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## Learning to and from research: two innovative UK programmes for older people. Examples of research-based activity

Since 2001, Lancaster University (in North West of England) has developed two innovative and successful learning programmes for people in later life which emphasise, respectively, research activity as a means to (1) the development of new skills and a further positive contribution to society and (2) self-discovery and learning at a higher level.

The first innovation, the University Certificate in Research Methods for Older People, was conceived in 2001 originally within the confines of a funded research project into the Housing Decisions of Older People. The research design specified that field-workers be recruited and trained from applicants over 60 years. The paper details the learning experiences, in the Certificate and the research project, of two cohorts of trainee fieldworkers (in Lancaster and in London). It shows how these older people, who largely had no prior experience of research and did not necessarily have a strong educational background, learned the theory and practice of qualitative field work and were then employed in the Housing Decisions research project. The paper goes on to show how the trainees used their skills in subsequent income - generating research and employment projects organized by themselves. After the end of the research project, another cohort was recruited openly to the Certificate, which became a learning programme, based on simulation of the stages of research enquiry rather than preparation for actual research, in which older students from a wide range of backgrounds developed their skills.

The second innovation, the University of Later Life, has been offered by Lancaster University since 2002. It is a five day programme open only to older people (initially 60+ years but latterly 45+). The aims of the programme are to give a "taste" of higher education learning for those who believe that study at university might be a next step for them and/or that the intellectual resources of a university can assist them in self-directed learning or research activities and/or are intrigued by the notion that they too can be university students, even for five days. The intensive programme seeks to mirror various aspects of the university experience. It includes a lecture and seminar programme by professors in a range of university subjects; visits to university departments, research and cultural centres; a portfolio of assessed work (including a research project); opportunities to begin hitherto unknown subjects of study; and personal tutorials to discuss individual study or research plans. The programme is highly popular (30-50 participants each year) and has adapted over the four years. The paper - including data on student feedback and progression to further study - will consider how successful the University of Later Life is in communicating to students the critical and research-based philosophy of universities and in

stimulating them to further higher learning. Taken together, these two Lancaster learning programmes for people in later life, now well established, challenge the ideas that older people in later life are too old to learn successfully from universities and that universities cannot adapt to provide learning experiences for such people which are potentially life-changing while remaining true to university ideals.