View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by WestminsterResearch

UNIVERSITY OF
LEADING
THE WAY
WESTMINSTER

WestminsterResearch
http://www.westminster.ac.uk/research/westminsterresearch

Proofing rural lifelong learning

Sue Jackson
Richard Clarke*

Birkbeck, University of London

* Richard Clarke now works within the Westminster Business School, University of Westminster

This is an exact copy of the original, published by Birkbeck, University of London, 2003, as FCE Occasional Paper No.3. ISBN 9780907904960.

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.
Users are permitted to download and/or print one copy for non-commercial private study or research. Further distribution and any use of material from within this archive for profit-making enterprises or for commercial gain is strictly forbidden.

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch: (http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail repository@westminster.ac.uk

Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Faculty of Continuing Education

Sue Jackson and Richard Clarke

Proofing Rural Lifelong Learning?

FCE Occasional Paper No. 3
2003

Proofing Rural Lifelong Learning?

Summary

The countryside covers 85% of England's land surface and the people who live and work in it comprise one fifth of the population. Yet in lifelong learning discourse, (as so often elsewhere) the countryside rarely receives much specific attention as the focus for elaboration and critique of policy. However, neither lifelong learning nor rural proofing are unproblematic categories. This paper examines some of the political and ideological assumptions and constructs which underpin the categories of 'lifelong learning' and 'rural proofing'. It argues that rural proofing (a government commitment to subjecting all its policies to scrutiny for rural relevance or bias) needs to reflect on its own assumptions as well as to recognise contested paradigms of lifelong learning (as an umbrella term for all post school 'adult learning').

It argues that the distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' needs to be mapped onto contested paradigms of lifelong learning, and, with them, seen in an historical context. Within New Labour, lifelong learning and rural governance are both subsets of a broader agenda that has to do with entrepreneurship and competitiveness; economic well-being and environmental quality; social inclusion, citizenship, civic participation and social engagement.

It concludes that the new administrative and funding structures of lifelong learning may permit a closer strategic focus on perceived regional needs, particularly those to do with skills and employment. However they are unlikely to encourage a revival and re-focusing of non-vocational (and especially non-formal) learning opportunities. Moreover to the degree that the emphasis on widening participation and social inclusion may secure access to work for some, they do little in themselves to address structural problems of rural inequality and poverty. Current instrumental trends in lifelong learning are closely focused on perceived 'human capital' requirements but do not necessarily take into account the specific requirements either of rural enterprises or of the diversity of rural people and their needs. Any radical developments in rural areas will need to be part of a new rural settlement in which longstanding social and economic problems of rural areas are addressed.

Proofing Rural Lifelong Learning?

Introduction

A recent internal report commissioned from the Faculty of Continuing Education (FCE) by the Countryside Agency (CA) set out to review the application of government lifelong learning policies in, and their implications for, rural areas. This Occasional Paper is an outcome of this study, which reviewed the application of government lifelong learning policies in, and their implications for, rural areas. In particular it attempted to identify and examine existing evidence for differential impacts of lifelong learning policies for rural people and businesses compared to their urban counterparts.

The report (Clarke et al., 2002) is essentially a 'scoping' study based on a desk analysis of existing knowledge, published and unpublished. Its primary conclusion is that very few current initiatives are being monitored for rural relevance (and fewer still have been designed with specific regard to the characteristics of rural areas) and that little is known about rural provision and uptake of lifelong learning activity. A number of recommendations are made, not just for further research, but for monitoring and evaluation, particularly of the plans of local Learning and Skills Councils and local authorities in rural or mixed urban/rural areas, as they emerge.

Alongside these conclusions, however, lie other considerations, and this paper starts from the recognition that both lifelong learning and rural proofing are contested categories.

Lifelong learning is a broad umbrella term, which may be used in different ways. It can refer to all forms of learning at all ages, but is normally applied to post school 'adult learning' in particular by those over 19 who return to study after completing their initial education. At its heart is **formal** learning, often classroom based, or involving paper and (today) electronic media, undertaken within educational institutions such as colleges and universities. As such, lifelong learning encompasses, but extends well beyond, a host of other terms which it subsumes and is tending to replace, including various permutations of ‘adult’, ‘continuing’, ‘basic’, ‘further’, ‘higher’, ‘professional, or ‘workplace’, distance’ and ‘open’, with ‘education,

or ‘training’. Each of these has their own nuance of meaning[1]. In addition, and from the perspective of the individual learner, lifelong learning can include **non-formal** learning (organised, systematic study carried on outside the framework of the formal system). It forms a continuum with **informal** learning that is a central element of daily living.

Lifelong Learning is promoted by government as a key contributor to national life. It is presented as central to economic progress and to a prosperous, active, inclusive and cultured society. Less explicitly it is taken as a self-evident good, not least by adult educators who claim ownership of its practice in their academic posts or institutions. By contrast, others argue that whatever the rhetoric, the reality is that the emphasis in delivery, and in its institutional arrangements, has increasingly shifted away from the ‘liberal ethic’ of education for its own sake, to an instrumental vocationalism, in which self- fulfilment is defined narrowly in terms of access to employment; in which the major overriding objective is a flexible workforce, and a liberal economy; and in which the early radicalising potential of adult education has been lost.

Rural Proofing manifests the government’s professed determination to ensure that its policies and those of other public bodies in every sphere have taken the rural dimension into account; that they benefit rural residents, businesses, and the rural environment at least as much as in urban areas. As such, it is conceived as a positive tool, which avoids or redresses the neglect of rural issues in the framing of policies, which are ultimately determined by an overwhelmingly urban electorate. Critics have variously claimed however that the introduction of rural proofing was a response to assuage widespread discontent amongst particular (and politically influential) sections of the rural population who had previously enjoyed privileges which they seek to protect from erosion and/or that it is window- dressing to assist the presentation and rural acceptance of policies whose content is likely to be unaffected.

Beyond the immediate conclusions of the Countryside Agency study, therefore, lies a problematic context of definitions and analysis. This paper refers to the political and ideological assumptions and constructs underlying the commissioning of the Agency study. It attempts to assess the degree to which critiques of

[1] For this reason we have tended to use the narrower term wherever this is more appropriate.

lifelong learning and of rural proofing may be examined against each other. In particular, in revisiting the conclusions of the study, it problematises the concept of rural proofing, as a context within which contested paradigms of lifelong learning may be examined in the rural context.

Rurality and rural proofing

Provision and uptake of learning opportunity reflects the interaction of historical, geographical and social factors with current government policies and priorities and the activities of providers. National policies and initiatives rarely impact evenly in different geographical areas or on different groups. The selection by the Countryside Agency's of lifelong learning as a focus for rural proofing study arises from its centrality in government policy as a vehicle for economic regeneration, and a general recognition of the importance of lifelong learning in individual fulfilment and social well-being. However adult educators have also neglected the rural as a focus for policy development and research.

Using the Countryside Agency's definition of rurality as land including individual settlements with a population of less than 10,000, the countryside covers 85% of England's land surface. The current rural population of England on this definition is approximately 9.3million, or approximately 20% of the total English population.

The heterogeneity of rural areas (especially the differences that are to be found between the so called accessible rural areas of the urban fringe and the more remote 'deep rural' areas elsewhere) and of rural populations means that it is difficult to generalise about the consequences of rurality for the provision and uptake of lifelong learning opportunity. However two features may be taken as examples of the way in which rural conditions affect both access to formal learning opportunities across the whole spectrum of lifelong learning and the specific problems of training needs for rural employers:

- The dispersed nature of rural populations (and of social groups within the rural population as a whole) means that appropriate learning opportunities may rarely be provided within the local area, and travel may become a particular problem. As a consequence of dispersed demand (and a general lack of adequate facilities including accommodation), supply of

appropriate local learning opportunities may often be limited, and access to them by individuals may be difficult.

- Features of the rural economy, in particular the prevalence of small firms and high levels of self-employment, makes provision of workplace based and college based training more difficult for both employers and workers.

The way in which these apparent barriers are reflected in participation and attainment is not simple:

> *"There has been an assumption that learners face greater barriers to learning in rural areas…[however] there is effectively no difference between the proportions who are current or recent learners in urban areas: they are virtually identical to the UK proportions"* (Sargant, 2000).

In general, rural residents report marginally better educational qualifications (and lower levels of educational deprivation) than their urban counterparts. This is likely to be a reflection of broad social composition. Average figures can mask a pattern of extremes. There is clear evidence of social class, gender, and ethnic imbalances in access to lifelong learning opportunity at a national level. It is probable that distributed (and therefore 'hidden') inequality in the countryside might exacerbate these differences although there is no data on this. The negative features of rural living impact disproportionately more on the more disadvantaged individuals and families, and it is likely that this is reflected in much greater disparities in participation and achievement between such groups. However there is very little empirical evidence to this end.

Lifelong Learning

In 1996 the European Commission declared a European Year of Lifelong Learning and across Europe, including Britain, lifelong learning was confirmed as part of the mainstream political agenda. In, 1997, the newly installed Labour Government appointed Britain's first Minister for Lifelong Learning. A Green (consultative) Paper, The Learning Age: a renaissance for a New Britain was published the following year. In his Forward, David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, states that the fostering of an enquiring mind and a love of learning are essential for future success, both for individuals and for 'the nation' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). In a much-quoted passage,

Blunkett asserts that as well as securing economic stability and growth

> *"…learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity that it brings."* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998).

Notable for its emphasis on 'learning for its own sake', this statement sits uncomfortably with the highly instrumental approach that has since developed. The current Education White Paper, for example, emphasises an increasingly competitive world where universities and the business sector need to develop strategies for global economic success. There is little in this White Paper that points to the wider contributions of lifelong learning:

> *"… we have to make better progress in harnessing knowledge to wealth creation. To help turn ideas into successful businesses … Our competitors see – as we should – that the developing knowledge economy means the need for more, better trained people in the workforce … In a knowledge-based economy both our economic competitiveness and improvements in our quality of life depend on the effectiveness of knowledge sharing between business and higher education. Good business links should also play a part in tackling the low skills levels that hold back national productivity."* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

In any case, the twinning of economic and industrial prosperity with individual self- fulfilment, although attractive, is oversimple and can conceal as much as it reveals. Lifelong learning is often used synonymously with 'adult and continuing education', focusing on formal learning which has at its heart self-motivated study in a formal context in which provision is largely dictated by demand, and in which explicitly vocational structures are secondary and awards are not linked to any national structure of vocational or professionally validated qualifications. By contrast a second construct focuses precisely on vocational relevance, often (but not necessarily) linked to formal (generally sub-degree) qualification,

focusing on the enhancement of skills and career prospects for those in work, and access to labour markets for those without it.

These two views to some extent correspond to what used to be called the Adult Education/Further Education – Higher Education divide: however, that is a concept which itself has little relevance today in structural terms, any more than does the supposed antithesis between these two views. Additionally, vocational and skills based learning is increasingly taking place within workplaces, further blurring boundaries with the development of their own 'universities' by some of the largest workplace organisations, including for example the National Health Service – a major employer in rural areas.

Lifelong learning represents an emerging view that transcends traditional divisions between vocationalism and 'learning for its own sake'. It can be a seductive concept: it is easy to support the idea of continuous learning through formal education and informal learning, through work and leisure activities, through experience and for pleasure. If lifelong learning is taken at its broadest sense – all learning that occurs both formally and informally, consciously and unconsciously – it is impossible not to be a lifelong learner. Yet despite assertions to the contrary by Margaret Thatcher and others, a society is more than the sum of the individuals of which it is constituted. It is not therefore sufficient to say that a society in which people learn is a learning society. A broader commitment to the institutional and political changes which should characterise a society in which the mass of people are progressively enfranchised by such learning, is required from individuals, employers and the State.

Restructuring: national policy and the rural context

The progressive and emancipatory function of learning has been a feature of adult education since its earliest days, which can be seen as an essentially political response to impact of the early industrial revolution on the lives of working people. Historically rooted in a tradition of supporting working-class people, ideologically critical and egalitarian, adult education in Britain has its early nineteenth century roots in *"trades unions, Friendly Societies, Co-operative Societies, Mechanics Institutes, Sunday schools, Methodist chapels, and all the various influences that help keep the soul alive in a*

population living under conditions that degrade the mind" (Hammond and Hammond, 1925).

Birkbeck College, for example, was founded in 1823 as the London Mechanics' Institution, dedicated to the education of working people. Seven years after its foundation, the Institution was amongst the first to open its doors to women students, admitting them to lectures (though not yet to full membership) in 1830. Birkbeck emerged as a leading provider of university education for people who could not afford to study full-time but who wanted to engage in what is today called lifelong learning. Other early initiatives included The Working Men's College, founded in 1854 to provide a liberal education for adults, later to be amalgamated with the Working Women's College.

From these earliest beginnings, adult education has been an essentially urban tradition, forged at a time when opportunities for formal learning for both young and old in rural communities was poor and patchy, based mainly on scattered village charity schools, a situation which persisted (alongside major debates and developments in educational policy in urban areas) until the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Economically, the interrelation of urban and rural change and their relationship with education and learning is not a simple one. Any attempt to theorise those interactions inevitably courts generalisation. The first upswing of industrialisation from the 1780s to the 1830s was preceded and made possible by – and in turn facilitated – agricultural intensification and rural depopulation. Subsequent phases of rural restructuring have tended to follow industrial technological/economic shifts. The second (mid 18th century) agrarian revolution predated and arguably provided the basis for the industrial revolution (and its consequential urban growth and other social changes) to which the early emergence of mechanics institutes (in the first major economic downturn in industrial capitalism) was a response.

Coming of age

Jones (2002) describes the 1870 Education Act as a 'defining moment' for rural learning, which transformed the provision of education in rural areas. The Act made it mandatory for local authorities to provide adequate facilities for education and, with parents, to ensure school attendance by all children (up to the age of 13). In doing so it *"articulated for the first time the central dilemma*

of rural education and especially education beyond primary school: the problem of how to achieve a viable critical mass of learners in a dispersed population without forcing them to migrate from country to town" (Jones, 2002). One response to this early perceived problem was (from 1899) the provision of school transport for children in remote locations.

Awareness of the need to bring intellectual enlightenment to rural areas was matched by consciousness of the difficulties of doing so. In addition to the physical difficulties of transport and lack of suitable accommodation were sometimes added the hostility of rural landowners and others who saw such classes as a threat to their own interests.

The 1870 Education Act anticipated the social and technological changes of the third (late Victorian) capitalist 'boom' in the late nineteenth century. However, unlike previous 'long cycles' this upswing was largely restricted to manufacturing and hence to urban areas. Agriculture did not take part. The long agrarian depression from the 1880s to the Second World War provided an unfavourable environment for the rural implementation of adult education policies (and also emphasised those features of rural backwardness, which made such provision all the more necessary in the eyes of their proponents).

At the same time the (Cambridge) university extension movement began, focused first on northern manufacturing cities, subsequently extended to mining villages and later to other rural areas, reaching Surrey in 1889 (Jones, 2002). This movement of education 'from above' was complemented by the parallel tradition of education 'from below', with communities defining an educational agenda for themselves. The main player here has been The Workers' Educational Association (WEA), which was founded in 1903 to provide learning opportunities for adults from all walks of life, but especially those who may have missed out on schooling or who were socially and economically disadvantaged. It later linked with the (Oxford) university tutorial classes movement, in which the curriculum was defined by the students themselves. This provided two distinct traditions in 'tertiary level' adult education, manifest (for example) in different university extra-mural departments. In London, until the mid 1980s, there were two quite distinct sections within the (then) Extra-Mural Department of the University, each funded separately by government as distinct Responsible Bodies). This

distinction did not finally disappear until the (then) Centre for extra-Mural Studies was incorporated in Birkbeck College in 1988, a process itself driven in part by changes (including the progressive reduction in funding and emphasis on accreditation) in the wider sphere of adult and continuing education described below.

In the workplace also, trades unions have been active historically in developing learning opportunities for working people. Until the restructuring of the mid 1970s (see below) and together with the provision of other labour movement organisations, in particular the Co-operative guilds, this made a significant contribution to the 'liberal' adult education provision of the WEA and university Tutorial Classes movement. Still today, trades unions have an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning for their members as a right. The Trades Union Congress supports affiliated unions in working to develop learning opportunities, and this movement is largely responsible for the broad recognition – from employers and government - of the need for workplace training. In addition, union Learning Representatives are active in the workplace in raising interest in training and development, especially among the lowest skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy needs.

Post 1945; agricultural restructuring and demographic involution

The post- war boom saw a rapid growth in provision by LEAs and by Responsible Bodies although university provision in rural areas declined in the 1950s, at least in part as a consequence of a major policy debate about whether 'university' standards of learning could be maintained in such areas (Jones, 2002).

Throughout this period (and on through the 1960s and 70s) agricultural intensification, and the twin processes of out-migration of rural working families to towns and the gentrification of villages by urban professionals seeking a rural 'quality' of life, led to a perceived blurring of the distinction between town and country (Royal Commission on Local Government in England, 1969). For adult educators, the view grew that there was little reason to distinguish urban and rural areas either from a research or a policy perspective. Jones (2002) compares the 1973 DES ("Russell") Report Adult Education: A Plan for Development (Department of Education and Science, 1973) with its predecessors in the debates of a half century earlier, in particular the 1922 Report The

Development of Adult Education in Rural Areas by the Board of Education's Adult Education Committee. He points out that both emphasise the enduring problems of transport and accommodation. But unlike the 1922 Report, the Russell report *"did not find any culture of resistance to education by villagers or their employers"*. He points to a contemporary (1970) report of NIACE (NIACE, 1970) as *"the watershed beyond which 'rural' is not of itself significant"* and after which issues of rural provision came to be seen as *"related to the small size or remoteness of communities rather than any especial rurality of identity or dependence on agriculture"*.

The current crisis in agriculture could be characterised as one further stage in the parallel trajectories of rural and urban-industrial socio-economic change. For example it could be argued that changes in agriculture in the last quarter of the twentieth century represent a form of 'postfordist' highly intensive (but flexible) food production system within a post (agro-) industrial landscape. This scenario is overlain by a host of factors. Not least of these is the Common Agricultural Policy (which greatly accelerated the pace of agricultural intensification from 1973) and attempts to reform it (including the production of 'heritage' landscapes and settlements). Within this scenario, however, some employment trends (e.g. the continuing reduction of the agricultural workforce, the decline of traditional occupations and skills, the gentrification of some rural areas and the impoverishment of others, with the emergence of a new rural underclass) represent a continuation of past trends. Others (e.g. rise of small firms, particularly in the service sector) represent a rural reflection of general economic phenomena. Much farm work was traditionally seasonal, casual and lowly paid (if not low skilled). Much has changed; agricultural workers now make up a very small proportion of the total rural workforce, and women now make up a much larger percentage of main income earners, although women's average earnings remain less than those of men.

These changes in agriculture and in the rural economy have been accompanied by profound demographic shifts. Today, the rural population is growing at the expense of towns (reversing UK historical trends of the past three centuries). Between the 1971 and 1991 censuses, the rural population increased by 20% at a time when overall UK population grew by only c.4%. This trend has continued since 1991. Rural incomers tend to be more affluent and of a higher social class than long-time rural residents, and they come with expectations of a better quality of life than that which they

have left behind in urban areas. However they face many of the same problems as other inhabitants. Other demographic trends may be significant. For example, rural populations may be ageing faster than in urban areas. However, any such national trends are likely to be less significant than much greater variations within and between rural areas themselves.

Such socio-economic changes are just one dimension of a countryside in crisis, of which the aspects of greatest concern to urban residents are environmental (especially the destruction of landscapes, species and habitats) and to do with food quality and recreational access. Amongst rural populations, the perception (justified or not) that their concerns were neither addressed nor understood by the government and by the largely urban electorate that put it in power, were the major stimulus for the Countryside March of 1998 (until the March 2003 peace demonstration against the government's plans for a war with Iraq, the largest demonstration ever seen in the UK). Partly NIMBYism, partly real frustration about poor rural infrastructural and service provision, and partly straightforward political reaction, the marches attempted to assert a distinctive 'rural identity' against a perceived urban hegemony. Like most (re)invented traditions, that self- assumed identity, like the presumed urban perceptions against which it was counterposed, involves a contrived identity and consciousness. This is perhaps one reason why its focus on blood sports as somehow emblematic of a 'rural' way of life received broad support, despite the fact that the great majority of rural residents do not take part in them, and that many who do, come from towns. Its political impact, however, was considerable.

Lifelong Learning and (new) Labour

It is within this radically changed context that the relation of educational policy to rural areas needs to be framed. The re-emergence of the concept of lifelong learning was initiated by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan's 'Ruskin' speech in the 1970s (Callaghan, 1976) which launched a national debate about standards and accountability in schools, and the relationship between school curricula and industry.

The debate was furthered during the 1980s. Both the Callaghan (Labour) and Thatcher (Conservative) administrations increasingly began to emphasise the key role of education not in some broad

generalised concept of personal fulfilment and citizenship, but rather in the context of reskilling and workforce restructuring. The aim was to increase profitability of individual enterprises and to help Britain retrieve its position in the world economy.

The most significant structural outcome of this development was the establishment during the early 1990s of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). These were employer led bodies (based on a model of Private Industry Councils imported from the USA) charged to promote closer local links between education and industry and to channel public funds into delivering skills required by local firms. In parallel with this came an attempt to develop a system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), based on open learning, and featuring accreditation of prior learning (APL) and in-service training within a framework of both general and sector- specific competence-based vocational standards. This had a considerable impact on agricultural and land-based industries, although attempts to develop effective vocational standards in environmental conservation (see, e.g. Council for Occupational Standards and Qualifications in Environmental Conservation, 1993) have had little effect.

At the same time, the landscape of adult and continuing education was fundamentally changed by the Further and Higher Education Act (F&HE Act) 1992. In respect of the HE sector the 1992 F&HE Act removed Polytechnics from local authority control and gave them independent university status together with pre 1992 institutions, funded in England under the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). The enlarged HE sector today remains reasonably distinct. However, changes in funding have aimed at increasing participation, and an emphasis on accreditation and outcome related funding have meant that much of the ‘traditional’ (non award-bearing) university adult education provision has simply disappeared. This includes not just ‘liberal’ community based adult classes but also a significant programme of industrial and trades union education, much of it promoted jointly with the WEA. At least in the former case, it seems likely that the impact has been much greater in rural than in urban areas.

Whilst the HE sector broadly retains its identity, the FE sector was transformed. The 1992 Act removed further education and other non HE tertiary colleges (including, most particularly in rural areas, agriculture and horticulture colleges) and sixth form colleges from

local authority control and established them as independent bodies funded by the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFC). The Labour administration elected in 1997 continued this process and produced a broad vision of developing provision (National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, 1997). This led to a Green Paper (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) which proposed the abolition of both TECs and of the FEFC in order to establish a new Learning and Skills Council (LSC), responsible for funding all post-16 education and training outside universities and including school sixth forms. The proposal was enshrined in the White (policy) Paper produced in 1999, Learning to Succeed (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) which concentrates on post-16 education and training.

The outcome was the Learning and Skills Act (LSC Act) 2000. This established the LSC as the single largest non-departmental public body in England. With an annual budget of more than £6bn, the LSC is responsible via 47 local Learning and Skills Councils for school sixth forms, FE and tertiary colleges, the funding of private work based learning, and of voluntary sector organisations (including the WEA).

It is this major restructuring, dominated by the LSCs, which today forms the institutional context for the delivery of lifelong learning (see diagram 1). Elements of the previous liberal (non-vocational and non award-bearing) ethic and provision remain, particularly within the voluntary sector, in some local authority provision, and in the ‘outreach’ provision of some higher education institutions. However, mainstream delivery and funding structures are dominated by the LSCs and by the guiding ethos of competency based vocational provision.

Outside the LSC framework, the work of other government agencies plays an important role in lifelong learning, but to some extent at least can be seen to follow similar trends.

One category of non-DfES sponsored non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are the skills councils for different occupational areas – the most significant of which is the sector skill council for land based industries, Lantra, sponsored by Defra, together with other rural NDPBs such as the Countryside Agency. Yet, whether because of its remit, its location within government, its level of resourcing, of for historical reasons, Lantra not yet proved capable of any significant initiatives linked with rural renewal. One recent

initiative involves proposals to develop a new rural craft apprenticeship scheme, which will fill a gap in national rural training provision to maintain the skill base for craft related micro industries, for example thatching, or saddlery. These may help to provide some jobs linked to the maintenance of countryside character and hence to rural tourism. However, they remain unintegrated with the main thrust of LSC based provision. Nowhere is there any real attempt to link significant initiatives in training, to any new vision for rural renewal. It may be for this reason that in late 2002, Defra launched its **Learning Skills and Knowledge Programme** (LSK). This *"integrated, customer-focused programme"* aims to encourage the development of learning, skills, and specialist knowledge by land managers and other occupational groups in rural areas. It is hoped to raise the performance of particular occupations and groups whose activities are necessarily based in rural areas. *"It will address issues about access to learning opportunities for people entering and leaving the rural industries and their particular needs for support, e.g. for those leaving farming, support to reskill or secure formal qualifications for existing skills, and to market them"* (Department of Environment, 2003).

Rurality revisited

Raymond Williams points out that the etymological derivation of 'country' implies something apart, separate, outside, different (Williams, 1976). Whilst the social (and in particular, the agricultural) policies of the Conservatives have been strongly influenced by their supporters in rural areas, this has not been the case for Labour (old or new) whose ideology and policies have been forged within a predominantly urban landscape. For Labour, rural was marginal. Only recently has this begun to change. No longer is 'the countryside'

> *"understood as a residual category - an assembly of the 'non-built-up' parts of the country. Instead it has come to be seen as a powerful unitary notion in its own right. One implication has been that decisions affecting the future state of the countryside are now felt to be legitimate matters for the population as a whole, rather than simply for those who live in it. The growth of new forms of individualism in the 1980s and early 1990s may well have intensified this process, consolidating a widely felt concern for the countryside as a shared 'common good'"* (Clark et al., 1994).

In 1999/2000 in parallel with the Government's educational green and white papers (which transformed the urban and rural landscape of lifelong learning), came significant, but far less transforming papers on rural England. One of them - at least in part produced as the government's response to the rural crises of 'mad cow disease' (BSE) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) as well as to the political backlash of the Countryside Marches - was the Rural White Paper, Our Countryside: The Future (DETR and MAFF, 2000).

This was followed by other documents such as Rural Economies produced by the Cabinet Office think tank the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU, 2000). Both are critical of past agriculture-based rural policies. But whilst the surface consequences – in particular the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) and the Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions (DETR) and the creation of a new Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) appear significant, the actual policy shifts proposed for rural have been both small and piecemeal. Neither creates any coherent new vision or direction for the countryside. One of their most trenchant critics argues that they present

> *"a clear demonstration of the stagnation which now grips official British - and especially English -thinking about the 'non urban' environment… The White Paper seeks to micro-manage the present with minor policy adjustments - a few more low-income homes here, a few incentives to 'diversification', removing a Council Tax break on second homes (good idea) maybe, a tiny bit of biofuels, something eye catching on rural post offices"* (Rose, 2000).

Contradictions, connections and complexities

The effects of changes in post-compulsory education in rural areas have been immense, although largely undocumented at a national level; and their impacts on rural communities, learning and social lives are complex and contradictory. On the one hand, an emphasis on learning and skills, on national standards and on vocationalism seems likely to have increased and widened participation amongst its target groups. However, such an emphasis can also be seen as highly instrumental and employer-led, with little to suggest that the new administrative and funding structures of lifelong learning will broaden participation for non-targeted groups, nor have any political or ideological commitment to revive or re-focus non-vocational learning opportunities.

The institutional arrangements for delivery of lifelong learning in rural areas reflect an agenda of instrumental vocationalism, with an overriding objective of access to employment for a flexible workforce. Young working-class men (who might otherwise be unemployed and who are considered to represent the greatest threat to social cohesion) are a particular target. The threat to social cohesion is likely to be perceived as greatest by those with most at stake: landowners (old or new) and the rural incomers who represent the main growth in rural populations, and who tend to be more affluent and of a higher social class than the majority of rural inhabitants. For rural incomers, often working in towns and cities where their learning needs are also fulfilled, the move to the countryside is ideological as well as material, with ambitions for a different way of life from that left behind.

This section will consider some of the complexities, contradictions and connections for and between rurality and lifelong learning, under three main heads: instrumentalism and commodification; participation and equality of opportunities; and social networks and networking.

a) Instrumentalism and commodification

Current government policy in the United Kingdom relies heavily on a view of learning that is about gaining (vocational) qualifications, and a supply-side concept of the relation between skills and economic well-being. In particular, the Learning and Skills Council (see above) focuses very much on a basic skills and vocational agenda. In addition, the highly centralised role of the LSCs in setting an agenda for learning is coupled with an emphasis on individual responsibility and initiative. Recent Government television campaigns and publicity surrounding LearnDirect, for example, suggest that if only people were aware of the opportunities available they could expand their educational horizons. It is for individual learners to identify needs and grasp opportunities, trying to negotiate their way through a plethora of possibilities and pathways to take responsibility for directing their own learning. Entitlement has become linked to a discourse of individual autonomy, and it becomes the responsibility of individuals to prepare themselves to take their place in a working society. It is incumbent on individuals to recognize, find and develop their learning opportunities, and on employers to develop workplace learning.

Within rural economies, there is a prevalence of small firms and high levels of self-employment. Small businesses often co-exist with a smaller number of very large employing organizations (most notably in the health, education and local government sectors). These latter organisations are often large enough to have their own training divisions and to provide much of their own training in-house. The remaining businesses - the majority - are generally small and provision of appropriate training by traditional providers is often difficult to justify economically.

Barriers to training immediately come to the fore. It is widely recognised, for example, that management training is a particular need for small businesses, especially in rural areas where managers are more isolated, but where uptake of training is very much lower. This is not only because there is unlikely to be a member of staff with specific responsibilities for identifying training needs and finding provision to meet them, but because of the real difficulties in releasing staff. In addition providers tend to be further away from businesses in rural areas, and if managers and other staff are to be released they can be away from their businesses for a much longer time than in urban areas. There is nothing to suggest that these barriers will lessen. In the absence of measures to address these issues, the more vocationally orientated learning policies become, the more they are likely to disadvantage rural communities.

However, it is not just problems of small businesses in rural areas that prevent people from participating in formal education; nor is it lack of information that prevents individuals from taking up their learning opportunities. John Field suggests that the Government has abdicated its responsibilities to leave individuals and groups to action and develop a lifelong learning agenda:

> *"Much has been promised in the public domain, but most the action has taken place within the private domain, by individual actors and firms. What achievements there have been in public policy have mainly fallen within the vocational domain. Was this simply a result of bad political faith or lack of political will?"* (Field, 2000).

Perhaps neither. If 'education is the best economic policy we have' then it seems likely that one of the consequences of local LSC plans will be to privilege the private domains of firms and employers. In addition, the specific sector skills councils are licensed by the UK

government to drive forward a new skills, training and business development agenda for their sectors. Lantra, responsible for the environmental and land-based sector, works with industries, employers and employees. It aims to promote the importance of training and development as a key contributor to increasing productivity and ensuring sustainable businesses; to help businesses to meet their skills need; and to give information and development opportunities to individuals. One way in which Lantra offers development to individuals is through Modern Apprenticeships, a government backed training scheme aimed primarily at young people aged between 16-24. These are structured programmes of learning delivered in partnership with employers from land-based industries, aimed at providing apprentices with a range of core skills at NVQ levels 1-3, in an agenda that is clearly set in vocational learning. Ongoing discussions between the Countryside Agency and Lantra include the need to develop a new rural craft apprenticeship scheme which will fill a gap in national rural training provision to maintain the skill base for craft related micro industries and provide local jobs linked to the maintenance of countryside character and rural tourism. Such 'reskilling' based on 'traditional' craft industries (such as thatching or saddlery) has been criticised for its passivity and lack of vision. It sees rural regeneration as dependent upon the transformation of the countryside into a leisure amenity for urban visitors and better-off residents.

This is unfortunate, because the ability of the State to define what the targets are, choose which targets to support (and therefore which ones should not be supported), to integrate educational policy with social and economic goals, and to implement these in practice is very powerful. As it is, the absence of any clear strategy for rural revival leaves rural vocational learning marginalised. If public policy *is* driven by largely economic concerns, then competitiveness becomes the primary focus (Field, 2000) and certain types of learning, skills and knowledges are prioritised. What is emerging is a class-based skills driven agenda, where those who 'buy in' to a system of developing learning opportunities that demonstrate their workforce flexibility are considered successful, whilst those with alternative views of their learning opportunities are not.

Today the seemingly never-ending demand for lifelong learning opportunities has become an integral part of life. In the process, the instrumentalism now apparent in lifelong learning does little to bring

about social change or challenge inequalities of social exclusion. Socio-economic and other factors (for example poor access to transport resources: see below) continue to prove obstacles both to access to educational opportunity and to the employment and other advantages those opportunities might otherwise bring.

b)Participation, inclusion and equality of opportunity

As with other national data, which show that there is less poverty and social exclusion in rural compared to urban areas (Chandola et al., 2001), existing national data shows that people living in rural areas exhibit, on average, marginally higher levels of educational attainment than their urban counterparts. For example they are slightly more likely to have qualifications at NVQ level 3 or above (Nomis, 2001). More complex measures also show that rural inhabitants suffer less education- related deprivation overall. However none of the available figures make allowances for social class or income differentials or other differences such as gender or ethnic origin. Average figures can mask a pattern of extremes. Differences in lifelong learning opportunity and uptake between groups of individuals are greatly in excess of what are relatively small national scale differences between rural and urban areas.

In general the marginally better educational qualifications (and lower level of Education, Skills and Training Deprivation) of rural residents seems likely to be a reflection of broad social composition. Conversely, the negative features of rural living defined above (incomes, employment, housing and transport) impact disproportionately more on more disadvantaged individuals and families, and on different groups. Women, for instance, are less likely to have access to cars and are therefore more reliant on public transport and are more likely to have lower incomes and greater family responsibility. It is likely that this is reflected in much greater disparities of education, skills and training deprivation between such groups. However there is very little direct empirical evidence to substantiate this assertion.

Before Thatcher, analysis of social inequality would have been couched in specifics, for example of class, gender or ethnicity. Thatcher famously declared not only that class was an out-dated concept but also that there was no such thing as society. New Labour has reinstated society but has been happy to replace class

with a less threatening and consensual concept of 'social exclusion'. This move contains other substantial conceptual shifts. Prior to the leadership of Tony Blair, Labour's emphasis on participation was on (economic) rights and social justice. Today, however:

> *"New Labour seeks to balance rights and responsibilities and thus changes the role of government to one of providing an infrastructure in which individuals can take responsibility for using the life-chances provided"* (Ryley, 2002)

More, any notion of the redistribution of wealth and power between groups has been replaced by one of the *"redistribution of possibilities".* (Giddens, 1998). This new politics redefines equality as **inclusion** and inequality as **exclusion**. In this way an agenda of limited access for an excluded minority has become substituted for one based on emancipation for the majority. A right to participate guarantees neither equality of opportunity nor equality of outcome. Indeed, the consequences of the 'learning society' may be quite the opposite, with the more privileged having the means to achieve greater access to limited resources. Ryley (2002) points out, with Young (1999), that New Labour's policies depart even further from those of its predecessor, largely ignoring social exclusion *"at the top of society and focusing instead on compensatory programmes at the bottom' – access to the bottom rung of a society in which the rich are able to exclude themselves from the common bonds of citizenship"*. Participation in lifelong learning and active citizenship will never be widened until and unless social inequalities, structural barriers and the material conditions of people's lives become part of an agenda for change, an agenda that becomes all the more difficult to negotiate within the dispersed and 'hidden' structures of social disadvantage in rural areas.

Moreover current programmes are largely focused on access to paid employment as the main vehicle of inclusion. The role of lifelong learning in this programme is then seen to lie in its effect on the employability of the individual. Social inclusion is defined as employment (irrespective of whether this is in a rewarding of dead-end job) and other forms of engagement including unpaid work in the home, or as a volunteer, are undervalued. This *"new paradigm for education, which confers an economic value within a market place, is driven by contradiction – not least of which is the individual motivation of students"* it *"creates new cohorts of the socially excluded; those who, for reason of age, are not economically active"* (Davidson, 2002). This is particularly important in rural areas where

social exclusion is as much the **result** of economic marginalisation, as its **cause,** *"a multi-faceted, dynamic process that both causes and consolidates inequalities"* (Ryley, 2002). The ways in which people actively engage (or not) with lifelong learning are determined by many factors, including geography. Socially excluded rural households tend to be more dispersed geographically and are less easily identified and catered for than similar urban households.

Income and transport are perhaps the most important rural issues linked to educational opportunity. The financial or time costs of travel to centres of provision may become significant barriers to participation for particular groups. The government has an express policy to extend assistance with access/travel costs to education. However, these initiatives are directed primarily at school children and none of them are specifically concerned with lifelong learning.

The supply of learning opportunities is broadly related to demand and therefore tends to be concentrated in areas with the highest density of population. In addition, facilities for the provision of classes may be lacking in rural areas. Despite this, there is a wealth of lifelong learning activity in rural areas. In addition to schools almost all the village and community halls surveyed in the Joint Provision of Services 2000 study included some form of adult education in their activities (Moseley et al., 2000). However the range of opportunities available is less than in urban areas and it has long been recognised that access to learning opportunities is highly dependent upon access to transport. This is especially so for unemployed people and older people. In general discounted travel for students is limited to those on full-time courses only, or is age-limited.

One of the features of UK transport policy over decades is that personal mobility is seen primarily as a private matter. Investment in public transport is expensive and is often seen as less desirable than higher spending on education – even though poor public transport acts as a brake on optimising the benefits of spending on lifelong learning. One in six rural households have no access to a car and low population densities mean that public transport links are limited both in number and frequency.

The growth of open and distance learning has increased the range of options but not changed the ground rules for access. It has the potential to ameliorate the situation, but it is not, on its own, an adequate or complete solution. Even though ICT can reduce some

of the barriers, it is not accessible or suitable for all – especially for the least privileged adults and the least confident and motivated learners. Whilst ICT could be seen as one answer to transport problems in rural areas, as a delivery mechanism for lifelong learning it is problematic. It may permit – in principle at least – a more even geographical coverage, but at the cost of exclusion of individuals and groups who lack physical access to, or the ability or inclination to use, the hardware required. Moreover, the notion that technology is a solution *"seems a curious argument when one of the barriers many rural people want to overcome is remote isolation"* (Gray, 2002a).

c) Social networks and networking

The focus, then, needs to be on debates around inclusion and exclusion and within wider socio-economic and political contexts of lifelong learning and rurality, including infrastructures such as transport. It is clear that government policy and learning practices are concerned with the accumulation of human capital, the manifestation of individual potential (knowledge, skills and employability) and the aggregate of individual capacities for action, particularly in respect of contributions (through individual employability) to economic and social well-being. However, in part, the engagement that individuals have with lifelong learning depends not primarily on human capital but on the social capital accumulated, and the values attached to it. Social capital has to do with networks, relationships and values and concerns the degree to which individuals engage in social networks and collective understanding and action (Baron et al., 2000). However, not all social networks carry equal amounts of capital for individuals to accumulate and use to advantage.

For example little recognition is given, or importance attached to, the lifelong learning that develops through women's family lives, networks and civic participation. In rural areas, and in particular for women who do not work outside the home, the social networks in which they participate are an important part of their lifelong learning, and of their engagement with community activities, especially for those women without access to transport. From women's institute meetings, to village book clubs, to parent and toddler groups or church and voluntary activities, social networks are being developed and social capital accumulated. However, the values attached to social capital are not equal, and the social networks that are

developed in golf and country clubs, in business networks or at Rotary meetings, carry far higher value and potential than those accumulated through some of the activities listed above. Social capital can expand or limit the space and possibilities for effective political engagement.

It can also do this in complex ways. One clear example of this is the Countryside Alliance, which promotes the interests of rural people, including all field sports. The Liberty and Livelihood March, held in September 2002, attracted around half a million people from rural areas. This march was viewed as a resounding success for the 'countryside', with shared understandings of and claims for a rural way of life that differs fundamentally from urban living. This was civic activity on a large scale. Yet the Liberty and Livelihood March, under banner of alliances in the countryside, demonstrates well the ability of one social group to exert its views – seemingly effortlessly – over others.

> *"Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups."* (Strinati, 1995)

In tracing the links between adult education and civic participation, Tom Schuller argues that active citizenship provides individuals with opportunities for motivation, achievement and self-esteem (Schuller, 2001). In particular, a discourse of (apparent) shared identity, sense of belonging, and collective understandings of 'community' is said to increase social cohesion. But, as can be seen through the example of the Liberty and Livelihood March social cohesion sometimes comes at a cost, with the interests of less dominant classes and groups subsumed under those of the more dominant. Ultimately the issue is not about social capital or social cohesion *per se*. A problem arises when social capital (usually presented under some other formulation) becomes an end in itself. Social capital and civic engagement are necessary but not sufficient prerequisites for social progress. They can also entrench the (pre-)dominance of the hegemonic group.

Contradictions and connections

Lifelong learning represents an emerging consensus that transcends traditional divisions between vocationalism and 'learning for its own sake'. It is an elusive idea, presented conventionally as providing a route to self- fulfilment for individuals at the same time as it underpins the success of businesses. It is presented as central to the economic progress and to a prosperous, active, inclusive and cultured society.

Within the current ideology of New Labour, lifelong learning is a subset of a broader agenda that has to do with entrepreneurship, competitiveness, economic well-being, social inclusion, citizenship civic participation and social engagement. Concepts of human and social capital are central to this. Within a rural context they also link in with parallel issues of environmental protection and sustainable development. All these are problematic categories, not least because the agenda is expressed often in imprecise and variable ways. Partly for this reason, the agenda has proved a seductive one, for those both on the political left and right, and not least for adult educationalists themselves.

Jane Thompson points out that whilst many adult education workers either *"mourn the passing"* of the *"heady days (sic) of adult education before the Thatcher-Major onslaught"* or simply do not remember them, others (including many former liberals and indeed socialists), whether they remember them or not, have been eager to adopt the both new educational language and the institutional changes that have accompanied them:

> *"this shift in paradigm, this systematic accommodation to the language and policies of the New Right has found those in adult education to be much more amenable, on the whole, to its logic and demands than school teachers have been prepared to be*" (Thompson, 1996).

As Thompson points out, the 'liberal tradition' was itself profoundly resistant both to any form of structural or material explanation of social and educational inequality or to challenges to its own educational elitism. It undoubtedly proved a route to self- fulfillment for some (many of whom were co-opted or compromised in the process); undoubtedly the barriers to participation were such that many more never tried, or tried and failed. It may be, paradoxically, that the new focus on competence based learning is more susceptible to such interventions to widen participation. The new

'democratic' model of accredited vocational training is, to many, more attractive than the old culturally skewed if not elitist paradigm of liberal adult education.

Conclusions; rural learning and rural futures

The results of the Countryside Agency study have been endorsed by others such as Gray, who states *"The marginalisation of the rural in lifelong learning and CE research agenda has meant that little or no knowledge has been gained to inform the production of policy".* The neglect of rural learning and of its importance amongst adult educators parallels the marginalisation of the rural itself (Gray, 2002a). Many rural problems remain marginalised or even invisible in national policy. In part this is because of the complexity of 'rurality':

> *"The countryside is charged with meanings – increasingly divergent meanings – by distinct groups of the population, by different industries, and even by separate agencies of government"* (Clark et al, 1994).

The recent attention to rural lifelong learning under new Labour may be one of the more welcome dimensions of its break with the very much urban tradition and focus of its ideologically 'old' Labour predecessor. However, as Rose (2000) has suggested, we need to move away from current as well as from past thinking about rural issues, and consider the environment as a whole.

Part of the problem (emphasised in the report to the Countryside Agency) is our lack of knowledge about lifelong learning in rural areas. Part is the high (and probably unjustifiable) level of resources that would be required to provide every inhabitant of rural areas with the level of access to the (admittedly inadequate) levels of learning opportunities available to urban residents. Ultimately the problem needs to be cast within a wider frame of reference.

Current lifelong learning policy is clearly increasingly influenced by perceived economic imperatives and by an increasingly utilitarian agenda, in a world in which financial and industrial capital is, equally clearly, a determining force. But it is also the outcome of negotiation and debate between other contending forces. The new regional framework of local LSCs permits the articulation of local strategies in which employer needs may be a major, but not the sole influence. Moreover in rural areas the diversity and small size of rural firms make for a plurality of views in which any one vision is likely to be

subordinated to the much greater need to secure adequate attention to rural employment needs in principle.

The dispersed nature of rural disadvantage (and advantage), and the fact that many barriers to access impact at least to some degree on all rural residents, make it difficult to target policies for increasing participation and widening access at any particular group, or on the delivery of any particular training programme. The same features of rural life mean that to the degree that liberal 'leisure education' survives (even though its content may be culturally skewed to the values of the economically or culturally affluent) it is unlikely to be more exclusive than in urban areas, and even here may contribute at least to some degree to a more inclusive community.

One solution – to reassert the primacy of traditional 'liberal' adult education – emphasises how much has been lost in this area, but ignores the much more diverse range of learning opportunities that is now open (in principle at least) to individuals and the variety of motives or benefits any individual may have or enjoy through choosing any one route. A variant on this theme, derived from Illich, is to advocate *'learning our way out'* - grass roots self activated provision (provided by individuals and voluntary groups outside the framework of LSC and funding bodies) which is ultimately oppositional to social trends of 'turbocapitalism' (see, e.g. Finger and Asun, 2001). Such activity may be palliative for those (teachers as well as learners) who engage in them but is of little overall significance in terms of the trends identified in this paper. The diversity of grass roots initiatives that exists in rural areas is exemplified by a number of published case studies (Gray, 2002b, Payne, 2000). Many of these examples inevitably consist of self-provision by articulate groups in their own perceived interests. As such, they may further accentuate the differences in access and uptake, which are already greater (though often hidden), in rural compared to urban environments. However they may also have the opposite effect. In general, the availability and diversity of lifelong learning opportunity may be considered a major contributor to the vibrancy and cohesion of rural communities, though seldom oppositional in a political sense.

The 'problem' of lifelong learning in rural areas is long-standing and complex. Well-documented problems of physical access and localised provision are likely to remain features of the rural condition. These are overlain by particular issues to do with social

inclusion and equality of opportunity, related to the heterogeneity of rural communities and the dispersed nature of disadvantage within them. We would argue that post-war trends in lifelong learning provision identified above have in general disadvantaged rural (as compared with urban) areas and accentuated social distinctions within them.

The marginalisation of rural communities may be oppressive or it may be a source of creativity. Individuals and statistics attest to the problems of rural life for many. However some who go to live in the countryside in preference to towns do so because they see it as a place in which alternative lifestyles can be lived, and some theorists see it as a place where new approaches to economic activity and social existence can be explored (Cloke and Little, 1997).

Local LSCs provide, in principle, a mechanism for more targeted adjustments to existing provision; however their dominance by centralised strategic goals means that there is little requirement at present for a specifically rural focus. Whilst there is a strong policy emphasis on widening participation, it remains to be seen whether this will impact significantly on adult participation rates amongst underrepresented groups in rural areas. Small-scale initiatives, in particular those developed through specially funded projects in protected landscapes, may point to the potential for wider replication.

There is evidence of recognition of the problem but little likelihood of solutions being implemented soon. It seems unlikely that this will happen to any significant degree if policy remains at the level of ‘rural proofing’ Departmental policies at a national level, and when local resourcing and coordination of provision (via LSCs) is dominated by a credentialist, vocationally oriented agenda. The government’s commitment to rural proofing attempts to address dimensions of the problem, but lies outside the main thrust of LSC policy and strategy. At the same time, that lifelong learning and rurality are themselves matters for national debate, offers the potential for intervention.

One of the key issues is the (in)appropriateness of the term ‘life long learning’. It is aspirational, even visionary, but is seldom defined and therefore capable of accommodating ends and means which may not be consensual and which may be incompatible. It invokes a complex process of elision, whereby - adopted as a mantra/ mantle for an increasingly instrumental vision of adult learning (with

outcomes defined in terms of participation and credits) - participation has increased and widened. Such ‘success’ becomes self-reinforcing of the definition that it supports. However it would appear to have been achieved at some cost, particularly at the expense of ‘bottom – up’ participation in learning ‘for its own sake’ as well as with critical engagement with wider dimensions of learning. Against this view, however is the proposition that informal learning, especially through television, has produced a more (scientifically, culturally, politically) literate rural (as well as urban) public, and that such informal media-led learning has taken the place of the liberal adult education class, in which only a minority of the rural population ever partook.

In the broader view there is no evidence for specifically ‘rural’ educational needs, despite the calls of those who would wish to assert a distinct cultural identity for rural areas. The ‘problem’ of lifelong learning in rural areas is one element of a wider debate not just about the meaning and content of ‘lifelong learning’ in general but about the relation between town and country. In rural (perhaps even more so than in urban) areas, success in the generation of learning opportunity is as much a symptom of social wellbeing as its stimulus. If this is the case then efforts to increase rural adult learning provision and participation must go hand in hand with other policies aimed at rural revival and sustainability.

Ultimately, we would argue that any long term policies for lifelong learning in rural areas need to be linked to a transformation of our concept of rurality. It is clear that the wellbeing of rural and urban areas are strongly linked. We would argue that lifelong learning will only realise its positive potential to the degree that it is part of a more robust rural/ urban settlement. This is a necessary focus not just those who live or work in rural areas but for the engagement of society as a whole.

References

Baron, S., Field, J. and Schuller, T. (2000) *Social Capital - Critical Perspectives,* OUP, London.

Callaghan, J., (1976). *Towards a National Debate,* Prime Ministers Speech at Ruskin College, Oxford. **http://education.guardian.co.uk/ thegreatdebate/ story** Accessed 27/11/2002

Chandola, T., Lloyd, M., Noble, M., Wright, G. and Wigglesworth, R. (2001) *Rural deprivation: an analysis of the indices of deprivation 2000 for rural areas,* Social Disadvantage Research Group, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford, Oxford.

Clark, G., Dararal, J., Grove-White, R., McNaughten, P. and Urry, J. (1994) *Leisure Landscapes, Leisure, Culture and the English Countryside: Challenges and Conflicts (Main Report),* Centre for the Study of Environmental Change, University of Lancaster, Lancaster.

Clarke, R., Cara, S., Thompson, A., Gray, F., Jones, B., Jackson, S., Mount, D. and Schuller, T. (2002) *Lifelong Learning in Rural Areas. A Report to the Countryside Agency,* Centre for European Protected Area Research, Birkbeck College, London.

Cloke, P. J. and Little, J. (Eds.) (1997) *Contested Countryside Cultures,* Routledge, London.

Council for Occupational Standards and Qualifications in Environmental Conservation (1993) *Standards for occupations in landscapes and ecosystems,* Council for Occupational Standards and Qualifications in Environmental Conservation, Gloucester.

Davidson, I. (2002) “Rural Society, social change and continuing education: from Wild Wales to the Aga Saga” In Gray, F (ed) pp. 19-32.

Department for Education and Employment (1998) *The Learning Age; A Renaissance for a New Britain* HMSO, London.

Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post- 16 education,* HMSO, London.

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *The Future of Higher Education*: HMSO, London

Department of Education and Science (1973) *Adult Education: A Plan for Development* HMSO, London.

Department of Environment (2003) *Learning Skills and Knowledge Programme. Background Paper*, Defra, Bristol.

Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions and Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (2000) *Our Countryside: the Future. A fair deal for rural England,* HMSO, London.

Field, J. (2000) *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order,* Trentham Books, Staffs.

Finger, M. and Asun, J. M. (Eds.) (2001) *Adult Education at the Crossroads. Learning our Way Out,* National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education and Zed Books, Leicester and London.

Giddens, A. (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social democracy,* Polity Press, London.

Gray, F. (Ed.) (2002) *Landscapes of Learning. Lifelong learning in rural communities,* National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, Leicester.

Hammond, J. L. and Hammond, B. (1925) *The Town Labourer,* Longman, London.

Jones, W. R. (2002) *Rural adult education in Britain: a historical survey* In Gray, F (ed.) pp. 47-65.

Lowerson, J. and Thomson, A. (Eds.) (1994) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Barriers to Participation in Rural Adult Education,* Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, Brighton.

Moseley, M., Parker, G. and Wragg, A. (2000) *The Joint Provision of Services 2000 CAX50* Countryside Agency, Cheltenham. Appendix 2

National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (1997) *Learning for the Twenty- First Century. First Report,* Department for Education and Employment, London.

NIACE (1970) *Adequacy of Provision,* National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, Leicester.

Nomis (2001) *Labour Force Survey 1998* Nomis, London.

Payne, J. (2000) *Rural Learning. A practical guide to developing learning opportunities in the countryside,* National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, Leicester.

Performance and Innovation Unit, Cabinet Office (2000) *Rural Economies,* HMSO, London.

Rose, C. (2000), *Time to Campaign Against Rural England* unpublished.

Royal Commission on Local Government in England (1969) *Report,* HMSO, London.

Ryley, P. (2002) “Social exclusion and lifelong learning in rural areas” In Gray, F (ed) pp. 33-46.

Sargant, N. (2000) *The Learning Divide Revisited,* National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, Leicester.

Schuller, T. (2001) “Tracing links between adult education and civic participation”, *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education,* 4

Shucksmith, M. (Ed.) (2000) *Exclusive Countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London.

Strinati, D. (1995) *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture,* Routledge, London.

Thompson, J. L. (1996) "The Great Tradition - a Personal Reflection" In *Liberal Adult Education. The End of an Era?*(Ed, Wallis, J.) Continuing Education Press, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, pp. 75-88.

Tulett, C. (2001) *Rural Learning: An investigation into the barriers and solutions to widening participation in rural areas* Coquet and Wansbeck/ Northumberland County Council, Morpeth.

Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords,* Fontana, London.

Young, M. (1999) "Some reflections: beyond The Third Way" In *Tackling Disaffection and Social Exclusion: Education Perspectives and Policies* (Ed, Hayton, A) Kogan page, London.