. For the purposes of this discussion, participation in lifelong learning means being involved in an activity leading to new information or understanding, either alone or in an organised setting, after the age of compulsory school attendance.

1.2 One major difficulty with applying this body of work to the evidence base for policy making is that there are so many theories, all of which have at least some degree of empirical support. The main challenge is finding an approach to understanding participation that will lead to the kind of broad and pragmatic insights needed by policy makers. Any one of the perspectives discussed in this chapter could provide insights into participation decisions, but the aim of this study was to find an approach that could be used to develop useful implications at the policy level.

1.3 Despite the huge amount of research on the topic there is little solid data on participation in adult learning. Tikkanen (1998) argues that ‘after more than two decades of intensive research on the subject, we ought to have progressed at the level of theory building’ but suggests that few models have very much predictive utility. In other words, the theories are unable to identify which people in which circumstances will participate in which kinds of education. As Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) suggest:

The practical import of such scholarly activity is hard to gauge . . . the most that a conscientious and well-informed programme planner could possibly learn from dimensional analyses [looking at barriers and motivations] is that there are x number of negative forces in the broader environment that actively work against educational participation. (p.29)

1.4 It seems that it is possible to identify some reasons to explain why people may not participate in learning, but harder to show why they choose to participate despite the barriers. With this caution in mind, we can now define the focus of this study, discuss the background of participation as an aspect of lifelong learning and examine the most influential theoretical approaches to participation in education for adults.

### **Participation and lifelong learning: Significant issues**

1.5 Lifelong learning is generally not regarded as the cradle to grave activity the name suggests-the majority of discussion concentrates on post-compulsory education, and frequently on the informal aspects of that provision. In the current discussion ‘lifelong learning’ is used as a generic term for all activities beyond the age of compulsory school

attendance that result in learning. This includes adult education (informal learning provision for adults such as evening classes), formal education (such as colleges or universities), and informal education (such as a book group). As lifelong learning has gained policy importance all of the terms have become more ambiguous, making the notion of participation much more complicated.

1.6 It is helpful to be clear about the forms of lifelong learning and the types of participation that policy can usefully address. This topic is examined in more depth in the following chapter, but as a general guideline ‘lifelong learning’ will be used as the generic phrase for the scope of this discussion and more specific phrases such as ‘adult education’ used only to refer to specific activities which will be defined as they arise.

1.7 At the end of the twentieth century there was a remarkable upsurge of interest in lifelong learning as a way to deal with a range of economic and social issues (McGivney, 2003). Unemployment, social inclusion, and national productivity were among the areas where policy linked lifelong learning to positive outcomes. Adopting a lifelong learning perspective in policy and practice raises some important questions about the nature of participation, many of which are significantly different from conventional ways of looking at the subject.

1.8 Traditionally, studies of adult participation in learning adults have focused to a large degree on involvement in some sort of structured provision, such as an evening class or college, but lifelong learning is not limited to involvement in classes of some sort. Given the desire to place learning at the centre of policy and society it is helpful and sensible to consider all forms, locations, and outcomes of learning, but many of these forms do not involve participation in any external activity beyond the actions of an individual. In effect the current drive towards inclusive models of learning as pervasive (a central life activity) and perpetual (continuing throughout life) make it far harder to locate the boundary between participation and non-participation. For example, if an individual attends yearly upgrading courses on the software they use everyday, does this count as participation? Older institutional models of education would say not, but it is very hard to justify not counting it as participation within the more open lifelong learning framework.

1.9 Adopting this more open definition of participation (such as ‘undertaking any form of learning’) raises significant issues. For example, if I learn how to fix my washing machine by going on the internet at the library I have clearly learned something of great potential and actual value to me, but with trivial public cost and little public benefit. Including such activities within the conception of learning tells us very little about the kind of policies that are needed to support learning and the potential social benefits of the learning. It would be useful to be able to discriminate between learning which consumes and produces public benefits, and that which is entirely individual or private in scope. However, since the majority of data on lifelong learning does not discriminate between these two categories of activity it is not possible for the current study to do so. I will discuss the meaning of participation in more depth in chapter 3, but there are a few points that are useful to highlight from the outset.

1.10 Firstly, what counts as participation is changing over the years, with the current widely accepted definition (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2004) being extremely inclusive-having learned anything in the last three years in any context counts as participation. Given the inclusiveness of this approach it is interesting that the reported participation rate is only around 40%. It would be reasonable to have some concerns about the validity of this figure, and it is difficult to turn to international comparisons to get a sense of its accuracy since the definitions of lifelong learning and measurement of participation vary widely even across Europe (see Coffield, 1999a). One study in Canada (another OECD country) suggests that around 20-25% of adults participate in learning (Rubenson & Xu, 1997) but uses a more formal definition of participation relying on course enrolment. This highlights the extent to which the approach to participation taken in any particular study affects the amount and type of participation found.

1.11 Secondly, there is an assumption that any participation in learning is always a good thing, irrespective of purpose, content, or context. To some extent this may be justified, in that involvement in learning helps to create a learning culture, but this needs to be balanced against the cost of learning for individuals and wider society. It may be helpful at some point to examine the limits of learning - where and for whom participation in learning is most valuable, and how that value is expressed.

1.12 Thirdly, there is another assumption that participation inevitably leads to progression up the 'educational hierarchy', that is, that literacies lead to further education then to higher education and so on. This is often an unrealistic assumption, if for no other reason than the long-term nature of educational participation means that it may take adults many years to progress through the various levels of education and there may not be sufficient motivation to do so. For people whose interest in education is instrumental, short term participation that meets their goals may be more attractive than long-term progression.

1.13 The fourth complexity is that learners' own notions of their own progress and participation are often different from the views of policy-makers, funders, and educational practitioners (McGivney, 2003). It is very difficult to get at the ways real people make real decisions about participating in real adult learning provision.

1.14 These factors combine to make it difficult to develop a clear view of participation patterns and their meaning. The drive towards a Learning Society does not lend a great deal of clarity to the situation since there is no agreed definition of a Learning Society. It may well be that a participation rate of 40% is an excellent benchmark. One of the tasks lying ahead for educational policy makers, nationally and internationally, is to develop a set of benchmarks representing the steps towards an acceptable Learning Society.

1.15 Lifelong learning has been used as a means to move towards a wide range of policy objectives that are not inherently educational, such as social inclusion. In this guise it illustrates some of the emerging issues of participation very clearly. One insightful report on further education and lifelong learning (Gallacher, Crossan, Leahy, Merrill, & Field, 2000) suggests that among the critical challenges for learning as a means to enhance social inclusion are widening participation to non-traditional students; strengthening and supporting

local communities; promoting social justice and equality of opportunity; and strengthened inter-agency working. Each of these challenges contains implications for who is, and who is not, engaged in education, and the nature of that engagement. In other words, understanding how learning affects social inclusion relies on a clear model of participation.

1.16 One of the most remarkable aspects of the growing interest in lifelong learning and the associated ideal of the ‘learning society’ is the consistent tone used to talk about lifelong learning has been framed. It has tended to be both highly optimistic about the effects of lifelong learning and vague about how those effects come about. As Merricks puts it in her analysis of the politics of lifelong learning in the 1990s:

All these reports—EU, Labour Party, and Conservative Party—have common elements. All stress that education is a ‘lifelong’ process continuing long into the post-compulsory period. However, all equally appear to regard ‘learning’ in terms of the economic advance of the individual and then of society (although this relationship remains untested). Strikingly, all three use the phrase ‘learning society’ without any real thought of what that means beyond some vague notion of ‘everyone learning.’ (2001, p.11)

1.17 The idea of ‘everyone learning’ continues to dominate thinking around lifelong learning. While different people make different arguments for educational participation, the basic idea of universal participation does seem to be accepted very widely. Accompanying the belief in the desirability of universal participation is the view that it may not matter a great deal what kind of learning is participated in. Tight (1999) suggests that three basic tenets shaping the work of educators of adults are that adults are volunteers for learning, education/learning/training is good for you, and that all participation is of value. As Tight argues, this blurred thinking is a significant challenge to developing clear understanding of participation and its value.

1.18 Within lifelong learning models, people do not divide neatly into participants and non-participants as they have been treated by most of the traditional, institution-centred studies. As one Rowntree Foundation report (Bowman, Burden, & Konrad, 2000) argues:

The data from the interviews and focus groups suggest that the classification of people into categories such as participants and non-participants, learners and non-learners, achievers and low achievers, or even reluctant learners and whoever their ‘opposites’ are, is an oversimplification. The evidence suggests that these dualisms do not reflect the role of education and training in people’s lives, nor the various ways in which people perceive and experience the relationships between education, training and work throughout their lives. (p.7)

1.19 Among the ways to draw a boundary around what counts as participation is to decide what counts as more or less valuable participation, and one common approach is to separate vocational and non-vocational forms of learning. This approach often assigns higher value to vocational than non-vocational learning, and Merrick (2001) raises a concern about the extent

to which vocational goals are seen as the key outcomes of lifelong learning, with participation often strongly linked to - or even exclusively portrayed in terms of - economic benefits. Carried to a logical conclusion, this suggests that participation, in the learning age, is a perpetual process of work-centred learning (Coffield, 1999). However, it is misleading to see lifelong learning as entirely concerned with vocational areas, and much more useful to take other forms of learning, such as parenting or personal interest learning, into account. As the Scottish Forum on Lifelong Learning (2000) argues:

The concept of lifelong learning has emerged to describe the process of maintaining learning throughout life in both formal and informal learning environments. At present two major strands can be discerned within the current lifelong learning agenda. The first relates to its role in social inclusion and encompasses debates on equity, social justice, personal development, social learning, and active citizenship. The second relates to the need for economic competitiveness and emphasises the role of lifelong learning in the formation of a skilled and flexible workforce, ready and able to compete in the global economy. (p. 1)

1.20 One of the key documents in the UK government's strategic thinking on lifelong learning, known as the Kennedy Report (1997), warns of the dangers of an overly economically focused approach: 'Prosperity depends upon there being a vibrant economy, but an economy which regards its own success as the highest good is a dangerous one. Justice and equality must also have their claim upon the arguments to educational growth' (p.6). Later in the report there is restatement of this position: 'Learning for work and learning for life are inseparable. Our work over the last two years has convinced us that learning is central to both economic prosperity and the health of a society.' (p.16).

1.21 As one well known researcher on participation has noted:

After 1997 participation became a major theme in policy, the expectation being that if individuals from the groups under-represented in organised learning could be encouraged to participate, structural progression in the sense of a linear upward movement would eventually follow (McGivney, 2003, p.2)

1.22 Participation, then, becomes the key to advancement on social, collective, and individual levels, and in terms of progress towards economic and equitable goals. This is an enormous burden for learning to carry, especially when the links between participation in learning and specific social goals are not clear. However, it also underlines a broad commitment to the idea that many diverse forms of learning must be valued in the creation of a true learning society.

1.23 A further consideration in participation is the nature of demand for learning. The assumption that everybody should be learning seems to slide quite easily into the belief that everybody wants to learn all the time. A framework developed to examine widened participation in higher education in Scotland (Murphy, Morgan-Klein, Osborne, & Gallacher,

2002) usefully reminds us that not everybody wants to be a perpetual consumer of education. The authors consider three broad categories of demand:

Existing demand: People want to participate, but may lack qualifications or self-confidence

Latent demand: People might participate if the opportunity arose, but it is not a priority at the current time

Non-existing demand: People have no desire to participate, for a wide variety of reasons (p.112)

1.24 In this section I have laid out some of the complexities surrounding the idea of participation, and shown the difficulties associated with the idea that everybody should want to learn all the time, and should progress through all possible levels of learning. The biggest challenge for researchers and policymakers is the fuzziness of the boundaries around participation, and the lack of clarity regarding the goals of a learning society. I have also suggested that the use of lifelong learning as a tool for increased social inclusion or other policy ends also depends on having a clear definition of participation.

1.25 In the following chapter I lay out the model of participation used in the current discussion. Before moving to that model it is useful to review the most influential theories of participation.

### **Selected theories of participation**

1.26 The most inclusive and detailed review of participation theories and empirical research on participation was conducted in the late 1990s (Silva, Cahalan, & Lacerino-Paquet, 1998) as part of the review of the US ‘National Household Education Survey (NHES).’ The aim of this document was to look at the theories of participation in adult learning, and the studies that either used or underpinned them, with the intention of examining how a large scale survey could capture some of the variables that seemed to be the most critical. Altogether 23 different theoretical frameworks for participation were included, organised into 9 categories by approach: economics, social psychology, leisure studies, health, adult education, change theories, education drop-out and student attrition, time allocation, and consumer behaviour.

1.27 The earliest framework dated from 1963, and most of the significant approaches from the last four decades are included. The most commonly applied theories are discussed at more length below, but it is useful to begin by examining the field on a broader level. In their conclusion, the authors state:

Two things are clear from the research studies that we reviewed. First, a myriad of factors have been hypothesized, and empirically shown, to be important in explaining participation and non-participation in AE [adult education, equivalent in this case to adult learning]. The reasons why people

do or do not choose to participate in adult education are multi-dimensional; the decision is a complex one, influenced by factors ranging from self-perceptions and attitudes to the costs and timing of available courses. Second, different groups or types of people may face different barriers to the same activity.

As for the implications of the findings in the studies we reviewed, many authors agree on the importance of trying to reduce barriers to participation by developing policy responses that reflect an awareness of how different types of people are affected by different barriers. However, there was no consensus on what types of barriers could or should be the focus of such ameliorative efforts. (Silva et al., 1998, p.103).

1.28 The report goes on to discuss, in some detail, how the participation theories should be used to shape the questions asked in future iterations of the survey. The authors argue for the NHES to include factors identified in a number of different frameworks and not just limited to, for example, the psychological or economic aspects of participation. In addition, for the NHES the factors have to be measurable in a telephone survey. While at first glance this might seem to be a significant limitation on the sort of questions that can be asked during data collection, telephone surveys can often lead to richer data than the written surveys more often used in large-scale participation studies. The factors identified as critical were:

- Demographic/background characteristics
- Life events and transitions
- Past participation in adult education
- Other participatory behaviour
- Co-participants (the others in the programme)
- Physical and mental health
- Intentions (regarding education)
- Perceptions of barriers
- Perceptions of benefits
- Motivations
- Reference group opinions (peer group influence)
- Attitudes/opinions towards education
- Role of technology and availability of other options to formal adult education courses

1.29 It is sobering to note that there are few leverage points for policy intervention in this list of factors. They are predominantly subjective in nature, based in people's attitudes and their experience more than their abstract knowledge about education or the nature of educational provision. Lifelong learning models are likely to emphasise subjective factors even more than the traditional models of participation in learning reviewed in Silva et al. because lifelong learning is a highly personal activity, not requiring institutions or classes. However, other research has identified a range of factors more amenable to policy level modification and potentially fruitful to explore as part of a broad understanding of lifelong learning.

1.30 The single most influential approach to accounting for broader influences is Cross' (1981) 'Chain of Response Model,' which has been described as one of the major undeveloped models for adult learning (Hiemstra, 1993). Cross offered a way of understanding participation that was complex enough to recognise the broad array of factors bearing on participation decisions, and also began to work towards an approach able to bridge agency (the areas individuals can control) and structure (more socially regulated aspects). The model takes into account self-perceptions; attitudes towards education; life transitions; value of goals (and expectations that participation will meet goals); information; and opportunities and barriers. The aspect of this model most appropriate for policy intervention are the barriers.

1.31 Cross (1981) suggests that there are three types of barriers likely to discourage participation:

1. Situational, arising from life circumstances at a particular time, such as elder care
2. Institutional, arising from organisational arrangements such as time and place of classes, availability of childcare and so on
3. Dispositional, arising from the attitudes and opinions of learners

1.32 Whilst dispositional barriers may, once more, be beyond the scope of policy, it is likely that educational providers can offer a response to Institutional and Situational barriers. Over the last few years, institutions have generally become more flexible in their delivery, allowing more part-time study at unconventional times, for example. Technology has extended the reach of education beyond traditional geographical limits.

1.33 Situational barriers can be addressed by targeted programmes that take the specifics of such barriers into account in design and delivery. Lone parent status, for example, can be made less of a barrier with effective and affordable childcare, and through strategies to ensure that the educational process leads to a more stable living situation for the family. Basically, the aim is to increase the benefits of participation while reducing the difficulties.

1.34 Another model, from the formal study of adult education, is the psychosocial interaction model (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982), which sees the participation decision as the product of internal and external pressures. The model has been developed since its original publication, and has led to a list of six general factors likely to act as deterrents to participation. These are:

1. Lack of confidence
2. Lack of course relevancy (or questions of quality)
3. Time constraints
4. Low personal priority
5. Cost
6. Personal and family



1.35 These variables are influenced by the prospective learner's perception of their importance and will change as the life situation of the learner changes (Scanlan, 1986). Another, very similar, approach (Young, 1999) suggests that there are 4 types of barrier preventing participation in adult education: informational (where the potential learner does not know about opportunities), financial, institutional, and motivational. While similar to Cross' model, it is worth noting that this approach does not recognise situational barriers.

1.36 The final example of this style of participation study was recently published by Smith and Spurling (2001). The fundamental assertions of their approach are:

1. The levels of learning motivation displayed by individuals reflect their social and economic experience in general, and their family experience in particular
2. Despite this experience every healthy person can, in principle, rise to high levels of motivation to learn
3. At every point in our society, practical steps can be taken to improve learning motivation significantly (p.1)

1.37 This perspective, and many others like it, can be seen as representing the 'classic' style of participation study, all of which are lodged within a similar view of participation as involvement in structured provision and which dominate attempts to understand educational participation. One weakness of this style of study is the difficulty of actually knowing what to do in order to reduce barriers and increase motivation. While Smith and Spurling (2001), for example, talk about the necessity of taking practical steps to increase motivation, their 'Agenda for Action' includes items such as 'Learning provider organisations to prepare wide ranging motivational strategies' (p. 116) without identifying those strategies specifically or explaining how a provider level strategy can affect learners' subjective decisions about participation.

1.38 The critical point is that only some barriers can be addressed through policy. The traditional approach to participation research generally does not identify those particular barriers as the most important. The converse is that the barriers and positive motivational factors identified by the classic studies as the most influential are often beyond the reach of policy. A common example is previous educational experience, which seems to make an enormous difference to participation in lifelong learning. There is no clear means by which policy can directly influence that factor.

1.39 There are two other bodies of work that are worth mentioning in a summary of participation theories. The first of these is economic theory, and the insights it offers into individual motivations (Osberg, 2000). One aspect is captured by a measure called internal rate of return, which works well as a way to demonstrate the thinking involved in an economic approach. Internal rate of return tries to model the decision-making involved in investing in education as opposed to an alternative activity—for example, going to university vs. staying in a secure job. Cohn and Hughes (1994) suggest that for undergraduate study, important variables include age, race, marital status, location, parent schooling, parents'

social class, siblings, religion, and education. A second set of variables covers employment issues, and a third addresses macro-economic issues such as wage rates. The economic work on participation is well-developed and complex (see, for example, Harmon, Oosterbeek, & Walker, 2003).

1.40 Economic analysis may well hold some important pointers, but it is unlikely to be the whole story behind participation decisions. It is unlikely that people consistently make rational decisions about learning as well as having sufficient information (and enough knowledge to understand that information), suggesting that there may be many cases where people make decisions not consistent with self interest and a high internal rate of return. People could think ‘I’ll get paid more if I participate in skills upgrading,’ but it is unclear how that is weighed against the many other factors that have to be taken into account.

1.41 Finally, it is important to acknowledge the new work being done in the UK, and particularly in Scotland, on learning and identity (Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill, 2003; Schuller, Brassett-Grundy, Green, Hammond, & Preston, 2002). This approach is distantly related to German research on adult education that begins from a biographical perspective, but is even more concerned with the identity formation of the individual learner. In other words, the central idea is that people develop social identities as learners in the same way as they develop identities as grandparents or football fans, and these identities shape their actions and decisions. Once the individual has developed the learner identity they are more likely to maintain their learning in order to maintain that identity. The notion of learning careers is related to the idea of learning identity, with the two areas mutually informing each other. As the individual’s learning career unfolds, it shapes their identity as a learner, in turn affecting the learning career.

1.42 The identity based work in Scotland is based on earlier work that started to present participation as a more complex phenomenon than suggested by the classic barriers and motivation models. For example, one report (Gallacher et al., 2000) emphasises the complexity of the participation decision, and points to the importance of critical incidents. If the decision to learn is based on the coincidence of, for example, meeting a friend who is enjoying her experience in adult education, then it presents some real challenges in terms of finding systematic ways to increase participation.

1.43 Ideas such as critical incidents and learning identity have enormous potential. The models based on identity go beyond the slightly mechanistic push and pull models of barriers and motivations, and also manage to avoid the normative assumption that everybody should be learning all the time. However, they are still in a very early stage of development, and the implications for lifelong learning and participation policy are unclear. As Crossan et al. (2003) argue,

Participating in organised learning as an adult serves as a strategy for coping with the risks associated with contemporary career trajectories and at the same time, by enabling greater mobility, it gives rise to further instability and fragmentation of established occupational structures (pp. 65-66)

1.44 This suggests that participation in adult learning is not just a response to changing economic structures, but a contributory factor to those very changes. If this represents a truly circular scenario, the appropriate role of a policy intervention is not obvious. Will increasing breadth and depth of participation simply increase the speed of change, exacerbating once more the economic divisions between those with and without access to learning?

### **Difficulties with participation theories**

1.45 There are a substantial number of theoretical approaches to adult participation in education, rooted in a variety of disciplines. While they all appear to point in the same direction when it comes to knowing what matters in participation, they consistently fail to suggest concrete policy options based on these insights. In addition, two of the uncontested assumptions mentioned earlier are extremely common within theories of participation (Silva et al., 1998; Tight, 1999). These are:

1. Participation is good. There is an unquestioned principle that participation is in some way more virtuous than non-participation. While an argument based on human capital theory could be made (on the basis that participation is equivalent to investment in the nation's human capital equity, and hence productivity) the situation is not as clear cut as it appears at first glance. The decision not to participate in education may well be a conscious strategic choice rather than failure to engage in what should be a default activity.
2. Participation leads to articulation. Less so in the adult education theories, but certainly dominant in the theories on participation in formal education is the assumption that entering basic skills education, for example, should lead to an ever increasing depth and level of involvement in learning. Recent policy documents on lifelong learning also seem to accept this assumption.

1.46 Many different questions can be asked about these assumptions. Among the most obvious is whether some forms of participation are more 'productive' than others, both at an individual and societal level. The answer to this question is largely unknown because human capital models of education (where education is viewed as an investment) tend to use years of formal schooling as the independent variable rather than a more incisive or nuanced measure. However, it does seem reasonable to expect that not all education is created equal in terms of effect and potential value. Whilst all participation may help to build confidence regarding learning, for example, surely not all learning is inherently good. It would be better to offer learners opportunities with both substantive and affective value - in other words, that offered high quality content as well as an opportunity to gain confidence in learning. Working towards this aim requires substantial understanding of why adults participate.

1.47 Similarly, it is far from obvious that all adults should be involved in articulating 'upwards' through the educational system. Whilst evidence suggests that the benefits of educational participation are maximised at degree level within OECD countries (Sianesi & Van Reenen, 2003) it does not follow that all adults have to attain degree level qualifications.

It is quite likely that the point of maximum return to education would move upwards with the average level of educational attainment in a continual spiral of credential inflation. Again, predicting who will benefit from what education requires strong theoretical and pragmatic knowledge of participation issues (McGivney, 2003).

1.48 Finally, the breadth and depth of participation have to be taken into account. Broad participation means that many people are taking part in learning, whereas deep participation means that they are undertaking substantial amounts learning. From the perspective of the learning society, it seems likely that participation should be both broad and deep. What forms and formats of learning meet these requirements is far from clear.

### **Summary**

1.49 This chapter reviews the context of the present study, including the current emphasis on lifelong learning and the dominant theories of participation. It suggests that there are some significant issues in understanding participation, including assumptions that participation in learning is normal rather than a special situation, and that learning should progress over time. This discussion sets the stage for the approach developed in the current study.

## CHAPTER TWO THE APPROACH OF THIS STUDY

2.1 Participation is an enormous topic in education, and understanding its meaning, the forms it takes, and the patterns within it is a perpetual challenge. This chapter discusses the approach taken to participation in this study and the ways in which that approach recognises some of the major challenges of the topic. I begin by describing the model of participation underpinning this study, using the work of Herzberg (1966) and Maslow (Huit, 2004). The following sections lay out a concrete framework for approaching participation (reflecting the policy context), and provide a brief overview of the criteria used to select the research included in this review.

### **A model of participation**

2.2 The current study has required the development of a consistent approach to the topic in order to organise and make sense of the vast body of literature on participation. I have chosen a simple model that, nonetheless, helps to address many of the complexities of the topic. There are two underlying theories, both of which can be considered as belonging to the field of social psychology.

2.3 The first of these is the notion of a hierarchy of needs, as developed by Abraham Maslow (1954). Maslow's basic idea is that humans have two kinds of needs: deficiency needs and growth needs. The deficiency needs are the basic requirements for survival, including physiological needs such as food and water; safety needs such as being out of danger; belongingness needs such as being accepted by others; and esteem needs including being competent and gaining recognition. Only when the deficiency needs are satisfied can the individual move on to the growth needs, which include the need to know and understand, and aesthetic needs such as an attractive home.

2.4 Maslow's theories have two significant implications for educational participation. The first is that people will participate in education when their basic deficiency needs are taken care of. That is, they will be able and willing to learn when they have already obtained food, shelter and clothing as well as other survival necessities. This has interesting repercussions regarding people living in poverty, as it suggests that expecting people to learn their way out of poverty may be unrealistic—the very features that mark poverty, such as low quality nutrition and housing, may inhibit people from engaging in learning. The second implication is that vocational and leisure focused learning will appear at different places in Maslow's hierarchy. While vocational education may in certain circumstances be inspired by, and satisfy, deficiency needs, education due to interest in a topic will clearly fall into the growth need area. This creates a potential separation between participation decisions around learning for interest and learning for vocational or other direct advantage.

2.5 The second theory is based on the work of industrial psychologist Herzberg (1966), who argued in the context of work that barriers and motivators for productivity were not at opposite ends of a single continuum (for example, lack of autonomy is a barrier, lots of autonomy is motivating). Instead he suggested that they were completely different sets of

factors. His model calls one set ‘hygienes,’ referring to factors that have to be present to allow for a particular behaviour to occur (such sufficient autonomy to choose eating times will ensure productivity is not lost to hunger), and the other set ‘motivators,’ referring to factors that make that behaviour more likely when they are present (such as the ability to change working hours to suit the worker leading to more productivity).

2.6 In a work context, money can be seen as a hygiene. Increasing pay for workers does not, by itself, tend to increase productivity, but a decent rate of pay has to be in place to ensure that workers will be productive. There is a optimum level of pay that does not detract from productivity because of dissatisfaction yet is affordable by the employer. An example of a motivator might be the possibility of promotion. The lack of promotion possibilities does not necessarily result in dissatisfaction and demotivation, but having the possibility of promotion and a pay rise can provide a motivating factor for the workforce.

2.7 One of the important implications of this approach is that the desired behaviour is not taken as a default option, which people will automatically do when the barriers are removed. Instead it suggests that not only do barriers have to be removed, but positively motivating factors have to be provided as well. In the case of participation in lifelong learning, the model suggests that there have to be no insurmountable barriers *to* learning and also very clear reasons *for* learning. So, for example, having childcare on offer may be a hygiene for lone parent participation, but will not increase participation by itself. There would also have to be a motivator for participation, such as a guaranteed improvement in the family standard of living. The following table sketches out a few factors that could fall into each category, derived from the literature reviewed for this study.

<b>Hygienes (factors that have to be in place for the possibility of participation)</b>	<b>Motivators (factors that will positively encourage participation)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Affordability</li> <li>• Time available</li> <li>• Accessibility to learning (time and space)</li> <li>• Attitude to learning</li> <li>• Confidence in learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear benefit to individual and family</li> <li>• Interest</li> <li>• Work demands (current or future)</li> <li>• Positive experience of learning</li> <li>• Maintenance of learning identity</li> </ul>

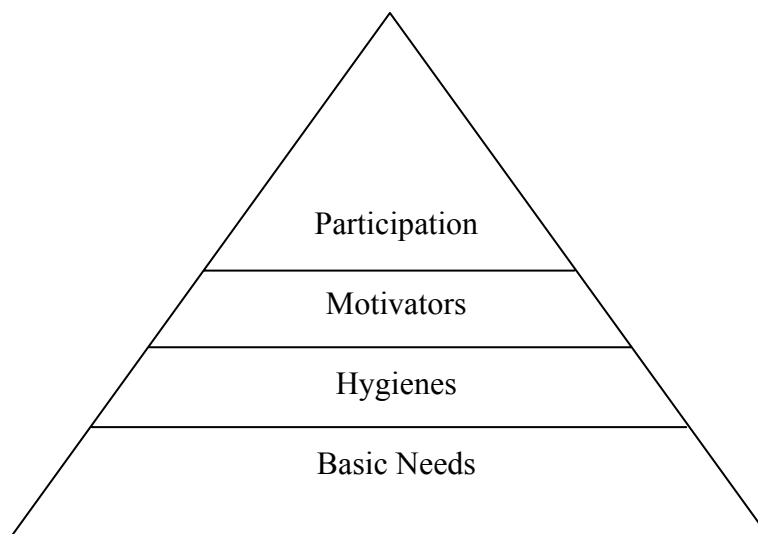
**Table 3: Examples of potential hygienes and motivators**

2.8 From a policy perspective, this approach has the potential to be extremely helpful. It separates out the areas where barriers need to be removed (hygienes) from those where incentives must be created (motivators). However, there are still a number of areas where policy cannot have a great deal of direct effect, such as confidence in learning or positive experience of learning (factors that are probably closely related), and it may well be that long term cultural changes are needed to affect these aspects of participation.

2.9 This approach means that what are conventionally considered as ‘barriers’ will be more positively ‘hygienes’—things that need taken care of. A further implication is that

factors outside the remit of policy will drop out of the analysis since they cannot be represented as hygienes. For example, individual experience of education needs to be positive if people are to continue in lifelong learning (see chapter 5). This is not a factor that can be directly affected by policy, and it is also not possible to represent this as a hygiene within Hertzberg's model. The model, in effect, filters the relevant factors and leaves only those that can be addressed through policy decisions.

2.10 In the later sections of this report the idea of hygienes and motivators is applied in a systematic way to the particulars of participation. However, the general framework is summed up in the following diagram:



**Figure 1: The participation pyramid**

2.11 This diagram represents a general model of participation rooted within the two theories discussed, and shows that participation is dependent upon the three other layers. For any specific educational participation, the three lower layers become more specific. Basic needs have to be satisfied for almost any educational participation. Hygienes will still be relatively general, but will reflect some characteristics of the specific learning—for example, childcare may be an issue for an evening course but not for a course during the day when children are in school. Motivators will be yet more specific, needing to answer the question of why the individual should participate at the current time in the current course.

2.12 It is worth making a couple of comments. The first is that each layer is not as separate as it appears in the diagram. There will be some basic needs that are also hygienes, and some hygienes that are also motivators, but the basic framework is a useful way to represent the relationships between factors. The second comment is that this model contains no assumption that simply removing barriers is sufficient to bring about participation. While hygienes can be seen as the factors that have to be addressed to ensure there are no barriers, the model still retains motivation as a separate layer. It is quite easy to imagine circumstances where the

hygienes are satisfied but the individual still does not participate in learning because there is no specific motivation. Participation in learning is not seen as an unquestioned norm, but a strategic decision on the part of an individual (Van Damme, 1999).

### The particulars of participation

2.13 The classic categorisation of educational provision, codified in the International Standard Classification of Education of the 1970s, divides it into formal, non-formal, and informal types. Formal learning occurs in settings such as schools, colleges, and universities, and non-formal learning in settings with an explicit educational aim but more ‘casual’ approach. Informal education is the learning that takes place throughout our lives, in family and community settings, and in many ways can be considered as a private activity because no programmes or credentials are involved. An inclusive lifelong learning approach such as the current Scottish policy views all three types of learning as valuable and worthy of support. Informal learning, for example, can be encouraged through supply of resources such as the BBC website of public libraries. However, this study will only deal with formal and non-formal - that is the public – aspects of learning.

2.14 The difference between formal (school-based) and non-formal (workplace, community programmes, CLD) is more subtle, and is laid out in the following table.

	Formal	Non-formal
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term and general</li> <li>• Credential based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short-term and specific</li> <li>• Non-credential based</li> </ul>
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long cycle / preparatory / full-time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short cycle / recurrent / part-time</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized / input centred</li> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Entry requirements determine clientele</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualized / output centred</li> <li>• Practical</li> <li>• Clientele determine entry requirements</li> </ul>
Delivery system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution-based, isolated from environment.</li> <li>• Rigidly structured, teacher-centred and resource intensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment-based, community related.</li> <li>• Flexible, learner-centred and resource saving</li> </ul>
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External / hierarchical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-governing / democratic</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Ideal-type models of normal and non-formal education** (Fordham, 1993)



2.15 In terms of participation such a typology has interesting implications. Participation will appear different in each of the two categories. The central question of this study concerns part-time participation, which certainly makes sense in the case of formal learning. In the table above, one of the characteristics of formal learning is that full-time attendance is the norm. This suggests that there is a need to be selective about what types of participation in formal learning are counted in order to make sure the emphasis lies upon part-time participation. For non-formal learning there is no full time engagement and any participation will fall into the traditional category of part-time learning. Therefore, the types of learning falling into the scope of this study are:

1. part-time engagement in formal learning
2. participation in non-formal learning

2.16 Some caution is necessary with this categorisation. While it makes sense from an institutional point of view to think of part-time and full time students as participating differently in education, one analyst was pointing out 15 years ago that:

The distinction between full and part-time students is in itself becoming more arbitrary and less clear. As increasing numbers of institutions adopt modular structures and credits are accumulated and transferred at further as well as at higher education levels, students can take on any workload and its associated credit-rating as they wish. (Sargant, 1991, p.17)

2.17 In other words, it is important to remember that the category of part-time student is a creation of institutional practices and policies more than any clear cut way of participating in learning. Some policies (such as hardship funds in Higher Education) may force students to view themselves in a particular way according to whether they are granted or denied access to support, but in general the lines are blurred. Within these limits, however, part-time versus full-time participation is a useful distinction to draw in terms of understanding the concrete decisions learners make about learning, and the resources they require.

2.18 The categories of non-formal and formal learning can be placed on one side of a matrix of learning used to organise discussion of the concrete implications of the hygienes and motivators identified in chapter 5. The other side of the matrix is made up of the specific groups who have traditionally been less engaged in learning.

	General	Unemployed	Social Classes C2-E	Lone Parents	Older Adults	People w. Disabilities
Non-Formal	A	C	E	G	I	K
Formal	B	D	F	H	J	L

**Table 3: Participation Matrix**

2.19 The matrix could have included other groups, such as women and visible minorities, but I chose not to include them for two reasons. There is little data on these groups, but more importantly, evidence consistently points to very healthy participation rates for these groups

(see, for example, Slowey, 2004, Sargant, 1991). The groups included in the matrix are those that can be demonstrated to under-participate in adult learning. Indeed, much of the participation literature, and the majority of evidence cited in chapter 4, points to membership of those groups as a reason for non-participation.

2.20 Ideally, this study would produce well evidenced recommendations for each of these groups, and lay out the policy implications. Unfortunately, while some sections are very well evidenced, many have little or no data available at all. Generally, there is much more information on the general topic of ‘participation by adults’ than there is on the more particular topics. It is not possible to use existing research to support that kind of analysis. However, there is a fair amount of evidence on what the most common hygienes and motivators are for the general population, and my approach in this study is to begin by listing and categorising these. At that point, it is possible to address each of the under-represented groups on a logical basis by suggesting which hygienes and motivators are most relevant to, and pressing for, each group of potential participants. This is an attempt to extend the current data to other, more specific groups, and can be considered as an example of a research technique called ‘generalisation to theory’ (Mason, 1996).

### **Gathering the evidence**

2.21 The evidence for the report is gleaned from a large-scale literature review of published documents on participation. However it is worth noting that there is surprisingly little written on participation that is both focused on individual decision making and strongly empirical. Most of the writing presents specific theoretical models, or constitutes a survey of the participation numbers, or argues for the desirability of increased participation from a policy perspective. There are not many studies that examine the concrete experiences of learners and try to draw conclusions about the mechanisms encouraging or preventing participation.

2.22 A recent discussion of research on widening participation suggested that there are three broad categories of research into access:

1. Macro-level studies of the evolution of modern higher education systems
2. Intermediate-level studies of specific policy initiatives aimed at widening participation
3. Micro-level studies of ‘access’ in terms of student experiences, progression, outcomes, and so on. (Scott, 2004, p.23)

2.23 Though all three categories have the potential to provide information on participation relevant to this study, the majority are likely to fall into the second category. Macro-level studies of higher education are unlikely to provide clearly evidenced suggestions for policy, and micro-level studies may be suggestive but have little claim to generalisability. The bulk of the information reviewed will be intermediate-level studies of specific policy initiatives. Unfortunately, this category is also least well represented in the literature.

2.24 There are also considerations of study quality to be taken into account. In order to be included as evidence in this study, literature had to meet the following criteria:

1. Published since 1990
2. Clear evidence of empirical base (which could be quantitative or qualitative)
3. Demonstration of appropriate analysis
4. Findings that are related to, and supported by, the data and the analysis

2.25 Restricting the studies included in this way helps to ensure the rigour of the report in terms of the evidence base and also provides a way to discriminate among the many thousands of publications on the topic. I have chosen 1990 as the cut-off year for studies because the rapid evolution of lifelong learning - and the policy context surrounding it - over the last few decades would make going any further back risky in terms of relevance. 1990 seems like a reasonable year to select as the approximate beginning of the lifelong learning era, being the date of the UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All.

## **Summary**

2.26 This chapter sets out the approach taken in the study, including the theory of participation underpinning the analysis and the framework for setting out the findings. The model laid out here combines two theoretical approaches to suggest that participation results when basic needs are satisfied, hygienes are in place, and there is motivation for learning. Before moving on to look at the hygienes and motivators that have been identified for participation in adult education, and to discuss which of these are amenable to policy intervention, it is useful to review the general literature concerning who currently participates.

## CHAPTER THREE WHO PARTICIPATES?

3.1 This chapter addresses the question of who participates, and by extension who does not participate, in adult learning. Most of the work done on participation sets out to address this question, and though it provides interesting background information it consistently fails to tackle some of the critical issues. The international literature over the last half-century shows that more educated people tend to be more involved in adult learning, as do employed people from upper classes. The benefits of adult learning, despite the rhetoric of access and widened participation, tend to accrue to those who are already doing well. The types of issues unaddressed include *why* people from lower socio-economic classes do not participate in formal or non-formal adult learning even when it is designed to recognise their needs. The mass of participation literature, whatever the location or educational form, tends to repeat the findings that some social groups participate and others do not without looking in detail at the factors involved.

3.2 Some information can be gleaned from these studies. If, for example, we know that older people participate less than people in their 30s and 40s, we can suggest that perhaps provision is not well designed for this age group. Care is necessary with this kind of broad attribution, however. We also know that the dominant reasons for participating in adult learning are vocational, suggesting that it is entirely logical that older people would participate less. So while studies of who participates can provide some clues to the structural aspects of participation they certainly do not provide complete answers.

3.3 There are a number of important UK and Scottish studies to review, though it has to be recognised immediately that there are extremely significant differences in the way each of the studies develops the idea of participation into a theoretical tool. This means that numerical data cannot be compared directly between the studies. Whatever the approach taken, it is interesting to note that the same factors are consistently identified as being correlated with participation. Most of these studies are based in the specific academic discipline of adult education, but are extremely relevant to the broader question of lifelong learning addressed in the present study.

### Scottish Studies

3.4 One of the most important Scottish studies was published just before the cut-off date of 1990, and I have chosen to include it. This was the 1988 'Adult Participation in Education and Training Report' published by the Scottish Centre for Research in Education (Munn & MacDonald, 1988). In this study the researchers adopted the notion of the 'adult returner,' an individual over 20 years of age with a break of at least 2 years from initial full-time education. This is a useful notion for targeting a particular group of learners. Participation in this case was defined as 'any course or systematic programme of learning which lasts for a total of 7 hours or more within a three month period' (p.3). This inclusive definition

embraces both full-time learners and those whose participation is below what might usually be considered part-time, and so the figures can be expected to be on the high side.

3.5 In the study's sample of 1826, 42% could be defined as adult returners, suggesting that a lot of Scottish adults are engaged in educational activity. This was divided almost equally between men and women. In more detailed analysis, there are significant differences between social groups, as expected from other literature. Social classes AB have a 74% participation rate compared to 23% for classes DE<sup>1</sup>. There were dramatic differences between the educational qualifications of returners and non-returners, with 15% of returners having advanced education compared to 4% of non-returners. The preferred mode of attendance was part-time in the evening (45%), with part-time day attendance getting 23% support and full-time a relatively small 15%. It seems that adult returners are strongly in favour of part-time attendance.

3.6 Reasons for not participating in adult education included 'not really interested' (28%), 'no time' (16%), 'children/dependents' (13%), and 'wouldn't help in a job' (8%). Reasons for participation were that the participant 'thought it would help in my job' (19%), was 'interested in the subject' (17%), or 'thought it would be useful to me' (15%). It is worth noting that this third category could also refer to vocational benefits. When asked for reasons for return defined by returners, the current job and personal interests were both mentioned by 41%, a potential job was mentioned by 17%, and increasing qualifications by 19%. The authors of this report (Munn & MacDonald, 1988) suggest that there is widespread lack of interest in returning to education and training, and that this lack of interest may come from negative school experiences.

3.7 The situation 16 years later is not as dramatically different as might be expected given the growing importance of lifelong learning rhetoric. In 2004 Slowey (2004) analysed the Scottish responses to the survey on adult participation in learning conducted by the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills. NIACE used a very broad definition of learning that included self-directed learning and study, and found that 25% of adult Scots were involved in some kind of learning and a further 19% had been in the previous three years. The 44% total is remarkably similar to the 42% identified by Munn & MacDonald (1988) yet uses a considerably broader definition. Altogether, two-thirds had been involved in educational activity since leaving full-time education.

3.8 Many of the same patterns held true. Individuals with degrees made up 43% of recent learners and only 14% of non-recent learners. Gender seemed to make little difference in the overall pattern of participation. Social class still played a central role, with almost half of those not participating from social class DE and 15% from AB. Recent learners were younger than those who had not recently participated in learning.

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<sup>1</sup> There are a variety of methods of measuring and representing social class, and in this discussion I have retained the approach used in the original surveys— usually a five letter scale from A to E. The scale is based on employment type, with professional occupations in Class A and unskilled occupations in Class E. For further discussion see Rose (1995).

3.9 Overall, further education colleges and the workplace are the two most frequently mentioned locations for learning. Interestingly, the location of learning was strongly stratified by class. Groups AB were most likely to be learning at university (28%), the workplace was dominant for groups C1 and C2 (29/30%), and further education colleges were almost equally important for C2 (29%) and dominant for DE. Education and class are still significantly linked in Scotland.

3.10 In terms of the time spent in learning activities, the majority (54%) spent less than 10 hours a week on their main subject. This implies that 46% spend more than ten hours a week, remarkably high given the breadth of the definition of learning, which would tend to bring in a higher number of short learning projects. One in five women and one in twenty men were committing over 30 hours per week to learning. This suggests that women may be more engaged in part-time learning.

3.11 The NIACE survey used a forced choice menu of options for identifying the motivations for learning. Interest in the subject (35%), the enjoyment of learning (30%), and advancement in their current job (29%) were the most commonly selected motivations. The study did not address barriers in any substantive way.

## **UK studies**

3.12 NIACE has been conducting surveys on adult participation in learning for over a decade, and are the most well known source of such statistics. The UK figures are different from the Scottish analysis presented above, but the trends are consistent. Having a longitudinal series of surveys means that change over time can be detected in a way not currently possible with the Scottish statistics. It is interesting to compare the later English and Welsh figures with ones from the early 1990s, and any trends that show up may also be relevant to Scotland, allowing tentative propositions about the development of participation over time. It is useful to examine participation studies chronologically despite serious concerns about their comparability.

3.13 One important study from around 15 years ago (Sargant, 1991) looked specifically at policy implications arising from the patterns of participation. The report was based on interviews with 4,608 people over the age of 17 from England, Scotland, and Wales. The study found that 10% of respondents were currently studying, and a further 16% had studied within the previous three years. Another 10% are engaged in self study of some sort, making a total of 36% involved in learning over the three years before the study. About 3% of the sample were still at school or in some form of full-time post-school study such as university. More men were involved in study than women (31% vs 27%), and there was a significant division between the people studying for a qualification (mostly male) and those studying in areas not leading to a qualification (mostly female).

3.14 The main influence on participation was social class, with 42% of ABs current or recent learners compared with 17% of DEs. Generally minority ethnic groups participated at

a rate comparable with the upper classes of the white population. The subjects for study are predominantly vocational, with arts and social science having lost learners over the ten years leading up to the 1991 report. The main reasons for people preferring part-time study are availability of time, money and the existence of work and family pressures. Sargant argues that:

What is serious is the failure of policy makers to get to grips with providing a proper framework for support for the financing and organisation of part-time post-school learning, clearly the preferred, if not the only available, mode of study for the majority of adults. (Sargant, 1991, p.17)

3.15 Finally, Sargant (1991) also found that four out of ten adults who were not currently studying and who had not studied recently were interested in studying, suggesting that there is significant potential to support learning among people who are currently not engaged in it.

3.16 At around the same time an influential study on the routes adult learners took through education was published (McGivney, 1992). The study found that those who participated in learning very frequently did so for vocational or vocationally related reasons, but the author suggested that the learners themselves did not discriminate enough between vocational and non-vocational outcomes for this to be a meaningful distinction.

3.17 Some interesting patterns of participation and progression did emerge from the data. 'There is substantial evidence that women, more than any other group, make use of adult and community education opportunities, including those provided by local voluntary organisations, to make their way back into formal education or employment' (McGivney, 1992, p.22). Other groups, such as ethnic minority, unemployed, literacy and older learners, also frequently used community-based education as a pathway to other outcomes. The implications of this analysis lie not so much in participation in community-based programmes, which generally have open access policies, but in the next level of participation. If people are using community based learning as a route to participation in Further and Higher Education, it is critical that formal education provides access to learners from community-based programmes. There has been a number of initiatives designed to achieve wider access for learners.

3.18 Both of the studies above mention the difficulty of tracking students and of making sense of their movements and development over time. This continues today, as there is no uniform system of collecting and collating data on learners in order to follow their learning careers. While such a system has worrying shades of surveillance about it, it may well prove to be the only way to truly understand and react to the issues of a society where learning becomes a universal activity.

3.19 By the late 1990s there was little change (Sargant, Field, Francis, Schuller, & Tuckett, 1997). The 1996 NIACE survey on adult participation in learning interviewed 4,673 people over the age of 17 to find out about their participation in adult learning, and found that 23% were learning at that time, with a further 17% have been involved in learning in the previous three years, for a total of 40% either currently or recently learning. Social class was a key

factor in determining likelihood of participation, as was employment, with half of employed people current or recent learners. The single strongest predictor of participation in adult learning was the length of initial education. Just under three quarters of learners of working age are studying for a qualification. The main reason for taking up learning was promotion at work, and the main barrier was work and other time pressures. Interestingly, more than 9 in 10 (93%) believed that learning is something people do throughout their lives.

3.20 The 2004 NIACE survey of adult participation in learning follows many others by identifying the factors affecting participation as socio-economic class, age, employment status, and education beyond the minimum school leaving age. The 2004 survey shows the lowest participation rate since the adoption of the current survey format, with 19% of adults currently participating and 38% having participated over the last three years. Adults in socio-economic groups ABC1 are more than twice as likely to be learning as those in groups DE. Nearly three-fifths of the members of socio-economic group DE have not participated in learning since leaving school (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2004). The NIACE survey participation rate is in line with previous iterations, and there is little reason to believe that there are significant trends towards greater or lesser degrees of participation—in fact, there is remarkably little change since the early 1990s despite the increased attention given to adult and lifelong learning in policy.

3.21 There are two further important sources of data on the UK level. One is the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS)(Fitzgerald, Taylor & La Valle, 2003), which suggests that 76% of respondents had taken part in some learning over the last three years. This is a much higher figure than other surveys, though given the broad definition of learning applied in the survey it may be more in line with intuitive expectations. Nonetheless, the discrepancy is important to note. The factors influencing participation remained the same: age, educational background, employment, financial circumstances, and local deprivation. The report claims that ‘the national learning target for adult participation has been met’ (p.1) in gross percentage terms despite the significantly lower participation of some under-represented groups such as those with no qualifications (29%).

3.22 The Pathways in Adult Learning Survey (PALS) (Snape, Bell & Jones, 2004) is an attempt to understand longitudinal patterns of participation in learning based on the NALS samples and data. Of the PALS sample, 58% were involved in learning both at the time of the 2001 NALS and the PALS follow up in 2003. When examining barriers, PALS found that those who continued to learn often had more formal barriers than those who dropped out, and that ‘practical barriers such as lack of time due to work commitments may be more easily overcome than barriers related to a lack of motivation to learn’ (p.7). Interestingly, relatively low percentages of people citing a specific barrier said they would be likely to participate in learning if that barrier were removed. For example, only 30% of those citing childcare as a barrier said they would participate if childcare were provided. Overall, PALS underlines the complexity of participation patterns once more.



## **Participation in Further and Higher Education**

3.23 It is worth noting that despite efforts to widen access to Further and Higher Education there is still widely differential access at the level of traditional students. One way of looking at this is to divide the population into five groups by deprivation, ranging from the least deprived (most privileged) 20% to the most deprived 20%. In a perfectly equitable system 20% of students would come from each group or “quintile”. Currently in Scotland the ancient universities draw 38% of their students from the least deprived 20% of the population and 8.5% from the most deprived (Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, 2004). This means the least deprived group are twice as highly represented as their numbers suggest they should be, and the most deprived group are half as represented. The average in Scotland across all higher education institutions is 28% from the least deprived, 13.3% from the most deprived—a great deal better than in England and Wales. There is also limited evidence of a trend towards growing numbers of students from the most deprived groups over the last few years in Scotland while this is not the case in the UK as a whole (Department for Education and Skills, 2005).

3.24 Further Education colleges do a far better job with deprivation indices, with each quintile being represented by close to 20% of the student body (Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, 2004). Across all institutions, 37% of students are part-time, and 47% are mature learners (over 21 at time of entry to study). It would be interesting to break down the figures further, in order to examine the types of courses mature learners are doing, and how strongly maturity correlates with part-time status or the deprivation index. Some of these correlations have been calculated for the UK as a whole, and show that between 1994/1995 and 2003/2004 the proportion of mature students increased from 59% to 60%, and over 90% of part-time students in the UK are mature students (Department for Education and Skills, 2005). In summary, Further Education colleges are serving people from diverse backgrounds relatively effectively, and are working intensively with part-time and older learners.

### **Summary**

3.25 The many surveys conducted on participation in adult learning have come up with a consistent list of factors that matter—educational experience, work status, social class and age. They have also come up with a consistent level of participation at around 40% of the adult population. On the positive side, this suggests that there are many more people who could become involved in learning, though more negatively it shows how far we may have to go to develop a rich learning society. The UK participation rate is higher than many other OECD countries, though the factors affecting participation are strongly consistent across the OECD countries (O'Connell, 1999). Vocational benefits are far and away the strongest motivation for participation in learning.

3.26 Though the surveys cited generally show that there has been little change in who participates in adult education over the last fifteen years, there are two factors to bear in mind. The first is the difficulty of getting reliable figures for participation in learning, an international issue (Collins, Brick, Kim, & Stowe, 1997). The second issue, at least for the

present study, is that these large scale surveys do not provide any insights into concrete policy measures. Knowing that people from social classes DE, or people with less initial education, participate less in adult education is a long way from knowing what to do about it. There is a need for future research to tackle the specific issues of why people with these backgrounds do not participate in learning. We know to whom access may need to be widened, but as yet there is little indication of what it would take to do this.

## CHAPTER FOUR      HYGIENES AND MOTIVATORS

4.1 This chapter lays out the factors that can be considered within the framework of hygienes and motivators. Each of the factors is supported by at least two empirical research projects, so the framework can be considered to have some grounding in evidence. It is unusual for different research projects to use exactly the same language to describe the factors they take into account, so it has been necessary to group the factors together in a coherent way. It is important to recognise that analysis of these factors is still strongly evidenced by the studies identified for each factor, but that the way they are laid out in this chapter is not based on previous work. Instead, it is designed to address the research questions driving this study.

4.2 The first section deals with those factors which do appear to make a difference, but which are less amenable to policy influence. It seems useful to identify those factors clearly, especially when such a lot of participation research has tended to focus on them, and also to explain why they are difficult to address through policy initiatives. The second section lays out factors associated with general participation in adult learning across all sectors of provision, largely derived from studies of non-formal education. I then look at the formal settings of Higher and Further Education to see what additional factors can be identified for those specific contexts.

### **Factors less amenable to policy intervention**

4.3 There are a number of factors consistently identified as critical to participation but that seem difficult to address through policy. The participation studies discussed in the previous chapter bring up several of them - age, social class, employment status, and educational experience - but the correlation of these demographic factors with educational participation does not necessarily offer many insights into the reasons why they matter. There is a need for research to examine why they make a difference to individuals' decision making.

4.4 Some caution is required in assuming that the knowledge generated by this research would allow policymakers to create systems guaranteeing universal participation. For example, if vocational reasons are a strong motivational factor, as most participation research suggests, then it follows that people approaching retirement may be less motivated to participate. It seems important to identify which factors may be more difficult for policy to affect, and may not respond to short or medium term measures.

4.5 In this discussion I have identified the factors less amenable to policy intervention using the following criteria:

- Factors that represent motivators rather than hygienes. Hygienes can often be addressed effectively at institutional or policy level, whereas motivators are more

difficult to influence. This is consistent with the argument about practical and motivational factors in PALS (Snape, Bell & Jones, 2004). Some motivators are amenable to policy intervention, but the presence of a motivation element suggests caution is required regarding that factor.

- Factors that are cultural or value based. It is possible that these will eventually change if policy retains a strong focus on lifelong learning, but it is likely to take a great deal of time. Education, and educational policy, are blunt and long term instruments when it comes to changing culture (see Barr, undated).
- Factors that are grounded in potential learners' long term experience or life patterns. A good example is the first factor, the learner's social networks. Support from social groupings is essential to successful participation, but it is extremely difficult to see how specific policies and educational practices can influence this factor in the short term.

4.6 Based on these criteria, and on the available research, the following factors are important in determining participation but less amenable to policy intervention.

*Social networks* Support from the learner's family and friends makes a substantial difference both to initial participation and retention in programmes. This support may be influenced by a number of factors, such as the network's collective experience of education, and there may be a degree of inconsistency, with some members more supportive than others. It is difficult to see how policy can affect this factor other than by general commitment to a learning-positive culture. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; Hansen, 1998; Kopka & Peng, 1993; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 2003)

*Pleasure/Interest* It should not be surprising that pleasure of studying and interest in the topic are important influences on educational participation, yet these factors are beyond the reach of policy. It is certainly possible for institutions to ensure that their provision is designed to reflect a range of interests, but final control over this factor is subjective. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; La Valle & Finch, 1999; Munn & MacDonald, 1988; Sargant, 2001; Slowey, 2004)

*Personal Development* Related to the idea of learning for pleasure and interest is the notion of learning for personal development. Again, it is easy to imagine a culture where learning is widely accepted as a route for personal development, but it is hard to imagine a policy initiative being able to influence this on a broad level. (Kopka & Peng, 1993; Sargant, 2001)

*Ambition* Several studies address the use of learning in a strategic way to achieve particular desirable ends such as personal or vocational advancement. While this makes a great deal of intuitive sense, it is once more hard to

see a role for policy in affecting subjective judgements. One factor policy could contribute to would be ensuring that learning receives recognition as a valuable contribution to productivity—an argument that has appeared in policy documents for several decades. (Hansen, 1998; Van Damme, 1999)

- Intrinsic Interest* While the category of interest listed above referred to interest in a specific topic, there is also the possibility of interest in learning itself as a worthwhile activity - learning for its own sake. Once again, the development of a learning positive culture would help with this factor, but there is no easy short term intervention. (Sargant, 2001; Slowey, 2004)
- Family Factors* There is strong evidence that family background makes a significant difference to participation. This can range from the positive end, where having a highly educated family can support participation at all levels, through general family unease, to the negative circumstances of family violence or lack of support. While policy can attempt to level the playing field to some degree (such as by ensuring that middle class families are not advantaged too highly), there are many factors within the private realm of the family. (Gallacher et al., 2000; Smith & Spurling, 2001)
- Confidence* Participation in learning requires a fair degree of confidence on the part of the learner that they are going to be able to handle the demands of education and use the outcomes to improve their life. While policy initiatives may help to clarify the benefits of learning in terms of broader learning, the confidence to participate is a more difficult issue. Current community based and self directed modes of learning already take these issues extremely seriously, but there is still a complex decision making process leading up to participation with only certain aspects open to intervention. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992; Sargant, 2001)
- Employment Status* Whether a person is working, and the type of job they are doing, makes a significant difference to participation, but the factor is outside the realm of educational policy. (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2004; O'Connell, 1999; Sargant et al., 1997)
- Educational Experience* Unfortunately the most widely cited factor in participation is also outside the direct remit of policy. The quality and quantity of previous educational experience has long been recognised as a central and deeply influential factor on participation, and while it is possible to see how policy can affect this in the long term, it is hard to see how it can be changed for individuals who are currently beyond initial education.

(McGivney, 1992, 2003; National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2004; O'Connell, 1999)

*Age* Age makes a difference to participation, especially for vocational programmes as could be predicted. Policy does have a role to play in ensuring that provision is as accessible as possible to all individuals, but people who perceive themselves as too old to learn are unlikely to take advantage of those opportunities. (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2004; O'Connell, 1999)

*Health* As with age, health makes a difference to the likelihood of participation and while policy can press for wider access the individuals themselves have to see learning as a realistic option. (La Valle & Finch, 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003; Sargant et al., 1997)

*Satisfaction* The last factor I will mention in this section is referred to by only one author, but it is such a useful point I would like to include it. If people are satisfied with their current situation they are unlikely to engage in learning beyond leisure interests. When looking at the population and considering policy, it is worthwhile remembering that people may be non-participants due to satisfaction with the status quo. (Hansen, 1998)

4.7 The factors listed above are broadly rooted in the literature of participation, and it is interesting that so many critical factors in participation are difficult to approach directly through policy. In some cases, they can be considered as clusters rather than single factors of participation issues and it is possible that identifying any common underlying factors may allow them to be addressed. For example, educational experience probably results in certain feelings about education that, in turn, result in decisions not to participate. It may be that those feelings could be addressed through long-term policy driven structures such as effective educational outreach programmes.

### **General hygienes for adult learning**

4.8 This section lays out the factors may have to be taken care of before an individual makes to decision to participate in learning. Policy has a role in ensuring that individuals have access to the support they need to ensure these hygienes are satisfied. Even when they are satisfied, there will be many people in many contexts who decide not to participate because there is no specific motivation to do so.

*Time Allocation* Before being able to commit to participation adults need to have a clear plan for time allocation. The needs will vary significantly depending on the individual and their life situation. One implication of this is that policy should encourage institutions to provide a variety of programmes, not only at different times but with different intensities.

Some programmes could be one hour per week and others could be 10 hours per week, with different amounts of online supplementation and different course durations. Policy could encourage institutions to move away from one size fits all course designs, which are often currently enshrined within funding mechanisms. (La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003)

*Location* A similar factor to time, location bears significantly upon participation. However, it is not only important that provision is geographically close to the intended participants, it also has to be in the kind of facility best suited to the purpose. This means that community education can be based in local community centres, but if there is a course designed to encourage access to an ancient university, there is a strong argument for having part of that course within the university to allow participants to get used to the setting. The role of policy is to encourage partnerships and institutional flexibility that support imaginative location of provision. Transportation needs should also be taken into account. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003)

*Financial Packages* It is important that funding is in place to ensure that people are not financially disadvantaged by participating in lifelong learning, but this does not mean that all education necessarily has to be free to the participant. In some cases policy has a role in ensuring that individuals can study while remaining on benefit, but in many cases the critical point will be that the cost of the course does not outstrip the potential income. Potential part-time students often work and can afford some contribution to costs as long as that contribution is realistic and clearly brings benefits to the participant. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; Hansen, 1998; Kennedy, 1997; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992)

*Support mechanisms* Within the providing organisation, support mechanisms for non-traditional learners are a critical factor. This may mean, for example, organising learner support groups or staff mentors for learners. Currently student services staff provide a lot of this support in formal education, but the resources and time are limited. It is possible to imagine many innovative and effective structures to ensure that learners feel the institution is interested in, and supportive of, their learning. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; McGivney, 1992; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003)

*Childcare* Where appropriate, convenient and affordable childcare is an important factor. If this is not available then individuals cannot attend educational programmes. Recent policies have recognised the

importance of this factor and gone some way to addressing it, but the mechanisms tend to be targeted towards full-time students. Policy could encourage the development of more flexible childcare suitable for part-time learners. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; McGivney, 1992)

*Information*

One of the simplest factors affecting participation is whether potential learners feel as if they have enough information to make an informed decision. It is important for policies to encourage institutions to inform community members about their provision in enough detail to allow informed decision making. Clear links need to be shown between educational achievement and work opportunities; the way potential learners see themselves and learning; and personal goals and learning. (Bowman et al., 2000; Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992)

*Provider Openness*

Institutional openness takes in a range of factors essential to broad participation. Firstly, the educational provider is open to participation by a diverse range of people, and works to ensure that no stigma attaches to any group of learners. Secondly, there is flexibility of programming to ensure the widest possible access. Thirdly, special initiatives to encourage participation by particular groups can be helpful. The role of policy in this case can be to encourage providers to be less restrictive and narrow in their thinking on who fits the institution's priorities, and encourage recognition how much diversity can be accommodated within a high quality educational programme. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; Lygo-Baker, 2000; McGivney, 1992)

*Employer Support*

This factor can take two forms. If the potential learner is employed, then the support of their employer can be a significant factor in their decision to participate. The second form is that employers may cooperate with the educational provider to ensure that educational programmes produce genuine work related benefits. Policy could be working to encourage this kind of cross-sectoral link and finding ways to help employers with the potential costs of a learning workforce. This is particularly true for small companies, whose workers are less likely to be involved in learning. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003)

4.9 This list contains only the hygienes that policy initiatives are likely to be able to affect. It is important to note that very few of the factors are primarily financial, though several have cost implications. The structures that need to be in place to encourage part time participation in learning by adults may be located within imaginative design rather than increased resources.



## General motivators for adult learning

4.10 Once the hygienics are in place, participation decisions come down to motivating factors. There are a number of factors that dominate the literature, though it is worth noting that employment related reasons for participating in learning are dominant. The motivators listed below are not meant to be exhaustive - others will always exist - but they are the significant factors within the existing research.

*Employment Mobility* This includes both getting a new job if currently employed and getting any job if currently unemployed. Learning is widely perceived as a way to attain and maintain the skills making the individual attractive to a range of employers. Policy could support this by continuing to develop qualification systems which are flexible and clear enough to signal competence to employers. (Cloonan & Crossan, 2000; Kopka & Peng, 1993; La Valle & Finch, 1999; O'Connell, 1999; Sargant, 2001)

*Employment Improvement* Another major motivator is the opportunity to do better at the learner's current job. Policies could be created to encourage learning to be taken into account in performance assessment and pay calculations, and to encourage employers to support the learning of their employees. Employers are sometimes concerned that employees enter learning to get a better job (so why would employers support them if they are going to leave?) but there is also a need to present learning as one of a range of activities pursued by responsible employees. (Kopka & Peng, 1993; La Valle & Finch, 1999; Munn & MacDonald, 1988; O'Connell, 1999; Sargant, 2001; Slowey, 2004)

*Get a Qualification* A very simple, but important, reason for educational participation is to get a qualification, in order to improve employment eventually, to enter a higher level of education, or for personal satisfaction. The policy response, as above, has to be to ensure that a range of credible qualifications are on offer. Part of this system could be opportunities for credit accumulation (from different institutions towards an award), well-developed accreditation for prior learning, and extensive modularisation. (Kopka & Peng, 1993; McGivney, 1992; Sargant, 2001)

*Learner Identity* Based on some of the new theories discussed earlier, it may well be that the individual's identity as a learner is a significant influence on participation decisions. While the policy implications of such an approach are not yet fully understood, it is likely that any initiatives that promote the notion of a learning career will be helpful to the creation of the learner identity. This implies that policy should make progression easier and more consistent, but it also suggests that there should be pathways that recognise the variety of ways in which

individuals participate in different levels and forms of learning. (Crossan et al., 2003; Lygo-Baker, 2000)

*Another Course* Entry into particular programmes can be part of a long term learning plan, and several analysts identify it as a significant motivation for learning. Policy implications include the need for clear articulation systems and wide access to initial levels of education. (Hansen, 1998; La Valle & Finch, 1999; McGivney, 1992)

4.11 It is interesting that this list contains relatively few motivators that are amenable to policy level intervention. However, this should not be taken to mean that policy is powerless to promote learning. As will be discussed in the following two chapters, there are many concrete options for supporting specific groups to participate.

### **Hygienes for part-time participation in formal education**

4.12 The hygienes for formal education participation are remarkably similar to those for general or community-based adult education. While there is a relatively small number of new factors, however, the existing factors will look somewhat different in a more formal context. It should be noted that there is less evidence for these factors than for general factors listed above, and sometimes they are based on a single study, so some care should be taken in generalising them to a student population. The vast majority of studies of formal education are population surveys, and there are few examples that set out to investigate the details of participation.

*Students with Disabilities* The institutional nature of formal education makes it imperative that there are clear and consistent policies to ensure access for students with disabilities. This may include particular physical facilities such as ramps and induction loops, but also includes structural accommodation for people with learning disabilities, such as learning mentors and alternative assessment approaches. The policy response should be to continue encouraging development of such innovations, and to develop a more specific monitoring system. (Gallacher et al., 2000)

*Financial* The main focus of policy intervention in the last few years has been funding for engagement in formal education such as Further and Higher education. However, a distinction between part-time and full-time study still exists in these forms of education, and that is reflected in the funding mechanisms. Hardship funds, for example, are often only available to full time students, and other financial supports such as childcare funding is often linked to hardship funds. This creates disincentives for part time study. Policy could help to address this situation by ensuring that these pragmatic supports are as flexible as possible, and reflect the actual needs of learners. (Gallacher et al., 2000; Young, 1999)

- Affordability* One of the financial factors worth underlining in the context of Higher Education in particular is the question of affordability. The costs of HE are affected to a large extent by parental income, which may not be a useful consideration for mature part-time students who have had their own household for many years. There is also a question of the hidden costs of formal learning. Policy could focus on developing mechanisms to understand and reflect the complexity of costs associated with part-time participation. (Ackaert & Verhaeghe, 2000; Osborne et al., 2001)
- Attitude/Confidence* The issues of confidence and positive attitude towards learning are especially pressing in formal education, often perceived as ‘not being for me.’ While, as noted earlier, the confidence of learners is hard to address through policy, there may be institutional structures capable of lessening the impact of these concerns in formal education. Examples could include well developed links between non-formal and formal education, and strategies such as peer mentoring and student support services. It would also be helpful to find ways to integrate components of formal education into community-based education and vice-versa. (Ackaert & Verhaeghe, 2000; Archer, 2001; Osborne et al., 2001)
- Need to Earn Money* Adult learners often have a need to earn money that cannot be set aside when they enter part-time learning, and this will be a substantial factor in participation decisions. This is a different issue from financial support, and is more to do with giving learners the opportunity to work than with any direct financial incentive. One policy option would be legislation allowing employees to spend a certain percentage of their time in unpaid educational leave, in order to make it possible for learners to participate in substantial education without having to leave full-time or permanent employment. Educational institutions would have to work within this legislation to design their provision. (Ackaert & Verhaeghe, 2000; Osborne et al., 2001)
- Social Class* The fundamental factor of social class is beyond the reach of policy, but there are still opportunities to reduce its impact on participation. These might include significant out-reach provision and support structures designed to build peer support for learners from under-served groups generally. It is difficult to monitor social class and participation, with the common approach of recording postal codes only working in a very approximate way. As with many other factors, structures to increase general access will have a substantial impact. (Murphy et al., 2002; Osborne et al., 2001; Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, 2004)

- Entry Requirements* Not only do learners react to the objective entry requirements for formal education, they may also be discouraged by their perception of those requirements. The process of entering formal education (especially Higher Education) can be daunting for learners who have not dealt with such structures before. Once more flexibility and support are critical strategies for policy to encourage. (Conrad, 1993; Osborne et al., 2001)
- Academic Support* Adults returning to learning in a formal education context often find the academic demands daunting. Policy can encourage institutions to develop effective support mechanisms such as peer and academic mentoring or flexible course timing using computer technology. A balance has to be achieved between the need for non-threatening progression and the requirements of academic rigour. (Conrad, 1993; Osborne et al., 2001)
- Cultural Factors* There is significant evidence that cultural factors play a part in formal education participation, both at the point of entry to education and also in retention. While some aspects of culture are clearly beyond the reach of policy, it still has a role to play in encouraging formal education institutions to develop an inclusive internal culture. This seems particularly pressing for ancient universities, and in this regard they have much to learn from Further Education provision. One of the first steps may be taking the needs of part-time students—potentially the majority of students—into account when designing programme structures and developing teaching methods. (Archer, 2001; Conrad, 1993)

### **Motivators for part-time participation in formal education**

4.13 The motivators for participation in formal education also largely reflect those for education in general, with employment related reasons seeming to be the dominant group once more.

- Employment* It should not be surprising that employment is a strong motivator for participation in formal education. The policy response to this factor has to be nuanced—not everyone needs to be engaged in formal learning all the time, and the costs to individuals and the economy would be substantial if everybody became over-qualified for the available jobs. While employment factors are a useful and strong encouragement for participation, they need to be balanced with well-informed and effective guidance services to ensure good decision making on the part of potential learners. (Gallacher et al., 2000; Osborne et al., 2001)

### *Peer Support*

One of the most interesting factors affecting participation in formal education is peer support. This can mean peer support inside the institution, where learners meet other learners like themselves, or outside the institution, where the learner's social network supports their participation. The role of policy in addressing this factor is limited, but there are opportunities for encouraging collaborative learning experiences and also the development of cohort based models of recruitment. The cohort model is already used in professional education to recruit groups of teachers and other workers, and there is no reason that it could not be extended to historically under-represented groups. (Archer, 2001; Gallacher et al., 2000; Osborne et al., 2001)

### **Summary**

4.14 There is a reasonable body of evidence allowing identification of specific factors associated with participation in learning, and these can be usefully considered within the framework of hygienes and motivators. It is also important to recognise that a number of these factors are not highly amenable to policy intervention, at least in the short term. The motivation to study is hard to instil in people who feel disenfranchised by the educational system, and the most effective policy strategy may be to make participation as straightforward as possible for people who already want to engage with learning.

4.15 The consistency of significant factors between non-formal and formal education is an encouraging finding, suggesting that there is the potential to create seamless participation mechanisms.

## CHAPTER FIVE                    IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

5.1     This chapter takes the hygienes and motivators identified for the general population of part-time educational participants and discusses likely application to particular under-represented groups. The discussion follows the organising matrix laid out in chapter 3.

5.2     It must be noted that this analysis is not evidence based, but that the allocation of hygienes and motivators to particular groups is theoretical, based on a number of evidence-based general factors. If we know, for example, that childcare is an important hygiene where appropriate, it follows that we can list this for lone parents. This is an accepted way to generate insights within qualitative research (Mason, 1996), especially where there is little direct evidence. The implication is that the factors mentioned here should be taken as ‘things to be aware of, and sensitive to’ rather than an exhaustive list of factors guaranteed to apply in every case. The factors are listed in the following table:

Type of Education	Unemployed	Social Class C2-E	Lone Parents	Older Adults	People w. Disabilities
Non-Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear links between education and desirable outcomes</li> <li>• Encouragement to view unemployment as an opportunity for learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community based programmes</li> <li>• Supportive environments</li> <li>• Opportunity to learn about learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Consistent benefits policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting learner identity</li> <li>• Support based on social networks</li> <li>• Clear information on benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provider open-ness</li> <li>• Ongoing support to address issues arising</li> <li>• Pathways to work</li> </ul>
Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits could support participation</li> <li>• Flexible entry systems</li> <li>• Modular courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-stigmatising support systems</li> <li>• Flexible enough to allow employment</li> <li>• Affordable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare (esp. for part-time participation)</li> <li>• Clear financial information</li> <li>• Strong guidance on employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible entry</li> <li>• Support for confidence building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme flexibility</li> <li>• Diversity friendly institutional culture</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Factors likely to be pertinent to specific groups**

5.3     Taking the next step and creating an evidence base of factors relevant to different groups and individuals would be an invaluable addition to the available knowledge on participation, and would permit more confidence in analysis.

## **General participation in non-formal education**

5.4 There are a number of factors that need to be taken care of as part of any policy driven attempt to encourage and support participation in Non-Formal education. The educational provision needs to incorporate:

- Flexible timing, including different lengths and intensity of programmes and activities that supplement face to face instruction
- Appropriate locations for the type and purpose of learning
- Financial packages that offer learning opportunities at a reasonable and affordable cost, which may be no cost in many cases
- Support mechanisms such as peer support groups, often provided in an informal way in community-based education
- Childcare, wherever appropriate, should be available
- Information systems that provide effective and accurate descriptions of the educational provision
- Provider openness, including efforts to ensure that no stigma is attached to any particular group of learners, flexible programming, and special initiatives to encourage participation
- Involvement of employers, so that they support learning on the part of their employees and potentially could contribute to programme design
- Means to help learners to turn their learning into employment improvement, which could include the development of flexible and clear qualification systems potentially developed in collaboration with employers
- The ability to provide learners with qualifications, meaning that a range of credible qualifications are on offer at different levels in different topics
- Recognition of the importance of the learner identity and ways to encourage individuals to develop learning careers
- Potential to progress between courses as seamlessly as possible

5.5 Many of these factors are already being addressed by current policy, or are part of general good practice in non-formal and formal education. However, there is potential for policy to prioritise and allocate resources for systematic development of these factors across the sector.

## **General participation in formal education**

5.6 There is a need, as noted earlier, for careful management of demand in Formal education generally. A balanced approach is necessary, opening participation more widely while ensuring resources are used wisely. Part-time participation may prove to be a very valuable strategy for working towards this balance, as it is relatively less resource intensive than full-time study, and allows for a diversity of participation patterns not found in traditional structures.

5.7 In terms of opening participation the considerations to be addressed include:

- Financial accessibility, including the development of consistent, seamless policies for support across all sectors of formal education
- Affordability, in this case meaning the hidden costs and the less obvious impacts of funding structures
- Structures to encourage learners to continue working while participating part-time in learning
- Well-developed student support systems to encourage students to become more confident in their learning
- Strategies to support students with disabilities whatever form the disability takes, meaning flexibility in general programming as well as more formal structures such as assessment
- Strategies to support students from a non-middle class background, both to encourage initial participation and ensure retention
- Flexible and supportive entry requirements based upon the notion of preparation to learn rather than exclusion
- Academic support for part-time learners irrespective of background, one simple example being to ensure that libraries are open at times working adults can use them
- Changing the culture of Higher Education (in particular) to be more inclusive of alternative participation patterns such as modular study
- Providing effective guidance systems to maximise the employment benefits of participation
- Developing peer support mechanisms both within Formal education institutions and the wider community

5.8 Altogether these considerations add up to a significant agenda for change in Formal education, despite recent developments in Scotland that address many of them. However, systematic adoption of strategies to address these factors would certainly hold the potential of transforming the patterns of participation in Formal education.

### **Unemployed people in non-formal education**

5.9 Given the importance of employment related motivators in educational participation, it should be unsurprising that unemployed people tend to participate less than those who are employed. Two potential ways to encourage participation in this group would be:

- Clear links between Non-formal educational provision and desirable outcomes, whether employment or progression to more advanced education. This implies that these connections have to be in place, suggesting that concrete cross-sectoral partnerships may have to be built between providers of Non-formal learning and businesses, for example.
- Encouragement to view unemployment as an opportunity for educational participation, the argument underpinning policy initiatives such as the New Deal programmes. While it is difficult to see how policy decisions could require



participation without becoming punitive, there is certainly opportunity to support and encourage it, perhaps by wider adoption of programmes such as the learner's allowance.

### **Unemployed people in formal education**

5.10 The situation is more challenging regarding unemployed people in part-time Formal education, though it should be noted that Further Education colleges have done excellent work in this area. To build on this:

- Benefits systems could be designed to support educational participation, and the funding could be made seamless. Currently one of the most significant changes in support occurs when people progress from non-advanced courses (generally supported by benefits) to advanced courses (funded by loans).
- Flexible entry systems for Higher Education (some of which exist) can be created to give unemployed people expedited entry to programmes, especially if those programmes are undersubscribed.
- More courses should be developed into modular formats, and the accumulation of credits from different providers towards degree level qualifications should be made more straightforward.

### **Individuals from social class C2-E in non-formal education**

5.11 Non-formal education has been remarkably successful in encouraging participation from Social Classes C2-E, even though there is still a 'participation gradient' showing lower participation in these social groups. While this may, to some extent, reflect other factors such as unemployment, it appears that the learning culture still has some way to go in achieving universal awareness and acceptance. Possible approaches could include:

- Continued development of programmes in convenient locations and with strong community support, ideally with well-developed systems for learners to move into other forms of education.
- Support mechanisms are critical, though these are often intrinsic to the design of Non-formal education because of the commitment to community these programmes represent. However, further structures such as cohort programmes, where a group of people move collectively through an educational programme, may have advantages.
- Information is an important consideration for groups of people who have historically been less involved in education. This could include extensive opportunities to interact with people who are currently engaged in education as well as mentoring in order to support potential learners.

## **Individuals from social class C2-E in formal education**

5.12 Individuals from these social classes are significantly under-represented in Formal education, and it is not difficult to see that there could be cultural difficulties when these individuals attend institutions dominated by people with different life experiences and expectations. Some potential strategies to address these issues include:

- Support systems have a significant role to play, though some care should be taken to avoid stigmatising people by assuming that they will all find participation difficult. It may be more effective to build a system of academic mentoring (ideally for all students) where learners can build relationships with representatives of the institution. It is likely that these inter-personal relationships will have a substantial effect upon retention.
- Programmes can be designed to be flexible enough to allow learners to continue employment while learning.
- Attention should be paid to affordability. While people from a financially privileged background can often deal with unexpected expenses, this is not so easy if money is tight.

## **Lone parents in non-formal education**

5.13 Lone parents come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and the relatively low rate of participation may not mean that they cannot attend education—it could mean that they are already well educated. However, there is some evidence that lone parents earn less than other groups and might find education helpful. Potential strategies to support participation include:

- Childcare is an essential consideration for this group, and emerges in many reports on participation. The issue is not so much childcare for full-time learners, which is often satisfactory, but the kind of informal drop-in care required for part-time participation. Community based programmes often do a good job of recognising this factor, but further development would be helpful.
- Lone parents often have extremely tight time allocation, and programmes that can be flexible enough to recognise these constraints (for example, by timing provision when children are in school) are likely to encourage participation.
- There should be consistent policy on what forms and duration of learning is permitted without loss of benefits. Lone parents' first priority is support of their children, and any activity which threatens this imperative cannot be pursued. There is a need for clarity regarding education and financial supports.

## **Lone parents in formal education**

5.14 A parallel piece of work by the current author looking at lone parents in Further Education suggests that the supports for lone parents are already substantial. Nonetheless there are still some areas for development in Further and Higher Education:

- Childcare is an issue once more, and again the gap is childcare for part-time participation.
- Financial issues will be important to some lone parents, and there is a need for consistent and relatively simple systems to allow potential learners to make informed decisions about paying for their studies.
- Vocational outcomes may be a more complex motivator for lone parents than other groups, since any employment will have to be consistent with the needs of parenting. This calls for effective guidance information and the creation of links with potential employers.

## **Older adults in non-formal education**

5.15 Traditionally there has been an expectation that older adults (past the most common age of participation in the 30s and 40s) will participate in adult education for leisure reasons. As mentioned earlier, if this is the case it would explain the under-representation of this group since the major motivations for participation have consistently found to be vocational. However, a changing economy with less long-term job security makes it more important for people to remain engaged in learning throughout their careers. Similarly, a commitment to lifelong learning requires participation of older adults if it is to be meaningful. Strategies to encourage this would include:

- Encouragement of learner identity could be especially useful with this group. Learning might prove to be an ideal way to ease the transitions associated with older adults, and to refute the stereotype of learning being difficult for older people.
- Support mechanisms based on social networks would be valuable for this group, since adults beyond working age often have vibrant social lives, and this social capital could be a useful educational resource. For those who are more isolated, learning could be a motivator and an opportunity for more interaction with their community.
- Information should be clear, both in terms of the expectations and the benefits of participation in learning. As with any learner, older adults need to be able to make well-informed decisions about how they allocate their time, and clear language statements about educational participation are an important aid to decision-making.

## **Older adults in formal education**

5.16 The less frequent vocational pressures of later adulthood can diminish the major motivator for participation in Formal education, especially if there are other demands upon the potential learner's time. While adults generally compose a significant proportion of Formal education participants, older adults are still a relatively under-represented group. Possible responses include:

- Flexible entry requirements with well-developed systems of accreditation for prior learning and experiential learning. Gaining recognition for employment and general life experience may make a significant difference in decision making, as well as reducing the time needed to complete a programme.
- Confidence in learning may be an issue for older adults who have not been involved in education for some time. Peer and academic support structures could help ease the transition to Formal education, especially in contexts that are dominated by younger learners.

## **Learners with disabilities in non-formal education**

5.17 The nature of Non-formal education makes it easier in some ways to respond to learners with disabilities than in more formal settings. The wide range of disabilities potential learners can experience also makes it difficult to talk in general terms about structures that will support participation by all. However, some broad considerations are:

- Provider openness, including lack of stigmatisation of individuals with disabilities, is a central factor in participation. Depending on the specific disability, high degrees of programme flexibility can be an asset. In most cases, educational providers can learn about the factors most important to particular learners by consulting the learners, and are then able to react appropriately.
- Support structures should be in place within the programme to ensure that issues arising during the course of educational participation can be addressed. This should help to enhance retention and potentially learner progression.
- Employer support could help to create pathways for individuals with disabilities to move into work through non-formal education. For some individuals with disabilities employment can be difficult, and educational provision could be tailored to address this issue.

## **Learners with disabilities in formal education**

5.18 The challenges facing learners with disabilities in Formal education are more substantial than non-formal education, because structures such as timing and testing are far

more rigid. However, formal education institutions do a good job of including individuals with disabilities, with approaches including:

- Programme flexibility, such as extra time to complete essays and exams, is a vital contribution to the ability of individuals with disabilities to participate in learning.
- Cultural factors go beyond the factors bearing directly upon participation of people with disabilities to include the general orientation of the institution to diversity among learners. While there are potential complexities regarding the maintenance of quality if programme structures are extremely loose, there are still many options for Formal education to develop beyond traditional models towards greater inclusivity.

## Summary

5.19 In this chapter I have attempted to take some of the evidence based factors identified in chapter 4 within the range of policy intervention and discuss how those factors might be significant for specific under-represented groups. Once again, some caution should be used in interpreting these discussions since they are based on theoretical extension rather than empirical testing of the ideas. There is a need for research that does test these strategies in a concrete and valid way so that stronger claims can be made about what policy actions are likely to promote what type of participation in learning.

5.20 One significant point about this discussion is that, finally, the same sort of policy initiatives are likely to increase participation irrespective of the particular group (or groups) potential learners belong to. They are:

- Some protection from financial risk
- Flexible provision
- Peer and academic support for learners
- Clear information about how learning can benefit the learner

5.21 This list should not be surprising. It covers the same factors that any of us would want to take into account when making a decision about participating in educational programming, whether in a Non-formal or Formal setting. Basic needs must be satisfied and hygienic in place, and then people are able to weigh the degree of their motivation to become involved in learning. In the next chapter I return to the research questions and draw out some of the policy implications from such a framework for motivation.

## CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 In this final chapter I will return to the research questions driving the study, and build on them to clarify the implications of the study for policy. One of the central findings of this work has been that many of the central factors in decision making about participation are not directly accessible to policy level initiatives. However, this need not be a counsel of despair for policy-makers, since there are organisational structures that do affect participation and reflect political priorities and resource allocations. Policy can help to make a difference, but it cannot make the difference alone.

### Research questions

6.2 There were three research questions underpinning this study. In many ways the most interesting results were not direct responses to those questions so much as commentary upon the questions themselves. Each question, while not stating so directly, concerns part-time educational participation.

#### *1. What motivates adult learners to take up learning opportunities?*

6.3 The evidence reviewed suggests that the dominant reasons for participation are vocational - to do with either getting a better job, a promotion, or improving performance within a current job. There is a great deal of learning for interest and personal development going on, but it is not clear that policy can affect this type of activity a great deal. Policy's ability to change practices is probably strongest in the economic realm, as it is possible to apply a degree of regulation to employment practices that is less practical or desirable in leisure based learning.

6.4 On a less direct level, however, involvement in any form of learning helps to create and sustain a learning culture, which may help to make learning credible and attractive to many who would not previously have considered participating in learning. The problem is the difficulty of affecting people's values in areas such as learning through policy designed for that purpose. The most important factor in creating a culture of learning may be relatively slow and inefficient word of mouth, where one person tells others about their positive learning experience. This would tend to reinforce the importance of social networks in learning decisions, as highlighted earlier in the report.

6.5 Decisions to participate in education are motivated by subjective factors. While policy interventions can help to ensure that the necessary hygienes are in place, it is difficult to affect an individual's positive motivation to become involved in learning. It seems that policy can enable and support participation, but it can only directly encourage it to a limited extent. However, over the longer term it is possible that there will be a snowball effect, with ever more people taking advantage of opportunities created by policies designed to satisfy the hygienes and make participation less difficult. Over time this could lead to participation in

learning becoming a more central aspect of more people's lives, and less steeply tilted towards those who already have good education and income.

*2. Can we distinguish between the relative importance of interest in the subject/enjoyment of learning as opposed to more instrumental reasons (related to jobs for example)?*

6.6 The main way to get at the information needed to answer this question would be to examine survey evidence. That evidence is not clear. The most recent survey in Scotland, for example, shows that 35% of participants are interested in the subject, 30% enjoyed learning, and 29% thought it would help their current job. But these categories are not exclusive, and it is easy to imagine circumstances where all three would apply.

6.7 It may well be that learners themselves do not distinguish between various reasons for participating in learning in an exclusive way, and are more likely to participate if a particular learning event offers vocational benefits as well as being interesting. The implication is to blur the line between vocational and leisure centred learning, a situation likely to raise significant challenges for the design of policy.

6.8 The one context in which learning for economic reasons and learning for pleasure may diverge is when basic needs are not met (Maslow, 1954). There will be situations where economic stress can be relieved by participation in learning, and it may be that this could be a strategic choice for individuals even when they have unsatisfied basic needs. However, it is unlikely that learning for leisure or interest reasons would be pursued in the same circumstances. Even setting the scenario up in such a way assumes that economic and more interest centred motivations can be separated, and it is far from clear that this is the case.

*3. How do these vary for different sectors of the population?*

6.9 The factors likely to be important for certain sectors of the population have been identified in the previous chapter, but the final response to this question has to be that the hygienes and motivators for participation in learning do not vary widely for different sectors of the population, and there is far more common ground than there is difference.

6.10 It is not my intention to reiterate the lists of hygienes and motivators found in the previous chapters, but it may be useful to mention the summary arguments once more. People will tend to participate in learning when policy encourages:

- Some protection from financial risk
- Flexible provision
- Peer and academic support for learners
- Clear information about how learning can benefit the learner

6.11 The details of each of these four factors will vary depending on the learner's situation, but focussing on these as policy goals would help to maximise participation.

## **Comments for policy**

6.12 Lifelong learning and widened participation has become a central policy objective over the last ten to fifteen years, and in many ways this is a good thing. However, the temptation to assume that everybody must participate all the time and that some participation inevitably leads to more participation must be avoided. This can lead all too easily to punitive measures designed to force participation on unwilling non-participants, which contradicts most of what is known about how adults learn.

6.13 There is a pressing need to decide what degree and type of participation is sufficient for a society to have evolved into a Learning Society. Universal participation is unlikely to be reached in the foreseeable future, and it is probably not a very desirable goal in any case. The ideal outcome of policies on learning would be that anybody who needed or wanted to participate in learning would have the option available. In other words, universal opportunity rather than universal participation. Yet this goal needs a great deal of careful thought to describe what it would look like, and how we would know that we had reached it.

6.14 There is a pressing need to address two significant questions:

- What forms and levels of participation represent the attainment of the learning society ideal in Scotland?
- What measures can be used to assess progress and to demonstrate this attainment?

6.15 The structures and policies used to frame lifelong learning and participation are often left over from an era of highly differentiated education, and perpetuate rigid divisions between different types of learning such as formal and informal, or full-time and part-time. The highly diverse - and sometimes arbitrary seeming - nature of the entry requirements for different courses is not optimal for encouraging participation. It would encourage adult participation if entry to courses, financial support and other practical aspects of learning could be as seamless and consistent as possible.

6.16 There is also a need for more research to identify the particular factors affecting participation decisions with particular groups of people. There are some small scale qualitative studies in existence, but they are specifically designed within the limits of their method and cannot be generalised to the whole population. It would be extremely valuable to know more about, for example, how people from social classes C2-E succeed in Higher Education, traditionally an unfriendly environment. This research should be designed to produce generalisable results (which does not mean that it has to be large scale quantitative research) that are appropriate for informing policy decisions.

## **Summary**

6.17 The depth and breadth of the changes that need to be made in order to change participation patterns are significant. They go beyond tinkering with current structures and involve thinking carefully about the way the educational system works. Many of the aspects



of education that are taken for granted, such as the need to work with people on an individualised rather than community basis, are challenged by new information on how people decide to participate and how they behave while participating. If people do not draw clear distinctions between work related and interest related participation, for example, it makes targeted funding difficult to manage.

6.18 The education system as a whole functions by drawing distinctions between people and subjects. While this may make sense on an institutional level, and lead to more efficient and effective structures, it does inevitably lead to the exclusion of some individuals from participating. Over time this creates the types of participation gradients reflected in this discussion. Serious commitment to creating an educational system with higher participation in learning would require fundamental changes in the philosophy and practices of education.

6.19 In the meantime, however, a balance can be struck between the need to have some degree of administrative and academic rigour and the desire to open participation as widely as possible. This balance involves recognising that education is not a universal panacea, and that people are wise enough to decide for themselves when participation is in their strategic interests. The best use of policy is to ensure the hygienes are satisfied, so that learning is as straightforward as possible when it is when people are motivated. The key to engaging more adults in learning is to being ready to respond with accessible high quality learning when they are looking to learn, a goal that can be very fruitfully addressed by policy initiatives.

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