Putting ‘a foot in the door’ for Continuing Education in the UK: the case for its retention; strategies for its survival

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The commercialisation of the British higher education sector

- International students and their families brought £26 billion into the UK economy last year.
- Student fees generated nearly £16 billion for the sector in 2016
- Research generated nearly £8 billion
- Each year, universities add £21.5 billion directly to the UK’s gross national product
- Universities contribute £95 billion to the UK economy, and support 940,000 jobs

(Universities UK, 2018)
Expansion of HE

- From 2006-7 to 2015-16 the numbers of entrants onto full-time first degree courses has increased by 31.2%
- Numbers on postgraduate taught courses rose by 30.5%
- Number on postgraduate research courses by 25.7%
- Student numbers reached a record high in 2015-16
Collapse of part-time, mature student numbers

- 40,000 part-time places have been lost from the sector since 2012 (when tuition fees trebled)
- Between 2010 and 2015 a 51% decline in part-time student numbers, from 216,000 to 106,000
- The Open University has experienced a 63% drop in its enrollments over the same period
- Largest percentage drop amongst those over the age of 35; from 95,000 in 2010 to 39,000 in 2015
- Closure of centres for/or lifelong learning
- Loss of continuing education programmes

(Universities UK, 2018)
The place of ‘lifelong learning’: a historical view

- The Workers Educational Association (established in 1903)
- Post WWII state commitment to ‘cradle-to-grave’ learning
- Rise of information technologies in 1980s; digitisation of industries
- 1972 UNESCO report *Learning to Be*
- The Manpower Service Commission
- The Open University (established in 1969)
- University extramural studies
The ‘four pillars’ of lifelong learning

- Learning to know (knowledge and understanding)
- Learning to do (skills and capabilities)
- Learning to live together (social cohesion)
- Learning to be (self-realisation and fulfilment)

(Delors, J., Learning: the Treasure Within, UNESCO 1996)
Three types of ‘skill’

- Skills of direct relevance to job market entry
- ‘Merit skills’ that are of more generic workplace relevance
- Personal skills that are of benefit or enjoyment for the individual only

(Bynner 2016; Smethurst 1995)
Benefits of continuing education

- Health and well-being benefits

- ‘Embedded vocationalism’ that ensures local, cultural and effective workplace integration for skills-oriented programmes

- Social inclusion (covering the integration of newly settled migrant communities, citizenship agendas, digital literacy, sustainable development, community relations etc.)
Continuing Education strategies for survival

- Research impact
- Commercial value
- Partnerships
- Widening participation
- Self-sustaining status
- Student engagement