



# Minutes of the **National Conference 2007**

**Britannia Hotel Coventry, 26-27 October 2007**

Workers' Educational Association  
Third Floor, 70 Clifton Street, London EC2A 4HB

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# Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007

The joint WEA/NIACE Conference took place on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and was entitled *The Public Value of Adult Learning: Who Benefits?*

Chaired by Richard Bolsin, the joint conference included the following events:

- An address by Dr Leon Feinstein, Director, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education.
  
- A panel discussion chaired by Richard Bolsin and including representatives from:
  - Centre for Excellence in Leadership
  - Trades Union Congress
  - The Work Foundation
  - NIACE
  - WEA
  
- A choice of workshops with case study discussion groups on the following:
  - Single Homeless Action in Derwentside
  - WEA Reach Out Project
  - Armagh College
  - WEA Rochdale Programme
  - Leicester College
  - WEA Helping in Schools
  - Bridges to Learning – Open University
  - WEA Tandrusti Project
  - Action for Communities Portsmouth
  - WEA courses at Swans
  - Unionlearn
  - WEA Thurrock MIND
  
- A debate chaired by Richard Bolsin and including Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE and Prof. Bob Fryer, Chief Learning Adviser, Department of Health.

A presentation was made by WEA Enterprises Ltd.

Dinner took place in the hotel for WEA representatives attended by the Deputy Lord Mayor and Deputy Lady Mayoress of Coventry; the speaker was Mr Michael Standen, former District Secretary in WEA Northern District.

# Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2007: WEA Business

## Attendance

3	Elected National Officers
5	Other Trustees
8	Other Members of the Association Committee
41	Delegates from Branches
28	Delegates from Regions / WEA Scotland
4	Members of the Standing Orders Committee
23	Directors and staff with Speaking rights
23	Staff and Visitors

## Welcome

The President, David Lanch, welcomed everyone to the business meeting on the second day of the WEA Conference in Coventry.

## Standing Orders Committee Report

Michael Crilly, Chair of the Standing Orders Committee, moved the Report of the Standing Orders Committee, detailing the Timetable and Order of Business.

The following points in the Report were noted:

- Ann Maybrey, a member of the Standing Orders Committee, had been ill and was not able to attend Conference.
- An addendum to the Report was included in each delegate and visitor pack. This included a re-wording which clarified the meaning of the amendment to Motion 6 proposed by North East Region.
- Representatives proposing the following motions had not registered to attend Conference. The motions and amendments could not therefore be debated:
  - Motion 3 - Box Branch
  - Motion 9 – Wellingborough Branch
  - Motion 10 – Hurst House Chesterfield Branch
- The General Secretary would give an oral statement to Conference on the subject of concessionary fees referred to in Motions 9 and 10.
- The Honorary Treasurer was not able to be present at Conference and was to be represented by another Officer.
- At the elections, the General Secretary would take the Chair.

Following a vote, Conference approved the Standing Orders Committee Report.

## Minutes

The minutes of National Conference held at the University of Manchester on 14-16 October 2005 were considered and accepted as a correct record.

## Video Presentation

Chair of WEA Trustees, Professor Dick Taylor, was not able to be present at Conference, owing to a previously arranged speaking engagement. He had prepared a video presentation which was shown to Conference.

## Trustees' Report

The President introduced the *Trustees' Review of Activities since the 2005 Conference* setting out achievements following incorporation. The following were noted:

- The four external Trustees appointed had encouraged Trustees to question conventional approaches.
- Association Committee meetings had taken place in WEA Regions. This rotation had contributed to an improvement in the quality of governance.
- Finance and HR regulations had been introduced and had assisted the work of Regions.
- The ALI Inspection in 2005 judged the Association "satisfactory" and a monitoring visit in 2006 confirmed further progress. In the forthcoming Inspection we shall strive to achieve grades of "good"/"excellent".

## Treasurer's Report

The Financial Statements for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2005 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006 were received by Conference.

A report by the Honorary Treasurer, Peter Cooper, was read to Conference.

Questions from the floor relating to the WEA Pension Scheme and course fees were addressed by Officers.

## Officers of the Association

Nominations to serve for the period 2007-2011 as WEA President were received from Colin Barnes and David Lanch, and for the post of Deputy President from Cyril Snell and Lynne Smith. The candidates addressed Conference. Following a ballot, the results of the elections were declared as follows:

<b>President</b>	<b>Colin Barnes</b>
<b>Deputy President</b>	<b>Lynne Smith</b>

Peter Cooper and Chris Morton remain Association Officers for a further two years.

## Standing Orders Committee

Five nominations were received to serve on the Standing Orders Committee for the period 2007-2009 and the following were declared to be elected:

Gill Aldridge

Frank Colls

Michael Crilly

Martin Sundram

Betty Wolfenden

Conference considered the motions contained in the Final Agenda. Decisions taken are detailed below. The numbers refer to those used in the Agenda. The original proposers are given for information, with the proposers of the successful Amendments to Motions 14 and 15 also included.

## The following motions were carried and became Resolutions of Conference:

1. This Conference notes the Trustees' report responding to the resolutions of Conference 2005.

Association Committee

2. This Conference agrees that while the WEA supports the Government's drive to improve UK skills through learning, it does question the emphasis it places on simply skills and qualifications as the method to achieve its objectives. The WEA believes that if adults of all ages are active and confident learners, then any UK skills' deficit now or in the future will be more easily rectified. In addition, there will be other benefits which improve the quality of life for individuals and communities through better health and well-being, improved civic and social cohesion, and more sustainable environments. This Conference therefore urges the Government to recognise the public value inherent in adult learning and review its current policies which have already reduced significantly the numbers of adult learners.

Association Committee

4. This Conference congratulates Yorkshire & Humber Regional Committee on its initiative in establishing a project on "Revitalising Volunteering including Branches" and encourages other Regions to consider this issue in depth. Conference looks forward to a report from the Trustees to the next Association Conference on the implementation of any recommendations from the Association Committee's Working Group on these issues which may include proposed amendments to the Governing Documents, policies and procedures.

Association Committee

5. This Conference notes that the formation of Branches is not occurring as well as it could. Conference therefore endorses the approach of developing other voluntary structures (as allowed under Regulation 5.5) thereby encouraging WEA activity where the minimum requirements for Branch creation or maintenance have proved too difficult.

Such groups should allow for the creation of new models of democracy and working relationships between individuals or small groups of pro-active Members, regional staff or nearby Branches.

Conference asks the Association Committee to pursue this development actively.

South West Region

6. This Conference endorses the Association Committee's report on the future of WEA Membership and calls upon the Trustees to implement the following recommendations in time for the 2008/9 academic year:
- a] In England Membership of the WEA will remain free and be open to anyone who supports the principles of the Association.
  - b] All learners will be invited to opt to become members during the period of their enrolment.
  - c] All members will be able to join a branch and vote and stand for office.
  - d] All members will receive each year, as part of the basic membership package, one Members' Newsletter.
  - e] All members will have access to the WEA website which will carry the latest news about courses, campaigns and indicate ways in which members can help the Association.
  - f] The WEA website will be developed to include a 'Get Involved' section with pages on courses, membership, volunteering, supporting, campaigning, communicating and getting involved with the WEA at a local level.
  - g] Regions and branches will be able to access current information about members in their area and will supplement the communications outlined above as they see fit.
  - h] The WEA will develop a national supporters' scheme and other opportunities for members and other individuals who wish to contribute financially to the work of the Association.
  - i] All existing members in England will be written to, advising them of the proposed changes to the scheme. They will be informed that their membership under the current scheme will be carried forward and they will be invited to join the new scheme when it is implemented.

Association Committee

7. This Conference endorses the establishment of WEA Enterprises Ltd as an exciting new venture by the WEA and welcomes the assurance that it will cover all costs in the first year of its operation. For it to be successful the Regions must be closely involved.

Conference asks the Association Committee to ensure that during this start-up phase a meeting (or meetings) of representatives from all Regions is called in order to:

- a) Understand the processes that have been gone through to establish this work (e.g. risk assessment, business planning etc)
- b) Identify and evaluate opportunities within the Regions that could be developed on a commercial basis
- c) Ensure that there is consistency between the values of the WEA and this new stand-alone venture

Yorkshire & Humber Region

8. This Conference asks the Association Committee to examine and measure the practices of the WEA in relation to environmental sustainability. This will determine the social and environmental impact the organisation has with its educational programmes and as a major national charity. This will include the evaluation (and encouragement) of the use of renewable resources and the use of ethical suppliers and their products.

Conference asks the Association Committee to bring a report on the issue to the next national Conference of the WEA.

Yorkshire & Humber Region

13. This Conference is concerned about the current level of bureaucracy in the Association. This is undermining the voluntary efforts of local Branches to sustain adult education. Conference calls upon the Association Committee to conduct a review of the present situation with particular reference to the current level of form filling by tutors, students and Branch officers.

Malmesbury, Pewsey & Urchfont Branches

**Please Note that motions 14 and 15 were carried after the adoption of the relevant amendments set out in the final agenda.**

14. This Conference notes the recent Report of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations on the need for Voluntary Bodies accepting contracts from Government to retain and develop their autonomy.

Conference calls on the Association Committee to develop a strategy which enables Regions, Branches and Groups to operate either inside or outside the LSC contract, and to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the breadth of the tutor base.

South West Region  
Association Committee  
London Region

15. This Conference recommends that the Association Committee should initiate an educational campaign to inform the general public about the WEA, what it is and what it does. Such a campaign should emphasize the opportunities the WEA provides for everyone, irrespective of age, qualifications or country of origin, to broaden their experience and learn new skills with the aid of qualified tutors in an appropriate atmosphere.

Bottisham & District Branch  
London Region  
Association Committee

17. This Conference recognises and welcomes the growing importance of the social enterprise sector. Conference also recognises that this approach is in its infancy and the infrastructure needed to develop it is still being established. Conference calls upon the Association Committee to investigate the educational and training implications and make proposals for implementation in the years 2008/9.

Yorkshire & Humber Region

18. This Conference calls upon the Association Committee to consider the most effective way of drawing up policy and educational approaches which develop the concept of Education for Global Citizenship (as articulated by Oxfam) within the WEA. The approach defined by Oxfam is education based on asking questions and developing critical thinking skills; equipping people with knowledge, skills and values to participate as active citizens; acknowledging the complexity of global issues; revealing the global as part of everyday local life, whether in a small village or a large city; understanding how we relate to the environment and to each other as human beings. (Oxfam 2006).

Yorkshire & Humber Region

# The following motions and amendments were lost:

## Amendments to Motion 6

### (i) AMENDMENT:

First Sentence: Delete all after “WEA Membership” up to and including “academic year” and substitute:

“but believes that attracting people into membership would be assisted by the elaboration of themes that assign purpose to member participation. In calling on the Trustees to implement the following recommendations for the 2008/9 academic year, Conference requests the Association Committee to advise the Trustees on how a link could be established between membership and the Association’s three Educational Strands of Cultural Studies, Community Involvement and Second Chance to Learn.”

North East Region

### (ii) AMENDMENT:

Clause (a) Delete “remain free and”

Add new sentence to end of Clause (a): “Conference asks the Trustees to use their powers to introduce a membership fee should they judge it appropriate.”

North East Region

11. This Conference views with alarm the over-bureaucratic and detailed approach implicit in the WEA OTL scheme of lecturer inspection. It has already caused the loss of some highly qualified, experienced and popular tutors. Furthermore, the requirement for all tutors to hold or seek a teaching qualification, regardless of experience, other professional qualifications and other life-skills, is denying the Association access to a pool of respected lecturers.

We call on the Association Committee to review its position on this issue.

Malmesbury, Pewsey & Urchfont Branches

12. This Conference notes the recent Report of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations on the need for Voluntary Bodies accepting contracts from Government to retain and develop their autonomy; records its view that the new Regulations on minimum requirements for teaching qualifications constitute a serious invasion of the Association’s academic freedom; and calls on the Association Committee to develop a strategy which enables Regions, Branches and Groups to operate effectively outside the LSC contract and to retain the breadth of the tutor base.

Mid-Cornwall Branch

16. This Conference recommends that the Trustees consider allocating a sum of £5,000 to be made available from Association funds to be bid for by Regions. This will enable Regions to mount campaigns of National or Regional significance such as the “Right To Learn” Campaign in the Northern Region, for fairer funding for adult education.

Newcastle on Tyne Branch

# General Secretary's Report

In this, his second Conference, Richard Bolsin noted how much the WEA had moved on since his appointment – resulting in a new mood, new faces and a new impact. On the previous day, WEA members had been seated with others interested in adult education and the Association now had confidence derived from its tremendous achievements, which had been outlined by Dick Taylor in his video speech.

Now that our house was in order, a sense of moving on had been achieved and the need to look ahead to the next stage of revitalising and renewal was emphasised. Satisfactory is not good enough and the WEA was committed to dealing with the tasks resulting from motions agreed at conference.

At a recent meeting, the Minister John Denham challenged us to ask what our founders would make of the WEA if they were to come back today and how they would want the Association to be carried forward.

The next conference would show progress in the way we engage with the branch movement and the WEA needed to take some difficult decisions on its future shape.

The General Secretary paid particular tribute to the voluntary members for all they do to keep the WEA in the mould that it is today.

Finally, he welcomed the two new WEA Trustees and paid tribute to the three people who were leaving office following Conference.

## Presentations

Presentations were made to:

**David Lanch**, who had served the Association for many years including 10 years as Treasurer and 6 years as President. The General Secretary reported that David had been totally supportive through some very difficult decisions.

**Eddie Conway**, who did not seek re-election as Deputy President. Eddie had been associated with the Association for 35 years and had chaired many key national committees.

**Angela Clark**, who was retiring as Conference Secretary and Secretary to the General Secretary after nearly 25 years with the WEA.

## President's Thanks

The President thanked the voluntary members, the General Secretary and all the staff whose work had resulted in real progress, building a sound platform for further improvement.

## Vote of Thanks

Mr John Whinray, Chair of the host Region, West Midlands, outlined some of the work undertaken in the Region and thanked delegates and visitors for coming to Coventry and submitting motions for debate. He also thanked everyone involved in the organisation and conduct of Conference.

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**THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF CONFERENCE**

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