Adult education funding, civil society and the state: boldness and compromise in the 1918 Education Act and the 1919 Report on Adult Education

A Society for Education Studies (SES) workshop

Kellogg College, University of Oxford
Tuesday 17th December 2019, 10.00am-2.00pm

The Report of the Centenary Commission on Adult Education will be published on 18th November 2019: 100 years, almost to the day, from the publication of the Ministry of Reconstruction’s Final Report on Adult Education. This workshop will bring together practitioners engaged in the provision and development of adult education, historians of adult education, and researchers on the economics and sociology of educational policy. The aim is to influence policy for adult learning, informed by the SES research and the work of the Centenary Commission.

Through archival research, the SES project examined the role of the Education Act 1918 in shaping adult education, and its influence on the Ministry of Reconstruction’s Adult Education Committee (1917-19) in its task “to consider the provision for, and possibilities of, Adult Education (other than technical or vocational) in Great Britain, and to make recommendations”.

The 1918 Education Act was clear that education, for all ages and of all types, should be supported by local authority infrastructure. By contrast, the 1919 Report was sceptical: it doubted that LEAs would promote a broad, life-wide, adult education curriculum which looked beyond the vocational: “We do not think that Local Authorities will, generally speaking, take bold steps for the provision of non-vocational subjects. Indeed, we believe that they are more likely to provide vocational studies” (§194). Instead, the 1919 Report focused on the importance of the voluntary sector – what today might be described as civil society, NGOs, social movements, or social partners – in adult education, and the importance of adult education to a well-functioning democratic civil society.

We will consider the tensions inherent in state leadership in adult education, a point of contestation throughout the 20th century, and examine this in relation to the informal connections that emerge from grass roots adult learning. This will enable us to consider what is necessary for the 21st century with what was seen as needed for the 20th. The First World War and its aftermath was a turbulent time in which the foundations of the economy and politics were challenged. The workshop will discuss the implications of the Centenary Commission report for adult education, democracy and systems of work today, considering in particular:
What directions should adult education take in the years ahead? What role should it play in social, economic and personal development?

What role can and should the voluntary sector play in adult education today? How is this affected by austerity?

How should the state relate to the voluntary sector in adult education and vice versa?

Schedule for the Day

9.30am: Coffee and registration in the Kellogg Bar

10.00am – 10.15am: Welcome and introductions
Dr Cilla Ross, Vice Principal, Co-operative College, and member of the Centenary Commission on Adult Education

10.15am – 10.45am: The 1919 Report and the 1918 Education Act: the respective roles of the state and the voluntary sector – a report on the SES research findings
Dr Sharon Clancy, Chair, Raymond Williams Foundation; Senior Research Fellow, University of Nottingham; and member of Centenary Commission

10.45am – 11.00am: The Centenary Commission Report: Where it came from, what it says and why, and how to maximise its impact
Professor Jonathan Michie, Kellogg President and Continuing Education Director, Oxford, and Co-Secretary to the Centenary Commission

11.00am – 11.15am: Coffee break

11.15am – 11.45am: Workshop one – 3 groups, one of the key questions

11.45am – 12.15pm: Workshop two – as above, moving groups

12.15pm – 1.00pm: Plenary and feedback on the ways forward
Chair: Professor John Holford, Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, and Co-Secretary to the Centenary Commission

1.00pm – 2.00pm: Lunch and Networking

Booking for the event

Numbers for this workshop are restricted to a maximum of thirty. Registration is therefore required. There is no charge. To register, please click on this link to the Eventbrite booking:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/society-for-educational-studies-oxford-adult-education-workshop-tickets-78771334181