

**The concept of education in higher education
in England 1960 – 1997
with special reference to
adult continuing education**

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Abstract

This thesis reports a study of the concept of education in higher education and in adult continuing education within higher education in England in the period from 1960 to 1997. The period chosen has seen great changes in higher education: one aim of the study is to explore the associated changes, if any, in the understanding of the education provided in the changed system.

The study begins with a consideration of the philosophy of education, the need to take account of the historical and social settings of concepts, the distinction between concepts and conceptions, and the issues of essentially contested concepts. A brief and selective review provides an historical background for the study.

Three main conceptions of education in mainstream higher education are identified, discussed and traced in the report of the Robbins Committee (1963) and other studies. Four main conceptions of education in adult continuing education are similarly identified, discussed and traced in the provision made by adult education departments. Consideration is given to conceptions of education developed within the radical tradition in education. A number of emerging ideas associated with developments of the 1990s, including the idea of lifelong learning, are identified and discussed with particular reference to the report of the Dearing Committee (1997).

It is shown that higher education and adult continuing education alike have been dominated by one particular conception of education. The reasons for this dominance and its implications for the future of higher education are discussed in relation to the development of a mass system of higher education and the emergence outside higher education of a significantly different conception of education, here characterised as the 'commodity' view of education.

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Chapter One: Setting the scene

Introduction

This study in the philosophy of education has its origins in two main interests. One is an interest in the philosophy of education; the other a practitioner's interest in the development of higher education, and of continuing education within higher education in particular. The combination of the two interests provides insight into the past, present and future of higher education and continuing education, from a perspective which has been surprisingly neglected during the rapid changes of recent years in these spheres of education.

The perspective is that of the person curious about the concept of education underpinning higher education. Institutions of higher education offer programmes of study to people who wish to progress beyond the academic levels attainable in Britain through compulsory and further education. This implies that higher education institutions are involved in, at least, teaching and learning; but what kind of teaching and learning, and to what end? The answers to such questions necessarily draw on ideas about the nature of education and the values implicit in different forms of education; that is, on a concept (or concepts) of education.

Discussion of concepts of education in higher education has been notable by its absence in recent years, even recent decades. There has been a flood of works on the administration and organisation of higher education, on finance, on students, and so on: but most of this writing assumes that there is in the background a clear, widely-accepted understanding of what higher education is for. The extent to which this assumption is correct is one of the questions to be examined in this study.

Even if there is one widely-held concept of education in higher education, is it a useful or viable concept? There are many critics of higher education who claim that higher education is not as useful as it might be, and many supporters of the current system fearful that it is no longer viable. Particular foci of concern are the perceived need for higher education to produce graduates who can contribute directly to sustaining and developing the British economy in a rapidly-changing world; and the perceived move to a mass system of higher education. Critics and commentators claim that higher education, despite its obvious external changes, is still wedded to an understanding of education which cannot meet these concerns. However, there is a notable silence about alternative ways of conceiving higher education to meet the expressed concerns.

Thus an examination of how we got to where we are conceptually in relation to education in higher education, and where we might go from here, is clearly worthwhile, even necessary, at the present time. But what of adult continuing education? There are at least three reasons for thinking that examining higher education and adult continuing education together might be particularly apposite at present.

First, there is much talk about 'lifelong learning' as a key element in education in the future. It is not clear what lifelong learning means, and even less clear what it might mean for higher education. However, lifelong learning clearly involves adults learning in some way continuously throughout their lives. One would expect therefore that the perspectives and experience of a century of adult continuing education in British higher education might play a role in shaping the understanding of lifelong learning in higher education. If so, it is useful to know how the understanding of education in mainstream higher education and adult continuing education are related.

Second, there is a view, strongly held in some quarters, that the development of higher education into a mass system of education entails what has been called the 'adultification' of the universities (Duke, 1992). This is more than a claim that the higher education system is moving to the point where the majority of students are mature students, aged 25 or over, who could be properly described as 'adult'. Rather the claim is that the ideas, methods and practices of adult continuing education will make a significant contribution to higher education in the future. Tight discusses an approach to higher education which has similar elements to Duke's, and writes

In the United Kingdom, adult/continuing education, in both its liberal and vocational forms, embodies many of the alternative characteristics which I have described (1991: 135)

In the words of Scott, continuing education has intellectual values,

a set of norms and associated practices which would reflect, I would argue, a larger reconfiguration of useful skills and valuable knowledge (1996: 26)

Commentators such as Scott and Duke see adult continuing education almost reborn as a significant influence on the structures, methods and curricula of higher education. In the words of one group of researchers, "the 'adult university' may now be coming of age" (Bourgeois *et al.* 1999: 4). If this is so, it will be helpful to have a clear idea of the particular strengths of adult continuing education which make 'adultification' worthwhile.

Third, one long-lived and enduring part of the self-image of practitioners in adult continuing education is their difference from practitioners in the rest of higher education. This is reflected in the claim about the value of 'adultification'. In British higher education, adult continuing education is changing dramatically, and may perhaps disappear, at least in the forms in which it has existed for the past half century. It is therefore an appropriate moment to ask just how extensive were the conceptual differences between the mainstream of higher education and its adult education tributary.

The claim of this study is that those conceptual differences were not great. It will be argued that in the period reviewed higher education in England was dominated by a conception of education which can be characterised as 'liberal' and traced back to the writings of J.H. Newman in the nineteenth century. The same conception of education, it will be argued, dominated the provision of adult continuing education within the sector during this period. The most significant extension of the liberal conception within adult continuing education, it will be suggested, was the determination to treat students as adults bringing significant experience to their studies. However it will also be shown that it is precisely this understanding of the students as adults which has been lost as adult continuing education has moved into the mainstream of higher education provision.

If this is correct, then the idea of 'adultification' loses much of its force. The suggestion that ideas and practices drawn from adult continuing education can significantly change higher education in general depends on two claims. One is that that ideas, or Scott's 'intellectual values', drawn from adult continuing education are sufficiently different from those already in the higher education system to provide an alternative view of education to that, or those, already found in the higher education system. The other claim is that the fundamental values of the higher education system are open to significant change: but such change requires the support of those within higher education as well as those outside the system. As Tight puts it, change will involve 'altering the attitudes of those who work in higher education' (1991: 136)

This study claims that neither condition is fulfilled: Conceptions of education in adult continuing education have not been sufficiently different in most respects from those in the rest of the higher education system to offer an alternative vision of higher education, conceptions of education in higher education have changed little over the period under review, despite external pressures, and show little sign of the kind of change of attitudes which Tight mentions.

To focus these claims, we shall explore the following questions:

- What concept or concepts of education shaped higher education in the period from 1960 to 1997?
- What concept or concepts of education shaped adult continuing education within higher education in the same period?
- What were the significant conceptual differences between the mainstream of higher education and adult continuing education?
- Are those differences sufficiently significant to support the claim that the adultification of the university on these lines will be useful?
- What signs are there of change in the conception of education within higher education?

The focus of this study on concepts will necessarily entail ignoring many aspects of the changes in higher education and adult continuing education of the last few decades, and leaving aside discussion of many issues of great importance for higher education. However, this study rests in part on the conviction that discussion of the concept of education in higher education is as important and necessary as discussion of other aspects of the system, since it is the conception of education which provides the rationale for the system as it exists at present, and will provide the rationale for future development.

Philosophy of education

This study is a study in the philosophy of education. But what is the philosophy of education? How does the philosophy of education relate to philosophy as a whole? What exactly is the contribution of the philosophy of education to what goes on in education? For the sake of clarity, it will be useful to spend a little time on questions such as these before embarking on our study.

The philosophy of education is, it is claimed, a branch of philosophy. Its practitioners claim to be philosophers, bringing the insights of that discipline to bear on education, but drawing on developments within philosophy generally. Philosophy of education as a recognisable branch of philosophy is said to have developed after the Second World War. One of its leading exponents, R.S. Peters, began his introduction to a collection published in 1973 of papers on the philosophy of education with the words:

In the past decade the philosophy of education has been steadily establishing itself in Britain as a branch of philosophy. (Peters 1973, Introduction: 1)

More recently the philosophy of education has become much less confident. It is mainly practised not within departments of philosophy but within departments of education. Peters writing in 1973 noted that philosophy of education could be studied as an option in philosophy departments, but this is now very rarely possible. Even in departments of education, philosophy of education is not highly regarded; in the training of teachers more attention is given to practical matters than to the theorising of the philosophers. This inattention is often defended on the grounds that the philosophers have lost touch with the realities of life in education, a charge frequently levelled at philosophers in other areas too.

One reason for this it is claimed, is that for a period the philosophy of education became, like philosophy generally in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, rather dry, arid, even academic in a pejorative sense. Philosophers concentrated on linguistic analysis almost to the exclusion of other aspects of thought, in a conscious attempt to escape the metaphysical speculations of the earlier part of the century.

Linguistic analysis focused attention on units of language, which were assumed to be the basic units of meaning and themselves incapable of further analysis. Gradually the problems with this approach became clear, most notably the reliance on certain metaphysical claims about the nature of language and meaning. Philosophers shifted their attention from the units of language to the concepts which lay behind the language, and philosophy became primarily concerned with conceptual analysis.

At first conceptual analysis looked rather like linguistic analysis writ large. There was an assumption that by the careful study of the way concepts were used, the exact meaning of the concept could be established and criteria laid down for the correct use of the concept. Correct uses would be those that were both coherent and consistent and accepted by the majority of reflective language users. This is the kind of conceptual analysis which Körner called exhibition analysis (Körner 1969). Körner also wrote of replacement analysis, a conceptual analysis in which a concept judged defective in some way is replaced by a concept which is free of the alleged defects (Körner 1969).

One problem with conceptual analysis viewed in this way is that it tried to be too precise. It aimed to establish the essential meaning of any concept, but failed to notice that few concepts can be so easily delimited. Through the 1950s and 1960s, many philosophers pointed out that concepts have an inherent vagueness simply because they are used in a variety of contexts. The search for an essential meaning was attacked, most strongly in the work of Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein and others, the way to understand a concept was to explore the different

ways in which it was used. That entailed looking at the social contexts in which the concept was employed. Thus, as D.P. Gilroy put it, philosophical inquiry:

is in a sense the queen of the social sciences, synthesizing the work of subjects such as sociology, social psychology and anthropology so as to get to grips with problems concerning the nature of particular groups' presuppositions. (Gilroy 1982: 82)

Philosophy has continued to develop along the lines suggested by Gilroy, not abandoning conceptual analysis or even linguistic analysis, but trying to set words and concepts in context. Rather than trying to legislate for the correct meaning of a concept, philosophers seek to describe a plurality of meanings and explore the overlaps between multiple uses.

The significance of this for our study is that the philosophy of education is charged by writers such as Gilroy with ignoring such developments in philosophy and so losing its claim to be taken seriously. According to Gilroy, writing in 1982, the dominant school of thought in the philosophy of education was then still identified with a kind of conceptual analysis long abandoned by most philosophers. In particular, by seeing itself as being concerned primarily with the clarification of concepts, the philosophy of education, according to Wilfred Carr:

was depriving itself of all creative critical purpose and denying itself the opportunity for radical educational thinking of any kind. (Carr 1995: 22)

Carr adds to the criticism by pointing out that the kind of conceptual analysis embraced by leading writers in the philosophy of education, such as R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst, ignores the history of concepts. If concepts have a social setting, then they have an historical setting. We should therefore expect concepts to reflect their historical setting, and we should expect concepts to change over time as currents of thought more generally change and develop over time.

For Carr, the failure of the philosophy of education to take account of the history of concepts leads also to a failure to recognise that philosophy of education has a history, and that

our understanding of what constitutes a genuinely philosophical question about education has changed. (Carr 1995: 24)

Unfortunately Carr does not say directly what he regards as the genuinely philosophical questions about education. However he writes;

'Educational philosophy', then, is not some kind of academic theory to which practising teachers may remain indifferent. It is more or less implicitly contained in

the common-sense assumptions, values and beliefs underlying their everyday practical activities. Moreover, in so far as this common-sense thinking constitutes the basic pattern of thought in terms of which teachers make sense of what they are doing, it thereby defines the proper starting-point for theorising about their educational practice. (Carr 1995: 53)

Carr goes on to make the point that common sense is a style of thinking which assumes that its beliefs are true and its assumptions self-evident: this does not make them true. The common-sense assumptions, beliefs and values underlying the practice of teachers are open to examination and question.

This gives us a way of understanding the work of the philosophy of education: it is the uncovering and examination of the beliefs, values and assumptions which undergird the practices of education, and are frequently taken for granted and left unquestioned. This is the approach we shall adopt in this study.

Despite what was said above in criticism of earlier philosophy of education, we should note that this approach does relate in some way to the concerns of writers such as Peters and Hirst. Part of their concern was the justification of education and educational practice: indeed Peters wrote a paper entitled *The Justification of Education*. Since the justification of education must involve saying something about why education should be valued, why education is a worthwhile practice, we might expect that an enquiry which examines the values and beliefs implicit in educational practice would be of use in justifying that practice. However, the kind of justification sought in the light of Carr's remarks will take much more account of the social setting of education and the demands of society, recognising that education is a social practice and must respond to the expectations and pressures of contemporary society. (Carr 1995: 57)

The idea of justification is important to guard against the suggestion that the philosophy of education is a descriptive exercise, in which educational practices are examined to uncover values, beliefs and assumptions, which are then exhibited in detail. This is part of the work of the philosopher, but only part. The examination which is envisaged in the philosophy of education is a critical examination. That is, it includes an evaluation of the values, beliefs and assumptions uncovered. It will also include, following Carr's model, consideration of how those particular values, beliefs and assumptions have come to play their role in education. It may also offer some insight into what might be the most appropriate values and beliefs to undergird the development of education in the future.

We must exercise caution here. One of the characteristics of some of the confident philosophers of education of the past was their willingness to prescribe what education should be, and hence how education should be carried out and what criteria should govern the selection of curriculum material. This tendency has not disappeared. Outlining the material in part 3 of his recent book *Education and Meaning: Philosophy in Practice* (Walsh 1993), Paddy Walsh writes:

It proposes, first, a particular classification of educational values and an ordering of them that accords primacy to what it calls 'love of the world', and, second, a particular pluralist approach to the analysis or mapping of cognitive and cultural capital for educational purposes, which it relates to the previous ordering of values. (Walsh 1993: viii)

Walsh accepts that linguistic analysis of the older kind is inadequate, but insists that by paying attention to a full range of the uses of the word 'education' it is possible to uncover

relationships between them which are not just common threads or similarities, but are ways in which they complement and feed off each other by virtue of their differences. What we are to suppose is that it is precisely in these relationships that the concept of education lives – and empowers and structures our thinking. (1993: 10)

Despite the mention here of relationships and the subtle discussion elsewhere in the book of different discourses of education, Walsh is quite clear that the concept of education revolves round seeking and achieving a coherent view of life as a whole. This perspective leads him to a number of statements about educational practice in particular cases, all based on the particular ordering of values which for him leads to a rich and full life. It would take us too far from our own study to discuss Walsh's work in detail: what we need to note for the moment is how easy it is to slip from analysis to prescription, from, in Walsh's case, discussing the values inherent in different uses of the term education to laying down the ordering of those values which should inform educational practice.

We should distinguish carefully here between prescription and something like the exploration of implications. It is a proper part of the philosopher's task to explore and depict the implications of the adoption of certain views of education, and to draw attention to the consequences of following particular practices. However, this is not the same as specifying which views of education should be adopted.

Of course, it is open to the philosopher of education to argue for the adoption of a particular concept or set of concepts of education. However, the implication of Carr's reminder, mentioned above, that education is a social practice is that the argument for the adoption of a

particular concept of education must show how that concept of education makes education worthwhile in a particular social and historical setting. Walsh, for example, goes some way towards that, but in the end arrives at claims that seem to be intended to be timeless and universal, without any argument to support the implicit claim that his particular set of values and his ordering of them are timeless and universal.

One reason for this is the failure to distinguish clearly between philosophies of education and educational theories. We have suggested that philosophy of education is the attempt to uncover and examine the beliefs, values and assumptions which shape educational practice, in part to answer the question: why is education valued in this society now?

A theory of education takes a philosophy of education and uses it to help answer the question: how do we achieve whatever it is education is supposed to achieve in this society now? This question clearly involves issues about the use of resources – and, when resources are scarce, about the allocation of resources. The justification of the use and allocation of resources in particular cases will be grounded, explicitly or implicitly, in values and beliefs about education, so drawing on the philosophy of education.

Further, to answer the question of how we accomplish education, we must draw on theories from other academic disciplines. For example, given that whatever education is supposed to achieve will be achieved by some form of teaching and learning, we need to draw on the insights of psychology to help us understand how people learn and teach; and we need to draw on the insights of both psychology and sociology to help us understand the motivation of teachers and learners and the various barriers to teaching and learning. So a theory of education brings together insights from a variety of disciplines. But those insights may not always be congruent; they may not combine to produce a coherent theory; they may even be competing or directly contradictory. Then we shall have recourse to the underlying concepts of education in order to select and combine appropriate theories from other disciplines in a coherent way.

The process will be two-way. As we use concepts of education to develop our theory of education, so we may find it necessary to develop our concepts of education to take account of fresh insights.

The same kind of exchange is found between theories of education and practice. Educational practices do not exist in a vacuum. They are informed by educational theories, often more than one educational theory. An important part of practice is reflection on the extent to which

practice is achieving the desired ends: but that requires identification, at least, of the desired ends, and identification to of other ways of achieving those ends. Reflection on the practice may lead to changes in the theory, and changes in theory may lead to new insights into practice.

Thus there is an intimate relationship between philosophy of education, theory of education and the practice of education. The relationship should be both dynamic and creative, with each of the three partners influencing and responding to the other two, and being self-reflective as well. The distinctive role of philosophy is to uncover the beliefs, values and assumptions which shape all three partners at particular times and in particular places, and to examine them critically.

This is what is attempted in this study in relation to higher education and adult continuing education within higher education in England in the period between 1960 and 1997. The aim is to discover, explore and evaluate the beliefs, values and assumptions underpinning the theory and practice of this sector of education in England in our period. More formally, the study seeks to delineate and examine the concept or concepts of education underlying higher education and continuing education in England in this period. It attempts to discover why higher education and adult continuing education are valued in this period, what they expect to achieve and are expected to achieve, and what justification is offered for their practices

‘The concept or concepts’: this phrase points to an important preliminary question. Do we expect to find one concept or many? Some philosophers would argue that there must be one concept of education, one umbrella idea which unites all the different uses of the word ‘education’. The recent work of Walsh already mentioned appears to take this view. Others would argue that the concept of education admits of a number of meanings which are both distinct and incompatible. Going further, some writers maintain that these meanings of the concept of education are essentially contested. What does this mean?

Concepts, conceptions and contestability

Before entering the discussion of essential contestability, it will be useful to consider the distinction between concepts and conceptions. The need for such a distinction rests on the claim that ideas change and are affected by the circumstances in which they develop and are used. For example, the idea of representative government requires some notion of how and by whom the representatives are to be chosen: in parts of ancient Greece representatives were chosen by show of hands in the assembly of free males; in many medieval European towns,

representatives were chosen by ballot of property owners; in the United Kingdom at present representatives are chosen by secret ballot of those over the age of eighteen registered to vote.

Thus the application of the idea of representative government has been adapted to different circumstances and different social ideas, for example on the enfranchisement of women: but the basic idea of government by representatives chosen in some manner is clear in each application. In this example, the idea of representative government serves both to distinguish this form of government from other forms, such as dictatorship by one person, and to provide common ground for a discussion of different ways of choosing the representatives. The concept of representative government serves as an organising principle for different conceptions of how representation should be achieved.

We can generalise from this example. A concept is an organising principle; a conception is an application of that principle to one or more specific situations. A concept is very general in form and claims to be universal in scope, applying to all times and circumstances; a conception may appear general and may make universal claims, but is actually constrained by the particular circumstances of the application.

If this is accepted, we may expect that any given concept of interest is likely to admit of different conceptions, each related to particular circumstances. The conceptions may exist in parallel: that is, at any given time we may have a number of conceptions derived from the same concept, but each having a different emphasis and drawing attention to different parts of the same area of discussion.

An example here is the concept of democracy. Often construed popularly as 'one man, one vote', democracy means to some the idea that every person who has the franchise is able to take part in making decisions which affect the government of their lives. But in modern states, this has been changed to the right to vote periodically to elect representatives to take decisions on behalf of the voter, without necessarily seeking the voter's views. Some now claim that the development of modern technology makes it possible for all franchise holders to express an opinion on any question. Thus there are currently in existence at least two parallel conceptions of democracy, one emphasising decision-making by representation, the other emphasising decision-making by all. The two conceptions are related, but in competition, since you cannot have both in operation at the same time. In the discussion about which conception to adopt a common move is to claim that one or other approach is 'more democratic' than the other. Such claims quickly lead to debate about the application of

the concept 'democracy', with supporters of different conceptions arguing for the adoption of their preferred conception as the 'correct' use of the concept.

Disputes of this kind arise most often where the concepts are abstract and such that the criteria governing their use are very general and open to interpretation. As Michael Naish expresses it:

What may be said of a term marking such a concept is that the criteria governing its use are abstract and general, and in a good number of cases cannot be made immediately to yield firm and unambiguous directives as to whether or not it applies to them. It is this that leaves room for different conceptions, and justifies calling issues about the term's application 'interpretative'. (Naish 1984: 147)

It is in connection with such concepts that W.B. Gallie (1958) introduced the idea of essential contestability. Gallie's suggestion was that there are certain concepts whose meaning is contested, where the contestants can support their view with rational arguments, but there is no rational way of deciding between the arguments. He gave as examples of such concepts art, Christian doctrine and democracy; others later suggested that the concept of education fell into the same category (Hartnett & Naish 1976).

Gallie did not make use of the distinction between concepts and conceptions. He proposed seven criteria to distinguish the class of concepts which he described as essentially contestable. All seven criteria have been questioned, and various revisions of the list have been suggested. Naish in particular, returning to the debate in 1984, developed what he claimed to be

a more economical account of essential contestability than Gallie's. All that would seem to be required for a term to be essentially contestable is that the disputants agree on some general description of the achievement, practice or enterprise in question, that these be complex, open and modifiable as circumstances change, with there being as Gallie (1964, p. 165) says, "no question of any purely mechanical repetition or reproduction"; and that the dispute be about the particular form they might take in some particular circumstances. (Naish 1984: 144)

Using this account of essential contestability, Naish goes on to discuss whether or not education is an essentially contestable concept. He notes that disputes about essentially contested concepts are not simply or even primarily linguistic, and draws attention to the role of essential contestability in problem-solving. He writes

Put briefly, essentially contestable terms offer general answers to certain kinds of problem, and their competing uses offer more specific answers to these problems in the various forms in which they appear over time. (Naish 1984: 145)

To what kinds of problems do essentially contestable terms offer answers? Naish selects two characteristics: the problems will be to do with how some area of human activity is to be conducted or classified, and they will be problems which are 'enduring',

problems which have to be lived with, and solutions to them consist in developing strategies which will, at best, contain but not remove the problem. (Naish 1984: 146)

Naish goes on to draw the distinction between concepts and conceptions which we have already discussed, insisting that in the case of essential contestability the parties to the dispute

must have an appropriate concept in common (which amounts to sharing some general description of the achievement in question), and they must believe that this concept offers a general answer to the same particular enduring problem, and that it marks out the area within which more specific answers must fall. These more specific answers will themselves be embodied in conceptions. The debate will be about which of the competing conceptions best solves the problem in the particular circumstances in which it arises. (Naish 1984: 146)

He then goes on to argue that, contrary to Gallie's original suggestion, disputes about essentially contested conceptions do admit of some kind of rational agreement, but the rational agreement may still not settle the dispute.

One party might be unable to see the force of compelling reasons; the reasons advanced on the various sides might, at a particular time, be very evenly balanced; or the resolution of the dispute might turn, on the resolution of some other dispute, say, of a metaphysical kind where none of the currently canvassed solutions seems in any way adequate. (Naish 1984: 148)

In the light of all this, Naish claims that 'education' is an essentially contestable term.

He writes

What may be said about 'education' is that it embodies a general answer to the question as to what kind of preparation should be given to children or young persons in their role as future adults and citizens. Some other answers are simply socialising them or simply training them for jobs or simply training them to be unquestioningly obedient citizens. (Naish 1984: 149)

This general problem, he claims, is 'enduring' and

'education', like all other essentially contestable terms, admits of different conceptions which offer solutions to the various particular forms of the general problem as these arise in particular times. (Naish 1984: 149)

We note two points in passing. First, Naish restricts the use of the term 'education' to children and young people: even on the loosest of definitions of 'young people, this would exclude almost all higher education and all adult continuing education from consideration as education. Second, the alternative answers suggested by Naish to the general problem addressed by education ('simply socialising', 'simply training') would be taken by some to be education, or at least conceptions of education.

Leaving these issues aside for the present, we may accept that Naish has successfully established that education is an essentially contestable term according to his delineation of such terms: for there are different and competing conceptions of education, they do attempt to provide specific answers to a general problem, the description of the general problem is common to the contestants, and the conceptions are open and flexible.

What do we gain from recognising that education is an essentially contested term? First, we may expect that at any given time there will be competing conceptions of education, loosely related to one another under some general and relatively abstract concept, but incompatible in significant elements. Second, our attention is drawn to the embedding of the competing conceptions in political, social and economic theories. Third, we shall be wary of any assertions about *the* concept of education, particularly in connection with proposals to prescribe educational practice. Fourth, we shall be aware that the organisation and practice of education at any given time represents a compromise between competing theories and practices, and this awareness will temper our assessment of the value of particular educational forms.

For the present study, the significance of the claim that education is an essentially contested term is this. If we accept the claim, then we shall expect to find competing conceptions of education in higher education and adult continuing education in the period reviewed; we shall expect those conceptions to reflect the changing circumstances of the period; and we shall expect the conceptions to be supported and defended by rational argument.

Naish has shown that there is at least a *prima facie* case for suggesting that the concept of education in respect of children and young people admits of more than one conception, and we may reasonably expect that the same is true of education in higher education and continuing education. This study therefore adopts as a working hypothesis the idea that the concept of education in higher education and adult continuing education is essentially contestable. This will give a framework to the study: it will seek to identify distinct conceptions of education, and explore the extent to which they are competitors. One aim of

the study will be to determine whether or not these conceptions are sufficiently distinct and incompatible to justify the claim that education is an essentially contestable concept in higher education.

We have already accepted the idea that concepts have histories and arise within specific contexts; the emphasis on political, social and economic dimensions in Naish's description of education as an essentially contested concept is therefore welcome. To these dimensions, we shall add the cultural dimension, for higher education is widely described as reflecting specific cultural ideas in ways which are controversial.

Thus this study is a study of values and assumptions underlying different conceptions of education in higher education and continuing education. However there are many values involved in discussions of education and some are more relevant than others. To provide a framework for our discussion we need some idea of which values are significant for conceptions of education. A brief look at discussions of conceptions of education outside higher education will help us find direction.

Conceptions of education

We have noted that there has been very little study of the conceptions of education in higher education or even in continuing education. However as we have indicated there has been a long tradition of discussing the conceptions of education found in education in schools. We noted above some of the difficulties with this work. Nevertheless it is worth reviewing it briefly in order to orientate ourselves and discover the kind of issues which have been seen as worthy of discussion. We shall not necessarily limit ourselves to the discussion of those issues, but they will provide us with some initial markers.

We should note, of course, that there are considerable differences between schools and institutions of higher education, which may mean that the conceptions of education underlying educational practice in schools are different from those underlying educational practice in higher education. However, we might expect conceptions in the two sectors to be related, for at least two reasons.

First, even if we accept the case for differing, perhaps essentially contested, conceptions of education, it would be strange if the conceptions of education in primary, secondary and higher education were so different that there was no common ground between them. This would call into question the use of the term 'education'. By using the term 'education' to

cover what happens in different sectors, we clearly intend that there should be some continuity between the sectors. Consequently we should expect at least some of the elements in conceptions of school education to be present in conceptions of education in higher education.

Secondly, in the United Kingdom, the school system is shaped in part by the demands of higher education. What universities demand by way of entrance requirements is a significant factor in discussions of curriculum content and teaching methods. Further, what universities deem to be 'knowledge' strongly influences the boundaries of what it deemed appropriate curriculum content, even for those with no aspiration to higher education. Thus the universities affect what counts as teaching and learning in schools, and hence the understanding of education in schools.

However the influence of the universities on conceptions of education in schools goes further. All teachers in United Kingdom state schools have had some exposure to higher education as students, generally in obtaining a university qualification of some kind. They are thus socialised into the culture of higher education, and the views of education which are part of that culture. Inevitably that cultural exposure will influence their view of education, and so the view of education developed generally in connection with school education. Consequently, by looking at the issues discussed by philosophers in relation to school education we can catch at least echoes of the ideas abroad in the universities, explicitly or implicitly.

For an overview of conceptions of education in school education we turn first to Wilfred Carr, who has helpfully suggested that philosophies of education fall into two rough categories. Carr labels these traditional and liberal-progressive, though he is very careful to emphasise that both the groupings and their labels should be treated with great caution.

The characteristics of the traditional group are an emphasis on subject-centred objective knowledge, allied to the pursuit of academic excellence associated with an elitist view of society. Teaching methods are formal, with the teacher being seen as an expert transmitting a cultural heritage, and assessment is by examination designed to test the acquisition of knowledge.

The liberal-progressive group is characterised by an emphasis on learning from experience. Teaching is informal and involves the use of 'discovery' centred methods in flexible small groups, leading to informal evaluation of understanding rather than knowledge. Knowledge is

seen as more subjective than objective and the role of the teacher is to facilitate individual personal learning. There is a more egalitarian view of society and a desire to respond to the needs of pupils rather than the demands of a curriculum. (Carr 1995: 55)

Carr does not wish to set these two groups of philosophies in opposition to one another, but there are clear divergences between them. These divergences broadly reflect the debates of the last few decades about school education and the theories underlying changes in curriculum and methodology. We can explore some of the ideas a little further through the writings of some representative authors.

We begin with the analysis offered by R.S. Peters. Peters did much to develop the philosophy of education and his work still provides a starting point for many discussions, even though now much criticised. Of course Peters himself amended his views in response to criticism, and tracing the changes in his views is an interesting exercise in itself. However, for our purposes the main lines of his analysis are all that is required.

For Peters, education

is not a concept for picking out any specific activity, but for laying down certain criteria to which a family of activities must conform. (Peters 1973: 15)

Some of the criteria will characterise the successful outcome of education, the educated person; other criteria will delimit the processes by which people become educated. Peters is quite clear that education is what Ryle called an 'achievement word', pointing to something sought. It is not clear whether he thinks the process ever ends.

Amongst Peters' criteria for the educated person there are four main ideas. The educated person pursues a particular activity 'for what there is in it as distinct from what it may lead to or bring about'; the educated person 'must possess some body of knowledge and some kind of conceptual scheme to raise this above the level of a collection of disjointed facts'; the educated person must not be a narrow specialist; the educated person's knowledge and understanding must permeate their 'way of looking at things'.

We can see here the emphasis on objective knowledge identified by Carr. As Peters put it elsewhere:

Central to the concept of education is the development of knowledge and understanding. (Peters 1973, Introduction: 3)

However, for Peters breadth of knowledge is significant: while Carr suggests the knowledge is subject knowledge, for Peters it must go beyond the boundaries of particular disciplines and must be supported by a conceptual scheme which aids understanding.

There is also an important note in Peters' criteria of the worthwhileness of education, primarily for the individual: education offers something which the individual wants to pursue for its own sake. Moreover, education is transformative, changing the individual, for the better, a point made more explicit in one of Peters' major writings, *Ethics and Education*:

[education] implies that something worth while is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner. It would be a logical contradiction to say that a man had been educated but that he had in no way changed for the better, or that in educating his son a man was attempting nothing that was worth while. (Peters 1966: 25)

We may note in passing the unconscious sexism in the use of the example of the man educating his son, a clear pointer to the age of the text.

Peters was criticised for elitism and intellectualism, and for concentrating on a rather narrow band of educational activity. Interestingly for this study, the narrow band on which he concentrates is highly academic in character.

Another influential writer who was also greatly concerned with the place of knowledge in education was Paul Hirst. Hirst wrote a great deal about forms of knowledge, distinguishing different types of knowledge and examining their place in the curriculum. His most famous paper was entitled *Liberal education and the Nature of Knowledge* (Hirst 1965). In it he defends an idea of a liberal education as a development of the mind. He sees its core as the development of intellectual abilities for handling knowledge in all its different forms. Hirst contrasts a liberal education with a narrow vocational education or scientific education, neither of which, in his view, is sufficient for education of the whole person. Writing more recently, Ryan similarly looks for the education of the whole person but is more sceptical about the divide between liberal education and vocational education (Ryan, 1999). We shall look more closely at Ryan's views when we examine liberal conceptions of education in higher education later.

The concern for the education of the whole person links with a concern for the development of the autonomous person. This is brought out in a discussion between Ian Gregory and Ian Davies (Davies *et al.*, 2002). Gregory claims

The successful pursuit of knowledge and understanding equips individuals with the wherewithal to make better sense of their lives. In freeing them of ignorance, in encouraging the use of critical rationality premised upon the desire to understand more accurately what is going on and happening both to them and in the world, individuals will move towards autonomy. (*op. cit.*: 14)

Davies criticises this approach, claiming that while the attraction of the idea of autonomy is that it allows us to think that as individuals we can ask significant question of society and so make life better,

The reality is that self-interest becomes a more powerful factor in the determination of educational policies than the consideration of group as well as individual needs and the pursuit of justice (*op. cit.*, 24)

Another who defends the idea of the development of autonomy as a key consideration for education is Levinson (Levinson, 1999). For Levinson personal autonomy is a key concept of liberal ideas and is

A substantive notion of higher-order preference formation within a context of cultural coherence, plural constitutive personal values and beliefs, openness to others' evaluations of oneself, and a sufficiently developed moral, spiritual or aesthetic, intellectual and emotional personality. (1999: 35)

The development of such autonomy is, in Levinson's view, the key objective of education in schools,

because no other institution has the same singularity of purpose - to educate children for autonomy - as the school is able to have (*op. cit.* 62).

As we shall see below, other writers, such as Walsh and White, would not agree that the development of autonomy is so central; but the development in some way of the independent person is a constant background theme in discussions of school education.

In addition to his discussion of liberal education, Hirst's contribution to the study of education is of interest for our purposes because of his emphasis on the primacy of propositional knowledge. For Hirst, 'knowing that' is more fundamental than 'knowing how', and the heart of the development of a child as a rational being is the development of the intellect and the ability to handle propositional knowledge (Hirst 1974).

The emphasis on propositional knowledge was challenged from various directions. One challenge suggested that the idea of the intrinsic importance of knowledge is based on

metaphysical ideas about the nature of knowledge which are no longer held. For example, after a long discussion of the nature of knowledge, John White writes

The discussion in this chapter has failed to reveal any reason why knowledge (etc.) for its own sake should be the central aim of education. But it has not entirely closed the door to some such aim, if not as central. (White 1982: 21)

Notice that knowledge is not unimportant in education; but it is not of central importance. In part this is because talk of knowledge focuses attention on the development of the intellect, whereas according to White

More widespread, perhaps, than the view that education should aim at knowledge for its own sake, is the belief that it should promote the well-being of those who undergo it. (*ibid.*: 23)

The focus on well-being leads White in the direction of what Carr called a liberal-progressive philosophy. Given our interest in higher education it is interesting to note White's stipulation:

Let me stipulate that education is simply upbringing. In asking what the aims of education ought to be, I shall be taking this to mean: what should we aim at in bringing up children or young people? (*ibid.*: 5)

White is at one with Peters in the claiming that education is intrinsically valuable:

... educational achievements – the knowledge and skills, for instance, which children come to possess – should be seen as valuable for their own sake, quite apart from any other value they may have, of a vocational kind, for instance. (*ibid.*: 9)

He also makes an explicit link between knowledge and attitudes:

If educators are to promote the good of their pupils, their work is twofold, partly a matter of enlarging understanding and partly to do with shaping dispositions to behave in certain ways. (*ibid.*: 58)

More recently, the same themes appear in the work of Walsh (1993). Walsh distinguishes between formal education, which is specifically related to institutions and programmes of education, and education in a wider sense, which is mostly informal, caught not taught, and acquired outside the classroom and school. Formal education is more to do with training, informal education has more to do with ideas of nurturing, development and growth (Walsh 1993: chapter 2). The two senses of education are closely linked, to each other and to society:

The ideas of formal education and education in the widest sense emerge together from nurture-type ideas on the one hand and training-type ideas on the other in the measure that a society espouses the ideal of a reflective view of life as a whole, and the dialectic between these ideas is what underwrites that ideal. (Walsh 1993: 32)

O'Connor (1982) presents the same sort of contrast, but with a different emphasis.

It is not germane to our purpose to discuss these ideas in detail. However this brief survey of some representative writings on education shows a concentration on certain themes which can then be traced in the debates about schooling.

Thus what Walsh calls the dialectic of nurture and training is reflected in the continuing discussion about education as personal development, the development of the whole person, or the autonomous person, against the view of education as primarily training in skills and abilities for useful work. The centrality of knowledge in education is an important element in debates about curriculum content, particularly about whether the teaching should concentrate on intellectual skills or practical skills, about the balance to be struck between humanities, sciences and technical subjects, and about the place of emotions in education. There is a debate about the moral and cultural values communicated in education: not only what they are, but the extent to which they should reflect the diversity of cultures in modern Britain.

We have considered a small number of representative figures whose writings have given shape to these debates. There are many other writers who have entered the lists in vigorous discussion, from a variety of perspectives. However, while these different approaches raise important questions for school education, they all deal with the same fundamental issues. Sufficient has been said for our purposes to indicate the main elements of conceptions of education in school.

Sufficient has also been said to indicate why many of the discussions about the conception of education in school have only a small bearing on discussion about higher education. While not all are as explicit as White in the passage quoted above, most writers assume that school education is in some way about the formation of the minds and characters of children. Those who enter higher education as students have been through some process of prior education, and have acquired some experience of life and some formation of mind and character. In consequence, many of the issues discussed by philosophers of education take on a new aspect in relation to higher education.

One important element in the change of perspective is that students in higher education are there voluntarily, while schooling is legally compelled; this makes a difference to the discussion of the moral basis on which education is provided, and to discussions of autonomy and choice in relation to education. Another significant element is that the idea of knowledge is seen in a different light in the discussion of higher education and school education. As we have seen, much of the discussion about conceptions of education in schools refers to differing ideas of what sort of knowledge is to be transmitted through the curriculum. Higher education prides itself on, indeed partly defines itself by, its role in the creation and advancement of knowledge as well as its transmission. In consequence, while knowledge also plays a significant role in conceptions of education in higher education, the role is different from that played in conceptions of education in schools.

In spite of these important differences, many of the debates about school education have their parallels in higher education. There are discussions, often heated, about education seen as primarily liberal and education seen as primarily vocational. Issues about culture, particularly about which culture is being transmitted, are important. There are significant debates about elitism and access, and the extent to which the very best education should be available to all. All these debates share some of the conceptual underpinning of discussions about education in schools.

A framework for this study

We have seen sufficient to give us the markers for our study which we were seeking. Generally, conceptions of education are concerned with what is offered as education, what education is intended to achieve, and why it valued. Issues about what is offered are focussed on ideas about knowledge, skills and attitudes, the relationship between them, and their relative importance in education. Questions about what education is intended to achieve often put the development of the individual person against the production of people equipped to perform given roles. Discussion of the value of education often takes the form of striking a balance between the satisfaction of individual needs and the meeting of the requirements of society.

In the case of higher education we can add to these concerns a debate about who is involved in education. In part this concern manifests itself in continuing debate about access to higher education, and in particular the selective nature of higher education. However, there is also a debate about who should be involved as teachers in higher education: what background, skills, training are required?

A further concern for conceptions of education in higher education is the nature of the culture (or cultures) fostered and transmitted by the system. While this is clearly an issue for education generally, it becomes a significant issue for higher education because of the perceived role of higher education in producing leaders and in conserving culture. Higher education in the United Kingdom has often been charged with conserving and transmitting the culture of an elite or of the ruling classes. This is said to be exacerbated by the practice of withdrawing students into academic enclaves. Thus the conception of education in higher education must take account of where the education takes place, and of the cultural milieu in which it takes place.

We can focus these concerns in a series of questions which can be addressed to any distinguishable conception of education in higher education:

What is the dominant aim of this conception?

What is the view of knowledge?

What skills are offered?

What attitudes are inculcated?

To whom is the education offered?

By whom is the education provided?

Where does education take place?

Why is this education valued by the recipients, the providers, and society?

Recalling that our aim is to uncover and discuss the values and assumptions which inform the theory and practice of education in higher education and continuing education, we can expand on each of these questions.

What is the dominant aim of this conception? We have noted above that the discussion of the aims of education in higher education is often presented as a choice between incompatible alternatives: developing individuals or equipping people to fulfil roles. However, there is also much discussion about what developing or equipping is appropriate: is the focus to be the development of the mind, or is other development required? Are people to be equipped with intellectual skills only, or are other skills as, or more, important? There is also a widely-expressed view that the only worthwhile learning in higher education is learning carried out for its own sake, with no utilitarian aim. No conception of education in higher education can afford to take a simplistic view of these issues, but nor can any conception of education in higher education afford to ignore any of these view-points. Thus we shall be interested in

how the aims of education within a given conception combine the different perspectives, and which perspective, if any, is dominant.

What is the view of knowledge? Ideas of knowledge are important to any conception of education in higher education, because as we have noted one of the commonly accepted defining characteristics of higher education is involvement in the advancement and transmission of knowledge. We have also seen that many writers regard knowledge and understanding as key elements in education generally. Hence, ideas about the nature of knowledge, how knowledge is obtained, how knowledge is transmitted and what is transmitted will all affect conceptions of education. For higher education the questions about what knowledge is transmitted involve discussion about the role of specialist and generalist knowledge, and about the place of academic disciplines. All this becomes particularly significant for higher education when alternative conceptions of knowledge are developing, as has been the case in the period under review.

What kind of skills are offered? Once it is accepted that the communication of skills is one of the aims of higher education, questions arise about which skills are to be the focus of the efforts of academics. We have already referred to this discussion with reference to a choice between intellectual skills and other skills. However, there is also much discussion about which intellectual and other skills are most appropriately taught in higher education, and which are better taught elsewhere; and there is discussion about the relationship between different skills, especially in view of the development of information technology. From the perspective of this study, these issues are significant.

What attitudes are inculcated? An important part of education, it is widely agreed, is to do with the inculcation of attitudes. In higher education, these attitudes will clearly reflect a view of academic culture, and what is appropriate to the pursuit of knowledge in higher education. However, the selective nature of higher education and its traditional insistence on separation of the student from the outside world have both been taken by supporters and defenders of the system to be marks of a particular culture developed and transmitted within higher education. This culture has often been attacked as elitist, as the culture of the ruling class, and as conservative. If education is seen as transformative, or culturally open, then the question of what attitudes are fostered, implicitly or explicitly, becomes a significant part of the conception of education.

To whom is the education offered? Since higher education in England is not compulsory, there is an immediate question about to whom it is offered, or to whom it is available. A

system which selects by academic achievement is different from a system which selects by ability to pay, for example. A system which aims to maintain an elite, of whatever kind, is different from a system which aims to give something to everyone. Thus the issues of access is important for any conception of education in higher education.

By whom is the education provided? We have noted the running theme of the alleged elitism of the higher education system. The conception of education is affected by the ways in which the providers are recruited. Are all teachers in higher education to be people who have themselves enjoyed higher education, and thus become indoctrinated with the values of the existing system? Is high academic standing necessarily a good guide to teaching ability? Must all teachers in higher education be also research active in a specialist field? All these issues affect the conception of the education which is provided.

Where does education take place? One of the long-standing debates in higher education is about whether or not it is appropriate to take a group of students and separate them from the world for a period of full-time study. Is part-time study effective in higher education, and what are the issues arising from the development of distance learning and the use of information technology? To what extent do these change the nature of the education offered?

Why is this education valued by the recipients, the providers, and society? It is clear that higher education is valued in our society, if only from the numbers of people wishing to take up the opportunity of higher education. From ideas of the value of higher education comes much to inform discussions about what kind of higher education is need in our society now, and how we should pay for it. These questions are related to issues about who benefits from higher education, and who should benefit. Hence any conception of education must give us an idea of why it is valued.

It is appropriate at this point to note that in our study we shall have to recognise the differing roles, requirements and influence of a number of stakeholders. We can easily identify as stakeholders in higher education:

- the government
- higher education academic staff
- higher education administrators and managers
- students
- employers
- the public, or society in general.

All these have a legitimate interest in higher education. The government provides from the public purse much of the funding of higher education and has a duty to ensure that the money is well spent (whatever that might mean); it also has an interest in higher education as a source of ideas, knowledge and personnel for running the country and developing its economy and social life. Academic staff, administrators and managers in higher education have a proper interest in the system, but their needs and views are not necessarily the same: for example, academic staff might have strong views on the number of students who can be properly taught in one class, while administrators and managers might have equally strong views on the economically viable number of students in a class. Students have a legitimate interest in the education they are receiving, even though their voice has often been ignored. Employers, who will make use of and pay for the skills and knowledge of graduates, have a legitimate interest in what skills and knowledge are acquired. Finally the general public, who fund the system through taxation and are affected by its products, have a legitimate interest in the system. In considering conceptions of education it may be appropriate to note on occasions how different conceptions are shaped by the interests of one or more of the stakeholding groups.

Further preliminaries

Having established the questions which will shape our analysis, we need to consider a few other preliminary matters.

Our investigation is limited to England, because higher education in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has its own particular characteristics and circumstances. Since, as we have noted, the concept of education is affected by social and cultural circumstances, it is inevitable that differences will emerge.

We are considering the concept of education in all higher education in England. There are two points to note about this. First, we are concerned with higher education, not just with universities. It is common for talk of higher education in Britain to focus on universities, but it is necessary to remember that higher education embraces more than the university sector. In the period covered by this study, higher education has been provided by universities, higher education colleges, further education colleges, and polytechnics. One question of interest to us will be to what extent the different sectors of higher education reflect the same conceptions of education.

Second, we are concerned with conceptions of education, not with the idea of a university. Education is only one of the functions of a university. A university is also a research institution, and during the period covered by this study, this aspect of the function of the university has become more and more important, to the point where for some institutions, research generates more funding than teaching. Universities are also employers, often the largest employer in an area, and play a cultural role in the life of a region. They thus have roles which are distinct from their role of education, and even, it is said, conflict in some cases with their role in education. Thus discussion of the idea of a university is different from discussion of the idea of education in higher education.

This is significant, because there has been much discussion of the role of the university, which implicitly assumes that education is a prime function of the university but never discusses what education means. One important exception to this general criticism is Ronald Barnett's *The Idea of Higher Education* (Barnett, 1990), where the idea of education and the challenge to higher education are discussed. Barnett's book is noteworthy precisely because it is unusual in tackling these topics. We shall take up the discussion of some of Barnett's ideas later. For the moment it is sufficient for us to note that our focus is narrower than the discussion of the idea of a university.

It is also important to note that we are discussing conceptions of education in higher education. We are not necessarily discussing what makes this education higher education. While conceptions of education in higher education necessarily have an implicit understanding of why this education is properly termed higher education, discussion of this topic would take us too far from our present purpose.

Finally we note an important detail of terminology. We are concerned with conceptions of education in higher education and in adult continuing education within higher education. For brevity and ease of reference we shall adopt the terminology of *mainstream* and *adult continuing education*. Our main focus in discussion of adult continuing education will be on the education offered by designated departments, whether they are called extra-mural studies, adult and continuing education, part-time studies or whatever. The key factor in identifying these departments will be that their primary objective is the provision of university level education to those who are not traditional full-time students. We shall use the term *mainstream* to refer to all other provision in higher education.

This is necessarily a somewhat crude division, since there are many 'mainstream' departments which provide substantial programmes of part-time study, and some, notably

departments of education, which exist to provide mainly post-graduate in-service training and development. However, the extra-mural departments, in their various guises, are united by a focus on giving opportunities to those who for one reason or another do not fit the normal university admission criteria. Crude though it is, the distinction made here follows the pattern of the literature, in which extra-mural departments appear to have a clear unity of aim and approach, at least in distinction from the mainstream. For our purposes, this is enough to separate the two strands of provision.

Structure

For the sake of clarity in analysis it will be helpful to have some way of categorising the various conceptions to be examined. As has been seen there is a variety of ways of categorising conceptions of education in the philosophy of education generally. These categorisations and some very general ideas about higher education give the study a helpful framework.

A cursory glance at the literature on higher education reveals two very broad and allegedly contrasting, even opposed, conceptions of education, the liberal education and the vocational education traditions. These mirror to some extent the division familiar in the discussion of education in schools, between a tradition of education focused on the development of people and a tradition of education focused on the development of skills. Of course this division is too crude, in schools and in higher education: but it is widely referred to in the literature and provides a convenient way into our study.

A third broad umbrella conception is often referred to in the literature, though it is much more difficult to pin down. This is the conception allied to the self-designated 'radical tradition' within education, which has its branch in higher education with a distinctive view.

A fourth over-arching conception is that linked with the development of ideas of lifelong learning. This appears in many ways in recent years. It is explicitly mentioned in the Dearing report (1997), and taken up by such writers as Duke (1992). Then there are ideas encapsulated in words like 'massification', that is, the development of a mass system of higher education. Ideas associated with the development of information technology and with the so-called 'post-modern movement' also have their influence on conceptions of education. Thus there are several recent developments which produce variations on conceptions of education of which we shall take note as we proceed.

Having established some broad categories to assist with the organisation of the material, we can briefly describe the structure of this study.

This opening chapter has reviewed literature on the philosophy of education and established the analytical framework and tools to be employed in the study.

Chapter two provides a brief review of the history first of higher education and then of adult continuing education, concentrating on those aspects of particular relevance to conceptions of education. In an interesting indicator of the dominance of certain ideas of education, it will be necessary to explore the history of both sectors outside our period of interest.

Chapter three discusses conceptions of education in mainstream higher education. It begins with the Robbins Report of 1963 and its snapshot of views of higher education. It then takes up the two strands already mentioned, the liberal and vocational strands. Reason will be found to distinguish as a separate conception of education the ideas underlying professional education provided within higher education.

Chapter four discusses conceptions of education in adult continuing education. Here the study is guided by this sector's view of itself as providing both education for its own sake (learning for learning's sake) and education with a social purpose (learning for a social purpose). After an examination of these two main lines of thought, note will also be taken of the development of accredited provision, access provision and the influence of post-modernism, and the resulting changes in conceptions of education.

Chapter five is devoted to the 'radical tradition'. In higher education this has been most obvious within continuing education, but it has developed conceptions of education which have had influence across the sector. The main lines of these conceptions will be explored together with their challenge to more established conceptions, and the reasons for the failure of the radical tradition to gain much influence.

Chapter six explores briefly some of the more recent developments in higher education which are alleged to be changing views of education. It examines the conceptions of education underlying the Dearing Report, and ideas of lifelong learning, computer mediated distance learning, 'adultification' and 'massification'

Chapter seven draws the threads together. The study will show that one particular conception of education has dominated higher education, both in its mainstream and continuing education

forms, throughout the period under review, and remains dominant. A concluding discussion asks whether this conception is adequate for the future and, if not, what changes need to be made to provide a conception of education appropriate to higher education in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Two: The changing environment of higher and continuing education.

Introduction

As we noted in the previous chapter, concepts and conceptions have histories. Ideas of education are no exception. From the days of the Greek philosophers to the present, notions of education have been affected by the circumstances in which education has been practised. In this chapter we shall look briefly at some of the major influences on higher education and adult continuing education in England in the period from 1960 to the present.

Our review will necessarily be selective and brief. The aim is to sketch the background for the discussion of conceptions of education, not to provide even a brief history of either higher education or continuing education. Our interest is in those aspects of the history which bear on conceptions of education and changes in conceptions in the period. We shall also attempt to relate the history of higher education to the political, economic, social, cultural and intellectual history of the period, because all these affect the understanding of higher education and its purposes and its delivery.

In the decades since the Second World War higher education has been seen as a significant resource in the attempt to maintain and develop Britain's place as a leader in an increasingly competitive world. This has been emphasised especially in recent decades as the world has moved, allegedly inexorably, towards a knowledge-based, international economy. The acquisition, development and transmission of knowledge have traditionally been seen as prime functions of higher education, so higher education has been expected to provide those who can keep nations at the forefront of the knowledge industries and international companies at the forefront of commercial exploitation of knowledge. Since higher education in Britain has been funded largely from the public purse, this role inevitably meant that higher education was directly affected by the national political and economic environment.

The period from 1960 to the late 1990s saw a move from a largely consensual form of politics to a largely confrontational form. At the end of the 1950s the political mood in the United Kingdom was frequently described as Butskellism, a word coined to reflect the large areas of agreement between the political leaders Butler and Gaitskell, even though they belonged to apparently opposed political parties. The two parties

seemed to have converged towards a general consensus on political values and institutions: there was more to unite than to divide them (Jones, 2001: 76)

According to Jones (*ibid.*), with the ‘faltering’ of the British economy in the 1960s, exacerbated by the rise in oil prices of the early 1970s, the old consensus crumbled, to be replaced sharper political and ideological divisions as new leaders came to the fore.

Many writers see the election of a Conservative administration under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 as a watershed. Under Mrs. Thatcher’s leadership, it is said, policies were adopted for ideological and political reasons, regardless of their practical effects, and every area of public life was viewed through a political lens. Education was affected as much as other areas of public life. While in previous years there had been great debates and arguments about educational practice, there had been a broad liberal consensus on the aims of education. Now education became a political item as well, with education policy driven by ideology. Eventually, even higher education felt the effects of this approach.

One aspect of the approach of the Thatcher administrations was their attitude to public expenditure. Everywhere there was a drive to reduce expenditure and to achieve greater ‘value for money’. This was applied across the spectrum of government spending, including education. In the eyes of many this focussed attention on short term effects at the expense of long-term planning.

Another aspect of the economic scene was the focus on skills. It was widely asserted throughout the period under review that Britain’s work force lacked skills appropriate to the modern world and, worse, was largely unwilling to retrain to acquire new skills. Successive governments sought to encourage training and re-training. Higher education was expected to play a part in this. Moreover, higher education was also expected to provide the leaders of industry and research. However, a constant complaint from the industrial and commercial sectors was that the products of the universities were too academic, skilled, but not skilled in what was necessary for success in the commercial world. This meant not only a continuing debate between the government, industry and higher education, but also a more career-centred approach amongst students.

For higher education this had a number of implications. One was that the importance of education for the purposes of getting a more highly paid job became clearer. Another was that many qualified young people chose to go directly into employment rather than continue in education. Many of them later regretted this and sought university-level study as part-time or full-time mature students. Another effect was that young people, seeing themselves as consumers, became more discriminating and more demanding about the conditions under which they were expected to live and study. They required more independence, and the idea

of the university acting *in loco parentis* increasingly made little sense, especially after the age of majority was lowered to 18.

For higher education, two other aspects of cultural change in the period are significant. First, there was a great change in the role of women. There is still considerable controversy about the extent to which the role of women has changed, as distinct from the appearance of change: but certainly in higher education there were many more women students and more women staff, though not often in the higher reaches of academia.

Secondly, Britain became a more overtly multi-cultural society. There was large scale immigration, especially from parts of the former British Empire such as the Caribbean. There were also large numbers of asylum seekers, from all over the world, added to the traditional flow of Americans, Australians, and so on. The result was that greater attention was drawn to implicit racism in British society, and higher education was required to pay attention to issues such as the low rates of take up from students from ethnic minorities. Higher education institutions also increasingly faced questions about their treatment of students from non-white backgrounds, not only in racist terms but in cultural terms.

Another great change which affected higher education came in access to knowledge. Research, particularly in the sciences, grew exponentially during the period, resulting in a huge output of material. The development of the Internet through the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the invention of the World Wide Web in 1990, made much of this material readily available to anyone with access to a computer and a means of connecting to the Internet. In consequence, universities became some entities amongst many concerned with the production and distribution of knowledge. The universities' role as gatekeepers or accreditors of knowledge became more and more questioned.

Further, the very idea of knowledge was questioned. From all directions there was an attack on the idea of certainty and universal truth. This came to its fullest flower in the philosophical guise of anti-foundationalism and the wider guise of what came to be termed post-modernism. In the former, philosophers argued that the idea of knowledge as justified belief that relied on a system of foundations was simply false. The post-modernists claimed that the traditional view of knowledge entailed fitting all human ideas into a small number of over-arching 'grand narratives', culturally shaped and controlled by elites; against such ways of understanding human existence, post-modernists posited fragmented discourses in which we all make sense of our own lives through narratives constructed, and constantly changed, as

we go along. The combination of these ideas challenged the very idea of knowledge on which higher education rested.

Higher education

The history of higher education in the last four decades has been dominated by issues of resources allied to alternating periods of rapid expansion and contraction. Again and again the sector has found itself reacting to sudden changes in government policy toward higher education. Often the reaction has been less than enthusiastic.

Giving a public lecture in 1993, Professor Stewart Sutherland, then Vice Chancellor of the University of London, put the period in perspective in typical style:

Indeed, the recent Christmas pantomime season led me to recall the dialogue over the last thirty years being something like this:

1960s and 1970s

Government: You will expand!
Universities: On no we won't!
Government: Oh yes you will, or we shall give all the money to the colleges of advanced technology (CATS) and the new universities!
Universities: Oh yes we will!

1981 to 1988

Government: You will stop expanding!
Universities: On no we won't!
Government: Oh yes you will, or we shall fine you for each student over quota whom you admit!
Universities: Oh yes we will!

1988 to 1992

Government: You will expand!
Universities: On no we won't!
Government: Oh yes you will, or we shall give all the extra money to polytechnics!
Universities: Oh yes we will!

1992 –

Government: You will stop expanding!
Universities: On no we probably won't!
Government: Oh yes you will, or ...

At this point I wakened from my nightmare and decided that I preferred the more rational world of pantomime! (Sutherland 1994: 1)

As Sutherland suggests, it is hard to see any coherent strategy for the numbers of students or institutions in higher education over the whole period. It is equally hard to see any long-term strategy for the sector: as Sutherland remarks in the same lecture:

One of the major problems besetting universities in the United Kingdom for the last two decades has been a preoccupation with the short term. This has meant, at best, a tension between short-term and long-term priorities, and at worst a neglect of the long-term. (Sutherland 1994: 1)

For convenience of analysis it is helpful to divide the period under review into sections, as Sutherland has done. There are several ways of doing this. One popular way is like Sutherland to follow the rise and fall of numbers. Most commentators agree that there was a period of expansion in the 1960s, marked by the publication of the Robbins Report (1963). This was followed by a period of contraction in the aftermath of the economic crises of the early 1970s. Next came another period of expansion, in the late 1980s. Finally came a period of both expansion and contraction, during the 1990s, marked by the publication of the Dearing Report (1997).

However, as with most such ways of sub-dividing the period, the boundaries between the different sections are difficult to fix, especially as there is inevitably a time lag between an announcement of government policy and a consequent effect on higher education. Since we need only an outline of the history of higher education in the period as a backdrop to our main concern with the concept of education, it will be more convenient to follow W.A.C. Stewart and take the period decade by decade (Stewart, 1989). This gives us clear sections, even though themes, policies, and the effects of policies, run from one decade to the next.

It is worth noting immediately that one significant factor in the history of higher education in our period does transcend decades, and also provides a clear and sharp dividing line in the story. The period could well be divided into two according to government interest in higher education. Prior to 1979, education was a consensus area in political terms. After 1979 education became an arena of political confrontation.. While government attention was focused initially on the compulsory sector, the post-compulsory sector could not escape scrutiny: higher education has taken its place in the spotlight since the mid 1980s (Kogan, 1983).

A second point to note is that in order to understand conceptions of education after 1960 we need to pay some attention to earlier developments. There are two main reasons for this. One is that first, conceptions generally take a long time to develop, and the conceptions of

education abroad in 1960 did not spring from nowhere, but grew out of the activity of previous decades. The other reason for paying attention to developments before 1960 is that many of the attitudes which inform the development of conceptions in the period after 1960 were not only formed but set firmly, some would say too firmly, by the earlier developments.

In this section on higher education we shall follow Stewart's work for the period from 1960 to 1989, since it is one of the very few books providing a comprehensive overview. For the later period, from 1989 to the publication of the Dearing report in 1997, we shall use a number of sources to construct a picture of relevant developments, since a comprehensive history of higher education in that period has yet to be written.

While Stewart treats separately development of universities, teacher training colleges, and other institutions of higher education, we shall take the sector as a whole, noticing differences between parts of the sector only where they are germane to our interests.

Before 1960

Stewart recalls helpfully the origins of the mediaeval universities in the guilds of masters in particular centres which attracted students from all over Europe to listen and to debate with the scholars. The masters were responsible for deciding who would be given bachelor status, and which bachelors would be admitted to full membership of the guild as masters themselves. Already we see the idea of an autonomous and exclusive community of scholars, which will be significant in the development of a concept of education.

In England, both Oxford and Cambridge had their origin in this period and began with this ethos. They became the main training grounds for members of three ancient professions, the church, the law and medicine. As what is now called the scientific and industrial revolution gathered pace, the two ancient universities were accused of paying too little attention to the new knowledge and its applications. The growth in England from 1700 onwards of societies for the study of 'philosophy' and related subjects, mostly scientific, led to attempts to create new universities with a different ethos.

These attempts at last bore fruit in the nineteenth century, with the creation of the University of London in 1827. Stewart writes

There was a real sense in which London University of 1827 was based on being different from Oxford and Cambridge; it was not residential but simply a teaching centre; there were to be no teaching of religion and no entry condition

of Christian, let alone Anglican, allegiance. It incorporated teaching medicine and surgery from the start, together with law, economics, geography, classical and modern languages, mathematics, chemistry and moral philosophy. (Stewart 1989: 10)

Further

within the first twenty years, women were allowed to study in the university, although it took almost sixty years before full graduation was made possible for women. (*ibid.*)

Though the students and subjects and even methods of teaching might be different, London shared the ethos of knowledge being imparted to students by accredited scholars.

Through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century more universities were founded, beginning with Durham in 1832. Later came Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Bristol, all of which had full university status before the First World War. It is significant for our purposes that each of the latter six universities developed from a college of arts and science, founded by one or more local industrial benefactors. There was a clear connection between local industry and higher education, not only in finance but in the expectation that the new institutions would provide the knowledge and skills, and skilled people, to develop local industries and keep them competitive. Further the new institutions were associated with civic pride: all the cities listed were significant regional centres, prosperous and proud, and their leading figures were determined that their city should have a university. Already the status attached to the title 'university' was making itself felt in an early indication of the value placed on a university education.

In addition to the universities, there were university colleges at Reading, Nottingham and Southampton, joined after the First World War by colleges at Exeter, Leicester and Hull. These institutions did not have degree awarding powers, but prepared students for external degrees of the University of London. In consequence their curricula were determined by what London would permit, and in virtue of its validating powers, London exercised considerable influence on how the curriculum should be taught.

Gradually the university colleges achieved university status in their own right. The process took a long time, the last of the colleges, Leicester, achieving degree-awarding powers only in 1957.

The dominance of London, Oxford and Cambridge in the period up to the late 1950s is significant. Because they were the main degree-awarding bodies, they attracted teachers and students of high quality, and their graduates filled most of the highest positions in the professions and government, including administration, and took many of the positions of influence in the business world. Naturally they were pre-eminent in research. Thus in the discussion of the expansion of higher education which took place in the 1950s, the main players were people whose educational background and experience was shaped by the traditions of Oxbridge and London.

One change of significance in this period was the revision in 1946 of the terms of reference of the University Grants Committee, originally set up in 1919. Central government started to make regular grants of funds to the universities in 1889, and in 1906 a permanent advisory body was established to administer them. This body became the University Grants Committee, whose terms of reference now read:

To enquire into the financial needs of university education in Great Britain; to advise the Government on the application of any grants that may be made by Parliament towards meeting them; to collect, examine and make available information on matters relating to university education at home and abroad; and to assist, in consultation with the universities and other bodies concerned, the preparation and execution of such plans for the development of universities as may from time to time be required in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to national needs (quoted in Stewart, 1989: 58).

Here we see the start of the central planning of higher education which was to become more and more significant. It should be noted that the universities were not hostile to the extension of the government's overt role in planning higher education (Stewart 1989: 58). The mention of national needs is also noteworthy: this is the first official mention of a theme which was to play an important role in shaping ideas about the aims of higher education in succeeding decades, becoming more and more noticeable in the 1980s and in the 1990s playing a major part in the developing discussion of lifelong learning.

National needs also appeared in the report of the Committee on Future Scientific Policy, set up in 1945 and chaired by Sir Alan Barlow. The Committee's terms of reference included consideration of 'the use and development of scientific manpower in the succeeding ten years'. Reporting in 1946, the Committee concluded that the numbers of scientists and technologists had to be doubled in ten years, and this conclusion brought the Committee to look at higher education as a means of providing some of the expansion. The Barlow Report insisted on the need to keep the higher education system separate from the school education system (contrary to the views of RA Butler, author of the Education Act of 1944). It also

took up the cudgels on behalf of institutions outside the big three, recommending the granting of university status to university colleges and the founding of at least one new university.

The latter recommendation led to the foundation of the University of Keele, set up as the University College of North Staffordshire in 1950 and gaining university status as a degree-awarding institution in 1962. Significant in the discussion of the establishment of Keele was the reaction to the original proposal of CVCP:

The suggested basis [of academic studies] seems to provide not a new type of University institution but a new type of Technical College; and in the view of the Vice-Chancellors such an institution could not be given even limited degree-granting powers without serious detriment to the whole University system. (CVCP 1946, quoted in Stewart 1989: 52)

Keele tried from the start to present an interdisciplinary programme, focused in a foundation year common to all students. A similar emphasis is found in the formation of the University of Sussex for which negotiations began in 1956 (Daiches, 1964).

In the late 1950s a decision was taken to create ten colleges of advanced technology as an interim stage on the way to creating new institutions of university rank with a strong focus on technological education. Stewart writes

It was not simply an academic status game, but a redirection of talent and training from pure to applied science in order to secure a competitive workforce of well-prepared scientists, engineers, economists, industrialists, social scientists and craftsmen from the intelligentsia. (Stewart 1989: 85)

The move to university status for these institutions, with the power to award their own degrees, came during the 1960s. Thus in terms of institutions at least, a serious attempt was made to meet the requirements identified by the Barlow Committee.

With these developments, in 1961 there were 113,000 university students, located in 28 institutions, of which only eight had more than 3,000 students. The emphasis therefore was on small institutions, which fitted well with traditional ideas of academic community.

The 1960s

One of the enduring popular myths about higher education in the 1960s is that the report of the Robbins Committee, published in 1963, ushered in a period of great expansion for the universities. As many commentators have noticed, the expansion was already under way

before the Committee was set up in 1961; one example of this is the development of the Colleges of Advanced Technology, mentioned above. The true significance of the Robbins Committee's work according to Stewart was that, having reviewed the range of full-time higher education, the Committee proposed the outlines of a system in place of 'a series of particular initiatives'. (Stewart 1989: 144). Perhaps just as significant as the Robbins Report was the report of the Anderson Committee of 1960: this recommended mandatory maintenance grants for all full-time students following first degree courses.

During the 1960s Newcastle separated from the University of Durham, to become a separate institution in 1963, and six new universities were approved and opened in England: York, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Warwick and Lancaster. All six took advantage of green field sites to develop a pattern of residential accommodation, and all tried to follow a pattern of studies which emphasised inter-disciplinary matters. None of them served apprenticeships as university colleges, as the earlier institutions had done.

In addition to expansion in institutions and numbers of both students and staff, the 1960s saw a great increase in intervention in university affairs from the central forces of government, the UGC and the CVCP.

The terms of reference for the Robbins Committee are an example of this trend:

To review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangement for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution. (Robbins, 1963)

It is instructive to note that the terms of reference restrict the Committee to consideration of full-time higher education: the growing numbers of students attending part-time courses were not included. The mention of 'national needs and resources' and 'arrangements for planning and co-ordinating' are significant pointers to a changed environment for higher education.

One of the enduring influential legacies of the Robbins Committee is the statement which has become enshrined as the Robbins Principle:

Throughout our Report we have assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available to all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and wish to do so. (Robbins 1963: para. 31)

This principle put the expansion of higher education on a new footing, and provided a focus for much debate in the ensuing decades of changing financial fortunes. Some participants in the debate focused attention on the idea that higher education courses should be available to all who wished to pursue them, while others were at pains to stress the qualification by ability and attainment. The Robbins Committee itself noted that

the criterion by which capacity is to be judged is clearly a question on which there may be a variety of opinions. (Robbins 1963: para 31)

Institutions of higher education, generally chose to use the 'gold standard' of performance in the GCE 'A' level examinations as their criterion, both in the 1960s and subsequently. Since this is an academic qualification, reliance on it was felt by many to disadvantage large numbers of potential students. The discussion of entry requirements, particularly for potential students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups, grew in importance over the next thirty years.

An important development of the 1960s was the creation of the Open University (OU), a political act, announced in 1963 by Harold Wilson, then Prime Minister. The Open University was, he later claimed, his own idea rather than party policy, and he was determined to push it through. However it is questionable whether the OU as it emerged after Wilson became Prime Minister in 1964 was what he originally envisaged (Sargent, 1996: 291; DES 1966)

The hall mark of the OU was the use of broadcast audio and video material as the main means of instruction. However, from the start the audio and video material was supplemented by course books, many specially written by course teams. There were local tutorials in which students met their tutor on a regular basis in a small group. There was also a great emphasis on Summer Schools, when students came together for a residential week of intensive teaching and socialising. For many at the OU the tutorial and the Summer school were vital as a means of establishing close contact with students, and enabling students to establish contact with each other. Thus the ethos of interaction between tutors and students was maintained. The ethos persists: in the 1990s the OU was at the forefront of the developing use of multi-media and electronic means of learning, including what the OU calls 'conferences' as means of providing opportunities for interaction between students and between students and tutors (Sargent, 1996: 306). The Open University admitted its first students in 1971 and awarded its 100,000th BA degree was awarded in 1991. Courses were modular, and one could gain credits to build to general degrees. Students were mature, and studied part-time over periods of several years to obtain a degree.

The other great development of the 1960s of interest to our study was the establishment of the polytechnics which took place in 1966, following a speech by Anthony Crosland, Minister of State for Education, at Woolwich Polytechnic in April 1965.

The case for a strand of polytechnic provision had been argued strongly for some time (Robinson, 1968). These institutions were intended to stand in a 'service' tradition, characterised as

responsive, vocational, innovative and open. Institutions in this tradition do not hold themselves apart from society: rather they aim to respond to its needs. (Pratt, 1997: 9)

Those needs included a need for vocational, professional and industrial based courses and a need for 'social control' of part of higher education (Crosland, 1965 reported in Pratt, 1997: 8). The polytechnics were intended to serve part-time students and those seeking a qualification below degree level (DES 1966). In pursuit of the idea of 'social control', they were placed under the governance of Local Education Authorities.

The 1970s

The early 1970s saw Britain in the grip of economic crisis (Morgan 1999: 346). However, the economic crises of the universities and colleges were only partly caused by the general economic situation. The growth in student numbers was already slowing, and as expansion slowed, so did the flow of money to support expansion. As actual numbers dropped significantly below the forecasts the UGC tightened its limits on universities. (Stewart 1989: 158)

One reason for the slowing of the growth of student numbers, according to Stewart, was the fact that fewer people wanted to go to university. This may itself have been linked to perceptions of economic crisis, with school leavers (and their parents) more conscious of the need to find paid employment at a time of rising unemployment. It is interesting to note that statistics show that the number of students from working-class backgrounds dropped through the 1970s at a much greater rate than the general drop in participation rates.

A major effect of the tighter economic situation was a change in planning horizons. Universities had become used to planning for a quinquennium, which gave them some security: but the UGC stopped quinquennial planning in 1975, the third year of the current quinquennium, and never resumed this form of planning.

During the 1970s there was an attempt to give greater focus to the talk of meeting national needs through higher education. The DES began to issue instructions about the balance of arts and science based students, and also about the balance of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Numbers in particular areas were capped. However, these attempts at direction met with small success, because there was no real incentive for students to follow the DES direction and they were not persuaded by the rhetoric.

Hardest hit by the changes in economic fortune were the new universities, which were still seeking to establish themselves, and the polytechnics. The latter were expected to expand more than the universities, but with a much lower rate of funding and from a lower baseline. To some it seemed that there was no real expansion taking place in higher education, just a switch of resources from the university sector to the non-university sector.

The only new institution of higher education to be approved in the 1970s was, significantly, a privately funded institution, University College, Buckingham, founded in 1976. This was intended to be 'a university institution endowed by private benefaction and sustained by fees independent of public finance and giving a balanced education of high academic standard without over-specialization'. One of the factors in its foundation, according to Stewart, was dissatisfaction with the degree of political interference and the resultant loss of independence of the older institutions.

Teacher training also changed in the 1970s, following the report of the James committee, published in January 1972. The report suggested a new structure for teacher training; the government accepted those proposals which reduced the number and status of teacher training colleges, but did little to create a new structure. As a result, a new and somewhat amorphous sector came into being, comprising colleges involved in part in higher education. There was no clear direction about their names or what they were expected to do, but they were placed firmly under the control and financial direction of Local Education Authorities. Many of them offered degree programmes validated by CNAAB; others were linked to local universities. Teacher training was undertaken by some of these colleges, but also continued in some universities and polytechnics. A significant drop in the number of places to be funded by the public purse in teacher training and in the colleges of higher education was a major government objective.

Despite the economic problems, the new universities, the polytechnics and other institutions of higher education attempted to develop their facilities and programmes. A sign of the times

was a rapid increase in courses in business and management studies. The forced mergers of institutions meant that many institutions of higher education found themselves responsible for courses in fine arts, which they developed. There was a marked increase in the number of students gaining experience through sandwich courses, particularly in engineering, and some innovative work in language teaching.

The 1980s

The key feature of the 1980s for higher education was the transition from a demand-led economy, based on the Robbins principle of access for all suitably qualified, to a cash-led economy, based on limited funds made available by the Treasury. This transition was the effect of deliberate government policy; inevitably, the new arrangements were accompanied by calls for efficiency and accountability in the use of public funds.

In 1987 the government produced a White Paper *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (DES, 1987) which had a very utilitarian standpoint. It was followed by a Bill which removed the polytechnics from Local Education Authority control, paving the way for the end of the binary divide and bringing to an end what Pratt (1997) called *The Polytechnic Experiment*.

In Pratt's view, this experiment had successes and failures. Amongst the successes he lists are increasing numbers of women students and students from ethnic backgrounds, maintaining access for students from working-class backgrounds and those with non-traditional entry qualifications, and the demonstration of the benefits of diversity in course design and pedagogy for different students and purposes (Pratt, 1997: 307). However, he notes that there were considerable variations across the sector in respect of students' age and background. He also notes that the proportion of part-time students actually fell, as institutions moved away from sub-degree work to concentration on undergraduate degrees (*op.cit.*: chapter 3). The number of full-time mature students in polytechnics and colleges increased by more than twice the number in universities between 1979 and 1992; but the number of part-time mature students increased by nearly twice as much in the universities as in the polytechnics and colleges (*op.cit.*: 73 - 76). However, it is not clear which part-time students are included in these figures: for example, it is not clear if all part-time students attending short courses or postgraduate courses are included.

The 1990s

The binary divide came to an end in 1993 and the polytechnics were given university status, thus gaining the right to award their own degrees at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. At the same time some of the larger colleges of education were also permitted to apply for university status: three did. At a stroke, 36 new universities were created on 1 April 1993 (34 former polytechnics and two of the larger colleges of higher education). Very quickly a new terminology developed which reflected perceived differences of status between institutions. In this terminology, there are 'old' universities and 'new' universities: the 'old' universities are those which bore the title before 1992, including ancient foundations such as Oxford and Cambridge alongside more recent creations such as the six universities established in the 1970s; the 'new' universities are those which acquired their status by the stroke of a pen in 1993 following the Act of 1992.

This terminology is in widespread use and reflects a continuing divide. Employers are said to value degrees from the new universities less highly than those from the old universities; staff conditions are different in the two groups; students regard the new universities as both easier to get into (which is not always the case) and less worth the effort. There are differences between the two groups in areas such as research funding from the public purse.

The emphasis on research has fuelled a growing concern about teaching. Students, now paying fees, are more conscious of what they are getting, and not getting. With resources being squeezed and time needed for research, academics are less often facing classes. Large classes are becoming the norm, and the tutorial group and seminar group and face to face meeting are fading, especially in the 'new' universities.

The funding of higher education has continued to be a source of friction between interested parties. Throughout the early 1990s the replacement of the student grant in whole or part by some form of loan was widely discussed, together with ideas of fees and even 'top-up fees' in institutions with very high student demand. The issues were a political hot potato, and with a General Election looming no political party wanted to grasp the nettle. So a Committee was set up under the then Sir Ron Dearing to examine the future of higher education. The Committee reported in 1997, and we shall examine its report in more detail later. While the Committee's recommendations were broadly favourable to higher education, it is too early to assess their effects.

The talk of independent learning linked with another important government theme of the 1990s, the idea of lifelong learning. We shall later explore this in more detail. For the moment it is sufficient to note that even as late as 1999 the lifelong learning policy officer for

the Higher Education Funding Council for England could state publicly that nobody quite knew what lifelong learning meant in higher education.

The pressures on the higher education institutions have increased during the years since the Robbins report of 1963, and there have been great changes in the organisation, administration and size of the sector, in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state, and in general expectations of what higher education can deliver. However, the extent to which the changes have affected the underlying culture of the universities is a matter of debate; and whether they have had any significant effect on the understanding of education within higher education is a focus of this study.

Adult continuing education within higher education

As with the higher education sector generally, adult continuing education had a long period when it was not politically hot followed by a period when it has been subject to great scrutiny. For our purposes it will be convenient to follow the lines of the recent survey of the history of adult education by Fieldhouse and others (1996).

As with higher education it is useful to begin with a brief look back to an earlier period, since many of the attitudes which became important for our purposes were formed then..

Fieldhouse notes many initiatives in adult education in the nineteenth century, involving scientific and philosophical societies, mechanics institutes and similar Bodies (Fieldhouse, 1996). The involvement of universities in adult education began in 1867, when James Stuart, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, gave a series of lectures for ladies' educational associations in Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds. The success of these led to the foundation of the North of England Council for promoting the Higher Education of Women, whose aim was to provide lectures in literary, historical and scientific subjects for women, and to promote higher examinations for women. Further lecture series were arranged, with an increased number of venues. All the lecturers were from the universities of Cambridge and Oxford.

Soon, in 1871, the Council and others were petitioning the University of Cambridge to open the university 'to those whose circumstances prevent from residing there'. In 1873 the University began to organise courses of lectures in a limited number of centres. London followed in 1876 and Oxford in 1878. The movement was slow to gather momentum, reached a peak in 1891-92, then stabilised (Fieldhouse, 1996).

In keeping with popular views of the Victorian era, the university extension movement is often presented as aiming to provide university-level courses for the poor and the working class. However, from the start the courses were aimed equally at ladies and 'young men engaged as clerks and shop-assistants'; and the students were predominantly middle-class, and predominantly female, with perhaps as many as two-thirds of students being women. (Jepson, 1973: 104; Fieldhouse 1996, 38).

Here, right at the beginning of the university extension movement we see one of the contradictions which was to mark university adult education for the next century, the gap between the practitioners' perception of their aims (to bring education to the disadvantaged) and the reality of their recruitment (predominantly middle class and those who had already enjoyed some educational advantage)

Partly in response to the universities' failure to attract working class students, the Workers Educational Association was founded in 1903, with the explicit aim of making university level education available to working class adults. The founders had a strong belief in both the intellectual capacities of manual labourers and the value of an education untainted by ideas of material gain. They emphasised the high standards of their courses, and the joys of learning without the need to pay attention to certificates and diplomas.

In practice, many students attended WEA classes as much for job-oriented reasons as for the joy of learning. Perhaps inevitably too, the proportion of students from non-working-class backgrounds was higher than the founders wished. There was also a gradual drift toward courses offered at a lower level than university study, in addition to those offered jointly with universities.

From the start, the WEA offered courses in partnership with universities, at first Oxford, then others. The universities saw these classes as part of their attempt to discharge their responsibilities to society at large, but also as a possible means of recruiting students from less privileged backgrounds. The basis of the provision was the three year tutorial class, in which students followed a systematic programme of study, with lectures, private study and regular assessment, principally by examination. The most popular elements of the curriculum were social studies, history and economics, and the provision was, according to Fieldhouse, supported by an ideological agenda which

encompassed notions of individual self-fulfilment, social purpose, public service, social justice and class emancipation 'provided they were pursued through a dialectical process rather than by propagandising'. This was what university adult education existed for. (Fieldhouse 1996: 202)

This ideological agenda was acceptable to the Government and to the universities to such an extent that public money was made available to help fund the tutorial classes, and the universities accepted the consequent inspection of classes by HMI. This latter move allowed HMI to exercise some oversight of university provision, which in mainstream provision would have been firmly rejected as interference with academic freedom. It is interesting to note that this occurred even before HMI had gained the right to inspect universities' contributions to the training of teachers.

Nottingham University College became the first to establish an extra-mural department, appointing the first head for the 1920-21 session. Other institutions followed the Nottingham lead so that by 1939 only Leeds, Sheffield and Reading lacked such departments (Fieldhouse 1996: 208).

One result of the provision of public funds was that universities were able to employ more full-time staff to oversee the provision of adult education. However, both full-time and part-time staff jobs were very insecure. This, the nature of the funding, and the requirement that tutors be acceptable to the academic community yet sufficiently popular in approach to attract students, helped to develop a sense of separation between extra-mural departments and the mainstream departments of the parent institutions. Over the course of the twentieth century the sense of separation became not only deeper, but, for some, almost a hallmark of the extra-mural department.

The 1944 Education Act relaxed many of the detailed requirements for work by students, thus accelerating the drift to courses without assessment. Increasingly university departments mounted courses of a year or less in duration with no specific requirement that students should undertake written work. The report of the Ashby Committee, published in 1954, urged the university departments to pursue a diversity of provision, a recommendation which the universities adopted enthusiastically. There was a rapid growth in both short courses and courses with a particular vocational orientation. Many of the latter were aimed at the growing bands of professionals in areas such as social work who needed to keep up to date with developments in their fields and with government regulations.

By the late 1950s there was great diversity in the provision offered by university extra-mural departments, and great debate within those departments about their proper focus. Some, such as Wiltshire at Nottingham, bemoaned the demise of the 'Great Tradition' of liberal adult education; others, such as Raybould at Leeds, saw the change as beneficial, with adult education moving from a social purpose of making society more egalitarian to a social purpose of serving society. Certainly much more attention was paid to the desire of students to acquire qualifications, with Cambridge, Leicester and Leeds all offering extension Certificates alongside the well-established London extension diplomas (Fieldhouse 1996: 214)

The 1960s and 1970s

The 1960s saw an expansion of university provision of adult education. The three year tutorial class declined and much of the provision consisted of short courses aimed at those who wished to continue their education beyond the formal education system. Thus the courses catered for those who had some prior educational background, and the idea of making good deficiencies in the formal education system by providing opportunities for the educationally deprived faded away.

The idea of education for social purpose did not vanish completely however. For example, many university departments provided courses on a day-release basis for trade union members. While much of the content of these was to do with very practical matters of union procedures and industrial relations, there were also attempts to set these practical issues in a wider context, to help students understand better the society within which they were attempting to promote their members' interests.

The majority of provision in the 1960s, however, was of two kinds, liberal adult education and professional development. The liberal adult education classes were unashamedly directed primarily at those with at least secondary education, they were not assessed, the course curriculum was decided by students and tutors together and largely followed the students' preferences, and they were taught as learning for the sake of learning with not only no vocational orientation but often a definite hostility to both vocational content and the gaining of qualifications.

The professional development courses were aimed in part at those who sought technical or vocational training to provide them with the new skills needed for an increasingly technology-based working environment. There were also more courses for groups such as

social work professionals. An interesting development was a steady growth in courses for those professionally involved in adult education in the LEAs and in the universities and other colleges, and those whose work has some kind of adult education aspect, such as clergy. Gradually the idea emerged of adult education as an area of academic expertise and research, and extra-mural departments began to change their names and become departments of extra-mural studies and adult education. By 1970 some offered certificates, diplomas and post-graduate degrees in adult education. (Fieldhouse 1996: 221)

While there was great diversity and a steady expansion of provision through the 1960s, there were also continuing concerns. One concern was about standards. Clearly as courses became shorter it became more difficult to take in students with a limited educational background and expect them to reach university standard during the course; but even with students who had already enjoyed the benefits of higher education, it was not easy to ensure that study was at a level appropriate to a university. The report of the Universities Council for Adult Education in 1961 was quite explicit about standards, stating

university adult education does not normally imply on the part of the students any fixed standard of attainment ... (only) that the teacher is either a member of a university staff or person of comparable academic standing (UCAE 1961, quoted in Fieldhouse 1996: 218)

By 1970 the same body was talking of standards being maintained through the scholastic approach of the classes and the research base of the tutors, but the concerns remained. The concerns of critics were strengthened by the development of more courses emphasising 'learning by doing'. Subjects such as archaeology, local history and field biology, which offered students the opportunity of field work and engagement in a form of primary research, became popular. There were also courses in making music and practical art, which were regarded by some as inappropriate for university level study, whereas art appreciation and music appreciation, seen as more amenable to critical approaches, were acceptable.

Another continuing concern was funding. Despite increases in the government grant for university adult education and consequent increases in the number of full-time staff employed in this work, the departments relied heavily on the services of part-time tutors, and had to constantly justify their expenditure by reference to student numbers and student attainment. In many departments there was a feeling of insecurity in not being more part of the mainstream of the parent university. As a result, some within the field pressed for adult education to be funded through the University Grants Committee block grant to the universities, seeing this as a way of embedding themselves within the system.

The development during the 1960s of more social concern in the public at large and protest movements involving students and academics was reflected in the university adult education departments. Many of the tutors appointed during this period had a more radical view of education than their immediate predecessors, and were often more openly left-wing, socialist or Marxist, in their political views. This led to attempts to develop further the social purpose of university adult education and the beginnings of what was to become known as community education.

Senior members of departments were not averse to the rediscovery of social purpose education, but they did shy away from the more radical developments which followed in the 1970s as the tutors became established. The publication of books like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973) encouraged many adult educators to embark on programmes designed to provide the oppressed with access to education. Inevitably, such programmes involved a great deal of work at a level below that of normal university work. This caused great tensions in departments, and those advocating such work were constantly required to justify themselves. They also found themselves constantly fighting battles for resources and facilities.

University adult education was not directly affected by the Robbins Committee, but there were indirect effects. One was that the Robbins report stimulated interest in higher education, and increased the number of people ready to dip a toe in the water through extra-mural courses. Another was the creation of new universities in the years following Robbins. These provided competition for existing departments, since the new universities were keen to promote their own courses in their localities, which were already served by existing departments.

The 1960s also saw an increase in the time available to people for leisure activities, and increases in disposable income which enabled many more people to develop leisure pursuits. One such pursuit was adult education. Such was the demand for adult education generally and the potential impact on public funds that the Labour Government set up in 1969 a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Lionel Russell to examine the provision of non-vocational education in England and Wales. A Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Alexander was set up with a similar remit for Scotland.

The Russell Committee eventually reported in 1973, its Report being entitled *Adult Education; A Plan for Development* (Russell 1973). The Report recommended that

universities should concentrate on work of university quality, or intellectual education. It listed seven areas which it saw as proper for the universities to be involved in:

1. liberal studies of the traditional kind;
 2. 'balancing' education of an academic character;
 3. 'role education' for groups whose common element was their role in society;
 4. industrial education at all levels, from management to the shop floor;
 5. project research work;
 6. training for those engaged in the education of adults;
 7. pioneer work in connection with special problems or new fields of work.
- (Russell 1973: para 213)

Most of this was just what universities were already doing. The most radical suggestion was that universities should be involved in pioneer work, in which they would develop fields which had not been hitherto touched, before turning them over to more appropriate bodies. As for funding, the report saw the university provision as part of a system of adult education, rather than part of the university system, and consequently advocated the continuation of direct DES funding rather than funding through the University Grants Committee. There was however no increase in funding as the result of the Report.

The recommendations of the Russell Report were rather overtaken by two white papers produced during the 1970s. The first in 1972 was entitled *Education: A Framework for Expansion* (DES, 1972) and encouraged a greater focus on vocational and professional development, and on the provision of certificated courses. However, it also stimulated the development of other providers of vocational and professional development, providing competition for the university departments which they were ill-prepared to meet. Their great asset was their ability to offer university certification, but that brought conflicts of its own. On the one hand there was conflict with internal colleagues, who were unconvinced of the standards of work and course content of the extra mural courses; on the other hand there was a conflict of ideology within departments, some of whose staff had turned the idea of non-assessed courses into something of a sacred cow, to be defended at all costs.

The other significant white paper, produced in 1978, was entitled *Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES, 1978) and seemed to offer university adult education room for expansion and give impetus to the idea of continuing education, or recurrent education as some preferred to call it. It emphasised the role of university adult education in economic regeneration, but also suggested that the adult education departments would be called on to provide university education for increasing numbers of mature students as the demand from traditional undergraduates diminished but the need for graduates grew. However, the emphasis on the

contribution to economic recovery led some to suggest that this was too big and too important a role for the universities to be left in the hands of single departments: the whole university should be involved. Thus departments were challenged internally to justify their existence as separate departments, and the process of drawing them into the mainstream of the university gathered pace.

1980 and after

As the 1970s ended university departments of adult education or continuing education found themselves in something of a dilemma. Both the government and their parent universities wanted them to expand their work, and the government at least had clear ideas about the direction of the expansion. However, expansion brought with it questioning of some of the work which was central to practitioners' sense of their vocation in adult education. Departments reacted to the situation in different ways, and the sector lost its homogeneity of purpose and organisation. Fieldhouse records:

The then Honorary Secretary of what had become the Universities Council of Adult *and Continuing* Education (UCACE) later recalled of that time that 'an element of drift had come into the system; a mixture of imagination, ingenuity and idealistic traditionalism, along with a sense of being all things to all men (sic), whilst producing some very fine programmes had diffused our sense of specific purpose, priorities and motives'. (Fieldhouse 1996: 225, emphasis original)

As so often, the sector became much more united again during the 1980s in the face of common enemies. Two threats in particular stand out, the re-organisation (and cutting) of funding for university adult education, and the development of vocational courses by mainstream university departments.

The re-organisation of funding was driven by the government's expressed determination, already noted above, to ensure that universities provided value for money. In 1983 the DES announced both a large cut in the funds available for university adult education and a new funding formula. The new formula included a strong focus on provision for specific groups (disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, handicapped, unemployed, older people) and an allocation mechanism which depended on a very crude measure of student attendance. United in their hostility to the new formula, the universities nevertheless found it hard to create a united response. Eventually, in 1986 and 1987, the DES recognised that the formula was unwieldy, if not unworkable, and revised it. By this time however, the DES formula had become almost

irrelevant, as funding for university adult education was to be transferred from the DES to a new body.

The transfer came about as the result of a UGC report published in 1984 which questioned the way in which university continuing education was funded. The Government responded in 1987 by announcing that responsibility for the funding of university continuing education would be transferred in April 1989 to the new Universities Funding Council. This raised fears that money formerly earmarked for continuing education would be diverted by universities to other purposes, and opened the possibility of funds for continuing education being allocated to universities which had not hitherto been eligible for such funding.

After much discussion, a joint DES/UGC/CVCP working party produced a report which asserted that liberal adult education needed subsidy but post-experience vocational education should be self-supporting. The report distinguished five categories of work which would receive funding: liberal adult education; credit bearing courses leading to university awards; post-experience vocational education; access to higher education courses; and courses for disadvantaged groups entailing a high level of central support. (Fieldhouse 1996: 227). Significantly funding would be based on output, reflecting the number of full-time-equivalent students taught; but the cost of developmental work and research in adult education would be recognised for funding purposes.

While the still-to-be-formed UFC indicated that it would abide by these recommendations, it also indicated that they would be subject to review. Thus the adult education sector within higher education became caught up in the wider discussion of university funding and its consequences. Departments of continuing education became subject to the short-term funding, the uncertainties and insecurities faced by other departments. Like mainstream departments, continuing education found itself facing Government demands for value for money which led to decisions being taken on financial grounds rather than academic or educational grounds.

Both considerations of funding and the need to respond to Government pressure to contribute to economic development lay behind the other major threat to the adult education departments, the growth of vocational and professional development course offered by mainstream departments. The Government was making money available for post-experience vocational training in particular, and mainstream departments saw this money as a useful addition to their income. Some departments had long been involved in continuing professional development, but now, for example, modern languages departments began to

offer short courses for business people and there were similar entrepreneurial moves elsewhere. The main thrust was that continuing education was no longer the preserve of continuing education departments, even though continuing education departments might deplore the failure of mainstream colleagues to take proper account of the fact that their post-experience students were adults.

Despite the general shift in emphasis towards vocationally-oriented education, university departments of adult education maintained and even extended their programmes of liberal adult education, the continuation of the 'Great Tradition'. The extensions were mainly in two areas. There was a steady growth of award-bearing programmes, including part-time degrees; and there was the development of access courses explicitly aimed at giving students a second chance to gain the qualifications for university entrance, by taking university validated courses rather than traditional 'A' levels. However both types of work, in common with the longer established programmes of liberal education courses, were faced with an increasing concentration on outcomes, measured in terms of student numbers. Getting enough students together to enable a course to run became one of the major tasks of organising tutors, though interestingly, at this stage, once the course had begun the attendance did not matter greatly.

The screw was further tightened as Mrs. Thatcher's administration embarked on a programme of major educational reform during the late 1980s and early 1990s. At first, adult education escaped relatively lightly. Then came the Education Act of 1992, which amongst other things dissolved the binary line between polytechnics and universities and in the further education sector separated vocational provision from non-vocational provision. Both changes had enormous consequences for university adult education.

The first created both new competitors and a new playing field. In the former polytechnics adult students were not distinguished from other students; all courses were expected to cater for mature students, and part-time study was accepted and well established. The new universities had not hitherto been eligible for funding from the continuing education pot. Now the new institutions could bid for money for widening participation and non-vocational courses on the same basis as the old universities; they were also able to mount continuing education courses offering university qualifications. Thus they challenged directly the established university departments. Just as significantly, the former polytechnics' claim that the education of mature students was an integral part of their work challenged the self-identity and sense of difference of the university extra mural tradition.

The other change noted above, the separation of vocational and non-vocational work in further education was important in that it presaged a similar approach in higher education, which came to pass a year later. The new Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) brought continuing education into the mainstream of university funding through the block grant. As part of this, students in continuing education departments were to be regarded as 'normal' part-time students, like any others, and specifically like the large number of part-time students in the new universities. This meant that funding would be available only for those students following courses leading to a university award of some kind. Students on non-vocational courses would not qualify for funding.

Since most of the students on the old universities' liberal adult courses were not trying to gain an award, this meant a large part of the universities' adult education work would cease to qualify for funding, and would have to be supported in some other way. For such courses to become self-supporting would require fees to be raised to prohibitive levels, and no institution had spare cash to subsidise adult education. The only way forward was to accredit the liberal adult education provision, and this most departments attempted to do, under the pressure of a very tight timetable set by HEFCE.

Accreditation required in most cases that courses were scrutinised by internal university validating bodies, which were already in place to validate course proposals from mainstream departments. Liberal adult education courses were thus scrutinised on the same basis as other courses. This process brought strains, but it also brought benefits. The necessity to state aims and objectives and specify content, often for the first time, improved many courses and enabled the euthanasia of many courses which had lost their educational rationale. While assessment was resisted by many tutors and students as inimical to the spirit of adult education, it was seen by some as a useful way of establishing that learning was occurring, and of showing students that learning was occurring. The pressure to assess in ways which were appropriate to adults led to innovations in assessment and the development of such tools as learning journals. However, many students who had previously attended liberal adult education classes did not want assessment and simply stopped attending assessed classes.

The mainstreaming of funding for continuing education led some institutions to question the need for a separate department of continuing education. Some departments, such as that at Bristol, were disbanded and their staff relocated to mainstream departments, often with the brief of developing a continuing education or part-time strand within the mainstream department. A few institutions maintained their continuing education departments, but increasingly the focus was on the provision of part-time degree programmes and short courses

for vocational and professional development, including the professional development of adult educators.

The development of vocational and professional courses fitted well with a growing government emphasis on the idea of lifelong learning. For national government, of whatever political colour, the imperative for adult education at all levels seemed to be the need to provide a workforce which could adapt to change. Gone, it was said, was the idea that skills once learnt would last a lifetime; in the brave new technological world, workers must expect to learn new skills at many points in their working lives if they were to survive in employment and play their part in the economic development of the country. While much of the money to support this rhetoric was directed to further education, there was provision for university adult education in the form of some extra money for widening participation and for access courses. The amounts however were relatively small, and were open to competitive bidding from across the higher education sector, which meant that many of the older university departments received nothing but some new ventures were funded.

Conclusion

From this very brief and selective survey of the history of higher education and adult continuing education three features stand out which are significant for this study.

First, the demands and pressures on higher education from society at large have increased steadily in recent decades. There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important reasons is the status and economic potential of a university degree. Degrees are coveted because they confer an advantage in the pursuit of power and wealth. Consequently the system through which the coveted end product is gained has a high profile and has become subject to pressures from a wide range of interests. The vulnerability of higher education to external pressure has increased as economic realities in particular have forced higher education to acknowledge an interdependence with society at large.

Secondly, the relationship between higher education and the state has changed. A strong element of central direction for higher education was in place even before higher education, with education in general, became a political battleground in the 1980s. This trend has been accentuated by the increasing reliance of higher education on state funding in various forms.

Thirdly, higher education has changed. A collection of universities has evolved into a higher education system. The system has grown: there are more institutions, more students, more

staff, more money. There is a greater emphasis on accountability, and on research in addition to, or in place of, teaching. Participation in higher education by women and by mature students has increased, and so has the participation of students from ethnic minorities, though not at the same rate. The pace of change has become increasingly rapid as the decades have passed.

Yet higher education in Britain has survived in a form which is immediately recognisable. For all the changes, there is a striking continuity between the universities of the early twentieth century and the many more universities of the late twentieth century. Stereotypically, young men and women are released for a period from the responsibilities of earning a living in order to become highly educated. In many ways the education they receive has changed, yet there is great continuity also between the education received by an undergraduate at the beginning of the century and that received by an undergraduate at the end of the century.

Where in this picture of continuity and change do we find the conceptions of education which inform higher education? Have they changed with the institutions, or are they part of the glue of continuity? Our aim in part is to try and answer these questions with respect to the period 1960 to 1997.

Chapter Three: Conceptions of education in mainstream higher education

Introduction

The brief historical review in the previous chapter has provided some idea of the environment of higher education in England in the last four decades, and the changes which took place in the sector. In this chapter we examine three of the conceptions of education which informed and were affected by the changes in mainstream higher education. Our review will take us up to the mid 1990s and include the transformation of the former polytechnics into universities. Since the former polytechnics were already part of the higher education sector, this change of itself did not substantially affect conceptions of education in higher education; but it does mark a change of pace in the development of ideas of lifelong learning and is claimed by some as an important step in the process of widening participation in the universities, both of which contribute to the claimed 'adultification' and 'massification' of the higher education system and so to developments in the conception of education in mainstream higher education. As noted earlier, we shall consider these developments later, in chapter six.

We have already noted that there was very little direct discussion of conceptions of education in mainstream higher education in the period under review. Much of the writing about higher education in this period seems to assume that the educational aims and the values of higher education are widely known and generally agreed. There is considerable, and heated, discussion of curriculum, assessment, standards, access and similar matters, but the discussion takes place within an implicit assumed conceptual framework.

However, it is easy to find writings that seem to be based on very different views of about the purposes of higher education. For example, some writers seem to assume that the purpose of higher education is to equip students with particular skills, while others insist that 'training in skills' is not the business of higher education at all. Yet both sets of advocates simply take it for granted that their view of higher education is correct, at least in spelling out the main or dominant purpose of higher education. Rarely is there any argument to support the view advocated, nor in most cases is the underlying conception of education spelt out.

Our purpose in this chapter is to explore these underlying conceptions. We have noted that writers appear to hold very different views; but it is possible that the differences are more differences of emphasis than differences of substance. It may be that beneath surface differences lies an understanding of the nature of education which gives writers on higher education more in common than is ordinarily supposed. To see whether this is the case, we

shall try to uncover and examine the main strands of conceptualisation of education in higher education in our period.

In the literature about higher education in the period we can identify two main perspectives on the nature of education, commonly referred to as the liberal concept and the vocational concept. We shall examine these two strands, though in keeping with our chosen nomenclature, we shall refer to them as the liberal conception and the vocational conception of education.

To these two conceptions we shall add a third, the conception of education which underlies professional education in higher education. By professional education we mean that education which is designed to prepare students for entry to one of the professions, or to continue their education as members of a profession. Professional education in this sense has always been part of the work of the university, and it is an aspect of higher education which has grown greatly in recent years, as more and more occupations have sought the status of a profession. We shall suggest that the conception of education which informs the development of professional education deserves to be distinguished from the other two conceptions to be found in the literature.

As noted in chapter one, there also existed in our period a fourth conception of education, the self-proclaimed radical conception. We suggested there that this conception reaches across both mainstream higher education and adult continuing education: indeed some practitioners in adult continuing education would claim that any influence the radical view has had on mainstream higher education has been a result of their activity. Be that as it may, it is more convenient for our purposes to examine the radical conception separately from the conceptions to be examined in this chapter.

We noted in our historical review that the period we are examining is marked by two major public reports, the Robbins Report and the Dearing Report. It will be instructive to see how the three conceptions of education we have identified appear in those two reports, and what are the differences between the conceptualisations of education over a period of more than forty years. We shall consider the Robbins Report in this chapter, leaving our consideration of the Dearing Report to chapter six, when we shall look at it in connection with the development of ideas of lifelong learning and possible new or revised conceptions of education in higher education.

As noted in chapter one, there have been three major academic discussions of the idea of a university in our period, those of Robinson (1968), Minogue (1973) and Barnett (1990). Like the Robbins and Dearing reports, these three works almost span our period and provide convenient snapshots of the way in which conceptions of education were being worked out at different points in the period. We shall look briefly at all three in this chapter.

Throughout the chapter we shall have in mind the analytical questions developed in chapter one. In the concluding section of the chapter we shall draw together the responses to these questions of the three conceptions identified, to uncover the similarities and the differences and form some idea of the changes which took place over a period of more than thirty years. We shall also note some points of significance for the discussion in our final chapter.

The liberal conception

The main thrust of this conception of education is encapsulated in the slogan 'education for education's sake'. Proponents of this view claim that their objective is simply to open minds to the riches of human thought and develop understanding of that thought. There is no interest in what the thinking might lead to; indeed the idea of applying thought to any activity is often derided by proponents of this view.

Of course the academic in the ivory tower often protests too much. Since education minimally involves teaching and learning, it must involve teachers and learners: and presumably the learners, at least initially, undertake education for more utilitarian reasons than a thirst for knowledge. Even if the purpose is to equip themselves to join the teachers, the purity of the conception as presented is tarnished. One might also note that even the most unworldly academics show a great propensity for engaging in polemical disputes, applying their academic knowledge ruthlessly in attacking and if possible destroying an idea or system of which they disapprove, along with the academic reputations of their opponents.

Our concern is with this conception of education in its rather less pure forms, as found in the practice of higher education. Although we are reviewing the last four decades it is helpful to begin our examination of this conception by looking back to 1852, for proponents of this thread of understanding often support their view by quoting a passage from Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University*, first published in 1852.

Newman's work has become a classic and has been reprinted often: we shall refer to an edition published in 1902. The paragraph in which Newman sets out what has become the classic definition of liberal education runs as follows:

It is a great point then to enlarge the range of studies which a University professes, even for the sake of the students; and though they cannot pursue every subject which is open to them, they will be the gainers by living among those and under those who represent the whole circle. This I conceive to be the advantage of a seat of universal learning, considered as a place of education. An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he only pursues a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called "Liberal." A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom; or what in a former Discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a University, as contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching. This is the main purpose of a University in the treatment of its students. (p. 101)

The middle section of this paragraph, the sentences defining liberal education, is the part that is most often quoted and is most familiar. For our purposes it is important to set these sentences in context, for the setting in which this education is to take place is an important part of Newman's conception.

That setting is the collegiate gathering of scholars. In this 'assemblage of learned men' there is a respect of other scholars accompanied by discussion which recognises the intellectual claims of others. The guiding principle is calm, reasoned debate. Sitting at the feet of the wise, the student imbibes not only knowledge, but also the attitudes of detached scholarship.

Newman's insistence on the breadth of learning available to the student in this ideal university is also significant. While acknowledging that students cannot pursue every subject, Newman is very concerned that they are able to apprehend the great outlines of knowledge and the principles on which it rests, and insistent on the value of living amongst those who represent the whole circle. For him, observation of, and perhaps participation in, the interaction of scholars in different disciplines (as we should call them) is important for the development of the educated person.

In the light of this, the following passage from the preface to the published version of the Discourses is of interest:

The view taken of the University in these Discourses is the following:- That it is a place of *teaching universal knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students: if religious training I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science. (p. xi, emphasis original)

We note the emphasis on the diffusion and extension of knowledge, rather than the advancement of knowledge. For Newman, research is properly carried out not in the university, but elsewhere: he does not undervalue research, but insists that it is not the proper task of the university. The university is concerned with the intellectual development of the individual. Newman places great emphasis on the individual, insisting that

A university is, according to the usual designation, an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill. (p. 144)

There is no hint however that this intellectual development is easy. Newman writes:

I will tell you, Gentlemen, what has been the practical error of the last twenty years, - not to load the memory of the student with a mass of undigested knowledge, but to force upon him so much that he has rejected all. [...] All things now are to be learned at once, not first one thing, then another, not one well, but many badly. Learning is to be without exertion, without attention, without toil; without grounding, without advance, without finishing. There is to be nothing individual in it; and this, forsooth, is the wonder of the age. (p. 142)

Later in the same discourse, Newman is at pains to support, even encourage, the widest dissemination of knowledge and the education of all – but he insists on the difference between education and other pursuits:

Education is a high word; it is the preparation for knowledge, and it is the imparting of knowledge in proportion to that preparation. (p. 144)

For what does this education, this training of the intellect, this acquisition of knowledge, equip one? Newman is scathing about those who

insist that Education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured. (p. 153, capital original)

For him

If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world. (p. 177)

However, Newman does not think that practical ends are important for University students:

This process of training by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called Liberal Education; (p. 152)

Nor indeed is the gaining of credentials important; in an instructive passage Newman writes:

I protest to you, gentlemen, that if I had to choose between a so-called University, which dispensed with residence and tutorial superintendence, and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination in a wide range of subjects, and a University which had no professors or examinations at all, but merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years, and then sent them away as the University of Oxford is said to have done some sixty years since, if I were asked which of these two methods was the better discipline of the intellect, - mind, I do not say which is *morally* the better for it is plain that compulsory study must be a good and idleness an intolerable mischief, - but if I must determine which of the two courses was the more successful in training, moulding, enlarging the mind, which sent out men the more fitted for their secular duties, which produced better public men, men of the world, men whose names would descend to posterity, I have no hesitation in giving the preference to that University which did nothing, over that which exacted of its members an acquaintance with every science under the sun. (p. 145, emphasis original)

I have quoted extensively from Newman, partly because he is so often taken as the classic apologist for the idea of liberal higher education, and partly because so much of what he wrote is relevant to conceptions of higher education now. In his apologetic role, Newman is ill-served by the selective use of his work by many writers, who take portions of his work out of context, without realising how much support for their case is contained in what they ignore.

For despite the obvious historical and religious perspective of Newman's work, his ideas underlie to a great extent not only the conception of education in higher education labelled liberal, but, we shall argue, other conceptions as well.

What emerges from this brief selection from his discourses is an unashamedly elitist and purist view of higher education. This higher education is concerned with the transmission of knowledge, a body of assured truths, and the development of intellectual attitudes in a

leisured way which takes no account of the demands of the world beyond the walls. Its end is simply itself, and its value lies in intellectual maturity, which may then be put to other, lesser uses in the world of affairs. In this education, knowledge is transmitted and attitudes inculcated by discussion between experts and novices, in a communal setting largely insulated from its surroundings, and, ideally, there is no requirement of certification that knowledge has been gained.

A cursory summary of this kind might suggest that present day conceptions of liberal higher education have moved far away from Newman's conception. The elitist, purist, leisured view seems to have been replaced by an insistence on wide participation in a higher education system driven to meet the needs of the economy. Newman's insistence on the researchless university rings hollow in the ears of the academic faced with another Research Assessment Exercise, his attitude to qualifications would fall foul of the Quality Assurance Agency; and his espousal of wide ranging exchange between disciplines seems impossible amidst the plethora of modern specialisms.

Newman's conception of liberal education also omits one of the chief concerns of other supporters of liberal education, the role of such an education in creating a liberal society. This difference is brought out by Alan Ryan, who draws a distinction between

'liberal education' and *'liberal-education'*. The former refers to the kind of education that sustains a liberal society, while the latter refers to the modern equivalent of the education that was thought fit to make a young man behave as a *'gentleman'*. What makes the two sorts of liberal education one subject-matter is the belief that a widely disseminated liberal education in the second sense is an essential element in a liberal education in the first sense. (Ryan 1999: 22, emphasis original)

The link between the two sorts of liberal education is the idea that a liberal education is intended to emancipate the individual, providing the knowledge and intellectual skills to allow the individual to *'call their minds their own'* (Nussbaum 1997: 293), to make critical judgements and form opinions independently of *'authorities'*. According to Martha Nussbaum, those skills include *'a capacity for critical examination on oneself and one's tradition'* and *'the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself'* (Nussbaum 1997: 9, 10). Development of these skills, Nussbaum claims, will allow people to *'cultivate their humanity'* and become *'world citizens'* who

recognise the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us. (1997: 9)

Nussbaum contrasts this understanding of the aims of a liberal education with what she characterises as ‘the older idea of a gentleman’s education’ (1997: 294), in which category she would undoubtedly, and correctly, place Newman’s conception. She sees defenders of this older idea as urging

that our colleges and universities focus on acculturation to what is great and fine in our own tradition, rather than on Socratic and universalistic goals. Insofar as that education reaches out to new citizens, it will do so because they agree to accept time-honoured gentlemanly standards. They should not expect that their experiences and traditions will form part of the curriculum. They may enter the academy only on sufferance and in disguise. They may remain only so long as they do not allow their nongentlemanly voices to be heard, or inject their non-traditional experiences into the dignified business of liberal learning. (1997: 294)

Ryan makes the same kind of point with specific reference to Newman:

To think that liberal education, in the sense in which Cardinal Newman defended it, is a natural ally of political, social, and cultural liberalism is to think something that he surely did not. (Ryan 1999: 230)

The reading of Newman above supports this view: Newman is not concerned about the world outside the academy, and he is concerned with the passing on of traditions. However, he is also concerned with the development of intellectual powers. The problem lies in how one moves from the development of individual minds with extended horizons and sympathies to political, social and cultural liberalism, to use Ryan’s phrase.

Nussbaum takes the idea of Socratic dialogue as a central means by which this emancipatory process is carried out, and her book reviews a number of programmes in liberal arts colleges in the United States which exhibit her required characteristics and, in her account, deliver the expected results. Nussbaum is defending the idea that such programmes are a worthwhile, even essential, investment by society: but in doing so, she seems to assume that the products of such liberal education will espouse liberal views of society. Ryan provides some telling counter-examples.

The greatest tract on education ever written was Plato’s *Republic*, which is not merely non-liberal but illiberal and anti-democratic of set purpose. Rousseau’s *Emile* was written as a rejection of the modern world and its liberal, commercial, individualist spirit. (Ryan 1999: 23)

Nussbaum also claims that liberal education of the type she advocates will help in the project of extending ‘the benefits of this education to all citizens, whatever their class, race, sex, ethnicity, or religion’ (1997: 294). The liberal education she envisages is

pluralistic, imparting an understanding of the histories and contributions of groups with whom we interact, both within our nation and in the increasingly international sphere of business and politics (1997: 295).

Since we cannot teach every student everything, it is an important part of this conception of a liberal education that it teaches students 'what they do not know and how they may inquire' (*ibid.*). This links with the emphasis on Socratic dialogue.

Again it is not clear that liberal education thus conceived will achieve the desired end. Nussbaum herself notes the problem of devising curricula to 'prepare people of highly diverse backgrounds for complex world citizenship' (1997: 295); and there are other problems. That someone has been shown how to inquire does not by itself guarantee that the skill will be used. There is no necessary link between learning about other people and their cultures on the one hand and understanding other people or recognising their worth or accepting the value of their traditions on the other hand. There is no necessary reason why critical thinking should not reinforce one's acceptance of one's own tradition as superior to others. Nussbaum's examples show that there can be a link between the two senses of liberal education distinguished by Ryan, but she does not show that the link is necessary, or even common.

In linking liberal education with liberal citizenship, Nussbaum could be said to be providing something of an instrumental justification for such education, moving a little away from the idea of 'education for education's sake'. In her view, education which is good for the individual is also good for society. Interestingly one could characterise in the same way the views of James Tooley: but his view of the good for society of a liberal education is very different from that of Nussbaum.

Tooley advocates 'reclaiming education from the state' (Tooley 2000). He is in favour of a liberal education, but one which is controlled by market forces. In this approach the aim of a liberal education is to set people free to be economically independent. This entails giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to become economically independent, but also giving them the opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge that they see as necessary for economic independence. Education must provide what the student market demands and, according to Tooley,

While higher education is complex, it is not clear that choices about it are different in kind from choices about other complex services in the market (Tooley 1997: 42)

One problem with this view from the perspective of liberal education is that the market may be seen to favour certain groups. As Ruth Jonathan puts it:

This approach to the ordering of society fails to engage with important social realities. For people do not differ merely in their preferences and their resources for obtaining them. They also differ in abilities, understanding, experience and cultural capital, all of which structure preference, making some possible and others not (1997: 53)

A constant criticism of higher education in Britain in recent years has been that it has not been socially inclusive (see for example Coffield and Williamson, 1997: 6). Tooley's view of a market-led higher education could lead to further concentration of higher education on those who are best placed to perceive its advantages and best prepared for taking up the opportunities, such as those with ready access to good schooling.

Nevertheless we should note that it is not necessary on a liberal view for higher education to be available to all. Ryan suggests that not all will want higher education and

The argument for wider participation in higher education that appeals to governments is largely vocational and not anything that a defender of liberal education would recognise (Ryan 1999: 137).

He goes on to argue that the distinction between vocational and liberal education is not 'as obvious as it is generally taken to be' (1999: 138). Rather,

It is not obvious that the goals of liberal education are in the least inimical to the employability of the student who gets such an education (1999: 139).

and

The recent enthusiasm for so-called transferable skills is not inimical to liberal education, since the skills that liberal education inculcates are evidently both transferable and strikingly useful in the business world (*ibid.*)

Thus from very different perspectives both Tooley and Ryan support the idea that a liberal higher education should equip students with 'tools for dealing with the world' (Ryan 1999: 25). Both also support the idea of a liberal higher education which helps students to become autonomous citizens.

We noted in chapter one the emphasis on the importance of autonomy amongst liberal concerns in the work of Levinson (Levinson, 1999). This links with Nussbaum's focus on the development of critical judgement, though Levinson goes beyond Nussbaum. Because he

does not discuss the idea in these terms, it is not clear how Newman would see this ideal of autonomy: he certainly wants to see the development of critical judgement, but always within the community of scholars. Thus while the student is expected to develop as an independent thinker, the judgement of the scholarly community remains the standard.

One aspect of the notion of autonomy is of particular interest for this study: this is the idea of self-directed study. As students become more autonomous, they will take more responsibility for, and control over, their studies, including the choice of modules (Ainley, 1994: 107).

We see then that modern conceptions of liberal education show some differences of emphasis from Newman; but what of the similarities between Newman and modern conceptions? Consider knowledge first. Newman was presenting a defence of the idea of a university to be supported by the Roman Catholic Church, and large parts of his Discourses are concerned with the relation of knowledge to religion and the role of theological and philosophical knowledge. Nevertheless it is clear that Newman takes knowledge to be a body of certain truths, established in a variety of ways according to the type of knowledge concerned. He has no hesitation in referring to sciences (including theological science), nor in accepting that empirical methods as well as rational investigation can lead to knowledge; for example he recognises the difference between the advancement of knowledge and the extension of knowledge. Knowledge is disciplinary, and Newman recognises that disciplinary knowledge must be studied in depth. To this extent his attitude to knowledge is exactly that which underlies the development and practice of modern disciplinary study in higher education. There are many more disciplines, and there is a much greater emphasis on empirical methods of some kind as the means of establishing knowledge, but the basic idea of a body of assured truths is dominant in higher education.

Further, the idea that knowledge is disseminated from expert to novice by means of structured and disciplined instruction is shared by Newman and modern conceptions. Again, that an important part of the acquisition of knowledge is the student's own reflection and study is a shared value. Throughout higher education students are given a great deal time for private study, and the perusal of books, journals and other information sources is regarded as a vital part of the student's education. The rapid growth of student numbers and the declining numbers of academic staff together with the development of information technology have made this element of private study even more important, dressed up in phrases like 'self-directed learning'.

Here we seem to reach a departure from Newman, for it is clear in his conception that live interaction between expert and novice is a vital part of the teaching process. This may of course reflect the fact that he knew no other option; though since he does refer approvingly to the publication of popular books as a means of instructing and entertaining the general public, he clearly recognised that not all communication must be face to face. The ideal of live interaction has been preserved in the idea of the tutorial and the seminar, where students set out ideas and expose them to criticism from both tutors and their peers. However, in the age of financial stringency, tutorials are becoming an expensive luxury, seen as inefficient because they deliver tuition in a very labour-intensive fashion; and seminar groups are becoming so large that very few students have the opportunity to say anything and genuine discussion is hard to find.

Nevertheless, despite the problems of practice, the ideal of the face-to-face contact and interaction of tutorial and seminar is sought across higher education, in all disciplines. One mark of the importance attached to this ideal is the continuing insistence in the Open University on local tutorials to support distance learning students, and the provision by the same University of Summer Schools, offering an opportunity of intensive interaction with peers and staff. Another mark of this ideal is the great attention being given to the development of means of interaction for students using information technology for distance learning: such programmes of study normally incorporate compulsory conferencing and 'chat shops' where students are required to exchange ideas by electronic means.

This interactive element draws our attention to another similarity between Newman's conception and modern conceptions, the idea of the community of scholars. Not only in the ancient universities, but in the latest universities, the former polytechnics, student residence in a university community is taken as the norm. Even where there are considerable numbers of mature students or part-time students in employment and residing at home, great efforts are made to make them part of the academic community. One mark of this is the insistence that the timetabling of lectures and other academic events is driven by the needs of the academic staff, not the students: because the students are in the community, they are expected to be readily available. This has led to problems, especially as more and more students are working part-time to earn the money to support themselves while studying. However, the attitude that the academic community can work to its own rhythm without external constraint runs deep and reflects clearly Newman's communal emphasis.

The way in which institutions of higher education adapt or fail to adapt to the needs of their students is often taken to be a reflection of an elitist attitude, and here Newman and modern

conceptions are totally in accord. Newman does not concern himself with entry qualifications, used by modern higher education as one simple means of restricting the potential student body; but he is at one with modern conceptions in his insistence that this higher education is suitable only for some people. Moreover, he is at one with modern conceptions in suggesting that the people for whom it is suitable will be those who are able to benefit from an intellectual training. This fits well with the conception which underlies university insistence on the gold standard of 'A' level performance as a means of showing intellectual potential.

There is also in modern conceptions a strong element of Newman's insistence that the purpose of higher education is intellectual training of the individual, with no other practical end in view. Certainly students want a degree, and want a degree to enhance their career prospects; but it is a recurring claim in surveys of student attitudes that for most the content of the degree is irrelevant. There is some evidence to suggest that even in subjects like law and medicine, a significant proportion of students move on to careers unrelated to their studies: see the Robbins Report, Appendix Two, and national statistics in the series *What Graduates Do*.

Do students acquire the habits of thought which Newman regarded as central to higher education? Certainly, there is much talk in modern writings of the development of habits of critical thinking and critical analysis. Ronald Barnett has claimed that the development of critical skills is of the essence of the university (Barnett 1997): but he also insists that this is one area in which higher education is failing to deliver. It is also noticeable that this is an aspect of higher education much criticised by employers in industry, as we shall see below.

Another way in which modern practice does not live up to Newman's conception is in the breadth of intellectual outlook of graduates. For Newman, we recall, the educated person was one who knew the 'contours and principles of thought' as well as certain disciplines in detail. Modern disciplinary consciousness militates against this approach. One may see this by looking at the departmental research seminars which are now a part of the staple diet of every academic: increasingly these are becoming restricted in scope, so that only those within the discipline, or even within a specific sub-discipline, can make sense of the proceedings. While this is defended as an inevitable consequence of the growth of knowledge, it is certainly not part of the conception of a liberal higher education.

The position is exacerbated by funding regimes which make departments into cost centres expected to at least balance their books: it is then in the interests of departments to keep

'their' students within the department and discourage them from taking courses in other departments. There have been some attempts at a wider approach, most notably in the new universities of the 1960s and in the Open University. For example, at Sussex, where teaching began in 1961, there was a determination from the first to create inter-disciplinary courses in which students would be taught by scholars from more than one discipline (Briggs 1964: 63). In the Open University there was a deliberate decision to move away from the single honours degree and offer the opportunity of crossing disciplinary boundaries and mixing courses from different faculties.

However, maintaining inter-disciplinary courses at undergraduate level had proved difficult. Mountford (1972) shows how at Keele the inter-disciplinary Foundation Year quickly came under pressure because of the attractions of single honours degrees in other institutions. Sussex still requires most students to take in their first year courses from within their school of study not specifically related to their main discipline of study, but the focus in the later years of study is disciplinary study. The Open University is proposing to offer single honours degree from 2000.

It is interesting to note that at Sussex the attempt to promote interdisciplinary study was combined with a strong emphasis on individual study and participation in tutorials and in seminar groups, while lectures were 'ancillary and voluntary' (Briggs 1964: 65).

Finally we should note Newman's contribution to the debate on the relationship between teaching and research in higher education. Newman's reference to 'learned men, zealous for their own science and rivals of each other' suggests that the teachers in his university will be leaders in their field: yet as we have seen he is quite clear that the business of the university is the dissemination of knowledge, not the advancement of knowledge.

We see that Newman's ideas can be seen behind much of the practice of modern higher education. Some have been modified, but it is not too strong to say that the liberal conception of higher education is largely shaped by Newman, and largely unchanged in its essentials from his description. In a later section we shall summarise those essentials: but first we shall look at other conceptions to be found in mainstream higher education.

The vocational conception

One of the major criticisms of the liberal conception of higher education is that it fails to equip the student to do anything. It does not even fit the graduate to play a role in affairs, as

Newman suggested it would, simply because it ignores the world outside the walls of academia. Vocational conceptions of education are advocated as a means of redressing the balance, without losing important elements of the liberal conception. Pring writes:

Vocational preparation signifies the acquisition of skills, qualities, attitudes and knowledge that are judged to be important for entry into the world of work (1993: 60)

The major thrust in the view of higher education as vocational education is the claim that the prime business of a modern higher education system is to provide the skilled people who can maintain the economic competitiveness of the nation. This is often presented in the form of a claim that higher education should prepare people for employment, a view trenchantly expressed by Sir Graham Day:

In any discussion on education – primary, secondary, undergraduate or graduate – my overwhelming interest is in fitness for employment. The ability first to secure a job, then to hold or change it while continuing always to learn and to adapt constructively to change, is something we should encourage our graduates to develop and our education to promote. (Day 1994: 24)

Others put the claim more in terms of preparation for careers, but since the careers in mind are primarily careers in industry and commerce, the thrust of the argument is the same. In this context we recall Stewart's comments on the founding ideals of the University of Buckingham, which stressed preparation for 'broader careers'.

In some versions of this view, expressed especially in the command economies of the former Soviet Union and its satellites, the needs and desires of the student are subordinated to the needs of the state, or perhaps the economy. The personal fulfilment of the student is less important than the service required by society. In England the view has more usually been that the student's main desire is a satisfying and (preferably) lucrative career, so the needs and desires of the student and the needs of the economy can be met simultaneously.

In our period this view of higher education emerged most strongly in the discussion of the colleges of advanced technology and the polytechnics and the colleges of education outside the universities. Both the colleges of advanced technology and the polytechnics were originally created with a view to providing what was described as a 'vocationally-oriented' education. Both kinds of institution were subsequently given university status, the colleges of advanced technology mostly in 1966 and 1967 and the polytechnics in 1993. In both cases, the change has been more than one of name. Following their exaltation, both kinds of

institution rapidly acquired many of the characteristics and attitudes of universities of longer-standing, including a conception of education more akin to the liberal conception.

We can usefully begin our exploration of this conception of education by recalling that most of the great civic universities had their origin in colleges of science and arts, one of whose aims was the provision of skilled people for developing local industries. We noted in chapter two that the civic universities developed and for a long time maintained links with local industries. Thus at least some aspects of the idea of a vocational higher education have been around for a long time.

But what does 'vocational education' mean? For many the term conjures up visions of people being trained in practical skills, and training in some kinds of practical skills are certainly part of the conception of vocational education. However we must be wary of too large and rapid a leap from talk of some kind of practical skills to talk (often dismissive) of 'mere training'.

A good starting point for our purposes is provided by the Education for Capability manifesto, issued by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1983. The Manifesto is concerned with education as a whole, but higher education is specifically mentioned.

For our purposes it is worth quoting the short manifesto in full:

There is a serious imbalance in Britain today in the full process which is described by the two words 'education' and 'training'. The idea of the 'educated person' is that of a scholarly individual who has been neither educated nor trained to exercise useful skills; who is able to understand but not to act. Young people in secondary or higher education increasingly specialize, and do so too often in ways which mean that they are taught to practise only the skills of scholarship and science. They acquire knowledge of particular subjects, but are not equipped to use knowledge in ways which are relevant to the world outside the education system.

The imbalance is harmful to individuals, to industry and to society. A well-balanced education should, of course, embrace analysis and the acquisition of knowledge. But it must also include the exercise of creative skills, the competence to undertake and complete tasks and the ability to cope with everyday life; and also doing all these things in co-operation with others.

There exists in its own right a culture which is concerned with doing, making and organizing and the creative arts. This culture emphasizes the day-to-day management of affairs, the formulation and solution of problems and the design, manufacture and marketing of goods and services.

Educators should spend more time preparing people in this way for a life outside the education system. The country would benefit significantly in economic terms from what is here described as Education for Capability.

(RSA 1983)

We note immediately the emphasis on industry and the economy. Industry is clearly to be taken more widely than manufacturing industry: the reference to services in the penultimate paragraph makes that clear. Nevertheless, design, manufacture and marketing are picked out as significant activities, and the benefit to the economy of education for capability is stressed.

The first paragraph points up the apparently sharp distinction between this conception of education and the liberal conception: here the major value of higher education is that it equips people to use the knowledge they have acquired. In this document, practical skills are to be preferred to the skills of scholarship and science, which, it is said, current education provides.

It is noteworthy that the skills of science are linked with scholarship in this opposition. This opposition reflects a tension between pure and applied science which has often been noted, and is at first sight rather puzzling. Are not the skills of science of interest to industry? Does not industry require research skills so that British industry remains at the forefront of technological advance? Certainly industry requires research, and research which is at the leading edge of the advancement of knowledge. But industry looks to universities and other specialist research institutes to provide that research, and the research skills required (Council for Industry and Higher Education, 1987).

There has been a change in recent years in some sectors, with companies, especially large international firms, setting up their own research institutes. This is especially noticeable in certain sectors. Pharmaceutical companies have often had their own research laboratories, but they are now being joined by companies with interests in, for example, bio-technology and information technology. Often these research institutes are developed in close collaboration with universities, as in the 'Silicon Fen' developments associated with Cambridge University. But the important point for our present purposes is that the vocational conception of education regards research skills as non-vocational: we shall see later that the research career view fits better with the conception of education linked with professional development.

What kinds of skills are sought in this vocational conception of education? We have noted the emphasis on the use of knowledge. The manifesto also talks of creative and practical skills, and mentions the management of affairs and the formulation and solution of problems.

These are activities which require a flexibility of mind and an ability to see situations in a new light. There is a need to apply principles, but to recognise the particular constraints of a given situation. Skills of analysis are obviously required here, and those skills which are often referred to as transferable skills.

It is important here to distinguish between education and training. In this conception of education it is suggested that training occurs when the desired solution to a problem is known in advance, and the most important skill is that of selecting the most efficient route to the desired end. What the vocational conception is seeking is the kind of skill which can apply familiar methods to fresh problems, but also is able to formulate the problem in a fresh way. It seeks people who know about techniques and can use them effectively in a variety of situations. For this reason, many of those who advocate a vocational approach to higher education talk of 'problem-solving skills' as the essential outcome of a higher education and 'problem-based learning' as the best means of education in higher education (For example, Birch 1988: chapter 4)

However, some suggest that higher education can offer more than skills. Peter Moore, writing, ironically, of the provision of management education, which he regards as professional development, said

Education can indeed provide two things: first it can be an experience accelerator. No longer is it so essential to accumulate a full quiver of experience, possibly at random over a long period of time. Peak performance can be achieved earlier and thus the period of such performance extended. Secondly, education can provide managers with the background of information and modes of diagnosis and analysis that will enable them to examine problems that are new to their (or their colleagues') experience. (Moore 1984: 76)

It is clear from this that intellectual skills and knowledge of techniques are more important than the kind of disciplinary knowledge which is celebrated in the liberal conception discussed earlier. As we saw then, disciplinary knowledge is the cornerstone of higher education, so the vocational conception of education seems to raise a problem. However it is a spurious problem: for this conception (as distinct from the professional conception to which we shall come) the content of the degree is less important than the training in skills and techniques, so it does not matter if a person acquires disciplinary knowledge which is irrelevant, as long as they can use knowledge.

It is significant that many employers now seem to recognise this. They say that the content of the degree does not matter, as long as the graduate is equipped with skills. The necessary

job-related knowledge can be acquired on the job – and indeed in many people's eyes is best acquired on the job, and before the graduate has become too set in academic ways (Meyer-Dohm 1990: 64).

What is important in the estimation of employers is that graduates can use knowledge collaboratively, so the idea of group-learning becomes important. In the vocational conception the student should learn collaboratively in order to appreciate the strengths of that mode of collective problem solving and to learn how to do it. Individual study as envisaged in the liberal conception is still necessary, but is of less importance than learning together.

Paradoxically, it is the emphasis on problem-based learning in groups which leads many advocates of the vocational conception to the view that this approach to higher education is much better for those who wish to study part-time or non-residentially. The suggestion seems to be that problem-based learning can be more easily divided into discrete sections, more sharply focused, than other forms of learning, and this lends itself more to discontinuous study. At the same time, the emphasis on learning together required that the problem-based learning provide opportunities for interaction of a very high order.

We should note that this conception makes possible a particular kind of challenge to the alleged elitism of the universities. If techniques and intellectual skills are what is required, then the academic 'A' level gold standard may not be the most appropriate way of judging a person's potential to benefit from higher education. Credit must be given also for experience and non-academic qualifications. There is also room for mature students. Hence the vocational view has often been seen as a more sympathetic to mature students: but this has also often made it second best in the eyes of some!

We note that if the use of knowledge is stressed, it is still the case that knowledge is seen as a body of truths, albeit including so-called 'practical' truths, which can be transmitted and drawn on. There is no suggestion that knowledge cannot be found, nor that knowledge is anything less than universal truth. We should note also that despite the apparent opposition between knowing and understanding on the one hand and acting on the other, the application of knowledge presupposes the acquisition of knowledge. It is in the *relative* importance of acquiring knowledge and applying knowledge that this conception differs from the liberal conception.

Similarly, there is a clear understanding in this conception as in the liberal conception that knowledge and techniques are transmitted from expert to novice. The apprenticeship model

of learning by watching and emulating may be preferred to the model of individual study, but the expert/novice divide remains.

Finally we should notice that this conception of education judges the success or otherwise of the education primarily on what the student is equipped to do rather than what the student knows. Assessment is of skills outcomes rather than learning outcomes.

We see then that there are differences between the vocational and liberal conceptions, but also great similarities. On the one hand the vocational view is at odds with some of the most cherished aspects of the liberal conception. Most notably, the vocational conception does not deal solely with knowledge of the kind which universities respect. This helps to explain why Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATS) and the Polytechnics changed in character so quickly after they acquired university status: they wanted to establish themselves as 'proper' universities, pursuing 'proper' knowledge.

Nevertheless we should notice how easy it was for the CATS and Polytechnics to change. This was because the liberal and vocational conceptions have more in common than might appear at first sight. Like the liberal conception, this conception requires the student to have the widest possible introduction to knowledge and skills: the exact knowledge content does not matter but the widest possible skills are needed and the widest possible background in order that the student may be flexible and have great resources on which to draw in problem solving.

Given that the exact content of the knowledge is not important, the attitudes developed by the student towards the acquisition and application of knowledge become important. The graduate must respect knowledge and the processes by which knowledge is advanced, as well as being ready to deploy knowledge. This is not so very far from the kind of attitudes to scholarship which the liberal conception tries to inculcate. Thus the liberal and vocational conceptions have a common requirement for the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in parallel, and a common understanding of at least some of the appropriate attitudes. We shall return to this point in the concluding section of this chapter.

The professional conception

We turn now to the conception of education underlying professional education in higher education. By professional education we mean education which prepares people to enter one of the professions such as law, medicine, engineering, nursing, teaching or social work. This

form of higher education is supported by a conception of education which differs from both the liberal and vocational conceptions. One major difference from both of these is that in professional education the content of the curriculum and the forms of assessment are largely controlled by professional institutions outside the universities; another major difference is that professional education has a much greater focus on multi-disciplinary knowledge than either vocational or liberal education. We shall examine these differences in this section; but we shall also note the parallels between this conception and the other two, parallels which may be more significant than the differences.

As noted in the historical review in chapter two above, one of the chief duties of universities in Europe from their earliest days has been preparing people for the three ancient professions of the church, the law and medicine. While it is now possible in England to follow a career in law or medicine without a degree, one's activities are strictly circumscribed and one's opportunities are severely restricted. The higher reaches of both professions are open only to holders of university degrees. That the same is no longer true of the church, even of the Church of England, has more to do with the supply of candidates and resources for training than any desire to abandon university education for the profession. It is noticeable that more recent claimants to the status of profession, such as social workers and nurses, are moving in the direction of graduate qualification for entry to the profession.

What marks out a profession? There are many studies, and almost as many views, of what constitutes the essence of a profession or professionalism. For our purposes Sir Monty Finniston provides a convenient statement:

The development of professionalism requires the provision of facilities for education, training and experience to standards set by those qualified and respected as setting example and to the personal satisfaction of the potential practitioner. (Finniston 1984: 57)

Finniston was writing about the education of engineers, but his words apply more widely. They point to what, for our purposes, are significant elements of a profession: the existence of an accepted body of practice, and self-regulation allowing control of standards of professional practice. The latter includes control of entry to the profession.

It is interesting to note that Finniston distinguishes between education, training and experience. Since he chaired the government enquiry into the production of engineers, published as a report in 1980 entitled *Engineering our Future*, we may assume that Finniston represents the way the engineering professions think. In his view, there is a distinction

between the so-called academic knowledge on which engineering practice is based and the application of that knowledge. We have already seen this distinction at work in our review of the conception of vocational education above. There the distinction was captured in the notion of capability: here it is much more to do with professional skills. Significantly, engineers are not alone in making this kind of distinction. In the same volume on professional education, Henry Walton writes

Medical students are trained to follow systematized history-taking, physical examination and ordering of special investigations in a standard sequence which experienced doctors themselves do not operate. (Walton 1984: 53)

Further, it is noticeable that all professions which have graduate entry require graduates to undertake further training in practice before they are admitted to the profession. Clearly the university degree does not guarantee that the professional can actually perform as a professional. So what does it offer?

For most professions the answer seems to be a combination of knowledge and the ability to see that knowledge in a wide context. The graduate is supposed to have acquired a detailed knowledge of the field of study, a knowledge which is up-to-date and covers the latest developments. At the same time, the graduate is supposed to be able to put that knowledge to use in new situations, for example in diagnosis of a patient's illness or examination of the special features of a legal case. The emphasis is on the application of knowledge to interpret information in a new case, drawing on precedents and known data, but recognising each case as different.

It is important to note the view of knowledge here. Knowledge is seen as a body of theory abstracted from practice, together with a body of interpretation based on experience. The theory and methods of interpretation and even some of the interpretation can be passed on from expert to novice: but there will always be a requirement for interpretation and judgement in each particular case. Thus the professional draws on professional knowledge which is a combination of theory and case law.

As we have seen, mainstream higher education is based on the idea of disciplinary knowledge. For professional education disciplinary knowledge is important, but equally important is the combination of knowledge from different disciplines to form the theories which underlie professional practice. Thus the conception of education in professional education requires an inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary stance which is closer to the conception of liberal education than to the conception of vocational education.

The need for an inter-disciplinary education is pointed up by concerns expressed about the narrowness of the professional education offered by universities. For example, Terry Johnson writes:

We might even have the temerity to ask what the educational rationale is for the fact that doctors are trained for hospital practice when the working lives of a majority are spent in other locations, responding to a quite different set of demands and conditions. Also, at least since Snow's conception of the two cultures entered academic and political discourse, it has been clear that the engineering institutions and academics have only hesitantly and partially responded to the need significantly to extend the cultural horizons of future generations of engineers, and, in particular, to prepare them for the administrative, organizational and political contexts of their working lives. (Johnson 1984: 24)

It seems then that the aim of professional education must be in part the integration of a number of strands of disciplinary knowledge to provide a basis for the application of theory to new situations, as demanded by Finniston. However, the depth to which a range of disciplines can be studied in the time available is limited, as Finniston recognised:

Engineering education must give engineers some knowledge and understanding of those other disciplines with which they will come into contact and interrelate, including relevant institutional constraints; (Finniston 1984: 63)

That statement with its clear limitation of '*some* knowledge and understanding' of other disciplines could be adopted with minor modifications in all professional education:

A fresh slant on this issue is given if we include in the idea of professional development the development of professional researchers. One of the tasks of the university is to provide a stream of people trained to conduct research. In the past, these would usually have become university lecturers as well, but there is a growing number of people whose career is as researcher.

Typically such researchers are graduates, usually with a higher degree. They are trained within a discipline; they accept the norms and rules of their discipline and rarely venture outside it. Thus the education they require and receive is primarily an education in the knowledge content and methods of the discipline concerned, and perhaps even of a particular school within the discipline. This education equips them to become expert in a narrow field of knowledge and have skills to pursue further study in that field, leading to the creation of knowledge. It is significant in this context that regulations for the award of the degree of Ph.D in all disciplines universally require that the candidate's thesis make an original

contribution to knowledge. Since such a degree is generally a pre-requisite for an academic or research appointment, the requirement gives a good indication of what is sought.

How does this fit with the professional conception of education? The focus on wide learning has become narrowed to a discipline, and even to a small area of a discipline. Thus while other professionals were increasingly required to have a broader base of knowledge and skills, professional researchers were becoming more and more specialised. Interestingly, the move towards a wider understanding of professionalism is now becoming evident in the training of professional researchers. One sign of this is the development of programmes of 'research training', compulsory for full-time research students supported by public funds. Typically in these, trainee researchers are required to be trained in public communication of their field of study, and in methods of management and even ethics, as well as in research methods. In other words, the narrow disciplinary specialism has to be set in a wider context which recognises some of the implications of engaging in research.

A further twist to the theme of professional education arises from the point noted earlier, about preparation for a career in higher education. In the liberal tradition, teaching is by those who are already accredited as experts in a discipline and are socialised within the tradition, having the approved attitudes – in other words, higher education professionals. However, there is a growing concern that higher education professionals lack professional expertise in teaching, which in theory at least is still one of their major occupations. This is one of the mainsprings of the creation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching, which hopes to raise the profile, status and professionalism of teaching in higher education. Unfortunately, both the development of research training and the moves to improve teaching leave higher education facing the charge that it is dedicated primarily to producing higher education professionals and researchers, while the other professions come later.

The professional conception of education extends to the idea of continuing professional development (CPD), as provided within mainstream departments. Students in CPD are expected to be motivated by the professional concern to remain up to date with knowledge in their field: that is they are already socialised into the profession. They are expected to have a basis of knowledge which can be added to easily, by lectures and seminars. They are expected to take in new knowledge and then assimilate and use it as part of their practice. Thus their continuing professional development continues their education as professionals, rather than as those who wish simply to extend skills and knowledge.

One important development in this field in the last two decades has been the widespread adoption of the idea of the 'reflective practitioner'. This term, given currency through the work of Donald Schön (1987), encapsulates the idea that a significant, perhaps the significant, source of learning for professionals is their own experience. By observing and reflecting on their own application of theory in practice, it is claimed, professionals will be able to refine both theory and practice. As well as a focus on the necessary interaction of theory and practice, this idea relies on a conception of education as personal development guided by the needs of particular circumstance. It is a development of the idea that professionals apply professional knowledge in particular situations: having applied the knowledge, the reflective practitioner learns from the results, rather than waiting for someone else to observe the outcomes and develop the underlying theory. One important benefit of this perceived by advocates of reflective practice is that the immediacy of experience necessitates the recognition of affective elements of professional practice and the uncertainties surrounding the application of technical expertise.

Schön's work has been criticised from a variety of standpoints (Boud and Walker 1998), but it has undoubtedly affected ideas of professional development: all professions now require practitioners to be reflective. However, this has not altered significantly the conception of education underlying professional education. New demands have been placed on professionals, new resources offered to them, but the objective is still the acquisition of specialist knowledge to be applied in both familiar and novel situations.

We see then that there is a distinct conception of education at work in professional education in higher education: but it is a conception which has much in common with the other two conceptions we have studied. Before we examine the similarities and differences more closely, we shall examine how these three conceptions appear in some representative writings of the period under review.

The Robbins Report

We have identified and traced three conceptions of education in higher education up to the mid 1990s. Our claim is that these three conceptions shape thinking about higher education during the period. This can be demonstrated by examination of four documents covering the period. The first is the *Robbins Report*, published in 1963; the second is Eric Robinson's *The New Polytechnics*, published in 1968; third comes Kenneth Minogue's *The Concept of a University*, published in 1973; and finally there is *The Idea of Higher Education* by Ronald Barnett, published in 1990. Not only do these documents span the period and provide

convenient snapshots at different points, they are also the only documents which try to take an overview of what the universities are about in educational terms in the period. It is significant that both Minogue and Barnett come down strongly for a version of the university which emphasises the liberal ideal, over against the other two conceptions.

We begin with the Robbins report. As we saw in chapter 2, the Robbins Committee was set up in 1961, at a time when the expansion of higher education was already under way. The number of students in higher education was predicted to grow to over 300,000 by 1970, and expenditure on higher education was expected to be £206 million in 1962/63, rising to around £740 million by 1980/81 (Robbins 1963: 65, 202). The government wanted some idea of where the money was going.

We recall that before the Robbins Committee was appointed, the DES had already accepted the idea that the universities would be unable to provide all the scientists and technologists needed by the country (Stewart 1989: chapter 4). We also noted above the acceptance by the universities of the idea that the government should give guidance on the way in which higher education could serve the national needs (*ibid.*). With these points in mind, we turn to the report of the Robbins Committee.

In Chapter Two of the Report there is a section headed the Aims of Higher Education (Robbins, 1963, pp 6-7, paras 22 -29). The opening paragraph of the section is very short:

To begin with aims and objectives - what purposes, what general social ends should be served by higher education? (para 22).

The next paragraph recognises that the question is not new, and has had many answers. The paragraph asserts

no simple formula, no answer in terms of any single end, will suffice. There is no single aim which, if pursued to the exclusion of all others, would not leave out essential elements.

Further

To do justice to the complexity of things, it is necessary to acknowledge a plurality of aims.

In paragraphs 25 -28 the report states and amplifies four

objectives essential to any properly balanced system (para 24)

namely

instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour (para 25)

what is taught should be taught in such a way as to promote the general powers of the mind (para 26)

the advancement of learning (para 27)

the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship (para 28).

Paragraph 29 then makes an eloquent and often overlooked statement about the ways in which these objectives are to be realised in the sector as a whole, while maintaining diversity between institutions. Noting that institutions vary, the report recognises that the four objectives will be addressed in different ways and to different degrees by different institutions. It then says:

Our contention is that, although the extent to which each principle is realised in the various types of institution will vary, yet, ideally, there is room for at least a speck of each in all. The system as a whole must be judged deficient unless it provides adequately for all of them. (para 29)

The four objectives listed in the report have become very familiar, particularly in recent years, as they have often been used as starting points for claims for the allocation of resources to particular parts of the higher education sector. Less attention has been paid to the amplification of each objective in the report, or to the statement just quoted about the responsibilities of institutions and the sector as a whole. We shall return to the latter point later. For the moment we shall examine the four objectives more closely.

First it is worth noting a section which is often overlooked. In discussing numbers and eligibility, Robbins, as we saw in chapter two, lays down as an axiom the idea that higher education should be available to all who are qualified and want to pursue it. In defence of this axiom, the report makes two points. One is that a modern state needs to make the most of the talents of all its citizens if it is to aspire to both economic growth and high cultural standards.

The other point is this:

beyond that, education ministers intimately to ultimate ends, in developing man's capacity to understand, to contemplate and to create. And it is a characteristic of the aspirations of this age to feel that, where there is a capacity to pursue such activities, there that capacity should be fostered. The good society desires

equality of opportunity for its citizens to become not merely good producers but also good men and women. (para 33)

Here is a clear statement of the purpose of education in the 1960s, and one which fits very happily into the liberal conception of education examined earlier. We must bear this statement in mind as we examine more closely the four objectives of higher education stated in the report.

Instruction in skills

It is interesting that the report places this objective first. To judge from some comment on the government's interest in so-called vocational education at university level in the 1980s, one would suppose that this was a new idea, invented by doctrinaire and philistine ideologues with no understanding of the true nature of higher education. Yet here is the idea, first in the Robbins list.

Why does the Robbins report put this objective first?

We put this first, not because we regard it as the most important, but because we think that it is sometimes ignored or undervalued. (para 25)

The paragraph then goes on to suggest that this objective is valuable primarily because it reflects the aims of the students:

We deceive ourselves if we claim that more than a small fraction of students in institutions of higher education would be where they are if there were no significance for their future careers in what they hear and read; and it is a mistake to suggest that there is anything discreditable in this. (para 25)

The point is bolstered by reference to Confucius and to the origins of the ancient universities of Europe as institutes for what we should now call professional training. Then at the end of the paragraph we find:

And it must be recognised that in our own times, progress – and particularly the maintenance of a competitive position – depends to a much greater extent than ever before on skills demanding special training. A good general education, valuable though it may be, is frequently less than we need to solve many of our most pressing problems. (para 25)

Thus in this paragraph the Robbins report is conceiving higher education as a means of transferring skills of a special kind, with the aim at least of improving the job prospects of the students, and beyond that, of maintaining progress and a competitive position. Presumably,

the competitive position includes industrial and trading competitiveness, within a world context, but that is not drawn out explicitly in this report. It is worth noting that in this paragraph the Robbins report seems content to talk of skills without any mention of accompanying knowledge or understanding. It is also noticeable that the two strands of vocational and professional which we have distinguished are here run together. Moreover, the report does not spell out what is required in education beyond the general to satisfy this paragraph: what are the skills required which should be taught?

As we have seen the same problem is found in discussing the vocational and professional conceptions of education; it is not clear exactly what is required which goes beyond the general. Talk of 'problem-solving', as we have seen does not help.

Promoting the general powers of the mind.

This, the second on the Robbins report's list of objectives, reflects clearly the liberal tradition which we traced back above as far as Newman in 1853. The report presents this tradition in terms of the training of minds,

However, the Robbins report wants more than trained minds. The relevant paragraph says:

The aim should be to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women. And it is the distinguishing characteristic of a healthy higher education that even where it is concerned with practical techniques, it imparts them on a plane of generality that makes possible their application to many problems. (para 26)

Moreover

It is this that the world of affairs demands of the world of learning. And it is this, and not conformity with traditional categories, that furnishes the criterion of what institutions of higher education may properly teach. (para 26)

The emphasis is on generality. Education is to provide a frame of mind, a set of attitudes and intellectual skills, which can be widely applied. Here we can see quite plainly the influence of the liberal conception of education.

We note that this is necessarily the development of the individual mind. We note also that there is a spirit of enquiry latent in this paragraph: education at the university level is not to be bound by traditional categories, but, presumably, to go wherever the search for knowledge leads.

The advancement of learning

... the search for truth is an essential function of institutions of higher education and the process of education is itself most vital when it partakes of the nature of discovery. It would be untrue to suggest that the advancement of learning has been or ever will be wholly dependent on universities and other institutions of higher education. But the world, not higher education alone, will suffer if they ever cease to regard it as one of their main functions. (para 27)

The pursuit of knowledge hinted at in the previous paragraph of the report is here spelt out as essential not only to the university but to the educational process in higher education. The report talks elsewhere of the role of research in universities: here we note the emphasis on discovery as part of education. There is something in this of Newman's liberal view, but the note of research is foreign to him.

It is important to note that in discussing both the transmission and the pursuit of knowledge, the Robbins Committee accepted without question the ideas of knowledge as universal truths and knowledge as primarily disciplinary. As befits a flagship document of the 1960s, there is no hint of the debate about the nature and scope of knowledge, even though that discussion was already underway.

The transmission of culture and common standards of citizenship

The fourth of the Robbins Committee's objectives does hint at some of the discussion of its time. It is sensitive to criticism of the higher education system as promoting an elite monoculture. The report is careful to emphasise difference:

By this we do not mean the forcing of all individuality into a common mould: that would be the negation of higher education as we conceive it. (para 28)

The individual mind is to be trained and allowed its individuality. But

We believe that it is a proper function of higher education, as of education in schools, to provide in partnership with the family that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends. This function, important at all times, is perhaps especially important in an age that has set itself the ideal of equality of opportunity. It is not merely by providing places for students from all classes that this ideal will be achieved, but also by providing, in the atmosphere of the institutions within which the students will live and work, influences that in some measure compensate for any inequalities of home background. (para 28)

This is reinforced by what is said later in the report about social interaction between students and between staff and students. The committee insists that institutions of higher education are communities (para. 585). Noting the comparatively low wastage rates at Oxford and Cambridge it declares:

A number of factors contribute to this; among them is undoubtedly the comparative ease with which contact between senior and junior members of the university can take place outside teaching hours. This is one of the great merits of the college system: it unites senior and junior members in a common way of life, and makes the teacher's study a natural place for casual and informal meeting as well as for teaching. (para. 585)

For the student

The two things a student requires throughout his (*sic*) university career are the possibility of privacy – a room of his (*sic*) own, however modest – and facilities for social life. (para. 591)

The committee proposes that in order to meet these requirements for social interaction between students and between students and staff, at least two-thirds of all students should be housed in residential accommodation provided by the institution, and institutions should encourage staff to live reasonably close to the institution and provide facilities for staff to entertain students (paras. 594 and 586).

Interestingly, the Robbins Committee noticed only social differences as cultural influences. There is no hint of awareness of the development in Britain of a multi-cultural society, which was already occurring in the 1960s. Even when students from overseas are discussed, it is assumed that they will adopt and adapt to the culture they are entering, without any thought for the changes this requires or the need to sustain the student's own cultural heritage. There is a strong sense here that the culture the universities are to conserve and transmit is known, accepted and worthwhile for all.

One other part of the Robbins Report of particular interest to this study is the discussion of the breadth and depth of courses. Noting that it had heard many criticisms of the traditional single honours degree, the Committee writes:

There are unquestionably young men and women for whom study that involves penetration in depth is naturally appropriate. They are eager to get to the heart of the subject and to develop powers of rigorous analysis and observation within its ambit. ... And we should add that the suitability of this training is not necessarily confined to future academics and high professionals. The urge to knowledge for its own sake, pursued in depth, is one that inspires students of many levels of ability.

Nevertheless there is another sort of mind that at the first degree stage is likely to be more at home in broader fields studied to more moderate depth. There is evidence that many young people would prefer such studies were they assured that broader courses carried no stigma of inferior status. Many students would like to enlarge their knowledge in a number of subjects and feel constricted by the horizons of courses specialising in depth. (paras. 258, 259)

The Committee here both supports the liberal ideal of learning in a community of disparate disciplines, and recognises the need and desire for narrow study in depth. Its suggestion is that higher education institutions should be flexible and develop opportunities for both kinds of study. For our purposes, the important thing to note is that the key factor in the choice of either type of study is the student's desire for knowledge, whether specialised or broad.

This is of a piece with the thrust of the Robbins report. Despite its explicit and careful recognition of the role of higher education in relation to the economy and the mixed intentions of students, the report is underpinned by a conception of education strongly informed by the liberal conception discussed above. The pursuit of knowledge, seen as universal truth, for its own sake in a residential community of scholars remains the ideal against which all other provision must be measured.

Three writers (1): Eric Robinson

We turn from the Robbins report to three works which between them almost span our period of interest. The first is Eric Robinson's *The New Polytechnics* published in 1968. Robinson was a tireless and articulate critic of the university system and advocate of the polytechnics, and his book, written while the polytechnics were being established, sets out an educational rationale for their existence. His work has often been taken to be an attack on liberal conceptions of education and a clarion call for the vocational conception. Whether this is the case we shall see.

Our second book is *The Concept of a University* by Kenneth Minogue, published in 1973, ten years after the Robbins report. During those ten years, the universities had expanded greatly and the polytechnics had come into being. By 1973 the polytechnics had developed sufficiently, and sufficiently aggressively, for questions to be raised about the need to change the universities and make them more like polytechnics. Minogue's book is a defence of the universities as traditionally understood, and an attack on more vocational ideas. It therefore represents a defence of the liberal conception against the vocational conception.

Finally in this section we jump nearly twenty years to Ronald Barnett's *The Idea of Higher Education*, published in 1990. As Barnett himself notes, there had been many changes in higher education since the publication of Minogue's book, and many examinations of aspects of higher education such as administration, curriculum, and so on: but there had not been an examination of higher education from an educational perspective (Leverhulme 1983: 3, Barnett 1990: 4). Writing in order to fill the gap, Barnett also writes in order to show how the traditional idea of a liberal higher education is being lost, and how it can be regained and implemented.

We thus have two books apparently advocating the liberal conception of higher education and one apparently advocating the vocational conception. It is noteworthy that there are no similar books advocating or defending what we have called the professional conception. This may be because the professional conception has not been sufficiently distinguished from other conceptions, particularly the vocational conception; it may be that writers have not considered the professional conception worthy of detailed examination; it may be that professional education has been considered unworthy of academic attention. Whatever the reason, the absence of a sustained discussion of the professional conception is noteworthy.

We turn to Robinson first. Robinson begins his development of proposals for the then new polytechnics with an historical review leading to a discussion of the difference between universities and other institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom. He identifies five major differences:

(1) finance and control via the University Grants Committee (2) limitation of their work almost exclusively to degree studies and to full-time students (at least up to first degree level) (3) a royal charter to award their own degrees (4) existence as an independent legal entity (5) the definition of their senior academic posts as those of 'professor'. (Robinson 1968: 43)

Of these, three are particularly relevant to our concerns, the second, the third and the fifth. All of them relate to Robinson's perception of the educational shortcomings of the then university system and the possibilities of reform offered by the creation of the polytechnics.

On the range of studies, Robinson's criticism is sharp.

As the British universities have developed during this century it has been generally presumed that a student would be a full-time student for at least three years and that, unless he was a failure, he would obtain at least a bachelor's degree. From being little more than a certificate of residence and good behaviour during those three years the bachelor's degree has become a certificate of academic standard. (1968: 45)

For Robinson, this approach, which he describes as 'exclusive' (1968: 46), ignores the facts that for many students a three year academic programme is inappropriate, because they do not have the necessary academic ability or because it gives them nothing to help them develop a career. The insistence on full-time study also, in Robinson's view, excludes many capable people who for one reason or another cannot study full-time, or do not want to study full-time in a semi-monastic environment (1968: 47).

The significance of the royal charter lies for Robinson in the freedom to create new kinds of course. He sees the CNNA, which validated polytechnic courses, as both bureaucratic and restrictive, following, he claims, a policy of making new courses conform to existing models. Consequently, since the CNNA panels are dominated in his view by university academics, courses in institutions subject to the CNNA are restricted by academic views of what is acceptable in study, and so there is little scope for innovation and the extension of more vocationally oriented provision or the introduction of different teaching methods. (1968: 51)

The title of Professor, for Robinson, indicates the universities' emphasis on research rather than teaching as the major factor in the recognition and promotion of academic staff. Associated with this, he claims, is the growth of subject departments and disciplinary specialisms, which inhibit cross-disciplinary courses. (1968: 56)

In place of these approaches, Robinson advocates a higher education system which will recognise and accredit study which is not at degree level, and provide greater opportunity for movement from sub-degree level studies at institutions of higher education outside the university sector to degree level and advanced studies in universities. He insists that a system focused on eighteen to twenty-one year olds studying full-time is inadequate and socially divisive: instead he wants a system open to mature students and those who wish to study part-time, with flexible entrance criteria, flexible study patterns, and financial support. In such a system, the students will be the primary focus, not the course or curriculum

The polytechnics should attempt to redress the balance by making their students their primary consideration unambiguously and without fear or favour – students should come before subjects, before research, before demands of employers and before demands of the state. (1968: 117)

What will these students study? Robinson is highly critical of liberal, vocational and what he calls academic views of the curriculum. By liberal, he means studies with no direct vocational content; these in his view equip the student for nothing. Vocational studies are attacked as too narrow. Academic studies are discipline focused and harmful.

In their place Robinson advocates a form of study which he regards as liberalism at its best. On the one hand he wishes to avoid the pitfalls of over-academic study, on the other hand he wishes to avoid the pitfalls of vocationalism. The third way is that of liberalism, but not liberal education as Robinson finds it in the universities of the time. This is insufficiently liberal. He describes his ideal;

The most liberal education [the student] can receive is one which enables him to make his way in employment without being its prisoner, which enables him to serve but also to change industry, which teaches him not only how to use his leisure and live in spite of his work but how to make his work an integral part of his life. (1968:116)

Thus Robinson advocates a form of the liberal conception of education, demanding only that it become broader in scope and focused on students. We note that he does not challenge the idea of knowledge at all: for him, knowledge is to be transmitted. He does challenge the ways of transmission – the emphasis is on more exposure to the world of work and less passive learning – but there is no suggestion that knowledge cannot be transmitted.

It is interesting to reflect that Robinson criticises the former Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) for their move to a more academic view of education after acquiring university status, and clearly hopes that the polytechnics will not follow suit. He accepts that the polytechnics will eventually become universities, but intends them to open a new view of what higher education is. Now that the polytechnics have become universities, there is clear evidence of the same kind of academic drift in them as in the CATs. Robinson's brave new world has not come about. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the student as the primary focus of attention for higher education is echoed in much of the discussion of the 1990s, as we shall see.

It is worth noticing that Robinson, the most articulate defender of the polytechnics at their inception, does not see them as providing primarily vocational education. Indeed he does not offer us an idea of higher education based on a conception of vocational education. His conception of education in higher education is liberal, though with more recognition of the world outside the academy than Newman's conception.

It is also interesting to note that much of Robinson's criticism was echoed by those responsible for the University of Buckingham. As we noted in chapter two, Buckingham was set up specifically to embrace different kinds of course and different teaching methods from those in other universities, and its provision, if the original aims were realised, might have met many of Robinson's demands. However, this did not happen. Perhaps, as with the

polytechnics in Robinson's view, the CNNA proved too academically obdurate to embrace new ideas. Perhaps also, the concept of education did not fit the understanding of higher education prevalent in the UK.

Three writers (2): Kenneth Minogue

Kenneth Minogue begins his book by taking issue with what he regards as an 'intellectual mistake',

namely the assumption that academic inquiry is the same thing as rationality and intellectuality (1973: 1)

He sees two reasons for the spread of this error. The first is an association of universities with a view of education

in which knowledge is transmitted from teachers with chalk to students with pens. So far as it goes, this picture is adequate enough, but it happens to be particularly misleading in the case of universities. It encourages us to construe education as a mechanistic process rather than as an individual adventure; as a result, considerations of efficiency become prominent. (1973: 2)

Secondly, there is the entrance of universities to the realm of public discussion, in which, in Minogue's view:

The very form of the discussion impels us to regard as fundamental the question: what is the function (or place, role or purpose) of the university? We begin, in other words, by preparing a Procrustean bed for the luckless object of our thought. And the result is that universities are required to fit a variety of functions sponsored by a variety of political and cultural interests: advocacy or prediction has recently taken them to be power-houses of industrial society, institutions of 'social criticism', promoters of the rate of industrial growth, 'society's response to its troubled sense of something profoundly wrong', and much else. (1973: 2)

For Minogue, this functional view of the university is part of a general debasement of the word 'education'. Education, he writes:

used to refer to the arrangements by which the young might be brought to the recognition of a certain quality of life, as the result of contact with traditionally recognised forms of study. Among Europeans from medieval times onwards, this meant immersion in the abstract worlds of mathematics and music, in law, and in the literature of Greece and Rome. Such an experience was regarded by some temperaments as valuable for its own sake; nor need it have any very determinate bearing upon what an educated man might do with the rest of his life. No doubt the possession of an education might make some things possible which had not

been possible before, but this was a contingency unrelated to the point of education itself. (1973: 5)

What Minogue is keen to stress is the difference between academic discourse and any other. He contests the claim that all knowledge is seamless, holding that in the universities it leads to narrowness (1973: 81). Instead Minogue advocates a view of knowledge as dual: practical knowledge, which can be in error, and academic knowledge which is concerned with objective truth, this leads, he says, to a contrast between academic and ineffective (or irrelevant) and practical and effective. the academic renounces passionate involvement in order to gain the freedom to roam wherever it will (1973: 96)

The upshot of all this is that Minogue regards the university as a place for a very special kind of discussion, in which the mind is free to roam, to ask questions, to ignore practicalities in the pursuit of linkages and so on. The education that takes place in a university is perforce education of the intellect, an initiation into this world of discourse. This is clearly related to Newman's conception of liberal education.

Minogue says very little about who should partake of this university education, but we can infer that it is an elite. He is certain that the universities should maintain their autonomy.

Thus Minogue presents us with a version of the liberal conception of higher education which ignores almost completely the vocational or professional aspects of the university: for him the academic is the essence of the university. He does recognise that universities do many other things: but for him the preservation of the academic world is their first priority. Of course, to preserve the academic world, universities need to provide themselves with more academics, people who recognise the academic world and wish to be part of it. Here they will begin to border on the professional conception of education we have outlined, training academic professionals. It is perhaps significant that Minogue talks of 'preserving' the academic, with overtones of looking back, rather than 'conserving' the academic, which might carry connotations of openness to change.

What is striking about Minogue's work is that his emphasis on the academic – especially the remoteness from the practical world, the need for academic autonomy unsullied by the cares of the world, even the hint that assessment is not part of the university's role – echoes strongly the work of Newman from more than 150 years earlier, and yet Minogue claims to be describing the university not only as it should be, but as it actually is in the early 1970s. He asserts, without offering any evidence, that the kind of university education he describes is

occurring all over the world, hidden away but happening. This certainly suggests that the liberal conception of education had not lost its force, even in the age of university expansion and the creation of polytechnics with an apparently different mission.

Three writers (3): Ronald Barnett

Barnett, as we have noted, sets out to advocate a liberal conception of higher education. What does he mean by this? A key to his understanding is given in his introduction:

I try to show (chapter 2) that, in its various formulations through history, the idea of higher education has contained – as I term it – an emancipatory element. The idea of higher education promises a freeing of the mind, but also looks beyond to bringing about a new level of self-empowerment in the individual student. (1990: x)

Later Barnett draws a distinction between what he sees as two concepts of liberal education, a conservative and a radical concept. The conservative concept is marked by an emphasis on liberty:

The general idea is that all individuals have the seed of liberty within themselves, and the task of the educator is to help it grow. Education is a matter of allowing to unfold those characteristics of reason and independence which lie naturally within the individual. (1990: 190)

The more radical conception places more emphasis on liberation than liberty, according to Barnett. Constraints on the individual, primarily social and psychological constraints, are seen as dominant and not easily overcome. Consequently

On this view, education becomes a process of ‘liberation’, helping individuals to understand the forces acting on them in such a thoroughgoing way that they are enabled to undergo a self-transformation. By allowing them to see those forces for what they are, individuals go through a cycle of self-reflection, self-understanding and seeing themselves in a new way. The educational process is dramatic, and therefore radical, but essentially it is achieved by the individuals for and by themselves. (1990: 190)

Following from this distinction, Barnett draws attention to a related question: is higher education concerned with the mind or with the whole person? He claims that the more conservative concept of liberal education is associated with the view that objective knowledge can be obtained by research and transmitted by relatively passive learning to people who are socially free and therefore do not need to think of the practical implications of their learning. The radical conception is associated with a view of person-centred learning which insists that the student must take up a personal critical, even sceptical, stance towards knowledge and link

theoretical and practical elements to gain an appreciation of the different perspectives of different social groups. (1990: 191)

Barnett points out two assumptions on which, he claims, this liberal conception of higher education rests, and which have been undermined in the modern period. First there is the assumption that objective knowledge and truth are obtainable, undermined by developments in epistemology; second there is the assumption that higher education is offered in institutions which are relatively independent of their social settings, undermined by changes in the position of higher education in relation to the state and the growth of an academic community which wields considerable influence, particularly in relation to matters of curriculum. (1990: x)

The undermining of these assumptions has, in Barnett's view, created the conditions for a move of higher education towards the more radical conception he has discerned, in which

Higher educational processes promote:

1. A deep understanding, by the student of some knowledge claims.
2. A radical critique, by the same student, of those knowledge claims.
3. A developing competence to conduct that critique in the company of others.
4. The student's involvement in determining the shape and direction of that critique (i.e. some form of independent inquiry).
5. The student's self-reflection, with the student developing the capacity critically to evaluate his or her own achievements, knowledge claims and performance.
6. The opportunity for the student to engage in that inquiry in a process of open dialogue and cooperation (freed from unnecessary direction)

These are the minimal educational conditions for an educational process to justify the title 'higher education'. They are logically necessary, in the sense that they follow as a matter of logic from the idea of higher education. (1990: 202, emphasis original)

Barnett claims that liberal higher education thus conceived rests on the recognition of knowledge as practice and performance as well as intellectual, and would promote the acceptance of a wide range of students by emphasising both non-intellectual knowledge and achievement before entry to university and acknowledging growth during the course. He also insists that higher education thus conceived would promote interdisciplinarity, and thus produce graduates capable of taking a place in more than one sphere.

We do not need to pursue the details of Barnett's argument here. What is of interest is his insistence that the liberal view of higher education as he has outlined it is in need of restating, and can be made to work today. He is firmly against any instrumental view of higher

education, and for all his talk of radical conceptions, fits snugly into the liberal view stretching back to Newman. Barnett's stress on practicality and application cannot disguise the fact that he is advocating a view of trained individual minds, consistent with the view of Newman.

Further, despite his remarks about access, Barnett's view leans towards an elitist system: not because of the entry qualifications, but because to achieve what he is setting out to achieve, one must be freed from responsibilities and enabled to explore with like minded people. This is the liberal view.

Notice that in the end, the use to which the education is put does not matter. Certainly the student will be prepared to be critical and so on: but the preparation has no necessary outlet. It is not a preparation to do anything in particular, but to have a certain approach to problems: the liberal view of Newman, writ large, but modified to take account of a different approach to knowledge.

Thus in these three works covering our period, we find a strong element of the liberal conception going back to Newman. Even Robinson, who challenges most strongly an academic conception of higher education, follows Newman to a large extent. It is clear that the dominant conception of education in higher education in our period is the liberal conception, albeit modified in some respects.

Compare and contrast

We began this chapter by identifying three important and influential conceptions of education in mainstream higher education, and we have examined those conceptions and their representation in representative documents. In this section we shall compare and contrast these conceptions and draw some conclusions to feed into a wider discussion in the final chapter.

In chapter one we formulated a number of questions for use in assessing conceptions of education and uncovering the values and assumptions behind them. Table 3.1. presents a summary of the responses to our questions of the three conceptions reviewed above. Inevitably, the summary is reductive and requires nuancing, but it makes clear the relationship between these conceptions. It is helpful to draw out some highlights, question by question.

	Liberal	Vocational	Professional
<i>Dominant aim</i>	development of the individual intellect	development of competence in applying knowledge	development of skills and attitudes appropriate to the profession concerned
<i>View of knowledge</i>	body of universal truths, transmitted from experts to novices, discipline based	body of working hypotheses, transmitted from master to apprentice	body of professionally accepted truths and practices
Skills	critical analysis rigorous argument	problem solving group work	application of principles; problem solving
Attitudes	pursuit of truth for truth's sake openness to discussion	focus on application collaborative	multi-disciplinary; regular updating
For whom?	academically able	those able to show ability to learn	academically able
By whom?	accredited academic experts	academic experts and practitioners	academic experts and practising professionals
<i>Where?</i>	community, isolated from everyday world	in workplace with excursions to academia	academic community and professional practice
Why valued?	produces generalist trained mind; preserves culture	produces leaders for commerce and industry	produces skilled and socialised professionals

Table 3.1 Conceptions of education in mainstream higher education

What is the dominant aim of higher education in this conception? At first sight it seems that the three conceptions have different aims; but the closer examination undertaken above suggests otherwise. Both the vocational and professional conceptions require the training of the individual intellect: it is the use to which that intellect is directed which distinguishes the different conceptions. Further, while the professional conception emphasises the development of skills, these are as much intellectual skills as any other. We conclude that the three conceptions share an aim of individual intellectual development, albeit with slightly differing views about the purpose of intellectual endeavour.

What is the view of knowledge? Here there is very little difference between the conceptions. The idea of knowledge as a body of universal and objective truths to be transmitted runs through all three. In the vocational and professional cases rather more credence is given to so-called 'practical knowledge', but even here the knowledge is assumed to be universal, objective and transmissible from expert to novice.

What skills are offered? There is more divergence here. The liberal conception offers individual intellectual skills, while both the other conceptions require skills in the application of knowledge and in working collaboratively. However, these skills are in addition to rather than in place of the primarily intellectual skills. It is important to note the close relationship between skills and knowledge: many of the skills sought can be broadly termed 'skills in handling knowledge'.

What attitudes are inculcated? Again the vocational and professional conceptions add something to the liberal conception. Both require acceptance of inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary working and of the need to work collaboratively. Further the professional conception requires the adoption of a strategy of constant professional development, at least to stay abreast of new thinking. Nevertheless, the liberal values of the search for truth, respect for other opinions and openness to discussion are just as important for the other two conceptions. Again we notice a close connection, this time between attitudes, knowledge and skills: in all three conceptions, the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills require, implicitly or explicitly, the development of appropriate attitudes. This is especially clear in the case of the professional conception, where inculcation of appropriate attitudes seems as important as the transmission of knowledge.

To whom is the education offered? Here the variation is offered mainly in the vocational conception. The liberal conception is unashamedly elitist, looking for high academic ability in prospective students; the professional conception is less obviously elitist, but the

professions exercise strong control over entry standards. In the vocational conception, more credit is given for experience and practical ability, with a recognition that academic excellence may not be the best guide to skills in applying knowledge. Nevertheless, the vocational conception still rests on a high view of academic ability.

By whom is the education provided? Here the three conceptions all place emphasis on the expert, academic or practitioner. It is also noticeable in all three cases that the expert is accredited by the system: the academic expert by academia, the practical expert by the world of affairs, the professional expert by the profession: it is very much a closed shop.

Where does education take place? There is a clear division here. The liberal view is that learning is best undertaken in communities isolated from the concerns of everyday life, where thinking and discussion can take place without distraction. The vocational conception insists on exposure to the world of work, and sees academia as something of an escape from reality. The professional conception requires the communal emphasis of the liberal view, for the purposes of forming professional attitudes, while also requiring the immersion in practical affairs of the vocational conception. In general the professions solve the dilemma by requiring professional training after academic study, while the vocational conception would prefer academic study and practical training to take place side by side.

Why is this education valued by the recipients, the providers and society? The overwhelming response to this question in all three conceptions is that higher education provides trained minds which can then be applied in spheres of importance to society, the value being indicated by the material and social rewards accompanying graduate status. While the three conceptions take different views on the relative importance to society of trained academics, captains of industry and professionals, all agree that all are required in a modern society.

This summary, coupled with our earlier examination of the available material makes clear the dominance of the liberal conception of education. The differences we have noted are insignificant compared with the similarities between the three conceptions; and those similarities reflect strongly a liberal conception rooted firmly in the work of Newman in the nineteenth century.

An interesting indication of the extent of Newman's grip on the idea of higher education comes from a paper by Malcolm Tight entitled *The Ideology of Higher Education* (Tight 1989). In a section headed *Practice: what does higher education offer?* Tight writes:

The following characteristics of the dominant model of British higher education may be identified:

- an insistence on standard forms of knowledge and certification on entry;
- entry immediately after school;
- a period of study lasting for three or four years full time, but with long vacations and a considerable amount of spare time during term;
- study away from the (parental) home, preferably taking up residence within the institution, and relatively isolated from the surrounding community;
- study leading to a degree, preferably a specialized honours degree;
- study based on and within 'disciplines', which may have little relevance to the student's prior or subsequent experience;
- the use of expert/novice forms of teaching, exemplified by the lecture and the three-hour unseen written examination, and sustained by the notion of a body of knowledge which has to be mastered.
- the majority of the costs incurred borne by the state and the student's parents.

(Tight 1989: 91, bullet points original)

Tight is quite clear that this list is simplified, and that there are many examples which would deviate from this list in one or more respects. However, he offers this as an overview of what the universities were providing in 1989, and it is consistent with the view of many other observers of the scene. Some of Tight's characteristics have little bearing on our interest in the conception of education, but others are highly significant: the view of knowledge, the form of teaching, the entry requirements, the outcomes and the study away from home.

Comparing Tight's list with our summary of Newman, we can see some differences. Newman says nothing about entry requirements, nor the age of entry; nor does he specify a period of study. Newman is against narrow disciplinary study and specialised degrees and lukewarm about examinations.

However, the similarities between Tight's list and Newman's work are much more significant. Both include, explicitly or implicitly, a body of knowledge to be mastered, expert/novice forms of teaching, study which includes substantial free time, study in an institution relatively isolated from the community, study which may have little or no relevance to the student's subsequent experience. If Tight's list is reasonably accurate and representative, Newman's liberal education is very much alive in higher education.

Our examination of the Robbins report and the works of three representative writers suggest that Tight's list is both accurate and representative. In those documents we found that the liberal conception was the dominant force. This was the case even in the writing of Robinson, who apparently espoused most firmly a vocational conception of education.

From all this material we draw three conclusions of particular significance for our study, which we shall explore in more detail in the final chapter. The first we have already noted, namely the dominance in mainstream higher education of a liberal conception of education.

Secondly we should note how little real change there was in the conceptions of education in mainstream higher education during the period under review. On the face of it, this is rather surprising, given the expansion of the higher education system, the economic pressures on universities and the changing climate of government opinion about education in particular. It will be interesting to reflect on this in the light of our later examination of claims about conceptions of education in the late 1990s.

Thirdly, of significance for our understanding of conceptions of education in higher education in particular is the strong link we have noted between knowledge, skills and attitudes. All the conceptions we have studied assume that the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes will take place in parallel, and all of them regard that development as best undertaken in interaction with others, both other learners and teachers. There is no suggestion that the necessary knowledge, skills or attitudes can be transferred from expert to novice as discrete packages. It is not necessary in these conceptions for the transmission to take place in a separated community, though the liberal conception inclines to that view: but what is necessary is exposure to learning in company over a period. The significance of this point will become apparent as we look later at a very different approach to knowledge and skills in particular, to be found in some more recent discussions of the future of higher education.

These three points will be taken up in our final chapter. For the moment we leave mainstream higher education and turn to adult continuing education within higher education.

Chapter Four: Adult continuing education

Introduction

We turn now to examine the conceptions of education found in adult continuing education in the period under review. Our aim in this chapter is to identify what Scott called the 'intellectual values' underpinning adult continuing education which, in his view, could transform higher education (Scott, 1996). As we noted in chapter one, this entails identifying ways in which the conceptions of education in adult continuing education differed from those found in other parts of the higher education system.

One difficulty in doing this is deciding what falls under the heading of adult continuing education. Duncan (no date) notes that adult continuing education includes the provision made in dedicated departments in the pre-1992 universities, continuing professional development offered by other departments in those universities, a wide range of provision in the former polytechnic sector, and other provision in colleges of education and other institutions not formally regarded as part of the higher education system. The provision in the former polytechnics continued after they became universities in 1992. Other writers indicate the same range, using different headings (Tight, 1991; Duke, 1992; Fieldhouse, 1996).

The significant factor for our purposes is the extent to which this provision took account of the educational requirements of students as adults. As argued in chapter one, the thesis of 'adultification' requires that there are differences between conceptions of education in adult continuing education and those in other parts of the higher education system sufficient to provide alternative visions of higher education. We have noted the large numbers of mature students in the higher education system. Vocational provision in the polytechnics, the post-1992 universities, provided opportunities for mature students studying part-time (Pratt, 1997), while many polytechnics provided some 'traditional adult education' (Wood, 1982: 22). Continuing professional education and development is necessarily aimed at those who have already fulfilled some kind of professional entry qualification, and so are at least mature students. We have already examined in chapter three the conceptions of education underlying these strands of higher education, in so far as that provision is made by mainstream departments.

However, even where that provision was focussed on mature students, were the mature students regarded as adult students with particular educational needs related to their status as adults? Attention has often been focused on the provision of modular courses, timetabling to

suit the requirements of mature students with time constraints, and similar organisational activities (for example, Woodley *et al.*, 1987). However, there is some evidence to suggest these organisational changes did not amount to a concern for the needs of adults, especially when viewed from the perspective of the students.

Blaxter and Tight conducted a survey of students on part-time degree courses in the universities of Warwick and Coventry, one a pre-1992 and one a post-1992 institution (Blaxter and Tight, 1994). They reported that individual adult students

are being expected to take on the role of students in institutions where the perception of the student role is of someone with no other major commitments, and with little or no reduction in their other responsibilities. (1994: 178)

Similarly, Zukas and Malcolm claimed

Once they arrive in higher education, students move from being 'adult students' to 'mature students'. While this might be considered a mere shift in nomenclature, we believe that it signifies discontinuity. (2002: 203)

Having examined the literature on pedagogy in higher education, they further claimed

The new specialism of teaching and learning in higher education has developed without reference to adult education and takes little account of who the students are (*op.cit.*: 204).

Bourner *et al.* examined part-time students' experience of higher education in both universities and the then polytechnic sector and included in their work staff and institutional attitudes to part-time students (Bourner *et al.*, 1991). They reported that some attempts were made to recognise the 'added maturity and experience' (1991: 43) of part-time students. According to their report, a small minority of institutions deliberately attempted to build on students' work experience by setting mini-projects related to the students' work; others used student-led seminars as a way of drawing on students' experience (1991: 44). They conclude that the general picture is of a few institutions being adventurous, and a

significant minority who are not convinced that part-time students have needs that require a wider range of teaching/learning methods than those provided for full-time students (*ibid.*)

Bourner *et al.* further found that 'patterns of assessment showed even less recognition of students' part-time mode of study'; and the provision of advice to students during their studies showed few concessions in practice to the needs of part-time students (*op.cit.*: 45)

Focussing particularly on adults, Bougeois *et al.* claimed that even when adults enter the university, often

the adaptation will be all on one side; students must reshape themselves as square pegs in the prepared round holes. Their distinctive and unique qualities and life-experiences count as nothing. (1999: 173)

While the work of Bourner *et al.* suggests that this judgement is too harsh, it nevertheless suggests that the 'distinctive and unique qualities' of adults are little recognised within higher education. However, these qualities were recognised within the adult continuing education provision of dedicated 'extra-mural' departments in the pre-1992 universities. As the 1970 statement by the Universities Council for Adult Education put it, courses for extra-mural students:

should preserve essential qualities that should be common to all university teaching: with these qualities they should fuse other characteristics that derive from the fact that students are mature adults and "people engaged in the ordinary business of life". (UACE, 1970: 18)

Thus it seems appropriate for our purposes to focus attention in this chapter mainly on the conceptions of education underlying the provision of adult continuing education in those dedicated departments. Although, as noted above, we have considered the vocational and professional development strands in mainstream higher education in chapter three, we shall take note of some elements of these in this chapter, in so far as they add to the picture of conceptions of education focussed on adults.

For most of the period it is possible to identify in the literature three main strands of conceptualisation of education in adult continuing education: learning for learning's sake, learning for social purpose and a self-proclaimed radical view. Towards the end of our period we find increasing reference to another conception, associated with a claimed 'post-modern' approach to adult education. There are also increasing references to lifelong learning, developing under a number of terms but emerging towards the end of our period with an apparently distinctive conception of education.

We shall find it necessary to distinguish a further conception, underlying both the programmes of continuing professional development offered by adult education departments, and the provision of access courses. These two strands of provision, apparently so different, share a conception of education which is sufficiently distinctive to merit separate consideration. We shall refer to this conception as 'learning for specific purposes'.

As explained in chapter one, it will be convenient to consider the radical view of adult continuing education with the radical view of mainstream higher education in a separate chapter. Lifelong learning will also be considered separately. This leaves us to consider in this chapter the other four conceptions: learning for learning's sake, learning for social purpose, learning for specific purposes and the post-modern conception.

As noted earlier, we have difficulties of nomenclature to cope with in this chapter. What is commonly referred to at the end of our period as adult continuing education includes strands which have been differently named in different institutions at various times in the past. The different names reflect different emphases and preoccupations, and we must be careful not to lose sight of distinctions and nuances which might be significant for our inquiry. Nevertheless, as was suggested in chapter one, behind the different names lies sufficient common ground to delineate a distinct sector of higher education. Part of this common ground is a shared understanding of the nature of education offered within the sector.

At the start of the period under review, university adult education seemed to have a clear common understanding of its purpose and methods. Although there were tensions and some sharp differences of opinion about priorities within departments, there was a common sense of what adult education was about as a distinct area of university provision. Then came a period of much more incoherence, with departments making provision in response to various pressures, but without any overall strategy for the sector (Forster, 1989, quoted in Fieldhouse, 1996: 225). At the end of the period we again have a commonality of provision, with perhaps a common understanding of purpose, in fewer departments.

At the start of our period, the titles of dedicated departments often contained the words 'extra-mural studies', to signify that their aim was to take university-level study to those outside the campus walls. By the end of the period, many remaining departments had the word 'adult' and the phrase 'continuing education' in their titles. In some universities, such as Sheffield, former departments of adult education were being reformed and repackaged in units whose titles include the phrase 'lifelong learning'. These title changes themselves reflect changes in the perception of the aims of university adult education (Kelly, 1992: xlix).

The title changes also reflect a growing questioning of the need for a dedicated department of adult education (Fieldhouse, 1991: 237). By the end of our period, mature or non-traditional students formed more than half the higher education student body. Furthermore, a growing Government and funding emphasis on lifelong learning and widening participation was

causing institutions to think more about the way in which they recruited, provided for and retained students from non-traditional backgrounds.

The conscious focus on the idea of providing university level education for adults who were not full-time students of the university had important consequences. One consequence was that the departments of adult education felt themselves to be different from other academic departments of the university. The sense of being different was reinforced in many ways, such as a different form of funding (Todd, 1998: 26), and led to a feeling of being not understood by the rest of the university, often at odds with the rest of the university, even consciously against the mainstream of the university (Marriott, 1984: 121; Fieldhouse, 1996: 219; Scott, 1996: 31). Adult continuing education was regarded as marginal (Marriott 1984: 116; Moseley, 2001: 139), and staff in adult education departments often felt that they were not regarded as proper academics, and their work was not treated as academically respectable. Even their research, whether in education or in another recognised academic discipline, struggled sometimes to be recognised as 'academically respectable' (Zukas, 1996: 2). Such perceptions united adult educators in spite of many other differences, and led them to argue strongly the case for their work.

It is perhaps significant that there is no modern government statement of the purposes of adult continuing education. Even the Russell report of 1973 (DES 1973) contained no such statement, though it did list the six areas of work the committee felt should be supported from public funds. Both the Robbins report (1963) and the Dearing report (1977) make reference to the education of adults in higher education, but neither offers a definition. Such statements of purpose as we have come from organisations such as UCACE (Universities Council for Adult Continuing Education), which in 1993 became UACE (Universities Association for Continuing Education), and from defenders of the adult education movement.

Before we examine the different conceptions of education, it is useful to discuss three significant elements of the ethos (or perhaps ideology) of adult continuing education. These are the focus on adults, the ideal of taking the university 'beyond the walls' and the notion of education for all. These three ideas permeate the thinking of practitioners in the field and shape much of their work, and their response to external pressures. It seems that for many practitioners in the field these ideas are so fundamental that to abandon them is to abandon adult education; and any challenge to them, any suggestion of change, is fiercely resisted. Clearly ideas which arouse such commitment are significant for the sector; and since these ideas in particular are seen by practitioners as going to the heart of what they are about, the ideas must have significance for any conception of education within adult continuing

education. Because they run through the whole sector, it will be convenient to explore them before we consider the different conceptions of education which draw on them.

The educational distinctiveness of adults

The concern for adults and their distinctive needs rests primarily on ideas about the differences between adults and children. Knowles (1973) borrowed the term andragogy, to describe the field of study of the teaching and learning of adult students. Andragogy is deliberately opposed to pedagogy, in an attempt to emphasise the particular needs of adult students, and to focus attention on the claim that meeting those needs requires a different approach from teaching children. The need for the concept has been questioned (Hanson, 1996), on the grounds that there is little real evidence that adults and children are 'absolutely different' in their learning (*op. cit.*: 99). However, the differences between adults and children to which the term draws attention are widely espoused.

Squires (1993) described four conceptions of adult students 'in terms of adult learning, adult thinking, adulthood and adult development' (1993: 97), all of them contested. Research on adult learning has informed a variety of theories of learning and teaching which have been applied to adults (Rogers, 1996). Practitioners in adult education have contributed much to research in this field (see, for example, the Proceedings of the 1998 Conference of SCUTREA (Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults), edited by Roseanne Benn (Benn, 1998)). For our purposes in considering conceptions of education the idea of adulthood is more significant (Squires, 1993: 95). One theme of importance is that adult life is a period of development (Squires, *ibid.*); another is the perceived independence of adults. Particular stress is laid by practitioners of adult education on two areas of adult independence: adults are independent in thought, and they are past the age of compulsory education.

The claimed independence of thought of adults is held to be a result of their position in society. Adults, it was claimed, are used in their everyday lives to making decisions for themselves, weighing up evidence and working out where their interests lie. They also have a greater experience of life than school pupils or even traditional undergraduates. Consequently they bring to their studies a framework of ideas, together with the capacity and determination to make their own judgements about whatever is offered to them. If they are to learn, ways must be found of integrating new ideas into established frameworks of thought, of extending horizons and reforming conceptual frameworks (McNair, 1996: 242). Moreover, this cannot

be done in the didactic manner of 'the expert says' (or even 'the tutor says'), for adults are wary of, and ready to challenge, claimed expertise.

Not only do adults come with outlooks and frameworks of ideas, they bring to a class existing knowledge. While their knowledge might not be as systematically organised or as broad as that of the tutor, many adults do have significant knowledge of the subject under discussion; in some cases they might be experts in a very narrow field. Adult education practitioners made and make a great deal of drawing on this student expertise and of learning from students (Schuller, 1991: 18).

It is not only the knowledge which adults bring to class which is considered important: there is also the experience of life they bring (Jarvis, 1995: 67). Experience in this context is taken by practitioners to mean the living of daily life, but certain aspects of living are taken to be more significant than others. Those aspects of daily life which bring people into contact with, and often conflict with, the 'system' or 'the establishment' are held to be especially important, together with any experience which affects a person deeply at an emotional level, such as bereavement or the break-up of a relationship. By reflecting on the experience, it is claimed, adults come to see themselves in a new way and thus acquire knowledge about themselves and their communities. This privileging of experience became particularly significant in community work provision (Liddington, 1986: 145; Martin, 1993: 201).

The other important aspect of adult independence is that adults do not have to attend educational classes. They can choose what to study, and who to study with, and can vote with their feet and leave a class if they find it does not satisfy them (Hostler, 1981: 17; Thomas: 1999: 54). In consequence great attention must be paid to what students wanted: as one retired Head of Department put it 'For all involved in adult education the *sine qua non* was the satisfaction of students' (Mitchell, 2000: 131). This obviously affects the choice of subjects offered for study (Parker, 1972), but it also has important effects when the question of assessment is raised. If students do not wish to be assessed or to do any kind of work in connection with their learning, what should one do?

The issue of assessment was also affected by the claim that many adult students are wary of higher education, in part because of educational difficulties in the past and in part because of perceptions about the very high intellectual demands of higher education (Knapper and Cropley, 2000: 84). Adult students therefore need, it is said, a particular kind of supportive atmosphere in which to learn, one which will encourage them to develop while not threatening them

In keeping with the idea of a supportive and non-threatening atmosphere, university adult education claimed to adopt a collaborative approach, with classes being conducted in an informal seminar fashion (Parker, 1972). This was designed to allow everyone to participate, and new tutors were given careful instruction on how to cope with students who stayed silent and students who talked too much. Tutors were expected to initiate guided discussion rather than to lecture (even the title 'tutor' rather than 'lecturer' is significant here), and to allow students freedom to explore the students' ideas as well as those being advanced by the tutor (Stephens, 1990: 99).

Although adults are used to making decisions, and so to evaluating material, it was assumed that few of those attending classes would be used to academic evaluation, at least in the early stages of their learning. Moreover, many of those attending adult classes, it was felt, had bad memories of assessment during their compulsory schooling. In particular, it was assumed that many adult students would feel threatened by examinations; consequently, great attention was given to the development of other forms of assessment. However, it was recognised that any form of assessment might set student in competition with student, which, it was felt, would go against the collaborative nature of the classes. So in many cases there was a strong move to avoid any form of assessment.

A further significant aspect of adult learning for the departments was the claim that adults learn better by doing rather than by listening. This was partly taken up in the insistence on discussion in class, intended to involve all the students. The idea was that the processes of formulating a contribution and responding to the contributions of others would draw the student into active rather than passive learning.

The same idea of active learning was part of the justification for offering courses with a practical content (Webster, 1972, Fieldhouse, 1996)). These included music courses which required students to make music, courses in archaeology and geology which included fieldwork, and local history courses which demanded hands-on work in local archives. The activity was seen as an important means of 'earthing' the academic ideas being discussed in the course.

Education beyond the walls

One of the main motives for adult education in the very early days was the idea of taking the university beyond the walls, clearly shown by the use of the term 'extra-mural' in the names of many departments. In our period the extra-mural element was interpreted as meaning to

take university level education to those who would not otherwise have access to it by reason of distance. So tutors travelled into the remote parts of the country and classes were conducted in village halls, in pubs, in private houses – wherever people could come together under suitable conditions, as Richard Hoggart describes (Hoggart 1990). Since many of the tutors were full-time academic staff of mainstream departments, there was a real sense of the university's expertise being offered abroad (Rees, 1982: 174).

The growing demands on academic staff in recent years has reduced the supply of such tutors to a trickle, and remote classes have been taught by full-time staff from the departments of adult education or by part-time tutors. Growing economic pressures have also seriously eroded this kind of provision: classes are too small, and the costs of travel and hiring premises are too large for the exercise to be economically viable (Jones, 2002: 59). Interestingly, one of the problems has been the provision of books. It is expensive to carry books to remote locations; often they cannot be stored at the class venue and must be transported every week. Crucially, the same books are needed on campus for the classes there, and departments can no longer afford to purchase extra copies (departmental librarian, 1994, private communication). So remote provision was steadily eroded, and in many cases vanished altogether in the 1990s.

Nevertheless the provision of education beyond the walls had a great influence on conceptions of education in adult education. For many tutors it was a mark of their commitment to education for all that they would trail out night after night to remote places to teach small classes. There was a strong sense of serving the community and in some way democratising higher education (Fieldhouse, 1996).

At the same time the idea of education beyond the walls provided ammunition for critics of university adult education. In particular this provision raised questions about what was being taught and to whom, and what learning was taking place (see for example the quotation from HMI in McIlroy and Spencer, 1988: 121). In many of the remote classes one would find the same people year after year. Often they asked for the same tutor, to take a different aspect of the same subject: for example, a literature tutor might be asked to proceed gradually through the different historical stages of English literature. According to some critics, the classes lost their edge and became little more than social gatherings. It was not suggested that social gatherings were unimportant, but it was suggested that to call them educational opportunities was stretching the truth.

Education for all

It was important for adult educators that the education should be offered to all. Anyone who wished to attend a course should be able to do so. The idealistic motive for this had its origins in the early days of the adult extension movement and the vision of bringing education to the working class. To this vision was added later the idea of giving the chance of university education to those who had, for whatever reason, not had that opportunity at an earlier stage of their lives. Most of the latter simply did not have the academic qualifications for university level study, but were thought (and often proved) capable of undertaking it. Gradually there developed amongst adult education practitioners a fierce, often uncritical, belief in the academic ability of adults, and the obligation on the universities to offer appropriate opportunities for study without entry barriers.

This is one reason why in practice so much of the adult education provision was focused on the humanities and social sciences, for here less basic knowledge or skill was required. But even in other areas of study the aim was to open the class as widely as possible, and many tutors went out of their way to help students develop skills and understanding to the necessary level.

This immediately raises questions of quality: are all those who wish to take a course capable of working at 'university level'? And what happens to the quality of learning in a class with a very wide range of educational background, academic knowledge and academic and practical skills? Part of the problem here lies in the definition of university level: is the level defined mainly by the knowledge attained or by the intellectual skills acquired?

The position was complicated by the recruitment for adult education classes. Many of the students had already benefited from higher education, and so already had the appropriate attitudes and intellectual skills of analysis and critical reflection. Many of those who came were already experts in other fields. They came primarily to extend their knowledge, often in a new field, and they expected to be given knowledge in depth (Kelly: 1992: 365). Alongside them were a minority, but a significant minority of students without the background in higher education. To combine teaching of these very different groups was a major challenge.

Part of the ideology of 'education for all' was the avoidance of assessment, on the grounds that those who had been educationally disadvantaged would be put off by the thought of assessment, and those who were simply seeking to extend their knowledge or remain intellectually active did not want assessment. While there was indubitably some truth in both

claims, the lack of assessment meant that it was very difficult to gain any idea of just what learning went on in many classes, or what benefit the students gained. Even the crude measure of drop-out rates was not very helpful, since there were many reasons for students ceasing to attend a course, not all of them directly linked to the quality of the course (Harries-Jenkins, 1983: 23).

Thus the idea of education for all became a significant part of the identity of the adult education tradition, with its roots firmly in the more idealistic ideas of the movement, but the practice was problematic. The problems were harshly exposed in the late 1980 and early 1990s as the government shifted funding for adult education courses to those courses which offered accreditation of some kind: the subsequent move to accredit adult education courses, especially in liberal adult education, showed that many courses had in practice been sustained by those with previous educational attainment who did not wish to gain further qualifications. 'Education for all', important though it was to practitioners' identity, was revealed to be more a hope than an achievement.

Conceptions

We turn to the major conceptions of education which were fed by the ideological elements already discussed. From the perspective of this study, the most interesting element of the defences of university adult education in our period is their assumption that university adult education is marked by two major ideas about learning: learning for learning's sake and learning for social purpose. These are properly termed assumptions because throughout the period under review they are simply taken for granted as the mainsprings of adult education. There is discussion of how they should be interpreted, but their role as principle ideas is so marked that they simply appear as claims about the period which are so obvious that they have no need of further explanation (see for example Watson and Taylor 1998: 62).

Learning for learning's sake

The classic expression of the idea of learning for learning's sake in university adult education comes in a seminal paper by Harold Wiltshire published in 1956. In that paper Wiltshire claims that the purpose of the university extra mural class is to stimulate personal learning. Great emphasis is placed on the development of attitudes to study which have no vocational or mercenary element. For Wiltshire, the sole purpose of adult education is, in a resounding phrase from the later Robbins report on higher education, to develop the general powers of the mind.

In writing thus, Wiltshire claimed to be articulating what he called the Great Tradition of adult education, a tradition which could be traced back into the previous century. It rests partly on the liberal tradition of university education discussed in the previous chapter, with its claim that the purpose of university education is to stimulate and train the mind. However, there is also in Wiltshire's piece a conscious resistance to the idea of education for utilitarian purposes which is related to the concern for the education of adults. Wiltshire is concerned that adults shall discover the joys of learning for the sake of learning, unaffected by concerns about job prospects or academic approval. He does not use the word pleasure, however: discovering the joys of learning for the sake of it is hard, disciplined work.

The learning is partly hard and disciplined because it is concerned with the transmission of disciplinary knowledge in a systematic way at a level appropriate to university study, together with the development of appropriate critical skills. A particular course might not be just in one discipline, indeed much was made of the attempt to be inter-disciplinary, but the knowledge was shaped by the understanding of academic disciplines. Tutors needed to be experts in their disciplines, and preferably actively engaged in research in those disciplines, so that they were offering the most advanced knowledge possible, in parallel with their colleagues in mainstream academic departments (McIlroy and Spencer, 1988: 114).

Even when he wrote Wiltshire recognised himself to be articulating a view which was rapidly becoming outdated. Nevertheless the view he proposed was a mainstay of university adult education for many years after 1956, underpinning in particular the provision of what came to be known as 'liberal adult education'.

We note that Wiltshire's view requires teachers who are themselves imbued with the idea of learning for learning's sake, who see learning as an end in itself and are not concerned about the ends to which the learning might be put. This attitude sits uneasily with the concern for learning for a social purpose, discussed below. It also raises questions about the kinds of students envisaged: learning for learning's sake might be taken to imply that learning is an extra activity to the business of, say, earning a living, and an activity to be enjoyed primarily as a leisure pursuit.

The liberal view that any knowledge is worth having, provided it is studied and structured appropriately, fitted well with the idea of education for all. To overcome the immediate question of how students could be expected to study at university level without academic prerequisites, practitioners insisted on the time factor: the development of appropriate levels of

skill, knowledge and understanding took time (Harries-Jenkins, 1983: 19, 20). Hence there was an emphasis at some points on the three-year tutorial class, in which a systematic programme of study was offered over three years, with written work to demonstrate student progress and achievement (see, for example, Fieldhouse's account of the early days of the Leeds Department, Fieldhouse 1996: chapter one; and Shaw's comments on the views of Raybould in the same volume, chapter two).

This latter requirement of regular written work sat a little uneasily with the view that adults did not like assessment, and with the view that assessment somehow was inimical to the enjoyment of learning and brought in ideas of vocation and education for a purpose other than itself. Consequently, both the three-year class and compulsory written work became under-emphasised (Harries-Jenkins, 1983: 21).

We finish up then with a conception of education which is closely related to the liberal conception of higher education discussed in chapter three, modified on the face of it to take account of the special needs of adults and the commitment to education for all. Disciplinary knowledge is to be transmitted by experts to anyone seeking knowledge, though the process of transmission might also involve student expertise. Learning is to be valued for its own sake.

Learning for social purpose

The second conception of education widely identified in the literature on adult education is summarised in the slogan 'learning for social purpose'. A key element of this conception is the idea that education is a vehicle for social change; another key element is the idea that those who are privileged have a moral responsibility towards those who are disadvantaged. In educational terms the key element of this conception is the idea that the acquisition of knowledge is a basis for changing one's circumstances (Taylor and Ward, 1986: 172).

We shall meet the idea of education as a vehicle for social change again when we consider the self-designated radical conception of education in the next chapter. Here it is important to notice that the idea of education for social purpose is linked to the notion that social change can be brought about by working within society, in a gradualist manner. This approach is often referred to as 'soft socialism' to distinguish it from the so-called 'hard socialism', often accompanied by explicit Marxist commitments, which underlies the radical view.

For our purposes, neither the titles nor their accuracy matter. More important is the difference in the way social change is to be achieved: gradually and co-operatively, or by outright challenge to the established system. The difference is significant because it helps to shape the difference in view of the curriculum of this conception and the radical conception.

The idea of learning for social purpose can be found at the very start of modern university adult education, in the extension movement of the late 1880s. As we saw in chapter two, this movement began at Cambridge, spread to London and Oxford, and was taken up by the other universities in the early years of this century. Its mainspring was the idea that working class men (sic) could benefit from university level education.

As the extension movement in this form died away, the idea of learning for social purpose became a basic plank in the development of education for the working class through trade union links and then for community education (Taylor, 1986: 14). In each form the idea went through a process of change. The two most important elements were the repeated attempts to target provision at particular groups, and the content of the curriculum.

The specific targets were those who were regarded as disadvantaged. Taylor and Ward, writing of the development of community work provision in the department at the University of Leeds, describe the target groups of disadvantaged adults thus:

All these groups were indeed 'working class' but they were also subject to double disadvantage. They were working class and unemployed, or female, or black, or retired (and often a combination of two or more of these). All were 'unwaged', dependent upon the State to a large extent, and were generally in the more disadvantaged section of the working class. All these groups also had major educational as well as economic, social and psychological needs. (Taylor and Ward 1996: 41)

In the same volume, Fieldhouse notes the definition of 'working class' which in his view underpinned this area of work in the Leeds department for many years:

persons having left school at or near the minimum school leaving age (Fieldhouse 1996: 13)

This fits well with the note in the quotation from Taylor and Ward above about major educational needs, and draws our attention to another element of social purpose. Those committed to the idea of learning for social purpose often saw those they worked with as people who had been failed by the education system. Many practitioners went out of their way to insist on the failure of the system rather than the people. On the one hand this

insistence served as a great encouragement to the students, who gained self-respect from the idea that they were victims not failures; on the other hand, blaming people's low educational level totally on the system led some practitioners into creating and defending educational programmes of dubious quality.

The curriculum associated with learning for social purpose was dominated by the idea of 'really useful knowledge', that is, knowledge which would help people to become aware of themselves and their situation in society. This meant study in disciplines such as history, sociology, economics and politics, linked with very practical work on social legislation, particularly that relating to state benefits, and legal issues such as housing law and citizen's rights.

It is commonly accepted that many of those who became full-time staff members in university departments of adult education did so because they had a social conscience. They believed that education could change not just people but society, and they believed firmly that universities had a duty to provide education for this purpose. (Marriott, 1984: 121; Fieldhouse 1996: 221) There was an element in this idea of rebellion against the perceived class-oriented structure of university education; later there was also an element of protest about the male-dominated university setting.

We should note that for those who espoused the idea of education for social purpose, the frequent complaint that their work was not appropriate for universities was just another illustration of the need for change in the universities (McIlroy and Spencer, 1988: 95). The universities were seen as part of the oppressive elite in society, in need of reform. This perspective contributed to the sense of difference from the rest of the university mentioned earlier, and in no small measure to the feeling in adult education departments of being, consciously and self-righteously, against the mainstream of the university.

The openly expressed ideological attitudes of some tutors, full-time and part-time, raised questions in some minds about the objectivity of course material. We shall return to this point below, when we consider the provision of industrial, trade union and community studies

Learning for specific purposes

The third conception of education in adult continuing education for our consideration is the conception which we have dubbed learning for specific purposes. The distinguishing

characteristic of this conception is that the teaching and learning are intended to achieve a very specific end focused on satisfying an external body as to the credentials of the student.

This conception is seen most clearly in the provision of continuing professional development and continuing vocational development, and the provision of access courses. It is however the least articulated of the conceptions of education in adult continuing education. This is partly because neither access courses nor professional or vocational development had figured in the history of adult education in universities; and partly because the idea of learning for specific purposes seems opposed to the two other basic conceptions which shaped practitioners' views of themselves.

Most significantly, this conception challenges the idea of learning for learning's sake. Clearly the students are there primarily to acquire a qualification. Further, the criteria for determining their success or failure are set by bodies other than the tutor of the course, and require some kind of assessment. The content of the provision is set largely by the external body, and it is no longer possible for tutor and students to agree what they will study.

Secondly there is the challenge to the idea of learning for social purposes. The rationale for access courses and courses of professional or vocational development is that the students will be equipped to meet someone's requirements: they will be equipped to fit into the university admission system, or to carry out their work related tasks better. Thus the social purpose is not to change society but to fit people into existing structures.

The social purpose element might be seen in the access strand, for here many of the students were educationally disadvantaged. In the case of continuing professional development in particular the students, by definition, are unlikely to be the very disadvantaged. Even with access courses, they are likely to be those who have already come to see the advantages of education: but they need to recognise the importance of progression and other academic attributes (O'Rourke 1996: 148).

In this conception of learning for a specific purpose, inevitably the content of the learning is shaped by the demands of the purpose. In access courses, it is knowledge required for admission to a university course; in continuing professional and vocational development, it is knowledge related to and defined by the particular work or profession. In all cases it is a body of knowledge which is to be transmitted by experts and accepted by the students. Of course there is an attempt to inculcate appropriate university level critical skills where those are lacking; but the body of knowledge is regarded as given.

Forms of provision

We noted above that much of the writing about adult education in our period takes for granted the grounding of adult education practice in the two ideas of learning for learning's sake and learning for social purpose; and we suggested that these ideas are insufficient as a basis for understanding adult education in the period, and need to be supplemented by the idea of what we have called learning for specific purposes. To support this suggestion we now need to see these ideas in action in the sector. In the case of mainstream higher education in the previous chapter we were able to examine a number of statements which illustrated what we were declaring. In the case of adult education this is more difficult, partly because of the assumptions already noted about underpinning ideas, and partly because of the absence of any equivalent of the Robbins report or the studies of Robinson, Minogue and Barnett. Our study therefore must turn to the practice of adult education: how was the provision of adult education in our period related to the ideas we have identified and discussed?

As noted in chapter two, we may distinguish six main strands of provision in university adult education in this period: liberal adult education, trade union education, community education, access courses, accredited courses, and continuing professional and vocational education. Most departments made provision in all these areas at some point in the period, and many of the larger departments had provision in all the areas for most of the time. In chapter two we outlined some of the main characteristics of these different forms of provision: now we shall examine them in more detail and relate them to the three conceptions of education discussed above.

Liberal adult education

We begin with liberal adult education, because this was for many the flagship work of university departments of adult education. It stood in what Wiltshire (Wiltshire, 1956) called the Great Tradition (always written with capital letters!), and its main theoretical principle was the idea of learning for the sake of learning.

There are clearly close links between this strand of adult education provision and the liberal view of university education discussed in the previous chapter. This is not surprising, given the origins of the extra-mural tradition in the idea of taking university education 'beyond the walls'. We have seen that extra-mural work began in the 1870s with the development of the extension movement from the universities of Cambridge, London and Oxford. Since those institutions were dominated by ideas of education properly characterised as 'liberal', it was

inevitable that the education offered through the extension movement should follow the same lines.

Consequently, the education offered was seen as a means of developing the minds of individuals through the exchange of knowledge and the generation of understanding. As noted above, the tutors, full-time and part-time, were expected to be experts in their subjects, and the full-time tutors were expected to engage in research in their disciplines; but it was also expected that many of the students would have knowledge in the subject area, and this was to be drawn on by the tutor, providing an exchange of knowledge (UCACE, 1984).

The role of the tutor was to guide discussion. This required not only discipline specific knowledge, but an ability to relate the discipline to other areas. Wiltshire spoke for many when he insisted that the main subjects to be studied should be those which allowed people to understand themselves as persons and as members of a wider community (Wiltshire 1956). This explains in part the concentration in the liberal adult education tradition on humanities and social science disciplines.

The knowledge to be shared was discipline specific knowledge because that was the way knowledge was organised in the universities. However, practitioners in the field recognised early that the interests of students could not be easily confined within recognised disciplinary boundaries. Further, if part of the aim was to extend the students' understanding of themselves as human beings, it would be necessary to draw on and integrate the insights of different disciplines. Hence there was a conscious effort to cross disciplinary boundaries and offer courses which drew quite deliberately on resources from different disciplines. However, in general the courses, even the specifically interdisciplinary courses, were taught by one tutor. Thus tutors were required who were not only subject specialists, but also had a very broad academic knowledge and an ability to relate different, even disparate, disciplines. This immediately raises the question of whether courses were being taught to the levels required for university study.

It is important to note the view of knowledge which is assumed here. Knowledge is seen as a body of information which can be transmitted, together with conceptual frameworks which can be analysed and adopted or rejected. Critics were very concerned that the body of information was being transmitted without the appropriate critical analysis which was supposed to be an essential element of university level work (Fieldhouse, 1996: 218).

A significant source of such concerns was the insistence within this tradition on education for all. Generally there were no academic pre-requisites for joining a liberal adult education class; indeed much of the publicity material for classes explicitly stated that no previous knowledge or experience of the topic was required, only enthusiasm and interest. Critics could point to the very wide-range of academic backgrounds and qualifications to be found in many classes, and ask reasonably how any tutor could expect to provide education appropriate to such disparate academic levels in a course of twenty or twenty-four contact hours (Fieldhouse, 1996: 219). Defenders of the tradition pointed to the experience that adults brought with them, insisting that academic qualification is only one measure of ability to engage in study and analysis at a high academic level, and probably not the most useful measure where adults are concerned (UCAE, 1970: 15 - 19).

This draws our attention to another source of concern about standards, the emphasis on collaborative learning. Critics were concerned that discussion could be held down to the lowest common level of understanding, could be dominated by students with much information but little critical understanding, or could be sidetracked by the riding of hobby-horses by students (and sometimes by tutors). Supporters of the tradition acknowledged that all these things could happen, and sometimes did happen: but they pointed out that tutors were aware of the dangers and trained to avoid them, and that the majority of students, being adults, were not so easily diverted from their purpose of learning as much as they could.

We should note that critics at this point focus attention on the level of knowledge and analysis attained by students, defenders focus on the experience brought to the class by students. This slight difference of terminology hides an important element in the conception of education underlying this strand of provision, the way in which the experience of students was interpreted. Despite the statements of practitioners, it was the knowledge adults brought to classes which was important, rather than their experience of living. Ordinary life might provide examples to illustrate a point being made, and tutors were at pains to earth the academic work in the daily lives of students in order to aid understanding. However experience provided only examples. It did not even provide in this strand of provision much raw material to be worked on, as it did in other strands. Even in a subject like family history, students might contribute information from research into the history of their own family and anecdotes which illustrated points about the use of old documents: but the information was regarded as more important than the experience of research.

The interpretation of adults' experience in terms of knowledge points up another difficulty with practitioners' claims about the importance of collaborative learning within this strand of

provision. The high level of class discussion was claimed to be based on the recognition that, at least for adults (and by implication for other university students as well), education could not be a matter of experts pouring knowledge into empty vessels, but had to be seen as a collective learning experience. However, in this strand of provision there was certainly a strong sense of teacher and taught, on the part of students as well as, and perhaps more than, tutors. Further, as we have seen, the idea of knowledge as a construct, or constrained by context, is largely absent.

A further source of concern for critics about the standards achieved by students in this form of provision lay in the practical orientation of some classes. As we have seen, there was an attempt to involve students in learning by doing: classes in making music, archaeology and geology encouraged students to learn by engaging in activities within an academic framework. This raised questions about how such courses could be delivered at university level.

Critics here overlooked, or ignored, two things. One was the element of practical work in the mainstream, for example in sandwich courses for engineering or indeed in archaeology or music. The other was the provision of courses in creative arts at degree level within the polytechnics and colleges of higher education. In both cases, those with an elitist view of what counts as academic work in higher education were dismissive of the courses offered within the mainstream, and took the same attitude towards the adult education provision.

However, if the critics had looked more carefully at the offerings of practical work within liberal adult education, they would have been less concerned. The acquisition of practical skills was always secondary to the acquisition of academic knowledge, and the skills were always integrated with an academic framework in which they were an essential part.

It is significant that in Wiltshire's Great Tradition, the students were expected to be motivated to learn. Tutors could expect that students would be open to new ideas and would be prepared to work hard and contribute well. In practice, this was not so: not all students were equally ready to contribute, not all students were open to new ideas, and not all students were ready to work hard, particularly when it came to assessment. For many students, and not a few tutors, the idea of learning for learning's sake meant that one could engage in learning as a leisure activity, even a social activity. The content of the learning became for some almost irrelevant.

This points up a significant effect of the idea of learning for learning's sake on liberal adult education: the lack of continuity or coherence in the programmes of study followed. Courses were offered as separate units, which could be studied as students wished. The criterion for offering a course was often that a tutor and a group of students had an interest in studying a particular topic. There were no pre-requisites for joining a class, and no necessary route from one course to another. Some classes did come together and stay together for several years, gradually moving deeper and deeper into a topic: but they were expected to be open to anyone who wished to join the class, whatever that person's level of knowledge.

Another important effect of learning for learning's sake in the liberal adult education provision can be seen in the nature of assessment, or, rather, the lack of assessment. Wiltshire was adamant that assessment would get in the way of the open, collaborative kind of learning he envisaged. This view was linked with the view that adults would be wary of examination and even of any form of assessment, and produced a strongly held view in some quarters that there should be no form of assessment in liberal adult education classes.

This had the result that there was no means of knowing what learning, if any, was taking place in these classes. When universities started, under pressure, to become more conscious of the quality of their provision, and funding bodies began to demand measurable learning outcomes, the liberal adult education stream of provision was ill-equipped to respond. Not only did it have no mechanisms for assessing learning, many within it had become ideologically committed to not assessing learning, or teaching.

It is worth noting that in this strand of provision, education is seen implicitly as a process which can continue indefinitely. Once one has discovered the joys of learning and developing the mind, one can simply go on enjoying the experience. This has contributed to the development of a view of lifelong learning to which we shall return later.

It is thus not surprising that this kind of adult education came to be dominated by students who had previous experience of higher education and wanted to stretch their horizons. They had a love for learning, they had expertise in the methods of study, they recognised expert knowledge and knew how to draw on it, and, significantly, they had the time and the money to undertake study as a leisure pursuit. In the government's more instrumental view of education at a time of financial stringency and an emphasis on value for money measured by particular outcomes, such pursuit of learning for learning's sake by the privileged was doomed. This led to a greater concentration on the development of accredited education, closely linked to the liberal adult education tradition, and to this we now turn.

Accredited education

Continuing education departments offered credit-bearing courses from at least the 1950s (Fieldhouse, 1996: 221), but accreditation in continuing education developed rapidly in the 1990s, chiefly in response to the financial mainstreaming of adult education within higher education. Very quickly, the overwhelming majority of non-credit bearing courses were accredited, in response to the requirements of funding councils (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 40). The emphasis on credit might appear at first sight to be in direct competition with the idea of learning for learning's sake, which, as we have seen, underpinned many departments' perception of their work. However it is the most convenient term for the large number of courses which offered some kind of qualification. The qualifications ranged from university Extension Certificates to part-time degrees: the important point was that they all bore the stamp of university validation.

The conception of education underlying the provision of qualifications had much in common with that underlying the liberal adult education provision discussed above. There were three significant differences. First the idea of learning for learning's sake was modified to accept the notion that one could enjoy learning and at the same time have another purpose in learning. The emphasis was on both aims, rather than an exclusive pre-occupation with one aim. In practice, once the dam was breached, the pre-occupation with learning for the purposes of obtaining a qualification could easily become dominant, and learning for the sake of learning fade.

The second change to the conception of education underpinning liberal adult education lay in the development of assessment. In order to obtain university validation, courses had to provide some means of assessment. This went against the idea which had come to dominate in the liberal adult education provision, that assessment was inimical to the adults' learning for learning's sake. The argument for the development of assessment was partly the requirement of validation; but there was another strand to it. It was argued that students needed some way of assessing their own learning, in order to see how they were developing; otherwise, how would they (and the tutors) know that development was taking place? However, a variety of assessment methods was used: student-centred and reflective methods of assessment such as learning logs and journals were seen as more appropriate to adults students (Thomas 1996: 188).

The third change from the conception of education underpinning liberal adult education lay in the need for coherence of study. For the purposes of gaining university validation, it was

necessary to show that a student had covered a curriculum which satisfied academic criteria, including criteria about the coherence of disciplinary study. While adult education departments tried hard to create qualifications which allowed students considerable flexibility in courses, the mainstream academic scrutineers in the universities were opposed to what they described as 'pick and mix' qualifications.

The argument turned on conceptions of academic disciplines and academic knowledge. Many mainstream academics felt that knowledge within a discipline had to be built up, using particular methods and developing a particular sense of what was appropriate to a discipline. While not necessarily denying this, adult education practitioners insisted on the value of interdisciplinary study, the commonality of methods of academic enquiry, and the contextual nature of knowledge.

Inevitably, perhaps, the conceptions of the mainstream academics were accepted. The more eclectic university adult education certificates were replaced by much more tightly controlled discipline based qualifications. However, this development then raised acutely the question of why such qualifications were being offered in a department of adult education, and not in the other academic departments of the university. If the answer was simply that the adult education department catered for mature students studying part-time, then perhaps the time had come for other academic departments to consider doing the same.

This leads us to note the kind of students attracted to accredited adult education classes. As was noted above, in the liberal tradition, the majority of those attending classes were people who had already benefited from higher education and had little interest in gaining further qualifications. Amongst students on accredited programmes, the gaining of qualifications was important, so they tended to be those who had not previously had the benefit of higher or even further education. They tended to be younger, more diverse, less well-educated (Fieldhouse, 1996: 236; Thomas, 1996: 186).

It is important to note that accreditation had an effect on some aspects of the conception of education, but left others untouched. Thus, the purpose of the education changed, and the value put on it: the measure for students, staff and institutions was the number of students gaining qualifications at the end of a course. The curriculum might become more restricted, prescribed by the demands of university validation and ideas of disciplinary knowledge, rather than being directed mainly by interests of students and tutors (Fieldhouse, 1996: 236; Taylor, 1996: 70). As just noted, the nature of the student body changed in some respects. However, whatever the curriculum, it was still the case that a body of knowledge was offered

by experts to learners, albeit with some account taken of the learners' adulthood. Many tutors still sought to inculcate a love of learning for its own sake and to stimulate students to enjoy study, even while recognising the pressures of assessment. Although many students were now committed to programmes of study extending over long periods, up to six years in many cases, tutors still often taught as though the students were committed only to a particular module, and there was little attempt in most cases to forge links between elements of courses, despite an insistence on the interdisciplinary nature of part-time degree courses.

Thus the advent of greater accreditation within the liberal adult education stream of adult education produced a compromise between the older liberal conception of learning for the sake of learning and a modified conception which accepted the idea of learning to gain a qualification. The compromise showed itself in changes of curriculum and assessment, but in many ways the surviving adult education departments continued as before in their approach to their particular niche market.

Trade union and industrial studies

We suggested above that liberal adult education was often seen as the flagship provision of adult education departments. In the earlier part of our period the dominance of liberal adult education was challenged in many of the then extra-mural departments by the provision of courses of study related to the trade union movement; later this was supplemented by what came to be called community education.

Both forms of provision claimed at least equality of importance with liberal adult education, on grounds of both history and significance in the rationale for the existence of extra-mural departments. Both traced their roots to the extension movement of the 1870s and the idea within that of education for social purpose.

As we noted in chapter two, one of the main ideas of the extension movement was that university level education should be made available to the working classes. After the second world war, this idea was expressed in the development of work with the trade unions, explicitly aimed at providing leaders for the movement.

The aim of bringing university level education to working class men has a long and honourable history in university adult education. In part it was a revolt against the perceived class orientation of university education with its roots in ability to pay. The cry was that many from the working classes could benefit from education, but could not afford it. Behind

this cry lay a view of humanity which claimed that all people are capable of being educated to a high level given appropriate opportunity, though this view was rarely articulated, being taken almost as axiomatic.

Similarly taken as axiomatic, but more often articulated, was the idea that education is a vehicle of social change. If the working-class man were educated, and he received wisdom, he would come to see the ways in which he was limited, and would demand change. Further, because he had become educated and therefore both informed and articulate, he would be able to provide alternative ways of doing things and to persuade others of the merits of his case. It is important to note that the change was to be brought about gradually, using the tools of democratic reform. There was no suggestion in this strand of thought that change should be revolutionary: we have deliberately avoided using the word 'oppressed' earlier in this paragraph to describe the working man's developing perception of his condition. Ideas of social revolution and the oppression of the working class are more to be found in the radical conception of education which we shall explore in chapter five.

We should note here however one of the main criticisms levelled against this idea of working-class education by those of more radical interests: the accusation that working class education was explicitly designed to serve the interests of the ruling classes. The suggestion was that some, only, of the working class were being given a carefully regulated education designed to co-opt them as allies of the ruling elite (Fieldhouse 1996: 41; Thompson 1997: 60). Students were not intended to develop the ability to think for themselves, but were rather expected to discover and accept their proper place in society. Whether or not this accusation holds water is not our concern. For us the charge is significant because of the questions it raises about who benefits from adult education, which affect the value of education and so conceptions of education.

The ideal of classes for the working class faded quite quickly, as it was found that extension courses catered more for the lower middle class and the rising groups of clerks and similar workers, rather than for the labouring classes of ideal theory. Consequently, after the second world war, the provision was channelled through the trade union movement. University departments developed strong links with particular unions, especially in areas such as Yorkshire. Union support was important, for it helped to get employers to give workers day release to attend classes (Rees, 1987: 133).

Having decided to offer courses to the workers, or trade union members, extra-mural departments had to decide on the content. Here there were two main influences. One was the

liberal tradition in higher education, which suggested that the courses offer study of recognised academic disciplines for their own sake. The other influence was the trade union connection, which insisted that the courses should have some relevance to the development of the individual in society. Within the idea of education for social purpose, this was interpreted as meaning that the disciplines studied should be those which would help the working man to understand his condition (and it was the working *man* at whom these classes were aimed)

Consequently the curriculum focused strongly on history, politics, economics, industrial relations and social science (McIlroy, 1996: 285). These were the disciplines which would provide the working-class man with the understanding of society which he needed 'for effective action' (TUC, 1922, quoted in McIlroy, 1996: 285) but they also offered for discussion a variety of 'often conflicting analytical frameworks and ideological models' (Taylor *et al.*, 1985: 88). The disciplines were studied in a disciplined way: many of the trade union programmes ran over three years and required a large commitment to study on the part of participants.

The strength of the idea that classes should provide a view of society is shown by the concerns of Her Majesty's Inspectors about the subversive element in these classes and the approaches of certain tutors (Fieldhouse 1996: 214). The Inspectors' comments also raise questions about the extent to which a wide view was being offered: was this the critical reflection required by university level study?

It is interesting to note that one of the reasons for the decline of these programmes was a decline in support from trade unions, which wanted their members trained to be good union officials rather than social revolutionaries. This meant that trade unions tried to take over the programmes and direct them into areas such as health and safety practice and union legislation, losing the wider social context. When the university departments insisted on the wider context, the unions took their members into their own courses (Taylor *et al.*, 1985: 89). Thus there was here a clash of conceptions of education: the trade unions required education for a purpose directly related to the activities of the organisation, the university departments were intent on providing education for a social purpose (Taylor, 1986: 20).

The other notable element of these classes from the perspective of conceptions of education lies in the delivery of the courses. The students were adults, and the delivery was based on the ideas of the education of adults noted earlier: classes were to be conducted as seminars, with discussion and group work drawing on the experience of the class members (McIlroy, 1996: 286). Since they were all likely to be active in the trade union movement, it was to be

expected that they would have much to contribute to the discussion of, say, politics. However, their experience was to be set within an academic framework provided by academic disciplines: they were to be given context and background and information to help them understand better their experience as members of a social class (Mitchell, 2000: 24). Thus while in one way the tutor and the students were said to be sharing the process of education, it was clear who was the real expert.

It is interesting to note, in the light of the earlier discussion of the liberal adult education strand of provision, that in the trade union classes assessment was mandatory: . Assessment included both essays and examinations, though more of the former than the latter. However, standards were rigorous, and the idea that the introduction of an element of competition was somehow wrong was simply laughable. The students were used to having their performance measured and saw nothing problematic in that.

It should also be noted that almost all the tutors, as well as most of the students, were male. There was a shared perspective on the role of the men and women. The perception that adults needed to be taught starting from where they are was pointed up by the attempts to recruit tutors from amongst graduates of the courses. This certainly provided tutors who has started as the students were: but by the time they became tutors themselves, they had been refashioned in their thinking and were no longer working-class men. Thus the conception of education as a shared process in which tutors and students worked together in dialogue was only partially realised.

The conception of education as a vehicle for social change was realised for individuals: these courses did produce students who moved from working-class roots to become members of Parliament or local councillors, or who moved from working-class occupations into middle-class occupations. For such individuals social change certainly occurred: Geoffrey Mitchell gives an impressive list of people whose lives underwent significant change following their participation in the courses provided by the department at Sheffield (Mitchell, 2000: 26).

However, there was little direct change in society as a whole as a result of these classes. They did not produce revolutionaries, but rather people who were content to better themselves and work through the existing structures of society to better others. That is not to deny that many who came through these classes did develop a strong social conscience and try to change society.

Community education

With the loosening of trade union links with university departments, the attention of those committed to learning for social purpose shifted to community work. This was based firmly in local centres, indeed one of its main characteristics was its local base.

The aims of community work are usefully summarised by Taylor and Ward, describing the work in the Leeds Department, where this strand of provision was known as Pioneer Work:

The four primary aims of Pioneer Work were to create educationally innovative structures and curricula for the development of working-class adult education; to select specific 'target groups' within the community for which such provision can be made, and to devise programmes specifically designed to meet their needs; to build a network of inter-agency links across a very wide field including in particular local authorities, voluntary organizations, and community groups; and finally, and crucially, to monitor and analyse provision including socio-political and educational evidence concerning the 'success levels' and the intended and unintended outcomes of the various approaches adopted. (Taylor and Ward 1996: 42)

The reference to target groups and programmes designed specifically to meet their needs demonstrates clearly the learning for social purpose conception underpinning this work. But it is also interesting to note the fourth aim stated by Taylor and Ward, monitoring and analysis to include socio-political evidence: clearly the conception of education includes the idea that education is inextricably linked to its setting in social, economic and political terms, and has a role to play in changing society, not just individuals.

We noted above in discussing the conception of learning for social purpose how the Leeds department defined its target groups. Clearly in addition to the needs of these disadvantaged students, one of the factors affecting the programmes offered was the educational background of the students: having left school at the earliest opportunity, and generally without any qualification to show as a result of their schooling, the students were not ready for the kind of critical discussion which in theory predominated in liberal adult education classes. Instead, the discussion was very much more personal and anecdotal story-telling, with the tutor acting as an interpreter (Gardiner, 1986: 127). One consequence of this was that the class could be driven by what the tutor saw as significant, and the students generally deferred to the tutor as the expert. Indeed one of the complaints of many tutors in this work was the extent to which they were treated as experts and teachers, rather than as the facilitators they sought to be.

The courses provided sought to offer 'really useful knowledge', that is, knowledge which would help people understand and change their circumstances. Courses were offered on benefit rights, job hunting, understanding the law, relations with officialdom, and similar practical topics. However the knowledge offered was offered within the traditional disciplinary matrix of higher education: thus it had to be related to sociology or law or politics, and the courses suffered to some extent from the constraints imposed by artificial academic boundaries and the need to show that tutors were academically qualified in an appropriate discipline. This latter point also implied generally that the tutors were professionals, with jobs, income and status. Though the classes were locally based the tutors were not.

An important part of the self-understanding of practitioners was that they listened to the needs of the local community. However, once a need had been identified, it was the views of the educational professionals which shaped the provision, and the exact content of the course: given a need, the educational professionals then told the community what was required to meet that need.

Criticisms were made about the academic level of the provision. These were answered by emphasising the social purpose and the importance of linking the university into its region and serving the community. While these arguments carried some weight, community provision was tolerated rather than accepted by parent universities, and it is not surprising that under the tighter financial regimes of the 1990s community education work has largely vanished from the university scene. It still exists, even flourishes in other parts of the adult education sector under further education or local authority patronage: but as university provision it is seen as at best marginal and at worst a level of provision which is academically indefensible for universities. Universities' service to their region is seen much more in making mainstream places available to qualified local students and the provision of research expertise to local commercial firms than in helping the disadvantaged to challenge the system.

As Rebecca O'Rourke has written, the funding changes of the 1990s have meant

the professional role of community educators changes as they become managers and distributors of learning. How compatible is this with the practice of community education, rooted as it has been in relationships which were relatively unmediated through institutions and where credibility develops out of a willingness to work alongside people, embedding professional practice in the rhythm of their needs, priorities and enthusiasms? (O'Rourke 1996: 147)

'Not very compatible' is O'Rourke's answer, and she goes on to link this incompatibility with the preoccupation with academic issues such as progression and credit accumulation. The thrust of O'Rourke's comments, echoed by others, is that community education is following trade union and industrial studies into the history of university adult education departments.

The question then arises, does the conception of education for social purpose, principally represented by these strands of provision, become history too? This is a question to which we shall return when we consider the development of lifelong learning and discuss the possible 'adultification' of the university.

Access

The access strand of adult education provision has a number of roots. One was in the community education programmes which often awakened in people both a desire for education and a belief in their own capabilities. Another was in the liberal adult education programmes, which achieved the same effect for a different constituency. Then there was the early provision of certificated courses, which led people to ask why they could not move from their part-time studies to full-time courses or part-time degrees. With the universities under pressure in the 1980s and 1990s to widen participation, an entrance route for mature students through part-time courses in adult education departments was seen as both natural and useful (Kelly, 1992: 1; Tight, 1993: 62).

The difficulty lay in the willingness of the adult education departments to accept all comers onto their courses. By the very nature of community courses, for example, most of the students lacked the academic qualifications for university entrance. Even on the liberal adult education programmes, many of those who had not enjoyed higher education before lacked the accepted academic qualifications for university entrance. So, pursuing the vision of access to university education for all able and willing to benefit from it, departments started to offer access courses, designed to equip students to satisfy university entrance requirements without the need to take formal public examinations such as GCE or GCSE.

These courses were carefully designed to answer the three questions which admissions tutors ask of mature candidates: do they know enough? have they the intellectual skills to study at university level? will they stay the course? Thus the courses were designed to demonstrate certain kinds of knowledge and skill; the fact that the student had completed a year or two years of an access course was deemed sufficient to show the student's commitment and ability to last the pace and fit study in with other demands (Mitchell, 2000: 63).

The dominant conception of education underpinning such courses was that of education as a means of transmitting skills and knowledge for a particular purpose (Tight, 1993: 67). It was recognised that the students were adults, with all the implications noted earlier about special consideration. However, the object of the exercise was to provide students with evidence of their skills and ability which would satisfy university admissions tutors (Brennan, 1989: 58). The curriculum was designed with that in mind, and the assessment was also designed with that in mind, consisting mainly of essays which could be given to admissions tutors to read. Though classes were still conducted in as informal a manner as possible, there was no doubt that here were tutor and students, teacher and learners. Classes were mainly small, often deliberately so, in order that special attention could be given to each student.

It is important to note here the content of the courses. Courses in mathematics and English were supplemented by courses in, for example, history, politics and religious studies. There was an element here of the liberal tradition of giving people a broad education. But the dominant goal was that they should have the opportunity to demonstrate skills of thought and the potential to develop further (Mitchell, 2000: 63). Thus the curriculum was focused on areas which could easily show such skills, those which could be examined or in which essays could easily be written. The curriculum was also designed to follow closely the conventional academic disciplines, both because this was what admissions tutors wanted and because students were being prepared to follow disciplinary study (Brennan, 1989: 58). In general students were not encouraged to be controversial, rather they were encouraged to display their ability to read and analyse critically and produce coherent arguments.

There is no doubt that the courses were successful. Students went on from them to university study and often did very well (Mitchell, 2000: 64). However, there were questions. One was that by definition access courses were not offered at university level: so why were university departments engaging in them? The response to this, as we have indicated, was in terms of education for social purpose: university adult education departments were playing their part in offering the opportunity of higher education to a wide range of educationally disadvantaged people. Certainly a high proportion of the students concerned were from ethnic minority backgrounds or 'second chancers', that is, people who had not taken the opportunity of higher education when younger, for a variety of reasons, and now wished to make up for lost time. There was a significant number of women returning to study. Interestingly, there is little evidence to suggest that most of the students on access courses had any other goal than university entrance in mind; few of them seem to have taken the access route as a means of improving their career prospects: personal fulfilment and the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities to themselves and others, especially partners, seem to be more important.

However, why did these students not simply go to a further education college and gain their qualifications there? There are several possible reasons, which are relevant to our study. One is that the further education institutions often demanded that people go through the whole gamut of qualifications, taking lower level qualifications before moving on to study for 'A' level, the gold standard which offered university entrance. Many adults simply did not wish to spend that length of time qualifying. The university access courses offered a short cut.

Secondly many adults felt uneasy in the predominantly younger classes of the colleges: here the ethos of the adult education departments and their emphasis on the needs of adult students was very important. Adults liked the small classes and the discursive methods of teaching.

Thirdly, the content of the courses, while tied to disciplines, was not tied to the syllabus of an external examination, but was set by the tutors. This allowed tutors to present topics in ways which appealed to adults specifically. Further, the use of essays as well as examinations for assessment purposes helped adults to overcome fears of assessment resulting from previous experience in school or public examinations. In this connection the role of tuition in study skills is worthy of note: built into access courses was the presumption that a significant amount of time would be spent on the skills of reading and writing for academic purposes, whatever the ostensible content of the course.

Fourthly, the courses were offered by universities. The idea of being a university student, as opposed to a student in further education, carried a cachet which was important for many access students. For them this was not so much intellectual snobbery as a reaching for something which had previously been denied to them.

Thus in the access courses there was a combination of the ideas of liberal education, vocational education and the specific needs of adults to produce a distinctive conception of education. The main elements of this conception were that disciplinary knowledge was transmitted in a disciplined fashion to adult students with limited educational background for the purpose of enabling them to qualify for university entrance. Education was valued, by students, staff, departments and universities alike, as a means to the end of widening participation in higher education.

Continuing professional development and continuing vocational education.

For our purposes these strands of provision can be considered as one, for they rely on the same vision of education. The provision of continuing professional development had its

genesis in the recognition that professionals need to keep up to date; this led those professions which required university level study, such as law, to look at using university courses to maintain professional knowledge. Continuing vocational education developed to enable workers, professional and others, to cope with the rapid changes affecting the workplace in all spheres of employment, particularly those changes arising from the development of new technologies.

As we saw in the previous chapter continuing professional development programmes in universities were often offered by academic departments whose main concern was not adult education. These included business schools and medical schools, and departments of law and accountancy. They also included departments of education, some of which provided training for teachers and saw continuing professional development as a natural extension of their work. Other departments of education provided only post-graduate courses, including Postgraduate Certificate in Education courses; for them, the provision of continuing professional development for teachers was part of their main work. Where such courses were provided in adult education departments they tended to be done on the basis that someone had to do them, or there was no cognate mainstream department. The rationale was often that this was continuing education, the education of adults.

The main idea behind this form of provision was that of knowledge update: in general these courses were not designed to take the practitioner into new fields, but to add to knowledge already held. This was true of continuing vocational education as much as continuing professional development. Thus we have the idea of knowledge within a discipline, something that can be transmitted. It is assumed that the learners already have a framework of understanding into which the new knowledge can be easily fitted. It is perhaps significant that there was very little attention to the updating of skills, apart from skills associated with information technology. Here again we see the influence of the idea that higher education is concerned with knowledge rather than the application of knowledge.

That these classes were for adults had little impact on the design or delivery of the courses. More important was the fact that the students were drawn from a profession, and assumed to be professional in outlook or, in the case of continuing vocational education, committed to updating their knowledge in order to progress in their careers. The students' desire to learn, it was assumed, was guided by their desire to develop in their chosen professional or job. Since they were members of a profession or had reached a certain career level, students could be assumed to have reached a certain level of knowledge and understanding and to have acquired

certain skills in study. Thus many of the significant features of adult learning which informed the work of the adult education departments could, apparently, be safely ignored.

The post-modern view

We turn now to examine the conception of education implicit in what its exponents call the 'post-modern' view. There is an immediate difficulty here, for

Education generally does not fit easily into post-modernity, nor can it easily adapt to the postmodern mood. (Usher *et al.*, 1997: 12)

Some writers dismiss postmodernism: Cooper describes it as

a self-satisfied conspiracy in the intellectual laziness of our age. (1998: 48)

It is not even entirely clear what counts as 'postmodernism':

Postmodernism, then, means and has meant different things to different people at different conceptual levels (Bertens, 1995: 10)

Nevertheless, writers have discussed education in post-modernity, and after post-modernism. In relation to higher education, one writer wrote of *The University in Ruins* (Readings, 1996). Others have been more positive about the postmodern university: see for example the papers by Bauman and Scott in the collection edited by Smith and Webster (1997). Yet others have seen postmodernism as totally negative (Taylor *et al.*, 2002: 13).

However, if we ask what conception of education inform postmodern perspectives on higher education, it is difficult to find a clear answer. One critic of Readings wrote:

Like many postmodern arguments, Reading's thesis is largely a counter-thesis, a critique of the prevailing order and does not offer anything of substance for those seeking an alternative institutional embodiment. (Delanty, 2001: 140)

Those seeking an alternative conception of education face the same problem. However, in the area of adult education there has been some attempt to delineate a conception of education for a postmodern world.. This is why this discussion appears in this chapter rather than in the previous one.

Postmodernism can be described as a reaction to so-called 'modernism', or 'the Enlightenment Project'. Some writers see postmodernism as a failure of modernity (Baudrillard, 1984, quoted in Bertens, 1995: 155), while others see it as the logical outcome

of modernity (Bauman, 1992: 187). An important element of this modernist project was the idea that human beings by rational means could come to knowledge of themselves and their world.

In contrast, post-modernists, seizing on the work of authors such as Lyotard (1984) and Foucault (1972), assert that all knowledge is essentially subjective knowledge. We select as knowledge what suits us and our circumstances and mould our knowledge according to our current self-understanding. There is no sense of knowledge as universal or guaranteed truth to be discovered and possessed and passed on, no idea of knowledge as objective. Knowledge is embodied and relational, contingent and contested (Paechter, 2001: 1) and 'both an outcome and part of the exercise of power in societies' (Edwards, 2001: 38).

In these circumstances, the idea of education as the transmission of knowledge or even culture breaks down; education becomes open, indeterminate, participative (Bagnall, 1994: 269). The view that education is about personal development is questioned:

The modernist search for a true and authentic self and the fulfilment of a pre-given individual autonomy gives way to a 'playfulness' where identity is formed (and re-formed) by a constantly unfolding desire realised, although never fully and finally, through life-style 'cruising' in its multiplicity of forms. (Usher and Edwards 1996: 46)

The idea of education as vocational training is also lost, since vocational training is seen as providing the means to get to the 'correct' answer as efficiently as possible, and so leaves no room for experimentation and open-endedness (Usher *et al* 1997: 111). Instead, in the post-modern world, the openness of experience is important: experiencing is an end in itself, experience leads simply to further experience (Usher and Edwards 1996: 47).

With all these ideas of education discarded, the question has been raised as to whether or not post-modern adults can be educated (Wiltsher 1996). Or rather, can there be education in a post-modern world?

Usher and Edwards, amongst others, clearly think so, but suggest that attention should perhaps be focused on adult learning rather than adult education (Usher and Edwards 1996: 48, 52). For these writers, education in the post-modern world will celebrate difference, provide space for a diversity of 'voices', become 'decentered' and based

on cultural contexts, on localised and particularised knowledges, on the cultivation of desire, on the valuing of a multiplicity of experience as an integral part of defining a 'lifestyle' (*op.cit.*: 54)

Education so construed emphasises learning rather than learning and teaching. What is important is what the learner achieves or gains or loses. Accepting that education must somehow be for betterment, Usher *et al* (1997) note Burbules' suggestion that education might more aptly be seen as a process involving disenchantment or disillusionment and write

Although we would consider it a strange education indeed that did not involve the gaining of new insights and understandings, these gains might well be ambivalent, partial and provisional. Education is still education even if it involves losses as well as gains. (Usher *et al* 1997: 26)

On this view, the student then becomes a self-directed learner, a consumer, choosing between learning opportunities in order to fulfil personal desires, and also choosing different methods of learning and times and places of learning according to personal preference. Since on this view education does not require the structured transmission of information, let alone knowledge, there is no need for the learner to attend a particular place, follow particular methods or meet with particular people.

What becomes of the teacher, tutor or educator in this view of education? According to Usher *et al*:

education involves an engagement between teachers, learners and knowledge. Since this engagement can lead to dependency, there is a need for critical distance. This means that teachers need to problematise their conventional role as 'enlightened pedagogues'. They need to avoid taking themselves too seriously even when they are engaged in education for social transformation. (Usher *et al* 1997: 25)

Educators in the post-modern moment are challenged

to make clear and reflect upon, as a vital element in the learning process, their own subject positions - or to put it another way, their 'situated biographies' - rather than adopting the stance of the disembodied bearer of universal 'messages'. (Usher and Edwards 1996: 57)

In effect, the role of tutor or teacher is changed to that of provider of a partial picture, incorporating information and the provider's personal understanding, which becomes raw material for the learner to receive and work on.

What is education for on this view? At a superficial level, this is an easy question to answer: education is about fulfilling personal desires. However, it is pertinent to ask why anyone should choose education as a means to the fulfilment of their desires. What does education

offer which cannot be found elsewhere? Other conceptions of education could answer in terms of knowledge, or qualifications, or personal development, or the development of skills: but none of these are acceptable to the post-modern view. Again, other conceptions of education insist that education involves some kind of structured programme of study: but on the post-modern view, the only structure to a programme of study is that given by the student's desire to follow some path.

While these are problems, the post-modern view is that they are problems caused through the attempt to hold on to old conceptions in a new situation. The dislocation caused by the post-modern view simply reflects the variety of contextual voices of the post-modern situation.

We can see why this conception has managed to find a foothold in adult education. First, the emphasis on experience fits well with the adult education practitioners' emphasis on adults as experienced, discussed earlier in this chapter. Second, the assault on the idea that knowledge is handed down fits well with adult educators' perceptions of themselves as democratising learning.

However, as we have seen the dominant conceptions of education in adult education are closely linked with ideas of disciplinary knowledge, expertise, and intellectual development. Thus, in challenging these ideas, the post-modern conception challenges the heart of adult education. It is not too surprising that it has achieved little more than a foothold.

We should note also that, despite the claims of the post-modern movement, in practice there is not a great difference between provision informed by the post-modern conception and provision informed by other conceptions. There has been some use of so-called life-history methods in working with disadvantaged communities, for example the work reported by Linden West (West 1996), but the work is fragmentary (perhaps necessarily so). Post-modern views are also said to inform some of the provision for disadvantaged students which is replacing the community provision of earlier years. Nevertheless the post-modern conception has had more impact on adult education research than on adult education practice. This, we might suggest, is partly because of the need to fit in with institutional and organisational structures dominated by other conceptions, and partly because of the need to work with learners whose understanding of education has been informed by other conceptions.

However, there is also at the heart of the post-modern conception of education an unresolved contradiction. By accepting that education has connotations of betterment and direction, the

post-modern exponents come dangerously close to embracing the liberal conception they have criticised, of education as progressive in some sense. One does not have to embrace Victorian ideas of Progress to value education because it enables a person to change positively: yet in thus valuing education the post-modern conception moves a considerable way towards the conceptions of learning for the sake of learning and learning for social purposes discussed earlier. Indeed, the post-modern emphasis on playfulness and the need for adult educators to take themselves less seriously might be seen as supportive of the idea of learning for the pleasure of learning – one of the main planks of the Great Tradition of adult education so eloquently defended by Harold Wiltshire!

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter we identified a number of elements common to the different strands of the university adult education movement: the feeling of being outside the mainstream, the emphasis on working with adults, the idea of education ‘beyond the walls’, and insistence on education for all. We have seen how these elements informed the three main conceptions of education in the sector: learning for learning’s sake, learning for social purpose and learning for specific purpose. We have explored briefly how these conceptions informed provision by university extra-mural departments and their successors in the departments of adult and continuing education. Finally we glanced briefly at the developing post-modern conception of education within adult education. We shall now draw these strands together in an overview to carry forward to the discussion in the final chapter.

Writers on adult education in the last four decades have often suggested that there are deep divisions between the different sections of the sector. For example it is suggested that those who adopted the view of learning for learning’s sake were at odds with those who emphasised learning for social purposes; and those who were concerned mainly with liberal adult education conceived their work very differently from those involved with trade union education or community education. At times, it seems, the only thing that united academics in departments of adult education was their deep suspicion of people and policies from the mainstream.

While there were clearly deep divisions between staff members, our study suggests that they were united by far more than an antipathy to the mainstream. The clear conclusion from our study is that the vast majority of adult education academics (and administrators) shared a conception of education which is rooted in the liberal view of university education explored in chapter three.

This becomes clear when we examine the responses to our analytical questions of the four conceptions of education reviewed here. The responses are summarised in table 4.1. Again we must emphasise that this table, like all summaries, over-simplifies very rich and complex collections of ideas; but it is helpful in revealing clearly similarities and differences. We shall explore these summary responses a little further.

What is the dominant aim of adult education in this conception? At first sight it seems that the four conceptions have different aims; but the closer examination undertaken above suggests otherwise. The focus on knowledge and skills in learning for social purposes and learning for specific purposes is compatible with the development of an individual love for learning; only the emphasis is different. Indeed, many of those involved in access courses or community provision hoped and expected that their students would develop a love for learning, alongside gaining the knowledge and skills which were their primary focus. Similarly, the post-modern conception, for all its emphasis on experiential learning, requires the individual to develop a desire to continue intentional learning.

What is the view of knowledge? Here there is very little difference between the three main conceptions. The idea of knowledge as a body of universal and objective truths to be transmitted runs through all three. Only the post-modern conception takes a different stance, based firmly on the rejection of all claims to universal knowledge.

What skills are offered? Again it is the post-modern conception which provides the exception. The three main conceptions are united in their view of intellectual skills as their primary offering. Even though the post-modern conception is more interested in the individual construction of perception, it too requires the skills of critical analysis and argument, though it is less concerned with rigorous argument.

What attitudes are inculcated? Here the differences between the conceptions become clear. Each has its own view of the essential attitudes to be inculcated in students. In the cases of learning for social purposes and learning for specific purposes the major attitudes are instrumental in focus. In the post-modern conception, there is a clear opposition to liberal ideals, though, as we saw, this conception comes close to embracing at least some liberal attitudes. Despite the differences, we notice again a close connection between attitudes, knowledge and skills: in all four conceptions, the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills require, implicitly or explicitly, the development of appropriate attitudes

	Learning for learning's sake	Learning for social purpose	Learning for specific purpose	Post-modern
Dominant aim	development of individual love of learning	provision of really useful knowledge to change society	development of knowledge and skills to satisfy external body	fulfilment of individual learning desires
View of knowledge	body of universal truths transmitted from experts to novices, discipline based	body of universal and practical truths, transmitted from experts to novices	body of universal truths. discipline based	individual, personal, changing perception of world
Skills	critical analysis rigorous argument discussion	critical analysis application of analysis to immediate situation	critical analysis rigorous argument	construction of perception from experience
Attitudes	love of learning for its own sake	desire to change society belief in ability to bring about change	pursuit of accreditation desire to learn	playfulness adaptability
For whom?	anyone who wishes to study	disadvantaged	those able to show existing acceptable basis	everyone
By whom?	accredited experts	accredited experts	accredited experts	anyone
Where?	anywhere	within specific communities	anywhere, but preferably on campus	anywhere
Why valued?	provides education for all	offers opportunity of change	required for access to further opportunities	?

Table 4.1 Conceptions of education in adult continuing education

To whom is the education offered? Here the four conceptions all offer variations on the theme of education for all, even though in two cases a narrower target group is delineated. Only in learning for specific purpose is there any hint that academic qualification is required to undertake education. All four conceptions consciously reject academic elitism.

By whom is the education provided? Here the three main conceptions all place emphasis on the expert, academic or practitioner. In all three cases the expertise is accredited by academia, a mark of the sector's need to gain respectability in the eyes of mainstream academic peers. Again the post-modern conception claims a different approach, in which anyone can be an instructor: but in practice this ideal has been lost in the need to remain within a system built on different values.

Where does education take place? Again there is unanimity: in pursuit of the idea of education beyond the walls, education can take place anywhere. The only slight variation comes with the conception of learning for specific purpose, where a preference for venues on university campuses betrays a desire to make students feel that they are part of the university.

Why is this education valued by the recipients, the providers and society? The three main conceptions offer different answers, which reflect their different aims and attitudes. Again the post-modern conception is different: it is very difficult on this view to state what is the value of education, as distinct from informal learning. It may be that the variety of answers to this last question provides a clue to the rapid demise of adult continuing education in recent years: the sector was unable to provide a clear and coherent justification for its activities in the language of value for money.

Whatever the truth of that suggestion, our summary, coupled with our earlier examination of the available material makes clear the dominance of a liberal conception of education in adult continuing education. Even where the education has an instrumental focus, as for example in learning for specific purposes, the values of liberal education shape the content and inform the belief in the power of education to produce change in individuals.

In the three main conceptions, the purpose of education is to transmit knowledge and skills. The knowledge is primarily academic knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, even though interdisciplinary work is celebrated. Knowledge is delivered by experts, accredited by the academic community, to learners, even though some of those learners may themselves have and contribute detailed knowledge in a narrow field. What counts as knowledge is defined by professional academics: even in community education the experts' role is to help the local

community identify their needs and resources and then to show the community how to meet their needs and exploit their resources.

Courses and programmes are open to anyone who wishes to come, and who is prepared to accept a certain way of doing things. Both teaching and assessment take account of the alleged particular needs of adult students, but increasingly this approach is subverted by the requirements of university validation. Learning is intended to be active, with students participating in discussion: but increasingly the discussion is tutor-directed and controlled by the demands of a fixed curriculum.

The overwhelming purpose is the development of the individual. Increasingly students are concerned with gaining qualifications or accreditation of professional or vocational knowledge or skills: but the central concern for the staff remains the development of the individual, in a variety of ways.

In the post-modern strand, some of these ideas are modified: there is a greater emphasis on the community and on the self-direction of learners; tutors become more facilitators. However they are still facilitators approved by the academy and recognised as knowing more than the students. Further, as we have seen, in some ways the post-modern view takes up and emphasises parts of the liberal conception. Thus the post-modern conception fits within the general conception we have outlined. In the rapidly changing environment of adult continuing education the post-modern conception may prove a useful tool for visualising how a reformed adult education might rise from the ashes, but thus far at least, it shows little sign of changing radically the conception of education underlying adult continuing education during the last forty years.

During this period there was one alternative to this dominant conception, the conception which informed self-proclaimed radical views of adult education. To this conception we now turn.

Chapter Five: The radical tradition

Introduction

Our study so far has examined the dominant conceptions of education within higher education and continuing education between 1960 and about 1995. We have seen that these strands of thought have a long history, and we have explored their development in interaction with the political, social, economic, cultural and intellectual environment. Now we turn our attention to a significant alternative conception, one which also has a long history, but which in recent decades has become much sharper in focus and more overt in its challenge to the dominant traditions.

This alternative conception arises within a tradition which likes to refer to itself as 'the radical tradition' (Thompson 1997), and we shall adopt the name for convenience. However, the term 'radical' has been claimed by many movements and currents in education: for example, many of those involved in the community education provision of university adult education departments, discussed in the previous chapter, referred to themselves and regarded themselves as radical in some way. It is important for our purposes to distinguish the tradition considered in this chapter from other movements and currents within higher education.

The key distinguishing characteristic of the radical conception of education to be discussed in this chapter is that education is seen as a means of improving society through explicit challenge to existing established systems, institutions and ideas. It is the element of explicit challenge which distinguishes this strand from other similar and related strands of conceptualisation. Other conceptions of education, as we have seen, have seen education as a means of social change, but they have expected to bring about change from within established systems and through established channels. The radical tradition rejects that approach in favour of challenge, even confrontation; and because of this, the radical tradition claims always to be on the side of and 'in solidarity with' those who are oppressed or disadvantaged, economically, socially, politically or, in our area of interest, educationally.

The difference between improving society and changing society should not be overlooked. The radical tradition contains a strong element of idealism, in which change is only worthwhile if it brings about permanent improvement, preferably on a wide scale. The tradition is also strongly democratic and populist in orientation, with empowerment a key notion: ordinary people are to be encouraged and empowered to take control of and

responsibility for their own lives, and bring about changes for the better themselves instead of waiting for change to be offered to them from above. The role of education in this process of empowerment is to give people the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to transform their lives

In higher education, the radical tradition has been made most explicit in the writings of practitioners within the field of continuing education. More widely but often implicitly, this tradition informs much of the discussion of the response of higher education to particular groups such as women, minorities of various kinds, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. At issue in many of these discussions is what kind of education higher education offers to these groups. Is it education which recognises their perspectives and attempts to meet their needs, or education designed to transform them into models acceptable within traditional boundaries?

The framing of the question, with its implicit confrontation, is characteristic of the radical tradition. It also points to a distinctive conception of education intended to challenge dominant conceptions. This distinctive conception makes explicit the radical tradition's view of the role of education in improving society, but also makes claims about the content, methods and students of a radical education. Because higher education generally is taken to be concerned in some way with the production and dissemination of knowledge, the radical conception of education in higher education also makes claims about the nature of knowledge.

The claims about the nature of knowledge are sufficiently significant for the radical conception of education in both mainstream higher education and adult continuing education to be explored first. Following this we shall look then at the radical conception of education in the mainstream of higher education, and then at the radical conception in adult continuing education. Finally we shall draw the threads together and examine the effects of this radical conception on the higher education sector,

The wider radical tradition

Before we focus on the higher education sector, it is worth glancing more widely at radical education in the compulsory education sector, for the radical tradition in higher and continuing education was and is part of a wider self-proclaimed radical tradition in education, and this itself is part of an even wider movement (Wright 1989). The wider movement is linked with protest movements and with groups having an explicitly left-wing political stance. However, not all those who sympathised with radical ideas were left-wing in their politics,

and certainly most were not on the extreme political fringes. Many of them came from a more mainstream European socialist tradition.

In the compulsory education sector, radical education, as its proponents called it, came to the fore in the 1960s. However, Wright insists that the movements which 'flowered' in the 1960s were already under way in the 1950s. He sees them as growing out of a 'contempt for the complacency of the 1950s' and sharing a 'long list of criticisms of our society' (Wright 1989: 1). Further, Wright identifies ten 'currents' which, in his view contributed to the growth of radicalism in education.

The ten are: an English radical tradition dating back to the English revolution and before; the working-class movement; Marxism; anarchism progressive education; existentialism; third world liberation; humanistic psychology; the counter-culture; and the American influence (Wright 1989: 4 ff). Of these only some are of direct interest to us in our study; and they are to be seen more in adult continuing education than in mainstream higher education.

Wright, following Brian Simon, identifies the English radical tradition with ideas of the formative power of education, the part education can play in social change, and the role of rational and secular education. The working-class movement is claimed as an important source of the discussion of education in relation to class, as is Marxism. Anarchism led, according to Wright, to talk of deschooling, while progressive education is seen as a movement to make schools more relaxed and informal, with greater emphasis on individualism and freedom. Existentialism influenced political protest, psychology and the sociology of education, while third world liberation acted as both focus and catalyst for many young people and drew attention to the writings of figures such as Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Humanistic psychology, drew attention to the importance of the emotions and personal relationships, and many of the leaders of the movement wrote about education; they were mostly American, which contributed to the American influence. The counter-culture is significant, in Wright's view, because of its emphasis on individualism and individual self-assertion or self-realisation, and its interest in non-rational modes of experience.

Of these currents, the most noticeable in higher education in England are the English radical tradition, the working-class movement, Marxism and humanistic psychology. While the writings of Freire, Illich and others were influential, their provenance in the third world was less important than their assertions about the content of education. Self-assertion, individual freedom and similar ideas were of course present, and within the radical tradition students

were encouraged to assert their freedom in various ways, but links with ideas of progressive education in schools or with the counter-culture are less easy to demonstrate.

One reason for this is that in mainstream higher education and adult continuing education it was assumed that the students had already asserted their freedom by choosing to take up these forms of education. Further, unlike school children, they were to a large extent responsible for themselves, so issues of self-assertion and self-realisation had a different context and a different colour. While the counter-culture indubitably influenced individuals and provided a backdrop to the work of higher education institutions, the structure of higher education prevented more than a marginal involvement of students and staff in the counter-culture. Staff had a place in a social system, students were concerned with obtaining a place in the system, and both had to work within a system of hierarchical assessment. Those individuals who were unwilling to work within the system, who wanted to embrace the counter-culture instead, mostly dropped out of higher education altogether.

We have noted four of Wright's currents of thought as more significant for radical views in higher education than the rest. The English radical tradition to which he refers gave to higher education generally, and more explicitly to adult continuing education, a concern for social change and an appreciation of the role of education in social change. We have already seen this at work in the conceptions of education explored in the previous chapters. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, the radical tradition within higher education endorsed the idea that social change could only come about through direct challenge to established systems and views. This in some ways went back to the roots of what Wright calls the English radical tradition, for it is based on claims about the ability and right of everyone to benefit from education.

To this English radical tradition was added the influence of Marxism, particularly the class analysis which was significant in that tradition. For the radical tradition in higher education this meant that both that higher education was set within the class structure (and supported the ruling classes against the rest) and that the composition of the academic body of scholars at all levels was heavily biased by class. More broadly, the Marxist tradition and the English radical tradition were combined in an emphasis on power and power relationships both within and without education, and the role of education in changing, indeed subverting, such relationships. Many self-proclaimed radicals in higher education saw themselves as warriors in a class war, dedicated to using higher education to overcome the oppression of the masses.

The masses in this case were represented by the working class. The radical tradition in higher education drew heavily on ideas received from the various movements of earlier centuries which tried to offer education to the working classes. However, the radical tradition in higher education saw many of those movements as patronising attempts to educate the working class to be good, that is subservient, citizens: in contrast radical higher education was aimed at turning those same working class students into revolutionaries.

Finally, the humanistic psychologists emphasised for the radical tradition the ideas of relationships and emotions as important components of education. Building on this idea, many within the radical tradition in higher education tried to break away from the formality of staff-student relationships and conduct themselves as equals. This was difficult in the highly stratified system of higher education, especially amongst those who subscribed to the idea of education as a process of transmission of knowledge from expert to novice.

Important as these currents were both in shaping the radical tradition in higher education and in linking it to radical movements elsewhere in education, they were less important than the radical conception of knowledge. Because the higher education system saw itself as a, perhaps the, significant creator and transmitter of knowledge, any challenge to its ideas of knowledge was a serious threat. The radical tradition mounted such a challenge.

Knowledge

Radical conceptions of education in higher education make particular claims about the nature of knowledge. Their contention is that the dominant view of knowledge in higher education is a distortion, at best inadequate and at worst harmful. On this view, the dominant understanding of knowledge is that knowledge gives us certainties about the world in which we live; the paradigm for this understanding of such knowledge is the knowledge claims of the natural sciences and their attempts to predict and control events. In opposition to this perceived dominant understanding, the radical tradition asserts a view of knowledge as socially and culturally constructed.

It is important to distinguish the radical critique of knowledge from the attacks of philosophical non-foundationalists, whose approach is related to the post-modernist views noted in chapter four above. The view of knowledge to be discussed in the present context arises from sharp criticisms advanced mainly within the social sciences rather than within philosophy, and has an explicitly political dimension foreign to the work of many writers in philosophical epistemology.

We may distinguish several elements of the radical critique of ideas of knowledge. The radical tradition criticises fiercely the claim that knowledge is objective and established dispassionately; it claims in contrast that knowledge is subjective, created and passionate. This leads to the claim that knowledge is controlled and used by the powerful to maintain their power; and this in turn leads to questioning of who decides what counts as knowledge and who decides what are the acceptable ways of expressing knowledge.

The starting point for all this is the sociological and philosophical critique of the sciences, particularly the natural sciences. Traditionally, it is said, knowledge in science is thought to be gained through detached investigation of a reality external to the investigator. The knowledge thus gained is universal, certain and objective; that is, what is accepted as knowledge in science is independent of time, [place and person. The guarantee of this is the repeatability of experiments, coupled with the ability to make testable predictions.

Philosophers, historians and sociologists of science have attacked this alleged traditional view from many directions. The sum of their criticisms, as adopted by the radical tradition, is that all knowledge claims reflect human interests. In science, objectivity is undermined by the theory-laden nature of experiments and the particular interests, concerns and even background of the experimenter. Further, what is accepted as the basis for knowledge is claimed to be dependent on paradigms of thought which have a social basis and are related to the particular interests of societies and cultures, which are themselves historically situated. As a result, the radical tradition claims, it makes no sense to talk of universal certainties.

In contrast the radical tradition adopts a view of knowledge as a social construct, created by the interaction of many people within a particular context. On this view, knowledge claims are intimately related to the immediate concerns of human beings and arise from the human need to organise living. This entails trying to understand the world as it is and envision it as it might be. 'Knowledge' is a description of the ideas used in understanding and envisioning. One implication of this is that knowledge is necessarily subjective and context dependent; it may have a wider application than one context, but in each context care must be taken to ensure that knowledge claims grow out of the situation rather than being imposed from outside. Further, because knowledge claims relate to the particular conditions and circumstances of people, they will be passionate: the claimants will have a commitment to their knowledge claims which may lead to the rejection of challenges on the basis of feeling rather than traditional 'evidence'.

Once it is accepted that knowledge is related to human interests, it is a short step to the claim that knowledge, like other resources, is used to serve the interest of the powerful. There is a long tradition of such claims about material resources, and both the Marxist tradition and the sociological schools which drew on the work of thinkers such as Habermas applied this analysis to intellectual resources. The basis of the analysis is the claim that knowledge leads to power, a claim that many involved in education would acclaim. However, the radical tradition in education claims that those already in power control access to knowledge. In the case of higher education, they decide who shall have access to the means of acquiring knowledge and, just as importantly, who shall not have access. The powerful also control who shall have access to the fruits of research and the advancement of knowledge: for example, peer refereeing of journals in science can be seen as a means of gate-keeping, excluding those whose ideas challenge accepted orthodoxies.

A particular form of control of knowledge is the decision about what counts as knowledge. The emphasis on dispassionate objectivity is challenged by the radical tradition, as we have seen; but further, the radical tradition insists that older views of knowledge pay too much attention to intellectual knowledge and too little to what is called emotional knowledge. The claim is that the emphasis on the intellect ignores the contribution to our knowing which comes from our reactions to the world around us and our relationships within it. For example, our acceptance or rejection of a knowledge claim may be affected by our own experience which challenges the claim. However, this kind of emotional knowledge is not acceptable in academic circles: a scientific paper which includes reference to personal experience is unlikely to achieve publication. In consequence, the radical tradition argues, academia is ignoring a very important resource, the experience of people built up over generations. For example, much alternative medical practice is based on long experience handed down through centuries of tradition rather than built up from rigorous scientific examination; the medical establishment, controlling medical knowledge, refuses to accept alternative traditions as knowledge, yet is compelled to acknowledge that they do seem to work. According to the radical tradition, a more inclusive approach to medical knowledge would benefit everyone.

This leads on to the final element of the radical critique which is significant for our purposes. Not only is the content of knowledge claims controlled, the form in which they are expressed is also, it is said, rigidly controlled. According to academic tradition, knowledge claims must be expressed in forms which make clear both the evidence and the arguments used to support the claim. The arguments are expected to conform to logical forms first discussed by Greek philosophers centuries ago. There is no room, for example, for narrative or story-telling, even though these have been accepted as ways of passing on knowledge since time immemorial.

The reason for the rejection of narrative and similar forms of knowledge claim, according to the critics, is that they do not obviously conform to the criteria of dispassionate objectivity demanded of knowledge claims. However, once that demand is relaxed, other forms of expression of knowledge claims become possible.

None of these elements of criticism were peculiar to the radical tradition, but in that tradition they were given a particular form by the focus on those who were seen as disadvantaged or powerless. In particular, the rise of feminism gave a sharp focus to much of the above critique. For feminists the view of knowledge as objective, the denial of emotional knowledge and the insistence on particular forms of expression all reflected male dominance of the world and the subservient role of women. According to this view, the traditional view of knowledge served male interests, both in emphasising those areas of thought of special interest to males and in disparaging ways of knowing which are natural to females. This was said to be particularly the case in higher education:

Women who enter higher education do so principally to learn more about men – about male ideas – and about male ways of doing things. It's not usual to classify higher education as men's education although the description is a useful one. Centuries of philosophy and selection have gone into the creation of what counts as important knowledge. Notions of reason and logic and objectivity have been constructed to obscure the extent to which what emerges is a reflection of male experience and male priorities. It is unlikely to be otherwise so long as women's experiences of the world – our ideas and achievements and struggles, our priorities and allegiances – remain largely unrecorded by the men who had the power historically to decide what is considered important. (Thompson 1997: 59)

As the above extract suggests, a special target was the claimed analytical and competitive nature of male ways of acquiring knowledge. The analytical approach was held to be divisive: by analysing things into units, one lost their essential unity and wholeness, a trait claimed to be typical of males but foreign to females. Competition for knowledge, especially in claims to be first to express a given thought, was also held to be natural for males, an extension of their competition in other areas of life. By contrast, it was claimed, females were naturally co-operative, and worked together in acquiring and defining knowledge.

The significance of all this for higher education was that it challenged fundamental parts of the self-understanding of higher education. Higher education practitioners regarded themselves as being in the forefront of the advancement and dissemination of knowledge. The radical critique claimed that their understanding of knowledge was inadequate and their practices suspect in both the acquisition and the dissemination of knowledge.

Further, the radical critique raised questions about the treatment and assessment of students. Students, it was claimed, were required to conform to standards of knowledge based on a white male view of the world, analytical and competitive; Even if you adopted the view that knowledge is created and attempted to work collaboratively in acquiring knowledge and were ready to acknowledge the contribution of others to your own knowledge, when it came to assessment by essay or examination or seminar contribution you had to conform to the traditional standard. This, it was said, ignored the culture and contribution of those who were not part of the dominant group, such as women and students from ethnic minority cultures. Even the choice of topics for study and assessment was held to be guided by male views of what was acceptable, making the contributions of women and those from minority groups almost invisible.

The radical tradition in higher education tried to challenge the traditional view of knowledge not only through trenchant criticism, but also by creating teaching and learning situations which operated under an alternative view. This is well expressed in the following extracts from a discussion of Women's Studies:

The women who are in Women's Studies – students and teachers - both recognise and feel women's oppression from personal experience. By bringing these abilities to our attempts to understand it in an academic scholarly way not only do we 'deconstruct' and 'reconstruct' previous knowledge but we also construct new knowledge that includes women as self-determining human beings, that empowers women to explore ways to end their status as underpaid and overworked, abused and exploited second-class citizens. (Klein 1984: 224)

Rather than transmitting knowledge as 'the truth' from 'the expert' to 'the ignorant', students and teachers in Women's Studies attempt to create knowledge in an environment in which all are learners. Some, usually the teachers, are more familiar with the existing scholarship on a topic and make this resource their contribution to the classroom. (*ibid.*, 225)

Given the huge investment of the academic community in knowledge and the processes for acquiring and disseminating knowledge, it is not surprising that the radical approach was not adopted on a wide scale. However, this approach to knowledge did inform the practices of some practitioners within both mainstream higher education and adult continuing education. It thus contributed to radical conceptions of education in both the mainstream and the adult strands of higher education. We now turn to explore other aspects of these conceptions.

The radical tradition within adult continuing education

Within higher education, examples of the radical tradition at work are found more readily in adult continuing education than in the mainstream. One reason for this, already noted in chapter four, is that many of those recruited as adult education tutors during the expansion of the 1960s had a commitment to education as a vehicle of social change. Another reason was that it was much easier in adult education departments to organise courses at the margins of university life and avoid the scrutiny of those with academic traditions to uphold. A third reason was that adult education departments had access to the kind of potential students sought by those in the radical tradition, whereas in the mainstream those in the radical tradition had to rely on standard university admission procedures which selected out the radicals' target groups.

Those groups were described as 'disadvantaged'. However the radical tradition, especially within adult education, was not happy with this description: it had too many connotations of patronage, of the 'disadvantaged' as passive recipients of help. The complaint of the radical tradition was that this approach ignored the structural causes of disadvantage and left the relationship of the disadvantaged to others largely untouched (Thompson 1997: 8).

Instead, the radical tradition preferred to talk of educating the working class, understood as a group of people distinguished by their low status and lack of opportunities, in all areas of economic and social life. It was recognised that within the working class there were those who were better off and those who were worse off, economically and socially and in other ways. But

the similarities between the social experiences of the "deprived" and "affluent" working class are much more important than the differences (Jackson and Ashcroft, 1972, quoted in Thompson 1997: 20)

On this view, to be working class means

being involved in a social, economic and political relationship, varying according to personality and experience. It entails belonging to a social class not a category. (Jackson, unpublished paper, quoted in Thompson 1997: 19)

Of course the working class are still seen as disadvantaged according to social and economic criteria. They suffer from low income, low-status employment (or lack of it), poor educational background, poor job opportunities, poor access to resources, inability to choose their place of residence, and so on (Thompson 1997: 19). For the radical tradition however all

this pales into insignificance before the consciousness of being relatively powerless in relationship to other groups in society.

This draws our attention to two important elements of the radical tradition in adult continuing education, its class orientation and its concern with power relationships. The radical tradition was unashamedly class oriented. Its understanding of society in terms of class owed much to Marxist traditions, but also drew on a long tradition of English radical social ideas going back at least to the seventeenth century. Radicals recognised the deficiencies of class descriptions, particularly as Marxism came under attack in the 1970s, but they found 'working-class' to be a term with active and positive connotations, as opposed to 'disadvantaged' with its perceived more passive connotations.

This was in large part because the term working class carried connotations of power relationships, and the radical tradition perceived education as a means of changing power relationships. When the radicals in adult education talked of social change they meant change which altered the relationships of power. They despised what they saw as the liberal compromise of working stealthily on the enemy, of adopting the enemy's clothes and methods in order to subvert from within. Jane Thompson is caustic about that approach:

... you quickly forget the point at which you began to adopt the language of the enemy as a strategy to gain acceptance, with the intention of 'working from within'. It soon becomes 'second nature' to you, and the repertoire with which you make sense of the world. Except that you are likely to be making sense of the world in a significantly altered way, as you become progressively wedded to the concepts and concerns of those whose interests might be very different to your own, and into which you have now become incorporated. (Thompson 1997: 148)

Instead the radical tradition saw its mission as helping the oppressed to overcome their oppression, and saw two main ways of doing this. One was the raising of consciousness, especially political consciousness, amongst the working class. This was often referred to as the process of conscientization, a term drawn from the work of the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire. The publication in Britain in 1973 of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* marked for many a turning point; many adult education practitioners, in higher education and elsewhere found his work both a stimulus to and a means of focusing their thinking. Freire wrote primarily about the development of adult literacy work in Brazil, but his work was taken up as having wider implications.

The basis of Freire's work was the idea that adults would learn to read and write when they felt personally involved in the process. He involved them in the process by working with

ideas which were important to them, one of which was their oppression at the hands of the ruling classes. Translated into British contexts by radical educators, this meant working with members of the working class on ideas which were important to them. For university adult education this meant helping the members of the working class to articulate and understand their feelings of oppression, and to recognise and understand the structures which oppressed them.

The other major way of helping the oppressed was the way of empowerment. Once students were awakened to their situation, they could be helped to acquire the tools for changing it. These tools included knowledge of their situation and how it had arisen and of the avenues open to them, both formal and informal, conventional and unconventional, to challenge the oppressors. A favourite slogan derived from Audre Lorde was “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”. Students were encouraged to reject the perspectives offered to them by conventional education, even conventional adult education and instead to take control, not only of their lives and their learning but even of what counted as learning. They were specifically encouraged to recognise and claim acceptance for their own knowledge based on experience, and to assess all knowledge claims from their own standpoint in society.

The knowledge thus gained was to be ‘really useful knowledge’. Jane Thompson writes

The radical tradition in adult education has argued not simply for knowledge which is deemed to be ‘the best that has been thought and said’ – which is the basis of the extra-mural and liberal traditions. Or for knowledge that is vocational and practical – in order to make people into more skilled and responsible workers – which is the antecedent of the current pre-occupation with training. Or for knowledge which is devoid of any social context but is related to ‘personhood’ and ‘individual self-fulfilment’ – the concern of the essentially American ‘human growth’ school of thinking popular in the seventies. The radical tradition in adult education judges ‘the usefulness’ of knowledge in relation to its contribution to assisting social and political change. Especially in relation to those whose social, material and political conditions are based on oppression, inequality or exploitation. (Thompson 1997: 145)

Adult education based on this idea of really useful knowledge

implies the development of critical thinking, the recognition of human agency, political growth and the confidence to challenge what is generally taken for granted as inevitable. It means deriving theory from the authority of lived material experience and using it in ways which connect with the similar or related experiences of others, in order to establish a ‘critical mass’ which can join together to develop collective forms of social action to achieve political change. (*ibid.*: 145)

and the

critical detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy (Usher *et al* 1997: 186)

Thus radical adult education in higher education sought to maintain the critical stance associated with higher education, while at the same time giving priority to the experience of students. Working with students in this way meant a change of roles. Students and tutors became collaborators in a shared exploration, and became involved with one another's lives in ways which challenged the separation between tutors and students more usual even in adult continuing education classes.

A series of powerful snapshots of the radical view of adult continuing education in practice is given in Jane Thompson's collection *Words in Edgeways* (1997). Thompson founded and directed the Women's Education Centre at Southampton University, which struggled for many years to provide education for working class women. Programmes in the Centre were not aimed primarily at preparing working-class women for higher education, though that was the result for some students (Thompson 1997: 63). Rather the programmes were aimed at giving women the opportunity to learn in a women-centred world. In the words of former students:

... we're making women-centred knowledge in collective ways. We're linking together personal experience, powerful ideas, strong emotions and political action on our own behalf, in a way that makes education not just about being clever and getting qualifications but about changing the world for women. It's not only what we learn that matters, it's how we learn that's important, and in both of these respects we have to be in control of what we do. (Thompson 1997: 106)

This extract indicates many of the elements of the conception of education underlying the radical tradition in adult continuing education. Education is seen as a means of discovering how to challenge and change existing structures. Students and tutors together are to acquire the really useful knowledge which will empower them. Knowledge is to be judged in terms of its application to their situation, and the students are the judges. Tutors are there to help, but not direct.

The emphasis is not on skills nor on knowledge for its own sake nor on the development of individuals – though all these are present as means to the end. Rather the emphasis is on collective action to recognise, tackle and overcome oppression in all its forms.

It is not surprising that this conception of education found little purchase within the world of higher education. Not only did it challenge the right of those who were in power to dictate to the powerless, it ignored and even attacked such liberal ideals as dispassionate learning and

balanced viewpoints. In its radicalism, it really did attack the roots of the established conceptions of education in higher education and continuing education we have already examined.

Mainstream higher education

Within mainstream higher education the radical tradition is more difficult to trace. It has its flagships, such as the journal *Radical Philosophy*, but mostly it is a shallow stream. This is partly because of the innate conservatism of English higher education, and partly because the radical stream has many currents, and they do not always flow happily together.

Many proponents of this radical strand would also claim that the shallowness of the stream reflects the deliberate oppression, marginalisation, even suppression of radical thought by 'the establishment', a tribute they would argue to the challenge offered by the radical conception to other views. Certainly in the mainstream the pressures of academic culture, peer review, promotion and departmental structures made it much more difficult to admit, let alone advocate radical views, than was the case in the apparently more receptive extra-mural departments.

The sense of challenging the existing system, or 'the establishment', is important in any consideration of the radical tradition. In the 1960s the radical stream within mainstream higher education was part of a wider movement of protest and challenge to established political and social ideas, described above in chapter two. This movement affected institutions of higher education, as it affected other areas of public or semi-public life, although the effects in the United Kingdom were small compared with those in other countries. However, amongst students and staff there was an idealism and a sense of social justice which was surprisingly widespread. It is likely that the expansion of higher education in the 1960s, played a significant part in the development of social concern. The expansion brought into higher education many students from less privileged backgrounds and, particularly, from state schools rather than public schools; these students were very conscious both of the privilege of higher education and of the peers they had left behind. Expansion of the universities also resulted in the rapid recruitment of more staff and a consequent dilution of the proportion of staff content with traditional university culture.

From the perspective of this study, the two key elements of the radical movements of the 1960s in higher education were the demands for democracy and social relevance. The first was seen in demands not only for greater access to higher education for all – a development

of the Robbins principle conveniently ignoring Robbins' qualifier 'all who can benefit' – but for student access to records and student participation in decision-making bodies such as senates, councils, faculty boards and departmental meetings. This challenged directly the view that the education of students was a matter for the staff: instead students, with the support of some staff, claimed that university education should be collaborative, and students had a right to participate in decisions about their education. Some staff translated this into variations in teaching methods, giving students much more say in curriculum content and the conduct of classes. Thus the radical movement tried to push the institutions back to a conception of education within a community of scholars and aspirant scholars which Newman would have readily endorsed.

However, the second element we have picked out, the concern for social relevance, would have been less to Newman's taste. The demand here was that university courses should serve the needs of society, particularly the disadvantaged. This approach led naturally in disciplines such as law and sociology to a demand for courses which emphasised practical issues relevant to the disadvantaged: many students were happy to spend time in advice centres, offering free advice to anyone who wanted it, and they wanted courses which would equip them for this role. But the concern spread more widely. In science departments, there was a great deal of agonising over funding from military sources, and some students rejected the opportunity to proceed to research studentships under military contracts, or even to give assistance to such work. Thus it was not only the content of courses which was affected, but also the aim of higher education: radical students and staff demanded education which would equip them to better society, and rejected education which would threaten society.

All this led to the gradual development of a conception of education which saw the aim of higher education as equipping people to change society for the better. However, through the 1970s and the 1980s, much of the idealism of the 1960s disappeared in the face of the apparent failure of radical movements to achieve their goals. At the same time, more and more students and staff found it necessary or expedient to concentrate on their careers, and avoid directly challenging the establishment. The radical movement became more and more the voice of those opposed to the economic and social policies of successive governments, but also became muted and largely ignored. Moves towards greater student participation in decision-making continued, slowly, but of greater significance for radical conceptions of education were the development of radical feminist thought, critical consideration of colonialism, and growing discussion about race and sexuality. These discussions continued the challenge to established ideas within and without the universities.

We have already discussed the view of knowledge which underpinned these discussions, with its attention to the social context and construction of knowledge and stress on the importance of non-intellectual knowledge. The idea of knowledge as a collaborative creation fitted well with the demand for democracy in higher education, and the stress on experience as a source of knowledge supported the rhetoric of widening access to higher education. Of greater significance however were the view of knowledge as controlled by other interests and the challenge to the objectivity of knowledge.

The first, the idea that knowledge as a product and a commodity is made to serve the interests of the powerful, surfaced in challenges to the perceived patriarchal structure of knowledge, the perceived white, male, Western bias of consideration of knowledge, and the perceived refusal to acknowledge the contribution to the advancement of knowledge of women and those from non-white ethnic groups. The challenges took the form mainly of demands for the inclusion in courses of material from non-traditional sources and of non-traditional kinds. Mostly the challenge was met by permission to develop courses which dealt specifically with women's issues, or issues of colour, or women's contributions to science. In other words, while the challenge was recognised, there was little effort to revise mainstream courses. Thus while a radical conception of education might operate in some courses, the overall conception remained untouched.

It is worth noting just how radical was the challenge. We can illustrate this from some comments on women's studies:

The subject matter of Women's Studies is women (Klein 1984: 225)

Women's Studies is not 'just' about facts and figures, it is not 'just' another academic discipline – it involves a different way of viewing the world. (*ibid.*:223)

While some call Women's Studies 'interdisciplinary' I prefer the term 'transdisciplinary' arguing that 'interdisciplinary' still accepts as given the only recently institutionalised academic disciplines. (*ibid.*: 226)

We note how these echo the writings, quoted earlier, of Jane Thompson, writing from within the adult education movement. This illustrates the way in which the radical conception transcended other differences between mainstream higher education and the adult education sector.

The other element of the view of knowledge that is significant for our purposes is the claim that knowledge has an ethical component. This claim drew on the protests of the 1960s, and

linked them with the claim that knowledge is used to serve the interests of the powerful. In the 1970s there was an upsurge of interest in the ethical responsibility of scientists in particular: given that developments in science were having a major effect on the world, the question was asked, do not scientists have some responsibility for the use to which their work is put? The 1970s saw a mushrooming in universities of societies with names including phrases like 'ethical responsibility in science'. These groups, composed of staff and students, organised seminars and debates which cut across disciplinary boundaries and drew, for example, philosophers, sociologists, natural scientists and medical specialists together to consider developments in medical research. Most of the societies were short-lived: but they illustrate the ethical context in which science was seen. The ethical concerns were linked with the history, philosophy and sociology of science in the development of the new discipline of science studies. This discipline itself was short-lived: by the late 1980s, science studies had become once again a minority interest, indulged in by academics whose primary business, in the eyes of their employers, lay elsewhere.

From all this we can distil the elements of the radical conception of education in mainstream higher education. It saw higher education as available to all (not just those selected by the system). The business of higher education was initially to enable people to contribute to the betterment of society. In the changed conditions of the 1970s and 1980s this became more to awaken people to the injustices implicit in society, for example in the patriarchal organisation of society, and thus to empower them to change. Higher education was still focused on knowledge, but, in this conception, on knowledge gained collaboratively and recognised as subject to human interests.

Given the nature of the system, it was difficult in mainstream higher education to do much about offering higher education more widely: radical movements were still forced to go through the traditional admissions officers. Further, as we have noted, the courses which took account of the radical view were mostly marginal. But they did exist, and they survived, and some of the views of knowledge infiltrated even mainstream courses. However overwhelmingly higher education preferred to regard knowledge as objective, to be transmitted from experts to novices. Thus while the radical conception had some success in changing higher education at the margins, it had very little success in achieving its goals of equipping people to change society by confrontation.

One could suggest, cynically, that it was against the interests of the establishment in higher education to accept the radical conception: it threatened their monopoly of education. More generously perhaps one might suggest that academics in higher education were so trained in

particular ways of thinking that they could not change. This is a strange claim about people whose business it is to examine new ideas and develop changes.

Perhaps the strongest reason for the failure of the radical conception to take hold in mainstream higher education is simply that the academic mainstream has yet to be convinced that knowledge is power or knowledge is personal. Within whole swathes of academia, especially the sciences, this view is seen as simple nonsense.

The effect of the radical strand

We have shown that in the period under review there has developed a self-described radical view of higher education and continuing education, with a distinct and distinctive conception of education. The conception of education overlaps with and draws many elements from both the liberal and the vocational traditions of higher education, and from the liberal and social concern traditions of adult continuing education. However the radical tradition adds its own distinctive notes in its passionate concern for reforming society, its view of people as agents of social change, its constant challenge to the structures of power in education and elsewhere, and its optimism about the capacity to learn of everyone. The slogan 'really useful knowledge for all' encapsulates much of this view of education.

It is useful to compare the answers to our analytical questions of this conception and the liberal conception, which, as we have already seen, has dominated higher education and adult continuing education in our period. The table below summarises the results.

Even when we make allowance for the necessary simplification of the table, the differences between the two conceptions are clear. The radical conception does indeed pose a challenge to dominant ideas about aims, content and methods.

We have seen that the radical conception has a long history, but took on new forms and became stronger during the period under review in this study. We have also seen that this view of education was marginal, particularly in mainstream higher education. Given the emphasis within this conception on access to knowledge for all, especially the disadvantaged, one might expect that moves towards a mass system of higher education would allow the radical conception greater influence. Whether or not this is the case, we shall see later. To conclude this chapter however, it is worth reflecting briefly on the apparent failure of the radical conception to change higher education, or indeed adult continuing education

0	Liberal	Radical
Dominant aim	development of the individual intellect	development of individual within a supportive group
View of knowledge	body of universal truths, transmitted from experts to novices, discipline based	body of experiential truths, with universal application
Skills	critical analysis rigorous argument	problem solving group work
Attitudes	pursuit of truth for truth's sake openness to discussion	focus on experience collaborative
For whom?	academically able	anyone
By whom?	accredited experts	collective
Where?	community, isolated from everyday world	anywhere
Why valued?	produces generalist trained mind, preserves culture	develops self-confidence to challenge established views

Table 5.1: comparison of liberal and radical conceptions

One mark of that failure is that much of the talk about access and widening participation in higher education can be seen as empty rhetoric. The numbers of non-white students, and students from working class or disadvantaged backgrounds are growing, but very slowly. The number of women students in higher education has grown dramatically over the last few decades, as has the number of female staff in higher education, but the number of female staff at the highest level is small in proportion to the total number of high ranking staff.

Of greater significance for this study than numbers is the attitudes displayed within the academic community, as evidenced by the content of curricula and the ways in which students are treated. The evidence here suggests that the radical conception of education has had very little impact on the thinking of higher education, and even of the thinking of practitioners within continuing education. All the right statements of intent are made, all the politically correct attitudes are adopted: but when it comes to the content of the curriculum, the

arrangements for study and assessment and the view of what counts as knowledge, attitudes are unchanged. The radical tradition has focused attention on who higher education is for: but the related changes in what and why have not gone below the surface.

This is, of course, connected with the radical challenge to the view of knowledge dominant in higher education. We explored this at greater length earlier in this chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that the radical conception of knowledge has hardly affected academic views of knowledge. What radicals claim as knowledge is still discounted by most academics.

In part the resistance to new ideas of knowledge is a resistance to change. Higher education in England is innately conservative. The overriding idea is of the passing on of traditions, albeit changing traditions. While many might accept the idea that knowledge is power, fewer, much fewer, would accept the idea that change needs to be brought about by radical shifts. On the whole, English higher education is gradualist in its view of the change of society, preferring to work from within. In other words, we change the system by recruiting people to it and giving them room to change.

There are two problems with this approach. One is that once in the system people become comfortable. As they are assimilated, it seems, they find the privileges of the system congenial and lose their desire to change it. Less cynically, we might note that once accepted by the system, people lose touch with the experiences that made them radical in the first place, and so with the sharp things that nudge them to take the initiative for change, in a system which puts the weight of the establishment on the side of small change.

The other problem with the gradualist approach is that the new managerialism in higher education leaves little room for changing the system on grounds of educational principle. Decisions are made on the basis of finance or an institution's profile. A growing load of administration saps the energy of staff, while more and more power is concentrated in the hands of administrators who like universal, tidy solutions. The effort required to present the intellectual case for changes to the system becomes too great, and takes too much time away from the activities on which academic staff are assessed, and on which their future careers depend.

In this way the conservatism of the system links up with the economic considerations which have played their part in marginalising this conception of education. There is enormous pressure on resources. Consequently, there is pressure to recruit and retain large numbers of

students. This militates against the small classes favoured by at least the adult radical tradition. Further, courses must be provided which will satisfy the demands of the students, who are apparently concerned with getting jobs. Commentators have lamented the decline of a radical student consciousness. Many of the courses which challenge stereotypes are of no interest or become the arena of the minority. Does this reflect the class background of most of the students? We may note here that many of the students of concern to the radical tradition are economically disadvantaged, and are now being forced by economics to forego higher education.

Further pressure comes from the concern for quality and standards. In higher education quality is measured and standards are maintained according to a view which accentuates performance in certain kinds of test. The skills required for success in these kinds of test are academically oriented, and so the tests favour students with a conventional academic background. Students with a history of educational disadvantage often struggle to acquire the necessary skills. Further, the tests applied in higher education at undergraduate level favour the presentation of accepted views rather than challenges to orthodoxy, which again counts against students who find themselves at odds with the conventional wisdom on a topic. The concern for quality and standards is supported by a system of external examiners which itself militates against challenges to conventional views. Against all this, a radical conception, as we have seen, insists that judgements must be made according to standards laid down by the student not the establishment: but that is exactly what the system of external moderation cannot permit.

For all these reasons, and perhaps others, the radical conception of education has made little direct and discernible impact on higher education. However, the radical conception of education remains in existence. By its very nature it survives and thrives in the space outside the mainstream. On the surface, the massification and adultification of higher education, if occurring, promise more scope for radical ideas. Certainly some elements of the radical conception have infiltrated the debate about lifelong learning, albeit in ways which might make some radicals unhappy. The depth of that infiltration is one issue to be considered as we examine recent developments in conceptions of education in higher education.

Chapter 6: Conceptions of education in higher education in the late 1990s

Introduction

We have now examined conceptions of education in higher education and adult continuing education from 1960 to the middle years of the 1990s. In so doing we have found it convenient and fairly easy to separate mainstream higher education and the extra-mural strand. As we turn to the recent past and the concluding years of the 1990s, this separation becomes unhelpful. We noted in our brief historical review in chapter two that towards the end of the 1990s, separate adult or continuing education departments were rapidly disappearing from universities, and those left were being regarded and treated more and more as part of the mainstream of the university, albeit perhaps with a particular orientation towards provision for part-time students. One consequence of this development is that the conceptions of education underpinning mainstream and adult education have become less distinct. In this chapter, therefore, as we examine the conceptions of education current in higher education in the late 1990s, we must adopt a different approach.

A different approach is required also because the conceptions of education which we are now seeking to draw out are necessarily much less well defined or articulated. They are in the process of development, in response to developments in higher education. Further, due to the rapid process of organisational change in higher education in recent years and the need to respond to many external pressures, even less attention has been paid to conceptions of education than in earlier years.

There is however one document which offers a firm basis for our study, the Dearing Report published in 1997. As noted in chapter two, a National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education under the chairmanship of the then Sir Ron Dearing was established in 1995 during the dying days of John Major's Conservative Party administration. The Committee reported in 1997, after the sweeping General Election victory of the Labour Party led by Tony Blair. Commentators on all sides saw the establishment of the Committee of Inquiry as a means of avoiding serious consideration in the pre-election period of political hot potatoes such as the financing of higher education in general and student loans in particular. It suited both major political parties to have the report and ensuing debate delayed until after the election. Although the Committee's recommendations were very quickly overtaken by events, the Report and the published evidence submitted to the Committee provide a snapshot of views of higher education around 1996, comparable to that of the Robbins Report's snapshot of the early 1960s. As with Robbins, we might expect to gather from the Dearing Report some idea

of the underlying conceptions of education which were current during the Committee's deliberations, and the developments anticipated in the next decade to which the report was addressed.

However, the context of the Dearing Report is very different from that of the Robbins Report. The Robbins Committee reported at a time when an expansion of higher education was taking place against a wide, if implicit, consensus about the nature and aims of higher education, which the Committee's report reflected. Nearly thirty-five years later, the Dearing Committee was reporting against a background of considerable doubt about higher education. Not only aims and purposes, but methods of recruitment, teaching and assessment were under question, and many academics were unclear about their role or where to focus their attention. Thus the snapshot of conceptions of education within the Dearing Committee's report, based necessarily on official communications, reflects only part of the discussion. For our purposes, the Committee's views need to be supplemented by some consideration of the conceptions of education informing the doubts.

One way into this task is to examine the conceptions of education implicit in some of the developments in higher education which are seen as significant for the future because they seem to address at least some of the questions about higher education. Four developments stand out, each widely accepted as potentially significant and each claimed by advocates as the key to higher education in the next century. Each is encapsulated in a short title: lifelong learning, networked learning, adultification and massification. We shall look at each in turn, in each case asking what conceptions of education underpin the development.

It is important to emphasise that in each of these strands of development more attention has been paid to practice than to theory. In particular, very little attention had been given to trying to work out what kind of education might be offered as a result of these developments. There is discussion of recruitment, curriculum, assessment, academic accountability, university organisation, quality control and the student experience. One issue that is much discussed is that of widening participation in higher education, extending the benefits of higher education to more and more people: however the exact nature of those benefits, and the aims of this extended higher education are much less explicit. Consequently rather than describing or expounding writers' statements of conceptions of education, we are concerned in this chapter with drawing out implicit conceptions as we perceive them. Inevitably this is a much more tentative procedure than that adopted in earlier chapters.

We shall begin with a study of the Dearing Report, since that does contain explicit statements about the aims and purposes of higher education, and other material relevant to conceptions of education. Then we shall examine in turn each of the four developments noted above, before drawing the strands together in preparation for the concluding chapter of this study.

The Dearing Report

As noted in chapter two the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education was set up in 1996 under the chairmanship of the then Sir Ron Dearing. Its remit was

to make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years, recognising that higher education embraces teaching, learning, scholarship and research. (Dearing 1997: 1)

By the time the Committee reported in 1997 there had been a change of Government, following the sweeping victory of the Labour Party in the General Election of that year. We noted in chapter two some of the pressures which led to the establishment of the Committee by the Government of the day with the tacit support of the then Opposition parties. We noted too some of the changes in higher education and continuing education which have resulted, directly or indirectly, from the inquiry and the recommendations made in the Committee's report. Now we consider what the report tells us about how the Committee conceived education within higher education. What snapshot are we offered of the thinking of those who gave evidence to the inquiry?

The report discusses aims and purposes in chapter 5. This follows the setting out of a vision of the creation of a learning society in the United Kingdom (chapter 1); a review of developments in higher education since the Robbins report (chapter 3) and a survey of the wider context of higher education (chapter 4). The placing of the chapter on aims and purposes is significant. It is clearly intended to be informed by the previous chapters, particularly the one on the wider context: in this report the question of value for money is important.

Considering aims and purposes, the report refers back to the Robbins report. It then notes a consultation exercise undertaken by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in 1994,

which invited views on what changes to the Robbins's aims were needed in the light of modern circumstances. (Dearing 1997: para 5.8)

In the light of the results of this exercise, the Education Departments offered the Dearing Committee a list of objectives for higher education:

- imparting employment skills;
- providing opportunities for adult lifetime learning to enable individuals, employers and the nation as a whole to adapt to changing circumstances;
- promoting the general powers of the mind;
- advancing learning and research
- promoting culture and high standards in all aspects of society;
- serving local and regional communities, as well as national interest at home and abroad. (*ibid.*: para 5.9)

Having quoted this advice, the Committee sets out its own list:

The four main purposes of higher education are:

- to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest possible potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well-equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment;
- to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their applications for the benefit of the economy and society;
- to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels;
- to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society. (para 5.11)

In the next chapter we shall compare the aims and purposes of higher education as seen by the Robbins Committee in 1963 with those listed above from the report of the Dearing Committee. For the moment it is instructive to compare the two lists quoted above. We note immediately a difference of emphasis. In the Education Departments' advice pride of place is given, bluntly, to employment skills: not to skills relevant to the division of labour, as in Robbins, nor to capabilities making people well-equipped for work as in Dearing, but employment skills. This is immediately followed by a reference to adult lifetime learning and the need to adapt to changing circumstances. The emphasis is firmly on learning for employment, and there is no mention in this list of objectives for higher education of knowledge or understanding. Despite the later references to general powers of the mind and culture, the Education Departments' list has a strong feel of instrumentalism about it.

This emphasis reflects the conditions under which the Dearing Committee was appointed and the pressures on it. There was considerable government concern about 'value for money'

from the expenditure of public funds. The terms of reference of the Committee include as a principle to which the Committee should have regard

value for money and cost-effectiveness should be obtained in the use of resources (Dearing 1997: 3)

In the case of higher education this concern could be focused in two principal questions: was the state getting value for money from its investment in higher education? were students getting value for money from higher education? One major measure of value for money in both cases was, in government eyes, the employability of graduates and the contribution of higher education to the economy. Hence the Committee's terms of reference required it to have regard to the principle that

learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs and include the development of general skills, widely valued in employment (*ibid.*)

and of course the Education Departments' evidence to the Committee reinforces this. While trying to avoid such crude measures of value for money, the Dearing Committee nevertheless had to take the prevailing climate into account, and operate within its terms of reference, so its report shows a marked emphasis on matters related to the employment of degree holders, graduate and postgraduate.

However, the Committee was careful to insist that there could be no simple separation between skills, knowledge and understanding. All are required if people are to be properly equipped for employment. The Committee declares

The single most important capacity employers seek in those with higher education qualifications is intellectual capabilities of a high order. We take the view that any programme of study in higher education should have as one of its primary intentions the development of higher intellectual skills, knowledge and understanding in its students. We believe there is intrinsic merit in this aim because it both empowers the individual – giving satisfaction and self-esteem as personal potential is realised – and because the development of the general powers of the mind underpins the development of many of the other generic skills so valued by employers, and of importance throughout working life. (para 5.18)

In keeping with this, there is a description of what the Committee gathered from a research seminar on the distinctive elements in learning in higher education:

We heard that it [learning at the higher level] can be defined as the development of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in a range of situations. This requires information and the opportunity to engage in 'learning conversations' with staff and other students in order to understand and be able to

use new concepts in a particular field. A successful student will be able to engage in an effective discussion or debate with others in that field, relying on a common understanding of terms, assumptions, questions, modes of argument, and the body of evidence. Learning also involves acquiring skills, such as analysis and communication, but these in isolation do not constitute learning. (para. 8.6)

In a later chapter the Report identifies four skills which the Committee saw as

key to the future success of graduates whatever they intend to do later in life.

These four are:

- communication skills;
- numeracy;
- the use of information technology
- learning how to learn.

...We believe that these **key skills** are relevant throughout life, not simply in employment. (paras 9.17. and 9.18, emphasis original)

Not only did the Committee look for these four key skills to be present in every programme, it also endorsed the idea of a greater breadth to degree study. Looking back to the Robbins Report, the Committee says

The breadth of programmes was a particular theme for the Robbins Committee. It felt that higher education was constrained by a tradition of relatively narrow educational experiences, and that its requirements drove a similarly narrow focus in the education system. We believe that, while many students will continue to welcome the opportunity to pursue a relatively narrow field of knowledge in great depth, there will be many others for whom this will be neither attractive, nor useful in future career terms, nor suitable. (para. 9.3)

Further:

We believe that introducing breadth more extensively would assist students to respond to the social, economic, and cultural changes they will be facing throughout their lives by assisting them to think divergently and to integrate information and knowledge from a variety of sources. (para. 9.8)

For the Dearing Committee the way forward was to provide a diverse range of programmes, offering choice and flexibility to students, while maintaining standards. The Committee felt that the development of modular courses would help in creating broad and flexible study programmes. However this is not a licence for students to study anything in any combination they choose: not only did the Committee feel that

choice and flexibility must be constrained by coherence (para 9.9)

but they also noted

For Robbins, it was not breadth for its own sake which was important, but breadth reflecting long-established and natural groupings of subjects, or new combinations with recognisably organic connections. This is increasingly important as connections across disciplines become more apparent. (para. 9.7)

Thus both disciplinary specialism and inter-disciplinary breadth are to be encouraged, but the Committee is clear about the changes this will entail for higher education:

To be able to work closely with industry, broadly defined, and to ensure that graduates can contribute effectively, the conventional organisation of knowledge and teaching in major areas may need to be transformed. Activities which cross traditional boundaries will become more important. Institutions will need to be more flexible in the way they organise their resources and in their organisational structure. programmes will need to give students the opportunities and skills to work across disciplines and to develop generic or transferable skills which are valuable in many contexts. (para. 4.32)

On the theme of skills and knowledge, the Committee noted that

Some of the employers who responded to our survey identified quite specific areas where they felt they had immediate difficulties in finding graduates. There are many others for whom the subject of study is much less significant. Many employers are concerned less with the subject studied than the skills and attributes of the individual, as developed by their higher education studies. Of course, for individuals, employment prospects may be an important factor in their choice of study, but there will be others, including intellectual excitement and intrinsic satisfaction. (para. 6.48)

Given greater breadth, can we still expect the same academic depth? The Committee thought not, but did not see this as a problem. As we have seen, they were happy to endorse the idea of different programmes at different depths for different students. They advocated a framework of qualifications which included recognition of work at sub-degree level (Chapter 10) and they stated that higher education institutions

need to recognise more consistently that individuals need to be equipped in their initial higher education with the knowledge, skills and understanding which they can use as a basis to secure further knowledge and skills. (para. 4.14)

As part of the equipping process, the Committee advocated greater opportunities for students to undertake work experience during their period of study (Recommendations 18 and 19, paras. 9.31 to 9.36).

Interestingly the Committee argued that many students do not want a full degree programme. It expected much of the expansion of higher education to take place at sub-degree level, with many more 'stopping-off points with real value' below first degree level (para. 6.52). This

expectation is reflected in the suggestions for a qualifications framework (Chapter 10). For the Committee an important aspect of this sub-degree level education is that it offers greater opportunities for part-time study and for those who wish to take their higher education in small pieces at intervals.

The emphasis on part-time opportunities is part of the Report's advocacy of lifelong learning in a learning society (paras. 1.10 to 1.17). Many more people, the Committee asserts, will want to combine study with work; more significantly, they will want to build qualifications through short courses, possibly using a variety of providers (para. 4.26). Students will take responsibility for their own learning and create their own pathways to knowledge. (para. 4.22). The development of lifelong learning will offer a greater role to continuing education (*ibid.*). It will also involve institutions in

guiding and enabling students to be effective learners, to understand their own learning styles, and to manage their own learning. We see this as not only directly relevant to enhancing the quality of their learning while in higher education, but also to equipping them to be effective lifelong learners. Staff will increasingly be engaged in the management of students' learning, using a range of appropriate strategies. (para. 8.15),

The final sentence in the above extract draws out attention to another consequence of the development of lifelong learning advocated in the Report. With more part-time and mature students in higher education, there will inevitably be changes in the relationship between students and institutions, students and staff, and students and other students. We have already noted the Committee's endorsement of 'learning conversations' to help students develop knowledge and understanding. This is reinforced by the claim that

we do not believe that students will in the future see themselves simply as customers of higher education but rather as members of a learning community (para. 4.59)

This is as close as the Committee goes to a comment on the traditional idea of collegial scholarship: it seems to want the best aspects of the community of scholarship, while reducing in importance many of the features of higher education, such as residence, which supported that community. It is significant that the Report makes a clear link between high quality teaching, research and scholarship (para. 8.58) and insists that scholarship is part of the mission of higher education, though it does not say exactly what it means by scholarship. One mark of the linking of these three areas, is the note that one prime duty of higher education is the training of future researchers: but even here, it is noted that research training should include the development of professional skills, including

the ability to operate effectively in a commercial environment, to be able to communicate ideas in writing and to a variety of audiences, to work effectively in teams as well as independently, and to develop high level planning and self-management skills. (para. 11.84)

It is interesting for our purposes to note the Report's views on the culture of higher education:

At the heart of our vision of higher education is the free-standing institution, which offers teaching to the highest level in an environment of scholarship and independent enquiry. (para. 1.22)

Further, amongst the things U.K. higher education must do is

sustain a culture which demands disciplined thinking, encourages curiosity, challenges existing ideas and generates new ones (para. 1,4)

In the Committee's view, there are:

values shared throughout higher education and without which higher education, as we understand it, could not exist. Such values include:

- a commitment to the pursuit of truth;
- a responsibility to share knowledge;
- freedom of thought and expression;
- analysing evidence rigorously and using reasoned argument to reach a conclusion;
- a willingness to listen to alternative views and judge them on their merits;
- taking account of how one's own arguments will be perceived by others;
- a commitment to consider the ethical implications of different findings or practices.

These are values higher education can, and should, share with students. (paras. 5.39 and 5.40)

Elsewhere (para. 4.61) the Committee notes that there is great debate about what cultural values higher education should seek to transmit, but suggests that the transmission of some of the values listed above will be of benefit to society. However, the Committee sees less of a role for higher education in transmitting a common culture than when the Robbins Committee reported:

partly because cultures within the U.K. have become more diverse, and partly because there are so many other forms of cultural transmission available through the mass media. But this reinforces the need for higher education to preserve and transmit those forms and aspects of culture which may be, for the time being, unfashionable or in danger of being overwhelmed by the majority culture. (para. 5.46; see also para. 4.51)

We have quoted extensively from the Dearing Committee's Report in order to illustrate how the Committee's vision of higher education relates to our interest in conceptions of education.

Even so, much of the Report has not been considered here because it covers many topics which, while having implications for implementing conceptions of education, lie outside the immediate scope of our consideration. It is time to try to draw together the strands and delineate the conception (or conceptions) of education implicit in the Report

First we note the dominant role in the Report of the individual learner. Not only is the learner to be placed at the centre of the learning process (para. 3.55), it is the learner as individual who is in view. It is the needs, requirements and aspirations of the individual learner which are to shape the forms of provision of higher education, and there is considerable emphasis in the Report on the provision of information to allow students and prospective students to make informed choices.

Nevertheless, the content of higher education provision is shaped by other requirements. In the Committee's conception, the aim of education in higher education is the preparation of the individual to serve the community, principally but not exclusively in economic ways, through the development of knowledge and skills. These include the development of skills relating to how to learn and attitudes which make lifelong learning a central part of an individual's self-perception.

This education will be made available to everyone who can qualify for it, by whatever means. Its content will be primarily academic and disciplinary, but it will have greater breadth than previously and will include the development of skills.

Much of the learning will be done independently, making use if information technology, with the higher education institutions and staff acting as a resource and service, helping the student to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.

The vision of knowledge in this Report is essentially that of unified disciplinary knowledge, with specific disciplinary areas studied in depth, linked into teaching through research. However, the interdisciplinary nature of much of the application of knowledge is recognised.

Finally there is an emphasis on lifelong learning and on mature students, part-time study and discontinuous study which nevertheless leads to recognised qualifications. All these ideas relate to the themes of lifelong learning, networked learning, adultification and massification. We shall explore briefly the conceptions of education underlying these ideas before linking these conceptions to our earlier work.

Lifelong learning

One of the features of recent literature on higher education and continuing education is the growth in references to lifelong learning. The phrase recurs again and again in all kinds of writings, including government documents, academic books and articles, and the popular press. We have seen that it occurs frequently in the Dearing Report, together with the phrase 'the learning society'. For all the multitude of references, it is not at all clear what exactly lifelong learning means for higher education, or even for continuing education within higher education, despite the claims of the latter.

The phrase 'lifelong learning' has a substantial history. It is significant that its acceptance in Britain as common currency follows on the adoption of the phrase by the European Community, with consequent implications for the writing of bids for funding for research projects. However, the ideas which the phrase encapsulates have a long history in Britain too. Over the last forty years in particular these ideas surfaced from time to time under titles like recurrent education, continuing learning, and continuing education.

The main theme of these formulations of lifelong learning in the past was that education is a process which can be taken up at any point in a person's life and never ends. Proponents of this idea were found across the spectrum of adult education provision, encouraging those who had given up on education to try again, and those who had taken advantage of educational opportunities to go further or move in new directions. It was recognised that learning was not only a benefit to the individual, in widening horizons and keeping people intellectually active, but that it could also benefit the community, giving people new skills, new ways of engaging with the community and new perspectives on being a citizen.

This approach is captured by the definition of lifetime learning offered by the European Lifelong Learning Initiative:

a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will need throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments (quoted in Gibbs *et al.* 1997: 6)

As Gibbs and his collaborators comment, this definition is all embracing. For their work on a project with the people of Derbyshire, they preferred

the development of a positive attitude towards a continuous process of personal learning at all ages which is relevant, appropriate and contributes to leading a full and rewarding life. (*ibid.*)

The emphasis here is still on personal learning, but the personal learning is carefully linked to the leading of a full and rewarding life, which was expected to have a strong communal element.

Major factors in the renewed interest in lifelong learning or lifetime learning as defined by Gibbs *et al.* (and many others) are the increased life expectancy of people in economically advanced countries, such as those of Europe, the greater complexities of modern life, and the speed of change, particularly in technology in the modern world. Taken together these are seen to indicate that formal schooling can no longer be expected to equip people with all the knowledge and skills they will need throughout a longer life in a changing world. Everyone, it is said, will need to go on learning throughout life.

However, the recurrent economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s focused attention particularly on the idea that the demands of industry in the modern world required a workforce which is constantly developing its skills and learning new skills in order to cope with advances in technology and ideas. As three Secretaries of State put it in 1995

Creating a culture of lifetime learning is crucial to sustaining and maintaining our international competitiveness. Technological change will dominate the working lifetimes of those now in work, and we must be in a position to adapt. At the individual level, our personal competitiveness will have a major effect on our prosperity. (DFEE 1995: preface)

This was not only a government concern. Gibbs *et al* quote from a TUC document also published in late 1995:

If Britain is to remain competitive there is a need to raise the standards of education and training of our young people and also promote lifelong learning for the workforce as a whole (quoted in Gibbs *et al* 1997, frontispiece)

The Government consultation document of 1995 did refer to other benefits of lifetime learning

However, lifetime learning is not just about the economy and competitiveness. It is also crucial to our national culture and quality of life. For older people in particular, participation in education and training represents a major way in which they can contribute to the life of the community. (DFEE 1995: preface)

Even here, there is no reference to the ideas of stretching the mind or learning for learning's sake which had informed previous ideas of education throughout life. The emphasis is on learning as instrumental, and the economic benefits are all important. We have already noted this emphasis in the Department of Education and Science evidence to the Dearing Committee. One consequence of this emphasis has been that much of the subsequent discussion of lifetime learning has concentrated on the provision of basic skills or vocational skills or what have come to be called 'transferable skills'. Partly because of this concentration on skills, many in higher education have felt able to largely ignore the discussion, claiming that their business is with knowledge and understanding, not skills. Even that position has been challenged, as more and more attention has been paid to the so-called knowledge economy and the demand for skills in the handling of information and knowledge.

One mark of the confusions surrounding lifelong learning is the frequency with which skills in handling information and skills in handling knowledge are not distinguished, but are thrown together with skills in relating to people and skills in collaborative working as an all-embracing package of higher-level transferable skills required in the modern knowledge-based economy. These higher-level transferable skills are then said to be the business of higher education, in direct challenge to those in higher education who abhor all talk of skills.

Government calls for the development of lifelong learning have included specific calls for widening participation in higher education. Echoing a running theme of the whole period of our review, politicians and social activists of all kinds have demanded that higher education take more mature students, more students who lack traditional entry qualifications and more students from ethnic minorities. So far the evidence is that higher education is moving very slowly in these directions, though recent moves (1999) by the funding councils to earmark some small amounts of money to support initiatives in these directions may concentrate minds.

It is clear already from this discussion that the view of lifelong learning which emphasises skills and vocational benefits echoes ideas of continuing professional development which have been around for a very long time, and which we examined above in chapter four. As we noted there, the professions have always insisted on a professional duty to remain abreast of developments in one's professional field, and have encouraged the provision of courses for that purpose. Is lifelong learning simply a way of extending that professional approach to the whole workforce?

Certainly the idea of lifelong learning links with the professional duty of staying abreast of developments. However, the emphasis in current discussion of lifelong learning is on the need to change and adapt: the workforce is not merely required to stay abreast of developments in a field, it is being called on to learn new skills, develop new knowledge, enter new fields, and to do so on a regular basis. While continuing professional development assumes a base of professional knowledge which needs regular updating, lifelong learning in the Government's presentation assumes that employees will need to change bases several times. This emphasis was strong in the documents produced by the Conservative administrations of the early and mid 1990s: but it is still strong in the pronouncements of the Labour administration which took office in 1997.

On this view of lifelong learning, change is more significant than progress. A learner must learn how to adapt quickly to new situations, how to acquire quickly new skills, how to deploy quickly new knowledge: not only is there more stress on learning to learn than on the content of the learning, there is no sense that any of the learning is progressive. In many, perhaps most, cases of learning the only continuity from one learning situation to another will be the habits of thought acquired by the learner, and even they may in some cases be a hindrance. Though there is an insistence that learning never ends, what is learned is a series of discrete elements. The idea of building knowledge and skills progressively has gone. We shall consider in a moment how this view of learning is incorporated in a conception of education.

First we must note a further aspect of lifelong learning which seemed to be accepted on all sides in the 1990s, the insistence that students take responsibility for their own learning. The Government consultation document of 1995 was clear about this. Citing the need for rapid adjustments in the labour market to cope with technological developments, the document says:

These significant features and changes also make it less likely that employers (despite an overall rapid growth in training effort) will do sufficient training to meet all the skill levels required by individuals. The balance of responsibility for investment in skills will shift more towards individuals. (DFEE 1995: 20)

and

research shows that individuals buying their own training are more likely than employers to invest in longer courses and to aim for qualifications. (*ibid.*)

These words were echoed in 1998 in the Labour administration's document *The Learning Age*:

We cannot force anyone to learn – individuals must take that responsibility themselves – but we can help those who want to develop a thirst for knowledge. Together we can create a culture of self-improvement and a love of learning where if people want to get on, their first instinct is to improve their skills and education. (DFEE 1998: 13)

Further, taking responsibility for one's own learning is now required by professions, some of which now supplement the idea of a professional duty to engage in continuing professional development with regulations that make continuing professional registration conditional on the provision of evidence of regular and sustained participation in continuing professional education. Some large companies also require their professional employees to demonstrate their commitment to their own professional development, even on an annual basis (Stephenson and Yorke 1998: 8)). In the context of this study, it is interesting to note that the newly-established Institute for Learning and Teaching, which seeks to establish itself as a professional body for teachers in higher education, is proposing a three-year membership cycle, with renewal dependent of evidence of continuing professional development (ILT 1999).

The idea of taking responsibility for one's own learning interpreted in this way as responsibility for the acquisition of appropriate skills and knowledge links with other ideas we have already examined. One is the suggestion that independent learning is part of the necessary formation of the character of higher education graduates. Another is that people learn best by doing; so they will learn best by going and finding out for themselves. This links with the idea that in taking responsibility for one's own learning, one is able to set the learning agenda, to make the learning 'really useful', appropriate to one's situation. From adult education comes the idea that mature students need to take responsibility for their learning as they take responsibility in other fields: if the number of mature students is growing, and even traditional teenage students are being treated more as adults, there is clear scope for increasing the students' responsibility for their own learning.

Finally there is an important element here which should not be overlooked of the post-modern, post-foundational challenge to the unity of knowledge. If knowledge is not universal and certain and seamless, but is socially constructed and relational and relative, then why not let people take control of what they learn and put it together in their own way? This leads, as we have seen, to a conception of education as the collecting of knowledge and information,

loosely held together in a framework which owes much to the life history of the person concerned.

Letting – or making - students take responsibility for their own learning is easily linked with ideas of independent learning, a currently fashionable idea of great interest to managers and administrators and some teaching staff in higher education. For managers and administrators, independent learning suggests individual learning, with the prospect of doing away with lectures, seminars, tutorials and other meetings of teachers and learners. Instead, everything the student needs can be made available by electronic means. Some academics too welcome the escape from teaching in order to pursue the research which is required of them, and which for many of them is of greater interest.

We shall examine in a later section some of the ideas associated with learning using information technology. Here we note that what is missing in these extreme visions of independent learning is the kind of interaction which stimulates the enquiring mind and pushes people into moving outside their personal frameworks. In all the conceptions of education in higher education we have examined thus far, the element of expanding personal horizons through interaction with others has been present.

This contrast brings out one of the key questions about the view of lifelong learning taking shape in the current discussion: is such learning to be seen as education? It seems clear that, despite some references in the documents from which we have quoted to the thirst for knowledge and the development of a love of learning, the aim of education in this view is the acquisition of employment-related skills and knowledge. Knowledge seems to be more to do with collections of information for problem-solving than with understanding. The primary benefit of education is increased (or continuing) employability, though again there are nods in the direction of gaining skills and knowledge to benefit the community. While this education is said to be needed by everyone, the focus on skills and knowledge for employment means that the provision of education is heavily biased towards those in employment, or preparing to enter employment as a result of finishing their formal schooling, coming to end of a 'career break' or being jobseekers, to use a government euphemism for the unemployed. Lifelong learning seems to be equated mainly with working-life-long learning.

As we have already noted there is great emphasis on learning, but little idea of the structure or progression of learning. Much is made in government documents and the brochures of education providers of the framework of qualifications within which lifelong learning is set, and these qualifications do give some structure to the learning. However, many of the

qualifications are based on the measurement of skills outcomes which are not always appropriate to higher education.

Thus the conception of education underlying lifelong learning as currently discussed is more appropriate to other levels of education than higher education. This is perhaps one reason why there is very little clarity about the meaning of lifelong learning for higher education. We have noted the pressure for widening participation. But if wider participation simply leads to non-traditional students being forced into the mould of traditional learning, the result will be to put them off lifelong learning: exactly the opposite of what is sought.

Adultification

The main idea behind this rather ugly term is that the theory, practice and ethos of continuing education are spreading throughout the higher education system, changing that system for the better and making redundant separate or dedicated provision for adult or continuing education. This idea is advanced strongly in Chris Duke's book *The Learning University* (1992), subtitled *towards a new paradigm*. Duke and several collaborators followed this up with *The Adult University* (1999), in which they reported on research into access to and participation in higher education by mature students. The second book thus provides some measure of the extent to which the hopes and expectations expressed by Duke in 1992 had been realised by the end of the decade.

We may express the chief idea of adultification as the aim that every department in every university will be structured to provide continuing education for mature students. There will still be younger, traditional students: but with adultification the emphasis will be on provision designed for mature students. The structure, content, delivery and assessment of courses will be largely determined by the requirements and expectations of mature students rather than those of younger students or academic staff.

Such a change in focus is significant enough for Duke to refer to it as creating a new paradigm for our understanding of the nature of the university. The new paradigm is that of the lifelong learning centre, as opposed to the older metaphor of the ivory tower with its echoes of monastic detachment and ascetic poverty (Duke 1992: 112). In the lifelong learning centre paradigm the university becomes a learning resource centre for the learning society. Students, or consumers, come and go, taking up what they require at any particular instance from the menu of modular courses on offer, while the role of academics is to service the needs of the community. Of course, the academics will be involved in research, so that

the service they offer is informed by the latest advances in knowledge; and of course the academics will continue to have a role as critical observers of society. However the main role of the academic community in the lifelong learning centre is to act as an intellectual resource and provide a knowledge base to meet the changing needs of a rapidly changing world.

Both the books referred to above chart the pressures on higher education which, in the authors' view, are producing a majority in the system of mature students. They chart too some of the organisational and institutional changes required to cope with this development, and *The Adult University* explores the extent to which these changes have taken place. In both books there is a clear recognition that adultification is occurring very slowly: the culture of higher education is still shaped by the values of an older elite system, and by the perceived requirements of traditional young full-time undergraduates.

It is not germane to our purpose to ask whether or not Duke and his collaborators are correct in their perception that the adultification of the university is taking place, is being blocked or is inevitable. Nor do we need to examine directly the various antecedent and attendant changes, for example in finance, organisation and culture which they discuss. Our interest is in what kind of education they conceive of being offered in the adult university.

Some clues are provided in the following paragraph describing the adultification of the university:

More than half of those in HE in many modern systems are adults in the sense of having left full-time education for other roles before returning later to full- or part-time study. Such students commonly combine study with other major life-roles: work, family and community. Their dedication to the business of being a student is less exclusive. On the other hand their occupancy of the student role may be more single-minded and purposeful: getting a degree, not living the life of a student who is growing up. Adults are often described for this reason as better students, but they are also less amenable to the direction and the socialisation which the traditional, especially the residential, university may value. The functions of social and cultural transmission are muted. It is less easy to turn a mature-age person than a more malleable youngster into an archetypal doctor, research scientist or lawyer (Bourgeois *et al.* 1999: 17 – 18).

The clues in this extract can be supplemented from the reports of empirical research in *The Adult University* and the authors' commentary on their research findings to establish some idea of the education to be offered in this adult university.

Clearly the new system will be much less selective than the old. More students will come into higher education through access routes or with qualifications such as GNVQs rather than the

traditional academic 'gold standard' of 'A' levels. Some, perhaps an increasing number, will be accepted on the basis of accredited prior learning (APL) or even accredited prior experiential learning (APEL), thus being given academic recognition for their post-school experience. Not only will this widen the social base of the student body, it will alter the academic base. Expectations about what incoming students know and the academic skills they can deploy will have to change, with consequent effects on the content and teaching methods of courses offered, at least in the first year of study. The whole university will thus be in the situation of university liberal adult education before the imposition of widespread accreditation of courses.

More students will be part-time and non-residential. Thus institutions will lose the kind of social intimacy associated with the older system. This could mean less informal interchange, social and academic, between students or between students and staff. There will be a greater concentration on lectures and seminars, for two reasons. One is that part-time students with many other commitments have less time to devote to their studies, so they wish to cram in as much as possible and see lectures and seminars as a way of quickly gaining access to knowledge. Secondly, lectures and seminars provide fixed and visible points at which the part-time, non-residential student can feel part of the academic community, part of the university, a real student. This self-perception is particularly important for those grasping a second chance to extend their education.

Seminars, lectures and tutorials also provide access to the expertise of academic staff. Mature students seem hesitant to approach members of staff for advice or assistance, and even more hesitant about engaging in informal academic discussion with them. The reasons for this are complex and obscure, but the effect is to make formal face to face contact an important event, which no amount of contact by other means can replace.

In seminars and in their work, students will deploy more life experience, which will have to be taken into account by the staff. At the same time, some students may need help in standing back from their experience and generalising about it. Thus the conception of education being invoked involves the idea of general principles derived by critical reflection, albeit reflection on life experience as well as on academic abstractions and discourses.

Students will be much more focused in their expectations. They will want courses which are relevant to the world in which they are working, or not working, and will enhance their job and career prospects. Many of them will have or develop a love of learning, and some of them will thirst to learn as much as they can, for many 'second chance' students are very

conscious of the opportunity which is theirs and are determined not to waste a moment. However, the desire for career enhancement will be the dominant motive in their choice of courses and modules within courses.

Students will seek knowledge. This will still be largely disciplinary knowledge, partly because that appears to be what career enhancement requires, and partly because that is the way the university is organised. Mature students are less interested in challenging the system than in using it. The idea of exploration beyond the discipline, or even beyond the requirements of assessment, will be seen as nice, but not necessary and not possible within the time constraints.

Although mature students are more interested in using the system than challenging it, they are far more conscious and critical of the shortcomings of the system. Lectures which do not deliver knowledge clearly and concisely, instructions about assessment which are not clear, and notes and booklists which are unhelpful are all criticised on the grounds that they waste valuable time. Further, mature students demand transparent and transparently equitable systems of evaluation.

While much of this is written from the perspective of students and their expectations, it is supported by the views of academics. Staff expect to have to help mature students more, particularly in their efforts to generalise from experience. Staff expect to have to modify course content and teaching methods to give more room for the discussion of life experience. They accept that mature students have different goals and requirements from their other students. However, there is little hint in any of the material presented by Bourgeois *et al* that the academic staff see much need to change the pattern of lecture, seminar and tutorial, or a need to review the dominance of disciplinary knowledge.

On the face of it we have here a conception of education which marries some of the emphases of a liberal conception with some of the emphases of what in chapter three we called a professional conception. On the one hand there is a demand for the face to face academic interchange as a means of learning which we saw as one of the hallmarks of the liberal view from Newman onwards. This is coupled with a focus on knowledge organised according to academic criteria and transmitted from expert to novice. On the other hand there is an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge required by authorities external to the academic community, the employers of the future, and on judging academic provision in terms of its ability to deliver the required certification. The liberal ideal of love of learning and a wide

academic experience is married uneasily to the instrumental goal of gaining an advantage on the employment treadmill.

On this view, the conception of education underpinning adultification is that of the liberal adult education sector of university continuing education as the sector moved to accredit its provision. There is the same uneasy marriage of the liberal views of staff and institutions and the more vocational concerns of students. This is not surprising, since we noted that in advocating adultification, Duke expected that the best practice of continuing education would inform the mainstream of the university, to the benefit of the latter. However, the conception of education outlined here is not the conception of education underpinning the work of continuing education departments in the late 1990s. In particular, it has lost the focus on the particular requirements of adults in terms of adult learning, as distinct from matters of timetabling and access, which marked the best practice of continuing education.

Despite Duke's vision of the lifelong learning centre, the conception of education underpinning adultification is shaped by a liberal view of education which is recognisably that of Newman. Some concession have been made to the goals of mature students, but the main thrust is that mature students must be accommodated within a system designed to educate those who can dedicate themselves full-time to learning. Moreover, despite the pious words about access and non-traditional qualifications, the conception of education outlined here makes little or no concession in practice to the variety of educational backgrounds of students in the adult university: those who are not up to the gold standard will be given some extra help, but the standard remains, simply because the dominance of academic disciplines requires it.

Massification

As already noted, this ugly term refers to the great expansion in the numbers of students in higher education during the 1990s, and the accompanying claim that this expansion has brought about an irreversible shift from an elite system of higher education to a mass system. This phenomenon and its implications were explored by Peter Scott in a much-quoted book, *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education* published in 1995, which provides a convenient starting point for our consideration.

Scott acknowledges from the start of his book that the idea of an elite-mass shift in higher education is derived from studies of the American system and is in many ways inappropriate for a study of the British system. This is partly because of the historical characteristics of

British universities, and partly because one simple idea will not suffice to explain or understand the many changes taking place in British higher education. Nevertheless, Scott regards the elite-mass transformation as a useful framework for trying to understand admittedly complex changes.

We should note that there are at least two different, but related, senses in which the British higher education sector has been elitist in Scott's terms. One is to do with its academic culture, the other to do with the role of universities and their graduates in society.

The academic culture is seen as elitist because the academic community is self-governing and self-selecting. Self-governance, also often described as autonomy and defended as essential for academic freedom, allows universities and their dons in particular to lay down the criteria by which their activities are judged: it is the academic community which decides what shall count as academic study and the criteria for determining academic success and failure. Academics control entrance to academia, they control what is taught and how it is taught, and they control the award of the degrees which indicate academic achievement. Thus the community becomes self-selecting and self-perpetuating, and hence elitist in the sense that it is not open to all nor transparent in its operations.

The second form of elitism is related to the first in that positions of influence in society tend to be occupied by graduates, particularly of the old established universities. These choose similar graduates to follow in their footsteps, and protect and promote the elitist system in which they themselves were educated. They share a common culture, transmitted through the university system, and they remain exclusive, since entry to their ranks requires following in their university footsteps.

Of course these charges of elitism are not new. In many ways they echo the charges of those who formed radical conceptions of higher education in earlier decades, as we saw in chapter five. However, Scott's purpose is not simply to rehearse old charges, but to suggest that these forms of elitism cannot survive in a mass higher education system. For in a mass system, according to Scott, both the autonomy and the hold on positions of influence in society of academics and their graduates are destroyed.

One obvious reason for this, he claims, is that a larger number of students inevitably means a greater range of social backgrounds and a greater number of mature students with different experience of life from the mainly middle and upper class students of previous generations. These new students have a different view of education from their predecessors. For them,

higher education is not simply the next stage in growing up, it is a means of acquiring the skills and accreditation which will lead to improved career prospects. These new students are also consumers, and see themselves as such. They demand that universities satisfy their needs, for course which are relevant to jobs rather than academic disciplines, for teaching at times which fit in with their other commitments, for assessment which is transparent and equitable, and so on. The consumer orientation of these students is enhanced by the fact that they are paying for their education.

Another reason, according to Scott, for the inevitable demise of elitism is that the universities are being forced to become more accountable. Not only are their students demanding value for money, the institutions are becoming more and more dependent on public funding which is now tied to ideas of value for money. The universities now have to account for their activities and show that they are delivering promised outcomes, in a way that was not true in earlier years.

A third reason for the demise of elitism is that the intellectual certainties which undergirded academic autonomy are being eroded. Universities are not the only creators of knowledge in the modern world, nor the only disseminators of knowledge. Consequently academics are losing the power to decide what counts as knowledge. Using information technology anyone can gain access to a variety of knowledge sources, and increasingly to knowledge offered and accredited by leading institutions. Thus academics are also losing the power to determine academic status through accreditation. A mass system of higher education, in Scott's view, is inevitably a democratic system. Interestingly, Scott claims that changes in the traditional view of academic knowledge are coming from within the academic community as much as from outside it (Scott 1995: 167).

These are some of the ways in which, in Scott's view, a mass system will bring about the demise of elitism in higher education. But what are the characteristics of a mass system? For Scott a mass system has two main characteristics: reflexivity and openness. He writes

The first, reflexivity, can be observed in the 'public' life of higher education, its political and organizational forms and its interaction with the wider socio-economic arena. The second characteristic, apparent in the 'private' knowledge-based world of higher education, is a shift from closed intellectual systems to open systems. In the former, the academic agenda is determined by the inner dynamics of disciplines and expressed through the professional activities of experts; in the latter, both cognitive values and social practices are shaped by transactions between knowledge producers and knowledge users, a partnership between academy and community (Scott 1995: 168)

Clearly both these characteristics, particularly the latter, might affect the conception of education offered. However, Scott does not deal directly with conceptions of education. He asserts that universities are fixed in old conceptions of education without describing those conceptions. He makes no attempt to delineate the conception of education underlying the mass system as he conceives it.

We may however draw out some elements of a conception of education implicit in Scott's work. The main aim of higher education in his view is to improve the career prospects of graduates through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. What knowledge, which skills are to be determined primarily by the requirements of employers and knowledge users. Knowledge is not organised according to academic disciplines, nor defined by academic criteria. The system is less selective, so the recipients of the education will be different, however it is not clear just how open the system can be. Teaching is carried out by accredited academics, but at a distance and with very little personal interaction.

Scott regards the changes he describes as inevitable. However, even in his own work there is some evidence to suggest that the creation of a system with greater numbers of students does not immediately or necessarily have the effects he suggests.

First, there is what is commonly called the 'academic drift' of the new universities, the old polytechnics. We should note that part of the increase in numbers to which Scott refers came about through the acquisition of university status by the Polytechnics in 1993 and their attempts, with Government encouragement, to expand. They drew on a different clientele from the old universities. Survey after survey coupled with anecdotal evidence suggests that the new universities are copying their established counterparts in the structure of degree programmes along disciplinary lines, in their selectivity, in their pursuit of academic excellence shown by research. They are offering their students a range of learning opportunities, but much less teaching; they are looking to recreate the intimate collegial atmosphere of their counterparts, even though they have many more students for whom this is a practical impossibility. Crucially, the new universities are structuring their programmes and their mission around the ideal young, single undergraduate who has been the staple of the older universities. Other students, mature, non-white, and so on are expected to fit into this pattern, even where they are in the majority.

Certainly there are some innovative course and approaches, some interdisciplinary courses which genuinely cross and even break boundaries, some institutions which are trying to structure their ways of working to suit their non-traditional students. But the overwhelming

idea of education is still that of knowledge being handed on from expert to novice in a collegiate atmosphere removed from the world. It should be noted that this is true even of professional education and vocationally oriented courses.

In short, massification does not seem yet to produce even the organisational effects claimed by Scott. It is easy of course to suggest, as Scott does, that a major reason for this is that academics still have too much power and autonomy, that they like a quiet life and so resist change, that they are too steeped in old traditions to accept change, even that they are too busy with research to worry about education. Whatever the truth of these charges, organisational change is linked to conceptual change, and the conception of education in higher education seems so far unaffected to any significant degree by massification.

Yet Scott is correct in suggesting that the older elite values of liberal education which dominated past conceptions of education in higher education are not sufficient to sustain higher education in a mass system. The implications of this observation will be explored in the concluding chapter.

Networked Learning

Networked learning is the term that has come to be used of learning using electronic information and communications technology, and in particular the facilities offered through the Internet, e-mail and the World Wide Web. While for some using the internet for teaching and learning means no more than encouraging students to use electronic databases and information sources for their essays, networked learning involves the development of courses which seek to take maximum advantage of the new media.

The use of computers, or, more recently, information technology, in higher education is not new. From the very earliest days of their development, computers have been used to help students develop expertise in computer programming and learn new computer languages. Disciplines such as mathematics, physics and engineering also quickly developed computer-assisted learning (CAL) packages in which computers are used to take students through structured exercises. More recently the general growth in the availability of personal computers, networks linking computers, and databases available to computer users has led to the use of information technology as a means of accessing material such as journal indices and, increasingly, journal articles.

In all these uses of information technology in higher education there has been little change in the conception of education being offered. The information technology has been seen as a tool, fast and flexible but essentially an adjunct to other means of teaching and learning. Information retrieval and learning exercises have been structured according to the demands of established academic disciplines and the teaching, learning and assessment strategies employed in face-to-face teaching in institutions.

However the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web have given students access to a very wide range of resources, and increased dramatically the potential pool of students for distance-learning courses. This has led to the development of courses specially designed to use information technology, as opposed to versions of existing courses in which existing material is simply made available through information technology. It is these new courses with their focus on computer mediated teaching and learning which suggest the possibility of a different conception of education.

One way in which a different conception of education might develop is through research in how people learn through computer mediated instruction. Research programmes are under way to explore areas such as how students actually use information technology in learning, the kinds of course material that are appropriate, the opportunities and problems of computer-based assessment, and similar topics. In none of these areas is there yet sufficient material to draw more other than tentative conclusions. Hence the effect of this research on conceptions of education is still awaited.

The other major way in which computer mediated learning may produce a different conception of education lies in the development of computer mediated conferencing. In computer mediated conferencing, a group of people communicate with each other using information technology, usually by e-mail. Effectively a multi-way conversation is in progress, with participants contributing asynchronously. Sometimes the conversation takes place in 'real time', with participants all having simultaneous access to the material and contributing immediately. More often, the material is available permanently and participants contribute by reading and adding to the material when they wish to.

This kind of computer mediated conferencing is in use in the Open University, and increasingly plays a part in courses developed for distance learning through information technology. There is a growing literature of research in this area, from which two aspects stand out as of interest from our perspective.

One is that developers of networked learning courses have found it necessary and desirable to include conferencing as part of their courses. This has come about partly because of the need to distinguish between information retrieval and education. It is one thing to give students instant and constant access to notes, journals and the like, and the skills to make use of these resources; it is another to claim to educate them. Typically, education is taken in such courses to involve both the acquiring of knowledge and gaining understanding. Understanding is taken to mean both that the student can relate items of knowledge to one another and to their context, and that the knowledge gained can be deployed in different contexts. The difficulty lies in the creation of understanding when the student is working alone without explicit reference to tutors or experts and without all the contextual cues which are part of face-to-face dialogue.

In overcoming these problems, developers of networked learning courses have adopted a view of learning as social, and moved in the direction of making collaborative working a key element of their strategy. Networked learning courses typically include a requirement that students engage with others through computer mediated conferencing and/or group work projects conducted by means of computer mediated conferencing. Computer mediated conferencing is claimed then to offer individual learning which arises from the experience of working together in a group. Anthony Kaye puts it thus:

we use the term collaborative learning to mean the *acquisition by individuals of knowledge, skills, or attitudes occurring as the result of group interaction*, or put more tersely, *individual learning as a result of group process*. (Kaye 1992: 4, italics original)

Through collaborative working students are compelled to take account of different perspectives from their own, and hence are able to discover what they have learnt and to develop understanding. The missing contextual cues are provided to some extent by the communication with other participants in the conversation. Since information technology allows any participant to present any image of themselves they wish, the contextual clues may be misleading: but that also may be part of the learning process.

One problem in computer mediated conferencing is the role of the tutor. All such conferences are moderated by someone, usually a course tutor, who offers advice and comment, restrains students who try to dominate, encourages those who are shy, and, in most cases, acts as filter to ensure that material in the conversation is acceptable, to the institution as well as in legal terms. However, there is some evidence to suggest that contributions by the tutor/moderator

are given more weight than those of others, which raises for some questions about the extent to which this is really collaborative learning (Kaye 1992: 12).

The other significant element of computer mediated conferencing is that, for some, it incorporates an approach to knowledge which challenges the standard view in academic circles. For example, David McConnell sees computer mediated communication as engaging in praxis based on the idea that knowledge is a process of engagement with reality (McConnell 1991: 53). More generally, computer mediated conferencing is underpinned by the view that knowledge is created through the interaction of the participants in a dialogue. Since information technology makes the dialogue fast and widely accessible, a great deal of new, contextually related knowledge can apparently be created very quickly.

In more traditional academic circles, such an approach to knowledge raises problems of acceptance, assessment and accreditation. Computer mediated conferencing thus sits rather uneasily within the teaching and learning strategies of higher education, and networked learning course developers are proceeding very cautiously in their efforts to push back the boundaries of what is academically acceptable.

From our perspective the tensions generated by these two aspects of computer mediated conferencing (the insistence on learning as social and knowledge as created) are significant because they point to the associated tensions in conceptions of education underlying networked learning.

On the one hand many developers in networked learning, and more generally in distance education using information technology, are content to work within traditional conceptions of education, with knowledge structured according to academic disciplines and delivered by experts to novices. For such developers, networked learning offers the opportunity to widen access to higher education, to deliver higher education more efficiently and perhaps to extend the ways of learning available to students. Such developers are working within existing conceptions of education in higher education, with perhaps some slight amendments in the area of who is being educated.

For others, networked learning offers the opportunity, and even the necessity, to challenge and change significant elements of current conceptions of education. Most importantly, as we have seen, there is the challenge to the underlying conception of knowledge and to the idea of individual learning. However, if the ideas of knowledge as socially created and learning as primarily social are accepted, there follow challenges to the conception of academic

disciplines: for socially created knowledge is highly likely to be inter-disciplinary in nature and structured according to the interests of the student or, in social learning circles, the interests of the group currently involved. There is also an implied challenge to the hierarchical understanding of knowledge transmission: in computer mediated conferencing, for some, the emphasis is on democratic participation with no division into expert and novice (Kaye 1992: 7). We noted above the tensions about the role of the tutor/mediator in computer mediated conferencing.

Thus if the views of some developers are taken seriously, networked learning, and in particular computer mediated conferencing, potentially challenges major elements of the conception of education in higher education. Drawing on the previous three chapters we can see that the challenges to the conceptions of education arising here echo elements of other conceptions of education. The ideas of created knowledge and social learning are found in radical views and in some of the adult education work, especially in community related work. There too we can see the idea of the demise of intellectual hierarchies. Further, the insistence on collaborative working in computer mediated conferencing, with its notion of learning through interaction with others, echoes elements of the liberal conception going back to Newman.

However, much of the development of networked learning has taken place in connection with programmes of continuing professional development or continuing vocational development. As we have seen, these rest on conceptions of education which stress knowledge as certainty within a strongly hierarchical structure of expertise. It is not surprising therefore that the challenges to conceptions of education generated by network learning are at present muted and thus far have had little effect. Whether this will change as the use of information technology for the delivery of higher education at a distance increases, only time will tell.

Conclusion

We have examined briefly the conceptions of education underlying the report of the Dearing Committee and some of the developments in higher education in the late 1990s. We shall now try to draw these strands together and form some overview of recent developments to carry forward to the discussion of our final chapter. As already noted, our summary here is necessarily more tentative than in earlier chapters.

We begin with the Dearing report. In our discussion attention was drawn to the significant role played in the Committee's deliberations by ideas of value for money and the contribution

of higher education to the national economy. Nevertheless our study shows that the Committee's report is underpinned by a broadly liberal conception of education which echoes in many respects the conception of education found in the Robbins Report more than thirty years previously. The Dearing Report emphasised the vocational and professional elements of higher education rather more than did Robbins, and Dearing is also far more concerned with widening participation. However, higher education is still to be selective, still aimed at those who have shown in advance the potential to benefit academically from the experience of higher education. It is still individual achievement at which higher education is aimed.

Significantly, the view of knowledge espoused by the Dearing Committee is the same as that of the Robbins Committee. Knowledge is academic knowledge, defined and controlled by academics, and organised in disciplines, though Dearing does press for more crossing of disciplinary boundaries. The attitudes and skills advocated by the Dearing Committee are apparently more oriented to the demands of employers, but they are still primarily the attitudes and skills of an ideal community of intellectual peers. Moreover, for all its advocacy of widening participation and recognition of the costs of residential study, the Dearing Committee still holds the model of a separate academic community of study as the ideal.

However, the academic community in the Dearing Committee's view contains many more part-time students and many more students studying for qualifications below first degree level. Lifelong learning is an important theme in the Dearing Report, though the educational rationale of the idea is not spelt out in detail.

For more detail on lifelong learning we turn to the other developments we have reviewed. Table 6.1. summarises the responses of the underlying conceptions to our analytical questions. Even given the reductive nature of such a summary, we can immediately see how these developments both reflect and offer challenges to the broadly liberal conception of the Dearing report. We can draw these similarities and differences out briefly.

What is the dominant aim of adult education in this conception? All four developing conceptions have more instrumental aims than the liberal view. The love of learning is not denied, rather it has become unimportant. This echoes the Dearing Report's vocational emphasis, but allows it to become a dominant note.

What is the view of knowledge? Here the four developing conceptions differ little from the liberal tradition. The summary table draws attention to Scott's robust assertion of the defining role of employers and knowledge-users, and to the minority stream within networked

	Lifelong learning	Adultification	Massification	Nnetworked learning
Dominant aim	development of ability to learn and adapt throughout life	provision of learning opportunities for individual adults	development of knowledge and skills for career purposes	development of knowledge and skills
View of knowledge	universal truth transmitted from expert to novice multi-disciplinary	universal truth transmitted from expert to novice disciplinary	information required for performance of tasks	perspective created by group interaction
Skills	learning to learn independent learning ability to adapt	critical and analytical skills	application of knowledge	critical and analytical skills collaborative working
Attitudes	willingness to go on learning	willingness to go on learning, responsibility for own learning	demand for appropriate learning opportunities	openness to group process openness to critical discussion
For whom?	everyone	everyone	anyone who can benefit	anyone able to benefit
By whom?	accredited academics	accredited academics	accredited academics	accredited academics
Where?	anywhere	academic community	dispersed academic community	virtual academic community
Why valued?	provides skills needed to remain employable	provides adult with continuing learning opportunities	provides knowledge and skills required in national economy	makes academic study easily available in remote locations

Table 6.1: conceptions of education in developments in higher education in the late 1990s

learning which adopts a view of knowledge as a social construction. However, the latter is a minority stream: most practitioners in networked learning are content to work within the traditional paradigms of disciplinary knowledge. In the case of Scott, it is not clear what view of knowledge the knowledge-users are expected to have, but it is most likely that they will adopt the current dominant view, which is that of disciplinary knowledge, wherever produced.

What skills are offered? Here there is more variety. Traditional critical and analytical skills figure in all four conceptions, but are overtaken in importance by other skills, such as the skills of learning to learn, independent learning and collaborative learning. The instrumental cast of these desired attributes is a significant departure from the liberal conception, and even from the vocational or professional conceptions we explored in earlier chapters.

What attitudes are inculcated? Responsibility for one's own learning is the key thought in all four conceptions, whether expressed in terms of willingness to learn, seeking learning opportunities or openness to critical reflection. The emphasis is on the learner choosing to learn and choosing what to learn.

To whom is the education offered? Here the four conceptions all offer variations on the theme of education for all. We noted above that it was not clear in Scott's work just how open a mass system of higher education would be; and in the case of networked learning there is some hesitation about departing from traditional entry requirements for university courses. However, in both these cases, the thrust of the development is towards a system of education open to anyone who can access it – and with developments in information technology, that means anyone. All four conceptions consciously oppose academic elitism.

By whom is the education provided? Here there is complete unanimity, and apparent agreement with the liberal conception. However in these conceptions the role of the accredited academic changes from expert provider of direct teaching to resource person. It is implicit in all these conceptions that the student may choose to supplement the expertise of one academic, or group of academics, with the expertise of others, perhaps many others, and perhaps some others who are not academically accredited. The model of the learner sitting at the feet of the expert vanishes.

Where does education take place? Here again there is remarkable unanimity and agreement with older conceptions. There is a strong emphasis on an academic community of some kind in all the conceptions except that of lifelong learning. This conception is prepared for learning to take place in the workplace and more informal setting outside the academic

community; nevertheless the academic community still has a role to play, particularly in providing opportunity for significant interaction between students.

Why is this education valued by the recipients, the providers and society? Here there is much greater diversity, even amongst advocates within the different conceptions, and it is difficult to summarise the responses. This is probably due more to the developing status of these conceptions than anything else: they are relatively new and unarticulated, and need time to become established before we can say with any certainty why they are valued. Nevertheless, even our tentative summary suggests that education will be valued for instrumental reasons related to careers and employment.

The overwhelming impression of these developing conceptions is that while they pose challenges to more traditional views, the challenges are not so radical that they could not be incorporated in traditional views. This is perhaps not too surprising, given the dominance of the liberal view within higher education and the relative newness of these developments. However, within them these developing conceptions contain the seeds of radical challenge in at least three areas: the view of knowledge espoused, the widening of access to higher education, and the presentation of education as a commodity. The first two we have already discussed briefly; the third will be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Conceiving education for mass higher education

Introduction

We have reviewed conceptions of education in higher education in England and in continuing education in England over the last four decades. Several strands of thought have been identified, examined and compared. In this chapter we draw together the results of our study and consider what implications arise for the discussion and understanding of higher education in the future.

In chapter one we suggested that the aim of a study in the philosophy of education should be a critical examination of the values and assumptions underpinning the theory and practice of education, in our case, of higher education and of adult continuing education within higher education. In the light of such an aim, three clear conclusions can be drawn from this study.

- Between 1960 and 1997 there was very little change in the conceptions of education underpinning higher education and adult continuing education, despite many other changes in the sector. Only at the end of the period reviewed was there any sign of significant conceptual change.
- In the period under review conceptions of education in mainstream higher education and adult continuing education were dominated by a view of university education best described as ‘liberal’, rooted in the nineteenth century and having its clearest expression in a book published in 1852.
- There is a growing gap between the conception of education accepted within the higher education sector and the conceptions of education underlying statements about the future of higher education by observers from outside the system, government ministers, public officials and other potentially significant figures. This gap is not, as commonly suggested, between ‘liberal’ and ‘vocational’ views of higher education, but between views of education as a process and views of education as a commodity.

In this chapter we shall demonstrate and explore these conclusions, and examine their implications for the future of higher education. Finally we shall return to issues about the philosophy of education.

The lack of change in conceptions of education in higher education

Writing in 1995, Leslie Wagner declared:

Both the earlier and later periods of the last thirty years, from the 1960s to the 1990s, have been ones of rapid change for UK higher education. In both periods, however, the changes concerned mainly its external life, the issues of finance, governance and structure. The internal issues of value and purpose, of what is taught and how it is taught, have been subject to far less change. As a result, the external and internal worlds are now out of balance. The external changes have produced a mass higher education system whilst the lack of internal change has resulted in the retention of the values of an elitist system. (Wagner 1995: 15)

This study supports Wagner's claim, because our first main conclusion is that conceptions of education in higher education have changed very little in the period 1960 to 1997.

One convenient way of showing this is to look at the similarities and differences between the Robbins report of 1963 and the Dearing Report of 1997. These official reports span our period, and, as we saw earlier, they provide us with convenient pictures of higher education in the early 1960s and the mid 1990s respectively. Our claim is that the understanding of higher education in England after Dearing is little different from the understanding of higher education before Robbins.

For our purposes a comparison of the stated aims of higher education in the two reports is instructive. The Robbins Committee, we recall, set out four aims of higher education: instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour, the promotion of the general powers of the mind, the advancement of learning and the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship (Robbins 1963: paras. 25 – 28).

For the Dearing Committee the 'four main purposes of higher education' were: to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities; to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and foster their applications; to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy; and to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society. (Dearing 1997: para 5.11)

The lists are noticeably similar, allowing for differences of terminology. Robbins talks of the division of labour, Dearing of the economy; Robbins uses phrases such as 'cultivated men and women', while Dearing talks of 'personal fulfilment'. Such terminological differences reflect changes in language as much as changes in thought. However the two lists do differ significantly in two respects. One is that the Dearing list is more explicit than the Robbins list

about aiming higher education at the individual. The other is the stress in the Dearing list on serving the needs of the economy, which has a much sharper focus than the discussion in the Robbins report.

In both the Robbins and the Dearing reports we are told that the order of aims is not significant and does not reflect the relative importance attached to the different aims. Nevertheless the order and wording of the aims is worthy of attention. What is reflected in apparently small differences is the change in the setting of higher education between 1963 and 1997. First, the social climate changed between 1963 and 1997. In particular the 1980s saw a resurgence of explicit individualism, epitomised by Mrs. Thatcher's famous or infamous assertion that there is no such thing as society. This is reflected in the Dearing Committee's more explicit references to the individual.

Secondly, there was a change in the demands made on higher education by the government and the funding bodies. That higher education must contribute to the economic needs of the nation, as well as other needs, was recognised in 1963; but by 1997 higher education was required to demonstrate its contribution according to measures such as the employability of graduates and the rate of turning research into commercially marketed products. Both the Robbins Committee and the Dearing Committee were required to perform a balancing act between competing demands, but for the Dearing Committee the question of demonstrable value for money was much more searching.

The other values and assumptions underlying the two Committees' lists of aims seem very similar: concern for scholarship, for the advancement of learning, for culture and serving the community. Like the Robbins Committee the Dearing Committee brings together what we earlier called the liberal and the vocational conceptions of higher education, learning for the sake of learning and learning for a purpose. Both reports give a pivotal role to the single honours degree, taught within a framework of disciplinary knowledge, and both suggest other forms of qualification in higher education.

One other difference between the two reports is of significance for our study. The Robbins Committee effectively endorsed the idea of scholarly collegiality expressed through residential study. For the Dearing Committee, part-time and non-residential study assume greater significance. However the ideal of learning in a scholarly community has a dominant place, and it is rather access to and the organisation of that scholarly community which would be affected by the Dearing reforms. In Wagner's terms, the major differences between the

Robbins Report and the Dearing Report concern the external life of higher education rather than its internal life.

This picture drawn from the two major reports on higher education in our period is confirmed by the other material we have examined. While dissident voices, such as Robinson (1968), raised questions, they were always at pains to stress their support for the traditional view of the communication of scholarship as the main aim of higher education. Their suggested changes were additions to the system, ways of providing more flexibility, more diversity, and greater access. In terms of conceptions of education, the suggestions were for conceptual extensions rather than change. This is true also of documents such as the Finniston Report on the engineering profession (1980) and the RSA's *Education for Capability Manifesto* (1981). Although these documents make trenchant criticisms of the higher education system, they insist that they do not wish to replace academic scholarship and the development of new scholars, but to add awareness and experience of applied scholarship.

Even when we turn to the developments of the last decade, examined briefly in chapter six, we find little real conceptual change. While there is much talk of greater access, of a different view of knowledge and of teaching which takes account of mature students, there is little evidence that the changes affect the underlying conception of education. The same knowledge, skills and attitudes are to be imparted to students as before; it is the students and the way they organise their learning which are expected to change. This view is supported by Wagner's report of a comment by a university lecturer, to the effect that it is the student's job to learn, not the lecturer's job to teach (Wagner 1995: 18).

We conclude that conceptions of education in higher education have changed very little in the period we have reviewed. In this respect at least Wagner is right.

Why is this so? We began our study with the idea that conceptions of education would change under the influence of changes in the circumstances of higher education. There can be no doubt about the changed circumstances of higher education between 1960 and 1997: so how have conceptions of education stayed relatively static?

As we noted in an earlier chapter, commentators such as Scott would have no hesitation in ascribing the lack of change to the unwillingness of academics to change or give up their 'ivory tower' privileges. While there may be some truth in this observation, and in other sociological observations, one significant factor in the lack of change is the dominance of one

particular conception of education, the liberal conception. This dominance is the second main conclusion of our study.

The dominance of the liberal conception

We have examined a number of conceptions of education found in higher education and continuing education in the period from 1960 to 1997. In higher education (chapter three) there were conceptions labelled liberal, vocational and professional. Adult continuing education (chapter four) gave us learning for learning's sake, learning for social purposes, learning for specific purposes and a view rooted in the post-modernist movement. Chapter five added a view which drew on radical ideas of education, while in chapter six we tried to uncover the conceptions underlying lifelong learning, adultification, massification and computer mediated learning.

Our analysis in each chapter has shown that the conceptions reviewed are all shaped by the liberal conception outlined in chapter three and there traced back to the writings of John Henry Newman in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is worth recalling briefly the summary conclusions of each chapter.

At the end of chapter three we found that the three conceptions, liberal, vocational and professional, shared a view of education focused on the development of individual knowledge, skills and attitudes. We noted that knowledge was seen in all three conceptions as a body of truths to be transmitted from expert to novice. The differences between the conceptions were in their views of the proper location for education, the differing emphases on purely academic preparation and the importance ascribed to the application of knowledge. Our study showed clearly that increasingly the knowledge content of a university degree is regarded as less important than the intellectual skills acquired and the attitudes fostered. We showed how these ideas echo the values of detached study in a community of scholars so eloquently articulated by Newman.

Chapter four showed that the dominance of liberal ideas has been even greater in adult education circles. We saw that liberal values underpinned the Great Tradition, with its emphasis on learning for learning's sake. We also saw that the acknowledged social dimension in adult education provision was underpinned by the same liberal tradition, with an added social conscience and purpose: the emphasis was still on the development of individuals, albeit so that they might then do good to others. Throughout the adult education tradition there has been a view of knowledge as transmitted from expert to novice, though the

recognition of expertise has been less dominated by academic prejudice than in mainstream higher education.

The post-modern view offered an exception to this view of knowledge, and apparently a conception of education which raised basic questions about the nature and value of education. Yet, as we saw, the post-modern emphasis on playfulness and the use of education to fulfil an individual's current desires leads back to a form of the liberal conception, in which the development of the individual takes precedence over any utilitarian purpose.

One interesting point to arise from this study is that concepts of education in adult continuing education were never as different from those in the mainstream as continuing education practitioners and advocates liked to suggest. This is not too surprising, given the need for adult continuing education departments to justify their existence within higher education institutions, and the need to recruit staff who were recognised by the institution, and therefore were most likely to be themselves university graduates, socialised into the liberal view of higher education.

The radical conceptions examined in chapter five place great emphasis on the provision of 'really useful knowledge' in pursuit of social change. We saw that these conceptions attacked the view of knowledge embraced by higher education and threw much more emphasis on the role of the students in creating their own knowledge collectively. Nevertheless, even here, there are strong elements of ideas of individual development through learning and the interchange of ideas which help the individual to make new intellectual maps and develop greater personal awareness, without particular utilitarian motives.

Finally in chapter six we explored developing conceptions. Unsurprisingly, given that they are all developing in relation to higher education as it currently exists, these developing conceptions too are dominated by a liberal perception. The biggest challenges we saw to the liberal conception were concerned with views of knowledge and the role of face-to-face teaching. We noted that the advocates of change in higher education, such as Duke and Scott, were more forthcoming on what Wagner would call external matters rather than conceptual issues.

We are forced to the conclusion that conceptions of education in higher education and adult continuing education in England between 1960 and 1997 were dominated by the liberal conception. This conception assumes that learning at the highest level is beneficial to the individual and derivatively to society. It fosters the intellectual skills required to advance

knowledge, seen as universal truth, and it values the attitudes of detached critical scholarship above all else. It views higher education as a process in which the academically able few are withdrawn to sit at the feet of scholars and imbibe knowledge, skills and attitudes without distraction.

The values of this liberal view of higher education are, in Wagner's terminology, elitist. Under this conception, higher education is directed primarily at academically able young people without other responsibilities. They are taught by those who themselves are accredited by their academic peers, and who maintain their position in academia by their contribution to the advancement of knowledge. This education process is best carried out in dedicated communities, giving time and opportunity for informal as well as formal interaction between scholars and novices. In many ways this is an apprenticeship model of higher education: apprentice scholars learn their trade at the feet of the masters. That many of the apprentices have no intention of following the profession of academic scholarship is seen as irrelevant: it is the perceived requirements of the apprentice scholars that shape the education offered.

It is important to notice the relationship of the individual learner and the scholarly community in this conception. Education is aimed at the development of the individual as a member of a scholarly community. It is the community which decides what is required of aspirant members by way of knowledge and skills, and the community which determines and regulates the disciplined, and disciplinary, structure within which knowledge and skills are transferred in an ordered and systematic way. The individual's views and preferences take second place to those of the community.

It is significant that such a scholarly community becomes self-replicating. Academic staff and administrators in English higher education are mostly products of the British higher education system, socialised into its values and assumptions and appreciative and respectful of its many strengths. They share attitudes of scholarly detachment, commitment to individual excellence, openness to discussion and respect for universal truth, and they communicate these attitudes to students and potential students: consequently those who do not at least acknowledge these attitudes are unlikely to enter or remain within higher education.

We noted above, in chapter 5, that this community control has been fiercely criticised as leading to domination by certain kinds of thinking, certain definitions of knowledge and 'academic thought'. However, even this critical assault has been mounted within the framework of what Alasdair MacIntyre has called a 'tradition' (MacIntyre 1988). The liberal conception of education depends on a particular view of rationality, shared assumptions about

how knowledge should be categorised and handled and shared cultural assumptions about the nature and purpose of academic discourse. As MacIntyre has shown, this dependence is necessary, in the sense that any and every tradition depends on some basic assumptions: but it also leads to tensions when one tradition is confronted by another. MacIntyre has claimed that there is more than one tradition of rationality in Western thought, and it might be expected that non-Western cultures would add further traditions. It is not clear that all these traditions are compatible. In this light the liberal conception of education faces increasing challenges as it encounters other traditions of rationality and other cultural assumptions. This is significant because the increasing interchange of ideas and people across the world inevitably brings alternative, and radically different, traditions within the walls of higher education in England. It is interesting to note that many of the fiercest critics of British higher education are people with extensive experience of other systems, notably that of the United States of America, which apparently are not underpinned by the same liberal conception of education.

However, as we have seen, it is the liberal conception of education which has shaped higher education in England in recent decades as it had done throughout the twentieth century. Despite some differences in emphasis, this conception underlies both the Robbins Report of 1963 and the Dearing Report of 1997 and almost all the studies of higher education in England in between. It is largely taken for granted in the work of groups such as CVCP and UACE, and for long periods was also taken for granted within the higher echelons of government and the Civil Service.

The dominance of this conception at the start of the period we have reviewed is perhaps unsurprising. In 1960 the higher education sector was relatively small and dominated by the triumvirate of Cambridge, London and Oxford, especially in matters of academic validation and acceptance. Since provision in these three institutions was shaped by the liberal conception, it is not too surprising that this conception was so dominant in the system as a whole, not least because the system was staffed by products of this conception.

However, the continuing dominance of the liberal conception in the succeeding decades requires some exploration and explanation. During these decades the higher education system expanded, in numbers of institutions, students and staff. It was the subject of fierce criticism over its failure to produce graduates fit for employment in the worlds of industry and commerce, its reliance on academic criteria in the selection of students, and its adherence to means of course delivery geared to young people studying full-time and resident in institutional accommodation. Higher education institutions were increasingly required to

make 'efficiency gains', delivering education to more students at a lower unit cost, and to justify their requests for public money to support their activities. In the face of all this, one might have expected changes in the nature of the education provided.

Changes there have been, in organisation and administration, in the scope and content of courses offered, and in the resources provided by institutions to support students. The effects of these changes have been hotly debated, but what has been missing from the debates is any discussion of what education is being provided. Instead there is much talk of learning and teaching, as though these summed up the extent of education. Few within higher education would subscribe to such a restricted view of education. It seems then that the higher education system has managed to deflect pressures for reform into making changes in externals, which, while significant and far-reaching in their effect on the day to day life of an institution, nevertheless have only a marginal effect on the understanding of education underpinning the work of academic staff and students.

This study suggests that a major reason for this achievement is that the vast majority of academic staff, administrators and students subscribe to a liberal conception of education in which issues of organisation and delivery of courses are insignificant compared with the imperative of scholarly formation. Well-informed observers such as Duke and Scott are convinced that this conception of education is insufficient to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, in particular the continued expansion of student numbers. Their view is supported by the third main conclusion of this study, that there is a growing gap between the conception of education accepted within the higher education sector and the conceptions of education underlying statements about the future of higher education by observers from outside the system, government ministers, public officials and other potentially significant figures. We turn now to this conclusion and its implications.

Differing conceptions of education

One mark of the growing gap between conceptions of education within higher education and outside the system is the difference noted in chapter six between the aims of higher education espoused by the Dearing Committee and the aims of higher education listed in evidence to that Committee by the Education Departments. We recall that the Education Departments' list of aims made no mention of knowledge or understanding and was firmly focused on employment skills and the need to develop adaptability. This suggests a conception of education aimed not at the development of individual scholars but at the production of adaptable units of workforce.

The impression given by the Education Departments' evidence to the Dearing Committee is reinforced by our brief consideration of lifelong learning in chapter six. We noted there the emphasis in government documents on skills for employment and the view of lifelong learning as a continuing process of updating of skills and adapting to new circumstances. As we saw, these emphases have led to confusion over what lifelong learning means in higher education, and have enabled many in higher education to sidestep the idea of lifelong learning. It is clear however that these government statements on lifelong learning reflect the same conception of education as aimed primarily at enabling employment in a rapidly changing world.

On the face of it, this conception of education is simply a version of what in chapter two we called the vocational conception of education. However, there are important differences. While the vocational conception we discussed was imbued with liberal ideas of education as a process of development, the conception we are now examining sees education as a series of discrete learning opportunities, connected only by the participation of a particular learner. The emphasis on learning rather than teaching is significant, marking a shift in thinking about higher education. Government documents seem to envisage an higher education system driven by the demands of consumers rather than the imperatives of scholarly development.

We noticed the same importance attached to the demands of students as consumers in the writings on adultification and massification reviewed in chapter six. There are many reasons for suggesting that consumer-led education is problematic, but they do not concern us here. What is of interest to us is the underlying view of higher education, which we might characterise as the commodity conception of education.

On this view, the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired through participation in higher education can be packaged as discrete units. These units can be taken up, unpacked and absorbed at will by anyone. Individual units will be valued according to the requirements of the user, principally by their contribution to the user's continued success gaining and keeping paid employment.

The treatment of knowledge as a commodity to be packaged and disseminated has been noticed often in recent years. One example of this is a paper on open learning by Richard Boot and Vivien Hodgson (1987) in which the authors discuss two 'orientations' to open learning. These they label the 'dissemination' model and the 'development' model. In the dissemination model, they claim, knowledge is seen as a

valuable commodity existing independently of people. Can be stored and transmitted (Boot and Hodgson 1987: table 1.1, emphasis original)

while in the development model knowing is seen as a

process of engaging with and attributing meaning to the world, including self in it. (*ibid.*, emphasis original)

Even the ‘development’ view of knowing suggested by Boot and Hodgson is at odds with the dominant view of knowledge in higher education, as we have seen. Most of the conceptions of education we have reviewed have incorporated a view of knowledge as universal truth, organised along disciplinary lines. The exceptions have been conceptions such as the post-modern, which have so far played a minor role in higher education. In such conceptions, knowledge is seen as created, socially or individually, and lacking universality. The view of knowledge as a commodity sits uneasily between these views. On the one hand it portrays knowledge as universal truth, so that the discrete units have value everywhere; on the other hand it portrays knowledge as valued according to individual circumstances and needs. Further uncertainty arises through the conflating, or confusion, of knowledge and information: those who handle information for commercial purposes like to describe themselves as providers of knowledge, while those whose profession is the advancement of knowledge are keen to maintain a distinction between knowledge and ‘mere’ information or data.

It is thus possible to relate the view of knowledge as a commodity to current debates about the nature of knowledge, the growing range of organisations professionally and commercially involved in the advancement of knowledge and the rapidly increasing availability of information. However such debates are of less relevance in the development of the commodity view of knowledge than market interests. For centuries it has been recognised that access to knowledge has a market value, and now that idea has been extended to the content of knowledge as well. It is a short step from recognising that knowledge has a market value to asking how best to exploit that value: and the natural move for sellers is to package their product in units which can be individually priced and marketed. This is what Boot and Hodgson are acknowledging in their description of a model in which knowledge is seen as a valuable commodity to be stored and transmitted. Our suggestion is that this view of knowledge has been extended to cover skills and attitudes as well.

Explicit evidence for this can be found again in documents such as government statements on lifelong learning. These make much of the need to develop transferable skills, including the skill of ‘learning to learn’, and an attitude of acceptance of the need to go on learning and

adapting throughout life. Such skills and attitudes are presented as though they can be acquired in the same way as one acquires the basic skills of literacy and numeracy; and like those basic skills on this view, once acquired transferable skills and attitudes need no further development, only use.

Whether or not this is a correct view of basic skills such as numeracy and literacy, it is a view of intellectual skills and attitudes which requires considerable defence, yet one looks in vain for any such defence. What seems to be happening is that the view that everything has a market value, espoused stridently by the governments of the 1980s, is being applied not just to the delivery of higher education but also to its content. What Edwards (1997) called 'the learning market' has been extended to embrace all aspects of higher education, so that every part of higher education becomes a commodity with a market value.

However, it is not just government policy which reflects this view of higher education. The conception of education as the provision of a set of commodities is congenial to, amongst others, those who set themselves up as independent purveyors of knowledge, those who seek to purchase entry to the elite formed by the academically successful, and those who seek quick routes to academic creditability. It is in many people's interests to portray higher education in this way.

Even if our delineation of this view of education is over simple and crude, there is no doubt that this commodity view of education is a very long way from the liberal conception which dominates higher education. Interestingly, our study suggests that it is also a long way from the conceptions of higher education which inform the approach to higher education of leaders of industry, commerce and the professions. These, often in the past critics of higher education and its ways, seem to be moving more and more towards a conception of education which embraces a developmental view of skills and attitudes as well as knowledge. This can be seen in the growing consensus amongst employers that the content of a degree matters less than the skills and attitudes developed as a basis for later, work-based experience and growth; and the view of the professions that a professional needs more than knowledge and skills, and needs to continue to develop as a professional.

Thus this study indicates that a gap is developing between those who see higher education as a process of development of knowledge, skills and attitudes and those who see higher education as the provision of packages of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The debate between these two groups does not follow the recognised and time-honoured lines of a debate between liberal and vocational views of higher education, for those began from a shared view of education as a

process. Instead the debate is between a conception of education rooted in liberal values and a conception of education rooted in market values. It is a debate between a conception of education focused on people acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes, and a conception of education focused on knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired. One conception begins with people and sees education as personal formation; the other begins with commodities and sees education as an expression of consumer choice.

Viewing education as an expression of consumer choice has some important implications for the conception of higher education. First, consumers will choose what they wish to learn. Adherents of this approach assume that the consumers will choose what 'authorities' – the Government or the university – have decided is useful for them. The experience of attempts within adult continuing education to provide 'really useful knowledge', explored in chapter 4, suggest otherwise. This raises questions for the view of higher education as an apprenticeship for scholars: not all, perhaps even very few, of those entering higher education will want to become scholars or choose to acquire scholarly skills and habits.

Experience in adult continuing education further suggests that consumers will also be eclectic in their choice of study: we recall that one of the criticisms of adult continuing education from within the mainstream was that there was little or no coherence to student study. But why should there be? If knowledge is packaged in units, why should anyone lay down a particular order in which the knowledge must be acquired? This strikes at the heart of the idea of disciplinary knowledge, but also at the idea that the scholarly community, the masters, determine what is required for scholarly acceptance. Systematic, disciplined study can be replaced by a 'pick and mix' approach, much derided by academics, but entirely appropriate in a system driven by individual interests. The conception of education as the ordered transfer and acquisition of knowledge and skills can be replaced by a conception of education as the collection of information and skills

Thirdly, on a consumer-oriented view of higher education, it becomes very hard to draw the line between knowledge and information. In the world of knowledge packets, knowledge consists in knowing where to find information and knowledge handling is indistinguishable from information processing. This leaves little room for understanding, seeking new knowledge or applying knowledge in new circumstances, so undermining the liberal conception of higher education.

Fourth, in the consumer conception the learner is independent. However, the liberal conception requires the learner to be part an interchange of ideas. We saw in chapter six how

designers of computer mediated learning strive to include and enforce some kind of interchange as part of the learning process for remote students, and we noted the problems inherent in this. Again, this approach raises questions for the liberal conception of higher education.

It is clear from even this brief survey that these two conceptions of education, the liberal and the commodity, can only co-exist uneasily, if at all. If our analysis is correct, the developing gap we have identified poses a significant threat to higher education, concerned not just with external issues nor even with internal issues, but with the basis on which higher education in England has been constructed for over a century. This challenge is greater than those of changes in conceptions of knowledge, changing views of eligibility for higher education, or the development of a mass system. The liberal conception of education has remained dominant in higher education through a period of great external change between 1960 and 1997. Can it meet the challenges of the new century? We turn now to consider briefly the implications of this study of conceptions of education in higher education.

Implications

The conclusions of this study can be summarised thus: higher education in England has been and is dominated by a conception of education properly termed 'liberal'; this conception of education is deeply entrenched, but increasingly diverges from the conception of education informing the thought of many of those outside higher education but having influence over higher education.

In the course of our study we have noticed a number of challenges to the liberal conception. Barnett (1990) picked out epistemological challenges and sociological challenges. The epistemological challenges were concerned with changing views of the nature of knowledge, which challenged the dominant view in higher education of knowledge as universal disciplinary truth. The sociological challenges, in Barnett's view, arose from the insistence that higher education could not remain aloof from the rest of society, but must recognise its obligations to society.

We have noticed both these trends in this study, and we can add other challenges. In the years since Barnett wrote the challenge to the elitism of higher education created by the dominance of selection criteria based on academic performance has become strident, coupled with a growing clamour for wider participation in higher education, particularly of students from ethnic minorities and from working-class backgrounds. The focus on young minds to be

developed has been challenged by a growing recognition of the importance of mature students, not least because mature students now form the majority in higher education. Developments in information technology coupled with demands for improvements in the 'efficiency' of course delivery have challenged ideas about the location of teaching and learning, but have also raised important questions about the role of interaction in academic development. Finally, we have noted the development of a view of higher education which sees higher education as a commodity.

Barnett thought that the challenges he discussed could be met by a revision of the conception of higher education which left the liberal view of education virtually untouched as the basis for a higher education system. Duke and others (1992, 1999) claimed that concepts drawn from adult continuing education would suffice to meet the challenges posed by mature students. Scott (1995) thought that the liberal conception was inadequate for a mass system, but offered no alternative conception of education.

In the light of our conclusions, three questions arise in relation to these varied challenges and the suggested responses to them. First, is the dominant liberal conception of education appropriate for the mass higher education system apparently envisaged for England? A negative answer to this question leads to the second question: do adultification, distance learning and similar proposed developments offer a way forward in conceiving education in higher education? Again a negative answer leads to another question: can the liberal conception be adapted to meet the challenges faced by higher education?

The first question can be dealt with fairly briefly, since we have already covered the necessary ground in detail. A mass higher education system assumes less selectivity and much more diversity in provision to meet the needs of students with a greater range of academic ability and interest. Utilitarian motives focused on employment are likely to play a significantly greater role than the love of learning, coupled with economic imperatives to shorten as much as possible the time devoted to costly study with little or no income. A mass system must either have greatly increased resources or it must abandon the liberal commitment to intimate interaction over a long period between scholars and would-be scholars as the basis for education. Earlier we characterised the liberal conception of education in higher education as aimed at the formation of scholars: in a mass system there will not be time for formation, nor will the majority of students necessarily wish to become scholars. We conclude that the liberal conception as we have found it in higher education is inadequate to cope with a mass system of higher education. Given the dominance of the liberal conception which we have

shown, the implication of this is that higher education as currently conceived cannot cope with the transformation to a mass system.

Can the liberal conception be adapted to a mass system? In the course of our study we have noted various suggestions of ways in which the liberal conception might be developed. One of the stimuli for this enquiry was the claim that higher education could cope with a mass system by adopting the values, theories and practices of adult education. However, our study has shown that adult education has been underpinned largely by the liberal conception, despite the claims of some practitioners within the sector. Thus the adoption of values, theories and practices from within that sector will not change the main lines of the conception of education within mainstream higher education.

This conclusion is strengthened when we recall three significant elements of the ethos of adult continuing education identified in chapter four. These were the focus on adults, the ideal of taking the university 'beyond the walls' and the notion of education for all. None of these survives now to any great extent. The focus on adults has been undermined, in part by the move to mainstreaming: students are students, wherever they are taught, and the pressures of accreditation and quality assurance reduce the scope for taking account of the particular needs of adults. The ideal of taking the university 'beyond the walls' has succumbed to the economics of providing classes off campus. The notion of 'education for all' lives on as part of the idea of widening participation: but many critics regard 'widening participation' as aimed at a largely young audience, rather than the wider groups which adult education had in view. Thus these significant elements of adult education ethos, or ideology, have largely vanished. Hence, the project of renewing higher education by taking up the distinctive values of adult continuing education faces an impossible task. This is not to suggest that the values of adult continuing education cannot inform the development of higher education, but it seems unlikely that they will be a major driver of change.

This conclusion is supported by the history of adult continuing education: almost all dedicated departments of adult continuing education have vanished. Their values, theories and practices have not enabled them to fulfil the demands of their institutions. It seems unlikely that the institutions will take much notice of the voices of those who are now seen as unable to deliver what the institution requires, especially where those voices have become solo singers in mainstream departments.

In chapter six we noticed the suggestion that computer networked learning offered a way of meeting at least some of the practical problems of delivering education in a mass system.

However, we saw that developers of computer mediated learning programmes were working largely within the liberal conception. If that conception cannot cope with a mass system of higher education, moves to take more explicit account of networked learning are unlikely to make much difference.

We conclude that the liberal conception of higher education is inadequate to meet the challenge of a mass system, and that the suggestions we have examined for developments in the conception of education in higher education will not make much difference. This brings us to the third question arising from this study: can the liberal conception be adapted to meet the challenges faced by higher education?

As far as the epistemological and sociological challenges identified by Barnett (1990) are concerned, the answer is unequivocally yes, even if we do not follow Barnett's preferred route. There is no reason why the liberal conception should not expand to embrace conceptions of knowledge other than that of universal truth: indeed it has already done so, for example in relation to vocational and professional views of knowledge (chapter three) and radical views of knowledge (chapter five). Similarly, the liberal conception can easily accommodate a closer relationship between academia and society at large, having moved in this direction in relation to the professions (chapter three) and learning with a social purpose (chapter four). While these strands are unlikely to replace the dominant idea of knowledge, they can be accommodated without great strain.

Similarly there is no reason why the liberal conception should not accommodate greater flexibility and diversity in course content and delivery, as our review of adult continuing education provision showed. In this way, some of the pressures for economy, efficiency and widening participation could be met without radical change in the conception of education.

The sticking points for the liberal conception of education come at the point where a mass system of higher education demands education for a very wide range of academic abilities over the shortest possible period. Essential in the liberal conception of higher education are the ideas that learning at the highest level takes time, that the development of intellectual skills and scholarly attitudes takes time, that the integration of ideas which produces understanding takes time. Further, the liberal conception insists that the kind of critical discussion which explores knowledge and generates understanding requires a certain detachment and protection from concerns of utility. Finally, the liberal conception insists that while learning is good for all, only relatively few have the capacity to benefit from higher education.

Thus the liberal conception of education, and hence higher education in England, cannot easily adapt to meet the demands of a mass system of higher education as currently envisaged. Nor can it easily adapt to the commodity view of education, as we have seen.

One possible way forward is for higher education to abandon its reliance on a liberal conception of education. This seems very unlikely. As we have shown there is a deep commitment to the liberal conception, rooted in history and ingrained in most within the higher education system.

Another way forward is the establishment of a two (or more) tier system of higher education, with some institutions holding to the liberal conception, others informed by other conceptions. This kind of separation has been advocated many times, but history suggests it is not a solution to the problem. Colleges of Advanced Technology and Polytechnics were in their day parts of a multi-tier system intended to encourage diversity: but the pressures of academic drift, the desire for the status of 'proper' universities and the expectations of students have eventually restricted the diversity and reinforced the grip of the liberal conception of education.

Perhaps a more realistic way forward is a fresh look at the distinction between higher education and other education. A major spring of challenges to current views of higher education is the large range of demands on higher education institutions. They are expected to be at the forefront of the advancement of knowledge through research, to train the minds of future leaders and equip them with employment skills, to provide continuous updating of knowledge and skills for a range of workers, and to teach students of very diverse backgrounds and abilities. Perhaps this is asking too much. Perhaps we should become clear about what we mean by higher education, and find some other way of describing education which has different aims. Perhaps then even the commodity view of education might have a recognised place within the education system of England.

A way of moving in this direction might be to see higher education as enabling people to develop and use intellectual capabilities to the utmost. In particular, graduates will be equipped with knowledge in depth in specific areas and the ability to draw on a range of perspectives to inform their reflection and their problem-solving. They will be aware of the interconnectedness of knowledge in all its forms and the resources for finding information, and of the different means of applying knowledge and using information appropriately in relation to different problems. A high degree of intellectual flexibility will become a prime characteristic of the highly educated person.

This approach implies both a re-appropriation of aspects of Newman's conception of university education, and an extension of the liberal conception of education. With Newman there is an emphasis on the range of interaction in the scholarly community, a requirement to transcend the limitations of disciplinary boundaries while respecting the particular needs and approaches of different disciplines. At the same time there is a requirement to accept, appreciate, explore and exploit ideas of knowledge and rationality and scholarly discourse which are different from or even in conflict with the dominant ideas of Western culture. In the terms used by MacIntyre (1988), higher education thus conceived will equip scholars to explore their own tradition of enquiry in relation to other traditions, taking account of differing histories, acknowledging their own standpoint within a tradition. Such a conception of higher education will specifically challenge what Macintyre describes as the presuppositions of modern liberal culture (and, by extension, the liberal conception of higher education):

the fiction of shared, even if unformulable, universal standards of rationality
and
the irrelevance of one's history to one's status as a participant in debate
(1988: 400)

Like Newman's conception of a university, higher education so conceived is elitist: only the very best minds will be able to stretch thus far. However, this conception leaves considerable space for continuing and extending much of what currently takes place under the banner of higher education, as a means of developing the intellectual abilities and knowledge and information processing skills of a large number of able people who provide leadership and advances in economic, social and other realms. Widening participation, social inclusion, contribution to the economy, updating of skills, even lifelong learning in the Government's narrow use of the term: all become possible, without the debilitating baggage of an inappropriate conception of education.

Whatever the way forward, this study has shown that much more attention needs to be paid to conceptions of education in higher education. On the one hand, higher education needs to be clear about what it aims to do, and what it does not wish to do, and must face the implications of its decisions. On the other hand, those outside the higher education system must be clear about what they require of such a system and must face the implications of their decisions. Both sides will need at some point to address the question: what do we mean by education? Our study has shown not only that this question is important, but that it has been sadly neglected in the last forty years.

Finally

It remains for us to return briefly to some matters to do with the philosophy of education considered in chapter one.

We have found the distinction between concepts and conceptions not just useful but necessary. While we have shown that higher education has been dominated by one conception, all the conceptions we have examined are distinct and significant in higher education. To try to lump them together as a single concept would be to miss important nuances. Nevertheless, all these conceptions are clearly derived from a single concept, that of education, seen as a means by which worthwhile ideas are transmitted from one generation to another.

Are these conceptions essentially contested? It is difficult to give a clear answer to this question because, as we noted, the advocates of many of the conceptions are at pains to stress their acceptance of the dominant liberal conception, and to deny any competition with that conception. Of course, the practical issues of organisation and resources quickly bring different conceptions into some form of competition, but the main conceptions do not appear to be contested in the required fashion. However, the marginal conceptions, such as the radical and post-modern conceptions, do seem to provide a form of essential contestability. Moreover, if, as suggested above, there is developing outside higher education a conception of education as a commodity which is directly opposed to the tenets of the liberal conception, the conditions of essential contestability will be satisfied in respect of these two conceptions. It seems then that in higher education it is possible for conceptions of education to be essentially contested.

One of the claims about concepts and conceptions noted in chapter one was that concepts and conceptions have histories, are embedded in the discourses of societies, and change under the influence of changes in societies, particularly in their values. Our study has shown that the conceptions of education in higher education have histories and have developed in response to particular demands within society. However, the study also shows that where one conception assumes a dominant role, conceptual change is more by way of accretion at the boundaries rather than change in the main lines of the conception. In discussing the development of a conception, the relationship between conceptions is sometimes as important as their social setting.

Finally, we set out the aims of this study as an examination of the values and assumptions underlying the practices of higher education and adult continuing education in the last four decades of the twentieth century. It has proved extremely difficult to uncover those values and assumptions, because they have been taken for granted for so long that they are rarely made explicit. This may show that there is no need to articulate the conceptions on which higher education practice rests because everyone knows them and supports them. On the other hand, the lack of articulation may disguise a conceptual laziness which leaves higher education ill-prepared to meet conceptual challenges. There is some evidence to suggest that this was the case when higher education was challenged by the political and economic ideologies of the 1980s, and it may be happening again as attempts are made to turn higher education into another commodity in the information marketplace. The conclusion of this study is that higher education is underpinned by a clear and strong conception of education, but the very strength and dominance of that conception may mislead. The liberal conception of education in higher education has shown its resilience over decades: but it will need articulation, revision and reasoned defence if it is to remain the major force behind higher education practice in England in the twenty-first century.

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