CHAPTER D3

Lifewide Development Awards:
an emergent phenomenon in UK higher education

Charlotte E Betts and Norman J Jackson

SUMMARY

This chapter is intended to provide a conceptual framework for other chapters in the practice section of the Lifewide Education e-book that relate to UK higher education co- and extra-curricular skills awards. It is based on a survey of higher education institutions in 2010/11 which showed that over 50 universities had developed or were developing awards that recognise achievements gained from experiences that were outside the academic curriculum. The most recent survey suggests that the number of higher education institutions offering such awards has grown to around 80. Although such awards are found in other HE systems the speed of growth of this phenomenon appears to be unique to the UK. The authors describe the characteristics and variations across award schemes and provide a typology of awards based on the 2010 survey. They conclude by considering the value of an ecological approach to viewing lifewide education within the lifelong learning paradigm of formal and informal education.

BIOGRAPHIES

Charlotte Betts is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Surrey. Between 2009-11 she was Coordinator for the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award at the University of Surrey responsible for the day to day operation of the scheme and facilitating the learning partnerships that underpinned the scheme. She is also a practising professional artist and an educational consultant.

Norman Jackson is Director of the Lifewide Education Community Interest Company which he founded in 2011. Between 2005-11 he was Director of the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrE) which developed the idea of lifewide learning and education in a university environment, and created the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows that at the end of the first decade of the 21st century UK higher education is witnessing an emergent phenomenon: namely, the growth of student development awards that aim to recognise and value learning and achievements gained through experiences in the co- and extra-curricular dimensions of students' experiences. These are experiences that are additional to the academic curriculum and that generally do not receive academic credit. This assertion is based on a mapping exercise undertaken in 2009-10 (Rickett 2010). Internet-based searches and networking have identified 57 award schemes (Table 1) that are either established or are being developed or piloted. An interesting feature of these schemes is that they are distributed across all institutional peer groups but the research-intensive Russell Group and the 1994 Group of Universities proportionally contain more schemes than other institutional peer groups.

Table 1. UK Universities in 2010 known to have some form of award for recognising learning and personal development gained outside the academic curriculum, or are developing their scheme

Russell Group	1994 Group	University Alliance	Guild HE	Million +	Other
Birmingham	Bath	Bournemouth	Winchester	Bedfordshire	Aberdeen
Bristol	Durham	Bradford	University of the Creative Arts	Birmingham City	Chichester
Cardiff	Exeter	Lincoln	York St John	Central Lancashire	Dundee
Glasgow	Goldsmiths	Liverpool John Moores		Coventry	Edge Hill
Leeds	Lancaster	Manchester Metropolitan		Derby	Heriot-Watt
Manchester	Leicester	Plymouth		London South Bank	Hull
Newcastle	Loughborough	Salford		Northampton	Keele
Nottingham	Queen Mary	Sheffield Hallam		Roehampton	Kent
Queens Belfast	Reading	West of England			Strathclyde
Sheffield	St Andrews				Swansea
Warwick	Surrey				Worcester
Southampton	Sussex				
	York				
TOTAL 12/20	**TOTAL 13/17**	**TOTAL 9/23**	**TOTAL 3/6**	**TOTAL 8/28**	**TOTAL 11**

AWARD SCHEME CHARACTERISTICS

Award schemes have developed in a highly situated way so it is not surprising that there is great variability in their characteristics. A summary of the key features of these schemes can be found at http://lifewideeducation.co.uk.

Variations occur in:
- their purpose and focus - personal development, professional development, employability skills, lifewide learning.
- what they choose to emphasise - education, employability, leadership, transferable skills.
- expectations in the level of student commitment (time and effort involved) in order to achieve an award.
- their inclusion criteria - who is included or not included.
- scale and level of participation within the student population.
- whether students opt in or opt out of the scheme.
- types of experiences that qualify for the award - some are more limited than others.
- whether the focus is co-curriculum, extra-curriculum or a combination.
- whether there are specialist routes or pathways.
- how they are assessed, by whom and the criteria used.
- how learning is demonstrated - the extent to which critical reflection is encouraged or valued.
- the form of recognition - points, credits, certificates.
- how they are organised and who organises and coordinates them.
- how they are resourced and who is responsible for managing the scheme.
- extent of staff involvement - academic staff, personal tutors, central service staff.
- level and types of employer involvement - including sponsorships and endorsements.
- extent to which the scheme is an explicit part of the university's concept of the student experience.
- how schemes are presented and marketed to students.
- how awards are made on completion.
- whether such awards feature in transcripts.
- the degree to which the institution's Students' Union is involved.

CONCEPTUAL VARIATIONS

Our research has tried to identify the key conceptual features that underlie different schemes. While there is much variation and conceptual mixing, our sense is that schemes differentiate at the conceptual level according to whether:
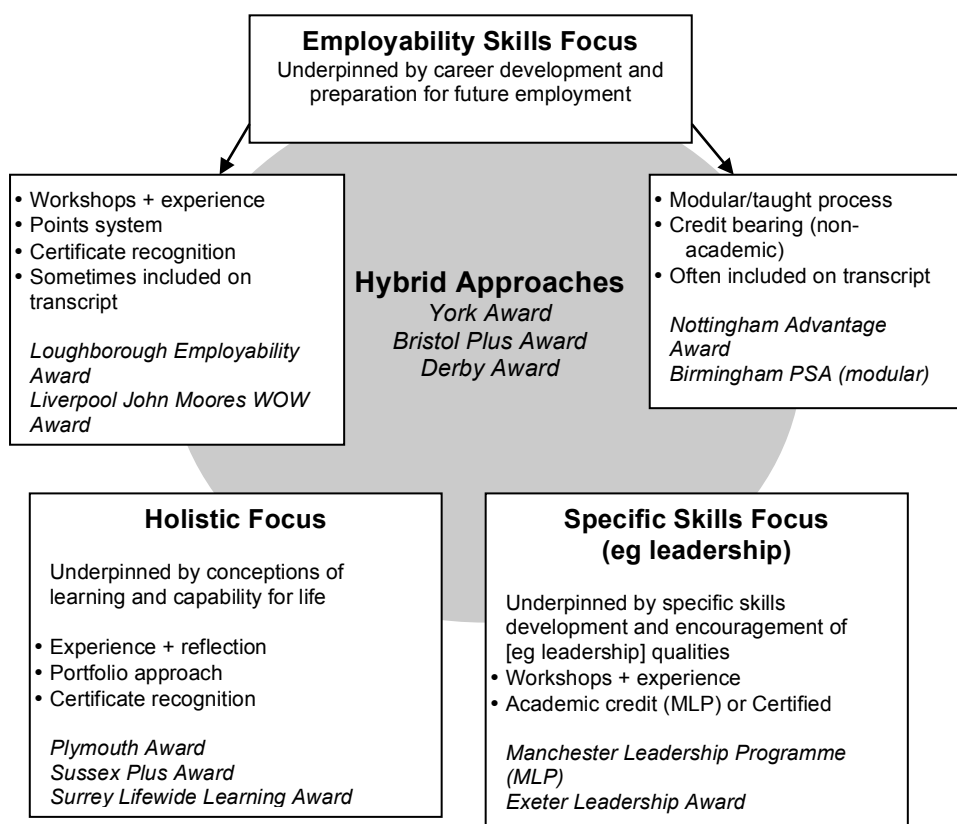- the approach emphasises whole-person education and personal/career development or attention is focused primarily on transferable and employability skills.
- the environments for learning are predominantly controlled/taught or are predominantly experiential.
- assessment is primarily through reflective, self-evidencing and reporting or through a tutor-assessed/competency-based assessment.

- the experiences that make up the award are predominantly extra-curricular (not designed by the institution and not linked to a programme) or co-curricular (institution-designed, linked to or outside a student's programme).
- leadership skills are seen as either implicit or explicit within the scheme.

Most schemes contain a mix of these conceptual continua but some schemes tend to one or other sides of the conceptual diagram.

Figure 1 shows idealised representations of the different foci and approaches that awards are based around - a holistic, whole-person, self-determined focus; a predominantly designed and taught process; an employability approach; and one centred on specific skills or leadership development. Many schemes combine these dimensions. Some examples of awards that can be categorised in this way are listed along with others that might be viewed as hybrid approaches.

Employability Skills Focus
Underpinned by career development and preparation for future employment

- Workshops + experience
- Points system
- Certificate recognition
- Sometimes included on transcript

Loughborough Employability Award
Liverpool John Moores WOW Award

Hybrid Approaches
York Award
Bristol Plus Award
Derby Award

- Modular/taught process
- Credit bearing (non-academic)
- Often included on transcript

Nottingham Advantage Award
Birmingham PSA (modular)

Holistic Focus

Underpinned by conceptions of learning and capability for life

- Experience + reflection
- Portfolio approach
- Certificate recognition

Plymouth Award
Sussex Plus Award
Surrey Lifewide Learning Award

Specific Skills Focus (eg leadership)

Underpinned by specific skills development and encouragement of [eg leadership] qualities
- Workshops + experience
- Academic credit (MLP) or Certified

Manchester Leadership Programme (MLP)
Exeter Leadership Award

AN EMERGENT PHENOMENON

The rapid growth of student development awards between about 2007-11 suggests that we are witnessing a system-wide adaptation that is fundamentally about adding value to the student experience by making higher education more relevant to the lives of learners and recognising that there is more to learning and education than studying a subject. Concerns for employability are a significant driver. With such a rapid growth in these award schemes there is likely to be a multiplicity of reasons. Some of the possible reasons are given below.

- The nature of the traditional single honours course in UK higher education leaves little scope for broader educational considerations especially in research-intensive universities. Student development awards offer a way of embracing forms of development that are not catered for through the academic curriculum.
- The drive for efficiency has progressively reduced contact time: in some courses students spend significantly more time doing things other than studying and student development awards provide the means of recognising learning gained outside the academic programme.
- Many students have to undertake paid work in order to support themselves through university and there is a ready-made context for demonstrating students' employability skills by recognising that work is a valid context for learning.
- The rapid shift from public to privately financed tuition fees corresponds to parental and student concerns for best value for the tuition fee. Institutions that can offer such awards can claim more value for the fee income.
- It is now a universal driver that employability has to be an important outcome of a university education, so demonstrating a commitment to helping students' demonstrate their employability skills is an important institutional consideration.
- The significant support being given by employers and graduate recruiters, as evidenced through sponsorship and direct involvement in institutional schemes, further reinforces the institutional, student and parental beliefs that these schemes are a worthwhile investment.
- There is fear that an institution might be competitively disadvantaged if their competitors offer such awards and they do not.
- There is a genuine desire to broaden and deepen the concept of what a higher education means, and to embrace much richer representations of learning that truly embrace the real world beyond the classroom and make higher education more relevant to students.

THE SOCIAL CHALLENGE

As the twenty-first century unfolds, two insights will change the way we think about people, society and politics. First, a better future relies not just on security, economic growth and good government, but also on the development of more capable and responsible citizens. Second, human beings are complex social animals, influenced more by our nature and context and less by calculating, conscious decisions, than we intuitively believe. Personal fulfilment and social progress are more likely if we understand better what drives us to think and behave as we do. (Taylor 2011)

Such enhanced capability and wisdom can only be gained through deeper engagement with the world and reflective contemplation on our place and presence within it. Our formal educational structures have a pivotal role to play in contributing to both of these personal and social changes but these too also need to change if we are to create a more creative, self-aware and socially engaged society. Formal education has to become more engaged in the holistic development of people as they develop themselves through the whole of their life experiences. As a society we have to adopt not only a lifelong commitment to our own

development as people but also to embrace the opportunities for continuous and transformative development that a lifewide approach to education affords. It might be argued that the growth of student development awards that aim to encourage and recognise these more holistic forms of personal development are one of the ways in which we are adapting as a society to meeting the challenge of our own future.

THE CHALLENGE FOR EMERGENT PRACTICE

Establishing any new field of educational practice is challenging. Establishing standards for learning and development in co- and extra-curricular awards is especially difficult as there is no shared understanding of what 'standards of learning and achievement' means. Each institution is in effect inventing its own standards and operating without the support of an established peer network (like the External Examiner system for subject-based learning) to help validate the process and outcomes. External peers can be incorporated into the assessment process to provide an independent view on standards but it is also important to develop an appreciation of how your own approaches to evaluating learning and the outcomes from your scheme compare with the approaches and outcomes from schemes in other institutions. One collegial way of dealing with this issue is to establish benchmarking groups in which practitioners involved in these schemes participate in a process to share their practices, experiences and understandings so that all might learn through the process. Early in 2011, SCEPTrE approached four other universities with a similar portfolio-based student development award scheme to engage in a benchmarking process aimed at comparing and evaluating the student development schemes operated by the members of the group.

BENCHMARKING FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Benchmarking is, first and foremost, a learning process structured so as to enable those engaging in the process to compare their practices and outcomes in order to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a basis for self-improvement and/or self-regulation. Benchmarking offers a way of identifying better and smarter ways of doing things and understanding why they are better or smarter. These insights can then be used to implement changes that will improve practice or performance (Jackson & Lund 2000). It is a 'process to facilitate the systematic comparison and evaluation of practice, process and performance to aid improvement and regulation' (ibid). This definition draws attention to the continuum of benchmarking practices from processes that are primarily for developmental purposes to those which are motivated by regulatory concerns. In reality, processes serve both of these purposes although they are likely to be more oriented towards one of them.

Benchmarking methodology

A proposal paper outlining the purpose, objectives, scope and approach was used to explain the process, and four institutions agreed to participate. In joining the process participants were hoping to reassure themselves that the approaches they were using were

sound, and the outcomes demonstrated by students were appropriate for the achievement of an award, when they were compared with what others were doing. In doing this they believed that the new understandings that emerged could be used to create a typology of practice that could be shared with others. A questionnaire was developed through a collaborative process and, once agreed, the five participants completed it and posted it on a password-protected website so that each member of the group could see it.

The next stage involved the production of a series of tables to show the variations in practice across participating institutions. Participants then met for a 24 hour meeting and discussed aspects of their awards, drawing on the information provided in the tables. The formal and informal conversations enabled participants to gain deeper understandings and to share perspectives on the challenges. Additional materials were provided, for example student portfolios, so that participants could see how students were representing their learning through the different schemes.

After the meeting, participants reviewed and where appropriate amended their responses to the questionnaire in the light of the discussions and sought permission for making the information publically available.

All participants agreed that the opportunity to compare their own approach with what other institutions were doing was valuable. All were interested in learning about new practices that they might also adopt or adapt. They wanted to share the issues and challenges they were dealing with and learn how others were coping or addressing these. All participants shared the sense of isolation or 'lone voice' that they experienced in their own institution, and simply by networking with others they reduced their sense of isolation. All felt vulnerable in an academic world that has little respect for learning that is not within the scope of the academy and all were looking for ways to strengthen the arguments they could use in their own institution for justifying their practice and the resources required to support practice. All were deeply committed to enhancing the student experience and helping students prepare themselves better for the world outside higher education, and all believed that their award scheme was contributing to this process. All were interested in the use of technological aids to support the administrative and learning processes.

Everyone shared the issue of institutional engagement and all were interested in the experiences of others in bringing about change in their institutions. All were interested in understanding the directions of travel and how these award schemes could be connected to systemic policies like personal development planning, e-portfolios and the Higher Education Achievement Report.

Issues that emerged through the process, although perhaps aired by one institutional representative, resonated with all participants, suggesting that regardless of context and institutional factors there is a set of generic issues that are associated with these forms of educational practice at this point in the evolution of practice. Examples include:
- *Creating an educationally sound and cost-effective framework.* One that is educationally sound, requires a reasonable but not excessive demand and is cost effective and manageable with a small team.

- *Buy-in from top level management* is essential. Where there is not a senior manager acting as champion the award is not likely to prosper. There are issues when such champions are replaced.
- The fact that these schemes are *often viewed as a 'project' peripheral to mainstream activity.* They are not taken seriously by the institution as they are not seen as 'academic' or crucial to success.
- *The difficulty of convincing academic staff of the value of lifewide learning* and engaging them in promoting/advocating the award scheme. Most academic staff have little interest in student development beyond their disciplinary interests. This issue is also linked to establishing the credibility of an award and then maintaining it.
- *Reaching students* to make them aware of the scheme and its potential value to them; this is a particular issue in the early stages of establishing an award.
- *Reaching out to all students*, not just those who always get involved.
- *Retaining student interest and commitment* – typically three or four times as many students register for an award as complete it.
- *Providing technological solutions that all students are comfortable with* and find engaging; helping technologically averse students to use an e-portfolio.
- *Helping participants develop the habit of reflection.*
- *Creating a sense of community amongst participating students* for what is essentially a solitary act of portfolio building.
- *Developing assessment procedures that are efficient and effective* and are scalable and affordable; issues relating to the *assessment* of unique portfolios.
- *Demonstrating the positive impacts on student learning and development*; the need to establish longitudinal research to demonstrate the longer term effects.
- *Resourcing – schemes are often run on a shoestring* with typically one main member of staff to help – 'There is often a sense that you're doing this alone and making decisions "on the hoof" without any real back up from the structures which support formal academic learning'.
- *The impact of national policies* like the Higher Education Achievement Report.
- *The impact on schemes of the significant increase in tuition fees* initiated in 2012.

Participants believed that a benchmarking forum would provide the relationships between practitioners and opportunities for discussion that would help individuals and their institutions to be better informed.

AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

We could treat the growth of these student development schemes as an isolated phenomenon. But it would be more valuable to connect and integrate this spontaneous and essentially bottom-up development in one part of our education system to an evolving systems view of lifelong learning, which appears to be the overarching whole-system concept for policymakers in the UK and Europe.

The previous section argued for the use of benchmarking as an organic, self-determined (self-organised) response to the need for developing deeper understanding of practice and

for growing a community of practice. This, it might be argued, is an ecological response to the need to learn and develop within a higher education system that is underpinned, at least at the level of practitioners, by collegial values. Hodgson and Spours (2009), drawing on the theoretical work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), argued for an ecological approach to understanding the organisation and governance of lifelong learning in the UK:

> The humanistic language of ecologies, which recognises the dynamics, diversity and complexity, helps practitioner, policy and research communities to move away from mechanistic engineering metaphors. (Hodgson and Spours 2009:5)

The terms 'ecologies' or 'ecosystems' have traditionally been used to refer to dynamic interactions between plants, animals and micro-organisms and their environment, working together as a functional unit. Ecologies are seen as living systems containing a diversity of factors that interact with each other organically; that are literally self-organising, adaptive and fragile. (Hodgson and Spours 2009:9)

In the following section we try to embed the idea of lifewide learning and education within this ecological way of thinking about the lifelong learning system of organisation and governance.

While the overall concept of lifelong learning is powerful and undeniable, one of the problems with it is that higher education is seen as one point in a learner's formal education. This book explores the potential for personal development contained within the informal as well as the formal learning experiences. It is in the detail that makes up the situations of an individual's life that the lifelong journey is enacted and given real meaning. Furthermore, because of its organic, relational and emergent nature, it is the lifewide dimension of human experience that gives lifelong learning ecological significance.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, cited by Hodgson and Spours 2009:10) used the term ecology to propose that human development is influenced by factors operating at different levels of a system within a broad ecological structure, in which each level interacts with and influences the others:

- The *microsystem* contains the factors within a learner's immediate environment (eg his curriculum, the day-to-day situations he encounters and his relationships and interactions with the people he meets). This is the level of our lifewide learning experiences, the levels at which our individual situations and our responses to these situations matter. This is the level at which greater self-awareness and reflective engagement with our experiences allows us to appreciate more deeply the how, why, when and where of our own development; and the level at which our will and our agency determines our future.

- The *mesosystem* encompasses the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates; for example, between home or looking after yourself and between formal and informal learning. The mesosystem involves people who have an interest in promoting and supporting learning. In our approach to lifewide learning this is the level at which learners interact with the organisers and

facilitators of the student development award framework. It is the level at which guidance is offered and tools, like the lifewide learning map and personal development plan, are provided to help learners make more and deeper sense of their lives, of their being in the world and of how the different parts of their lives interact and interfere. In other words, organised activity in the mesosystem enables people to learn more and better in their own microsystem, and then to use this enhanced self-awareness and capability in future situations.

- The *exosystem* consists of settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what is happening in the settings which the learner inhabits. This includes, for example, organisations that are responsible for supporting education (schools, colleges and universities) and the public, community and business organisations they interact with. This is the ecological level at which an institution adopts and embeds in its policies and practices a lifewide concept of education and provides the necessary resources and rhetorical support to publicly proclaim that these forms of learning and development are valued. At this ecological level an institution's policy connects to and dovetails with other policies like its learning and teaching, student experience, employability and widening participation strategies. This is also the level where different parts of the organisation - faculties, academic departments, student services and the Students' Union - work together for the benefit of students engaged in lifewide learning. It is also the level at which the university's partnerships with local and regional community, including employers, are utilised for the benefit of learners engaged in lifewide learning. Inter-institutional collegial activity that enables institutions to learn and develop, such as the benchmarking scenario described earlier, is also a feature of this level in the ecosystem.

- The *macrosystem* is the wider society in which all other settings are nested including the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. It includes government policies and strategies for promoting and supporting lifelong learning. This is the ecological level of the higher education system and the vision is that one day the system as a whole will embrace the idea of lifewide education.

Ecological perspectives not only help us think about the governance of individual institutions, but also about partnership working at different levels of the system. A learning partnership, viewing itself as a 'collaborative local ecology', would be linked to ecologies above and below. (Hodgson and Spours 2009:14)

The fundamental learning partnership in this lifewide learning ecosystem is between an educational provider and the learner - the framework and the set of relationships that are developed to promote lifewide learning. This set of relationships and interactions connects in a meaningful way individual learners and their microsystem for learning, with the support for learning and the recognition and validation of learning by the university through the adoption of a lifewide concept of education.

But the university itself is involved in many other forms of learning partnership – for example, learners are enrolled on study programmes leading to a degree. Cowan (2011) shows how

the micro-ecology of an individual's lifewide learning could extend and be integrated into mainstream higher education. The university also has links with its local and regional community through a variety of partnerships and associations, and these too could be utilised in an ecological sense for the purposes of lifewide education. For example, it is easy to imagine universities entering new partnerships with their local schools to utilise an adapted lifewide learning award framework to encourage 16-19 year old students to appreciate their informal learning and personal development, and to utilise such a framework to develop a relationship to encourage progression to the university (far more informative than a UCAS[1] personal statement). This would certainly help demonstrate to young people that learning and development is much more than sitting in a classroom. Similarly we could imagine a university in partnership with a local Lifelong Learning Partnership[2] might use an adapted lifewide learning award framework to encourage adult learners taking their first tentative steps back into the world of formal education. In this way adapted lifewide learning award frameworks could help extend partnerships for learning and provide bridging and transition structures and aids to relationship development in the community surrounding an institution.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Since this chapter was first published in mid-2011 the AGCAS Skills Award Task Group (AGCAS 2011) conducted a survey and identified approximately 80 awards being developed or implemented confirming the rapid and continuing growth of these awards.

The emergent phenomenon of co- and extra-curricular student development awards shows that we are witnessing a system-wide adaptation that is fundamentally about making higher education *more relevant* to the lives of learners and to recognise that there is more to learning and education than studying a subject. In witnessing this shift from more traditional models of education to lifewide education we are in the early stages of a transforming system: one that pays more attention to individuals' learning ecologies. The more firmly embedded these award schemes can be within the student experience, the greater the chance students have of preparing themselves for the real world beyond the classroom.

In an era of top-down accountability and markets we believe that an ecological perspective on lifelong learning offers the potential for a more organic and human-centred approach to the organisation and governance of education, stressing concepts such as inter-dependence, complexity, fragility, resilience and sustainability. It also reflects the learning process itself, emphasising a more connective, participative and exploratory approach that critiques the stress of behaviourist and acquisitive learning. (Hodgson and Spours 2009:21)

The added value of the lifewide concept and practice of education is that it gives more and deeper meaning to the fundamental ecology of the everyday learning and development enterprise of an individual. Furthermore, it honours and celebrates individuals' commitment to their own development, rather than simply seeing it as a stage of life to progress through on an individual's lifelong journey. It is also likely that changing perceptions of what counts as learning and personal development will help people appreciate more the lifelong-lifewide

nature of learning and personal development that is necessary to live a healthy, productive and fulfilled life.

This book is inspired by a vision for adult education that permeates our thinking about a more complete higher education experience. We can think of no better way of gaining closure in our initial story of lifewide learning than by returning to Eduard Lindeman's inspiring vision.

> A fresh hope is astir. From many quarters comes the call to a new kind of education with its initial assumption affirming that education is life – not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living. ... The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings. (Lindeman 1926:6)

ENDNOTES

1 These are the personal statements prepared by people applying to University through the Universities and Colleges Admission System (UCAS).

2 A network of 104 (originally 101) Learning Partnerships were set up across the country in early 1999 to promote a new culture of provider collaboration across sectors (schools, FE, work-based learning and adult and community learning) and to rationalise the plethora of existing local partnership arrangements covering post-16 learning. They are non-statutory, voluntary groupings of local learning providers (ranging from voluntary sector to FE/HEIs) and others such as local government, Connexions/Careers Service, trade unions, employers and faith groups. http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/llp/

Example Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership - http://www.surreyllp.org.uk/

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