

May/June 2005: Issue 5

Adult education in the news

In recent weeks national and regional newspapers have carried articles on a crisis in adult education. Dramatic fee increases and cuts in adult courses have been reported from colleges and local education authorities.

How has this arisen? There are a number of reasons. Firstly, the Department for Education and Skills requires the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to prioritise 16-19 year olds in its funding, as over the next two or three years there is a 'demographic bulge' which is taking a larger share of funding. Second, the Government's 'Skills Strategy' is intended to 'put the employer firmly in the driving seat' of post 16 education and the funding for people over 19 is being targeted at those working to get their first full level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 GCSE A*-C or vocational equivalent). Provision outside these areas is referred to as 'Other' by the LSC and has had

a significant cut across the country. In addition, the fee level the LSC assumes will be paid by students has been increased by 10% this year and is intended to be increased by at least the same level in each of the next two years. Finally, the LSC is having substantial cuts in its funding and is arguably passing those on to providers and students. The outcry arose over the last month because colleges and LEAs were recently given their funding allocation for the academic year 2005-06. Many believe that these allocations were delayed until after the General Election and have hit courses already advertised.

For next year only, the WEA is less dramatically affected - although we do face the 10% increase in fees. This is euphemistically termed a 'fee target'. However, it's one we can't miss because it has already been cut from our allocation! We

haven't had our provision target cut next year and this makes us an exception in adult education when you see the news from across the country.

However, all indications are that this will get worse from 2006/07 onwards; we will face very hard times and need to campaign to maintain our provision of liberal adult education and widening participation across the country. In particular, there are many who are annoyed that a fee target ('making those who can pay, pay more') is a dishonest way of making a cut. This is especially important given the disproportionate impact it would have on the 'hard working families' and 'fixed income pensioners' that politicians claimed to listen to on the doorstep during the election. Not everyone is confident that employers have had a great track record in improving skills in the UK over the last century. Many feel that there is a danger that a history of adult education, affordable to all, could be lost in return for a remedial and vocational push to fend off "competition from the Far East" that is as untested as Curriculum 2000 was for sixth formers a few years ago.



Some of the 15 staff from WEA North East Region who successfully passed the National test in numeracy and/or literacy receiving their certificates on 26 May. Skills for Life Manager Mike Rugg (far left) encouraged colleagues to take the tests to help prove that there should be no stigma attached to improving basic skills.

By Peter Templeton, WEA Director of Education, Quality and Strategy

Good news on re-inspection visits

The latest Adult Learning Inspectorate report, which covers extensive re-inspection visits to the WEA's North West, East Midlands and Southern Regions, is positive, and shows 'some' or 'good' progress being made in all areas assessed - both on issues relating to leadership and management across the WEA, and specific areas that were picked up in each of the Regions in the previous inspection.

FirstClass users can obtain the full report in the 're-inspection news' conference on their FirstClass desktop, or it can be found on the internet at <http://mail.wea.org.uk/tutors>.

Many thanks to all the tutors, other staff and volunteers in the three Regions who have spent time being inspected and interviewed.

We have been told of two general programme courses in Southern Region that were particularly highly marked by the inspectors, and are worth detailing here since the methods used met with the approval of learners too!

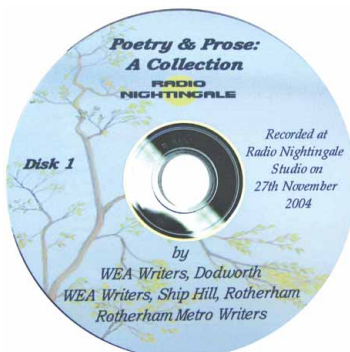
Howard Martin's philosophy course was commended on its use of a learning diary by each student. Learners found that this added to the course, while it also provided the proof of progression that inspectors look for - not always easy to provide on non-accredited humanities courses. Students were sent a booklet of suggested reading ahead of the course, this helped them arrive engaged and ready for the course. Howard also provided students with a glossary of common philosophical terms; this helped to demystify the language, particularly for new students.

Bob Parry was inspected on a cartography course for members of Maidenhead Branch, and was complimented by inspectors for the use of magnifying equipment and also for the way that he used IT to help teach the course. Inspectors suggested that the magnifying equipment may also be useful for groups studying historical documents. Bob says:

I found the inspection experience positive and painless. At the mid-session break, I left the room while the inspector discussed the course with the students. She then came and gave me some useful feedback before departing. She commented positively on my integration of IT with my teaching. The course was about access to the countryside and use of maps for planning and navigating walks. I have given versions of it a few times before, aided by slides and overheads. This time I abandoned both in favour of PowerPoint...I tried to keep the text slides simple, using them to provide summaries, list sources, and present quotations for discussion for example. PowerPoint is no substitute for the opportunity to handle and closely examine full-sized paper maps however, so hands-on exercises were integrated with the short PowerPoint sessions.

The next round of re-inspection visits will take place in late September and early October, with a final set scheduled for early December this year.

CD of work by WEA creative writers available now



Students from two WEA creative writing workshops in South Yorkshire have recorded some of their work at Rotherham General Hospital's Radio Nightingale studio. The pieces will be broadcast by Radio Nightingale in regular short slots during 2005, and are now also available on a double CD for £3, of which £1.70 will go to the radio station, which is a registered charity.

To order your copy of the CD please contact WEA tutor Graham Rippon on grippon@wea.org.uk or via the Yorkshire and Humber office on 0113 245 3304.

For more detail on this story, see the following article on our website: http://www.wea.org.uk/weanews/news_feb01.htm



Speakers Corner

Frank Evans, a tutor in Southern Region, sums up the responses he has received since starting this column

Over recent months I have received several letters from tutors, and I am very grateful to those who have taken the trouble to write. Only one student appeared in my mailbag, however, which I feel is a reflection of the fact that there is no real communication with those who are, after all, the 'end users' of the WEA - the real customers. They rarely see WEA News, and often know little of the organisation. They may, perhaps, be all delighted with what they are receiving, and if this be true, the LSC should take note. The one student wrote:

Of course, I understand that some standards must be set and some goals, but I feel we are in danger of losing education for its own sake as a worthwhile goal.

The obvious fact should never be forgotten that without students we are nothing.

Although I have not been inundated with letters, a selection from tutors who have written include the following:

The people I meet each week are not seeking further qualifications; they operate as a collective group, discussing social, historical and literary questions...the weekly meeting is their high point; they read alone then come together to bond with each other in an important way; the coffee-break at half-time is not trivial because it helps bring the group closer together; they are not obsessed with their individual progress or learning outcomes.

WEA seems to be in thrall to the LSC and our future determined by its financial subsidies. How much does it cost, I wonder, to put in place all the assessment and evaluation processes, the record-keeping of session plans and schemes of work, the filing of learners' records, the management of the vast amount of paperwork so generated, and the staff needed to scrutinise and organise all this? Why are Branch members of the WEA no longer as involved as they once were in the running of the organisation?

A course which will expand the mind, develop a new interest, stimulate greater understanding - in short, which will educate, in the proper

sense of that word? Here is where the WEA can indeed continue to provide a service - as it has been doing since its foundation.

I have chosen these to be typical of comments I have received, and, I feel that the two main issues that stand out are the fears of some that the WEA, as they have always known it, is vanishing, and secondly that feel they are feeling exploited and their professional status is being subtly undermined by unknown faceless people.

An immediate response could be to ask ourselves if the WEA, as it was in the past, is worth preserving, anyway? Does it provide something valuable that is not available elsewhere? Is it even possible to preserve it in the present climate? Most would answer the first two questions with an emphatic yes. The last is the unknown.

From the tutors' point of view, I think it has to be recognised that many - if not all - have always valued working for the organisation because of its special ideals, and have been prepared to do so not just for financial reasons, but often driven by more idealistic motives, or even because it suits their less conventional way of life. In my own view and experience, there are probably a higher percentage of inspiring, unusual, and devoted teachers in our ranks than in most other educational organisations. It should be the role of the permanent tutor-organisers, in my view, to establish and foster good on-going relations with tutors, and also to root out any unsatisfactory practices that are discovered in their own individual patches. They should be backed with a minimum of formal managerial diktats.

In other words we certainly need better vertical communication, to and from management, via tutor-organisers to tutors and students.

Do you agree or disagree with the points raised in this piece? Why not write a short letter in response or indeed about other WEA issues - we intend to start publishing letters next issue. The writer of the best letter published each time will receive a £25 book voucher. Please address letters to WEA News and send by post or email; details on page 8.



Richard Crisp, Exeter Branch Secretary, on communication, the voluntary membership and democracy in the WEA

I wonder why there has been little feedback from Branch members generated by this page. Is it because so few members read it or have the opportunity to do so? The next issue of WEA News will include a questionnaire to try to find out who does read it, and how you come by it. Please be sure to respond to it if you do read WEA News.

Communication is always difficult in any large organisation, but for us it is hugely influenced by whether or not you have use of computers and website access. All staff have access to e-mail, the internet and First Class, but not even all NEC members do. But many Branch members don't have computer skills, don't have access to a computer or don't want any of it anyway. They are already in effect excluded from the mainstream of WEA information and communication. This is a serious issue for active Branch members and for the organisation. By way of example, did you know that the deadline for Motions to the National Conference in October was 24th June? What is the date as you read this? This information was posted on the website at the beginning of June, and as a Branch Secretary I did receive the paperwork for my Committee. Nevertheless, you have to be quick. I suggest that Branches should try to identify a local member with internet connection, be they on the Committee or not, to act as reporter of WEA internet information. With John Nixon newly appointed as Head of IT, new strategy on the way forward is underway. Is FirstClass the best vehicle for expanding voluntary members' electronic communication, or should much more information be available via the WEA website (www.wea.org.uk)? I would certainly like to hear your views.

The whole ethos of the WEA is to educate and inform. Naturally, this is usually focussed on learners, but in my recent experience, we also need to be looking at our own people as well, be they staff or volunteers. Branch volunteers, if they are to feel appreciated, valued and useful, need a clear role, understood by staff, and the necessary information

and resources to carry it out.

Thinking of the National Conference again, it is perhaps the most traditional of vehicles for the democratic process. Every Branch can send a member to vote. Individuals, usually via their Branch or Region, can put Motions to the conference for debate. But what of democracy itself? We state it proudly in our Constitution, but how well do we put it into practice? Do staff always give due consideration to the role of the voluntary member in terms of our democratic ideals? If democracy simply boils down to scrutiny by voluntary members of executive plans, how well are we even doing that? With so much change in the last couple of years, can the NEC be more than the House of Lords to the Association Management Team (AMT)'s Cabinet? How often is consultation or scrutiny compromised by the guillotine of deadlines? Perhaps we should currently consider ourselves to be under siege as during wartime; the current strategy is simply to survive. We need strong leadership to punch our way through the gloom but the voluntary membership may be severely shell-shocked come the peace. It is up to the voluntary membership to start thinking creatively on how to reinvigorate itself and to retake its due place in the co-driving seat of WEA progression. Don't get me wrong, NEC members are and never have been 'them', they are also active Branch, Regional and specialist committee members, and do a great job. However I think they are probably overloaded with work. Separating the roles of Trustees and NEC (as incorporation plans would do) may not overcome this issue on its own.

Please contact me for input on Branch issues for the next WEA News at rcrisp@wea.org.uk or via the postal address on page 8.

National Trust

A reminder that the WEA holds a full Education Group Membership with the National Trust. This enables groups of students with a tutor to visit any National Trust property for free - and tutors can make planning and preparation visits ahead of time too. In all cases, the visit must be booked with the site at least seven days in advance.

The National Trust has had problems sending out its membership cards this year - one will be sent to each Region when they do arrive - in the meantime please quote WEA membership number 300303315 when booking a course visit to a Trust site.

WEA awards and activities during Adult Learners' Week 2005

Mike Buchan, a learner from the WEA 'Reach Out' project, was the overall individual winner of the Scottish Adult Learners' Week Awards. Mike joined the project in January 2004 whilst recovering from alcohol addiction and throat cancer. Since then, Mike's progress has been remarkable. He now volunteers within the project, which is aimed at unemployed adults in Aberdeen, is due to qualify next year in Mountain Leader and climbing instructor courses, and has successfully raised funds for the project with a sponsored walk.

Life has taught me many things, I've found one to compare
I felt just like a caterpillar, existing without a care
This caterpillar who I thought, was just like me,
Was trapped in a dark place, where we couldn't be free.
Inside this dark place, we had to experience things.
Where I grew my strength, and the caterpillar grew wings
The caterpillar and I, made lots of changes you see,
For her to become a butterfly, and for I to become ME!!!

By Carol Nicholson, WEA Student in Yorkshire and Humber Region, who won an individual Government Office, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Adult Learners' Week Award.



Members of the Ripon Project Group collect their award from Education Secretary Ruth Kelly at the national Adult Learners' Week awards ceremony.

The Ripon Project Group from Harrogate were winners of a national NIACE Adult Learners' Week award in England, sponsored by the European Social Fund. The Group consists of diverse learners with long-term health problems who have attended the Acorn MIND Centre in Harrogate. All the group went on the WEA's New Directions course and achieved OCN certificates at level 1,2, or 3, this gave them the encouragement to form a committee and create the new MIND centre in Ripon, where they offer a similar range of learning opportunities and drop in support to that they had received. "Learning can be an adventure into the unknown with challenges along the way, learning isn't a solitary road there are always others to travel with," said one learner.

Two WEA learners, Barbara Willis and Allan Yeoman, from Wanstead & Woodford and Ilford Branches, won awards at the Redbridge Institute ceremony on 23 May. Mrs Willis won the Long-Standing Class Member Award - she has been learning with Wanstead & Woodford for over 50 years - whilst Mr Yeoman won an award for personal progression. He began learning with the WEA four years ago after becoming unable to work through illness - now he carries out voluntary work, is an active class member and also belongs to an amateur operatic society.

A Cultural Diversity Day was held at West Green Learning Centre in Haringey, North London. A variety of taster sessions were run in subjects ranging from Spanish to clay modelling. Traditional food was provided by local Kurdish and Somali communities, whilst other attractions included Kurdish folk dancing and the showing of an award-winning Turkish film.

Comedian and actor John Fortune lead a 'masterclass' satirising government policy towards adult education, which was greatly enjoyed by an audience made up WEA students, voluntary members and staff as well as representatives of other organisations in the field of adult education.



David Tyler from WEA Barnets Branch gets his point across at the John Fortune event

Learning for Learning's Sake

General Secretary Richard Bolsin on the value of non-vocational adult education

One possibly unintended consequence of targeting funding for adult education almost exclusively towards qualifications and specific skills is a squeeze on funding for more general adult education.

The mistaken assumption may be that this is all leisure and recreational provision - line-dancing, dog obedience and yoga classes. Inclusion is less of a priority, and adults who are interested in their personal betterment find courses that used to be available have now stopped, or have become too expensive and exclusive.

We certainly need a skilled workforce, but to sustain our economic performance and to attract further inward investment, we also need confident individuals and confident communities. For many, that sense of self-belief and engagement stems from participation and success in serious evening and day classes run locally in libraries, church halls, schools and wherever else people naturally congregate. Active learning leads to active citizenship.

For example, a sizeable number of people, many of them young, face multiple challenges, often including homelessness and drug misuse, leading to personal breakdown and loss of self-respect. They may lead almost invisible lives. Their goal is to survive to the next day. They may never have experienced success. Qualifications and employment are, for the time being, beyond their grasp. Volunteers and organisations working with these groups - often in highly effective, complex partnerships - invest huge amounts of time and resources in engaging them in regular routines and patterns that will enable them to reconstruct their lives.

Although the government and the Learning and Skills Council recognise that "first steps" provision is needed for these people, it is already far out of their reach. Their "learner journey" fails even to be conceived. Much more planned resource is needed for these people to resume constructive lives and to be able to contribute effectively to society.

What about older people? Many adults have a deep aversion to the formality of paperwork and qualifications. In recent years, they may have tolerated them because "the funders want it". Now funders want much more from the learner to help pay for the skills strategy. The goal for many older learners is often to sustain independence, in their lifestyle and physical and mental health. Education lets them keep active faculties that would otherwise decline. By engaging in voluntary activity in this way, many of them will also provide the mortar that holds local communities together. Without it, not just in cities but also in rural areas, we see only too often the vacuums that enable more intolerant groups to foment and incite hatred and unrest, which in turn leads to ghettos and blighted local economies.

Where are these needs identified in the skills strategy? Provision of this sort, usually through liberal education and humanities classes exploring issues of culture, faith and citizenship, is unlikely to be properly funded in many parts of the country after this year. And yet, with an increasing, ageing population, is it not essential to encourage and develop activity that will reduce dependency on health and social care? In rural areas, the contribution made by voluntary organisations such as the Women's Institute, the University of the Third Age and the Workers' Educational Association, as well as local adult education services, is particularly under threat.

Jamie Oliver recently led a successful uprising over healthy eating in schools. Wouldn't it be sensible to build on this by offering parents and children opportunities to learn together how to create simple, nourishing meals from natural ingredients? The benefits are almost beyond imagination, but this sort of provision is at risk of being squeezed out.

The chancellor of the exchequer and the director general of the Confederation of British Industry extol the necessity for Britain to spearhead the knowledge economy, where the values of innovation and mould-breaking are so important. Imagination and flair will be needed more than regulation. Yet the funding that is linked so remorselessly to easily measurable, skills-related outcomes is unlikely to produce the free-thinkers needed, while provision that could do so is being squeezed out.

The skills strategy is important, and so is provision for the increasing numbers of young people staying in full-time education and for adults lacking basic skills. But have the consequences been fully understood?

Much of the provision I have illustrated results from complex partnerships of volunteers, organisations, colleges and adult education services working together. It takes time, effort and resources to engage the hardest to reach. It will be impossible if the same organisations are expected to chase alternative funding, which will often be from multiple sources, short-term and require a substantial investment of time and resources in bidding. Once the partnerships and the provision cease, the infrastructure will be lost and be very difficult, if not impossible, to recover.

Our continuing economic success depends just as much on this provision as it does on a well qualified and skilled workforce.

Bringing the world into adult education

The annual Global Learning Award celebrates adult education programmes that raise awareness and increase understanding of global issues. Past winners include Preston College and Lancashire Global Education Centre's project, Global perspectives in English, Walsall College of Art and Technology's citizenship programme Learning Together, and a distance-learning course for members of the union Amicus-MSF: Global labour Studies.

The Award is open to tutors, organisations and institutions in England who can give evidence that their project has raised awareness in their students of international issues and has empowered the students to consider their own lives in a global context. For further information or to nominate, contact Amy Dunkley at the DEA, tel: 020 7490 8108, email: amy.dunkley@dea.org.uk, www.dea.org.uk/adult/projects_gla.html

Quick House phone numbers

Corporate Services finance staff have now moved to Quick House, and a new phone system has been installed. The key numbers to note for Corporate Services are now:

General: 020 7426 3450
 EST: 020 7426 3493
 IT: 020 7426 3456
 HR: 020 7426 3465
 Finance: 020 7426 3477
 Training: 020 7426 3492
 Marketing: 020 7426 3487

Phone numbers for individual staff should be available on their FirstClass resume.



Dawn Hope, Karen Barrett and Valerie Elkins (left to right), were among five WEA staff from the NEAL Centre in Portsmouth who raised nearly £500 for cancer research by running the 'Race for Life'. Dawn works in the NEAL Centre office, whilst Karen and Valerie are tutors in IT and French respectively

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

The WEA has joined hundreds of other not-for-profit organisations in signing up to the Make Poverty History statement and policy agenda.

The proposal to sign up was approved by the WEA Policy and Resources Committee - the report they considered states, "Make Poverty History provides the WEA with an opportunity to join in an historic campaign for social justice on an international scale. It reminds us of the need for the Association to engage in campaigning and we should look to do this in a considered way by developing a policy for future campaign affiliations after conference."



Readers may be interested in a short book that has been published, which links the local and the global in suggesting practical steps towards elimination of poverty. The book can be bought for £2, or the full text is available free on the internet at:

<http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/extras/buythebook.shtml>

Conference latest

Plans are now well underway for WEA National Conference at Manchester University this year between 14 and 16 October.

This year the formal business of Conference will take place during the Saturday with Sunday morning dedicated to workshops and sessions to allow delegates to comment on some of the key issues of the day

Programmes will be available in mid July and Conference news will be available on the WEA's website in the run up.



Arrivals, departures and exchanges

Southern Region

Sad news from Southern of the death of **Doris Griffen**, who was a regular music tutor for both Bromley and Sevenoaks Branches, and organised many visits to concerts. A Saga tour guide, she was well travelled and also worked at The Royal Festival Hall as a meet and greet helper.

End of an era

The WEA office at 6 Brewer Street, Oxford closed on 17 June, ending a long association with the city. Thames & Solent District had been based there since 1983 but consolidation of administrative support for the new Southern Region into Rochester sadly means that the three remaining administrators based in Oxford have all opted for redundancy. We say goodbye to **Wendy Bunning** who has been the office manager for six years and to **Nick Pratt** and **Nancy Browner** who have both been general administrators for some ten years. We thank them for their long service and wish them all well in their future careers.

Angela Hendry, PA to John Williams, has left the Luke Street office and now works in Quick House.

Eastern Region

Congratulations to finance officer **Rita Gerza** on her successful completion of the final stage of the Association of Accounting Technicians' exams: Rita can now put MAAT after her name.

London Region

Dragana Jakovljevic of the Community Interpreting Project is now proud mum to Stefan, who was born on 8 June.

North East Region

Many staff have sadly had to leave

due to redundancy following projects within the Region coming to an end with no further funding available. The valued staff members to whom the Region has had to say goodbye to are:

Stephen White, Sarah Stronnel, Sue McBride, Sahana Ahmed, Margaret Morris, Julie Patton, Lesley Auston and Anna Dixon Dawson. We wish them all well for the future.

Founder member and first secretary of the Whickham Branch – **Win Metcalfe** – died recently. We salute her memory and all that she and her late husband, Jack, did for the WEA.

Congratulations to Skills for Life Manager **Mike Rugg**, who was married on 19 June.

South West Region

"**Russ**" **Russell** joined the Region on 20 June as a part time Development Worker – North Somerset Education & Training Consortium. He has much experience having previously run a consultancy company in Vocational and Adult Education.

Two departures in the South West: **Janet Smith**, who has been a Finance Officer for over ten years is retiring at the end of August, whilst **Sally Ware**, who has been a tutor and ILT Co-ordinator with the WEA since 2000, is leaving at the end of July but will continue working with people in the community. A big thank you to Janet and Sally for all their hard work - they will be sorely missed!

Corporate Services

Congratulations go to **Jeremy Brocherie**, who tied the knot with Mari in a traditional ceremony in Japan in June.

Colin Thorne retires on 1 July after many years service to the WEA. Colin's most recent role has been as Education Strategy Manager for

Employer Engagement.

Two new arrivals in the finance team: **Sarah Hatton** joined as PA to Linda Acquaye on 13 May 2005, whilst **Maj Grey-Areben** started work on 27 June 2005 as Management Accountant - Projects.

Kevin Gillan joined the South Yorkshire ALAC Hub as a Development Worker on 9 May 2005.



Finance staff member **Mimi Tesfaye** (far left) is pictured at a recent demonstration against Ethiopian leader **Melas Zenawi** - for more information on the issue and demonstrations around the world, see www.ethiomeia.com.

About WEA News

WEA NEWS is produced for WEA staff, tutors and voluntary members. Many thanks to all who contributed to this edition, including: **Peter Templeton, Liz Carlin, Pearl Ryall, Lesley Stiles, Dawn Hope, Bob Parry and Nicky Booth.**

If you have an item for inclusion or would like to comment on the newsletter please let us know.

It is not always possible to include all items submitted but every effort will be made to do so.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

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Quick House, 65 Clifton Street,
London, EC2A 4JE.

or emailed to news@wea.org.uk
Views expressed are not necessarily those of the WEA.

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Dear colleague,

As many of you will know preparations are under way for National Conference in October, taking place at Manchester University.

This year I hope that Conference will approve incorporation of the WEA, enabling us to be on the same financial and legal footing as other charitable organisations of our size. Incorporation will also create other opportunities for the WEA. A WEA trading arm will enable us to increase and diversify our funding streams. Independent trustees will be able to join a new Board of Trustees, and the new more independent Trustee body will strengthen the governance and management of the Association.

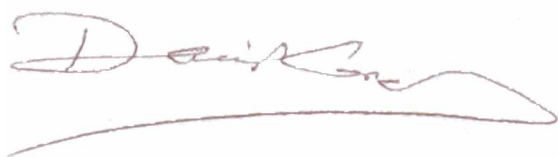
These new arrangements will play an important part in the ongoing recovery and future direction of the WEA, as well offering an opportunity to broaden representation and participation at governance level - to bring the necessary 'new blood' to the Association's Board of Trustees.

As we approach Conference I hope that more of you involved in voluntary activity across the WEA at Branch and Regional levels will consider whether you, or one of your colleagues, might have a contribution to make at a national level and will consider standing for the Association Committee or even for officership. It is an important and exciting time for the Association and this is an opportunity to help form a new Board of Trustees which is appropriate to the times. All members of the Board will receive full training and support in their Trustee capacity.

If you would like to find out more information or have an informal discussion on the subject I should be very pleased to hear from you.

Further information on incorporation, nomination of officers and this year's conference is available on the WEA's website at the following link: [www.wea.org.uk/conference 2005](http://www.wea.org.uk/conference2005). Your involvement at Conference is as important as always and this year in particular will help to preserve and develop democracy within the Association. Debates and workshops will consider issues such as the defence of liberal education and the role of conference and membership in achieving greater democracy, while presentations on Manchester's Community Grid for Learning and the outstanding Five Arts Cities project in Liverpool will illustrate how today's WEA is cutting-edge and innovative in its educational practice whilst remaining firmly anchored to its founding mission. I hope you will be able to join us in Manchester this year.

Yours sincerely,



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