

Further Education Trust for Leadership: Lifelong Learning: Winter Symposium 2018

This paper summarises the discussion from FETL's 2018 Winter Symposium, which explored the concept of lifelong learning in response to FETL's monograph, *Reimagining Lifelong Learning: A brief history of an idea*, by Paul Stanistreet. It has been divided into the following sections:

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Held in the House of Lords in December 2018, the symposium brought together an audience of more than 100, including parliamentarians, civil servants, sector leaders, practitioners, academics and the wider policy community. The event was hosted by the **Baroness Sue Garden of Frognal**, with a keynote speech was provided by the **Sir John Hayes CBE MP**. Panel contributions were made by:

- **Prof Tom Schuller** (chair), Birkbeck University | Institute of Education, UCL
- **Dr Fiona Aldridge**, Director of Policy and Research, Learning and Work Institute
- **Dr Paul Feldman**, Chief Executive, Jisc
- **Dame Ruth Silver**, President, FETL

100 years of lifelong learning

In 1919, the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Board published its *Final Report*, which emphasised the social purpose of adult education in its vision for post-war reconstruction.

Adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.

The report pitched adult education as 'an activity indispensable to the health of democratic societies' and foregrounded the importance of 'creative enjoyment' and informal and non-formal learning. Despite its emphasis on intrinsic values and intangible goods, the report's findings led to the creation of the Adult Education Committee and shaped the development of early lifelong learning policy and practice.

One hundred years later and the vision espoused by the report authors, Basil Yeaxlee and R.H. Tawney, appears just as relevant. Indeed, the report's conception of adult education as an 'aid to the realisation of political or economic freedom', and its proposed role for adult education in 'supporting an enlightened and responsible citizenship', have a particular resonance as one reflects on the current socioeconomic and political circumstances.

Re-asserting the case for lifelong learning

Adult learning is not a luxury; it has an intrinsic worth and value, and is an essential component of our education system.

In his keynote speech opening the FETL Winter Symposium in December 2018, former Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, Sir John Hayes MP, outlined his belief in the value of adult education. He further emphasised the case he made for the sector while in the 2010 coalition government, as the Treasury sought to make significant spending reductions across government to reduce the budget deficit.

Learning for its own sake develops individual skills and a feeling of self-worth that can help people onto the first steps of a ladder towards structured learning and sustainable employment. Learning that starts informally often leads to other things too – new friends, new leisure interests, community action, hobbies that become successful small businesses or volunteering that turns into job opportunities. Adult learning makes a profound and measurable impact to people’s happiness – sustaining personal wellbeing, community health and the common good.

Sir John Hayes MP



In arguing for the protection of the £210 million annual budget for informal learning, Sir John demonstrated the wider benefits adult education brings to a number of government objectives, including its potential to reduce pressure on the NHS and the wider welfare system. For example, community learning contributes to older people’s health and quality of life by helping them stay physically and mentally active, preserving their independence for longer. Programmes developing IT skills also allow people to access the increasing number of digitalised government services, and locally designed family learning programmes motivate hard-to-reach groups to engage in learning by involving parents in their children’s education.

While the commitment of Sir John, and the then Secretary of State Vince Cable, may have initially offered adult education some protection from fiscal retrenchment, the case needs to be made once more for lifelong learning. The 2017 *Adult Participation in Learning Survey* showed the lowest level

of participation across the whole of the 20 year series. Focusing on the themes from the survey, Dr Fiona Aldridge, Director of Policy and Research at the Learning and Work Institute, spoke of the persistent inequalities it showed:



You are more likely to learn as an adult if you have previously done well in education, if you are from a family background higher socio-economic class, if you are younger, if you are closer to the labour market. Those who might benefit the most are the least engaged and we have not found a way to systematically – to change these patterns of participation so we need to do something different

Dr Fiona Aldridge, Director of Policy and Research, L&WI

In the context of longer working lives and the application of automation and artificial intelligence to swathes of the labour market, the impact of these inequalities could become acutely pernicious. With this in mind, Dr Paul Feldman, Chief Executive of Jisc, argued that the concept of lifelong learning will become more relevant than ever:

We expect the industrial revolution 4.0, as promoted in the industrial strategy, to create an enhanced need for lifelong learning. Skills people have had for years and built their identity on will become obsolete in the next decade. And there will be whole new cohorts who believed their white collar skills in particular are marked for life are going to be impacted by tech. We need to help everyone to retrain regardless of profession and we need to help these people retrain.

Dr Paul Feldman, Chief Executive, Jisc



Devolution and community hubs

In the same way as the 1919 adult education report focused on the importance of local government, 2019's discussion places equal hope on localised delivery and networks. Sir Alan Tuckett described the gulf between government rhetoric on lifelong learning and the reality of governments' devastating provision with budget cuts across the OECD nations.

If you look at FE as a system it's absolutely damaged by being a low national priority, yet at a local level everyone knows how important colleges are.

Sir Alan Tuckett

This reality has created a great deal of optimism in the sector around the greater levels of devolution to regional and sub-regional levels across the UK. Indeed, many have argued that the development of learning cities, as proposed by the RSA, should be a priority when looking ahead.

Designing provision from the bottom up has also been posited as a way to engage those currently marginalised in the labour market and those furthest from the education system. While Dr Aldridge spoke of the significant proportion of adults who did not see the value of further learning, studies by the Learning and Work Institute into groups not in education, employment or training have shown that there are many motivating factors for adults to engage. These range from wanting to help their children to managing health needs. The access points for engagement in lifelong learning may therefore arise beyond the traditional FE sector. As a result, strategies for greater inclusivity should be coordinated across local government, frontline service provision and civil society. While innovations such as 'social prescribing' in the health service offer a fresh approach, Dr Jim Crawley at Bath Spa University, was keen to highlight:

The great work that is being done is done below the radar, by a variety of small organisations. There are some really good projects going on, but funding is an ongoing challenge. Despite this, many of these organisations keep going because they are passionate about making a difference to their local communities. Colleges, despite the mergers, are still great hubs for the community.

Dr Jim Crawley, Bath Spa University

The successes of the community learning sector were highlighted by the Chief Inspector in Ofsted's 2017/18 Annual Report and attendees at the Symposium attested to the role FE colleges play in local communities across the country. Ruth Spellman, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Workers' Educational Association, described the important role of colleges as community anchors. She emphasised the great significance of the local college to the community in the mining village where she grew up. She also provided an international perspective from Singapore, where distinctions between adult and children's learning are less stark, and educational institutions are open to the community at weekends for learning. The concept of social integration was also explored by symposium chair Professor Tom Schuller, Chair of the Prisoner Learning Alliance. The FE sector has played an important role in the question of how we integrate offenders into the community, but colleges could also play an important role in a world that seems increasingly socially atomised.



For all the talk of the bubbles we live in, I think adult education and colleges above all are places where you get communication across the divides that split us up. There are very few places now where people from different generations and from different social backgrounds can actually meet and sit alongside each other and exchange views and learn alongside each other. So I feel that mission of social cohesion is a crucial part of FE's contribution.

Professor Tom Schuller

Colleges of the future

Colleges were highlighted as serving a potentially pivotal role in ensuring a consistent approach to adult education. An increasingly devolved adult learning system runs the risk of making the delivery of lifelong learning a postcode lottery. Here the infrastructure offered by a college plugged into a national network could be useful in ensuring that learners benefit from the most up-to-date forms of teaching and learning and are able to progress flexibly through the wider education and training system. As Dr Feldman pointed out, of all the parts of the education system, FE is where we could see the greatest application of new technology in transforming learning, and no parts of the country should be left behind.

We have an agenda called education 4.0 and it is using the technological advances of the forth industrial revolution to transform the way our educators teach and students learn. AI, machine learning and mixed realities, such as virtual or augmented reality, are increasingly effective tools for teaching and practising skills, both remotely and in classrooms. For those retraining, it can be preferable to be guided by a machine rather than to return to the classroom. VR environments could revolutionise apprenticeship end-point assessments. New

data systems will also allow learners to pick up their studies from where they left off at any point across their lives by ensuring their credits and learner journeys can be shared between institutions and employers.

The application of these advances to FE could help create different ways of accessing learning and act as a great leveller, allowing learners to set the pace of learning and experience the joy it brings.

Put all this together and our vision for the next decade is of a vibrant and successful learner-led system, with learning technology fitting into the daily lives of learners, and with lecturers passing on their mastery and experience. This will make a great lifelong learning available to all.

Dr Paul Feldman, Chief Executive, Jisc

Being heard: The need to evangelise



Between assisting the sector to overcome the challenges of austerity, reaching the ‘left behind’, and future-proofing the system for the onset of the forth industrial revolution, it is vital to look for opportunities to promote the sector to government, and thereby ensure the sector is adequately resourced.

There is a degree of cautious optimism around the future opportunities for the sector. Brexit and the changes proposed in the government’s immigration White Paper will centre-ground adult education and lifelong learning in national policy. According to Gordon Marsden MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Skills:

Devolution also has the potential to create empowering structures with colleges, training providers, the third sector and groups such as the WEA, acting as the building blocks for a revitalised lifelong learning structure. However, it will be crucial that government acts as an enabler, not as a micro-manager.

Gordon Marsden MP

While structures can facilitate or impede effective policy delivery – the silo thinking of government departments being a common complaint – creating the political will across different levels of government is an imperative for the sector. Key to this is finding advocates beyond the education sector and in other branches of government. Learning supports a wide range of policy agendas and as Dr Susan Pember, Director of Hoxley and former Director for FE at the Department for Education, said:



FE and community learning must also be making the wellbeing case to government and not just the economic [case].

Dr Susan Pember, Director, Hoxley

Speaking from his experience in government, Sir John Hayes agreed. Placing the sector’s hope in one minister, however determined a champion for FE, is a risky strategy. Instead, creating Cabinet allies by showing the Health Secretary how community learning can improve health outcomes, or illustrating the links between education participation and offending rates to the Home Secretary, can create a stronger voice for FE in government.

Influencing the Cabinet Office can help overcome the silos that have traditionally bedevilled government departments and assist in forming the joined-up policy we need. Under Gordon Brown and George Osborne the Treasury also became a great enabler of joined-up policy in certain areas once a clear case for action was made.

On the promotion issue, I do think it comes back to this evangelism. We've got some powerful spokespeople for the cause in which we all believe. But it isn't just the corridors of power here where the case needs to be made. Journalists, often graduates of academic pathways, and nostalgic for their experiences in education, need to understand the sector and its vital role in local communities and economies. The local press should not be overlooked either. As a local MP, constituents talk to me far more about what was in the Lincolnshire Free Press, than stories in the national newspapers. We all have a duty to advocate for the great work of the sector.

Sir John Hayes MP



Further reading

FETL Publications

[Reimagining Lifelong Learning: A brief history of an idea](#)

[Cities of Learning in The UK](#)

[Rising to the Challenge](#)

[Collaboration and Leadership for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

[Possibility Thinking: Creative Conversations on The Future of FE and Skills](#)

[The long-term implications of devolution and localism for FE in England](#)

Other

[The potential of Education 4.0 is huge – the UK must take the lead, now](#)

FETL 2019

1. 100 years of women in skills
2. Shame and repair
3. How to rescue organisations
4. 100 years of lifelong learning
5. Transformational leadership
6. Genealogy of leaders
7. Leaning cities
8. PhDs
9. The four nations
10. Infrastructure of skills system
11. Ways of thinking in the FE sector

