

Learning For Democracy – Inequalities in Democracy Event Briefing Note June 2016

Following a very successful and well attended event on the 29th February at the Scottish Parliament, the Learning of Democracy Planning Group are investigating the potential of holding a follow up event to celebrate the International Day of Democracy on the 15th September 2016.

The theme for the event is '*Inequalities in Democracy*' with inputs and discussions that will provide a focus for the significant yet seldom problematized issue of the correlation between income and democratic engagement.

What is the problem?

Although voting rates are a blunt instrument for indicating the health of Scotland's democracy they clearly indicate that the more economically disadvantaged the area you live in the less likely you are to vote.

- Link between economic disadvantage and lack of political influence
- Lower participation rates amongst younger voters
- Disenfranchisement of homeless and those in prison
- Insufficient support for those with additional needs
- Lack of accessible reliable information sources dealing with complex issues

What are policy makers currently doing to address this problem?

Little research has been carried out in the UK and Scotland to enquire in to the reasons behind the disengagement of those in the most economically deprived of our communities.

A 2015 report "[Political inequality: Why British democracy must be reformed and revitalised](#)", from the Institute of Public Policy Research found

"Ingrained political inequality in the UK is undermining the legitimacy and vitality of our democracy."

The follow up report "[The Democracy Commission – Reforming Democracy to combat Political Inequality](#)" is another useful document for background on this issue.

The 13th Edition of Hansards Audit of Political Engagement flags up these issues.

Inequalities in engagement

Generally, the most politically engaged in the Audit series tend to be male, older, white, higher educated, affluent, home-owning citizens. The social class gap in electoral participation continues to rise: there is now a 37 percentage point difference between the certainty to vote levels of those in social classes AB and DE, an increase of 6 points in 12 months. However, the gap between the social classes tends to be much smaller in relation to questions about satisfaction with politics and institutions. Younger people (aged 18-24) are also more likely to be satisfied with the politics and institutions of our political system, and have a greater sense of their own potential to influence it than are other more generally engaged groups. This is also true of BME adults, although they are much less likely to say they have actually undertaken some form of political action than white adults in the last year.

The Inequalities in Democracy event will seek to link with a range of partners and organisations such as Bite The Ballot / <http://bitetheballot.co.uk/portfolio/the-basics/> to enquire:

What steps if any are practitioners in Community Learning and Development or other fields undertaking to address the issue?

We are looking for examples of good practice nationally and internationally and to give a platform for a range of views and ideas relating to the health of our democratic infrastructure in Scotland.

Education Scotland, the Workers' Educational Association, Learning Link Scotland and the University of Edinburgh are working together to offer several conversational events throughout 2016 which will focus on how to develop learning for democracy in community learning and development practice.

This event will be hosted by the Centre for Research & Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CR&DALL), University of Glasgow School of Education.