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?