

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