

Lifelong Learning: Changing the Culture and Keeping up with Cultural Change

Working Paper

Creating Learning Cultures:

Next steps in achieving the Learning Age

Second report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning: Changing the Culture and Keeping Up With Cultural Change

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is, firstly, to argue that government policy makers and professionals engaged in lifelong learning need to analyse and understand the changes that are taking place in our society, and how and in what ways people are different, in order for us to develop new ways to engage people in the lifelong learning agenda. If we do not do this, and all the initiatives that spring from current government policy are focused on current institutional forms, then the aspirations expressed in the “Learning Age” for the development of a lifelong learning culture nationally will not be realised. Secondly the paper argues that the many programmes and initiatives currently being promoted by government to create a more integrated and equal society and combat social exclusion (eg New Deal for Communities, Health, Education and Employment Zones, Sure Start, Crime and Drugs) will only succeed (as the government recognises) if people and communities develop and empower themselves. Lifelong learning should be at the heart of that development and empowerment process. This however has not been acknowledged in most of the current policy initiatives.

2 What do we mean by a lifelong learning culture?

- A critical mass of individuals is taking responsibility, at whatever stage in life they are in, for identifying their learning and development needs and is engaged in activities to meet those needs
- there is a visible and measurable change in the way individuals and groups behave - whether at work, in their personal lives, in their leisure time, in social and political settings - so that reflection on experience, and what is learnt from that experience, is embedded in social interactions of all kinds
- activities around learning are at the heart of all activities promoted to achieve social change and democratic renewal
- a critical mass of employing organisations, whether in the private or public sector, is actively promoting learning and development activities for their employees, in order that the organisations themselves will become more effective, both economically and socially.

3 Diverse and Divided Society

“The state serves a society that has become increasingly diverse. Different sections of society lead very different lives, do different sorts of work and choose different forms of entertainment. Communities have become increasingly fragmented. People travel considerable distances to work and shop. Age, gender and race provide vital sources of difference in culture and values. Ours is a society which prizes individuality and difference, and yet the state is far more comfortable with services that are uniform and standardised.”

Charles Leadbeater and Sue Goss, 1998

People’s values are very different from a generation ago. Research shows that younger people are:

- individualistic
- pleasure seeking
- looking for excitement and open to experimentation
- more tolerant of gender and race differences
- less tied to notions of place and neighbourhood
- concerned about the environment.

We also know that people’s values have been shaped and changed by the massive focus on individual consumption in recent years. People are more demanding and questioning of the services they receive. The public sector is under constant pressure to match the pace of service improvement in the private sector.

There has been a breakdown in “authority centred” environments, whether in the family, at work or in people’s social lives. This has had its positive and negative sides. It is easy to predict two very different scenarios for the future - where the individualistic fragmented nature of many peoples lives leads to a breakdown in the collective support structures of society, and where the most vulnerable individuals and families go to the wall, or where those same trends and values lead to high levels of accountability and self actualisation in a socially responsible environment. A lifelong learning culture across the whole of society could be the key to which scenario actually happens.

None of us can afford to underestimated the speed of change in our society. That change is being led and shaped by powerful, distant multi-national companies who through technology, product innovation and the creation of markets are changing the shape of people’s lives for good or ill. In this context continuous education for everybody - in institutions and as individuals - to match the changing environment is a necessity not a luxury. If it does not happen we are all powerless - including the institutions of government.

4 Achieving integration and renewal

The changes in behaviour and values that has occurred over the last generation has coincided with us becoming a more divided country. The changes in employment patterns and in families and the rise in consumerism has concealed pockets of intense deprivation where people lead hopeless and isolated lives and where weakened family and community structures and poor housing and education have blighted whole communities through crime and anti-social behaviour.

The recent report from the Social Exclusion Unit outlining a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal argues that the key to tackling these problems of social division lies in investing in people not just buildings. The SEU report commits the DfEE to assess the effectiveness of current institutional and non-institutional approaches to engaging adults in education in deprived communities and to identifying the most cost effective “schools plus” approaches to redressing failure at school and using schools as a focus for other community services.

There is widespread concern about the low esteem in which politicians and our political institutions are held and there has been a major drive to “renew democracy” at local and national level. The belief is that Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, devolution to the regions, and a range of measures to reform local government will revitalise democracy and enable many more people to engage in decision making, that government at all levels will be less remote, more “in touch with the people” and people will be more empowered, and feel less marginalised around issues that affect their everyday lives. There is an aspiration for more diverse forms of democratic participation and enrichment of democratic activity.

These initiatives to renew democracy and combat social exclusion are based on a vision about realising the potential that everyone in our society has for self actualisation, for participation and for a sense of well being about themselves and their place in the world. This vision is also at the heart of the drive for lifelong learning - the belief that it is through learning above all that the potential of people is realised. Learning is essentially about understanding, adapting to and controlling social change. Learning is about increasing the capacity to do things. A learning culture is the necessary foundation for growth and change - be it individuals or societies.

In reality there is currently little acceptance or recognition in government that promoting lifelong learning is at the heart of social change and democratic renewal. While there is considerable focus in raising educational achievement levels in young people and skills levels, particularly amongst unemployed adults, an overarching approach to learning is the key to unlocking the aspirations for an integrated more participative society. This is in contrast to many big commercial enterprises which recognise that continuous organisational learning to match the changing competitive environment is essential if they are to survive. This has led them to restructure and to change the way they organise themselves in order to facilitate learning at every level.

The social Exclusion Unit’s report in neighbourhood renewal argues for an integrated approach to renewal both by people themselves and amongst different local and national agencies. What needs to be argued for more strongly is to have learning at the heart of the integrated approach to social and democratic change currently being promoted by the Government and its agencies.

5 How can Government promote a Lifelong Learning Culture?

1 *The Government should promote a major campaign around learning to support inter alia:*

- a) engagement of adults in the range of opportunities available to improve their own education and skills levels***
- b) the linkage of lifelong learning to its crusade to raise standards in schools***
- c) the Sure Start programme and other programmes to draw parents and young children into education activity***
- d) the promotion of wider access to and use ICT for learning and democracy.***

The purpose of this campaign should be to change people's perceptions of what learning is and how it can change their lives and it should be integrated around the concepts of learning, empowerment and increasing individual capacity. It should recognise the key change makers in society are now the big multi-national companies and the campaign should be developed in partnership with them.

This campaign should use the most modern expertise and techniques available to engage people in supermarkets, sites of leisure activity, the workplace, football stadia etc. All appropriate tools of intervention should be identified to develop a 'taste' for lifelong learning bringing from the margins to the mainstream. This campaign is as important as those designed to raise political awareness around, for example, the Scottish Parliament and the Mayor of London. The Government has raised the terms of debate on transport as fundamental to our whole future as a society. So far there has been no "terms of debate" on Lifelong Learning. These should now be raised in terms of the capacity of all of us to understand, engage and take control of our lives.

2 *A clear and comprehensive set of targets should be developed across all Government Departments (eg DfEE, DTER, Health, Home Office and DTI and DCMS) which will demonstrate how each Department will be using lifelong learning to meet their objectives through existing and future programmes over the next 5-10 years. The identification and development of these targets into a comprehensive lifelong learning development programme should be led by a new initiative in the DfEE, capable of auditing and co-ordinating across all departments, as in the Social Exclusion Unit model. There should be an increased focus on culture media and sport as a means of promoting lifelong learning.*

3 *Lifelong learning experts should join the appropriate cross cutting teams proposed by the Social Exclusion Unit to develop a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.*

For example lifelong learning should make a major contribution to:

Team 2 Skills

Team 9 Community Self Help

Team 11 "Schools plus"

Team 12 Young People

- 4 A pathfinder agency should be identified in one of the 17 areas selected by the Government connected to local Government White Paper for funding under the New Deal for Communities Programme to bid to lead a regeneration programme which has at its heart lifelong learning as a driver for social change and community renewal. This project should be championed by a Government Minister.*
- 5 A pilot partnership between a local authority and a Government Regional Office and FEFC and HEFCed to establish a large scale learning city project as part of SRB round 5. This project should be focused on a town or city which could pilot new mechanisms for engaging with citizens in learning in line with changing cultural norms. This project should be championed by a Government Minister.*
- 6 The new Local Government Bill will propose a new duty on local authorities to promote the social and economic well being of their communities and areas. Building on local authority lifelong learning development plans, the Bill should require Local Authorities to develop performance indicators around the promotion of lifelong learning as a key mechanism for community change and renewal.*
- 7 The Government should produce new advice to the FEFC and HEFC which requires them to demonstrate how they are using their funding mechanisms, inspections and other forms of implements to contribute to culture change and new forms of participation. One tool should be targeting setting and effective monitoring and reporting.*

Convened by LEISHA FULLICK

1998