

Hitting targets but missing the point

WEA General Secretary Richard Bolsin outlines his concerns for the future of adult education following potential changes resulting from 'Priorities for Success'



There can be no doubt: a crisis is emerging over the future of adult education. Under proposals published in October by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the WEA's main funder, in 'Priorities for Success', it can be assumed that the WEA will have to increase its fees to students on average by 20% in 2006/7 and a further 20% in 2007/8. In addition, funding for short courses below 9 hours will be cut and "first steps" provision with the hard to reach will be much more tightly defined. This could put at risk some of the very successful work the WEA currently does, for example with disabled adults and women's groups, usually in partnership with other local

voluntary groups.

Although the WEA is unlikely to receive confirmation of its LSC funding allocation before the end of January, real terms reductions of at least 4% (or £750,000) are likely. Many colleges and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are facing more severe cuts.

The Government clearly has a number of problems. It must fund the increasing numbers of 16 to 19 year olds in the education system, and it is hard to argue with the need to continue to develop a more skilled workforce. Since funding for adult education will be squeezed by those pressures, it is not unreasonable to expect adults who are not studying in priority areas and who can afford to pay an increased element of the cost of their provision to do so.

But the proposals within 'Priorities for Success' to increase fees across the board for all "non-priority" provision will deny many adults the opportunities they currently have, which have been taken for granted for much of the last 100 years, to access affordable, serious adult education. There is a real danger that in the next year or two adult education will increasingly

become the preserve of the wealthy - those with high levels of disposable income - and the poor and needy. Hard working adults in ordinary jobs are likely to find it much harder to continue to afford the provision made by organisations like the WEA.

The poorest will still be entitled to concessions, and those whose literacy, language, and numeracy skills are short of level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework - the Government's measure of an acceptable standard for adults - will gain free access to those courses. But who else, apart from the wealthy, will be able to afford the fee rises?

This suggests that the Government is failing to recognise the benefits which lifelong learning brings, not just to individuals, but also to communities and to the country as a whole. These benefits, although difficult to quantify precisely, have a great deal of public value - as research by the Learning and Skills Development Agency and the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning confirms. Think about the cost benefit of reductions in government interventions (including health, criminal justice,

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social care and education) whether in local communities or struggling families. Positive attitudes engendered by education enable older people to retain their independence longer, with huge economic benefits to health and social services, while healthy living and eating reduce the risk of heart disease, with the same effect. Active, self-confident people contribute to more confident and sustainable communities, improving the local quality of life and generating medium and long-term inward investment locally and nationally. I believe the Government and the LSC understand this, too, but have failed to see the consequences of their actions to address the spending pressures they currently face. Crude, across-the-board increases in fees will not help.

The risk facing those who are harder to reach and who face multiple barriers to learning are much greater. Organisations like the WEA work in often complex partnerships in the heart of local communities with local groups representative of them. The first objective is usually to build confidence and to help bring order to what is often a very disordered existence. Serious learning, let alone a level 2 qualification, is a very distant goal.

Such partnerships require time, patience and investment to develop and maintain. I am genuinely concerned that these partnerships and the infrastructure they support will collapse if funding which is currently applied to those purposes is cut, as seems likely. Once gone, they will be very difficult if not impossible to recover. I am not concerned immediately about the future of the WEA, in which I have great confidence, but about the threat facing the education of adults across the country who add public value by participating in lifelong learning.

These are the reasons why access to adult education for the whole population is so important, and why we should all be concerned about the unintended consequences of 'Priorities for Success'. If you share my concerns, you might consider drawing them to the attention of your MP, something you can do by e-mail through www.writetothem.com. If you do contact your MP, it would be helpful to say how WEA classes have helped you personally and what they have done to enable you to add to public value, perhaps through what you have been able to contribute to your local community, at work or in other ways.

What does 'Priorities for Success?' say?

This is a summary of four elements of the LSCs policy paper 'Priorities for Success' that are likely to impact the WEA. Interested readers can find the full document on the web at:

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/FundingLearning/priorities-for-success.htm>

Fee assumption

The fee assumption, which is the percentage of course costs that the LSC expects learners to contribute, rose from 25% to 27.5% in 2005/06. Priorities for Success proposes further rises to 32.5% in 2006/07 and again to 37.5% in 2007/08. In other words, in two years time the LSC will contribute only 62.5% of what it feels the full tuition costs of a given course should be - except for those courses it regards as a priority or where learners can prove that they are eligible for fee remission. The LSC expects providers such as the WEA to pass these increases on to learners - indeed, "local LSCs will address situations where colleges or providers are systematically undercutting the fee assumptions, within the requirements of competition law."

Skills for Life and short courses

Until now, the LSC has funded 'very short courses' (fewer than nine hours) in Skills for Life (commonly for initial assessments of a person's current educational level), and sometimes in other subject areas such as computing. Such funding will no longer be available. Priorities for Success states that the Skills for Life initial assessments should be incorporated into longer courses, and that 'very short courses' other than Skills for Life "appear to have limited benefits in terms of progression for learners".

Non-certified provision

Priorities for Success states that the LSC is aiming for a 13% cut this year in the money that it spends on provision that is either internally certified and/or not certificated through the National Qualifications Framework. This will have a significant impact on the WEA, since most of our provision falls into this category. However, Special Designated Institutions including the WEA, unlike many Local Education Authorities (LEAs), have been safeguarded from the full effect of this cut - for now.

Quality Improvement Agency

This new body will start work in 2006 and aims to help providers such as the WEA develop their capacity for generating income from sources other than the LSC (in the light of changing LSC funding priorities) by "disseminating innovative approaches and good practice and facilitating partnership working with those in the sector with a positive record of income generation."

Conference takes landmark decision

The biennial WEA Conference was held at the University of Manchester on 15 and 16 October.

The main item on the agenda was the incorporation of the WEA, which was agreed with no votes against to the visible relief of the Officers and General Secretary. Once implemented this will convert the WEA into a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, the same legal status as almost all other large UK charities. The planned date for the formal changeover is 31 January 2006.

Other decisions taken and commitments made by Conference include:

- the election of four Association Officers (see page eight for more),
- a report will be written outlining the governance and management structures of the WEA and the relationship between the two,
- a statement will be produced defining the partnership between voluntary members and staff,
- the new Trustee Board will draw up plans to safeguard the provision of the WEA's high quality liberal adult education (mostly provided through the Branch programme),
- a Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Affiliations will be established to continue and extend the WEA's campaigning work.

Although attendance was disappointing, as it was at the

2003 conference, most delegates who returned an evaluation form enjoyed conference - with over 85% of responses describing the event as either 'good' or 'very good'. Many said that they enjoyed the social side of conference and that they found the chance to network with colleagues and friends both old and new very useful.

Particularly popular was the after dinner speech by author Robert Douglas, who is a member of WEA's Hexham Writing Group in Northumberland and wrote *Night Song of the Last Tram*, an autobiographical tale of his post-war childhood among Glasgow's tenements, which received great critical acclaim when published earlier this year. Delegates snapped up all the copies of Bob's book available at conference, but WEA News has two to give away to the first two people who request one by email or post (sent to the contact addresses on page eight).

Conference Views

A selection of quotes from Conference evaluation forms - most are positive, but you can't please everyone!

"Important conference, well organised"

"A lot better than I feared"

"I came away with a sense that the WEA is being rejuvenated"

"The motions were utterly bland and addressed none of the real concerns of members"

"Informative and stimulating discussion"

"I went expecting to be bored and was very pleasantly surprised"

"The worst conference I have been to in nearly 40 years"



Photo: Alex Whittle

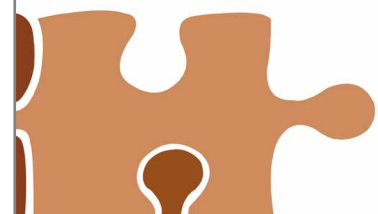
Tony Beakman of WEA Scotland played the role of judge in a Conference workshop about British Culture, based upon the work of a WEA Scottish Culture project that he has tutored for.

Equality and Diversity policy launched

Over forty people including representatives of every WEA Region attended an Equality & Diversity event in Sheffield in October. Staff and other FirstClass users can find the Equality & Diversity pack, launched at the event, in the Development & Training Zone. A full report of the event will be available in the next 'Developing our People' issue.

Dave is blind

He wants to do a WEA craft course... can he?



Helping to tackle educational disadvantage in the West Midlands

WEA learners in the West Midlands have been among the participants of a research project focussing on the learning journeys of students from working class backgrounds who hope to go on to study at university. They said that they appreciated and benefited from the informal, flexible nature of their WEA course, and from the support provided by their tutors. In addition to their academic achievements, most felt that the courses had led to positive changes to their sense of identity, communication skills, social relationships, confidence and self-esteem. Further findings included the importance of such courses being provided free to the student, as many would not otherwise be able to attend, and provided evidence that time and money were the main barriers to their progression on to university.

The research was funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation and carried out by a partnership between the WEA, the Open University and Staffordshire University. Learners from the three institutions were interviewed and surveyed on their previous educational level, motives for study, intended progression routes after their current course and the impact of studying on their lives. The WEA learners involved came from two groups: assistant social workers from central Birmingham, and learners on community-based courses in Rugeley, Staffordshire. Most learners in both groups had left school at 16 or earlier. The assistant social workers are on a Learning at Work Pathway, and hope to go on to university to become qualified social workers, whilst the learners in Rugeley, a former mining community, attend a Social Studies Pathway at the Miners' Social and Welfare Club - this is an introduction to the study of issues in UK Society since 1945, which can contribute credits towards an Access to Higher Education certificate recognised throughout the UK education system.

The full report will be released in January, and a collaborative website (right) is already up and running at www.open.ac.uk/cwp/learning-journeys. The findings of the research will be used to promote understanding of adult learners' experiences and acknowledgement of the wider benefits of adult learning by government and other funding bodies. Learners can log onto the website and leave details of their own experiences - this is also suggested as a useful reflective activity for tutors to carry out with their classes, perhaps as part of the learner evaluation process.



Howard Croft co-ordinated the WEA's part in the project and invites anyone wishing to know more to go to the website (see above for address) or to contact him directly on hcroft@wea.org.uk or 0121 666 6101.

WEA News survey results: more snail mail, less acroynms

Thanks to all of you who responded to our survey two issues ago. Almost all responses were from WEA members rather than staff or tutors, and most were positive towards the newsletter. Almost two-thirds of readers said that they read WEA News from cover to cover, whilst a similar proportion said that they would prefer to receive it by post - this will be followed up in the new year. One response came all the way from the WEA in Sydney, Australia, where the newsletter is downloaded from the UK website and included in a Council mailing. By coincidence, we heard this month of student Sheila Walker from Darlington Branch, who happened across a WEA office whilst on holiday in Australia. WEA News is told "she couldn't believe her eyes when she saw the WEA signboard and sent her husband hot-foot back

to the car to get the camera!"

Popular suggestions made in response to the survey included a round up of regional news; more features from the North and West of the country; fewer acroynms and complex language, and information and comparisons of WEA courses and class sizes across the country. In response, the chart on page 5 is an attempt to begin to provide basic information about the scale of WEA activity that some members may not be aware of, and we continue to try and avoid or clarify as much of the education sector jargon as possible. As always, the content of the newsletter (and whereabouts in the country it comes from) depends on ideas and articles submitted to WEA News at news@wea.org.uk or the postal address on page eight.

Fingers crossed as inspectors across the country complete their rounds

The WEA's final re-inspection visit has now been completed so we await the publication of the final report by the inspectors, which is due in late January.

The most recent stage of the inspection concentrated upon class visits in five Regions (North West, Yorkshire and Humber, Southern, London and East Midlands), as well as interviews with senior managers from across the Association.

Peter Templeton, Director of Education and Strategy, was the WEA's national nominee for the inspection, and thanked staff and volunteers across the Association for their efforts in preparing for re-inspection in a message on 9 December. In the email, Peter states his belief that the actions that have been put in place since the original inspection in early 2004 have had a positive effect on learning and learners in the WEA. He adds, "I would also like

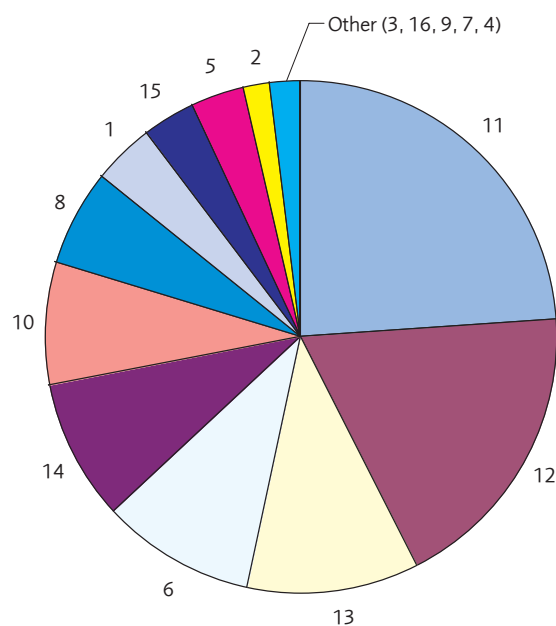
to thank all the tutors across the Association who have engaged with the improvement agenda, joined in briefings and training events and really delivered improvements in the classroom".

The final report from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) will be released on the 27th January - WEA News and www.wea.org.uk will inform you of the outcome - the full report will also be available on ALI's own website www.ali.gov.uk

WEA's 2004/05 educational statistics released

The final statistics for academic year 2004/05 were submitted to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on 28 November. The data shows that 86,691 people attended WEA courses in the year, attracting funding from the LSC of £18,077,250 at an average of £184 per learner per course. The amount of this government money designated for each student varies widely based on the length of the course, the subject, and whether learners are considered to be disadvantaged (based on their postcode, whether they receive means tested benefits and other factors).

The table and chart below show how many learners went on WEA courses in each subject area in the year. The figures add up to more than 86,691 learners since some people attended more than one course. All of these figures exclude provision in Scotland, where there are different funding arrangements.



Area of Learning (as categorised by inspection body ALI)	Number of learners	As % of total
11 - Visual and Performing Arts and Media	23,588	23.9%
12 - Humanities	18,371	18.6%
13 - English, Languages and Communications	10,208	10.4%
6 - Information & Communication Technology	9,680	9.8%
14 - Foundation Programmes	8,617	8.7%
10 - Health, Social Care and Public Services	8,232	8.4%
8 - Hospitality, Sports Leisure and Travel	5,799	5.9%
1 - Sciences and Mathematics	3,992	4.0%
15 - Family Learning	3,533	3.6%
5 - Business Administration, Management and Professional	3,149	3.2%
2 - Land-Based Provision	1,736	1.8%
3 - Construction	519	0.5%
16 - Community Development	463	0.5%
9 - Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	290	0.3%
7 - Retailing, Customer Service and Transportation	275	0.3%
4 - Engineering, Technology etc.	31	0.0%

Bookworms of the world, unite

Fiction lovers may be interested in a new service that claims to be the world's first co-operative online library. To use the service, members pay an annual fee and submit details of at least 10 paperback books they own and would be willing to share. All of the books listed by other members are then available to borrow for the cost of postage and packing.

The site went online in August, has already received media coverage in the Guardian and the Telegraph, and has the support of Friends of the Earth, The Literacy Trust and the Arts Council.

For full details including a list of the books already available through the online library, please see www.mybookyourbook.co.uk

Everyone involved with the WEA has been offered a discounted first year's membership fee of £6.99 - reduced from £8.95 - if you'd like to take advantage of this offer, use the code WEA7441 when signing up.

New trade union partnership with USDAW helps migrant workers

In October 2004 the WEA was approached by a Lifelong Learning Project worker from Shop, Distributive and Allied workers union USDAW. The challenge was to deliver English courses (ESOL) to East European migrant workers in Doncaster, who now formed a large part of the workforce at a re-cycling plant run by multi-national logistics company Christian Salvesen.

After a preliminary visit and strong support from the Site Manager the WEA put on hard hats and got stuck in. Time was spent on site to build up a picture of the working environment and the language skills which were important for the workforce, including signage and health and safety documentation.

The first course launched in December 2004, and ran through to the following summer. Following the success of this course, the WEA is currently delivering a second ESOL course to new workers and now also delivers IT courses on site. A lively Learning Committee has been established; it meets termly to discuss and review courses - allowing learner representatives and the employer to have a say in the planning of provision.

Pictured below are some satisfied learners from the site, with tutor Barbara Jacques.



Study while you shop

WEA North East Region is about to work with Newcastle University and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) on a set of research projects focussing on adult learning in major retail centres. Around 40 marketing students will work in groups exploring the views of shoppers, retail and office workers, employers and regional agencies in relation to the provision of adult learning in the Gateshead MetroCentre (pictured below), which is advertised as Europe's largest shopping centre. It is hoped that the projects might open the door to a feasibility study on how to provide adult learning at the Centre, where there has been little if any provision in the last three years.

The work will involve researching adult learning initiatives at other major retail centres in the UK and elsewhere in the world, so if anyone has conducted similar research or knows a case study that may be of interest, Regional Secretary Nigel Todd would like to hear from you at ntodd@wea.org.uk. Nigel jokes, "rumours that the post-incorporation WEA is planning to launch a franchise chain of trendy 'Level Two Learning Boutiques' are just that: rumours!"



Highlands computer course wins award

A WEA Scotland project has won the 2005 Chairman's Award at the Highland Council Quality Awards. The project, which was funded by the Highland Adult Literacies Partnership, developed the computer skills of residents and staff at Duthac House Care Home in Tain, enabling them to begin producing their own newsletter.

Five members of the project gave a presentation to a judging panel before collecting the award in a ceremony at Carbisdale Castle (pictured are Sheila Maher, Teresa Johnson, June Gillies, Sandra Wlodarczyk and Elma MacLelland).



The project was developed and delivered by Sheila Maher, WEA Workplace Literacies Co-ordinator - a longer article by Sheila was published in Highland Adult Literacies' newsletter Literacy Matters, and can be found at www.halweb.co.uk/pages/documents/issue20.pdf

Local history in action

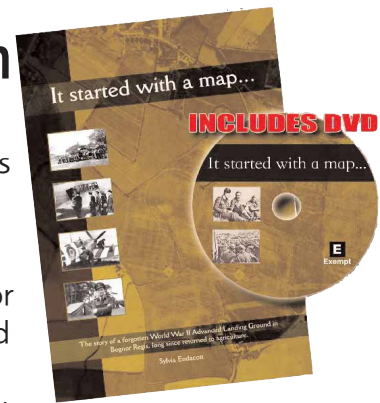
Research that began when a student brought a wartime map into a WEA Local History class has culminated in the publication of a book written by tutor and historian Sylvia Endacott.

'It started with a map...' tells the story of Bognor Advanced Landing Ground in West Sussex, and draws upon official records as well as the memories of local people, particularly those that were children during the war and were excited to have an airfield just down the road. At its peak, the Landing Ground was regularly used by 100 aircraft from a number of RAF squadrons and two Norwegian squadrons - who were visited there by Crown Prince Olav.

An accompanying DVD explains the research for the book, and includes discussions with people that were there at the time as well as a reconstruction of the WEA class where the map was first brought to Sylvia's attention by student Amanda Cox-Rushbridge.

'It started with a map...' is available for £15.99 (including DVD but excluding postage) from author Sylvia Endacott; please email your order or enquiry to 1787bognor@dsl.pipex.com or phone Sylvia on 01243 823 820.

A longer article about the Landing Ground, also written by Sylvia, can be found at www.bognor-local-history.co.uk in the Articles section.



Quick Reads for adults announced

Plans have been announced for a major new initiative aimed at producing exciting, short, fast-paced books by leading authors - specifically written for adult emergent readers. Quick Reads has been developed by the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) and has support and funding from a wide range of organisations including the Department for Education and Skills, the BBC and the Arts Council. Authors for the first set of books include Ruth Rendall, Joanna Trollope and Richard Branson.

NIACE describe Quick Reads as one of the most exciting adult learning developments for years and promise an unmissable publicity campaign and a programme of outreach to bring the new books to the attention of learners and tutors. The books are aimed at the estimated 12 million people of working age who have literacy skills at or below the level expected of a 13-year old, and may therefore be of interest to learners, tutors and organisers of courses in Skills for Life and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

The first twelve Quick Reads will be published on World Book Day, 2 March 2006, whilst a further ten will be published in May for Adult Learners Week. All the books will sell for £2.99 from bookshops, supermarkets and other outlets.

Tutors and other staff can order a supply of £1-off Quick Reads book tokens for their learners and readers so that they can buy any Quick Reads book for £1.99 (from 2 March to 31 December 2006). The tokens will be usable wherever Quick Reads are on sale and will be attached to a short, clear leaflet, explaining to learners and readers how they can be used.

As well as the tokens, publicity material and lesson-planning resources (from February) concerning Quick Reads are available free from NIACE - go to <http://www.niace.org.uk/quickreads/register.html>



Arrivals, departures and exchanges

Eastern Region

Best wishes to **Lynda Wick**, who left on 2 December to take up a post with the East of England Development Agency.

Congratulations to **Bev Wratten**, who has been promoted to Administrative Officer in Lynda's stead and took up her duties on 5 December.

London Region

Three departures to report in London: **Laurence Clark** left on 21 October, while **Antonia Saint-Claire** and **Roberto Haddon** will be leaving at the end of December.

North East Region

Victor Cadaxa, who worked for the WEA in the former Northern District and then the NE Region in a variety of roles for nearly 30 years, has retired - his final working day was 25 November.

Southern and London Hub

Staff at the hub were pleased to welcome **Julie Gear** to the cross-Regional Support Centre team in November.

Southern Region

June Holmes has left the WEA after a long and varied career here. Her first involvement was as a voluntary member between 1976 and 1984; including a spell as Portsmouth Branch Secretary. From 1984 to 1999 her roles have included: Tutor Organiser for Liberal and Trade Union Studies, National Secretary of MSF, National Health & Safety Rep. and a responsibility for National Health & Safety Training. Since 1999 June had the combined role of Tutor Organiser and Centre

Manager at the North End Adult Learning Centre in Portsmouth, where colleagues held a leaving do for her on the 16th December.

South West Region

Two new staff were welcomed in November. **Tom Elliott** joined the Regional Office in Exeter on 1 November as a full time Admin. Assistant, replacing **Claire Mitchell**. Tom previously worked for BHTS North Devon College as a Distance Learning Administrator. **Lin Euden** joined the Truro Office on 29 November as an Admin. Assistant to Andrea Stevens. She is working on a part time basis and replaces **Jo Bateson**.

About WEA News

WEA NEWS is produced for WEA staff, tutors and voluntary members. Many thanks to all who contributed to this edition, including: Angela Clark, Sharon Watson, Nigel Todd, Howard Croft, Kate Singlehurst and Sheila Maher.

If you have an item for inclusion or would like to comment on the newsletter please let us know. It is not always possible to include all items submitted but every effort will be made to do so.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

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or emailed to news@wea.org.uk

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the WEA.

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Changes to WEA Trustees

At Conference, elections were held for the four Officer posts, which were filled as follows:

President:	David Lanch
Deputy President:	Eddie Conway
Deputy President:	Chris Morton
Treasurer:	Peter Cooper

Presentations were made to two departing Officers who did not stand for re-election: **Colin Barnes**, who had served the WEA as a Vice President since his election in 2001 and **Janet Racklyeft**, who was elected Vice President in 1993 and Deputy President in 1997.

Following incorporation, the National Executive Committee (NEC) will be replaced by a new Board of 12 Trustees and an Association Committee containing representatives of each Region and WEA Scotland. This sadly means that five NEC members are not seeking a place on the Association Committee, so at its last meeting in November, the NEC said a fond farewell to:

John Hurst - South West

Geoffrey Mitchell - Yorkshire and Humber

Tony Reid - Southern

Pat Kynaston - North West

Esther Quinn - WEA Scotland

All these voluntary members will continue work in their Regions and many of them will continue to serve on national committees.

The first meeting of the Association Committee elected four Trustees to join the Trustee Board along with the four Officers elected by Conference - they are: **David Freeman**, **Charlie Lynch**, **Ruth Tanner** and **Gordon Vowles**. They will be joined by a further four co-opted Trustees from outside the Association in due course.