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Through the Archives

A History of Ditchley Education Narratives

January 2020

DITCHLEY

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DITCHLEY

Introduction

Ditchley was set up in 1958 as an international centre for Anglo-American exchange. From the start, Ditchley brought together networks of influential people to discuss carefully considered topics at a time when people began to turn away from the rawness of the Second World War to the more optimistic prospects of the coming decades.

Education, for many, defined the zeitgeist of the 1960s; it was quintessential to aspirations for a better future. Ditchley itself was (and still is) fundamentally an educational enterprise; it is not surprising that education alongside questions of democracy, economics, international governance and trade was a major pre-occupation. Lively and free-thinking, discussions at Ditchley addressed contemporary challenges, often with those we now recognise as historic figures – people who made the arguments and took decisions that led to the next half century of educational change.

Education

In recent years and in continuing Ditchley's ambition to take forward systemic change, education as a programme of action, comes up at almost every Ditchley discussion. It is part of the answer to address every difficult issue society faces, from how to take forward genetic engineering, restore ocean health, mediate the future of technology to sustaining democracy itself: all call for more education. But while everyone can agree on the broad value of education for social progress, the questions of how it is organised, for who and when, are much more contested and this disagreement has defined wider discussion about equality, social mobility, and a fair society.

The reports from the 700 plus Ditchley conferences going back to the early 1960s add-up to a unique resource providing insights into the post-war history of the UK, including transatlantic and international perspectives (early discussions were Anglo-American, more international perspectives were included over the decades).

The terms of debate, contemporary ideas, the ways they were discussed and evolved and the people who raised them are recorded. The conference reports (Director's Notes) reveal the ways people thought about and anticipated change, and how they responded. We can understand contemporary concerns alongside the social, economic and political change of the time, and we can trace the ways certain ideas gained credibility or were dropped. Did the same questions come up again and again; were they subsequently dealt with in policies – and how? How were particularly difficult issues articulated and received? With hindsight, what can we learn that is relevant to our discussion today about education for human development and social progress?

Over the course of 60 years, discussions about education have been continuous and consistent. Themes reoccur and often are unresolved. Most enduring is the defence of the university as an elite and autonomous institution that has, in the production of knowledge, advanced human society but at the same time worked in favour of particular social classes. The university as the educational institution par excellence has survived many decades of sustained calls to expand access and integrate into a broader system in order to meet wider societal needs. As discussions at Ditchley show, at different historical moments arguments did break through and changes to universities and post-secondary education were made, but it is only over the last five years that discussions have begun to signal a weakening of the power of a certain kind of traditional university education as it gives way to new kinds

of research and knowledge needed to mediate the technological transformation of human societies.

1960s: ‘Education for all’

‘Education for all’, television, comprehensive and progressive

In its first decade Ditchley convened some fourteen conferences and co-hosted more discussions (together with the Gulbenkian Foundation and further with the Ford Foundation) on questions directly related to education. It held pioneering discussions on what schools and universities are for; the changing roles of the young, their moral values and political opinion forming; uses of technology; questions of educational aid overseas and the risks of brain drain from developing countries; the position of young people in society; economic and industrial change and corresponding changing demands made of state education.

Significant figures from the period came to Ditchley to talk about education. Academics who led change in their own disciplines, such as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Ralf Dahrendorf and Margaret Mead came. Sir John Wolfenden (who chaired the Wolfenden Committee recommending the decriminalisation of homosexuality) and published on what he considered to be the detrimental effects of the separation of intellectual disciplines, chaired several conferences. The influential social entrepreneur Michael Young, and politicians such as the 1966 Minister for Education and Science, Anthony Crosland and a predecessor Sir Edward Boyle (1962-64) were also some of the 1800 or so people that took part in these detailed and extended discussions.

Right from the start tensions over equality in education are clear

Debates at Ditchley over the last 60 years have wrestled repeatedly with how to reconcile a system of ‘education for all’ as a (state funded) public good with its actual effect in differentiating between people, to create winners and losers and to allocate the scarce resource of higher income jobs.

Placed at the top of the UK education system, universities have had a huge impact in determining the shape of the rest of the system. Their purpose was debated again and again in the context of social change. In the 60s the arrival of ‘mass society’ and ‘mass communication’ were held up as reasons for changing the context and content of education, to increase the value of its utilitarian, scientific and technical aspects.

“We in Britain needed to ask ourselves what we really wanted over and above examinations and qualifications. We wanted to learn much more about the purpose of higher education and the function of the teacher.”¹

The expansion of the universities drove much soul searching. Ditchley conferences show general but not total support for the expansion of universities and the opportunities for social progress expansion was thought to bring, but detailed accounts revealed reservations and a concern that the intention to expand access (notably recommended by Robbins Report, 1963) extended higher education within those social classes with access already. Discussion at Ditchley recognised this limitation early on and called for more profound thinking about the purposes of higher education, the values that lay behind it and what it meant for those left outside the remit of universities.

¹ *Third Related Bodies Conference* (Dec 1963).

America was often looked to as an innovator and leader

In the 1960s, the US was seen to be leading an increase in college attendance, the provision of community colleges, and the development of new academic subjects. A conference in 1963 entitled *The relevance of American Liberal Arts Colleges to British Higher Education* encouraged the introduction of American Studies in the UK. It was noted in quite detailed preparatory survey work that, at that time, neither Oxford nor Cambridge Universities offered American literature as a subject of study (Oxford offered no modern literature at all).

The same was true for the introduction of business schools and management studies. The lack of connection between universities and industry was often a cause for concern at Ditchley (*Management Education, 1966*). The US business schools, and Harvard Business School in particular, were seen as models for bringing together industry and academia and overcoming the fear and scepticism on both sides. These debates helped to accelerate the inclusion of Business Schools within UK universities.

New initiatives and innovations were more likely to be brought in by the new universities. University expansion made room for more discussion about innovation.

Educational television

A major area for innovation was the use of broadcasting technology – in particular television. In the early 1960s, Ditchley held two conferences on *Education by correspondence and television*.² Again, taking a lead from the US, a number of universities were beginning to think about how to incorporate broadcasting technology in the delivery of education. Michael Young (an influential social entrepreneur) and Peter Laslett (a Cambridge political scientist) took part in discussions at Ditchley and were convinced of the potential for educational television. Along with Sir Edward Boyle, a Minister from Harold Wilson's new government who was also present, a Ditchley working group led by Michael Young drafted a report '*Towards an Open University*', which was later published in *Where Magazine* (a progressive education magazine of the time) in autumn 1964 and was described by the historian Asa Briggs as a 'landmark text'.³

The negotiations that led to the Open University were complex with many players including Jennie Lee (Labour's Arts Minister) and others in the Wilson government. In 1967 a document that set out Young's Ditchley report for the Government's Open University Planning Committee contributed again to what was a complex negotiation caught up in conflicting visions of education at the time – was the OU to be a version of an elite university or something much more open and accessible? Early ambitions were to provide a second chance to those without access to higher education and to create opportunities for the majority of people who would not otherwise get close to university.⁴ Ditchley discussions reflected serious debates about how to serve a majority, at that time excluded from elite post-secondary education.

Selective and comprehensive systems

Themes linked with progressive education were ascendant at the time: a conference on *Selective and comprehensive systems of secondary education* (Feb 1967) again looked to the US experience and the high school system in considering the extent to which central

² One with the Dept. of Education, Oxford University and a second with US engagement.

³ Michael Young, *Social Entrepreneur*, by Asa Briggs, Palgrave 2001, p215.

⁴ The Gulbenkian Foundation, involved in the Ditchley discussions was an early funder of the OU.

government should be involved in local education, the relation between the school and the community, and the future of external exams in secondary schools.

This UK conference represented different parts of the state sector — state school heads, government ministers/officials, school inspectors, or representatives from Local Education Authorities.⁵ On the American side there was participation from school, college and teacher training leaders.

Social role of education

The trend towards comprehensive education reflected strongly held convictions about the social role of school education. The segregation of children at age 12 was considered ‘wrong’: mixed ability teaching was the way forward. A widely shared view at the time was that a young person's personal and social development benefitted from spending their formative years of early adolescence in schools where the pupils represent a fuller cross section of society.

“There prevailed the general belief that pupils realistically accepted the existence of differences and/or attainment.”⁶

Progressive objectives explored at the time considered that the purpose of school was to help a child to learn to live with others. School should prepare people on leaving school for their place in the economic life of the community. To that end, non-academic objectives outlined at Ditchley included:

- Emotional health,
- Concern for others,
- Concept of integrity,
- Intellectual curiosity,
- Capacity to make wise decisions,
- Enjoyment of aesthetic experience,
- Encouragement of creativity.

In the context of discussions about ‘progressive education’, universities were often described as a limiting factor to progress: In England and Wales, university entrance was highly competitive with top ‘A’ levels and a good recommendation from a head teacher required. These conditions did not apply in state supported institutions in the US and in this sense, the US was at times seen to show the way.

In Ditchley’s most radical debates of the 1960s, hopes were expressed for a future in which national external examination at the end of secondary school for university selection would become unnecessary. Instead there would be adequate places in higher education for all who wanted one — a comprehensive higher education system. Of course, these aspirations were fiercely contested.

⁵ The Sunday Times education correspondent, Colin Chapman was also present.

⁶ *Selective and comprehensive systems of education* (Feb 1967).

Responding to student unrest

The late 1960s marked a period of student protest and in response Ditchley held discussions in January and February 1969: *New political ideas and movements, with particular reference to student and racial unrest* (Jan 1969); *The changing attitudes of the young to the purposes of a university, and the consequences for university policies and government* (Feb 1969).

These conferences acknowledged a general change in student attitudes arising from changing economic and social circumstances. The young were seen to have a greater role in consumer markets and in employment, and in turn made demands for a less paternal approach, particularly to discipline. The tension between state funding and university autonomy re-surfaced. A 'public service' view of the purpose and function of universities conflicted the concern of universities and groups within them for autonomy and other intrinsic values. Universities defended their autonomy but their reliance on public funding and a lack of diversity in their financial support was identified several times at Ditchley as a risk for British universities.

As in the past, the elements of what constituted a good university were broadly agreed in principle but were contested in practice. Students were demanding greater participation and representation in the running of universities. Again, discussions at Ditchley noted that despite its expansion, higher education was still restricted both in terms of numbers and social class. In the 1960s, Britain was behind the US in the percentage of 18 year-olds entering full-time education.

1970s: 'Concern about youth'

Social equality vs university autonomy

Despite expansion, student unrest and the aspirations of an 'open university', the position of the British universities remained structurally largely unchanged. The angst about their purpose persisted. *The meaning of an academic community* (Feb 1970) discussed relationships within the university and between the university and the wider society, and described them as "turbulent". For all the egalitarian trend and the removal of financial barriers in Britain (with student grants for fees and maintenance), the proportion of working-class students at British universities was said to have remained broadly similar to the position pre-war.

The growing power of external pressure on universities, seen on both sides of the Atlantic, was felt to be from two main sources: one was the growth of public expenditure on universities and their increasing dependence on public funding; the other was the rise in external demands for specific types of education and research.

The autonomy of academic values was pitted against societal demands for greater public value. In return for public spending, governments wanted more by way of accountability, an ability to guide the direction of research and to encourage greater uses of university facilities. Many in defence of universities saw this as interference and the sense that 'interference' was becoming harder to resist was attributed to a decline in academic prestige, which in turn was attributed to the expansion and growth of universities.

Industry, too, was seen as more demanding in claiming a role as a stakeholder in higher education. But there was resistance from those who saw this as pressure for university education to become specialised preparation for a career. Such developments militated against the aim of university staff to preserve a more liberal type of education — the spirit

of inquiry and the pursuit of pure science. These conflicting aspirations were played out time and again in careful debate at Ditchley with opposing voices around the table.

Other parts of the education system — British colleges of technology and junior colleges in the United States - were often referred to as part of an overall system, but inevitably received less attention.

It was the increase in the demand for higher education that the state responded to.

“Higher education was seen, perhaps even more in the United States than in Britain, as the first and almost inescapable rung for anyone who wanted to climb the social ladder”.⁷

Universities recognised then (as they do now) that for many, university is out of reach, not through a lack of basic ability but because of social disadvantage. Universities then (as they are now) were uncomfortable about being put in a position to make amends for broader societal disadvantage.

1970s and major concerns with youth

The 1970s saw much interest in the concept of ‘youth’. Ditchley held a series of conferences in this decade examining different aspects of education and opportunities for young people. That youth was emerging as a category was clear in the conference on *The training of young people for rescue, relief and service* (May 1967). Chaired by Prince Phillip, it was intended to develop thinking about the provision for and by youth, “*for young men and women in the present world of conflict, instability and delinquency*”, and furthered ideas developed in the Duke of Edinburgh Award set up in the late 1950s for young people’s service.

These discussions and the expansion of higher education opened-up new divisions about education policy. Would post-secondary education continue as a binary system (formalised in 1966), with universities in one sector and local authority-financed institutions in the other; or a unitary system including all forms of higher education – universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education?

As the numbers of young people going to universities increased there was a growing sense that the form and content of education could not be contained by traditional concepts and practices. Many young people would not be motivated towards or suited for the traditional academic education and it would therefore need to be changed. The first flickerings of a concept of education as a facility to be developed throughout life began to emerge as discussions at Ditchley explored more radical ideas. Could education be seen as a series of varying educational experiences, lived through intermittently over a long period? The ‘right to education’ could include opportunities to choose between

“traditional schooling, community work at home or abroad, anthropological style living in other cultures, direct participation under certain conditions in production. In other words, education will be conceived in a variety of ways and at the very least, it will transcend the school.”⁸

Could we conceive of a “*school without walls*”, successful both academically and in terms of personal development?

⁷ *The meaning of an academic community* (Feb 1970).

⁸ *Education and Youth Problems* (Feb 1971).

Even in the more utopian brainstormings at Ditchley, the arguments about social mobility would not go away. What worked for middle class students in elite institutions (a liberal humanist education, non-vocational and non-specialised that ensured good jobs, whatever the academic subject), would not, it was argued, work for all. Demands for this more elite model to be replicated to the newly expanded sector were made by those unwilling to be fobbed off with what many considered to be second-best – i.e. vocational and technical education. But the concern was that these students were unlikely to get as good a humanist education as the elite students, or if they did that this would not translate in the employment market.

For some therefore, the expansion of higher education in its existing form was said to be accentuating and entrenching class and social divisions, rather than mitigating them. There was no way out. In an expanded system of higher education, children from poor and deprived backgrounds were seen to be doubly disadvantaged compared with the middle-class young. The desire for flexibility, openness and a range of different models, time and again clashed with the reality of education as a private good - the means to differentiate between people and to distribute opportunity for some.

The third and fourth of the 70s conferences on education looked at schools in detail and again radical ideas were shared. A belief in growing prosperity gave rise to a view that vocational education would become less important and that students could drop in and out of education as they felt was needed. Schools could therefore become less formal, and students could participate extensively in school decision-making. Traditional schools were described at the time as dysfunctional and wholly new alternatives were felt to be necessary. New approaches to teacher training were called for, as was the input of musicians and artists. More academic counsellors, better pastoral care and well-developed careers advice were considered essential.

Efforts in the 1970s to think through how schools deal with disadvantage produced the same dichotomy apparent in most discussions on education: schools should respond but could not be held responsible for society's ills. The intellectual ideal of high standards was felt to come into conflict with the full implications of education for all.

1973 – the year of lifelong learning

In 1973, the idea of extending learning throughout life came up in the context of an anticipation of increased 'leisure time' and greater availability of technology that can be used for education. The expectation of increased leisure has shaped the concept of learning throughout life: constructive outlets were thought to be needed for early retirement and shorter working weeks. Ditchley's fifth conference on *Education and youth problems* (Feb 1973) considers opportunities for adults for education at various points through life. As well as increased leisure time, there were also concerns about how lifelong learning might play into rising economic expectations, shared prosperity and new family arrangements where both husband and wife work and share management of the home and children? Would these social changes give rise to new opportunities for learning that would be needed at different stages throughout life?

Models of lifelong learning were to include the expansion of non-vocational education through access to formal and informal sources such as university extra-mural studies, local authority courses, broadcasting and voluntary associations and public libraries. It also included continuing vocational education and alternative forms of delivery, such as open admissions and credit courses (as in the case of the Open University). The distinction between vocational and non-vocational perpetuates a central theme about the purpose of education as primarily linked to employment or to quality of life.

Non-vocational and vocational

For those who saw universities as having a responsibility to share knowledge widely and provide learning opportunities for the general public, the question was how to build incentives (to commit to this responsibility and to meet demand) into university institutions. Could adult education be built into the rewards systems of university staff promotion and tenure?

Voluntary organisations were seen as core to the delivery and a sector that needed government support, alongside community resources such as galleries, museums and libraries. Television was also key and a means to deliver learning by 'stealth'. Non-vocational education was not the responsibility of a single agency but should be integrated across society and supported in its different guises of the state.

Vocational education, like education and adult education, were seen as instruments of social mobility and as such there was concern about how to integrate 'the poor'. The routes that linked basic education to higher education were described as woefully limited. The OU, part-time degrees offered by some Polytechnics and some franchised options were the only alternatives to school and A levels. Regional centres and outreach workers to build up the various parts of lifelong learning were proposed. The aims for post-secondary and continuing education, including teacher training, were to achieve greater flexibility in an era of social and technological change, to strengthen ties between educational institutions and the community, and to assist minorities and encourage social mobility.

Vocational re-training for was seen more as the direct responsibility of government or industry or some kind of partnership between them. An implicit distinction between a pursuit of knowledge and training for work is still present.

By 1975 the idea of planning for increased leisure time (increased prosperity for some, unemployment for others) had taken hold. Discussions at this time covered issues such as the psychological effects of job losses and the likely course of employment patterns, causes of unemployment and the effects on older employees used to traditional jobs (in mining and the railway industry) and opportunities for new job creation. The longer-term outlook was still expected to include a shorter working week and longer annual holidays. What would the relationship between more income and more leisure be? Could there be breaks or absences from work and more education and training. Would voluntary retirement increase? What will be the impact of demographic change, what role would the trade union play, what happens if there is a recession or a labour shortage and what about the cost of supporting larger numbers of older people? Are there opportunities to build a second career? Much discussion took place on retirement, how to manage and pay for it. The role of companies, trade unions and availability of counselling and other services and possible uses of tax credits were all considered. If there is to be more leisure time, what new facilities and services will be necessary?

Increasing affluence and yet unemployment and recession

In the end the question of youth remained a primary pre-occupation. In a discussion on *Young people in contemporary industrial society* (Oct 1976) the changing status of youth in modern industrialised countries was the focus. Youth unemployment was emerging as an issue. Concerns about quality of work for those who went straight from school into the labour market were raised. The limited opportunities for education and training was apparent. Again, existing models of higher and further education were considered inadequate. The impact of what was seen at the time as the expansion and prolongation of education was not clear. In the context of both increased affluence and unemployment and recession, increasing programmes of public or community service were proposed.

This conference defined the following categories: -

- The Advantaged (those with adequate family financial resources and adequate early education and socialisation);
- The Alienated (those with adequate family financial resources but inadequate early education and socialisation);
- The Disadvantaged (those with inadequate family financial resources but adequate early education and socialisation);
- The Deprived (those with inadequate family financial resources and inadequate early education and socialisation),

and decided that:

“there is in the contemporary industrial society a youth problem of extraordinary, unprecedented, and worsening, proportions — lying beyond the reach of macro-economic, counter-cyclical measures and defying established institutional approaches.”⁹

Discussions included calls for a radical institutional re-organisation of education, health, employment and law enforcement. Proposals were made for a youth job guarantee scheme to include forms of a national (youth) service for community and environmental projects and expanded apprenticeships. A voucher system (community service paid for with vouchers), that could be cashed in at any point in life for education and training or saved up for early retirement was described as a proposal to permit young people to buy ‘freedom with service’. Open access institutions were to be within easy commuting reach of all. As a society, the argument was made that it is better to invest in the young than to pay the old to retire early.

The anxiety about youth in the 1970s and the future of industrialised societies was clear.

1980s: ‘Are standards slipping?’

Arrival of international students and technology

The growth in the numbers of international students coming to UK universities became more apparent in the 1980s. A demand for access to higher education as empires dissolved and new states came to independence, and began to deal with development, began to be felt. The movement of students extended well beyond traditional university levels of education and training, including vocational, technical and high-level professional programmes. The care and welfare of overseas students and their integration was taken seriously.¹⁰

A conference on training policy raised questions about the impact of technology on employment and the need for specialist training. Could specialist training be grafted onto the generalised education offered in Western states? The question was a frequent point of speculation. The relationship between education and training was a particular concern. That vocational training had historically been perceived “as the refuge of those who were

⁹ *Young people in contemporary industrial society* (Oct 1976).

¹⁰ *Higher education: problems of access and financing – examination of overseas policy* (June 1983).

not able to meet academic standards of higher education” was understood to be a significant barrier. Arguments were made that there is no pedagogical difference between education and training.

The Trade Unions were seen as a positive force in making the case for employer based technology training and in providing education programmes. Regular re-training was considered a necessary part of national survival and growth, combining social and economic needs - both personally desirable for people and in the national interest. It was the role of government to stimulate and subsidise regular retraining. Youth training was being developed in the context of high unemployment and there was much concern at the time that training had to be of high quality and not a means to massage unemployment figures.

The impact of technology was on jobs, education and equality. Would the elitism that surrounded a liberal humanist education be reproduced in future tech-based education? There are signals of more profound change.

“It was generally accepted that in future the large wealth-generating industries will employ fewer highly qualified people. In order to provide the kind of opportunities for education and occupation needed by the rest of the population it would be necessary to consider the relationship between work and income. It would also be necessary to tackle the vested interests of those now dominating the education system — universities, examination boards, teachers, professional associations etc. There was a marked reluctance in the discussion to consider the detailed actions that this would require.”¹¹

The mechanisms to support training could include: training vouchers or grants; subsidised training accounts (employer, employee contributions, tax free); public-private sector partnerships; a training loan bank; and leverage and matching funds.

In a discussion of *Higher Education in an advanced society* (April 1988), as in the past, the broad definitions of the role of education were easily shared; but conflict came in discussion of their delivery. The debate over public funding and academic autonomy continued. There was more agreement that in response to the needs of advanced society, higher education must diversify — in terms of its institutions, its content, its students and, crucially, its funding sources.

Despite the expansion of the 1960s, Britain was considered to have failed to create a mass higher education system, but there were hopes that the 1990s would realise the expectations expansion was thought to deliver. The needs of the economy (rather than arguments about equality) were now motivating arguments for expansion of access to universities.

There was surprising consensus in this discussion that widening access had led to a decline in standards and in the US a division between local colleges and ‘Ivy league’. Although the US was seen to have (in general) a more advanced model, US participants expressed concern about whether diversity and mass access in the US system had been accompanied by a lowering of standards and a lost sense of direction.

Diversification in funding for universities was seen as important and recognised as a significant shift in thinking. Diversification of funding would make universities more widely accountable for their output.

¹¹ *Training policy: opportunities for initial and continuing training – what should be provided by whom?* (Feb 1984).

The persistent division between social needs and university autonomy were articulated again and integrationists were seen to be in the ascendancy:

“The two different approaches were characterised by one participant as a model of ‘integration’, and a ‘cross-grained’ vision. Integrationists saw higher education as an integral part of a nation’s institutions, contributing to its economic and social goals in reasonable harmony with the rest of society. Cross-grained advocates saw universities as performing a special function as a nation’s gadfly, challenging orthodoxies and refusing to bend with the wind. ‘Their duty is to imagine the past and remember the future.’”¹²

The 1980s had seen a fierce debate between traditionalists, who claimed that educational standards were slipping as a result of modern teaching methods, and “progressives”, who either disputed that standards were falling or blamed a combination of poor resources and wider social problems. Even so a period of sustained reform followed.

1990s: ‘Reform and review’

Reform and review

Concerns expressed at this time were over the effectiveness of major contemporary reform, educational standards, third party oversight, and broadening the teaching profession. Restoring lost confidence in the competence and professionalism of teachers was also felt to be necessary.

In a discussion on *Primary and secondary education, including multiculturalism and the perceived problem of falling standards* (Oct 1992), the demands of the modern economy were interpreted to require a move away from a set of specific skills towards a more highly developed capacity to learn, to learn afresh throughout life. Not only were unskilled jobs expected to disappear, but increasingly complex demands made on adults as citizens, parents and consumers meant that everyone needed an education. The conclusion was that education systems designed to serve 10%-20% of the population and to ‘fail’ the rest had been insufficiently restructured to provide ‘education for all’.

In the UK the division between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ were still a source of complaint and were driving two weaknesses of education systems: a class-oriented division in which ‘academic’ equals prestigious; and an artificial distinction between the theoretical and the applied. Clear frustration was expressed towards the higher education sector (*Higher Education*, April 1994):

- *That higher education is not giving any clear messages to schools, because it is too absorbed in its own problems;*
- *That too much status is still given to pure academic studies, when higher education should actively be finding ways of giving status to other forms of learning;*
- *That even the small minority who succeed in these studies are being ill-served, with over-specialised, over-theoretical approaches to learning;*
- *That universities have done next to nothing to incorporate a more practical understanding of the world into initial teacher training.*

¹² *Higher Education in an advanced society* (April 1988).

The context of high unemployment across Europe led to calls for better interactions between universities and the world of work. A lack of business / university connection was a point of frustration. There was a sense at this time (mid-1990s), that universities had lost some status and were less revered than they once were. (University representatives at the conference were described as *'bruised and battered by a persistent barrage of criticism'*.) Employers felt more empowered to claim a stake in university outcomes. A range of now more-familiar issues emerged:

- Research-intensive universities had a special responsibility to pass on or disseminate knowledge, and to do this by more than just publishing articles in journals. In part their role was to help non-research universities with their job of teaching, but how was this to be done?
- Given the speed of change, it was seen to be precarious for students to predict which subjects would sustain their careers. The need for generic capabilities and a capacity to go on learning was deemed more apt;
- Calls for greater flexibility in the teaching method, the use of distance learning and for wider age ranges;
- The fading of a single career-long job or profession implied a growing need for re-education and a need for universities to engage in the market of re-training;
- Emergence of contested approaches to evaluation (audit – pushed by governments). Universities were being subjected to bureaucratic control by governments in the name of accountability. Big concerns about processes of performance evaluation. Seen as a cultural battle between politicians and professions (doctors and teachers), and a split between the administrative and research/teaching functions;
- The pressure for new students — whether young people arriving in greater numbers to study a wider range of vocational and non-vocational courses, or adults returning to study in relation to work or leisure right into old age;
- The limits to the public sector's willingness to fund expansion, certainly at previous levels of per-student spending, and the consequent need to diversify funding sources;
- Increased demands for accountability, coming from government, employers and the public;
- Demands for new modes of learning, defined as much by what customers want as by what universities define as appropriate;
- Demands for higher quality in an increasingly internationalised higher education market;
- The potential of new information technologies to give greater access to a greater number of people in new ways.

The call was for universities to play more of a role in their local communities and to widen their mission. New tasks for universities included: working outside the boundaries of the academy, working with non-traditional clients, and the performance of traditional functions in non-traditional ways. For some, the provision of learning throughout life is an essential part of a university's service to the community. For others, the role of the university should not be diluted. This unresolved debate raised the question of how far universities' expertise could be put to 'non-traditional uses.'

Since the previous Ditchley conference on Higher Education six years earlier in 1988, participation at UK universities had doubled.

Skills and welfare in modern workforces

Conditions in the mid 1990s - a growth in unemployment, labour force growth (with the inclusion of more women), youth and long-term unemployment - prompted discussion about the skills necessary for modern workforces. Issues of training and education throughout life were important. (*Unemployment and Industrial change in developed countries*, May 1994). Higher skill levels were now seen as important. An employment strategy must consider training to increase standards at entry to the workforce and to retrain flexibly and recurrently as demands and opportunities change throughout working life.

The 'work economy' was described as the prime operational context for the distribution of wealth, with social welfare provision as always second best. Receipt of unemployment benefit had to be related to and contingent upon action such as training or temporary work. Benefit systems had to positively support the workings of the labour market.

Could major injections of government funding into additional infrastructure programmes help absorb unemployment? Ditchley discussions included the voices of radical thinkers such as Frank Field (tasked by Tony Blair to 'think the unthinkable') and Geoff Mulgan, (Director of the Young Foundation and later NESTA).

Youth and crime

A broad spectrum of education relation issues were linked to fresh worries about youth and crime: idleness and boredom, especially for young men; lack of basic skills relevant to employment; shortness of the school day; lack of civic values; rising influence of gang culture. Schools were seen both as a source of these problems and the opportunity to prevent them.¹³

The 'child-centred' approaches that gained ground in the 1970s were said to have shielded students from dealing with difficulties and set-backs that build character and led to an acceptance of illiteracy which damaged and burdened children. Educational failure was said to be the surest predictor of offending behaviour; and action to rescue individuals from these educational failures needed to be taken early in school years, not at age fourteen or fifteen.

But there was push-back: education it was argued did not occur in a vacuum; it reflects its environment. Any discussion about educating the young is necessarily cast against a background of influences: the role of the mass media; the consequences of increasing globalisation of national economies; increasing uncertainty about the transition from school to work; and much greater heterogeneity of the community in terms of race and culture. The resulting dilution of common core values to which most citizens subscribe has major effects upon what are considered appropriate models and aims of schooling. (*School-age education: tasks, systems, performance*, Oct 1999.) Citizenship teaching was introduced into the school curriculum and seen by many as a positive turn.¹⁴

¹³ *Preventing Youth Crime* (Nov 1996); *The prevention of youth crime: schooling, neighbourhood and intervention* (Oct 1997).

¹⁴ *Civil Society: Young People and Citizenship* (Oct 2002).

2000s: 'Technology stupid'

Tech and higher education are directly linked

In the 2003 conference *Higher Education: the global future and the value of universities in the information age* (March 2003), the higher education world is now characterised by intense competition both for teachers and students. Universities needed to find their niche in this competitive world. The role of universities themselves in their local economies is recognised. The connection is made between fundamental research and economic growth. The role of Chinese and other foreign students was recognised along with the emergence of a global network of world-class universities. And, finally, the idea that as the beneficiaries of higher education, students should pay more towards the costs was now broadly accepted.

Industrial policy, the digital revolution, growth and jobs

Education is now explicitly a part of a range of conference discussions. It has jumped the subject boundary and is relevant across the range of technology related discussions. References to changing educational need are made in all discussions on 21st economies, including at the following conferences:

- *The Future of Manufacturing: is re-shoring the name of the game?* (Jan 2014);
- *Managing the Digital Revolution: can governments keep up?* (March 2014);
- *Growth and jobs in Europe: the way forward* (May 2016);
- *21st century manufacturing, the jobs, workers and technology for a new era* (Nov 2016);
- *Will we still have a global internet in 2025* (Oct 2016).

Education is now part of discussions about the modern economy and whether government, as part of an industrial strategy, should ensure provision of sufficiently skilled manpower through education policy and apprenticeships. There is concern about the quality of jobs in future (given increased automation) and hope for better jobs in design, maintenance, and associated services. Smaller higher-tech adaptable factories of the future would be quite different and the race is on to be agile, adaptable and innovative with access to the new skills.

For many conference participants, the single most important thing that governments could do is to ensure the overall economic conditions for manufacturing. Education policies which produced the right mix of skills were essential. But to bring about better education for modern manufacturing a shift in cultural attitudes (including those of decision-makers) towards manufacturing and innovation was also necessary. National education systems that could not adapt would disadvantage adults as well as children.

Digital citizens

For many millions of older, poorer people, even in highly developed countries, access to new technology was not guaranteed. Lack of access risks new and powerful kinds of disenfranchisement.

“The code creators behind the algorithms were in effect re-writing the social contract for western societies without any supervision or agreed ethical basis to do so.”¹⁵

Education for citizenship had now to take account of technology. Strikingly, this new need applied not just to the poor or elderly but to decision-makers. Concerns began to be raised about ministers, officials and decision-makers not being able to ask the right questions because they did not understand technology and its operation in the modern world.

How should education, particularly tertiary education, be changing in the digital world? The overall lack of change made education look stranded and irrelevant. Narrow traditional single-discipline courses bounded by bricks and mortar were not the answer, nor were Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). New tools should be multi-disciplinary, problem-solving approaches. Higher education analytics drawn from student uses of on-line resources could, it was suggested, open-up a new understanding of learning. More integrated approaches were needed.

Concerns about a lack of innovation in education were raised in the context of high unemployment and lack of dynamism in EU economies. In the context of growth and jobs, what would technology do to the quality of jobs?

People will need significant direction, support and re-training. Re-education will be necessary at all stages of careers. Problem solving skills, technological awareness and adaptability will be more important than any specific skill sets, such as computer coding in a particular language.

Education may be important for several categories of people (not in education) such as: decision-makers, government officials, company board members, teachers, academics and parents as well as citizens and workers. All of these needed a better understanding of technology, uses of data and cyber security. People will need to adjust to lifelong learning – a significant shift of society’s expectations. The focus on academic education through expanding universities was still seen as a problem; it was argued that more appropriate training could be delivered through apprenticeships and an emphasis on practical education. Companies had begun to set up their own programmes because state education is not providing graduates prepared for industry.

Last 5 years: ‘Post-18 reform — finally’

The most recent discussion earlier this year (*Modern Education: what is contemporary education for, whom should we be educating, and how is it best achieved*, March 2019), described education as being at a pivot point: technology, geopolitics, economics, the future of work and worsening inequalities, new knowledge and information, the revolution in the way we communicate, our understanding of the human brain, neuroscience and emotional development – all these developments were seen as transforming the context for formal education. In answering the question of how modern education will evolve and adapt, the agenda for the post-18 sector seemed in most need of radical change. Integrated partnerships between institutions could lead to provision between, across and outside the formal sector to create routes and options that better meet peoples’ needs. A

¹⁵ *Managing the Digital Revolution: can governments keep up?* (March 2014).

framework for the post-18 education ecosystem that sets out connections and pathways was the described as an obvious next step.

Education and the future of democracy.

Discussions at Ditchley in the last few years have seen education to be at the centre of the project of democratic renewal.¹⁶ The challenges to Western societies in dealing with globalisation and preparing for the shifts in technology and economics are also challenges for re-thinking the future of Western education systems. Specific sectors such as the future of policing in the digital age¹⁷ require public understanding and consent for the likely changes in the delivery of law enforcement that come with increased use of technology (such as facial recognition) in policing. The further use of the internet to manage physical objects (the Internet of Things) or the introduction of digital currencies requires public understanding of data and privacy, encryption and cybersecurity.¹⁸ Conferences on the arctic and the ocean – both essential to future human prosperity – highlighted much greater need for public understanding of factors affecting ocean health. The operation of smart cities shows educational infrastructure as the core, supporting research and innovation, creating start-ups and shaping a built-environment that attracts business, finance and people.¹⁹ Disruptive biotechnology – its application, regulation and use – will require new skills and a wider understanding. The relationship between China and the West, and the way values are shaping the future of the global economy, is already being played out in the sphere of education.²⁰ In China, education is prized highly and heavily invested in by individual citizens and the state. Education is at the heart of the project of democratic renewal.

¹⁶ *Which way is West and is the West still best? What do President Trump, Brexit and the technological revolution mean for the future of the West?* (March 2017).

¹⁷ *The future of policing in the digital age* (Jan 2018).

¹⁸ *The digital economy: power and accountability in the private sector* (Nov, 2015); *The Internet: how can we make it safer without losing its vitality?* (June 2018).

¹⁹ *Globally connected cities and their relationship to the nation state* (Jan 2019).

²⁰ *China and the West: different values, the same global economy. How do we respond to challenges on the premise of mutual respect?* (Dec 2018).

Appendix: Conference list

The following 50 or so conferences were reviewed.

1960s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
1963	March	Relevance of American Liberal Arts Colleges to British Higher Education	Mr. A.D.C. Peterson, OBE — Director, University of Oxford Department of Education.
1964	May	Education by correspondence and television	Mr A.D.C. Peterson, OBE
1964	Nov	The teaching of American Studies in Britain	Professor Marcus Cunliffe — Chairman of the British Association for American Studies
1965	March	Principles and policies of Educational Aid, especially in Asia, Africa and the Carribean	Sir Roger Stevens, QT, CMG — Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds
1966	Feb	Aid to developing countries through new educational techniques	Dr Leslie Farrer-Brown. CBE, JP — Chairman, Executive Board, Centre for Educational Television Overseas
1966	March	Post-Graduate Medical Education	Lord Cohen of Birkenhead — President, General Medical Council
1966	Nov	Management Educations	J. W. Platt, GBE — Chairman, Foundation for Management Education
1967	Feb	Selective and comprehensive systems of secondary education	Professor W.R. Niblett — Dean, University of London Institute of Education
1967	May	The training of young people for rescue, relief and service	H.R.H. The Prince Philip, KG, PC, KT, GBE, Duke of Edinburgh
1967	March	Moral values in education	
1967	July	Training for the Law	The Rt. Hon. Lord. Justice Diplock, PC — Lord Justice of Appeal
1968	March	The 'Brain Drain' from developing countries	Lord Jackson of Burnley, FRS — Pro-Rector and Professor of Electrical Engineering, Imperial College of Science and Technology
1969	Jan	New political ideas and movements, with particular reference to student and racial unrest	The Rt. Hon. Lord Shawcross, PC, QC — Chancellor, University of Sussex

1969	Feb	The changing attitudes of the young to the purposes of a university, and the consequences for university policies and government	Professor W.R. Niblett — Head of Department of Higher Education, University of London Institute of Education.
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1970s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
1970	Feb	The meaning of an academic community	Sir John Wolfenden, CBE — Director of the British Museum
1971	Feb	Education and youth problems	The Rt. Hon. Lord Boyle of Handsworth, PO — Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds
1971	July	Education and youth problems (second conference)	The Hon. Lincoln Gordon — School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University
1972	Feb	Education and youth problems (third conference)	Sir John Wolfenden CBE
1972	July	Education and youth problems (fourth conference)	Sir John Wolfenden, CBE
1973	Feb	Education and youth problems (fifth)	Sir John Wolfenden, CBE
1973	July	Education and youth problems (sixth)	Professor John Vaizey — Professor of Economics, Brunel University
1974	Oct	Younger people in society in 1985	Professor John Vaizey
1975	Jan	Implications of increase in leisure time	The Rt. Hon. Lord Edmund-Davies, PC — Lord of Appeal in Ordinary
1976	Oct	Young people in contemporary industrial society	The Lord Wolfenden, CBE — President, Chelsea College, University of London

1980s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
1983	June	Higher education: problems of access and financing-examination of overseas policy	The Rt. Hon. the Lord Thomson of Monifieth, KT, PC — Chairman, Independent Broadcasting Authority.

1984	Feb	Training policy: opportunities for initial and continuing training — what should be provided by whom?	Sir Alastair Pilkington, FRS — A Director, Pilkington Brothers Ltd.
1988	April	Higher education in an advanced society	Dr John E Brademas — President, New York University

1990s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
1992	Oct	Primary and Secondary Education	Sir Claus Moser KCB CBE FBA — Warden, Wadham College, Oxford
1994	April	Higher education	Mr Jon Westling – Executive Vice President and Provost, Boston University
1994	May	Unemployment and industrial change in the developed countries	Professor Giuliano Amato — Professor of Italian and Comparative Constitutional Law, the University of Rome La Sapienza
1996	Nov	Preventing youth crime	The Honorable Janet Reno – Attorney General of the United States
1997	Oct	The prevention of youth crime: schooling, neighbourhood and intervention	The Rt Hon The Lord Windlesham CVO PC – Principal, Brasenose College, Oxford; President, Victim Support
1999	Oct	School-age education: tasks, systems, performance	Mr Bernard Shapiro – Principal and Vice-Chancellor, McGill University

2000s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
2002	Oct	Civil Society: Young people and citizenship	Baroness Howe of Idlicote – President, UNICEF UK

2003	March	Higher Education: the global future and value of universities in the information age	Sir John Kingman FRS – Director, Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences, University of Cambridge
2007	Dec	How do young people form political opinions?	Mr Robin Lustig – Presenter, Newshour, BBC World Service
2009	March	Universities: securing the future	Mr Bahram Bekhradnia – Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

2010s

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
2019	March	Modern Education: what is contemporary education for, whom should we be educating, and how is it best achieved?	Professor Stephen Toope, OC – Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge

Economics, technology, democracy and China

Year	Month	Conference	Chair
2014	Jan	The Future of Manufacturing: is re-shoring the name of the game?	Terry Morgan CBE – Chair of Cross-rail.
2014	March	Managing the digital revolution: can governments keep up?	Mike Bracken CBE – Executive Director, Government Digital Service, Cabinet Office (2011-).
2015	Dec	The digital economy: power and accountability in the private sector	Ms Nuala O’Connor – President and CEO, Center for Democracy and Technology, Washington, DC
2016	May	Growth and jobs in Europe: the way forward	The Rt Hon. the Lord Willetts
2016	Nov	21 st century manufacturing, the jobs, workers and technology for a new era	Mr John Higgins CBE – Director General, DIGITAL EUROPE
2017	March	Which way is West and is the West still best? What do President Trump, Brexit and the technological revolution mean for the future of the West?	Mr Peter Thiel – Technology entrepreneur and investor; co-Founder, PayPal and Palantir;
2018	Jan	The future of policing in the digital age	Commissioner Cressida Dick
2018	June	The Internet: how can we make it safer without losing its vitality?	Dr Vinton Cerf – Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist, Google Inc.

2018	Dec	China and the West: different values, the same global economy. How do we respond to challenges on the premise of mutual respect?	Dean Xiang Bing and Sir Andrew Cahn (co-chairs)
2019	Jan	Globally connected cities and their relationship to the nation state	Ambassador Ivo Daalder