



# Lifewide Education's 2030 Vision

## Making an effective contribution to the ecosystem for adult lifelong-lifewide learning & education

### Introduction

As we enter a new decade it is right for Lifewide Education to review its role and work as an organisation and refresh our approach for the years ahead. This paper reviews our work and achievements since 2011 and draws attention to the need to revitalize the community-based organisation in order make it more effective, relevant and sustainable so that it is better able to serve and work with its diverse communities of interest and deliver its educational and social mission and vision – *to make an effective contribution to the ecosystem for adult lifelong-lifewide learning and education.*

The significant idea underlying our work is captured in the inspiring words of Eduard Lindeman, written nearly a century ago, *'the whole of life is learning therefore education can have no ending'*<sup>1</sup>. It is this inspiring vision of a comprehensive, inclusive, ecological, lifewide and lifelong concept of learning and development embracing all the dimensions of our life that has caught our imagination. This concept of learning seems most useful and relevant to the survival and flourishing of people in the uncertain, turbulent and disruptive white water worlds<sup>2</sup> we inhabit today and in the future.

### Political and policy frame

Lifewide Education grew out of an educational project and was formed as a social educational enterprise in 2011. Its work gives meaning and practical substance to policies for lifelong learning that recognise the lifewide dimension of learning, development and achievement.

The EU Commission 'Memorandum on Lifelong Learning'<sup>3 p8-9</sup> recognised 3 categories of learning activity – formal, non-formal and informal and embraced the idea that all learning should be recognised and valued. It acknowledged for the first time the lifewide dimension of learning. *The term 'lifelong' learning draws attention to time: learning throughout life, either continuously or periodically. The newly-coined term 'lifewide' learning enriches the picture by drawing attention to the spread of learning, which can take place across the full range of our lives at any one stage in our lives. The 'lifewide' dimension brings the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning into sharper focus. It reminds us that useful and enjoyable learning can and does take place in the family, in leisure time, in community life and in daily work life. Lifewide learning also makes us realise that teaching and learning are themselves roles and activities that can be changed and exchanged in different times and places.* These ideas surface again in a foresight study commissioned by the EU in 2011<sup>4</sup> (see below).



## United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations recognised the importance of sustaining the planet and humanity and in September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>5</sup> SDG 4 focuses on education which is the key to educating the world so that we are better able to sustain it and ourselves.



SDG 4 recognises that people have to sustain themselves through long, complex learning lives. It calls on Member States to, “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, defining lifelong learning as: “The **integration of learning and living**, covering learning activities for people of all ages (at home, at school, in the workplace, in the community, etc.) through formal, non-formal and informal modalities, which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands.”<sup>6</sup>

‘Promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all’ means, “to complement and supplement formal schooling, broad and flexible lifelong learning opportunities should be provided through non-formal pathways with adequate resources and mechanisms and through stimulating informal learning, including through use of ICT.” While the onus in the declaration is on the state to provide such learning opportunities, adults themselves create far more opportunities and resources for learning through their contexts and the activities they undertake in their everyday lives. The concept and practice of lifewide learning and education draw attention to this taken for granted, complex intermingling of learning and living through which people create who they are and try to become who they want to be. Furthermore, lifelong learning through the lifewide dimension of life is key to individuals creating a sustainable world.

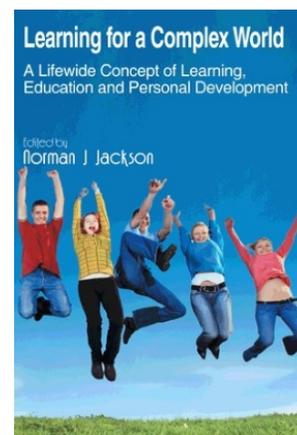
In 2019, the UK’s Centenary Commission Report on Adult Education<sup>7</sup> set out a vision for **lifewide adult education** aligned to SDG 4. It provides a strategic vision for adult learning and education within which to locate Lifewide Education’s work. In this way our advocacy for lifewide learning and education and our role in developing and sharing our understandings of what lifewide learning and education means and how it can be enabled and supported across and throughout the whole of a person’s life, is connected to the UN’s global vision of learning for a sustainable future.

## THREE PERSPECTIVES ON LIFEWIDE LEARNING

### Looking back over the last decade

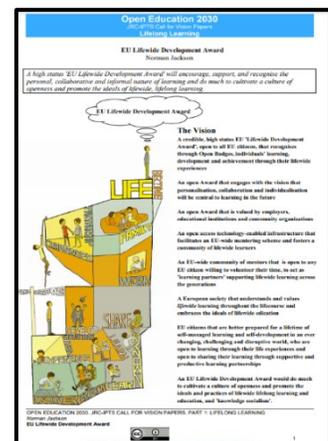
The origins of the ‘Lifewide Education enterprise’ lie in the work of the Surrey Centre for Professional Training and Education at the University of Surrey: one of over 70 centres for excellence in teaching and learning set up by Government to encourage innovation in education.

Between 2008-11 SCEPTRe developed and applied the idea of lifewide learning and education in higher education and created an evidence-base relating to the way students engaged with the whole of their life in order to learn, develop,



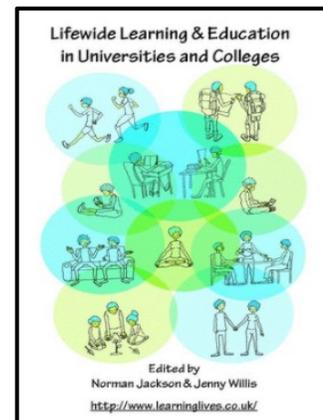
achieve and create opportunities for themselves. This work was published in ‘Learning for a Complex World: A lifewide concept of learning, education and personal development’<sup>8</sup> and it provides a substantial theoretical, practical and research evidence-base to underpin the work of Lifewide Education.

Inspired by the learning gained through SCEPTre’s work and the immortal words of adult educator Eduard Lindeman<sup>1</sup>, Lifewide Education was founded by Professor Norman Jackson as a *community of interest* company in 2011. With the help of numerous volunteers and no external funding we have: 1) established a reputation as an honest advocate and champion for lifewide learning and education, 2) attracted and served a global community of interest with nearly 600 subscribers to our mail list 3) created a HUB <https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/> hosting a range of free open access resources 4) conducted numerous scholarly explorations of ideas relating to lifewide learning and education and published these through our open access Lifewide Magazine<sup>9</sup> (now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> issue and accessed online over 24,000 times) 5) brought together practitioners in UK universities who are responsible for skills awards to share their practices through a conference and e-book<sup>10</sup> and 6) developed an award scheme to show how lifewide learning could be supported and recognised <https://lifewideaward.uk> 7) developed an ecological model and perspective on learning and practice publishing several magazines and two books<sup>11,12</sup> on this theme. Through these activities we gained international recognition through an invitation to participate in Harvard University’s Learning Innovations Laboratory (LILA) inquiry into learning ecologies (October 2019).<sup>13</sup> At a policy research level, Lifewide Education contributed a vision paper<sup>14</sup> and participated in an EU Foresight Study Workshop ‘Open Education 2030’ aimed at developing a vision of adult learning and education in 2030.



Lifewide Education has always viewed creativity as an important component of lifewide learning and in 2015 we established Creative Academic<sup>15</sup> as a separate but related enterprise to support a community of practice that is interested in creativity. This enterprise has its own team of supporters, publications, forums and strategy but ideas explored through this community are also relevant to lifewide education’s work and vice versa.

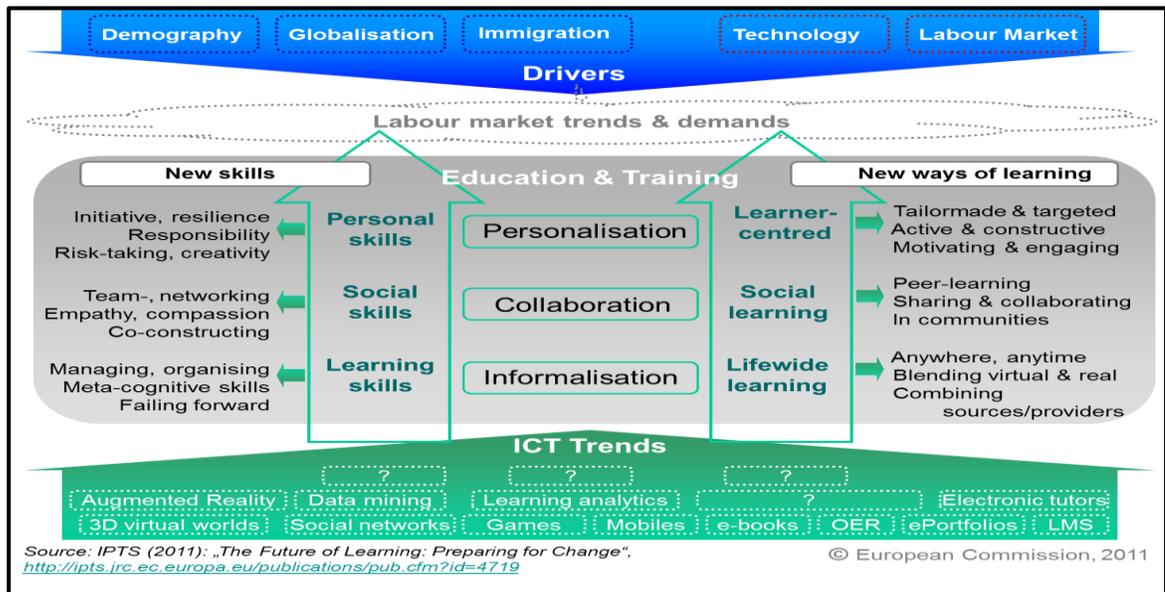
***Lifewide learning focuses attention on the holistic development of people. Lifewide Education focuses on the culture and pedagogies needed to encourage and support lifewide learning.*** The focus of lifewide learning is on the way individuals develop themselves as whole people through all the affordances (opportunities) they can find or can create within their own lives. Lifewide education refers to the approaches adopted by educational institutions in order to embrace the holistic whole-of life development of individuals. It is as much concerned with the development of attitudes, values, character and creativity as it is with the intellectual development of individuals that is often the traditional focus of secondary and tertiary education.





The overall vision is that personalisation, collaboration and informalisation (informal learning) will be at the core of learning in the future. These terms are not new in education and training but they will become the central guiding principle for organising learning and teaching. **The central learning paradigm is thus characterised by lifelong and lifewide learning** and shaped by the ubiquity of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). At the same time, due to fast advances in technology and structural changes to European labour markets related to demographic change, globalisation and immigration, generic and transversal skills are becoming more important. These skills should help citizens to become lifelong learners who flexibly respond to change, are able to pro-actively develop their competences and thrive in collaborative learning and working environments.<sup>4</sup>

Conceptual map of the future of learning 2030<sup>4</sup>



Lifewide Education was not in existence when the foresight study was undertaken but we did get involved in subsequent work in the EU's Future of Learning project and we were fortunate to have Christine Redecker, who led the project, to be the keynote speaker at our 2014 conference<sup>19</sup>.

The explicit role played by lifewide learning in this vision of near future learning is connected to the ideas of learning anywhere/anytime, informal learning and the capabilities to plan, manage and self-regulate own learning and development. These capacities are key to being an effective learner in this vision of future learning as it unfolds in the decade to come. But lifewide learning is also connected to the ideas that learning is both personal and individual, yet also social and collaborative. Lifewide learning provides a learning paradigm that enables the learner to view themselves 'as the designer of an integrated, meaningful life experience. An experience that incorporates formal education as one component of a much richer set of experiences that embrace all the forms of learning and achievement that are necessary to sustain a meaningful life'.<sup>20 p115</sup> Such a perception also enables learners to see their life and how they chose to use it as their essential resource for their growth and development as a person. One of our aims is to support policy initiatives that promote the lifewide perspective in learning, personal development and education. Where possible we will contribute to discussions and initiatives that have a chance of influencing the thinking of policy makers.

## **Looking forwards to the second half of the century**

The children, adolescents and young adults of today who are participating in education (and all the other parts of their life) will be the workers and citizens of societies 50 years from now. They will live in a world that is unimaginably different and the way we educate today will lay the foundations for survival and flourishing in the latter part of this century. In this context lifewide takes on new meaning and relevance. In all societies education is used instrumentally to prepare people for work – to equip them with knowledge and skills so that they are employable both generally and more specifically. But the emphasis is on the short term – entry into the work force and what societies need to be doing now is pay more attention to the distant future and how people will cope with and flourish in an unimaginable world. As the UN quite rightly alerts us to, our greatest challenge is to learn how to sustain the planet and its ecosystems and act on this learning.<sup>5</sup>

We might also add to this wicked problem the fact that we have entered the machine age - the age when human beings will compete with machines which will progressively out-perform us in more and more areas of activity. It's an age when humans for the first time cease to exist as a natural organism as we transition to human beings that are partly genetically engineered and partly mechanically and electronically engineered.

Work has been core to sustaining the lives of individuals, families and societies but, while nothing is certain about the future there are lots of pointers that indicate that the role currently performed by work will significantly change. Economist, Daniel Susskind's book 'A world Without Work'<sup>21</sup> paints a vivid and sometimes frightening picture of a future containing far fewer opportunities for work than the present. In such a social environment people will a) have to be financially supported by their Governments through some sort of universal wage and b) have to be able to find purposes and meaning in their lives that are not related to work (the activity through which most adults in their day to day life currently find purpose and meaning). It can be argued that the development of an appreciation of how life provides such affordances through a lifewide approach to education and learning would help build a foundation of awareness that will help people sustain themselves in a distant future, whose details will only emerge in decades to come.

*Although we cannot tell how long it will take to arrive at a world with less work for human beings to do, there are clear signs that we are on our way there. The problems of inequality, power and meaning are not lurking in the distance, hidden out of sight in the remote future. They have already begun to unfold, to trouble and test our inherited institutions and traditional ways of life. It is up to us now to respond<sup>15</sup>*  
p238

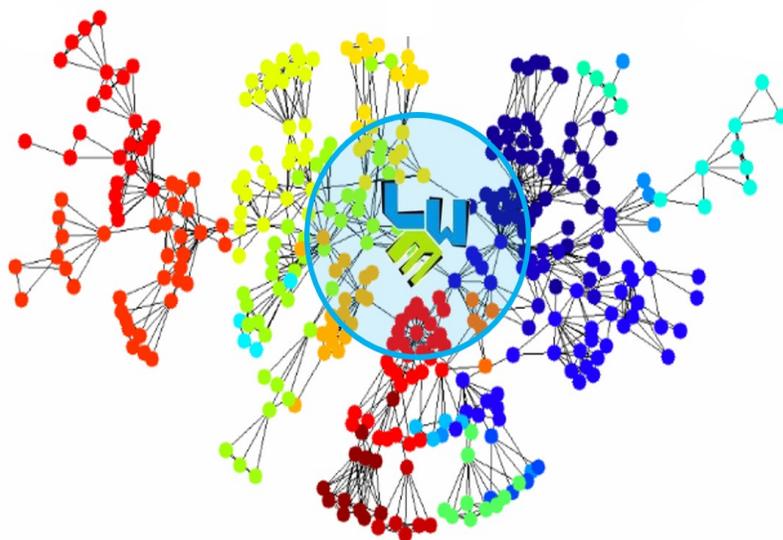
## **Our Strategy**

So this is the set of contexts for the contributions that Lifewide Education might make. Our vision is to continue to develop, support and advocate a paradigm of human learning, development, education and achievement that is 'lifewide' as well as 'lifelong': a concept of learning that recognises and values that 'the whole of life is learning therefore education can have no ending'<sup>1</sup>. From this vision flows our core purpose - to encourage, through words and actions, a comprehensive, inclusive, lifewide concept of learning and education to sustain individuals, societies and the planet. Our aim is to make an effective contribution to the national and global ecosystem for adult lifelong-lifewide learning & education, and contribute to its development.

Pragmatically, our focus remains on higher education: that is a big enough task for the resources we have, but we need to be more connected to the wider world of informal learning outside and beyond higher education. To realise this purpose we aim to:

- Move beyond the idea of a single community of interest towards a self-sustaining *community of networks* enabling people working in different areas of educational interest to interact and share their ideas and work to harness the collective power of different professional communities in such fields such as: *employability and work integrated learning, skills and co/extra-curricular awards, careers education, enterprise and entrepreneurship, volunteering and citizenship, mental health and wellbeing, improving access and widening participation, personal development planning, and recoding achievements through the HEAR, and beyond higher education in the wider world of adult learning and education.*
- Work collaboratively across different areas of professional interest, concern and practice to help develop an adult learning ecosystem that supports a holistic, lifewide approach to learning and education thereby enabling learners to develop and sustain themselves through long and complex lives in an increasingly, fluid, turbulent and disruptive white water world.
- Continue to develop and share scholarly perspectives on the nature of lifewide learning and the ecology of learning and practice.
- Contribute our knowledge to discussions and other initiatives that might influence policy for lifelong learning that recognises and values the lifewide dimension of learning and the development of people.

#### **Illustration of the idea of a community of networks – networks of imaginations**



The community of networks we are imagining doesn't have to be large but it does have to be active in sharing, receiving, using, curating, disseminating and making use of information and knowledge it develops. The role of members is to facilitate the flow of information from their own practitioner networks to the lifewide education community of networks and facilitate the flow of relevant information back from this community network to their own practitioner network. In time of course we hope that through the relationships we develop and interests we share we might collaborate on projects like for example the production of a magazines, books, webinars and other forms of social interaction.

## Infrastructure to support interaction, communication and collaboration

Lifewide Education has established an infrastructure (mail lists, websites, social media platforms) that can support not only a community of interest but a community of networks with cognate interests and facilitate communication and interaction and exchange of ideas and practices across diverse communities of professional interest. Members of the lifewide team of supporters keep the organisation informed and connected to networks and communities but if we are to succeed in developing a community of networks we need involve representatives from different professional communities in our Supporters & Advisors Group. The rough plan outlined below aims to achieve this objective by:

- A Expanding and refreshing our team of supporters and activists by securing representation from diverse professional groups who have an interest and involvement in lifelong-lifewide learning.
- B Reaching out to practitioners in different professional groups to expand our community and considering the most appropriate form and structure for our organisation
- C Building understanding and practice through discussions and the sharing of ideas and resources through social media, webinars and collaborative active learning projects, to stimulate thinking and share practices.
- D Encouraging practitioners to share their ideas and practices through our magazines and books
- E Reaching out to the political sphere and contributing to initiatives to influence policy that recognises and values the lifewide dimension of learning
- F Contributing a lifewide ecological perspective to the third edition of the Oxford Handbook for Lifelong Learning commissioned by Springer as a Major Reference Work for publication in 2023.
- G Supporting initiatives that value learning as one of the 5 ways to wellbeing proposed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), which now underpin many local health strategies
- H Working nationally to support the Centenary Commission on Adult Education's vision for lifewide adult education and internationally through the International Association for Lifewide Learning



## Invitation

Our ambition is to build an inclusive global community that enables educators and practitioners from many different areas of professional interest to work together to create an adult learning ecosystem that is better able to support a lifewide approach to learning and education. If our vision for lifelong-lifewide learning and education resonates with you, please get in touch with Norman Jackson, Director Lifewide Education [lifewider1@gmail.com](mailto:lifewider1@gmail.com) or join our community using the contact form on our website at <https://www.lifewideeducation.uk/>

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### **LIFEWIDE EDUCATION SUPPORTERS & ADVISORS GROUP**

**Norman Jackson, Doug Cole, Rob Ward, Jenny Willis, Barry Carney, Ron Barnett and Kieran Matthews**  
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