

Adult and Lifelong Learning in the UK

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Context

- Growing and ageing population
- Significant ethnic minority groups
- Large in-flow of younger immigrants
- Longer life and longer working life
- Economic decline since the late 2000s
- Increasing youth unemployment
- Huge government public debt
- Huge public sector cuts
- Widening of income gaps
- Slowing down of social mobility

Oversight

- Education is the responsibility of devolved governments
- In England Department of Business, Industry and Skills
- Centralised and long-terms processes for policy development
 - Comprehensive Spending Reviews and Public Service Agreements

Conceptual Development

- Long history of adult education
- Publicly funded non-vocational adult education – until 2001 at discretion of local authorities
- Under LSC and SDA ‘safe-guarded’ adult education has declined
- Focus - literacy and functional skills for employment and employability

Definition

- Narrow - synonymous with adult learning and the post-compulsory sector
- More inclusive - 'cradle to grave' notion.
 - formal settings
 - workplace
 - family, cultural and community settings
 - not restricted to credit-bearing provision.

System

- sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges (FECs)
- adult and community learning (ACL) in a range of settings (public and private) including community centres, libraries and museums
- universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- work-based, work-related training and Trade Union' provision
- private training providers
- prisons
- voluntary organisations

Awareness-raising and Flexibility

- Ufl/Learndirect
- Adult Learners Week
- National Careers Service
- Flexibility – Credit Frameworks, APEL
- Distance Education - OU

Legislation and Reports

- Consultations
- Green Papers
- White Papers
- Laws
- National inquiries
 - Higher Education
 - Further Education
 - Basic Skills
 - Widening Participation
 - Skills and Competitiveness
- Independent Inquiry into Lifelong Learning - NIACE

Political context

- broad lifelong learning policy that incorporates schooling, vocational education and training, and higher education
- concerns about functional literacy
 - emphasis on skills for employment
 - improving the skills of younger people in the workforce,
 - changing the overall culture and improve attitudes to learning and training
- changes in cost-sharing in HE from state to individual

Content – main emphasis

- Skills for Life courses (literacy, numeracy and IT) for adults
- Full Level 2 qualifications for adults without these
- Level 2 vocational qualifications for working adults (through the Train to Gain programme), makes a significant contribution to enabling employees to access training in key competency areas and
- Level 3 qualifications (equivalent to GCE A-levels) for 19-25 year olds.
- Modern Apprenticeships

Priority Groups

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

Funding

- FECs and other recognised providers – via Skills Funding Agency
- HEIs – move to individuals covering costs and loans
- Independent Learning Accounts
- Lifelong Learning Accounts
- Funding support diminishes by age

Governance

- Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)
 - inspection framework for Further Education Colleges, work-based learning providers, and adult and community learning
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
 - standards setting agency for the learning and skills sector

Participation

- NIACE Adult Learning Survey
- Rise in total participation in the late 1990s and early 2000s
- Followed by a fall in total numbers - stronger concentration on more intensive programmes targeted more directly at particular economic and social needs.
- Women outnumber men, although there remain concerns that they do not always participate in programmes of equal status
- Participation among different minority ethnic communities varies widely - black African and mixed ethnic origin most likely to participate, and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin least likely do so.
- Strong social class bias in participation

Reflections

- No specific adult and lifelong learning sector
- Eligible for funding from the state has had the greatest effect on adult learning
- State funded limited to narrow range of provision
- Strong system of to ensure standards
- Credit framework structures provide potential for progression
- Do we have to choose between youths and adults?