
A history of the development of NIACE



Like adult learning itself, NIACE has moved dramatically from the margins to the mainstream in the last decade. Its strengths lie in its many networks, working in partnership across sectoral boundaries, and its willingness to take risks with new ideas, of which Adult Learners week (one of the great international innovations in adult learning in recent years) is only the most widely visible. It has consistently sought to support the interests of adult learners, in all their diversity, and to be a critical friend to all those who support adult learning.

Stephen McNair, 'From worthy margin to lively mainstream' in Adults Learning, Jan 1999 Vol 10 No 5

Introduction

The roots of NIACE can be traced back to the end of the First World War when, in 1918-1919, a **World Association for Adult Education** (WAAE) was established in London by a group including Dr Albert Mansbridge, founder of the Workers' Educational Association.

Despite the grand title, this body had a largely British membership with its international dimension coming primarily from the Dominions of the former British Empire. Nevertheless, the desire to learn from and contribute to activity beyond the UK has remained a feature of the Association's successors. The WAAE ran conferences, published the Journal of the World Association for Adult Education and set up a Central Bureau of Information (on Adult Education) in London, with a library.

In 1921 a separate **British Institute of Adult Education** (BIAE) was established. Originally a branch of the World Association it became constitutionally separate in 1925, though still "in association" with the WAAE.

The BIAE was an association of individual members, and its main aim was to be "a centre for common thought by persons of varied experience in the adult education movement". It did not have its own premises, and met in hired rooms. The address sometimes quoted - 28 St. Anne's Gate, London - was the private address of its first President, Viscount Haldane.

The **National Foundation for Adult Education** was set up in 1946, as a forum for consultation between the organisations providing adult education (Local Education Authorities, Responsible Bodies, voluntary organisations etc). In 1949 it merged with the BIAE to become the National Institute of Adult Education - an organisation with both individual and corporate members. The first Secretary of the NIAE was

This is the first in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues.

Suggestions for future issues to be covered are welcome.

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They are also available on the website at www.niace.org.uk.

If you require a different format - e.g. a large print version please let us know.

Edward Hutchinson - the NFAE's founding secretary.

At the same time, a separate **Scottish Institute of Adult Education** (SIAE) was set up - largely because the former NFAE had not covered Scotland and the NIAE did not either. (The BIAE had, since 1928, had a Scottish Branch with its own Committee). The SIAE - later SIACE - survived until it lost Government funding in 1991.

NIAE changed its name in 1983 to the "National Institute of Adult Continuing Education". While this did not involve a change in the organisation's structure or immediate practice, it sought to reflect more accurately an emerging remit beyond the traditional mainstream territories of university extra-mural provision; the agendas of local education authority adult and community education services and the concerns of major voluntary bodies like the WEA. As the 1980s progressed, NIACE started to contribute more confidently to discourses about the relationship between general education and vocational training and between economic prosperity and social inclusion. NIACE was also building membership among further education colleges and Training and Enterprise Councils whilst retaining its traditional membership base among local authorities and universities.

The Institute's "children"

Ever since 1918, NIACE and its predecessors have produced or nurtured units, projects and initiatives. Some of them grew to become better known than their parent. Among them are:

The Arts Council

In 1935, the British Institute set up an initiative called "Art for the People" as a scheme to provide ordinary people throughout the UK with the opportunity to see great works of art. Many private collectors agreed to loan their paintings to the Institute for this purpose (all the works were given labels with the BIAE's address, which still prompt occasional enquiries to NIACE from art historians who assume that the Institute owned particular paintings). Unfortunately no catalogues survive in our archives. "Art for the People" led to the establishment, in 1939, of a **Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts** (CEMA) was set up in 1939 with the help of the BIAE and especially its Secretary, WE Williams). In 1946, CEMA became the Arts Council.

BFI (the British Film Institute)

In 1929 the BIAE took the leading role in setting up an informal Commission on Educational and Cultural Films. This produced a report in 1932: *The Film in National Life*, which resulted, in 1933, in the establishment of the British Film Institute.

BSA (the Basic Skills Agency)

ALBSU - the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit - (formerly the Adult Literacy Unit and Adult Literacy Resource Agency) was a government-funded unit of NIACE which remained in London when NIACE moved to Leicester. It became independent of NIACE in 1990) and is now the Basic Skills Agency.

ACACE (the Advisory Council for Adult Continuing Education)

Was an independent Government-funded body co-located with NIAE/ NIACE between 1976 and 1983. It was chaired by Dr Richard Hoggart (now an Honorary Life Member). Four of its members also served on NIACE's council, ensuring a close relationship. In addition they included NIACE's past President, Richard Smethurst (Provost of Worcester College, Oxford), and our Honorary Research Fellow, Professor Naomi Sargant.

UDACE (the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education)

This government-funded successor to ACACE operated between 1984 and 1992. Although it had neither the status or resources proposed for a National Development Council for Adult Continuing Education that had been recommended by ACACE, UDACE developed a powerful reputation through its work on specific issues of policy and practice, often through the medium of expert groups. Among the topics developed by UDACE were educational guidance for adults (including managing the National Educational Guidance Initiative), accreditation and Open College Networks. In 1992, UDACE was taken over by the Further Education Unit.

REPLAN (*not an acronym*)

Was a government initiative which ran between 1984 and 1991 and which was concerned with improving, increasing and extending educational opportunities for unemployed and unwaged adults. The NIACE-REPLAN unit was based in Leicester and managed a network of regional development staff who undertook consultancy and staff development as well as mounting a programme of

development projects which played a major part in taking NIACE activity into the FE college sector. The overall initiative also had several strands independent of NIACE (including a large programme of Education Support Grants to Local Education Authorities and a raft of curriculum development managed by the Further Education Unit).

NIACE Cymru

Originally called the Wales Committee of NIACE, it was established in 1985 to advise the Welsh Office, the Welsh Joint Education Committee, NIACE and providers of adult education in Wales on adult continuing education matters and existing good practice with a view to improving the quality of provision. NIACE Cymru particularly recognises the distinctive ways in which Welsh culture and language affect adult learners in the Principality.

Journals

The Journal of Adult Education was begun by the BIAE in 1926 as a half-yearly journal. It became a quarterly called *Adult Education* in 1934, which became the monthly *Adults Learning* in 1989.

Time to Learn began in 1949 as a half yearly *Calendar of Residential Short Courses*.

Studies in the Education of Adults began in 1969 as *Studies in Adult Education*.

Initiatives which grew...

In 1928 the BIAE and the BBC set up a joint Committee of Enquiry, which produced a report *New Ventures in Broadcasting* (published by the BBC). This led to the formation of a Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education, as a forum for the co-operation of established adult education organisations with the BBC.

The Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) was set up in 1941 by the Army Education Corps under the Direction of Sir William Emrys Williams (Secretary of the BIAE). ABCA undertook a programme of general education for citizenship which is often credited with having an impact on the result of the 1945 General Election.

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

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