

**ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON POLITICAL
LITERACY Minutes For 7th Meeting on 05.12.2022**

Attended on 08.02.2022 (Parliamentarians): Lord Iain McNicol (Co-Chair), Kim Leadbeater MP (co-Vice-Chair), Layla Moran MP (office in attendance), Lord Blunkett (office in attendance)

Apologies from those who could not attend (Parliamentarians): Simon Fell MP (Co-Chair), Tracey Crouch MP, (co-Vice-Chair), Nickie Aiken MP (Co-Vice-Chair), Cat Smith MP, Lord Chris Rennard, Owen Thompson MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Helen Hayes MP, Afzal Khan MP, Kate Green MP, Rachel Hopkins MP, Andrew Bowie MP, Christian Wakeford MP, Julie Marson MP, Tim Loughton MP, Lord Simon Woolley, Ben Bradley MP, Lord Andrew Lansley, Ruth Jones MP, Marion Fellows MP, Flick Drummond MP

Attended on 05.12.2022 (Secretariat): Matteo Bergamini, CEO (Shout Out UK), Lucie Spicer, Operations and Projects Manager (Shout Out UK), Spencer Caminsky, Head of Campaigns and Parliament Relations (Shout Out UK), Shima Langan, Public Policy Coordinator (Shout Out UK), Sarah Bannon, Digital Campaigns Coordinator (Shout Out UK).

Welcome: Updates from members on new projects/publications/related activities

1. Lord Iain McNicol opened up the meeting, thanking everyone for attending the first in-person meeting of the APPG on Political Literacy. He talked about how, in a post-pandemic world, Political Literacy is crucial to providing citizens with the skills they need to understand and engage with their own political system. He stressed that an engaged and informed citizenry was the cornerstone to a healthy democracy and a necessary antidote to the challenges of our contemporary world, including the proliferation of mis, dis and mal-information. He highlighted the important work of Shout Out UK, Dr James Weinberg and The Missing Link Report, saying that the APPG has made important strides towards ensuring young people are equipped with the tools to engage with our democracy. He reaffirmed his commitment to nonpartisan political literacy education and thanked the APPG's supporters for continuing to bolster the work of the Group.
2. Following this, the CEO and Founder of Shout Out UK, Matteo Bergamini thanked Lord Iain for the introduction, the roundtable participants and the audience for coming along to the event. He reaffirmed Lord Iain's words and stressed the need for the provision of Political Literacy education in every school across the country. He argued that now is the time for action, and said that as per Dr James Weinberg and the APPG Academic Advisory Group's research, the support for these issues from all parties is there. He said that the APPG will continue to push for comprehensive nonpartisan political literacy education and show those that may have concerns that this is not about party politics but rather about defending and enhancing our democracy.
3. Hannah Taaffe and Sarah Murray from Save the Children UK started with an

introduction of Save the Children and the work they do to eradicate child poverty. They expressed how the APPG on Political Literacy was closely aligned to the interests and values of Save the Children UK, such as giving children the right to express their views freely. They said that The Missing Link report highlighted how the lack of political literacy education was preventing children from exercising that right. They argued that this is most stark during election time and in order to combat this, Save the Children UK was creating a 'Parallel Elections' project at the next election that would provide children with the foundational education they need about politics. They went over how the project would work, including ideas around creating child friendly manifestoes and creating a parallel online voting system where children could cast their votes. They highlighted how the project was still in the early stages and that they were looking to gather support and listen to feedback from organisations, parliamentarians and young people.

4. After the presentation from Save the Children UK, Kim Leadbeater MP reiterated how important it was to engage with young people and make sure they understood how their democracy works. She explained that the Online Safety Bill currently being debated in the Chambers would have a massive impact for young people despite many young people not being aware of the Bil. She went on to say this is why political literacy was a huge priority to her as it reaffirmed the importance of engaging with young people. She went on to say that teachers needed to also be properly trained on the functionings of our political institutions in order to improve the current provision of political education. She discussed how the Missing Link report pointed to the need to take a more comprehensive look at our current educational curriculum and the strain being put on teachers, especially in the context of the cost of living crisis.
5. Finally, Lucie Spicer introduced Shout Out UK's NATO project report titled 'Building Societal Resilience to Disinformation'. She spoke about the importance of media literacy and how political literacy can't be spoken about without mentioning the former. She discussed how the project was focussed on building literacy and resilience towards disinformation and was organised through 'hackathons' (cross-collaboration events centred on solution building and problem solving). She explained how these hackathons were organised with young people from different universities, clubs and societies, with the final solutions from the hackathons being sent as policy briefs to NATO. She said a common solution suggested across all the hackathons was the need to build political and media literacy education in the curriculum to incite behaviour change. She expressed how this report and its recommendations showcased the relevance of political literacy and its importance amongst young people. She thanked everyone for listening and informed them that they will be sent the report after the meeting.

Missing Link Report and Crook Prize Findings

James Weinberg, the Head of the Academic Advisory Group, introduced the Missing Link report and its findings. It was launched in 2021 and focussed on the quality and quantity of democratic education in England. He noted that the term 'political literacy' was used in the report to denote the intended learning outcomes of democratic and citizenship education, including knowledge (e.g. understanding key institutions), skills (e.g. active participation, debating, critical thinking), and values (e.g. support for free and fair elections, free speech). He explained how they surveyed schools and teachers across the country and shared some of the crucial stats in the report, including how only 1/3 of secondary schools in England offer weekly lessons in Citizenship or politics broadly, and only 1% of teachers feel prepared to deliver politics in schools, despite 50% being asked to do so in some capacity. He went on to share how this report was supplemented by focus groups conducted with a diverse group of young people who shared their views and reactions to the report and its findings. He shared how the young people stressed the importance of improving the current provision of political education as many commented on how they felt under-prepared to engage politically when they turned 18. Similarly, he discussed how most of the young people in the focus groups didn't think their political involvement would bring about any positive change. The final conclusion that came out from these focus groups was a desire to not only teach politics in schools but to teach young people how to protect themselves against online harms. He moved on to talk about inequalities at home – i.e. parents with a household income of more than £70,000 were almost twice as confident in reporting that they would talk to their children about politics at home than parents earning less. He said this suggested that the 'politically rich' were getting richer whilst the 'politically poorer' were getting poorer. He reported that some young people in the focus groups expressed how this inequality in provision was heightened for students from minority ethnic backgrounds and low socioeconomic groups as the content they received reinforced negative stereotypes. He stressed how this was a reflection to take away on how politics was being imagined and taught in schools. Finally, he explained that one of the key recommendations from the report was to increase teacher training and funding, which the focus groups participants wholly agreed with. On top of that recommendation, the focus groups participants called for greater accessibility to content learning (i.e. a minimum standard for all schools), greater engagement and direct contact with politicians, and to include parents in the delivery and discussion of how politics is being taught in order to dispel the myth that teachers are biased in their teaching of political issues.

After the presentation, Lord Iain passed it over to the roundtable participants. Sarra Jenkins, a teacher of politics introduced herself. She reaffirmed James' conclusions – i.e. the teachers she has met are subjected to teaching politics because there are not enough teacher training of politics available. She said that amongst teachers, there is a fear of impartiality and bias, especially on topics with morality implications (e.g. abortion). She said quite often teachers want to engage with students in a well-meaning way but reported feeling unable to do so because they can't explain the political processes in the United Kingdom meaningfully. She shared how teachers are seen as being the 'priests of democracy' because they are often the impartial contact that students have with politics. Because of this, she stressed the importance of embedding political literacy education in the curriculum from

primary school.

Michael Shirley, a student at the University of Exeter and one of the focus groups participants, shared how he went to a state school and lacked education in politics. He reaffirmed how there is an inequality in political education provision between state schools and private schools and that we needed to tackle this issue in order to tackle democratic inertia. He expressed his hopes that this meeting would set out a roadmap to tackling this inertia and creating a more inclusive democratic system.

Following Michael, Hattie Andrews from the Politics Project thanked James for the presentation on the Missing Link report. She said that the report was inspiring to everyone working within the sector and talked about how, from her work, it was evident that teachers are keen to teach these topics but it's about getting the mechanisms right. She said impartiality and political bias are often seen to be bogeymen but that her research concluded that the political party or politician you engage with (i.e. visits, direct contact) in schools has no impact on the outcome of teaching. She finished by saying that she would love for the APPG to focus on bridging the gap between activities and conversations happening in schools and outside of schools (e.g. activism, social action).

Lord Iain opened up the floor to the audience for both questions and comments.

Follow-Up Questions and Further Points

Dylan, a member of the Youth Parliament, asked a question to Hannah and Sarah on whether they had thought about working with youth parliament. Hannah responded that they were interested and would speak to Dylan afterwards.

From Zoom, Matteo read out a question asking if a political education framework could be created to raise its profile, in the same way careers education improved since a framework was created. Sarra responded that we've had frameworks for citizenship education but to some extent, any framework lives or dies by the implementation and the accountability of it. She said it would be the accountability of the framework that would be more controversial and difficult to achieve, rather than the framework itself. Hattie agreed and suggested that lessons in classrooms should be brought together with wider school culture. James echoed these sentiments and said it is less about another framework but more about how you facilitate longevity.

Another member in the audience asked how to improve political literacy in homes and in family settings. Lord Iain responded that talking about politics is a daunting task but stressed how important it is because virtually everything is political. He said that this was why political literacy was so important to him because it moves beyond party politics.

Sarra said that the number one thing she hears from parents is that discussions in the family can often be facilitated by discussions happening in schools and through their own children's education.

Another audience member asked if there is an age group that particularly responds to political literacy education. Hannah Taaffe responded that Save the Children Norway ran their children elections with students until age 9 and received great engagement. She said that Save the Children UK were interested in going lower than age 9 for their 'Parallel Elections' project.

An audience member wanted to know how ethnic minority communities could be targeted to ensure they are politically engaged, as they are often marginalised. James agreed that this was an extremely important question. He said that young people who receive citizenship education in schools tend to be far more active in politics and think more highly about being politically; however, he said those effects are only felt by white and middle or upper income groups. Conversely, BAME students or low socioeconomic groups have a null effect. He concluded that this is because the latter do not see themselves being reflected in the political world around them. He said improving engagement for the latter group comes down to changing the curriculum in order to make sure students are represented in the content and increasing accessibility to resources.

Hattie reaffirmed that her report supported James' comments.

Another audience member asked the roundtable if there was any research done on political literacy education available for people with learning disabilities. James said he was unaware of any research taking this focus but pointed to a colleague that looked at the experience of people with learning disabilities in politics.

Co-chairs' closing remarks, final points

Lord Iain began his closing remarks by thanking all of the roundtable participants and audience members for attending and support the APPG. He thanked Shout Out UK for putting together the event and for their work on the APPG. He said roughly 3 meetings take place every year, with each meeting focused on a different topic. He thanked everyone again.