University Adult Continuing Education – the Extramural Tradition Revisited

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Introduction

The expansion of higher education across Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries at the end of the twentieth century represented one of the most significant aspects of change in higher education in recent times. Taking 1995 as a baseline, student enrolments increased dramatically across the higher-education sectors of 21 member states (OECD, 2005). The growth was largely driven by young school leavers where, on average, participation rates of the population aged 18–24 years increased by 70%, and young adults, aged 25–29 years, where levels of participation increased by almost 50% (OECD, 2005). However, in some countries, significant numbers of older students also entered higher education (OECD, 2005) – a pattern reflecting what some analysts considered to be the basis of a lifelong learning model (OECD, 1999).

While the trends in relation to participation in higher education in the developing countries outside the OECD vary, they also reflect expansion in general. The scale is enormous – a study of middle-income countries involved in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Education Indicators (WEI) program showed that far more students entered and graduated from these countries than in the 30 OECD member states combined (UNESCO, 2007). (Countries participating in the UNESCO WEI program are Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt, India Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay, and Zimbabwe.)

In 2006, for example, China had more tertiary graduates (2.4 million) than the top three OECD countries combined – United States (1.4 million), Japan (0.6 million), and France (0.3 million). Overall, however, the proportion of young people gaining a higher educational qualification in the WEI countries (19.7%) was about half that of the OECD group.

In exploring the topic of university adult continuing education (ACE) and looking behind these headline participation figures, three factors need to be taken into consideration. First, one of the key comparative indicators of the levels of participation is the age participation rate (APR). This measures the proportion of the population of the typical school-leaving age which progress to higher education. By definition, this refers to young people, and only rarely are such measures used to explore levels of participation by adults in higher education. Second, much of the expansion in higher education over the last two decades took place in non-university institutions such as polytechnics, community colleges, further education colleges, and the like. The statistics, therefore, generally refer not only to universities, but also, more generally, to participation across all types of higher-education institutions. Third, international statistics usually refer to full-time undergraduate entrants, whereas mature students are more likely to be found on part-time, distance, post-experience, and non-credit programs.

The term university ACE is open to different interpretations reflected, since the 1980s or so, in the shifting policy discourse at national and international levels (Duke, 1992; Bourgeois et al., 1999; Davies, 1995; Osborne and Thomas, 2003). A benchmark international study of adult participation in higher education undertaken by the OECD 20 years ago distinguished between four categories of the adult student in higher education (OECD, 1987):

1. students who enter or re-enter higher education as adults in order to pursue mainstream studies leading to a full first degree or diploma (delayers, deferrers, or second chancers, i.e., those who are admitted on credentials gained by means of work experience or second-chance educational routes);
2. adults who reenter to update their professional knowledge, or seek to acquire additional qualifications, in order to change occupation or advance in their career (refreshers and recyclers);
3. those without previous experience in higher education who enroll for professional purposes, especially in courses of short duration; and
4. adults with, or without, previous experience in higher education, who enroll for courses with the explicit purpose of personal fulfillment (personal developers).

In a follow-up study nearly 15 years later, another categorization, based on a combination of three criteria associated with (a) entry routes, (b) modes of study, and (c) nature of program attended, was developed (Wolter, 2000).

This resulted in a six-fold classification.

1. those who take a vocational route to the achievement of the high school leaving examination (the second educational route);
2. special admission examinations (the third educational route);

3. students with high school leaving qualifications who undertake vocational training or work experience before moving on to higher education (the double qualification route);
4. students studying on a part-time or distance-mode basis;
5. graduates who return to higher education for continuing professional development courses (often of short duration); and
6. older adults taking continuing education courses largely for personal development purposes.

Building upon this work, and developing it further for analytic purposes, five different conceptions of university ACE can be identified in the international literature at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century:

- The first conceptualization focuses on the age of the learner – namely, mature students, defined in most countries as those aged somewhere between 21 and 25 years above when entering higher education) as opposed to young, recently matriculated high school graduates.
- The second focuses on the mode of study – predominantly part-time or distance, as opposed to full-time or on campus.
- The third focuses on the type of program undertaken – for example, professional updating or retraining and noncredit or community courses, as opposed to undergraduate degree qualifications.
- The fourth focuses on the life course stage, or predominant motivation of the learner – for example, second chance or postexperience, as opposed to direct progression from initial school education.
- The fifth conceptualization focuses on the mode of organization of provision for adult learners – through specialist institutions (such as open universities) or centers with a dedicated mission to meet the needs of adults (of which the extramural tradition, considered below, is the classic example) as opposed to widening access for adults to mainstream provision.

Global Trends in Lifelong Learning and University Adult Education

The widely debated concept of lifelong learning (Coffield, 2000; Bagnall, 2000) figured prominently in national and international educational policy discourse for three decades, with some more limited resonances in higher education (Field, 2006; Scott, 1995, 1997; Tavistock Institute, 2002; Watson and Taylor, 1998; Rubenson, 2006). In Europe, in a research exercise conducted as part of the major higher-education reform agenda across all the member states of the European Union – termed the Bologna process – 54% of respondents indicated that their university had a lifelong learning strategy; a further 25% said that one was in preparation, while 19% indicated that they did not have one; and 2% did not reply (Davies and Feutrie, 2008). Within this shifting discourse, one focus of attention relates to access by adults to higher education – and the statistics do point to generally increasing levels of participation by those aged over 21 years in higher education. This trend, for example, was highlighted in a joint report from the American Council of Education and the European Universities Association (Green *et al.*, 2002). In the United States, on a head-count basis (which includes part-time students), approximately 40% of all undergraduates were over 25 years of age, while, in Canada, 31% were over 24 years of age.

The reasons behind this growth in the numbers of adults in higher education in some countries are complex – ranging from demographic trends through to the emphasis on the development of the knowledge society (Schuetze and Slowey, 2003). In many developed countries, demographic projections of a substantial decline in the numbers of young people coming through from schools fuelled concerns about skill shortages and recruitment problems for higher education. Human capital theories had also become highly influential among policymakers and politicians, sparking a renewed emphasis on the continuous need for updating and retraining of the workforce and focusing attention on the extent to which university systems, structures, and staff were, in fact, prepared to meet the projected demand from employers and the professions. Additionally, for institutions of higher education, continuing professional/vocational education was being viewed as a potential source of new revenue – increasingly important as a result of funding pressures from the neo-libero public policy agenda.

Over and above all of these factors, and interacting with them in complex ways, is the issue of equality of opportunity and access to higher education. In most countries, the social class composition of higher education remains unrepresentative of the population at large; women students have grown as a proportion, but are concentrated in particular disciplinary areas; and the limited information available on participation by those from ethnic minority groups shows variable patterns in different countries.

Also important are internal changes of a qualitative nature, such as more flexible provision, new approaches to teaching and learning, and an increasing emphasis upon quality assurance and the evaluation and certification of learning. The forms of knowledge creation and dissemination, the greater access to information sources, the use of new media and new channels of communication, the development of complex partnerships with employers,

and the growing marketization of education are all factors that have a major impact on where, what, how, and why tertiary/post-secondary students learn.

p0065   In fact, many of the features associated with the policy emphasis on lifelong learning in higher education can be traced back to a wide-ranging reform agenda of Western higher-education systems. For the better part of half a century, this agenda has included an emphasis on the student experience, especially at the undergraduate level; enhancing teaching quality; developing partnerships with employers and other external agencies; strategic planning at an institutional level; and expanding interdisciplinary teaching and research.

s0015 ## International Patterns of Adult Participation in Higher Education

p0070 While higher-education systems in developed societies are subject to common economic, social, and demographic pressures, resulting in increasing levels of participation by adults, evidence from an international comparative study of ten countries suggests that the differentials between countries appear remarkably persistent over time.

p0075   Schuetze and Slowey (2000) developed a threefold typology along a continuum relating to the levels of adult participation in higher education.

- First, countries with relatively high levels of participation by adult learners and demonstrating a relatively high degree of flexibility in relation to entry criteria and study patterns; this category included Sweden and the United States.
- Second, countries with significant, but lower, proportions of adult learners across the system as a whole, and in which adult students were frequently located in open universities or dedicated centers of adult or continuing education within mainstream institutions; this category included Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK.
- Third, countries at the other end of the continuum with very low levels of adult participation in higher education; this category included Austria, Germany, Ireland, and Japan.

p0080   Analyses of the same ten countries over a 10-year period indicated that, while overall levels of adult participation in higher education had increased, the relative levels of participation between countries remained largely the same.

p0085   This analysis suggests that, while trends toward convergence can be discerned as a result of globalization, the forms taken by contemporary university ACE continue to be largely determined by the higher education traditions from which they spring.

s0020 ## Historical Patterns of University ACE

p0090 In order to understand current patterns of university ACE, it is necessary to have a broad appreciation of the historical traditions from which they emerge.

p0095   In relation to university ACE, three major traditions can be identified.

1. First, the extramural model of bringing university education to the adult population. The origins of this model can be formally traced back to the 1870s in the ancient British universities, and led to the development of dedicated adult education departments. These departments were unusual in being multidisciplinary, and devoted to the delivery of university programs which were specifically tailored to meet the needs of adult students. This extramural approach provided a conceptual model which, for complex historical reasons, has had a widespread international influence, in particular in Commonwealth countries.

2. Second, traditions of university ACE which are connected to the ideal of service by the university to local and regional social and economic communities. A significant example of this tradition arises from the land-grant universities in the USA, which included a particular mission to support community and rural development from the start.

3. Third, traditions where educational provision to adults, as a distinctive group, was not seen as a significant function for universities. This is particularly evident where the university traditions emphasized research, and ACE allocated to other agencies and specialist institutions, such as open universities or vocational organizations (e.g., Germany).

p0100   The complexity and variability of patterns is demonstrated in the findings of a comparative study of continuing education in universities across 30 countries. This showed that:

> .. .activity with ostensibly different purposes, including continuing professional development, second chance education, education for leisure and social development, U3A and technology transfer, are all within the remit of continuing education. Increasingly, continuing education within universities has become blurred with other aspects of flexibility including part-time education, summer universities, open and distance education, accreditation of prior learning and work-based learning. (Osborne and Thomas, 2003: 20)

p0105   In terms of theoretical writing on university adult education, and the practice in many countries throughout the world (particularly Commonwealth members), the extramural tradition was, for much of the twentieth century, a particularly influential model. In order to better

understand contemporary variations, therefore, it is useful to have a familiarity with the origins of the values and objectives underpinning this approach to university adult education.

Background to the Emergence of the Extramural Model of University ACE

The movement for university extension, such as the *folkuniversitet* in some Scandanivian countries, formed part of the widespread growth of interest in university ACE in the nineteenth century. The extramural model which emerged from the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England is of particular interest as it was influential both in terms of time scale (several centuries) and geography (throughout the Commonwealth and in many English-speaking countries).

Some of the earliest university lectures for the general adult population can be traced to those given by Francis Hutcheson, Professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow in the 1720s (Hamilton and Slowey, 2005). It was James Stuart – another academic who also had spent time at Glasgow University – who is credited with articulating the idea of university extramural (beyond the walls) provision in Cambridge University (Fieldhouse, 1996). In 1873, the University of Cambridge agreed to organize, formally, programs and lectures in various centers, and Oxford also undertook to provide a number of programs through extension centers. Shortly afterwards, the University of London established the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching (Jones, 2008). The work grew in fits and starts, but quite rapidly overall; thus, by 1902, Oxford and Cambridge had established well over 900 centers with more than 20 000 adult student learners attending.

However, from the outset, the activists were concerned to attract a broader cross section of the population and, in particular, students from working-class backgrounds – an objective which remained strong throughout much of the twentieth century. The challenges included low levels of literacy, relatively high costs, and, perhaps most notable of all, the cultural gulf between establishment, upper-class culture, as embodied in universities, and working-class culture.

What would be termed today quality assurance was also a persistent problem. How could the university ensure that its extension programs were of a standard appropriate for university-level provision? In an attempt to facilitate and sustain more focused study, both Oxford and Cambridge introduced residential summer meetings for adult learners. Despite all the problems, university extension was a significant force in the later years of nineteenth century in Britain and, consequently, also shaped aspects of the higher-education systems of many countries.

Another aspect of this tradition related to the strengthening of links between universities and broader social movements – for example, the Workers' Educational Association in the UK, which reflected a broadly liberal ideological stance, exemplified the influential early leaders of university ACE such as Temple, Tawney, Lindsay, and Cole. Nottingham University was the first formally to establish a department of extramural studies, in 1920–21. Within a decade of World War II, most of the major British universities had developed such departments.

In 1947, the extramural departments came together to form the Universities Council for Adult Education (UCAE). This continues as a significant policy body in university ACE through to the present time (2009), albeit with changes in title, to the University Association for ACE (UACE) and, recently, to the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL). Many other countries developed equivalent bodies, notably the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA) in the United States, which grew out of the National UCEA – one of the oldest college and university associations in the USA, founded in 1915.

From the beginning, UCAE asserted that liberal studies, although the core concern of extramural departments, should be complemented by vocational, professional, and technical course provisions to address the changing needs of the postwar society. The resulting pattern of provision was a combination of shorter liberal studies programs (sometimes indistinct from WEA provision), attracting predominately middle-class students, and professionally orientated provision, much of it for the growing numbers of employees in the welfare state.

Internationally, in many university systems based around the Anglo-American model, large centers or departments developed over this period. Such departments often held unique positions in the university: on the one hand, they were part of the mainstream university structure, with representation on Senates, professorial appointments, and the like; on the other hand, however, they were also, in many important respects, separate and different, and more connected to their local communities.

Structural Tensions – Inside or Outside the Walls?

Structural tension – being partly inside, and partly outside, mainstream university structures and processes – is a distinguishing feature of the centers, institutes, and departments which have grown out of the extramural tradition.

To begin with, they are often separately funded, and, importantly, have the opportunity to generate their own direct fee income; their students are adults and part time, not standard age and full time; their teaching is

often off-campus and at nonstandard times; and they are multidisciplinary rather than having a single-subject focus as conventional mainstream academic departments do.

p0160 At a rather different level, it is also interesting to note that not only did they include, in their number, leading public intellectuals – such as E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams – but also gave birth to, or were the key catalysts for, the development of new interdisciplinary areas of research and teaching, later to become major parts of mainstream university provision – for example, cultural studies, women's studies, industrial studies, and applied social studies.

p0165 Typical examples of the forms of provision of extramural departments and centers for adult education over the last three decades or so include:

- liberal studies of the traditional kind, characterized by intellectual effort on the part of the student, and the attainment of a standard appropriate for university study;
- continuing education programs designed to support a change of career or life course;
- the development of part-time courses for credit leading to university awards;
- role education for groups whose common element was their role in society – often including work with the public sector and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs);
- industrial education at all levels from management to the shop floor;
- social purpose, community education, and outreach;
- project research work;
- training for those engaged in the education of adults – increasingly at the postgraduate level such as masters and doctoral programs;
- research in adult education as an academic discipline; and
- acting as a seedbed for innovative programs – frequently regarded, for one reason or another, as high risk by the parent university.

p0170 In relation to the last point, there has been a growing recognition in many countries that universities should undertake more innovative and pioneering work to open up new fields of study and attract new learners where the provision, once established, might be handed over to other agencies. This, for example, includes access provision and third-arm activities such as work with local communities, employers, or other groups.

p0175 With the rapid expansion of higher education over recent decades, the overall shape changed as many countries developed some form of binary structure. In the UK, this distinction was abolished in the early 1990s. One consequence was that financial support for adult university education was mainstreamed across the entire system, so that part-time students, and the courses on

which they were enrolled, had to be accredited as equivalent to at least the first year of undergraduate study.

p0180 This created considerable turbulence in the system, with many adult learners withdrawing. On the one hand, it had the potential to bring adult learners into the mainstream of the university system; for the first time, adults could study for and, if successful, gain university awards through university ACE. In one sense, this could be seen as something of a coming of age for ACE. On the other hand, and to quite an extent, this eroded the autonomy and flexibility of university ACE, and was regarded by some as undermining the student-led, democratic culture of the ACE tradition. It also reflected an international trend, also seen, for example, in the shifting focus of the folk universities of the Nordic countries which, while originally not aimed at qualifications, "...are now increasingly involved in preparing students for professional life or upgrading previous qualifications" (Fagerlind and Stromqvist, 2004: 258).

Global Trends in University ACE – Convergence or Divergence?

p0185 As has been shown here, the forms which university ACE takes vary considerably over time, are integrally connected with the traditions from which they spring, and are subject to the broader global changes impacting national university systems. The case of the extramural tradition considered above illustrates common challenges faced. In essence, these boil down to the issue of the mainstream versus the dedicated provision for adult learners. How this balance tips is influenced by broad social and economic factors, mediated through university strategies at particular times.

p0190 In reviewing the current situation of university ACE, five broad international trends can be identified.

p0195 First, much of the recent growth in higher education has taken place in institutions other than universities. In some countries, adult students are predominantly located in these institutions which, typically, have a particular mission to work in collaboration with local and regional communities, and to strengthen links with employers. While these trends can be seen more generally (typically characterized as moving from knowing what to knowing how (Barnett, 1992, 2005)), their impact on newer and nonuniversity institutions tends to be strongest. On the plus side, it is very often the elements of flexibility and relevance that are of greatest interest to many adults. On the other hand, however, the growing emphasis on international university league tables – such as the Shanghai and the Times Higher Education rankings – serves to reinforce differentiation and hierarchical positioning of research-intensive, elite universities compared to the broader spectrum of higher-education institutions.

In practice, in many countries, adult students tend to find it easier to gain access to nonuniversity institutions, and to be less well represented in the highest-status universities. Whether this matters or not – as long as learning needs are met and successful outcomes achieved – is the subject of ongoing debate.

Second, the use of new learning technologies and new modes of delivery are widespread in the broader field of continuing education for adults. However, their impact on mainstream university provision remains variable. Therefore, the utilization of new learning technologies does not (yet) appear to have resulted in an anticipated blurring of boundaries between full-time and part-time students in most countries. At the undergraduate level, the resourcing and organizational model of most university systems remains orientated toward the traditional, full-time student. However, perhaps this might change in the future as the patterns of study of young students alter, as they increasingly combine study with significant employment commitments, and as higher education comes to be viewed as an activity to be pursued over the life course (Slowey and Watson, 2003). At the professional masters' level, the pattern may be somewhat different. Some countries – for example, many member states of the European Union, through the Bologna process – have seen the growth of modular programs at the postgraduate level, which are designed to connect with the world of work and continuing professional development.

Third, core values associated with the extramural tradition of seeking to widen access to university learning to the wider public do indeed appear somewhat beleaguered along with being somewhat marginalized in relation to the broader field of research on higher education. Aspects of university ACE are also increasingly connected with the growing commercialization of higher education as evidenced, for example, through the inclusion of higher education under the World Trade Organization General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). As some universities in the richer countries seek to develop provision in the continuing education market as a global economic initiative, this undoubtedly carries potential implications for capacity and sustainability of universities in developing countries (e.g., UNESCO, 2005, 2008). Furthermore, within and between nation states, the arena of lifelong learning is one which is particularly subject to the growth of the private sector and both profit and nonprofit higher-education providers (Peters, 2001; Marginson, 2007).

Fourth, in contrast to the structural and ideological issues which arise in relation to universities engaging in direct provision of adult education, activities such as the training of adult education professionals, doctoral education, and research in the field of adult education are all areas that sit relatively comfortably within the university environment – frequently as a special section or unit within faculties of education (Hinzen and Przybylska,

2004). Given the continuing international policy emphasis on lifelong learning, and interdisciplinary research, these are all areas which have the potential to form an important part of the future development of university ACE , and specialist research journals with a focus on adult and lifelong learning represent a flourishing area of publication (Jarvis, 2006).

Fifth, in organizational terms, long-standing structural tensions between university ACE and parent institutions continue to be observed in the twenty-first century – albeit in rather different forms. It is possible to detect on-going debates about the role of units, centers, or departments which operate at the interface between the higher-education institution and external stakeholders such as local communities, employers, trade unions, and the like. This inside/outside – sometimes marginal – positioning continues to offer independence and creative space (Taylor *et al*., 2002). The price to be paid for this independence, however, may involve exposure to institutional policies which can vary over time.

Whether or not contemporary developments will see a new flowering of university ACE and lifelong learning and will usher in a new era in which universities engage dynamically and imaginatively with the whole community remains to be seen. Without doubt, the environment is a volatile and unstable one, and there is much to strive for in the context of university ACE and the broader area of educational and training policies relating to adults.

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Relevant Websites

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http://www.bc.edu – Boston College, CIHE (Center for International Higher Education).

http://cauce-aepuc.ca – Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE).

http://www.esrea.org – ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults).

http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm – European Commission Education & training.

http://www.EUCEN.org – European Universities Continuing Education Network.

http://www.icae.org – ICAE (International Council for Adult Education).

http://www.oise.utoronto.ca – OISE University of Toronto, Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education.

http://www.oecd.org – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

http://www.srhe.ac.uk – SRHE (Society for Research into Higher Education).

http://www.scutrea.ac.uk – Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults.

http://www.adulterc.org – The Adult Education Research Conference (AERC).

http://www.unesco.org – UNESCO.org, IAU Scholarly Publications.

http://portal.unesco.org – UNESCO.org: Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Educational.

http://www.uall.ac.uk – Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL).

http://www.ucea.edu – University Continuing Education Association.

Non-Print Items

Abstract:

Internationally, the structures of contemporary university adult and continuing education (ACE) reflect the higher-education traditions from which they spring. With the increasing policy focus on lifelong learning over the last decade, some countries are reaching a stage where adult learners now represent a majority of students in higher education. A distinctive form of university ACE lies in the extramural tradition, with specialist centers or depart-ments dedicated to providing university courses to adult learners. Current debates focus on the merits, or otherwise, of mainstreaming versus dedicated provision for adult learners. How this balance tips is influenced by broad social and economic factors, mediated through university strategies at particular times.

Keywords: Access; Continuing education; Extramural education; Higher education; Lifelong learning; Mainstreaming; Mature students; Part-time students; Professional development; Universities; University adult education; University extension

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She served as a member of the UK Research Assessment Exercise Panel on Continuing Education, the Research Priorities Board of the Economic and Social Research Council, and the Steering Committee of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. In Scotland *inter alia*, she was a member of the Independent Committee of Inquiry on Student Finance and an academic adviser to the Scottish Parliament Committee on Lifelong Learning Inquiry on Lifelong Learning.