

Lifelong Learning in Rural Areas - A report to the Countryside Agency

Life Long Learning in Rural Areas **A Report to the Countryside Agency**

Main Report

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1) Introduction; 'rural proofing' lifelong learning

'Improving education and learning opportunities for people throughout their lives is fundamental to our objectives for a globally competitive economy, a highly skilled and productive workforce, equality of opportunity, the elimination of child poverty within one generation, and a better quality of life for all. This applies in rural as much as urban areas. We intend to make sure that people of all ages living in rural areas have full access to the range of opportunities available and that obstacles to access are addressed¹.

Lifelong learning is broadly seen by government as one of the keys to prosperity for individuals, businesses and the nation². It also seen as having an important role to play in promoting a fair, active and cultured society. Provision and uptake of learning opportunity reflect the interplay of past situations and local conditions, modified by the policies and priorities of government and other providers. National initiatives rarely impact evenly in different geographical areas. People living and working in rural areas comprise 1 in 5 of the population of England, yet the rural context is not always given adequate attention in the provision of lifelong learning opportunity and in the formulation of policy. In its Rural White Paper, Government committed itself to 'rural proof' its policies and it has asked the Countryside Agency to monitor and report on this proofing.

What does this report try to do?

This report aims to:

- Present a concise outline of current lifelong learning provision and policy in England, including existing institutional arrangements and funding mechanisms
- Review the application and implications of these in rural areas, including available evidence for differential impacts on rural people and businesses compared to their urban counterparts
- Identify areas where a review of existing policies may be required or where adjustments could be made to existing policies to improve their effectiveness
- Indicate areas where further research or policy analysis may be needed.

Who is this report aimed at?

The intended readership of this report includes:

- Countryside Agency section heads, Regional Officers and policy teams
- Policy staffs and planners in government and in government funded rural agencies³

It aims to provide an overview of lifelong learning issues for those concerned with rural policy, and of rural policy issues for those concerned with lifelong learning.

¹ 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*. CM 4909. London: The Stationery Office.

² Department for Education and Employment. 1999. *Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post- 16 education*. London: HMSO.

³ NDPBs, see p 30

Who has produced it?

The report has been commissioned for the Countryside Agency from the Faculty of Continuing Education, Birkbeck, University of London, in association with the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. It has been produced by a working group consisting of Richard Clarke, Sue Cara, Fred Gray, Bill Jones and Alastair Thompson with additional contributions from Sue Jackson, David Mount and Tom Schuller. The affiliations and roles of each of the contributors are outlined in Appendix 5. The contract was supervised from the Countryside Agency by Jo Taylor and James Hatcher.

How has it been produced?

The report is primarily a 'scoping' study mainly based on a desk analysis of existing knowledge, both published and unpublished. There has been no attempt to gather new data. Rather, this report seeks:

- to review the range and extent of existing relevant information
- to draw appropriate policy conclusions where this is possible
- where this is not the case, to indicate what further research may be needed to fill the gaps.

This report refers to but does not repeat published material which is readily available elsewhere. In particular it does not seek to duplicate the detailed studies contained in *Landscapes of Learning*⁴ or the practical advice in *Rural Learning*⁵ respectively forthcoming and recent publications from NIACE.

Scope of the report

Lifelong Learning is a broad umbrella term which includes many different kinds of provision and different forms of learning. At its heart is *formal* learning, often classroom based, or involving paper and electronic media, undertaken within educational institutions such as colleges and universities. It may or may not lead to an award and it includes learning undertaken for vocational reasons as well as for general interest. It encompasses what are sometimes also known as adult education, continuing education, continuing professional development (cpd), vocational training and the acquisition of basic skills. It may also include work-based learning, and may overlap with post compulsory (post 16) education, i.e. with further education and higher education, but normally applies to all 'adult learning' i.e. by people over the age of 19, in particular those who are returning to study after completing their initial education.

From the perspective of the individual learner, however, *non-formal* learning (organised, systematic study carried on outside the framework of the formal system) is also

⁴ Gray, Fred, ed. 2002 (forthcoming). *Landscapes of Learning. Lifelong learning in rural communities*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

⁵ Payne, John. 2000. *Rural Learning. A practical guide to developing learning opportunities in the countryside*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.

important. This forms a continuum with *informal* learning that occurs frequently in the process of daily living, sometimes coincidentally for example through information media or through interpretive provision (such as at museums or heritage sites⁶).

This report focuses on those aspects of adult learning which are directly affected by government policies, and thus of prime concern for rural proofing.

A particular focus is provision in further education (FE) and higher education (HE), funded respectively by the Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) and by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and also local education authority adult and community education provision (AE) as well as formal learning activity provided by voluntary organisations (such as the Workers' Educational Association, WEA, which is now funded via LSCs). All these activities fall within the purview of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, see *Figure 1*)

Other Government departments (for example the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS) also have a remit which directly includes policies for education, and many of their wider activities have implications for informal learning as well. For example, in rural areas, informal learning facilitated by interpretive provision (particularly in protected landscapes and heritage sites) is important not just for visitors (the primary 'target') but also for local residents. Insofar as these are influenced by government policies, they fall within the purview of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) via the various national rural agencies (including the Countryside Agency).

Section 2 of this report addresses general issues to do with the relationship of lifelong learning to the people who live or work in the countryside, or visit it, under five heads. The first of these concerns the characteristics of rural areas (in particular, remoteness from the place of provision and the availability of transport) that affect access to learning opportunity. The second raises issues to do with social inclusion and equality of opportunity to participate in lifelong learning. The third concerns the wider benefits that lifelong learning may provide to rural residents and communities (particularly in respect of human and social capital). Both of these raise the issue of how lifelong learning opportunity and participation may be monitored, and the degree to which any such monitoring may feed in to the Agency's *State of the Countryside* thematic indicators (the fourth head). The fifth head emphasises rural heterogeneity (and introduces the two area studies presented in the appendix, see below).

⁶ These categorisations themselves overlap. For example, learning in an adult education evening class involves social learning going well beyond the formal transmission of information and understanding of a subject; skills based vocational training or basic education involved personal development beyond the competencies that may be acquired. Conversely a guided walk or talk enjoyed by visitors to a heritage attraction is a semiformal learning element within a generally non- formal setting.

Section 3 of this report consists of a broad review of the policy, planning, and funding structure for lifelong learning of the main government department responsible, the Department for Education and Skills. It also outlines more briefly the lifelong learning related activities of other government agencies, including those reporting to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The object is to provide a 'map' of the lifelong learning landscape and this is assisted by three highly simplified diagrams.

Section 4 of this report focuses on the activity of DfES funded 'mainstream providers' in further education (the 'learning and skills' sector), higher education, local authority and community education, and in the voluntary sector as represented by the Workers Educational Association. Where evidence to do so exists, it examines the implications of provision in each of these sectors for rural people and businesses, in particular whether there is evidence for differential consequences in the nature of provision and its uptake, in rural as compared to urban areas.

Section 5 looks at more recent policy initiatives, both those funded by DfES and from other sources. Again, it attempts to summarise existing evidence for differential urban/rural uptake or impact, and where policies appear to have been specifically tailored to rural circumstances, it attempts where possible to gauge their success.

In all these areas a major problem is the lack of existing information or documentation. In many cases (for example of the recent policy initiatives identified in Section 5) it is too early to assess their impact, even where the appropriate studies or monitoring have been put in place. Even in the case of the more established mainstream provision (outlined in Section 4) much of the requisite data has either not been collected or, if it exists, has not been analysed. In both cases, it is to be hoped that the impetus given by rural proofing to policy making and evaluation will, in time, begin to make a difference 'on the ground'.

The problem of lack of information is not just one of little monitoring or evaluation at a policy level. It is also a consequence of a lack of research activity in the rural dimensions of lifelong learning. A substantial body of lifelong learning research has looked into work-based learning, widening participation and the role of education in social regeneration and social capital. However very little of this has focused on the rural context. For example, of 56 citations for rural education in the British Education Index, 8 are historical studies and a further 41 are concerned with international education, primarily in development education. Searching the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) website for 'lifelong learning' gives 63 hits, but none if rural is added as a search term⁷.

⁷ O'Rourke, R K. 2001. *ESRC Research Seminars Competition Proposal "Lifelong Learning, Rurality and Regeneration"*. Leeds: School of Continuing Education, University of Leeds.

Difference and detail

Recognition of the needs of individuals, of social differences and of the importance of social inclusion is a key aspect of Countryside Agency policy. Such recognition is one of the criteria against which the outcomes of policies and provision examined in this report are judged. The main body of this report addresses lifelong learning in the English countryside 'in general'. The countryside, however, is not a homogenous entity, and its social diversity is paralleled by the variety of rural landscapes within the English countryside. This variety (reflected in the Agency's Countryside Character approach) is as much a product of people - present as well as past - as it is of 'natural' physical and biological processes.

In order to address the question of rural heterogeneity, **Appendices 1 & 2** of this report examine the way that current policy and provision in lifelong learning intersect with rural social, economic and environmental characteristics within contrasting rural areas; of Northumberland and Sussex. Like the main report, these are not intended to be in-depth studies. Rather, they identify known local issues on which policy adjustments or further research may be needed. These area studies also indicate the direction that subsequent regional or Countryside Character Area studies might take. They complement other recently published studies, for example in *Landscapes of Learning*⁸ and in *Rural Learning*⁹ which also look at particular localities or projects in more detail.

An understanding of current issues in rural lifelong learning is enhanced by an awareness of the policy changes that have occurred, particularly in recent decades. **Appendix 3** - 'The changing boundaries of Lifelong Learning' - provides some contextual background to some of the policy issues that are addressed in the main text. It does not attempt to present a comprehensive history of rural lifelong learning.

Although the bulk of this report focuses on formal adult learning, it is the view of the authors that effective policies and strategies for a 'learning society' should address lifelong learning in its broader context. This would include the informal learning that is an intrinsic albeit incidental component of so many Countryside Agency initiatives, particularly with regard to rural regeneration, as well as those policies and provision (such as the Local Heritage Initiative and Doorstep Greens) in which 'learning' is an explicit component. **Appendix 4** addresses the provision of lifelong learning opportunity in protected areas (such as national parks and conservation sites). These now cover almost one-third of the English countryside, and within them initiatives are possible which may later inform policy in the wider countryside.

⁸ Susan Oosthuizen on the Fenland Villages oral history project and Peter Riley on widening participation in N Yorkshire, both in Gray, ed. *Landscapes of Learning*

⁹ A number of case studies are cited in Payne. *Rural Learning*.

Conclusions: policy adjustments and further research

Throughout the report a note is made of where policy adjustments or further research may be required. Because the policy adjustments advocated are at this stage tentative, and require more detailed development based on information that is not yet available; and because the research advocated has direct policy implications, research and policy recommendations are not distinguished in presentational style. The recommendations made are of varying degrees of importance, feasibility, or relevance both to rural proofing or to the Countryside Agency's mission.

Section 6 of this report draws some overall conclusions from the study, and indicates the key priority areas where policy adjustments may be needed, or where further research may be required.

2) The rural context

‘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 proportions¹⁰’

This section focuses on three areas:

- Those characteristics of rural areas which may affect supply of lifelong learning opportunities, or the demand for and uptake of those opportunities, with a particular focus on transport and training
- The issue of social inclusion and equality of opportunity
- The contribution that lifelong learning may make to human and social capital, to the quality of life for rural residents and the vibrancy of rural communities

Finally, this section considers the place of lifelong learning in state of the Countryside Thematic indicators; emphasises the heterogeneity of rural areas; and shows the need to analyse, evaluate and develop policies on a regional or a local level if the particular character of rural areas is to be recognised and their particular needs met.

Characteristics of rural areas affecting supply of and demand for lifelong learning opportunities

Using the Countryside Agency’s definition of rurality as land including individual settlements with a population of less than 10,000, the current rural population of England is approximately 9.3million, or approximately 20% of the total English population

The rural population is growing at the expense of towns. Between the 1971 and 1991 censuses, the rural population increased by 20% at a time when the overall population growth was c.4% and 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 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.

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) 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

¹⁰ Sargant, Naomi. 2000. *The Learning Divide Revisited*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. p7

learning opportunities across the whole spectrum of lifelong learning and, second the specific problems of training needs for rural employers:

- The dispersed nature of rural populations (and of categories of resident 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.
- Features of the rural economy, in particular the prevalence of small firms and high levels of self employment, has particular consequences for training needs and for the provision of work-based training.

Transport

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, as the two area studies in this report demonstrate, there is a wealth of lifelong learning activity in rural areas. In addition to schools (see section 4), almost all the village and community halls surveyed in the Joint Provision of Services 2000 study included some form of adult education in their activities¹¹. 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.

Many adults are unable to pursue education or take up training because transport difficulties mean that they are unable to attend what is offered. Although public subsidy in the form of fee remission is substantial, most adult learners finance their studies from their own pockets and the price of transport is likely to be an important factor in deciding whether or not to study. 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.

While the growth of open and distance learning has ameliorated the situation, 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. Those people with least access to choice and autonomy around their personal mobility are, broadly, the same people who believe that education and training are not for them, and who have benefited least from post-16 learning. Removing the barriers to social inclusion caused, or exacerbated, by transport difficulties thus plays a significant part in opening up new pathways to learning.

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

¹¹ Moseley, Malcolm, Gavin Parker, and Amanda Wragg. 2000. *The Joint Provision of Services 2000 Appendix 2*. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

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. Bus routes tends to run from central hubs outwards rather than cross-community or radially. This may have a significant effect on accessibility – the nearest adult education class may only be 5 miles away in another village but accessibility via bus route may only be via a more distant town centre hub.

Of all the features of rural areas which directly intersect with supply or demand issues, transport has been singled out for its links to educational opportunity. The Rural White Paper included an express policy to extend assistance with access/travel costs to education¹². It seems likely that this will be targeted initially at schoolchildren and others in full-time education (for example assistance with access/travel costs is provided from the FE Access Fund) and subsequently at other schemes indicated in section 5. For example, the 'Connexions Card' pilot project in Northumberland is intended to provide young people aged 16-19 with discounts on travel and learning materials. Rural proofing involves ensuring that the funding structures being developed operate well in rural areas, where travel distances tend to be longer and more costly¹³. Several rural areas are included in the current 76 'Pathfinder initiatives', and 5 of the 56 pilots for the Educational Maintenance Allowance scheme are in rural areas. However, none of these initiatives are directed specifically at lifelong learning.

Training

Rural economies tend to be characterised by the prevalence of small firms and high levels of self employment. Small businesses often co-exist with a smaller number of very large employing organisations (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 in its normal mode of delivery. Barriers to training immediately come to the fore. It is widely recognised that management training is a particular need for the small business and especially in rural areas where managers are more isolated. However, all research shows that uptake of training is very much lower among smaller businesses, not only because there is unlikely to be a member of staff with specific responsibility 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 the staff are to be released they can be away from their

¹² Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions and Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. *Our countryside: the future*.

¹³ Countryside Agency. 2002a. *Rural Proofing in 2001/2. A report to Government by the Countryside Agency*. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency. p 35. See also Fletcher, Mick and Gordon Kirk. 2000. *Student transport : unfair or just unequal?* LSDA Comments. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

businesses for much longer time than in urban areas. There is no reason to suppose these barriers will lessen over time.

Social inclusion and equality of opportunity

Access and uptake of lifelong learning is an important indicator of social inclusion. Economically and socially disadvantaged people tend to be excluded from lifelong learning, which is enjoyed disproportionately by the already educated. At the same time, lifelong learning can be an important route to conquering disadvantage for individuals, and to a more inclusive society. Lifelong learning in this context is not only seen as being about skills development, although this is a clear priority, but also about the development of community infrastructure and the interest and skills necessary to engage with community planning. Active citizenship is a term that may be said to embrace some or all of these agendas.

Socially excluded rural households tend to be more dispersed geographically and are less easily identified, and less easily catered for than similar urban households which, at the ward level, may be more homogenous, demonstrating distinct characteristics and needs, and perhaps more able to make their voice heard.

As with other national data, which show that there is less poverty and social exclusion in rural compared to urban areas¹⁴, 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 above¹⁵. 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 (see below).

The annual NIACE participation study (a sample survey carried out during Adult Learners' Week) showed a current participation rate in 2001 in all forms of adult learning of 29%. This figure increased to 46% when those who were not currently studying but had done so in the recent past were added. The 2001 National Adult Learning Survey carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (using a different sample base but with learning defined in a similarly broad way) produces a participation rate of 76% for adults who had engaged in at least some form of adult learning over the past year. However, these figures mask differences in class, sex and other individual differences. For example, a growth in

¹⁴ Chandola, T., M. Lloyd, M. Noble, G. Wright, and R. Wigglesworth. 2001. *Rural deprivation: an analysis of the indices of deprivation 2000 for rural areas*. Oxford: Social Disadvantage research Group, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford.

¹⁵ Nomis. 2001. *Labour Force Survey 1998*. Nomis (Online). August <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk..>

participation between 1996 to 2001 from 53% to 67% amongst professions and managers contrasts with a growth in social classes DE from 26% to just 28%¹⁶.

None of these surveys presents easily assimilable data regarding rural as compared with urban provision and participation. 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 the 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 (see below); and are more likely to have lower incomes and family responsibilities. 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.

A 1994 RDC report on disadvantage in rural areas declared that 'published data on incomes at a dis-aggregated level which identifies rural areas is extremely limited and notoriously difficult to obtain even with the use of local surveys'¹⁷. Such data would be even more difficult to obtain with regard to participation in activities such as lifelong learning. The five case studies cited in '*Not Seen Not Heard*'¹⁸ suffered various combinations of disadvantage, including low income, isolation and lack of transport facilities, lack of a secure home and powerlessness. None of the five instances were engaged in any significant form of formal learning, and these case studies demonstrate how multiple the dimensions of disadvantage are and what an obstacle they must prove to access to lifelong learning. Those who suffer this deprivation however are often obscured in the wider community alongside people in very different circumstances.

Wider benefits of learning in rural areas

Human and social capital

The notion of human capital is well established in the policy world. It is increasingly associated with the notion of social capital, which sets the acquisition of skills and qualifications in a broader context of networks and values¹⁹.

Human capital is the aggregate of individual potential (knowledge, skills, employability) and is clearly closely related to learning. For the individual learner it is one aspect of personal fulfilment; for society at large it is a major contributor to economic well-

¹⁶ Aldridge, Fiona and Alan Tuckett. 2001. *Winners and losers in an expanding system*. The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2001. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. p9

¹⁷ Rural Development Commission. 1994. *Living and Working in Rural England*. London: Rural Development Commission.

¹⁸ Rural Media Company. 2000. *Not Seen, Not Heard? Social exclusion in rural areas*. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

¹⁹ Baron, Steve, John Field, and Tom Schuller. 2000. *Social Capital - Critical Perspectives*. London: OUP.

being. A particular focus in rural areas is the link between re-skilling and rural regeneration. For example ongoing discussions between CA 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 to provide local jobs linked to the maintenance of countryside character and rural tourism. At the same time, human capital is broader than vocational competencies, and includes the acquisition of knowledge and skills perceived to be important at an individual, family and community (as well as professional) level.

Social capital, by contrast, has to do with relationships, networks, social engagement and citizenship, and is related to lifelong learning particularly in its less formal dimensions. People's access to learning, and their ability to put their human capital to effective social and economic use, is dependent on their membership of networks of varying kinds, and on the values which characterise the social and economic units to which they belong.

Rural communities may have high or low levels of social capital, just as they have high or low levels of human capital. Policies on lifelong learning need to take account of the strength and resilience of their networks. One particular feature is the extent to which rural networks are linked to wider networks in ways which may help to combat rural isolation. The networks may be organised around face-to-face contact, but may also reflect other modes of communication. We need to understand these relationships and how they operate in different rural contexts.

Village appraisals provide a very concrete example of CA contributions in this area. Between 1979 - 1999 some 1,200 parish appraisals have been carried out involving some 15,000 local people, and with some three quarters of a million individuals providing feedback. As John Payne points out, "whilst these have not been set up as 'adult learning', there is no doubt that they have become an important form of adult learning, both for the individuals involved in conducting the appraisals and as a way for the village as a whole to learn about itself as a social unit"²⁰.

However any analysis of the contribution of more formal learning activities to social capital, or of the significance of such wider initiatives in terms of the broader context of lifelong learning has yet to be undertaken. There is a clear need for further research here (see section 6).

²⁰ Payne. *Rural Learning*. p15

State of the Countryside Thematic Indicators

A significant development in Countryside Agency policy has been the introduction of its annual *State of the Countryside* reports²¹. These are produced at a national and regional level and are structured around a set of 20 thematic indicators which provide a broad picture of the main economic, social and environmental conditions experienced in and affecting all rural areas. CA thematic indicators link natural and environmental capital²² ('countryside capital') and physical capital to human and social capital. These concepts are not merely of 'academic' interest but can provide a framework for the generation of rural initiatives and for analysing their outcomes. These State of the Countryside indicators are related to DEFRA's Rural White Paper headline indicators²³.

It is clear that many of these indicators are linked, both to each other and to the wider issues of human, environmental and social capital. Quite where lifelong learning might fit is unclear. The Countryside Agency's Indicator 8, 'Education and training' is said to be currently under development and will incorporate data from ONS and DfES. It is important that this indicator, when developed, is not based solely on achievement (e.g. based simply on 'averaged' NVQ level or other formal educational qualifications). It needs also to include adult participation rates in formal educational activities, and to take account of differences within and between groups and localities. Countryside Agency commissioned studies of education related needs and aspirations of rural people to date²⁴ relate to schools only. There have been no surveys of the wider rural lifelong learning needs or participation patterns. Development of an indicator which incorporates an effective measure of lifelong learning in rural areas, will require providers of learning opportunity to modify their own monitoring procedures in a way which is sensitive to rural needs: there are no existing data sets which can easily be drawn on to input to a revised indicator.

Lifelong learning in its broader sense is also a central component of several other thematic indicators. In all of these areas, developing approaches to evaluating the contribution of adult learning to human and social capital have the potential to provide an

²¹ Countryside Agency. 2002b. *The State of the Countryside 2002*. CA109. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency. see also Countryside Agency. 2000. *The State of the Countryside*. CA44. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency; and Countryside Agency. 2001a. *The State of the Countryside 2001*. CA61. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

²² English Heritage, Environment Agency, The Countryside Agency, and English Nature. 2001. *Quality of Life Capital. Managing environmental, social and economic benefits*. London: CAG Consultants. see also CAG Consultants and Land Use Consultants. 1997. *What Matters and Why: Environmental Capital- a new approach*. Cheltenham: Sustainable Development Branch, Countryside Commission.

²³ see Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions and Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. *Our countryside: the future.*; and also House of Commons Select Committee. 1996. *Third Report: Rural England; The Rural White Paper*. London: HMSO. and Quality of Life indicators Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions. 1999. *Quality of Life Counts. Indicators for sustainable development for the United Kingdom: a baseline assessment*. London: DETR.

²⁴ See, Hedges, Alan. 2000. *Living in the Countryside: the needs and aspirations of rural populations*. CAX28. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

input **25**. However it is important that they address issues specific to rurality, which is not yet the case, for example, with the DfES funded Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning**26**.

Rural heterogeneity

CA's classification of rural districts and unitary authorities (as used in State of Countryside reports and elsewhere) has demonstrated the variety of rural areas (and the difficulties of producing definitions of rurality to suit all users). A more detailed classification to ward level using selected socio-economic variables (SOCCODE)**27** is one of a number of approaches studied by a contract to review urban and rural definitions for the former DETR**28**

It is recognised that all policies in life long learning may impact differently in different rural areas. The 'countryside' is a heterogeneous entity and it would be expected that lifelong learning needs, and the consequences of the application of national policies, will be different in different types of rural areas, including, for example, deep rural, coastal, former coalfield, semi-rural, urban fringe and market towns.

In general, and as with differences of social class, gender and race, locational differences in access and opportunity between rural areas may be much greater than national rural/urban averages, which may themselves be reversed in some regions. For example, in the south-west, fewer people living in rural areas have NVQ3 or higher qualifications than in urban areas**29**, a reversal of the national situation.

One of the pictures that emerges from adult learning surveys (across both urban and rural areas) is of a North-South divide. The NCSR surveys show highest figures for participation in adult learning in the south east of England (84%) but this drops to 69 - 72% in northern England**30**. However again the more detailed the analysis the more complex the conclusions; the NIACE study**31** indicates considerable regional differences. A growth of 19% in participation in north west England, for example, compares with a decline of 1% in the north east (the south east showed a median growth of just 9%).

Again, none of this data can be easily broken down into rural-urban differences. Most of Britain's most deprived wards are in urban areas, however 16 of the 88 most deprived

25 Schuller, Tom and John Field. 1998. Social Capital, Human Capital and the Learning Society" International Journal of Lifelong Education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 17, no. 4: 11-20.

26 See e.g. <http://www.learningbenefits.net> and <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/media/r00010703.htm>

27 Chandola, Lloyd, Noble, Wright, and Wigglesworth. *Rural deprivation*.

28 John Shepherd at SERRL/ Birkbeck http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/urban_rural.asp

29 Countryside Agency. 2001d. *The State of the Countryside 2001: The South West*. CA106. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

30 La Valle, Ivana and Margaret Blake. 2001. *National Adult Learning Survey 2001*. London: National Centre for Social Research. p 31

31 Aldridge and Tuckett. *Winners and losers in an expanding system*. p9

districts contain substantial rural areas. All of these 16 authorities are Rural Priority Areas, eligible for funding under the Regional Development Agencies' rural programmes³².

In order to tease out some of the contrasts Appendices 1 and 2 look in greater depth at Sussex (one of the most prosperous EU regions) and Northumberland (one of its more depressed). Some of these regional contrasts are summarised in the table below.

The Rural South East and North East (various sources, including State of the Countryside reports³³)

Rural North East		Rural South East
255k/ 2.58m (9.9%)	Population in rural areas (England average 28.5%)	3.75/15.37m (24.4%)
+0.9%	Rural population growth 1990-99 (England average 7.58%)	+6.23%
300	Population density persons / km2 (England avg. 377)	423
lower	Economic activity cf. national averages	higher
higher	Unemployment cf. national averages	lower
102.67	Standardised mortality ratio (UK = 100%), rural districts	92.23
14.63	% persons with a long standing illness (1991)	11.26
£270.20	Household income (rural districts) as gross weekly earnings (England avg. £308.83)	£332.28
£77,014	Avg. house prices (£s) rural wards 1999	£134,983
Lower than the average for rural England	House prices	The highest for any part of rural England
20.4	% all households in local authority rented housing, rural wards	13.8
42.93	Education & training NVQ 3+ as % population (England avg. 42.79)	44.80
£9,741	Economic performance GDP per head	£13,731
78.2	Economic activity rate (rural wards)%	83.29
4.2	Claimant rate % (rural wards)	1.76
The lowest in England: 36% households have no car	Car ownership	The highest in England: 32% households have two or more cars
53% area is LFA (highest for any region of England)	Agricultural economy	No LFA designations
17% land surface is AONB and a further 13% is National Park	Protected landscape	33% land surface is AONB, rising to >50% in E& W Sussex
251 SSSI (12.6% land area) and 16 NNR (1.3% land area)	Conservation sites	741 SSSIs (6.57% land area) and 40 NNR (0.45% land area)
189 cases (the third most affected region following NW and SW)	No. of cases of Foot and Mouth Disease during the 2001 outbreak	Only 9 confirmed cases (out of 1,724 for England)

Other markers indicate further major differences not just between each area, but also between groups within them:

³² Social Exclusion Unit. 2001. *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal. National Strategy Action Plan*. London: Cabinet Office.

³³ Countryside Agency. 2001c. *The State of the Countryside 2001: The South East and London*. CA105. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency; and Countryside Agency. 2001b. *The State of the Countryside 2001: The North East*. CA99. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

Northumberland	Proportion of respondents reporting ³⁴ :	West Sussex
61%	Less than 80% of mean income of area	46%
26%	Less than 140% of income support entitlement	6%
Men 18.6%	with no access (at some times) to a vehicle	Men 11.3%
Women 32.0%		Women 18.5%
Men 10.6%	No driving licence	Men 6.1%
Women 39.5%		Women 21.4%

It seems in any case likely that these gross differences in the table above, significant though they would appear to be, conceal much greater local differences within each region. Both regions include significant variations in economic prosperity, transport infrastructure, social and economic well-being and educational attainment.

What is striking about these two case studies is that apparently significant differences, even at a gross regional level, are not related in any simple manner either to patterns of existing learning provision at that level or to advocated policy adjustments or research.

Both area studies emphasise the need for lifelong learning policies to be tailored to local conditions and to recognise the 'fine grain' of rural difference. In both regions contextual factors – for example, social and economic change – impact in specific ways and, in turn, have consequences for the development of lifelong learning policies directed at say, social inclusion or sustainability. So a given policy objective (for example, a decrease in rural social exclusion) may be common to many areas but the specific policies and their implementation may differ. For example:

In the rural North-East:

- Lifelong learning policies in rural ex coalmining areas (where diversification through tourism is not a realistic policy option) need to be quite different from those in depressed coastal areas.

In the rural South-East:

- The apparent affluence (and hidden poverty) in some areas required specially tailored lifelong learning policies directed at excluded groups. In addition, although the case study area of Sussex is not remote in the manner of parts of rural Northumberland, there are significant local differences in terms of accessibility to educational provision and areas (and groups of people) disadvantaged by poor accessibility.

Also striking is the congruence of their general policy (and research) recommendations. Both case studies stress:

³⁴ Cloke, Paul, P Milbourne, and C Thomas. 1994. *Lifestyles in Rural England*. Rural research report 18. London: Rural Development Commission. cited in Shucksmith, Mark, Deborah Roberts, Duncan Scott, Polly Chapman, and Jeremy Edge. 1994. *Disadvantage in Rural Areas*. Rural research report 18. Salisbury, Wiltshire: Rural Development Commission.

- the need for integration of lifelong learning and wider rural policy issues, and for policy makers in both areas to be aware of and understand the needs of the other
- the contribution that lifelong learning can make to arresting the process of rural decline, and its negative consequences for the individuals affected, to rural regeneration and to a vibrant rural economy and society
- the significance of retraining and skills delivery for small businesses and the difficulty that SMEs may have in securing adequate provision for themselves
- the problem of short term funding, and the need to secure an adequate financial basis for continued development and to disseminate good practice
- the fragmentation of policy and provision amongst different agencies and the need to secure co-ordination in delivery
- the problem of boundaries, in particular the fact that strategic areas may not necessarily be appropriate for local conditions.

Summary

Although the heterogeneity of rural areas makes generalisation difficult, lack of public transport and training opportunities emerge as key barriers to lifelong learning. However, these and other barriers will impact differently on different groups, and are likely to be more pronounced for women and those who are economically disadvantaged. In addition, people's access to lifelong learning may be partly dependent on their access to and membership of various networks. However, as the case studies indicate, general policy objectives will require specific and localised policy implementation.

3) Policy

This section 'maps' the policy landscape of the main players and policies in lifelong learning that are relevant to rural areas. Most of these organisations operate across England as a whole, and the policies they promote apply throughout the country. Few have a specific rural brief.

The landscape is complex, and may be analysed in a number of ways:

- by functional role (bodies responsible for policy formation and/or funding; those which actually provide adult learning).
- 'top down' by government department (Department for Education and Skills, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, &c), the agencies through which they operate, and the policies that they promote and implement.
- 'bottom up' by category of lifelong learning provider (colleges of further and higher education, the Workers Educational Association, libraries, museums &c) and the type of learning opportunity they provide.
- by target group or learning mode (18-25 year old vocational training, 'liberal' or leisure interest, non- vocational adult learning for those in jobs, home-workers and retired people)

None of these ways of looking at the lifelong learning landscape is adequate in itself, and the boundaries of every category are imprecise and overlap:

- functions are often blurred. The Learning and Skills Development Agency, for example, is formally a supporting organisation but may sometimes play a significant role in the formulation of policy.
- different government departments may fund provision through the same learning provider. For example local education authority adult education is funded through the Learning and Skills Council, but may also be provided through a museums service which receives funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport
- different providers may deliver very similar kinds of learning and may often work together. For example a significant element of university adult education provision is still delivered in collaboration with local authority evening institutes; in rural areas, community colleges may be important venues for providing adult evening classes as well as secondary level education during the day.
- target groups are not distinct and different learning modes are seldom specific to a particular form of provision. For example, adult returners may form a majority of students in many degree level or further education programmes that formerly catered primarily for school leavers. Conversely, university continuing education departments increasingly provide postgraduate awards, as well as in-service professional training. Individual students may register on a given programme for a variety of reasons, and individual learning programmes increasingly use a variety of modes of delivery from face- to face teaching to 'remote' delivery via the Web.

The following sections and their accompanying diagrams provide an outline 'map' of the lifelong learning functions and means of delivery of the major government departments.

Policy formation

Downing Street

An analysis of the manifesto upon which the current government was elected in 2001³⁵ provides important pointers concerning the place of both lifelong learning and rural policy within the government's overall priorities. Significant pointers to the development of policy include the 1993 'Learning Society' Green Paper³⁶ and the 1995 policy document 'A Working Countryside'. The Cabinet Office, Prime Ministers' Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) exert a strong force in servicing the cross-departmental ministerial committees at the heart of government. Education is the third key goal in the Prime minister's "personal" introduction to the 2001 Manifesto "Ambitions for Britain". Unusually, this focuses upon the expansions of higher education (to 50% of 18-30 year-olds) rather than upon schooling. It then goes on to outline five ambitions, the first of which is highly significant:

1. sustain economic stability and build deeper prosperity that reaches every region of the country

"Skills, infrastructure, the technological revolution - all are vital to raise British living standards faster. We will put as much energy into helping the seven million adults without basic skills as we did when tackling unemployment through the New Deal....."³⁷

This elevates a central aspect of lifelong learning into the front-line of government priorities for the first time ever, a priority manifest in the adult basic skills sub-committee of the overarching Cabinet Domestic Affairs committee (DA(ABS)). Other relevant Cabinet sub-committees include social exclusion and regeneration and also older people³⁸.

Several central policy units have a track record in formulating "joined up policies" within the broad field of lifelong learning. The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) has led government thinking on workforce development. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, now located within ODPM) initiated the Connexions Service for young people³⁹. Also within ODPM, the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) is likely to play an increasingly important role. These priorities are in turn reflected in the work of government departments.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

The principal government department with responsibility in lifelong learning is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), formed following the General Election in June 2001, after a redistribution of the work of the former Department for Education and Employment and of other ministries. The new Department's aim of "creating opportunity,

³⁵ The Labour Party. 2001. *Ambitions for Britain: Labour's Manifesto 2001*. London: The Labour Party.

³⁶ The Labour Party. 1993. *Opening doors to a learning society: a green paper*. London: The Labour Party.

³⁷ The Labour Party. *Ambitions for Britain*. p4

³⁸ Within Downing Street, some of the most central posts are filled by staff with a background in education policy.

³⁹ Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Unit. 1999. *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training*. London: HMSO.

releasing potential and achieving excellence for all”⁴⁰ is, for the first time, linked to achievable targets and to clear policies aimed at securing their delivery. Of the Department’s three objectives, the first concerns children and the second, young people preparing to enter the labour market. The third objective is to “encourage and enable adults to learn, improve their skills and enrich their lives”.

In respect of post-school education, the DfES’s policies split into two halves. The first of these concerns higher education and focuses upon widening participation, improving standards, the development of world-class institutions in terms of teaching, research and technology transfer and linkage with business to generate jobs and wealth. The second area concerns adult learners outside the higher education sector, and is characterised by an emphasis on delivery, in partnership with others, of specific outcomes across a wide range of lifelong learning sectors, including:

- Better adult basic skills through Skills for Life – the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills
- New institutional arrangements: support for the Learning and Skills Council now that it has become fully established, and for the new Sector Skills Councils, as they are introduced
- Increased learning opportunities through the University for Industry’s learndirect service and the continuation of Individual Learning Accounts (now discontinued – see below)
- Increased access to IT via a full network of UK online centres to widen access to IT in the most disadvantaged communities
- New Centres of Vocational Excellence in colleges of FE
- Expansion of e-learning by opening up the learning opportunities and enjoyment offered by digital TV and the Internet
- A revitalised adult and community learning sector
- A comprehensive workforce development strategy in the light of reviews by the CBI/TUC, LSC and the Cabinet Office’s Performance and Innovation Unit
- Increased involvement of trade unions in raising skills supported by the Union Learning Fund.

This is accompanied by specific and measurable targets including:

- Reduce the number of adults who have literacy or numeracy problems by 750,000, by 2004.
- Increase the percentage of adults attaining a Level 3 qualification from 47% to 52% in 2004.
- Half of all FE colleges to establish Centres of Vocational Excellence by 2003/4.
- Open two technology institutes in every region to meet the rising demand for high-level technical skills.
- Produce a workforce development strategy that increases the training offered by employers and undertaken by employees.

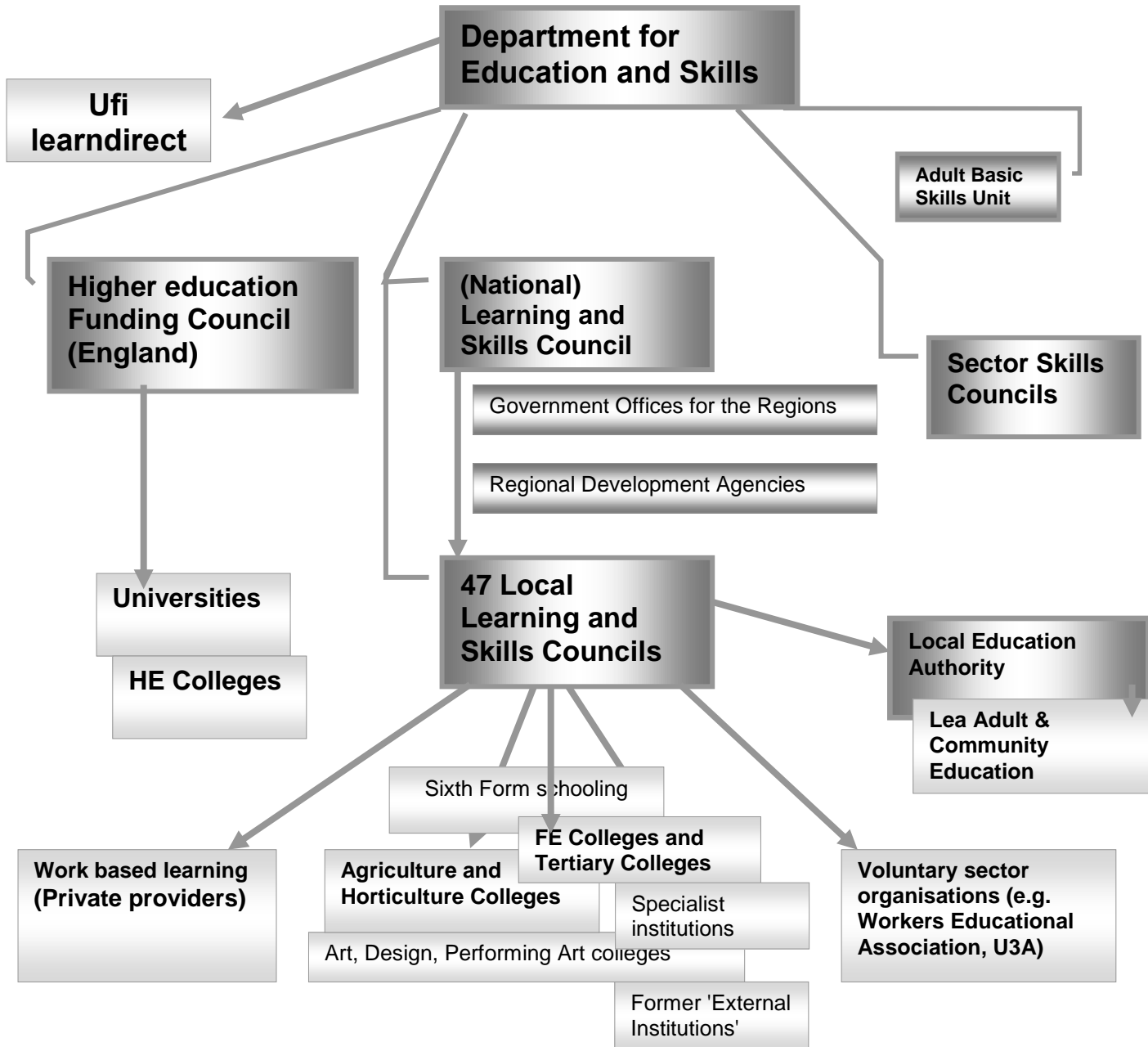
⁴⁰ Department for Education and Skills. 2001. *Delivering Results: A Strategy to 2006*. London: Department for Education and Skills,.

- Expand Individual Learning Accounts and set up a network of 6,000 IT learning centres by the end of 2002.

In terms of delivery, the mainstream areas of lifelong learning provision may be seen as lying within four main areas (**see Figure 1**):

- Further Education and the 'Learning and Skills Sector'
- Higher education
- Local authority adult and community education
- The voluntary sector

Figure 1 Policy and funding structure for lifelong learning within the purview of DfES



Other government departments

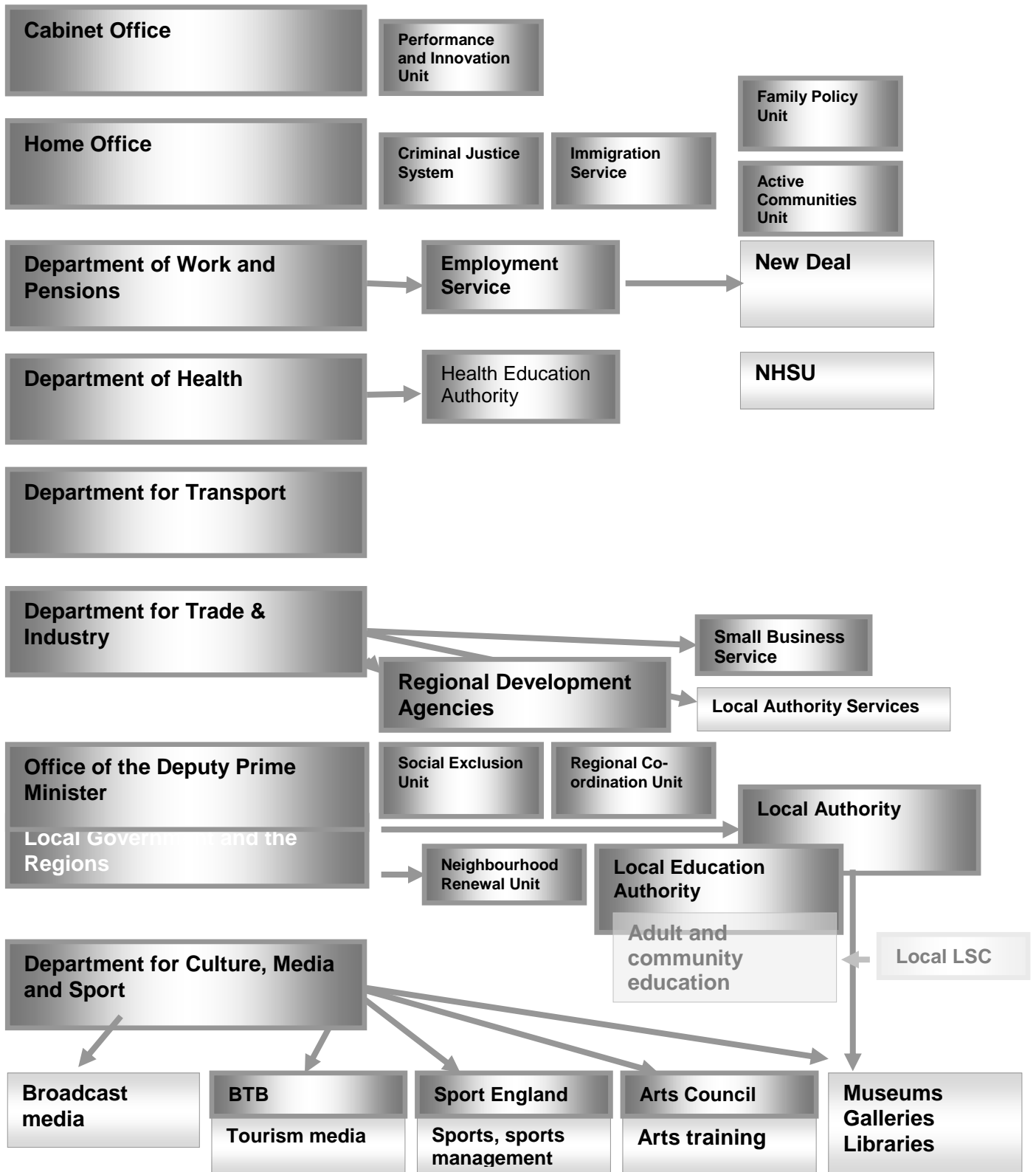
The DfES is the lead Department for lifelong learning. However, the work of many other government departments has a significant relation to lifelong learning. These include:

- the Home Office, which houses the Active Communities Unit and the Family Policy Unit - both of which have an interest in lifelong learning. The Home Office's responsibility for the criminal justice system and immigration also involve aspects of lifelong learning
- the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which has a directorate for education, training, arts and sport and which is responsible for libraries, museums, broadcasting and tourism;
- the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) which is the sponsoring ministry for the Countryside Agency, English Nature, and the Environment Agency
- the Department of Health, which sponsors the Health Education Authority and is establishing NHSU - a university for the Health Service
- the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) which is responsible for such bodies as the Small Business Service. DTI is also responsible for the Regional Development Agencies.
- successor bodies to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR; from June 2002, mainly within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) with responsibilities for such issues as community leadership and neighbourhood renewal as well as regional policy;
- the Department for Work and Pensions which is responsible for the work of Jobcentre Plus (formerly known as the Employment Service) and the overall welfare to work strategy.

All the above Departments have an impact in rural areas. For example the provision of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) through its support to rural tourism, its funding museums and galleries, and support to the arts and to sport (figure 2), is highly significant. The Arts Council declares that 'lifelong learning in the arts is a priority for the Arts Council' and although reporting formally to DCMS, it receives a part of its funding from the DfES for this purpose. It is clear that the bulk of Arts Council funding is directed at, and delivered in, urban areas. However some funding has been directed specifically at rural areas, where performance provision has had a specific rural orientation. As far as is known, there has been no study of the relative consequences of these for provision or learners in rural or urban areas.

In general the variety of such activities of departments other than DfES which may impact on lifelong learning is so varied that any attempt to map it (with the exception of discussions here related to the activities of DEFRA) would be beyond the scope of this report.

Figure 2 Policy and funding for government departments other than DfES and DEFRA



DEFRA

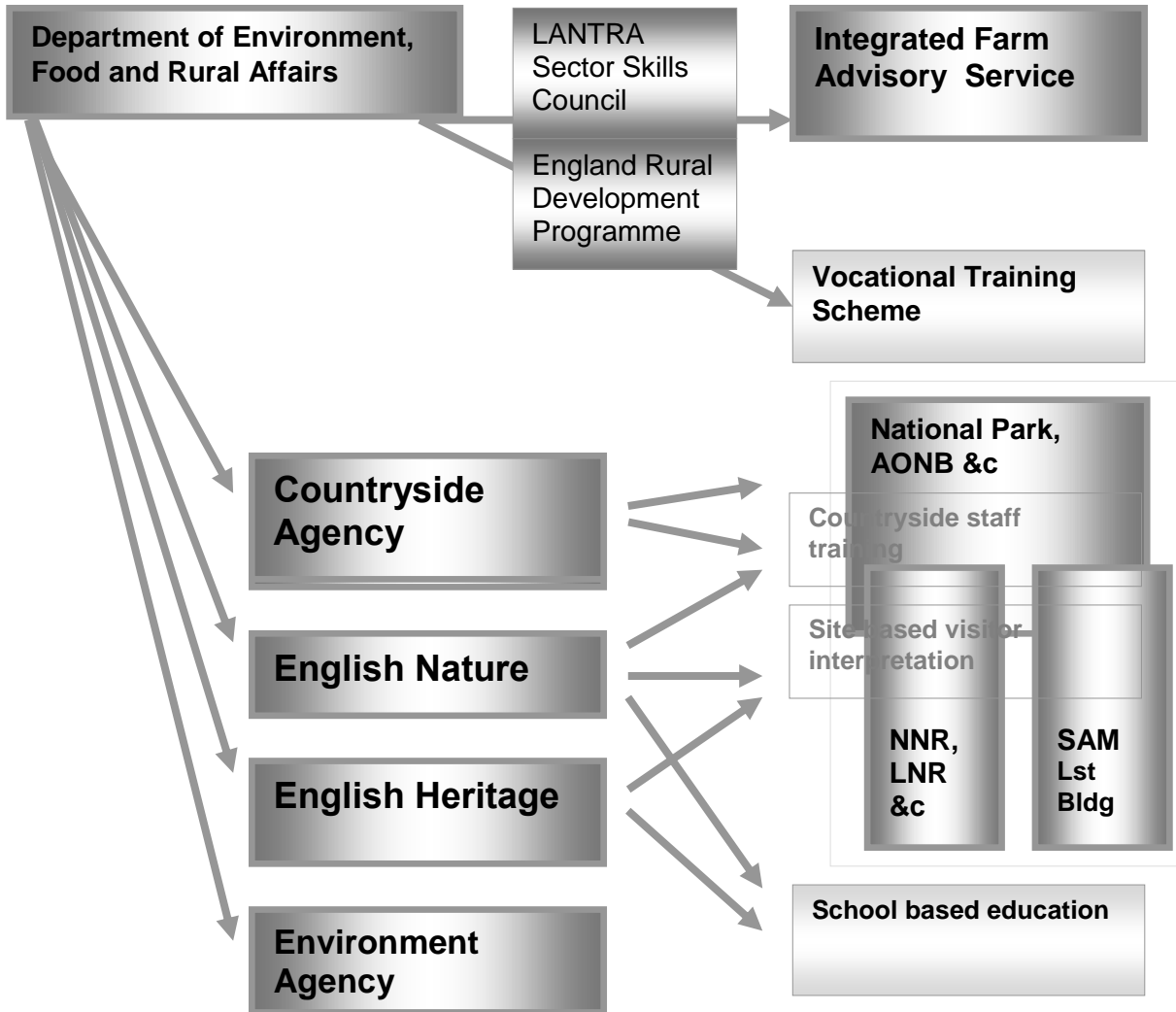
Much activity of these government departments relevant to lifelong learning is delivered through agencies (Non-Departmental Public Bodies or NDPBs) with specific remits. The Countryside Agency has declared that although the extension of rural proofing to NDPBs and agencies has not taken place in all government Departments, it should do so⁴¹. The agency work of DEFRA is a prime example here. It illustrates the breadth of activity which may include an element of lifelong learning or may impact on it: moreover because it is the primary rural government department, DEFRA's activities in lifelong learning require special consideration. DEFRA is responsible through its agencies for a number of areas of work which have a direct relevance to lifelong learning (figure 3), for example:

- Training for small businesses including agriculture
- Educational activities of rural agencies
- Site based visitor interpretation and education
- Protected Areas

Additional areas of direct relevance to lifelong learning include the training of countryside staff, and guidance on countryside information and site - based interpretation. Both areas were once considered within the remit of the Countryside Commission although they do not figure within the current activities of the Countryside Agency. None of these areas are considered in detail in this report. Training for land based industries is considered further on p. 58. The 'special case' of protected areas is considered in Appendix 4.

⁴¹ Countryside Agency. *Rural Proofing in 2001/2*. p17

Figure 3: Policy and funding structure in relation to lifelong learning for DEFRA



The social partners

Employer and employee interests (articulated through organisations such as the TUC and CBI) are powerful shapers of lifelong learning policy which has always balanced economic and social agendas. Employers are both funders and providers of lifelong learning opportunities - with an estimated annual spend of £20 billion⁴² and unions are increasingly involved as promoters and brokers of opportunities. No studies of the rural dimensions of their involvement are known, neither has an attempt been made to examine rural aspects of their involvement.

Planning and funding bodies

Government policies in relation to lifelong learning are co-ordinated and delivered through a variety of planning and funding agencies at regional and sub-regional levels. The lifelong learning policies of the DfES particularly in respect of further education, work-based and vocational training, and basic skills (though not in respect of higher education) are delivered by the national and local Learning and Skills Councils, with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) playing an important developmental role in skills development for individual occupational sectors.

Government Offices for the Regions

Government Offices in the nine English regions were set up in 1994 and now bring together the regional operations of seven Government Departments (DEFRA, DoT, DTI, DfES, DWP, DCMS, Home Office). Their boundaries are the same as those of RDAs. They manage programmes on behalf of parent Departments and seek to inform the development of Departments' policies from a regional perspective. In 1999-2000 they were responsible for over £60 billion of Government expenditure. The aim was to achieve a more coherent, integrated and partnership based response to regional issues. Government Offices co-ordinate local organisations and national funding streams to support the regeneration of neighbourhoods and communities.

In terms of lifelong learning, Government Offices are specifically responsible for Local Learning Partnerships although the duty to sustain partnerships will pass to the LSC (see below) in April 2003. The overall aims of the Government Office in the education field are to increase participation in learning, increase motivation and secure a sound skill base. In order to do this, the Offices work through a range of projects, contracts and networks.

Government Offices also work to ensure that local Learning and Skills Councils complement and contribute to the programmes and policies of other Government Departments and key local agencies – including for example, the work of the Home Office with ex-offenders.

⁴² Blunkett, David. 2001. *Opportunity and Skills in the Knowledge Driven Economy. A final statement on the work of the National Skills Task Force.* Department For Education And Employment. p8

One of the key intentions in the development of regional government offices bringing Departments together was the possibility for coherence at regional level between Departments. We are unaware of any information about how or whether this has impacted on lifelong learning provision in rural areas.

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

RDAs are statutory bodies launched in eight English regions in 1999. The ninth, in London, followed in 2000. They aim to provide effective, properly co-ordinated regional economic development and regeneration to enable the regions to improve their competitiveness. In the education and training field, RDAs are charged to improve the skills base of the region, including developing a regional skills agenda and to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in their area.

Agencies' specific functions are:

- Formulating a regional strategy in relation to their purposes
- Regional regeneration
- Taking forward the Government's competitiveness agenda in the regions
- Taking the lead on regional inward investment
- Developing a regional Skills Action Plan to ensure that skills training matches the needs of the labour market
- A leading role on European funding.

The production and development of a Skills Action Plan and its implementation is clearly a significant contribution to the lifelong learning agenda and such action plans might be expected to be rural proofed. We are not aware of any analysis of such plans that specifically focuses on rural skills needs although individual plans undoubtedly involve action to improve the skills of those living in the rural areas of the regions concerned.

The Learning and Skills Council

Set up by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (and subsuming the old Further Education Funding Council and the 72 Training and Enterprise Councils), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England (see section 4). Its mission is to raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training which puts learners first. The LSC is a NDPB whose members are appointed by the secretary of state for education and skills. It also has two statutory committees: one responsible for education and training for 16 – 19 year olds and the second for adult learning. The Council has 47 local "arms" each with a chair, an executive director and local council members. Each local council has appointed members drawn from employers, trades unions, learning providers and community groups. They have responsibility for planning provision and maintaining quality over their own areas within a framework and targets set by the national council. With an annual budget of £7.3 billion, the Councils' work covers:

- further education
- publicly funded work-based training for young people
- workforce development
- adult and community learning
- information, advice and guidance for adults
- education business links
- school sixth forms

Rural Proofing of LSC activity will need to ask how the national and local Councils address the particular training needs of rural economies and rural communities, and how they plan and fund the delivery of education and training to dispersed populations. In his remit letter to the LSC⁴³, the then Secretary of State asked that neighbouring local LSCs should work together, within frameworks that were supportive of regional strategies, the development of the rural economy, and the promotion of sustainable development. The LSC's Corporate Plan refers only twice to issues relating to geographical area. However it does set out an intention to develop a data base that will show the areas from which learners are drawn. We are unaware of any intention yet to "rural proof" local plans and or of any specific analysis of local plans that looks at the impacts for rural areas. There is an opportunity for further work and influence here.

Funding is critical. Rural areas are as likely to be affected as much by national funding systems as by local planning. Current studies being undertaken on the funding of disadvantage and area costs may improve the position of rural areas in this regard. The DfES has had discussions with the Countryside Agency about rural trades (see p 58).

The LSC certainly has the potential to act as a positive force in providing for rural areas. Local LSCs operate within a national framework, but have the flexibility to meet the learning and skill needs of individuals, employers and local communities. Around 40% of the Board members of a local LSC have recent business experience, so appropriate local LSCs have members drawn from rural industries such as farming, and hospitality and tourism. Local LSCs have been consulting widely on their local strategic plans to 2005, and final plans will be publicly available on the LSC website. However monitoring of local provision will be done at a local level and separate arrangements will need to be made to provide a more than piecemeal view of how rural England is being served by the new planning and funding system.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) distributes public money for higher education teaching and research to universities and colleges (see section 4). Its mission statement describes it as:

'Working in partnership, we promote and fund high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society'⁴⁴

Because of Universities' traditional autonomy, HEFCE does not have the same degree of planning responsibilities as the LSC. It is very much a funding agency. This does not mean however that its impact in rural areas can safely be ignored. There is some evidence that the changes that have been made to the funding of university level Continuing Education courses in the community have resulted in a reduction of the service available to adults living in the country. Courses that were formerly offered in this way did not require learners to take a qualification or a module that contributed towards a degree programme. They were flexible and often offered in conjunction with partner organisations within the community in rural areas (notably the Workers Educational Association (WEA) (see Sect.4).

However, in 1994 the funding of all such provision was "mainstreamed" which meant that public funding was targeted primarily at courses that offered progression to degree level formal awards at undergraduate or postgraduate level. The provision of courses without accreditation became more problematic. Rural areas where student groups tended to be more mixed, comprised of older learners and group sizes small were a regular casualty.

'Mainstreaming' was intended to increase participation in higher education but for rural adults the loss of provision and the increases in fees that came with the reduction of public funding for this kind of learning seem to have resulted in a lessening provision (and hence of participation) in university provided education in their locality.

As part of the more recent drive to increase participation in higher education HEFCE has funded a number of "widening participation" initiatives. These have in general been directed at making existing educational programmes more accessible to underrepresented groups (including ethnic minorities and students with mental health problems) or tailoring programmes to meet the needs of non- traditional target audiences (such as refugees or asylum seekers). A small number of these initiatives have focused on the specific problems of rurality. Rather more have been located in rural areas and so have this aspect as a secondary area of interest. However not enough is known about the rural examples to enable us to draw even provisional conclusions about these approaches.

National Training Organisations/Sector Skills Councils

National Training Organisations (NTOs) are now being succeeded by a rationalised number of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) working at a strategic level with their occupational sectors, and with Government, across education and training throughout the whole of Great Britain. They are employer led bodies set up to help Government ensure that the needs of business are taken fully into account in developing training policy.

⁴⁴ McGivney, Veronica. 1999. *Informal Learning in the Community*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.

NTOs and their successor SSCs aim to

- identify skill shortages and the training needs of the whole of their sector
- influence education and careers guidance provision;
- develop occupational standards and NVQs/SVQs and advising on the national qualifications structure
- influence and advise on training arrangements and training solutions
- communicate and network with their employer base and key partners to implement strategies.

The SSC for agriculture and the rural small business sector is Lantra, which has been declared one of five 'trailblazer' SSCs. Lantra is the base for Ufi's Environment and Land-based Industry Sector Hub (see p 58) as well as for several projects within the area of Education Business Links (see p 52 on).

4) Providers

This section describes some of the main providers of lifelong learning in England. Providers of lifelong learning include central and local government; the voluntary sector; and a range of lifelong learning support organisations. Few of these providers have a specific rural brief, and all operate across England as a whole.

The picture is complex. Schools, for example, play an important part in the pattern of provision and are key venues for activities. Primary schools may often be the only public venue available for provision in small settlements. Secondary schools are often the only place where adequate equipment and facilities for learning can be found in easy reach of local people. There is a long history of "Village College" provision, which has the school as its main centre. Provision of this sort has an underlying vision of the school as a centre of community life, and a focus of education available in the community for all from pre-school children to the oldest inhabitants.

Recent legislative and funding changes, however, mean that there is an understanding that budgets for compulsory school activity may not be used to subsidise any other kind of provision made on the premises. This has produced a nervousness among schools in some areas regarding the degree to which they are prepared to engage in adult provision. A further threat to rural provision may be contained in inspection arrangements that insist on provision for adults being "fit for purpose", when clearly the furniture and equipment of primary schools is less than ideal for mature students. Providers are unwilling to risk criticism for poor facilities. In rural areas this may mean no provision is the consequence.

With regard to work-based learning, the major contributions to training comes from employers, who spend a considerable (but unknown) total on education and training. It is difficult to assess the differential impact of such training in rural areas although the preponderance of small employers might indicate that less investment is made by employers in rural areas. Publicly-funded work based learning includes education and training for young people and some older adults on government training schemes, such as Modern Apprenticeships that include work based experience as well as provider based training, although there is a gender imbalance in favour of men. The range and availability of provision of work-based learning, which includes public, private and voluntary organisations, shares the same characteristics as other education and training with more restricted choice and greater travel requirements being a feature of provision in rural areas.

The further education/ learning and skills sector

This is a broad area traditionally encompassing all post school education (but now including school sixth forms) with the exception in the main of higher (university/degree level)

provision (see below). It is today most easily defined as all the all the areas funded by Learning and Skills Council (including sixth forms and workplace education as well as college-based further education), together with related areas of provision which may be funded from other sources.

Further Education Colleges

There are more than 400 colleges in England, falling into five broad types:

- agriculture and horticulture colleges
- art, design and performing arts colleges
- general further education colleges and tertiary colleges
- sixth form colleges
- specialist designated institutions.

Colleges vary in size — 25% have fewer than 2,000 students whilst 24% have more than 10,000. These institutions provide vocational and academic qualifications and a significant volume of higher education as well. The majority of this work is funded through the Learning and Skills Council (see p. 33). The Further Education sector also includes some of the provision made by local authorities that leads to qualifications. This is delivered alongside Adult and Community Learning (see below) and is often the main source of basic level qualifications and basic skills that is available locally in rural areas.

Agricultural and horticultural colleges have a particular part to play in the rural economy. Changes in the industry and the requirements of the Further Education funding system have meant that such colleges have diversified from their original curriculum area and are in most cases offering a much wider range of courses more closely reflecting the diversity now to be found in the rural economy. This is coupled with an increased demand (often from mature students) for award bearing and short courses, particularly in the environmental sector.

Further education delivery in rural areas is clearly more problematic than in suburban or city locations in specific ways. Transport and its availability is a key to recruitment, retention and achievement (see p. 12). Learners must expect longer days and often a restricted choice of institutions. Expansion of the Centres of Vocational Excellence initiative will require discussion of the options so far as dealing with rural areas and their need for adequate choice for learner is concerned. For adult learners the issues about access to College are perhaps more critical. We are unaware of any significant recent study on adult access that specifically focuses on rural issues.

Adult and community Learning

The Adult and Community Learning Sector may be defined in funding terms as local education authority secured adult education. Prior to the reorganisation of FE provision, local education authorities had a duty to secure adequate adult education provision for their local

communities. Following the Learning and Skills Act 2000, this responsibility passed to the Learning and Skills Council which now funds a range of provision from basic skills to advanced courses that are organised through the local authority. Many authorities deliver adult learning programmes in-house, but a very significant proportion secure such provision by contracting a third party to deliver it (usually a further education college or the authority's own schools, and in some cases, voluntary organisations).

LEA adult and community learning delivered directly by local education authority services (using a mixture of schools, community venues or specialist premises) is often run by a small section of the education department, although some councils choose to run adult provision through a different department such as recreation or leisure. There is a wide variation in expenditure and in the level of provision across the country, because prior to the transfer of funding to the LSC, local priorities and the level of spend on adult education was a matter for each local authority.

All LEAs are required to prepare a plan for the education and training that will be funded by the LSC, and receive funding for agreed delivery on the basis of that plan. The degree to which such plans set out to meet the needs of rural areas against a range of competing priority groups and how such delivery will be secured is an area worth investigating. Prior to the creation of the LSC the impact of local authority budget cuts led to significant fee increases and contraction of provision. Rural adult education is expensive for the provider because of the small groups that can be recruited and travel costs for staff; and for the learner because of travel costs and increasing fees. The difficulty of targeting disadvantaged groups in rural areas makes project funding which supports much work with disadvantaged groups more challenging to obtain and the opportunity to experiment with new and different models is more restricted. However, with limited access to colleges of FE in the countryside the importance (though not necessarily the provision) of community based adult learning of this kind may be higher in rural areas than in towns where there is more choice of facilities.

Recently, DfES budget allocations have increased from £145m in 2000-1 (the last year of local authority control) to £167m in 2002-3. However it is not possible to differentiate between investment in rural and urban areas and there appears to be no correlation between high spend and rurality. No significant work has been done on patterns of participation or patterns and choice of provision in rural and urban areas, so it is hard to say who is missing from this kind of learning. It is clear that for those in isolated rural areas and unable to travel, opportunities are likely to be very limited.

Adult and community learning is also delivered through the voluntary sector. This delivery is largely via LEAs at present but this may change after 2003 when funding

arrangements become less restrictive. Local authorities also deliver lifelong learning opportunities by virtue of their other functions (see below).

The higher education sector

The higher education (HE) sector is funded primarily by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (see p. 35). It encompasses the 87 universities in England, (including the Open University and 16 colleges of the University of London) together with 47 other higher education institutions (HEIs). In addition higher education courses are also offered in more than 250 FE colleges.

The government's 2001 manifesto contains the goal of expanding participation in higher education (to 50% of 18-30 year-olds by 2010). The institutional basis for this was laid by earlier administrations, first, in the establishment of the new 'redbrick' universities in the 1960s, then in 1988 by the separation of the Polytechnic sector from local authority control and, finally, by the ending in 1992 of the binary system in higher education when polytechnics and other higher education institutions were granted university status.

Whilst expansion has led to increased participation there is no evidence of differential consequences for rural as contrasted with urban areas. This is also the case in respect of the loss of local authority control of HE and some FE institutions; any centralisation of function has been masked by overall growth in provision.

Prior to the expansion of HE in the 1970s, a relatively clear distinction could be made between undergraduate degree programmes in which the majority of students would be school leavers (and the postgraduate programmes to which some of them progressed), and university liberal (i.e. non - vocational and often non award bearing) adult education. The latter was provided typically off campus, by university 'extra-mural' departments, which were funded directly by government (as were voluntary sector partners like the Workers' Educational Association), as 'Responsible Bodies'. 'Responsible Body' provision involved a good deal of partnership with local providers, and its highly flexible mode of delivery (classes were often provided in church halls, community centres, and local libraries) meant that there was relatively extensive provision in rural areas. Changes in funding have altered this pattern (as mentioned above) but there is no hard evidence of a rural/urban divide either in regard to the increased take up of intra-mural degree level provision or in the decline of university extra-mural liberal adult education.

With regard to degree study there is an ongoing debate about the consequences of the abolition of student grants and the introduction of tuition fees and student loans on participation. One distinct impact relevant to rural areas is that the increased costs of university study have led fewer entrants to move outside their home region to study. Study options are in any case reduced for rural people, for whom the increased disincentive to live

away from home may well act as an additional barrier. Some HEFCE widening participation projects have been focusing on this matter as of particular interest, and evidence might be available in due course on this issue.

In respect of liberal university adult education, traditional 'extramural' provision was (and, where it survives, remains) located in the 'old' (pre 1992) universities. The 'new' (post 1992) universities have other forms of dispersed provision but this is normally via FE sector and other educational institutions through franchising or partnership arrangements, and is focused much more on vocational provision. Funding changes, combined with an increased focus on research over teaching in the old university sector, seem likely to have further eroded local rural provision.

The voluntary sector

Voluntary groups and organisations are significant providers of formal and informal lifelong learning. Formal educational opportunity is provided by a wide range of bodies from large national organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association (see below) through to local community arts initiatives or local history groups which may receive some local authority or other funding, though usually on a modest scale.

In addition to formal learning, many local groups provide opportunity for informal learning, however:

"it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of informal learning that is undertaken in community settings because of its scale and diversity and because it is often both a part and a product of ostensibly non educational activities" **45**.

Two long standing rural providers illustrate very different types of provision which are likely to be important players in rural areas.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA)

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the major national voluntary adult education organisation in Britain. The WEA has a long and proud history of rural provision both of liberal adult learning and also of courses that combat social exclusion. In total more than 10,000 courses are provided each year for more than 140,000 learners.

The association is controlled at all levels by its voluntary members although it employs over 400 permanent staff as well as thousands of part-time course tutors. Initially funded directly by government as 'Responsible Body' (see above), then by the Further Education Funding Council, the WEA's National Association is now funded primarily through the Learning and Skills Council. The regional tier of organisation is the responsibility of thirteen English Districts each of which has a District Secretary plus field and administrative staff to promote and develop the educational programme.

45 *Ibid.* p 16

At the local level, the WEA is represented by some 650 voluntary branches, ranging from small rural branches which may promote a small number of courses, to large urban branches running extensive educational programmes. Central funding is supplemented by course fees and in some cases by grants from local education authorities, although the latter has declined considerably and in some areas ceased altogether. The organisation has also been subject to competing priorities driven by funding that tends to favour accredited provision for disadvantaged groups.

Despite this, WEA rural classes remain an important element in rural provision. In addition to a programme of evening or daytime classes, branches may play an important role in informal learning. For example in Boscastle (Cornwall) the local WEA runs a community newspaper, has funded the upgrading of the parish hall as a venue for classes and other village activities, and supports a local history project involving both 'locals' and 'incomers'. Yorkshire WEA region has, since 1993, used European funding for coalfield regeneration to provide a mobile project delivering IT and foreign language courses accredited through the Open College Network to pit villages⁴⁶.

The National Trust

The National Trust (NT) deserves special mention in a rural context as it is the largest and most important private landowner in the UK, is Europe's largest membership NGO, and because it declares lifelong learning to be a central aspect of its work. The NT has always paid some regard to the educational value of its property portfolio, not just for visitors, but for local residents. Even more than other such organisations it has become increasingly mindful of its obligations to social inclusion⁴⁷. Lifelong learning opportunities are seen as central to delivery in this area.

The current Strategic Plan declares that 'Learning and education are not add-ons but need to be at the heart of the way we operate and demonstrate the importance to the nation or what we do. A learning programme at the heart of the Trust not only provides inspirational learning opportunities to those who come to the Trust, but can also reach out to communities and individuals who currently see us as remote or even irrelevant to their lives. We can and should be making a major contribution to lifelong learning...⁴⁸'. Presently however most lifelong learning provision is through property-based interpretation for visitors, and conservation activities. Exciting initiatives include links with working class communities, and work with asylum seekers and people with learning difficulties. However, most of these are in urban areas. There are as yet few instances of firm partnerships or linkages with other providers in rural areas.

⁴⁶ Payne. *Rural Learning*. p22

⁴⁷ Clarke, Richard. 1996. Heritage in Trust: sustainable stewardship in transition? *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 3: 145-159.

⁴⁸ The National Trust. 2001. *The National Strategic Plan, March 2001 - February 2004*. London: The National Trust. P 1

Other national NGO provision (not DfES/ LSC funded)

Some voluntary organisations are of particular interest in terms of provision in rural areas. Examples include:

- social organisations such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), a non-party political, non-sectarian organisation with 275,000 members, primarily in the countryside, with a brief to provide learning opportunities for adults from all walks of life
- conservation bodies such as the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds, or county Wildlife Trusts, which provide both jobs with training in rural areas as well as learning opportunities for its members and volunteers
- volunteer groups (most importantly, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, BTCV) which provide training and volunteering opportunities in conservation (including a vocational element, for example in its courses which lead to statutory certification such as pesticide handling) for both those with leisure to spare and those actively seeking work
- Education support bodies such as the Pre School Learning Alliance. This is a national educational charity linking 17,000 community based pre-schools. Not only do local groups provide early education for nearly three-quarters of a million children but their role in the active encouragement of parental involvement in learning means that they are a major provider of further education and training for adults

Local voluntary sector providers

There is enormous diversity and fluidity in those voluntary and community groups with interests in lifelong learning and which are active within any given locality. The two area studies in this report evidence this. Two important sources of further information in this area are

- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), a national charity with a membership drawn from Rural Community Councils that supports sustainable rural development and has a specific focus on targeting rural disadvantage
- The National Association of Councils of Voluntary Service. This covers nearly 300 rural and urban organisations many of which are the umbrella body for community groups in any locality

Local authority lifelong learning provision incidental to other functions

Alongside formal adult education provision, local authorities are significant providers of lifelong learning by virtue of their other functions.

- Library and museum departments, and recreation departments in District Councils are likely to be involved in different levels of public provision
- Economic development departments, social services departments and others may all be involved in formal and informal provision to specific groups.
- In addition many local authorities, which are significant employers in their areas, provide lifelong learning opportunities to their workforce.

For some authorities one specific target of work is in rural villages and towns that do not have easy access to mainstream provision. Mobile arts programmes and other means of bringing services to local communities are an important focus.

Ufi/learndirect

Ufi (originally developed as the University for Industry) is an on-line and distributed learning network for individuals and businesses. Launched in Autumn 2000, it uses the branding of learndirect to:

- stimulate demand for lifelong learning amongst businesses and individuals
- promote the availability of, and improve access to, relevant, high quality and innovative learning, in particular through the use of information and communications technologies.

Under the brand of "learndirect" it also runs the national telephone helpline service which offers impartial information and advice about learning opportunities.

Ufi uses ICT to bring learning opportunities into homes, community settings and workplaces in a more flexible and accessible way so that people can learn at their own pace. Learndirect has a restricted but growing curriculum range at present. This includes basic skills, ICT skills and business management. Learndirect is not a wholly centralised operation. Much of its delivery is through "hubs" which may have either geographic coverage (for example Leicestershire and Rutland) or sectoral focus (for example, health and social care). It also has a network of quality-assured learning centres based not only in colleges but in a range of community and workplace settings. Learndirect centres have been located in a number of rural areas, and the required ICT services are said to be widely available.

The Agency's 2000/01 Rural Proofing report declares that existing arrangements are suited to rural circumstances⁴⁹. However it is clearly important that adequate arrangements are made for monitoring and a comparison of their operations between rural and urban centres could provide valuable information. Lantra has a £1.9m contract to operate Ufi's Environment and Land-based Industry hub. It is developing specialist training programmes for land based industries, of which the first - a farm diversification package - is already on line. Lantra's announced its 3,000th learndirect entrant in March 2002⁵⁰ (its target was 4,000 on-line learners by mid 2001).

Inspection

Inspection of Independent Provision in the Learning and Skills Sector is carried out by Ofsted where provision is for those aged 16 – 19, and by the Adult Learning Inspectorate where provision is for those over 19. In addition to inspection of providers Ofsted carries out Area Inspections of provision for 16 – 19 based on Local Authority landowners. This kind of inspection is not carried out in respect of post 19 provision. Extension of Area Inspections to the post 19 sector might give a better picture of the adequacy of provision available to rural people. It might be appropriate for the Countryside Agency to add its voice to those arguing the case for Area Inspection of adult provision.

⁴⁹ Countryside Agency. *Rural Proofing in 2001/2*. p35

⁵⁰ Lantra press release 13 March 2002

Inspection should act as a positive force on all provision including that in rural areas. However the pilot inspections of adult and community learning have thrown up issues that expose the tensions that sometimes exist between access and quality. The pilot inspection drew attention to the inadequacies of some accommodation, including primary schools, where adults had to use child size furniture, and cold and draughty halls (see p. 37). The lack of suitable space for adult learning in rural areas is a reality and the possibility of developing and purpose built accommodation is negligible. Often the choice is between unsuitable accommodation and no provision. Management and support of dispersed accommodation were also issues where performance fell below expectations.

While the inspectorate would undoubtedly hope that their criticisms would produce better investment in management, accommodation and equipment there is a real concern that with the smaller numbers involved in rural courses, and the risk to reputation and the possibility of losing funding as a result of poor inspection grades, providers might feel that withdrawal from such provision is a safer course of action. Without Area Inspectors to make adequacy arguments there is little to prevent this happening and no current system for managing it.

Lifelong learning support organisations

Providers are supported in their work by a number of established bodies whose function is to further the quality and extent of provision. In addition to the national organisations listed below, other bodies are active on a local scale.

Learning and Skills Development Agency

Established by government in 1995, the Agency provides services to Further Education which are intended to promote quality, lead curriculum design and development, and enhance effective governance and management. Publications include some rural examples with a specifically rural focus⁵¹, however we are unaware of any internal studies on rural issues.

Basic Skills Agency

The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) is the national development agency for literacy, numeracy and related basic skills work in England and Wales. Covering work with adults and schoolchildren it aims to promote the importance, and increase knowledge of basic skills; initiate and support the development of basic skills provision; and improve the effectiveness of basic skills programmes and teaching. The Agency has supported rural adult providers of basic skills over a long period but we are unaware of any specific recent work on rural matters.

⁵¹ ee, eg Fletcher and Kirk. *Student transport : unfair or just unequal; and* Learning and Skills Development Agency (Policy and Communications Unit). 2001. *Our Countryside*. Policy unit briefing paper 4. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

NIACE is the national membership organisation for adult learning in England and Wales. Its membership includes LEAs, colleges, universities, broadcasters, unions, and voluntary bodies. It undertakes advocacy and policy work on behalf of adult learners and prospective learners; provides information, advice and guidance to organisations and individuals; carries out research, development and consultancy; acts as a major publisher and conference organiser in the field and co-ordinates the UK's largest celebration of lifelong learning through the annual Adult Learners' Week. NIACE has a major interest in rural issues. Recent publications include *Landscapes of Learning*⁵² and *Rural Learning*⁵³

Universities' Association for Continuing Education.

UACE is the UK representative body for over 110 Higher Education Institutions in the UK. It aims to promote the interests of continuing education and lifelong learning within higher education; to foster and facilitate communication, collaboration, networking and the exchange of good practice; to provide a forum for discussion; to inform and influence policy; to promote and conduct research; and to assist with the dissemination and application of research findings. Much of this work is conducted through nine UACE networks.

Continuing Education in Rural Areas (the UACE 'Rural Network') is an association of individuals, mainly working in university departments of continuing education. The NIACE publication *Rural Learning*⁵⁴ arose through the network which has recently secured a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council to organise a research seminar series entitled *Lifelong Learning, Rurality and Regeneration* which will take place at Leeds, Nottingham, Sussex, Stirling, and Aberystwyth.

The Campaign for Learning

A national charity, working to create an appetite for learning in individuals that will sustain them throughout their lives. The Campaign uses a "cradle to grave" definition of lifelong learning and works with public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Key activities include Family Learning Weekends and Learning at Work Days. We are unaware of any specific rural focus for the Campaign.

⁵² Gray, ed. *Landscapes of Learning*

⁵³ Payne. *Rural Learning*.

⁵⁴ See case studies in *Ibid*.

5) Initiatives and support structures

This section examines the major lifelong learning initiatives of the current administration (since 1997), identifies their overall objectives and considers some of the delivery initiatives intended to operationalise them. These are then examined to see whether there is any obvious rural proofing or whether any particular challenges for delivery in rural areas are recognised.

These cross cutting policies and initiatives have a considerable effect on provider behaviour at any given time, particularly if accompanied by funding or funding regimes geared to motivating provider behaviour.

Since 1997, lifelong learning themes have been articulated through a complex and bewildering number of policy initiatives at a national and local level. Some of these are available throughout England, others are at various stages of piloting with the intention that they become national. Some are well established, others have been subject to review or revision to better align them with later developments, and some are in the process of development or redevelopment. One particular major programme (Individual Learning Accounts) was closed suddenly by government because of concerns about cost and fraud and is expected to be re-introduced in modified form.

This almost inevitably means that this section is illustrative rather than exhaustive in terms of the capture of individual initiatives.

It focuses on what we consider to be the critical five elements of government policy (which build upon the philosophy launched in the Labour Party's 1993 Green Paper⁵⁵)

- improving adult basic skills
- expanding participation in higher education
- workforce development
- exploiting ICT for adult learning
- neighbourhood renewal and combating social exclusion

The first four elements listed above are being (or will be) initiated, funded and delivered through the Department for Education and Skills.

Improving adult basic skills

“Our first priority is to help the estimated seven million adults who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, with 750,000 people achieving basic skill levels by 2004”⁵⁶

The Government has a developed national strategy⁵⁷ for basic skills “Skills for Life” and has set up a specific unit (the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit) to work towards the

⁵⁵ The Labour Party. *Opening doors to a learning society*.

⁵⁶ The Labour Party. *Ambitions for Britain*.

successful implementation of this strategy. The Unit has a national central staff and officers in each English region. The national programme aims to increase take up of basic skills provision and also to improve the quality of the provision made. Thus the strategy involves not only aims geared towards the recruitment of learners but also strands relating to the development of curriculum, materials and tutor training. The LSC's delivery plan for basic skills indicates how the Council will fund and plan basic skills to deliver targets in the sectors for which it holds responsibility.

A national freephone number about "Get On" courses and an TV advertising campaign encourage access and take up.

A number of reports, including "Freedom to Learn", "Breaking the Language Barriers" and "Assembling the Fragments", concentrate on specific aspects of the basic skills agenda. Two other initiatives targeted at developing effective participation strategies - the Union Learning Fund and the Adult and Community Learning Fund also have strong basic skills elements within them.

The priority groups explicitly identified in Skills for Life include disadvantaged communities in rural areas. Of the nine literacy and numeracy skills pathfinder areas (effectively pilots for good practice) identified in *Skills for Life*, five are metropolitan, one coastal (Isle of Thanet) and three shire authorities (Gloucestershire, Nottinghamshire and Cambridgeshire). DfES has commissioned evaluations of each of these pilots, two of which have so far (06/02) been published. In addition an internal evaluation of the three shire pilots has been commissioned and will be available in late summer 2002. This should provide some information regarding the degree to which facilities will be accessible to people in rural areas, and on the ability of the provider network to target rural learners effectively.

The Learning and Skills Councils and its local arms share a strategy and targets in this area, but without study of their plans it is not possible to see what profile rural areas have in the plans to develop this work.

Extending participation in higher education

"Our ten-year goal is 50% of young adults entering Higher Education" **58**.

As discussed above, there has been a constant drive to increase take up of Higher Education since the foundation of "new" universities in the 1960s following through to the end of the binary divide in 1992 when polytechnics and other higher education institutions were granted university status. Expansion has led to increased participation but the proportion of

57 Department for Education And Employment. 2001. *Skills for life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*. London: Department for Education and Skills, see also Department for Education And Employment. 1999. *Improving literacy and numeracy: A fresh start*. London: Department for Education and Skills,.

58 The Labour Party. *Ambitions for Britain*.

entrants from disadvantaged social groups has not shown proportionate increases. In order to achieve this new target real efforts will be required to address this imbalance.

Education Action Zones, Excellence Clusters and Foundation Degrees

Specific government initiatives in this include “the Excellence Challenge” which primarily addresses the needs of cities but also covers Education Action Zones including a number of rural areas (including Cornwall, Cumbria and Herefordshire and Lincolnshire). Education Action Zones work in partnership with businesses, the community and other organisations to raise standards in schools in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas in England, developing innovative ways to ensure all pupils succeed whilst discovering models for improvement which can be shared with the rest of the education system. Zone initiatives usually target school pupils themselves and do include programmes encouraging participation in higher education. Excellence Clusters are an extension of the Excellence in Cities programme (EiC) and cover small pockets of deprivation which are predominantly in rural areas. Cumbria is one rural partnership which has developed programmes to enhance pupil’s language skills and raise attainment through the extension of cultural enrichment activities. Other initiatives include “Aim Higher” a promotional campaign applied nationally; and the introduction of Foundation degrees.

Much of the activity to increase participation is focused on those still in the school system and involves the raising of aspiration as well as improving results. With all initiatives aimed at delivering numerical targets there is a natural tendency to focus on areas most likely to deliver large numbers. Rural Schools which tend to do better in league tables may well not form such a clear target for activity as those in large centres of population. In consequence, disadvantaged young people in such schools may not be subject to the targeted work that aim to raise aspiration in their urban peers.

The use of postcodes as a proxy for disadvantage is acknowledged as flawed in that some rural areas suffer marked deprivation but would not register as disadvantaged because of their mix of population. “... *the postcode premium as it stands is acknowledged as not entirely satisfactory, in that some rural areas are suffering marked deprivation yet do not ‘count’ as areas of disadvantage*” ⁵⁹ This is an area worth monitoring.

Because of the traditional autonomy of Universities both the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Universities own movement (UUK) will be as significant as Government departments, which directly fund only a small number of special initiatives in this area. In recent years all Higher Education Institutions have developed widening participation strategies reflecting their individual circumstances and supported by a range of HEFCE initiatives.

⁵⁹ Universities UK. 2002. *Social Class and Participation*. London: Universities UK., p4

The main elements of HEFCE's approach are

- additional funding in proportion to the number of students from neighbourhoods with low rates of participation in HE, through a formula based on postcodes
- a funding stream (aspiration funding) to those HEIs with the lowest proportion of students from state schools and colleges, so that they can increase their efforts to broaden their intake
- a summer schools programme, now in its third year which offers a taste of higher education to 16 year olds
- a request to HEIs to submit revised three year strategies for widening participation. The first generation of such strategies was commissioned in 1998. The second generation, commissioned this year, covers the period 2001/2 – 2003/4

In addition since 1999-2000 HEFCE has provided £7 million annually for a regionally based programme of widening participation projects, administered jointly with the LSC. These focus on collaborative work between HE and FE and other partners.

HEFCE and LSC have also developed joint proposals for an initiative entitled "Partnerships for Progression" intended to support the achievement of the 50% participation target by raising aspirations of school pupils and FE Students and strengthening the progression routes into HE including through workplace learning. The exact details of this initiative are awaited pending among other things the outcome of the current spending review but proposals envisage a formula base allocation of resources to English regions via associations of HE providers. The four primary strands of activity envisaged are:

- the extension of HE/FE regional partnerships and their widening participation activities
- support for the improvement of quality standards in Further Education and training providers with disadvantaged students
- incentives for workplace learning to provide progression to HE entry
- a national programme of pilots, research and evaluation to assess what interventions have most effect.

Clearly the effects of this developing policy in a rural context are not yet apparent. However influencing HEFCE and the LSC to ensure that pilots include rural areas, that small employers' needs are considered in the workplace route and that regional associations are reminded of the rural dimension might influence the policy in this development phase.

Workforce development, workplace learning and vocational training

"In 2010, the UK will be a society where government, employers and individuals actively engage in skills development to deliver sustainable economic success for all" .60'

This government's current interest in workforce development began in 2000 when the Prime Minister asked the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit to develop policy proposals. Before the Unit could report the TUC and CBI joint submission to the Treasury's

60 Performance And Innovation Unit, Cabinet Office. 2001. *In demand: adult skills for the 21st century*. London: HMSO.

productivity initiative (October 2001) made a series of proposals for skills development which fed into the Chancellors thinking on this matter. As a result, the PIU report (In Demand, Skills for the 21st Century) ⁶¹ was issued on the same day as the November pre-budget report (Building a stronger, fairer Britain in an uncertain world). The latter document contained a new vision of skills development while the PIU was asked to turn its broad analysis into a focused national strategy. This is due for publication in the summer of 2002.

In April 2002 as part of the budget documentation, HM Treasury and the DfES set out details of pilot schemes in six LSC areas⁶². The pilot areas were Birmingham and Solihull, Derbyshire, Essex, Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Swindon and Wiltshire, and the goal here is to test a new policy approach to support the training of low skilled workers in the UK, based on shared responsibilities between government, employers and individuals.

In this context the LSC's draft workforce development strategy (May 2002) has appeared at a difficult time - after the budget proposals for pilots but before the second definitive PIU study.

None of these approaches appears to make any distinction between rural and urban workforces apart from the wide range of the pilot areas chosen. However this is developing policy and opportunities for intervention through responses to consultation are still available.

Apart from the workforce development strategy there are a number of other initiatives related to lifelong learning that should be mentioned in the context of this report.

The Union Learning Fund

The Union Learning Fund has provided £27 million over three years for workplace project partnerships between employers, trades unions and employees to promote learning in the workplace. The regional distribution of union learning has been considered through external evaluation⁶³. It shows disproportionate success in London and the north west region. The density of union membership is a key contributor to success. The reason why density of union membership is lower in rural areas was not considered.

Although rural areas have high numbers of small businesses and the PIU report acknowledges that firms with fewer than 25 employees are significantly less likely than others to provide training, no specific consideration appears to be made of rural dimensions of workforce development in either the PIU or Treasury reports. The large numbers of very small or micro enterprises in rural areas and such enterprises' history of poor investment in training have yet to be addressed through the work of this fund.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² HM Treasury. 2002. *Developing Workforce skills: Piloting a new approach*. London: HMSO.

⁶³ DfES Research Report 282, July 2001.

Investors in People

This national Standard, aims to improve organisational performance through the development of people. As of January 2002, there were 26,424 organisations recognised as Investors in People in the UK, and a further 20,815 working towards the Standard. This means that over one third of the UK workforce work in organisations that are covered by Investors in People. The initiative has had a greater success with large organisations than smaller enterprises but as of April 2002, an extra £30 million was announced in the budget to encourage more small firms to take up the Investors in People Standard. There is a national target for the Learning and Skills Council to deliver 10,000 small firms (10 – 49), and 45% of medium to large organisations in England by December 2002. As at March 2002, there are 9,880 small firms and 39% of medium to large organisations working with the Standard. No studies are available which easily identify rural impact but given the numbers of small enterprises in rural areas it is inevitably likely to have less effect on employers in the countryside.

Modern Apprenticeship scheme

Modern Apprenticeship aims to provide an apprenticeship place for all who want one. Delivery and the monitoring of outcomes are the responsibility of the LSC and are organised by Local Learning and Skills Councils. The implementation of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme may be more problematic in rural areas because of the high proportion of micro-enterprises (see section 4). One critical issue is the requirement for specific elements of the programmes to be delivered off site or in separate training accommodation. Access to external training may be difficult because of transport problems. The requirement to include key skills to specific levels may prove difficult to achieve without trainees being away from work for longer than a very small business can support; the loss of an apprentice for up to two days per week for two years imposes a disproportionately heavy burden on the typical small rural firm. National Vocational Qualifications are also seen sometimes as less relevant for trainee and employer alike and there is a perception that the qualifications are overly bureaucratic. The working of Modern Apprenticeships has been reviewed by the modern apprenticeship advisory committee⁶⁴. As far as is known, there is no national monitoring which would enable analysis of specifically rural issues.

The Sector Skills Agency for land based industries (Lantra) is collaborating with the Countryside Agency in working towards the development of a rural craft apprenticeship scheme. This draws on experience of the Agency's New Entrants Training Scheme (an assisted rural apprenticeship in seven rural trades) and is based on Lantra's development of the Modern Apprenticeship in Floristry which shares similar employer requirements to those

⁶⁴ Cassels. *Modern Apprenticeships: The Way to Work.*

of small rural enterprises⁶⁵. This model should be regarded with interest as it may show a way forward for other apprenticeships in rural areas perhaps even outside rural craft trades.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

Centres of Vocational Excellence are an initiative located in Further Education whereby Colleges specialise in specific topics in which they are strong, and develop provision and good practice to deliver a high quality experience for learners. The initiative is well regarded and will be extended in scope by the LSC.

Of the 16 Pathfinder COVES announced in July 2001, 3 are specifically located in rural areas. Of these, 2 focus on agriculture and one on tourism post foot and mouth disease. Evaluation of these initiatives will provide a degree of rural proofing. However, the critical problem for rural areas in respect of this initiative is one relating to choice. Within a conurbation prospective learners have a possible choice of institution and may choose one that is a COVE in an area of interest. In a rural area many learners will not have any realistic choice in terms of the institution they may attend and thus are constrained by the area of expertise of the College - it may simply not be possible to choose to attend a COVE in an area of interest. While this does not mean that other provision will not be available and of good quality it does constrain rural learners from the possibility of being able to select best institutional practice in a way available to many of their urban counterparts.

Small Business Service

The Small Business Service (SBS) is an agency formally within the DTI giving guidance and support to small business in setting up and continuing their activities. Through its local Business Link service SBS includes an important focus on training. Business Link advises on training and development opportunities and connections with appropriate research organisations and delivers workforce development initiatives on behalf of the LSC.

The DfES runs the Small Firms Training Loans scheme in partnership with eight high street banks. The scheme enables firms employing no more than 50 people to borrow between £500 - £125,000 to fund vocational education and training. Depending on the size of the loan, firms make no repayments for up to 12 months. The government pays the interest on the loan during this period. There appears to be no available information on relative take up between urban and rural firms of this service or what proportion of firms approaching business link for advice are from rural areas. As with CDLs (see p 58) help was offered for any SFTL firms affected by the foot and mouth outbreak but there was no take up of this offer.

Exploiting ICT for adult learning

“Set up a network of 6000 IT learning centres around the country”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Countryside Agency 2002: *Towards a National Rural Apprenticeship Scheme* (internal briefing).

The Government approach to investment that enables more general effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) is manifest in a number of initiatives. These include an intention to set up a national network of ICT centres, extending access for pupils and teachers, equipping schools and embracing the challenge to enabling access to the internet to all households.

On the surface, information technology seems to be deeply attractive as a means of dealing with the learning needs of rural areas. ICT undoubtedly has immense potential in this area. Early experiences with tele-cottages have shown that ICT Centres with a multiplicity of business, domestic and learning uses can present exciting centres for learning and contribute to community life⁶⁷. However in addition to major technical issues (such as the cost of installing high bandwidth landlines in isolated areas, see below) there are major social considerations, particularly related to equality of learning opportunity. The CA's own study shows that ICT services in rural areas will rarely be *producer led* ('because rural areas rarely represent good market places for any kind of unsubsidised services') and rarely also *consumer led* ('because the people who experience service-related problems, and whose needs are therefore the greatest, are likely to be the least able or willing to access information and communication technology'⁶⁸) Publicly funded, public access facilities are therefore required. Several of the local initiatives reported have fed in to the new initiatives, which are summarised below.

Experience with learning centres exposes many of the same intransigent problems that affect other forms of delivery. New learners engaging with technology need considerable tutor support in the early stages and technician support is also a critical factor. The use of equipment in schools and particularly primary schools requires consideration of adult needs as well as those of young schoolchildren in terms of software and the siting of equipment and furniture suitable for adult use. These factors mean that "incidental" adult use is not likely to provide meaningful engagement. Strategies need to include the needs of adults in the development of provision from the start.

Some rural proofing has taken place in terms of a number of ICT initiatives but rural proofing of delivery of mainstream initiatives at local level is more complex. Among the main initiatives likely to impact on rural communities are the following

UK online centres

UK online centres are specifically intended to widen access to ICT to disadvantaged communities. As stated above there is a view that ICT has a great potential in meeting the

⁶⁶ The Labour Party. *Ambitions for Britain*.

⁶⁷ See examples of Staffordshire Moorlands tele-cottage and the Nottinghamshire 'Virtual Village' in Payne. *Rural Learning*. p33. A detailed account of a HEFCE funded project in Shropshire is given in Graham, L and O'Donoghue, J 'Rural Broadnet and the Electronic Village hall' in Gray, ed. *Landscapes of Learning*.

⁶⁸ Cloke, Paul and Nick Moore. 1999. *Information technology and rural services*. Cheltenham: The Countryside Agency..

needs of rural learners, and bidding guidance on UK online centres was broadened to allow for more rural projects. A specific initiative developing ICT centres in pubs was mounted in three regions (the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and South West) and found to offer exciting potential. An evaluation of rural centres is being discussed by the DfES and the Countryside Agency.

Wired up Communities Initiative

This initiative, which aims to provide households with the technology to connect to the internet, is at an early phase of development. Of the seven pilot communities, two are rural. Evaluation has not yet shown differences or specific adjustments necessary to deal with rurality and it is too soon to judge the effects of the initiative. Issues of tutor and technician support will be particularly worthy of examination in terms of sustainability in scattered communities. Discussion of the technical challenges shows recognition of the prohibitive cost of installing high bandwidth phone lines in isolated areas.

National Grid for Learning

Launched in 1998, this is a relatively mature initiative and is the Government's key programme to stimulate and support the use of ICT to raise standards and encourage new ways of teaching and learning. It sets out to ensure that schools have the infrastructure to use digital resources effectively, trains teachers to use ICT to best effect and stimulates the development of high quality digital materials. The national policy on distribution of resources includes a "sparsity" factor to help towards the costs of applying the initiative in rural areas where connection costs will be high.

The potential benefits in terms of lifelong learning relate to out of hours use by adults of the equipment. As mentioned previously, the real challenge here is to ensure that this intention is built into the provision of facilities at the start and that issues like tutorial support are fully understood. There may have to be some compromises between adult and school needs if real involvement of adults in these initiatives is to be a reality.

Supporting Initiatives

A number of supporting initiatives in this area may have a part to play in the development of rural approaches, although no specific information is available on rural dimensions. In addition to Ufi/Learndirect (which is dealt with in section 4 of this report) other initiatives worthy of note are the **E Universities Project**, the DfES's **E-learning Strategy Unit**, the FE **National Learning Network**. None of these appear to have any specifically rural dimension, nor are evaluations available to allow assessment of their impact in rural areas.

Learner support, neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion

Two major government initiatives relate to the support of learners:

Individual Learning Accounts

The government's 1997 election manifesto included a commitment to establish a programme of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) as an initiative to stimulate demand for learning by giving individuals direct purchasing power. Between 1997 and 1999 a variety of local pilot schemes were tested by Training and Enterprise Councils before the introduction of a national scheme in September 2000. The national scheme offered a public subsidy of £150 to the first million people to open ILAs if they contributed £25 of their own money towards the costs of their education and training. A discount of 20% was offered on a wide range of courses and an 80% discount was available on a limited number of IT and maths programmes.

ILAs proved particularly attractive to those wishing to access training in information technology and its applications. Importantly, open and distance learning was also eligible for funding – thus ostensibly allowing for learners in isolated areas to access a wide range of choices. By November 2001 2.6 million accounts had been opened through the national framework. A regional breakdown of uptake is available but no more detailed figures and it is thus difficult to assess differential impact in urban and rural areas. Access to guidance and advice obviously affects uptake and lack of such services in rural areas might reduce uptake but there is no evidence available to show that this is the case.

In October 2001 Individual Learning Accounts were suspended and then terminated due to serious allegations of potential fraud and theft. There were also some concerns about an absence of quality control mechanisms and an overspend of some £63 million. The operation of ILAs showed enthusiastic take up, but a real question raised by their operation relates to the proportion of account users who comprised learners who would have taken up learning opportunities at their own expense, as opposed to new learners attracted by this initiative.

In any new scheme the retention of open learning with public support would be beneficial to rural learners although it would need creative work by providers and would rely on learners having access to information technology at home or use of local learning centres being available.

Career Development Loans

Career Development loans are deferred repayment loans from four major high street banks. Sums from £300 - £8,000 are available for up to two years of education and training with the DfES paying interest during the training period. Recent data indicates that 41 per cent of Career Development Loans are taken out by people with a First Degree or higher qualification. We have been unable to identify any targeted policy or differential effects with regard to rural areas. However the Training Loans Unit has offered some help with regard to such loans for those affected by the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Take up of these has been

very low (only six to mid-July 2001) and there are no records of others in the twelve months subsequently.

Beyond this support for individual learners, a number of recent initiatives address issues of social exclusion and community development.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funds

The government's National Strategy Action Plan on Neighbourhood Renewal is focused on improving conditions in the most deprived areas of Britain so that people should not be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. Building on the work of 18 cross cutting Policy Action Teams (PATs) and putting into action their recommendations, the strategy concentrates resources and efforts on areas suffering widespread deprivation concentrated in 88 local authority districts. Of the 88 Districts that will receive substantial funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) the Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chests, five (Allerdale, Kerrier, Pendle, Penwith and Wear Valley) are predominantly rural.

Among the PAT reports was one focused on skills which used Peterlee (County Durham) and its surrounding area as one of its case studies where rurality was a significant issue in disadvantage. The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy is a long term programme: it is estimated a realistic timescale of ten to twenty years is necessary to achieve significant change. It aims to develop social as well as human capital. The strategies to be employed in such areas involve not only the training in vocational skills but also strategies to engage communities in planning and development of their own communities. Monitoring how resources are used in the rural areas of the districts to be targeted, as well as the consequences for individuals and communities within them will be essential.

The Adult and Community Learning Fund

The Adult and Community Learning Fund is a grant programme of £5 million per year over four years to promote innovative approaches to the involvement of new learners in education and training opportunities. It has a dual focus on general adult learning and basic skills and aims to develop capacity in community based organisations to deliver learning. The fund has awarded over 600 grants and a constant priority in the invitation to bid has been for work in rural areas. Despite this there have been limited numbers of bidders from rural areas and less than fifty grants have been awarded that have had a specific rural focus. Community Groups from rural areas have not bid to the fund in large numbers and the focus on disadvantaged adults has made it challenging for bidders to show how they will specifically target such groups in the rural context.

New Deal for Communities

New Deal for Communities (NDC) is a programme to tackle multiple deprivation giving neighbourhoods resources to tackle problems in an intensive and co-ordinated approach. It is delivered through local partnerships that include private and public sector

organisations, the voluntary sector and the local community. Among the many activities carried out by partnerships are a significant number focused on lifelong learning. As part of the 'six month' option, young people work towards a NVQ and thus receive some training benefit even if they subsequently lose their job. However the 39 partnerships funded through this initiative are presently located entirely in urban areas.

Regeneration Programmes: the Single Regeneration Budget

The government has a wide variety of regeneration programmes many of which include provision for projects and initiatives that involve lifelong learning including both skills development and programmes to promote active community engagement. Many of these programmes have an urban focus but the Single Regeneration Budget contains a number of programmes that focus on lifelong learning activity in rural areas. Examples in the sixth round of funding include *Growing Together: Thetford and the Brecks*, a 7 year scheme with strong adult learning components focused on Thetford and Brandon in Norfolk and the rural hinterland, *Communities First in Rural Somerset*, and *Northumberland – The Can Do County*, which has a specific aim of developing vibrant learning communities in the declining coalfield, rural areas and market towns.

An additional and important programme that includes lifelong learning elements is the European Social Fund co-ordinated by the DfES and Objective 1 of the European Development Fund where Cornwall is one of the areas covered.

Supporting partnerships

There are a number of multi-agency partnerships of varying strength that have been established with government support and that have a role in taking forward lifelong learning. Often involving the same organisations their inter-relationship is not always transparent. The quality and impact of their work is also varies across the country.

Local Learning Partnerships

Local Learning Partnerships are voluntary groupings that aim to deliver greater coherence and better co-ordination of local lifelong learning strategies. A network of 101 partnerships has been in place since 1999 with core members from local government, schools, further and higher education, connexions/careers companies, employers and trade unions. Following a ministerial review in early 2002, Learning Partnerships have been assigned two core roles of promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning and maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration. Learning Partnerships predate the setting up of the LSC and, in order to get a better alignment between Partnerships' activities and their local LSC, the £10m Partnership Fund will transfer in April 2003 from DfES (currently channelled through Government Offices) to the LSC's Local Initiative Fund. Many Learning Partnerships have wide memberships including voluntary sector and community interests. They have been instrumental in promoting a culture of provider

collaboration and have played a part in ensuring that the voice of the learner influences the planning of local services. Many are also positioning themselves as the learning arm of the Local Strategic Partnerships.

It is left to each partnership to decide what contribution it can make to rural issues. There are several examples of specific projects or activities in rural areas. DfES has commissioned evaluations of individual learning partnership activities. Although there is no existing national overview that would allow generalisations regarding rural activities, this would be relatively easy to produce and there are a number of known examples of good practice.

Local Strategic Partnerships

Local Strategic Partnerships are bodies of stakeholders that are intended to develop ways to involve local people in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods and how services are provided. Three hundred partnerships are envisaged, most being established on the basis of local authority district boundaries. In the 88 most deprived areas receiving Neighbourhood Renewal Fund monies the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is working with Government Office Neighbourhood Renewal Teams to support partnership development. In all cases the government has pledged the support of relevant local agencies, health, learning and skills, benefits, employment and small business to support and facilitate partnership working.

It is anticipated that local authorities will initiate partnerships with an intention that, once established, leadership will be found from within the partnerships themselves.

The core tasks of partnerships are: -

- preparation of a community strategy for the area identifying priorities and monitoring progress
- developing and delivery of local neighbourhood renewal strategies to improve services and narrow the gap between deprived communities and others
- bringing together local plans and initiatives (including lifelong learning plans) to provide a forum for working effectively together
- working with local authorities that are developing a Public Service Agreement to help them deliver local targets.

Partners are to include public sector organisations, business, community organisations and local people and the voluntary sector. There is an accreditation process which has resulted in 87 of the 88 Partnerships in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas being accredited.

In terms of rural areas the guidance to partnerships includes an indication of the need to work with Parish and Town Councils. There is an emphasis on the need to work towards greater integration of services, joint use of service outlets, use of modern technologies and

innovative ways of developing services and good mechanisms for involving village communities. Skills and knowledge development and local action to develop learning opportunities are key parts of partnerships' role. It is anticipated that the new emphasis on regeneration given to Local Learning Partnerships will align them closer to Local Strategic Partnerships and help bring about greater coherence. We could find no specific evaluation or information on Strategic Partnerships work in Rural Areas in relation to learning and skills but this might be a key area for investigation when the arrangements are more mature.

Connexions

Connexions is an initiative to develop an integrated service providing a personal advisor and advice services for young people on careers, further education and other issues likely to impact on young people's life prospects. It is delivered through local Connexions partnerships bringing together work from six government departments and their local agencies on the ground. 27 Connexions partnerships are currently up and running 9 of which are in predominantly rural areas with another 11 having substantial rural areas within their scope and the hope is that the network will be established across the country by 2003. The Connexions rural pilot in the New Forest will be fully evaluated during summer 2002.

The Connexions initiative appears to have taken the needs of rural areas fully into consideration and DEFRA sit on the Ministerial Connexions Group. The DfES' guidance for Connexions Partnerships was adjusted so that their business and delivery plans are "Rural Proofed" using the checklist and the Countryside Agency performed "expert reading" of Phase 2 and 3 Connexions partnership plans. The DfES will investigate the additional costs of rural delivery of the service and to research effective practice in rural areas. Connexions is also represented on the Rural Children's and Young Peoples Forum. CA intends shortly to let a contract to examine how far the Connexions plans take rural issues into account, with the aim of using the lessons learnt to produce a good practice guide.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships

There are currently 75 local information advice and guidance partnerships covering the whole of Britain. Originally funded by the DfES they are now the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council. Their responsibility is the delivery of information advice and guidance to adults. Core members are careers companies and Jobcentre Plus. Other partners may include free standing educational guidance services funded from a number of sources including local authorities and the EU, further or higher education institutions and regeneration projects. Recent evaluation of IAG partnerships indicates that many have broadened their base – new partners include voluntary and community bodies, employers, libraries, trades unions and probation services.

No studies have been done on differential rural impact in relation to these services but it is clear that there are less guidance opportunities for those living in rural areas due to

both transport difficulties and the expense of delivering such a service in sparsely populated areas.

6) The future: conclusions and recommendations

The central finding of this report is just how limited is our understanding of the rural dimensions of lifelong learning. With respect to the majority of apparent issues, good information (quantitative and qualitative) is simply not available at a national or regional level.

At the same time it is apparent that there is an enormous volume and diversity of lifelong learning activity taking place 'on the ground' in rural areas. Only a limited amount of this is ever properly evaluated. There are a significant number of policy areas where rural pilots exist, or where policy adjustments have been made, and where ongoing evaluation and monitoring is taking place, for example of local learning partnerships, *Skills for Life* pathfinder pilots, *Connexions* partnerships and ICT initiatives. These need to be pulled together and appropriate conclusions drawn. This would necessarily be an ongoing, not a 'one-off' process, and should be linked to the monitoring of local LSC plans, and should feed in to their review.

This section summarises the principal conclusions of the study overall. It:

- identifies those areas of policy/institutional arrangements where a review of existing policies may be required or where adjustments could be made to existing policies to improve their effectiveness for rural people and businesses
- indicates particular priority areas relevant to existing government policies (such as those of the Rural White Paper)
- indicates those areas where present knowledge or understanding is limited and unsatisfactory, and where further research may be required

The Countryside Agency's Rural Proofing initiative is still at a relatively early stage of development and may grow in significance as government departments and non-departmental public bodies become more aware of it and how it should be used. The first report⁶⁹, inevitably, applies the concept to policies which were generally developed prior to its introduction. As such the report's progress tables are an indication more of each department's readiness to engage with the approach than a real assessment of impact. In the case of the Department for Education and Skills, for example, the Agency's rural proofing checklist was circulated to central policy teams with a follow-up reminder. There has not yet been any accompanying staff training and development.

At a minimum, rural proofing should be able to influence the development of policies and inform their application. It is to be hoped that it will also lead to appropriate monitoring to assess their effectiveness and outcomes. It is important also that the initiative should begin to frame policy debates to include issues of concern to rural communities and that it should inform the setting of government priorities. More proactive methods may be needed to

⁶⁹ Countryside Agency. *Rural Proofing in 2001/2*.

ensure that the development and implementation of policy begins to deliver specifically to rural communities. Rural proofing is a vital ingredient for progress, but not the whole recipe.

In general terms the proposals we make fall under three headings

- To secure **more and better information and evidence** of how lifelong learning policies actually operate in rural areas and in different kinds of rural areas for different kinds of people
- To ensure that **lifelong learning policies** as they develop and as they are implemented take account of the needs of those living in the countryside and ways to monitor the effectiveness of measures taken to meet the needs of rural communities
- To enable **policies targeted at the countryside** to take account of the lifelong learning dimensions that may be involved and make them more explicit.

We believe that action in these three areas will assist development of a robust strategy for rural lifelong learning which would have the potential to assist the regeneration of rural economies and also help to build inclusive and flourishing rural communities.

Information and evidence

This report reveals a major absence of policy related information regarding the delivery and uptake of lifelong learning in the countryside. The Policy Action Team reports on England's most impoverished areas did include one rural area. Inevitably however, given the concentration of poverty and disaffection in urban areas, we know much more about what works and what fails in inner cities than we do about rural areas. If the needs of rural areas are to be adequately addressed, we need more and better information on which to base local and national learning policy and policy implementation.

Information is needed on which to build indicators to measure progress and achievement in meeting needs. It is important that the Countryside Agency's own Indicator 8, 'Education and training' (see p 17) adequately reflects the richness and diversity of lifelong learning opportunity and uptake and is not limited merely to quantitative measures of vocational achievement.

CA/ DfES:

- a) should consider commissioning research on patterns of adult learning needs and lifelong learning provision among scattered rural communities. This might include local area studies, evaluation of the effects of policies in rural areas, and mapping projects on provision and uptake. Research should build on existing (or shortly to be available) evaluations, for example, of local learning partnerships and *Skills for Life* pathfinder pilots.
- b) should undertake an analysis of the training needs consequent upon agricultural restructuring and diversification in relation to rural regeneration. This would not be limited

to existing land based training provision which falls within the remit of Lantra, who would nevertheless need to be a partner in the exercise.

- c) should consider negotiating with the LSC, HEFCE and others collecting data on participation in learning activities, as well as others (such as NIACE) who engage in participation surveys, to identify patterns of participation in scattered communities and the relative success of different models of delivery.
 - should consider whether and how the work of the DfES funded Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning might include work on rural learners, and the contribution of lifelong learning to human and social capital in the countryside

Lifelong learning policies.

Influencing policy and provision in lifelong learning will require a number of different and complementary strategies at national, regional and local level if a real focus on rural areas and their needs is to be gained. While “rural proofing” of policies is a strong lever, particularly given the requirement to report on results, it will be necessary to ensure not only that government departments themselves are engaged but also specific government units, NDPBs and those bodies planning at a regional and sub regional level.

Work from the two rural studies featured in this report brings out a number of themes that should be addressed in lifelong learning policies:

- the problem of boundaries, in particular the fact that strategic areas may not necessarily be appropriate for local conditions.
- the fragmentation of policy and provision among different agencies and the need to secure co-ordination in delivery.
- the problem of short term funding, and the need to secure an adequate financial basis for continued development and to disseminate good practice.
- the very different needs of differing rural communities need to be reflected in plans and proposals.

Lifelong learning needs in rural areas are as diverse as the character of rural areas themselves, and national policies need to be both flexible if these needs are to be met. In many cases initiatives need to be specific, targeted and locally generated. There is a wealth of such examples, some successful, some less so, of innovative and effective initiatives across the spectrum of lifelong learning needs. However there is a problem of long term benefits: many rural projects are short term, and after a final report has been written, little more is heard of them. It is possible that short term projects may even displace long term rural provision.

The scope and limitations of this study and the fact that policy both in relation to lifelong learning and to the countryside is rapidly changing, make it premature to articulate policy changes in detail, or to suggest here particular adjustments to the rural application of

individual initiatives. However we would suggest that some of the following actions may help to increase consideration of rural issues

CA/ DfES:

- a) should work to ensure that rural interests are represented on NDPBs and on the groups concerned with the development of planning and funding systems in lifelong learning.
- b) should consider how to evaluate the plans of local LSCs and local authorities located in substantially rural areas and in mixed rural urban areas, in particular to monitor and enhance strategies employed to reach scattered communities. Careful planning can begin to deal with the fragmentation mentioned above. They should also study the proposals of Rural Development Agencies Skills Action plans in such areas. Attention should be given to how plans foster local partnership and coherence
- c) should ensure that consideration is given to consultation circulars on funding arrangements for lifelong learning issued by the LSCs so that the case can be made for consistent long term flexible funding for rural learning. Present number-driven resource models need to be accompanied by funding provision that takes into account population density to allow smaller classes in rural areas to be economically viable.
- d) should consider the extension of Area Inspections to the post 19 sector in order to give a better picture of the extent and quality of provision available to rural people and to provide an input into policies for its enhancement.
- e) should work to enhance rural delivery of the Government's major lifelong learning priorities, and in particular, should consider what action should be taken:
 - to monitor the roll out of the "Skills for Life Strategy" asking for reports on specific activities and targets in respect of rural learning.
 - to work with HEFCE to map and monitor the effects of the drive to widen participation in HE on rural areas and to consider the needs of such areas so far as non-accredited university level provision is concerned
 - to influence LSCs developing workforce development strategy in regard to the specific needs of rural areas. This should include the consequences of FMD accelerated agricultural restructuring and might focus in particular on the training needs of SMEs.
 - to ensure that developments in ICT do not neglect the needs of rural learners and to press for a rural strategy that brings together in a coherent way the many government initiatives operating in this area
 - to ensure that widening participation strategies pay attention to the distributed and often concealed nature of disadvantage in rural areas, including the development of alternatives to the postcode system of allocating resources.

Policies targeted at the countryside

The obverse of 'rural proofing' for policies and provision in lifelong learning is the need, wherever appropriate, to make explicit provision for lifelong learning in rural policies.

This is particularly appropriate for the Countryside Agency, as the lead body concerned with the articulation and championing of rural needs.

For example CA:

- a) should ensure that lifelong learning considerations are taken adequately into account in the development and implementation of its own programmes (eg Market Towns, Vital Villages, Finest Landscapes)
- b) should consider whether its guidance on management planning and on countryside interpretation, as well as other publications should make specific reference to the interrelationships between lifelong learning and community participation and/or visitor information
- c) should promote a review of existing lifelong learning provision and potential in protected landscapes (National Parks and AONBs). In collaboration with English Nature and English Heritage it might also commission a study of nature reserves, ancient monuments and historic sites to establish the relationship between site based interpretation and visitor education and other aspects of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning opportunity should be promoted as an appropriate element of management policy for all protected areas

Working with others: towards a national rural lifelong learning strategy

The above areas are all potential elements of a possible National Rural Lifelong Learning Strategy. The Countryside Agency might usefully work with national support organisations and research institutions in the development of such a policy based on firm evidence of need. To this end the Agency might wish to consider the establishment of a forum with representatives of LSCs in rural areas in collaboration with the UACE Rural Network and with NIACE, to take such a strategy forward and to monitor its implementation

Interim measures

Action in the areas outlines above would contribute to the development of a robust strategy for rural lifelong learning. This would have the potential to enhance rural economies as well as to help build the inclusive and flourishing rural communities that are a central feature of government and Agency policy.

The proposals summarised above will clearly require further consideration within the Agency. The list is long, and resources may not allow all of them to be taken forward. In the interim the Agency should consider the following three immediate priorities for research and action; a seminar series as proposed in the final recommendation would allow the proposals above to be elaborated and prioritised:

- 1) **Data** should be sought from those involved in participation surveys to develop specific information on participation in rural areas to ascertain who, from these mixed communities, is participating in education and training and to what extent national patterns in terms of gender, social class and age are replicated or exacerbated in rural locations. CA and DfES should liaise with the LSC, HEFCE and others collecting data on participation in learning activities in order to secure appropriate data on provision and participation in scattered communities.

There is a need also for local area studies to be commissioned from existing research agencies. This should include analysis of the impacts of major policy initiatives in rural areas.

- 2) **Rural Proofing** should be carried out on LLSC plans focusing on the following issues:
 - How far is the rural dimension specifically indicated as an area for action in such plans?
 - What activities are planned specifically targeted at rural skills and work based learning, further education delivery to rural communities and rural community adult learning?
 - What measures of success are being developed to monitor the effects of LSC activity in rural areas?
 - How are LSCs tackling issues of coherence in rural areas?
 - How are ICT strategies reflected in the rural dimension of these strategies?
- 3) **Working in partnership** with other bodies concerned with lifelong learning in rural areas will help to ensure co-ordination of initiatives and economy of effort. As a first step CA/DfES might consider commissioning a seminar series on rural issues, with representatives of providers including FE, HE and adult and community learning interests and national support organisations as well as the major planning and funding bodies. The focus would include analysis of differentiated delivery by those engaged on the ground. Such a series might lead to the establishment of a forum charged with a watching brief on policy development in lifelong learning and its effect on rural areas. It would also inform debate about the components of a national rural lifelong learning strategy.

Appendix 1: Area Study: The north-east; lifelong learning in rural Northumberland

Northumberland - the regional context

Area, population and development

The NE region covers 8,600 km². This comprises the counties of Northumberland and Durham, including the Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear. Northumberland, the most northerly county in England, has an area of 5026 km². Within Northumberland are nine of the 15 Countryside Character areas in the region: North Northumberland Coastal Plain, Sandstone Hills, Cheviot fringe, Cheviots, Border Moors and Forest, North Pennines, Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall, Mid Northumberland, and SE Northumberland Coastal Plain, and part of the Tyne and Wear Lowlands. Characteristic of all these areas are low population, agriculture and other land-based industries, and whilst tourism features in most it is to a varying degree.

Northumberland comprises 58% of the NE in area, but only 1.19% in population. It has the lowest population of any English county – 310,000 - of whom over 50% live in 5% of the total area (in the SE corner of the county). Another relatively densely populated area is Blyth Valley (80,000) The remainder of rural Northumberland is very sparsely populated. There is a contrast between the relatively affluent rural communities in the Tyneside commuting area, and the remote north of the county.

Although there is currently no overall process of depopulation in the county – the rural population has remained within +/- 1% - this conceals an imbalance between growth in the commuting areas and depopulation in the deep rural north. Also, this must be compared with the average growth in rural population in the UK of 7.58%. Some areas of the county are the least densely populated in England, Tynedale and Berwick on Tweed local authority areas, for example, have only 27 people per km²⁷⁰. In some deep rural areas there has been a declining population for many years.

This low density of population gives a greater prominence to the small market towns, which provide a “crucial component in the well-being of rural areas and traditionally they have acted a focal points for commercial and social activity”⁷¹. In the remoter areas this essential focus for community and services is also found in villages⁷².

Economic and employment

This population is relatively older than the England average. Of working-age adults (59% of the population⁷³) a higher proportion work on the land – 5% against the NE region

⁷⁰ Countryside Agency. *SoC 2001 North East*. p 26

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Northumberland County Council. 2000. *Economic Review 2000*. Morpeth: Northumberland C Cl. p 37

and GB figure of 2%. This has however declined from 20% in 1981. The highest (and increasing) proportion of the workforce are engaged in public service employment (38% against nat. avg. 26%) The proportion of employees working full time is 68% (73%).

Business start-ups are among the lowest in England, averaging 8% (against England avg. 11%) but this conceals rates as low as 4% in the far north of the county. GDP per head of population is only 79% of the UK average⁷⁴. 82% of businesses employ less than 10 staff.

The county is characterised by extremes – of density of population, levels of learning achievement, and wealth and poverty “This presents a real challenge to those who would seek to build a learning society, to enable adults to take control and to advance their intellectual economic and social lives”⁷⁵

There are areas of deprivation in both the urban and semi-urban former coalfield communities, and in the remote rural hinterland⁷⁶.

Lifelong learning provision in rural Northumberland

Northumberland Learning and Skills Council

The Northumberland Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has developed an initial strategy for the county for the planning period 2002-2005⁷⁷. The Strategy does not address rural needs separately, but recognises that both geography and social deprivation make Northumberland ‘inaccessible’ in a number of ways.

The strategy is based on two broad principles. The first is that all development initiatives in learning delivery should be strongly evidence-based, and therefore needs analysis and data collection are early priorities. The LSC is collating much evidence from sources and projects in the county, drawing on, for example, the Northumberland Information Network which has produced high-quality information on patterns of participation and learning.

The second principle is that although there will be recognition of locally different needs and demand, distributed learning will be at the centre of the county strategy. The challenges presented by the geographical and demographic characteristics of the county are recognised as significant, and the objective is to build a distributed learning structure which is sensitive to local needs. This is in itself a major challenge, which if successful will make a valuable contribution to addressing problems of rural learning.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p 15

⁷⁵ Northumberland Learning Partnership. 2001. *Draft Strategic Plan 2002-5*. Morpeth: Northumberland Learning Partnership., p 6

⁷⁶ Ibid. p 6

⁷⁷ Northumberland Learning and Skills Council. 2002. *Local Strategic Plan 2002-2005*. Morpeth: Northumberland Learning and Skills Council.,

The strategy is thus defined as 'reconfigured provision based on the evidence of need and demand, and...of economic, demographic and geographical characteristics of the county' with distributed learning as the primary vehicle **78**.

Providers of lifelong learning (post school) are:

Further Education Colleges

Northumberland College – the county's only indigenous FE college. The main campus is at Ashington. The college has satellite campuses at Amble, Berwick upon Tweed and Blyth. The college has now merged with Kirkley Hall agricultural college, which is now the campus for land-based education and training provision. There is community provision in the villages of Newbiggin and Widdrington. A feature of the College is the 'Travelling Classroom' – a converted bus which can take up to twelve students at a time for theory-based classes, or ten for computing and information technology training. It is available for training individuals, businesses and other organisations, in rural Northumberland, who might otherwise have great difficulty in accessing high quality training and education because of their location. The College is well-equipped for electronic learning: the Ashington campus has 300 Internet linked work stations available for student use. It is a learndirect learning centre, and has an on-site hall of residence for those who cannot travel every day.

Newcastle College has outreach sites at Hexham and Cramlington and as such is a provider of Lifelong Learning to the county. These offer a range of personal development programmes. Both colleges offer a limited range of distance/online learning programmes in for example: IT, business, and sport.

Further education: community provision

In addition to the colleges the Northumberland County Council Community Education Service provides access to further education through the network of twenty schools in the county, amounting in total to 20% of FE provision in the county, and providing a valuable distribution of provision across communities, particularly in Tynedale and Alnwick**79**.

Higher education

The two regional HE institutions are the Universities of Newcastle and Northumbria as well as the Open University. The Open University has 900 registrations in the county, mostly undergraduate and the majority resident in Tynedale. The two campus universities offer complementary and distinct programmes of foundation courses and in the case of the University of Newcastle Centre for Lifelong Learning a large public programme both outreach and campus-based with approximately 3000 participants, including provision in socially-excluded coalfield communities in SE Northumberland.

78 Ibid. p16-17

79 Northumberland Information Network. 2001. *Further Education Funding Council Enrolments in Northumberland 1999/2000*. Morpeth: Northumberland Information Network. Section 5

Voluntary sector provision

The most significant voluntary provision is the WEA which has twelve branches in Northumberland and a large and varied programme ranging from traditional courses to outreach initiatives on family learning and confidence building. In 2000/01 the WEA delivered 52 courses to 541 learners in 21 centres across the county.

Co-ordination and advice

There are many other providers in both the public and voluntary sectors, and support for lifelong learning from libraries, community centres and other agencies. Information advice and guidance is supported and co-ordinated through the Northumberland Learning Partnership, with funding from the LSC and additional European (ESF) sources. Learndirect centres are based in FE and community centres. There are issues relating to the local knowledge of telephone call-centre operators, but a high volume of calls is received. The Northumberland-specific volume is unknown. The TUC organises a network of workplace learning advisers through the county.

Local impact of specific initiatives

Several examples demonstrate the diversity and significance of initiatives in the region

- **Young people affected by Drug Misuse and AIDS (1995-99)** A higher education community initiative funded by the HEFCE under the Widened Provision scheme (1995-99), organised and delivered by the University of Newcastle Centre for Lifelong Learning. This had the aim of providing community-based programmes of raising confidence and aspiration through creative activity in run-down ex-coalfield communities with major social and economic problems. The programme was successful and demonstrated a number of key factors including the necessity of solid partnerships, recognition of local need, dedication of individuals who are trusted in the community, and continuity (HEFCE 98/49 *Good practice in non award-bearing continuing education*). The issue of continuity is a vital one yet the short-term nature of funded projects militates against this.
- **Higher/Further Education Northumberland Project 1999-2002** A project co-ordinated by the Universities of Newcastle/Northumbria and Northumberland College/Newcastle College to encourage progression from FE to HE through information advice and guidance, including mentoring, outreach, open days, IAG including on-line. A project aimed at non-traditional students, which has produced a degree of success. The issue highlighted by this project is that the labour-intensive nature of encouraging non-traditional entrants is exacerbated by the small population scattered over a very large area.
- **'Project Curlew'** This is an ongoing project with the University of Newcastle Centre for Lifelong Learning and Northumberland Wildlife Trust as the principal partners. It aims to pilot integrated environmental conservation training and education for a dispersed rural workforce supported by digital technologies. The key issue highlighted is that workers in land-based industries require a range of skills, knowledge and understanding. These range from core work-based competencies which can be provided by the NVQ structure;

ICT skills; sector specific skills such as chainsaw training through organisations such as the National Proficiency Training Council; and underpinning knowledge and understanding that could fit within University lifelong learning provision. Charting a way through this training maze is a serious challenge for individuals, micro-businesses and SMEs and Project Curlew is investigating the way in which digital technologies can reduce barriers to training by, for example, collection of evidence for competency-based awards using digital images, video and sound clips.

- **Open University Widening Participation scheme** As part of its ESF funded Widening Participation programme, the Open University in the North developed a series of six Open Road 'taster' courses - two each in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Maths, Science & Technology fields - aimed at getting eligible students into HE for the first time. Delivery was via written materials and telephone tutorials, and each course was designed to take about three hours per week for eight weeks, with each student completing two pieces of written work. The criteria for eligibility included: those with previously low levels of formal education; lone parents; members of ethnic minorities; disabled people; and those living in remote/inaccessible areas. Primarily through a network of Outreach workers, a number of suitable locations were identified in which teams of advisers could run promotional drop-in sessions. These sessions were particularly well attended in parts of rural Northumberland – especially those held at Shilbottle Skills Centre and Stonehaugh Social Club – with the latter resulting in a group of seven students taking the same course simultaneously (for which face-to-face tutorials were arranged). In general there seems to be a real demand for this sort of project, with a very high percentage of attendees at drop-in sessions signing up for Open Road courses. Although it is too soon to evaluate the project as a whole, early feedback is very encouraging, with a number of students seeking progression to the undergraduate programme in 2003. Most gratifying are the individual testimonies of students for whom the very idea of HE was once unthinkable, but who now recognise it as a distinct possibility.
- **Certificate in Nature Conservation**, University of Newcastle Centre for Lifelong Learning This undergraduate 40-credit certificate has run for some 12 years, offering an accredited qualification in conservation. Students commonly are land-based workers seeking re-skilling in the environmental field, and the success rate for new employment is high.

It is clear that as in other areas successful community/lifelong learning programmes needs stability and continuation in their funding.

There is a need also for better understanding of the impact of community learning programmes on, for example, progression to FE and HE formal programmes, or on participation of individuals and the level of activity in community development.

Issues specific to lifelong learning in Northumberland

Northumberland as a 'Frontier state'

Northumberland is not only remote but adjacent to the Scottish border. Cross-border provision, which has many attractions for the delivery of lifelong learning, can be hampered by the differing providing cultures and funding methodologies of England and Scotland. This

'frontier' exists in other senses, for example between Government Offices and RDAs in different regions. The traditional North of England area that included Cumbria is being differentiated into North East and North West, causing potential difficulties for provision in low-population areas near the regional boundaries. An example is ESF funding for rural lifelong learning that would work equally well in rural Northumberland and Cumbria but would be very difficult to manage through two different Government Offices. The development of Regional Assemblies for the North West and North East may exacerbate this situation.

It is clear that fragmentation between agencies disproportionately affects rural communities in the area, especially the deep rural. A study of the above with special reference to the deep rural north of Northumberland adjacent to the Scottish national and NW regional borders would be particularly valuable.

Population patterns – large conurbation in SE corner, otherwise very low density

The population is small, and this is exacerbated by the great preponderance of population in the south east corner of the county (5% of the area). This generates a very uneven provision of services.

There is a double effect of these two factors: the rural south east of the county is relatively well connected to the services of metropolitan North Tyneside and the City of Newcastle. This rural population which can access Tyneside services must be differentiated from the communities for whom there must be delivery in the rural areas, where the focus for services including learning provision is either small towns or, in the case of the deep rural areas, villages as centres. The threat to the viability of some market towns⁸⁰ adds to the potential uncertainty for lifelong learning provision.

Another aspect of population distribution is the disparity between the comparatively affluent rural areas within commuting distance of Tyneside, where population is rising, and the depopulated deep rural northern section of the county (between Alnwick and the Border) where disadvantage is often great, and where poverty and deprivation are relatively invisible in scattered, remote communities with a declining population⁸¹. Provision of lifelong learning for these scattered communities is severely constrained by distance, remoteness, thinly-populated communities, absence of culture of learning, lack of connectivity and familiarity with IT, and the need for provision to be tailored to the particular local needs rather than generic. Within a community there will be particular groups with specific needs. This fragmentation of what might be termed 'communities of learning interest' adds to the existing geographical fragmentation and makes critical mass for learners doubly difficult to achieve. There is a migration of young people from the deep rural areas for education and

⁸⁰ Countryside Agency. *SoC 2001 North East*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p 5

employment reasons. The link of funding to numbers discriminates against areas with low population levels but high needs.

Patterns of rural growth are very uneven. Strong net growth in employment in rural Northumberland (in part associated with out migration of people from conurbations to accessible parts of Central and Southern Northumberland) contrasts sharply with the marked reduction in rural employment in rural County Durham (which has suffered badly from mine and factory closures)⁸²

Rural employment is strongly structured by gender - male and full time employment dominate in primary and secondary occupations whilst female and part time employment are high in the tertiary sector⁸³.

The north- east presents an excellent example of the need for lifelong learning provision and policy for rural communities to acknowledge the specific characteristics of rural communities. In particular, funding structures for rural areas need to be made more flexible to take into account the learning needs of small communities of learners. Present number-driven resource models need to be accompanied by funding provision that takes into account population density to allow smaller classes in rural areas to be economically viable. At the same time there is a need for more understanding of patterns of learning need among scattered rural communities

Land-based industries and land-ownership

The land-based industries occupy a relatively higher proportion of the workforce than in other counties, especially in the deep rural wards. This can be linked to the pattern of land ownership, where a large proportion of the county is owned by very large estates.

There are a number of consequences of this: a tenant culture, which militates against investment, entrepreneurship, training and up-skilling; a dependence on the landowner's attitude to training, services and education. For many areas of rural Northumberland, employment, housing supply and the infrastructure required to deliver lifelong learning in a village, such as village halls etc, will all be strongly influenced by the attitudes of large landowners and their ability to invest in lifelong learning training and up-skilling in difficult times for an agricultural economy. (This could also include the Forestry Commission, a major employer in the Kielder Forest area). There is a need to engage large landowners and tenants/workers in awareness-raising and development plans for learning among the tenants and communities of learners dependent on their land. This could be based on a survey of attitudes/provision of large landowners of community/learning to the people living/working on their estates.

⁸² Lowe, Philip, Martin Whitby, Alan Townsend, Matthew Gorton, and David Parsisson. 1999. *The Rural Economy of North East England*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Centre for Rural Economy, Univeristy of Newcastle upon Tyne. p55

⁸³ Ibid.

The ex-mining communities of the coalfield.

The essentially rural industry of coal mining created industrial villages at a distance from the conurbation, whose existence depended on mining. The closure of the industry has left these rural communities without a *raison d'être*, resulting in poor and unpredictable employment and social disadvantage, problems and lack of cohesion and confidence. The same considerations apply to the coastal communities of the north of the county, where the fishing economy has disappeared or reduced drastically, For some there is a tourist economy (e.g. Seahouses) but this is seasonal and only in some places.

It is clear that ex-mining villages are a special case in being rural but not amenable for many aspects of diversification such as tourism, and having specific problems resulting from the removal of their source of employment: this needs to be recognised in lifelong learning policy.

Socio-economic decline

The loss of old staple labour-intensive industries – extractive, manufacturing and steel fabrication – has not been matched by the successful growth of new enterprises. There is a residual culture of resistance to retraining/up-skilling, and entrepreneurial activity is less successful than in other parts of the UK. Business start-up and survival is low, the vast majority of businesses are SMEs whose training culture is very limited, and large employers tend to be low-skill (call centres) and with head offices outside the north east. The assumption is that high-level training is irrelevant to most local employment, with the resulting skills gap affecting inward development and high skill-based initiatives.

Policies need to address the reasons for the poor performance of business enterprise and entrepreneurship, and the low level of training investment by SMEs. Further investigation into the reasons for the poor performance of existing programmes is required, addressing cultural issues surrounding training/up-skilling and of delivery models for learning/training which fit the needs and circumstances of small businesses.

Distributed learning, including electronic delivery

The issues here are: to what extent the flexibility of distributed learning can assist in enhancing participation in scattered or remote communities; what kinds of distributed delivery are appropriate for differing communities; what exactly are the ways distributed learning can overcome barriers of geography and transport; how to avoid creating further unintended barriers to learning by not recognising physical or cultural difficulties (by for example inhibiting older learners, failing to acknowledge the increased costs for rural people, or the absence of evening public transport), or not recognising the distinctiveness of each rural community⁸⁴.

⁸⁴ Tulett, Caroline. 2001. *Rural Learning: An investigation into the barriers and solutions to widening participation in rural areas*,. Morpeth: Coquet and Wansbeck. p 6

“The average rural citizen has never heard an explanation of the value of information technology and telecommunications that made any sense to them, therefore they are not interested in spending a lot of time or money on it” **85**.

It is important to recognise the real advantages/barriers produced by distributed learning and the relative costs and benefits of different modes of delivery within a ‘distributed learning’ model which are appropriate to rural communities especially remote locations. The Northumberland LSC strategic focus on distributed learning will be an invaluable test bed for these issues.

Short term funding.

Many of the projects aimed at initiating and developing community programmes are funded by processes which are short-term. The issue here is the continuation of the resources for such work, where such continuation is essential if the achievements are to have long-term effects. The Widening Provision project in the Blyth Valley was funded for four years, and continues through valuable but very small-scale funding and partly supported by a large University adult education provision.

It is vital that lifelong learning policies recognise the necessity of sustained funding for some activities especially in areas of severe deprivation. A study of which kinds of provision/community would most benefit from longer-term funding would produce significant benefits.

Tourism

Northumberland is a popular tourist county, with 30% of its area designated as national park or area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). The public rights of way form a valuable asset to tourism⁸⁶. In some areas there is a significant proportion of existing employment in tourism (for example Kielder Forest). Lifelong learning provision can enhance the county in two ways: by re-skilling for employment in the tourism/wildlife agencies, and by offering learning opportunities to tourists. The opportunities for jobs and the economy are considerable; the RSPB estimates that through its activities 18000 jobs in the UK have been generated (8789 Eng), and visitors to UK bird reserves spend £12M pa: ‘Conservation jobs help keep rural people in the countryside and benefit community life. They help to diversify the rural economy, benefit nature conservation and enhance regional identity’ (RSPB 2002, p1) . Tourism has been severely affected by foot-and-mouth disease (see 9 **87**below). Farm tourism is poorly developed in the county, and loses business as a result.

There is still little co-ordination in education/re-skilling provision in different sectors, for example agriculture and tourism. The areas would be an excellent focus for an investigation into the challenges and opportunities for such developments

⁸⁵ Ibid. p 48

⁸⁶ Countryside Agency. *SoC 2001 North East*.

⁸⁷ Northumberland County Council. 2002. *A Recovery Plan for Rural Northumberland*. Morpeth: Northumberland County Council. p143

Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease

The outbreak in the north east was the third worst after the north west and the south west, while in duration it was the worst: 'first in last out' is the phrase used. The impact of FMD was, and continues to be, severe. The crisis emphasised the vulnerability of rural economies, and the link between agriculture and tourism. 68% of rural companies attributed loss of turnover to FMD, while small companies (less than 10 employees) which make up the great majority of the county's businesses, were worst affected⁸⁸. The deep rural areas suffered relatively more severely. An important service was created in the form of the Northumberland Rural Stress Initiative, including health, charity, citizens advice and other bodies. The impact is widely believed to be long-term.

The crisis struck at those areas which were already suffering from economic stress⁸⁹. The post-FMD Recovery Plan of the County Council emphasises this – 'It is only the latest blow to a community, and particularly a farming industry, which was already beset and fragile...it thus provides a stimulus to action focused on recovery from the direct effects of this disease *and* on tackling the underlying weakness and uncertainty'.

Key to the Recovery Plan are agricultural diversification, tourism, and community development. The necessity of lifelong learning provision, for individuals, businesses and communities is self-evident.

Recognition of the seriousness and long-term effects of the FMD crisis includes the need for new support programmes of lifelong learning to aid diversification, and better co-ordinate provision For example the DEFRA Vocational Training Scheme as presently constituted only focuses on farmers, etc. and ignores the interdependence of farming with other rural businesses

⁸⁸ Countryside Agency. *SoC 2001 North East*. p 6

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p 5

Appendix 2: Area Study: The south-east; lifelong learning in rural Sussex

East and West Sussex: the regional context

Sussex is in one of the most prosperous EU regions but this conceals significant variations in economic prosperity, transport infrastructure, social and economic well-being and educational attainment⁹⁰.

Politicians and policy makers in rural Sussex are likely to subscribe to the view that a major objective should be 'a vibrant, balanced and sustainable society where local people have reason and ability to work locally, where local skills and innovation are fostered to develop locally born and lead businesses, whilst also looking at how to encourage new and exciting business opportunities into the county'⁹¹ But there is little awareness in analysis of and policy proposals for rural Sussex of how lifelong learning might contribute to the achievement of these local sustainability objectives.

Area, population and development

East and West Sussex lie on the Channel coast of south east. East Sussex (ES) covers an area of 172,500 hectares and West Sussex (WS) 199,300 hectares. Both counties have protected rural landscapes: 63 per cent of ES and slightly over 50 per cent of WS lie within designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the High Weald AONB and the Sussex Downs AONB; re-designation of the latter as a South Downs National Park is currently under discussion).

Both counties are in the shadow of London with major consequences for many dimensions of social and economic life. The impact of London affects, for example, economic development, employment patterns, road and rail communications, commuting and other aspects of travel, house prices and other housing costs, and living costs and domestic life of many local people. While the facilities of London are often little more than one hour's travel time, opportunities are consequently closed down within the two counties. There are also substantial flows of people into Sussex for work, leisure and housing.

Urban development in Sussex is concentrated in an inverted 'T' shape running along the coast and on a central south to north axis from the City of Brighton and Hove, leaving as almost wholly rural two large inland areas, one western and one eastern.

Sussex (excluding Brighton and Hove) has a population of 1,257,000 (1999) that is expected to rise by circa 10,000 by 2011. Including Brighton and Hove, 62 per cent the population are of working age (aged 16 – 64) and 20 per cent are aged over 60. Sussex has

⁹⁰ Sussex Learning and Skills Council. 2002. *Draft Local Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005. A Sussex blueprint for transforming post-16 education and training*. Brighton: Sussex Learning and Skills Council, p11

⁹¹ East Sussex Economic Partnership. 2001. *Pilot for Rural East Sussex - An Integrated, Sustainable Strategy and Action Plan for the Renaissance of Rural East Sussex*. Lewes: East Sussex Economic Partnership, p2

a relatively low percentage of people from ethnic minorities; 2 per cent compared with a national average of 5.5 per cent⁹².

These Sussex-wide figures hide local differences. Some contrasts are between ES and WS. For example, in ES one in four residents is over pensionable age compared to just over 18 per cent in the South East and in England and Wales. In WS, 31 per cent of people are over 55 years of age compared with an English average of 26 per cent, and two in five households in WS contain at least one pensioner. However the proportion of elderly people is decreasing locally compared to increasing nationally. The total population in ES has increased by just over 5 per cent since 1991 to 496,200 in 1999. This increase is entirely the result of in-migration. In 1999, there were approximately 2,000 less births than deaths in ES. Sussex is relatively healthy in comparison to the South East and England and Wales as measured by Standardised Mortality Ratios.

Agreeing a definition and count of the population of rural Sussex is challenging. In part this is because of the complexities of separating rural from urban. Of the 750,000 people in WS, nearly 90 per cent live in the twenty-four towns and larger villages with a population over 4,000 and which cover just over 12 per cent of the land area. Over 525,000 people, almost 70 per cent of the WS population, live in the eleven main towns concentrated along the south coast and in the eastern and north-eastern part of the WS. Almost 235,000 people – about 30 per cent of the WS population – live in the small towns, villages, hamlets and other rural areas⁹³. In ES in the mid-1990s 57 per cent of people lived in the urbanised coastal strip, 18 per cent in the market towns of Battle, Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Lewes, Rye and Ukfield, and the remaining 25 per cent in rural areas. Three districts – Lewes, Rother and Wealden contain over 100 parishes and over 500 settlements⁹⁴.

There is also substantial differentiation at a more local level. Over the fifty year period to 2001:

Several detached groups of villages and small towns with easy access to employment centres and not subject to the severest planning controls have seen rapid population increase ... In contrast, the lack of population growth [in some cases a decline approaching fifty per cent] in the remote AONB parishes north of Chichester and in northern East Sussex is striking'.⁹⁵

Such contrast suggest rural lifelong learning needs differ from locality to locality and that policies need to be sensitive at often fine spatial scales. Some parts of rural Sussex not only have an expanding population whose adult education needs are served by local AE centres in schools and community colleges but are also close to the urban centres containing

⁹² Sussex Learning and Skills Council. *Draft Local Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005*.

⁹³ West Sussex County Council. 2001. *Shaping our Future The West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016, Background Briefing*. Brighton: West Sussex County Council. p5

⁹⁴ East Sussex County Council. Lifelong Learning Development Plan. East Sussex County Council, Lewes. Appendix 1 'Socio-economic profile of East Sussex, p. 1

⁹⁵ Leslie, K and B Short, eds. 1999. *An Historical Atlas of Sussex*. PLACE: Phillimore p56

other lifelong learning provision. Other rural localities are remote from urban centres, certainly for people without access to a car, and have no adult education facilities of their own.

This finer differentiation on the basis of wards is revealed in the regional report of the State of the Countryside 2001 (reference: see, especially section 4 Incomes, education, health and crime in Countryside Agency, The State of the Countryside 2001: The South East and London). The spatial pattern is complicated, although many people in the far east of ES suffer multiple disadvantage. These particular issues are recognised in the designation of an East Sussex Rural Priority Area (RPA) based on the rural wards of Rother District (all of Rother except Bexhill) and seven wards in the adjoining parts of Wealden District and including these areas' rural towns and villages.

RPAs are designated because they are 'deprived areas with unique problems that need to be addressed through a programme of support.' Although current priorities include both capacity building for local communities and social inclusion, the available evidence suggests few explicit links are made to lifelong learning. Education bodies are not directly included in the RPA management by 'a partnership of the key organisations involved in the economic and social development of the area'⁹⁶. There is a noteworthy mismatch between rural policy debate – which tends to ignore rural lifelong learning – and Sussex-wide lifelong learning debate – which often ignores the rural. Mechanisms are required to counter this lack of engagement.

One way of encouraging the integration of rural initiatives – such as RPAs – with lifelong learning initiatives is cross membership of appropriate committees. For example, educational representatives should be included in the management of RPAs and similar rural initiatives (and vice versa).

Investigation of lifelong learning needs and demands at local levels is important. This might be approached through a spatially sensitive supply and demand analysis.

Rural Sussex has complicated patterns of relationships with urban Sussex, the adjacent counties (including Kent, Hampshire and Surrey) and London. Adult learners, especially those at the edges of the two counties, may travel beyond Sussex to access lifelong learning. For example, some adult learners living in rural north east Sussex enrol on courses in Kent. It is also the case that rural lifelong learning issues are not contained within county boundaries: people in the rural Weald of Kent and Sussex face essentially identical problems in accessing lifelong learning.

Although the Sussex Learning and Skills Council is an especially important agency with an across Sussex brief for significant dimensions of lifelong learning, there may be a

⁹⁶ see <http://www.centrerural.org>

case for the cross county boundary issues impacting on rural learners to be considered at a regional level. (Note the regional wide role of the South East England Cultural Consortium, which includes lifelong learning objectives.) An issue for the future is the key policy decision of the Sussex Learning and Skills Council to use geographical planning areas each centred on existing (urban) educational provision.

There is a long established and continuing pattern of decline in many rural services including, for example, food shops and post offices. In WS, the percentage of parishes without a general store increased between 1991 and 1994. Poor access to services scores highly amongst the rural wards of inland ES with 17 of the county's wards falling within the most-deprived 10 per cent in England. In both ES and WS, in contrast, there has been a growth in the provision (and improvement) of village halls⁹⁷.

The relationship of lifelong learning to the (changing) level of other rural services is an important issue and a useful focus for research. For example, to what extent is the growth and improvement in the provision of village halls linked to positive lifelong learning developments?

Economic and employment

Much analysis of economic and employment information is at a Sussex wide level⁹⁸. It rarely examines rural dimensions. 90 per cent of Sussex (including Brighton and Hove) employment is in the two main corridors of economic activity – the south coast corridor and the Brighton to Gatwick corridor. Of 55,000 businesses in Sussex, 86 per cent employ fewer than 10 people but account for only 24 per cent of those in employment. 13 per cent of businesses employ between 10 and 200 people and only one per cent employ over 200. Sussex has 940,000 people of working age, with 780,000 economically active. This represents an economic inactivity rate of 17 per cent: one per cent above national average. 56 per cent of the workforce is in full time work, 27 per cent in part time and 17 per cent are self-employed.

The Sussex economy has grown faster than the UK economy for the past 7 years (2 per cent compared to 1.5 per cent). This growth has been driven by Gatwick Airport, a high proportion of 'hi-tech' manufacturing industry (20 per cent above UK average), the strength of the financial services sector and a growing cluster of new technology businesses in the Brighton area. Over 23 per cent of the Sussex workforce is employed in the public sector.

Unemployment has fallen in Sussex over the past 5 years. Unemployment is lower than the UK but higher than the SE region (Sussex 3.4 per cent, region 2.5 per cent, UK 4.6

⁹⁷ Sussex Rural Community Council. 2001. *Rural services and Social housing: Annual Monitoring Report to the Countryside Agency*. Lewes: Sussex Rural Community Council, and West Sussex County Council. *Shaping our Future*. Background Briefing p 5. Also available at:

<http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/PL/splan/backbrf/SPbriefing%20note.pdf>

⁹⁸ Sussex Learning and Skills Council. *Draft Local Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005*.

per cent). These figures hide extremes, ranging from 1 per cent in Mid-Sussex to 6 per cent in Hastings and in Brighton. Sussex employers report 4,000 skill shortage vacancies and 9,000 hard-to-fill vacancies. This represents 42 per cent of companies reporting vacancies. Sussex LSC has the fourth highest percentage of companies with skill shortages nationally (25 per cent). The majority of vacancies are at level 2 or below⁹⁹.

The two main employment sectors in rural areas are distribution, hotels and restaurants, and public administration, education and health. Agriculture and fishing provides for about 2 per cent of the jobs in rural Sussex¹⁰⁰.

Both the coastal strip and rural areas experience particularly low basic and ICT skill levels among both unemployed and employed people

Rural social inclusion and sustainability

Two significant rural issues that relate closely to rural lifelong learning are social inclusion (see p. 14) and the development of sustainable rural communities.

Rural social exclusion is viewed as a major problem by key local agencies. For example, in rural ES it 'is a major problem for many people ... with great variations in levels of personal wealth, access to facilities, work opportunities and relevant skills'. In WS the County Council has used the following definition of 'social exclusion':

'people living in urban or rural areas, who suffer a combination of linked problems such as lack of access to services and learning opportunities, unemployment, poor health and housing, high crime environments, low incomes and other factors which contribute to individual and family stress and lessen the quality of life'.

West Sussex County Council is concerned with both exclusion from services and exclusion from society. The strategy sums up the nature of rural social exclusion:

Frequently the effects of deprivation are intensified by the prosperity of the surrounding population. Rural isolation is a major problem for large numbers of West Sussex residents and is often hard to quantify in terms of standard deprivation indicators, but the problems encountered are no less significant: they include low wages, seasonal employment, inadequate housing, poor public transport provision, a lack of community facilities and reducing access to services. In last year's [2000] Government statistics on access to amenities (post office, GP, primary school and food shop) 33 out of 155 West Sussex wards were in the worst 20 per cent in the country. Although unemployment levels are below the national average (6 per cent in West Sussex compared to 9.3 per cent nationally) we have a large number of residents on low incomes. In rural areas in particular the range of employment opportunities is limited and agricultural employment continues to be lowly paid. 1 in 3 workers in rural areas experienced low income during 1991-1996. 68 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men earned £250 or under in West Sussex.

The county has a very large rural population and many live in an existence very far removed from the "rural idyll". Issues surrounding rural isolation are often understated and under publicised. The nature of this "deprivation" and the fact

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ West Sussex County Council. *Shaping our Future*.

that it is often dispersed over a wide area means that it is not as visible or readily quantifiable as urban deprivation. Key issues for these people are transport, housing, IT and access to facilities and services **101**.

There is a potentially significant role for lifelong learning to combat rural social exclusion and isolation.

Exclusion is usefully related to sustainability in work by the East Sussex Economic Partnership (2001). This report argues:

'East Sussex has pockets of severe rural deprivation, and finding ways of addressing the challenges of social ex/inclusion is key to the overall sustainable economic growth of the county. Local communities should be empowered to focus and lead local initiatives, and people must be given the opportunity to live and work locally. This relates both to the skills required to carry out jobs effectively, and also the physical opportunities: appropriate jobs and homes they can afford to live in'.

We believe that rural East Sussex can be a vibrant, balanced and sustainable society where local people have reason and ability to work locally, where local skills and innovation are fostered to develop locally born and lead businesses, whilst also looking at how to encourage new and exciting business opportunities into the county. **102**.

The document goes on to list strategic priorities, objectives, and key actions/milestones. Only a small minority feature lifelong learning and training. As one illustration, 'Ensure benefits of Information Technology are available to all businesses' is listed as one dimension of the 'Strategic Priorities to Foster and Support Sustainable Businesses in East Sussex'. One objective of this priority is to 'Explore opportunities for 'e-commerce' in rural businesses, and provide training opportunities to rural businesses (including farmers)', with the identification of two key actions/milestones: i. Collate best-practice examples of use of ICT in business, and ii. Establish training networks/ schemes targeting rural businesses and linked to small business support service. Elsewhere in the report there is little recourse to education and training as a means of building sustainability.

As noted in the following section, policies and reports devoted to lifelong learning in Sussex rarely highlight rural issues. There is therefore a noteworthy mismatch between rural policy debate – which tends to ignore rural lifelong learning – and Sussex-wide lifelong learning debate – which often ignores the rural. The reasons for this lack of engagement are unclear but it would be appropriate to develop mechanisms to counter it. Interestingly, however, at the local on the ground level, there is evidence of much good quality innovative rural lifelong learning work (see the section below on the local impact of specific initiatives).

101 Corporate Review Team, West Sussex County Council. 2001. *Action for Communities - A Strategy for Social Inclusion in West Sussex*. Chichester: West Sussex County Council. p 4-5

102 East Sussex Economic Partnership. *Pilot for Rural East Sussex*. pp 2-3

Lifelong learning in Sussex

Sussex Learning and Skills Council

The most significant and radical change in post-16 educational provision is the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (see p. 34). Draft strategic plans were published in late 2001 and it is, of course, too soon to assess whether the LSC and its policies will make a positive contribution to rural lifelong learning. The Sussex Learning and Skills Council (SLSC) is responsible for strategic planning and funding of post-16 educational provision throughout East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

A significant feature of the SLSC Draft Local Strategic Plan is the use of six 'planning areas'. With the exception of one area, Brighton and Hove, all include both urban areas (in which post-compulsory education provision is concentrated) and rural areas. These 'geographical areas within which the majority of post-16 learners currently live and study' also easily relate to existing structures such as learning partnerships, LEA boundaries and Sussex Enterprise economic areas'. A key issue will be whether these SLSC planning areas are an adequate means for meeting rural lifelong learning needs and demands ¹⁰³. Will they allow for the delivery of locally sensitive policies or rather confirm existing patterns of rural educational disadvantage?

The SLSC Draft Strategic Plan reports key aspects of the learning activities it has funding responsibility for. The SLSC argues: 'The totality of the provider network has developed in an unplanned and competitive environment, and operates at varying levels of effectiveness and efficiency. There are large disparities in funding levels and methodologies for post-16 learners across Sussex.' ¹⁰⁴. It is likely that these disparities, which of course long pre-date the SLSC, impact on rural lifelong learning.

The SLSC Draft Strategic Plan contains a detailed listing and analysis of key education and training issues in Sussex. There is little specific or explicit acknowledgement of rural issues, and no very strong signal that rural people and rural learners are disadvantaged in accessing education, training and learning opportunities. Exceptions to this generalisation include:

- An acknowledgement that 'The predominantly rural areas in the north east and north west and several coastal areas require imaginative approaches to engaging learners and raising attainment'.
- In the case of workforce development a recognition that 'attempts to draw people from the rural areas and pockets of higher unemployment on the coastal strip remain frustrated by poor transport infrastructure and costs.'
- The SLSC also indicates that it will in the future develop its demand and supply analysis to take account of rural issues.

¹⁰³ The definitive plan, appearing to show little change from the draft, was published in May 2002: Sussex Learning and Skills Council. *Draft Local Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005*.

¹⁰⁴ Corporate Review Team. *Action for Communities*. p 12

The question here is whether the generic Sussex wide analysis – and resultant policy proposals – is sufficiently sensitive to respond to rural needs and demands. It is simply far too early to have any sense of the answer. It may be that the operation of the policies will, almost by default, counter rural educational disadvantage. But if the analysis of Sussex rural social exclusion noted above is correct, there are specific Sussex rural issues (for example educational and income poor and isolated individuals remote from education provision but in close proximity to educational rich and income wealthy individuals) that may require specific rural measures. Interestingly, the SLSC has allocated some discretionary project funding to rural projects.

Are these planning areas an adequate means for meeting rural lifelong learning needs and demands: will they allow for the delivery of locally sensitive policies or rather confirm existing patterns of rural educational disadvantage? Have other local LSCs produced similar planning and resource allocation areas?

Nationally, a new post-16 funding methodology centred on the LSC is to be introduced. Will this be rural proofed? If so, in what way? What freedom will individual LSCs have to depart from rural proofing?

Rural Sussex lifelong learning provision

There are 13 FE colleges and 3 HE institutions in Sussex (apart from the Open University with its regional centre in East Grinstead in north central Sussex.) All are located in urban Sussex with the exception of the two Sussex agricultural colleges (see p. 38), Brinsbury and Plumpton. People living in rural Sussex are therefore forced to travel into urban areas to access most formal provision from FE and HE. Socially excluded people and communities encounter most barriers to accessing provision based in urban areas. Apart from factors such as cost and lack of suitable transport, there are other nebulous social and cultural barriers. Research indicates that countering social exclusion through lifelong learning depends on accessible provision located where people live and also that ICT as a substitute for face-to-face provision is often intensely problematic **105**.

In the case of HE institutions, particular dimensions of the funding regime of the Higher Education Funding Council of England (see p. 36) actively work against rural proofing. Although the HEFCE provides premium funding for 'widening participation' and recruiting disadvantaged groups, this funding is allocated on the basis of postcodes and is, by definition, rural unproofed: it favours urban areas and is a positive disincentive for HEIs to work in rural areas.

However, lifelong learning opportunities in rural Sussex are provided through other mechanisms including:

105 Gray, ed. *Landscapes of Learning*

- 10 community colleges in ES, mostly in rural towns Service
- 7 adult education centres in rural WS, often attached to rural schools, and co-ordinated by the West Sussex Adult Education Service
- 13 Workers' Educational Association branches in rural towns or villages
- Courses in rural Sussex provided by the University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education (see p. 41 for a discussion of the HE sector). CCE also organises certificate and degree courses – for example, a certificate in Field Biology and a BA degree in Landscape studies - with specific rural dimensions, recruiting students from both rural and urban Sussex and beyond, some studying for vocational reasons.
- Provision by voluntary, private and other public organisations including the University of the Third Age, WIs, Age Concern, private training bodies, and the library services (see pp 42-44). Some organisations have a specific rural remit: two examples are the Sussex Rural Community Council, which provides training for paid and volunteer community workers, and the Sussex Wildlife Trust, which provides courses about Sussex natural history for members of the public. It is difficult to measure the nature and volume of activity under this heading and the number of rural people involved.

There is a relatively poor understanding of the full range of lifelong learning opportunities throughout rural Sussex or in specific rural localities. We do not know how the available opportunities relate to issues such as sustainability and social exclusion. Is it the case, for example, that formal provision is mostly accessed by socially included people? Behind such issues are other important concerns. For example, what does it mean to be a rural learner or rural non-learner in a specific locality in rural Sussex? Who are the learners and non-learners? Are particular organisations – whether, for example, it's a U3A branch, an agricultural college or University CE department - more able than others to attract and retain particular groups of non learners?

A valuable research activity would be to map the volume of learning opportunities available in different rural localities, and especially those provided by voluntary and informal bodies and groups not in receipt of public funding. Such research should also examine the success and conditions of success of such activity in successfully providing learning opportunities for socially excluded groups.

In 1997 a working group of the West Sussex Adult education Forum examined ways of encouraging participation in rural areas. Partly on the basis of research with 150 Women's Institute branches in West Sussex, travel, reluctance to attend evening events, no access to a car and a divide between courses seen as vocational and for pleasure were identified as major issues¹⁰⁶. This report recommended the use of a travelling 'rural learning fair'; working with existing organisations such as the library service, using Adult Learners' Week as a focus; and using small rural towns as suitable locations.

¹⁰⁶West Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes. 1996. *Rural Adult Education Guidance Project. Unpublished Report*. Brighton: West Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes,; and West Sussex Adult Education Forum. 1997. *Reports from working groups. Unpublished*. Brighton: West Sussex County Council.

East and West Sussex each have their own learning partnerships (LP) – groupings of stakeholders of post 16 education. The West Sussex Learning Partnership (WSLP) works on the basis of eight geographical groupings (Networks), with four of those having a significant rural population. All of the provider networks in the WSLP engage the statutory, voluntary and private sectors and the four with a significant rural population have spent much time discussing rural issues. Although the learning partnerships bring together key players at a country level and are often ‘ideas rich’, having a good grasp of rural learning issues and possible solutions, they are ‘cash poor’, having minimal funding with which to institute new policies. Often LPs can do no more than support proposals from individual organisations or groups of organisations. The WSLP, however, has carried out research on rural provision and achievement in rural areas. A colleague in the WSLP comments:

‘It is clear that that rural areas miss out often because their profiles don’t press the right deprivation buttons compared to many urban areas. However the actual number of people regarded as in the key group can considerably greater and dispersed over a much wider area. We have done some work on this especially through the WSLP on basic skills that shows this. The continuing issues of transport, access to appropriate buildings, financing programmes with low class sizes while at the same time offering a range of provision, access to information, advice and guidance.’

Similar issues may be identified for the Learning Plans published by the East Sussex and West Sussex Learning Partnerships from the late-1990s and since regularly updated. For example, the West Sussex Learning Partnership Draft Learning Plan 2002/2005, makes little explicit mention of rural issues. One exception (under the objective of improving participation, retention and achievement) is the priority to: ‘Develop packages to increase the demand and supply of learning opportunities for adults with a particular focus on rural communities and disadvantaged areas’¹⁰⁷. Moreover, the most recent version of the West Sussex Learning Plan is sensitive to the generic issue of developing a plan that relates to local differences and, by implication, to needs and demands in rural areas. There is a stress, for instance, on the meeting of ‘locally identified needs’, and as noted below, there are many local rural initiatives

Local impact of specific initiatives

- Within ES and WS there is much evidence of specific rural lifelong learning initiatives. Some of these relate to particular national policy developments or funding streams, others to essentially county-wide or local initiatives from public or voluntary sectors. This section lists some of the most noteworthy recent developments. The diversity and number of initiatives is remarkable. It is unclear whether any substantial co-ordination across Sussex took place or whether those initiating and running projects were fully aware of similar past or current activities either elsewhere in Sussex or further afield.

¹⁰⁷West Sussex Learning Partnership. 2002. *West Sussex Learning Plan 2002/5*. Chichester: West Sussex Learning Partnership. p6

Many are project based. Note that a number of these projects are not rural specific but include 'rural' along with other socially excluded/priority categories.

- Rural mobile bus developing peer education and drugs education for young people in villages around Chichester and Horsham (West Sussex County Council (2001) Action For Communities - A Strategy for Social Inclusion in West Sussex Corporate Review Team)
- The West Sussex Learning Partnership is involved with or aware of a significant number of projects involving rural learners in the county. These include lifelong learning activity linked to a mobile library bus in Mid-Sussex, other activity linked to the peoples network in libraries and adult education provision being developed in the Steyning/Storrington area, and the involvement of voluntary, private and statutory bodies in several other WS rural places.
- The East Sussex Learning Partnership members have been involved in a number of rural collaborative projects. One result is the ESLP (2001) A Good Practice Guide to Partnership Project Work Within Adult Education, a publication that details as indicators of good practice: real collaboration, inclusion, learner involvement, resources, documentation, credit for learning, sustainability and time. Projects targeted a diversity of groups in different parts of rural ES including older people, new older learners with basic computing needs, women returners, a living history project for older learners, adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, and an ICT centre for a small rural community.
- The Sussex LSC has invited bids from individual organisations and partnerships of organisations to support areas including raising participation. Specifically: 'Enable providers to engage young unemployed people with low skills base and/or young people in transitory or part time employment in order to increase participation in structured learning. In particular, this should engage hard to reach groups for example young offenders or those in rural areas.'
- SLSC Local Initiatives Fund project from November 2001 to March 2002: Access to management NVQ training for the voluntary / community /not for profit sector. This is to 'enable managers, co-ordinators and other appropriate staff working in voluntary, community or not for profit organisations to take part in and benefit from high quality and flexible management training by provision that is tailored to their needs and that will overcome problems of access and availability. Supported open learning reaching out to those in rural areas, people with disabilities and others who would have difficulty in accessing college provision.'
- SLSC Local Initiatives Fund project from November 2001 to March 2002: Routing 4 U - The TechnoBus. This is 'To create opportunities and raise individual achievement of people of all ages and abilities in rural areas and Worthing/ Lancing/ Shoreham coastal strip'. The TechnoBus is a double-decker mobile learning centre sponsored by business, and fully equipped for up to 38 users with 18 laptops and seminar room. Individual programmes of study will lead to recognised qualifications in addition to Numeracy, Literacy and ICT.
- ESF project: Getting Our Act Together (GOAT). Aims and Objectives: 'To develop the local capability to identify, support and address initial basic skills needs within low basic skills communities and places of employment, by training community workers, volunteers, work place mentors and education workers using an OCN accredited course developed by East Sussex LEA with the Workers' Educational Association.' This project provides

'Training trainers from education and community/voluntary sector to further train 'barefoot helpers' to support basic skills development in community and workplace settings'.

- East Sussex County Council: Learn To Earn. A project aimed at 'The most disadvantaged people in ES and B&H. Lone parents, people with disabilities & mental health problems, workers over 50, refugees, long term U/E, those in rural areas & ex-offenders all aged 19 to 63. Helping them gain employability skills'.
- Wealden and Rother Rural Renewal Initiative Projects (all projects are for 5 years unless otherwise specified):
- Rural Skills Hub/Mentoring Skills 'To develop a group of entrepreneurs who will act as business angels and venture capitalists to business within High Weald. The project will enable businesses to gain advice and expertise and develop joint marketing.'
- Uplands Online Project: 'Teaching adults with little or no ICT skills to use the internet.'
- Community Leadership Skills (2 year project): 'A series of training events and supporting documentation to develop skills of project animators in the community.'
- Skills to pass on: 'Intergenerational skills project in which older people share traditional skills with young people.'
- Young People mean Business: 'Help disadvantages young people become self employed in businesses based on rural skills.'
- The IT Zone in Pulborough Library is a partnership between AE and the Library Service and has the support of the WSLP. Evaluation of the initiative indicates that it has brought in new learners to the Library Service in a non-threatening familiar setting.
- Higher education rural projects include some that are funded through ESF in ES and WS. At times rural projects involve webs of partner organisations and local people. One innovative and long established project, developed by the University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education, is the Bedelands Meadow Management Experiment. Set up in 1997 in a Local Nature Reserve with a Royal Society COPUS grant it involves Mid Sussex District Council, the local community and part-time continuing education students¹⁰⁸. Note, however, that much of the University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education's rural work has depended on project funding – as already noted HEFCE widening participation funding disadvantages rural areas

In these and other cases some of the key issues that apply in Sussex and elsewhere include:

- evaluating and assessing good (and bad) practice
- untangling the rural from other issues and processes
- sustaining activity (for project based activity this includes maintaining funding)
- replicating good practice elsewhere.

¹⁰⁸ Pilkington, M.C and M Stuart. 2001. Science for Active Citizenship: the challenge for Lifelong learning. *Journal of Access and Credit Studies* 3, no. 1: 4-16.

Appendix 3: The changing boundaries of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is something of an elastic concept. This brief appendix explains why the way in which it is conceptualised matters ¹⁰⁹. The institutions and policies which are seen as relevant depend upon where the boundaries are set – and these are both flexible and contested. It goes on to trace the roots of lifelong learning approaches. Next it identifies and describes how the current Government is pursuing its policy objectives in the field of lifelong learning, looking at the landscape in terms of the players and the policy initiatives. Initiatives are split between those coming from the DfES and those from other departments.

Definition and diversity

The two words ‘lifelong’ and ‘learning’ are often used imprecisely when used singly by policy makers and commentators. Combining them multiplies opportunities for misunderstanding.

Intuitively, “lifelong” should mean from birth to death. When applied to education and training policy however, it often acknowledges the pre-school and school years but focuses on the “post -16”; “post-19” or “post-school” period. In addition it may, but more often may not, be used in a way that includes full-time higher education.

Similarly, “learning” may be used in a very narrow sense as a synonym for schooling. More often it is used to describe the outcome of a broader process that occurs as a result of some kind of formal teaching, training or instruction. “Education and training” may be seen as processes within which learning may, or may not, occur.

At its broadest, “lifelong learning” is a term that recognises and acknowledges that such outcomes may also be the result of non-formal, informal or incidental activities that give rise to a greater or lesser extent to the acquisition of skills and competence, understanding, knowledge, behavioural traits and attitudes.

“Lifelong learning” may be used to describe everything from basic literacy to advanced scholarship. It may happen in many different ways and includes not only formal study leading to qualifications, but also workplace-led learning, community-based learning and learning through the use of new technology. Overall, it is an approach which sees education, continuing personal development and the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding as an everyday activity for people of all ages rather than simply an activity intended for people at particular ages and stages of life which occurs in specialist premises.

Although the way in which the concept is understood by policymakers in different parts of the UK may be diverging as a result of devolution, lifelong learning in England may be understood as encompassing continuing professional development, vocational

¹⁰⁹ A concise but authoritative summary history of rural adult education in Britain is given in Jones, WR "Rural Adult Education in Britain; a Historical Survey" published in Gray, ed. *Landscapes of Learning* .

preparation and training, adult basic skills provision, and what has generally been understood as “adult education”. It refers particularly to education and training undertaken by people who are returning to study having completed their initial education. As such, it is not used usually to describe the extended initial education of teenagers and young adults although it might including the learning of those below 19 who have been excluded or self-excluded from the education process earlier in their lives. While often focussing on people of working age, the concept may also be used to cover the learning undertaken by adults above retirement age – for whom education may be a significant way of delaying the onset of morbidity and maintaining a breadth of social networks.

This report takes a broad view of what constitutes learning. It includes formal learning which takes place in educational institutions such as colleges and universities whether or not it leads to qualifications, and non-formal learning that takes place outside the framework of the formal system but is nonetheless recognisable as an organised, systematic and purposive activity. It also attempts to include informal learning that takes place in the processes of daily living but which can still be isolated and recognised as learning and even accredited.

This acknowledgement of informal learning is not simply a linguistic point. It is important because of its significance in policy approaches intended to increase and widen participation in education and training. These acknowledge that those alienated from more formal education and training can be motivated to re-engage in education and training activities through such a route.

The current Government has taken a broad and inclusive view of the kinds of learning that are to be valued to the extent of being supported to some degree by the public purse:

‘As well as securing our economic future, 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 us 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 it brings’ **110**.

The roots of current policy

There is a long tradition of adult education within the UK and a number of general themes have shaped the development of current policies and practice. These include:

- innovation in provision — giving rise to some of the great successes such as the Open University

110 Blunkett, D ‘Foreword’ in Department for Education and Employment. 1988. *The Learning Age; A Renaissance for a New Britain*. London: Department For Education And Employment,.

- competing priorities — in which controversies over social purpose and equity have had a shaping influence and a ranging back and forth over the territory of the arguments about vocationalism versus general education, usefulness versus leisure in various guises
- the colonisation of adult provision — with the institutions, often innovative, for adults and/or working class people being taken over by young people and/or the middle classes
- reverse colonisation — the absence of regulatory restrictions on age ranges in both Further and Higher Education allowing a kind of reverse colonisation, so that by the end of the 1980s adults formed a majority in both sectors
- the persistence of structures and funding mechanisms suitable to full-time young students in many institutions long after these became a minority of students
- the persistent raising by adult educators of the questions ‘who participates?’ and ‘who is excluded?’

Since James Callaghan’s ‘Ruskin’ speech in the 1970s¹¹¹ and particularly during the Thatcher administrations, a broad political consensus grew that Britain could not meet its skill needs solely by focusing on the preparation of young people newly entering the labour force. By the late 1980s, following a decade of high unemployment, the Conservative government articulated an approach described as “lifelong learning”. This recognised that the country would need to foster a learning workforce and include the development of the skills of hitherto marginalised groups if Britain was to maintain its share of increasingly global markets. An expansion of publicly-funded training was critical – not least because of high levels of registered unemployment and, given an antipathy towards policy solutions funded from the public purse, employers and individuals were exhorted and offered incentives to meet more of the costs of this training.

To encourage this expansion Training and Enterprise Councils were established to replace much of the activity of an earlier quango known, for most of its existence, as the Manpower Services Commission. Based on a north American model of Private Industry Councils, TECs were local employer-led bodies which were given a role to secure the delivery of publicly funded training provision for adults and young people and also to play a strategic planning role and to encourage and promote closer links between education and industry at local level.

The Further and Higher Education Act (1992) removed Further Education colleges (including sixth form colleges) from the control of Local Authorities and established them as independent corporations as well as setting up a national funding body for Further Education in England. In time this agency recognised the need to widen participation in post-school learning and laid the foundations for an expansion and improvement in educational opportunities for adults. The election of a new government in 1997 provided further impetus for a new approach which re-balanced colleges’ concern for the skills agenda with a concern

¹¹¹ Callaghan, James, A N. 1976. *Towards a National Debate. Prime Ministers Speech at Ruskin College, Oxford.* <http://education.guardian.co.uk/thegreatdebate/story>.

to combat social exclusion, placing the non-economic benefits of learning firmly back on the agenda. Meanwhile, participation in higher education expanded rapidly in the years to 1997.

During this period “lifelong learning” emerged as a concept which had straddled social and economic policy discourses.

The debate about access to learning was, however, largely focused on opportunity being made available to those without educational advantages. Little was done to unpack the differences in opportunity available to town and country dwellers. Although the funding formula for Further Education in Wales contained an element to compensate for the higher costs of rural delivery, in England the Further Education Funding Council never recognised the levels of greater costs incurred in making provision in rural areas.

The recent period: 1997 - 2001

Post-school education policy outside of higher education was an important, if under-reported, element of the 1997-2001 government’s activity. In addition to the delivery of two important manifesto commitments to establish a University for Industry (now trading as learndirect) and to set up a million Individual Learning Accounts, the administration commissioned a wide overview of lifelong learning through the work of a its new National Advisory Committee for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. In its first reports¹¹² it set out a vision, much of which was developed into a green paper (The Learning Age, 1998) which proposed the abolition of both TECs and the FEFC to establish a new Learning and Skills Council, responsible for funding all post-16 education and training outside universities (including school sixth forms) and articulated a broad, inclusive vision. The proposals eventually resulted in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 which established the Council as the single largest non-departmental public body in England with an annual budget of more than £6bn.

At its broadest, the aims of Government during the 1997-2001 period were to:

- create a demand for recurrent learning throughout life for both economic and social purposes
- develop a responsive, flexible and high quality education and training system in which opportunities to learn are widely available at times and places to suit everyone, whether as formal courses or through the community and the workplace.

The creation of a “learning society” was seen as a responsibility to be shared between the state, employers and individuals. Since lifelong learning was not an “initiative” of Government but a general policy approach, a wide range of partners were and are involved in its delivery and facilitation. The most obvious are publicly-funded ‘providers’ (such as colleges, universities, schools, local authority adult education services). In addition there are private and voluntary sector training providers; agencies offering information, advice and

¹¹² National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. 1997. *Learning for the Twenty-First Century. First report.* First Report. London: Department For Education And Employment.

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guidance; employers and trade unions; cultural institutions such as libraries, theatres,
museums and broadcasters; community organisations and a range of healthcare and welfare
bodies.

Appendix 4: Lifelong learning in protected landscapes and conservation sites

Protected areas (defined as places with statutory or *de facto* measures in place to protect the natural or cultural resource) cover over 30% of the land surface of England. Increasingly the management emphasis has shifted from resource protection (and in the case of National Parks, access and Protected areas may be divided into two broad categories; protected landscapes and conservation sites.

Protected landscapes

Protected landscapes include 10 National Parks, together with the Norfolk Broads and (and in due course the New Forest and the South Downs) covering some 11% of the countryside, 37 AONBs (covering a further 17% and almost 25% in the South-East, and over 60% in east Sussex) and Heritage Coast, as well as planning designations such as Green Belt. They are a statutory responsibility of the Countryside Agency, nationally through its Finest Landscapes team. The 1995 Environment Act reaffirmed the duty of National Park Authorities to promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities, and it also introduced a new requirement to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities. Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, both functions are now also a duty of authorities (local authorities or Conservation Boards) within AONBs. Lifelong learning (both for visitors and for local residents) is clearly a direct element of 'understanding and enjoyment and an integral element in social and economic well-being. The Agency's management planning guidelines for National Parks¹¹³, like those for AONBs¹¹⁴ reaffirm life long learning as an objective of management, but do not give further policy or other guidance as to how this might be achieved.

Conservation sites

Conservation sites include areas such as nature reserves, ancient monuments and historic buildings. Their statutory protection e.g. as National Nature Reserve (NNR), or as Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) falls under the remit respectively of English Nature or of English Heritage. Listed buildings are in addition afforded protection by local planning authorities through planning legislation, and local authorities are able in addition to apply various levels of designation and protection to small areas for amenity, architectural or nature conservation purposes. However there are also a very large number of non statutorily protected sites (in addition to those with formal designations) in private ownership or management, particularly by County Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, and other conservation organisations.

¹¹³ Countryside Commission and Countryside Council for Wales. 1997. *National Park Management Plans Guidance*. CCP: 525. Cheltenham: Countryside Commission.

¹¹⁴ Clarke, Richard and David Mount. 2001. *AONB Management Plans: A Guide*. CA: 23. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

Conservation management is often complemented by interpretation (primarily aimed at casual visitors) which may range from a blue plaque, interpretation board or leaflet, to more elaborate facilities which may sometimes include more formal educational provision for organised parties. The Countryside Agency's site management planning guidelines **115** (which cover all categories of rural site, from nature reserves to village greens) make explicit reference to the need to consider education and interpretation, but do not go further to indicate how this might be done. Explicit provision for lifelong learning ranges from the non-existent to the elaborate and varies greatly between organisation. For example, English Nature does not have an educational policy and there has been no national study of the educational use of nature reserves since 1986 **116**. However education is becoming an increasingly significant element of management practice (although a 1994 Audit Commission report was critical of their management for being often elitist, and unwelcoming to visitors **117**). The lack of formal policies means that there is a great deal of diversity in provision between conservation sites. This has allowed some exciting individual initiatives usually as a consequence of the enthusiasm of individual site managers. However the absence of area planning means that there is often no relation between the location of provision and its appropriateness, either in terms of site quality, or in relation to the needs of potential visitors. It also means that there is little, if any, evaluation of interpretive and educational provision. By contrast, English Heritage has a very well developed philosophy of and provision for educational activities. Although these are directed primarily at school children, publications and site based interpretation include a wealth of material of general interest to adults.

115 Clarke, Richard and David Mount. 1998. *Management Plans and Planning; A Guide*. CCP: 527. Cheltenham: Countryside Commission.

116 Spouncer, C. 1986. *The Use of National Nature Reserves for Education*. Peterborough: Nature Conservancy Council. Internal Report.

117 National Audit Office. 1994. *Protecting and Managing Sites of Special Scientific Interest*. HC: 379. London: HMSO.

Appendix 5: Details of contributors

- Richard Clarke** Senior Lecturer in Conservation and Head of the School of Social and Natural Sciences within the Faculty of Continuing Education at Birkbeck College. His teaching and research interests focus on rural policy including the relationship between landscape protection and sustainable development, both within the UK and at a European level. He is the author with David Mount of the Countryside Agency's guidance on AONB planning and the Countryside Commission guidance on site management planning. At the University's Centre for European Protected Area Research (CEPAR), he is Course Director of the Masters' programme in Protected Area Management and of the Diploma in Countryside Management. He is currently a member of the Technical Board of the EU Leonardo TOPAS (Training of Protected Area Staffs) project. He has wide experience of training and consultancy for bodies such as The National Trust and English Nature.
- Sue Cara** Associate Director (Programmes and Policy) at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), where she leads on NIACE's Adult and Community Learning Fund and NIACE's work in the regions. Prior to this, she was the Principal Adult Education Officer for Norfolk running a directly delivered service with over 30,000 students involved in both FEFC funded and non-accredited programmes. Since being at NIACE she has carried out project work for the BBC, HEFCE and for the DfES, the latter in connection with the development of Learning City Initiatives in Britain. Sue has been a board member of the Further Education Development Agency, a member of the FEFC's Consultative Group on External Institutions and served on the DfES's Further Education Student Support Advisory Group. She has recently been seconded to the Learning and Skills Council for work on transition issues in adult and community learning and is a member of the LSC's interim National Rates Advisory Group.
- Fred Gray** Professor of Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. From 1991 until December 2001 he was the Director of the University's Centre for Continuing Education. He has a special interest in lifelong learning in rural contexts, and in the relationship between lifelong learning, history and 'sense of place'. He is co-convenor of the University's landscape studies programme, and he serves on a number of local and regional committees including the W Sussex Adult Education forum. He is past convenor of the Rural Network of the Universities Association for Continuing Education (UACE). He has a number of relevant publications in the area and is the editor of the forthcoming (July 2002) book on Lifelong Learning in Rural Communities published by NIACE.
- Sue Jackson** Lecturer in Lifelong Learning and Citizenship in the Faculty of Continuing Education at Birkbeck College. She is course director of a range of Certificates and postgraduate Diploma and MA in Lifelong Learning and of the Certificate in Teaching in Lifelong Learning. Sue's particular include issues of social class, ethnicity and culture, as well as gender and education and she has published widely on these and other educational issues. Sue is active in several networks, including NIACE, UACE and SCUTREA (Standing Committee on Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults) including The Wider Benefits of Learning; The Institute for Feminist Research and Theory; the Gender and Education Association; the Women in Higher Education Network; and the Gender Research Forum.

Bill Jones

Professor of Lifelong Learning at the University of Newcastle. He is Director of the University's Centre for Lifelong Learning, which has long experience of providing outreach programmes for the rural communities of the North East. He has a personal interest in rural lifelong learning and its associated issues of accessibility and relevance to local needs. He is working closely with the Northumberland LSC on implementing their strategy for rural learners. He is a member of the UACE Rural Network, and a contributor to the forthcoming book: Lifelong Learning in Rural Communities. He is active at national level in university lifelong learning policy matters and is Secretary Elect of UACE.

David Mount

CEPAR Associate and freelance professional, with extensive expertise and experience in rural training and development, applied research, and policy development. David is director of the Countryside Training Partnership which currently delivers the Countryside Agency's External Training Programme. Individual contracts for the Agency include preparation (together with Richard Clarke) of the Agency's AONB Management Planning Guidance (CA23, November 2001) following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Other clients include the Alfred McAlpine Group, the Peak District National Park Authority and the University of Leeds.

Tom Schuller

Dean of the Faculty of Continuing Education and Professor of Lifelong Learning at Birkbeck, University of London. Previously Director of the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Edinburgh, he has worked also at the Universities of Glasgow and Warwick, and for four years at OECD in Paris. He has a particular interest in life course distribution of learning opportunities, with books on Life After Work (with Michael Young), Part-time Higher Education in Scotland (with David Raffae and others) and Social Capital : Critical Perspectives (edited with Stephen Baron and John Field, OUP 2000). He is co-director of the DfES-funded research centre on the Wider Benefits of Learning, based jointly at Birkbeck and the Institute of Education; a governor of the Working Men's College (for men and women); and has been a member of several national Advisory Groups on issues relating to lifelong learning, including the Fryer Committee which led to The Learning Age.

Alastair Thomson

NIACE's Policy and Development Officer, currently responsible for policy coherence, parliamentary liaison and advocacy. He leads on work-place learning; guidance and widening participation in Higher Education. During his time at NIACE he has undertaken or led assignments for the TUC, the Netherlands Economic Institute, the Ford Motor Company, and for Coopers and Lybrand, as well as for a range of public bodies and government. Within Europe, Alastair is an elected vice-president of ERDI, and Board member of the journal "Lifelong Learning in Europe" (KVS Foundation, Helsinki, Finland). He has led a four country Leonardo project on employee development schemes.

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