

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Political Literacy**  
**Minutes for 10th Meeting:**  
**Consultation with ROTA**  
**on 17.10.2023**

**Attended on 17.10.2023 (Parliamentarians):** Lord Iain McNicol (co-Chair), Lord David Blunkett.

**Apologies from those who could not attend (Parliamentarians):** Kim Leadbeater MP (co-Chair), Philip Dunne MP (co-Chair and registered contact), Lord Chris Rennard (co Vice-Chair), Simon Fell MP (Co-Chair), Nickie Aiken MP (Co Vice-Chair), Cat Smith MP, Owen Thompson MP, Tracey Crouch MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Helen Hayes MP, Christian Wakeford MP, Tim Loughton MP, Ben Bradley MP, Flick Drummond MP, Yasmin Qureshi MP, Lord John Anthony Bird, Lord Knight of Weymouth, Lord Kenneth Baker.

**Attended on 17.10.2023 (Secretariat):** Lucas Scott-Harston, Head of Opportunities and Social Impact (Shout Out UK), Gabriel Kaabianpour, Opportunities and PCVE Lead (Shout Out UK), Cora Wilson, Programme Coordinator (Shout Out UK), Amy Turner, Digital Growth Coordinator (Shout Out UK).

**Welcome from Lord Iain McNicol**

1. Lord Iain McNicol welcomes attendees to the meeting. He explains that MPs who are members of the APPG on Political Literacy are voting on legislation today and that key points made in Virgil's presentation will be circulated to absent members of the APPG in due course.

Lord Iain describes the aims of the APPG and stresses its particular emphasis on the political literacy of young people.

He introduces Lucas Scott-Harston to give an update on the work of the APPG.

**Remarks from Lucas Scott-Harston**

2. Lucas Scott-Harston explains that he is speaking on behalf of Matteo Bergamini, the CEO and founder of Shout Out UK – which is the secretariat of the APPG.

Lucas proceeds to give several updates on the APPG.

Lucas explains that during the last APPG meeting members discussed engaging with and inviting the head of Ofsted to a future meeting. He says that a letter was drafted and reviewed by chairs. However, as the new head of Ofsted was only recently appointed, sending the letter has been pushed back with the aim of organising a meeting for later this year or the start of next, pending member availability.

Lucas gives an update on developments regarding the Missing Link Report commissioned by SOUK and the APPG, and written by Dr James Weinberg. SOUK is partnering with the Open University and Dr Sandra Obradović to conduct qualitative research in England to explore what citizenship and democracy mean to young people, and to complete interviews with teachers about the new curriculum rollout in Wales. The project will aim to conduct 12 focus groups with students in 6 schools and 12 interviews with teachers in a further 6 schools. They will also launch a nationally representative survey exploring how the general public perceives the role of education in citizenship-development and political literacy. Lucas explains that the aim of this is to add to the research conducted by James and to give more qualitative data to members of the APPG.

Lucas gives a third update that the Academic Advisory Group for the APPG, chaired by Dr. James Weinberg, will be meeting with co-Chair Lord Iain McNicol on 24 October for a knowledge sharing session.

Lucas gives a fourth update that Political Literacy Day will run again this year, near the back end of the year and Cora Wilson will share more information on this in the coming weeks.

Finally, Lucas emphasises that as discussed in prior meetings, Political Literacy education isn't a one size fits all approach. Each community must be included in this conversation. As such he explains that SOUK invited the Roma Organisation for Training and Advocacy to the APPG on Political Literacy to discuss the importance of political literacy education.

### **Virgil Bitu presentation**

3. Lord Iain introduces Lord David Blunkett to the group.

Lord Iain also explains that there is a member of the House of Lords on the Labour bench who is positioned to raise concerns and issues of the Roma community in Parliament.

4. Lord Iain introduces Virgil Bitu and invites him to begin his presentation.

5. Virgil introduces himself and his organisation, the Roma Organisation for Training and Advocacy (ROTA). He explains that ROTA is a relatively new organisation. He explains that ROTA has been running the Roma Political School 2023, which is comprised of 5 regional workshops where political training is delivered with SOUK. Virgil explains that regional workshops open up opportunities for local partnerships which can help support the community.

Virgil continues that the GRT (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller) community lacks access to making political decisions and that Roma is committed to trying to change that. He explains that the conference of the Roma Political School, which took place over the last couple of days, aims at creating a non-partisan effort to involve the GRT community in the political process.

Virgil stresses that it is important for policy to develop from the bottom-up and emphasises the significance of grass-roots organisations, as opposed to only the same large organisations being invited repeatedly and a lack of change actually occurring.

Virgil reiterates that ROTA wants to build up a non-partisan political movement. He says that if members of the Roma Political School would like to join political parties they will be supported and can be lobbied for.

Virgil points out the great heterogeneity of the GRT community, and says this comes with the realisation that it may never be possible to have complete national representation.

Virgil discusses the idea of ethnic representation and quotas, and says that though it's a complex question in British society, it's something to consider, especially given other countries have.

Virgil stresses that the Roma community is a global and a hugely diverse ethnic group, and as such it is important to be better organised at a global scale for the cause. Virgil gives thanks for the opportunity to speak.

### **Questions / discussion**

6. Lord Iain asks Virgil for more information on the political education schools that have been organised.
7. Virgil says funds have been limited, and that there is a very small budget for the schools, with money from organisation members' own pockets also put into the bucket. However, he adds that there is a report forthcoming. Virgil

says he would like the programme to reach more communities. There are currently only five schools in London, Bradfield, Sheffield, Luton and Newcastle.

8. Lord David encourages Virgil to send the report to the parliamentarians and suggests that a meeting could possibly be arranged for next year where this can be discussed.
9. On the matter of ensuring Roma representation among parliamentarians, Lord David says that in Bulgaria there have been quotas for Roma seats. He says that in the UK, reserved seats in the Commons are not a possibility, but the potential for Roma representation in the House of Lords is more promising.
10. Lord Iain points out that Virgil mentioned before the meeting began that in Newcastle there is now the first Roma local councillor, named Nicu Ion.
11. Lord Iain points out that most diaspora communities in the UK have had a cross-party spread across areas where they have worked. Lord Iain says it would be valuable to hear Nicu Ion tell the story about how he became a Labour party councillor in Newcastle, as this can't have been an easy feat.
12. Lord David stresses the point that if there are to be Roma politicians, it is necessary that they represent the interests of the Roma community but crucially also represent the wider community interests in order to be elected.
13. An attendee points out that the vast majority of the Roma community doesn't vote. He says it is important to work together in order to ensure that the Roma community are encouraged to act as good, voting and taxpaying citizens. He says that in order to achieve this it is necessary to have figures who are respected within and by the Roma community. The guest expresses thanks for the opportunity to attend the meeting, and expresses the importance of the government's role in changing the lives of the Roma community in UK. He reiterates Virgil's point about the importance of grassroots work.
14. Virgil speaks about the experience of running local regional workshops over the past couple of days. He expresses that within the community there is lack of engagement with politics and barriers to communication. He talks about the importance of trying to connect and break barriers between the system and the Roma community. He says that local GRT community intermediaries need to connect the system to the Roma people. He explains a way of breaking the barrier is by creating local consultation groups of community representatives who are brought in by local councillors.

15. Lord David says that the Local Government Association could potentially facilitate getting local authorities to spend more money on targeting for voter registration in Roma communities
16. An attendee says a good channel of communication is needed, and explains that lack of IT skills in the Roma community pose a significant barrier to voter registration.
17. Virgil says a network is needed and lobbying efforts involving greater power. Virgil talks about the importance of fostering a culture of democratic participation and involvement
18. An attendee says this has been a good start of the conversation. He expresses excitement for the future and says it's been an honour to attend. He adds that he can't wait for the next young Roma person to be in power.

### **Closing remarks**

19. Lord Iain draws the meeting to a close and thanks everyone for attending.