

Lifelong Creative Learning at UAL

Briefing Paper for Discussion

Introduction

The Queen's Speech (11 May 2021) indicates that there will be legislative changes ahead to support flexible access to high quality education and training throughout people's lives.¹ How this will impact on creative higher education has yet to be fully understood.

The government paper *A Plan for Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning Revolution* (December 2020) states that "part-time higher education student numbers have been decimated, and numbers of part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds fell by 42% between 2010 and 2015". Despite this decline, in the same paper it is acknowledged that "flexible part-time university study is a key route for delivering a highly skilled workforce and the Department of Education needs to prioritise reforms that will restore the part-time higher education sector".²

Whether the Government will financially support such reform (or give loans for part-time degrees) is yet to be seen. This paper highlights the need for the University of the Arts London (UAL) to improve its strategy and provision of part-time, learner centred creative learning, in response to external and external drivers such as the adoption of blended learning during, and post Covid-19.

This paper also aspires to encourage a wider discussion of lifelong learning across UAL, engaging with academic, teaching, research, and technical staff, as to whether UAL should seek:

- (1) new and innovative ways of offering access to teaching and learning regarding creative subjects, including a wider offer that would serve the needs of a broader range of adult learners than currently provided for;
- (2) new means of accrediting creative learning for diverse actors and communities, including those who may already engage on community projects across UAL but do not have the right qualifications/access to higher education;
- (3) a better understanding of its role not just as a creative but also a future "civic university"³ that interacts and connects with local communities, to make positive impacts on their lives, livelihood and mental health connected to UAL's Social Responsibility⁴ agenda.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/queens-speech-2021>

² https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmeduc/278/27810.htm#_idTextAnchor082

³ A civic university is an institution that has a place-based strategy about how it connects to its local city area and local community.

⁴ Social responsibility is best understood as the idea that organisations, institutions and individuals have an obligation to act for the benefit of society as a whole, drawing on principles around ethics and social welfare.

Definitions

Lifelong learning is often understood as returning to different forms of learning or returning to higher education later in life. At the heart of the term lies the idea that learning is not confined to formal educational periods/places, but takes place throughout a variety of different life stages, experiences and situations.

Throughout this paper, the term “lifelong learning” follows the Department of Education (2000) definition as the “ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of creative knowledge, and other skills, for either personal or professional reasons.”

The paper also adopts the European Commission’s (2006) association of lifelong learning to personal development, self-sustainability, individual competitiveness, and employability “that can enhance social inclusion and active citizenship” and “has a key role to play in responding to social exclusion”.

We live in times of convergence that will create the fastest, deepest, most consequential transformation of human civilisation in history⁵, due to simultaneous changes in information, energy, food, transportation and materials production and distribution. There is a need for UAL to consider a dramatically different landscape in relation to what, how and with whom we learn.

Thought leaders have recognised that the emerging skills landscape cannot be supplied by a one-directional pipeline between secondary education and professional work. They envision agile, lifelong learning opportunities where learning is at the heart of an eco-system that supports seamless and equitable transitions between tertiary education providers and employment.⁶

Aims & drivers for change

This paper has two aims. First, to gain a better understanding and identify initial gaps in relation to the different ways and levels of educational provision for adults over 21 (including vulnerable people) UAL currently provides by bringing together for the first time the provision various UAL staff deliver linked to lifelong learning, as part of their contributions in drafting this paper. Second, to make a case that the time is right for UAL to further discuss and develop a clear strategy on lifelong learning given internal and external drivers for change post pandemic. Specifically:

⁵ Rethinking Humanity Five Foundational Sector Disruptions, the Lifecycle of Civilizations, and the Coming Age of Freedom by James Arbib & Tony Seba (June 2020): <https://www.rethinkx.com/humanity-download>

⁶ Dr. Kay Hack: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/Reshaping-higher-education-for-a-post-Covid-world>

- (i) there is a gap in the University's social justice and widening participation agendas in relation to improving pathways towards easier access to higher education for vulnerable adults - individuals and communities of learners with specific characteristics, such as young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), refugees, ex-offenders, and employees at different career levels who are in need of reskilling or upskilling, to name a few.
- (ii) the APELS framework⁷/access routes may no longer be sufficient to meet operational demands, highlighting a pressing need to better understand how the current gap in innovating new ways to offer accreditation to individuals and communities might be filled. This is currently being addressed and led on behalf of the University by significant research being tested by Paul Haywood, Fred Meller and a team of other UAL academics, who are leading on learning recognition and support tools for managing the accreditation of prior learning, or the management of evidence based portfolios through the learning endorsement system they are devising with a broad base of partners. This research project, REBEL (Recognition of Experience Based Education and Learning), started with Erasmus funding and is producing a system, to be taken forward by CSM⁸, that allows learners to accrue endorsement and micro-credentials in lieu - submitting an APEL claim for higher education credits⁹.
- (iii) the need to reinvent ways of accrediting student volunteering and other forms of student engagement with the social justice and social responsibility agendas during final degrees, that is fair to all students, and to enhance UAL's position to fulfil its role as a civic university. Previous UAL discussions in this area identified that students who can't afford to volunteer (and thus have degrees accredited linked to volunteering) may be at a disadvantage. Therefore systemic ways to enable equal student participation would need to be developed by UAL regarding accreditation of volunteering¹⁰.
- (iv) The climate emergency necessitates a new form of education, one that is ecologically centred and connects sources of knowledge from beyond western, techno-centric sources. This distributed learning requires new

⁷ <http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/credit-apel-qualifications-frameworks>

⁸ Central Saint Martins Dean of Academic Services has confirmed there is a plan to submit stand-alone APEL units for validation; and are in the process of developing 6 options as credit shells. These units have been under development within the context of a Work and Experience Based Learning framework.

⁹ <https://www.kerrijefferis.com/rebel>

¹⁰ UAL have discussed accrediting volunteering in the past; Katie Mills and Tessa Read looked at this for UAL in 2015 in regard to the "Do It" website: <https://doit.life>. Tessa Read (2020) has subsequently developed a new account of the role of social enterprise in the civic university: <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/16842/>

frameworks and models relating to pedagogy, content, delivery and course lengths.

- (v) The need for reskilling & upskilling in a post-Covid-19 and post-digital world, taking into account blended learning models and the need for a skills revolution to address ways the Fourth Industrial Revolution is shaping/challenging the future of skills and work.
- (vi) The need for access to part-time creative arts degree and further study for local (as well as international) communities of learners, some linked to evening provision, that has not been served well by the existing grant system. The UK Government's Publication "A Plan for an Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning Revolution" (December 2020), as mentioned previously, calls for change to empower disadvantaged learners, such as adults working full-time as carers, and single parents, who need a more adaptable offer to access education, than UAL currently appears to accommodate¹¹.
- (vii) The need to ensure UAL's work around decolonisation of the curriculum, anti-racism and challenges with attainment gaps progresses so that we can confidently assert that the expectations of different learners entering UAL will be met. Differentiating for learners, particularly in the first year of study, is critical and at the heart of enhancing the student experience. This is one amongst a range of considerations, and does mean moving away from an over-reliance on westernised curriculums.

The call for a renewed focus on lifelong learning has also come from my own, late-start educational journey, as well as evidence-based research and engagement with returning citizens led by the Design Against Crime Research Centre (DACRC). Also the recognition that both UAL and the UK may need to upskill populations in order to move towards a more prosperous society both economically, and socially post-Covid-19, and also post-Brexit, in order to break barriers related to social mobility and inclusion.

A recent OECD report (2018) recognises a "growing perception that social mobility across generations has declined and that, increasingly, parents' fortunes and advantages play a major factor in people's lives". The Social Mobility Barometer 2021 also suggests that the pandemic has heightened people's perceptions with 56% of all adults in the UK thinking that social inequality has increased as a result of the pandemic".

¹¹ See evidence: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmeduc/278/27802.htm>

Creative education is often extremely significant to neurodiverse individuals who do not do well with traditional convergent forms of education, and thus increased pathways to creative education can impact positively on their social mobility prospects. Additionally, creative education and divergent thinking approaches are documented to contribute significantly to improved mental wellbeing¹².

Further external drivers for change

- Automation could replace 800 million jobs by 2030 pressing for reskilling, and upskilling in order to keep up with the changes brought by the technology revolution and transition to a green economy (The McKinsey Global Institute, 2017).
- Lifelong learning will power future business models in education encompassing shorter courses with credentials, and online access (World Economic Forum, 2020).
- Covid-19 is disrupting higher education with universities facing competition from companies offering focussed training. This is likely to democratise learning and make it accessible to more than those prospective students who can afford to pay fees for an advanced degree (World Economic Forum, 2020).
- Covid-19 has forced universities to bring their courses online – signalling the way towards a new educational paradigm still in the process of being defined (World Economic Forum, 2020).
- There is a shift towards lifelong learning for economic recovery and resilience post-pandemic, post digital (UK Government Office for Science, Nesta, 2018)

Further internal drivers for change

- Seek new opportunities for UAL to remain meaningful, cutting edge and financially solvent is always significant.
- Social design research, which works with vulnerable communities to change the world for the better, including finding new ways to access, and utilise,

¹² There are numerous studies linking creativity with mental health and social mobility. See Baring Foundation's latest research study entitled "Creatively minded: a new study mapping the Arts & Mental Health field in the UK" (February 2020). For Criminal Justice see the Arts Council (2018): <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20and%20in%20the%20Criminal%20Justice%20system-%20a%20summary%20of%20evidence.pdf>

government-funded initiatives, such as vocational training or mental health initiatives associated with social prescribing.

- Promote wider participation in our education programmes by a broader cohort of students to aid delivery of UAL's Anti-Racism Action Plan (2021), which seeks inclusive ways to encourage implementation of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies.
- Offer additional approaches to lifelong learning aimed at home as well as international students to help build future leaders and widen diversity both amongst students and also the number of Visiting Lecturers UAL employs from BAME communities, for example.
- Proof of concept courses such as the Centre for Sustainable Fashion's 8 week open source course has attracted over 72, 000 learners from 192 countries, using technologies such as Padlet to offer peer-to-peer learning and assessment and for the UAL teams to engage in mutual learning opportunities with learners that span generational, locational and disciplinary borders.

Initial mapping of UAL lifelong learning activity

Initial mapping of UAL existing activity in the area of lifelong learning provision shows that the University's offer is currently scattered, and that further mapping by staff is needed to ensure all activity is understood. Also to help fully consider whether its range could be extended to include not only degrees but also opportunities offered by:

- UAL Awarding Body, who develop nationally recognised Level 1 to Level 5 qualifications delivered by 200+ schools, FE colleges, private providers and HEIs. UALAB are exploring how best they can support the lifelong learning and widening participation agendas through their existing provision or through the development of new provision.
- Open Book (UAL), Making for Change (LCF), the Design Against Crime Research Centre (CSM) who are working with the UAL Awarding Body and UAL Accreditation Office on Level 3¹³ Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) provision.
- Projects led by the Public Collaboration lab at CSM, Poplar Works at LCF, MAKE@Story Garden at CSM, and more recently Playground at CCW appear to enable creative engagements with research, philanthropic or community

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

projects subject to external funding provision, and linked to place-based engagement. These need to be further understood and documented, and other UAL initiatives mapped onto this list.

- Widening participation initiatives such as the UAL Insights programme offers young people access to UAL Colleges and pre-University advice; UAL's partnership with Open Books also offers some access to lifelong learning for vulnerable adults.

Future strategies may improve on above by additionally looking at:

- Special enrolments (as proposed by Paul Glennon);
- Blended models of operational delivery including new staff contracts regarding evening and weekend access to educational provision;
- New forms of UAL accreditation – from Extended Project Qualifications (EPQs) awarded by the UAL Awarding Body as part of the national regulated system, to the accreditation system currently being developed and led for UAL by Prof Paul Haywood.

Working with partners to explore micro credentials further. Many universities around the world are already doing this. CSF and CCI is very active in this space with various initiatives/communities. FutureLearn is one example:

<https://canvas.arts.ac.uk/News/81560/cci-courses-on-the-government-s-learning-platform-to-support-post-covid-economy>

Opportunities for growth

The commitment in the Queen's speech 2021 mentioned at the beginning of this paper may indicate that there will be a push on government to make more part time degrees available in the future. Lobbying to target government funding of part time creative degrees, given the neurodiversity arguments, as well as those related to the contribution of the creative and cultural industries to economic and social prosperity, can widen opportunities to fund lifelong learning across UAL through a variety of government sources.

UAL is in a unique position to develop strong partnerships with businesses spanning knowledge exchange and research, and initiate innovative models to fund lifelong learning open educational resources through industry.

Conclusions

Lifelong learning is increasing in priority and focus in the UK government agenda and is responding to a pressing need and internal as well as external drivers for change post Covid-19, post pandemic.

The UAL lifelong learning offer is currently scattered. We need more clarity about definitions of life long learning, work based, experienced base, placement etc, as not always clear.

This paper makes a case for the need to develop a strategy that optimises the University's opportunities to play a pivotal role in linking lifelong learning with many pathways, including part-time pathways, to creative education for different communities of learners.

Immediate Call to Action

1. UAL should consider appointing/supporting a senior member of staff to lead the focus on lifelong learning at UAL, with a clear remit and budget.
2. UAL should consider appointing a researcher to undertake to map the lifelong learning user journey. Also to map UAL's offer (particularly the work being delivered in different colleges by Deans of Academic Services) and compare the two to better understand what UAL can deliver and what opportunities exist to extend the offer in future.
3. Future opportunities for growth relating to lifelong learning at UAL need further research to better mobilise both government and industry funding and to develop innovative funding models linked to both knowledge exchange and research
4. UAL should consider lobbying government regarding making loans available to UK students for part-time study.

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