

# **MINUTES OF MEETING CROSS PARTY GROUP ON ADULT LEARNING**

Tuesday 29 September 2015

Committee Room 6, The Scottish Parliament

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**MSPs in attendance:** Jean Urquhart and Alison Johnstone

## **Agenda items**

### **1. Welcome**

Jean Urquhart, MSP welcomed attendees and our overseas visitors to the seventh Cross Party Group meeting.

### **2. Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### **3. Introduction**

Jean invited Professor Ian Martin, Emeritus Reader in Education, University of Edinburgh to present his paper 'What is lifelong learning for: earning, yawning or yearning?'

Ian delivered a thought provoking paper on adult learning for democracy (attached), offering another way of thinking about the critical issues facing adult learning. In his introduction he painted a picture of adult learning, where he proposed that it had just escaped a near death experience. However, he suggested that it was not safe yet and he offered another way of thinking about the critical issues facing adult learning to help focus the group discussion.

### **4. "Adult Learning and Democracy" Presentation**

Pat Brechin presented the work of the Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group, with members from voluntary organisations, Edinburgh City Council's Community Learning and Development and the University of Edinburgh. Topics for the group included G8, Iraq, Fracking, Modern Day Slavery (the group's papers attached provide a flavour of what they have been working on).

Tom Berney informed the group that the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> age, which is run entirely by older people works in a similar way nationally. Tom added that 45% of the voluntary work undertaken in Scotland is by people aged 45+. He suggested that current thinking appears to assume that education for adults is only about employment and doesn't include volunteering, citizenship or learning for community purposes..

Rob Mark congratulated the speakers on their input and suggested that we needed to spend some time focusing on how to convince politicians that we need strong political commitment to adult learning as well as additional financial resources, for an area of policy that hasn't benefitted from new money in the past.

Graham MacLellan added that the discussion today chimed with many of the recent conferences and debate forums on adult learning where concerns were raised about the short term and narrowing focus of adult learning provision. The forums have raised issues centering on the nature of short term funded projects being outcome driven and largely supporting the policy of the organisation running the programme rather than supporting adults to develop and unlock their potential.

## **5. Open Discussion and Action Planning**

Discussion groups were asked to consider 'What should we do to get political support for adult learning in democracy?'

Key Points:

1. We need to engage with politicians on the subject of adult learning for democracy, because there are a broad range of agencies working in this field to address the issue with different target groups.
2. Government at all levels both local and national are focused on measurement – perhaps we should offer a mechanism and focus for increasing participation in democratic processes through an adult learning project that raises critical consciousness.
3. There are still many underlying issues facing adult learning organisations none more so than funding, democratic engagement could be a way to support adults to achieve their objectives.
4. The Scottish Older People's Assembly representative said that they had a real issue getting MSP's to attend their events even when they are held in the parliament. Many want to help but cannot attend meetings as there are other more pressing issues to be dealt with but that we need to keep trying.

## **6. Any other Business**

The group discussed how we get the government to listen and came up with a few suggestions? Alison Johnstone, MSP felt that there was so much more that adults could be doing, including being noisier. She cited the success of higher education and illustrated examples of how they achieved their ultimate aim by being noisy, articulate and by being seen at the Parliament. She highlighted the benefits of adult learning as being therapeutic and life changing and has seen results of constituents who have praised the work of adult learning providers, and changed their lives through their involvement.

Alison advised the group to keep campaigning, write to the politicians by email, put questions to parliament and work at a local level to raise awareness and encourage the reallocation of budgets to support adult learning.

There was agreement that we need to make better links between education and health as statistics have proven that learning keeps older people active and included, supports young parents in raising healthy families provides adults with mental health issues alternatives to therapy saving millions of public finances. A member of the group offered one example where the cost of care to the local health board was between £45,000 -

£50,000 for an 8-10 week stay for one person in hospital whereas the preventative adult learning programme might cost less than £2,500 for a group of ten adults.

The group asked what was happening with the Statement of Ambition as it had initially looked promising and seemed to suggest that adult learning was finally beginning to be recognized as a key policy objective, but there appeared to be a hiatus since the launch. Jean suggested that we invite the Scottish Government to make a presentation to a future meeting.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on 27 January time to be confirmed.

### **Those indicating attendance at the CPG:**

Ahmadov, Alishir	Mammadov, Jamil
Arnott, Margaret	Mammadov, Vusala
Berney, Tom	Mark, Rob
Bissland, Val	Martin, Ian
Boucher, Fiona	McHarg, Jim
Brechin, Pat	Morini, Mara
Callaghan, Lee	Nelson, Jean
Catto, Derek	Orr, Shugg
Dunbar, Lesley	Patterson, Walter
Freidkina, Elena	Paul, Shona
Gasimov, Sayavush	Reid, David
Judge, Linda	Smolnik, Inna
Kara, Anna	Somerville, Nancy
Kutnetcova, Elena	Spulber, Diana
MacLellan, Graham	

## What is lifelong learning for: earning, yawning or yearning?

Ian Martin

### 1. Democracy and citizenship in Scotland today

Citizens are people who make and respond to political arguments and make political choices. The political expression of citizenship is fundamentally a moral activity in which we collectively argue about the relationship between means and ends. Without this constant and continuous re-invention of the political, societies become morally bankrupt. It is essential for the health of democracy that the educational space for this creative, democratic work is cherished and expanded.

### 2. Open letter: 'Whatever happened to learning for democracy?' (2006)

'We see our work as part of a broader democratic process. This is about enabling people to demand social justice and equality for themselves and others. There is now an historic opportunity to renew democracy in Scotland, and yet we are beginning to feel a profound sense of disappointment about the way in which both our own work and ordinary people's lives are being managed, regulated and controlled. .... What is required is a much more open, democratic and imaginative dialogue and debate about what kind of society we want to live in, and how we can begin to build it in Scotland today. .... Ordinary people need the opportunity to have their say, to be listened to and to talk back to the state. This is essentially a democratic process. It cannot simply be managed and measured; it has to be nurtured and cultivated in communities. It requires faith and trust in the people, and a valuing of genuinely democratic dialogue and debate.'

### 3. Resourcing dissent (?)

'Society is now less certain about the values it should uphold and tolerates a wide range. Individual freedom to question the value of established practices and institutions and to propose new forms is part of our democratic heritage. To maintain this freedom, resources should not be put at the disposal only of those who conform but ought reasonably to be made available to all for explicit educational purposes. The motives of those who provide education need not necessarily be identified with the motives of those for whom it is provided.' (Alexander Report *Adult Education and the Challenge of Change* HMSO 1975)

### 4. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitan democracy

What are the possibilities and limitations of dialogue? What happens when we must agree to disagree?

What are the competing claims of universalism and particularism?

Does democracy impose limits on multiculturalism? Does multiculturalism impose limits on democracy?

Where do we draw the line between reason, respect and religion? Do we need to do so?

What are the key moral, cultural and political issues we must address in Scotland today?

What aspects of our common and different intellectual and cultural traditions do we need to re-learn if we are to forge a genuinely cosmopolitan Scottish democracy?

How much history (and whose history) helps us and hinders us in all of this?

### 5. Democratic adult education as prefigurative work

'Democracy implies the formation of social judgement on the basis of informed discussion. It requires that men and women shall decide on particular issues, not as a result of passing moods or casual opinions, but in the light of a philosophy of life. Such a philosophy, if it is to be anything more than the repetition of slogans, must be formed as the result of much reflection on the problems of social organisation and on the aims and purposes of society. Knowledge is essential; but it must be mixed with experience; and the pooling and comparison of experience in the light of new knowledge, in a group of people with common interests but bringing varied contributions to be drawn from daily life, is the essence of democratic Adult Education.' (Harold Shearman *Adult Education for Democracy* Workers' Educational Association 1944)

### 6. 'Useful knowledge' vs 'really useful knowledge'

The radical tradition in British adult education made a crucial distinction between 'useful knowledge' (ie knowledge that is constructed to make people productive, profitable and obedient workers) and 'really useful knowledge' (ie knowledge that is calculated to enable people to become critical, autonomous and - if necessary - dissenting citizens). Is this distinction still valid? If so, why does it matter?

globalisation and their impact on Scottish politics; the implications of both an independent and a devolved Scotland. This was picked up by the *Scotsman* newspaper when Tax Payer Scotland argued that tax payers 'money should not subsidise political education classes'.

Both these courses were offered as part of the Council's city wide Adult Education Programme, which people pay a fee to attend, and were extremely popular – with students in one class continuing to meet to discuss the issues after the 8 week course had finished.

#### **Referendum Events for Literacies Learners**

Two half day events were organised in the city centre for literacies and ESOL learners. Learners did preparatory work in their groups, then came together for a morning to learn about the context of the Referendum: constitutional history; devolved and reserved powers; how to vote; and to discuss what kind of Scotland they would like to see. Key issues were prioritised and the second event included speakers from Yes and No campaigns to address the students' issues from each perspective.

#### **Work with Young People**

##### **Political and critical literacies work with young people.**

Will Golding, a youth and adult tutor, was employed for 9 months to work with young people from 16 to 25 - using a critical literacy approach to develop resources. This included exploring democracy and active citizenship in relation to issues of importance to the young people, and the Referendum. One of the activities was "A' dinnae dae politics" which offered a range of different sessions for young people to choose from.

Will also ran 27 Referendum events or workshops in youth clubs, or youth forums, and worked with young people to organise hustings and two short action research projects with different groups focusing on the Referendum. He also delivered upskilling sessions for youth workers and CLD workers, delivered workshops to practitioners at the Scottish Peer Education Network conference and the South East &

Central CLD workforce development consortium 'Inspiring Practice' conference, and developed an extensive range of resources.

Callum MacLeod, based at Broughton High School organised a wide range of events for school pupils, including mock elections, film screenings of *Better Together* and *Yes Scotland* videos, information stalls, a poster competition, debate, question time, a visit to the Scottish Parliament and a drama project as well as collaborating with school staff to integrate Referendum education into the curriculum.

He has also started up a participation newsletter for children and young people in North Edinburgh called *The Charger*.

Gavin Crosby, the Youth Work Strategy Implementation officer:

- was involved with the Edinburgh Youth Work consortium in training youth workers across the city in democracy education.
- helped develop a lesson plan 'Democracy on the Move' about decision making, registering to vote and the impact of political decisions in daily life – which can be used by workers with a small amount of training.
- encouraged youth workers to get young people to register to vote, and created a 'branded' registration form which could be used to record the impact of the push to get people registered.
- supported the Scottish Youth Parliament who were also rolling out the resources developed in Edinburgh on registration and reasons to vote - 'Aye! Naw! Mibbe!.

A range of other Referendum and political education initiatives also took place in local communities. These included:

- *People and Power* classes on Scottish political history for people in north Edinburgh;
- *People and Power* events at North Edinburgh Arts – including films, plays and discussion about the Referendum issues.

- The Adult Learning Project held a co-investigation to engage local people in political dialogue in the build up to the Referendum.
- *Write Around Our Referendum* – a 6 week course exploring writing around the theme and discussion in South West Edinburgh.
- Ladies Referendum Coffee Morning in Leith.
- 4 week Road to Referendum course at South Side Community Centre.

A particularly interesting piece of work was undertaken with homeless and vulnerable men through CRISIS Skylight. The men worked with a tutor to discuss the Referendum from the starting point of issues of concern to them eg benefits, sanctions bedroom tax. They decided to tackle these through humour and comedy, writing their own material, and planned to present comic sketches to homeless people to encourage them to take part in the political process and develop confidence. The group won the Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2014 Edinburgh Adult Learners' Week Achievement Awards. City Libraries came on board by theming book groups around the Referendum, holding a debate and producing a resource list of relevant materials.

### **Resources**

Many of the above activities resulted in the development of some excellent resources and the *Talk Scotland* Group collated all of these, as well as other relevant articles, literature, teaching packs and links to useful online resources. They were all downloaded and are available for anyone to access and use at [www.upskilling.org.uk/home/talk-scotland-materials-resources](http://www.upskilling.org.uk/home/talk-scotland-materials-resources)

### **Pat Brechin**

**Community Learning and Development Worker, City of Edinburgh Council**