CHAPTER 14. BUILDING A LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

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Introduction

As many of the chapters in this book indicate, the current Labour Government in the UK sees education as its number one priority, both because of the changing nature of society and the economy at the beginning of the 21st century and also because of the considerable and persistent problem of low levels of achievement and participation in the education and training system in this country. It could be argued that this Administration has a two-fold strategy for tackling these challenges. First, it believes in improving the quality and performance of compulsory education from the early years upwards in order to enable more young people to succeed at 16 and thus to enter post-compulsory education and training. Hence the *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE 1997a) agenda with its focus on literacy and numeracy targets, strong inspection systems, performance tables and benchmarking. Second, the Labour Government wants to stimulate the demand for learning among adults and particularly among those adults who have previously missed out on education or training or who have failed to gain the skills and qualifications required to meet the needs of a flexible labour market. Evidence of this approach can be seen in *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998a) with its emphasis on initiatives such as the University for Industry (UfI) and Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). The first approach is seen as long-term with the expectation that it will produce future generations with higher levels of basic skills and an improved capacity for learning. The latter is a desire to get something done now to address the acute problems of non-participation and social exclusion and to remediate some of the worst effects of the 'Conservative legacy' (Hodgson & Spours 1999). But it can also be seen as a longer-term approach based on an assumption that there is a pent-up demand for learning which can be released by a range of learner-led mechanisms.

We start this final chapter by recognising that there is a strong rationale behind the Government's dual approach to lifelong learning in a first Labour Parliament. However, we will argue that it is now time that this was supported by an additional strategy to create an 'all-through' education and training system to support lifelong learning. Later in the chapter we identify three major dimensions of an all-through approach. First, there is a need for an all-through vision which sees lifelong learning as a building process starting at an early age and in which each phase of education connects with the next. Such a vision seeks to relate formal learning (e.g. in school, college or the workplace) with informal learning. Lifelong learning is thus conceived as a seamless web of progressive learning opportunities extending out of a strong foundation of successful initial education, rather than as a series of episodes in adulthood which remediate for past failure. Second, all-throughness seeks to address fundamental barriers to learning and achievement. English society still suffers from deep social divisions which prevent effective mass participation in lifelong learning and sustain an anti-educational culture in certain sections of the population (see, for example, Macrae et al. 1997, Oppenheim 1998). In this chapter, we will argue for the need to build a lifelong learning infrastructure to address factors which we believe work against the development of a lifelong learning system for the future – poor achievement in compulsory education, which diminishes the number of those participating in post-compulsory education (Gray *et al.* 1993; Green and Steedman 1997); a selective curriculum, qualifications and delivery system (Hodgson & Spours 1997); a lack of widespread and sustained

employer involvement in education and training (Senker *et. al* 1999) and inequitable access to both funding incentives (Callender 1999) and rewards for learning (Robinson 1998). A third dimension of 'all throughness' as we see it is the development of 'personal capacity' for learning as an individual and as an active member of wider 'communities of learners'. In Chapter 7, Michael Young argues for the development of a range of skills and forms of connective thinking and a recognition that learning is a social and not just an individual activity. We support this view and suggest that a debate about learning needs to accompany policy debates on the development of an all-through system to support lifelong learning.

The UK Government's strategy for lifelong learning post-16

The Government's current approach to lifelong learning in the UK might be described as comprehensive and proactive but diffuse and potentially contradictory. At its core, it relies on stimulating individual demand for learning, based on a range of initiatives and incentives. *The Learning Age* Green Paper (DfEE 1998a*)*, which provided the first and only comprehensive statement of the current Government's policy in this area to date, indicates a strong commitment to lifelong learning as a strategy for supporting national economic competitiveness, personal employability and social inclusion. It sets out an agenda for individuals, education providers, employers and trade unions around individual learning accounts, the University for Industry (now Learning Direct), basic skills, unitisation of qualifications for adults, standards and inspection, learning in the workplace and collaboration at the regional and local level. Alongside *The Learning Age*, the Government stated its approach to further and higher education in two accompanying documents *Higher Education for the 21st Century* (DfEE 1998b) and *Further Education for the New Millennium* (DfEE 1998c), which outline its responses to the recommendations of Sir Ron Dearing's report on higher education (NCIHE 1997) and Baroness Helena Kennedy's report on further education (Kennedy 1997).

Six strands of policy in lifelong learning

From these documents and others listed below, it is possible to draw out six major strands of policy associated with lifelong learning in England. These strands arise from the work of different task groups or agencies, have different reform timescales and may be uncoordinated and even, at times, actively in tension with one another.

The first, which might be termed an 'adult learning opportunities strand', is the most prominent and diffuse. It emerges from *The Learning Age* itself, the Moser Report on basic skills, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (Moser 1999) and the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL) Report Creating *Learning Cultures: Next Steps in Achieving the Learning Age* (NAGCELL 1999). These developments form part of the discussion in Chapters 7 and 9 and elsewhere in this book. This strand has been the major focus of the Government's policies for lifelong learning, because it has been concerned to find ways of including those who have previously been excluded or who have not felt the need to participate in learning. *The Learning Age* is based on a vision of lifelong learning as a series of learning episodes throughout the lifespan and identifies a wide range of initiatives to support these, notably the development of individual learning accounts and Learning Direct.

NAGCELL was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, to investigate the creation of the type of 'learning cultures' which would stimulate demand for learning, particularly in relation to the needs of mature adults. This is seen as the next step on from *The Learning Age*. The NAGCELL committee's work is, in some senses, more ambitious than *The Learning Age* because it seeks to go beyond an individualistic approach to lifelong learning by focusing on strategies for stimulating individual demand for learning, for improving the environment for learning, for providing incentives and for encouraging peer support and mutuality (NAGCELL 1999). It can be commended as an immediate and pragmatic approach to the issue of motivating more learners to take up opportunities to learn, although it does not address the complementary issue of lifelong learning system building because it works within the framework and constraints of *The Learning Age*.

Second, there is a social exclusion strand, which is extensively discussed in Chapter 4 and has been a major focus of the Government's reform agenda for lifelong learning. Initiatives include, for example, the development of the New Deal programmes, New Start, the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit and the development of funding mechanisms for widening participation in further and higher education. This strand seeks to connect the work of the DfEE with other government departments, notably areas of government concerned with welfare and housing, so as to be able to more target opportunities more effectively at the most excluded and marginalised.

A third strand is related to qualifications reform and emerges from *Qualifying for Success* (DfEE 1997b), *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998a) and a review of the National Curriculum. As described in Chapter 8, this strand has three major thrusts. Currently, the two main areas of reform relate to broadening the advanced level curriculum and creating more flexibility for 14-16 year olds to undertake vocational education. The third area is about rationalising the national qualifications framework by focusing on the development of credible whole qualifications. While all these reforms amount to important changes in each of their individual areas, there is, as Chapter 8 points out, no overall conception of building an all-through credit and qualifications framework for lifelong learning.

Fourth, there is a skills and work-based learning strand which is associated with the three major reports produced by the National Skills Task Force - *Towards a National Skills Agenda* (DfEE 1998d), *Delivering Skills For All* (DfEE 1999c) and *Tackling the Adult Skills Gap* (DfEE 2000). This strand, which forms part of the discussion in Chapter 12, focuses largely on exhorting employers to support work-based learning and suggests a range of weak voluntarist incentives to underpin this development. This approach pays little heed to long-standing criticisms of low

employer demand for skills within the UK (e.g. Keep & Mayhew 1996). Nor does it address the lack of employer involvement in the work-based route for younger learners (Senker *et al.* 1999).

A fifth strand of work involves the broad area of post-16 funding and organisation, which is associated with the *Learning to Succeed* White Paper (DfEE 1999a). This is discussed in several of the chapters earlier in the book, particularly Chapters 5 and 10, and will be described and analysed in more detail later in this chapter.

The final strand concerns quality and standards. These issues are discussed extensively in Chapters 6, 8, and 13, permeate all the Labour Government's major policy documents and are likely to lead to quite significant changes to post-16 inspection regimes and the training of education professionals. However, policies focused on 'standards' are also likely to create difficulties for some of the other strands outlined above - the development of an inclusive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning, for example the Government's widening participation agenda.

A weak framework approach?

Despite the comprehensive nature of these strands of work and the plethora of policy initiatives they contain, elsewhere we have described New Labour's proposals for lifelong learning in its first two years of government as a 'weak framework approach' (Hodgson & Spours 1999). We will argue that this type of policy approach places too much responsibility on the shoulders of individuals while not paying sufficient attention to overcoming wider system barriers or to building an all-through infrastructure for lifelong learning which genuinely empowers learners. In particular, we point to the Government's cautious approach to qualifications reform and to securing the involvement of employers in education and training. This administration tends to place responsibility for change in the hands of individuals or institutions when it is apprehensive of alienating important interest groups. This has certainly been the case with A Level reform and is echoed in the Government's reluctance to consider a levy system to underpin vocational education and training.

Another feature of a weak framework approach is the absence of all-through system building and even the imposition of potential new barriers. One of the underlying assumptions behind *The Learning Age* is that there needs to be a different approach to policies for young people and to those for adults and that lifelong learning is largely associated with the latter. The problem with focusing on adults and young people as separate groups is that it draws attention away from the education and training system as a whole. Seeing younger as well as older learners as part of the same lifelong learning system, on the other hand, is more likely to result in an analysis which identifies the type of system barriers we outlined at the beginning of this chapter. These barriers begin in compulsory education, are exacerbated in the 14-19 phase and continue into later life and lifelong learning. We will see in the final part of the chapter that lifelong learning documents in Wales and Scotland have taken a different approach by connecting the problems of younger and older learners in a more overt way. These policy statements, unlike their counterparts in England, thus recognise the need to tackle education and training system barriers in order to create all-through lifelong systems. It is a radically different form of analysis which leads, we would argue, to a different reform emphasis.

A further feature of a weak framework approach can be seen in the Government's position on the role of the market in education and training. In *Learning to Succeed*, the Government recognises the detrimental effects of institutional competition on learners and attempts to modify them by

creating voluntarist partnerships at the local and regional levels. Within the rubric of personal responsibility already described, there is also an emphasis on the targeting of limited amounts of state funding to incentivise certain groups of individuals to participate in learning rather than bringing in reforms which might make the system more attractive to all learners. It is also possible to see strong centralised structures (e.g. DfEE, QCA, Ofsted and sectoral funding bodies) as part of a weak framework approach, because they retain power at the centre to regulate market forces, rather than devolving real power and resources to regional and local levels to strengthen the type of strong collaborative planning structures required to assist the development of a lifelong learning system in the longer term. A key question is whether voluntarist partnerships will exercise sufficient power to overcome the dysfunctional effects of the market in education and training.

Finally, a weak framework approach attempts to address divisions within the education and training system by overarching rather than replacing divided structures. This is one way of looking at the emerging proposals for a graduation certificate for 18 and 19 year olds (SEU 1999).

A weak framework approach, therefore, does not fundamentally alter the structure of the education and training system as a whole, although it may have a modifying effect on the way in which it works. Moreover, because the weak framework approach does nothing to counter institutional voluntarism (for example, decisions to implement or not to implement qualifications reforms), it places considerable power in the hands of education providers and end users such as universities and employers, which may work against equity and common learner entitlements.

The degree to which the Government deploys a weak framework approach differs across the six different strands of policy identified above. The approach to social exclusion might be characterised as less weak, for example, because it seeks to use 'joined up government' to target resources and opportunities on those who need them most. On the other hand, the Government's approach to the reform of qualifications and work-based learning has been particularly weak because of its dependence on voluntarist arrangements. Yet, we would suggest that the qualifications system and the traditional lack of employer involvement in education and training constitute two of the deepest education and training system barriers to the creation of a lifelong learning system in this country.

Learning to Succeed: a move towards a strong framework approach to lifelong learning?

It is possible to interpret the recent White Paper *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE 1999a), as marking a departure from this approach and a move towards a strong framework in the area of funding and organisation, because of its emphasis on local planning mechanisms, common funding and inspection systems.

On the surface, this policy document appears different from earlier ones because it claims that it wishes *"to drive up standards and performance by removing structural barriers within the current (education and training) system"* (DfEE 1999a: 15). It then sets out new and more common arrangements for the funding and organisation of all post-16 education and training (with the exception of higher education).

The creation of a National Learning and Skills Council with 47 local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) responsible for funding all post-16 provision with a single national tariff across all providers (schools are currently excluded but are expected to join this system by 2002/3)

appears to constitute what we would describe as a strong framework approach to organisation and funding. Similarly, the setting up of a common inspection system for all post-19 provision (although a different one for 16-19 provision) indicates a move towards such an approach. Undoubtedly, the development of local LSCs will create an impetus for planning, rationalisation and collaboration at the local level.

However, closer scrutiny of *Learning to Succeed* from the perspective of building an all-through system for lifelong learning suggests that it is divisive, narrow in its focus and does not sufficiently connect with the other strands of reform outlined earlier. From this standpoint, it is possible to see this document not as an elaboration of a comprehensive vision of lifelong learning hinted at in *The Learning Age*, but more as a swift pragmatic reaction to immediate education and training system failings and an attempt to address some of the negative effects of the Conservative legacy of marketisation. As the document itself states:

> *"This is the case for change. There is too much duplication, confusion and bureaucracy in the current system. Too little money reaches learners and employers, too much is tied up in bureaucracy. There is an absence of effective co-ordination or strategic planning. The system has insufficient focus on skill and employer needs at national, regional and local levels. The system lacks innovation and flexibility, and there needs to be more collaboration and co-operation to ensure higher standards and the right range of choices* (DfEE 1999a: 21).

This is damning stuff indeed, but it remains a very selective criticism of the current education and training system. First and foremost, it focuses on obtaining value for money from public funding - the Learning and Skills Council Prospectus (DfEE 1999b:9) claims that the new post-16 organisation and delivery system set out in *Learning to Succeed* will save at least £50 millions per year which will be invested in improving the quality of learning. There is no denying that this is important: public money wasted on bureaucracy is a legitimate cause for government concern, not least because it robs potential learners of scarce resources. A second rationale for change is to facilitate better individual access to relevant learning experiences. This again is a laudable aim and can be seen as carrying through part of the vision of *The Learning Age*. However, because *Learning to Succeed* does not take a system perspective and does not, therefore, look at some of the underlying barriers to access which continue to dog the education and training system in this country, it remains questionable whether its policy proposals will succeed in achieving its own aim of facilitating individual access to learning.

While *Learning to Succeed* holds out the possibility of creating networks of education providers and users at the local level, it does not make overt connections between the strands of policy at national level (e.g. qualifications and skills and work-based learning) which will allow these local learning systems to work flexibly and effectively. Moreover, *Learning to Succeed* introduces new barriers and distinctions which may undermine some of its own objectives.

First, it divides strategies and provision for 16-19 year olds from those for adults. We would suggest that this is on political rather than on educational grounds. There are areas where it might be important to make distinctions between the needs of younger and older learners, for example in relation to the curriculum. There are well-known educational arguments for making a distinction between the kind of broad foundation education which 16-19 year olds might require and the more flexible learning opportunities which adult learners might need or want to undertake as part of their continuing education or professional development. Indeed this distinction is made in all other European countries. In *Learning to Succeed* differentiation between policies for adult and younger learners is, we would suggest, made along the wrong dimensions -inspection,

qualifications and some aspects of funding – which, arguably, erects new barriers to an all-through system for lifelong learning.

Second, higher education remains outside the remit of the LSC and will continue to be funded through the Higher Education Funding Council and inspected by the Quality Assurance Agency. It is possible to have some sympathy with the practical problems that might arise from bringing higher education institutions into the new and already complex arrangements for other post-16 providers. Placing higher education institutions outside these arrangements, however, is also likely to be problematic. The work of higher and further education institutions is often both overlapping and mutually inter-dependent. If one of the major thrusts of the *Learning to Succeed* funding and organisational reforms is to make progression routes for learners more transparent, then the importance of local learning networks involving higher education institutions becomes immediately apparent.

Third, as we have mentioned earlier, the *Learning to Succeed* reforms are taking place on a different timescale from the *Qualifying for Success* reforms. This means that changes to funding are not being made at the same time as changes to curriculum and qualifications for 16-19 year olds. There is some emerging evidence that this might jeopardise the success of the latter reforms because schools, in particular, are concerned both about the cost of the qualifications changes which will be introduced as a result of *Qualifying for Success* and the potential impact of future funding reforms (Hodgson & Spours 2000).

Fourth, in spite of its emphasis on learning in the workplace and learning for work, *Learning to Succeed* continues to take the type of voluntarist approach to employers which characterised *The Learning Age*. Employers are given *"a substantial stake in shaping what is provided in post-16 education and training"* (DfEE 1999a: 22) through their representation on the LSCs at national and local level, but without commensurate statutory responsibilities for funding or providing education and training for their employees. Neither is regulation in this area supported by the Third Report from the National Skills Taskforce*, Tackling the Adult Skills Gap: Upskilling Adults and the Role of Workplace Learning* (DfEE 2000). Indeed, this document overtly shies away from the idea of a statutory minimum training requirement, despite strong calls for proposals of this type from some of its members: *"A new statutory obligation on employers does not form part of our recommendations."(*DfEE 2000: 46)

Finally, *Learning to Succeed* lacks detail or clarity about the roles of and the relationships between the different layers of government - national, regional and local – in the funding, organisation and planning of lifelong learning. Currently the arrangements look bureaucratic, complex and undemocratic. It also remains to be seen how the various different types of voluntary partnership at local level will function and to what extent learners' voices will be heard over those of all the competing providers, users and administrators. Under the proposed arrangements resulting from *Learning to Succeed*, who ultimately has either the power or the desire to forge a lifelong learning system at the local level?

Strong frameworks - towards 'all-throughness'

At the beginning of this chapter it was suggested that an initiative-led approach to lifelong learning could be seen as a necessary early response to the Conservative legacy. Our principle criticism, however, is that to date this approach has tended to focus on the individual without providing mechanisms for constructing a holistic system to support lifelong learning and to address more fundamental underlying factors which inhibit educational participation and

achievement. Towards the end of a first Parliament, and in consideration of a further term of Office, the Government is now in a position to think about a longer-term strategy for England. In this respect, other parts of the UK education and training systems are already pointing the way.

We can contrast the approach taken in England with that taken in Wales and Scotland. Wales has traditionally shared the same education and training system as England, but now appears to be diverging. In both the Welsh Green Paper on lifelong learning, *Learning is for Everyone* (Welsh Office 1998), and the report from the Education and Training Action Group for Wales (ETAG 1999) it is possible to identify an emphasis on building a comprehensive system for lifelong learning which is based on the development of integrated post-16 provision to support both young people and adults to *"fulfil their individual aspirations*"(ETAG 1999: 3). These documents argue for a *"radical shift"* in the education and training system, but with *"phased progress over a longer time scale"* (ETAG 1999: 13). They thus stress both a clear vision of what a future lifelong learning *system* should look like and propose a staged approach to its creation. Scotland, which has always had a more separate education system, takes a similar approach to Wales by linking the 'learning habits' of younger and older learners (Scottish Office 1998) and by stressing the need for a credit and qualifications framework which embraces learners of all ages in post-compulsory education.

Earlier in the chapter we suggested that the Government employed a 'weak framework approach' to lifelong learning with the emphasis being placed on individual responsibility without addressing fundamental barriers to participation and achievement. This can be contrasted with a strong framework approach which attempts to provide a clear vision of a future lifelong learning system in which individuals and organisations can see the staged development of different dimensions of a holistic system over the longer term. Crucially, it involves building common structures within the education and training system which support genuine individual empowerment and a planned approach to lifelong learning at the local, regional and national levels. A strong framework approach thus means reforming key areas of the education and training system (e.g. qualifications, the roles and responsibilities of employers, funding and organisational arrangements) to overcome long-standing system barriers and divisions. It also requires devolving governmental power away from the centre in order to strengthen regional and local collaboration to support the individual learner within her/his local learning context. In contrast to a weak framework approach, the aim is to provide a set of common rules or conditions within the education and training system which are designed to limit the harmful effects of institutional discretion and to maximise learner voice and entitlement. A strong framework approach to lifelong learning might, therefore, be built around three basic dimensions of what we have termed 'all-throughness' – a vision of an holistic all-through system, the creation of an infrastructure for lifelong learning and the development of personal capacities for learning within the compulsory education system.

A vision of an all-through and holistic system

At this point we would argue that a vision of all-throughness is absolutely crucial to counteract the potentially negative outcomes from the Government's 'standards agenda' which is in danger of creating an artificial divide between the needs of younger and older learners. The current focus on lifelong learning as a set of learning experiences which take place beyond compulsory schooling is, in itself, too narrow. We believe that a lifelong learning system for the 21st century will need to secure connections between all phases of education so that

learners develop early on the skills and motivation to undertake learning throughout the life-cycle. The idea of a holistic and all-through system vision is equally important to policy-makers as they try to implement 'joined up government' to ensure that different initiatives and strands of the reform process do not contradict each other but pull in the same direction. It is for this reason that it is vital for government to articulate its vision of an all-through lifelong learning system and the steps and stages towards its development.

All-through thinking leads to asking different questions about the purposes of education, particularly in the early years of schooling. Currently, the priority is getting young people to attain at normative levels by certain ages, on the premise that this will provide them with the capacity to continue in education and training. This is undoubtedly important. However, the emphasis on testing and benchmarking is highly pressurised and can lead to a dull or mechanical educational experience and a sense of failure at an early age. The current emphasis on attaining examinations should, we feel, be balanced with an equal emphasis on motivating all students to want to continue learning. A lifelong learning perspective would still stress the need for early success, but above all it would emphasise the importance of creating a confidence in learning and the expectation that all learners could progress at their own pace.

A further reason why all-through system vision is important is that it encourages an identification of barriers which make their appearance early on in both compulsory and post-compulsory education. If lifelong learning is seen as simply the domain of adults, then there is not the urgency to tackle some of the barriers which affect younger learners and effectively turn them off learning before the age of 16. This would require, amongst other things, a 'latticework' of provision and an all-age qualifications and credit system which would ensure that learners and providers could easily identify opportunities for movement and progression at any stage.

A lifelong learning infrastructure

We have stated earlier that while the six current major strands of lifelong learning policy - adult learning opportunities, social exclusion, qualifications, skills and work-based learning, funding and organisation and quality and standards - are to be welcomed, they do not yet constitute the framework for a lifelong learning system. This is partly because some strands are stronger or more developed than others and partly because each strand is largely seen as a separate entity and has not been designed as a constituent part of a holistic system. The strategies being used currently to stimulate learner demand (e.g. widening participation funding steers, ILAs and UfI) are a start, but the picture still looks fragmented and is essentially based on a 'deficit model' of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning initiatives are largely being targeted at those who have not traditionally participated, which has led to a piecemeal approach for a minority rather than system-building for all.
Moreover, it is arguable that the Government's current overwhelming emphasis on the learner-led nature of lifelong learning runs the risk of being read as 'anti-provider', thus denying that providers are of crucial importance. The rhetoric of 'learner-ledness' effectively underplays what has to be done to improve the capacity of education and training providers. We would argue that a network of strong providers - schools, colleges, employers, universities and adult and community organisations - is an essential pre-requisite of a system for lifelong learning. Learners need to see their potential pathways through lifelong learning provision and providers need to have a picture of how the system is put together and how their particular part of the system relates to the whole.

While the elements of an all-through lifelong learning system would need to be debated more extensively than we have space for here, we would suggest that a minimum infrastructure would require the development of:

- an all-age, flexible and inclusive national credit and qualifications system;
- a regulatory framework to underpin the involvement of employers and trade unions in 'local learning systems';
- a statutory right to educational leave for all employees;
- a fair and transparent system of funding for both providers and individual learners; and
- strong locally-based lifelong learning guidance systems.

The latter two features have begun to emerge as a result of current policies on lifelong learning, but the first three are clearly still viewed by government as holding some political risk and are being developed much more slowly within an overall voluntarist policy approach.

Developing the capacity for lifelong learning

Finally, we believe that developing a vision of an all-through lifelong learning system will, as Michael Young points out in Chapter 7, requires a broader debate about the nature of learning. This is likely to include a discussion of strategies for building personal and collective learning capacity and ways of creating the optimum contexts for learning. To date, there has been little room for debate about learning for the future due to the Government's preoccupation with addressing past deficits. Hence, its emphasis on numeracy and literacy for learners in compulsory education, on the three key skills for 16-19 year olds and on basic skills acquisition for adults. Again, this can be seen as a necessary emergency response to the Conservative legacy. But, like on so many issues outlined in this chapter, it is time to move on. Developing personal capacity for lifelong learning will mean developing more than basic skills. It will require the development of critical thinking, of wider problem-solving and collaborative skills, underpinned by a pervasive philosophy of wanting to learn, not only for economic gain but also for personal growth. Moreover, this will become an issue for people as members of social groups as well as for individual learners.

In this chapter we have argued that the concept of personal responsibility for learning is important and a necessary ingredient of lifelong learning. However, lifelong learning cannot simply be left to the individual because this would reproduce social divisions between those who are able and motivated to learn and those who are not. On the other hand, the Government cannot legislate to ensure that people learn throughout their lives. The role of government, we would argue, is to articulate a vision for lifelong learning and to put into place an infrastructure of strong frameworks to encourage participation, progression and achievement. This will mean removing some of the deep-seated barriers, both within the education and training system and beyond, which inhibit learning and creativity. We have argued that these are intensified at points of transition and particularly, in this country, in the 14-19 phase. This is one of the areas where there is the most urgent need for reform to motivate more learners to achieve and to want to continue to learn.

Realising the vision of 'all-throughness', for which we have argued throughout this chapter, will mean an active recognition that the willingness to learn throughout life is instilled and encouraged very early in a child's life and that it is vital to ensure that compulsory education is a positive experience for all children. At the moment we are doubtful whether the Government's

strategy of simply boosting literacy, numeracy and basic skills provides a sustainable and long-term approach to this issue. One of the major functions of compulsory education should not only be to provide the basic skills to cope with day-to-day life, but also to build learners' capacity to think creatively and to have the confidence to work with others to address the complex problems that all of us will face in the 21st century and throughout the different stages of our lives. It is a vision and strategies which will develop this kind of capacity in all learners which we believe should underpin all lifelong learning policies in this country. In our view, it is high time to open the debate about what is required to build a lifelong learning system for the future.

(6521 words inclusive of refs)

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