

The attached response is a collective one from community education staff based in the Department of Higher and Community Education at the University of Edinburgh.

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## **CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Lifelong learning – building on success: a discussion of specific issues related to lifelong learning in Scotland

We welcome this opportunity to comment on the policy for lifelong learning as it is expressed in *Life Through Learning Through Life (LTLTL)* and related documents on community learning and development and adult literacy in particular. Specifically we wish to comment on the following points below – some which are specified as areas you desire feedback on but other relevant areas we see as important and would like to raise in this context.

1. **Vision:** We are concerned that the vision and shape of the consultation is too focused on skills for work. Lifelong learning should be about much wider concerns given that what motivates people to engage in learning more often relates to issues in their everyday lives rather than simply skills for work. Whilst the policy does refer to ‘people-centered’ goals, in terms of personal fulfillment, active citizenship and social inclusion these tend to be underpinned by the view that work is the means to achieving these ends. Lifelong learning could mean much more and relate to people’s lives in a more rounded manner. There is recognition of this in the policy (p7) but nothing that substantiates this perception or develops proposals to further a wider interest in learning and the benefits that result.

We are surprised that there is little interest in policy in the relationship between education, learning and democracy. This has been a central thrust of Scottish policy for the past two centuries and this was manifest in the new Scottish parliament. This in turn came from an interest in democratic renewal in Scotland and it is important that the state actively supports this development. The furthering of democratic life in social and cultural terms is important for democracy as a political process and procedure. Unless democracy is nurtured educationally it is likely to wither. Education for citizenship may be an element in this but it is not enough. Education for citizenship tends to focus primarily on ‘rights and responsibilities’ whereas the more important issue is to involve people in processes of debating and deciding what these rights and responsibilities are and who is included or excluded from exercising them.

2. **Preoccupation with markets**

Learning and education are public goods and not commodities that should be subject to market processes and decisions. What type of education and learning we should have is too important to be left to the calculations of individuals operating in a market context and basing decisions on criteria of personal gain or need. Moreover, in the market model depicted in the policy document (p9) the claim is made that employers and individuals interact in ways which will mutually benefit both. However, there is little evidence that labour markets operate in the way claimed.

If lifelong learning is to benefit a 'knowledge society', as distinct from a 'knowledge economy', then policy needs to pursue the development of a rich and varied curriculum which is genuinely lifelong (not simply for those of working age) and is genuinely lifewide (in the sense of relating to all of life). Placing employers in the driving seat of lifelong learning cannot achieve this.

Furthermore, specific initiatives are needed that are tailored to the learning needs of distinctive groups if participation in learning provision is to be improved. For example, the changing demographic profile of Scottish society is clearly understood in *Life Through Learning Through Life*. By 2022 just less than half of the population will be over 50 years of age. It is also well established in the research literature that participation in learning declines with age. This presents a challenge and opportunity for lifelong learning so it is surprising that there are no policy initiatives in the document to address this problem and the trend in the population profile. In the context of new patterns of migration across the European union the changing mix of communities residing in Scotland needs to be addressed and measures identified which can realise the rich array of social, cultural, intellectual resources and skills that are available. Simply focussing on training for work will not achieve this.

### **3. Community learning and development (CLD)**

CLD is not about '...delivering our agenda' but should be concerned with assisting people to identify their own interests, work out how these can be achieved and develop the necessary knowledge, skills and actions which help people in communities realize their goals. In other words it involves working *with* people rather than *on* them as objects to be delivered to policy.

We are skeptical about the role of community-based learning in community regeneration strategies. The evidence base for the view that community initiatives are able to successfully turn round communities is very slim. This perspective ignores the structural causes of community problems which cannot be resolved at a local level. Where there is evidence of regeneration initiatives making a difference they require the genuine 'empowerment' of the community which a constructive and critical educational process can support, but this is not the type of learning which lifelong learning policy encourages.

### **4. Community planning partnerships**

There is a growing concern that top down mechanisms of governance are reducing democracy to what one writer calls 'the tyranny of participation'. Whatever may have been the laudable intentions of legislating for consultation

with the public, the reality has proved somewhat different. Through the imposition of Community Planning Partnerships, for example, participation has become a tightly regulated and bureaucratic responsibility rather than a claimed right. This has a number of serious implications for practice. First, it privileges and reinforces a kind of 'involvement elite' which is already skilled in responding to the (often unrealistic) demands of policy, thus creating further distance between the 'engaged' and the 'estranged'. A Recent Joseph Rowntree Fund publication *Community Participation: Who benefits?* concludes that the same small number of people are not only involved in everything, but exclude others through their superior knowledge of managerial imperatives.

Second, this situation is reinforced by construction and regulation of an alien discourse in which communities are expected to represent their views and interests. The performance and audit regime which surrounds partnerships drives out any possibility of deliberation since the agenda is already set and there is no opportunity for people in communities to develop and articulate their own views, critiques and aspirations. A recent report on participation in partnerships by Jonathan Davies of the Warwick Business School observed that partnership 'seemed very unlikely to enhance democratic inclusion'. This view is based on research, partly in Dundee, which highlighted the way in which 'managerialism is eroding the prospects for democratisation'. In other words, the agenda is so prescribed and the discourse so limiting that local participants either lose interest, get burnt out or become incorporated themselves.

Third, and following on from the previous point, democracy is depoliticised as a political process. Within Community Planning Partnerships, there is no genuine opportunity to raise those issues of political concern to and in communities which are not policy priorities. It is supremely ironic that whilst community has become ever more central to policy, policymakers are not more interested in finding out what is of central concern to communities. Writing about 'capacity building' in Glasgow, John Diamond observes that the partnership model of engagement 'has defined the solution before agreement has been reached on the problem'. Learning for democratic involvement should begin by assisting community groups to develop and articulate a shared understanding of the causes of the problems at hand, rather than blind adherence to government dictat.

There is a logic at work here which is built on a fundamental fallacy: that democracy is simply a consensual process which can be 'rolled out' and 'delivered' through a range of managerial procedures concerned with outcomes, outputs and monitoring – not a political process of deliberation and negotiation between different interests which is just as likely to produce dissent. It is of course the greatest irony if more involvement in participation might actually mean less democracy in any real sense of the word.

Bureaucratic systems of governance cannot create active and engaged citizens. People become activated when they are angry about something and want to take action, or when they want to celebrate something they are proud of, or

when they become conscious of injustice, or when they want to learn about something that will make a difference to their lives. Community Planning Partnerships represent a process of manufactured consensus which not only ignores the reality of different interests but also denies the possibility of dissent. Evidence is emerging of a growing and unequal struggle between performance centred and democratic notions of partnership. The bureaucratisation of politics through various mechanisms of performance, audit and surveillance produces a conformity which is stifling for community education – and potentially dangerous for democracy.

It is essential to remember that community education has historically been concerned with citizenship and democracy, but there are different ways of understanding what this might mean. If democracy is understood as a managerial procedure which is delivered from above to consumer citizens in a process of consensual change than this leads to a very different practice than if democracy is understood as a social and political process which has to be enacted from below by changing sets of activists. The latter position should be respected and reinforced if creeping managerialism is not to overwhelm the possibility of real educational engagement with people in ways which enable them to articulate their own, often contradictory, experience of policy and politics. David Miliband, in a speech to the voluntary sector last year, acknowledged the necessity for community organisations to act as a thorn in the side of governments. The recognition that such organisations can act as the conscience of government is a necessary corrective to the blandishments of the market.

### **5. Adult literacy**

We recognise that adult literacy provision in Scotland is having an important impact on people's lives. One significant difference between English and Scottish policy initiatives is that in Scotland adult literacy and numeracy is taken to relate to people's lives in a broad way. In England the focus of provision is more narrowly directed at achieving core skills related to functioning at work. The ambition to reach 150,000 literacy learners is a commendable one. However, we are also aware that in the rest of the UK targeting has led to a loss of adult education provision in areas not prioritised in policy. For example, there has been a decline in adult education and leisure classes as a consequence of funding priorities. It is important therefore that policy supports all forms of adult learning and education if a truly genuine culture of learning is to be achieved.

In conclusion we would urge the Scottish Executive to widen its vision for lifelong learning, develop specific measures to address what this means and how it will be measured, prioritise the importance of enhancing learning for democracy and address the unintended as well as intended outcomes of policy.

#### **References:**

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