Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning:
Learning from the Past

By Peter Clyne

Setting the scene

Producing this paper has enabled me to reflect on my work in adult learning. The judgements and conclusions expressed in the paper are my own, based, primarily, on my work as research assistant to the Russell Committee, member of the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, Local Education Authority organiser, inspector and chief officer, consultant to national governments and international organisations and author of *The Disadvantaged Adult* (Longman, 1972) and *Russell and After* (NIACE, 2006). In addition, I have enjoyed the pleasure of being an adult learning teacher and trainer and community development worker for nearly fifty years.

At a time when worldwide social, environmental and economic issues call for fundamental changes in thought, assumption and action by decision-makers at all levels, the report of the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL), *Learning Through Life* (NIACE, 2009), is timely.

In December 2006, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills* was published as the final report of the Leitch Review of skills. The foreword to the report stated with supreme confidence:

> "Today the UK is in a strong position with a stable and growing economy. We have world-leading employment rates. However, we cannot be complacent and we cannot predict future economic conditions with certainty, but we do know that demand for skills will grow inexorably."

This statement, made in good faith and on the best available evidence at the time, appears now to be related to an entirely different world from that one that received *Learning Through Life*, the main IFLL report.

Political decisions concerning lifelong learning have typically been taken without paying sufficient regard to the many aspects of the lives of prospective learners and the changes over time. The world does not stand still for people with family, work and other responsibilities and duties. Understandably, but unhelpfully, many of the governmental changes over the years, in policy, priorities and funding systems, have been rooted in a generalised and narrow view of the economic benefits of technical, vocational and work-related education and training for adults. Insufficient attention has been paid to the sense in which much personal, leisure, community and recreational learning, of great value as it is, can and does operate as a spring-board to further and different learning. The degree to which non-vocational learning can increase confidence and ambition and/or can lead to greater self-awareness of potential has been greatly understated. Lifelong learning is nothing, if it is not defined, programmed and provided within the totality of life of individuals, communities and society generally. Imposing structures, priorities and measures of evaluation without clearly indicating that lessons have been learned from past

practices is to waste opportunities and risk ignoring or further marginalising those whose needs for appropriate learning are the greatest. The Inquiry's determination to learn from the past is a central thread of this report.

Throughout the twentieth century, many inquiries were undertaken, reports were published and recommendations were made regarding aspects of lifelong learning. Some have proved to be more important than others. This opening section of our review highlights the work and principal recommendations of the major inquiries and includes references to the Adult Education Committee Report (1919), the Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations (1924), the Hadow Report (1926), the Physical Training and Recreation Act (1937), the Education Act (1944), the Albemarle Report (1960), the Plowden Report (1967), the Russell Report (1973), the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education (1977 – 1983), the Education Reform Act (1988), and the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The extent to which they informed policy development, action and funding is described. In addition to the above-mentioned adult learning milestones, references are made to other reports, inquiries and pieces of legislation with an indication of the extent to which they have or have not informed policy development, action and funding.

It will be noted that there are a number of recurrent themes and issues, all of which merit continuous attention and action appropriate to the changing times. These include:

- work and employment-related education and training;
- the changing language of lifelong learning;
- basic and targeted education;
- family and inter-generational learning;
- higher education and adult learning;
- lifelong learning and community development;
- the role and contributions of voluntary organisations; and
- public funding for lifelong learning.

During the twentieth century, many of the most original, relevant and effective adult learning initiatives would not have been recognised by the learners at the time as adult education. The experiences and processes had sufficient meaning for the learners without requiring any provider-defined title or designation, which might well have been inaccurate and could have given rise to feelings of alienation. Participants were often unaware that what they were doing was being described by others as adult education. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, many people who pursued their learning in the context of apprenticeships, work-based or job-related training, or post-qualification or post-graduate study would not have considered that they participated in adult education. Nor would men and women, who pursued their learning within the framework of skill and knowledge acquisition by means of community-based or interest group learning, necessarily have recognised their experiences as adult education or adult learning. The debate

about language and terms is largely a diversion, unless it is rooted in the views, experience, values and language of the actual or potential learner. Policy development and programme planning should be built on the motives, abilities and prior knowledge of learners. Regrettably, governments and providers have not always learned from past mistakes and acted in this way.

Of greater importance than any debate about terminology are the discussions and disagreements throughout the twentieth century about the range and nature of adult learning to be embraced by public policy and supported with public finance. Both the Adult Education Committee (AEC), in 1917, and the Russell Committee, in 1969, were expected by the government to focus attention on what was described as non-vocational adult education. The brief of the AEC extended across Great Britain, while the brief of the Russell Committee was limited to England and Wales. The Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education (ACACE), appointed by the government in 1977, was similarly limited in its geographical coverage to England and Wales.

However, ACACE was given broad terms of reference enabling it to report 'on matters relevant to the provision of education for adults in England and Wales, and, in particular:

- to promote co-operation between the various bodies in adult education and review current practice, organisation and priorities, with a view to the most effective deployment of available resources; and
- to promote the development of future policies and priorities, with full regard to the concept of education as a process continuing throughout life.'

The Inquiry, independent of government, has been considering the future of lifelong learning in the UK. In seeking to complete its task, the Inquiry has given careful consideration to the range and nature of lifelong learning, the extent to which government policy and practice has related appropriately to the required provision and the reasonableness of public fund allocation. An essential prerequisite in this exercise is the careful attention given to the work of previous inquiries and their impact on lifelong learning.

Adult Education Committee Report (1919)

The Adult Education Committee (AEC), established as a sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee in 1917, was charged with considering: 'the provision for, and possibilities of Adult Education (other than technical or vocational).' The Committee's report, produced in 1919, has been arguably the most frequently quoted publication in English about adult learning in the UK. Inspirational language, optimistic tone and comprehensive attention to its brief made the report a milestone in the literature and an example for subsequent committees dealing with adult learning. Given the fact that it was produced within the framework of the Ministry of Reconstruction's work and submitted directly to the Prime Minister, it

was inevitable that, after the degradation and slaughter of the First World War, it should point a way to an expected enlightened and positive future.

The report called for:

- an expanded and publicly recognised and funded role for universities, including the establishment of extra-mural departments;
- more and better paid staff; and
- an increased role for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and other voluntary organisations.

The similarity between the terms of reference of the Russell Committee, appointed in 1969, and those set down for the AEC, 52 years before, are notable. Russell was asked 'to assess the need for and to review the provision of non-vocational adult education . . .' One of the most significant features of the AEC report, which influenced the attitudes and values of a number of subsequent committees and adult learning practitioners, was the attention it gave to issues relating to the personal and social consequences of exclusion and deprivation. In this way, adult learning was given an important position within the broad spectrum of social and community services.

Nonetheless, disappointment and frustration were expressed by many activists in the world of adult learning in 1917 and 1969 that the terms of reference of the committees were unduly narrow and restrictive. Much later, in 2004, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills commissioned the Leitch Review to examine the UK's optimal skills mix in order to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice. The Review was later asked by the Chancellor, in 2006, to consider how best to integrate employment and skills services. The limited terms of reference inevitably led to undue concentration on employment-related skill acquisition and the economy generally. From 1917 to the early years of the twenty-first century, with the notable exception of ACACE in 1977, terms of reference tended to be too narrow to enable the broad range of adult learning to be addressed as an integrated whole. Opportunities to introduce lessons learned from the past, in conjunction with forward thinking to respond to new and changing times, were missed.

Allowing for the use of different language and emphasis, the Russell Committee, in paragraph 10 of its report (1973), paid respect to the AEC in saying:

> "We do not wish to underrate the value of increased technical efficiency or the desirability of increasing productivity; but we believe that a short-sighted insistence upon these things defeats its object. We wish to emphasise the necessity of a great development of non-technical studies, partly because we think that it would assist the growth of a truer conception of technical education, but more especially because it seems to us vital to provide the fullest opportunities for personal development and for the realisation of a

> truer conception of citizenship. Too great an emphasis has been laid on material consideration and too little regard paid to other aspects of life."

Conclusions and recommendations, in this regard, strongly and correctly sought to assert that adult learning, in all its many forms, should seek to meet the learning needs of adults given the various roles they may play in life. The education of young people, including higher education, is largely designed to build a foundation upon which skills, knowledge and experience gained as adults can be firmly based. By definition, by virtue of age alone, the aims, purposes and uses of adult learning are different. Lifelong learning, according to the Russell Committee and others in the 1960s and 1970s, should embrace the learning needs of adults as parents, carers, employers and employees, family members, residents in local communities and citizens more generally.

From 1919 to the Education Act 1944

After considering the recommendations of the AEC report, the President of the Board of Education created an Adult Education Committee of appointed individuals charged with the responsibility of advising the Board. The Committee, in common with the Board itself, moved away from the emphasis in the 1919 report on university involvement in adult learning and argued for a stronger coordinating and leadership role for Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Committee sought to broaden the range and nature of organisations, statutory and voluntary, involved in adult learning, which received recognition by governments, national and local. Thus, the Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations (1924) permitted universities, the Districts of the WEA and other approved bodies to apply for recognition as 'Responsible Bodies' entitled to receive grants for tutorial and other courses. Later, the Hadow Report (1926) commented that:

> "It is desirable that teachers in Modern Schools and Senior Classes should endeavour to secure continued education of their pupils after school age by drawing attention to such facilities for further instruction, whether cultural or vocational, as are available in the area."

This encouragement of extended education for all, as adopted by the Hadow Committee and advocated by the Board's Adult Education Committee, ensured that there would be national recognition and approval of the 'village college' initiatives launched by Henry Morris, Chief Education Officer in Cambridgeshire. His concept of all-age institutions, staffed, programmed and managed in a manner to provide vocational and non-vocational learning opportunities for all in any given area was greatly influenced and encouraged by the Sports Council's view that sports and leisure facilities could and should be developed for general community use on school sites. Such developments blended well with the drive by the National Council of Social Service, later the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, during the 1920s and 1930s, to encourage, support and initiate action to spread village halls and community centres across the country, increasing the practice and appreciation

of arts and crafts, music and dance. The concept of all-age learning centres, following the Cambridgeshire initiative, was later adopted in a number of areas including Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Devon.

The Physical Training and Recreation Act (1937) responded to concern about the physical condition and general health and welfare of the nation and the implications of poor health for the economy. Funds were made available to local organisations and councils. It was some time before there was an acceptance by government that these important initiatives would have far-reaching implications for adult learning. Local authorities, not necessarily Local Education Authorities (LEAs), were given the power 'to establish or support community centres and recreational institutes and urged the general extension of opportunities for physical training and recreation for older and younger students.' The 1937 Act enabled authorities, through leisure and recreation departments, to obtain central government funding to meet the cost of staffing and equipment. In this way, efforts to improve the physical training, health and welfare of the country were organisationally and financially linked with efforts to increase and improve the opportunities for adult learning and skills training. Indeed, not only were these activities linked, but the crucial contribution of the voluntary sector in consolidating and improving the quality and range of the arts and culture in local neighbourhoods and communities was recognised and supported.

Many years later, the Russell Report (1973) took this point further in arguing that adult education should be accepted as being an education-oriented social service, often operating alongside and in conjunction with other services designed to respond to a multiplicity of needs: personal, communal, academic, vocational, work or family. From the 1940s to the appointment of the Russell Committee in 1969, all concerned with adult learning in its many forms shared the hope that a legal framework would be created to embrace the full range of adult learning. The wording of the Education Act 1944 was most unhelpful with regard to adult learning. Subsequent to the passing of the Act, and in recognition of the necessity to improve and increase the provision of vocational, craft and industrial education and training, LEAs were required by the government in 1947 to prepare Schemes of Further Education provision for their areas to include adult learning.

Whereas the LEAs were expected to interpret further education with respect to young school leavers as being work-related and vocational, within the Schemes the references to adult learning related to enriching leisure time activity in the context of defining and contributing to the needs of society. The government's clear intention was to establish a distinction between vocational and non-vocational, and give greater priority, in terms of policies, programmes and resources, to work-related courses and education for employment for young people. It was later a concern of the Russell Committee, of ACACE and of many other bodies which sought to emphasise the importance of responding to the motivation, aspiration and wishes of the prospective individual learner rather than oblige learners to fit into neat bureaucratically defined categories of learning.

Education Act 1944 to the Russell Report 1973

In introducing a summary of major documents of the years 1944 to 1971, the Russell Committee stated that 'the sequence of official publications suggest a declining concern with adult education' (paragraph 78 of the Report). The Committee was concerned to note that three indicators of need at the end of the Second World War were not acted upon:

- the experience of successful basic education programmes in the armed forces during the war;
- the need to train and retrain large numbers of returning men at the end of the war; and
- many women had been recruited to work in industry, the service sector and the professions during the war and needed their experience certificated to enable them to continue after the war.

These three factors alone pointed to a priority need for a national impetus for adult learning which, unfortunately, was not forthcoming.

In view of the positive outcomes of initiatives since 1919 and the lessons learned from war-time experience, adult education workers had expected that the urgent need for adult learning provision would have been recognised by the government.

The omission of adult learning from the list of socially and economically significant service improvements implemented by the post-war government was a considerable disappointment. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this disappointment continued. The Ministry of Education in 1952 threatened Responsible Bodies with a budget freeze for the year 1952–1953 and a 10 per cent reduction in their central government grants in 1953–1954. Following protests from 'the field' and intervention by the Prime Minister, the freeze remained but the proposed 10 per cent cut was lifted. This action led to the appointment by the Minister of Education of the Ashby Committee:

> "…to review the present system by which the extra-mural departments of universities, the WEA and the other Responsible Bodies provide local facilities for adult education, with special reference to the conditions under which the facilities are organised, and are aided by grants from public funds."

The Ashby Report (1954) made no recommendations for fundamental change in the organisation of adult learning by Responsible Bodies. It urged that grants should be based upon the quality of organisation, teaching and learning, and the extent to which the Responsible Bodies paid regard to the learning needs of their areas and the provision made by other providers of adult learning opportunities. Much adult learning was taking place outside recognised and overtly educational structures and

organisations, and certainly in buildings not funded nor designated as primarily for adult learning.

In 1958, the government established the Albemarle Committee to review the youth service in England and Wales. A government-sponsored building programme was launched following the publication of the Albemarle Report in 1960. The number of free-standing youth centres, sometimes designated as youth and community centres, and of youth wings on school sites, increased dramatically during the 1960s.

By 1969, when the Russell Committee started its work, large numbers of adult students were pursuing their studies in these new premises which, because of their prime purpose as youth service facilities, were generally located in residential areas of towns and cities. Funding from the LEA Further Education Building programme was used to transform or extend some youth work buildings to become appropriately designed and equipped adult and youth facilities, available for use by statutory and voluntary bodies and under the overall management control of the LEAs. The neighbourhood or area centre concept, as recommended by the Russell Committee, was closely related to the post-Albemarle developments. It gave a strong impetus to adult learning in local neighbourhoods throughout the country. Friendly local centres were more inviting and welcoming to many people hitherto not in touch with adult learning than large, imposing and intimidating college premises.

Two further reports of the 1960s, which had a bearing on the adult learning scene, were the Robbins and the Plowden Reports. In 1963, Robbins recommended that arrangements should be made to increase higher education opportunities for mature adults. It was not clear whether the intention was to focus on the relationship between higher education, the national economy and employment. If this was the intention, the target was missed and has continued to be missed throughout the following 45 years. Neither at the time of Robbins, nor subsequently, have the majority of people leaving higher education moved directly into employment related to their course of study or leaving qualification. Instead of seeking a flexible range of full-time and part-time academic and work-related forms of higher education, to which adults can move from paid or unpaid work, governments have tended to concentrate on increasing the numbers following courses within existing structures. This has inevitably perpetuated past arrangements and course design and has not drawn sufficiently on current experience. It has been a major contributory factor leading to the rising levels of drop-out from part-time courses of study.

Robbins argued for an increase in the number of higher education students with the removal of impediments faced by mature adults seeking opportunities for training and education. Universities were encouraged to admit ‘non-standard’ students in larger numbers. By the late 1960s, the government had established polytechnics as degree-awarding higher education bodies, bringing into the higher education sector a large number of mature students following work-related and vocational courses of study. The binary division between universities and polytechnics, which lasted until

the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 and designated the polytechnics as universities, was unhelpful. Unlike the newly established universities, the older ones tended not to take seriously the government's wish to see an increase in the numbers of non-standard and mature adult students seeking work-related and vocational courses.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the Plowden Report (1967), *Children and their Primary Schools*, gave an impetus to family and parent education and strongly highlighted the relationship between individual educational achievement and personal, social and communal poverty. The report recommended, and the government endorsed, the creation of a number of Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) to be designated in areas of multiple deprivation with the brief to devise learner-friendly and easily accessible methods of meeting the learning needs of adults while paying regard to the education of children. At the same time, twelve Community Development Projects (CDPs) were established as a dimension of the Urban Programme to develop mechanisms and activities to alleviate social needs. They were coordinated by the Home Office and involved the Departments of Education and Science, Environment, Health and Social Security. The educational elements of the CDPs were designed to be community-based and community-led initiatives, committed to learner participation in course design, curriculum and teaching and learning techniques.

During the period from 1944 to the 1960s, there was much debate between those people expressing an unswerving belief in a fixed hierarchy of learning, with work-related and qualification-bearing vocational study meriting public funding, and those convinced that adult learning should be seen as an essential part of a movement towards equity and equality between peoples and between all areas of learning, embracing vocational and non-vocational, personal, community and family learning. Many local initiatives, often but not solely within EPAs and CDPs, were launched and funded to meet individual and communal, personal, social and economic needs, bringing into being a positive partnership, for action, between community-based organisations and networks and education and training providers. The success of these developments was to widely influence the nature of education and training of adults and directly feed into the work of both the Russell Committee and ACACE.

Rooting community-led adult learning in residential and neighbourhood shopping areas was a commitment of the New Towns Corporations, as a strong feature of their social development work. Equally, similar initiatives were a feature of community development work in a number of major industrial towns and cities.

Russell Committee 1969–1973

In February 1969, the Russell Committee was appointed with the brief:

> "To assess the need for and to review the provision of non-vocational adult education in England and Wales; to consider the appropriateness of existing educational, administrative and financial policies; and to make recommendations with a view to obtaining the most effective and economical deployment of available resources to enable adult education to make its proper contribution to the national system of education conceived of as a process continuing throughout life."

Initially, there was considerable disappointment that the brief appeared to focus narrowly on 'non-vocational' adult education. This disappointment was soon eased by the determination of the Committee to recognise and record the personal and national importance of all forms of adult learning. In a General Statement, incorporated by the Russell Committee in its report, preceding the report's recommendations, the Committee gave expression to its commitment to adult learning with a wide-ranging spread of activities: academic, recreational and work-related:

> "The value of adult education is not solely to be measured by direct increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large."

The Committee's far-sighted and generous view of learning, free from any taint of elitism and recognising the value of learning to the individual as well as to the wider community and economy, was not accepted by the Conservative government of the day. Indeed, it was not accepted by succeeding Labour and Conservative governments as the basic principle on which decisions, plans, programmes and funding systems should be based. An indication of the Committee's broad vision of adult learning is the fact that much of the evidence submitted to the Committee, despite its brief to concentrate on non-vocational adult education, came from organisations primarily concerned with what was designated as vocational education and work-related education and training. Individual trade unions, Trades Union Congress (TUC), Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Central Training Council and four Industrial Training Boards submitted the following evidence:

- The recommendations of the Russell Committee were not radical.
- They did not define a new view of education throughout life.
- They were not related to a single coherent philosophy of learning or teaching.
- They were not set within an organisational framework encompassing the entire range of publicly funded personal and social services.
- They were practical recommendations, not worded in a form likely to alienate,

disturb or surprise anyone giving them serious attention.

- The Committee was at pains to ensure that idealistic statements within the text of the report about what was desirable, to encourage and inspire practitioners and providers, were balanced with carefully considered, reasonable and realistic proposals for modest gains, capable of early achievement.
- Recommendations, as listed in the report, comprised a rich mixture of aspiration, hopes and urgent requirements.

The general plea for coherence, consistency and cooperation was not acted upon by government. Russell sought to emphasise the need for cooperation between authorities, services and post-school teaching and learning establishments to maximise the availability of specialist facilities and accommodation to prospective learners. In acknowledging the increasing mobility of adults between home and work, Russell recognised the potential value of the Regional Advisory Councils for Further Education (RACs). The RACs were primarily concerned to maximise cooperation between LEAs in the provision of technical and vocational post-school further education. In its search for wider cooperation between providers and removal of financial, organisational and political barriers affecting adult learners generally, it was logical that Russell should recommend that those RACs which did not have 'sub-committees for adult education' should establish them.

The RACs had neither overriding powers nor sanctions. Therefore, when a LEA decided not to co-operate, financial and/or administrative barriers and differences prevented some potential students from enrolling where their best learning interests would have been met. This had a particularly damaging effect in cases when the LEA or college was more concerned with adults' home addresses rather than the convenience and appropriateness of offering learning close to places of work. As a consequence of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, when further education colleges were removed from LEA control, cooperation and joint planning of programmes, fee policies and fee levels were dependent upon goodwill between providing organisations and establishments. Free trade and competition between LEAs and colleges became more important to the providers than cooperation and joint planning in fee policy and programme planning to meet the needs of prospective students.

Many of the conclusions and recommendations of the Russell Committee were seen to have significant and, in some cases, long-lasting beneficial effects on the range and nature of learning opportunities for adults, whether they were related to current or future employment or increasing personal, social and leisure skills and knowledge. LEAs were urged to develop and broaden the curriculum on offer to include opportunities for adults 'to complete formal general education'. This was defined as courses normally followed in school or college before completion of initial education and was in recognition of the thinking at the time, repeated many times since by governments, that adults should have a school-leaving equivalent body of knowledge or qualifications, measured by examination successes. In 2003, the government indicated that public money would be available from 2005 to fund

adults pursuing a Level 2 qualification (five GCSEs grade A to C, or the equivalent) with a consequent reduction of funds available for other forms of adult learning. For some people, the traditional course requiring attendance of a few hours each week, for many weeks of the year, was an inappropriate way of learning. Russell urged LEAs and other bodies to develop alternative patterns of provision and introduce flexibility and choice in their programmes.

Following the publication of the Russell Report, consideration was given to issues confronting the increasing number of mature adults seeking higher education opportunities. Russell had appreciated that the Open University (OU), launched in 1969, would not be able to satisfy the increased demand, partly due to the special nature of OU degrees, but also because the distant learning core of OU study was not suited to all people and all subject areas. Many adults wished to follow narrower courses offered by the existing higher education establishments. Adult students looked for a response to their growing call for qualifications and recognition at the end of courses of study. Little was known at the time about the strength and character of demand from mature adults for full-time and part-time higher education study. There was a general assumption, by government and providers, that part-time adult students would be employed during their period of study, thus sidelining unemployed people and many women, of whom large numbers were thought to be pre-occupied with domestic responsibilities. The significant increase in the overall number of people enrolled in higher education during the past 40 years masks the differences between the 'old' and 'new' universities. A disproportionate number of mature adults were enrolled in the 'new' universities (ex-polytechnics).

Despite the overall growth and the higher proportion of adult students completing academic, often work-related, study since 1970, working-class participation has hardly risen. During the last few years of the twentieth century, the proportion of mature students from working-class backgrounds, in further and higher education, fell. With the drive for higher numbers, and the continued belief in the overriding value of the front-loaded model of education, calling for more public investment in learning for young people, less attention has been paid to the needs of potential adult students and the families and communities of which they formed parts. Throughout the years since the Russell Report was published, too little regard has been given:

- to the importance of greater collaboration between further and higher education;
- to the contribution of community-based adult learning to personal, social and economic well-being; and
- to the necessary support and guidance systems for adult full-time and part-time students.

These were all areas of concern for Russell.

In giving consideration to the roles of further and higher education providers, the voluntary sector of education, particularly the WEA, and the long-term and short-

term residential colleges, the Russell Committee was mindful of the fact that the drive for greater participation by mature, working-class adults may benefit the individuals concerned but not necessarily their communities. Many of the most assertive and determined working-class individuals, who moved through the higher education and training systems, benefited in ways which lifted them out of their communities. Thus, while the individuals benefited educationally and economically from the opportunity, the potential of higher education to reduce social exclusion and disadvantage in society was not achieved. This remains an unresolved tension.

The Dearing Report, *Higher Education in a Learning Society* (1997), appeared at a time when higher education in the UK was in a poor state. The then recently elected Labour Government accepted a number of the report's recommendations including the introduction of tuition fees for full-time students. Although it has been accepted that Dearing brought about changes and improvements with respect to the quality of teaching and the numbers of people with Level 4 qualifications, equivalent to the foundation degree level, there remains much concern about the consequences of student debt and the fact that the needs of part-time students were not given sufficient attention. This last point is particularly relevant to the position of the majority of mature adults who seek graduate qualifications.

In its report, *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* (1997), the Kennedy Committee argued that learning for work and learning for other purposes were inseparable. However, it was clear that the funding mechanism and the priorities of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) militated against widening participation across all aspects of adult learning. While the incoming Labour Government was pleased to receive and endorse the Kennedy report, widening participation and ensuring equal opportunities in learning for disabled people remain as aspirations. The long-standing barriers to access, including organisational, financial and physical barriers, remain. Nonetheless, Kennedy's conclusions and recommendations were important in the early work of the Cabinet Office's Social Exclusion Unit and, in particular, its approach to the issue of widening participation.

The terms of reference of the Russell Committee heavily emphasised what was termed non-vocational education for adults. It was therefore not surprising that the Committee's report paid less attention to work-related education and training. Nonetheless, Part 1 of the report discussed the essential interrelationship between the foreseen changes in the patterns of work and non-work and the development of adult learning. While stressing the importance of work-related education and training, the committee also emphasised the direct benefit to the individual of general and personal education and the indirect benefit to society and the national economy. The report drew attention to a number of other features of work-related education and training which had been under-resourced or given little governmental support, including:

- industrial relations training for senior management and shop-floor employees;
- the general principle of paid educational leave;

- broad education for workers in industry (particularly women);
- education for retirement; and
- education and training for occupational change.

All of these learning sectors remain necessary and urgent, meriting greater governmental support.

Looking ahead to likely changes in the patterns of work, and the balance between work and non-work time for adults, Russell repeated the then shared forecast, most of which proved to be correct:

> "Demand for skills of many kinds, including ever new kinds, is expected to increase steeply with consequent requirements for training and re-training; but the place of the unskilled labourer is diminishing. Many people are thought likely to move from production to service employment, for among other things the growth of leisure will add to the demand for services; but such employments often involve a direct personal and moral relationship between worker and client, and there will be a need for education of a kind that fosters interpersonal skills." (Paragraph 34 of the Report.)

Post-Russell

It was the increase in the levels and duration of unemployment in the late 1970s and 1980s, rather than any recommendations of the Russell Report, which led to government action on training and retraining matters. Education for occupational change became a growing element of adult learning programmes, due largely to the commitment of government funds to work-related education and training and targeted programmes for unemployed adults.

The Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 laid upon LEAs the duty to secure adequate provision of further education, including vocational and work-related, social and personal education and training for adults, for their areas. 'Adequate' was not defined and resources were not made available to enable LEAs to 'secure' provision. Before the full implications of implementing the ERA could be assessed, the government launched two White Papers in 1991:

- *Education and Training for the 21st Century* related to England and Wales and led to the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.
- *Access and Opportunity: A Strategy for Education and Training* was published simultaneously by the Scottish Office.

The 1992 Act, which established the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), sought to promote access to education and training 'for people who do not participate in education and training but who could benefit from it.' These governmental moves confirmed the growing political demand for movement of

funds from the general range of adult and community learning to work-related education and training. *Eight in Ten – Adult Learners in Further Education* was an independent report published by NIACE in 2005. It stressed the importance of recognising the increased demand by adults for education and training as reflected in the fact that some 80 per cent of students in further education colleges at the time were adults. Given the dramatic changes in the funding, organisation and priorities in post-school education and training since 2005, it is worthy of note, as a concern, that by 2008–2009, the age profile of the student body in further education colleges had greatly changed. This is largely due to the considerable increase in the numbers of enrolled young people, 16 to 18 years of age, and the reduction in the number and range of courses for adults not leading to qualifications – the so-called non-vocational programme of courses.

Terminology employed in the Russell Report may now, more than 35 years later, be considered dated and even inappropriate. Within the context of the Russell Report and the language of the time, 'disadvantage' was taken to apply to people who, for whatever reason, 'cannot easily take part in adult education as normally provided'. Suitably designed, structured and delivered programmes were called for by the committee to meet the needs of adults excluded from the mainstream of learning by virtue of:

- personal capacity factors (including physical and mental conditions);
- social disadvantage (including geographical isolation, poverty and social deprivation); and
- educational disadvantage (including the lack of basic education, sensory impairment and lack of the English language).

A particular challenge to adult learning provision, of course not foreseen by the Russell Committee, and which has had a dramatic effect on the work and non-work lives of adults, has been the arrival of the Internet and its consequential impact on employment and business systems. The impact of computer technology on society and the economy is uneven across the generations. The gap between younger and older adults, in this respect, has been widening. The proportion of older people in the total population has grown and continues to grow. Their desire and proven ability to learn for their own benefit, for the benefit of others and for the economic life of society has also been growing. Given the continuing debates regarding compulsory or voluntary retirement ages and the extent and nature of in-work training to be offered to older employees, it is necessary to maintain a flexible and even-handed approach to adult learning in all its many forms and across the entire adult age range.

Adult learning has been seen as a movement for change with a social purpose, bringing together personal aspiration and well-being, and the general needs of society and the economy. This thinking permeated a number of the major reports on adult learning in the twentieth century. Adult learning plans, programmes and policies prove to be most effective when advanced in conjunction with a wide range of community and employment services and activities, private and public. From the

publication of the Russell Report in 1973 to the appointment of ACACE in 1977, the world of adult learning experienced a period of uncertainty and insecurity. Government and politics were seen to be more concerned with macro issues, including:

- the negotiations for UK membership of the European Common Market (now the European Union);
- the world oil crisis;
- budget cuts at national and local government levels;
- the planned reorganisation of local government in England and Wales; and
- the implications of the results of two General Elections in 1974.

During this period, much lobbying took place to urge the government to 'establish a Development Council for Adult Education for England and Wales' (Russell Committee recommendation). Instead of establishing a Development Council, after a delay of four years, an Advisory Council (ACACE) was created. The political fear of the word 'development' was obvious. It had financial implications. ACACE was appointed for a three-year term. It was granted a second three-year term in 1980, primarily to complete its work on specific remits of the government. Unlike the Russell Committee, which operated with procedures according to the guidelines of a formal government committee of enquiry, ACACE operated within the public arena. ACACE completed and published reports on 36 separate enquiries. Russell reflected on the past, commented on the present and made recommendations as to the future. ACACE, by contrast, concentrated on contemporary policies and provision and advised the Secretary of State and the professional community as to the best way forward in terms of programmes, priorities and practices. Enquiries fell into one of three categories:

- policy and organisation at all levels;
- curriculum and programme development; and
- fact-finding.

Deteriorating economic conditions during the 1980s gave urgency to the government's directly commissioned work on adult basic education and education for unemployed adults. Particular attention was given to the implications of the loss of unskilled jobs and rising unemployment, moving towards three million people. A number of the ACACE reports, which picked up the conclusions and recommendations of Russell, have been recognised as having continuing relevance throughout the past 30 years, including *A Strategy for the Basic Education of Adults*, *Education for Unemployed Adults* and *Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice*.

Building on points made by the Russell Committee, and given further consideration by ACACE, the government launched a series of initiatives during the 1980s or

supported initiatives by other bodies. PICKUP (Professional, Industrial and Commercial Updating) was established in 1982 to be a means whereby higher education would respond to training needs as defined by business and industry. Employers were expected to pay for short, part-time, flexible and cost-effective post-experience training which was to be specifically vocational for people already in employment. The introduction of PICKUP led to a severe reduction in many university-provided liberal programmes, as vocational education and training increased, supported by transferred funding.

The Pre-school Playgroups Association (PPA), later the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), was launched before the Russell Committee started its work. With regard to parent and family learning, the recommendations of the Committee, coupled with a number of the documented outcomes of the EPA initiatives following the 1967 Plowden Report, gave an impetus to the conjoined early years and parent education work. During the period 1972–1997, the PLA was the largest single contributor to parent and family learning. It is a matter of record that the involvement of large numbers of parents, primarily women, in pre-schools and associated learning programmes resulted in numerous examples of individual education and employment progress. The routes from pre-school activity, as volunteer helpers, to trained and qualified teacher or social worker, or to university lecturer, school governor, elected councillor or MP may, in some cases, have been long but they were routes taken by many people. These very different paths of individual progress and achievement give emphasis to the significance of maintaining a flexible and responsive multi-faceted system of adult learning. Learning generally starts from where students are, not from where providers would wish learners to be.

In 1984, following recommendations in the ACACE seminal report, *From Policies to Practice* (ACACE, 1982), the government established REPLAN, overseen and administered by NIACE, to promote educational opportunities for unemployed adults in England and Wales. It was not the purpose of REPLAN to organise job training or job placement, although an unemployed person might well have benefited in these ways from participation in REPLAN learning activities. REPLAN was to be judged according to the extent to which adult learning providers changed policies and systems to accommodate the needs of unemployed adult students. Although funding was overwhelmingly targeted at unemployed working-class adult students, the needs of employed and unemployed working-class students were similar – given that many might have learning difficulties, suffer from some form of discrimination or be excluded from the social mainstream in some way. When the government decided not to extend the life of REPLAN beyond 1991, it was in order to change the emphasis and focus from the promotion of learning opportunities for unemployed adults generally to targeting the needs of those unemployed adults, and adults in work, who were thought to be unable to progress without improved basic skills.

This amounted to a fundamental move away from the conclusions and recommendations of Russell and ACACE, both of which had stressed the desirability of ensuring that work with and for unemployed adults should ideally be broad-based

and comprehensive in coverage and within the mainstream of adult learning provision, not on the margins or separate. Throughout much of the 1980s and the early and middle 1990s, governments, through the Department of Education and Science (DES), created a number of employer-led and work-oriented schemes including PICKUP, Enterprise in Higher Education and the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI).

The Manpower Services Commission (MSC), responsible to the Employment Department, was launched in 1972 and formally established by the Employment and Training Act of 1973. Establishing the MSC in this way was an unspoken but clear recognition and acknowledgement that concentrating skills training and related education on young people was unlikely to produce sufficient skilled workers and would condemn older workers to greater frustration and low-skilled employment. This point was elaborated in 'A New Training Initiative' (1981) and further developed in 'Towards an Adult Training Strategy' (1983) when attention was focused on the work-related education and training needs of adults with disabilities, and language and basic skills needs. From the MSC to the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), via the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), organisational arrangements changed. Through the European Social Fund, the government met much of the cost of work-related training and vocational education for young people and adults promoted by the MSC, including the Training Opportunities Programme. The Home Office Urban Programme, which supported many local initiatives to meet the learning needs of unemployed adults, non-English speaking adults and community development schemes, was also funded through the European Social Fund.

Coincidental with the timetable for the creation of REPLAN, having given consideration to the reports and recommendations of ACACE, the government launched the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE). Individual projects carried forward by UDACE were proposed by ministers or agreed by the DES after recommendations of the UDACE Steering Committee. The UDACE work programme was extensive, embracing:

- research;
- publications and field-work development, including access courses;
- open colleges;
- partnership working between institutions (public and voluntary sectors); and
- briefing on government matters which had a bearing on adult learning.

Of great importance was the development of educational guidance. Unfortunately, this aspect of UDACE's work was not matched by sufficient available public resources. Indeed, in 2003, the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA) took the unusual step of reprinting, with an appropriate updating commentary, the influential UDACE report of 1986, *The Challenge of Change: Developing Educational Guidance for Adults*.

Certain issues, concerning employment and skills training, have remained central in the thinking of government since 1998. These clearly indicate a significant move away from the idealistic, ambitious, but at the same time appropriate, aspiration expressed in the Foreword to the Green Paper of 1998, *The Learning Age*:

> "As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilized society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us to fulfil our potential, and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings."

The languages of the Green Paper, the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed*, which followed in 1999, and the Learning and Skills Act of 2000 differed from each other. The move from overtly comprehensive and integrated lifelong learning provision, with public financial support for all aspects of learning, towards a more narrowly focused commitment to work and job-related skills training became clear. The Act weakly called upon LEAs to make reasonable provision of learning opportunities for adults. In this respect, it greatly disappointed those adult educators who had believed that the pressures, problems, cuts in finance and reductions in facilities and staffing which typified much of the early to middle 1990s might be behind them.

Conclusions

- Throughout the more than 90 years of inquiries, reports and political action affecting lifelong learning and touched upon in this paper, a number of themes and issues regularly arise. Very rarely has the wide range of aspects of lifelong learning been addressed in one single exercise.
- Semantics have confused or misled people. Language changes. In order to more narrowly define sectors of learning, terms including non-vocational, vocational, lifelong, continuing, community or leisure have been employed. Playing with words helps nobody. It must be accepted that we are concerned that learning provision for all adults is considered. The motivation of the prospective learner is the key.
- Immediately after the end of the First World War and currently in 2009, and at various times in between, training for work and skills can be seen as the focus of attention for decision-makers. This has sometimes been linked to consideration of the position of adult learning within designated higher or further education establishments. Issues around the concept of paid educational leave for in-service study and training, the role of the employers in approving schemes and the contribution of college, university and local authority staff in designing and leading programmes, all need to be agreed.
- If adult learning provision is to contribute towards making opportunities and entitlements fairly and equally available to all, basic or targeted education programmes are crucially important. By virtue of personal capacity factors, social disadvantage or educational disadvantage, some adult are unable to immediately join mainstream programmes. There is no virtue in speaking of equal opportunities without acknowledging that some people need special help to reach the starting line.
- Lifelong learning must be seen to embrace aspects of family and intergenerational learning if it is to be effective. Whether it is the adult learning as the child completes homework or the child benefiting as a result of the adult attending a class, learning benefits accrue. The societal, family, as well as individual, gains are evident. This feature of lifelong learning gives emphasis to the word ‘lifelong’.
- Despite numerous efforts, and the evident success of the Open University, the financial arrangements and student support systems for mature adults in higher education, most of whom are part-time students, have not been appropriate or reasonable.
- Community development principles can be seen to underpin many successful lifelong learning programmes. ‘Start where the people are’ and ‘Let the social and personal circumstances of the learner decide’ are among basic guidelines to much provision within certain communities or neighbourhoods. This remains essentially the case for people who are marginalised, ignored or embittered by life’s experience and seek learning chances.

- The essential contribution of voluntary organisations, many of which are not overtly educational in purpose, must be recognised, respected and supported. It is the case that some voluntary organisations, with appropriate staffing, facilities and funding, are better placed to serve the needs of some individuals and groups than public authority providers.
- Much debate has taken place regarding the funding of lifelong learning. This debate has included consideration of the amounts and levels of public funding, the contributions of employers and employees to skills and work training and, thirdly, the level of fees to be charged to individual students in further and higher and local authority adult education. It is important in this debate to acknowledge that it is essential for the government at national and local levels to be seen to be underpinning the costs of services. At the same time, it must be the case that whatever fee contribution is called for from individual prospective learners, the level of fees does not become a deterrent.