

'A centre for common thought'

NIACE celebrates 90 years of support for adult learning this year. In the first of a series of articles marking the anniversary, **PAUL STANISTREET** looks at the origins of the organisation, its founding values and some of its early activities

On 19 January 1921 Albert Mansbridge, founder of the Workers' Educational Association and a member of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee, chaired a meeting at 20 Tavistock Square, London, to consider the formation of a British Institute of Adult Education. The Institute was to be a branch of the grandly – and somewhat inaccurately – titled World Association for Adult Education set up by Mansbridge in March 1919. The 'World Association', which boasted a largely British membership with a modest international dimension drawn from the dominions of the former British Empire, was committed to 'the establishment, or development, in all parts of the world, of movements and institutions for promoting adult education, and to promote co-operation between them'. It proposed to do this by establishing a Central Bureau of Information in London, publishing a journal on adult education and setting up branches, groups, commissions or research committees in various countries in the world.

The British Institute of Adult Education – what was, in 1983, after a number of changes in name and focus, to become NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education – was to act as a general national forum for adult education, holding public meetings and exerting parliamentary pressure. The inaugural meeting of the British Institute, at the University of London Club in Gower Street on 28 May 1921, was attended by between 60 and 70 members and supporters, most of them university teachers or administrators. By its fourth meeting in September of that year there were 267 members.

The primary aim of the Institute, in the words of its first President, Lord Haldane, was to be 'a centre for common thought by persons of varied experience in the adult education

movement'. It was to be a representative body and a 'thinking department', focused not on teaching but on discussion and advocacy. Initially, the Institute did not have its own premises and met in hired rooms. Its address for correspondence – 28 St Anne's Gate, London – was the private address of Lord Haldane. Haldane, a former Secretary of State for War, President of Birkbeck College and sometime lecturer at the Working Men's College in London, was a man of enormous political influence and was the force behind the early development of the organisation. Adult education was a passion with Haldane and he was committed to the extension of opportunities to attend university. University, he believed, was the place where enquiring minds were forged, where 'men and women of ideas' were produced.

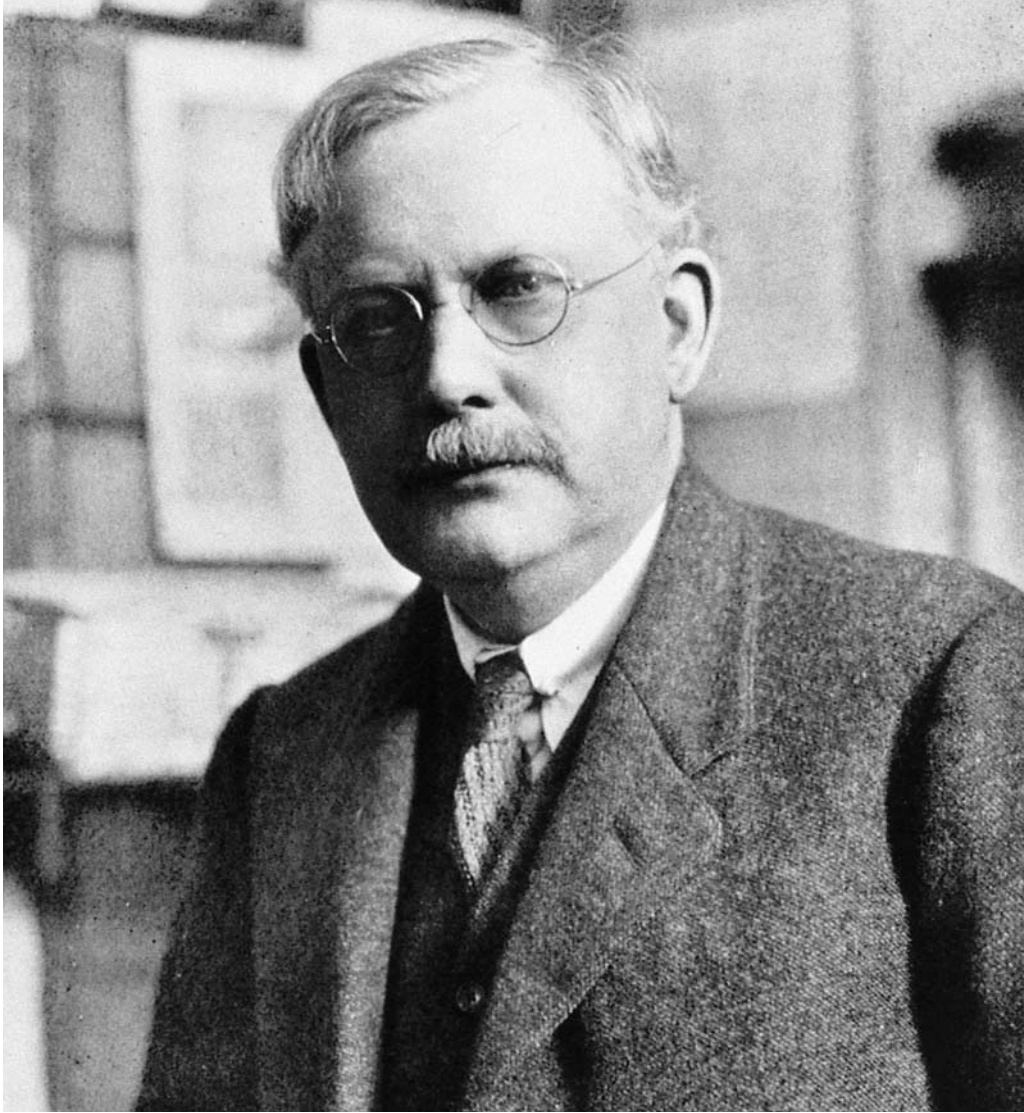
University adult education

Unsurprisingly, the Institute's early bias was towards university adult education, although it also turned its attention to adult education in rural areas, adult education for fishermen, women's education and broadcasting, according to the tastes and interests of its members. The Institute was one of the first organisations to take seriously the power and reach of broadcasting, both in terms of education and the promotion of democratic citizenship (the Workers' Educational Association was another). In 1923 the World Association asked the Institute to investigate the position of education in broadcasting in England. It arranged a conference of voluntary education bodies likely to be interested in the use of broadcasting for educational purposes. It was one of many conferences and events the Institute was to organise as it developed its role as a key forum for debate on issues pertaining to adult education and as a critical means of bringing together different interests

and areas of expertise in learning. Meanwhile, the Institute continued to broaden its scope and its range of interests. In 1924 it published a report entitled *The Guild House*, which proposed that each town and cluster of villages should have a centre for adult education. The still young organisation was finding its own, distinct and influential voice.

In 1925 the Institute became independent of the World Association. It was now a fully autonomous organisation with its own membership and its own journal, the half-yearly *Journal of Adult Education*, which began publishing in 1926 (it became a quarterly entitled *Adult Education* in 1934, which became the monthly *Adults Learning* in 1989). The Institute also started an adult education library and commenced publication of a *Handbook and Directory of Adult Education*, edited by Basil Yeaxlee, a member of the Institute's Council who, like Mansbridge, had sat on the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee and contributed to its famous 1919 report. In 1929 Yeaxlee published *Lifelong Education*, arguably the first full statement of the importance of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life, surveying the roots of the adult education movement and giving equal value to formal, informal and non-formal learning. As we make progress, Yeaxlee wrote, '[w]e discover more, and not less, need of adult education'. Adult education 'is as inseparable from normal living as food and physical exercise. Life, to be vivid, strong and creative, demands constant reflection upon experience, so that action may be guided by wisdom, and service be the other aspect of self-expression, while work and leisure are blended in perfect exercise of body, mind and spirit, personality attaining completion in society'.

The Institute's Council boasted a number of highly notable names beside Yeaxlee,



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Albert Mansbridge, founder of the Workers' Educational Association and a member of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee, was instrumental in founding the British Institute of Adult Education, as a branch of his World Association for Adult Education.

Mansbridge attended a range of university extension classes while working as a clerk and later became a teacher of evening classes. He came to the conclusion that university adult education was 'mainly a middle-class movement' except where the courses were managed by the students themselves.

Inspired by this experience within the co-operative movement, Mansbridge recognised the need for a new adult educational organisation, one in which 'the consumers of the education must themselves take an effective part in its provision'.

He founded the Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men with his wife Frances in 1903, with the aim of making university education available to working-class adults. It became the Workers' Educational Association in 1905.

Mansbridge was a member of the Adult Education Committee from 1917 and contributed to its final report, published, famously, in 1919. It has been described as 'probably the most important single contribution ever made to the literature of adult education' and as the 'Bible of British adult education'.

Mansbridge founded the World Association in 1919 and chaired the meeting which led to the creation of the British Institute of Adult Education, in January 1921.

Source: *Mansbridge: A Life*, Graham Marsh: <http://www.wea.org.uk/pdf/Mansbridge.pdf>

including G.D.H. Cole, the guild socialist and political theorist who helped shape the early aims of the WEA, Barbara Wooton, economist and Director of the London Tutorial Classes, and Grace Hadow, Vice-Chair of the Women's Institute and Principal of Oxford Home Students, a network for women students eager to enter higher education but unable to study full-time. Her group was the embryo of what was to become St Anne's Society and, in 1952, St Anne's College, Oxford.

'Auxiliary services'

Early activities of the newly autonomous Institute included an 'inquiry into the methods and principles of adult class teaching'. However, the Institute was already moving away from its early focus on the university extension class and was taking an interest in 'various auxiliary services' (meaning the wide array of voluntary agencies, many with primary purposes outside adult education, involved in creating less formal, and often more accessible, opportunities for adults to learn) and the 'remoter provinces' of the adult education scene. These activities included: collaboration with the BBC on

developing an educational use for the wireless (building on earlier work commissioned by the World Association); setting up a Commission on Educational and Cultural Films; assisting loan exhibitions of pictures in small towns and villages; an inquiry into public reading habits; and, in 1933, setting up a National Advisory Committee, in co-operation with the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), to develop educational work for the unemployed. Using a grant from the NCSS, the Institute published details of the kinds of educational work which was feasible for unemployed groups and the agencies which were able to provide them, with the aim of stimulating both the supply and demand for adult education in occupational centres and unemployment clubs.

By the mid-thirties, the Institute had come a long way from its initial emphasis on non-vocational university adult education. Reflecting on its early years, it now saw its work as 'analogous to that of a research laboratory': 'It conducts the experiments; it prepares the blue-prints ... Since its inception in 1921 ... it has set itself to discover where the defences of adult education were weakest; it has devised

a strategy for the advance into new territory; it has brought together every kind of interest and expert opinion to consider the revision and development of educational policy'.

Between 1921 and 1934 the Institute set up numerous commissions, undertook inquiries and produced reports on: educational settlements and adult education centres; the relation of library services to adult education; the possibilities of broadcasting in adult education; educational and cultural films; the educational uses of the gramophone; the supply and training of tutors in adult education; and mechanical aids to learning. It also started a book scheme for unemployed people, building on the work of its National Advisory Committee. The Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, which the Institute set up in 1929 to explore the use of films in education, the development of public appreciation of films and the establishment of a 'permanent central agency' to achieve these aims, produced a report in 1932, *The Film in National Life*. It recommended the creation of an independent film institute funded by public money. This resulted, the following year, in the creation of the British

The 1919 Report and after

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 arguably been 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.

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.

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.

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 1926 Hadow Report on *The Education of the Adolescent* 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

Film Institute. Its main tasks were to be to provide information on all aspects of film, to encourage public appreciation of film, to advise teachers, to act as mediator between teachers and the industry, to carry out research, to maintain a national repository of films, and to undertake the certification of films as cultural or educational on behalf of government. The BFI's early emphasis was on providing information to teachers, members and other enthusiasts and in 1935 it set up the National Film Library, since renamed the National Film Archive.

Art for the people

The Institute's experimental work in the arts during these years had enormous and lasting influence. In 1935, under the inspired and energetic direction of Secretary W.E. Williams, it set up a scheme called *Art for the People*, which was to provide ordinary people with the opportunity to see great works of art. Many private collectors agreed to loan their paintings to the Institute for the purpose. This work led to the establishment of a Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) which, throughout the Second World War, provided high-quality musical, theatre and opera performances, as well as art exhibitions, helping resist what Kenneth Clark, one of the founders of CEMA, termed

the 'cultural black-out' which commenced with the announcement of hostilities. Its initial remit was to give financial assistance to cultural societies which were struggling to continue their activities during the war, providing culture in the regions by promoting theatre and concert tours by national companies. It provided artists with employment and emphasised local participation and the contributions made by amateur groups. In 1946, CEMA, which had been chaired by John Maynard Keynes since 1941, became the Arts Council of Great Britain, with a charter committing it to securing greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts, and to increasing the accessibility of the arts to the general public; another of the Institute's highly precocious offspring.

In 1937, the Institute started a hospital education programme, and, in that same year, created a Trust for Educational Work among the Unemployed. It was active and influential during the war years, supporting an Air Raid Shelter Libraries and Reading Rooms scheme in 1940 (for which Penguin donated some 50,000 books) and initiating an Army Study Centres Scheme in 1941. Funds for the scheme came from the Pilgrim Trust, which also funded *Art for the People*. The Institute also produced a report on *The Housing and Equipment of Adult Education* for the Ministry

of Education in 1945.

In 1949 the BIAE merged with the National Foundation for Adult Education – a forum set up in 1946 in response to the 1944 Education Act to promote understanding and co-operation between the various bodies involved in the provision of adult education (Local Education Authorities, Responsible Bodies, voluntary organisations, and so on) – to form the National Institute of Adult Education (NIAE), under the leadership of Edward Hutchinson. In next month's *Adults Learning* we continue the Institute's story, from the creation of the NIAE through the difficult, transitional post-war years to the major inquiries of the 1960s and 1970s and to the 1980s when the Institute underwent its next significant change of name, becoming the National Institute of Adult *Continuing* Education in 1983.

Sources

A History of Modern British Adult Education, Roger Fieldhouse and associates, NIACE 1996

A Passion for Learning: Celebrating 80 years of NIACE support for adult learning, presented by Howard Gilbert and Helen Prew, NIACE 2001

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 1973 report of the Russell Committee – set up in 1969 to find 'the most effective and economical deployment of available resources to enable adult education to make its proper contribution to the national system of education' – 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.

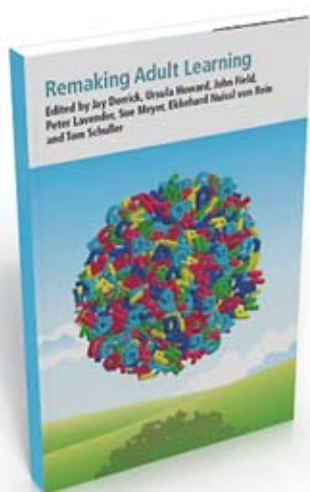
Whereas the LEAs were expected to interpret further education with respect to young school leavers as being work-related and vocational, within the Schemes the references to adult learning related to enriching leisure time activity in the context of defining and contributing to the needs of society. 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, 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.

The above is an edited excerpt from *Learning from the Past*, Peter Clyne's paper for the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning: <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Learning-from-the-past.pdf>

Remaking Adult Learning

Essays on Adult Education in Honour of Alan Tuckett

Edited by Jay Derrick, Ursula Howard, John Field, Peter Lavender, Sue Meyer, Ekkehard Nuisl Von Rein and Tom Schuller



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Remaking Adult Learning provides an exciting and innovative addition to the literature on adult learning. Charting challenges and successes in the sector, it illustrates how taking part in well thought-out programmes can have a positive and sometimes life-saving impact on people's lives. While grounded in adult learning practice, the book draws upon local, national and global perspectives, contemporary research and incisive analysis to focus on themes including: participation and equality; the role of adult learning in social movements; adults learning and teaching in different contexts; adult learning and policy; and the value of learning for its own sake.