

## **Call for evidence on lifelong learning, citizenship and belonging**

### **Draft response from the Centre for Lifelong Learning and Community Engagement, Department of Professional and Continuing Education, Goldsmiths, University of London**

The Centre for Lifelong Learning and Community Engagement very much welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into the future of lifelong learning and the call for evidence on citizenship and belonging. Citizenship has been centre stage as a public policy concern in Britain in recent years, as evidenced by the development of citizenship education in schools and colleges, as well as by government support for community-based learning for active citizenship (DfEE, 1998, Woodward, 2004). The concern to address the 'democratic deficit' and to promote active citizenship, marked in British policy debates, has also been part of a wider international phenomenon. So, too, have the concerns with identity, belonging, social capital and social cohesion, concerns particularly marked since the 9/11 attacks in USA and more recent bombings in London in 2005. In summary response to this timely call for evidence, we should like to make the following points.

#### **1) There is powerful evidence to support the view that lifelong learning, particularly community-based learning, can contribute to the promotion of active citizenship AND to the promotion of social solidarity.**

Active citizenship, however contested its precise nature may be (Lister, 1997, Westheimer and Kahne, 2004), has been promoted for a variety of reasons. On the basis of research carried out for the evaluation of the (then) Home Office's programme to promote Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC), we identified evidence that community-based learning — based on models and experiences of participative approaches — could contribute to the promotion of active citizenship in terms of the following dimensions:

- The citizen as voter and as volunteer
- The citizen as an active participant in existing structures for participation, including participation in service planning and delivery
- The citizen as an activist, participating in initiatives that challenge unequal power relations, promoting social solidarity and social justice, both locally and beyond (Mayo and Rooke, 2006).

In summary ALAC's outcomes included evidence that learners had progressed in terms of education, training and improved employability, and that participants had gone on to become more active in their communities and in public life (as, for example, school governors, local representatives/members of users forums and organisers within the Third Sector). Local organisations had been strengthened,

and conflicts within and between communities, including conflicts between newer arrivals and longer established communities, were being addressed and challenged.

Similar evidence has emerged from other initiatives including, for example, the WEA's Academy for Community Leadership (ACL) (WEA, Yorkshire and Humberside Region, 2007). As John Grayson, amongst others, has demonstrated, working with newer arrivals, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers, as well as with established communities, offers opportunities to identify common interests and the underlying causes and ways of addressing potential conflict (Grayson, forthcoming).

- 2. There are, however, gaps in the evidence about the long term impact of community learning on individuals and their families and civil society more generally. There are also gaps concerning how much difference active citizens actually make when they engage with decision-making processes. The question of who is listening to the voices of community remains a pressing one?**

The evaluation of 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' identified gaps in the evidence on the long-term impact of community-based learning for active citizenship. Evaluations of time-limited programmes and projects are inherently limited in these ways. There are similar limitations in relation to the evidence as to how much impact active citizenship actually makes. The Power Inquiry into Britain's democracy provided evidence on precisely this point — the frustrations experienced by citizens who conclude that their voices are not being heard. Rather than being characterised by an apathetic and uninterested public, the Inquiry concluded, Britain, like many established democracies, is typically by disengaged, with its citizens feeling that they lack effective voice (Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, 2006).

- 3. The key message that we should like to send to policy makers is that community-based learning needs on-going resourcing and support, rather than support via a series of disjointed short-term projects. This support needs to be available both directly and indirectly/independently via anchor organisations in civil society.**

The relative success of programmes such as ALAC has been linked to their established roots. The ALAC hubs were selected specifically to illustrate and build on promising practices, based upon relationships of trust, developed over time (Woodward, 2004). This has been a central finding, raising serious questions about sustainability for the future. Whilst the government actively supports the network that has emerged from the ALAC programme, promoting this as part of the 'Take Part' initiative, this still leaves questions over the long term funding of particular projects. Similarly, the ACL programme has been developed with time-limited EU funding, ending in March 2008. Parachuting in

and out of communities risks further contributing to citizens' alienation rather than contributing to strengthening active citizenship for the longer-term.

ALAC's relative success was also partially attributable to its location, based within civil society organisations rather than being directly funded and controlled by central government. The importance of strengthening civil society indirectly, through supporting anchor organisations, has emerged too in a number of other contexts, including via research into community engagement and community cohesion (COIC, 2007, Blake et al, forthcoming).

**4. There is evidence that civic engagement, rather than simply declining, is taking new forms in modern Britain, and is less formal in nature than has previously been the case.**

5. As the Power Inquiry demonstrated, people have changed and so have their forms of civic engagement. There is, that report concluded, 'a great deal of research evidence to show that very large numbers of citizens are engaged in community and charity work outside of politics' (ibid, 16). Research carried out by colleagues provides additional evidence in support of this conclusion. These new forms of engagement may require more support in terms of learning for citizenship, compared with engagement in more formal types of organisation, political parties and trade unions for example, which traditionally provided their own forms of induction and learning processes for their members.

**6. In the context of continuing diversity and population churn, lifelong learning has an increasingly additional important contribution to make.**

Just as established communities need to be supported as active citizens in making their voices heard, new arrivals also need support and access to specific information if social solidarity is to be promoted. The option is increasing conflict within and between communities. A forthcoming report funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Blake et al, forthcoming) illustrates the importance of information and advice, including information and advice about education and training, as well as the importance of community-based initiatives to promote social solidarity.

**7. Social purpose lifelong learning is therefore more necessary than ever, in the contemporary context, and would seem likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.**

Our conclusion is that social purpose lifelong learning is more necessary than ever in the contemporary context. Concerns with the democratic deficit would seem unlikely to disappear, at least in the immediate future, whilst concerns with community engagement would seem likely, if anything, to increase, given the

government commitment to strengthen user involvement and choice and increase the Third Sector's role in the modernisation of public services.

Diversity and population churn are also likely to continue as features of the social landscape. 'The most certain prediction,' according to Robert Putnam, is that almost any modern society 'will be more diverse a generation from now than it is today'. He cites this as 'one of the most important challenges facing modern societies' (Putnam, 2007. 137). In the context of increasing globalisation, identities would seem likely to be as complex, if not even more complex, than ever, as individuals continue to relate across of a huge range of possible and potential identities — diasporic, genderised, sexualised, religious, social and economic, national, transnational and so on. There would seem likely to be correspondingly continuing concerns with issues of community cohesion and social solidarity. There are significant issues for public policy here, beyond those already identified in relation to lifelong learning — including, for example, issues in relation to 'Voice and Choice' agendas for public service modernisation and policies for the regulation of migration and for the promotion of community cohesion. But these are beyond the scope of this particular consultation.

## References

- Blake et al, (forthcoming) (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our Shared Future*
- DfEE (1998) *Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools* (London: DfEE)
- Grayson, J. (forthcoming) 'Borders, Glass Floors and anti-racist Popular Adult Education' in J. Annette and M. Mayo, eds. *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (Leicester: NIACE)
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (2006) *Power to the People* (York: Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust)
- Lister, R. (1997) *Citizenship* (London: Macmillan)
- Mayo, M. and Rooke, A. (2006) *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (London: DCLG)
- Putnam, R. (2007) '*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first century*' *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30, 2
- WEA (Yorkshire and Humberside) *The Active Citizen* (Leeds: WEA)
- Westheimer, J., and Kahne, J. (2004) 'What kind of Citizen?' *American Educational Research Journal* 41, 2
- Woodward, V. (2004) *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (London: CRU, Home Office)