
Participation in Lifelong Learning: reality or myth? Issues Arising from a United Kingdom Coalfield Closure

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ABSTRACT In the spring of 2004, the Selby Coalfield, the largest of the remaining coal mines in the United Kingdom (UK) will close and 2071 employees will lose their jobs. The impact of the closure will be severe in the surrounding area, and will present a challenge to local employment services and training agencies. It will also test the UK government's rhetoric on the importance of lifelong learning. The primary objective of this article is to investigate the issues emerging from the retraining programme implemented to ease the transition from mining to alternative forms of employment. It questions the veracity of the New Labour government's commitment to lifelong learning in practice. Our research suggests that the retraining programme to assist the Selby miners does not meet the expectations engendered by the UK government's rhetoric on lifelong learning and calls into question the New Labour government's commitment to lifelong learning in practice.

Introduction

In 1997 the New Labour Government came to power in the United Kingdom (UK) with an explicit agenda to facilitate lifelong learning. Numerous documents setting out the government's thinking and policy proposals were produced (for example, Fryer, 1997, 1999; Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1998; Clarke, 2002) and a variety of learning programmes were established. This article considers the UK government's general approach to lifelong learning through examination of a case study scenario. Our objectives are to explore the meaning of lifelong learning, and to question the extent to which it is applied or

discarded in the context of industrial restructuring and large-scale redundancy.

In the spring of 2004 the largest of the remaining UK deep-coal mines, Selby, will close with the loss of 2071 mining jobs. The impact on surrounding communities still coming to terms with the effects of previous mine closures will be profound. Many of those to be evacuated from the industry have little or no experience of work outside coal mining and their skills are highly industry-specific. The average age of these men is 40, and many have no formal educational or vocational qualifications. The problems are further exacerbated by the changing nature of employment in the surrounding area and the miners' detachment from local labour market conditions. The closure presents, therefore, a challenge to the agencies given the responsibility of ameliorating its effects, especially in the area of retraining and development. Our approach to the problems emerging from the closure adheres to the moral principles set out by Hamblett et al (2002): that research should consider the conditions of human emancipation, and that the transformation of society to a more just and egalitarian one through human agency is the proper aim of lifelong learning (Hamblett et al, 2002). They have argued that 'those who take on the task of promoting, investigating or facilitating lifelong learning initiatives are required to evaluate their activities according to the contribution such activities make to the development of human agency' and that 'we take it for granted that the eradication of the terrible gulf separating the rich from the poor, the majority who suffer the consequences of exploitation from a minority who profit from the exploitation is a goal worthy of human agency' (Hamblett et al, 2002, p. 68).

Our aim is to identify the constraints on lifelong learning faced by the Selby miners in order to develop a more egalitarian approach to the retraining of this group of workers. Although the empirical focus of the article is on redundant mineworkers, the arguments we put forward will have resonance for any group of workers facing a similar situation of large-scale redundancy. Similarly, although focused on the UK approach, the issues discussed will have some relevance to industrial restructuring and learning elsewhere.

We begin with an outline of the methodology, then consideration of the government's general approach to lifelong learning, in particular the themes of occupational change, participation and individualism. There follows an outline of coalfield restructuring in Western Europe. We then present empirical evidence from the closure of Selby, using this data to question the assumptions underpinning the New Labour commitment to lifelong learning. However, let us first digress to consider the effects of industrial restructuring on individuals caught up in the process. The following example concerns a miner made redundant from a nearby, recently closed down mine. We will give this individual the pseudonym

'Dave'. Dave is 44 years old. He left school at 16 years of age with no academic or vocational qualifications, and immediately began employment at the mine. He has performed various mining jobs, but for the past 15 years has been a 'face worker'. This is a relatively highly paid job, and with overtime and bonus Dave earned in excess of £30,000 per annum. On announcement of the closure Dave sought a transfer within the company, but this proved impossible. Dave was unclear as to what he wanted to do and, on the advice of a representative from the local employment service, undertook a forklift truck-driving course to prepare for work in one of the many distribution warehouses springing up in the region. He hates this work and has been employed by four firms during a 9-month period. He earns close to the minimum wage, and feels badly let down by the agencies meant to help and advise. If the issues that form the basis of this article are not addressed it is possible that Dave's situation will be common among the Selby miners.

Methodology

The research aim is to explore the training and development matters arising from the closure of the Selby Coalfield in the context of government policy towards lifelong learning. Specific objectives are to assess the extent to which the training agenda corresponds to notions of lifelong learning or narrow job-related retraining; to investigate miners' patterns of participation in both formal and work-related learning; to evaluate the adequacy of guidance provided by the local employment service; and to identify the educational and vocational qualifications of the miners, and their aspirations for future employment and learning, in the context of regional employment conditions.

The investigation adopted an exploratory approach and used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative element utilised a survey design consisting of self-completion questionnaires. Questions concerned: respondents' age; length of service; previous work experience; previous participation in learning, both formal learning that leads to qualifications, and workplace learning; future aspirations for employment, training and learning. The questionnaire was distributed to 1480 miners employed directly by UK Coal plc. The questionnaire was not sent to managers, clerical and ancillary staff, or contractors (miners employed by contracting firms on a flexible basis, all of which had left the mine in the days immediately following announcement of the closure).

The rationale for sampling only miners relates to the specialist nature of their trade and the specific problems that characterise their position in the labour force. Some 698 questionnaires were returned, which represents a response rate of 47%. The exploratory nature of the questions precluded hypothesis testing and the analysis used descriptive statistics. The reason for this approach relates to the absence of any data

on the miners in terms of qualifications, experience and future plans, and the survey was designed to provide such baseline information on the Selby workforce.

The qualitative research consisted of 13 interviews with key individuals: three representatives from employment and training agencies; two careers guidance service personnel; two Coalfield Regeneration Trust personnel; a representative of one of the two trade unions; and five mineworkers. These individuals were chosen for their knowledge of specific aspects of the mine closure.

New Labour and Lifelong Learning

Occupational Change and Lifelong Learning

The closure of the Selby mine and the general contraction of the UK deep-coal mining industry exemplify the radical restructuring characteristic of Western economies over the past three decades. Various well-known terms have been used to describe this restructuring, such as Bell's 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1973) and 'disorganised capital' (Lash & Urry, 1987). The characteristics of restructuring are the decline of heavy industry, notably formerly dominant employers in extractive and manufacturing industries, and the growth of the service sector, especially those forms of service employment requiring mental labour, for example, the service class of managers, professionals, educators and scientists. In the UK support for the assumption of a shift from manual to knowledge work is provided by DfEE predictions of an increase in managerial, professional and technical employment between 1996 and 2006 (DfEE, 1997). A somewhat different interpretation of the effects of occupational change is given by Kumar (1995). He argues that, rather than a growth in the knowledge sector of the economy, much of the new employment created over recent decades is located in the lower levels of the tertiary economy such as fast food and ancillary hospital staff. His view is supported by Bradley et al (2000) who argue that jobs in the growing service sector are, mainly, low skilled and subject to a Taylorist division of labour. They argue that 'the advocates of increased knowledge work notwithstanding, much employment remains of a depressingly low-skilled nature' (Bradley et al, 2000, p. 120).

The New Labour Government's approach to lifelong learning is firmly attached to the idea of a shift towards knowledge work and a corresponding need to up-skill the workforce. Thus:

The industrial revolution was built on capital investment in plant and machinery, skills and hard physical labour [...] the information and knowledge based revolution of the twenty-first century will be built on a very different foundation –

investment in the intellect and creativity of the people. (DfEE, 1998, p. 9)

Yorkshire Forward, the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Development Agency,[1] which covers the region in which Selby is located, suggests that:

The employment and skills of Yorkshire and Humber's people will be vital to achieve the shared vision of a world class, prosperous region set out in the Regional Economic Strategy. Skills and educational attainment are integral to the productivity of the region's businesses that are operating in a global environment where knowledge is the key determinant of competitiveness. (Yorkshire Forward, 2002, p. 1)

The benefits of lifelong learning accrue, so the argument goes, on a number of levels, to businesses, the individual learner and society at large. According to the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) set up by the UK Government to 'raise the UK's game' on skill shortages, the main benefits are to society as a whole. Numeracy, literacy, communication and IT skills contribute to general economic performance (PIU, 2001).

The assumed link between economic performance and training, and the need for a more highly skilled workforce is questioned by Keep & Mayhew (1999). They concede that comparative studies suggest that countries with more highly skilled workforces have achieved higher rates of investment and growth. They also note, however, that presumption of a cause and effect relationship between training and growth is not universally accepted (see, for example, Shackleton, 1992). Keep & Mayhew suggest further that changes in the occupational structure associated with the shift to a post-industrial economy are complex and uneven. Whilst there has been an undisputed growth in higher-level occupations, the trend is counterbalanced by an expansion in the number of small firms, self-employment and part-time working, most of which are less likely to require high levels of skill and training. Moreover, with increased competition, many employers continue to utilise a market strategy based on cheap, low quality goods produced using Taylorist methods of work organisation. The net result is the retention of a large number of low-skilled jobs demanding little by way of training.

Participation in Learning

A second major theme in the lifelong learning discourse is that of participation, or, more accurately, non-participation. Research by Sargent et al (1997) shows that 55% of adults have no intention of taking up learning in the future. The propensity to engage in learning decreases further down the socio-economic scale. Some 19% of social class AB have

not undertaken any form of learning since leaving full-time education, a figure that increases to 53% for social class DE. According to McGivney (1999), white working class men are the most difficult to attract to education and training. She suggests various explanations for this phenomenon including cultural factors. Notions of masculinity and the proper role of men as 'workers' lead to a perception of learning as a feminine pastime. Women who engage in learning are seen as 'bettering' themselves, whereas men are seen as failures. Other research suggests that learning and development opportunities tend to be accessed by those who possess qualifications already and are what have been termed, 'skilled learners' (see, Forrester et al, 1995; Hamblett & Holden, 1998).

Concern over non-participation tends to focus on those individuals in the labour force with low skills and qualifications, in particular those with basic literacy and numeracy problems (PIU, 2001). Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education in the New Labour Government states that 'there is a large number of adults in the UK with no or very low level qualifications. This has to improve because the quantity and quality of skilled labour is essential to our productivity and growth' (Clarke, 2002). There is, however, a tendency to blame non-participation on the non-participants themselves. For example, the PIU document suggests that non-participation in learning reflects a preference for spending time doing other things, family commitments and work pressure. It also suggests that individuals with basic literacy and numeracy problems are often reluctant to admit they have a problem.

In order to engage non-learners, the Government propose a key role for guidance and support. Provision of information and the promotion of the benefits of learning can be used to stimulate demand (Clarke, 2002). Others involved in the lifelong learning discourse also stress the value of guidance (Edwards et al, 1998; Coffield, 1999). For example:

Accessible, informed and affordable guidance is essential to help learners and employers find their way round the range of options on offer, Guidance will help them to get maximum results from the time and effort they spend. (Scottish Office, 1998)

There is, however, a serious question concerning the impartiality and independence of those agents providing guidance to the Selby miners, an issue that will be addressed in due course.

Learning

So far, this discussion has proceeded as though lifelong learning is a clear and unambiguous concept. This is not the case, hence we need to consider our third theme: what lifelong learning means in practice. Fryer (1999) states that:

Learning can take many forms, both formal and informal. It can include developing a variety of skills, abilities, competences, and problem-solving capacities. It quite properly includes acquiring new information and knowledge, as well as the pursuit of credits and qualifications through programmes of study more conventionally recognised as 'learning'. (Fryer, 1999, p. 14)

The above definition encapsulates various forms and modes of learning. At one level lifelong learning is narrowly defined in terms of employment and the economy (Edwards et al, 1998). The emphasis of policy documents on the assumed link between economic success and learning would tend to support this view. Alternative and more expansive conceptualisations focus on the personal development of the learner. The matter of what is meant by learning is taken up by Forrester & Payne (2000) who argue that it is wrong to attempt to conflate notions of learning and training. They distinguish between human resource development, viewed as a narrow job-related form of training serving the needs of the employer and economy, and lifelong learning seen as a vehicle for personal development and growth. This view of lifelong learning corresponds with the notion of liberal education that is 'concerned with the cultivation of the intellect over the period of an individual's lifetime, where learning is for learning's sake. Education is concerned with life in the world and living with others. It holds in esteem an element of personal autonomy where an individual is free to choose how their learning develops and what they make of it' (Thursfield et al, 2002, p. 134). It would seem, however, that any conception of liberal education has been expunged from government policy on lifelong learning as a consequence of its enthusiasm for economic rationality.

In the context of the Selby closure, the distinction between lifelong learning and retraining is crucial. Selby represents a missed opportunity to promote the benefits of lifelong learning to a section of the UK workforce traditionally excluded from education. Rather, the emphasis has been on retraining in narrow job-related competencies. Although the survey evidence indicates a preference for retraining by the men, little attempt has been made to offer information that would facilitate meaningful choice.

An added dimension to this typology is the distinction between formal and informal learning. Formal learning consists of training or other modes of study, which may or may not lead to some form of certification. Informal learning, on the other hand, refers to the way in which we learn, through experience and adaptation. Research suggests that informal learning in situations of conflict can result in a breakdown of trust by prospective learners. Informal learning can thus constitute a barrier to

participation in formal learning (for example, Forrester et al, 1995; Thursfield & Hamblett, 2001).

Individualism

The final theme for consideration is the strand of individualism inherent to government policy on lifelong learning. Both learning in its most expansive sense and retraining are promoted as essential to employability and career progression. Employees need to be autonomous and self-motivated. They must also accept more personal responsibility for their own training and development, and seek out necessary advice and respond to it. This places responsibility on the learner, but in the context of the economic rationality described earlier, withholds choice over what is considered to be appropriate learning. The focus on the individual is also purported to 'undermine concern for the structural inequalities within society' (Edwards et al, 1998, p. 33).

The European Context

In his study of coal industry restructuring in Europe, Walker (2001) argues that 'not only must there be a commitment to retraining as part of any closure programme, but that the retraining has to be appropriate to both the trainee and the potential employer. It is wasteful in resources and damaging to morale if the training offered cannot meet these specific demands' (Walker, 2001, p. 34). Walker's analysis indicates that in France training programmes were developed to meet the needs of employers and dealt with short-term skill shortages. In Belgium and Germany, however, retraining was more apparent. In both countries ex-miners received payment for participation in retraining and training schemes were designed to meet the needs of both employers and ex-miners. In Germany, the government also part funded a scheme that is, in reality, a 'later life apprenticeship' (Walker, 2001). The experience of the UK mirrors that of France in that the needs of local employers are of paramount importance in the retraining programmes set up for redundant coal miners.

Selby

Background to the Closure

Dave's story is by no means unique in the historical decline of the UK coal industry. Policies to deal with previous closures have failed to address the training needs of the men, as reflected in the often transitory post-mining forms of employment experienced by many ex-miners. Walker (2001), in a review of European coal mine closures from the mid-

1980s to the mid-1990s, argues that 'many miners who found alternative work were faced with periodic unemployment, while their incomes were often markedly lower than their previous coal industry earnings' (Walker, 2001, p. 98).

A particular problem faced by ex-miners is their general low level of educational and vocational qualifications (Edwards, 1992; Walker, 2001). In an attempt to deal with this problem, in 1987, the then British Coal established the Job and Career Change Scheme (JACCS). The scheme involved a counselling and outplacement service known as 'Job Shop', activated whenever a closure was announced. Miners were offered counselling and evaluation of their skills by employment service personnel, then matched to suitable employment opportunities. JACCS sought to find the men alternative employment commensurate with their skills, rather than to facilitate training. A particular shortcoming was that entitlement to assistance ended 6 months after redundancy, giving the men little time to consider future plans and training options.

The efficacy of JACCS is subject to some dispute. According to British Coal, 50% of redundant mineworkers took advantage of JACCS between 1985 and the early 1990s, and the success rate of the job placement facility was 87% (Pickering, 1995). Edwards, in contrast, argues that only 10% of former mineworkers received training under JACCS and that this was designed to meet the needs of local employers, rather than the long-term needs of the miners. Edwards also alludes to the suggestion, put forward by British Coal, that ex-miners are reluctant to train unless a job is guaranteed (Edwards, 1992). The less than optimistic conclusions drawn by Edwards were supported later by Fieldhouse & Hollywood (1999). They examined how miners identified in 1981 had been absorbed into the labour force by 1991. A sample of 1270 men employed in 1981 was used and 1115 (88%) tracked at the 1991 census. Various issues became apparent: less than one-third were still in employment; 12.4% were either unemployed or on government schemes, and there was a large proportion either retired (25.4%), permanently sick (14.3%) or 'other inactive' (1%), suggesting very large levels of 'hidden unemployment', especially among the 45 plus age group. Miners who sought alternative employment were often hampered by their lack of educational attainment and single industry experience, and encountered only temporary or part-time work (Coalfields Communities Campaign, 1994).

Several significant changes have been made to JACCS in response to the forthcoming Selby closure. First, a Selby Task Force has been set up to oversee the closure, and to ensure the men are given guidance on training and other employment matters. Secondly, the 6-month rule on entitlement to help with training has been discarded. Thirdly, provision has been made for miners to attend a 10-day training course of their choice free of charge. The Selby Task Force will pay the men's wages for

days missed through attendance on a course. Fourthly, the men are encouraged to attend in-depth guidance sessions on future employment and training options.

These changes appear to be a positive development. The men can exercise some choice over what and how they learn; they are encouraged to participate; and the guidance element of the process overcomes some of the problems of individualism discussed earlier. In short, it seems that emancipation through learning is being encouraged. However, our empirical evidence suggests that this is not entirely the case in practice. The Selby miners, like those who went before them, find themselves trapped between the rhetoric and reality of lifelong learning.

The mine closure is occurring in parallel with fundamental change in the regional occupational structure; a contraction of primary and manufacturing industries alongside a growth in service sector employment. In Yorkshire and the Humber service sector employment has increased in the major cities, but has been relatively weak elsewhere in the region. For example, the numbers of managers, senior professionals, professionals and associate professionals, and technicians employed in the region is 4% lower than nationally. Despite this, the service sector is predicted to provide the major dynamic for regional growth, especially in health and education. Manufacturing will remain important, although the trend will be towards 'high technology manufacturing'. Employment will increase in transport, communications and construction (Yorkshire Forward, 2002). The Selby Task Force also identifies health, transport and construction as possible occupational destinations for ex-coal miners. Railway engineering jobs in track laying and track maintenance are, for example, categorised as areas of skill shortage. These occupations contain many similarities to coal mining in terms of skill. Similarly, the task force identifies a shortage of construction workers in the region (Selby Coalfield Task Force, 2002).

In general, however, changes in the regional economy will engender demand for a more highly skilled workforce, although the availability of these skills in the region is of concern (Yorkshire Forward, 2002b). A survey of 2049 firms by the RDA found that 22% regard skill shortages as a barrier to growth, especially marketing, management, professional and technical skills. Some 14% of companies require an improvement in manual skills, 32% of which are in the area of construction (Yorkshire Forward, 2002b).

The Survey

In this changing regional occupational context, the employment strategies of the miners reveal a degree of detachment from, and lack of knowledge of, local labour market issues. This is not surprising considering that the average length of service in the mining industry is

24.1 years and that 62% of miners have never worked outside the coal industry. Survey responses indicate that a number of men, 292 in total, have no idea as to what type of job they wish to do when they leave coal mining. The planned destinations of those specifying some form of employment are given in Table I.

What kind of work do you hope to do?	<i>n</i>
No answer/don't know	292
Driving	148
Railway work	52
Electrical work	52
Plumbing	35
Fitter	35
Health and Safety work	32
Building – Construction	28
Building – Maintenance	21
Engineering	18
Social/Care work	22
Computer work	15
Services (Police, Fire, Ambulance)	14
General	24
Outdoor/Gardening	
Sales/Administration/Office	11
Other	15
Total*	840

Table I. Answers to the question: What kind of work do you hope to do? (More than one job was specified by respondents so the total does not equate to the number of questionnaire responses.)

The responses suggest some degree of reflection by the men, although not matched by an understanding of the regional labour market. Relatively few mention rail track maintenance, construction or health, sectors characterised by skill shortages. There is, furthermore, little awareness shown of the growing importance of the service sector to the regional economy. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the skill requirements associated with the jobs identified or the training that may be needed for a change of occupation. For example, of the 559 men who do not consider either full-time or part-time training, 133 identify jobs that will require a degree of training ranging from short courses to longer, more in-depth study.

To describe coal miners as unskilled would be to denigrate the tacit skills built up over many years of working in a dangerous environment. There are, however, questions concerning the transferability of those skills. The industry specific nature of tacit skills and, in some cases, the

lack of formal qualifications have excluded former coal miners from employment opportunities elsewhere (Coalfield Communities Campaign, 1994). The qualification profile of the men at the mine is as follows: 20% have GCSE, 3% have NVQ/GNVQ and only 0.6% have a degree, while 29.2% have 'other' qualifications. These include City and Guilds in areas such as electrical, fitting, welding and plumbing.[2] They also include certification of practical mines-related courses such as Health and Safety. The percentage of men with no qualification whatsoever is 47%, and 30 respondents needed help with basic literacy and numeracy. A picture emerges of a low level of educational attainment compared with other industries.

The grim situation described here is intensified by either a relatively widespread unwillingness to train or by structural barriers to training. Only 20% (136) of respondents are prepared to undertake education or training and just 48 of these (7%) of the total, are willing to take up part-time training opportunities. Of those articulating part-time training/education as a possible option, 27 already have some form of qualification including 18 with GCSEs. For those prepared to consider full-time education/training, 29 have some qualification, including 19 with GCSEs. In the context of the shifting occupational structure described above, low-level qualifications and a reluctance to engage in learning could well become barriers to the miners' employment prospects. Table II gives a breakdown of the types of training identified.

Training need	Number of respondents
Help with job application	317
Help with literacy skills	30
Help with running own business	111
Help with computers	309
Unspecified help	389

Table II. Training needs suggested by respondents.

These responses support the view that redundant coal miners tend to require narrow job-related retraining that guarantees work, rather than what we have termed education for emancipation.

The degree to which participation in training is embedded in the daily working lives of the miners, and the forms of training undertaken, reinforces the narrow mines-related nature of skills held by the Selby workforce. One-hundred-and-sixty-one respondents stated that they had undertaken some form of training at work. Most of this training was in first aid (42), safety (37) and risk assessment (32). Other areas were technical mines-related, such as locomotive driving and mine inspection, although nine miners had undertaken forklift truck-driving courses for work and seven had taken supervisory courses. Just one respondent had

undertaken generic management training, an area identified as one of skill shortage by employers in the region (Yorkshire Forward, 2002b).

Two concerns emerge from the above training activity. First, the transferability of skills acquired from work-related training. Although health and safety are important issues in the workplace, the degree to which such training can, on its own, help secure work outside the industry is questionable. Secondly, the number of responses (161) describing training at work indicates that participation in job-related training is not embedded in the mine culture. It might also be suggested that for those miners with experience of workplace training, this experience and their preference for job-related retraining may be linked, and preclude a need to promote the type of education associated with lifelong learning. However, such preferences, whilst held by the majority of respondents, are not universal as the interview data demonstrates.

Interview Data

Qualitative interviews with five miners reveal some bewilderment and resentment on the part of the men, both in terms of the mine closure, and its handling. Their comments provide support for the suggestion that they are largely detached from local labour markets:

I have no idea what I want to do when I finish.

I've never had to look for a job before or think about training so I don't know what's out there – or where to start.

It's all construction and railways, but I don't want to do that. I want something different but I'm not sure what.

I have thought about training as a driving instructor. They never seem to be short of work.

These responses were given 7-8 months after the closure of the mine was announced. The in-depth guidance and counselling provided by the Selby Task Force seems to have done little to dispel the concerns felt by the men. Such concern is exacerbated by doubts over the worth of their qualifications. Reservations over the transferability of formal qualifications held by electricians and fitters were expressed. One electrician considered retraining as a joiner or driving instructor because he felt his qualifications would be insufficient to secure a job outside the industry. An additional issue to emerge concerns the need to provide help with basic literacy and numeracy for some men. Two interviewees expressed concern over the prospects of colleagues with literacy and numeracy problems. For example:

You can tell when someone can't read or write. If you do anything where you have to fill in forms they will say 'I've forgot my glasses – will you fill it in for me' or they suddenly have to go somewhere and they ask you to do it.

The problem is the pits took on people who were unemployable elsewhere – men who can't even read or write – and you do worry about what's going to happen to them when they (the mines) have all gone.

Particular resentment was articulated at the way in which advice and guidance staff attempted to direct men down training and employment avenues against their will to fill skill shortages in construction, railway maintenance, HGV driving, forklift driving and gas fitting. Whilst some men might be willing to move into these areas, others are not. One particular individual, who had been attending courses on computer maintenance in his own time, identified such a course he felt would lead to employment. During his guidance interview he was told this was not suitable and that he should think about one of the five areas mentioned above. He declined the offer. A second individual asked for advice on teacher training. The response of the guidance worker was to tear out the relevant pages of a local university's prospectus. No advice on access to higher education courses or financial matters was proffered.

There is, however, some further support for the argument that these men prefer short retraining courses leading to a job. The reasons for this are varied. For example:

It would be nice to go back to school, you know, do what I never got the chance to do before but I can't afford it. I need to pay my mortgage.

I'm too old to think about going back into education now.

A final problem mentioned by the men is that of funding. The Task Force has agreed to pay for 10 days' worth of training for each individual. Any further training would be funded by the men. This situation compares unfavourably with that in Belgium and Germany, where redundant miners are paid to retrain. The net effect is that the men distrust those who are, ostensibly, there to assist them:

I've not agreed to anything because I don't trust any of them – the company, the government or the job shop people. They don't give a toss about us really.

The Job shop is a waste of time. They're not really interested in helping us.

I didn't think a labour government would let this happen. I'm not voting for them again.

Conclusion

Local employment conditions appear, on the evidence from Yorkshire Forward and the Selby Task Force, to reflect the theories of occupational change. There has been a shift to higher level service occupations alongside retention of low-skilled manual occupations. More service sector employment suggests a need for higher skill levels amongst the regional labour force and, therefore, appropriate learning and development programmes. Redundant coal miners, however, seem to have been designated as candidates for manual labour regardless of their wishes. The survey evidence suggests that many men are willing to pursue manual occupations. There has, on the other hand, been little attempt to provide these men with information on the growing importance of the service sector or alternatives to manual employment. Nor has there been a real attempt to offer information on education in the lifelong learning tradition, rather than narrow job-related retraining. Indeed, the interview data suggests that, in a small number of cases at least, efforts have been made to dissuade the men from following a more educational pathway. The role of guidance has not adhered to the principle of independence with the needs of the men the primary concern.

The definition of learning applied in this example of industrial restructuring is the narrow, job-related form of training associated with the economic rationality described earlier. The survey suggests that where education or training is demanded, it is this job-related form that most of the Selby men require. The desire for a short course leading to some form of employment is not surprising given the need to sustain a certain income level once the mine has closed. However, variations in aspirations for the future should be taken into account and met with a flexible approach by guidance staff. It also seems apparent from the quotes given earlier, that informal learning has been a feature of these men's lives. Such learning appears to lead to a questioning of the motives of those agencies involved in the closure, including the government.

In terms of participation, the evidence supports a number of points made earlier in this article. First, several men report needing help with basic numeracy and literacy. Secondly, the difficulties of attracting white working class men to learning appear to be borne out by the survey data that shows only 20% of the sample are prepared to enter into some form of retraining. Thirdly, of the 136 who do envisage some form of education or training, 56 possess qualifications of some sort. The reasons for what seems to be reluctance to train by these men are unclear from our data. We can, however, put forward suggestions based on this and previous

research. There may, for example, be cultural factors influencing the decisions of the men. Financial considerations are also likely to be an important factor in the decision making process. In contrast to the German and Belgian model, ex-coal miners in the UK are not rewarded financially for completing a training programme. A third possible issue is fear of using up entitlement on an unsuitable course. Finally, the questionnaire responses indicate a weak culture of participation in learning at work and this may have constrained aspirations for future participation in training.

It can be argued that the efforts to increase participation amongst the men are weak. The offer of a 'free' 10-day course is, if these men are to acquire the types of skill demanded by the new economy, inadequate to say the least. No provision has been made for those men who might wish to pursue a career or some form of learning that adheres to Forrester's notion of lifelong learning. This, coupled with guidance that attempts to persuade the miners into training and jobs that the Selby Task Force and employment services deem suitable, leaves the men with few real choices. Given their detachment from labour markets, these men may well lack the knowledge needed to evaluate the advice they are being given and to make decisions on learning and training that may be best suited to their individual needs.

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Notes

- [1] Regional Development Agencies were set up by the 1997 UK Labour Government to promote regeneration of the regions.
- [2] GCSE (General Certificate Secondary Education) is the academic qualification taken by 16-year-olds in the UK. GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) is the vocational equivalent of GCSE. NVQ refers to National Vocational Qualification, which is certification of practical competence in the workplace.

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