

Realizing your Potential: Engendering Learning & Guidance in Later Life

Topic assessed: Researchers at the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL), University of Strathclyde, Scotland, mounted an initiative to encourage older adults to re-engage with lifelong learning to help enhance employability in later life.

The case study outlines the challenging demographics (ageing population) and employment scenarios (growing pressure for older workers to remain active for longer and re-train for new roles) which, characterize public policy in the UK and Europe and illustrates a possible ULL response.

		Helpful in achieving the objective	Harmful in achieving the objective
		Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal Factors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopting a research-based approach to a major policy issue with practical implications. Devising a practical intervention in the form of a university lifelong learning course. Utilizing insights from the research literature in devising the course. The intervention offers CLL a mechanism which can be rolled out again. There is scope to further substantiate CLL's position as a leading centre for research, development and practice in adult learning/employability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Project' nature of the initiative. Resource constraints, pressure of other objectives and priorities.
		Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) context is arguably congruent with a ULL intervention. The intervention affords other ULL centres a model which, can 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An educational mindset and structure which, frontloads effort on younger age groups, and assumes life/work/retirement patterns which are being challenged by demographic change and economic crisis.
External Factors			

<p>be adapted to their circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As public policy steers towards increasingly employability rates of older adults, it should become easier to raise the profile of ULL as a response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of a developed PEST mechanism to align with the response emerging from lifelong learning research and practice – a DIALOGUE issue. Accelerating scale of demographic and other socio-economic changes, which may overwhelm the capacity of ULL to respond. As the complexity and difficulty of the current economic crisis grows feeds through to pressures on University budgets generally, it may be very difficult to attract support for ULL.
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2. Can the hindering factors (weaknesses and threats) be generalised and applied at national level? Which other hindering factors can be identified?

The key “hindrance” distilled from this experience is the lack of a sufficiently powerful articulating mechanism to integrate the public policy sphere with what ULL can offer to address a rapidly developing problem in the labour market. In the Scottish situation (Independence Referendum, 2014) there should be an opportunity to raise the profile of ULL in the political discourse as a key aspect of public policy. In effect a major opportunity for dialogue between researchers, educational practitioners, employers and public policy experts.

In addition there is scope to disseminate this initiative within Scottish, and European, ULL circles, in order to examine the nature of ULL/public policy dialogue. This would entail for example: examination of the research/practice dimension illustrated by the case study; the implications for resources and organization of ULL; the ULL staff development requirements; and the articulation of a ULL ‘mission’ in respect of ageing populations and the implications for national and Europe-wide PEST factors.

3. Once you have identified the general hindering factors, please try to analyse their reasons to find out how these factors are embedded in your respective learning and research culture.

In this case it is arguable that the initiative is potentially at a ‘cutting edge’ of translating research into practice in relation to ageing populations in advanced economies. To that extent the factors outlined in 2 above are “embedded” in the culture as a consequence of both historical development and the disruptive pressure of a demographic change combined with a major economic crisis.