

Lifelong Learning and the Older Learner (and Teacher).

Written By: Derek Barter



By DACE Maynooth <

<https://dacemaynooth.com/author/dacemaynooth/>>

September 22, 2023 <



<https://dacemaynooth.com/2023/09/22/lifelong-learning-and-the-older-learner-and-teacher/>>

In memory of the late Anne Roundtree.



Anne Roundtree in full flow.

I would just to like to pay my respects on behalf of the Department of Adult and Community Education to the late Anne Roundtree. Anne along with her long time friend and teaching partner Margaret Sweetman introduced so many adults to a new life as mature students in the Return to Learning certificate programme that they delivered for over twenty years. Their care with this unique cohort of students has been a lesson to us all and one that I as a lecturer on that programme am happy to continue.



Margaret Sweetman.

There is a widely held belief that you can't teach an old dog new tricks and while it might be true in terms of training it is palpably not true for education. You train dogs, you educate people. Education = liberation. This was brought home to me recently in a Return to Learning course where a 76 year old student Áine Grace recounted that since beginning this course in university she has felt seen for the first time since she left the workforce. It has been liberating for this woman who no longer 'feels like I'm in god's waiting room' to feel validated at this stage of her life. 'Belonging' and 'mattering' two words that resonate with adult learners, and the university is a place where these can be enacted if we can really give time to think about Lifelong Learning in its wider sense.

The current understanding of Lifelong Learning has become conflated with work related skills and employment opportunities. It's part of a wider 'education to service the economy' discourse. This way of thinking fails to take into account adult students at all life stages who return to learning for any number of reasons that have nothing to do with employability or future skills. The Maynooth University [Return to Learning < https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/focus-further-education >](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/focus-further-education) certificate and the [ComMUniversity < https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/focus-further-education >](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/focus-further-education) provide ample evidence of people who attend programmes for a variety of reasons, some explicitly career focused and some social and recreational. Adults and especially older adults are a vast untapped and unsupported population whose motivation to engage with Higher Education has as much to do with coming to terms with the vicissitudes of life such as grief, loss, bereavement, aging, loneliness and isolation, encroaching disability, etc., as it has to do with job prospects. Of course many people enrol in courses for the qualification and that is a useful outcome. However a lot of people find there is also the unexpected benefit of studying in university in that it offers Community. Here in the classroom among our peers our desire to be seen and heard and to be part of something greater than ourselves can be satisfied.

From mid August to late September every year the media is full of stories about teenagers and exam results, getting their preferred college course or not, leaving home or not, finding accommodation or not and the world of education seems a territory completely occupied by the young. When I listened to Áine in the classroom or witnessed the ovation that Phil Devitt received by her fellow graduates when she was conferred with her BA in Community Studies at the age of 86 I can't

help but think of the thousands of people who have worked all of their lives, paid their taxes, sacrificed so much for their families and Irish society and by doing so help create a wealthy country in the relatively short one hundred years since independence. Adult students have much to reflect on and much wisdom to share. Áine gave a great talk at this year's ComMUniversity Celebration of Learning Day in June about her experiences coming to university in later life as a student on the Return to Learning certificate course. Take a look at Áine's talk [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1H8mXoIq37o) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1H8mXoIq37o> and you will see the transformative impact that her time in Maynooth has had on her and her plans for the future.

For the generations of older learners who didn't get the chance to study in university in their youth it's about time they got something back. Along with the free bus pass and the free TV licence, free funded education for our senior citizens, in a way that is compatible with their life style (part-time, off campus) is an idea whose time has come. As a society and a Higher Education sector we have so much to learn from them.



Tony Weekes Economics and Cathal Coleman
Politics ComMUniversity.



[Dr Derek Barter < https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/derek-barter>](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/derek-barter) is a

lecturer and the Continuing Education Co-Ordinator in the Dept. of Adult and Community Education

(DACE) Maynooth University and Director of the Communiversity. In

his post as Academic Co-ordinator of Continuing Education in the

Department of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth

University his main aim is to facilitate the entry into higher education

of mature students who may or may not be first time entrants to

university and foster a culture of lifelong learning for personal,

community and professional development. This includes the night-

time/part-time degree for adults the **[BA Local Studies/BA](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-workshop)**

[Community Studies.](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-workshop) <

[https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-workshop)

[education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-workshop)

[workshop](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/mh803-ba-local-studiescommunity-studies-cao-workshop)> Dr Barter works with different statutory, voluntary and

especially community organisations in order fulfil the university's

strategic goal for Community Engagement and Widening Participation.

Initiatives, such as the **[Communiversity,](http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13561/)** <

<http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13561/>> which brings higher

education out of the campus in a partnership arrangement between

MU, LEADER Partnership Companies and Local Public Libraries.



By DACE Maynooth

This is the new blog for students, colleagues and friends of the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth

University. We aim to promote diversity and inclusion in education using our online platform. Guest bloggers and friends of the Department will post about their research and experiences in Education. The views expressed by the authors of individual posts do not reflect the views of the Department of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University.

View Archive → <

<https://dacemaynooth.com/author/dacemaynooth/>>

**© 2024 Department of Adult and
Community Education Maynooth <
<https://dacemaynooth.com/>**>

**Blog at WordPress.com. < To
[https://wordpress.com/?
ref=footer_blog](https://wordpress.com/?ref=footer_blog)** **the
top**
↑