Widening Participation in Adult Education in Hong Kong: a Policy Perspective

by

Shui Kin Chan

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Political, International and Policy Studies
School of Arts, Communication and Humanities
University of Surrey

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Abstract

This thesis explores the extent to which lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong have been related to narrowing the gap between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor'. The study focuses on two cases: the establishment of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (OLI) in 1989 and the setting up of a $5 billion Continuing Education Fund (CEF) in 2002. It is concluded that the primary motivation behind the Hong Kong government’s setting up of the OLI was to maintain social and political stability; and the main reason for its establishment of the CEF was to boost the Hong Kong economy. Although in theory both economic/political motivation and social equity can lead to widening participation in learning, in practice the Hong Kong government’s policies have reinforced the learning divide because they have targeted the 'learning rich'.

Chapter 1 explains the aims of the research.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on conceptions and practices of lifelong learning. It shows that some governments, through their policies, have tailored the concept of lifelong learning to suit the economic and political needs of their societies. It indicates also that the Hong Kong government's lifelong learning policies have tended to emphasize the upgrading of work-related knowledge and skills.

Chapter 3 is a literature review on lifelong learning as public policy. It shows that in many countries those with higher-level qualifications are in general more likely to participate in lifelong learning (the 'learning divide') and highlights the need to examine adults' participation and non-participation in learning from a policy, not individual, perspective. Lifelong learning policies involve value judgements about who deserving learners are, and what kinds of learning activities benefit society. Hong Kong policies have been more concerned with economic and political stability than with welfare or equity.

Chapter 4 describes and explains the research methods used in this study. A qualitative and interpretative approach is adopted, drawing on both documentary analysis and in-depth interviews. The documentary analysis includes both published and unpublished sources. Interviews were with senior civil servants and policy makers and senior staff of educational institutions.

Chapter 5 reports the results of the documentary analysis on the establishment of the OLI. It shows that, as early as the 1970s, the Hong Kong government considered the establishment of a kind of 'open university' using the UK Open University as a model. It
indicates that a major motivation for setting up the OLI was to maintain political stability at minimum cost, and that the government’s imposition of a self-financing regime resulted in a market orientation which in turn affected the extent to which the OLI widened participation.

Chapter 6 reports the outcome of the interviews on the setting up of the OLI. These show, *inter alia*, that the OLI was established mainly in an effort to restore the confidence of Hong Kong people and to solve the problem of the 'brain drain'.

Chapter 7 deals with the documentary analysis and interviews related to the establishment of the CEF. It shows that the Hong Kong government considered that public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to society. It also indicates that both the government and the providers focused on the 'learning rich', and so widened the learning divide.

Chapter 8 summarizes and discusses the findings of the study.
Widening participation in adult education in Hong Kong: a policy perspective

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I would also like to express my thanks to my colleagues at the Open University of Hong Kong. Finally, I am extremely grateful to Professor Ronnie Carr for the support and encouragement he has given me in completing this thesis.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction: participation and non-participation in lifelong learning

Although terms such as ‘adult education,’ ‘continuing education’ and ‘lifelong learning’ are open to many different interpretations (e.g. Sand, 1998; Woodrow, 1999; Aspin and Chapman, 2000; Field, 2001), adult participation in learning is often seen as a vehicle to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor by increasing individual competitiveness. However, it has been suggested that:

David Riesman’s rule, familiar in many other fields of life – ‘the more, the more’ – applies equally appositely to participation in adult education as well. The irony is that those who participate most in continuing education are those who in a sense need it least; … (Johnstone and Rivera, p. 103, cited in Rinne and Kivinen, 1996, p. 184).

For these writers, the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer is not just an economic phenomenon but also a distinctive feature of adult participation in learning. This has been referred to in the literature on adult education as the phenomenon of the ‘learning divide’.

Concern about the ‘learning divide’, and the role lifelong learning can play in reducing it, is by no means confined to less developed countries. Indeed, equity in the
distribution of learning opportunities has become the focus of contemporary international developments in lifelong learning (see World Bank, 1994; Chapman and Aspin, 1995; UNESCO, 1996, 1998; Parry and Fry, 1999; OECD 1999b, 2001).

In this regard, a distinction needs to be drawn between increasing and widening participation. The former may involve the same groups of learners continuing to study after they have completed a course or programme – for example, a postgraduate programme after obtaining a first degree. In this case, the group of learners has not been widened; as Thomas (2001) argued, ‘despite the numerical expansion in student numbers, this does not necessarily mean that there has been an increase in diversity’ (p. 6). If those who have participated in learning in the past continue to participate while those who did not participate before continue not to do so, the ‘learning rich’ will become richer and the ‘learning poor’ poorer. In contrast, widening participation involves a more diversified group of adults in society participating in learning. Therefore, it will tend to result in narrowing the learning divide but increasing participation may not.

One possible explanation of the paradox in the quotation from Johnstone and Rivera above is the way in which governments have conceptualized lifelong learning and designed their related policies. Thomas (2001) categorized policy makers’ motivation into two broad types: economic and non-economic returns. These two perspectives are also related to the perceived purposes of lifelong learning, which in turn are linked to views on who most deserve learning opportunities, and which types of courses have the greatest value. The economic perspective, in Thomas’s view, focuses on increasing education and training for adults as a means of achieving
economic growth in society through more efficient training of the workforce. On the other hand, the non-economic motivation values the personal, social and cultural benefits of education as much as the instrumental ones. This latter perspective views the widening of access to learning as a route to more equal opportunities and wider social change. Of course, these two conceptions are not necessarily unrelated. For example, when a government expands learning opportunities essentially to increase society’s economic competitiveness, this can lead to widening participation where these opportunities are available to, and are taken up by, those who are ‘learning poor’. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference in orientation; and it can been argued that the apparent failure of government policies on lifelong learning to reduce the learning divide derive from an excessive emphasis on economic goals and inadequate attention to equity and social inclusiveness.

In fact, as will be shown later in this and subsequent chapters, the distribution of learning opportunities is closely related to lifelong learning policies. This research project aims to find out the extent to which lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong from around the mid-1980s to the early 2000s have been related to the widening or narrowing of the learning divide. This research shows that the lifelong learning policies of Hong Kong have not been much related to narrowing the learning divide, but rather more to maintaining the social stability of Hong Kong and enhancing its economy. This project also argues that both the Hong Kong government and many providers have tended to give priority to learning that brings about economic benefits to society. The providers also believe that people with higher qualifications are more eager to learn and have a greater potential to contribute to the development of the Hong Kong economy – and so have paid more attention to these ‘learning rich’. The
value advocated in the policies is that the purpose of learning is for economic reasons, at both individual and societal levels.

1.2 The impact of major developments in adult education in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the early 2000s on widening participation

The strategy chosen to investigate these questions is the close examination of two cases – the establishment of the Open Learning Institute (in the late 1980s) and the Continuing Education Fund (in the early 2000s). Before the reasons for choosing these two cases are explained, the major developments in adult education in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the early 2000s need to be outlined briefly, to give an analysis of the role, scope and changes in adult education and its impact on the widening of participation during that period.

After World War II, the emphasis in educational development was placed on the primary and post-primary sectors. At that time, Hong Kong had to move towards the development of new industries, which required a suitably trained workforce (Mok, 1997), and there was massive immigration from mainland China after 1949. In 1951, the Evening School of Higher Chinese Studies was established in the government’s Education Department, and in 1954 an Adult Education Section was set up in the Education Department to provide general and liberal education to adults. As such provision, which related to the economic development of Hong Kong and the influx
of immigrants, focused on groups with lower qualifications, it clearly resulted in the widening of participation.

The next milestone in adult education was the establishment of the Extra-Mural Department of the University of Hong Kong in 1956, as a result of a recommendation in the Report of the Committee on Higher Education in Hong Kong — the Keswick Report. However, as the medium of instruction in the early years was English, which was spoken by only 10% of the population at that time, the target group was very restricted and the Department’s provision did not lead to any significant widening of participation.

The 1960s witnessed various changes. For instance, recognizing the importance of technical and vocational education to Hong Kong, in 1965 the government set up the Industrial Training Advisory Committee to plan the workforce needs for major industries and to recommend appropriate means to meet them (Mok, 1997). Also, in the late 1960s, voluntary agencies such as Caritas–Hong Kong began to play an active part in adult education (Law, 1979) with the aim of widening the range of those involved in learning activities (as Law remarked ‘as ... was often the case, education started from religious bodies’ (p. 98)).

In the 1970s, at a time when Hong Kong’s economy developed significantly (Youngson, 1982), the government’s adult education policy focused explicitly on ‘retrieval education’, not on subsidizing higher education for adults. This policy was adopted because, with the increased number of places in primary and secondary schools, the government felt that those adults who had missed out on formal school
education earlier should be given a second opportunity to gain comparable educational qualifications. This approach was evident in a speech made by the Assistant Director of Education (Further Education) at the 22nd Adult Education Conference organized by the Adult Education Section of the Education Department.

The middle-income and relatively better-educated groups had already been catered for through the extra-mural departments, so that what adult education providers needed to consider were multi-media courses, literacy courses, social education, special education, education for newcomers, education for people in rural areas, and senior secondary classes (Winfield, 1977, p. 12, cited in Mok, 1997, p. 7).

Also, the White Paper, The Development of Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education, released in 1978 welcomed the development of educational opportunities for adults, again concentrating almost exclusively on those who had not gained formal educational qualifications in the past.

In the 1970s, the government also launched a Subvention Scheme which subsidized approved projects organized by non-profit-making organizations. Although not well received because it did not provide recurrent funds, this had some effect on widening participation, because it was targeted at a larger population, particularly those with lower qualifications. However, the learning divide remained significant, as can be seen in the following data: in 1981, the percentage of the population aged 15 or above with tertiary education was 6.7%, and with education only at lower secondary level or below was 68.4% (Census and Statistics Department, 1992).
By the mid-1980s, participation in adult education in Hong Kong had already widened to a certain extent, but this was mainly at the level of basic education. The Education Commission Report No. 2 (1986) signalled a significant shift in approach as it called for an open and distance education programme which would cover the full range of levels in post-school education in Hong Kong, i.e. from sub-degree to postgraduate level. The subsequent establishment in 1989 of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, which offered degree courses and had no academic entry requirements, was a very important step in widening opportunities for adult participation at a time when the provision of degree places in other universities was very limited. But what about adults with aspirations and interests other than studying for a degree?

The mid-1990s saw the publication of an economic analysis of continuing education commissioned by the UPGC (University and Polytechnic Grants Committee), which concluded that — compared to basic education — ‘there is less need for government subsidies to make continuing education equally accessible’ (Chung et al., 1994, p. 113). This market approach viewed the learners as one of the beneficiaries of continuing education because of their increased chances of labour market mobility, and its general standpoint was reflected in the relevant section of the University Grants Committee’s 1996 Report. For example, the UGC 1996 Report described ‘the usefulness of CPE [continuing and professional education] to Hong Kong and to the individual students largely in terms of economic benefit’ (p. 87).

Professional and higher education expanded rapidly in Hong Kong from the 1980s to the mid-1990s driven, on the one hand, by the economic situation and, on the other,
by the government’s policies on higher education (Mok, 1997). During the 1990s, there was a reduced emphasis on leisure or interest courses (e.g. the Adult Education Section’s recreational centres were closed) and an increased provision of award-bearing and work-related courses, a shift which was symbolized by changes in the names of university continuing education units which had now become self-financing. As Jarvis (1995) has argued, this instrumental perspective on the role of adult learning, with its marginalizing of leisure and interest courses, may be viewed as hindering the widening of participation in learning.

In the early 2000s, several relevant initiatives were taken by the government. For example, Project Springboard (now renamed Project Yi Jin) and Associate degrees offered increased continuing education opportunities for secondary school leavers who had difficulty in gaining access to mainstream higher education, and supported them financially in pursuing their studies. The former provided a qualification equivalent to five HKCEE passes for those who had not attained satisfactory results in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE); while the latter, which emerged as a major new sub-degree qualification in Hong Kong, may articulate with some university degree programmes.

In his 2001 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong announced a $5 billion subsidy scheme for learners aged between 18 and 60, which was launched as the Continuing Education Fund in 2002. However, to be eligible for support, learners had to study courses in areas closely defined by the government, such as logistics, China business and tourism. Initially, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, degree-holders could not apply to the Fund, although this restriction was later removed.
As can be seen from the above outline, the development of adult education in Hong Kong was closely related to developments in formal education and served different clientele at different periods. In the 1950s, when primary education was the highest level of attainment to which most people in Hong Kong could aspire, adult education provision focused on providing adults with a second chance mainly at this level. In the mid-1960s, however, the government described adult education as 'a complete educational ladder leading from the literacy level up to post-secondary studies' (Hong Kong government, 1966, cited in Mok, 1997, p. 5). As the education system of Hong Kong developed further, adult education still served the role of providing a second chance, but provision focused more on secondary education from the 1960s to 1970s, and then on higher education from the 1990s onwards.

1.3 The present project

Aims

In Hong Kong, as in many other parts of the world, the concept of 'lifelong learning' has been promulgated by the government as a means of enabling its citizens to cope with the changing demands of a knowledge-based society. And, as elsewhere, the ways in which the government conceptualizes the purposes of the overarching term 'lifelong learning' will have influenced the way in which its policies have been formulated, who stands to gain from the learning opportunities offered, and whether they should attract government financial support.
The two main research questions in this study are:

- To what extent have lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong from around the mid-1980s to the early 2000s been related to narrowing the gap between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor'?
- Why have lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong been so related (or not) to narrowing the learning divide?

To examine the government's motivation in policy making in this area, the two initiatives referred to above are analysed in detail:

- The establishment of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong in 1989;
- The setting up of a $5 billion Continuing Education Fund in 2002.

In order to answer the two main research questions, the following subsidiary questions are posed:

- What were the main reasons for the Hong Kong government's establishment of the Open Learning Institute?
- What were the main reasons for the Hong Kong government's establishment of the Continuing Education Fund?
- What value did the Hong Kong government and the provider ascribe to 'lifelong learning' in the establishment of the Open Learning Institute?
- What value did the Hong Kong government and the providers ascribe to lifelong learning in the setting up of the Continuing Education Fund?
- Which groups of adults did the Hong Kong government and providers pay more attention to? Why?
The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (OLI) and the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) were selected for in-depth study for various reasons. First, they represent government policy over two distinct periods in which the socio-political context differed greatly, as did the terminology used in the field, and the conceptualization of the purposes of adult learning. For example, several authors (e.g. Law, 1979; Shak, 1989; Tuijnman, 1999; Hodgson, 2000b) suggest that 'adult education' – the dominant term in Hong Kong at the time the OLI was conceived – appears to be more concerned with the provision of a second chance to adults and hence with equity and the widening of participation; and that, in comparison, 'continuing education' and 'lifelong learning' – the prevailing terms used locally when the CEF was implemented – have less concern with such personal and social aims.

Second, the establishment of the OLI was also chosen because it represents a milestone in widening access to learners: as its mission statement claims, it 'makes higher education available to all those aspiring to it regardless of previous qualification, gender, or race' – a philosophy of openness which seems to echo the concept of equity and narrowing of the learning divide. Also, as suggested by Holford (1998), the Hong Kong government has tended to assume that it was the principal vehicle for continuing education in Hong Kong.

Third, the setting up of the CEF was selected for purposes of comparison because it is the latest government policy on lifelong learning, and involves a relatively large amount of money. Also, it illustrates a shift in thinking on the role of government. Instead of establishing a provider (as in the case of the OLI), the government was apparently trying to influence the sector by shaping demand through subsidizing
learners and allowing them to choose the institutions at which they studied, subject of course to their enrolling on the courses it prescribed.

Research design

The research is qualitative and exploratory in nature, drawing on a combination of documentary analysis and in-depth interviews.

The analysis of documents is used mainly in relation to the founding of the OLI (and to a lesser extent the CEF), drawing on both 'product' and 'process documents' (a distinction drawn by Sweeting, 1999a), including official reports, statistics of learners' profiles in the OLI/OUHK, articles written by academics, press cuttings, and other relevant items such as the minutes of Legislative Council and Executive Council meetings. The latter sources were accessed in libraries and in the Public Records Office, where official documents are available for public inspection if they have been in existence for more than 30 years.

In the in-depth interviews, the interviewees were asked about their views on how lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong have been related to narrowing the learning divide. In relation to the OLI, some members of the relevant bodies – the Education Commission, the Executive Council, the Legislative Council and the Planning Committee, as well as the OLI's Associate Director, were invited for interview. Since the government and probably also the providers\(^1\) played a role in the CEF policy formation, the interviewees included the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower and a range of academic administrators from continuing education units in

\(^1\) The reason for including the providers is given in Chapter 4.
Hong Kong tertiary institutions. The methodology and its rationale are explained further in Chapter 4.

**Significance of the study**

The main body of the literature on widening participation in lifelong learning concerns western countries. Although the Hong Kong government has reflected the international trend of advocating lifelong learning as vital for a knowledge-based economy and a learning society, the local literature on policy making in the area of lifelong learning is limited. Moreover, the available literature focuses mainly on narrower issues such as the motivations of Hong Kong adult learners and the practical barriers they face (Kwong *et al.*, 1997; Mok and Kwong, 1999; Shen *et al.*, 2002) rather than broader issues such as equity and the distribution of learning opportunities dealt with in the work of western writers (e.g. Tight, 1998; Hodgson, 2000a; Aspin, 2001a, 2001b). This project aims to make a contribution to filling this gap in the local literature.

It is hoped, therefore, that this study will contribute to our understanding of the policy making process on lifelong learning in Hong Kong, and perhaps even help to predict future developments on the basis of the trends identified.
**Brief overview of the later chapters**

The study draws on the literature in a wide variety of areas, such as the concepts and practices of lifelong learning; the discourses of widening participation in learning; the benefits and beneficiaries of lifelong learning; lifelong learning and social exclusion; and the characteristics of the policy making process in Hong Kong.

More detailed consideration of this literature is provided in Chapters 2 and 3, the former focusing mainly on conceptions and practices in lifelong learning, the latter on lifelong learning as public policy.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology employed in this research project.

The next two chapters focus on the establishment of the OLI. Chapter 5 provides a documentary analysis on the reasons for its foundation, while Chapter 6 reports the key findings from interviewing relevant individuals and attempts to draw together the main points from these two sources.

Chapter 7 is devoted to understanding the government's motivation in establishing the CEF, and in later amending some of its provisions. The chapter contains the results of both the documentary analysis and the interviews with representatives of the government and continuing education providers.

Finally, Chapter 8 gives an overview and discussion of the findings and suggests some implications for lifelong learning policy in Hong Kong.
Chapter 2 – Literature review: conceptions and practices of lifelong learning

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, it has been argued that policy makers’ perceptions of the roles and purposes of lifelong learning influence their formulation of policy in this area. How policy makers perceive the functions of lifelong learning can be explored in various ways, such as: reviewing the literature in this area; interviewing the policy makers; and carrying out documentary analysis, with a special emphasis on policy and policy-related documents. This chapter focuses on the literature on lifelong learning in various countries, as well as in Hong Kong, particularly in relation to how conceptions of lifelong learning can affect policy making on the issue of the learning divide.

This literature shows that there is a discrepancy between the concepts and practices of lifelong learning. Very often, the concept of lifelong learning has been tailored by government policies to suit the needs of their societies. It also illustrates that when the concept of lifelong learning has been put into practice in Hong Kong, the resulting policies have tended to emphasize the upgrading of work-related knowledge and skills – which in turn has widened the learning divide.
2.2 Confusion in terminology

There is a wide array of sometimes overlapping terms in this area which are not always used consistently in the literature.¹ For example, some authors consider that lifelong learning can be used as ‘a synonym for lifelong education’ (e.g. Lawson, 1982, p. 100), or seen as simply ‘a new name for the third phase of education previously referred to as “adult (or continuing) education”’ (e.g. Parker and Leicester, 2001, p. 117); and still others consider that adult education is ‘a subset of lifelong education’ (e.g. Shak, 1989, p. 8).

The confusion and shift of terminologies can be exemplified by the titles of some publications in the field. For instance, in 1983 Jarvis published a book entitled Adult and Continuing Education, and its second edition (1995) bore the same title; but the third edition of the same book (2004) was renamed Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. Also, although the title of the earlier editions may suggest that ‘adult and continuing education’ is a single term, Jarvis (1995, 2004) drew a distinction between ‘adult education’ and ‘continuing education’, and argued that ‘adult education’ was different from the ‘education of adults’.

This terminological confusion derives from the fact that notions of adult education and lifelong learning vary widely, ranging from formal study (full-time or part-time)

for a qualification to virtually all adult daily-life learning experiences. For example, UNESCO (1977) adopted a broad view of adult education which covers virtually every learning activity of an adult:

The term 'adult education' denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise ... whereby persons regarded as adult in the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications, or turn them in new directions and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two-fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

Adult education activities, viewed as forming part of lifelong education, have no theoretical boundaries ... ; they cover all aspects of life and all fields of knowledge and are addressed to all people whatever their level of achievement (p. 2).

Similarly, although the term 'lifelong learning' has been used extensively in policy documents (e.g. OECD, 1996; DfEE, 1998; Tung, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003), there is a danger of assuming that there is a shared understanding of the term – doubts have even been expressed on whether an agreed definition is achievable at all (e.g. Sand, 1998; Woodrow, 1999; Aspin and Chapman, 2000).
The term 'lifelong learning' is a contested one because, as the following section explains in more detail, lifelong learning has become a strategy adopted by national governments to cope with the need to adapt to social and technological change, a feature of the post-modern debate (Griffin, 1999b). The term provides a justification for reducing resources that are made available through public services (Field, 2001). It appears to offer a comforting illusion that for every complex problem there is one simple solution (Coffield, 1999). The debate associated with the contested term 'lifelong learning' is related to policy.

In examining policy debates, it is important to clarify how such terms have been used (Griffin, 1999b). Historically, in many countries, different terminology (such as 'adult education', 'continuing education' and 'lifelong learning') has been employed; and changed usage may reflect changes in the provision and role of adult education and lifelong learning in society.

While, logically, changes in terminology and the purposes of learning activities can be two separate phenomena happening simultaneously without being causally related, the use of different terms at different times is not entirely arbitrary (Hodgson, 2000b; Aspin, 2001a). For example, the gradual replacement of the term 'adult education' by 'continuing education' and 'lifelong learning' is not just a reflection of 'fashion', but also involves changes in the meaning and purposes of the learning activities involved – as illustrated later in this chapter for both Hong Kong and other countries (e.g. Law, 1979; Shak, 1989; Mok, 1997; Coffield, 1999; Hodgson, 2000b; Aspin and Chapman, 2000).
2.3 From adult education to lifelong learning

A review of the literature (e.g., Yeaxlee, 1929; UNESCO, 1977; Law, 1979; Lawson, 1982; Dalgish, 1984; Shak, 1989; Stock, 1993; Chung et al., 1994; Jarvis, 1995, 2004; Mok, 1997; Coffield, 1999; Tuijnman, 1999; Aspin and Chapman, 2000; Bagnall, 2000; Parker and Leicester, 2001; Cribbin, 2002; Hodgson, 2000a) suggests that the concepts and terminologies in this area can be categorized as in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Categorization of views of learning and terminologies

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<th>Views of learning</th>
<th>Terminologies</th>
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<td>Learning can take place outside educational institutions.</td>
<td>Adult education, lifelong education, lifelong learning, continuing education, informal education, self-directed learning, community education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning takes places from the cradle to the grave.</td>
<td>Lifelong education, lifelong learning, informal education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should provide a second chance to those adults who missed the opportunity to learn in formal education.</td>
<td>Adult education, lifelong education, lifelong learning, continuing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should not only be related to work, but should also cover social and cultural dimensions.</td>
<td>Adult education, lifelong education, lifelong learning, continuing education, informal education, self-directed learning, community education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should take place in response to a situation of constant change in the employment environment.</td>
<td>Adult education, lifelong education, lifelong learning, informal education, continuing education, continuing and professional education, vocational education, self-directed learning, community education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the concepts represented by 'adult education' and 'lifelong learning' are very similar, except that, for obvious reasons, 'adult education' does not cover the period from infancy to adolescence. However, this similarity in the way the

---

2 These are examples, not an exclusive list, of terminologies.
terms are construed is not always reflected in practice, particularly in policy documents – an issue which is discussed in the next section. In other words, the terms ‘adult education’ and ‘lifelong learning’ in the context of policy reflect different meanings – more so than the differences in the notions the terms literally represent.

2.4 International trends in lifelong learning: conceptions and practices

A brief review of developments in lifelong learning in some other countries is necessary because of their potential impact on Hong Kong policy making. As Boshier (1997) pointed out, ‘the more organized forms of Hong Kong adult education are strongly shaped by Western models’ (p. 120). The trends in the United Kingdom are particularly relevant as Hong Kong was a British colony for many years until 1997.

The idea of everyday and informal education and learning, and the permanent need for education, was promulgated as early as the late 1920s (Yeaxlee, 1929), and notions similar to lifelong learning already existed in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Tuijnman, 1999). However, the most commonly used term in the 1970s and 1980s was still ‘adult education’, with ‘lifelong learning’ not becoming more popular in policy documents internationally until the 1990s (Hodgson, 2000b). For example, the UNESCO 1977 document focused on ‘adult education’. However, in 1996, the OECD published Lifelong Learning for All; and the European Commission issued a paper Teaching and Learning: towards the learning society and declared 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning. Finally, the European Commission issued a
Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in 2000 and Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality in 2001 (Hodgson, 2000b; Reeve et al., 2002).

There is a discrepancy between the concepts and practices of lifelong learning. Concepts are usually related to discussion among academics and are reflected in the literature, and they sometimes represent 'ideals' of the authors. (Some of these concepts are listed in Table 2.1.) However, practices are more related to policy making, the implementation of the policies by providers, and the kind of learning actually undertaken by individuals. As shown earlier in this chapter, the concept represented by the term ‘lifelong learning’ (and in fact, many other terms in the field as well, such as ‘adult education’ and ‘lifelong education’) is very wide-ranging and overarching – but when put into practice, the concept has been ‘tailored’. It is argued later in this chapter that this ‘tailoring’ of concepts is related to a consequent widening of the learning divide.

The argument that, when put into ‘practice’, ideas have been ‘tailored’ to suit particular policies is exemplified clearly in the literature (e.g. Lawson, 1982; Griffin, 1999a, 1999b; Woodrow, 1999; Hodgson, 2000a, 2000b). For example, Hodgson (2000b) considers lifelong learning to be a concept which remains very powerful at the level of rhetoric but has become ‘... as slippery and multifaceted as the environment in which it exists (p. 4); and that ‘The term “lifelong learning” was seen as useful in the 1990s precisely because it is potentially so all encompassing, but in reality it can be tailored to the particular requirements of the country or organization from which the policy document originates’ (Hodgson, 2000a, p. 2). Lawson (1982)
also argues that ‘lifelong education can be seen to be less of a concept and more as a policy for education’ (p. 99).

Griffin (1999b) considered that ‘the substitution of a relatively unambiguous concept of “education” by a relatively arbitrary collection of “learning” concepts may disguise what is, in fact, a major shift in national and international policies’ (p. 329). He further pointed out that ‘one of the forces which has driven “learning” in and “education” out is the sense of the inevitability of social and technological change which policy formation projects’ (p. 229). Griffin also argued that ‘the shifting emphasis away from education to learning in the lifelong context does signify some kind of substantive development away from a conceptual to a policy-oriented approach’ (Griffin, 1999a, p. 431). Finally, he claimed that ‘the principle of lifelong learning, as far as the EC is concerned, is one of employment policies and “continuous reskilling of the workforce”’ (p. 431).

For this study, there are two significant points worth noting in Griffin’s comments. First, he draws a distinction between ‘education’ and ‘learning’ – the difference being related to anticipated changes in technology and the globalization of the economy. Second, there is an economic motivation underlying government policies in lifelong learning. Griffin’s distinction between ‘education’ and ‘learning’ to some extent explains why the term ‘lifelong learning’ has become more popular than ‘adult education’. It is not because the concept of lifelong learning embraces new ideas on, for example, informal learning, the provision of a second chance to adults, and learning throughout life – they are already represented in ‘adult education’ and ‘lifelong education’. For Griffin, the popularity of the term ‘lifelong learning’ is
related to policies of 'continuous reskilling of the workforce', which drives 'learning' in and 'education' out. This meaning is implicit in 'lifelong learning' but not 'adult education' because the notion that learning should be the responsibility of individuals rather than the government is attached to the former term but not the latter (Wain, 1991; Griffin, 1999a, 1999b) – though as Wain (1991) and Griffin (1999a, 1999b) argue, this kind of notion is problematic.

Woodrow (1999) summarized four characteristics of lifelong learning: lifelong learning is for all, for anyone and everyone; it is everyday learning, informal as well as formal; lifelong learning is driven by economic imperatives; and it is centred on individuals.

On the surface, the first two characteristics Woodrow described should help to widen participation because of their inclusive nature. However, she considered that 'lifelong learning can only be for all if those who are currently benefiting least are given priority in the allocation of opportunities and resources (p. 11). Also, as regards the second feature, she argued that those who learn best from 'everyday learning' and 'informal learning' are unlikely to be those with no resources, no access to technology, little motivation and no satisfactory learning experiences. In this respect, she quoted research carried out in Switzerland which confirmed that 'lifelong learning finds its best clients among the so-called knowledge-workers' (p. 11). From this perspective, the issue of the learning divide is a result of a mismatch between the allocation of opportunities and resources and those in need of them.
2.5 Lifelong learning in Hong Kong: conceptions and practices

The previous section has indicated that there has been a widespread change of terminology from 'adult education' to 'lifelong learning', but that the latter concept has been 'tailored' when put into practice in different contexts. Parallel developments in the prevailing terminology have taken place in Hong Kong, with the most common usage being 'adult education' in the 1960s and 1970s, 'continuing education' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then 'lifelong learning' from the late 1990s onwards. This trend can be identified from a variety of sources other than policy documents, e.g.

- A literature search of Hong Kong doctoral theses, which revealed the following three titles:
  - 'Lifelong education: definition, agreement and prediction' (Shak, 1989).
  - 'Lifelong learning in Hong Kong – a case study of six adult learners' (Au, 2002).

- The names adopted by the relevant professional associations – the 'Hong Kong Association for Continuing Education' (the first such association), the 'Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions' and the 'Hong Kong Association for Lifelong Learning' which were established in 1975, 1994 and the early 21st century respectively.
The renaming of most of the university units concerned, with 'extramural studies' being replaced in several cases by terms such as 'professional' and 'continuing education' in the earlier 1990s. This change was accompanied by a shift in emphasis away from leisure or interest courses to the provision of more award-bearing and work-related courses as the relevant units became self-financing. Also, the university units established for this purpose in the late 1990s and early 21st century bear the name 'lifelong learning', e.g. the College of Lifelong Learning (CL3) of Hong Kong's University of Science and Technology (UST), established in 2000. The following extract on the mission and objectives of UST's College of Lifelong Learning shows that the new name is not just a matter of 'trendy jargon', but reflects a difference in the emphasis of its provision and the role it seeks to play in society.

The HKUST College of Lifelong Learning (CL3) ... aims to support the University's mission of assisting the economic and social development of Hong Kong and Mainland China. The vision of CL3 is to foster a lifelong learning culture ... to meet the needs of working people in a changing world.

To date, CL3 has developed over 300 public programs, of which 150 are registered as 'reimbursable courses' under the Continuing Education Fund set up by the HKSAR Government. Over 3,500 students, most of which (sic) are working professionals in Hong Kong, have been trained.
As the above statement makes clear, CL3 focuses on work-related courses targeted mainly at working professionals. Also, half of the course fees are reimbursable from the government's Continuing Education Fund which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, provides financial support for study in prescribed areas related to enhancing the Hong Kong economy.

As in many other countries, the Hong Kong government has viewed lifelong learning as the solution to a wide range of educational, social and political problems, particularly in recent years. The terms 'knowledge-based economy', 'lifelong learning' and 'continuing education' have been the key words in the relevant sections of every Policy Address from 1999 to 2003. As the following excerpts indicate, during these years, the government delivered a number of key messages about the needs of Hong Kong in the knowledge age, viz.:

- Lifelong learning is the solution to the economic problems Hong Kong faces at a time of global economic competitiveness.

- Lifelong learning is concerned with increasing the work-related knowledge and skills of people in the workplace.

- People with inadequate knowledge or outdated skills need to catch up by participating in lifelong learning.

For instance, in his 1999 Policy Address, Tung Chee Hwa, the then Chief Executive, stressed that 'if Hong Kong wishes to become a knowledge-based economy in the
information age, ... we must embrace 'life-long learning' (Tung, 1999, p. 20); and in 2000, he said that there was a 'significant expansion of continuing education' (Tung 2000a, pp. 23–24). He also noted:

But we must acknowledge there will be pressure on those who are left behind. Those without adequate education, those whose skills are outdated, those at an age when acquiring new skills will be difficult, will be disadvantaged. For them the knowledge economy will be a real challenge. The SAR Government will play its part to help. ... The 'Lifelong Learning' concept espoused by the Education Commission will be a most important step (Tung, 2000b).

In the following year, the Chief Executive announced that 'the government will set aside $5 billion to subsidize those with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training programmes' (Tung, 2001, pp. 14–15). Also, in 2003, he argued that 'only by developing our own local human resources and providing opportunities for continuing education for people of all walks of life can we prepare ourselves for the changes in the marketplace' (Tung, 2003, p. 11).

2.6 Roles and purposes of lifelong learning

In other countries, there has been criticism of the drive for economic competitiveness as the main motive for increasing participation in education (e.g. Sand, 1998). However, such arguments have not surfaced much in the local context, perhaps because people in Hong Kong are more concerned with their employment/careers
than with equity issues. As Wilding (1997) commented: 'The ideology which has dominated Hong Kong stresses individual effort, individual responsibility, self-reliance, and self-help. It emphasizes competition. ... Moreover, people generally held the value that they can move on to make a better living by their own efforts' (Wilding, 1997, p. 265).

However, while admitting that Hong Kong’s problems are very different from those of the European Commission, Holford (1998) raised the question: ‘... should Hong Kong’s lifelong learning structures have a cultural, social and political dimension, as well as an economic and vocational one?’ (p. 147). Several authors in the field (e.g. Holford, 1998; Gustavsson, 2002) have argued that, with an excessive focus on vocational aspects, the humanistic and democratic content of lifelong learning has been lost. This is clearly relevant to the ‘learning divide’ since, if a predominantly economic value is attached to learning, then some forms of learning will be given priority over others by governments. As Woodrow (1999) pointed out, ‘research in Finland ... where adult education has been “rolled over by market forces” indicates that the result has been greater polarization rather than wider participation’ (p. 11).

Obviously the perceived roles and purposes of lifelong learning affect the extent of participation. However, there are no clear boundaries between learning for leisure and learning for academic or vocational purposes. As Jarvis (1995) noted:

leisure need not be equated with the pursuit of only the creative arts ...

Leisure time activities do not preclude any form of learning, whether aesthetic, athletic or academic, but they may have been taken for the sheer enjoyment of learning rather than for a vocational purpose’ (p. 21).
As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, a shift in emphasis from the provision of leisure or interest courses to vocational and award-bearing courses is detrimental to the widening of participation and narrowing of the learning divide. 'For many people, recreational-type courses give them the confidence they need to pursue longer and more structured courses' (Latham, 1998).

Various writers (e.g. Holford, 1998; Gustavsson, 2002; Jarvis, 2004) have stressed that participation in lifelong learning should not be restricted to the vocational/economic and academic domains, but should also cover non-academic areas. Even within the vocational domain, participation should be widened to encompass as diverse a range of learners as possible, irrespective of their educational attainment and careers. In other words, participation should not be restricted to those learners viewed as having the most obvious potential to contribute to the economy, as this may widen the learning divide, and impede the development of a learning society 'organized in such a manner as to make all kinds of learning available to everyone' (Jarvis, 1995, p. 40). This argument can be summarized as in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Relations between the roles and purposes of lifelong learning and the learning divide
2.7 Summary

This chapter has examined the wide variety of terminology adopted in this field, and has shown the increasingly common use of the term 'lifelong learning' (replacing 'adult education') in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Possible explanations for this trend were discussed in relation to changing perceptions of the functions of lifelong learning over time.

The complex relationship between the wide-ranging concepts of 'adult education' and 'lifelong learning' and their implementation was also addressed. In practice, lifelong learning has tended to focus on the upgrading of work-related knowledge and skills, and has marginalized leisure and non-vocational courses. In this process, the implementation of lifelong learning appears to be less concerned with the issues of equity and widening participation than 'adult education' was.
Chapter 3 – Literature review: lifelong learning as public policy

3.1 Introduction

As pointed out in earlier chapters, the roles and purposes of lifelong learning affect 'who learns what', which in turn influences the learning divide. Chapter 2 discussed this issue from the perspective of concepts of lifelong learning, and this chapter develops the argument by examining it mainly from a policy perspective.

Lifelong learning is not a value-free concept, and lifelong learning policies are also not value-free. Public policy may be defined as 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do' (Dye, 1992, p. 2), and the choices made by governments give some indication of their preferred values. 'Policy is clearly a matter of the authoritative allocation of values; policies are the operational statements of values' (Ball, 1990, p. 3). Lawson (1982) pointed out that education1 'should be restricted to areas of learning that are chosen because they produce effects which we and society wish to bring about' (p. 97), and added that 'lifelong education cannot really escape the traditional tension between the interests of the whole and the interests of the individual parts of society' (p. 102). The values implicit in lifelong learning policies are brought out in the answers to two related questions:

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1 Although Lawson was referring to lifelong 'education', the argument can be applied also to lifelong learning.
First, who are the learners that can bring benefits to the society (which in turn is linked to the issue of what constitute societal benefits)?

Second, what kinds of learning activities will bring about such benefits?

The first question raises the issue of who are the ‘deserving’ and ‘non-deserving learners’, while the second is related to discourses of widening participation.

In countries such as the UK, there has been serious consideration by educators and government of the role lifelong learning can play in solving the problem of social exclusion (e.g. Rinne and Kivinen, 1996; NIACE, 1997; OECD, 1999a; Preece, 1999, 2001; Thomas and Cooper, 2000; Woodrow et al., 2000; Thomas 2001). However, this issue does not appear to have attracted the same degree of concern in Hong Kong. Although some local literature has been published recently on issues such as inequality and social exclusion (e.g. Wong and Siu, 2003), very little has been written about the learning divide among adults. In Hong Kong, the stress on increasing participation in education for economic competitiveness has been scarcely questioned. This may be, at least in part, because of people’s greater concern about livelihood than equity (e.g. Leung, 1990; Lui and Wong, 1995).

This review of the literature on lifelong learning as public policy first covers briefly different perspectives on why adults participate in learning, and then compares the social democratic and neo-liberal reform models, and the various discourses of widening participation. It then reviews the related issues of who are considered deserving and non-deserving learners, the perceived benefits of lifelong learning, and
the topic of social exclusion. The situation in Hong Kong is then put into perspective with a short review of the learning divide in several other countries; and the chapter concludes by considering the literature on the features of social policy making in Hong Kong at a more general level.

3.2 Participation and non-participation: a policy perspective

The issue of widening participation can be examined at the levels of the individual and society. At the individual level, this involves studying why adults do and do not participate in learning. Some researchers have attributed the participation and non-participation of adults to factors such as age, educational background, motivation and socio-economic status – as well situational, institutional and dispositional barriers (McGivney, 1993; Kwong, et al., 1997; Mok and Kwong, 1999). However, other adult educators, not satisfied with these kinds of explanation, prefer to explain adult participation from the societal level, particularly from the policy perspective. For instance, Griffin (1999a) described studies such as those noted above as ‘... characteristic examples of the redistributive social democratic approach to lifelong learning policy, focusing as they do upon barriers to participation’ (p. 435).

According to Griffin, such studies represent ‘a reductionist model in that they deal with measurement rather than interpretation’ (p. 435). Although acknowledging that these studies have added considerably to our knowledge about adults’ participation and non-participation in education, he argued that ‘they do little more than make a case for removing barriers to participation and expanding provision. They are also
generally lacking in any analytical or critical perspective with regard to policy issues' (p. 435).

Griffin's argument is significant for the present study as what he advocated was a different mode of thinking, focusing on interpretation rather than measurement, and explanation rather than description. He argued not only for the need for explanatory studies, but for a critical analysis from the policy perspective – the position adopted in this thesis.

This chapter continues by expanding on the argument that there are values embedded in policies, and that these values influence the design and outcome of the policies, including who are the target learners and what kinds of learning are endorsed.

3.3 From education to learning: social democratic and neo-liberal welfare reform approaches

As quoted in Chapter 2, Griffin (1999a) commented that the shift from education to learning 'does signify some kind of substantive development away from a conceptual to a policy-oriented approach' (p. 431). However, he also suggested that 'the learning focus of lifelong learning could never have been an object of public policy in the same way that the provision one could' (p. 434) and indeed that 'learning, as distinct from education, could not be an object of social policy at all' (p. 434). Griffin concluded that
... the issue with which these papers are primarily concerned, is that of the sense in which learning could be an object of policy, with its objectives as attainable as any other object of policy. If this is the case, then lifelong learning is just another name for the provision of education and training opportunity, and the learning society just another name for a better-educated and trained one. If not, then lifelong learning refers to learning as a function of individual, social and cultural life, and in this sense it could not be an object of policy as such (p. 438).

Jarvis et al. (1998) also expressed doubts about whether 'learning can ever be the subject of public policy', regarding lifelong learning as a 'utopian' policy agenda.

Griffin added that 'learning' is used as a strategy when national governments shift from a social democratic model to a neo-liberal welfare reform model. The former focuses on the responsibility of the state to provide learning opportunities, while the latter stresses the responsibility of individual learners, with learning perceived as 'lifestyle, culture, consumption and civil society' (Griffin, 1999a, p. 432). In this sense, lifelong learning could not be an object of policy because learning 'cannot, like educational provision, be directly controlled' (Griffin, 1999a, p. 434) — and, paradoxically, there would be no point in examining any lifelong learning policies as such. In fact, what Griffin is highlighting is the shift from a social democratic model to a neo-liberal welfare reform model in the lifelong learning policies which many national governments have adopted. The neo-liberal welfare reform model focuses on individual learning as a matter of lifestyle and culture which cannot be controlled or predicted by any public policies. It is only through social democratic and reductionist...
models that this can be achieved, though Griffin (1999a) considered that even the reductionist model is problematic in policy analysis:

The nature of the connection between education, training and economic development is by no means straightforward or thoroughly understood. … What we learn from such analysis is that there is no straightforward connection between, for instance, the identification of need and the formulation of policies to address it: it is precisely the reason why so many welfare policies have been abandoned or have failed (p. 436).

Once again, Griffin’s argument is very relevant to the present study. The Hong Kong government’s establishment of the Continuing Education Fund is an example of a policy formulated to address an identified need, and the government may use the level of participation (in this case, the number of applications to the Fund) as a measure of the policy’s ‘success’, or even as an indication of how eager people are to participate in lifelong learning. This perspective can be seen in many previous publications in Hong Kong (e.g. Lee and Lam, 1994; Shen et al., 2002). However, a learning society cannot be achieved through public policy unless it is measured by the provision of learning opportunities (this is a reductionist approach and is advocated in the social democratic model). But as Griffin (1999a) warned, ‘it is usually taken for granted that the level of adult participation in learning is a measure of the degree to which a “learning society” is becoming a reality’ (p. 435). Jarvis (1995) also argued strongly that a learning society is not the same as the provision of educational facilities.
These different perspectives on lifelong learning (lifelong learning as 'provision of learning opportunities' as distinct from lifelong learning as a 'learning culture', a 'way of life') are critical in this research because viewing lifelong learning as provision of learning opportunities often only focuses on the degree of increase of participation and not on widening participation. Also, the provision of learning opportunities is affected by the discourses of modernizers and progressives, etc. (as will be discussed in a later section of this chapter). Provision of work-related courses may be dominant and some kinds of learning, for example leisure and interest courses, may be marginalized. As mentioned in Chapter 2, for some people, leisure courses 'give them the confidence they need to pursue longer and more structured courses' (Latham, 1998). The study of leisure courses by adults contributes to narrowing the learning divide. Therefore the widening or narrowing of the learning divide is affected by the different approaches (social democratic vs neo-liberal welfare model) adopted by the government.

To elaborate further on the two models referred to earlier, the social democratic model emphasizes the 'continuing and redistributive role of the state' and the neo-liberal welfare reform model envisages a minimal role for the state. Griffin (1999a) went on to argue that 'learning to do without welfare is what lifelong learning is really about. ... lifelong learning policies really are anti-educational in the sense that they are intended as a kind of smokescreen to disguise the systematic dismantling of the welfare state' (Griffin, 1999a, p. 432). Adult education placed more emphasis on redistributive educational provision and the role of the government in this process, while lifelong learning focuses more on the individual's responsibility to learn to cope with changes in society.
Griffin (1999a) suggested that the publications of international organizations such as UNESCO (1996), the OECD (1996) and the EC (1996) projected the social democratic approach to lifelong learning and the learning society, but that the government and relevant national bodies, at least in Britain (NAGCELL, 1997; DfEE, 1998) have adopted the neo-liberal welfare reform approach. In his view, this distinction derives in part from the fact that the latter are accountable to taxpayers and reflects the 'withdrawal of the state from public policy making as part of a strategy to reform the welfare state' (Griffin, 1999a, p. 434). Griffin's analysis is summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1** Summary of the comparisons between the social democratic model and neo-liberal welfare reform model (Griffin, 1999a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Social democratic model</strong></th>
<th><strong>Neo-liberal welfare reform model</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes 'education'</td>
<td>Emphasizes 'learning'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected by international organizations</td>
<td>Projected by national governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistributive role of the state</td>
<td>Minimal role of the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees lifelong learning in the form of educational and training provision as a welfare function of the state</td>
<td>Sees lifelong learning as a strategy to reflect the centrality of learning in the lives of individuals. Individuals will be less dependent upon the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government prepared to fund</td>
<td>Withdrawal of state support from a whole range of social benefits. Costs are borne largely by learners themselves</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Has the trend identified by Griffin been apparent in Hong Kong also? This question can be examined through a review of the literature and the collection of empirical data. This section provides a literature review, while the analysis of empirical data is provided in later chapters.

As touched on in Chapter 1, there have been shifts in the Hong Kong government’s role in adult and lifelong learning over the period from the 1960s to the early 2000s. For example, in 1954, the Adult Education Section in the Education Department was established to provide general and liberal education for adults. This was the period in which adult education emphasized ‘retrieval’ education, and the government, besides allocating resources, also acted as a provider. In 1980, the government launched a subvention scheme which subsidized approved projects organized by non-profit making organizations, but did not provide recurrent funds – which represented the beginning of a withdrawal of government’s provision role.

By the late 1980s, when the Open Learning Institute (OLI) and continuing education providers operated in a largely self-financing mode and competed with each other, the government had adopted a different role – though the establishment of the OLI in itself still represented an important government initiative in terms of provision. However, in the early 21st century, with the introduction of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), the government had shifted to a role of shaping the demand by defining the learning activities worth subsidizing. Which of the approaches identified earlier – social democratic or neo-liberal welfare – best describes the Hong Kong government’s lifelong learning policies in establishing the OLI in the late 1980s and the CEF in the early 2000s? The empirical data provided in Chapters 5 to 7 will show
that the establishment of the OLI reflects the social democratic model while the introduction of the CEF reflects the neo-liberal welfare model.

3.4 Discourses of widening participation – ‘traditionalists’, ‘modernizers’ and ‘progressives’

According to Thomas (2001), the economic motivation for promoting lifelong learning illustrated in the above examples aims to increase participation, with the diversity of students being of ‘secondary or no importance’ (p. 5). In contrast, he argues, the non-economic motivation attempts to widen participation. While the situation may be more complex than Thomas suggests – economic motivation can also lead to widening participation and result in both social and individual benefits – a heavy emphasis on economic or non-economic factors will have a differential effect on adult participation in learning.

There is still a very broad range of views among the various stakeholders (governments, providers and adult educators) regarding what constitutes lifelong learning and its core values (e.g. Ball, 1990; Forrester, 1995; Sand, 1998; Tight, 1998; Bagnall, 2000; Wain, 2000; Thomas, 2001). For example, Ball (1990) analysed three broad strands of influence on educational policy development and categorized them as ‘modernizers’, ‘progressives’ and ‘cultural restorationists’. Also, based on Ball’s work, Sand (1998) identified three broad attitudes towards education and the expansion of opportunities for non-traditional learners in her review of government policies and reports related to lifelong learning. In this context, Sand considered the positions of the modernizers, progressives and ‘cultural restorationists’ to be
characterized respectively by 'economic relevance and its relation to the market', 'emphasis on social justice, democracy and responsiveness to the community', and 'concern for the preservation of traditional values and academic standards' (Sand, 1998, p. 18).

These three broad attitudes towards lifelong learning were also adopted by Thomas (2001) in her discussion of widening participation in post-compulsory education, though she replaced the term 'cultural restorationists' with 'traditionalists'. From her perspective, traditionalists view education as a form of selection based on individual ability and exclusion, and therefore see no benefit in policies to widen access – rather the reverse. In contrast, modernizers consider the widening of access to lifelong learning as a means of achieving economic growth through training of the workforce; while progressives hold that education has personal, social and cultural benefits which add to or even supersede instrumental gains, as they see wider access as a route to more equal opportunities and broader social change. Both modernizers and progressives support measures to widen access to lifelong learning, though they do so for different reasons (Reeve et al., 2002). Moreover, it can be argued that modernizers aim at increasing participation while progressives aim at widening participation.

As an illustration of the impact of such philosophies on policy, writers such as Stock (1993) have pointed out that the modernist emphasis on formal, work-related, instrumental opportunities as the main consideration in lifelong learning affected UK policies in the mid-1970s at the expense of broader educational opportunities. During this period, there was a strong shift in the adult learning population towards
certification, accompanied by a marked drop in participation in areas of general, non-certificated adult learning. Economic conditions at the time were encouraging more people to seek education and training as a means of gaining qualifications and more secure employment (Uden, 1996). This position was articulated by the government in public speeches. For example, the Prime Minister argued that 'Education is the best economic policy we have' (Blair, 1998), and David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, commented that

In a knowledge-driven economy, the continuous updating of skills and the development of lifelong learning will make the difference between success and failure and between competitiveness and decline (Blunkett, 1999, cited in Hodgson, 2000b, p. 12).

There were also reports, surveys and White Papers in the UK in response to the economic challenges of the 1980s and early 1990s, all of which highlighted the low level of skills and poor participation rates in education and training compared with those in mainland Europe. In these documents, lifelong learning was positioned in such a way to 'recognise the need for constant updating and development of our skills and knowledge base if we are to remain effective and competitive' (Duffin and Woods, 1990, cited in Sand, 1998, p. 19).

The drive for the expansion of lifelong learning opportunities essentially for economic development has been strongly criticized by international bodies such as the OECD, UNESCO and APEC, as well as some adult educators (e.g. Hodgson, 2000a; Aspin et al., 2001a; Thomas, 2001); and there is evidence of a move in the
debate from expanding participation in lifelong learning to widening participation in some European countries from the later 1990s. For example,

The case for increasing participation in post-compulsory education and training has been argued eloquently elsewhere (OECD, 1996; Green, Wolf and Leney, 1999) … national policy debates in this country, as in others within the European Union, have moved slightly beyond this position towards an interest in widening participation in lifelong learning to those who have traditionally not participated in education and training’ (Hodgson, 2000a, p. 52).

Also, as Hodgson pointed out, more recent policy documents in the UK (NAGCELL, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; DfEE, 1998; Welsh Office, 1998) have provided some evidence ‘of a greater emphasis on how lifelong learning might be seen as a policy instrument for promoting greater social justice, equity and inclusion’ (Hodgson, 2000a, p. 52). This shift of attention from increasing to widening participation has gained support from some adult educators (e.g. Woodrow, 1999; Hodgson, 2000a; Thomas, 2001).

The progressive philosophy views lifelong learning as a human right, bringing with it non-economic personal and social benefits. For instance, Mayo (1997) argued that there is ‘human rights’ value in addition to a functional value in lifelong learning; and the European document Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality (November 2001) recognized that the knowledge society threatens to bring about
'greater inequalities and social exclusion' and claimed that 'lifelong learning is much more than economics'.

Both economic and non-economic motivations for governments increasing access to lifelong learning may focus on either social or individual benefits. Economic motivations which emphasize social benefits such as economic growth require that participation is increased; while economic motivations that stress individual benefits such as obtaining higher incomes may either increase or widen participation. In contrast, non-economic motivations require that participation is widened. Table 3.2 summarizes the relation between motivations for promoting access to lifelong learning and widening participation which is argued in this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Effect on participation in lifelong learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Social benefits</td>
<td>Increasing participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual benefits</td>
<td>Increasing participation or widening participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-economic</td>
<td>Social benefits</td>
<td>Widening participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual benefits</td>
<td>Widening participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section considers the literature on the conceptions of policy makers and others on deserving and non-deserving learners.
3.5 Deserving and non-deserving learners

Who are perceived as ‘deserving learners’ by policy makers in Hong Kong?
‘Deserving learners’ are those seen by policy makers as able to bring benefits to their societies, but their judgements are obviously based on their interpretation of what constitutes ‘benefits to society’. For example, if economic competitiveness is seen to be a primary social benefit, adults who have the greatest potential for enhancing the society’s economy and productivity will be seen as deserving learners, although they may already be among the ‘learning rich’. In this context, Robertson (1996) argued that

funding policy appears to distinguish between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ learners. ‘Deserving’ learners are young, full-time and academically-oriented; ‘undeserving’ learners tend to be adults, part-time students and those seeking vocational training and career updating ... To maximize its return on the investment, the State chooses to fund those groups of students who promise the highest added value to the labour market ... it follows that the State tends to support the youngest and most educationally able groups before others (p. 7).

Robertson (1996) once again underlines government emphasis on ‘deserving learners’ being those who are likely to produce the highest return to the labour market; and he adds that such learners tend to be young and academically able. As evidence from many countries shows that those with higher qualifications are in general more eager to participate in lifelong learning, such a perspective offers little prospect of a reduction in the learning divide.
3.6 Benefits of lifelong learning

The distinction made between deserving and non-deserving learners is related to perceptions of the benefits of lifelong learning.

At the outset, it is worth pointing out the inevitable tension between the ideal of lifelong learning for all (as advocated by, for example, the OECD, 1999b, 2001) and the resources available in any given country. In practice, since resources are not unlimited, governments generally assume the responsibility of distributing resources to certain groups of people only, or to some more than others. As such, the issue of how participation should be widened is related to the debates on the potential benefits of learning.

The benefits which accrue from learning can be at two levels – social and individual (see, for example, Aspin et al., 2001a, p. xx). For example, social benefits include, but are not limited to, the economic benefit to a country, while individual benefits include personal satisfaction and career development. The relative benefits to individuals and society can be portrayed as involving four dimensions, as shown in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3 Typology of benefits of lifelong learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual benefits</th>
<th>Social benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Employment, career advancement, higher levels of income</td>
<td>Economic growth, economic competitiveness of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-economic</td>
<td>Leisure pursuits, social capital</td>
<td>Social and political stability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In another way of classifying the benefits, Aspin and Chapman (2000) described the 'triadic' nature of lifelong learning: for economic progress and development; for personal development and fulfilment; and for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity. However, in both Table 3.3 and Aspin and Chapman's formulation, these benefits are inter-related, so that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate social and individual benefits entirely. For example, the career development of individuals may also help to increase the economic competitiveness of a society as a whole.

Most education can bring both social and individual benefits (Smethurst, 1995). Nevertheless, the priority one assigns to particular benefits exerts a strong influence on who one believes should bear the cost. For example, Ball (1994) supported the principle of 'users-pay'; while Aspin et al. (2001a) argued that, as education is a public good, lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens should be supported (p. xxi). Some advocates of widening adult participation (e.g. Thomas, 2001) argue that lifelong learning is potentially of greater value to those who are more marginalized and disadvantaged.
These different perspectives are also evident in Hong Kong. For example, it has been posited that the benefits of continuing education, in which most of the courses are vocationally-oriented, rests mainly with individuals, and therefore ‘the case for government subsidization is not as strong as in basic formal education’ (Chung et al. 1994, p. 111). Chung et al. (1994) expressed reservations about continuing education being a ‘basic citizen right’, with entitlement to subsidies in the same way as universal compulsory education, and argued that ‘there is less need for government subsidization to make continuing education equally accessible’ (p. 113).

Holford (1998) criticized the research findings and recommendations in the Chung et al. report as a reflection of the orientation and approach of Hong Kong economists who ‘tend to be strongly committed to “the rational choice approach and methodological individualism”’ (p. 141). Also, Kennedy (2002) claimed that, in advocating a ‘users pay’ approach, ‘the educational equity argument is dismissed’ (p. 112). In this case, Kennedy argued that not subsidizing individual learners and requiring them to pay is against the equity perspective. However, as discussed in this chapter, the issue is more complex than this, as it involves the examination of who the beneficiaries of lifelong learning are, who are educationally ‘poor’ and what kinds of learning activities are at issue.

The UGC Report (1996) maintained that ‘courses whose primary purpose is social benefit (such as upgrading of teachers and social workers) may be subsidized’ (UGC, 1996, p. 111). This was a review of continuing education conducted by three researchers at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1994, commissioned by the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). The report was submitted to the UPGC in August 1994. This review eventually led to the CPE chapters of the 1996 UGC Report.
1996, p. 92). However, Kennedy (2002) has argued persuasively that courses that benefit individuals and those that benefit society are not mutually exclusive – for example, better trained teachers also gain personal benefits such as improved promotion prospects.

3.7 Lifelong learning and social exclusion

A related issue which has surfaced in the literature and policy discussion is the link between lifelong learning and social exclusion. ‘Social exclusion’ has been defined in a wide variety of ways, with no clear consensus (Thomas and Jones, 2000). Preece (1999) examined a range of definitions suggested by various authors and agreed with Barry’s interpretation: ‘The term “social exclusion” ... is culturally defined, economically driven and politically motivated’ (Barry 1999, p. 9 cited by Preece 1999, p. 10). Also, in the view of OECD, ‘The excluded do not constitute a defined group in the population: there is no single, clear-cut definition of “social exclusion”’ (OECD, 1999a, p. 15). Preece (2001) concluded that the socially excluded cover a multitude of groups – unemployed, homeless, disabled, disaffected youth, illiterate or some such other categories – and the OECD stressed that ‘It is not necessary to refer only to the most extreme cases of deprivation or isolation; equally important is how to ensure that those who are vulnerable and “at risk” do not slip into exclusion’ (OECD, 1999a, p. 16).

3 Two of the three researchers are economists.
There is an extensive literature in Europe about this issue (e.g. Thomas and Cooper, 2000; Hodgson, 2000a; Thomas, 2001; Preece, 2001), and this is reflected in the policy documents of some governments. For example, the Irish Green Paper ‘Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning’ presents a case for a sustained government commitment to combating social exclusion through lifelong learning; and in the UK ‘the New Labour government sees education as a major tool for tackling social exclusion’ (Hayton, 1999, p. vii, cited in Thomas and Jones, 2000, p. 12). However, although concern has been shown elsewhere, the issue of social exclusion has not been highlighted in government policy as regards lifelong learning in Hong Kong. This will be discussed in Section 3.9 on the local social policy-making process.

In what way is social exclusion related to the learning divide? As noted earlier, some (e.g. Rinne and Kivinen, 1996) argue that the adults most in need of lifelong learning are those least likely to participate, so governments should find ways to help those with lower educational attainment to participate in lifelong learning. Woodrow (1999) argued that ‘lifelong learning can only be for all if those who are currently benefiting least are given priority in the allocation of opportunities and resources’ (p. 11).

One way of assessing the social inclusiveness of a given policy is whether it ensures that the situation of the ‘worse off’ improves more than it would under other schemes. As Colebatch (1998) said:

The justification for government lay in its capacity to advance the greatest happiness of the greatest number … (the best action is that which makes someone better off and no one worse off) … Much attention has been devoted
to finding ways to calculate the 'best' policy option, generally based on calculating the relative advantage to different interests of the achievement of the desired goal of each of the options (p. 43).

The gap between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor' indicates that some have been disadvantaged in the process of increasing competitiveness and, therefore, have become relatively worse off. However, how best to widen participation is a far from simple issue and has engendered extensive debate. For example, policies which aim to promote equity and to widen participation may result in a 'zero tolerance' attitude to those who do not want to participate which can then open up the possibility of placing the blame for social exclusion and poverty on the non-participating individuals (Hodgson, 2000a). Lifelong learning could be seen as 'a moral duty everyone owes to oneself' (Wain, 1991). This argument is related to the earlier discussion on the fact that many research studies focus on the various barriers to explain non-participation of adults in learning – a perspective which shifts attention from looking at the wider policy level to a simplistic model of motivations and barriers at the individual level.

3.8 The learning divide in other countries

While this study focuses on Hong Kong, it is instructive to see that the learning divide has been a matter of debate in many countries. Comparisons are drawn here with the US, the Nordic countries and the UK. Imel (1988) of Ohio State University suggested that 'the best predictor of participation in adult education is an adult's level
of educational attainment (p. 1). Also, Robinson (2002) contrasted the enormous growth in adult learning in the US with the fact that so many workers were poorly prepared and commented that

our most educated are becoming even more educated, and those with the greatest need – whether because of their lack of skills or their advancing years often receive the least training and education (p. 4).

Even in Sweden, where participation in adult education is high, Rubenson (2001) argued that ‘the new opportunities for adult education were being used primarily by those already well prepared for study’ (p. 331). In Norway, the gap between participants and non-participants may even be increasing (Nordhaug, 1983, p. 36 as cited in Rinne and Kivinen, 1996, p. 184.); while in Finland, ‘there is a very clear link between previous educational background and participation in adult education’ (op cit, p. 192). Rinne and Kivinen attributed this pattern of participation in adult education to David Riesman’s rule – ‘the more, the more’. As Courtney observed, ‘one of the most frequent and significant findings in the research into participation in adult education is that adults are more likely to study for “continuity” than for “compensation”’ (Courtney, 1992, p. 50 cited in Rinne and Kivinen, 1996, p. 184).

Finally, in the UK, as early as in the 1980s, Lynch (1982) argued that ‘resources are paradoxically allocated to those groups who already enjoy educational and financial advantages, socially and in terms of educational opportunities’. A more recent survey on adult participation in education and learning funded by the Department for Education and Employment and carried out for the National Institute of Adult
Continuing Education (NIACE) found that the best single predictor of participation in adult learning is the length of initial education (NIACE, 1997). The study revealed that the UK still faces an enormous task in involving all its people in a learning society, as the learning divide between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor' has not been reduced:

Whilst the UK may aspire to transform itself into a learning society in which all participate, the experience on the ground is that the learning divide is as marked today as it has ever been. Age, class, previous educational experience and where you live all affect access to learning, and the confidence to join in (Tuckett, 1997, cited in Hodgson, 2000a, p. 58).

Also, in the UK, the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning published a report (the Fryer Report) in 1997 which formed the basis for the Government's Green Paper on lifelong learning, *The Learning Age*, in 1998. In a response to the Fryer Report, Jarvis et al. (1998) made the following comments which exhibit a concern to counteract the learning divide:

If we examine the rapid changes that are occurring in society, we see that people have to learn to cope with those changes. Once again, if we look at the wide range of learning materials being marketed by a variety of providers (not all educational), we see that there is already a large market for learning. ... What the report argues for is an institutionalized learning system – an educative society without using the word – seeking to help those who are at the wrong side of the 'learning divide' (p. 12).
Jarvis et al. (1998) further argued that learning has to be distinguished from the provision of learning opportunities which will result in a vision of a learning society as being market-driven — the mere provision of learning opportunities will not make people learn and will not help in narrowing the learning divide. Similar sentiments have been expressed by other UK academics. For instance, Coffield (1999) attacked the political language used in the public domain that moves people away from being concerned with individuals or social emancipation, towards ‘investment’ and ‘consumption’, which, for him, increases the learning divide. And Williams (2000, p. 74) argued that ‘the gap between the high skills haves and the low-skills have-nots will tend to widen rather than narrow’, unless there are public subsidies for lifelong learning to help promote social equality.

However, ‘the irony is that those who participate most in continuing education are those who in a sense need it least; one of the heaviest impacts of accumulated educational capital, in fact, is found in the adult education participation rate’ (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965, p. vi, p. 103 cited in Rinne and Kivinen, 1996, p. 184). As early as the 1960s, Johnstone and Rivera pointed out that there is a strong relation between initial education and participation in lifelong learning. Those who are more successful in their initial education will be more likely to participate in lifelong learning. This phenomenon has prevailed since the 1960s in many countries, including the US (Courtney, 1992; Robinson, 2002), UK (NIACE, 1997), Norway (Nordhaug, 1983), Sweden (Rubensen, 2001) and Finland (Rinne and Kivinen, 1996). Most of this literature, however, relates to western countries, with very little on Asian countries.
As this brief discussion illustrates, concern about the existence of a learning divide is not confined to the developing world. There is clear evidence of debate about this issue even in western countries such as the USA, the Nordic countries and the UK.

3.9 Characteristics of social policy making in Hong Kong

One of the research questions in this study is to find out why the OLI and the CEF were established in Hong Kong (in the 1980s and the 2000s respectively). As mentioned below, policy making does not necessarily start with a clear purpose which is then pursued. This section discusses policy making in Hong Kong and examines how far it is purpose-oriented.

'Public policy is, at its most simple, a choice made by a government to undertake some course of action' (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995 p. 5 as cited in Colebatch, 1998, p. 101). Dye (1992) defines public policy as 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do' (p. 2). In these definitions, policy making is a process of choice. It also involves a purpose to be achieved: 'It is essential for the policy concept that there be a goal, objective or purpose' (Friedrich 1963, p. 70 as cited in Colebatch 1998, p. 42). This is what Colebatch (1998) described as the dominant paradigm in the study of policy, which consists of several stages in a linear process: determining goals, choosing courses of action, implementing these courses of action, evaluating the results and modifying the policy. This view represents a purpose-oriented model of policy which assumes that 'government is the sort of creature which can have and pursue goals' (p. 43).
However, as Colebatch (1998) argued, there are other models besides this linear, purpose-oriented model. He considered this approach to be 'grounded in the dominant paradigm of human action as instrumental rationality' (p. 53), commenting that 'it is taken for granted that social action is directed to goals' (p. 53). He pointed out also that policy purposes 'are not independent of the policy process and prior to it, but rather have to be understood as part of the process'; 'policy does not start with a purpose and proceed to action' (p. 52).

Colebatch (1998) distinguished two perspectives on social policy: authorized choice and structured interaction. The authorized choice perspective assumes that policy is indeed about 'governments making decisions, and focuses on such decisions' (p. 102). The structured interaction perspective, in contrast

... [d]oes not assume a single decision-maker, addressing a clear policy problem: it focuses on the range of participants in the game, the diversity of their understandings of the situation and the problem, the ways they interact with one another, and the outcome of this interaction. It does not assume that this pattern of activity is a collective effort to achieve known and shared goals (Colebatch, 1998, pp. 102–3).

In theory, policy is made by government making a clear choice of the most effective response to a known problem, but in practice it emerges from struggles between powerful interests pursuing different agendas and is marked by contest and uncertainty (Colebatch, 1998, p. 104).
This thesis rejects the linear, purpose-oriented policy making model. Rather, it adopts a model which does not assume that there is a single decision-maker, and that policy making is a collective effort to achieve known and shared goals. As Colebatch (1998) argued, answers to the question ‘who makes policy?’ are not simple. Very often, policy makers ‘find themselves presiding over an extended array of people with varying levels of interest’ (p. 15) and ‘find that their own ability to determine the outcome is quite limited, and they might want to include some of these people as “policy makers”’ (p. 15). This is the reason why providers were included in the interviews in this research (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). There is a range of participants in the policy process with a diversity of understandings of situations and problems (Colebatch, 1998, p. 102–3, 104). That is, ‘policy-makers’ are not confined to those persons who have legislative authority to make policy (that is, the government in this case), but include many other actors. These actors or participants in the policy-making process do not all share the same goals. They may interpret policy objectives differently, due to differences in background or interests. The policy which emerges is the outcome of a complex interaction among the different participants. Policy analysis involves the examination of these different participants. As will be shown in Chapters 5–7, participants in the policy making process in the establishment of the OLI and the CEF did not all share the same goals, and had different interpretations of policy.

In general, how does social policy making in Hong Kong stand in relation to this perspective? Andrew W. F. Wong described the social policy making in Hong Kong as non-purposive adaptation. ‘To describe social policy-making as non-purposive adaptation is to say that social policy is not the outcome of deliberate (or purposive)
planning, but rather the product of pragmatic and situational reactions (or adaptations) to environmental changes' (Leung, 1996, p. 120). Wilding (1997) argued that the social policy making in Hong Kong is strongly influenced by economic and political factors:

In Hong Kong, because of the nature of the economy and of the Hong Kong state, economy policy was social policy. Economic concerns, however, have not always dominated social policy in a crude fashion because political concerns have been a central concern in economic policy (p. 269).

Wilding (1997) further argued that because of the uniqueness of Hong Kong, the government has put the economy first because 'economic success was seen as the most basic element in securing and maintaining social and political stability which were regarded as the key elements in social well-being' (p. 270). 'Policy development was always geared to broader goals - Hong Kong's economic and political needs rather than any abstract concerns about equity, rights or supposed social needs' (p. 270). He used education policy and environment policy as examples to illustrate his argument that these policies resulted from economic concerns rather than educational and environmental concerns.

Both Wong (1980) and Wilding (1997) argued that the welfare provision by the Hong Kong government does not really aim to solve the problem of inequalities in society. Similarly, Jones (1990) analysed various social policies in Hong Kong during the period from the 1840s to the 1980s, and considered that 'neither, by western standard, is it [Hong Kong] to be confused with anything approaching a welfare-minded or
even social security-minded society' (p. 254). Moreover, both Chow (1985) and Scott (1986) considered that the Hong Kong government tended to 'fall back on ad hoc and piecemeal policy-making as a safe way to cope with the “turbulence” of the current political situation' and Chow (1995) was not 'optimistic about the prospects for social welfare development in Hong Kong' (Leung, 1996, p. 128).

Wong (1990), Chow (1985, 1995), Scott (1986), Wilding (1997) and Jones (1990) all considered that due to the specific social and political circumstances of Hong Kong in the pre-1997 period, the 'purposes' of social policy making were more related to political stability than the provision of welfare as such. In this way, equity and rights, which progressives advocate, do not appear as a concern of the Hong Kong government (at least pre-1997). Rather, its policy development was dominated by economic and political needs.

Andrew W. F. Wong considered that Hong Kong's social policy is circumscribed by the government's 'politics of survival' (Leung, 1996). Leung also argued that 'the critical variables monitored by the Government in its “politics of survival” are therefore political stability and economic prosperity, within the parameters of which social policy is made and implemented' and quoted that 'in Wong's view, these are the major constraints on Hong Kong’s social policy-making' (Leung, 1996, p. 121). Leung also concluded that while there had been a number of perspectives on social policy in Hong Kong, 'they converge on one underlying theme: promoting political stability and economic prosperity has been the Hong Kong way of social policy' (Leung, 1996, p. 133). Scott argued that
this style of ad hoc, short term policy-making and implementation, with its emphasis on tackling only immediate problems, ... has very much been the product of the exigencies of Hong Kong's social-political circumstances. ... Its policy was to cope with each crisis as it occurred, for its survival was more a matter of immediate crisis management than long-term policy planning (Leung, 1996, p. 134).

Sweeting and Morris (1993) examined some of the educational reforms in Hong Kong from 1945 to the 1990s and offered an alternative analysis on educational policy making in Hong Kong. They argued that educational reforms could be analysed between two conceptual polarities. One extreme involves the 'predetermination of reform according to some clearly specified policy blueprint' (p. 201) and the other extreme is 'crisis intervention', which is a 'challenge and response' type (p. 201). At the policy blueprint extreme, 'rationality and the most comfortable fit between objectives and strategies would rank highest in logical priorities' (p. 210). On the other hand, 'unintended outcomes, rather than rational implementation of pre-defined policy, are, however, often characteristic of crisis intervention' (p. 213). Their analysis concluded that, in Hong Kong, some educational reforms are examples of policy blueprints and others are examples of crisis intervention.

Another example that Sweeting and Morris (1993) used to illustrate this crisis intervention approach was the plan for the expansion of tertiary education in Hong Kong set in 1989. The crisis that Sweeting and Morris (1993) cited was the emigration problem in the 1980s. Emigration in Hong Kong remained at more or less
20,000 per year in the ten years between 1976 to 1986 but accelerated to reach 30,000 in 1987, 45,000 in 1988 and 62,000 in 1990 (Skeldon, 1995). That very significant increase in emigration in the late 1980s was, at least partly, if not totally, due to the return of Hong Kong to the sovereignty of China is evident in the literature.

Public confidence in the future of Hong Kong is low, there is a fear of continuous interference from China in the lead-up to 1997 ... One perceived response to the increasing nervousness in Hong Kong is the upsurge in the numbers of people leaving the territory – emigration has become one of the major local concerns (Skeldon, 1991, pp. 500–1).

Lam and Liu (1999) also found out that political factors were more significant than economic ones in determining the likelihood of Hong Kong people emigrating. Skeldon (1991) argued that emigration from Hong Kong should be set against the background of two other important issues. First, many people in Hong Kong were immigrants from mainland China from 1949. ‘This migrant heritage of much of Hong Kong’s population intensifies the pressures to migrate again’ (p. 501). Second, Hong Kong had a very low unemployment rate at this time.

the extraordinary level of economic development that has been achieved in Hong Kong over the last forty years. ... Hong Kong’s economic success has given rise to virtually no unemployment. ... Any profound outmigration, particularly if the leavers are highly educated or possessed of skills, is likely to exacerbate the labour shortage and possibly contribute to the future
problems of economic viability in the territory. Hence the concern, both
official and public, about the 'brain drain' (op cit).

Sweeting and Morris (1993) were not convinced that the plan for expanding higher
education was justified by social demand because 'the government had consistently
maintained a low level of tertiary provision despite a high level of demand' (p. 212).
They argued that '[t]he 1988 expansion [of tertiary education] was designed to
improve local opportunities and to reduce the high level of emigration' (p. 212). The
crisis intervention approach described by Sweeting and Morris (1993) is similar to
Wong's (1980) non-purposive adaptation.

As explained above, policy does not always start with a purpose and proceed to action.
In the case of Hong Kong, some have argued that policy making has always been a
kind of non-purposive adaptation; others that crisis intervention is more likely to be
fully implemented in subsequent practice than are policy blueprints (Sweeting and
Morris, 1993). The cases chosen in this study - the establishment of the OLI and the
CEF will show that policy making in Hong Kong can be described in terms of crisis
intervention more than policy blueprints.

The Hong Kong government has not been able to take political stability for granted as
some western countries can; in general it has believed political stability and economic
success are inextricably linked, with the former dependent on the latter. In this
research, the reasons why the OLI and the CEF were established will be explored in
order to illuminate the nature of the policy process in Hong Kong.
The process by which the Hong Kong government's earlier policy decisions have changed – for example, when it extended the criteria for applying to the CEF to degree holders in 2003 – will also be examined. There are many voices in government seeking to turn policy making to their own advantage (Colebatch 1998). How far providers in Hong Kong sought to influence the CEF to their advantage will also be analyzed in this study.

Wilding (1997) argued that the Hong Kong government was more concerned about economic success than equity and people's rights. In this respect, the government has taken a 'modernizing' rather than a 'progressive' view of social policy making. He contended that economic considerations have also been a factor in the development of education in Hong Kong, although in a 'slightly unusual' way (p. 267). How far Wilding's views apply to adult education will be discussed in Chapters 5–7 of this thesis.

The extent to which adult education policies in Hong Kong have been designed to narrow the learning divide is related to whether Hong Kong is a 'welfare state'. According to Chow (1989),

[i]t is difficult to say positively whether Hong Kong can be called a 'welfare state'. ... If the government is willing to assume responsibility for its people's needs, and the people are willing to share each other's risks, this society can be called a 'welfare state' even if not all needs of the people can be met because of limited resources (p. 114).
On the other hand, Wilding quoted statements from Governor Patten in his last policy address to the Legislative Council (October 1996) to support his view that Hong Kong is a welfare state but with some unique characteristics. Patten said:

[Hong Kong’s welfare state system] does not exist to iron our inequalities. It does not exist to redistribute income. Our welfare programmes have a different purpose. They exist because this community believes that we have a duty to protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society, ...

(Wilding, 1997, p. 245).

What do these statements mean? One can argue that the welfare provision by the Hong Kong government does not really aim to solve the problem of inequalities in society. As the community expects the government to help the disadvantaged, welfare provision aims to maintain social stability by showing that government has made some provision for the disadvantaged. It is consistent with the view that the Hong Kong government is concerned about economic progress and political stability rather than welfare, equality and rights. Lau (1982) described the policies of Hong Kong as ‘economic laissez-faire’ and ‘social non-interventionism’; and Cheng (1992) noted that

Hong Kong has achieved a very rapid economic growth in the past decades. To the amazement of many, distribution of wealth is still not so much a concern in the community. This is partly because of the expansion of social welfare and partly because of the devotion for efficiency at the expense of equity (p. 99).
Kennedy (2002) expressed dissatisfaction about the laissez-faire approach adopted by the Hong Kong government in lifelong learning policy:

The expansion of CE in Hong Kong has proceeded without a clear government policy. A fundamental question is to what extent government should be involved at all? Chung (1994) argued that CE was best left to market forces. In fact, despite the ‘laissez faire’ rhetoric frequently heard in Hong Kong, the government has intervened extensively in areas such as housing and labour policy, as well as in all other sectors of education, primary to tertiary. Given the acknowledged central role of CE in the economic restructuring of Hong Kong is it now time for a more concerted CE policy? To date, the government has adopted a hands-off approach, … (p. 127).

This thesis argues that the Hong Kong government has not really taken a laissez-faire position in adult education, but has rather intervened with ‘purposes’ – but the purposes were not principally ‘welfare’ or ‘educational’ but for economic prosperity and political stability. How far the establishment of the OLI and CEF also reflected this will be discussed in Chapters 5 to 7. The factors shaping social policy making in Hong Kong form the background for interpretation and discussion of the evidence relating to the research question: to what extent are lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong related to narrowing the gap between the ‘learning rich’ and the ‘learning poor’?
3.10 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the debates about the philosophy, policy and practice of widening participation in lifelong learning, looking at the issue from a sociological perspective, particularly at the level of national policy. Previous work on the relationship between participation in lifelong learning, equity in policy making and the concept of the 'learning divide' has also been explored, as has the distinction between increasing and widening participation. Studies on policy making models have also been analysed, with specific attention to the process of social policy making in Hong Kong.

Overall, the literature suggests that policies promoting lifelong learning have an important role to play in widening participation in learning, but that the ideal of removing the gap between the 'learning rich' and 'learning poor', and reducing social exclusion, has not materialized – in part at least because government perceptions of the purposes of lifelong learning, and the related policies, have focused more on economic than social and personal concerns. In the case of Hong Kong, social policy over the years appears to have been circumscribed by 'the politics of survival'.

The issues raised in the literature review in this chapter and Chapter 2 provide the background for analysing and discussing the documentary and interview data collected on the two case studies – the establishment of the Open Learning Institute and the Continuing Education Fund – which are presented in Chapters 5 to 7.
Chapter 4 – Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

The research questions in this study are repeated here for ease of reference. The main research question is: To what extent have lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong from around the mid-1980s to the early 2000s been related to narrowing the gap between the ‘learning rich’ and the ‘learning poor’? The research also explores answers to the related question ‘Why have the lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong been so related (or not) to narrowing the learning divide?’.

In order to answer the two main research questions, the following subsidiary questions are posed:

- What were the main reasons for the Hong Kong government’s establishment of the OLI?
- What were the main reasons for the Hong Kong government’s establishment of the CEF?
- What value did the Hong Kong government and the providers ascribe to ‘lifelong learning’ in the establishment of the OLI?
- What value did the Hong Kong government and the providers ascribe to lifelong learning in the setting up of the CEF?
- Which groups of adults did the Hong Kong government and providers pay more attention to? Why?
This research project adopts a qualitative approach to answer these questions, focusing on two cases – the establishment of the OLI and the CEF. This chapter explains the research methods used and their justification.

4.2 A qualitative approach

There has been much debate on the most appropriate methods for the study of educational policy. For example, Nicoll and Edwards (2000) argue that much traditional work in this area is positivist, and fails to address underlying factors such as inequalities, values and power in the policy making process. They contend that the notion of lifelong learning can be interpreted using different metaphors – such as social Darwinism – but that the key issue 'is not to ask whether social Darwinism represents reality "truthfully"' (p. 465), as it is possible to have other formulations. Rather, the aim is to find the metaphor which is most powerful for interpreting the notion of lifelong learning.

Ball (1994) considered that how we carry out research on policy and how we interpret the findings depend to a considerable extent on the meaning(s) that we attribute to it. Ball's stress on the possibility of different meanings for policy, which can affect both the process and outcomes of research, has implications for this study. For example, some may interpret the establishment of the OLI as a clear sign that the government wished to widen participation in learning, while others may view it differently.
As has been seen, Colebatch (1998) argues that policy does not necessarily start with a clear and distinct purpose, and that policy making is not necessarily a linear process – a position which is explored in this study.

Overall, unlike research methods based on positivism which assume that the object of research exists in an objective reality, this project adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach in which there is a subjective element.

The research question examined involves an historical element as it explores two events, one in the late 1980s, the other in the early 2000s. To this extent, it is historical research. Historical research not only tells a story about the past, but also seeks to find out the 'truth' about some events – 'what really happened'. For example, to answer the question 'why did the Hong Kong government set up the OLI in 1989', evidence has to be collected through mainly primary sources. ‘Primary sources are produced by those directly involved in or witnesses to a particular historical episode or issue. … Primary sources therefore provide the researcher with first-hand accounts’ (McCulloch and Richardson, 2000, p. 79). Of the primary sources, ‘the key types are various kinds of documentary records and oral evidence’ (McCulloch and Richardson, 2000, p. 79).

To discover the government’s motivations in relation to these initiatives, particularly the founding of the OLI, evidence was collected from a wide variety of sources – various types of documentary records and oral evidence produced by those directly involved in or witnesses to these historical episodes. Also, in both cases, interviews were held with a range of relevant people. The use of both documentary analysis and
in-depth interviews combines the advantages of the 'unobtrusive and nonreactive' features of the former with the 'personal interaction' in the latter (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, pp. 110 and 117).

4.3 Documentary analysis

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe documentary analysis as follows:

Documentary analysis involves the study of existing documents, either to understand their substantive content or to illuminate deeper meanings which may be revealed by their style and coverage. These may be public documents like media reports, government papers or publicity materials; procedural documents like minutes of meetings, formal letters or financial accounts; or personal documents like diaries, letters or photographs. Documentary analysis is particularly useful where the history of events or experiences has relevance, in studies where written communications may be central to the enquiry ... Documentary sources may also be needed when situations or events cannot be investigated by direct observation or questioning (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995 cited in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 35).

As Marshall and Rossum (1999) argue, this approach is particularly useful in qualitative studies for establishing the background before further exploration through, for instance, interviewing.
Documentary analysis was the main tool used in the OLI case study, to establish the historical context. The OLI was founded as a result of Education Commission Report No. 2: all the official reports leading to ECR2 were reviewed, as was the Report of the Planning Committee for the OLI. Other evidence, especially relating to learners' profiles, comes from statistics contained in OLI/OUHK documents. Finally, other articles written by academics and documents related to the establishment of the OLI during the 1980s were examined to assess their contribution to understanding the background to its establishment.

The above documents are all published sources, available to the public. However, valuable information can also be obtained from unpublished records; unexpected information may come to light in a visit to a historical archive. In the UK and Hong Kong, 'the main repositories of primary sources on educational policy and administration are the public records offices' (McCulloch and Richardson, 2000, p. 97). This research uses a combination of published and unpublished sources. Unpublished records have some advantages. As McCulloch and Richardson (2000) state:

Where it is possible to gain access to them, these unpublished records have major advantages over published sources for the study of education policy ... Indeed, there are often interesting and important issues that arise from these aspects of study. ... unpublished records also allow deeper insight into the processes and interests involved. It is often possible to trace the development of a specific issue or phenomenon in much more detail with the use of unpublished sources. ... Moreover, political debates and contestation are
often expressed much more clearly in documents designed for private
circulation among only a small group. (pp. 98–99).

The value of such records in educational and policy research can be seen in the work
of Sweeting (2004) who used unpublished records in his analysis of the history of
education in Hong Kong. For example, he selected extracts from an Education
Department Triennial Survey for ‘the light they cast on the attitudes of Government
officials and on their perceptions of policy priorities’ (p. 186) and considered that the
Education Department’s Annual Reports in the immediate post-war years were
‘unintentionally revealing’ (Sweeting, p. 182). Unpublished records, especially
documents written for private circulation among a small number of people, can often
provide ‘insider-information’; and some such documents were discovered in the
Public Records Office.

The Hong Kong Public Records Office keeps official documents under the ‘Thirty
Year Rule’, which means that they cannot be accessed until they are at least 30 years
old. The Office also holds press cuttings and other related documents, and minutes of
the meetings of the Legislative Council and Executive Council which were believed
to be likely to contain information that could contribute to answering the research
questions in this thesis.

1 During the research process, the author successfully applied in writing for exemption from this
Thirty Year Rule for access to a file entitled ‘Open University Initial Proposals’ covering the period
from November 1972 to September 1974.
4.4 In-depth interviews

Rationale

In-depth interviews were used to explore the perspectives of relevant people on the policy making process in the two initiatives under study. In carrying out the interviews, the researcher adopted what Kvale (1996, p. 4) referred to as the 'traveler metaphor'. According to Legard et al. (2003), this approach relates to a constructivist research model in which knowledge is created and negotiated, unlike the 'miner metaphor' which broadly views knowledge as 'given'.

It can also be described as a narrative enquiry approach, in which the interviewees are expected to give extended and elaborated answers to 'open' questions raised by the researcher. They are purposeful 'conversations' in which the researcher does not simply ask structured questions, but may follow up subjects' answers by asking further questions which have not been prepared beforehand.

Overall, the approach adopted here mainly follows Patton's (2002) 'guided general interview approach' which 'keeps the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge' (p. 344) – rather than his 'informal conversational interview' which is unstructured, or his 'standardized open-ended interview' which reduces the flexibility of the interviewer to probe interviewees' responses more deeply.

Patton (1990) stressed that the success of qualitative enquiry hinges centrally on the credibility of the interviewer who is the 'instrument of data collection and the centre
of the analytic process' (p. 461). In-depth interviewing, therefore, makes considerable
demands on the abilities of the interviewer – for example, he/she must be a good
listener, show curiosity, have a clear and logical mind, and be able to establish good
rapport with the interviewees. Also, as Marshall and Rossum (1999) emphasized, the
interviewer must have the knowledge or expertise to raise questions that ‘evoke long
narratives from the participants’ – the researcher is an Assistant Professor in the Open
University of Hong Kong with a professional interest in adult education.

Given the profile of the interviewees (see next section), the interviews share features
of what Marshall and Rossman (1999) described as 'elite interviewing’ in which
prominent people are selected for interview based on their knowledge of the areas
under research. In this research, though the sample of interviewees is small, they are
significant persons in the policy making process. While interviewing such people can,
of course, provide very valuable information and insights, this approach also has a
drawback: they are normally very busy and it may be difficult to contact them
initially and/or to set up interview dates.

Interviewees and interview questions

In this research, the interviewees had to be selected from those who were involved
either directly or indirectly in the policy making process. To have interviewed all the
key figures in this category would have being impractical: a selection was made, as
explained below.
Establishment of the OLI

Who were the main people/bodies concerned with educational policy making at the time of the establishment of the OLI? Cheng (in Postiglione, 1992, p. 275) outlined the Hong Kong educational policy making structure at that time as shown in the Figure 4.1:

![Diagram of Hong Kong policy making structure pre-1997](image)

**Figure 4.1** The Hong Kong policy making structure pre-1997

- G – Governor
- EXCO – Executive Council
- HKEA – Hong Kong Examinations Authority
- BOE – Board of Education
- VTC – Vocational Training Council
- UPGC – Universities and Polytechnic Grants Committee
- ED – Education Department
- TETID – Technical Education Industrial Training Department

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Cheng (1992) described the decision making structure in colonial Hong Kong as follows:

The governor, or the governor-in-council, is *de jure* solely responsible for making policy decisions. The governor, who is the representative of the British Queen, presides over and is advised by the Executive Council (Exco) which is *de facto* the decision making body. ... [the Legislative Council is] 'de facto a top-level advisory body and has no substantial power in educational policy-making, apart from questioning the government on its educational expenditure (p. 107).

From Cheng’s description, it is apparent that policy decisions regarding the OLI involved several key bodies – the Executive Council, the Education Commission, and the Legislative Council, as well as the Planning Committee of the OLI. A number of people involved in these bodies at that time were therefore interviewed: a member of the Executive Council [Mr Allen Lee Peng Fei (Non-Government Member of the Executive Council from 1985 to 1992)], the Chair of the Planning Committee of the OLI (Dr Cheng Hon Kwan, who later became the Founding Chairman of its Council), and a member of the Planning Committee (Ms Lily Chiang) and the Associate Director (Academic) of the OLI in 1989, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan. These interviews were conducted between April 2003 and January 2005. 

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2 Dr Cheng Hon Kwan was interviewed twice, in April 2003 and January 2005. The second interview was conducted to collect more information on the issue of the consortium, which was suggested by the Education Commission Report No. 2 (1986). According to the report, the five institutions which were funded through the UPGC would be invited to participate as core members of a consortium.
Allen Lee was an Executive Council (EC) member, whose role was explained by Lydia Dunn (1989), a senior member of the Executive Council in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's system of government relies for its success not on full-time, professional politicians but on the participation of ordinary members of the public drawn from all walks of life (p. 77).

The Council's job generally is to consider and advise the Governor, before decisions are taken, on the many matters that are submitted to the Council by the Government (p. 80).

So the position of Members of the Executive Council is potentially a powerful one. I say potentially because it is, I believe, almost unheard of for a Governor to act against the advice of the Council or to refuse to put a matter before the Council (p. 80).

The non-Government Members have a particularly heavy responsibility for advising the Governor ... (p. 81).

As noted earlier, the interviews were semi-structured. Questioning began with the issues noted below, though these were tailored to the particular interviewee.

- What were the factors that made the Hong Kong Government consider the establishment of the OLI in the 1980s?
• Who were the target learners that the Hong Kong Government had in mind when it decided to establish the OLI?

• Why did the government want the OLI to be self-financing?

• In your opinion, what factors had led to the agenda of open education in Education Commission in 1986?

• Why did the Education Commission suggest a consortium instead of an independent open university?

• Was the idea of a consortium successful? Why/why not?

• Do you remember any controversial issues/debates in the meetings you attended during the formulation of the policy?

The questions asked were not only those prepared in advance; new questions were asked based on responses to the prepared questions. Occasionally, the meanings of the respondents' comments were checked by asking questions like: 'Do you mean ...'

The Continuing Education Fund

As regards the second case being studied — the setting up of the CEF — both government and providers played a role in policy formation (but not the Education
Commission, which produced no reports after 1997). Following the ‘structured interaction’ perspective (Colebatch, 1998, p. 102), it seemed appropriate to include providers among the ‘range of participants in the game’ (p. 102). Policy is the outcome of the interaction among people whose understandings may be diverse. Kennedy (2002) noted that ‘in the past, the voices of CE practitioners were not much heard’, but he detected ‘positive signs’ that this was changing, such as ‘the recent involvement of FCETI in the policy-making machinery’ (p. 131). Interviews with providers (including representatives from the FCETI) who may have influenced the policy making process were therefore undertaken.

This part of the study included the following people who were interviewed between April and June 2003: an Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, Education and Manpower Bureau (Mr Au Karn Hung); the Coordinator of the Adult and Higher Education Services of Caritas Hong Kong (Dr Andrew Ma); the Director of the School of Continuing Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Dr Victor Lee); the Director of the Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education (LiPACE) at the Open University of Hong Kong (Professor Lui Yu Hon); the Principal of the YMCA Hong Kong College of Careers (Mr Au Tik Kwan); and an Assistant Professor from the School of Professional and Continuing Education at

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3 The Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCETI) was established in 1994. The institutional members are: Caritas Adult and Higher Education Services, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Lingnam College (now University), the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Open University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong and the Vocational Training Council.

4 Initially, Mrs Fanny Law, the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower was approached. She passed the invitation to Mr Au Kam Hung, Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, Education and Manpower Bureau, who was also involved in the Continuing Education Fund discussions.

5 The Assistant Professor, Dr Kwong Tze Man was responsible for the management of logistics courses under the CEF scheme, and was therefore judged suitable to be an interviewee in this study.
the University of Hong Kong (Dr Kwong Tsz Man). Those involved in the adult/continuing education area were all either directors, heads or senior programme directors of major adult education providers and, though not all-inclusive, seem representative of this sector. It should be noted, however, that this group may have had vested interests, as the policy could directly affect their student enrolment. Some questions were therefore related to actions taken in the light of the policy and its impact on their institutions’ course provision and student numbers.

Interviews with the providers began with the following main questions, though these were tailored to the particular interviewees:

- Why do you think the CEF was started?
- Do you agree with the general principles of the CEF? Why/why not?
- If you had been asked to design the CEF, would you have organized it differently? If so, how?
- Did you submit any comments to the EMB regarding the establishment of the CEF? What were your views? Were they accepted? Do you know why/why not?
- Do you think other learners (besides the current target groups) should be subsidized as well?
Do you think that other areas (besides the current seven) should also be considered by the Fund? If so, which areas? Why?

Do you think it is right to exclude those who already possess a degree qualification?

How does the CEF affect the courses offered by your institution? (e.g. What is the percentage of courses offered by you which are entitled to CEF support? Do you anticipate an increase in this category of courses provided by your institution in the coming years?)

The interview with Mr K. H. Au, Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, Education and Manpower Bureau, focused on the following questions:

Why did the government introduce the $5 billion CEF?

Why did the government restrict the target group for the CEF to those without a degree?

Why did the government restrict the courses to seven areas?

Why did the government directly subsidize the adult learners instead of the providers?
As in the interviews about the OLI, the questions asked were not confined to those prepared in advance; new questions were asked based on responses to the prepared questions.

Table 4.1 summarizes the names and roles of the interviewees in the study as follows.

**Table 4.1 List of interviewees in the study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Evidence related to OLI</th>
<th>Evidence related to CEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Allen Lee Peng Fei</td>
<td>A non-Government Member of the Executive Council of the Hong Kong government from 1985 to 1992</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Cheng Hon Kwan</td>
<td>The Chair of the Planning Committee of the OLI from 1988 to 1989 and also the Founding Chair of its Council from 1989 to 1992</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Gajaran Dhanarajan</td>
<td>Associate Director (Academic) of the OLI from 1989 to 1991</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Lily Chiang</td>
<td>A member of Planning Committee for the OLI from 1988 to 1989</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Kwong Tsz Man</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, School of Professional and Continuing Education, the University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Andrew Ma</td>
<td>Coordinator, Adult and Higher Education Services, Caritas–Hong Kong</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Au Tik Kwan</td>
<td>Principal, YMCA of Hong Kong College of Careers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Lui Yu Hon</td>
<td>Director of LiPACE, the Open University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Victor Lee</td>
<td>Director, School of Continuing Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Au Kam Hung</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau, Hong Kong Government</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Approach to data analysis

There are, according to Silverman (2001), three different approaches to interview data: positivism, emotionalism and constructionism. Each provides different answers to questions about how interview data should be analysed (Silverman 2001). These are explained respectively as follows:

On the positivist approach, 'the aim of social science is to discover unknown but actual social facts' (Silverman 2001, p. 90). ‘Reality is supposed to be “out there”, and effective and unbiased interviews ‘give us access to “facts” about the world’ (p. 86) – interview data. Problems of data analysis are more technical than theoretical or interpretive (Maseide, 1990 cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 90).

According to emotionalism, interviewees ‘are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds’ (Silverman 2001, p. 87). Emotionalists aim to ‘access emotions by describing respondents’ inner experiences, by encouraging interviewers to become emotionally involved with respondents and to convey their own feelings to both respondents and readers’ (p. 91). ‘The particular concern is with lived experience. Emotions are treated as central to such experience’ (p. 90). Open-ended interviews are often regarded as appropriate, although one must be aware that open-ended or non-directive interviewing can itself be ‘a form of social control which shapes what people say’ (p. 92).

In the constructionism approach, ‘interviewers and interviewees are always actively engaged in constructing meanings’ (Silverman 2001, p. 87). While emotionalists
'persist in the positivist rhetoric in which accounts are "simply representations of the world"' (p. 95), constructionists 'are interested in documenting the way in which accounts "are part of the world they describe"' (p. 95).

The approach used in this research is based on constructionism. The interview data are interpreted according to a narrative inquiry approach. A research method can be described as narrative 'when data collection, interpretation and writing are considered a "meaning-making" process with similar characteristics to stories' (Gudmundsdottir, 1996 cited in Bell, 1999, p. 16). The interviewees are seen as storytellers and extended and open-ended interviews are used in this research, supplemented with documentary analysis.

This study adopts an interpretivist approach to data analysis, which does not code the interview data but

[a]ssume[s] that through continued readings of the source material and through vigilance over one's presuppositions, one can reach the 'Lebenswelt' of the informant, capturing the 'essence' of an account .... This approach does not lead to [dis]covering laws, but rather to a 'practical understanding' of meanings and actions (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 8).
In order to ensure that interviewees’ responses were understood holistically, the researcher did not code the interview data. However, he was sensitive to non-verbal ‘body language’.

4.6 Reliability and validity

Reliability

Reliability refers to ‘the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions’ (Hammersley, 1992 cited in Silverman, 2000, p. 175).

Textual data

‘Textual data are “in principle” more reliable than observations’ (Silverman, 2001, p. 229). Silverman (2001) argued that ‘reliability can be improved by comparing the analysis of the same set of data by different researchers’ (p. 231). An important feature of this method (known as ‘inter-rater reliability) is that the ‘categories should be used in a standardized way, so that any researcher would categorize in the same way’ (Silverman, 2001, p. 229). This approach has not been used in this research because, as Dye (1992) argued,

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6 Examples of these include the response made by Cheng Hon Kwan when he talked about the issue of consortium (p. 141) and the concern of the rate of consumption of the CEF expressed by Au Kam Hung (p. 169).
policy analysis deals with very subjective topics and must rely upon interpretation of results. Professional researchers frequently interpret the results of their analysis differently (p. 16).

This research adopts the view that ‘the credibility of qualitative inquiry is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and the centre of the analytic process’ (Patton, 1990, p. 461). Examples of literature in Hong Kong adopting this approach include Sweeting (1990) and Jones (1990).

The approach used is narrative inquiry. ‘The success of the interview depends, to a large extent, on the personal and professional qualities of the individual interviewer. In contrast to quantitative interviewing, qualitative research interviewers are, themselves, research instruments’ (Legard et al., 2003, p. 142).

Furthermore, ‘documents must be viewed with the skepticism that historians apply as they search for “truth” in old texts’ (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 117). If documents are reviewed sceptically, different researchers may reach different conclusions from the same data. Therefore absolute objectivity and consistency in this case is not possible. There are ‘multiple realities’, subject to different interpretations by researchers.
Interview data

Silverman (2001) pointed out that, according to quantitative methods textbooks, 'it is very important that each respondent understands the questions in the same way and that answers can be coded without the possibility of uncertainty' (p. 229). While Silverman argued that concentration on such matters deflects attention away from the theoretical assumptions underlying the meaning attached to interviewees' responses in qualitative research, he did not totally ignore the issue of reliability.

The need for low-inference descriptors can be satisfied by 'tape-recording all face-to-face interviews, carefully transcribing these tapes according to the needs of reliable analysis and presenting long extracts of data in the research report (Silverman, 2000, p. 230). In this research, reliability was ensured by tape-recording all the face-to-face interviews. The tapes were then transcribed in Chinese (except one in which the interviewee spoke in English) by some helpers. The tapes were then listened to again and checked against the transcripts by the researcher, before being translated into English by the researcher when presented in the thesis. This was designed to ensure the interview data were not mis-interpreted\(^7\). Finally, long extracts of data are presented in later chapters of this thesis.

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\(^7\) Prior to interview, the researcher invited all interviewees to inform him if they wished to be sent a copy of the transcript for approval. In the event, only one interviewee (Ms Lily Chiang) did so; she did not raise any objection to the content except one minor typographical error, which was corrected.
Validity

Validity means 'truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers' (Hammersley, 1990 cited in Silverman, 2000, p. 175). A qualitative approach not only questions, but also criticizes this notion of objective reality. It advocates the characteristics of contextual background, subjectivity and interactivity. This difference in the notion of 'truth' is not only a result of different research epistemologies, but is also related to the notion that 'social science research cannot be "value-free"' (Dye, 1992, p. 16). This is particularly applicable to policy analysis as Louis Wirth pointed out:

Since every assertion of a 'fact' and ... touches the interests of some individual or group, one cannot even call attention to the existence of certain 'facts' without courting objections of those whose very raison d'etre in society rests upon a divergent interpretation of the 'factual' situation (Wirth, 1936 cited in Dye, 1992, p. 16).

Therefore, in qualitative methods, the findings are only one of many possible explanations. Reality is seen as 'socially constructed' – there are 'many realities or "multiple realities"' (Pring, 2000, p. 59).

As this research is qualitative, adopting a constructionist approach, validity is a matter of taking careful steps to ensure the following nine points listed by Wolcott (1990) are observed as far as possible – 'talk little, listen a lot', 'record accurately', 'begin writing early', 'let readers "see" for themselves', 'report fully', 'be candid', 

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'seek feedback', 'try to achieve balance' and 'write accurately' (p. 126). The most important factors that affect the validity of this research are the documents reviewed and the people interviewed.

What the research aims to establish is a picture that is powerful in its interpretation of the issues under examination. Radical social constructionists suggest that 'no knowledge about a reality that is “out there” in the social world can be obtained from the interview' because the interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in which both parties construct 'narrative versions of the social world' (Silverman, 2004, p. 125). However, Silverman (2004) does not accept that 'interviews are meaningless beyond the context in which they occur' (p. 125). He considers that 'information about [the] social world is achievable through in-depth interviewing' and 'interview subjects construct not just narratives, but social worlds' (p. 126). However, 'research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds (p. 126).

This study adopts the position of Silverman (2004) – knowledge of 'reality' about the social world can be obtained by qualitative methods, though other 'realities' are possible. As Silverman (2004) writes:

All we sociologists have are stories. Some come from other people, some from us, some from our interactions with others. What matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are, and how we
can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life (p. 138).
Chapter 5 – Establishing the Open Learning Institute: a documentary analysis

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters related to the establishment of the Open Learning Institute (OLI), in this case using documentary analysis. As mentioned earlier, it draws on a wide range of documents including official reports, demographic data on the learners in the OLI/OUHK, articles written by academics and documents (including press cuttings) about the setting up of the OLI, documents in the Hong Kong Public Records Office and Legislative Council meeting minutes. In analysing these sources, an effort is made to relate the evidence to issues raised in the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3 – such as the perspectives the policy makers had in mind (e.g. modernizer or progressive), and the policy model adopted (e.g. policy blueprint, non-purposive adaptation or crisis intervention).

The data presented in the following sections relate mainly to two periods, the 1970s and the 1980s. The documents from the 1970s reveal that the Hong Kong government had considered the establishment of a kind of ‘open university’ using the UK Open University model as early as the 1970s, while those from the 1980s are concerned more with the planning and final establishment of the OLI. The documents from both periods show that the major motivation for increasing learning opportunities for higher education in Hong Kong through the setting up of the OLI was to maintain political stability at minimum cost. In other words, while the establishment of the OLI did widen participation, this was not the government’s basic aim – its motivation was
primarily political and economic, not the promotion of social equity. Also, the documents illustrate that the government’s imposition of a self-financing regime resulted in a market orientation which in turn affected the extent to which the OLI widened participation.

5.2 The Open Learning Institute

Hong Kong has had an educational system involving nine years of free and compulsory education for children between age 6 and 15 since 1978. Entry to tertiary education was very competitive until the 1990s. In the mid-1980s, there were only two universities and one polytechnic, providing 2.2% of the 17 to 20 age group with a local first degree programme (Murphy and Fung, 1999). Therefore, in the 1980s, the demand for degree places in Hong Kong much exceeded supply.

The Education Commission, established to advise the government on the development of the education system, devoted its first report (1984) to whether Hong Kong should have an open university following the model of the Open University of the United Kingdom (UKOU), a dedicated distance education institution. This report advised that the establishment of an independent open university would not be cost-effective. However, in 1986, Education Commission Report No. 2 suggested that there was a need for an open and distance education programme which covered the full range of possible levels of further education in Hong Kong, i.e. from sub-degree to postgraduate level.
In September 1987, the Executive Council approved the establishment of a Planning Committee for setting up an Open Learning Institute. The Planning Committee for the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (PCOLI), which was appointed in 1988 and chaired by the Hon. Cheng Hon Kwan, submitted its recommendations in early 1989; and in June 1989, after the required legislation had been passed in the Legislative Council, the OLI was established.

Among the major recommendations in the PCOLI Report were that the OLI should:

- be financially self-supporting within four years of its establishment;

- confer academic awards in its own name but operate in a consortium with the existing tertiary institutions funded through the UPGC;

- offer courses at sub-degree, first degree and higher degree levels;

- have three schools: Arts and Humanities, Commerce and Social Sciences and Science and Technology.

Also, a very important decision, entry to all its programmes in sub-degree and first degree studies should be open, with no requirement for prior academic qualifications.

Donald Swift was appointed as the founding Director of the OLI. The first recruitment, which took place in July 1989, attracted more than 230,000 people; and 4,200 were admitted to eight degree programmes after being drawn from 64,000 applicants (OUHK, 1999). There were three Schools, as noted above (though the first
two were restructured in 1990 as the School of Arts and Social Sciences and the School of Business and Administration).

The OLI was the first institution in Hong Kong dedicated to providing higher education opportunities for adults by distance learning. Unlike the other five tertiary institutions in the territory at that time, the OLI was not under the umbrella of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). Instead, it was directly under the financial aegis of the government and, as noted above, it had to become financially self-sufficient in four years’ time – which meant that the Hong Kong government did not have to provide the same level of resources as for institutions under the UPGC.

One way of examining the purposes of setting up the OLI is to look into the objectives listed in official reports. For example, as stated in the Report of the Planning Committee, the Institute’s objectives were:

... to provide opportunities for open learning, thereby contributing to the social and economic development of Hong Kong. Open learning. ... , refers to a system of education which offers open access to students and instructs through a variety of learning methods.

The OLI should enable people who had not had the chance to take advantage of the conventional tertiary education to undertake study including for degrees. Equally it will allow those who require new knowledge, in the face of changing demands, to undertake the necessary study.
By making available study programmes on the basis of open learning, the OLI should play a leading part in the development of continuing education in the territory, whether or not this leads to formal qualifications.

(PCOLI, 1989, p. 19)

The differences between the OLI and other Hong Kong tertiary institutions — its open access policy, its mode of delivery and its funding mechanism — are evident in its mission statement:

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong dedicates itself to providing sub-degree, degree and postgraduate courses leading to awards and qualifications principally through a system of open access and distance education, thereby making higher education available to all those aspiring to it regardless of previous qualification, gender, or race. ...

The Institute is further committed to achieving a balance of income and expenditure, in time, within the financial context of Hong Kong and to attaining this without sacrificing the level and quality of courses and support for its students (OLI, 1991, p. 7).

The courses envisaged by the PCOLI were 'general' rather than vocationally-oriented degree courses, as can be seen from the following extract from its report:

Initially, the School of Science and Technology will offer programmes in seven programme areas, leading to a Bachelor of Science degree. The School of
Commerce and Social Sciences will offer a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, with the opportunity to follow four special strands. It also plans to offer a Master of Business Administration degree. The School of Arts and Humanities will initially offer five programmes on Western culture and languages, leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. It will develop programmes on Chinese language, translation, Chinese history and Asian studies as a matter of priority (PCOLI, 1989, p. 1).

As mentioned earlier, at the time of the establishment of the OLI, there was a serious shortage of degree places in Hong Kong, and possession of a degree was very useful for career advancement. The OLI served the role of expanding the provision of learning opportunities leading to a degree, with apparently no major concern that the degrees should be 'vocationally-oriented' — though, as will be illustrated later, there was a subsequent change in the OLI's course provision strategy (as a result of its self-financing status) which affected the widening of participation.

5.3 Initial proposals for an Open University in Hong Kong in the 1970s

In an effort to trace when and why the issue of open education was first raised in Hong Kong government circles, a search was undertaken in the Public Records Office. This led to the discovery of several very relevant documents which reveal that the government's early consideration of an 'open university' was motivated by concern
to achieve political stability in a cost-efficient way rather than widening participation in higher education as such.

The documents discovered in the Public Records Office included a file entitled ‘Open University Initial Proposals’, covering the period from November 1972 to September 1974 (Record ID number HKRS482-2-15). This file, which contains correspondence, minutes, reports, etc. (some of which were confidential at the time they were written) provides clear evidence that the Hong Kong government considered the establishment of a kind of ‘open university’ using the UKOU model in the early 1970s. The story unfolded as follows.

The University Grants Committee produced a confidential paper No. 348 (Public Records Office file number: HKRS482-2-15) dated 2 March 1972 on ‘Tertiary Level Education – Student Number Targets in Hong Kong for 1977/78’ which showed that the Hong Kong government was concerned about the need to expand higher education opportunities, and deliberated on the social and political implications.

The terms of reference of the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong include the tasks of keeping under review in the light of the community’s needs the facilities for University education in Hong Kong, and such plans for development of the Universities as may be required from time to time. … These problems moreover have to be examined as relatively long-term issues: and decisions taken now cannot begin to bear fruit until towards the end of the decade (University Grants Committee, 1972, p. 1).
These introductory statements may suggest that the UGC at this time was simply embarking on a review of Hong Kong’s long-term needs for higher education. However, an examination of other extracts from the same document shows that the Hong Kong government was concerned about the possible political instability resulting from the lack of higher education opportunities as compared with other countries:

[Hong Kong is] ... a community which has almost no resources other than its own people. ... The current total enrolment (undergraduates plus all others) at the two universities in Hong Kong is 5,314 or a little under 2% of the age group. If University targets were maintained at roughly the same proportion of the age group for 1977/78 this would entail a total University student population of somewhat over 8,000. Such a target would have to be announced to the Universities themselves and would inevitably become public knowledge. It is probable that comparisons would then be made with other countries (such as Singapore, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, Canada etc) and although comparisons of this type may not be intellectually valid they may carry emotional and political weight (op cit, p. 2). (italics added)

As can be seen from the above, the University Grants Committee’s intention to increase university places was related to its concern about public emotional and political reaction to the territory’s limited tertiary level education provision.

The document then goes on to state that other forms of provision and adult education might provide an alternative solution. Interestingly, the document states that it may be
politically desirable to show that the Hong Kong government is considering ways to expand university education. However, the government was concerned that university expansion could not be achieved within a short period of time by traditional means.

It may be that Hong Kong cannot, or ought not to contemplate, an immediate University expansion to this size: and in the Committee's opinion it would in fact be impracticable. This does not exclude other forms of higher education and it may be politically desirable to show initiatives in seeking out means to a wider availability of tertiary education to a larger percentage of the post-secondary age group and possibly also to people who are somewhat older and more mature (op cit, p. 2). (italics added)

Also, in this 1972 paper, the University Grants Committee was very ambitious in its proposed target enrolment figures. Such an ambitious plan clearly could not be achieved in a short period of time and with limited resources; hence the offering of open university degrees, because of the economies of scale, became a possible solution to the problem.

Subject to these reservations and having in mind trends in other countries which appear to have no greater need for higher and further education than has Hong Kong, the Committee believes it possible that the total requirement for tertiary education (including the two Universities and the Polytechnic) could amount to about 20% of the age group 18 to 21. This would entail a current requirement of about 60,000 'places' of one sort or another and a requirement by the end of the decade of about 80,000. This requirement
includes the spare-time training of more mature students already in employment as well as the part-time and full-time training of younger people (op cit, p. 4).

From the above paragraph, it can be seen that the '20% of the age group 18 to 21' referred to a mix of full-time students and part-time students, as well as a mix of young and 'more mature' students. The University Grants Committee's plan was influenced by international trends:

The Committee has had to proceed by way of general comparisons in the knowledge that other countries which have moved away from a selective system to a more open one have uncovered large reservoirs of talent . . . . From their observations of the people of Hong Kong Members of the Committee believe this equally likely to be true of Hong Kong: and from their general understanding of Hong Kong's development they believe that the need to make such a move here is at least as great, and may be greater, as in any other country (University Grants Committee, 1972, p. 4).

The Committee envisaged that the targeted expansion of higher education was unlikely to be met by the two universities and a polytechnic at that time, and even if it was, it would be very expensive. 'A violent or excessively large expansion from 6,000 over the four years ending 1977/78 might be disproportionately expensive because of the capital implications and could probably not be handled by Universities' (University Grants Committee, 1972, p. 4). Therefore, the Committee considered that university places had to be expanded in a short period of time but that
would be expensive. Therefore open education with perceived economies of scale seems to be a solution to both these two problems. The Committee suggested open education as an alternative, with an open university based on the UK model being considered as being a relatively low-cost option:

There remains a very considerable gap to be filled (if possible) by alternative forms of higher education. The problem is not one peculiar to Hong Kong. Other countries have faced similar difficulties and have devised methods of overcoming them. These other forms of higher education need to be educationally flexible in order to meet the variety of demands that arise: and they have to be inexpensive in relation to University costs per student because of the larger numbers involved. They are differently named and organized in the many countries .... The last named, the U. K. Open University, provides courses and appropriate qualifications ... (University Grants Committee, 1972, p. 7).

The Committee also saw other advantages in an open university:

All the systems¹ have a number of factors in common which would be of particular importance in Hong Kong: These are:

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¹ These refer to all other forms of higher education in other countries as an alternative to traditional universities to meet the demand for large student numbers, such as the external degrees in the University of New South Wales and the UK Open University.
(a) political

The initiative for expanding tertiary education remains in Government hands. In addition because many students will be working in their spare time from normal employment they avoid some of the dangers of over-production and under-employment.

(b) social

... Because admission is 'open' they allow for the further education of people whose formal education may have stopped too soon.

(c) educational

They allow rapid adaptation to market demand ...

(d) financial

While considerable investment would of course be required if properly developed it should be possible to keep the costs per student relatively low.

Finally, the Committee recommended that the government should carry out an immediate investigation as to whether such a system could be developed in Hong Kong; ... the Government should consider announcing ... by, say, 1978 the community will have the benefit of modern and flexible higher education .... This might amount to perhaps 30,000 'places'

(University Grants Committee, 1972, p. 8).
On 8 November 1972, S. F. Bailey, the Secretary of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, wrote a letter to the Director of Marketing of the Open University in the UK enquiring about the cost of buying course material (Ref: UGC/GEN/60/72, in Public Records Office file number: HKRS482-2-15). In the letter, Bailey pointed out that:

Informal and exploratory discussions are being held in Hong Kong Government regarding the possibility of developing a form of Open University in Hong Kong. ... On current assessments this will have a gap of perhaps 40,000 'places' and it seems desirable to explore all possible means of filling it. ... but an economic use of resources has to play a large part in settling educational policies. In these circumstances a development on the lines of the Open University is clearly an interesting possibility (Bailey, 1972).

(italics added)

At this stage, as Bailey's letter shows, the Hong Kong government already had some idea about the targeted number of adult learners in the proposed open university:

The maximum total student population will probably be about 30,000 and the annual intakes probably about 7,000 – the Hong Kong educational system is very competitive in spirit and our first year drop-out rates are likely to be low. The student mix is likely to lean more towards technology than the arts. There may be a relatively large element of teacher-upgrading but it seems unlikely that the 'house-wife' element would be as large as in the U.K. On the whole I would expect more male than female enrolments and would expect more
students to be aiming at improving their present prospects than to be aiming at wholly new jobs (Bailey, 1972).

As this extract illustrates, it was anticipated that the students would be largely male, as they were more career-oriented than females in Hong Kong society in the 1970s, and academically capable; and because of the competitiveness of university entry, the drop-out rates would be low. The expectation of their choice of subjects (technology rather than arts) also reflects the perception that the learners would be more career-oriented.

The government was tempted to establish an open university at least partly because of lower student costs, but it did not exclude the possibility that an open university degree might be rated lower in status than a traditional one, and that drop-out rates would be greater than in other higher education institutions. Apparently, a high drop-out rate was viewed as a drawback to the cost-effectiveness of an open university. University and Polytechnic Grants Committee Paper No. 356 summarized three papers, two having been presented at the Lancaster Conference on Higher Education in 1972.

At Appendix C is a paper (not presented at the Lancaster Conference) by Leslie Wagner on 'The Economies [Economics] of the Open University' which is relevant. ... The paper ... is of interest in relation to normal University costs and to the Open University argument. On the face of things, even allowing for the possibilities both that an Open University degree may

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2 These papers are attached as appendices A, B and C to the UGC Paper No. 356.
be rated lower than an orthodox University degree and that the early drop-out rate may be higher than an orthodox University (i.e. that a Hong Kong student may be no more highly motivated than a UK student), the cost advantages of an Open University system seem likely to be significant. It is worth noting that these advantages come wholly from the distribution of a relatively high level of fixed costs over a relatively large number of students (University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, 1972).

The University and Polytechnic Grants Committee was concerned about the cost-effectiveness of open universities, but Bailey, Secretary of the Committee, was optimistic about student numbers in an open university system. For instance, in a paper 'The administrator's view' presented at a seminar on 'The Open University' held at the University of Hong Kong on 12 March 1973, Bailey stated that 'in terms of total resources, ... the Open University comes out at about one sixth, or 16.5% of the orthodox University. These figures assume a total student body of about 35,000 which is not unrealistic in Hong Kong' (Bailey, 1973). That the Secretary of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee was 'attracted' by the low cost per graduate of an open university system is obvious in his conclusion to that document:

Given all this it should be possible to develop in Hong Kong a system which will take people to degree level and to good sub-degree level at about 15% of the capital costs and about 10% of the recurrent costs per 'graduate' as compared with orthodox systems (Ref. UGC/GEN/60/72, 'Notes on University Extension systems, the Open University etc', in Public Records Office file number: HKRS482-2-15).
Later in 1973, in a memo to the Colonial Secretariat, Bailey expressed a preference for a separate institution, instead of expanding the extension system of existing universities, to increase the higher education places:

... the economies of size obtainable with the Open University system probably cannot be reached on a University extension system .... For financial and administrative reasons as well as for University autonomy reasons therefore the cards are stacked against any rapid development on a usefully large scale of a straight extension system. It would not however be difficult to set up a separate institution to achieve the results, educational and financial, which we want (Ref. UGC/GEN/60/72 dated 8 January 1973, in Public Records Office file number: HKRS482-2-15).

Another piece of relevant evidence was found in a minute in a government file (Public Records Office file number: HKRS482-2-15):

There appear to be several basic issues all concerning the subject discussed in the Governor's Committee 'Ways in which University Education in Hong Kong can be further expanded in the 1980's'. The two suggestions aired in this file deal with (i) an Open University, modelled upon the UK pioneer Open University, ... and (ii) the second suggestion for some form of University Extension Service.
This minute, which was written on 5 March 1973, reveals that the government had established a committee on the expansion of university places in the 1980s, and that an open university was one of the two options aired.

The objectives of setting up an open university to meet the demand for increasing needs for higher education can also be seen in the minutes of a meeting held on 12 July 1974 with senior government officials, including the Secretary for Social Services, the Assistant Director of Education, the Secretary of the UPGC, a Principal Assistant Secretary and an Assistant Secretary. But the following extract from the minutes also reveals that the government officials gave priority in learning opportunities to the 'learning rich'. The minutes stated:

Assuming no third university, some other forms of educational system would need to be developed to cope with increasing community needs for secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level education. This demand was expected from three categories of persons:

A: those qualified school leavers for whom there were no places in existing post-secondary or tertiary institutions;

B: those school leavers ('drop-outs') who, for various reasons, did not have the qualifications for entry into post-secondary or tertiary institutions; and

C: mature persons.
It was agreed that category A should have priority as they were being denied educational opportunities for which they were otherwise fully qualified. ...

There were three major ways of providing education for this pool of students: the development of an External Degree Programme, ... the development of a University Extension System ... the introduction of an ‘Open College’.

In these minutes, the main target group of learners for the open institution the government was considering setting up was qualified school leavers (category A). The concept of a ‘second chance’ in this context is, therefore, the provision of learning opportunities to those who are qualified but have been denied educational opportunities because of the highly competitive entry to universities at that time. Those in category A possess higher qualifications than those in category B, which has implications for the learning divide, as the government was still targeting people who were relatively ‘learning rich’.

The minutes also record that the external degree programme and university extension system were rejected at the meeting because of the limited places they could offer, and the limited amount of money and expertise available. For the open college system to be cost-efficient, a large number of students was needed. Therefore cost-effectiveness was again considered an important issue.

Overall, it seems that, in the 1970s, the Hong Kong government’s consideration of establishing an open university similar to that in the UK was motivated by a perceived need to increase higher education places to satisfy Hong Kong people’s expectations — and thus avoid an adverse public reaction to the current limited
provision. Perhaps the following press cutting, though clearly not a very authoritative source, gives some indication of the pressure on the government to consider increasing university places at that time. A letter by S. M. Schmidt — ‘HK needs more universities’ in the Letters to the Editor section of the South China Morning Post 20 January 1973 (Public Records Office file on ‘Open University Initial Proposals’) — protested that the number of local university places lagged so far behind other countries. He doubted whether the colonial government wished to see the local Chinese people well educated, pointed out that the Chinese tradition placed much emphasis on education, and concluded with a statement that ‘miserable is the fact that the unwary Chinese people are too timid to make any significant protestation!’

From this perspective, concepts such as ‘learning for all’ were not the government’s central concern, but rather a byproduct, which echoes the characterization of social policy making in Hong Kong as ‘non-purposive adaptation’ (Andrew W. F. Wong) and crisis-intervention (Sweeting and Morris, 1993), as outlined in Chapter 3. The main motivation of the government in expanding higher education opportunities was the maintenance of social and political stability rather than achieving social equity. As discussed in Chapter 3, whatever the underlying motivation, participation may be widened, depending on whether the learners are ‘learning rich’ or ‘learning poor’. However, as this chapter will show, the self-financing policy of the OLI and hence its need to focus on cost-effectiveness have hampered the potential of the institution to narrow the learning divide.
5.4 Developments in the 1980s

Legislative Council Meeting minutes

The Legislative Council minutes show that the government's main aim in setting up the OLI was to increase the learning opportunities for tertiary education in a most cost-effective way, though there were different concerns among various legislators.

The Bill for the establishment of the OLI was passed smoothly on 18 February 1987 when the Education Commission Report No. 2 was debated in the Council. Although the establishment of the OLI was mentioned in this report, it produced little debate. (As will be seen in Chapter 6, the endorsement of the OLI by the Executive Council also went very smoothly.) Although some legislators were concerned about whether the OLI would be financially viable, the government did not change its view on the self-financing policy. The Governor announced the government's intention to set up the Open Learning Institute in his speech in the Legislative Council in October 1987.

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong Bill 1989 was debated on 12 April (First Reading) and 24 May (Second Reading). The following statements made at the 12 April 1989 meeting by the Secretary for Education and Manpower highlighted a feature of open learning — to provide learning opportunities to a large number of students, which was presumably viewed as appealing:

Sir, the concept of open learning is still quite new, but already widely accepted throughout the world. It has two main features. First, it implies open
access, in that students are not required to have specific qualifications to enrol for courses. Secondly, open learning is not limited in its teaching methods: students learn in a wide variety of ways and can choose the time, pace and place at which they learn (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 12 April 1989, p. 1260).

In his Policy Address in the Legislative Council on 7 October 1987, the Governor, Sir David Wilson, said:

In our plans for higher education, it is important that we should provide opportunities for those who have not previously benefited from higher education, and to those who have done so, but who need to update and renew their skills. This was a point made in the second report of the Education Commission. To meet these needs, the Government have now decided to set up a planning committee for the establishment of an open learning institute. The provision of an open learning institute, which will be Hong Kong’s sixth degree-awarding institution, will considerably increase the opportunities for tertiary education (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes 7 October 1987, p. 31). (italics added)

Also, during the Legislative Council meeting at which the Hong Kong Open Learning Institute Bill 1989 was debated and passed, Ip Man Hing, a Legislative Council member and convenor of the Legislative Council ad hoc group set up to study the OLI Bill announced:
The Legislative Council ad hoc group formed to study the Bill is thrilled over the wide educational opportunities the OLI would open up for those who aspire to advancing their learning and knowledge. Many people who have not been able to get admitted to our very competitive tertiary institutions can now further their education through enrolment with the OLI. ... But I think the one most important feature of the entire concept of open learning relates to its openness. It provides access to high education for people regardless of their previous academic attainments. ... Sir, the objective of the OLI is to provide in Hong Kong opportunities for higher education by means of open learning and thereby to advance learning and knowledge, and enhance economic and social development (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 24 May 1989, p. 1744). (italics added)

Finally, in the same meeting, Cheng Hon Kwan said:

As its course delivery methods are more cost-effective when compared to conventional ones and it aims to cover full costs in the longer term, the OLI will contribute significantly to an expansion in opportunities for higher education without creating a burden on precious public resources (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 24 May 1989, p. 1746). (italics added)

While the first two extracts above reiterate the value of the OLI in expanding educational opportunities, the last highlights its cost-effectiveness. However, its proposed self-financing status raised concern among some Legislative Council
members about whether or not the OLI would be financially successful. Tam Wong Yik Ming expressed this issue directly:

According to the present proposal as mentioned by Dr Ip, the Government will meet the initial capital outlay in setting up the OLI, and its operating expenses in the first four years. The aim of the Government is that the OLI should become self-financing four years after its inauguration, ... Nevertheless, the Bill has not spelt out clearly the scheme of financial control on the OLI when it becomes self-financing (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 24 May 1989, p. 1746).

When the Secretary for Education and Manpower responded to the questions of Legislative Council members, he indicated that:

The OLI will not develop large academic faculties along the lines of, for example, the Open University in the United Kingdom. By remaining a streamlined organization, with a small, expert core of senior academics, the OLI will be able to react quickly to changes in the demands of society and will be able to keep the cost of courses within the means of the average student (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 11 November 1987, p. 391). (italics added)

The above statement shows the Hong Kong government's belief that the self-financing status of the OLI and market forces would increase its efficiency, giving the maximum return in promoting the territory's economic and social development with the minimum input of resources. However, as discussed below, the market orientation
in turn affected the extent to which the OLI widened participation.

As noted in Chapter 3, Hong Kong was facing an emigration problem in the 1980s. There was obviously concern among legislators, and the public at large, about emigration close to the time when the OLI (and the University of Science and Technology) was established. These initiatives to expand higher education were part of the government's strategy to restore Hong Kong people's confidence at the time of the brain drain. As Skeldon (1995) pointed out, 'there is unquestionably nervousness about the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and this has indeed caused many people to emigrate and others to seek a foreign passport' (p. 57). That the establishment of the OLI was part of a government strategy to reduce the high level of emigration as suggested by Sweeting and Morris (1993) is shown clearly in the interview data reported in Chapter 6.

The Legislative Council minutes show that at a time when the brain drain problem was serious, the Bill for the establishment of the OLI was passed smoothly. Although some legislators were concerned whether the OLI would be financially viable, the government did not change its view on the self-financing policy for the OLI. This again reveals that the motivation of the government in establishing the OLI was to increase considerably the learning opportunities for tertiary education in the most cost-effective way.

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3 Chow Liang Shuk Yee, Selina, a legislator, raised concern about the accelerating emigration figures (Hong Kong Legislative Council minutes, 12 April 1989, p. 1253). From the Legislative Council minutes, it can be seen that the figures of emigration for the years 1986 to 1988 were 18,989, 29,998 and 45,817 respectively.
Official reports

The main documents examined in this category were: the Llewellyn Report\textsuperscript{4} (1982), the first official document for public discussion on open education; the Education Commission Reports Nos. 1 and 2; the Report of the Planning Committee for the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (June 1989); and the OLI Submission for an Institutional Review and Annual Reports. In general, it was found that the policy makers had varying perceptions of the purposes of setting up the OLI, and were very concerned about the cost-effectiveness of establishing an open university. The extent of attention that these documents paid to the role of open education and widening participation also varies. The Llewellyn Report was more concerned about social equity, while the Report of the Planning Committee for the OLI focused more on the financial constraints. How these issues affected the widening of participation are examined in the following two sections.

\textit{Purposes of establishing the OLI and widening participation}

\textit{Llewellyn Report}

The Llewellyn Report saw three purposes for adult education: to bridge the 'generation gap'; social integration; and correcting educational bias (Llewellyn, J. \textit{et al.}, 1982, pp. 73–74). The term 'second chance' occurred in a number of places in the

\textsuperscript{4} Llewellyn \textit{et al}. were members of a visiting panel invited by the Hong Kong government to review the Hong Kong education system and were nominated by the OECD.
Report (e.g. pages 73, 77): ‘There is a great need for “second chance” offers through adult education: for example, in learning English or in obtaining formal education qualifications (p. 77). This emphasis arose because the panel considered that there were ‘large numbers of unskilled mainland immigrants’ (p. 73) and ‘for them it is particularly important not only to learn English as a condition for job security ... but also to learn what it means to live ... Hong Kong society’ (p. 73). It also included a spirited advocacy of the importance of equity:

Thus the need for continuing education in Hong Kong is justified on many grounds with the major arguments revolving around ideas of cultural development, of social change and notions of equity ... Furthermore, all members of society should have equal opportunity of realizing their interests and aptitudes ... education should not be the prerogative and perquisite of the few (Llewellyn, J. et al, 1982, p. 74).

The ‘second chance’ notion emphasizes that those who had been left behind educationally in the past (the ‘learning poor’) for whatever reason should be given priority in getting support to obtain the same educational opportunities as others (the ‘learning rich’) – a focus on equity which can lead to the widening of participation in learning

*Education Commission Report No. 1*

The Education Commission Report No. 1 also considered that providing second chance opportunities to adults, thereby narrowing the learning divide, was important. It took the view that open education
is non-age specific, covering basic literacy to tertiary level studies. It ranges from specialized vocational studies to general interest studies which may be recreation or leisure-oriented. The aims of open education are manifold and include remedial learning, providing second chance opportunities for obtaining qualifications, updating and keeping abreast of developments in fields where knowledge is expanding rapidly, and fulfilling individual personal development needs. (italics added) (Education Commission, 1984, p. 71).

**Education Commission Report 2**

Although ECR2 (1986) argued strongly for the removal of the barrier of entry qualifications and for a more diversified range of courses, it saw vocational updating as one of the key roles for open education. Also, it favoured the establishment of a consortium rather than an independent institution because of concern about the financial viability of a single institution, though its members were unclear about the likely level of student enrolment in such an open education programme:

[We] have not found it possible to quantify the demand for a programme of open education at the post-secondary level (Education Commission, 1986, p. 136).
While the above extract emphasizes once again the wide-ranging purposes of open education, and its contribution to personal as well as vocational development, the notions of getting a qualification and career advancement were dominant in the background section of the PCOLI report in comments such as: ‘... for the majority who have sought employment without the benefit of tertiary education, the prospect of advancing their careers through obtaining academic qualifications lies in continuing education’ (PCOLI, 1989, p. 3), although ‘to provide a second chance’ is still mentioned (p. 4). This means that there is a change of emphasis in the Llewellyn Report (1982), Education Commission Report No. 1 (1984), Education Commission Report No. 2 (1986) and the PCOLI Report (1989) from a more progressive perspective to a more modernizer perspective.

The PCOLI Report also stated:

Three primary objectives for open education at the post-secondary level were identified:

(a) to provide a second chance for those who had to forgo, or were denied the opportunity of, further education when they left school, or whose requirements for further education develop relatively late in life;
(b) to provide continuing education to update and enhance the training of those who completed their further education at the beginning of their careers; and

(c) to provide retraining for those who need to change or extend their career or vocational skills later in life to adapt to technological, economic and social change (PCOLI, 1989, p. 4).

As the above extracts show, the extent of attention that these documents paid to the notion of 'second chance' and 'equity' varies. There is a pattern of change in their focus at different times: the Llewellyn Report in 1982, Education Commission Report No. 1 in 1984, Report No. 2 in 1986 and the Report of the Planning Committee for the OLI in 1989. The Llewellyn Report was more concerned about social equity; and the Education Commission Report No. 1 also mentioned that one of the aims of open education was to provide 'second chance opportunities (p. 71). However, the Report of the Planning Committee for the OLI focused more on the notion of getting a qualification and career advancement. Finally, the Education Commission Report No. 2 was even more concerned about the financial viability of an independent institution and therefore suggested the establishment of a consortium.

**Demands for cost-effectiveness and the widening of participation**

Considerations of cost-effectiveness affect widening participation. Because of its self-financing nature, the OLI had to set its fees at a level higher than it would have
wished, which affected the extent to which it could widen participation. Its market considerations limited the kinds of courses to be offered – the likely popularity of courses was an important factor in deciding which ones were to be presented. In Hong Kong, those courses which are perceived to bring about career advancement have higher enrolments (e.g. information technology and accounting). This argument is supported by the extract from the 1995 OLI submission for institutional review. The submission revealed that, due to concerns about their financial viability, the OLI was unlikely ever to develop programmes 'likely to appeal to students primarily as avenues for personal enrichment, rather than for career-motivated purposes' (OLI, 1995, p. 13). However, the offering of courses which are market-driven will be more advantageous to the 'learning rich' than the 'learning poor' because the learners are usually already working in the field and have some qualifications in that area. Therefore the self-financing policy affects the potential of the OLI to narrow the learning divide.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, both the UPGC and the Education Commission were aware of the impact of the self-financing policy on the development of the OLI. But the Education Commission in its second report still proposed that the OLI should be self-financing. This implies that the Commission was not concerned about the impact of a self-financing policy on widening participation. But as argued in earlier chapters, this only represents increasing – but not widening – participation if the learners are not diversified and include the ‘learning poor’.

The following example illustrates the above argument. In 1989 the OLI decided not to offer a programme in Physical Science as a result of a survey which revealed that
very few respondents (1.6%) showed an interest in this area (OLI, 1995). This market orientation in turn affected the types of learners (and their motivations for study) who enrolled in the OLI and thus influenced the extent to which it widened participation – as indicated in the following extracts from the 1995 OLI submission for an institutional review:

Acknowledging resources limitations and the relationship between costs and fees we balance the introduction of new courses and programmes by conducting scrupulous reviews of existing provision ... (OLI, 1995, p. 13).

The submission further reported three outcomes of the review: a reduction in the number of courses; low population courses being offered in 18- or 24-month presentation schedules, rather than every year, to increase student enrolment; and the phasing out of the Western Arts and Humanities programme which was attracting low student numbers (OLI, 1995, p. 13). The submission also revealed that, due to concerns about their financial viability, the OLI was unlikely ever to develop: 'programmes likely to appeal to students primarily as avenues for personal enrichment, rather than for career-motivated purposes (e.g. degree programmes in the fine arts)'; 'programmes requiring a heavy investment in specialized facilities and equipment'; and 'postgraduate programmes requiring a considerable investment in course development' (OLI, 1995, p. 13).

The Institutional Review Report described this strategy of course presentation to adapt to the self-financing status of the OLI in a positive way by stating that

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5 Although the submission was in 1995, its content is a report on the period from 1989 to 1995.
the range of courses we offer is weighted heavily towards those which our prospective students think will directly improve their career prospects, i.e. an 'applied', 'practical', or perhaps 'vocational' orientation (OLI, 1995, p. 13).

This statement reflects the OLI's assumption that the motivation of its prospective students is essentially economic. And, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, by offering courses tailored to students who were economically motivated, such students would be more likely to register with the University; and those with a non-economic motivation for study would find the courses less suited to their interests and be less likely to enrol. In this way, widening participation has been affected.

The Education Commission Report No. 1 was influenced by the UPGC Report: "[i]n considering the question of an open university in Hong Kong, we were assisted in our task by studying a report recently completed by the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC) on the subject" (ECR No. 1, p. 73). 'The UPGC was commissioned by the Government to consider the feasibility of an open university in Hong Kong in July 1983. ... The UPGC completed its report in August 1984' (p. 73). The Education Commission published its Report No.1 in October 1984, only two months after the UPGC report, and endorsed the recommendation of the UPGC Report which did not favour the establishment of an open university in Hong Kong on the UK model.

Clearly, both the UPGC and the Education Commission were very concerned about the resource requirements for the development of a UK Open University-style
Institution – in fact, the Education Commission stated openly that ‘one of the main issues for consideration is clearly cost-effectiveness’ (p. 75).

However the Commission did argue for ‘a very high priority to be given as soon as possible to the development of open education’ (Education Commission, 1984, p. 75). While endorsing the UPGC’s recommendation that an open university should not be established in Hong Kong, the Commission concluded that in the next phase it would ‘examine the development of open education at all levels’ (p. 76). This whole series of events is summarized in the UPGC’s 1985–1988 Triennium Report, as follows:

In 1984, the UPGC advised the Government that the establishment of an independent open university in Hong Kong would not be cost-effective and recommended that consideration should be given to the development of open education opportunities. This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the Education Commission and the Government formed a Working Party on Open Education, comprising representatives of the five UPGC-funded institutions and the Open College of the University of East Asia.

Following receipt of the Working Party’s report, the Government gave approval in principle for the establishment of an Open Learning Institute (OLI). To this end, a Planning Committee was appointed in 1988. The OLI is intended to be an independent and eventually self-financing consortium of the five UPGC-funded institutions … . (UPGC, 1988, pp. 32–33)
In the event, however, the OLI was established as an independent institution, rather as part of a consortium which ‘should be the entity in which the students enrolled, rather than in an individual participating institution (p. 175). However, the institutions had only ‘agreed in principle to become participating institutions of the consortium as soon as the status governing the OLI is enacted’ (PCOLI, 1989, p. 15).

The OLI started to recruit its first batch of students in July 1989, less than two years after the Governor announced its establishment in October 1987. It appointed a relatively small core staff, especially in the case of academic staff, and to a considerable extent adopted course materials developed overseas, particularly from the UKOU, in order to establish the conditions for a self-financing regime four years later. The first Director, Donald Swift, who had previously been the Director of the University of East Asia in Macau, considered this ‘parasitic strategy’ of using overseas courses essential because of the very high cost of developing good quality courses with high academic standards (SCMP, 21 November 1988).

The issue of the future self-financing regime was clearly a matter of continuing concern. For example, on 28 February 1991, Cheng Hon Kwan, the first Council Chair of the OLI, told an SCMP reporter that ‘the question of the OLI’s self-sufficiency was “Government’s policy” and was therefore not open for discussion” (Beck, 1991a) – and a few days later, the same reporter said: ‘Mr Cheng described the situation in business terms. “This is a commercial enterprise”’ (Beck, 1991b).

The institutions were the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic (later Hong Kong Polytechnic University), the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong (later City University of Hong Kong) and the Hong Kong Baptist College (later Hong Kong Baptist University).
This section shows that while the main motivation of the Hong Kong government in setting up the OLI was to maintain social and political stability, its concern for cost-effectiveness and hence a self-financing policy limited the potential of the Institute to narrow the learning divide.

*Learner profiles in OLI/OUHK statistical reports*

What types of students were attracted to the OLI in its early days, and how do they compare with more recent intakes? Demographic information on OLI students in the first presentation and some later presentations (October 1989, October 1992, October 1995, October 1998, October 2001 and October 2004) are given in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

**Table 5.1  Student registration in the OLI/OUHK**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student registration</td>
<td>4,237</td>
<td>14,462</td>
<td>20,085</td>
<td>24,318</td>
<td>26,875</td>
<td>20,462</td>
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125
Table 5.2   Educational background of students

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<tr>
<td>University degree or above</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-degree, Diploma, etc.</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKA-Level/GCE A-Level</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCEE/GCE &amp; HK High-Level</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Others</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
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(* Others includes students with no formal qualifications, primary school graduates, and Secondary 3 or 5 graduates)

Table 5.3   Age distribution of students

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<tr>
<td>&lt; 22</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>24.92%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>32.38%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>18.08%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 35</td>
<td>11.52%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures show that, in the early days, the OLI student body comprised a very narrow population: for example, more than 80% of the students had A-level or HKCEE qualifications in the first presentation and only 3.3% had qualifications below Secondary 5. Also, about 38% of the students in the first intake were less than 25 years old at the time of enrolment. These figures suggest that many learners in the OLI's first presentation were young adults who had left school for a few years and were unable to enter a university because of limited opportunities. The students now
tend to be older, and the number with degree qualifications has increased significantly. This is partly because there are more postgraduate programmes and, possibly, because more and more degree holders are seeing the need for further study.

As the learners in the early years of the OLI had relatively lower qualifications, its effect on narrowing the learning divide was more significant. This was related to the fact that the degree programmes offered in 1989 were mainly 'general' in nature, rather than 'vocationally oriented'. This has changed gradually in later years because course offerings have become more market-driven. This thesis argues that those courses which have high student numbers (e.g. information technology) are usually more advantageous to the 'learning rich' than the 'learning poor'. Therefore the self-financing policy has affected the potential of the OLI to narrow the learning divide.

5.5 Discussion

The documentary analysis on the establishment of the OLI shows clearly that the motivation for establishing the OLI was predominantly economic (related to some degree to the 'brain drain') and political – rather than a deliberate effort to narrow the learning divide as such. Although both economic/political and social equity motivations can lead to widening participation, the findings in this chapter show that widening participation was not the ultimate aim of the Hong Kong government's policy. Had the government not perceived a risk to social stability and economic competitiveness, the OLI might not have been established. Also, there is a link between the economic motivation of the policy and the learning divide. If the policy
targets the 'learning poor', the learning divide will be narrowed; but if it focuses on
the 'learning rich' (as will be shown in the case of the Continuing Education Fund in
Chapter 7), the learning divide will be further widened. This is the difference between
an economic/political motivation and a social equity motivation for widening
participation.

The Education Commission believed that the financial burden could be relieved by
establishing a consortium model instead of an independent open university. However,
the cooperation among these institutions was limited to participating in working
groups on programme and course development, library facilities for staff use and
examining arrangements under which OLI students could make use of laboratories for
scientific experiments (PCOLI, 1989). Therefore, there was discrepancy between the
implementation of the consortium and its perceived benefits. This resulted, to a
certain extent, in the financial constraints that the OLI faced which in turn led to a
market approach in its operation, which affected its ability to narrow the learning
divide.

The Education Report No. 2 still advocated a more diversified range of courses as is
evident in the following extracts:

We have noted also that social as well as economic need must be considered,
and this is likely to require the broadening of the academic profile of an open
education programme beyond the most obvious areas such as commercial
studies' (Education Commission, 1986, p. 138). "Hong Kong will only
maintain the pace of its economic, educational and social development with
an increasing supply of better qualified citizens' (p. 139). 'Although in a
subsequent recommendation we have called for a thorough analysis of
demand and need, we consider that there is a prima facie case, both social and
economic, for an open education programme ... (p. 139).

Therefore if there had been fewer financial constraints, a more diversified range of
courses would have been provided which would have widened participation.

Also, the government argued strongly for a self-financing and 'users pay' approach,
which had an impact on the types of students who enrolled. In practice, the pressure
of coping with the demand to be self-financing has resulted in the OLI shifting to
some degree towards a modernizer approach: the relatively high tuition fees and the
market-driven course offerings have in effect excluded many who lacked secondary
education, but could not afford the fees or would like to take leisure courses.

To sum up, the Hong Kong government's main motivation in establishing the OLI
was to maintain social and political stability, not to promote social equity (as is
further supported by the interview data discussed in Chapter 6). The OLI was set up
by the Hong Kong government because of its potential economies of scale. Therefore
the government adopted a self-financing policy for the OLI at the expense of the
impact this policy had on development of the institution.
Chapter 6 – Establishing the Open Learning Institute: analysis of interview data

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented a documentary analysis on the background to the establishment of the OLI. In brief, it showed that during the 1980s the Hong Kong government wished to increase the number of degree holders at a low cost and over a short period of time. From these sources, the primary motivation for establishing the OLI in 1989 was found to be political and economic rather than concerned with an intrinsic effort to narrow the learning divide. That is, its policy making was driven mainly by a perceived need to solve the practical problems of potential social instability and reduced economic competitiveness rather than the promotion of equal opportunities for all. This chapter presents a set of interview data in order to supplement the findings from the documentary analysis and explore the issue at a deeper level.

The main conclusions drawn from the interview data are that the OLI was established primarily in an effort to restore the confidence of Hong Kong people and to solve the problem of the ‘brain drain’. Also, as in the documentary analysis the perceived cost-effectiveness of distance learning is found to play an important part in the decision to establish the OLI. The arguments in this chapter are built around the responses to the questions asked during the interviews, and an effort is then made to relate the interview findings to those derived from the documentary analysis.
6.2 Presentation of interview data

The background of the interviewees and the questions asked were discussed in Chapter 4. The interviewees (with the symbols used in the text to denote their contributions), were:

A: Mr Allen Lee Peng Fei, a Non-Government Member of the Executive Council of the Hong Kong Government from 1985 to 1992;

C: Dr Cheng Hon Kwan, the Chair of the Planning Committee of the OLI from 1988 to 1989 and also the Founding Chair of its Council from 1989 to 1992;

D: Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Associate Director (Academic) of the OLI from 1989 to 1991.

L: Ms Lily Chiang, a member of Planning Committee for the OLI from 1988 to 1989.

The main interview questions, as discussed in Chapter 4, were:

- What factors led the government to consider the establishment of the OLI in the 1980s?
• Who were the target learners the government had in mind when it decided to establish the OLI?

• Why did the government want the OLI to be self-financing?

• In your opinion, what factors had led to the agenda of open education in Education Commission in 1986?

• Why did the Education Commission suggest a consortium instead of an independent open university?

• Was the idea of a consortium successful? Why/why not?

• Do you remember any controversial issues/debates in the meeting you attended during the formulation of the policy?

The major findings from the interviews are discussed under the following headings, though there is clearly a degree of overlap among them.

• The reasons for establishing the OLI, and the policy making process;

• The cost-effectiveness of open and distance education;

• The idea of a consortium;

• The self-financing policy and widening participation;
6.3 Reasons for establishing the OLI

In Chapter 5, the documentary sources indicated that the main motivation of the Hong Kong government for establishing the OLI was to maintain social and political stability. This point is strongly reinforced from the interview with Allen Lee. In his interview, Allen Lee placed the founding of the OLI firmly within its historical context, stressing particularly the government's serious concern about the emigration of Hong Kong people, particularly those with higher incomes and educational qualifications.

A: After the signing of the Agreement up to '87, [the Chinese and British governments jointly issued their draft agreement on the return of Hong Kong to the sovereignty of China on 26 September 1984], the Hong Kong government was very worried about the brain drain due to emigration. I remember that we talked about the fact that Hong Kong did not possess natural resources ... we had to depend on human resources. Besides mainstream universities to develop human resources, there is a good and fast way. If we could establish a model like that overseas, this could enable those who had not had the opportunity to study to obtain a degree from the open university.
Allen Lee recalled that much of the consideration of a possible OLI took place during the Governorship of Sir Edward Youde (March 1982 to April 1987), during which the Llewellyn Report (1982) and Education Commission Reports No. 1 (1984) and No. 2 (1986) were published. However, he revealed that discussion took place as early as 1981, long before the actual signing of the Agreement on the future of Hong Kong in 1984.

A: Actually the discussion about the OLI took place a long time ago. ... The main reason was to broaden the scope of education beyond the so-called mainstream universities ... In fact, the worry about the outflow of people due to emigration predated '84. It was within our expectation. ... As you know, those who emigrated were able people ... financially capable and possessing knowledge. ... Therefore, the Hong Kong Government was very worried that this problem would become worse and worse. Sir Edward Youde began to talk about this. I was also a member of the Executive Council of Sir Edward Youde. ... The discussion on the Open Learning Institute was held when Sir Edward Youde was alive, not Wilson [Sir David Wilson, now Lord Wilson of Tillyorn succeeded Sir Edward Youde as Governor of Hong Kong from April 1987 to July 1992].

A: I remember there had been discussion [of this issue] in the Legislative Council in '81.

The Hong Kong government's concern about the brain drain is evident from the frequent discussion of this issue in the Legislative Council – almost once every month.
Allen Lee also indicated that the establishment of the OLI was to restore people's confidence in Hong Kong, particularly those who were not able to emigrate.

A: *At that time, the outflow of people was an agenda item that we discussed almost every month. ... I remember that the Government was very anxious about this. ... We were afraid that people would say: how about us who did not have money to go away. Therefore we tackled the problem by investing in education, and in this way, the University of Science and Technology and the Open Learning Institute were established.*

Building the airport was also a political decision. If there had not been the '89 democratic movement, the airport would not have been built. It was also a problem of confidence. This problem of confidence was even greater after '89, when the outflow of emigrants worsened. We had to restore people's confidence. We did three things, one of which was to strengthen education.

*If there had been no Agreement on the future of Hong Kong and no problem of a brain drain, the whole education system, including whether or not to establish the University of Science and Technology and the Open University, would not have had a momentum arising from political reasons. If they had not been pushed by political reasons, ... it means many things were determined by politics. Therefore politics is very important. The building of the airport was a political decision. ... At that time, everything was pushed by political reasons and then there was a need for policy.*
The above quotations highlight the degree of government anxiety about possible social and political disturbance in Hong Kong: it was their 'expectation' that the outflow of people, which had already started in the early 1980s, would worsen, and it became virtually a monthly agenda item in the Executive Council. 'A good and fast way' had to be found to solve the problem of human resource development in Hong Kong. Lee also noted that the political effort to solve the brain drain and restore people's confidence in Hong Kong's future was not confined to the establishment of the OLI but embraced also the setting up of the University of Science and Technology and the construction of a new airport. All these points support the argument that the decision to establish the OLI was mainly related to the maintenance of the social and political stability of Hong Kong rather than social equity per se.

Allen Lee also restated the government's motives in founding the OLI very explicitly.

A: It was not an educational reason, it was not established because of commitments to society. The reasons for establishing the OLI were all political reasons.

Overall, Allen Lee's reference to 'political reasons' supports the crisis-intervention (Sweeting and Morris, 1993) and non-purposive adaptation (Wong, 1980) perspectives on policy making in Hong Kong discussed in Chapter 3 and reinforces some of the points raised in Chapter 5. The Hong Kong government was facing a crisis due to emigration, and the founding of the OLI was one measure taken to resolve this. It was a matter of averting instability, and was not primarily motivated by the goal of widening participation.
Allen Lee's heavy emphasis on the urgent need to act quickly to resolve the 'emigration problem' was not raised in the other interviews, where different motives for establishing the OLI were expressed. For instance, Cheng Hon Kwan and Lily Chiang argued that the Hong Kong government wished to expand learning opportunities to those adults who had missed out on studying at university, therefore giving them a second chance – a point Lee also made in passing; and Gajaraj Dhanarajan and Cheng Hon Kwan mentioned that this was related to changes in the economy and technology. These different interpretations of the reasons for establishing the OLI and the policy making process can be explained by Colebatch's (1998) perspective on policy making – that there is 'a range of participants in the policy process with a diversity of understandings of situations and problems' (p. 104).

L: I think the government was giving a second chance to those who did not have the opportunity to study in mainstream education.

D: Hong Kong was no longer a place for cheap labour. ... And yet, the knowledge economy will demand people capable of higher skills and higher services. This prompted the government to review its educational policy. The participation rate in higher education had to increase, but it could not increase to meet the demand using conventional means, so they had to look for alternatives. ... the heart of the matter was that they needed to increase participation in education ...and to increase employment opportunities, not only in traditional manufacturing sectors, but in new sectors. ... The Education Commission...came to the decision that they needed to provide learning opportunities for working adults as well – especially those who were
talented and knowledgeable but could not get into the mainstream educational systems because of limitations of space. ... [though] they [the Education Commission] were concerned that open learning may not be ... may not sit comfortable in Hong Kong society.

C: There was also a vision that education should be universal, to give a chance to those who did not have the chance to study in universities. Incidentally distance learning was advocated at that time. My personal feeling is, regardless of whether it is because of finance or personal ability, many people had lost the chance of higher education – adult education should give them the chance later to study in higher education. The second reason is that knowledge and technology are developing rapidly and you have to upgrade yourself.

While all the different motives ascribed by the interviewees doubtless played some part in the government's thinking, it is a matter of prioritizing them – and in this respect, it should be emphasized that Allen Lee's membership of the Executive Council makes him by far the most authoritative source on the government's underlying motivations.

Interestingly, the comments of most of the interviewees also suggested that there were very few, if any, controversial debates in either the Executive Council or the Planning Committee during the formulation of the policy of establishing the OLI. The only concerns expressed there were related to the self-financing policy (which is looked at in more detail later), but even that issue seems to have produced only
limited debate. This is again similar to the findings from the documentary analysis discussed in Chapter 5 — the OLI Bill went through smoothly without much debate. This is because most, if not all, people in the policy making process — namely, the Executive Council, Legislative Council and the Planning Committee — aimed at establishing the OLI within a short period of time and with minimum input of resources, in order to restore people’s confidence. If the primary motivation had been social equity, there would have been much more debate on the issue of the self-financing policy.

C: All of us felt that it was very difficult to be self-financed. But the policy was fixed, we had to follow it.

L: As far as I remember, there were no issues which were very controversial.

A: No! No! There were no controversial issues. I remember that it passed very quickly. Members of the Executive Council, of course, had some questions to ask, but those were trivial questions. The open university was ... to support education. It got through easily. There was little obstacle to the Open Learning Institute.

Also, when asked whether there was a concern about a possible over-supply of graduates during the 1980s, Cheng Hon Kwan said:

C: No, not at that time. At that time, the society lacked the human resources.
Therefore, the ease with which the Bill passed was due to the relatively limited financial outlay involved (compared with establishing a traditional university) and the government’s concern about taking action quickly. In this regard, Lee’s comment on whether or not the government would have taken such an initiative now is very interesting:

A: *I think, ... I think it would not establish the OLI nowadays. We have 8 universities. They would not consider any more. Simply think about Shue Yan [a private post-secondary institution]. Shue Yan applied to become a university. Nobody listened to this for a very long period of time.*

Again, this implies that Allen Lee did not think that the Hong Kong government established the OLI to widen participation, or to increase the learning opportunities for the ‘learning poor’. It was because, even at the time of the interview, higher education opportunities were provided for only about 18% of the relevant age group. Moreover, if the OLI had not been established, adults who had missed the ‘first chance’ of studying in higher education would still not have had much opportunity of a ‘second chance’. So Allen Lee’s responses again suggest that the OLI was established to restore the confidence of Hong Kong people and to solve the ‘brain drain’.

The demand for and supply of graduates at different times seems to have been a major factor when considering the establishment of the OLI. But the paradox is that this involves a mix of two things: the number of degree places provided to school leavers at a particular period of time and the provision of a second chance learning to adults. The learners involved are different. The former should not affect the latter, but
in this case, it seems that it did. For example, if the government thought that enough
degree places were provided to secondary school leavers and therefore the demand
for higher education was satisfied, then there would be no need to establish an
institution to provide a second chance to adult learners; the learning divide would
thus inadvertently have been widened.

The OLI was set up to provide a second chance to adults, but narrowing the learning
divide was an unintentional outcome. The government’s motivation in establishing
the OLI was not concerned essentially with widening participation, or increasing
opportunities for the ‘learning poor’.

6.4 Cost-effectiveness of open and distance education

In Chapter 5, it was concluded that, in endorsing the setting up of the OLI, the Hong
Kong government was influenced by its perceived cost-effectiveness in terms of
economies of scale and the fact that such provision could be launched quickly.
Similarly, the interview data discussed in this section also reveal that, in an effort to
maintain political stability, the government wished to act quickly and cost-effectively;
and increasing the learning opportunities by setting up a self-financing distance
learning institution was perceived to be an effective solution. This is evident in Allen
Lee’s responses:
A: What is the quickest way to enable people to obtain degrees without attending formal universities? In this way, an open university is one of the ways to solve the problem of the emigration trend.

A: No money! No money! If we had money, considerations would have been different. A large sum of money had already been committed to establishing the University of Science and Technology. This model [distance learning] can also be developed in the quickest way. Another reason for not including it [the OLI] in the UPGC was to free it from its control. This was the model we thought of and we would have to see whether using this approach would be popular among Hong Kong people or not. It turned out to be satisfactory.

Allen Lee’s repetition of the words ‘the quickest way’ suggests that this was an important criterion in the government’s decision making. However, he also indicated that there was some uncertainty about whether or not a distance learning institution would be attractive to Hong Kong people – a point illustrated in his response to a question about the target learners the government had in mind:

A: I remember we discussed this generally. But there were no specific target learners. When we considered this issue, we mainly thought of giving a chance to Hong Kong people to obtain degrees. We may say it was a trial, because Hong Kong had no such experience. We had no idea about how many people had to be trained or the kind of courses that people would be interested in. We only felt that it would be regarded as successful if we had more than 10,000 students.
This indicates that the Executive Council did not have a clear plan on the number of students to be enrolled or the type of courses to be offered. It also suggests that the establishment of the OLI was mainly used to solve the emigration problem, with the type of courses to be offered not being of primary importance.

6.5 The idea of a consortium

As noted in Chapter 5, the Education Commission Report No. 1 did not support the establishment of an independent open university because it was not considered to be cost-effective; and the Education Commission Report No. 2 suggested the alternative of a consortium, again because of concern about the financial viability of a single institution. In the interview, Cheng Hon Kwan was asked about his views on the idea of a consortium, in order to explore further the government's proposal and why an independent institution was eventually established. In his response, Cheng Hon Kwan echoed the Hong Kong government's belief that a consortium of tertiary institutions could contribute to the establishment of the OLI, and highlighted the Hong Kong government's concern about the cost-effectiveness of the new institution.

The intention of setting up a consortium failed at least partly due to the competing interests of local institutions. When asked whether he considered the consortium idea had been successful, Cheng Hon Kwan laughed and said that he welcomed such a question\(^1\). He said:

\(^1\) His body language was interpreted by the researcher as showing that he had powerful memories of the consortium issue.
It is very difficult to implement such a consortium. ... Some institutions may think that they can develop this kind of learning in their own institutions. There is a possibility of competition. This is a complicated matter. The effect may not be what they originally thought. I think people in the Education Commission did not realize its complexity. Of course, I am not saying that these people [academics from member institutions of the consortium as members of the working groups when OLI was established] did not contribute to the formation of the OLI. But there was no actual assistance from them. ... The consortium died out eventually.

While Cheng Hon Kwan’s supplemented the above comments with the remark that open education was a new concept to Hong Kong, he considered ‘competition among different institutions’ as a factor in the failure of this model. The contribution of academics from other institutions was confined to advice, and did not involve the provision of resources for OLI students.

Although Cheng Hon Kwan did not say so explicitly, the demise of the consortium model had implications for the proposed self-financing policy for the OLI.

Gajaraj Dhanarajan also elaborated on the failure of the consortium concept, linking it to the very high level of competitiveness among Hong Kong’s academic institutions:

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2 As suggested by the Education Commission Report No. 2, the five institutions which were funded through the UPGC were expected to be core members of the consortium, rather than just giving advice on various committees and developing course materials for the OLI as paid consultants.
There was a Planning Committee ... to look into this matter ... But Hong Kong is very, very competitive. ... Within the Planning Committee itself, there were uncertainties about how such a consortium would work and the OLI could be a lame duck in such an environment, you know, without the ability to clearly design and define its curriculum, its assessment and delivery methods, and also to manage its governance and finance. The outcomes of this discussion finally ended with none of the potential participants in the consortium agreeing to a common plan, for everyone protected its own interests, which led the Planning Committee to say that the consortium would not work ... and this was related to Professor Don Swift who clearly saw the dangers of a consortium and encouraged the Planning Committee to think in terms of an autonomous institution.

6.6 The self-financing policy and the widening of participation

The self-financing policy had an impact on the size and nature of the student body. As Lily Chiang's response below indicates, enrolment was a major concern when deciding on the 'practical' courses to be offered, though she argued that the priority of the OLI should be to provide quality education, not to break even financially.

L: The only thing [discussed in the Planning Committee] I remember is whether OLI can break even. We thought OLI could break even in the medium to long term. ... The government thought that breaking even could be achieved. We did not object. But this should not be the priority. The main aim should be to
provide good education, teach practical things. Then if it really needs a little subsidy, the government should support it. I remember we spent relatively more time [on this issue]. Also, what kinds of courses should be offered first? I remember at that time, say, history, but how many people would want to study history?

Also, Cheng Hon Kwan made it clear that the OLI self-financing policy was a result of adopting commercial principles in its planning and management.

C: The impact was very great. It was very difficult for us. We had to control the budget very tightly. At that time, I felt that it was like running a shop. You cannot sell everything in a shop, that is, if everything can be studied, in this way, you cannot maintain the budget. If there are too many courses, then students enrolled will be spread, not focused. I preferred to have a shop selling a few things at the beginning. This was a matter of financial arrangement. Therefore this was something that could not be done by skills and knowledge, but a business mind.

Cheng Hon Kwan’s analogy of running a shop and Lily Chiang’s stress on student numbers obviously have implications for the nature of the student body since, as discussed in earlier chapters, course offerings which are market-driven have a negative impact on the widening of participation. Cheng and Chiang expanded on their points, as follows:

C: The self-financing policy made us use commercial principles to run the OLI.
The overall development has to be more careful. This may not be a bad thing because you have to look into how many people enrol in each course. You cannot offer a course with only 3 to 5 people enrolled in it, right? ... I think this did not have a major impact. ... We [the members of the Planning Committee] agreed with this policy [of self-financing].

When interviewees were asked more explicitly about the main factors to be taken into account in deciding on the programmes the OLI should offer, it was clear that market considerations were central.

The market was always a consideration because OLI was meant to be self-financed. ... We were dealing with adult learners and therefore, clearly had to be sensitive to market needs. [The programmes] had to be relevant to life-skills, life-needs rather than academic pursuits. ... But I wouldn't say the market totally dictated what we decided. ... The other thing ... was that, because it had to cost-recover, it created some barriers for many people – those students who could not afford the fees. And yet it was an Open Learning Institute which had to remove most, if not all, barriers. We were restricted in that.

We had to move fairly quickly from planning to delivering and there was very little experience in Hong Kong on instructional materials and delivering and supporting them. So we were dictated by what was available in the global market.
Again, the comments made by Gajaraj Dhanarajan clearly show that decisions on course presentation were market-driven, and that there were barriers to those who could not afford to pay the fees. If the course presentation is market-driven, this disadvantages the 'learning poor' as courses which have high enrolments are usually related to career advancement, and are more suited to those who already have some qualifications and working experience in the field.

As argued in Chapter 3, the different values people attach to lifelong learning, such as what constitute social and individual benefits and who are deserving and non-deserving learners, affect widening participation. The Hong Kong policy makers' perceptions of these notions were related to the self-financing policy. This is evident in Cheng Hon Kwan's comments below in which he elaborates on the importance of commercial principles, and suggests that the OLI had to offer courses that were 'needed in the society':

C: *We have to look at the needs in the society — that is, what is lacking in the society. We looked in this way, not from the perspective of personal interest. There are so many different kinds of interest. No, don't look at it in that way. You cannot survive with only one to two students, right? We looked at the courses which are practical, needed by society, and studied by many students. ... Under the self-financing principle, we had to be very careful and look at commercial principles. ... If OLI was not under a self-financing policy, we would offer all kinds of courses. But I don't think this is a main aim of*
adult education. We should look at what kind of courses are needed in the society.

This comment is interesting, as it reflects a particular perspective on the benefits of adult learning. It appears that, in Cheng Hon Kwan's view, the main aim of adult education is to provide courses which the society needs, not courses for personal interest, and this should be determined by the market. While he commented that if the OLI was not operating under a self-financing policy, all kinds of courses would be offered, he did not view this as the aim of adult education. These statements carry a mixed message. While he asserted that adult education should only provide courses which have high enrolments – and so attached more importance to learning which brings about 'social benefits', rather than 'individual benefits' – this may have been influenced to some degree by the predefined self-financing policy for OLI.

Cheng Hon Kwan also appears to believe that people's motivation to learn is related mainly to career advancement; and, as noted earlier, Lily Chiang also stressed that the OLI should offer 'practical' courses. In a self-financing regime this will inevitably lead to the offering of more vocationally-oriented courses. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the OLI initially offered courses of a more 'general' nature but there has been a gradual shift to the provision of an increased number of courses of a more vocational kind. This affects participation as the courses are targeted at a narrower group of learners who are already relatively 'learning rich'.

Cheng Hon Kwan considered that, if the courses studied are beneficial to society, either directly or indirectly, the students should be given some subsidy. In this way,
he was relating the giving of resources to learners to the social benefits of learning. Although he did not explicitly link social benefits to individual economic benefits, his reference to courses that are ‘useful to their careers’ suggests that this is the case. Again, this view affects participation.

C: *We should subsidize* [the learners] *if the courses studied by the students are useful to their careers.* ... *If the courses studied are beneficial to the society either directly or indirectly, there is no harm in helping them.*

### 6.7 Conclusion

Although not all the issues raised were dealt with in detail by all interviewees, the following conclusions are drawn from the analysis of their responses as discussed above:

- The perceived cost-effectiveness of distance learning, and the fact that a distance learning system could be set up relatively quickly, played an important part in the decision to establish the OLI.

- The intention of setting up a consortium failed at least in part due to the competing interests of local academics/institutions.
• The self-financing policy was a relatively uncontroversial issue, although it was recognized that this could result in the exclusion of some people because of the necessary high fee levels.

• Overall, priority was given to learning that brings about social benefits over learning that brings about individual benefits.

• The setting up of the OLI by the Hong Kong government was more related to considerations of political stability and economic prosperity than educational reasons.

As indicated in each section of this chapter, the conclusions listed above are related to each other. For example, in its effort to maintain political stability, the Hong Kong government wished to expand learning opportunities in higher education quickly and cost-effectively; and doing so through a self-financing distance learning institution was perceived to be the best solution. Also, the intention of setting up the OLI as a consortium was also related to the issue of cost-effectiveness.

In general, the interviews reinforced many of the findings from the documentary analysis, for instance on the early consideration of the establishment of an open learning institution, and the government’s desire to expand educational opportunities quickly and cost-effectively at a time when they were very limited at the tertiary level. It also provided stronger evidence of the fact that the need to ensure political stability because of the ‘brain drain’ was a central concern in the government’s decision to establish the OLI.
Chapter 7 – The Continuing Education Fund

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the second case study – the government’s setting up of the CEF in 2002. It reports on the research findings through documentary analysis and interviews that contribute to understanding the aims behind its establishment.

The number of part-time and distance learning students in tertiary education in Hong Kong grew very significantly in the decade 1991–2001 from 36,353 to 126,630. The percentage of the population aged 15 or over with tertiary education increased from 11.2% in 1991 to 15.2% in 1996 and 16.4% in 2001. Although there was a decrease between 1991 and 2001 in the percentage aged 15 or above with education at lower secondary level or below (57.1% in 1991, 51% in 1996 and 47.8% in 2001: Census and Statistics Department 2002, p. 104), the 2001 percentage remained high. To what extent is this section of the population being catered for by the lifelong learning policies of the Hong Kong government, such as the CEF? Analysing the goals in setting up the CEF will contribute to our understanding of the government’s views on the purposes of lifelong learning and the priority it assigns to expanding/widening adult participation in learning.

The findings in this chapter show that the Hong Kong government considered that public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to the society. It also indicates that both the government and most providers focused on the ‘learning rich’, and so widened the learning divide.
7.2 The Continuing Education Fund: an outline

As noted earlier in Chapter 2, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong announced in his 2001 Policy Address that $5 billion would be set aside to promote continuing education. The CEF was launched in June 2002, with the objective of ‘providing subsidies to people to pursue continuing education so as to prepare Hong Kong’s workforce for the knowledge-based economy’ (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002a). Learners were to be reimbursed up to 80% of the fees or HK$10,000, whichever is lower, for successful completion of courses. However, eligibility to apply for this fee subsidy was limited to study in specific areas tightly defined by the government, and was initially confined to Hong Kong residents aged 18 to 60 who did not have a university degree.

The following areas were originally identified as eligible for funding:

*Industry-specific sectors:*

- Logistics
- Financial services
- China business
- Tourism

*Generic skills:*

- Language
- Design, and
• Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002a).

Subsequent to its launch, several changes were introduced, partly in response to pressure arising from criticisms of the criteria. For example, the eligibility to apply for the CEF was relaxed to include degree holders from September 2003. Also, in January 2004, the coverage of the Fund was extended to include several additional sectors, viz.

• The Government decided to introduce a new sector ‘Creative industries’ to cover courses in advertising, digital entertainment, films, television and video.

• The existing ‘China business’ sector was also expanded and renamed ‘Business Services’ to include business management training under the Fund.

• In the skill domain ‘Languages’, French, German and Japanese were added to the original list of English, Putonghua and written Chinese.

In both the 2002 and 2004 documents, the government adhered consistently to a modernizer perspective on lifelong learning, e.g.

In making the decision, we [the government] adhered to the principle that the Fund should be used to subsidize training which would be conducive to the economic development of Hong Kong and as such, only courses from economic sectors with high growth potential and manpower requirement or
skill domains where our workforce may be deficient are to be covered under the CEF (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2004).

7.3 Documentary analysis

The documents studied included the prospectuses of providers, official documents, press cuttings and some internal OUHK documents, which were analysed in the context of the developments that took place during the period from 2002 to 2004. The findings are categorized under the following two headings:

- The number of applications;

- Pressure for change in the criteria, and the extension of coverage.

The number of applications

Data on the number of applications for the CEF since its launch in 2002 were gathered through various channels: official papers in the Legislative Council, Manpower Panel Papers in websites, press releases from the Information Services Department, Market Watch (an internal OUHK document) and press reports. The application numbers are given in Table 7.1. During the first quarter of 2003, there were only around 25,000 applications for the CEF, which represents only 5% of the
expected beneficiaries (500,000). However, as the table shows, from September 2003 (when graduates were first allowed to apply) to February 2004, the number of applications rose from 41,050 to 81,648 in six months. Clearly, the application rate increased very significantly in 2004 after the eligibility criteria were relaxed (as discussed in more detail below).

Table 7.1 Number of applications for the CEF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of applications (accumulated figures)</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As at 30 June 2002</td>
<td>900</td>
<td><em>Market Watch, June 2002</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As at 18 October 2002</td>
<td>13,384</td>
<td><em>Market Watch, October 2002</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As at 7 March 2003</td>
<td>25,347</td>
<td>Information Services Department, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As at 5 May 2003</td>
<td>29,820</td>
<td><em>Market Watch, April 2003</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As at 28 August 2003</td>
<td>41,050</td>
<td><em>Market Watch, August 2003</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As at 29 February 2004</td>
<td>81,648</td>
<td>Information Services Department, 2004a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pressure for change in the criteria, and the extension of coverage

After its first announcement in 2002, the range of views received from the public on the application criteria for the CEF can be categorized into three main areas, though some overlap is inevitable: extension of eligibility for the CEF to graduates and to those aged over 60, and a less restrictive definition of the courses eligible for subsidy.

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1 With the commitment of $5 billion for the Fund and a maximum subsidy of $10,000 per person, it is estimated that at least 500,000 people could benefit.
1 Extending the eligibility for the CEF to graduates

One of the key views expressed by individuals and the Focus Groups set up to advise the government on the competencies required by employers in the individual sectors was that 'degree holders should be eligible to apply' (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002b, p. 4).

In response, the government stated that:

> However, on the issue of excluding degree holders from application for the Fund, we have come to the conclusion that, bearing in mind resource constraints, priority should continue to be given to those who have not received the privilege of a university education and may be less adaptable in the new knowledge-based economy. We shall review the scheme, including the eligibility criteria, in one year (op cit, p. 5)

Although the government statement above seems to prioritize the 'learning poor' in allocating the Fund, the proposed review of the eligibility criteria after one year suggests that the government was not immovable on this point.

As reported in *The Standard* newspaper, a survey conducted by *New Youth* revealed that more than 60 per cent of 471 respondents aged between 18 and 35 did not agree with the government's move to allow only those without a university degree to apply for the Continuing Education Fund (Zee, 2002).
However, when answering a Legislative Council question on 19 March 2003 (LCQ15), the Secretary for Education and Manpower said:

As at 7 March 2003, a total of 25,347 applications have been received. ... A total of 83 requests for allowing degree holders to apply for the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) have been received so far. ... The primary objective of the CEF is to help Hong Kong's workforce prepare for the knowledge-based economy (Information Services Department, 2003).

Clearly the CEF's objective to help Hong Kong's workforce prepare for the knowledge-based economy represents a modernizer's view, aimed essentially at increasing but not widening participation – though, as argued in Chapter 3, if it targets the learning poor, even a modernizer perspective can narrow the learning divide. However, as shown later in this chapter, the outcome was that the 'learning rich' benefited from the Fund more than the 'learning poor'.

The Secretary went on to say:

When considering how to make the best use of the Fund, we believe that those who have not benefited from university education would be less adaptable to the new knowledge-based economy needed and thus have the greatest need for assistance. The existing eligibility criteria were laid down with this consideration in mind. We have no plan to relax at this stage (Information Services Department, 2003).
Yet, the extension of the criteria to include graduates was announced only four months later (17 July) (Cheung, 2002a). This shows that the government was more concerned about the utilization rate and possible relaxation of the criteria should the take-up be less than predicted, which again indicates that it was not basically concerned about the learning divide.

As shown in Table 7.1, this amendment to the criteria clearly increased the application rate very substantially. Although the Hong Kong government stated that they 'have no statistical information on the number of degree holders applying for subsidy and the corresponding amount of reimbursement granted' (Information Services Department, 2003), it seems very likely that the inclusion of graduates was a major factor in the upsurge in demand. This change had the effect of hampering the reduction in the learning divide.

2 Extending the eligibility to those aged over 60

Tik Chi-yuen, executive director of the Hong Kong Society for the Aged, the largest group for the elderly in Hong Kong, urged the Secretary of Education and Manpower to extend eligibility to those aged over 60. According to Tik, there were more than 600,000 people over 60 years old who had educational attainment above secondary education, and many of them were interested in continuing education; and he argued that the over-60s still have the potential to contribute to the economic development of Hong Kong. However, in response, a spokesperson for the EMB stressed that, though
the Fund was aimed at promoting lifelong learning, it targeted the working population (Cheung, 2002b).

On 24 March 2004, a legislator, Tam Yiu Chung asked the Hong Kong government whether it would abolish the upper age limit for CEF applicants and, if not, why not (LCQ19). This question was repeated on 10 November 2004 by another legislator, Ma Lik (LCQ18). On both occasions, the Secretary for Education and Manpower gave the same response:

CEF is introduced to assist our workforce to be better prepared for the change in manpower requirements during our transition to a knowledge-based economy. ... In view of the objective of CEF, we have no plan to change the age limit (Information Services Department, 2004a; 2004b).

This answer implies that, since those over 60 are not in the workforce, they are not ‘deserving learners’. From the government’s perspective, only those who have the potential to contribute to Hong Kong’s economy merit financial support – a clear illustration of a modernizer emphasis on increasing but not widening participation.

3 Extending the coverage of the CEF

The views the government received from the public included the suggestion that:
the Fund should be ‘extended to cover all courses that directly or indirectly benefit personal development and should not be restricted to specific economic sectors’ (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002b, p. 4).

The proposal to expand the list of reimbursable courses to include those directly or indirectly benefiting personal development highlights the ‘individual benefits’ (as against the ‘social benefits’) of lifelong learning. However, the government responded to these views by simply introducing ‘generic courses in change management, problem solving and team building’ (op cit, p. 5), all of which were also vocationally-related – an issue which is raised in the interviews reported later in this chapter. Once again, this shows that, in the government’s view, public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to the society – which, as shown later in this chapter, will be more advantageous to the ‘learning rich’ than the ‘learning poor’.

As mentioned earlier, in a further response to the request to extend the coverage of the CEF, an announcement was made on 18 January 2004 about: the inclusion of a new sector ‘Creative Industries’; the renaming of the ‘China Business’ sector as the ‘Business Services’ sector; and the addition of French, German and Japanese in the ‘Language’ domain. However, again, these changes relate to other vocational sectors, not to areas of personal interest or development, and so still represent a modernizer viewpoint, with enhancement of the economy as the prime consideration. This is evident from following principles on the use of the Fund which the government reiterated:
In making the decision, we adhered to the principle that the Fund should be used to subsidize training which could be conducive to the economic development of Hong Kong ... We have studied the survey results of 'Manpower Projection 2007' and two other related surveys, namely 'Household Survey on Employment Concerns and Training Needs' and 'Establishment Survey on Manpower Training and Job Skill Requirements' and have come to the conclusion that the proposed coverage of the CEF should have addressed the main economic sectors with high growth potential and manpower requirement or skill domains where our workforce may be deficient (Information Services Department, 2004c).

Overall, the government's response to the views of the public on the CEF reveals that it attached more value to social benefits than individual benefits. It is obvious that the extensions made to the CEF's coverage still represent a modernizer viewpoint, with enhancing the economy, not widening participation and social equity, as the primary consideration.

Increase in the number of courses reimbursable from the CEF

The existence of the Fund clearly influenced the provision of courses. For example, evidence of the increase in the number of courses reimbursable from the CEF include the following. Among the 309 courses offered by the School of Professional Education and Executive Development (SPEED) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in the period January to June 2003, 182 were classified as eligible under
the CEF scheme (*Ming Pao*, 23 January 2003). Also, in the Open University of Hong Kong, there were 60 courses eligible for CEF reimbursement in April 2002 but the figure increased to 289 by November 2004 (Source: internal information, OUHK). A similar reaction can be seen in the offerings of the School of Continuing Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which welcomed the government's decision to extend the eligibility criteria to graduates, and in its 2004 prospectus stated:

Effective from 1 September 2003, the HKSAR Government has relaxed the rules governing those eligible to apply for the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) to include degree holders. The decision affirms the Government's commitment to promoting continuing education and life-long learning ... For SCS, this also presents some exciting opportunities. The School now offers over 50 programmes listed as CEF reimbursable courses. In the near future, we will introduce more programmes in accordance with the sector-specific competencies of CEF and the needs of our students so that more people can benefit from the CEF scheme (CUHK, 2004, p. ii).

Also its 2005 prospectus noted that it had 'successfully applied for an additional 120 plus courses to be eligible for CEF reimbursement' (CUHK, 2005, p. 3).

Similarly, in 31 May 2002, the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Hong Kong offered 35 programmes and 297 courses/modules listed as reimbursable courses for the CEF (Source: HKU, *SPACE News*, Summer 2002). However, by August 2004, this figure had increased very substantially to 222
programmes and 1,185 courses/modules reimbursable under the CEF (Source: CEF Booklet, HKU SPACE, August 2004).

The adult education providers obviously saw the CEF as a way of increasing enrolments (an issue which is elaborated in the interviews reported below). However, it should be stressed that the courses provided favoured the 'learning rich' and made no contribution to reducing the learning divide.

7.4 Interview questions and interviewees

The following people\(^2\) were interviewed between April and June 2003, at a time when the CEF eligibility criteria had not yet been changed:

- Dr Kwong Tsz Man, Assistant Professor, School of Professional and Continuing Education, the University of Hong Kong

- Dr Andrew Ma, Coordinator, Adult and Higher Education Services, Caritas–Hong Kong

- Mr Au Tik Kwan, Principal, YMCA of Hong Kong College of Careers

- Professor Lui Yu Hon, Director of LiPACE, the Open University of Hong Kong

\(^2\) The reason for including the providers is given in Chapter 4.
• Mr Au Kam Hung, Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, Education and Manpower Bureau, Hong Kong Government

• Dr Victor Lee, Director, School of Continuing Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

The responses made by the interviewees are denoted by the following symbols:

K: Kwong Tsz Man
M: Andrew Ma
T: Au Tik Kwan
L: Lui Yu Hon
A: Au Kam Hung
V: Victor Lee

The main issues raised are repeated here for ease of reference:

• Why do you think the CEF was started?

• Do you agree with the general principles of the CEF? Why/why not?

• If you had been asked to design the CEF, would you have organized it differently? If so, how?
- Did you submit any comments to the EMB regarding the establishment of the CEF? What were your views? Were they accepted? Do you know why/why not?

- Do you think other learners (besides the current target groups) should be subsidized as well?

- Do you think that other areas (besides the current seven) should also be considered by the Fund? If so, which areas? Why?

- Do you think it is right to exclude those who already possess a degree qualification?

- How does the CEF affect the courses offered by your institution? (e.g. What is the percentage of courses offered by you which are entitled to CEF support? Do you anticipate an increase in this category of courses provided by your institution in the coming years?)

In the interview with Mr K. H. Au, Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, Education and Manpower Bureau, the following questions were raised:

- Why did the government introduce the $5 billion CEF?

- Why did the government restrict the target group for the CEF to those without a degree?
Why did the government restrict the courses to seven areas?

Why did the government directly subsidize the adult learners instead of the providers?

The interview data were divided into the following three categories for analysis:

- The government’s views on the purposes of setting up the CEF;

- The providers’ views on the purposes of setting up the CEF;

- The providers’ comments on the CEF.

7.5 The government’s view on the purposes of setting up the CEF

The interview data obtained from Au Kam Hung show that the government considered that public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to the society. At the start of the interview, Au Kam Hung stressed that the setting up the Fund was related to the government’s intention to increase the competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong in a knowledge economy and that the qualifications of the local workforce were inadequate at a time of rapid change in society. This reinforced the government’s formal views cited earlier (EMB 2002,
A: We are moving towards a knowledge-based economy society. The demand for manpower is high. ... Probably about 40 per cent of our population have qualifications of Form three or below. The establishment of the Continuing Education Fund is to help to increase the competitiveness of our manpower.

Au Kam Hung's claim that about 40% of our population have qualifications of Form 3 or below is consistent with the data presented in the 2001 Population Census Main Report. His comments, such as the above, may suggest that the government wished to make a significant contribution to narrow the learning divide. However, the CEF was not designed to upgrade the education level of the Hong Kong population in general, as the subsidy was only given for studying courses in a limited number of sectors. Therefore, there is no direct relationship between the fact that 40% of the Hong Kong population possess qualifications of Form 3 or below and the CEF's aim to increase the competitiveness of manpower in Hong Kong. In other words, the CEF was not directed at narrowing the learning divide.

Moreover, the interviews highlighted two reasons why the government (initially) limited applicants for the CEF to those without a degree qualification.

- First, it was expected those with higher qualifications would be more willing to study and, therefore, did not need the incentive of a subsidy.
Second, those with a degree had already been subsidized by the government when they studied in a local university and, therefore, the government did not wish to subsidize them a second time.

Au supported these claims:

A: Resources are not unlimited. We have to prioritize. The priority should be given to those not having a degree qualification. Those with higher qualifications are more inclined to study in continuing education. If we did not impose some restrictions, the five billion would be used up in a very short period of time.

A: From the angle of spending public resources, the vast majority of local university graduates have already obtained much subsidy from the taxpayers. Now the Continuing Education Fund can be used to help those who in the past did not enjoy this kind of subsidy.

The last point does not, of course, explain the exclusion of those who had gained a degree overseas, but it does suggest the government had a strong belief in the motivational effect of financial incentives on the 'learning poor'.

The type of learning focused on by the Fund was that which supported the economic growth of Hong Kong; and the process of identification of the seven areas in the CEF was tied to human resource development to cope with these economic changes. In his response, Au emphasized that the society in general agrees that those chosen sectors
have potential to boost the economy of Hong Kong – which implies that the society agrees with the government’s decision to use the CEF to bring economic benefits. Au Kam Hung explained that:

A: *There was a Government Commission on Strategic Development which published a report. Basically, it identified the so-called strategic sectors by examining the future direction of Hong Kong, that is, those sectors that had the potential to develop. Society in general may also agree that these are sectors that have development potential. We have four economic sectors, that is, financial services, China business, tourism and logistics.*

He also acknowledged that not only these prescribed industries, but also the ‘generic’ sectors in the CEF list, were work-related.

A: *Language is a very important skill in the workplace. A second important one is design, which is useful in many professions. ... Interpersonal skills is also one of the generic sectors. This sector ... emerged after we had consulted many employers, associations etc, who told us that their employees do not lack professional knowledge, or IT skills. Therefore eventually we did not have an IT sector. They lack a relatively soft skill – interpersonal skills. This is the weakest area among Hong Kong employees. Therefore we added training in this area to those eligible for funding through the Continuing Education Fund. Actually the seven sectors were identified in this way.*
Au Kam Hung also explained why the CEF could not be used for learning activities for personal interest, only if the learning was linked to a relevant occupation, which again shows that the government considered that public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to the society:

A: If learning ... is for personal interest, the government does not have a role to play. But if it is for entering a profession, the government is already providing such training.

The following interview data illustrate the fact that the government was more concerned about the utilization rate than narrowing the learning divide in the initial criteria for application to the Fund. The original decision to exclude graduates arose from concern that the money would be used up in a much shorter period of time by graduates who were keen to learn.

A: According to a survey done by SPACE [School of Professional and Continuing Education] of the University of Hong Kong, the amount of money involved in continuing education was $14 billion. Our $5 billion CE fund is only one-third. If the criteria of application are too loose, it will be used up immediately. ... Those who have higher qualifications will be more inclined to study.

These reasons for limiting the Fund to non-graduates, though different in nature, on the surface are clearly related to social equity and helping to narrow the learning

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3 Au Kam Hung stressed the words 'used up immediately' during the interview.
divide. However, the subsequent extension of the criteria to degree-holders was clearly inconsistent with the government's earlier argument. This suggests, in line with the conclusions of the documentary analysis reported earlier in this chapter, that the primary concern was the anticipated demands on the Fund, not benefiting people with lower qualifications.

7.6 Providers' views on the purposes of setting up the CEF

The providers' view on the purposes of the CEF paralleled their perspectives on the phenomenon of the learning divide. Dr Andrew Ma of Caritas-Hong Kong was more concerned about those whose qualifications were low, and argued that the government should use the Fund to help such people. Interviewees representing other providers, however, believed that the Fund should boost the Hong Kong economy and not concern itself with those with lower qualifications. For example, Victor Lee of the Chinese University supported the government's policy that learning activities such as flower arrangement should not be subsidized.

When the interviewees were asked the question 'Why do you think the CEF was started?', they gave varied responses. Andrew Ma believed that the resources allocated to universities would be beyond the reach of many people in society. Ma argued that the Fund should help the 'learning poor'.

M:  There are not many people in Hong Kong who have received post-secondary education. The educational level of our population is low ... Why did the
government not put the money into universities? Because if you put money into universities, many people would not get access to it. The gap will be widened.

In response to the same question, Au Tik Kwan simply said that 'It [the government] encouraged lifelong learning', while Victor Lee mentioned that the demand for continuing education was high and the government’s policy of providing a subsidy to learners could provide incentives to them.

V: In the past, the chance of having tertiary or university education was small. ... The demand for continuing education is high. ... Now the Government is doing something in this area. If the Government does not subsidize continuing education, it means that there will be no incentives or motivation. Now there is a CEF, it means an indirect subsidy.

However, Kwong Tsz Man did not regard the CEF as an education fund, arguing that the policy was related more to economics than education.

K: It is not an education fund. It is a sector fund. It gives support to the sectors. Therefore it is an economic policy more than an education policy.

This interpretation reflects the government's stated objectives for the Fund. Lui Yu Hon said specifically that the Fund was set up because of government concern about the Hong Kong economy.
L: The government thinks that Hong Kong is transforming into a knowledge economy. There are many people in Hong Kong who cannot cope with this societal change. Therefore the government was concerned about this and wished to upgrade the skills of these people, so that they contribute to the development of those sectors in the future economic development of Hong Kong, as well as improve their own employment situations, ... because ... the employment problems of these people are a burden on the government, directly or indirectly.

Some of Lui Yu Hon's comments may suggest a 'caring' government which wanted to help the less skilled to cope with change. However, he noted also that such workers were 'a burden' to the government. This argument, and the later inclusion of graduates as eligible for support, suggest strongly that the primary government concern was with the economy and employment; any impact on equity was an unintended by-product.

7.7 Providers' comments on the CEF

With the exception of Dr Ma from Caritas, the providers generally considered graduates more keen to participate in lifelong learning than those without a degree. They felt that the government should subsidize the well-qualified, instead of supporting those with lower qualifications.
Lui Yu Hon said explicitly that those who have a degree — the 'learning rich' — are more eager to learn than those without one. He also believed that, because of this, those with a degree can boost the economy. Obviously he is focusing on the 'learning rich'. Where he disagrees with the government is, therefore, on the restriction of the CEF to non-graduates:

L: The CE Fund is restricted so that only those who do not have a degree can apply. If the government wished to boost the economy, actually those with a degree are more eager to study. Those without a degree are not so keen on studying.

The following response from Lui Yu Hon again shows his belief that the 'learning rich' are more eager to study for learning sake, unlike the 'learning poor' who are motivated by the money offered. It is obvious that he placed much more value on subsidizing the already well qualified.

L: If you look at the market for continuing education, many people who study are those who already have a degree, then they study for a Master's degree or professional training. ... But if you look at lower levels such as the retraining offered by the Employment Retraining Board, then you have to give money in order to attract them. They come for money, not for learning. Therefore, there is a big difference between their levels of self-motivation.

Lui Yu Hon remarked that the government, in fact, also believed that the better qualified are more eager to learn but followed this with somewhat conflicting
statements about the value of supporting those in the lower strata of society and those at the top.

L: *I indirectly heard that the government believed that those who have a degree are more motivated to learn and these people have higher incomes. Therefore the government wished to upgrade those who are in the lower strata of the society so that these people will not become a burden in the future. ... If your aim is to increase economic competitiveness as a whole, of course, these people are important. But I think those at the top should be upgraded instead.*

While recognizing the value of subsidizing the 'learning poor' to increase overall economic competitiveness, he nevertheless believes that the CEF should focus on supporting the 'learning rich'.

L: *The transformation of the Hong Kong economy depends on people having higher education. Therefore those with a degree should also be considered for the subsidy.*

Kwong Tsz Man also argued for subsidizing those with degrees as those without them do not have the 'necessary background of a profession' (i.e. some qualifications and working experience in the field). He felt that the CEF should serve the industry sectors and that only those already working in the prescribed sectors could achieve the aim of the policy – to boost the economy of Hong Kong. As argued in earlier chapters, such a vocational emphasis in lifelong learning policy is more advantageous to the 'learning rich' than the 'learning poor'.
K: We should also subsidize those with a degree. The current policy which does not subsidize degree-holders argues that they had already been subsidized once by the government. This is foolish. It is an industry-sector fund, not an educational fund. These are two different things. Those without a degree do not have the background of a profession. The focus and target of the CEF is to support the development of the relevant industries.

K: Therefore the first requirement is that the persons should be already working in the professions. ... Subsidy should also be given to degree holders, but the first thing is that they have to be already working in the field.

Although Andrew Ma underlined the complexity of drawing a distinction between the 'learning rich' and 'learning poor', and hence identifying the groups which deserve priority in receiving government subsidies, he was also the only interviewee who expressed concern for the 'learning poor' and disagreed with the suggestion that the CEF should be opened to degree holders. He also suggested that since the areas eligible for subsidy under the CEF were so limited, the Fund could not narrow the learning divide. He argued:

M: The principle is to let those with lower qualifications get the resources. I agree with this. But if we are only concerned with those with low qualifications, then should we give resources only to those who have primary school qualifications? I am not suggesting this extreme. We are now talking only about people without a degree. They may have post-secondary or Form 7 qualifications.
I disagree with the suggestion that the application for CEF should be opened also to graduates. They should come under the users-pay principle. There are still many people with very low qualifications.

It is difficult to draw a line to separate people who deserve a subsidy from people who do not. Whether a degree qualification can be used to make this a distinction requires more research. However, I do think there needs to be a dividing line, unless we have as much money as those welfare societies such as the Scandinavian countries. If we have to identify a dividing line, I think degree qualification is a reasonable one. ... I am not saying that we should follow an absolute equality philosophy. But given the historical background of Hong Kong, the distribution of educational attainment is very unreasonable.

The present policy cannot narrow the gap between the learning rich and the learning poor because the industries are fixed. You can only study those areas. ... the CEF cannot narrow the gap of the learning divide.

However, in contrast to Andrew Ma’s concern for the 'learning poor', Victor Lee argued strongly that those with a degree should be eligible for the subsidy. He also mentioned explicitly his belief that the economy of Hong Kong depends on those who already have higher education:

V: I ... object [to the idea] that only those without a degree can get the subsidy.
In fact, even many people with a degree still have to learn, or have to change their careers. ... I do not think a distinction should be made between
graduates and non-graduates. Actually, ...the economy of Hong Kong depends on those with higher education. ... Therefore I think giving subsidies to these people is important.

In later email correspondence with the researcher, Lee indicated that, in the meeting on the CEF at the Education and Manpower Bureau, he had argued for opening applications to graduates, but that the government rejected this idea immediately at the meeting. This again suggests the government’s change of heart on this issue resulted from the low application rate, rather than any fundamental rethinking of policy.

In the context of the CEF, all learners are adult, part-time students seeking vocational training and career updating. Robertson (1996) would regard them as ‘undeserving’ learners. Among the interviewees, the Heads of the continuing education units of the Chinese University and the Open University thought graduates more deserving learners than non-graduates because they bring higher added value to the labour market. Providers, of course, have a vested interest in this argument — the extension of application criteria to graduates means an increased enrolment in their courses.

Only Dr Andrew Ma expressed concern about the learning divide, arguing that resources should be directed to those with least qualifications, and that excluding degree holders was reasonable. Even he, however, admitted that it is difficult to draw a clear line between the deserving and undeserving.
Caritas submitted a paper on the Fund to the government in 2002, arguing strongly for the need to narrow the learning divide in Hong Kong:

In Hong Kong, a great number of people are under-represented in most forms of learning. People with low levels of initial education and training, and therefore in most need of upgrading their knowledge and skill base, participate least in continuing education and training. We need to consider giving educationally disadvantaged members of society priority so that they are not further marginalized as the knowledge society takes hold. Therefore, we would like to suggest that equalizing public investment, as far as possible, in promoting learning, irrespective of form, mode or level, should be accorded deeper thought (Ma, 2002, p. 1).

The following interview data reveal how the interviewees conceptualize the stakeholders in the policy making process. The seven priority areas were identified before consultation with the providers. According to Au Kam Hung, the lack of prior consultation with providers arose from their having a conflict of interest. However, the response from Au Kam Hung shows that the government did consult representative of employers in financial services, bankers, academics in economics, etc., which indicates that it gave a higher priority to the views of people in the business area. This was also evident from the response of Lui Yu Hon who commented that the government's thinking was dominated by the 'the people' (by which he seems to have meant business people) in the chosen sectors:
A: Besides employees, we also asked academics in economics for opinions — areas that money should be put into. ... Then, we asked, for example, some representatives of employers in financial services, or some bankers, to work out together the details on how to satisfy the needs in that sector. We also asked the Legislative Council for opinions. Actually we consulted many different parties. ... We did not consult the Continuing Education departments of universities because they have a conflict of interest.

L: The seven areas were already identified before consultation with providers. The government's thinking was dominated by the people in the sectors. In fact, it was very risky for the government to determine which sectors should be eligible for subsidy. For example, if logistics is eventually found to be unsuccessful, it will become meaningless for people to study these courses.

Another issue explored was the impact of the CEF on the providers, which again revealed a diversity of opinions. For example, Victor Lee said his unit would offer more courses tailor-made to meet the specific requirements of the scheme so that more of their learners could get a subsidy.

V: We will try our best to ... increase the duration of the short courses to 30 hours. If the short courses do not involve an assessment of learners, we will add an assessment component to the course. I will break down a whole programme into different courses. In that way, students can study the programme in modules, and then be reimbursed from the Fund. Since it is now possible, there is no reason why we should not make use of this
opportunity to enable our students to apply for the CE fund. This is beneficial to students and the School.

Victor Lee said the strategy he used, that is, to offer more courses tailor-made to meet the requirements of the CEF so that their learners could get a subsidy, is beneficial to both the students and the School (the School of Continuing Education of the Chinese University). By ‘beneficial to the school’, he obviously meant that the enrolment figure would be increased. This shows that the number of enrolments was an important consideration for some providers, such as the Chinese University, when they gave comments to the government on the CEF. As noted earlier in this chapter, providers have a vested interest in the argument for the extension of application criteria to graduates as this means increased enrolment in their courses.

However, on the other hand, Au Tik Kwan did ‘not plan to offer more courses to suit the criteria of the CE Fund’, because ‘we have a wider perspective in looking at education. If there is subsidy and we feel the need to offer the courses, we will offer them. If there is no subsidy, it does not mean that we should not offer them. We will give more choices to our students’. Similarly Lui Yu Hon maintained that:

L: Our decision to offer a course or not is influenced by the CE Fund. Our experience tells us that those courses subsidized by the CE Fund will have more students. But if we find a certain area has a need and can attract people in that field to enrol, we will still offer the course. So, the existence of CE Fund is a major [but not the only] consideration.
The fact that providers' decisions to offer courses were much influenced by whether or not the learners could receive a subsidy from the CEF, rather than by society's needs, was reinforced by comments such as the following, which echo the findings of the documentary analysis.

K: *It is a waste of resources. There are about 200 logistics course in the market. I can say that, if there were no CEF, half of them would not appear. It is not a situation where the sector has such a need and then we provide the courses. It is the other way round – because the government has allocated an amount of money, providers then think that there are bound to be people who will then study because they do not need to pay for themselves. These people will get the money to study, and the providers will design courses, the fees for which are such that the students can get the maximum amount of entitlement from the government. In this way, this process has supported a new market – an educational market.*

As discussed in this and the earlier chapters, the offering of courses by adult education providers is very often market-driven. The above response by Kwong Tsz Man suggests that the introduction of the CEF had supported a new market by subsidizing it. However, the seven areas eligible for subsidy were chosen because of their perceived potential to boost the economy of Hong Kong. Therefore this adult education provision was not only market-driven, but also determined by its potential to enhance the economy. As argued at several points in this and earlier chapters, market-driven adult education provision, which is also work-related, will be advantageous to the 'learning rich', thus widening the learning divide.
7.8 Discussion

The interview data in general support the findings of the documentary analysis discussed in this chapter. In both cases, they show that the Hong Kong government considered that public subsidies should be given only for courses that bring economic benefits to the society; and that both the government and most providers focused on the 'learning rich'.

The data reported in this chapter show that the CEF supported the government's economic strategy. In January 2004, after the interviews were conducted, the CEF was extended to include the creative industries as one of the areas for financial support. This industry had been mentioned briefly in the Chief Executive's Policy Addresses in 2003 and 2004 as important for Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy⁴ (Tung, 2005). It is clear that the government viewed the development of the creative industries necessary to enhance the economy of Hong Kong. Lifelong learning policy – the CEF in this case – is again being used to support the government's economic strategy.

As seen above, the provision of courses to adults was influenced by the CEF and the economic strategy adopted by the government. In a New Youth Forum survey with 471 respondents, 63% said that the CEF would affect their choices of programmes (Market Watch, June 2002). It seems that not only adult education provision, but also the participation of adults was influenced by the CEF. This may even have been an

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⁴ In contrast, there were seven paragraphs on creative industries in the 2005 Policy Address compared to only one in the 2003 and 2004 Policy Addresses.
intended outcome of the policy. As argued in this thesis, adult education provision driven by the economic strategy of the government will widen the learning divide.

Also, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there were some comments from the public and providers arguing for changes in the eligibility criteria for the CEF, with some suggestions accepted and others rejected. This acceptance and rejection represents another manifestation of the values the government attached to deserving learners and learning activities. The message implicit in the policy is that those who are not in the workforce are not ‘deserving learners’, which again shows that economic interest was a key factor in the policy making process.

Another view on deserving and non-deserving learners arose in the comment given by Victor Lee when arguing for graduates’ eligibility for the CEF. He maintained that they should be included as the economy of Hong Kong depends on people with higher qualifications. Of course, this argument can be looked at in two ways. In his view, people who already possess a high level qualification should be given priority in learning because of their greater potential to contribute to the economy. However, it can be argued equally well that those without such qualifications should be provided with opportunities to gain them to increase the pool of those able to play a part in economic development. This illustrates the point made in Chapter 3: policies are ‘operational statements of values’ (Ball, 1990, p. 3); but ‘whose values get codified’ in lifelong learning policies is important (Kennedy, 2002, p. 131). It seems very possible that the position taken by Victor Lee was unduly influenced by a desire to increase student enrolments at providers’ institutions, rather than by an intrinsic concern with increasing or widening participation in learning. However, providers'
concern for increasing student enrolments inevitably results in more attention being paid to the already well qualified.

Overall – and certainly when they differed from the government’s perspective – the views of the providers do not seem to have had a significant impact on government policy. For example, Caritas’s view (articulated here by Dr Ma) that the coverage of the Fund should be greatly expanded was rejected, as was the call to increase the age level beyond 60. Certainly, in an ‘about-turn’, the government finally included graduates, but this was driven by the low take-up of the Fund. In general, the dominant influence on government thinking was exercised by the representatives from the chosen industries in the Focus Groups.

The very significant increase in enrolments after the decision to include degree-holders suggests that those with higher level qualifications are more eager to participate in lifelong learning and therefore more likely to benefit from the system. This is, of course, similar to findings elsewhere (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Lynch, 1982; Nordhaug, 1983; Imel, 1988; Courtney, 1992; NIACE, 1997; Rubenson, 2001; Robinson, 2002). That is, adults are more likely to study for ‘continuity’ than for ‘compensation’ – although strictly the CEF experience relates to certain areas only. The government’s lifelong learning policy, as illustrated by the CEF, did provide additional opportunities for adults to study. However, this was within narrowly defined areas; and, particularly with the expansion of courses for graduates after the change in eligibility criteria, it had the effect of marginalizing courses for non-graduates outside the chosen sectors. As Au Kam Hung stressed, the government’s stance was that public subsidy should be given only to those courses that bring
economic benefits to the society. Although data on the educational background of CEF recipients are not available, it seems highly likely that many of the reimbursable courses did not meet the needs of many of the 'learning poor' due to their limited educational background and work experience, thus widening the learning divide.

The documentary and interview data show that the majority of the providers were not much concerned about the learning divide. Only Caritas argued for a much broader approach to the large number of people in Hong Kong who still have very low educational qualifications, doubtless related to that organization's aims and objectives, as seen in the extracts below from one of its publications and its website:

Caritas Adult and Higher Education Service aims at creating a learning society through promoting lifelong education. It offers a provision with open access to those in need to receive education, at their first and second opportunities in life, which will better equip them in literacy, work skills, further academic attainment, community participation and personal development. (Caritas–Hong Kong, 1981)

Caritas–Hong Kong should continue with its services to the local community, strengthening particularly those which meet the genuine requirements of the

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5 It is interesting that in many of its publications, Caritas–Hong Kong still uses the term 'adult education' – a term which, it was argued earlier, is more closely associated with the provision of a second chance to learners and more concerned with the learning divide. This feature, which is exclusive to Caritas, shows that Caritas is an organization with a mission to care for the disadvantaged, which differentiates it from most of the other providers in Hong Kong's highly competitive educational market.
needy, the neglected, the underprivileged, and the marginalised groups.

To bring services to the neediest and most abandoned in our societies. (Source: Caritas–Hong Kong ‘Mission and Objectives’
(http://www.caritas.org.hk/f2/f2.html)

We believe that the whole society should be responsible for lifelong learning. Every citizen should have full opportunity to receive education and training. Especially the route to obtain information and education for those disadvantaged should be protected (Declaration of Lifelong Learning by Caritas, 22 January 2000, Hong Kong: Lifelong Learning Festival).

Another interviewee whose response is closer to that given by Andrew Ma is Au Tik Kwan, Principal of YMCA of Hong Kong College of Careers. He emphasized that he did not plan to offer courses tailored to suit the criteria of the CEF, and also did not argue for opening CEF applications to graduates. Interestingly, both Caritas and the YMCA are voluntary agencies with a religious background. The interview data show that these organizations pay more attention to the learning divide than the continuing education units of the universities, but the latter are the major adult education providers in Hong Kong.

The areas of study prescribed by the government also have an effect on the learning divide. Kwong Tsz Man believed that the CE Fund is an economic strategy developed
by the government to support some prescribed industries, and so the subsidy should be given to those who are already working in the field, regardless of whether they possess a degree qualification or not. This, together with the providers' belief that degree holders are more keen to learn than non-degree holders, and have a higher potential to contribute to the development of a knowledge-based society in Hong Kong, was reflected in the nature of the comments given by these providers to the government and the consequent formulation of the CE Fund policy.

Another factor that influenced the development of the CE Fund policy was the government's belief that public subsidy should be given to those courses that bring about economic benefits to the society. This was evident, for example, in Au Kam Hung's view on the provision of leisure courses. As a result only those sectors believed likely to bring future economic benefit to Hong Kong were considered suitable for application.

From the perspective of the learning divide, the government's and the providers' views on who are more eager to learn, and therefore to apply for the CE Fund, are significant. When participation is widened through more people with lower qualifications participating in learning, then the learning divide is narrowed. But, as seen in this chapter, the government and most of the major providers believe that people with lower qualifications are less keen to learn than those with higher qualifications. The outcome of the initial stages of application for the Fund tends to support this belief. However, one of the purposes of setting up a CE fund could be to provide motivation for some people who did not originally intend to study. If this group of people comprises those with lower qualifications (the 'learning poor'),
participation in learning will widen — but the findings in this chapter show that a
different view has driven Hong Kong policies.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has reported the results of a documentary analysis and interviews. It has
shown that the government’s establishment of the CEF, and its responses to calls for
change to its eligibility criteria, represent the values the government attached to
‘deserving learners’ and ‘deserving learning activities’; and in reaching its decisions,
it was influenced primarily by advice from representatives from the chosen industries.
Overall, the findings show that the government formulated the CEF essentially for the
enhancement of the economy, and was unwilling to subsidize courses for personal
interest or development. While it is unlikely that adult education providers could have
offered much counterweight to economic interests, few showed any desire to do so.
With the exception of Caritas – Hong Kong and to some degree the YMCA College
of Careers, the providers showed little concern about the learning divide in Hong
Kong society.

The findings also indicate that the government believed that those who have received
more education are likely to be more eager to learn and, with opportunities to further
their education, can make the biggest contribution to helping Hong Kong develop into
a knowledge-based society. Most of the providers concurred with this view, and made
significant efforts to offer courses tailored to meet the requirements of the CEF.
In general, the original scheme and the changes instituted by the government appear to derive more from economic and financial factors than from any inherent desire to reduce the learning divide.
Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Who are the missing learners? ... Catching up is one way of looking at the issue. Given the very large numbers of people who are engaged in some form of learning already, it must be other categories of people who are being urged to participate, ... (Evans, 2003, p. 53).

The main research question which this study has addressed is the extent to which the Hong Kong government’s lifelong learning policies, as illustrated in the establishment of the Open Learning Institute and the Continuing Education Fund, have been related to trying to narrow the learning divide. In order to answer this main question, subsidiary questions such as who are ‘deserving learners’, and what kinds of learning are seen to be of ‘value’ have been explored. This chapter first discusses the research findings in relation to the purposes of the study and the literature review, and then suggests some implications of the findings.

8.2 Central argument and the research findings

The central argument of this study is summarized diagrammatically in Figure 8.1 overleaf.
Interests of the providers

Interests of the Hong Kong government

Interests of other stakeholders (e.g. employers/representatives/in business/industries)

Who are deserving learners? What kinds of learning are of value? (learning rich vs learning poor) (social benefits vs individual benefits)

Purpose of lifelong learning (modernizers' view vs progressives' view)

Policy

1) types of courses offered by providers
2) funding policy
3) cost-effectiveness considerations

Outcome of policy (intentional or unintentional)
1  Participation and non-participation of adults
2  Participation increased or widened?

Learning divide narrowed or widened

How a 'learning society' is construed?

Figure 8.1 Explanatory model of policy and participation in lifelong learning in Hong Kong
Many authors in this area have argued that the barriers which prevent people from participating in education and training can be categorized as 'situational', 'institutional' and 'dispositional' (e.g. McGivney, 1993). The findings from this study show that another kind of barrier, perhaps even more important, also prevents people from participating in learning — the barrier created by policies themselves which prevent or discourage the 'learning poor' from taking part and thus reinforce the learning divide. More specifically, this research indicates that the lifelong learning policies of the Hong Kong government have derived more from a perceived need to enhance the economy and maintain social stability than from any real effort to equalize educational opportunities and to achieve social equity.

Policies reflect the values of the people who have the power to formulate and implement them (e.g. Ball, 1990; Dye, 1992). The beliefs of the Hong Kong government and the providers on who are deserving learners and what kinds of learning are beneficial to the society have shaped the purposes of lifelong learning embedded in their policies; and, since these values affect funding and the types of courses providers offer, they clearly influence whether participation in learning is increased or widened.

In the case of the establishment of the OLI, this study found that the risks to social and political stability posed by the 'brain drain', and the need to restore people's confidence in the future development of Hong Kong, were key factors leading to extending the limited opportunities for higher education available at that time. The policy was not directly related to economic prosperity and, therefore, unlike the CEF, did not place such strong emphasis on the need for learning to bring about economic benefits. The government does not appear to have had specific groups of target
learners in mind. In fact, setting up the OLI was one of the several expansions to higher education at that time. However, even if it was not the government’s main concern, the establishment of a university with open entry clearly had the potential to reduce the learning divide, if only as an unintentional outcome. However, the full realization of this was compromised by its insistence on the self-financing principle for the operation of the OLI which required fees to be set at levels which many people could not afford. As a result of the self-financing policy, the subsequent development of the Institute had to be market-driven which also hampered its potential to narrow the learning divide.

As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, courses which are related to career advancement are perceived by various players in the policy-making process as attracting larger number of students. Since these courses are usually more suited to learners who already have some qualifications and working experience in the field, adult education which focuses on the provision of work-related courses is more advantageous to the ‘learning rich’ than the ‘learning poor’. As Courtney pointed out, adults are more likely to study for ‘continuity’ than for ‘compensation’ (Courtney, 1992, p. 50 cited in Rinne and Kivinen, 1996, p. 184). The negative impact of the self-financing policy and the consequent emphasis on cost-effectiveness on widening participation is evident from the data reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

In the case of the CEF, the government was also concerned about the economic benefits to the society and saw those who have the strongest potential to bring about economic benefits to a knowledge-based society as more deserving learners; the providers also seem to give more attention to this group of learners, seeing them as more eager to learn, and hence likely to increase their enrolments. This group of
learners are already 'learning rich'; the learning divide is therefore widened. In both cases – the OLI and the CEF – it was found that those who have higher qualifications are indeed more likely to participate in learning. When the OLI was established in 1989, students with qualifications below HKCEE constituted only 3.3% of the whole OLI student population. Also, the utilization rate of the CEF increased substantially when the application criteria were expanded to graduates.

Besides finding out the extent to which lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong have been related to narrowing the learning divide, several related research questions were answered by the evidence collected in Chapters 5–7. In summary, it is concluded that lifelong learning policies in Hong Kong have not aimed at narrowing the learning divide. The evidence on which this conclusion is based is as follows. First, leisure courses have been marginalized; only those courses seen as enhancing the economy have been endorsed. Second, the Hong Kong government has been concerned about the political and economic stability of society. Third, both the government and providers have given priority to learning that brings about economic benefits to society and to learners who are 'learning rich'. Table 8.1 gives a simple summary of the findings in relation to the research questions.
**Table 8.1** Summary of the research findings in relation to the research questions

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<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Main findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 What was the main reason for the Hong Kong government’s establishment of the OLI?</td>
<td>To maintain social and political stability in Hong Kong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 What was the main reason for the Hong Kong government’s establishment of the CEF?</td>
<td>To boost Hong Kong’s economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 What value did the Hong Kong government and the providers ascribe to ‘lifelong learning’ in the establishment of the OLI?</td>
<td>In supporting an ‘open’ institution with no entry qualifications, the Hong Kong government took a ‘progressive’ view on the value of lifelong learning. However, its insistence on the OLI’s being self-financing and presenting courses for large numbers tended towards a modernizer perspective. The dominant view within the provider (the OLI) was that the fundamental role of lifelong learning is to give a second chance to adult learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 What value did the Hong Kong government and the providers ascribe to lifelong learning in the setting up of the CEF?</td>
<td>The government took a modernizer view on the role of lifelong learning. It believed that public subsidies should be given only for those courses that bring about economic benefits to society, not to individuals pursuing interest or leisure courses. Most of the providers also perceived the role of lifelong learning as being to enhance the Hong Kong economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Which group of adults did the Hong Kong government and providers pay more attention to? Why?</td>
<td>Both the Hong Kong government and many providers tended to give priority to learning that brings economic benefits to the society. They also believed that degree holders are more eager to learn than non-degree holders, and have a higher potential to contribute to the economy, and paid more attention to these ‘learning rich’. Most providers adopted this position, at least in part, because it would increase their enrolment figures.</td>
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</table>
After the establishment of the OLI, the learning divide may have narrowed to a certain extent, but this was only an unintentional outcome. The fact that the government initially restricted applicants to the CEF to those without a degree did not reflect an intention to narrow the learning divide, but rather a concern to avoid the Fund being used up in a very short period of time. With the subsequent opening up of the criteria to degree holders, the gap can be expected to widen. Therefore it can be argued that if the learning divide has narrowed, it was only an unintentional outcome, rather than the purpose, of the policy.

As argued in Chapter 5 and 6, the OLI’s self-financing policy resulted in the offering of more vocationally-oriented courses; and in Chapter 7, the CEF was shown to have a vocational emphasis which in practice benefited the already ‘learning rich’.

8.3 Further comments on the findings

Government motivation

As Easton (1965, cited in Cibulka, 1994, p. 106) said, policy is broadly ‘authoritative allocation of values’ for society. Overall, the values embedded in the Hong Kong government’s initiatives in 1989 and 2002 were related primarily to economic and financial considerations, both at the individual and societal levels. For example, as Chapter 7 shows, the inclusion of creative industries in the CEF eligibility criteria is an illustration of what the government sees as ‘valuable knowledge’. For knowledge
to be valuable, it must have some ‘use’ – in this case to promote Hong Kong’s economy.

Undoubtedly, with the establishment of the OLI and the CEF, the level of participation of adults in learning increased. Even though the government may have set up the OLI essentially to solve an impending social and political crisis, its policy can be said partly to reflect Griffin’s (1999a) social democratic model of lifelong learning with its emphasis on ‘second chance’ opportunities and hence redistributive educational provision.

In relation to setting up the OLI, the Hong Kong government clearly felt an urgent need to expand the existing very limited higher education opportunities – and in deciding to waive entry qualifications for the OLI, it took a bold step, particularly in the rather traditional higher education context in Hong Kong. However, its decision to establish an institution on the basis of a model similar to the UK Open University did not necessarily imply that the government wished to take a progressive position in lifelong learning (in which the value of lifelong learning is to promote equity). In fact, the research evidence indicates that the main characteristic of distance education that attracted the government was not its ‘openness’ but its ‘economics of scale’ and the possibility of its being in operation after a relatively short preparation period. The fact that cost considerations played a significant role is evident also in the policy of requiring the OLI to be self-financing within four years, and the emphasis on using a considerable amount of existing overseas material, at least initially.

The government’s motivation in setting up the CEF is easier to identify. It was quite evidently tied to improvement of the economy, as its precise definition of the original
areas eligible for support, as well as the nature of the areas added later, testify. Although the government was proactive, its CEF policy reflects Griffin's neo-liberal welfare reform model as it stressed the need for individuals to learn to cope with economic change (albeit with some government support). Its original specifications provided inducements for learning to those with lower educational qualifications, but this was undone to a large degree by its reversal of policy on the position of graduates. Although the government initially firmly rejected the eligibility of degree holders, its rapid change of heart does not suggest that this reflected any strong or principled position. A much likelier explanation for the rapid change lies in the low take-up by non-degree holders.

This study has reviewed the literature on the modernizer and progressive perspectives, and the social and individual benefits of lifelong learning. In the case of the OLI, it is found that, in general, policy makers emphasized social rather than individual benefits, but it seems very likely that this was linked to the belief that career advancement courses will have higher enrolments. Consequently the provision of courses by the OLI is closer to a modernizer than a progressive perspective.

Another finding in this study is that many players in the policy making process associate work-related courses with social benefits and courses for leisure or personal interests with individual benefits. This is evident from both the study of the OLI and the CEF. Consequently some learning activities have been considered as 'less valuable' to the society and the learners are 'undeserving' learners. This view has a negative effect on the potential of lifelong learning policies to widen participation.
Policy making process

The findings of this study have illustrated the complexity of the policy making process, as referred to by Colebatch (1998). In both cases studied, many participants were involved with a wide range of different viewpoints, some being more influential than others – for instance over the CEF, where the views of industrial sectors outweighed those of the providers. Nevertheless, the research shows that the providers tried to influence the government policy on the CEF but policy is 'authoritative allocation of values' for society (Easton, 1965, cited in Cibulka, 1994, p. 106), and so some views are accepted and others rejected.

The fact that consideration of establishing some form of open learning provision went back as far as the 1970s and that the idea came to fruition in the late 1980s suggests that the government had some clear purpose, and implemented it after a period of long-term planning. However, closer analysis of the circumstances surrounding its final establishment presents a much less clear-cut picture. The need to address possible social and political unrest weighed heavily, which shows elements of a crisis intervention model of policy making. As Chapter 3 argues, unintended outcomes are characteristic of this model (Sweeting and Morris, 1993), and in this case widening participation was an unintentional outcome of setting up the OLI.

This is also illustrated to some extent in the case of the CEF. Initially, it appeared to be a clear attempt to focus on the educational needs of the less well qualified in an effort to enhance their ability to cope with change. However, the reversal after a short period of the exclusion of degree-holders shows adaptation to specific circumstances – the lower than expected application rate to the Fund.
Concepts and roles of adult learning

The phenomenon of the learning divide is related to conceptions of the role of adult education. In the past, adult education in Hong Kong was strongly associated with the provision of a second chance to those who had for whatever reasons missed educational opportunities and, therefore, had lower qualifications. However, the findings on the CEF reported in Chapter 7 show a shift in how the functions of adult education in Hong Kong are construed. Both the government and many providers increasingly focus their attention on those who are more eager to learn and are perceived to be able to contribute more to economic development. No doubt the providers are attracted to this position because it increases their enrolment figures; while the government’s first priority is increasing economic competitiveness. Perhaps this shift in role, from providing a second chance to giving resources to the ‘learning rich’, resulting in the ‘rich’ becoming ‘richer’, is related to the shift from ‘adult education’ to ‘lifelong learning’.

8.4 Implications of the research findings

With the developments that have taken place in Hong Kong from the late 1980s to the early 21st century, the context which gave rise to the OLI no longer exists, e.g.

- There are now eight tertiary institutions offering full-time degree programmes, compared with two in the 1980s.
The percentage of secondary school leavers studying degree programmes rose from 5% in 1987 to 18% in the early 21st century.

Associate degrees, a concept unheard of in Hong Kong until recent years, are now being offered by a substantial number of institutions, and in some cases are articulated to ‘full’ degrees, often in collaboration with overseas providers.

Given the vastly increased range of opportunities, and the highly competitive nature of the Hong Kong ‘educational market’, the OLI’s role of providing an ‘open’ pathway and a ‘second chance’ for learning appears to have diminished – as is evident in its declining student numbers in recent years – which raises questions about the validity of its continuing to operate under a self-financing policy.

Despite the greatly increased availability of educational opportunities, a very significant percentage of the Hong Kong population still has a very low educational level. In practice, frequently used slogans such as ‘lifelong learning’, ‘knowledge as a personal investment’ and ‘upgrading oneself’ have been interpreted primarily in terms of developing one’s skills to meet the changing needs of the economy, as was clearly the case with the CEF. For those concerned about equity, this can seem like a step backwards from concepts such as ‘helping the disadvantaged’ associated with the previously common term ‘adult education’.

It was clear from this study that there has been little concern about the learning divide in Hong Kong, either in government or among most of the providers. The government’s discourse and policy, which is based on a simplistic version of human
capital theory, views lifelong learning as a duty of individual citizens to develop their potential for both their own personal economic benefit and the economic benefit of society (e.g. Wain, 1991; Hodgson, 2000a; Selwyn and Gorard, 2003). While it is true that this reflects a world trend, this perspective and the providers' heavy emphasis on the market approach and cost-effectiveness largely ignore the 'learning poor'.

If Hong Kong is to become 'a learning society', there needs to be a broader perspective on the purposes of learning, reflected in policies which promote learning of different kinds – not just economy-enhancing activities – and embrace the needs of the 'learning poor'. As articulated in the Caritas–Hong Kong paper to the government in 2002:

>'In Hong Kong, a great number of people are under-represented in most forms of learning. ....' A real learning society needs to 'consider giving the educationally disadvantaged members of society priority so that they are not further marginalized as the knowledge society takes hold [by] equalizing public investment, as far as possible, in promoting learning, irrespective of form, mode or level ... (Ma, 2002)

### 8.5 Strengths and limitations of the research

There are some strengths of this research. The research has made some contribution to the field by giving insights into the ways in which the Hong Kong government has conceptualized adult education and lifelong learning. The local literature on the
learning divide in adult education and a critical examination of the policy making in this respect is very limited. This study therefore contributes to filling this gap in the literature in Hong Kong. The researcher has successfully interviewed some key persons in the policy making process and identified some valuable unpublished documents (some of which were confidential at that time they were written) related to the formation of the OLI. These provided strong evidence to the conclusion drawn in this thesis.

However, it is acknowledged that this study has several limitations, e.g.

- Only two cases have been studied, and so the project does not provide a comprehensive coverage of all policy making in this area over the period.

- Not all the people the researcher would have wished to interview were available for reasons explained earlier. Also, it is recognized that, since the establishment of the OLI took place about 15 years ago, the reliability of the information depends very heavily on the interviewees' memories of the events, and also on their willingness to express their opinions.

In order to understand more about the learning divide in Hong Kong, further research may be needed in the following areas:

- Exploring in more detail the profile of the learners undertaking courses supported by the CEF; and
• Understanding the ‘stories’ of non-participants in lifelong learning.

However, the literature on policy making in adult education and lifelong learning in Hong Kong to date has been limited, and has often been rather narrow in its focus. This project has adopted a broader perspective than that in much of the existing local research by combining documentary analysis and interviews, and providing an in-depth analysis of two key policies in different socio-economic contexts. So despite its recognized limitations, it gives important insights into the ways in which the Hong Kong government has conceptualized adult education/lifelong learning.

8.6 A brief final comment

It has been shown that in many other countries such as the UK, concern has been expressed by governments on the issue of the learning divide in adult learning. However, this issue has not attracted the same degree of concern in Hong Kong. It seems that there is a paradox here. From the historical development of Hong Kong, one would find that political considerations were not infrequently lie behind educational policies. Some explanations are given in Chapter 3 on the characteristics of policy making in Hong Kong. As this thesis has shown, the Hong Kong government was very concerned about social and political stability – yet it did not attach much importance to the issue of social exclusion. The paradox is that social exclusion has been a cause of social and political instability in many countries – though not, or at least not yet, in Hong Kong. One possible explanation is that Hong Kong people have generally believed that the best way to improve their lives is
through their own efforts rather than by criticizing social policy (e.g. Leung, 1990; Lui and Wong, 1995). But what has happened in the past may not be a valid indicator of future developments, as increasing attention is now been paid to the issue of social exclusion by members of the Legislative Council and various pressure groups. The Hong Kong government should consider implementing lifelong learning policies that widen, not just increases participation – to ensure future social stability, and to move towards a ‘learning society’ which includes all people and all kinds of learning.
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