OVERVIEW

The end of retirement as we know it!
Older adult learning
Tertiary learning in later life
Late-life learning: Issues for universities
Towards a *Higher Education Strategy for Older Adults*
OLDER ADULT LEARNING

Rather than a one-way process of learning, late-life learning consists in

“…processes where older adults, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their ways of knowing”.

(Merken, 2010: 9)

PARTICIPATION

- a lower percentage of older learners compared to younger peers,
- a sharp decline of participation as people reached their 70th birthday, and
- typical learners are middle-class women living in urban areas so that the working classes, older men, and elders from ethnic minorities and living in rural areas are highly under-represented
TERTIARY LEARNING IN LATER LIFE

PREAMBLE

Older adults were a late entry in European Union policy documents on lifelong learning - in 2006 - eleven years after the first policy document.

Adult learning: It is never too late to learn (EC, 2006)

“there is a need for up-skilling and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for older workers.. to keep older workers employable, investment is needed throughout the life cycle”
**Action plan on adult learning (EC, 2007)**

“This Action Plan focuses on those who are disadvantaged...these could include migrants, older people, women or persons with a disability.

[i] by upgrading low-skilled workers...
[ii] to decrease the number of early school leavers
[iii] to reduce poverty and social exclusion...
[iv] integrating migrants in society/labour market
[v] to increase participation in lifelong learning after the age of 34.”

**PARTICIPATION**

A sharp drop after age 50 in tertiary education. Full-time 50-plus students remain a tiny group. Among part-time students, however, the 50-plus group is better represented.

**LEARNING BODY**

- undertaking professional & vocational qualifications (supported by employers)
- taking non-vocational courses (e.g. in adult and continuing education)
- studying for a degree but preferring a part-time route for financial, work-related or other reasons.
COMMUNITY ORIENTED STUDENTS...
Following widowhood, Amelia (70 years) joined a class at Birbeck (London): “I had to find a new social life...meet people of your kind, with whom you have things in common...who know about different things...”

CARERS, CATCHING UP WITH EDUCATION...
As her caring responsibilities ended, Beatrice (65 years) turned to tertiary education to enhance their self-esteem: “You have more confidence when you are educated...when at work I was often cowering the corner feeling that I’m not clever as these people...It’s nice to know that you have that little bit of knowledge tucked inside”

SOLITARY STUDENTS...
Charles, 78 years old and fully retired, whose wife divorced him two years after retirement: “It keeps you from being lonely...when I am alone I feel that this is my opportunity...it stops you brooding – a marvellous antidote to depression.

PHYSICALLY FRAIL STUDENTS
For Daisy, in her 70s, studying was her of coping with her physical ailments, especially arthritis: “I am one of those people who always have to do something, or I find my aches and pains to hurt more. When I come to class, my class may be aching like hell, but once again I can forget it
PULL FACTORS

- intellectual stimulation, sociability & skills enhancement (Manheimer, 2005)
- pleasure (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997)
- desire to keep up with what’s going on in the world, their own spiritual or personal growth, and the satisfaction of learning something new (AARP, 2000)
- ‘identity reinvention’ (Formosa, 2012)

Learning to learn
Learning to connect
Learning to work

PUSH FACTORS

- **Attitudinal barriers** reflect perceptions - by older learners as well as providers - about their lack of ability, motivation and interest in gaining new knowledge.

- **Situational barriers** highlight personal factors beyond the control of the learner. These may include health and caring responsibilities, as well as shortage of time and money.
Informational barriers refer to the failure of an agency to properly communicate learning opportunities it has on offer;

Institutional barriers suggest organisational practices that discourage people from participation in learning. The educational environment may be off-putting and people may not regard the subjects offered as relevant to them. Institutions may lack confidence or expertise with older learners, or find it difficult to teach intergenerational groups.

LATE-LIFE LEARNING:
ISSUES FOR UNIVERSITIES

THE CHALLENGES OF POPULATION AGEING

Income security  Employment policy

Health & long-term care

Social exclusion  Migration policy
POSSIBLE ROLES FOR UNIVERSITIES

- playing a leading role in creating a new type of ageing, built around extended economic, family and citizenship roles
- supporting people planning the probable two decades beyond their main work careers
- unlocking mental capital and promoting well-being in later life
- supporting a range of professional and voluntary groups working on behalf of older people.

Phillipson and Ogg (2010)

OBSTACLES AHEAD

- Which older learners to target, given their diversity across the different birth cohorts represented?
- What kind of activities are consistent with the distinctive mission of the university sector?
- What sources of funding for universities need to be secured to assist the expansion of work with older learners?
- How can the benefits of widening access to older learners be demonstrated?
FOUR POSSIBLE PATHWAYS

EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

EMPLOYMENT-RELATED PROGRAMMES

SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAMMES

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PROGRAMMES

SPECIFIC AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- undergraduate curriculum areas in gerontology
- modules in ‘active ageing’ for social care and health professionals
- outreach programmes targeted at older adults
- establishing centres/institutes for learning in retirement
- training programmes for older workers co-funded by employers
➢ training programmes for the 50-plus self-employed many of whom will be career/job changers with specific training needs

➢ link with NGOs to develop educational programmes focused on tackling social exclusion

➢ developing ‘ageing’ as a niche area that cuts across various faculties to act as catalysts for multi- and inter-disciplinary studies

TOWARDS A HIGHER EDUCATION
EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR OLDER ADULTS

A wider participation agenda

Productive ageing

Elder-sensitive programmes: part-time, distance learning, geragogy...

Funding

Fourth age learning: Informal carers Housebound elders Residential/nursing homes
THANK YOU

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