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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY PROVISION FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Local Education Authority (LEA) provision for adult education in the United Kingdom since 1944 is reviewed. Such a review necessarily involves a clarification of the term 'adult education' and its relationship to such other concepts as 'further', 'permanent', and 'continuing' education. Local authorities generally have given adult education a low priority in their overall educational provision. Current arrangements are described and subjected to a brief analysis. An attempt is made to indicate what might be the role and responsibilities of LEAs in adult education in the 1980s.

It has become almost mandatory for any writer who wishes to discuss 'adult education' to begin by defining what it is. The phrase unleashes so many prior conceptions that unless the author makes his position clear from the outset his efforts will only result in confusion and irritation for his readers. There are those for whom adult education is purely cultural or recreational and is seen as being sharply differentiated from 'the education of adults', a much wider concept which includes vocational training and social development. Others speak of recurrent education, or life-long education, which are similar in concept to the Council of Europe's *l'education permenante* which implies that individuals should be enabled to return to organized and structured forms of learning from time to time throughout their lives as they require it. I prefer to translate this as 'continuing education' rather than as 'permanent' which in English has connotations of non-ceasing rather than occasional. This concept of continuing education is now gaining credit in the United Kingdom and it is no accident that the government's recently created (1977) advisory council has been named The Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education (ACACE).

Two terms occur throughout this paper – 'adult education' and 'further education'. By adult education I tend to adopt the traditional view and understand it to mean publicly provided education offered primarily to adults by the local education authorities and intended to serve other than

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vocational needs Further education (which can be advanced or non advanced) comprises all forms of education beyond the age of sixteen years except that provided by the universities It is normally provided in colleges of further education, and although it is broadly vocational in purpose, it also includes general education, as well as cultural and leisure pursuits

There exists here a major area of overlap, not least because of the terminology of the 1944 Education Act which gave the local education authorities the duty of securing provision for the *population* of their areas of *adequate* facilities for *further* education which is defined as including not only full time and part time education for persons over the compulsory school age, but also recreational, cultural, and leisure time activities for those who require them In practice, further education offers full time, sandwich, short full-time, block-release, day release, part time day, and evening courses (4) These are offered not only to the 16 to 19 year old age range but to large numbers of adults as well Thus LEA adult education can be offered *within* further education (in Northern Ireland about 85% of all provision) and *outside* further education (e g , in the United Kingdom there are LEA funded adult education centres and evening institutes) For ease of understanding it may be convenient, if somewhat simplistic, to assume that further education concerns itself with *courses* while adult education concerns itself with *adults*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

The present organization of adult education in the United Kingdom is complex and haphazard Voluntary organizations play an important part in its provision (occasionally receiving local authority grants in respect of approved educational programmes) but the bulk of provision depends upon a partnership between three groups – the 'responsible bodies' (a designation given to the university extra mural departments and the Workers' Educational Association, both of whom receive a direct grant from the Secretary of State towards the cost of providing tuition in 'liberal' adult education), the Department of Education and Science (the DES), and the local education authorities (the LEAs) Each has, in its own way, made specific efforts to promote adult education but statistically the most significant provision since the war has been made by the LEAs, with student numbers increasing from around 800,000 in 1944, to about 1,500,000 in 1966, and to something over 2,000,000 in 1980 It is safe to say that the considerable majority of adults now contemplating adult education will eventually sit in a class provided by their LEA The Russell Report makes the point that 'the total number of

adult students attending local authority classes is about six times the number in university extra-mural and WEA classes' (7, p. 28).

The LEAs came into being in 1902 after the Education Act of that year swept away the old School Boards of the 1870 Education Act. There have been several re-organizations since then and today there are 105 LEAs in England and Wales, twelve in Scotland (nine Regional Authorities and three Island Authorities), and five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland. Among these there are considerable differences in the priority accorded to adult education and in the provision that is made. Some authorities, generally but not necessarily the largest, make enlightened and substantial provision; others make little more than token acknowledgement of its existance. Both of these are minorities. The vast majority of LEAs make regular contributions, directly and indirectly, to the provision of adult education in their areas.

Before the 1944 Education Act there was some involvement of the LEAs in adult education, but none of real substance. In 1917 voluntary bodies were obliged to seek financial aid, not from the then Board of Education but from the LEAs. The LEAs, however, were not particularly responsive to such requests. In 1919 the Smith Report (10) recommended that the LEAs should treat the education of adults as an integral part of their activities, as well as developing non-vocational institutes and giving aid to the universities and the voluntary bodies. It was also recommended that the LEAs should help to set up Adult Education Committees for the provision of non-university and non-vocational adult classes. Lowe (13, p. 42) maintains that few LEAs adopted these recommendations except, perhaps, the London County Council (as it then was) and the Yorkshire West Riding, and that although some minor financial aid was given to the responsible bodies, there was no direct contribution of any substance to adult education. His comments are, perhaps, a trifle harsh. Others are less critical, notably Kelly (12) who argues that most of the recommendations were eventually implemented and that they were a powerful factor in the development of adult education between the wars.

The landmark in LEA provision for adult education came in 1944 with the Education Act of that year. Sections 41 and 42 of the Act placed firmly upon the shoulders of the LEAs a statutory duty to provide adequate facilities in their areas for further education and, in doing so, to have regard to any facilities for further education provided for the area by the universities, educational associations, and other bodies. The LEAs were obligated also to draw up a scheme for further education and in 1947 the first priority was indicated in a Ministry of Education pamphlet (8)

which imposed upon the authorities the task of assuming leadership in the co operative enterprises of community education

There can be little doubt that the Act was worded as it was in order to ensure a happy co ordination of resources rather than wasteful duplication, but the wording was subsequently found to be sufficiently vague to allow the LEAs to meet their responsibilities by building upon existing provision, i e , by making grants to voluntary and responsible bodies In other words, it was considered by many authorities that they were not strictly obliged to make *direct* provision if they considered their area's indirect provision adequate It was partly for this reason that the Ashby Report (9) in 1954 suggested that the LEAs were not truly carrying out the impositions of the 1944 Act, i e , to secure provision for their area of *adequate* facilities for further and adult education, and in particular of leisure time and recreative activities for adults who wanted them Robert Peers suggests that Ashby's comments were justified and claims that in 1954 'by far the greatest proportion of liberal studies was shouldered by the responsible bodies rather than theLEAs'(17, p 106)

The situation since then, however, has altered somewhat With the development of technical and commercial colleges and the subsequent transfer of many adolescents from evening to day school, the LEA evening institutes were enabled to concentrate on providing non-vocational cultural and leisure activities for adults who simply wanted to improve the quality of their lives The LEAs still make indirect provision in grants to the responsible and voluntary bodies, to students, to the auxiliaries of adult education (museums, art galleries, etc), to subsidizing the publicity of the various bodies, and by ensuring close relations with the universities and other responsible bodies in the development of 'liberal' studies But the major part of their work is now in direct provision and, according to the Russell Report, the LEAs are the most important providers

> they provide the greatest part of the finance, they attract the largest number of students, they retain the largest number of staff (7, p 50)

Direct provision in Northern Ireland is straightforward There are 26 Colleges of Further Education, with some 213 out-centres, which provide in evening classes the vast bulk of the LEA adult education classes for the province (Estimates tend to vary between 80% and 85%) In Scotland, the pattern of organization is also straightforward and thus rather different from that in England and Wales Under the Education (Scotland) Acts, the local government education authorities are the statutory bodies who have the responsibility of providing primary,

secondary, and further education. A few classes are supplied by the universities and the Workers' Educational Association, but here the responsible bodies act as *agents* of the education authorities and are not funded as providing bodies in their own right.

In England and Wales the picture is more complicated. All the LEAs have evening institutes and vocational or non-vocational education in technical and further education colleges. Some LEAs have short-term residential colleges, colleges of further and adult education, adult education centres, and educational facilities in hospitals, mental homes, and prisons. The Inner London Education Authority has also provided Literary Institutes while others, such as Cambridge, Cumberland, Derbyshire, and Leicester, have Community Colleges or Village Community Schools. But it is normal now to assume that LEA provision in England tends to refer to adult classes in colleges of further education and in adult education centres. Harrison (11) sees the long-term residential colleges as the most exciting of all LEA ventures in adult education but they are still so small in scale that they have little bearing on the general picture.

FINANCING OF ADULT EDUCATION

The basic source of income for the LEAs, though not necessarily the largest, is the rates. There are also certain government supplementary grants, i.e., rate support grants. According to Lowe (13), about 60% of LEA expenditure comes in a block grant from the Department of Education and Science. Sometimes for capital expenditure on major items of equipment and building, the LEAs simply borrow the money. Some of their expenditure can be recovered from fees charged to the students, although this covers barely one third of the cost. There is another process of recoupment by which one LEA may recover from another LEA part of the cost of certain overlapping services. And, finally, there is a procedure known as 'pooling' by which all the LEAs can combine to pay for particular services, such as the training of teachers or the awarding of scholarships to students in further and higher education.

John Lowe is highly critical of expenditure on adult education by the LEAs as a proportion of expenditure on education as a whole. For 1957–1958, he says, the percentage of the education budget allocated to adult education was 2.9 percent. In 1967–1968, although the actual amounts had increased, the percentage dropped to 2.7 (13). And the slide has continued. According to Michael Ridger, Chief Education Officer of Warwickshire, the national picture is now bleak indeed; the adult proportion of the England and Wales education budget is now about 0.6% (compared, for example, with Norway's 7%) (3).

Scottish authorities appear to be more generous although they are poorer than their English and Welsh counterparts Pratt *et al* tell us that 'the average resources index for Scotland (1970–71) is just under £2 00 per pupil, about two thirds of the English and Welsh average for that year' (18, p 234), yet the Scottish LEAs spent just as much on adult education as did England and Wales (One must remember, however, the almost exclusive control which the Scottish LEAs exercise over adult education)

More recent statistics on expenditure are not readily accessible For example, in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) in Northern Ireland the allocation of funds for adult non-vocational education is lumped with the total allocation for the whole further education sector, i e , the vocational training of full-time 16 to 19 year old groups, as well as part time day release, and general academic courses Since each institution (in this case each college of further education) receives a global sum to cover its needs, there is no official breakdown on the amount spent on adult non vocational education The Further Education Officer for the SELB, however, claims that there has been a substantial increase in adult student intake over the five years from 1974 to 1979, as indeed there has in Northern Ireland generally (cf 4), and that the allocation of funds for adult education has risen steadily as a result, probably of the order of 1% per annum (This is 1% of *adult education* expenditure, not of the total further education budget) This may seem small, perhaps, but in view of the economic crises during that period it must be seen as a significant increase

The only figures I have for 1981 are those of my own area, Newry and Mourne, one of 26 further education zones The non vocational enrolments are much the same as last year, at 743 from an overall adult population of around 15,000, the adult *vocational* part time enrolment is 1,283 The total – 2, 027 – represents an involvement of approximatley 13 5 percent The non vocational involvement taken on its own is about 5%, (reflecting a national UK average of the same level)

Fees vary from authority to authority but in Northern Ireland, according to the Department of Education circular 1980/23, they work out at about 26 pence per hour for non vocational education These courses can last for either 15 or 30 weeks, tuition being provided for one two hour session per week Vocational tuition works out about 12 pence per hour (four hours per week over 36 weeks) The WEA and the universities can, of course, change their own fees (usually insufficient to cover costs) and they also run short courses and lectures occupying anything from 1 to 10 weekly sessions

The picture in England is very different from that in Northern Ireland. Mee and Wiltshire (14) express considerable concern about the falling-off of students – about 11% in one year – because of what they call 'profligate fee increases'. Arthur Stock states that in the current year the range of fee-increases has varied from 0 to 225 percent (3, p. 350). Mee and Wiltshire also indicate some reservations over the current emphasis on provision for the 'disadvantaged'. They suggest that while this area of need is receiving special consideration it quite possibly may be diverting funds from mainstream adult education at the expense of the huge area of middle-class, low-paid and less conspicuously disadvantaged who have no claim to special provisional consideration or concessionary fees.

COURSES, STUDENTS, AND FACILITIES

The LEAs provide a fairly comprehensive range of courses for adult education in their areas, but again it is necessary to acknowledge a wide variety of provision from authority to authority, especially between urban and rural areas. Some areas make totally inadequate provision, but, on average, certain overall similarities emerge.

Currently the main emphasis in LEA provision is, as Peers puts it, on 'doing' as opposed to cultivation of the mind or academic study for its own sake (17, p. 110). The subjects tend generally to be domestic crafts (female students outnumber males by about three to one) together with handicrafts, physical culture, some practical activities, music, drama, and art. Northern Ireland authorities tend to have a considerable number of adults studying General Certificate of Education subjects, at both Ordinary and Advanced levels, in courses that were originally liberal in intent. Generally, however, much of the appeal of LEA adult provision lies in the fact that there are no examinations nor any requirements for home study. In recent times there has been some tendency in the English LEAs to answer the odd demand (certainly from less than 10% of the student population) for such subjects as astronomy, psychology, and sociology, although in Northern Ireland this kind of provision is generally made by the universities. The approaches of the Workers' Education Association and the university extra-mural provision differ quite considerably from LEA provision. The Workers' Education Association, for example, favours women's studies, local history, trade union studies, traditional music, politics, and economics; university extra-mural courses offer something similar including occasional, minority-directed subjects, e.g., wild-life (Birds of Carlingford Lough), or Ancient Celtic History.

The students, according to the Russell Report (7), cover the whole

social and educational spectrum, but the highest proportion of them comes from the lower middle class Lowe (13) offers a detailed description of adult students and their characteristics and, like Russell, he claims that what stood out prominently in a survey he conducted was the relatively high socio-economic status of students in all areas except Leeds Manual workers, although they comprise about 70% of the population, are found in adult education only in small numbers, the overwhelming majority of students prove to be skilled workers Lowe's findings indicate that the highest proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled students to be found in adult education courses would be about 4% and 1% respectively

Generally speaking, the one significant inference commonly made about adults who bother to attend organized courses is that they are atypical of the population as a whole in that they have attained a level of education well above the national average Russell also points out that 'the less privileged social groups and those who had more restricted previous education are under represented' (7, para 83), and he tends to blame the continued decline in the numbers among these groups on increased class fees He points out, interestingly, that the overall proportion nationally of men to women is about 3 to 1 (a proportion reflected in the Northern Ireland statistics for the years 1971–1972 to 1978–1979) (4) In the year 1968–1969, approximately 5% of adults in the United Kingdom attended LEA courses (7, para 82)

While the motivations of students vary from individual to individual, the literature tends to indicate that they are primarily concerned with interests and skills relevant to personal rather than to vocational life, and that they are not so much interested in academic studies as in subjects with a practical or creative content While some seek the social advantages of the group or escape from routine, others actively wish to serve the community or gain understanding of perennial and current problems

The proportions of UK students choosing various options have not been determined so far as I know, but figures for Northern Ireland are available (4) From those we can see that the most popular subjects are ones which some might regard as having a large recreational component – physical education (keep fit, dancing, etc), dressmaking, cookery, home crafts, and flower arrangements The sad effect of current government policy is, however, that these are the courses that are being given low priority and are being almost priced out of existence in an attempt to make them self financing The Northern Ireland C C E Stragety paper, for example, makes the harsh comment,

> There is no justification for a course which is merely recreational, whatever its obvious social benefits, diverting resources from those courses which seek educational development (4, p. 25).

Institutions are exhorted not 'to surrender to market forces' (4, p. 31) but to husband scarce resources to meet urgent minority needs (i.e., those viewed as priorities). Such arguments might be deemed to be persuasive if one were to adopt a developmental view of continuing education. However, one is then left with the plight of the housewife who, having for years enjoyed her weekly dressmaking class, suddenly finds that she can no longer afford to attend it, or that the institution can no longer afford to run it.

A final comment about the students must concern the incidence of 'drop-out' from courses, usually around 35% of enrollees (cf 4). A small survey (20) suggests that the reasons for drop-out range from work, family, other educational or medical problems (3 to 10%) to disenchantment or criticism of teacher or centre (by far the highest cause at 22%). One wonders, too, if some adults are not a trifle inhibited by the large recent influx of young students, some as young as sixteen, who are taking advantage of 'evening school' to enhance their regular day-studies for General Certificate of Education qualifications. Their presence not only affects demand for certain subjects but can, as far as the older adult is concerned, adversely affect the social climate of a class.

How adequate, in fact, is the teaching of adults in the United Kingdom? Mee and Wiltshire are highly laudatory in their 1979 assessment, stating quite categorically that adult educators 'are deeply and personally committed to the service of adult education' with the consequence that they 'overwork themselves and are overworked' (14, p. 105). This view is not reflected by John Lowe who is extremely critical of what he calls 'part-time functionaries' (13, p. 55). The Further Education sector, especially in Northern Ireland, does not have full-time adult educators but tends rather to draw upon a pool of school teachers who get paid part-time rates for any evening class they take. These teachers fall more or less into three basic categories: teachers from local schools who know little about Further Education; teachers (or 'lecturers') from the Further Education college itself; and non-teachers who have some expertise in a specific recreational or cultural area. These tutors, in the main, tend to be untrained in the specific methodologies of *adult* teaching and it has been an unfortunate fact that rates of remuneration are so low that good recruits are discouraged from coming forward. Very few of those who do take evening classes have ever attended short special courses on the

teaching of adults, although such training would appear to be vital Its lack often results in teaching that is, as Lowe puts it, 'perfunctory, and some of it downright incompetent' (13, p 55) This is not to deny that many tutors are keen, dedicated, and enthusiastic But mere enthusiasm is not enough It is one thing to teach adults, it is some thing else to teach them in the most effective manner possible

Russell is less critical but the report devotes almost six pages to the issue of training adult tutors (7, pp 133–138) implying, at best, concern about the present nature of the teaching of adults New institutions for training adult educators have, of course, been springing up in the wake of the Russell Report (e g , The Institute of Continuing Education at Magee University College in Londonderry), while educational journals are carrying increasing numbers of advertisements from English univer sities and education colleges offering advanced courses in adult education Student numbers for such training are few in Northern Ireland at the moment but hopes are that the early graduates will perform an increasingly effective missionary function in the eighties

Accommodation is the subject of much criticism in the literature In Northern Ireland it is generally reasonable in the main college buildings (even if the *ethos* smacks of 'school') Here, too, various aids and resources are readily available, including the use of a technician to set up the aids, and to videotape TV programmes In the out-centres, however, conditions can often be primitive, classes being housed in old buildings in some of the more extreme cases

In England accommodation ranges from independent purpose built adult centres and wings of new schools, to old schools perfunctorily adapted for adult use It is part of the LEAs' mandate to provide suitable accommodation but this often means in practice utilizing day-schools for evening classes Such facilities can be uncongenial, even inadequate, for use with adults This has a serious bearing on the attitudes of students because there is evidence to suggest that where accommodation is genuinely geared towards adult education the classes flourish, whereas classes in day schools or otherwise unsuitable premises tend invariably to wane, with adverse effect both on the quantity and quality of provision

COMPARISON WITH EUROPE

It might be interesting to take a brief look at the European experience for purposes of comparison The LEAs in the UK have much to learn from their partners in the European Economic Community Various

conferences of the Ministers of Education of the 24 member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have revealed great similarities in the problems, although the United Kingdom seems to be lagging behind Western Europe in her efforts to solve them. The European tendency is to ignore the distinctions between vocational and non-vocational and between statutory and non-statutory provision. The United Kingdom tends not to, in spite of her acceptance of the European mode at the European Ministers of the Education Conference in Sweden in 1975.

In a great many continental countries adult education is now being seen, not as a separate entity requiring its own organization, but as an integral continuing part of the educational system. Indeed the most striking revision of public attitudes to adult education has occurred where there has been a general consideration of the overall educational policy and system of a particular country. Such has been the case in France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, and Norway where legislation has been passed concerning the establishment of a pattern of education for adults within a framework of permanent education (2, p. 214). In Norway, what is currently happening is the replacement of partial and unco-ordinated attempts at adult education 'by a centrally initiated major national effort which will focus the work of the agencies that have previously been working haphazardly and in isolation from each other' (19, p. 132). These sentiments are not unlike the 'networks of co-ordination' suggested by the Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education in its 1980 Strategy document (4, pp. 32-33), and the 'national, local and regional co-ordination between government departments' suggested by the English Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education in its 1979 discussion paper (1, pp. 13-14). Unfortunately the UK versions are as yet little more than twinkles in the eyes of the advisory bodies.

European provision, of course, is not without its own problems. Although continental legislation is in advance of British legislation, it proves on investigation to be complicated and potentially insecure. Simpson's rather caustic comment echoes a situation all too familiar to adult educators in the UK:

> [European] adult education continues to be founded on permissive legislation which states a principle, asserts an ideal, issues an exhortation, but in imprecise terms which leave a very great deal of latitude to the providing authorities in the extent to which they translate the principle into reality by financial support (19, p. 128).

The European concept of *l'education permenante,* however, and the blurred dividing lines between types of provision, is Europe's great advantage and, given the continued growth of a single education system incorporating as normal the adult's right to continuing education, it seems inevitable that increasing numbers of European citizens will grow to adulthood with no consciousness that the completion of education coincides with the completion of formal schooling

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

What are the future prospects for adult education in the United Kingdom? One would not wish to be cynical but ever since the early 1800s adult education has waxed and waned on a financial tide There seems, invariably, to be gratifying commitment on the part of the LEAs to adult education when monies are easily available, and, equally invariably, it is the first to feel the brunt of pruning when money is scarce And this is sad, because the cost of the adult service, even in times of recession, is relatively minimal The educational values this reveals must at best be questionable Ted Wragg, in a recent issue of the *Times Educational Supplement* (March 20, 1981) angrily suggests that education, in terms of the esteem which politicians accord it, 'ranks alongside the Albanian entry for the Eurovision Song Contest '

There is evidence that many LEA officers and advisers seem passion ately convinced of the need to provide a coherent and satisfactory service For example, several LEAs, according to the National Institute of Adult Education Year Book (NIAE) (15), have set up local development councils for adult education as recommended by the Russell Report, while others have prepared plans with Russell priorities in mind Recently, too, integrative concepts such as 'community education' and 'continuing education' have been adopted by a number of authorities as bases for planning and structuring their educational services for adults The NIAE Year Book concludes that whatever the eventual framework for future development, 'the local authorities will have crucial roles to play in its implementation' (15, p 12) One is forced to agree, even if it is only because the LEAs control the purse strings

Whatever optimism the above developments may generate, it must be negated by the frequent reluctance on the part of many LEAs to commit the resources needed for the progressive development of adult education The LEAs command most of the finances available for adult education, it is they who are in a position to know the educational needs of communities as a whole,,yet they continue to fight any moves towards

legislation for mandatory provision which they fear will place an additional financial burden upon already scarce resources. Indeed, the *Times Educational Supplement* of 20 March 1981 reports that a special working party, composed of LEA and government members, is looking at the legal aspects of sections 41 and 42 of the 1944 Act, and is considering ways of changing the LEAs' *duty* under the Act to a *discretionary* power. ACACE members are threatening mass resignations if the Education Secretary gives way on this, while a county chief education officer is reported as having said that 'such a move would give the green light to local politicians who wanted to dismantle the service,' and that it would be 'only a matter of time before adult education disappeared in some areas'. This fear is given reality by well publicized cases in 1980, when, to save money, West Glamorganshire wiped out services for a whole year, Humberside for half a year, while Cheshire stopped established grants to a number of voluntary agencies.

Most of the writers on adult education (e.g., Peers, Harrison, Lowe, and Kelly) tend to be critical of the LEAs overall provision, accusing the authorities of according adult education no better than a very low priority, while the NIAE enquiry of 1970 states:

> Few LEAs have shown much indication of attempts to reassess their range of provision ... often there is an absence of defined policy in many areas (16, p. 12).

The problems posed in 1980 by the British government's expenditure cuts have sadly, as practitioners in adult education have come resignedly to expect, reflected this trend. Following these cuts, fees rose sharply causing hardship and 'drop-out', particularly in the lower socio-economic sector. Minimum student numbers per class have also been increased and are being much more rigidly enforced. In the Northern Ireland Area Boards, for example, the average non-vocational adult education class will not be deemed viable unless it has a minimum of 16 enrollees. This means in practice that many classes, particularly in the smaller out-centres, are now effectively discontinued.

But is the picture necessarily so black? Many commentators tend to find excuses for the low priority accorded to adult education. Kelly (12) is really very sympathetic towards the efforts of the LEAs, blaming their lack of comprehensive provision on a series of economic crises. This view really implies a tacit acceptance of the standard approach – when money is scarce, cut adult education. Harrison's apologia is rather more subtle. He believes that the LEAs are inhibited by the low expectancy of

the 1919 Final Report which surmised that local authorities generally would not take bold steps to provide facilities for the study of non vocational subjects (11) Harrison also claims that the LEAs were hampered not only by the slow emergence from the atmosphere of the evening school Codes of the nineteenth century but also by the subsequent entanglement in the complexities of commercial and further education

I believe it fair to say, however, that the picture is changing Since the setting up of the Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education in 1974 and the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education in England and Wales in 1977, some real attempts are now being made to make objective assessment of less clearly stated needs and to develop a common strategy for meeting adult educational requirements in an era of increasing unemployment, early retirement, and enforced leisure time Pressure is now being continuously applied by these two bodies for political and legislative change, and indeed many respondents to the 1979 ACACE discussion paper, 'Towards Continuing Education' have demanded that legislation should place an explicit obligation on the LEAs to plan for a broad range of post-compulsory education, giving full regard to opportunities for those wishing to continue their education and laying down *minimum* standards of provision (21)

Encouraging in this respect are recent media reports which reveal the possibility of a new Education Bill which would include changes in the law on further and adult education Ministers are reported to be keen to have the 1944 Act amended so that the LEAs have a clearer duty under the law to provide education for persons over the age of 19 years The Northern Ireland Area Boards are currently submitting responses to a recent discussion document issued by the N I Council for Continuing Education (4) and there seems to be agreement about the importance of adult education and a general hope that the Boards, in these times of financial stringency, will be able to co ordinate existing resources in their areas and provide a more coherent and more efficient service than hereto fore

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a notion of adult education as traditionally defined In Britain alone among all European countries is the term used simply to mean non vocational education voluntarily undertaken by people over the age of eighteen It must now be concluded that in this sense the term has become moribund The LEAs have become involved in continuing education where the distinction between the terms vocational and non vocational, statutory and non statutory, have become increasingly

blurred. Education for adults is now an integral part of the business of living – whether for vocational, recreational, social, or developmental reasons. LEA provision, almost through pressure of events, now finds vocational continuing education falling very much within its ambit. For example, new partnerships have had to be developed with the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in England and Wales (and its sister in Northern Ireland, the Department of Manpower Services), with the Industrial Training Boards (ITBs), and with various other employers committed to vocational training. With the involvement of these bodies, as well as the promotion by the Department of Education and Science of the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), the LEAs' role has become somewhat undermined and a deal less defined. It is now difficult to assess what their continued role will be but it is heartening to note that a number of LEAs are making enlightened provision, not only in assisting voluntary and responsible bodies but in financing new initiatives of their own. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the growth of the Adult Literacy Campaign in which many of the best features of adult education came together (5). One negative benefit of this scheme, as Flude and Parrott point out, was 'to show up those local authorities which had failed to develop, or had run down, their adult education services, thereby rendering them unable to respond to such a clear cut need' (6, p. 160).

The most significant and optimistic feature of the literacy scheme is its continuing follow-up. It survives and blossoms and its development is now leading into the wider concept of adult basic education (ABE) which looks as though it will provide, as Flude and Parrott suggest, 'a permanent conceptual and administrative framework within which local centres will be able to chose the most appropriate way to meet the basic learning needs of a large sector of their local adult population' (6, p. 160).

There seems cause, then, for some optimism but there are some aspects of provision that must now be given priority. Apart from the obvious need for trained staff and full-time principals of evening institutes (in England), there should be LEA officers appointed with full-time responsibility for adult education. The Russell report (7) also stresses that, in the interests of strong and coherent administration, in colleges of further education adult education should be the sole responsibility of a head of department. John Lowe suggests that suitable, indeed specific, accommodation should be provided for all adult education, with no separation of liberal and technical education, together with the development of more adult residential colleges. For the students there should be more variety and flexibility in programmes, more access to advanced technological aids, accessible counselling and advice, and some attention to their social as well as their educational needs.

Whatever their shortcomings, the LEAs are now the main providers of adult education but we must not lose sight of the fact that the majority of LEAs whose services continue to be inadequate have still to follow the lead of the committed few Unless LEAs *in general* assume leadership in adult and continuing education, particularly in the realm of resources and finance, there can be no significant progress in the overall picture of adult education in the United Kingdom

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