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ABSTRACT

Great Britain's systems of continuing education (CE) and further education (FE) were compared within the context of change and decline in Great Britain's infrastructure and within the framework of an "index of innovation." Various options are listed for giving nontraditional adult students greater autonomy with respect to the following aspects of the education process: adult-centered provision, curriculum content, assessment methods, learning, resources, and openness of access. The major conclusions of the analysis were as follows: (1) despite their underlying diversity, CE and FE have begun converging toward the same values/goals, and the boundaries between them have begun to blur; (2) although the components of this convergence are in a state of flux and may not be moving at the same pace, the new vocationalism that has been fostered by economic changes in Great Britain is causing a blurring of the boundaries between CE and FE as providers respond creatively to shared contexts and conditions; and (3) the shared contexts and conditions may eventually bring about generative and productive "unlikely alliances" or even a universal system of higher education. (Appended are summary data on provision of FE and CE. Contains thirty-five references.) (MN)

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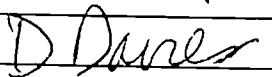
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Introduction

Contributions to our knowledge of the education of adults in particular and of higher education in general are most often the result of collective effort. The findings and conjectures of this paper have been greatly influenced by our work across the spectrum of adult education provision; from local and independent adult centres to huge empires of provision such as that of the Open University, and just about everything in between in terms of scale and scope of provision. We are much in debt to the work of many colleagues who are educators in the liberal adult education tradition who are concerned to explore the relationship of growth and change to an institution's culture and perhaps its sense of having a place in the scheme of things.

Higher Education - a shared agenda

Writing in the IPPR paper, Higher Education - Expansion and Reform, David Robertson identified the following requirements of provision by higher education institutions:

- * improved social result through an increase in the range and quality of students successfully entering institutions from all sections of the community, but in particular from targeted groups: mature students, women, ethnic minorities, and employees needing retraining;
- * educational variety through an increased diversity of academic programmes, by subject, award, mode and location;
- * a broader initial learning programme, based upon the acquisition of general skills as well as subject knowledge, leading to future specialisation as required;
- * a variety of interim and staged awards and a means of achieving awards determined by the demonstration of effective performance rather than by the length of the period of study;

- * a diverse programme of continuing education opportunities, preferably accredited, flexibly accessible and available to meet a wide range of capabilities and commitments;
- * systems of educational mobility and transfer between levels of achievement, learning experiences, sectors, institutions, and between different countries wherever possible.

This means that institutions must radically reshape their conventional courses, replacing them progressively with modular and credit-based academic programmes, the advantages of which are evident to students and academic staff.

These demands are set in a context in which higher education in the UK is expanding fast. If current ambitions are realised, the number of students will rise by almost two thirds in this decade, and by the year 2000 there will be some 80 universities catering for over 1 million undergraduate students; the proportion of 18 year olds entering higher education will rise to about one in three, yet the overall majority of higher education students (including part-timers) will be over 25 years of age. The important question is how the current system, founded on rationed supply and selective entry, can be adapted to meet the growing demands of students and society alike, while preserving what is good about existing provision. Unless there are significant reforms - embracing among other issues those of courses and qualifications, student funding, research and staffing and the provision of continuing education - there will be no successful transition to a mass system.

University CE - contexts of change

In order to respond to these challenges our society has adopted what is in spite of the disappearance of the binary line a progressive rather than revolutionary approach. We have sought to preserve, to reform, to build on best practice rather than go for huge institutional reform like making Oxford and Cambridge into graduate schools or creating an elite superleague of universities. This almost inevitably means that response starts from within and not necessarily in the mainstream of an institution's activity. The case has been argued

cogently in "The Learning University" (Duke) that one of the most effective pieces of mechanism available to traditional universities in bringing about institution wide change can be their traditionally marginal departments of continuing education.

One may attempt, as Duke does in search of his new paradigm, an audit to locate the position within a university of developmental work in the following areas:

- * a university's role in its regional community
- * the availability of recurrency of teaching
- * the incidence of pacing - variable pacing of study
- * the level of flexibility in provision
- * the widening of participation via access schemes
- * the development of credit accumulation and transfer
- * modularisation and student choice
- * the recognition of work based - off campus - credit
- * the establishment of inter institutional consortia
- * arrangements for franchising
- * the handling of the (increasingly significant) FE/HE interface.

Arguably the highest concentration of such activities will often be found not in the heartland of central teaching departments but in the university's continuing education work from where they may, in benign circumstances, begin to permeate the total institution.

Further Education: contexts of change

A transformation in prospect?

The growth of a mass participatory HE system such as we are witnessing, involves change and innovation across a range of institutions. This section of the paper attempts to raise questions and issues around the position and role of further education as part of the plurality of institutions contributing to a unity of purpose.

This purpose concerns the growth of access to higher education and training opportunities. Further education colleges, until relatively recently, were frequently associated with low status technical training, delivered in local communities in response to local industrial and commercial needs for labour at relatively low levels of skill. Recently, however, we can observe FE colleges competing to supply large numbers of entrants to the universities and providing significant numbers of courses leading to HE awards and degrees. A change has occurred; the FE colleges are no longer identified primarily as providers of working class skills but rather see themselves as providers of opportunities for work and higher levels of study for a wide range of students from all social levels in society. The picture is, however, not one of an unproblematic "rise and rise" of FE to success and higher status.

The distribution of educational opportunities, in spite of attempts at implementing egalitarian policies in the last three decades in the United Kingdom (Young, 1989), is still dominated by the failure of large numbers of people to attain higher education and skills levels. This failure is closely associated with social class differences. Yet as a feature of our educational landscape class has been obscured in recent times by the interest and concern in the UK with the low levels of participation in post-school education and training (CBI, 1989). This latter issue has appealed to all factions of our political life as one of the touchstones of our lack of international competitiveness, and presumably of our national decline in relation to more successful economies or cultures (Porter, 1985).

When we turn our attention to the recent past of further education, perhaps the most characteristic feature of the 'archetypical' FE college was its ability and willingness to reproduce some of the familiar inequalities. Its students were work-based, part-time and vocationally specialised. The curriculum embodied the division between the vocational and the academic and in so doing expressed the wider social class divisions. Ironically, during the 1980s when the world of secondary schooling was discovering the relevance of the world of work, the FE colleges began to engage in academic drift and to devote resources increasingly

to academic courses such as 'A' levels, possibly emulating their local authority counterparts in the 'polytechnic sector' who wished to be treated as 'real universities'.

At the root of this shift in the FE curriculum was a change in the nature and organisation of paid work itself. In many places traditional paid employment was simply disappearing - along with many of the features of working class life such as traditional leisure habits, neighbourliness, trade union membership and those aspects of culture associated with the values of close knit and supportive communal life identified most notably by Richard Hoggart (in his "The Uses of Literacy" and more recently by Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985 and 1993).

The changing nature and organisation of work itself in the 1970s and 1980s rendered increasingly irrelevant the notion that education and training was specifically or exclusively for work. The de-industrialisation of traditional mining, engineering, tool making, steel manufacturing, car manufacturing and ship-building communities meant that local labour markets for traditional workers, especially those for younger people, all but disappeared. Mass youth unemployment was a constant reality throughout the decade of the 1980s, ameliorated by massive Government sponsored interventions, at huge cost (Dale, 1990; Raffe, 1988; and Gleeson, 1990). If, therefore, education in the FE college was not for traditional work, it was for traditional groups who had been excluded from educational opportunity and mobility via patterns of social inequality. The non-availability of traditional work meant an increasing acceptance that work could no longer be defined solely in terms of labour market requirements for jobs. The meaning of work was thus to be re-examined. It was no longer sufficient to account for the form and content of education in relation to local labour markets in order to satisfy employment needs.

Education within the traditional FE college and its 'hinterland' of community based provision began to emerge as a form of work itself. Significant numbers of people began to see local post-school education as a means by which their lives and communities might be altered; transformed into something more productive and positive. Lauro Carlos Wittman has explored this idea of learning or "education as a form of work" whereby learning becomes the

realisation of the learner's purposes and so overcomes the previous exclusion from educational processes and institutions. (Wittman, 1989).

The implication of this for our theme of **growth and innovation in higher education for adults** is that change in the structure of what is taught and learned cannot occur without change in its functions for the wider social reality. Thus we might argue that the 'function' of the FE college curriculum was traditionally embodied in a division between the academic and the vocational; one that encapsulated a limited horizon of intellectual attainment appropriate for local labour market conditions. Traditional FE college courses were historically consistent with the needs of a "Fordist" system of mass production which consigned most courses and students to a low level of intellectual and knowledge content. This was consistent with the demands of a division of labour rooted in a "low skills equilibrium" (Finegold and Soskice, 1988).

However, under the ever mounting demands of international competitive forces and the growth of new technologies and mass communications systems it is clear that the old divisions will not do! Academic and vocational divisions and the social divisions they helped perpetuate are increasingly irrelevant to modern economic needs. The business community itself has been vociferous in opposing the narrow vocational focus of much further education in the UK. The most enlightened employers are often leaders in offering educational opportunity and improvement (the Ford Edap scheme for example). The work place itself is increasingly seen as a learning environment in which employees are 'empowered' as learners. In some real senses the divisions between 'life' and 'work' which bedevilled the education system post-school are crumbling under the impact of learning opportunities and the availability of technology to support independent learning such as TV, video and personal computers. Neither should we underestimate the long term impact of this 'globalisation' of communication on education whether acquired in a formal or informal situation.

Change and innovation in further education, as in other sectors, takes place under a range of circumstances with many variables contributing to the outcomes. Nevertheless, where many things are relevant it is important to identify some of the critical factors shaping the change process. For FE, the long sustained policy vacuum throughout the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the widely held view of a 'Cinderella Service' (Baker, 1989). The relatively uncontested terrain of vocational education made the sector vulnerable to the ideologically motivated change induced from the outside by government and its agencies in the 1980s. The 'owners' of colleges, mainly the LEAs, were unable or unwilling to effectively contest on the political stage the introduction of the market-led philosophy and disciplines characteristic of the era. The managers and principles of colleges, at the same time, were busy internalising as their own need for top-down managerial change, driven by performance indicators. As a sector, FE could not divorce itself either from the economic imperatives which threw up mass youth unemployment as well as local industrial re-structuring and in some cases the collapse of local economies and labour markets.

Change was not therefore curriculum driven, or necessarily motivated by educational values and decisions, but its discourse and vocabulary was refracted through discussion about the relevance of **qualifications** and standards that were attained (or not) by young people in a competitive economic world. This environment forced local colleges to address new needs. The increasing marginalisation of economic life in Britain's older industrial and inner-city communities was accompanied by an awareness by most young people of the growth of a 'global' world of consumerism, leisure and availability of "symbolic goods" such as popular music, style and forms of communication as commodities (Thompson, 1990). Yet the local capacity to deliver jobs, skills and education relevant to this world was diminishing, as was its economic resource base. Colleges were left to deal with the peripheral results of centralised economic and investment decisions. A partial collapse at best occurred in the traditional relationship of community to skill and job opportunity and FE was a front line player in this conflict situation.

This is the wider and general context in which FE colleges have been innovative. It embodies both a material process of change in economic circumstances and an ideological shift towards a vision of education as occupation or work - where education makes a difference to people's lives and lifechances. However, before we can turn to the specific contexts of innovation and change we need briefly to consider some of the things colleges have been doing following the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

Change and Innovation in Further Education: the Policy Context

Change in, and transformations of FE/HE have taken place within the context of governmental policy and strategies for its implementation. In particular, the 1992 F & HE Act introduced, at least formally, a decentralised and deregulated system whereby colleges of FE were 'decoupled' from their host Local Education Authorities and were deemed to be part of a new sector, funded and regulated by a newly created quango - the FEFC. The competencies of governing bodies and institutional managements were acknowledged and substantially increased.

In the early 1980s colleges were seen as neither innovative nor responsive (Kedney and Parkes, 1988, p.70). Ten years later, the colleges, at least as perceived by themselves, were at the forefront of post-school education development (Smithers and Robinson, 1993). The new structural situation engendered by the 1992 Act can be said to have maximised the possibilities for implementing change, albeit change which was already substantially underway at the point at which the Act was mooted.

It can be argued that to understand an innovative culture we may need to acknowledge the distribution of power and authority within institutions. We need to ask the questions - who formulates policy and the options for policy decisions; where is the locus in which a specific policy priority is determined; who has the authority to implement and manage the process? There are those who argued that we can understand the context of innovation, amongst other features of educational change (Weaver, 1975), by continually seeking the location of these

critical arenas of power and authority. It is a plausible view that the FE sector has moved from an emphasis given to governmental predominance and LEA control to a pattern focused on managerial and executive control exercised by the college principals and heads of department.

The 'internal' factors are now clearly enhanced in the rhetoric of incorporation and in the reality of management's control of the intellectual and physical resources of a college made possible by the 1992 Act. The executive functions of college management had begun to be separated from "collegiality" according to Kedney and Parkes (1988) in the HE institutions much earlier, and the same process of aggrandisement of administrative and financial power was already to be discerned in the late 1980s in the further education sector. This shift in power towards management has corresponded to an expectation that curriculum-led change will be replaced by learner-led or student-led change. The valorisation of the 'client', who is imagined to be an independent, price sensitive customer, who as part of the aggregate student customer body, drives the responsive college to innovate is a pervasive ideological inflection of the student as consumer within the 'market place' of education.

It is only possible to grasp the scope of change in the further education sector by reference to the new found consensus on the need to do something about our vocational education and training system and recognition of the need to achieve coherence across the post-school sector, including higher education. This concern led to the emergence of a consensus between Government, Labour Party, Trades Unions, Industry and educators in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Gleeson, 1993). The common theme of a myriad of commentators (CBI 1989, Baker 1989, TUC 1989, RSA 1990) was that Britain's future needed a 'skills revolution' to reverse the downward trend of recession and loss of competitive advantage of our economy and that action across the education and training world as a whole was needed.

The Act of 1992 represented an attempt to re-structure post-school further education and training on a series of assumptions, namely that all young people should remain in education and training up to the age of 18 and that the new FE sector would be linked with the

expanded HE sector. Changes in the qualifications systems were mooted with the emergence of GNVQs (so-called vocational A levels) and the assertion of parity between academic and vocational routes to further study and work.

The mechanisms by which change was to occur were spelled out in the 1992 Act. Although the creation of over 500 independent colleges might be viewed as a form of 'privatisation' or even 'liberation' from LEA control, the net effect, it can be argued, of creating a central funding body with delegated regional advisory committees was a centralising of power and authority. The key aspect of funding focused upon a numbers driven formula linked to quality requirements, where student numbers were targets set by government policy.

The key themes for change revolved around the need for a more integrated approach to post-compulsory education which was supposed to deliver more success and less failure. The market place was to be the ultimate arbitrator of success with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) setting the terms of competition, ie, offering financial incentives to colleges tied in directly for the recruitment of additional students. A raft of other initiatives now helps sustain the mix of public and private support and includes Training and Enterprise Council (TECs) administered schemes such as Training Credits for school leavers, adult re-training schemes and education-business partnerships and compacts.

Since our theme is to try to define the meaning of educational change as well as to describe the experience, we might ask whether there is a deeper significance to these initiatives? There is little doubt that the Government wished to sever the link between publicly funded further education and local government and their LEAs established through the 1944 Act. This link, it can be plausibly argued was a democratic one which allowed a measure of local and elected accountability and responsiveness. The second significant feature concerns that of the market. Colleges are now explicitly enjoined to be competitive and corporate status has turned them into businesses requiring them to think of themselves acting in a competitive market, responsive to the industrial and commercial interests which they are to serve. Gleeson (1993) argues that the 1992 Act is most centrally concerned with radically re-positioning the FE sector

within a new set of organisational arrangements by creating an internal post-16 market comprising 6th Form Colleges, Tertiary Colleges, FE Colleges all within an infrastructure involving schools, Funding Councils, NCVQ, Examination Boards, LEAs and Business and Industrial partnerships.

The Change Agenda

Leaving aside any judgments which may be deemed precipitous, how has the re-positioning of FE and its emergence into the policy limelight yielded an agenda for educational change? The evidence seems to show that FE is creating a more comprehensive service involving increased access, expanded qualifications, accreditation and progression between the worlds of school, college, work and higher education. The FE colleges are linked to NCVQ, the TECs, ILBs and industry. Courses are increasingly being modularised and accredited and the colleges are leading nationally on Access, guidance and innovative teaching methods and support for student-centred learning.

Lasting and deeply embedded change, however, must rest upon more than the operation of a market mechanism. The wider structural inequalities of British society and the local and regional differences continue to militate against the principles of equity and access. The inequalities of class, gender, race and age, for example, cannot simply be overcome by the issuing of 'credits' or vouchers; the problems lie at a deeper and more intractable level. This is not the place to propose a totalising theory of change, however, it may be helpful to try to identify elements in what Gleeson (1993) has called a "discourse of change". These elements are to be found in teaching and learning in colleges and in actual practice in the way parts of the workplace acquire skills, knowledge and training. They include challenges to the divisive academic/vocational divisions that beset our educational provision along with insulated subject categories and the continued separation of training from education. A curriculum bounded by market disciplines is unlikely to yield a framework for such innovative education.

A 'discourse of change' must naturally encompass the organisational structures of FE, the curriculum and the resource base of the sector. It seems unlikely that a single motivating factor of the market could ensure the full extent of change involving the creation of new ideas, professional inputs from leading teachers and researchers and the quality that emanates from commitment to values of equity, entitlement and democratic accountability. Change, it has been implied, must be long lasting and go to the core of the issue. In relation to our theme, the issue could be said to be the long term needs of the economy and society for a different and more successful system of education and training. Although we are embarked nationally on a flight path to a mass higher education system, the parts of the vehicle which is to transport us are not all in place. For example, a less differentiated and segmented education and training system may be a long term requirement of the industrial and commercial system, as might a strategic commitment to the public funding of lifelong learning opportunities; but neither exist at present.

The FE sector therefore embodies many contradictions. There are many exciting innovations taking place, often due to the very absence of policy directives, and it is innovative in organisational, managerial and curricular terms. Yet FE is still unable to define its place in any other sense than its recently acquired corporate status. Its relationships to the wider needs of economy and society are ambivalent. With respect to HE it is marginal, but since change frequently occurs at the margins of conventional life, perhaps FE can count high on the scale of innovation. What is certain is our need to understand what lies behind the rise of FE on the agenda for change and the implications of this as we move towards a pattern of mass higher education where the distinctions between colleges and universities diminish.

Shared agendas for FE and HE

Can there be any doubt that the awareness of need for greater social and economic equality in education opportunity has been a major factor in educational change? Following the American experience in the 1960s, higher education in Britain in the 1990s has come to be regarded as a

fundamental entitlement for a mass client group rather than as a select privilege for a few. As in the American case (House, 1991), however, we cannot be certain that the promises of achievement and success can be met and the hopes of minorities and disadvantaged groups fully realised. Whether an expanded HE sector involving FE can be realistically viewed as a significant part of the solution to the seemingly intractable problems of the economy and the UK's competitive viability is debatable, and the jury is still out!

Within the overall picture of change we can pick out some of the metaphorical contour lines on the map of provision which join the further and higher education providers at the same level, as it were. The changes we are now experiencing in access to higher education, for example, exemplify the assertion that general and liberal education is no longer at the centre of our higher education system. Rather, academic specialisation and technical training hold the centre stage. This is of course no new development and the correspondences with an earlier epoch are noted by House (1991) when he observes that ... "The full development of nineteenth century industrialisation is symbolised as much by the appearance of the modern departmentalised research university as it is by the smoke-belching industrial plant with its ever greater division of labour and specialisation" (pp 8-9). The agenda for change has been set in relation to the increasing value placed on science, technology and the growth of specialist expertise in education and in work. These concerns have been at the centre of curriculum-led change since the 1980s and can be understood as indirectly related to the same socio-economic forces which produced specialisation and vocationalisation in higher and further education. The process is of course part of a larger and longer term shift of profound character in our social life documented by Perkin (1990); in his work on the rise of "Professional Society".

In relation to our question of how we understand education change, the growth of a mass entry higher education sector, stretching across FE and HE, is an expansion based on increasing vocationalism and specialisation. As such, it is one that challenges previous conceptions of the university's role. It does this by incorporating a broad range of learners at several levels of previous education and thereby brings into question the idea of binary divisions between providers; one that has already been seriously eroded by government policy.

This new provision is for people well beyond the traditional age and qualifications categories. This is a response which corresponds to the changing nature of employment, leisure and social patterns which are themselves contingent on the evolving division of labour and our understanding of the nature of work and its availability.

The arena of work and education is of course a contentious one. We most frequently mean paid work when referring to work but if we were to use the term to encompass the more general notion of productive life it would be possible, arguably, to view work as ... "a potentially progressive principle for curricula ..." (Spours and Young, 1988).

The argument here is that the tendency to "vocalise" the curriculum and favour traditional subject specialisms in schools and colleges has led to a narrowing of the academic curriculum and a stress on vocational training. This is an education and training emphasising standards, discipline, attitudes and dispositions compatible with employers' views of the proper characteristics workers and employees should possess. This vocationalisation of learning opportunity has become part of new divisions of certification and at the higher levels of attainment has undermined the liberal approach to higher education which favoured general and humanistic approaches. Our understanding of the post-binary world may therefore be enhanced if we can incorporate into our discourse a real sense of the changes occurring in the relationship of work and education.

Our intention here is only to signal some key aspects of this process rather than follow them in analytical detail. There is little doubt that fundamental changes in western societies' labour markets are taking place and that these have great significant for education. We are now in a "Post-Fordist" society where the mass production techniques of the Ford Motor Company used to manufacture cars in the 1920s and 1930s are declining due to technological developments. Manufacturing industry is playing a declining role, service sector industries are growing, old skills barriers in the workforce are breaking down and new divisions between 'core' and

'peripheral' workers are being created. New forms of work and integration of productive processes are being created by the growth of the global economy.

These changes demand new responses from educators; a flexible relationship between work and education is called for which is more creative and less divisive than the vocationalist perspective prevalent in the 1980s. The imperatives of modernisation imply the coming together of education for personal growth and education for work, since it is work which connects us with so many aspects of market-oriented, consumer driven society with its emphasis on personal satisfactions and life chances.

Academic and specialist subjects as we know them cannot therefore be the basis for future routes to higher education since they no longer correspond to the needs of the wider reality, including the economic ones. People must therefore prepare themselves for a life of change and less for specific occupations and jobs. Vocation must come to denote the acquisition of more than technical skill and knowledge; individuals must also acquire critical thinking skills and knowledge to enable them to survive the inevitable changes in technical production which can obliterate stand alone occupational skills.

We have already mentioned work as part of a 'progressive' curriculum and it must be stressed in relation to the theme of change that work is no longer viewed by many just as paid employment. Work is about future employment in the labour market but it is also about work as leisure, work in the home, gift work, voluntary work, and self-employment. Work in these senses implies a new way of looking at the curriculum which includes all these aspects as the basis for the development of knowledge, skills and qualifications. This theme has been a vital underpinning of course and curricular development for both further and higher education in the phase of expansion and change in the 1980s and 1990s.

The nature and organisation of work is a structural feature of our social system which distributes educational access unevenly and unequally. However, in seeking to understand change at the levels we have touched upon, we need to admit the partial significance of many

phenomena. Anything approaching a complete understanding is beyond our present intentions and ability, however, there are some elements to be identified. There are, for example, financial and policy exigencies determined by government. These have been issued with increasing frequency and have contributed to the changes sketched out earlier in the argument. The growth of a culture of "leisure" has also been of some importance, especially for those able to retire early enough and with sufficient income to buy into the leisure markets. There have also been financial gains available for expansion and these have been central to the organisational and management issues around productivity and output. Above and beyond all of this, however, is the need for greater expertise and professionalism in an era of partial economic de-construction/re-construction and its attendant mass unemployment.

This is the overall context in which the skill-based function of continuing education and post-school provision has been expanding. The response to the demands of new technology and the need of masses of individuals to adapt to the changing nature of work and the division of labour help us account for the uptake of opportunities in both the liberal extra-mural tradition and the further education sector. This is the agenda for change shared by the further and higher education providers.

Our understanding of what is happening may lead us to be critical of the professionalisation and specialisation of academic life and to wish to re-assert the values of the older academy and of the validity of separate and unequal provision. Or, alternatively, they may force us to define new and emergent values which allow us a culture of inclusion for the world of higher education on a basis other than specialisation and expanded vocationalism. The populations and individuals who now participate in this culture have emerged into the stream of higher and further provision in the UK in recent years, and there is now mass participation - but participation in what and to what eventual end? These are perhaps imponderables which signal a new and emergent discourse on change and innovation. It is our view that in seeking to innovate, diverse providers can contribute to a common experience which is greater than the sum of the parts.

An Index of Innovation?

Our purpose in asking this question is not to suggest a spurious unity where none exists. Rather it is to seek common experience in the light of the need to innovate and initiate change, especially for non-traditional adult learners in the HE and FE sectors. It is this shared focus of activity, and not the divergent institutional structures which we are trying to explain.

The last decade has seen an explosion of innovative teaching and learning systems which have been at the heart of adult education. In one sense the development of Access and accessibility to further, adult and higher education has been co-terminus with the increased openness, flexibility and responsiveness to a wide variety of student learning needs; needs which were poorly served and largely invisible in previous eras.

A touchstone for identifying the different levels at which innovation and change occurs is that of **flexibility** available to students. It is how innovative systems meet the specific needs of individuals, ie, their flexibility, which yields information otherwise locked into multi-layered institutions. It is inconceivable, for example, that the flexible needs of individuals will be met without innovation in a college's management, financial, personnel, quality and curricular systems and practices.

The flexibility available to students can be separated into two fundamental categories (Spencer and Wynne 1990). The first is that of open access arrangements which have been targeted at students for whom A levels have been thought to be inappropriate. Leaving aside the exponential growth of the biggest single provider of Access, the Open University, there has been a huge expansion of 'Access' within the last five years with much provision being made by the FE sector and conventional 'old' and 'new' university continuing education departments. The second category concerns schemes which allow the students to choose the pace of study and to negotiate significant parts of the curriculum for him/herself. This last aspect should not be confused with existing open or correspondence systems which provide

courses designed to meet the requirements of an external validating agency or examining body. Neither should it be confused with 'modular' or 'unit-based' courses which allow choice of module but allow the student no choice of content or say over learning objectives.

There is an increasing demand for learning situations which give students flexibility and whose organisational procedures facilitate its growth. Spencer and Wynne (1990) have devised a Learner Flexibility Profile which records the nature and extent of student choice. The dimensions they select include the aims and content of learning, methods of assessment, modes of attendance and the pace of learning. A scale of flexibility can be devised to rank an activity within each of these categories. Clearly a flexible and innovative organisation will need to judge itself in terms of the curricular levels over which it operates - whether at course, module, degree or other level and at the administrative and organisational levels. The flexibility experienced by an individual student derives from the interaction between learners and teacher within the conditions imposed by, or deriving from, the complex institutional arrangements of a college or providing institution. Both academic and resource controls are involved here in supporting or denying flexibility to individuals. Innovation cannot therefore be limited to a single aspect of institutional life; it has to be beyond the boundaries.

Following Spencer and Wynne we could construct an index of innovation which attempts to bring into a diagrammatic configuration the major dimensions already mentioned around the key category of student autonomy. However, prior to this it may be advantageous to focus briefly on some specific characteristics of adult learners, since these have influenced greatly both the type of course and the methods of delivery and support offered within our two types of providers - the archetypical university extra-mural department and the ideal typical and developmentally inclined FE college.

What characterises the type of learner under review here is not just the fact that they are adults. Almost all educational institutions dealing with post-school provision handle adults, including the Church, the Armed Forces, Libraries, voluntary associations and a myriad of

other organisations. Neither can we easily define our client group in terms of what is taught or the level at which it is taught. Like universities in general, providers of access programmes are not identified by what is taught, since almost everything is included, nor by the academic level(s) since several of these are also embraced.

The distinctive and perhaps unique character of the adult learners under discussion here is the credence given to student-centred learning. In this view, adult learning is centred not only around allowing students control over curricula and teaching methods but in what Squires calls the "profound" sense that the whole activity of education turns on the **student**, rather than on the organisation of the curriculum or on the formal certification of learning (Squires, 1987). This approach yields some possible components of individual and collective experience which can contribute to the indicators of flexibility and innovation. The components are, according to Squire's classification - adult learning, adult thinking, adulthood itself and adult development. The first of these is concerned with how teaching and learning occurs with adults and is distinctive. The work of Malcolm Knowles is central to this theme (Knowles, 1978). The second is concerned with the kind of 'dialectical' and transformative thinking adults are capable of, whilst the third and fourth categories are focused on adulthood itself, its roles and life experiences.

The implications of this for our theme are that the curriculum for adult education is more diverse than anything that precedes it in the formal system of schooling and in further and higher education. This diversity supersedes the limitations of what is taught as the formal curriculum, since everything from archaeology to zoology is included. The form and content of adult education is more diverse than any single sector of education can offer and it tests to the limit some conventional distinctions between life and learning. Experience and experiential learning are central to what is perceived to be the learning outcomes and processes to be fostered. There is no possibility of role closure, where individuals are shut out of learning by virtue of their previous experience, or lack of it.

The charting of themes for innovation within an "index" is a simplified and schematic device, which cannot do justice to a complex reality. Nevertheless, it may be possible to derive benefits from its use by:

- * bringing a range of potential characteristics of innovation into juxtaposition and thereby creating a repository of ideas and concepts to act as a resource for practice;
- * enabling the role of principle actors involved in innovation and change to be underpinned by a classification and rating of the extent and rates of change;
- * applying its parameters as an audit mechanism, as a 'theoretical' framework for innovation and as a practical tool for development, along with other such devices.

The index is therefore not a completed product, but rather an aid to thinking through common issues facing those who wish to innovate, some of which we hope have been addressed here.

INDEX OR DIMENSIONS OF INNOVATION

Adult-centred Provision	Curriculum Content	Assessment Methods	Learning	Resources	Openness of Access
1. Recognition of individual experience	1. Fixed curriculum and subjects	1. Traditional end of course examinations	1. Formal classes based - didactic	1. Teacher/subject	1. Flexibility
2. Recognition of group experience	2. Narrow choice of options	2. Continuous course assessment	2. Plus informal classes	2. Centrally allocated	2. Home-based
3. Recognition of potential	3. Wide choice of options	3. Ad hoc testing of individual objectives	3. Seminars, tutorials	3. Interactive resources available on demand	3. Information technologies
4. APL	4. Content negotiated by students	4. Self-assessment	4. Projects	4. Resource centres - libraries	4. Multi-media
5. APEL		5. Group assessment	5. Open ended assessment	5. Student-based	5. On-going student support
6. Modular system to reflect life experience		6. Credit	6. Learning outcomes demonstrated	6. Community resources	6. Output related audit
7. Social/collective experience					
8. Social transformations					
Implications of an innovative approach for:	Teachers/lecturers				
	Resource Managers and developers				
	Verifiers, Validators and central authorities				

Towards a Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been, we hope, the examination of growth and change of two apparently diverse and different parts of the post-compulsory education service. Indeed, it is this very diversity which the sectors purport to describe that makes the task intriguing. Our theme has been that, underlying diversity between CE provision in higher education and further education provision in colleges, there is unifying convergence on values and on elision of boundaries taking place.

The components of this convergence are in a state of flux and may not all be moving in the same direction or at the same pace. However, there is a discernible synergy. Growth of F/HE is undeniable and for the more vulnerable in society, education is their best chance of access to wider opportunities and success. There is a common rejection of the culture of failure and low achievement characteristic of parts of our educational culture in times past. This 'value alliance' has been overlaid by the government's interventions at policy and funding levels in an unparalleled way in modern times and by the ideological penetration of the market place philosophy with its emphasis on personal choice and freedom.

Underlying our appreciation of these factors is a need to understand the impact of change and decline in the economic infrastructure of Britain. Technological change has helped foster new forms of vocationalism and signals a fundamental shift in the organisation, the meaning and the sheer availability of work itself. These are the contexts of change and innovation in the post-compulsory sector.

Our theme has been that boundaries are becoming more permeable as different providers respond creatively to a shared context and conditions. In order to successfully respond we need, we argue, a shared understanding of the conditions under which innovation takes place. It is our belief that an innovative educational culture will be a shared one and that what we have presented might help bring about generative and productive "unlikely alliances". As we move towards a mass, or even a universal higher education system such alliances may bring innovations at the margins to the centre of events.

Our suggested index of innovation leads not so much to tidy conclusions as to further questions. An adult centred approach immediately raises questions of inter-institutional relationships and the need to establish learning pathways which transcend traditional boundaries. Likewise, the segregated relationship of work and learning is called in question (as it was in the 1850s by FD Maurice). Furthermore, a student centred approach may lead to totally non-institutional forms of learning activity, for example Open University self help groups or the diffusion of the community education movement. In suggesting an index of innovation we are cautiously mindful of the need for credible instruments of measurement; of the need to balance ends and means and in an era of a plethora of educational legislation the need to go on asking the question "innovation for what purpose?"

What do Colleges do?: A Summary

Colleges teach 'further education' which is a myriad of courses and learning opportunities. Some two million students are involved each year and expenditure of some £2.5 billion in public funds. The colleges educate and train as many 17 and 18 year olds as the schools and as many over 18s as the universities. Levels of provision are mixed and approximately three per cent of further education is taught in universities and six per cent of higher education in further education colleges.

The Colleges are 'comprehensive' in character, and many are geared to serving the educational needs of everyone over 16 in the community. A very large number of A level and access students is involved and colleges provide over 50 per cent of all A level candidates. The colleges in the past have been 'schools' for young workers and apprentices but now are seen to be part of a national aspiration for universal education. This aspiration is focused on courses which will lead to vocational qualifications - but ones which it is hoped will carry greater prestige and parity of status with academic qualifications. Employment related education is a nodal point of the contribution of colleges, however, it is asserted that since colleges can offer the full spectrum of opportunities, they will have an important part to play in general education. Furthermore, they will share with universities the education of the over 18s, and have a special contribution to make towards achieving government targets for lifetime education and training.

A summary of data from the most recent comprehensive publication and analysis of further education activity reveals the following:

- * There are 465 colleges in England and approximately 30 in Wales.
- * Some 61,500 lecturing staff are employed and 14,100 full time equivalents as part-time lecturers in England.

* Colleges differ greatly in type and size.

Type ¹	N	Average FTEs ²	Range in Enrolments	
			Full-time	Part-time
General	224	2,523	0 - 4,380	0 - 21,780
Tertiary	63	2,449	534 - 3,182	399 - 14,071
Sixth-Form	116	830	365 - 2,902	<i>negligible</i>
Agriculture/Horticulture	35	394	0 - 674	132 - 1,829
Art & Design	13	601	84 - 1,049	0 - 1,283

1. Not including 14 designated institutions

2. Full-time equivalent student.

Sources. *Statistics of Education. Further Education, Higher Education, in Polytechnics and Colleges 1991/2*. London: DFE. *Statistics of Education Schools 1992*. London: DFE. *Statistics Bulletin Issue Number 2*, June 1993, Coventry: FEFC.

(Source: Smithers and Robinson, 1993, p9)

* An archetypical general college is described by Smithers and Robinson as follows:

Catchment

Small industrial town but also serving surrounding agricultural area. Next further education college 30 miles away but sixth-form college on same site. Transport into college difficult.

People

Number of students on role in 1991-92, 11,169 of whom 14.0 per cent were full-time. Local 16-18 participation rate has increased from 40 to 60 per cent. Adults comprise 30 per cent of full-time students. Decline in part-time employment-released students to about 30.0 per cent of enrolments. Expansion in part-time day students partly in response to attempts to attract under-represented groups in the community, for example, from sizeable Asian population.

Courses and Qualifications

Originally a College of Technology closely linked with local steel industry. Courses dominated by training and employment needs of the industry, with emphasis on part-time day-release. With its decline deliberate policy of broadening the range: dropped the word 'technology' from the college name; developed student guidance, counselling and support services to attract wider range of students; improved physical fabric, and catering facilities. Still predominance of vocational courses, 72.0 per cent of enrolments, with emphasis on engineering. Academic courses, mainly GCSEs and some A-levels, account for a further 22.0 per cent; with only 6.0 per cent adult non-vocational. LEA runs access, basic skills and English as second language courses. College competes with LEA by running courses at marginal costs subsidised from other activities. Keen to develop higher education franchise work since it believes it enhances the ethos. Currently has 55 full-time students on degree and diploma courses held in collaboration with local university.

Funding

Budget for 1991-92 approximately £8 million, about 66 per cent of which was from the LEA.

A list of the characteristics of the FE sector would include the following:

- * There is a large variety of students and a multiplicity of attendance modes. The length of courses, range of subjects offered and destinations for students are extremely diverse. A majority of students in FE are adults over the age of 21, as in universities.
- * Some 150 awarding bodies offer 1,700 qualifications via FE. There are major national stakeholders in the awards system such as BTEC, City and Guilds, RSA, GCSE and GCE Examination Bodies involved in the sector.

- * Colleges are more and more involved in higher education under franchise arrangements with universities.

- * Nearly 7% of higher education takes place in colleges and degree/diploma students account for 10% of the largest colleges' total student intake.

- * Some colleges aspire to university status as others have done previously.

(Sources: FEU, 1992
Smithers and Robinson, 1993)

What Adult Education Providers, Provide

Higher education in general has experienced exponential growth during the last five years, along with that of post-16 or further education. Such expansion has not been restricted to undergraduate and vocational programmes but has driven up demand for adult and continuing education of all kinds.

Higher education institutions are deeply implicated in the concomitant features of expansion as it impacts on the education of adults. Most notably these features are increasing diversity of provision and the question of what is to be the entitlement for adult learners to a "lifetime of learning" (Duke). This has led to the view that educational provision for adults is no longer identifiable as separate from the mainstream work of further and higher education.

However we decide to categorise provision, there can be no doubt that there is a lot of it, and that it is continuing to expand. A summary of data reveals the following:

- * There has been a major expansion in student numbers over the years. For instance, the change in numbers in the old universities sector was:

1939 50,000 students

25% Oxbridge 25% Scotland 25% London 25% Others!

1969 200,000 students

1991 360,000 students

The corresponding development of the polytechnics and colleges sector was particularly marked by exceptional growth in the late 1980s:

1969 60,000 students

1991 370,000 students

These data combine to show that there has been a marked shift in the Age Participation Index from 1961 to 1990 although the 1970s were clearly a decade of consolidation.

Year	1961	1970	1980	1990
Age Participation Index	6%	14%	13%	19%

- * The total number of full-time and part-time students in higher education rose in 1990 to 1,146,000, 7% up on 1989 and 43% higher than in 1980.
- * Staying on at 16+: in recent years about 3 in 10 have ended their formal learning at the first opportunity. Between 16 and 18, about 4 in 10 continued full-time, 3 in 10 in part-time, post compulsory education and training.
- * Participation at 18+: at present 4 in 10 continue post compulsory education and training after 18 (about half in higher education, half in further education). At present about 7 in 10 members of the workforce have received no formal education or training for the past three years.

Current participation

- * One in 10 adults are engaged in some form of current study. A further 16% have been studying within the past three years. Therefore one-quarter of all adults are current or recent students.
- * On top of this, another 10% are trying to learn or teach themselves about something informally - at home, at work or elsewhere. So, over one-third (36%) of the adult population are or have been studying or learning informally in the past three years. More men than women were engaged in current or recent study - 31% of men compared with 27% of women.

- * Research shows that men predominate in the *qualifying* sector in specialist colleges and in university postgraduate courses. Women form the majority in art colleges and in colleges of further and higher education.
- * In the *non-qualifying sector*, the proportion of women is very high: almost 8 out of 10 in LEA classes and in the sector as a whole. Even in the non-LEA classes there are virtually two women to every one man.
- * Younger adults clearly dominate the formal system, both in education and training. One-half of 20-24 year olds have studied in the past three years, as have one-third of 25-34 year olds and 33-44 year olds. Over 45, the proportion drops to one-quarter.
- * The major factor affecting participation continues to be social class. The upper and middle classes stay at school longer, go on to post-school education at a higher rate and are then much more likely to return to continue their education as adults than the working classes.
- * An increasing number of women are now working part-time and 85% of part-time workers are women. Women are to be a major source of recruits for new jobs. However, training opportunities are more widely available to full-time than to part-time workers, thus again disadvantaging women.
- * Participation among ethnic groups is higher than for the white population and runs at the level of the white upper and middle class, though there are differences between ethnic groups.
- * People study an incredible variety of subjects, many of them clearly vocational and others of general interest. The judgment as to whether a subject is vocational is made by the learners, who know what they want to learn and why they want to learn it.
- * Subjects which have increased in popularity since 1980 tend to be in the harder, more

vocational areas, which are also traditionally male ones and the ones that government policies have mainly supported in the last few years. Subject areas which have decreased include the arts and social sciences, academic and domestic subjects and some vocational areas which are traditionally occupied by women.

- * In terms of social class, the lower-middle class (C1s) are particularly motivated to pursue vocational studies/qualifications, as is the group (some of whom are the same people) who left school at 16 or 17. Languages are more attractive to upper and middle classes, as are arts and cultural subjects. The caring areas show a flat class profile, while home skills, both male and female, are of more appeal to the working class.

Informal learning

- * One in six people are trying to learn about or teach themselves something informally - at home, at work, or elsewhere. Informal learning therefore adds 10% to the pool of participants and doubles the number of people currently engaged in some form of study or learning. There are more formal learners among men than among women, among the young (20-24 year olds) and among the middle and upper classes.
- * The time commitment to study and learning is significant, and for most people is a commitment made at the cost of their leisure. Average time spent per week is 9.3 hours, with men spending 10.1 hours and women spending 8.4 hours. The majority of people are studying over a long time period, more than 50% are studying for over six months. More women than men are studying for shorter time periods.

Where do people study?

- * Educational institutions, whether universities, colleges or adult centres are still the main venue for adult students: four out of ten name them as their place of study.

- * Over the last 10 years, the development of open and distance learning has broken down some part of the traditional monopoly delivery of conventional educational institutions. People now have more choice about where they wish to study. The vast majority of adult studying and learning is part-time and has to be fitted into people's lives and around their work and family obligations.
- * More men than women have been learning at work, while more women than men go to educational institutions.
- * The distinction between full and part-time students is in itself becoming more arbitrary and less clear. As increasing numbers of institutions adopt modular structures and credits are accumulated and transferred at further as well as at higher education levels, students can take on any work-load and its associated credit-rating as they wish.

Some selective contexts:

- * Britain devotes a smaller proportion of its public spending to education than Canada, the United States and Switzerland but more than other European Union countries and Japan. However, Britain enrolls fewer young people into full-time university and other tertiary education than most other European countries, the US and Canada. In non-university education - typically courses leading to vocational qualifications - a higher proportion of young people in Britain are studying part-time than in the rest of Europe.
- * Britain lags behind many competitors in the percentage of the working population with degrees or other tertiary qualifications, reflecting lower numbers entering higher education in the past.

(Sources: N Sargent, 1991
 C Ball, 1991
 G Davies, 1992
 D.E.S News, 1992
 Guardian 9.12.93)

The picture of adult education provision across the post-binary sector(s) is one of complexity and diversity. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that adult learning is a recognised means of self-expression and fulfilment for very wide sections of the population. As with university degree-level study in general, it is a widely accepted route to life enhancement and social worth. The benefits of adult learning apply to both vocational and job-related aspirations and the achievement of humanistic purposes concerned with self-development. The expectations associated with such education are instrumentalist and democratic. They speak for the continued growth of mass educational experience and the reconciliation of elite provision with broad access to higher education.

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