

# Action for learning democracy

Our society depends on active, informed and effective participation in democratic politics. However, many people today feel powerless. People are not apathetic, but won't engage unless they can make a difference. They do not trust politicians or the political system and do not take part in politics at any level.

To restore trust in politics, we recognise our responsibility to enable everyone to take part in democratic politics at some level, in their own neighbourhood, voluntary associations, and national, European or even global governance.

To promote democratic participation, we support practical political education so that people can develop the confidence, skills and knowledge to have an effective voice. For a healthy democracy, we believe practical political education needs to be as accessible and widespread as education for basic skills, business and information technology.

We therefore **call on our elected representatives** in local and national government to:

1. support our efforts to provide adequate, accessible and affordable **practical political education** so that all citizens can understand how the system works, get their voice heard and influence decisions;
2. create local, independent '**democracy hubs**' to provide impartial information and support for effective participation in decision-making at all levels;
3. promote Nolan's **seven principles of public life**: accountability, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness and selflessness<sup>1</sup>.

We welcome initiatives such as the duty on local government to promote democracy, the Take Part Path Pathfinders and Parliamentary Outreach service, but these are not enough.

We urge all political parties to encourage active participation in politics and include these three points in their manifestos for election at a local and national level.

## I support Action for Learning Democracy

SIGNED:

NAME:

ORGANISATION:

Email:

DATE:

I will also support Action for Learning Democracy by

- asking my MP / councillor to support it
- getting support from organisations I belong to
- other (please say what else you can do to deepen learning for democracy):

Please return to: Action for Learning Democracy, 3rd Floor, CUC, 73-81 Southwark Bridge Road, London, SE1 0NQ  
You can sign online at: [www.gopetition.co.uk/online/29199.html](http://www.gopetition.co.uk/online/29199.html)

<sup>1</sup> [www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/parlament/nolan/seven.htm](http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/parlament/nolan/seven.htm)

## What do we mean by practical political education?

Practical political education means learning how to take part in public life at any level, from the very local to global. It means enabling people to:

- know who their representatives are, in the community, public services and government;
- access and analyse information about policies, issues, interests and points of view;
- understand political processes and structures;
- develop confidence, skills and techniques to influence the political process;
- enable people to bring about social and political change;
- raise issues themselves as well as respond to decision-making opportunities;
- challenge decisions;
- enter the political process themselves as elected representatives.

Three themes are at the heart of practical political education:

1. the **questioning citizen**, confident to ask “why?”, seek the facts, probe and challenge;
2. a **climate of openness** in public affairs, with access to information, debate and decision-making;
3. **respect for diversity** of age, ability, gender, race, status and opinions.

## Principles for practical political education:

The following principles should inform practical political education:

1. **pragmatic**: start from where people are and help them achieve what they want;
2. **pluralistic** in funding, forms of provision, content and values
3. **participative** to develop confidence, communication skills and critical thinking
4. **practical**, to include techniques, knowledge and analysis relevant to active politics
5. **peaceful**: violence is a failure of politics
6. **pro-poor**: prioritise provision for individuals and areas on low incomes.

These principles are based on the understanding that society benefits from more effective participation by all citizens in the political process, including the poor, disadvantaged and disenfranchised who are under represented in politics. The better off in society can afford to fund lobbyists, campaigners and pressure groups to promote their interests. We are all better off when the poor and marginalised can also learn to have their voices heard and their interests addressed in decision-making.

## How can we support practical political?

Practical political education takes place in many forms, through the media, community action, the internet, workshops, courses and active participation in politics.

Ensuring adequate support for practical political education for all means that

- Politicians of all parties and public officials at all levels actively encourage people to understand and take part in the political process;
- Government departments in local, national and devolved administrations fund provision for people to understand, contribute ideas and take part in decision-making relating to departmental issues;
- Major grant givers, such as the Big Lottery Fund, Unltd and charitable trusts, provide funds for learning about campaigning and engagement on issues they support;
- All adult, community, further and higher education funders and providers create attractive and accessible opportunities for people to learn about issues and political processes;
- Funding for community development, outreach and training for education in citizenship and practical politics is sustained on a coherent and recurrent basis rather than short-term initiatives;
- The BBC, Channel 4, press and other media provide better information on how to influence issues in the news and get involved in decision-making;
- Civil society organisations and charities support their members and users becoming involved in both their own decision-making process and in the wider politics of issues which concern the organisation.
- Voluntary associations of all kinds encourage people to have an effective voice through learning together and mutual support.

For examples of practical political education and background information, see:

***The Active Citizen: Politics and Public Life***, a programme run by the WEA: [www.wea.org.uk/pdf/Active%20Citizen%20booklet.pdf](http://www.wea.org.uk/pdf/Active%20Citizen%20booklet.pdf)

***Learning Power: a contribution to the national skills strategy*** <http://static.novas.org/files/learning-power-262.pdf>

with reviews by Francis Maude, Bernard Crick, Helena Kennedy and others.

***Campaigning is OK!*** a guide to building capacity for advocacy, campaigning and practical politics, with information on where to get support and resources available, including training, materials, books and websites.

Downloaded from <http://static.novas.org/files/campaigningisok-456.pdf>

Action for Learning Democracy was started by adult and community educators working for the Academy for Community Leadership, Novas Scarman Group, WEA, Take Part and other organisations.