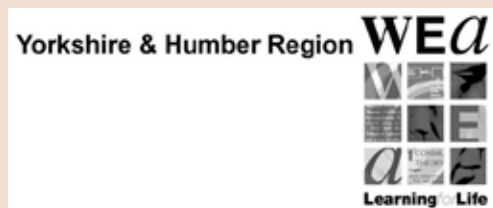


TITLE:

Active citizenship links to union activity

DATE: **May 2009**



SUMMARY

An innovative series of courses developed and run by the Workers' Educational Association successfully engaged many hard to reach groups across South Yorkshire. The result was more than 500 people who experienced courses on a wide range of subjects, but all with an active citizenship aspect.

INSTITUTION PROFILE

60 staff plus c500 sessional tutors in Yorkshire & Humber
1,753 tutors teaching each week nationally
More than 400 staff nationally
Operates 8 sites in Yorkshire & Humber
Charity
Largest provider of adult education in England

EAUC COMMENT

This case study demonstrates how working with external partners and their local community can enable education providers to develop a curriculum that includes citizenship and sustainable development.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Academy for Community Leadership (AfCL)
UNITE
A variety of voluntary and community organisations

Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)
Northern Refugee Centre

THE PROBLEM

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) wanted to develop an inclusive programme to target both community leaders and community members to equip them with the knowledge, skills and information to become active citizens. This meant they would be better able to participate in their community as well as better able to influence change and decision making that affected them.

In addition, the WEA's project team and tutors see activity on climate change at all levels of society as a key element of active citizenship in today's world. One of WEA's tutors is also a climate change activist, who was keen to develop learning opportunities and push the project forward.

The target region was South Yorkshire, an area the WEA believed would benefit from this type of activity.

THE APPROACH

Funding was made available by the Academy for Community Leadership (AfCL) and a series of courses was developed and offered to people across South Yorkshire. The courses were promoted through partner organisations as well as through more traditional routes such as leaflets, posters and on the WEA website.

The AfCL had been specific about some courses which needed to be delivered, but others were developed as the project progressed following discussion with partners.

The courses covered topics such as understanding political representation and European citizenship, global Issues, digital media skills and citizenship, community anthems, art and politics, understanding power relations, political structures and how to influence change and engage in the decision-making process.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) helped in the development of one of the courses – on climate change – and this enabled course content to be tailored to address its national and local priorities. The course was designed to whet the appetite of attendees and spur them on to further investigation and action. It covered both the theory of climate change and addressed the practicalities of how to start to take action.

The course topics were covered in new ways, for example, slavery and labour was covered as part of a course on sewing and digital media skills were developed through the exploration of current social issues e.g. homelessness.

One outcome of the courses was a greater involvement in general democratic activity, underpinned by increased confidence to engage, question, contribute and speak out. Everyone who completed a course received a certificate recognising their achievement.

OUR GOALS

- Create and run courses that leave people more confident, better able to understand the political landscape and more informed as a voter
- Enrol 550 people to the courses and ensure 500 complete them
- Provide access to the courses throughout South Yorkshire
- Make the courses accessible and relevant to a diverse range of people – both ethnically and in age
- Forge new networks and community links for the WEA

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacle

- Accreditation – the course had a target of 150 people gaining credits for accreditation from the Open College Network. The target audience for this course seemed unmotivated by achieving accreditation and were perhaps unaware of some of its benefits
- Funding for the continuation of the courses
- Role and purpose of the advisory group – created at the start of the course but its part became unclear by the end

Solution

- Accreditation should be optional, not mandatory
- The benefits and further uses of accreditation should be clearly explained to all participants so they can make an informed choice about whether it matters to them
- Individual organisations will find it hard to solve this problem. It needs Government commitment to sustained funding rather than peripheral and irregular funding
- Clearer terms of reference were drafted, but the group was still valuable as a forum for ideas

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

- 635 eligible people enrolled on the courses. 500 completed them and 260 of these gained accreditation through the Open College Network
- Evidence from the evaluation project, which ran throughout the programme, shows participants are more confident and better informed about political processes
- People from more than 10 different countries took part in the courses
- Tutors and staff at WEA have used the courses as an opportunity to enhance their continuing professional development, linking with the University of Sheffield on one of its 'Aim Higher' programmes
- The Academy for Community Leadership (AfCL) said the project should be extended, given the necessary resources, both within South Yorkshire and across the UK
- Links with PCS Union and other partners were strengthened
- Feedback from PCS Union was very positive. A 'green group' was formed by one enthusiastic official following their participation on one of the courses. Members of the group have planted a vegetable patch at one of their offices

LESSONS LEARNT

- It is essential to build these kind of programmes with partners – the WEA strengthened its links with trade unions by working with the Public and Commercial Services Union to provide content directly related to its national policy commitments
- Build a core tutor team committed to the work and to political education
- Free provision is crucial
- Resources are required to ensure accessibility, for example a contribution to childcare and travel costs

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Academy for Community Leadership - www.afcl.ac.uk



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